



Open your mind

NAMIBIAN BOYS' UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND UNDER-PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

School of Education
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Abstract	iv
2. Acknowledgements	vi
3. List of tables	viii
4. List of figures	xiii
5. List of abbreviations and acronyms	xiii
6. Dedication and an ideal of achievement in life for boys and girls	xv
7. Introduction	1
8. Background of the study	2
9. The statement of the problem and research questions	24
10. The significance of the study	25
11. Literature review	26
12. The conceptual framework used in the project	47
13. Research methods	50
13.1 Research designs	50
13.2 Population	50
13.3 Sampling	51
13.4 Research Instruments	58
13.5 Procedure	58
13.6 Data Analysis	59
13.7 Research Ethics	59
14. Presentation of results	60
15. Presentation of quantitative data collected from learners	68
16. Report on learners' focus group discussion data from the Kavango East, Omusati, Erongo and Kunene Regions	87
17. Report on learners' focus group discussion data from three Kavango East Secondary Schools and one secondary school from the Erongo Region	97
18. Presentation of quantitative data collected from teachers	106
19. Report on teachers' focus group discussion data from Oshana, Oshikoto, Khomas, Ohangwena, Kavango West and Zambezi Regions	120
20. Report on teachers' focus group discussion data from Khomas, Kavango East, Erongo, Kunene and Omusati Regions	167
21. Report on teachers' focus group discussion data from Karas and Otjozondjupa Regions	178
22. Presentation of quantitative data collected from parents	184
23. Report on parents' focus group discussion data from Oshana, Oshikoto, Khomas, Ohangwena, Kavango West, and Zambezi Regions	191
24. Report on parents' focus group discussion data from Erongo, Kavango East, and from one school in the Khomas Region	228
25. Report on parents' focus group discussion data from Karas and Otjozondjupa Regions	235
26. Presentation of quantitative data collected from university lecturers	239
27. Presentation of quantitative data collected from University and VTC students	250
28. Report on University students' focus group discussion data	265
29. Discussion of results	293
30. Reflections on the rationale for the study, the significance of the study and the manifestations of the boys' underachievement in education in the Namibian context	293
31. Discussion of quantitative and qualitative data collected from secondary school learners	295



32. Discussion of secondary school learners' quantitative data	295
33. Discussion of secondary school learners' qualitative data	299
34. Discussion of quantitative and qualitative data collected from secondary school teachers	303
35. Discussion of secondary school teachers' quantitative data	303
36. Discussion of secondary school teachers' qualitative data	306
37. Discussion of quantitative and qualitative data collected from parents	323
38. Discussion of parents' quantitative data	323
39. Discussion of parents' qualitative data	324
40. Discussion of quantitative data collected from university lecturers	339
41. Discussion of quantitative and qualitative data collected from University and VTC students	342
42. Discussion of University and VTC students' quantitative data	342
43. Discussion of University students' qualitative data	345
44. Recommended interventions	351
45. Linking recommended interventions to the main objective of the research project and basing them on principles of gender equality in education discourse	351
46. General recommended interventions that provide a framework for enhancing male learners'/students' academic achievement in school and at tertiary education institutions	353
47. Creating national awareness on the male learner/student underachievement and under-participation in education	353
48. Reframing the Namibian boy child's socialisation and education nexus	354
49. Taking an ecological developmental systems approach when enhancing boys' academic achievement	355
50. Specific recommended interventions	355
51. Educational policy-related recommended interventions	355
52. School-based interventions	357
53. Teacher support interventions	360
54. Learner-focused interventions	362
55. Parent-focused interventions	366
56. Community-focused interventions	368
57. University-based interventions	372
58. Other educational stakeholder-based interventions	374
59. Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research	375
60. References	376



ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the Namibian boys' underachievement in education research project was to find out what accounted for the disparity in academic performance between male and female learners/students and what its educational and social-economic implications were. In addition, the study sought to explore factors which influenced Namibian male learners'/students' underachievement and under-participation in education. Using a pragmatic parallel mixed methods research design, systematic, criterion and case study sampling techniques, we collected data from all 14 Educational Regions of Namibia by administering structured questionnaires to 4659 secondary school learners, 528 secondary school teachers, 182 parents, 122 University lecturers and 807 University and Vocational Training Centre (VTC) students. When collecting qualitative data, we conducted focus group discussions with sampled secondary school learners, secondary school teachers, parents and University students. From document analysis, we ascertained that at the secondary school level, challenges of some boys' low survival rates, low promotion rates from grade to grade, high failure rates, high school leaving rates, and high dropout rates negatively affected their academic achievement and academic participation in school in all 14 education regions. At the tertiary education level, evidence showed that substantially more female than male students had been enrolled in *all* public and private Namibian educational institutions for three decades and that in general, during this period, female students had consistently and substantially performed better academically than male students in all tertiary education institutions. In summary, according to sampled learners and sampled teachers, some Namibian boys performed worse than girls because they distracted themselves from school work, withdrew from learning activities, engaged in self-destructive behaviour, believed they could do without education and because they were not interested in education as it was boring to them. In addition, some boys under-participated in education because they dropped out of school, did not take advantage of psychosocial programmes that were organized to promote their participation in education, and did not actively participate in learning activities. All this expressed some boys' self-imposed exclusion from educational activities organized by schools. According to sampled learners, some boys underachieved in education because they spent less time on academic activities, preferred to work in isolation, were not eager to share academic information, did not care about their academic achievement, and they were less concerned about their future. Furthermore, sampled learners and sampled teachers reported that several parents undermined and sabotaged their sons' educational achievement during socialization by giving them too much freedom to roam and loiter around aimlessly without restraint while strictly controlling the behaviour and movements of their daughters; allowing their sons to abuse alcohol and drugs, including, in some instances, sharing alcohol with them- alcohol they had easy access to through bars, night clubs, Shebeen outlets and Cuca shops (i.e. small retail shops in rural areas that include the sale of alcohol); not caring about what their sons did and how they spent their time; not giving their sons responsibilities at home to cultivate in them ethics of responsibility, hard work, discipline, commitment, persistence-virtues that promote academic achievement; not being concerned of their sons' education, welfare, misconduct and misdeeds; and in some regions by criticising, ostracising, ridiculing, shaming and shunning their sons for going to school instead of looking after livestock. Moreover, University lecturers and University and VTC students reported that female students academically performed better than male students who underachieved at tertiary education institutions because they were motivated, worked harder, did not waste time socializing in dysfunctional ways (e.g. abusing alcohol and drugs), participated in learning activities, were collaborative, were willing to learn, were organized, were persistent and they did not easily drop out of universities when faced with difficulties.



We have discussed these and other findings in the rest of the report and made recommendations on how Namibia's educational policy framework should be reviewed, reoriented, adapted and transformed to cater for the needs of boys who underachieve in education; how schools, teachers, fellow learners, parents, communities, University lecturers, University students and other educational stakeholders should support Namibian boys' education. At the theoretical level, we have demonstrated how the data from this study could be used at the global, continental, Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional and Namibian national levels to reframe boys' and girls' education in a manner that promotes genuine gender parity in education, authentic and balanced social-economic development. We have also proposed that for all this to be implemented, a social cultural and participatory community-based transformation in support of boys' functional socialization and education should take place in the Namibian society.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When conducting this research project, we received support, cooperation and help of various kinds from several people and institutions. We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of them in the manner that follows.

We thank the University of Namibia for approving the study and for authorizing its conduct by granting it ethical clearance, funding it and by enabling 6 members of the research team as employees of the University to carry out the project as part of their work.

We wish to thank the late Prof. Frank Kavishe, as Acting PVC, Research, Innovation and Development, for recommending to the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Kenneth Matengu to release funds for phase 2 of the project. This action enabled us to collect data from the remaining 6 education regions, and thereby completing the collection of data from all 14 educational regions.

We thank the then Vice Chancellor of the Namibia University of Science and Technology, Prof. Tjama Tjivikua for allowing Dr. M. Kudumo and Mrs M. Sheyapo who were then employees of that University to be part of the research team.

We thank the Executive Director of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Mrs Sanet, L. Steenkamp, for granting the research team permission to conduct the study in Namibian Secondary Schools.

We thank the Executive Director of the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation, Dr. Alfred van Kent, for granting the research team permission to collect data from Vocational Training Centres.

We are very grateful to acknowledge the permission, support and help we received from the following 14 Regional Directors of Education during the study's field work in schools under their jurisdiction:

1. The late Mr. John |Awaseb, Former Director, Erongo Region
2. Mr. Mzingisi Gqwede, Former Director, Hardap Region
3. Mr. Fanuel Kapapero, Director, Kavango East Region
4. Ms Tiyopo Hamutumua, Former Director, Kavango West Region
5. Mr. |Awabahe, J. ||Hoeseb, Director, ||Kharas Education Region
6. Mr. Gerard N. Vries, Former Director, Khomas Region
7. Ms A. Steenkamp, Director, Kunene Region
8. Mr. Isack Hamatwi, Director, Ohangwena Region
9. Mr. Semba Pecka, Director, Omaheke Region
10. The late Mr Laban Shapange, Former Director, Omusati Region
11. Ms. Hileni M. Amukana, Director, Oshana Region
12. Mr. Lameck T. Kafidi, Director, Oshikoto Region
13. Ms. Josephine Mutenda, Director, Otjozondjupa Region
14. Ms. Joy Mamili, Former Director, Zambezi Region

With profound sadness we pay tribute to the late Mr John |Awaseb, the former Director of the Erongo Educational Region and the late Mr Laban Shapange, former Director of Omusati Educational Region. Their contribution to the conduct of this study in their respective Education Regions will always be cherished and remembered. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

We owe Principals of 53 participating secondary schools from the 14 education regions a huge debt of gratitude because without their meticulous logistical arrangements at their schools we would not have collected the data as problem-free as we did. We whole heartedly applaud them for a job excellently executed.

Without the participation of sampled secondary school learners, secondary school teachers, parents, University lecturers, University and VTC students, we were not going to be able to gather the comprehensive and rich data on which we have based this report. Without any reservations, we applaud and thank them for their understanding, insights, and help.

Assistant Pro Vice Chancellors stationed at Oshakati, Ongwediva, Rundu, Katima Mulilo and Southern Namibia UNAM Campuses are collectively thanked for facilitating data collection activities for the project at their Campuses. Some of them liaised with VTCs during our field work. Their support for research in the University and VTC systems was commendable.

Ms Anna Piet and Ms Raina Hatutala are gratefully thanked for entering quantitative data for the project using the SPSS data analysis software. In the same vein we thank Mr Musa Zimba for transcribing teachers' and parents' focus group discussion data from research sites located in Oshana, Oshikoto, Ohangwena, Kavango West, Khomas and Zambezi Regions. The many long hours he spent doing this are greatly appreciated.

We thank Ms. Libertina Shiweva for coming to our help when we needed someone to quickly help us statistically analyse our entered quantitative data. Libertina did a commendable job in using the SPSS statistical package to analyse our quantitative data. For this, we are very grateful to her.

We thank the staff of the then Centre for Research and Publications for overseeing the conduct of the study and for coordinating the rather cumbersome reimbursement of research funds for the study during fieldwork.

We thank the research team members for their commitment to and completion of the research task. We particularly thank them for their resilience, patience and persistence during field work, data analysis and report writing phases of the project that took a number of years to complete due to financial and research time constraints. For all this we applaud them. In addition, we wish to acknowledge the special service Dr M Kudumo provided when he acted as a liaison between the research team and officials of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and other key officials in other sections of the Namibian Government system and its partners (e.g. the National Council, UNICEF and UNESCO).

We wish to acknowledge efforts the research team made in attempting to source additional research funds for the research project from educational stakeholders in the country. Although the research team failed to raise additional research funds through these means, we thank the educational stakeholders for considering our application and for informing us that notwithstanding the importance of the research project, they were unable to support it financially due to budgetary constraints.



LIST OF TABLES

Page

1. Performance in English Second Language, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender	6
2. Performance in Mathematics, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender	7
3. UNAM enrolment by academic year: 1992-2018	8
4. UNAM enrolment by Faculty and gender, 2016-2020	9
5. NUST enrolment by Faculty and Sex, 2019	10
6. NUST undergraduate enrolment by Faculty, qualification type and sex, 2020	11
7. NUST enrolment by Faculty and sex, 2021	11
8. 2018 enrolment by Higher Education Institutions and by sex	12
9. 2018 Higher Education Institution enrolment by NQF fields of learning and by sex	13
10. 2018 Higher Education Institutions enrolment by STEM and non-STEM NQF fields by sex	13
11. 2018 Public and Private Higher Education Institutions' examination results by sex	14
12. 2018 examination results by Higher Education Institutions and by sex	15
13. Students in HEIs completing studies by NQF qualification type and by sex, 2018	16
14. UNAM graduation statistics per academic year by gender, 1992-2017	17
15. UNAM 2019 undergraduate graduation by Faculty, by qualification type and by gender	19
16. UNAM graduates by Faculty name and by gender, 2016-2019	20
17. NUST graduates by Faculty, sex and academic year, 2011-2016	21
18. NUST graduates by STEM field, sex and academic year, 2011-2016	21
19. NUST graduation statistics by qualification type, by sex and by academic year, 2016-2020	21
20. NUST's summary graduation statistics for 2016-2020	22
21. Gender of learners	51
22. Learners' grades	51
23. Learners' regions of origin	52
24. Learners' school location	52
25. Teachers' gender	52
26. Teachers' regions of origin	54
27. Teachers' school location	54
28. Teachers' highest teaching qualification	54
29. Categorized parents' age	55
30. Parents' gender	55
31. Whether parents had sons and daughters in secondary school	55
32. Parents' qualifications	55
33. Parents' regions of origin	56
34. University and VTC students' gender distribution	56
35. University and VTC students' year of study	56
36. University and VTC students' institutions of origin	57
37. Lecturers' gender	57
38. Lecturers' highest academic qualifications	57
39. Performance in History, Grade 10: 2016-2018 by gender	61
40. Performance in History, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender	62
41. Performance in Biology, Grade 10: 2016-2018 by gender	62
42. Performance in Biology, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender	63
43. Performance in Geography, Grade 10: 2016-2018 by gender	64
44. Performance in Geography, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender	65
45. Performance in Physical Science, Grade 10: 2016-2018 by gender	66



46. Performance in Physical Science, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender	67
47. Whether boys performed academically better than girls at school	68
48. Learners' views on boys' work habits and behaviour	69
49. Learners' views on the impact of cultural aspects on boys' academic achievement	70
50. Learners' views on why boys under-participate in education	71
51. Learners' views on available learning support for boys	72
52. Learners' views on boys' task behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and hopes	73
53. Whether boys perform better than girls by gender	74
54. Boys are not focused by gender	74
55. Boys are absent from classes by gender	74
56. Boys are indisciplined by gender	75
57. Boys believe that they can be employed without education by gender	75
58. Boys find school subject matter boring by gender	75
59. Boys are given less attention by teachers than girls by gender	75
60. Boys are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society by gender	76
61. More girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programmes by gender	76
62. More girls participate in class learning activities than boys by gender	76
63. Boys are given less psychosocial support in school than girls by gender	77
64. There are more educational girl supported programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes by gender	77
65. Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls by gender	77
66. Boys do not care about their academic achievement by gender	77
67. Boys are less concerned about their future by gender	78
68. Boys perform better than girls by age	78
69. Boys are not focused by age	78
70. Boys find school subject matter boring by age	79
71. Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls by age	79
72. Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls by age	79
73. Boys do not care about their academic achievement by age	80
74. Whether boys academically perform better than girls by school location	80
75. Boys are not focused by school location	80
76. Boys are absent from classes by school location	81
77. Boys are in-disciplined by school location	81
78. Boys believe that they can be employed without education by school location	81
79. Boys find school subject matter boring by school location	81
80. Boys are given less attention than girls by teachers by school location	82
81. Boys are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society by school location	82
82. More girls than boys participate in class learning activities by school location	82
83. Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls by school location	83
84. Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls by school location	83
85. Boys prefer to work in isolation by school location	83
86. Boys do not care about their academic achievement by school location	84
87. Whether boys academically perform better than girls by grade	84
88. Boys are not focused by grade	84
89. Boys are absent from classes by grade	85
90. Boys are in-disciplined by grade	85
91. More girls than boys participate in class learning activities by grade	85



92. Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls by grade	86
93. There are more girl targeted educational support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes by grade	86
94. Whether there were differences in academic achievement between boys and girls	107
95. Overall comparative academic performance between boys and girls	107
96. Comparative academic performance between boys and girls in specific teachers' subjects	107
97. Reasons why girls perform better than boys in specific teachers' subjects	108
98. Teachers' views relating to the impact of cultural aspects on academic achievement of boys	109
99. Teachers' views on why boys under-participate in education	110
100. Teachers' views on available learning support for boys	111
101. Teachers' views on learners' task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours	113
102. Boys believe that they can be employed without education	114
103. More girls than boys complete their secondary education	114
104. More girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programmes	114
105. More girls than boys participate in learning activities by gender	114
106. Teachers are more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities by gender	115
107. National policies in general are more supportive of girls' education than boys' education by gender	115
108. In my classroom or subject, girls perform academically better than boys by age	115
109. More girls than boys complete their secondary education by age	116
110. Boys are more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment than girls by age	116
111. Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than boys' by age	117
112. Boys believe that they can be employed without education by school location	117
113. More girls than boys complete their secondary education by school location	117
114. More girls than boys participate in class learning activities by school location	118
115. Boys tend to seek less academic support than girls by school location	118
116. Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than boys' education by school location	118
117. Parents' views on work habits and behaviours of their sons	185
118. Parents' views on boys' and girls' work habits, motivation and support they received	186
119. Parents' views on school support for their sons	187
120. Parents' expectations of their sons' achievement in school	188
121. Boys are less motivated to work at school than girls by gender	188
122. School keeps me informed of my son's progress by gender	189
123. Teachers help my son learn by gender	189
124. My son's school has good teachers by age category	189
125. The school keeps me informed of my son's progress by age category	190
126. Teachers help my son learn by age category	190
127. Whether there were differences in academic achievement between male and female students	240
128. Overall comparative examination performance between male and female students	240
129. Reasons why female students perform better than male students in examinations	240
130. Lecturers' views relating to the impact of cultural aspects on boys academic achievement	242
131. Lecturers' views on why male students under-participate in education	243
132. Lecturers' views on available learning support for male	

students at their universities	246
133. Lecturers' views on students' task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours	247
134. Male students find University subject matter irrelevant by gender	247
135. Male students are more affected by family poverty than female students by gender	248
136. Male students are allowed to engage in mischief by gender	248
137. The fact that male students are expected to grow up and tend for themselves early stifles their self-esteem by gender	248
138. Socialization stifles the male students' ability to express his feelings with regards to the negative consequences of his underachievement by gender	249
139. Male students are more affected by family poverty than female students by age	249
140. Female students are given more social emotional support at the University than male students by age	249
141. Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students by age	250
142. Male students are less concerned about the future by age	250
143. Reasons why female students perform better than male students in classes	251
144. University and VTC students' views relating to the impact of cultural aspects on boys' academic achievement	252
145. University and VTC students' views on why male students under-participate in education	253
146. University and VTC students' views on available learning support in their tertiary education institutions	254
147. University and VTC students' views on male students' task behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and hopes	255
148. Male students are not focused by gender	256
149. Male students are absent from classes by gender	256
150. Male students are in-disciplined by gender	256
151. Male students believe that they can be employed without education by gender	257
152. Male students find University and VTC subject matter boring by gender	257
153. Male students are given less attention by lecturers than female students by gender	257
154. More female students complete their tertiary education than male students by gender	257
155. More female than male students participate in psychosocial development programmes by gender	258
156. More female than male students participate in class learning activities by gender	258
157. Male students are given less psychosocial support at the University than female students by gender	258
158. Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students by gender	259
159. Male students prefer to work in isolation by gender	259
160. Female students are more eager to share academic information than male students by gender	259
161. Male students do not care about their academic achievement by gender	259
162. More female than male students participate in class learning activities by age	260
163. Socialization stifles the male students' ability to express their feelings with regard to the negative consequences of their underachievement by age	260
164. Male University and VTC students are not focused by institution	260
165. Male University and VTC students believe that they can be employed without education by institution	261



166. Male students are given less attention by lecturers than female students by institution	261
167. Male students are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society by institution	262
168. More male than female students leave tertiary institutions because of misbehaviour by institution	262
169. More female than male students participate in class learning activities by institution	263
170. Male students are given less psychosocial support at the University than female students by institution	263
171. Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students by institution	264
172. Male students prefer to work in isolation by institution	264
173. Male students are less concerned about the future by institution	264



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Sampled teachers' age distribution

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

1. AIDS Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
2. AU African Union
3. COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease
4. DNEA Directorate of National Examinations and Assessment
5. EAP East Asia and Pacific
6. EFA Education for All
7. EMIS Educational Management Information System
8. FAWE Forum for African Women Educationalists
9. FAWENA Forum for African Women Educationalists, Namibia Chapter
10. FGDs Focus Group Discussions
11. GRN Government of the Republic of Namibia
12. HEIs Higher Education Institutions
13. HIV Human Immunodeficiency Virus
14. ICT Information Communication Technology
15. IKS Indigenous Knowledge Systems
16. IUM International University of Management
17. KAYEC Katutura Youth Enterprise Centre
18. MDGS Millennium Development Goals
19. MOEAC Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
20. NAMCOL Namibia College of Open Learning
21. NCHE National Council for Higher Education
22. NDP4 4th National Development Plan
23. NDP5 5th National Development Plan
24. NEPAD New Partnership for Africa's Development
25. NETS Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary
26. NGO Non-Governmental Organisations
27. NIED National Institute for Educational Development
28. NQF National Qualifications Framework
29. NUST Namibia University of Science and Technology
30. OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
31. OVC Orphans and Vulnerable Children
32. RVTC Rundu Vocational Training Centre
33. SACMEQ Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
34. SADC Southern African Development Community
35. SDG Sustainable Development Goals
36. SES Social Economic Status
37. SPSS Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
38. SRC Students Representative Council
39. STEM Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
40. TADA Teenagers Against Drugs and Alcohol
41. UK United Kingdom
42. UN United Nations
43. UNAM University of Namibia



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44. UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
 45. UNGEI United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
 46. UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
 47. USA United States of America
 48. VTC Vocational Training Centre
 49. VVTC Volambola Vocational Training Centre
 50. ZVTC Zambezi Vocational Training Centre



DEDICATION AND AN IDEAL OF ACHIEVEMENT IN LIFE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Dedication

This report is dedicated to all boys in the world who underachieve in education without targeted support and without their educational concerns being seriously addressed and attended to.

An ideal of achievement in life for boys and girls

“Once upon a time there was a boy. He worked very hard at school and did all his homework. This boy did what he was told. He was very obedient and never talked back. He studied hard and did everything he was told and grew up and married the most beautiful girl who also worked hard (*at school*) and did what she was told. They had lots of children and they travelled round the world and everyone liked them. They had lots of money and they lived happily ever after” (Ben Okri, 2019, *The Freedom Artist*).



INTRODUCTION

At Namibia's Independence in 1990, there existed disparity in access to education by boys and girls, with girls being at a higher risk than boys of exclusion from education, underperformance and of not completing secondary school education. At the global level, the UN (1996) in the *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995*, described the status of the girl child in education at that time in this way: "Although the number of educated children has grown in the past 20 years in some countries, boys have proportionately fared much better than girls. In 1990, 130 million children had no access to primary school; of these, 81 million were girls. This can be attributed to such factors as customary attitudes, child labour, early marriages, lack of funds and lack of adequate schooling facilities, teenage pregnancies and gender inequalities in society at large as well as in the family.... In many cases, girls start to undertake heavy domestic chores at a very early age and are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and an early drop-out from schooling" (UN, 1996, p. 110). In the report, specific strategic objectives were set out to eliminate obstacles to the girl child's education. Governments were mandated to implement the objectives.

To participate in this process and that of the *Education for All* international programmes of action, Namibia put in place various programmes and initiatives to advance women's empowerment and support girls in education. In many countries of the world, the implementation of the strategic objectives spelt out at the 1995 Beijing Women's conference has removed many barriers to the girl child's education and enabled her to substantially outperform the boy child in education (Reeves, 2022; UNESCO, 2022; Welmond and Gregory, 2021).

In Namibia, there now exists gender disparity in academic achievement between boys and girls. From grades 1 to 12, this disparity is in favour of girls (Education Management Information System, 'EMIS', Namibia, 2012-2019). This type of disparity also exists at tertiary education institutions such as the University of Namibia and the Namibia University of Science and Technology where more than two thirds of graduates for about 30 years, in many fields of study, have been females. Research has revealed that boys' under-performance and under-participation in education in many educational systems of the world are due to educational, social-economic, cultural, political, historical, sociological, and psychological factors that go beyond gender (Jha, Bakshi and Faria, 2012; Zimba, 2015; Zimba, 2016).

Our goal in this research report is not to take theoretical or practice-oriented sides when attempting to understand why several Namibian boys underachieve in education. Our intention is not to uncritically join in debates about boys being the new disadvantaged lot who are victims of an adverse backlash of empowering support given to girls over the years. We are not out to counteract the position that the focus on boys' underachievement is a backdoor ploy to 're-legitimise educational structures and practices that favour the patriarchal hegemonic gender order' in schools and other educational institutions (Mills, et al., 2007; Mills, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

We do not wish to underestimate and simplify the power of the process of constructing a variety of masculinities and their impact on boys' participation and achievement in education in any society (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). We do not wish to remain at the level of deterministic and deficit populist rhetoric which attempts to explain boys' underachievement in education by focusing on biological differences between boys and girls and using common



sense arguments such as ‘boys will be boys’, ‘boys are socialized differently’, and ‘boys have different learning styles’.

Our main goal in the research report is, however, to reflect on apparent causes of boys’ underachievement in education that have been arrived at through research conducted elsewhere in the world, present research findings of a study on Namibian boys’ underachievement in education that was conducted in all of Namibia’s 14 educational regions, discuss the findings and make recommendations emanating from the findings in order to enhance boys’ and male students’ attainments in educational institutions in the country.

We expected the main outcome of the study to include preventing male students from dropping out of universities or secondary schools, promoting the retention of male students in their studies or in school, reducing the male students’ or learners’ repetition rates and providing support to male students in order to enhance the quality of their educational attainments.

Ultimately, we expected the main benefit of the study to be that of promoting the improvement of quality of education for male students/learners at tertiary education institutions and in secondary schools in the country. Our intention was to do this without overlooking the learning needs of female students in tertiary educational institutions and learners in school.

This report consists of the background of the study, literature review, methods that were used to conduct the study, results of the study, discussion of the results, recommendations based on the results of the study and their discussion and references that were consulted during the conduct of the study. These sections of the report will be covered one by one in the manner that follows.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

According to UNESCO (2004, p.1), the term ‘gender’

“refers to the socially and culturally constructed meanings and roles assigned to persons of different biological sexes: males and females. The concept also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and behaviours of both women and men. The notion of gender equality thus refers to all human beings developing their personal abilities and making life choices without the limitation set by stereotypes, rigid roles and prejudices. In other words, gender equality means that the differences in behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men should be valued and treated equally. **It does not mean that women and men have to become the same; but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.** Hence, gender equality starts with **equally valuing girls and boys.** It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society” **(Emphasis added).**

This definition encapsulates the ethic and rhetoric of gender equality. In practice, girls and boys do not seem to be valued and treated equally in many countries in the world. It depends on where you are in the world. If you are in Finland and Norway, this definition may be adhered to in practice. However, if you are in Pakistan or Kaduna, Nigeria, the situation is entirely different. There, girls and women are not treated as people who are equal to men in every respect. Substantiating this from a global perspective, UNICEF (2015) published a report entitled: *Progress for Children Beyond Averages: Learning from the MDGS*. In this report, UNICEF gave a progress report on achieving the third millennium goal which was on the empowerment of women and the elimination of gender inequality by the year 2015. In education the report stipulated that in 2012, whereas 31 million primary school age girls were



out of school, 27 million boys in the same age cohort were out of school. This meant that globally, 13% more girls were out of primary school than boys. This gender gap was narrowed substantially at lower secondary school where 32 million girls were out of school whereas 31 million boys were out of school. The report also indicated that in Sub-Saharan Africa, 84 girls were enrolled in secondary school for every 100 boys in 2012.

According to the report: *A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education* (UNESCO, 2020, p.1), this situation has drastically changed in favour of girls and women. In its key findings, the report indicates that:

- “Since 1995, the number of girls enrolled in primary and secondary school has risen by 180 million.
- Globally, equal numbers of girls and boys were enrolled in primary and secondary education in 2018, whereas in 1995 around 90 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys; significant increases in Southern Asia, and India in particular, drove this growth.
- Female enrolment *tripled in tertiary education* (emphasis added); at the country level, gender disparity at men’s expense exists in 74% of the countries with data.
- Between 1995 and 2018, the percentage of countries with gender parity in education rose from 56% to 65% in primary, from 45% to 51% in lower secondary and from 13% to 24% in upper secondary education.
- Among the 56 countries with data for 2000-18, primary completion rates improved faster for girls than boys. In one-third of the 86 countries with 2013-18 data, girls were more likely to complete primary school than boys.”

These current global trends are consistent with what has happened in Namibia where gender disparity in education has been effectively reversed in favour of girls. Now, more Namibian boys under-participate and under-achieve in education than Namibian girls. Could this be due to differential support and treatment of boys and girls in the education system? Have Namibian boys and girls been equally supported and valued in education for the past 32 years of the country’s independence from apartheid and colonialism? Although these questions are not easy to answer, we need to conjecture whether the differential levels of support between Namibian boys and girls could *solely* explain why substantially large numbers of Namibian boys under-participate and underachieve in education. A search for other explanations was warranted.

Before we focus on other explanations, it is instructive to show how, for nearly three decades, girls have been given more educational support than boys. This support has been based on, amongst other things, the rallying cry: “The surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family” (Dr. J. E. Kwegyir Aggrey, Ghanaian educator [1875-1927]). In addition, from a feminist perspective, Weaver-Hightower (2003, p.471) explained this support as follows:

“Until recently, most policy, practice and research on gender and education focused on girls and girls’ issues. This is as it should be, for in every society women as a group relative to men are disadvantaged socially, culturally, politically, and economically. All of these realms, of course, are integral to the study of schooling. In early interventions in education, particularly by liberal feminists and some radical feminists, schools were seen as significant causes of inequality for women and, more important, as a key institution through which such inequalities could be dismantled.”

Although we do not ascribe to the view that *in every society*, women as a group relative to men are disadvantaged socially, culturally, politically and economically, a lot of policies and practices on gender and education in the world were and are based on this view (UNESCO, 2020; Tembon, 2008).



At the global level, for instance, the support for girls' education has, for more than three decades, been promoted through initiatives that include *United Nations Girls' Education Initiative*; *Women in Development*; *Millennium Development Goals*; *Sustainable Development Goals*, *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*; *Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth* (The World Bank, 2008); *Gender and Development: Promoting Education Quality through Gender-Friendly Schools* (Mannathoko, 2008); and *The Dakar framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments*. (UNESCO, 2000).

At the African continental level, African girls have been supported in education through the avenues and instruments of *Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)*, *African Union Gender Policy* (2009), *New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)*, *African Charter on human and people's rights, the Solemn declaration on gender equality in Africa* (2004) and the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child*.

At the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region level, girls' education has been championed through the following instruments of the *SADC Protocol on gender and development* (2008) and the *SADC gender protocol Barometer* (2013-2020)

At the national level, Namibian girls' education has been supported by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, the Forum for African Women Educationalists- the Namibian chapter, (FAWENA) and through the Gender mainstreaming in education programme of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.

It is the case that while all these initiatives were put in place to support girls' education, few, if any, initiatives were specifically established in Namibia to target and support boys' education. Although this position may be disputed, we need to point out that boys were not chased away from school when girls were excelling. A number of searching questions may still be asked regarding the under-achievement and under-participation in education that several Namibian boys display. For instance: "What do boys do or not do to underperform in education? What is being done or not done to **or with** boys that causes them to underperform in school? What is being done or not done **for** boys that promotes their underperformance or under-participation in education?" Our view was that these questions could only be answered properly through research.

What we should also not gloss over is the fact that the support that girls received over the years increased their access to education, retention in education and increased their participation and achievement in education. Should similar support be provided to boys and young men in order to increase their achievement in education? Our view was that such support should be based on research evidence detailing what in fact were the issues that conspired to bring about boys' underachievement in education. This kind of evidence was lacking.

An analysis of the 2012 grade 10 and grade 12 Namibian examination data indicated that girls received higher grades in examinable subjects than boys across the then 13 regions (EMIS, 2012). In 2015, this was still the case when the grade 10 examination results were presented to the public (Kisting, 2015).



The 2017 EMIS statistics explained this disparity in schools by indicating that although at the beginning of the educational process there were more male than female learners enrolled in Grade 1, there were progressively more female than male learners enrolled in the educational system from Grades 6 to Grade 12. From Grades 6 to 12, more boys dropped out of school than girls because of failing at school, discipline problems, feeling old, going to work and because of demands from their parents that they leave school (EMIS, 2017). From 2011 to 2017, “lower promotion rates and higher school-leaving rates of males in Junior Primary and Junior secondary Grades resulted in female enrolment being higher than male enrolment in senior primary, in Junior secondary and in senior secondary”. From 2011 to 2017, “females had higher promotion rates than males up to Grade 7. Up to Grade 8 a higher percentage of males than females left school” (EMIS, 2017, p.41).

For the period covering 2010-2016, survival rates (i.e. the rates of remaining in school) “were consistently higher for females than for males from Grades 6 to Grade 12. The lower survival rates of male learners again confirmed that in Namibia, on average, early school-leaving was a greater problem among male learners than among female learners” (EMIS, 2017, p.43).

The indices of dropping out of school, lower enrolment rates from Grades 6 to 12, lower promotion rates, lower survival rates and higher school-leaving rates speak to the situation where several Namibian boys underachieve and under-participate in primary and secondary education. They do this by academically performing worse than their female counterparts and consequently receiving constant negative feedback from teachers, parents and caregivers. All this is consistent with the situation of boys’ educational underachievement and underperformance in South Africa (Fleisch and Shindler, 2009).

This situation largely prevailed in 2019 during which year, it was reported as was the case in 2017, that “an extraordinary feature of Namibia’s survival rates was that they were consistently higher for females than for males from Grade 6 to Grade 12 for the past five years. The lower survival rates of male learners again confirmed that in Namibia, on average, early school-leaving was a greater problem among male learners than among female learners” (EMIS, 2019, p.43).

To illustrate the disparity in academic performance between boys and girls further we assessed their comparative academic achievement in English and Mathematics at grade 12 level from 2016 to 2018. Whereas in Table 1, it is revealed that on average girls obtained high grades in English Second Language than boys during the three year period, in Table 2, although the difference is smaller, it is clear that on average, girls performed better than boys in Mathematics at grade 12 level during the three year period. Although this was not the case in most OECD countries, (Schleicher, 2008), this finding is now consistent with the UNESCO (2020) finding that globally, girls perform better than boys in Reading and Mathematics.

As referred to in the introduction, this disparity on academic performance between male and female learners also exists at Namibian tertiary education institutions such as the University of Namibia, Namibia University of Science and Technology and the International University of Management where more than two thirds of graduates for many years, in many fields of study, have been female. The following gender disaggregated University and other Higher Education Institutions student enrolment statistics, examination results in general and examination results obtained in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and selected specific institutional graduation statistics illustrate the disparity in academic



achievement over the years between male and female tertiary education students unambiguously.

Table 1: Performance in English Second Language, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 12											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	17	0.19%	32	0.33%	16	0.17%	50	0.49%	23	0.23%	67	0.62%
B	41	0.47%	85	0.88%	65	0.72%	152	1.49%	71	0.73%	182	1.69%
C	199	2.30	380	3.93%	223	2.49%	354	3.48%	260	2.68%	532	4.95%
D	546	6.31%	749	7.75%	565	6.29%	787	7.74%	749	7.73%	1040	1.30%
E	1298	15.0%	1744	18.0%	1542	17.2%	1908	18.7%	1902	19.6%	2266	21.1%
F	1959	22.6%	2280	23.6%	1994	22.3%	2335	22.9%	1905	19.6%	2086	19.4%
G	2217	25.6%	2322	24.0%	2439	27.2%	2737	26.9%	2404	24.8%	2548	23.7%
U	1158	13.3%	928	9.6%	940	10.5%	749	7.37%	1129	11.6%	966	9.00%
I	1173	13.5%	1068	11.0%	1108	12.3%	1019	10.0%	1181	12.1%	976	9.09%
X	34	0.39%	70	0.22%	47	0.52%	72	0.70%	58	0.59%	68	0.63%
Total	8642		9658		8939		10161		9682		10731	

Adapted from Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Directorate of National Examinations and Assessment (DNEA) statistics, 2018



Table 2: Performance in Mathematics, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 12											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	27	0.28%	33	0.29%	26	0.26%	48	0.41%	40	0.38%	37	0.30%
B	85	0.90%	115	1.04%	116	1.20%	105	0.89%	123	1.17%	94	0.76%
C	194	2.07%	263	2.37%	247	2.56%	245	2.09%	263	2.51%	273	2.22%
D	1915	20.4%	2005	18.1%	1978	20.5%	1778	15.2%	2201	21.0%	1922	15.6%
E	2150	22.9%	2252	20.3%	2059	21.3%	2237	19.1%	2212	21.1%	2340	19.0%
F	1891	20.2%	2146	19.4%	2090	21.6%	2501	21.4%	2239	21.3%	2630	21.4%
G	1716	18.3%	2323	21.0%	1654	17.1%	2459	21.0%	1852	17.6%	2517	20.4%
U	807	8.63%	1190	10.7%	916	9.49%	1472	12.6%	955	9.12%	1583	12.8%
I	521	5.57%	653	5.90%	522	5.41%	751	6.46%	529	5.05%	808	6.57%
X	42	0.44%	75	0.67%	40	0.41%	78	0.66%	53	0.50%	77	0.62%
Total	9348		11055		9648		11674		10467		12281	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2018.

In the following tables, we present the disparity in education achievement between male and female students in the form of selected examples of Higher Education Institutions' enrolment figures, examination results and graduation statistics over a number of years.

Table 3 displays UNAM's enrolment figures from 1992 to 2018. As can be noticed, UNAM enrolled, on average, for 26 years, more than 60% female students. One main reason for this is that more female than male learners qualified to enter the University during this period. Except in the fields of Engineering and Computing, Table 4 affirms this enrolment trend by showing that UNAM continued to enrol, in many fields of study, substantially more female students than male students from 2016 to 2020.



Table 3: University of Namibia (UNAM) Enrolment by academic year: 1992- 2018

Academic Year	Female	Female %	Male	Male %	Total
1992	2368	65.1%	1271	34.9%	3639
1993	2245	62.1%	1372	37.9%	3617
1994	2099	63.5%	1209	36.5%	3308
1995	2177	61.5%	1360	38.5%	3537
1996	2614	57.9%	1897	42.1%	4511
1997	2055	58.1%	1480	41.9%	3535
1998	2188	58.4%	1558	41.6%	3746
1999	2437	59.7%	1643	40.3%	4080
2000	2812	57.7%	2058	42.3%	4870
2001	2987	56.7%	2281	43.3%	5268
2002	2594	59.6%	1760	40.4%	4354
2003	3506	62.9%	2064	37.1%	5570
2004	3364	62.4%	2024	37.6%	5388
2005	3359	62.0%	2056	38.0%	5415
2006	3253	60.4%	2136	39.6%	5389
2007	4397	58.4%	3137	41.6%	7534
2008	4851	59.2%	3349	40.8%	8200
2009	6092	60.3%	4012	39.7%	10104
2010	7618	61.0%	4878	39.0%	12496
2011	9865	60.4%	6467	39.6%	16332
2012	10389	61.8%	6430	38.2%	16819
2013	10897	62.1%	6639	37.9%	17536
2014	12171	62.4%	7335	37.6%	19506
2015	13215	62.9%	7793	37.1%	21008
2016	16148	63.9%	9110	36.1%	25258
2017	16768	65.3%	8916	34.7%	25684
2018	18745	66.4%	9472	33.6%	28217

Source: UNAM Statistics Office, 2018



Table 4. UNAM Enrolment by Faculty and Gender: 2016-2020

Faculty School Name	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCE	447	389	460	400	471	416	505	425	495	427
CEN OPEN, DISTANCE & e-LEARNING					318	84				
ECONOMIC & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	2054	1680	2122	1502	3507	2213	3348	2078	3205	2039
EDUCATION	5650	2706	6452	3127	9149	4034	9727	4249	9408	4584
ENGINEERING & IT	80	306	98	327	147	368	171	416	194	423
EXTERNAL STUDIES - UNAM	3326	1622	2930	1193						
FHS: SCHOOL OF MEDICINE	316	127	342	133	404	157	464	161	469	173
FHS: SCHOOL OF PHARMACY	156	60	159	72	186	87	186	93	181	87
FHS:SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY									48	14
FHS:SCHOOL OF NURSING	881	201	923	220	1170	280	1232	322	1372	383
FHS:SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH	42	14	124	39	166	59	206	76	235	78
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES	1653	665	1566	609	1692	701	1761	696	1713	656
LANGUAGE CENTRE					277	203	309	240	429	510
LAW	489	358	495	361	636	505	687	490	710	554
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR	136	66	88	64	117	54				
SCHOOL OF COMPUTING	24	50	93	257	105	283	110	274	101	267
SCHOOL OF MILITARY SCIENCE	22	46	45	66	31	69	39	57	34	64
SCIENCE	872	820	871	546	902	583	1095	652	898	556
Total	16148	9110	16768	8916	19278	10096	19840	10229	19492	10815

Table 5. Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) Enrolment by Faculty and sex, 2019

Faculty Name	Number			Percentage		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Computing and Informatics	349	901	1250	6.0%	14.8%	10.5%
Engineering	380	1102	1482	6.5%	18.1%	12.4%
Health and Applied Sciences	664	429	1093	11.4%	7.0%	9.2%
Human Sciences	937	769	1706	16.1%	12.6%	14.3%
Management Sciences	3017	2210	5227	51.8%	36.2%	43.8%
Nat Resource & Spatial Science	457	674	1131	7.8%	11.1%	9.5%
Office of the Registrar	20	13	33	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%
Total	5824	6098	11922	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5 shows that in 2019, more NUST male students than female students were enrolled in STEM fields of Computing and Informatics, Engineering and Natural resources and Spatial Science. However, more NUST female than male students were enrolled in non-STEM fields of study of Human Sciences and Management Sciences. Because of this we expected male students at NUST to perform better academically than female students in STEM fields of studies. The reverse would be the case in non-STEM fields of study. This expectation is confirmed by graduation statistics from NUST that are provided below.



Table 6. NUST Undergraduate Enrolment by Faculty, Qualification Type and sex, 2020

Faculty Name	Qualification Type	Number			Percentage		
		Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Computing and Informatics	Bachelor Degree	243	833	1076	4.6%	14.6%	9.8%
	Certificate	6	30	36	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Engineering	Professional Bachelor Degree	153	432	585	2.9%	7.6%	5.3%
	Bachelor Degree	81	328	409	1.5%	5.8%	3.7%
	Diploma	20	43	63	0.4%	0.8%	0.6%
	Introductory Courses	91	234	325	1.7%	4.1%	3.0%
Health and Applied Sciences	Professional Bachelor Degree	247	99	346	4.7%	1.7%	3.2%
	Bachelor Degree	404	328	732	7.6%	5.8%	6.7%
Human Sciences	Bachelor Degree	729	496	1225	13.8%	8.7%	11.2%
	Diploma	175	204	379	3.3%	3.6%	3.5%
	Certificate	9	12	21	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Management Sciences	Bachelor Degree	2705	2070	4775	51.2%	36.3%	43.5%
	Diploma	30	24	54	0.6%	0.4%	0.5%
Nat Resource & Spatial Science	Bachelor Degree	338	480	818	6.4%	8.4%	7.4%
	Diploma	38	77	115	0.7%	1.4%	1.0%
Office of the Registrar	Non-Degree Purpose	13	12	25	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
Grand Total		5282	5702	10984	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6 affirms the interpretation we made on Table 5.

Table 7. NUST Enrolment by Faculty and sex, 2021

Faculty School Name	Number			Percentage		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Computing and Informatics	356	1049	1405	5.7%	16.3%	11.1%
Engineering	403	1132	1535	6.5%	17.6%	12.1%
Health and Applied Sciences	743	478	1221	12.0%	7.4%	9.7%
Human Sciences	1113	839	1952	17.9%	13.0%	15.4%
Management Sciences	3119	2277	5396	50.2%	35.4%	42.7%
Nat Resource & Spatial Science	471	657	1128	7.6%	10.2%	8.9%
Office of the Registrar	8	2	10	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Grand Total	6213	6434	12647	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

As was the case in Table 5 that covered NUST's enrolment figures for 2019, the institution's enrolment figures for 2021 that are depicted in Table 7 revealed that except for Health and Applied Sciences, more male than female students were enrolled in STEM fields than non-STEM fields. Again, we expected female students to perform better than male students only in non-STEM fields.



Table 8: 2018 Enrolment by Higher Education Institutions and by sex

Higher Education Institutions	Number			Per Cent		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
NAMCOL	414	3,921	4,335	10%	90%	100%
NUST	5,386	5,375	10,761	50%	50%	100%
UNAM	9,180	18,243	27,423	33%	67%	100%
Total Public HEIs	14,980	27,539	42,519	35%	65%	100%
ALI	85	83	168	51%	49%	100%
HEADSTART	16	499	515	3%	97%	100%
IOB	58	160	218	27%	73%	100%
IOL	861	4,106	4,967	17%	83%	100%
IUM	2,405	5,348	7,753	31%	69%	100%
LINGUA	234	491	725	32%	68%	100%
MONITRONIC	207	251	458	45%	55%	100%
NETS	17	4	21	81%	19%	100%
PHILIPPI TRUST	-	5	5	0%	100%	100%
ST.CHARLES	39	1	40	98%	3%	100%
TRIUMPHANT	613	817	1,430	43%	57%	100%
TULIPOHAMBA	7	53	60	12%	88%	100%
PAULINUM	14	16	30	47%	53%	100%
WELWITCHIA	51	248	299	17%	83%	100%
Total Private HEIs	4,607	12,082	16,689	28%	72%	100%
Grand Total	19,587	39,621	59,208	33%	67%	100%

Source: National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), 2018

Table 8 includes NAMCOL data that communicate the message that substantially (i.e. 90%) more female than male learners persisted to continue with education when they failed at grade 10 or grade 12 level in 2018. In addition, the table includes enrolment data from several private Higher Education institutions. According to this table, except for NUST, NETS and St Charles, all other institutions enrolled more female than male students. This implies that on average, we would expect more female than male students to excel in education in the majority of Higher Education Institutions in Namibia. This is confirmed by examinations results that are reported in tables below. Because NETS trains Church Pastors, it would appear that it prepares more male than female students to become Pastors.

Table 9: 2018 Higher Education Institution enrolment by NQF Fields of Learning and by sex

Qualification Field of Learning	Number			Per Cent		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture and Nature Conservation	515	534	1,049	49.1%	50.9%	100.0%
Business, Commerce and Management Studies	5,530	9,563	15,093	36.6%	63.4%	100.0%
Communication Studies and Language	554	1,136	1,690	32.8%	67.2%	100.0%
Culture and the Arts	13	25	38	34.2%	65.8%	100.0%
Education, Training and Development	6,162	20,053	26,215	23.5%	76.5%	100.0%
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology	1,306	413	1,719	76.0%	24.0%	100.0%
Human and Social Studies	563	1,238	1,801	31.3%	68.7%	100.0%
Law, Military Science and Security	902	871	1,773	50.9%	49.1%	100.0%
Health Sciences and Social Services	1,211	3,631	4,842	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Physical, Mathematical and Computer Sciences	2,108	1,576	3,684	57.2%	42.8%	100.0%
Physical Planning and Construction	631	378	1,009	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
Services and Life Sciences	92	203	295	31.2%	68.8%	100.0%
Total	19,587	39,621	59,208	33.1%	66.9%	100.0%

Source: NCHE, 2018

Table 9 presents composite Namibia's Higher Education Institutions enrolment data by NQF Fields of learning and by gender. The table shows that Public and Private Higher Educational Institutions in Namibia enrolled more male than female students in STEM fields in 2018. The reverse was the case for non-STEM fields.

Table 10. 2018 Higher Education Enrolment by STEM and non-STEM NQF fields by sex

Qualification Field of Learning	Number			Per Cent		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture and Nature Conservation	515	534	1,049	2.6%	1.3%	1.8%
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology	1,306	413	1,719	6.7%	1.0%	2.9%
Health Sciences and Social Services	1,211	3,631	4,842	6.2%	9.2%	8.2%
Physical, Mathematical and Computer Sciences	2,108	1,576	3,684	10.8%	4.0%	6.2%
Physical Planning and Construction	631	378	1,009	3.2%	1.0%	1.7%
Total STEM Fields	5,771	6,532	12,303	29.5%	16.5%	20.8%
Business, Commerce and Management Studies	5,530	9,563	15,093	28.2%	24.1%	25.5%
Communication Studies and Language	554	1,136	1,690	2.8%	2.9%	2.9%
Culture and the Arts	13	25	38	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Education, Training and Development	6,162	20,053	26,215	31.5%	50.6%	44.3%
Human and Social Studies	563	1,238	1,801	2.9%	3.1%	3.0%
Law, Military Science and Security	902	871	1,773	4.6%	2.2%	3.0%
Services and Life Sciences	92	203	295	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
Total Non-STEM Fields	13,816	33,089	46,905	70.5%	83.5%	79.2%
Grand Total	19,587	39,621	59,208	100%	100%	100%

Source: NCHE, 2018

Table 10, reaffirms the manner in which Higher Educational Institutions in Namibia in 2018 enrolled more female than male students in non-STEM fields of study. The reverse was the case for STEM fields of study.

Table 11. 2018 Public and Private Higher Education Institutions examination results by sex

Examination Results	Number			Per Cent		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Completed Studies	2,479	4,906	7,385	16.5%	17.8%	17.4%
Pass	6,350	13,677	20,027	42.4%	49.7%	47.1%
Fail	4,384	5,904	10,288	29.3%	21.4%	24.2%
Continuing (Masters and PhD)	209	343	552	1.4%	1.2%	1.3%
Absent	1,558	2,709	4,267	10.4%	9.8%	10.0%
Public HEIs Total	14,980	27,539	42,519	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Completed Studies	1,128	2,278	3,406	24.5%	18.9%	20.4%
Pass	2,551	8,248	10,799	55.4%	68.3%	64.7%
Fail	404	829	1,233	8.8%	6.9%	7.4%
Continuing (Masters and PhD)	12	10	22	.3%	.1%	.1%
Absent	480	643	1,123	10.4%	5.3%	6.7%
Not Stated	32	74	106	.7%	.6%	.6%
Private HEIs Total	4,607	12,082	16,689	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Completed Studies	3,607	7,184	10,791	18.4%	18.1%	18.2%
Pass	8,901	21,925	30,826	45.4%	55.3%	52.1%
Fail	4,788	6,733	11,521	24.4%	17.0%	19.5%
Continuing (Masters and PhD)	221	353	574	1.1%	.9%	1.0%
Absent	2,038	3,352	5,390	10.4%	8.5%	9.1%
Not Stated	32	74	106	.2%	.2%	.2%
Total HEIs	19,587	39,621	59,208	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NCHE, 2018

Amongst other things, Table 11 shows that in 2018, whereas 68% of students in Public Higher Education Institutions who passed in their examinations in various subjects were female, 76% of students in Private Higher Education Institutions who passed their examinations were female. According to Table 11, this implied that more female than male students in both Public and Private Higher Educational Institutions passed their examinations in 2018.

Table 12: 2018 Examination results by Higher Education Institutions and by sex

HEIs	Examination Results	Number			% within Institution		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
NAMCOL	Completed Studies	63	561	624	15.2%	14.3%	14.4%
	Pass	266	2,824	3,090	64.3%	72.0%	71.3%
	Fail	85	536	621	20.5%	13.7%	14.3%
	Total	414	3,921	4,335	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
NUST	Completed Studies	987	1,227	2,214	17.5%	21.7%	19.6%
	Pass	2,064	2,000	4,064	38.7%	37.7%	38.2%
	Fail	2,191	2,055	4,246	41.0%	38.7%	39.9%
	Absent	144	93	237	2.8%	1.9%	2.3%
	Total	5,386	5,375	10,761	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
UNAM	Completed Studies	1,429	3,118	4,547	15.6%	17.1%	16.6%
	Pass	4,020	8,853	12,873	43.8%	48.5%	46.9%
	Fail	2,108	3,313	5,421	23.0%	18.2%	19.8%
	Continuing (Masters and PhD)	209	343	552	2.3%	1.9%	2.0%
	Absent	1,414	2,616	4,030	15.4%	14.3%	14.7%
	Total	9,180	18,243	27,423	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
IUM	Completed Studies	567	1,202	1,769	23.6%	22.5%	22.8%
	Pass	1,234	3,205	4,439	51.3%	59.9%	57.3%
	Fail	246	443	689	10.2%	8.3%	8.9%
	Continuing (Masters and PhD)	12	10	22	0.5%	0.2%	0.3%
	Absent	346	488	834	14.4%	9.1%	10.8%
	Total	2,405	5,348	7,753	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
IOL	Completed Studies	76	363	439	8.8%	8.8%	8.8%
	Pass	758	3,617	4,375	88.0%	88.1%	88.1%
	Fail	27	126	153	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%
	Total	861	4,106	4,967	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
TRIUMPHANT	Completed Studies	188	123	311	30.7%	15.1%	21.7%
	Pass	271	524	795	44.2%	64.1%	55.6%
	Fail	74	83	157	12.1%	10.2%	11.0%
	Absent	80	87	167	13.1%	10.6%	11.7%
	Total	613	817	1,430	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Other HEIs	Completed Studies	297	590	887	40.8%	32.6%	34.9%
	Pass	288	902	1,190	39.6%	49.8%	46.9%
	Fail	57	177	234	7.8%	9.8%	9.2%
	Absent	54	68	122	7.4%	3.8%	4.8%
	Not Stated	32	74	106	4.4%	4.1%	4.2%
	Total	728	1,811	2,539	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NCHE, 2018.

Table 12 reveals that whereas 91% of learners who passed their examinations through NAMCOL in 2018 were female, 49% of the students who passed their examinations in a variety of fields of study at NUST were female. In addition, whereas 69% of the students who passed their examinations at UNAM were female, 72% of students who passed theirs at IUM were female. Moreover, Table 12 showed that in 2018 more female than male students passed

their examinations in all Higher Educational Institutions which supplied NCHE with their examination results.

Table 13. Students in HEIs completing studies by NQF qualification type and by sex, 2018

Qualification Field of Learning	Number			Per Cent		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture and Nature Conservation	89	130	219	2.5%	1.8%	2.0%
Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology	273	77	350	7.6%	1.1%	3.2%
Health Sciences and Social Services	179	639	818	5.0%	8.9%	7.6%
Physical, Mathematical and Computer Sciences	422	353	775	11.7%	4.9%	7.2%
Physical Planning and Construction	139	86	225	3.9%	1.2%	2.1%
STEM Fields Total	1,102	1,285	2,387	30.6%	17.9%	22.1%
Business, Commerce and Management Studies	1,213	2,455	3,668	33.6%	34.2%	34.0%
Communication Studies and Language	95	254	349	2.6%	3.5%	3.2%
Culture and the Arts	3	6	9	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
Education, Training and Development	887	2,715	3,602	24.6%	37.8%	33.4%
Human and Social Studies	94	240	334	2.6%	3.3%	3.1%
Law, Military Science and Security	193	180	373	5.4%	2.5%	3.5%
Services and Life Sciences	20	49	69	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%
Non-STEM Fields Total	2,505	5,899	8,404	69.4%	82.1%	77.9%
Grand total	3,607	7,184	10,791	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NCHE, 2018

Table 13 shows that academic performance in the STEM fields of study was a contested area between male and female students in tertiary education institutions. This was the case because although 78% of male students passed their examinations in Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology, 54% of them passed their examinations in Physical Science, Mathematical and Computer Sciences, and 62% of male students passed examinations in Physical Planning and Construction, 78% of female students passed their examinations in Health Sciences and Social Services and 59% of female students passed their examinations in Agriculture and Nature Conservation. Some data from NUST is inconsistent with this deduction. What was uncontested according to Table 13 was the fact that Higher Education female students performed substantially better than male students in 2018 in almost all of the non-STEM subjects in which examination results were reported on.

The following graduation statistics from UNAM and NUST further communicate stable findings over the years on the disparity in academic performance between male and female students.

Table 14: UNAM Graduation statistics per academic year by gender, 1992-2017

Academic Year	Female	Female %	Male	Male %	Total
1992	415	69.1%	186	30.9%	601
1993	323	57.3%	241	42.7%	564
1994	388	65.0%	209	35.0%	597
1995	362	62.4%	218	37.6%	580
1996	483	64.3%	268	35.7%	751
1997	377	59.8%	253	40.2%	630
1998	476	60.0%	317	40.0%	793
1999	415	62.0%	254	38.0%	669
2000	515	60.4%	338	39.6%	853
2001	543	66.5%	273	33.5%	816
2002	645	66.2%	330	33.8%	975
2003	971	69.2%	432	30.8%	1403
2004	829	65.4%	439	34.6%	1268
2005	794	66.6%	398	33.4%	1192
2006	766	65.8%	398	34.2%	1164
2007	834	67.5%	402	32.5%	1236
2008	834	64.2%	465	35.8%	1299
2009	973	62.2%	591	37.8%	1564
2010	1206	65.6%	633	34.4%	1839
2011	1854	61.9%	1142	38.1%	2996
2012	1712	67.6%	821	32.4%	2533
2013	1708	66.6%	855	33.4%	2563
2014	1718	66.3%	873	33.7%	2591
2015	1936	67.2%	943	32.8%	2879
2016	2592	66.0%	1337	34.0%	3929
2017	2530	67.8%	1200	32.2%	3730

Source: UNAM, 2017

Table 14 shows that for 25 years, on average, more than 65% of students graduating from UNAM were female.



Table 15: UNAM 2019 undergraduate graduation statistics by Faculty, Qualification Type

Faculty School Name	Qualification Type	F	M	Total
AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCE	Bachelor honours Degree	52	22	74
	Diploma	37	24	61
	Doctorate Degree	1		1
	Master's Degree	9	5	14
	Professional Bachelor degree	8	9	17
AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCE TOTAL		107	60	167
ECONOMIC & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	Bachelor honours Degree	79	56	135
	Certificate	44	23	67
	Diploma	218	142	360
	Doctorate Degree	1		1
	Master's Degree	31	23	54
	Professional Bachelor degree	92	48	140
ECONOMIC & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE TOTAL		465	292	757
EDUCATION	Bachelor honours Degree	889	440	1329
	Diploma	650	271	921
	Doctorate Degree	1	1	2
	Master's Degree	13	8	21
EDUCATION TOTAL		1553	720	2273
ENGINEERING & IT	Bachelor honours Degree	1	2	3
	Master's Degree	2	2	4
	Professional Bachelor degree	9	21	30
ENGINEERING & IT TOTAL		12	25	37
FHS: SCHOOL OF MEDICINE	Professional Bachelor degree	37	17	54
FHS: SCHOOL OF PHARMACY	Diploma	15	8	23
	Doctorate Degree		3	3
	Professional Bachelor degree	19	4	23
FHS: SCHOOL OF PHARMACY TOTAL		34	15	49
FHS:SCHOOL OF NURSING	Certificate	13		13
	Diploma	74	13	87
	Master's Degree	2		2
	Professional Bachelor degree	135	25	160
FHS:SCHOOL OF NURSING TOTAL		224	38	262
FHS:SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH	Doctorate Degree	2	1	3
	Master's Degree	7	2	9
	Professional Bachelor degree	21	10	31
FHS:SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH TOTAL		30	13	43

and gender

Source: UNAM, 2019

Table 15 shows that in 2019, except for the Faculty of Engineering and IT, more than 60% of graduates in the rest of the Faculties at UNAM were female. In fact, in the medical fields and in Education, more than 68% of the graduates at UNAM in 2019 were female.

Table 16. UNAM Graduates by Faculty name and gender, 2016-2019

Faculty School Name	2016		2017		2018		2019	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCE	100	67	88	76	90	69	107	60
CEN OPEN, DISTANCE & e-LEARNING					92	20		
ECONOMIC & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	408	283	366	238	641	340	465	292
EDUCATION	634	280	1042	468	1339	576	1553	720
ENGINEERING & IT	17	48	26	69	19	42	12	25
EXTERNAL STUDIES - UNAM	586	268	401	166				
FHS: SCHOOL OF MEDICINE	39	18	56	14	44	19	37	17
FHS: SCHOOL OF PHARMACY	33	16	43	16	34	14	34	15
FHS:SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY								
FHS:SCHOOL OF NURSING	198	46	167	31	228	42	224	38
FHS:SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH	5	1	9	2	8	3	30	13
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES	312	99	276	88	350	111	355	116
LANGUAGE CENTRE								
LAW	112	84	94	69	126	75	88	53
OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR								
SCHOOL OF COMPUTING	1	1	11	33	10	40	17	33
SCHOOL OF MILITARY SCIENCE	4	6	17	15	5	12	11	10
SCIENCE	143	120	97	65	119	84	126	71
Grand Total	2592	1337	2693	1350	3105	1447	3059	1463

According to Table 16, except for the Faculty of Engineering and IT, all other Faculties at UNAM produced substantially more female than male graduates during the four-year period of 2016-2019. For instance, more than 68% of the medical doctors who graduated from UNAM during this period were female.



Table 17. NUST graduates by Faculty, sex and academic year, 2011-2016

Faculty	2011			2012			2013			2014			2015			2016		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Management Sciences	1413	622	2035	1393	681	2074	1139	569	1708	1448	665	2113	1306	568	1874	1268	635	1903
Computing and Informatics	71	95	166	78	107	185	143	194	337	146	181	327	121	157	278	118	142	260
Engineering	65	144	209	71	192	263	71	255	326	67	201	268	75	158	233	92	170	262
Health and Applied Sciences	49	31	80	59	31	90	56	35	91	63	35	98	66	41	107	88	58	146
Human Sciences	52	68	120	57	67	124	55	65	120	198	166	364	279	185	464	250	230	480
Natural Resources and Spatial Sciences	133	127	260	151	142	293	185	159	344	118	135	253	145	133	278	118	145	263
Total	1783	1087	2870	1809	1220	3029	1649	1277	2926	2040	1383	3423	1992	1242	3234	1934	1380	3314

Source: NUST, 2017

Table 17 shows that for every year from 2011 to 2016, more female than male students graduated from NUST. However, more male than female students graduated from NUST with degrees in Computing and Engineering during this period.

Table 18. NUST graduates by STEM field, sex, and academic year, 2011-2016

Field of Study	2011			2012			2013			2014			2015			2016		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
NON STEM	1465	690	2155	1450	748	2198	1194	634	1828	1646	831	2477	1585	753	2338	1518	865	2383
STEM	318	397	715	359	472	831	455	643	1098	394	552	946	407	489	896	416	515	896
Total	1783	1087	2870	1809	1220	3029	1649	1277	2926	2040	1383	3423	1992	1242	3234	1934	1380	3314

Source: NUST, 2017

Although Table 18 is clear on the point that from 2011 to 2016, more male than female students graduated from NUST with degrees in STEM fields of study and that more female than male students graduated from NUST with degrees in NON STEM fields, the table masks some STEM fields in which female students in fact performed better than male students.

Table 19: NUST Graduation statistics by qualification type, by sex, and by academic year, 2016-2020

QUALIFICATION_TYPE	2016			2017			2018			2019			2020		
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total
Doctoral Degree				1	1	2	1	3	4	1		1		4	4
Masters Degree	24	27	51	26	29	55	62	42	104	73	49	122	41	52	93
Honours Degree	217	122	339	282	172	454	355	180	535	395	192	587	409	191	600
Postgraduate Diploma	5	9	14	17	9	26	8	2	10	20	21	41	13	13	26
Postgraduate Certificate	13	9	22	28	21	49	32	34	66	30	7	37	29	26	55
Professional Bachelor's Degree	57	54	111	33	57	90	50	60	110	43	75	118	48	56	104
Bachelor's Degree	948	603	1551	892	587	1479	758	580	1338	698	597	1295	790	619	1409
Diploma	223	181	404	132	132	264	107	147	254	100	120	220	270	180	450
Higher Certificate	18	27	45	10	19	29	27	44	71	26	31	57	6	8	14
Certificate	103	105	208	104	102	206	75	93	168	75	105	180	75	90	165
Grand Total	1608	1137	2745	1525	1129	2654	1475	1185	2660	1461	1197	2658	1681	1239	2920



Source: NUST, 2020

As was the case in table 17, Table 19 shows that for every year from 2016 to 2020, more female than male students graduated from NUST. This was particularly the case when it came to Bachelor's degrees.

Table 20. NUST's summary graduation statistics for 2016-2020

ACADEMIC_YEAR	GENDER		Grand Total
	F	M	
2016	1608	1137	2745
2017	1525	1129	2654
2018	1475	1185	2660
2019	1461	1197	2658
2020	1681	1239	2920

Source: NUST, 2020

We note that the overall difference in performance between male and female students depicted in Table 20 is smaller than the one depicted in tables on UNAM graduation statistics provided in Tables 14, 15 and 16 above. The reason for this could be that at NUST, more male students perform better than female students in STEM subjects (see Tables 17 and 18).

According to us, the data presented in the tables above communicate the following messages:

1. What is obvious from the data provided in the tables above is that in general, the majority of Namibian secondary school female learners and Namibian tertiary education female students academically perform better than their male counterparts. This type of performance is consistent with that which obtains in a number of SADC countries.
2. Graduation statistics from UNAM and NUST demonstrate, unambiguously, that except in some STEM fields of study, substantially more female than male students over a span of nearly 30 years obtained degrees and other qualifications in various fields of study. Based on enrolment figures from the two institutions and from other Higher Education Institutions in the country, covering a number of years, the disparity in academic performance between male and female students is a reflection of the fact that more female than male learners qualify from Secondary Schools to enter tertiary education institutions.
3. As has been explained earlier in this report, more female than male students qualify to enter tertiary education institutions because more male learners than female learners drop out of primary and secondary schools, in general display lower performance, have lower promotion and survival rates from lower to higher school grades.
4. The data obtained from the 2018 Namibia Higher Education Statistical Yearbook that was published by the National Council for Higher Education provided more evidence affirming the assertion that more female than male students studying at almost all public and private tertiary education institutions passed their examinations. This meant that more female students academically performed better than male students in their studies in 2018. This deduction is consistent with graduation statistics from UNAM and NUST that have been provided above.
5. We wish to reiterate that data in Table 13 showed that academic performance in the STEM fields of study was a contested area between male and female students in tertiary education institutions. This was the case because although more male students than female students passed their examinations in some STEM-related subjects, more



female than male students passed their examinations in other STEM-related subjects. For instance, some data from UNAM and NUST revealed that for a number of years, more female than male students graduated with qualifications in the medical fields.

Specifically, since its inception, the School of Medicine at UNAM that is situated at Hage Geingob Campus in Windhoek has produced more female than male doctors. What was uncontested according to Table 13 was the fact that Higher Education female students performed substantially better than male students in 2018 in almost all of the non-STEM subjects in which examination results were reported on by almost all Higher Education Institutions. An important general implication we deduce from all this is the point that the male students' underachievement in education is not displayed in all fields of study. There are STEM-related subjects such as Engineering, Physical Planning and Computer Science in which male students at tertiary education institutions perform academically better than female students.



The statement of the problem and research questions

The statistics provided in the background to this study did not tell us why Namibian female learners and students outperformed their male counterparts. They also did not tell us how this type of performance was expressed throughout the country. At the tertiary education level, the statistics did not provide us with characteristics of female students who outperformed male students and those who did not. We also did not know the academic and social profiles of male learners and male students who underachieved in education and those who in fact outperformed female learners and students. *In other words, we perceived the nature, scope and presentation of Namibian boys' and tertiary level male students' underachievement in education to be rather opaque. All this needed to be clarified through an empirical study.*

Moreover, we needed to go beyond the process of capturing the profiles of male learners and male students who underachieved in education and look at the manner in which these learners, other learners, teachers, University students, lecturers and parents viewed and understood the phenomenon of academic underachievement.

Research was needed to understand in depth how a number of stakeholders in the Namibian education system viewed and thought about academic underachievement that many boys and young men in the country exhibited. In addition, we needed to go beyond gender analysis and consider how sociological, psychological development, cultural, economic, curriculum-based, quality of education, inclusive education, political and social media perspectives could be deployed to elucidate the phenomenon of boys' underachievement and under-participation in education.

Our expectation in the study was that this understanding would yield empirical data on which to base ameliorative programmes for improving and enhancing the quality of academic attainments amongst male and female learners in the Namibian education system.

Based on all this, the main purpose of this study was to find out what accounted for the disparity in academic performance between male and female learners/students and what its national short and long- term educational, social-cultural, economic and political implications were. In the main, the study was about finding out what gender-related, cultural, economic, curriculum-based, quality of education, inclusive education and political factors influenced Namibian male students' /learners' underachievement and under-participation in education.

Emanating from this statement of the problem, we intended to answer the following specific research questions:

1. What is the nature and scope of Namibian boys' underachievement in education?
2. How do sociological, cultural, economic, political, curriculum-based and quality of education, psychological development, inclusive education and social media factors influence boys' underachievement and under-participation in education in the Namibian context?
3. How do international, continental, regional and national gender-related interventions and policies influence boys' achievement in education in Namibia?
4. What support do schools, tertiary education institutions and communities provide to boys and young men in the Namibian Education system?
5. What should the education system and communities do to prevent boys' under-participation and underachievement in education?



-
6. What suggestions do teachers, lecturers, parents and students/learners have about educational and social programmes that could be put in place to enhance the academic performance of boys who underachieve and under-participate in education?

The significance of the study

The significance of the intervention initiatives that were intended to be the main outcome of the study was to include preventing boys from dropping out of school early, promoting the retention of boys in school, increasing the boys' survival rates in school, reducing the boys' repetition rates and providing support to boys in order to enhance the quality of their educational attainments. Ultimately, the main benefit of the study was expected to be that of promoting the improvement of the quality of education in Namibia.

Part of the vision on Gender enunciated in Namibia's Vision 2030 was that by the year 2030, "girls remain in school as long as boys, and girls and women are participating equally in the fields of science and technology". Contrary to this vision, the picture that emerged from the 2012-2019 EMIS statistics referred to earlier was that of gender *disparity* and not gender *parity* in education. This disparity was in favour of girls. One of the national benefits of the study was expected to be the creation of awareness of this disparity and how boys could be supported to come back to parity with girls.

According to Namibia's fourth National Development Plan (NDP4, p. 46), "since independence, the Namibian education system has often failed to deliver quality in its graduates. Issues surrounding the quality of education provision persist at practically every level and in almost every type of training institution. Passing standards are generally low, and the knowledge required to achieve the marks is often considered insufficient by global standards." One of the main strategies proposed by NDP4 to enhance education quality was that of improving learning standards and curricular development. The other important benefit of the research project that emanated from NDP4's indictment of the education system was that of increasing the quality of boys' and girls' educational outcomes with the view of promoting education for economic skills transfer.

Moreover, the research project was expected to produce research findings that would provide evidence for a paradigm shift in understanding gender and education in Namibia. The evidence would require the country to shift the focus from understanding gender parity in education in favour of girls to gender parity in education for the good of **both** girls and boys.

At theoretical and practical levels, the study was expected to give voice to an apparent backlash of gender parity initiatives in education. In Namibia, the gender-based initiatives to increase access to education and improve the quality of educational attainments amongst learners seem to have bypassed many boys. The research project was partly intended to highlight the social-economic dangers of ignoring this backlash and the importance of putting in place mechanisms of ameliorating it to promote gender balanced social-economic development.



LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we review literature pertinent to male students'/learners' underachievement in education by considering apparent causes of Namibian boys' underachievement in education, by reflecting on educational policy ramifications on Namibian boys' underachievement in education, by reviewing school, teachers', parents', peers' and communities' support of boys' education in the country. In addition, the literature review section includes a conceptual framework on which the study was anchored. We shall consider these components one by one in the manner that follows.

Apparent causes of Namibian boys' underachievement in education

Although lack of targeted learning support for boys and boys' under-participation in education in Namibia could be attributed to their under-achievement, research evidence on *causes* of this under-achievement is scanty in the country. Nambala (2002, p.29) stated that "in the majority of the teachers' opinions, the dominant characteristics of girls are that girls are quiet and full of simplicity and sincerity. They have the patience, gentleness, zeal and affection necessary to maintain classroom order and to make other classmates' lives easier. On the other hand, boys are trouble makers, aggressive, domineering, and careless".

Mapani and Mushaandja (2013) reported that amongst other things, boys dropped out of school in the Khomas Region due to negative peer pressure, lack of family/parental support, personal reasons (e.g. low motivation, perceived low ability, not valuing education, getting involved in sexual relationships early in life) and lack of teacher/school support. This study had limited coverage as it was conducted in 5 schools in 1 out of 14 education regions. Another limitation of the study was that data were not collected from boys who had dropped out of school. In our judgment, additional research data on reasons for Namibian boys' grade repetition, low promotion rates, low survival rates and relatively low academic achievement were required.

We can further attribute Namibian boys' under-achievement in education to a myriad of causes that have been arrived at through research conducted in Australia and other Asian countries, in some Commonwealth countries, in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in some countries of the SADC region and in some Sub-Saharan African countries (Jha, Bakshi and Faria, 2012). Jha, Bakshi and Faria (2012) categorized causes of boys' under-achievement in education into sociological, economic, schooling, cultural, political, and curriculum-based explanations. Let us consider each of these causes in the manner that follows.

Sociological and cultural explanations pertain to the influence of socialization, social economic status, location (i.e. rural or urban location), the construction of masculine gender identity, perceived 'feminization' of education, and peer pressure in boys' under-achievement in education.

In terms of *socialization*, the thinking is that boys 'experience privileging' as they are not expected to have domestic responsibilities. This does not enable them to learn self-discipline that is required if one is to academically excel. Girls are socialized and expected to perform multiple domestic chores at home. Instead of disadvantaging them, this experience teaches them to be self-disciplined, to multi-task and to learn how to manage time and take responsibility- ingredients that are essential in academic achievement.



This understanding would apply to many boys from many cultural backgrounds in Namibia. However, this explanation is inadequate because it does not help us to understand why some boys in the same socialization regimes excel as well as or even better than some girls. What is more compelling is the view that the freedom and flexibility that boys are given in the home in many societies works against them as it teaches them to be rebellious, disobedient and to stand up to authority.

Once in school, they tend to resist authority and flout school rules (EAP UNGEI, 2011). Stating this does not, however, explain the issue of Namibian boys' underachievement. Although we currently, are unaware of **published** research evidence in Namibia to either support or refute this understanding, we shall later in this report share findings that affirm this view from the perspectives of parents, teachers, secondary school learners, University students and University lecturers.

The variable of *Social Economic Status (SES)* influences boys' under-achievement when more boys from low SES under-achieve than boys from high SES. What is intriguing is that even under the same SES conditions, findings in a number of studies have shown that girls in many countries perform better in education than boys (Filmer, 2008). This appears to be the case in Namibia. However, in our view, research evidence was required to confirm this phenomenon. We shall present some data on this that were provided by University students in Focus Group Discussions.

SACMEQ (2011) data have revealed that advantaged urban school settings promote better gender equality in learning achievement than disadvantaged rural school settings. More boys in rural schools tended to perform worse than girls in Reading and Mathematics at grade 6 level. Knowing this does not answer the question: Why do girls perform better than boys in rural Namibian schools? We needed further research to unpack this.

Jha, Bakshi and Faria (2012) have reported research data which indicated that in Latin America and in the Caribbean countries, boys' under-achievement in education was associated with the construction and application of negative *masculine identities* that promoted the development of 'anti-feminine' and 'anti-school' attitudes. More Latin American and Caribbean boys from low income groups than those from high income groups perceived schooling as a 'feminine' activity that should be left to girls and boys who were perceived as 'sisis'.

Because of this social-cultural mentality, they dropped out of school early. Although pro-school and prosocial culture can be developed amongst boys from any society (Sax, 2016), we were not aware of research evidence that showed that this phenomenon operated in the Namibian context. How Namibian boys and girls valued education needed explication through research. We needed contextualized Namibian research data on how the construction of a variety of masculinities impacted on boys' underachievement in the country. We provide some data on this in the results section of this report.

According to Gevers and Fisher (2012) *Peer pressure* in South African schools influences boys' under-achievement when boys find anti-social behaviour such as bullying, gang membership and violence, crime, drug and alcohol abuse more attractive than going to school. So, they drop out of school early or under-participate in education by simply 'goofing' off and 'lazing' around. Although school violence in Namibia is a problem in some



schools, its association with boys' under-achievement in education has not yet been empirically ascertained (Burton, Leoschut & Popovac 2011). Notwithstanding this, we present later in this report findings on the influence of peer pressure on Namibian boys' underachievement in education.

Economic causes of boys' under-achievement in education implicate poverty, occupational practices, economic hardships and 'complacency' in school activities amongst boys that emanates from the belief that they can find jobs that do not depend on educational credentials.

One argument is that boys from poor backgrounds withdraw from formal education experiences in order to go away and work to raise income to support their families. We shall later in this report provide some University Students Focus Group Discussion data which affirms this. They may also spend less time on school activities because they are required to supply labour to their families' subsistence or livestock undertakings. In Lesotho, for instance, many boys from poor backgrounds stayed away from school because they had to look after their families' livestock (Jha, Bakshi and Faria 2012).

In Namibia, this explanation may be used to explain the under-achievement in education of boys from some poverty stricken families. It does not however, explain why girls experiencing similar economic hardships outperform boys in school. It also does not explain why some boys from well-to-do families underachieve in education. We hoped that the present study would provide some empirical evidence pertaining to this.

The "*complacency*" explanation which stipulates that some boys under-achieve at educational tasks because they believe they can get jobs that do not require much education may apply to some Namibian boys. This would be the case because with a national youth unemployment rate of 39%, there were more unemployed girls amongst the youth aged 15-34 years than boys (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2014). To avoid unemployment, girls would be expected to work harder than boys in education and thereby outperform them. However, this may mean that girls were not unemployed but in school while boys had dropped out to work. In any case, we shall provide later on in this report some evidence which would support the position that the "*complacency*" theory operates in Namibia as it has been used elsewhere in the world.

In terms of **School Processes**, it is held that boys under-achieve in education because they are perceived to be lazy and inattentive to their studies, low academic expectations are held for them, they are expected and accepted to be aggressive and less disciplined. In addition, boys may under-participate in education because they receive more corporal punishment from teachers and their peers and so drop out of school (Jha, Bakshi and Faria 2012; Nambala 2002; Mapani and Mushaandja 2013; Froschl and Sprung 2012). We judged that these aspects might speak to gender stereotypes that we intended, in the Namibian case, to verify through the research being reported on.

Curriculum – based and quality of education explanations are of two kinds. Firstly, boys under-achieve because they are confronted in school with curriculum content that is perceived to be either irrelevant to them or does not relate to their needs and aspirations. We have some data to speak to this in this report.



In addition, boys appear to under-achieve in education because they are assessed on educational material such as reading, writing and Mathematics that they perceive to be unimportant to their lives. Nicholls and Hazzard (1993, p.177) clarify this vividly in the following quotation that is based on the thinking and behaviour of a grade 2 learner called Tim who displayed low performance on standardized tests:

“Tim reminds us that students do not have to be academically superior or see themselves as above others to be committed to asking their own questions and making experience expand, glow, and cohere. Tim thinks about the world, how it looks, feels, works-what he can do in it and what it does to him- more than he thinks about his standing in the class. He derives satisfaction from communicating art and meaning more than from acclaim or feeling superior.If achievement as the tests define it is, in the end, the important thing, Tim is a failure. If schools and parents communicate this to Tim, how will his vigorous and sensitive commitment to constructing a humane, artful, and interesting world survive?”

This kind of reasoning provokes the following questions: What exactly do we mean when we say that boys are under-achieving in education? Are boys failing to learn or are they learning other things they perceive to be more worthwhile to them? What other things are they learning that are not part of their schooling? Are boys ‘failing’ to extract meaning from what they experience in the world? How do we ensure that the curriculum captures boys’ and other learners’ interests and aspirations? Are we perhaps failing to teach them in accordance with their needs? Some of these questions were asked in the study on which this report is based.

Secondly, poor quality education causes boys’ under-achievement in education. In support of this, SACMEQ (2011) reported data which implied that in Namibia, gender equality was promoted in learning achievement contexts where high quality education prevailed. However, a question can still be asked. How does poor quality education affect girls’ learning achievement? Why is it that girls, in general, still perform better than boys under conditions of poor quality education?

Political explanations of boys’ under-achievement in education revolve around issues of ethnicity, discrimination and marginalization. Boys from marginalized communities tend to perform worse than girls in education. We would expect Namibian boys from marginalized groups to perform worse than girls in education. Because the category of marginalized children in Namibia includes several types of children such as children belonging to marginalized ethnic groups (e.g. the Ovahimba, Ovatwe and the San), orphans and vulnerable children, children from poverty stricken homes, children with disabilities, children of farm workers, children from informal settlements, children residing in remote areas of the country, children from single parent headed families, etc., this would be an oversimplification as both girls and boys from these communities would experience barriers to formal education (Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture, 2000).

This does not rule out the possibility that boys from these varied groups in Namibia may be prone to underachievement and under-participation in education than boys from other population groups in the country. In countries such as America, discrimination on the basis of race operates in such a manner that black boys are stigmatised as bad ‘boys’ and ‘trouble makers’ in school, who are likely to underachieve (Diprete and Buchmann, (2013). We have not come across research evidence in Namibia which indicates that selective discrimination impacts on boys’ underachievement. However, in the next section of this literature review,



we shall reflect on how educational policies in Namibia could influence boys' underachievement in education.

Educational policy ramifications on Namibian boys' underachievement in education

In USA (Weaver- Hightower (2003), in Australia (Lingard, 2003; Mills, 2003; Mills, et al., 2007) and in UK (Moreau, 2011), vigorous debates raged over the years about reviewing education policies to cater for targeted educational needs of boys. Amongst other things, the gist of the debates have been on the premise that in order to more comprehensively enhance the academic achievement of boys who underachieve in education, education systems, as they did for girls, may have to review their policies and establish targeted educational support frameworks for such boys.

In Namibia, one position is that there is no need to review or adapt national educational policies to meet targeted needs of boys who underachieve in education because most educational policies in existence in the country had been framed to take into account the needs of all children/learners, including boys. For instance, policy documents such as *Towards Education for All: A development brief for education, culture and training (1993)*, *The Namibian Constitution, article 20 (1990)*, *The Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (1999,2000)*, *Namibia National Plan of Action for EFA, 2001-2015(2000)* and *Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture Strategic Plan, 2017/18-2021/22 (2017)* were designed to cover all learners in the country.

When we reviewed other Namibian education policies that appeared to cover the needs of all learners equally, we discovered that they, in addition, targeted the girl child and not the boy child for special support. For instance, whereas the *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalized Children (2000)* among other things, singled out the girl child as one of the vulnerable children to be provided with targeted educational support, the *Education Sector policy on Inclusive Education (2013)* also identified the girl child as one of the vulnerable and marginalized children to be provided with targeted educational support. Similarly, whereas the *Basic Education Act, 2020 (Act No. 3)* includes the issue of the prevention and management of learner pregnancy, the *5th National Development Plan (NDP5) (2017)* singled out girls and women for special support under its section on gender equality. Moreover, *Namibia Vision2030: Policy Framework for Long Term National Development (2004, p.52)* identified the girl child as a recipient of targeted support so that by the year 2030 “girls remain in school as long as boys, and women also participate in science”.

The point we are making by pointing out that the girl child was *specifically* paid attention to in these policy documents is that it would not be out of the ordinary to ask that the boy child, due to his identified concerns, needs and peculiar challenges, could also be made a subject of targeted support in Namibia's educational policy goals and objectives. This position would be consistent with Namibia's practice of designing educational policies for children requiring targeted attention. For instance, over the years, Namibia designed and implemented the *National Policy on HIV/AIDS for the Education Sector (2003)* and the *Education Sector Policy for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (2008)*.

When we surveyed how other education systems in the world attempted to review their policies to enhance boys' educational attainments (e.g. Golding, 2010; Mill, et al., 2007; Mills, 2003; Lingard, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Yates, 1997) we identified the following educational policy issues of foci:



1. The policy review should not use statistics on boys' underachievement in education as justification for claiming that the boy child has become a victim of unfair treatment in the educational system. However, the statistics should be used to communicate the message that because the boy child is underperforming and under-participating in education, he needs policy support in the form of ameliorative strategies which when applied in schools and other educational institutions would enhance his academic achievement (Mills, et al., 2007; Golding, 2010). In other words, the policy review should conceive boys' underachievement in education in the context of learning outcomes from schooling and not necessarily in the context of equality between boys and girls (Lingard, 2003). Emanating from this, the policy review should include the principle that the education system needs to "develop pedagogical practices which meet the needs of boys as well as those of girls" (Mills, 2003, p. 63).
2. The policy focussing on boys' education should not *homogenize* boys' and girls' academic performance in school but focus on boys who underperform and girls who underperform. In addition, it should focus on sources of difference in performance such as those of social-economic status, poverty and socialization (i.e. upbringing). This would be important to do because **not all** boys perform worse than **all** girls and **not all** girls perform better than **all** boys (Mills, et al., 2007). As will be reported on and discussed later in this report, issues of poverty and socialization implicate not only boys' underachievement but girls' underachievement as well.
3. The policy review on boys' education should not create the impression that women and girls are no longer discriminated against in some educational settings. It should however, acknowledge that there are aspects of the educational system that may be construed to cause men and boys experience disadvantaging discrimination because of their gender (Mill, et al., 2007). Such aspects should be identified and mitigated. Failure to recognize factors that promote boys' underachievement in education may constitute some form of discrimination against them and educational neglect of their needs, concerns, problems and challenges. We later in this report present findings on factors that may influence some boys' underachievement in education.
4. To take into account their propensity to learn from practical experience, the policy review on boys' education should include learning out of school in factories, on farms, construction sites, adult learning centres, in markets, shops, fishing boats, etc. (Golding, 2010). Such practical learning would form a valuable link between school and the world of work for boys and girls. The need for this is elaborated on in the data that we present later in this report.
5. Because possible causes of boys' underachievement in education are multifaceted, the policy review on such underachievement should focus on redressing negative effects of poverty, marginalization, lack of access to educational opportunities, resources and materials, rurality, remoteness, drought, lack of shelter, poor sanitation, lack of amenities of various kinds, hunger, lack of transport to and from school, alcohol and drug abuse, peer pressure, family instability, lack of affirming role models, etc. (Lingard, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). We have data that speak to these aspects in this report.
6. The boy child underachievement in education issue has not yet risen to widespread public concern in Namibia because the focus on girls' issues has not yet waned and because the focus on girls still attracts funding and international moral and political support. The policy review on boys' education should highlight and create awareness on this and assuage fears of those who think that the process of mitigating boys' underachievement in education would undermine girls' gains in education (Yates, 1997; Weaver-Hightower, 2003).



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7. To assure critics that support for boys is not intended to harm girls' programmes, both boys' and girls' programmes should be equally funded and advocated for in the boys' education policy review (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).
 8. The policy review on boys' achievement in education should also attend to 'ordinary' boys (i.e. boys who may be cooperative, compliant, not destructive and not disruptive). This means that the policy review should speak to issues, concerns and challenges of **all** boys (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).
 9. The policy review on boys' achievement in education should recognize roles of parents, communities, teachers and boys themselves in intervention programmes. We expand on this in the next section of this review.
 10. The policy review on boys' achievement in education should 'rupture' the boy/girl dualism as academic underachievement challenges go beyond matters of **binary** gender issues. To some extent, this is the case because sources of underachievement in education may reside in conceptualizations of multiple masculinities and multiple femininities that are cultural-context bound and in some cases toxic in function (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). We have some data that allude to this in this report.
 11. The policy review on boys' education should aim at empowering civil society, faith based organizations, teacher unions, government agencies, partner organizations (e, g, UN, the Private sector,), etc., to advocate for boys' education.

The main purpose of presenting the 11 policy review suggestions from literature is to provide a benchmark against which to interpret the data pertaining to the possible influence of education policy on some boys' underachievement in education that we provide and discuss later in this report.

School support of boys' education

A synopsis of literature review on how schools could support and enhance boys' academic achievement has revealed a number of suggestions, guidelines and proposals. Aimed at providing a resource to be used when interpreting data on this issue, we highlight the following school support insights that have been discerned from literature employing a variety of vantage points and world views:

1. According to Sax (2016), to support boys who underachieve in education, schools should recognize that boys learn differently from girls. This difference is not only socially constructed but it can also be biologically explained. For instance, Sax (2016) states that girls are more likely to share common aims and values with adults, more likely to listen to instructions and do what they are asked to do, see things from the perspective of adults, wish to please teachers, try harder and care about the quality of their work. In addition, girls tend to be self-disciplined and self-controlled. However, several boys, in general, do not display these dispositions. Instead, many of them are inspired to learn when they are provided with experiential and theoretical knowledge. So, to avoid impairing their 'passionate curiosity for learning', schools should provide boys with a balance between experiential (i. e. *Kenntnis* in German) and theoretical knowledge (i.e. *Wissenschaft* in German). In such a context, schools should provide 'boy friendly' learning environments where boys are welcome, free to be their authentic selves (Cox, 2018) and where they are provided with space to play, compete and thrive without feeling embarrassed, humiliated and slighted due to failure at learning tasks.



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2. We discerned four insights on school support for boys who underachieve in education from the work of Diprete and Buchmann (2013). Firstly, Diprete and Buchmann (2013) point out that to enhance the academic performance of boys who underachieve, schools which they attend should be of high quality. According to them, poor quality schools diminish the academic performance of all learners. In order for schools to improve in their overall performance, they should work out ways of enhancing the performance of all learners, including all boys. Secondly, schools should devise programmes that benefit boys *in particular*, “regardless of their level of achievement” (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p.157). Such schools should put in place programmes that deal with learning barriers that boys face such as negative peer pressure, alcohol and drug abuse and dysfunctional views of masculinity (i.e. what it means to be a man). Thirdly, because scholastic and social-emotional quality of teachers affect learner performance, schools should have in their employ teachers of high quality. Doing this would enhance the academic performance of boys who underachieve in education. Fourthly, to create a learning-oriented peer culture, schools should develop student bodies that are highly motivated and achievement-oriented. This implies creating school learning environments that prize academic achievement as a source of high status in peer group circles.
 3. Riechert and Hawley (2010) provided a number of qualities of schools that would promote boys’ academic achievement. We highlight three of these qualities. Firstly, they suggest that schools should foster learning relationships in which teachers create respectful and reciprocal classroom climates where “boys feel they are seen, known and valued” (Riechert and Hawley, 2010, p. 237). Such schools would reflect relational climates based on concern for learners, teachers, respect and empathy for all in the schools. In addition, schools are urged to cultivate virtues of truth telling, keeping commitments and promises, respect, fairness, kindness, helpfulness, empathy, self-control and self-lessness. Because mere preaching of these virtues would yield little benefit, they should be instilled into all students through experience and practice. In other words, the virtues should be lived and demonstrated in the day to day workings of schools and classrooms. Secondly, Riechert and Hawley (2010) share the insight that schools should organize professional development forums, workshops and seminars to empower teachers with instructional and relational skills to effectively teach students with diverse abilities, needs and challenges. These students would include boys who underachieve in education. Such professional development initiatives enable teachers to share instructional strategies that work and those that do not when teaching boys. Thirdly, Riechert and Hawley (2010) point out that the mission of all schools is to realize the potential of all children. However, the concept of “*all children*” does not mean *generic* children because there are no children who are generic. This means that “children are morally equivalent- equally valuable- but are not otherwise equivalent” (Riechert and Hawley, 2010, p. 240). Based on this, schools should endeavour to search and discover ways of supporting the learning of boys who have distinctive ways of responding to classroom instruction. To elaborate on this reasoning, (Riechert and Hawley, 2010, p. 240) indicate that “all children are boys and girls. To realize the potential of boys and girls requires acknowledging the distinctive ways each may respond to instruction”. This is why teachers are encouraged to discover ways of reaching boys in their teaching during professional development workshops and seminars.
 4. Whitmire (2010) argues that the goal of schools should be to support boys who underachieve in education to improve. It should not be to produce gender equality/parity between boys and girls. Building on this, Whitmire (2010) suggests



that the key to enhancing academic achievement amongst boys is not necessarily that of using targeted instruction strategies that meet boys needs but that of overall improvement of learning at a given school. According to him, when quality of education improves at a school, it improves for all learners, including boys. Advancing his position further, Whitmire (2010, p. 132) stipulates that “when you refuse to let even a single student to slide by, you end up helping boys the most because the boys are the big sliders”. Although Whitmire (2010) has a point here, we also agree with Riechert and Hawley (2010) who assert that because children are not generic, you cannot have ‘a one size fits all’ approach when catering for the distinctive needs of boys who underachieve in education. Stating this is consistent with Whitwire (2010)’s own proposal that schools should employ the ‘Help One Student to Succeed’ –HOSTS- approach as a responsive mentoring and tutoring approach in areas where boys have learning difficulties.

5. According to Cox (2018), to foster maturity in boys, they must be taught to work with their hands, taught skills to accomplish *meaningful tasks* and taught interesting new things. To him, the “school needs to be infused and driven by the spirit of vocation” (Cox, 2018, p.96). This implies that schools should promote learning by *doing* and learning by *doing useful things*. For instance, boys should be given opportunities of doing things by being of service to others in school, in the family and in the community. This could mean setting aside a period during the week on manual work. During this period, all learners could be asked to maintain school grounds, plant and tend fruit trees and flowers, build and maintain walkways at school. This is consistent with Samuels (2019, p. 108)’s assertion that “man’s meaning (over the centuries) has come from *doing*” and that work is “the most obvious way to seek some sort of meaning in life”. Cox (2018) also suggests that schools should develop qualities of **URGENCY and NECESSITY** in boys in order to enable them value learning and thereby enhance their academic achievement. He points out that **urgency and necessity** promote the development of the feeling that something important needs to be accomplished right away. To him, this “elevates the status of work, making it something worthwhile, and prospectively, impressive to others” (Cox, 2018, p.98). We present data in this report indicating that amongst other things, some boys underachieve in education because they procrastinate and lazy around. To deal with this, Cox, (2018), advises that schools should let boys do purposeful work to serve others in schools, homes and in communities. They can do this by creating service clubs at school such as the Red Cross Club, Nutrition Club to distribute food amongst the poor in the community, cleaning school yards, helping parents build chicken runs, care for livestock, buying groceries, changing car tyres, washing cars and growing vegetables.
6. According to Samuels (2019), schools should work in tandem with the rest of the society when supporting and enhancing the academic achievement of boys in school. He explains this in the following way: “*To make a real impact on the plight of boys, schools and parents could do with some heavy-lifting from the rest of society: throwing the onus on social media, advertising agencies, and food companies to ensure that whatever is being pumped into children’s heads and bodies is more nourishing than destructive; providing serious mentoring for boys who are growing up without a father figure; and giving the elderly more of a presence in kids’ lives, such as placing childcare and nurseries in retirement homes*” (Samuels, 2019, p. 232). Samuels (2019, p. 231)’s point here is that schools are not in control of a situation where boys are not under the tutelage and mentorship of fathers, mothers and elders but at the mercy of the “*social media, ---test-driven academia, toxic porn-*



fuelled sexual expectation, near-religious exaltation of fame, and job markets in which many boys are ill-equipped to thrive". We agree with Samuels's (2019) stance and present some data and discussion later in this report where we suggest several ways of partnership between schools and communities in support of enhancing boys' academic achievement.

Teacher support of boys' education

According to Dweck (2017), it is not useful to pay lip service to the mantra: "*Every student can learn*". What is useful is to enable every student to learn. To do this, teachers should believe in the *growth* of the intellect in all students, *including boys* and be fascinated about the process of learning that students can demonstrate and display. The growth of the intellect can be shown by individual students when they understand the subject matter they are exposed to and when they discover new ways of solving problems and when they discover new things. Teachers should facilitate and share in the students' discoveries.

Dweck (2017) further proposes that teachers would promote the growth of the intellect in all students when they set high standards for all their students in a *challenging and nurturing atmosphere*. In this atmosphere, teachers should:

- Express genuine affection, care, and concern for all their students;
- Be warm to, accepting, and trusting of all their students as they believe that all of them can improve, learn and grow;
- Create a 'disciplined' learning environment;
- Treat all students as people worthy of their deep personal commitment.

In other words, teachers should be inspired by the mantra: "*Challenge and nurture learning and growth in all students*". They should live by this mantra by mentoring hard work and modelling the belief that for them to enhance their academic achievement, students who underachieve should work hard. To do this, teachers should truthfully and honestly inform their students about their level of achievement, whether poor or good. Furthermore, they should realize that *no student stops caring* for their wellbeing even if they may temporarily stop working and become intransigent, uncooperative, stubborn, and disruptive.

To help such students to learn and improve, teachers themselves, must be eager to continuously learn about the students, about the subject matter they teach, and learn about themselves. They should always be curious, fascinated, and eager to discover new things and be willing to grow. In other words, they should keep abreast of new developments not only in their fields of specialization but in also how to relate to their students and keep abreast of new ways of being. They should be interested in learning and growing in all spheres of life.

We present later in this report, some data from various respondents on the need for these qualities when supporting boys' education.

Diprete and Buchmann (2013) suggested that to enhance boys' academic achievement, teachers should teach such students social and behaviour skills that promote achievement. They could do this by creating a socially enhanced learning environment in which students are eager to learn, willing to obey rules, eager to work in groups and willing to actively participate and be actively engaged in learning. In such a learning environment, according to



Reichert and Hawley (2010), teachers should *be present* for their students in at least four ways.

Firstly, they should invite their students who underachieve to *engage* in learning by getting closer to them at a personal level. They can do this by making themselves personally available not only in the classroom but also in the social contexts of having coffee together and dinner together. On such occasions, teachers could offer any social and academic support, talk about academic challenges boys face and convince boys to open up and engage. Doing all these things would enable teachers to be authentic (or real) in the eyes of their students and demonstrate the relationship between school and real life. One of our main goals in the study on which this report is based was to find out if Namibian teachers were engaging with boys who underachieve in education in these various ways.

Secondly, teachers can be present to their students who underachieve by authentically answering the question on why learning/school is important. This means informing students about why the subjects they learn in school are important in their lives. Reichert and Hawley (2010) suggest that teachers can do this by sharing their personal experiences about how they discovered the usefulness of learning new things. They can demonstrate this by loving the subjects they teach and enthusiastically teaching them. To model this enthusiasm so that it becomes infectious and emulated by their students, teachers should be experts, competent and genuinely interested in the subjects they teach and be passionate about them. They should also elevate the subjects they teach by holding them in high esteem and relating them to real life. Some of the data we present later in this report speak to this reasoning.

Thirdly, Reichert and Hawley (2010) presented research data which supported the position that to support boys who underachieve in education, teachers should establish effective social working relationships with such students that are *mutually beneficial*. Either the teachers or the students could initiate such relationships based on the need to be of help or support. For instance, to enable each boy feel important, known by the teacher and feel that his participation in class is valued, teachers should greet every student by name.

Fourthly, teachers could be present for their students who underachieve by providing scaffolding support and help to them in real time as they grapple with academic tasks. To do this teachers should take extra time, assume the role of guides, talk less and they should not give up on any struggling students but challenge them to learn through perseverance. In addition to this, according to Sax (2016), teachers should have a balance between experiential and theoretical knowledge when they teach boys who underachieve and assess their understanding.

It has been argued that providing targeted support to boys as a group would promote the masculinization of classrooms and the celebration of masculinity in education. This is because, it is asserted, it would support the narrative that boys underachieve in education because their “natural interests and skills” are not taken into account by the school curricular, teachers and schools (Martino and Kehler, 2007). We present some data later in this report which support the position that teachers should, in their teaching, take into account special barriers to boys’ learning because such barriers may not necessarily emanate from boys’ ‘natural interests’ but from social issues that thwart their motivation to learn. For instance, in our view, the establishment of ‘boy friendly learning environments’ (Sax, 2016), may provide learning spaces in which boys are welcomed, recognized, included, involved and invited to actively participate. To support boys’ learning, teachers should, in practice, promote the



functioning of such learning environments. Moreover, we agree with the assertion that teachers should encourage boys to “read more, listen and attend more to teachers and to other pupils, work harder and take more pride in their work, work collaboratively and articulate themselves better in all aspects of communication” (Francis and Skelton, 2005 as cited in Martino and Kehler, 2007, p. 424).

In addition to establishing ‘boy friendly learning environments’, teachers should focus on improving the quality of education for all students. This means promoting a high degree of intellectual quality that involves learning for understanding and acquiring skills of learning to learn, connecting curriculum content to its application to students’ lives outside school, creating supportive classroom environments where students feel valued and encouraged to take risks in their learning and employing a strong recognition and celebration of difference. According to Martino and Kehler (2007, p.424), all this would amount to teachers providing all learners with “intellectually demanding and problem-solving tasks relevant to the demands of life outside the school” and using curriculum, pedagogy and assessment approaches and procedures that have “purchase in students’ lives outside school”. As they do this, teachers should promote high-order thinking and actively engage all students in learning.

Moreover, Hayes, et al. (2005) have asserted that teacher *knowledges* are essential for the improvement of overall quality of learning for all students. These include: subject discipline knowledge, knowledge of student development, understanding about the purposes of schooling, knowledge of educational policy, and knowledge and understanding of gender concepts and their impact on students’ attitudes and learning. Linking this thinking to our research project, one of the main goals of our study was to advocate for the improvement of quality of education for both boys and girls.

Taking a divergent view and supporting the ‘boy friendly learning environments’ approach, Cuttance and Thompson (2008), advised the Ministry of Education in New Zealand to take the interests and dispositions of boys into account when designing the curriculum and learning environments. By focusing on boys who struggle with learning, disengage from schooling and underachieve, teachers, in such environments should employ activity-based learning that would involve project-based learning, mentoring and hands-on-learning that boosts self-esteem and fosters skills of cooperation, teamwork and persistence. Consistent with Martino and Kehler, (2007), Cuttance and Thompson (2008) advised that teachers should set challenging goals and provide critical feedback to boys when assessing their work. To do this teachers should create opportunities for such boys to experience adventure in education and work experience while in school. We present some data later in this report on boys who struggle with learning and disengage from schooling.

Writing for the Centre for Young Men’s Studies, Ulster University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, Trefor Lloyd (Boys Development Project) (2011) advised that to support boys’ learning, teachers should be aware of and identify boys who underachieve and creatively plan to meet their needs. They should use scaffolding methods to help boys improve their academic achievement. For instance, teachers could use the following instructional strategies by:

- Carefully structuring lessons;
- Using clear objectives;
- Including real-life context setting in teaching;
- Providing well-focused short term tasks;
- Providing quick feedback;



-
- Including fun, humour and competition in teaching;
 - Employing a variety of learning activities to avoid boredom;
 - Holding high learning expectations for boys who underachieve.

Later in this report, we present data that speak to the use of scaffolding methods such as the ones given above to help boys improve their academic achievement.

In consonant with Martino and Kehler (2007), Martino (2008) advised that Canadian teachers should not accentuate boy stereotypes by expecting boys to be disruptive, destructive, rude, etc. but instead, they should identify and work around factors (e.g. SES, poverty, rurality, marginalization, etc.) other than gender that influence boys' underachievement in education. In doing so, they should use intellectually challenging curricular, challenge boys to learn and create safe and welcoming learning environments.

As was the case in Canada (Martino, 2008), Jha and Pouezevara (2016) reported that in Seychelles, teachers' expectations that boys perform and behave less well than girls, partially accounted for lack of interest in school among boys. This was due to stereotypes in which boys were perceived to be lazy, irresponsible and lacking in motivation. Consistent with this, Stromquist (2007) and Page and Jha (2009) obtained data from seven countries and from three different continents and concluded: "In countries where teachers do not have high expectations of boys, they tend to underachieve". By holding low expectations of boys, teachers may be inadvertently creating gender disparity between boys and girls. In addition, in agreement with Jha and Pouezevara (2016), we suggest that the teacher expectation that boys require a more authoritarian control for them to be taught should be replaced with dialogue, negotiation, and understanding of boys' perspectives. Moreover, teachers should be aware of these and other stereotypes and resist the temptation to employ them when working to support the improvement of boys' education.

This should be the case because, consistent with Stromquist (2007), Page and Jha (2009) and Jha and Pouezevara (2016), Jha and Kelleher (2006, p.21) asserted that "teachers in the classroom have been guilty of gender stereotyping, and that low expectations of boys' behaviour and academic effectiveness contribute to the levels of boys' underachievement". As we indicate later in this report, some respondents in our study seemed to perceive boys' underachievement in education from a simplistic and stereotypic point of view. Another factor is that teacher absenteeism and a paucity of qualified teachers in a school may contribute to boys' lack of participation and underachievement in education, Jha and Kelleher (2006).

From an alternative construction of school underachievement that is viewed from a power relations point of view, Stojnov, Dvinovic and Pavlovic (2008) posit that some students in general and some boys in particular may underachieve as a way of resisting the manner in which academic achievement is perceived and valued. Such students may perceive the clamour for meeting academic standards of achievement as a form of control, surveillance and intrusion into their personal lives under the pretext of upholding societal norms of educational excellence.

To enhance the academic achievement of such boys, there should be collaboration between teachers and students in creating, negotiating and valuing mutual meanings of the usefulness of learning as growth and learning as *knowing what, knowing why, and knowing how to do*



things. This implies that to support their learning, teachers should *seriously* listen to why some boys underachieve and how such boys understand underachievement.

To do this, teachers should promote student participation in a sphere of democracy where students themselves, parents and members of the local community are actively involved. Some of the data we present later in this report are consistent with the discourse of resistance as they show that some boys who underachieve in education do not care about whether they pass or fail examinations because they view the entire education process as a farce and not valuable to their lives out of school. It is with such students that Stojnov, et al.'s (2008) advice should be used.

Parents' support of boys' education

In order for parents to adequately support the learning and academic achievement of their sons, they should foster the growth-mindset which affirms that children are developing persons who need to be nurtured and supported in their quest for and pursuit of development and learning. In doing this, parents should not apply the fixed-mindset which prizes and praises children's natural intelligence, ability, 'smartness', and 'brilliance' (Dweck, 2017). To elaborate on this, Dweck, (2017, pp. 179-180) states:

"Parents think they can hand children permanent confidence- like a gift- by praising their brains and talent. It doesn't work, and in fact has the opposite effect. It makes children doubt themselves as soon as anything is hard or anything goes wrong. If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, seek new strategies, and keep on learning. That way their children don't have to be slaves of praise. They will have a lifelong way to build and repair their own confidence".

What this quotation implies is that to support the learning of their sons, parents should:

- Avoid praising their son's intelligence or talent but praise their effort at having things done, diligence in studying, persistence, and their hard work. Parents should praise their children for the work they put in to succeed.
- Assure their sons that they would improve and do well in school if they worked hard, studied and did what they were supposed to and learnt the material.
- Tell their sons not to be devastated by failure but learn from it and focus on what should be done to succeed in future. The parents' role in this situation is to provide constructive feedback to their sons and let them depend on effort and hard work to succeed. In addition they should use their sons' failure and mistakes as an occasion for providing suggestions of how to do better in future, providing encouragement and for teaching. It is not an occasion for judging their son's lack of ability, intelligence and lack of talent. It is an occasion for promoting learning.
- Want the best for their sons in the right way "by fostering their interests, growth and learning" (Dweck, 2017, p. 192).
- Inspire their children to grow and learn for the sake of learning and for the sake of acquiring skills with 'purchase power'. These are skills which enable children to do things competently and thrive in life.
- Not compare their children with ideal children conjured in their minds. Instead, they should focus on their children's 'becoming', and 'growing' into valuable human beings to themselves and to society.



According to Diprete and Buchmann (2013), parents influence their children's performance due to their Social Economic Status (SES), parenting boys and girls differently and due to the character of children's local environments of peers, neighbourhoods and schools. Parents differ in how they make use of these environments when raising their children. What this means is that children's performance in school is largely dependent on social economic resources and the social-cultural capital their parents have access to. According to this premise, the more viably parents make use of these enablers, the better they are at catering for the educational needs of their children. In the Namibian context, we would expect the different social economic backgrounds and social-cultural contexts of parents to either enhance or attenuate the educational achievement of boys. We shall apply this reasoning when interpreting some of the data later in this report.

Another theoretical premise is that two different approaches of raising children lead to two different educational outcomes for boys and girls. Firstly, the gender-egalitarian approach stipulates that the more educated parents are the more they support their sons' and daughters' education equally (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013). What is unclear in the Namibian context is whether or not equal parental educational support for brothers and sisters leads to equal academic achievement between them. We shall present some data later in this report that shows that some parents invest more resources in the education of girls than in the education of boys and some parents do the opposite of this.

Secondly, the gender role socialization perspective stresses the importance of gender-specific role modelling. In this perspective, girls look to their mothers and boys look to their fathers as they develop their educational and occupational aspirations (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013). Research has shown (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013) that when fathers are absent from the family or are of low education, boys lose role models and underachieve in education. They do this because in the absence of their fathers, boys misbehave more than girls. The misbehaviour negatively influences their academic performance.

When fathers obtained university education and were present in the family, there was no difference in performance between sons and daughters. This was the case because boys engaged with schooling more adequately when their fathers acted as educated role models who provided "the type of masculine identity that links educational achievement with masculine accomplishment" (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p. 154). In contrast the more mothers got educated, the more girls aspired to get educated and perform better than boys academically.

We present some data later in the report which speaks to the absence of the father from the family in the Namibian context.

Sax (2016, p.251), concurs with Diprete and Buchmann, (2013), when he states: "A boy needs real-life models of healthy masculinity, just as girls need real-life models of healthy femininity". This means that the boy child needs to learn to be a prosocial man from male role models, such as fathers or father figures. Consistent with this, the ideal of the husband and father "who sacrifices himself for the sake of his wife and children" (Sax, 2016, p. 253) should not be condemned but applauded. Sax (2016, pp.253-254) elaborates on this by saying: *"To become a man, a boy must see a man. But that man doesn't have to be his father. In fact, ideally, it shouldn't be only his father. Even if your son has a strong father or father*



figure in his life, he still needs a community of men who together can provide him with varied models of what productive adult men do.”

By implication, Sax (2016) makes the important point that for a boy to have his academic achievement enhanced, he does not only need the support of his father but the support of several ‘fathers’ from the community. This position resonates with some focus group discussion data that we obtained from parents and teachers.

Sax (2016) makes another insightful suggestion on how boys’ education could be supported by groups of adult men when he says that there should be bonds across generations otherwise many boys will lose direction and purpose in life, seek the pleasure of the moment, avoid responsibility and will be set adrift. To put this suggestion into practice, Sax (2016) advises that older men and young men should interact with each other. From this interaction, young men should learn from older men. This could be in the form of going on retreats for boys and older men. This would ensure that “--- children and teenagers must be taught by adults, not by one another” (Sax, 2016, p.255).

Consistent with Diprete and Buchmann, (2013), Samuels (2019, p.211) provides the following perspective on modern-day parenting of boys and girls:

“It looks like a relentless, exhausting, libido-killing, relationship-straining, time-sapping, identity-stealing mission that you muddle through without any manual. One that’s easier if there’s money to soften the edges and exponentially more stressful if you’re struggling to make ends meet”

In this context, parents would enhance boys’ education by convincing them that education would enable them to be financially independent and able to support themselves, get jobs, create jobs and support their families. Some of our respondents in focus group discussions made this case as we shall explain later in this report.

Another important point that Samuels (2019) makes is that to be good parents in today’s world, parents must *make time* for their children amidst work, school activities for children, entertaining children, and having some time for each other- especially if both parents are working. To support boys’ education under these circumstances, parents must be *available* and *present*. Although mothers are expected to provide nurturance and care, fathers are expected to provide stimulation and role modelling, both parents should provide protection, representation, scaffolding, encouragement and motivation. In the Namibian context, parents should provide not only shelter, health and nutrition but also transport (where possible) to and from school, school fees, school supplies, etc. What this implies is that both parents must actively participate in childrearing duties, responsibilities and obligations.

Although parents may be eager to be supportive to their sons and daughters, several of them in the Namibian context are constrained by lack of time and poverty which manifest itself in the form of unemployment, lack of money, homelessness, living in un-serviced informal settlements without proper sanitation and amenities, and unstable family relationships.

One mark of unstable families is the absence of fathers from family units. Absent fathers, as indicated by Sax (2016) and Samuels (2019) deny boys of love, encouragement, support, scaffolding opportunities, empathy and modelling resilience. According to Samuels (2019, p. 221), in America and in other countries from the Western world, “children from dadless



homes are more likely to excel at just about everything you don't want them to, from teenage pregnancy, to being adolescent murderers", What communities could do to avoid all this is to establish fatherhood training classes for fathers who do not know what to do with their sons and their daughters.

According to Samuels (2019), to further support the education of their sons, parents should instil meaningful responsibility in them by giving them various opportunities to be responsible. For instance, boys could be enabled to be in charge of young children at early childhood development centres, they could be trained to be life guards at the coast, be trained to become soccer, rugby, and netball referees and they could be asked to volunteer to take care of animals in animal shelters. We present data later in this report that speak to the issue of enabling boys to be responsible as part of the effort to take their educational achievement seriously.

In his book on *Dreams from my father*, Barack Obama (2004), communicated the message that to enable boys to aspire for meaning in life and be committed to making life better for themselves and others in society, parents must inspire them to be of use to themselves and to others. Consistent with Samuels (2019), Obama (2004), advises parents to do this by providing their sons opportunities to volunteer to serve and help at school and at home. In addition, they should enable their sons to:

- Commit themselves to God and become Christian activists for freedom and dignity of all humankind;
- Commit themselves to education, learning, scholarship, community, family, the work ethic, discipline and self-respect;
- Overcome challenges and difficulties in pursuit of success, achievement and validation;
- Ascribe to values of hope for change, respect and hard work.

From all this, Obama (2004) urges parents, amongst other things, to support their sons' education by operating from families which are transmitters and reservoirs of prosocial values, social skills and ideas that build, 'grow', and develop people and their communities.

As we shall show later in this report, Obama's (2004) insights communicate the message that for parents to adequately support their sons' education, they should hold onto ideals of hope for change and transformation not only in the intellectual realm but also at the personal, social-emotional, community and societal levels.

Cox (2018) builds on Obama's (2004) idea of change by urging parents to note that boys are in the process of change, growth and development. Viewed from a social-cognitive developmental perspective and consistent with Dweck, (2017), Cox (2018) indicates that what develops in boys is personhood which is fluid, malleable, and not linear but can be chaotic or regressive. Because they are 'wired' to learn, boys and other young people have flexible minds that are geared towards acquiring knowledge and understanding. One meaning of this is that although some boys are bound by rigid thinking, repetitive and self-sabotaging behaviour, they can change as well as they are guided, counselled and exposed to change-evoking experiences (Cox, 2018, p. 70). Based on this, parents are urged not to give up boys who underachieve but support them in their process of turning around and focusing on educational pursuits.



Another important suggestion that Cox (2018) makes which is consistent with Sax's (2016) work is that for them to effectively support the education of their sons, parents should beware of the influence of electronics in their lives. One major adverse effect of electronic gadgets such as pcs, laptops, mobile phones, i-pads, etc. is the promotion of boys' tendency to be *self-absorbed*. In this state, boys whose minds are dulled by electronics, waste a lot of time in trivial amusement and participating in the spectator culture which weakens their capacity to create, innovate and bring things into being. In other words, the long time they spend viewing screens does not promote creativity and action. They only spend this time watching myriad sensational images that clamour for their attention. According to Cox (2018, pp.72-73), video games and other electronic engagements such as spending a lot of time on social media lead to a 'kind of paralysis' for many boys. In this state boys express no commitment to anything, they do not know what is authentic or real, they do not know what is disposable and what is 'costume' in life. They become so self-absorbed that they find it difficult to relate to others in empathetic ways. To apply this understanding, parents should monitor the manner in which their sons use the internet, the social media and electronic gadgets.

According to Cox (2018), parents should, furthermore, support the education of their sons by cultivating their authenticity. As used by Cox (2018, p. 74), authenticity refers to "those aspects of a person's selfhood which are essential to his life story and personal coherence". It relates to a person's key experiences, skills, interests and perspectives, *underlying logic that drives a person's thoughts and actions*, what a person stands for and it is about personal truth. In other words, an individual's authenticity is a process of finding himself or herself and a state of being real.

The main point that Cox (2018) makes is that when boys operate from an authentic position, they will be motivated by their *self-defined* sense of purpose, honour, role in life, direction, usefulness and value. They will be motivated by an *underlying logic that drives their thoughts and actions*.

To cultivate authenticity in boys, Cox (2018) suggests that parents should:

- Note that boys' purpose and role in life are defined by *doing things that are tangible*. These could be academic, sport or any kind of work.
- Promote boys' sense of purpose and motivation by offering them *concrete life enhancing options* from which they could choose paths to careers *they would like* to follow in future. To do this, parents should show video clips on what various professionals do when discharging their duties. For instance, these video clips could be on what engineers, doctors, plumbers, pharmacists, scientists, business men and women, academics, tour guides, property developers, architects, contractors and builders do.
- Prevent and discourage self-absorption by encouraging growth, confidence and strength through *challenge*. This means that parents should challenge boys to acquire understanding or skills through *doing things*.
- Encourage perseverance based on boys' own values, interests and goals. Boys should be urged to persevere in accomplishing tasks that are meaningful to them and not necessarily those that are meaningful to parents.
- Provide encouragement and constructive non-directive involvement by creating a balance between showing the way and getting out of the way of boys' growth, exploration and experimentation.
- Avoid the investment approach in parenting boys by focusing support on meaningful accomplishments that are not based on parents' goals but on boys' ideals, interests



and goals. *This would promote academic achievement that enables boys to discover who they are and what they wish to become.*

Seagraves and Leavine (2018) have offered suggestions on gender and religion and its relationship to boys' wellbeing and parents' advice and counsel. They have advised that in supporting boys' education, parents should note that:

- “It will never be loving to support something that God is against, and it will never be loving to encourage someone to act contrary to how God has designed them” Seagraves and Leavine (2018, p. 39). Although this may be controversial in today's world, parents should be free to support and guide their sons' education according to their faith in God if indeed they are Christians who are commanded to love God first and then love their neighbours as themselves.
- Tolerance is not that all views are valid; none is better than the other. However, tolerance is disagreeing with someone while still respecting them as persons. By implication, parents should note that there may be times when they would agree to disagree with their sons on courses of action to take when pursuing standards of academic achievement. However, these disagreements should not be on matters of truth, empathy, trust, helpfulness, honesty or other qualities that are aimed at enhancing the wellbeing of persons.
- Negative influences that may derail their sons' quest for academic, social-emotional and spiritual wellbeing emanate from multiple sources- the social media, music on mobile phones, movies on NETFLIX, YOU TUBE, messages from peers, etc. Parents should advise their sons about such negative influences and counsel them about how to handle these sources of information and entertainment wisely.
- Their faith in God and their conviction to lead Christian lives may give boys the opportunity to clarify their own values, beliefs and their need to care for the welfare of themselves, their families and other people. So, if they are Christians, parents should demonstrate genuine faith in God by leading lives that are consistent with His word.

We shall use these suggestions later in this report when interpreting focus group discussion data in which parents and teachers sought for the support of the Church when dealing with boys' underachievement in education.

Peer support of boys' education

Earlier in this literature review we presented some research findings which portrayed adverse effects of peer pressure on boys' academic achievement. We now build on this position and review some literature which not only focuses on the negative impact of peers' influence on boys' education but demonstrates how the peer culture can either enhance or undermine boys' education.

According to Diprete and Buchmann (2013), the nature of the student body of a school affects students' academic orientation and academic performance. This is the case because when the adolescent culture rewards academic performance, students are motivated to invest in their studies to gain status with their peers and to please significant others such as parents and teachers. The converse of this is that when the adolescent culture values non-academic outcomes more highly (e.g. sport, popularity or opposition to school authority) “and especially when the adolescent culture denigrates academic achievement, it draws energy



away from students' academic achievement. Simply put, a highly motivated, achievement-oriented student body creates a learning-oriented peer culture" (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p.168). This means that schools can promote the formation of student bodies whose peer cultures are learning-oriented. Such student bodies would enhance academic achievement of all learners, including boys who underachieve in education.

Diprete and Buchmann (2013) have also presented research findings to the effect that gender identities influence boys' low academic performance. Researchers such as Hurrelmann (2010, as cited in Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p. 168) "have argued that gender identities perpetuate the belief that girls have to work hard in order to learn, whereas boys are naturally gifted... this belief is reflected in boys' casual, if not reluctant attitude towards school". To promote this ill-conceived belief, some boys may reduce effort when undertaking academic tasks to create the façade before their peers that because they are naturally intelligent, they can perform well in school without working hard.

This interpretation is consistent with the view that "disruptive behaviour is often encouraged by male peers insofar as it precipitates status gains in the adolescent peer group, while working for academic achievement is labelled as feminine and thereby stigmatized. Among girls, however, school work is typically viewed as acceptable and sometimes, even encouraged" (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, 168). Epstein (1998, p.106; as cited in Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p.168) concurs with this when she states that "the main demand on boys from within their peer culture ...is to appear to do little or no work" –whereas for girls, "it seems as if working hard at school is not only accepted, but is in fact, wholly desirable". The implication of all this is that in order to use the peer group to support boys' education, stereotypic myths of this sort should be confronted and dismissed as simply wrong. We present data later in this report on how the peer group in Namibia influences some boys' underachievement in education.

Diprete and Buchmann (2013) have additionally discerned from research conducted by several researchers the following insights pertaining to the influence of the peer culture on boys' academic achievement:

- Peer resistance to school and teachers may be one way in which boys construct masculinity. This attitude of resistance may be partly responsible for male underachievement in school. To support boys' education, such resistance should be understood locally and discouraged.
- Adolescent peer cultures are not uniform but vary in their values. For instance, in schools where academic performance is prized and leads to status raising in the peer group, research has shown that boys compete more for high grades ...and school performance. However, in schools where this is not the case, some boys underachieve in education. Moreover, differences in academic performance between boys and girls are attenuated and considerably reduced in schools with higher average academic performance. One implication of this is that high quality education practised in an education institution leads to a reduction in academic achievement disparity between boys and girls.
- The social economic status (SES) composition of schools influences boys' academic performance. Research has shown that boys' academic achievement is enhanced at schools with high SES and lowered at schools with low SES. For instance, Legewie and DiPrete (2012b) as cited in Diprete and Buchmann, (2013, p. 175). "found that males receive a relatively strong gain from classroom socioeconomic composition when working habits or the strength of the students' learning orientation are the



dependent variable. These findings suggest (that) the local peer environment affects academic achievement for all students while at the same time providing especially strong gains for boys”. Moreover, “locally strong academic climates boost both girls’ and boys’ performance but ...their net effect is to reduce the gender gap in achievement”. In the Namibia context, this may imply that we would expect diminished disparity in academic performance between boys and girls in schools with high SES and increased disparity at schools with low SES. What may be more meaningful in the Namibian context, though is to look at the influence of disparate resourcing of schools on the academic performance of boys and girls.

When focussing on the role of communication in ameliorating boys’ academic achievement challenges, Cox (2018) has noted that research has shown that boys are freer to talk to their friends and open up to express their opinions to them than to adults. To support boys’ education, teachers and parents should not discourage this tendency but recruit the peer group as an ally in the process of enhancing their academic achievement. In other words, teachers and parents should influence the peer group to become pro-learning and pro-academic achievement.

According to Cox (2018), research has also shown that boys use the peer group as a source of their legitimation, status, attention, respect, and standing amongst their peers. It is advised that instead of attempting to obtain the attention of individual boys, teachers or parents should ‘capture’ the peer group by using performance in school as a source of high status and recognition. This could be done by raising a school’s image through academic performance. Notwithstanding this, it is also valuable to encourage some boys to detach themselves from dysfunctional peer groups if they wish to become their ‘own person (s)’ and academically achieve.

Consistent with Cox (2018), Reichert and Hawley (2010) have stated that boys could raise their status and earn good reputations by making tangible contributions when collaborating with peers on group learning tasks. This would especially be the case if learning peer groups compete with each other to attain specified goals and win prizes. To win the prizes, boys collaborate and work hard as individuals and as groups. This means that to positively apply the peer group to enhance boys’ education, teachers should encourage them to collaborate when tackling academic tasks.

Community support of boys’ education

After reviewing several pieces of literature on factors influencing community support for boys’ education, Jha and Pouzevara (2016) isolated the following issues:

- Community gender-loaded perceptions (or stereotypes) regarding the abilities, attitudes and behaviours of boys and girls shape schools’ and teachers’ expectations about and attitudes towards boys’ potential to grow and achieve well in school. For instance, community generated stereotypes such as those which portray boys as typically abrasive, rude, disrespectful, disruptive, uncooperative, self-destructive, self-absorbed and prone to aggression, violence, disorderly behaviour, etc., feed into teachers’ negative self-fulfilling prophecies when interacting with boys in school and classrooms. Because they expect some boys who underachieve to misbehave, teachers interact with them in a hostile manner. Instead of reducing or changing the boys’ apparent negative behaviour, teachers’ hostile demeanour exacerbates it. In this unsupportive context, the boys implicated underachieve. This implies that to



ameliorate the negative stereotypes about boys which undermine their academic achievement in education and in schools, the community as the original source of the stereotypes should be sensitized and made aware about this. This should be the case because “a strong sense of community, racial identity and family support enabled (es) boys to be *resilient* against, or even try to prove wrong, negative stereotypes and low expectations” (Jha and Pouzevara, 2016, p.28).

- To promote the education of their children, parents in the communities form and utilize social networks within groups they belong to and interact with in their daily lives. They also form and use networks with other families. Used as *social capital*, parents use these community-based networks to combat the effect of negative stereotypes and protect their children’s achievement in school. The point to note is that inter-family relationships and social relationships in the community can enhance boys’ academic success. This means that families should collaborate with other families in the community to do this.
- Community traditions of valuing education and learning promote boys’ academic achievement in education. This means that the specificity of community contexts should be taken into account when linking the community to boys’ education. It is not just a matter of marginalization or poverty and lack of community resources that may cause boys’ underachievement in education. Rather, it is a matter of the extent to which education and learning are valued in a given community. For instance, the valuing of the social construction of mobility, affluence and financial security due to education, raises the value of education and learning (Atthill and Jha, 2009). This may explain why several boys and girls from resource-depressed communities beat all the odds and excel in education. The main message here is that boys’ education is enhanced in communities where education is valued.
- Community protective factors such as those which promote boys’ self-esteem and confidence, autonomy and rejection of dysfunctional peer influence, mentoring to act against the influence of hegemonic masculine influence and peer influence with alternative positive values enhance boys’ education. This means that cultivating these and other protective factors in any community would enhance boys’ achievement in education. We shall use this and other insights related to the community when discussion data on community involvement in boys’ education later in this report.
- To modify dysfunctional parenting practices and improve learning outcomes of boys, community-based parenting interventions should be established. Such interventions could offer parent support programmes with the aim of training parents on how to work with their sons, how to strengthen their sons’ self-esteem and build their sons’ interest in education and on how to mentor and develop their sons’ sense of self-worth. In the discussion of the data we obtained from parents later on in this report, we have made use of this insight.

The conceptual framework used in the project

The conceptual framework that was employed in this project was informed by the rights-based approach to education, the gender equality in education perspective, the girl child education support ideology, the transformative education perspective and the democracy, equality and freedom perspective. All these perspectives are embodied in the constructivist and transformative research paradigms whose main tenet is to conduct research in education or any other field for the purpose of social change and the enhancement of the wellbeing of individuals who are the subject of the research (Mertens, 2010). We intended to ultimately use the findings of the research project to inform educational policy on boys’



underachievement in the country and promote the academic wellbeing of Namibian boys and girls in education.

Based on the social cognitive developmental perspective, we also used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach to anchor the study to the understanding that as developing persons, boys derive their developmental impetus from a variety of social contextual systems (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). These include the microsystem (e.g. the family), the mesosystem (e.g. the school, the neighbourhood), the exosystem (e.g. parents' workplace, a local NGO on children's issues), the macrosystem (e.g. community's world views and belief/value systems on children's development) and the chronosystem (i.e. the influence of contextually time sequenced events that influence development). In a concentric fashion, these systems describe different social contextual 'ecologies' or environments that influence the boy child's (or girl child's) developmental, learning and academic achievement resources of support. We use this theoretical framework later in this report to explain the boy child's circles or networks of support that could be used when enhancing his academic achievement.

In addition to this, it is important for us to clarify theoretical concepts that are commonly used to create meaning when discourses about boys' education are undertaken. These concepts pertain to *boys' underachievement in education, boys' under-participation in education, masculinity and boys' underachievement in education, the boy turn debate, the what about boys' debate, the backlash politics in boys' education, and essentialism in boys' education.*

According to Jha and Kelleher (2006), there are two sources of academic achievement. These are *academic performance* and *academic participation*. In this report, we understand boys' underachievement in education to mean boys' under-performance at educational assessment tasks of learning outcomes. In school, this assessment largely involves continuous assessment appraisals, tests and examinations. It is the assessment of learning outcomes that we are concerned with. We have also included the issue that boys would underachieve if they under-participate in the learning processes. In Namibia, for instance, as indicated in the background of this report, whereas school dropout rates for boys are higher than those of girls, school survival rates and promotion rates are lower for boys than for girls. This means that more boys than girls under-participated in education in Namibia.

We understand the concept of *masculinity* to imply 'what it means to be a man'. In a simplified but insightful manner, Sax (2016, p. 224) states that "being a real man means using your strength in the service of others." In addition to this, Sax (2016, p. 258) expresses the view that "we must tell true stories that affirm real men and the value of real masculinity, without disrespecting women or devaluing women's accomplishments and importance." We concur with this view.

We also note the view expressed by Weaver-Hightower (2003) and Diprete and Buchmann (2013) that there are multiple masculinities which are historically and contextually dependent. One of the factors on which masculinity depends is ethnicity. For instance, in Namibia, different ethnic groups may have varied constructions of masculinity which would affect boys' schooling differently. This would be the case because there are conceptualizations of masculinities which are supportive of academic achievement and there are conceptualizations of masculinity which oppose schooling and academic achievement.



Diprete and Buchmann (2013, p. 147) explain this in three ways. The first way “to higher academic performance for boys is attending a school where the dominant masculine culture values and promotes academic achievement, or at least where there is no hegemonic (i.e. dominant) masculine culture that opposes academic achievement”. This means that schools can partly enhance boys’ academic achievement by nurturing dominant masculine cultures which value learning and education. In the second way, boys can reject and detach themselves from hegemonic masculine cultures when these cultures oppose academic values. They can do this by showing a high degree of attachment to schooling and academic values and thereby enhancing their academic achievement. In this instance, schools should support and encourage boys who do this. Thirdly, boys can accommodate “the hegemonic masculine culture while maintaining an *instrumental* attachment to school as an eventual source of the human capital and credentials that correlate with fulfilling the more ‘real-world’ adult version of masculine identity” (p. 147). This means that boys in this category can motivate themselves to do well in school by tolerating or working around the machinations of the hegemonic masculine culture and focus on the future purchase of academic credentials when seeking lucrative employment.

From a Christian faith-based perspective, Rekers (1991, p.305) stipulates that “*the sexual identity of a boy or man rests on much more than his genital functions. There are social and moral as well as physical attributes that define a man as man. The male role has been understood throughout history as embodying much more than the male reproductive act. As a whole person, the man’s role involves social responsibilities of father and husband that accompany sexual intercourse. As a whole person, the man’s spiritual responsibilities as moral leader and provider attend the procreative sexual act. Marital fidelity and a leadership responsibility for children are intrinsic to the true and complete masculine role.*”

Akin to this view of masculinity, we present and discuss data on fatherhood and male family headship as they relate to boys’ education later in this report.

According to Weaver-Hightower (2003, p. 472), the *boy turn debate* is a *double entendre* (i.e. conveying two meanings) concept. Firstly, the debate is on the view that the *boy turn* implies *turning away from* the focus on girls’ concerns in education which have been adequately dealt with over a number of decades to boys’ issues in educational research, educational policy and education. We do not ascribe to this view. Secondly, the *boy turn* implies that “boys are finally having a ‘turn’, a share of research and policy attention” in education. As can be noticed, this does not mean turning away from girls’ concerns in education. We ascribe to this interpretation in this study.

The *what about boys debate*, in its basic form, is focused on the view that boys underachieve in education because they are discriminated against in education systems where their educational and other needs are not seriously paid attention to in research, policy and practice and where they are not materially, educationally, socially and financially supported as much as girls are. In this debate, boys’ educational interests and concerns are pitied against girls’ interests and concerns (Foster, et al., 2001; Mills, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003; Lingard, 2003). This view has been criticised as an expression of *recuperative masculinity* which men “use to reclaim their hitherto lost societal dominance in the face of feminist ascendance that has its clearest manifestation in the superior academic performance of girls when compared to that of boys” in several countries of the world (Lingard, 2003, p.33). According to Martino and Kehler (2007), this attempt to re-masculine schooling should be challenged. Our view in this report is that of seeking ameliorative educational policy frameworks, strategies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the academic achievement of Namibian boys in education without undermining Namibian girls’ educational gains and future educational prospects.



As indicated in the background of this report, *backlash politics in boys' education* debates are about boys being the new disadvantaged lot who are victims of an adverse backlash of empowering support given to girls over the years. In other words, “these politics suggest that boys are the new ‘victims’ of schooling and that the girls’ agenda in schooling is a completed one” (Mills, 2003, p. 57). In our view, the focus should not be on the victim status of boys who underachieve in education but on providing support of various kinds to enhance such boys’ academic achievement.

As used in boys’ education discourses, *essentialism* pertains to the fact “that boys and girls are *naturally* suited to different kinds of learning activities” (Martino and Kehler, 2007, p. 409). In other words, the essentialist approach focuses on a biological or deterministic view which indicates that because boys and girls are naturally constituted differently, problems with their learning and academic achievement should be handled in concert with their peculiar developmental and learning needs and learning styles. In our view, although boys’ underachievement may partly result from some particular personal needs, the local schools’ and communities’ social-cultural contexts and the effects of familial social-economic resources should not be ignored when attempting to enhance boys’ academic achievement.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research designs

We based the research project on the constructivist, transformative and post-positivism research paradigms. To be consistent with these paradigms and the research questions we provided earlier, we used a pragmatic parallel mixed methods design in which both quantitative and qualitative data were concurrently collected. We used the survey design when establishing the nature and scope of the Namibian boys’ underachievement in education phenomenon and when answering the research question: “How do sociological, cultural, economic, political, curriculum-based and quality of education, psychological development, inclusive education and social media factors influence boys’ underachievement and under-participation in education in the Namibian context?”

We used the case study and narrative research designs when answering research questions such as the following: “How do teachers, lecturers, parents and learners understand differences in academic achievement between male and female learners? What do girls do to excel in school that boys do not do?”

Population

To undertake the survey part of the study, we originally viewed all grades 10 and 12 secondary school teachers from all 14 education regions in Namibia and their learners as constituting part of the population for the study. In 2019, there were 204 state schools offering grades 10 – 12. In terms of the teaching force, there were, in total, 9336 secondary school teachers. Whereas the total number of grade 10 learners was 28761, the total number of grade 12 learners was 25421 (EMIS, 2019). Originally, we decided to focus on grades 10 and 12 teachers and their learners in the study because they would enable us to have access to national examination results. When in the field, we decided to view all secondary school teachers and all secondary school learners as part of the population of the study. This decision was made for logistical reasons. In addition, all lecturers teaching 1st to 4th year modules and



their students at the University of Namibia and the Namibia University of Science and Technology were part of the study's population. In addition, some students from the International University of Management (IUM) and Vocational training centres were part of the population. Moreover, all parents of the grades 8 to 12 learners in the 14 education regions were part of the population of the study.

Sampling

For the survey part of the study, we used the systematic sampling technique to select 10% of secondary schools from each of the 14 regions. When all logistical contingencies were taken into account we obtained data from 53 schools located in all 14 regions. Originally we proposed that at each school we would randomly select 3 grade 10 classes and 2 grade 12 classes. Each class was to yield at least 33 learners. When in the field, it became necessary to adapt to individual school's circumstances, revise our original proposal and obtain data from grades 8 to 12 learners. Based on this, we obtained quantitative questionnaire data from a total of **4659 learners**. The mean age of the learners was 17.48 years, with the minimum age of 11 years and the maximum age of 32 years. The learners' sub-sample is described in tables 21-24.

Table 21: Gender of learners

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	2110	45.3
Female	2524	54.2
Others	11	.2
No response	13	.3
Total	4659	100.0

Table 22: Learners' grade

Grade	Frequency	Percent
Grade 10	760	16.3
Grade 12	1350	29.0
Grade 11	983	21.1
Grade 9	1003	21.5
Grade 8	552	11.8
No response	9	.2
Total	4659	100.0

Table 23: Learners' region of origin

Region	Frequency	Percent
Hardap	291	6.2
Kavango West	161	3.5
Otjozondjupa	203	4.4
Omusati	121	2.6
Kunene	157	3.4
Zambezi	184	3.9
Karas	266	5.7
Erongo	489	10.5
Khomas	625	13.4
Oshana	516	11.1
Oshikoto	305	6.5
Kavango East	1047	22.5
Ohangwena	131	2.8
Omaheke	120	2.6
No response	43	.9
Total	4659	100.0

Table 24: Learners' school location

Location	Frequency	Percent
Valid Urban	2817	60.5
Rural	1377	29.6
Peri-urban	408	8.8
No response	57	1.2
Total	4659	100.0

The teachers' sub-sample consisted of a total of 528 teachers whose minimum age was 20 years and the maximum age was 61 years. According to Figure 1, the mode of the teachers' age was in the category of 20-30 years. The teachers' sub-sample is further described in Figure 1 and in the 4 tables that follow Figure 1.



Figure 1: Distribution of age amongst teachers in the sample

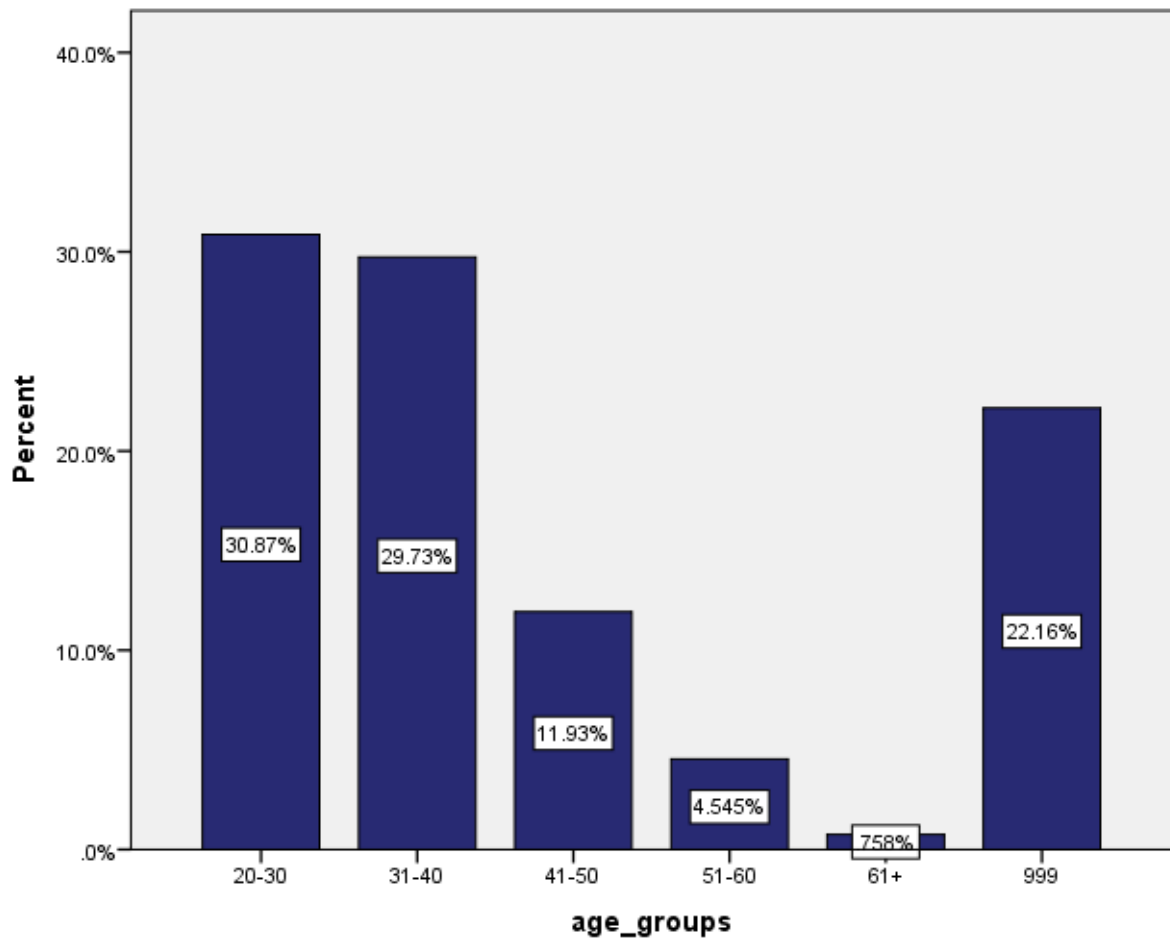


Table 25: Teachers' gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	206	39.0
Female	310	58.7
NR	12	2.3
Total	528	100.0



Table 26: Teachers' region of origin

Region	Frequency	Percent
Oshikoto	38	7.2
Omaheke	17	3.2
Omusati	10	1.9
Kunene	12	2.3
Zambezi	19	3.6
Kavango West	20	3.8
Hardap	40	7.6
Erongo	97	18.4
Karas	52	9.8
Kavango East	70	13.3
Oshana	62	11.7
Khomas	54	10.2
Ohangwena	21	4.0
Otjozondupa	15	2.8
NR	1	.2
Total	528	100.0

Table 27: Teachers' school location

Location	Frequency	Percent
Urban	345	65.3
Rural	151	28.6
Peri urban	23	4.4
NR	9	1.7
Total	528	100.0

Table 28: Teachers' highest teaching qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percent
Certificate	23	4.4
Diploma	128	24.2
Degree	334	63.3
Postgraduate degree	15	2.8
Others	7	1.3
Postgraduate Diploma	11	2.1
NR	10	1.9
Total	528	100.0

Based on their availability, 182 parents or guardians of secondary school learners become members of the sample. The minimum age of parents was 26 years and the maximum age of the parents was 62 years. The parents' sub-sample is further described in the following 5 tables:

Table 29: Categorized parents' age

Age category in years	Frequency	Percent
21-30	17	9.3
31-40	67	36.8
41-50	67	36.8
51-60	28	15.4
61-70	1	.5
No response	2	1.1
Total	182	100.0

Table 30: Parents' gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
M	64	35.2
F	115	63.2
No response	3	1.6
Total	182	100.0

Table 31: Whether parents had sons and daughters in secondary school or in University

Did parents have a:	Responses							
	Yes		No		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Son in secondary school?	95	52.2	85	46.7	2	1.1	182	100
Daughter in secondary school?	89	48.9	87	47.8	6	3.3	182	100
Son at University?	41	22.5	139	76.4	2	1.1	182	100
Daughter at University?	33	18.1	148	81.4	1	0.5	182	100

Table 32: Parents' qualifications

Qualifications	Frequency	Percent
Less than grade 10	17	9.3
Grade 10	38	20.9
Grade 11	2	1.1
Grade 12	47	25.8
Certificate	6	3.3
Diploma	24	13.2
Degree	35	19.2
Postgraduate	7	3.8
No Response	6	3.3
Total	182	100.0



Table 33: Parents' regions of origin

Region	Frequency	Percent
Kavango east	18	9.9
Kavango west	8	4.4
Omaheke	10	5.5
Kunene	2	1.1
Otjozondjupa	4	2.2
Zambezi	9	4.9
Oshana	22	12.1
Oshikoto	38	20.9
Erongo	14	7.7
Hardap	18	9.9
Karas	12	6.6
Khomas	12	6.6
Omusati	6	3.3
Ohangwena	7	3.8
No response	2	1.1
TOTAL	182	100.0

Also included in the sample were 807 University and VTC students. The mean age of the students was 23.4 years. The University and VTC students' sub-sample is described in the following three tables:

Table 34: University and VTC students' gender distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	355	44.0
Female	446	55.3
No response	6	.7
Total	807	100.0

Table 35: University and VTC students' year of study

Year of study	Frequency	Percent
1st Year	206	25.5
2nd Year	213	26.4
3rd Year	246	30.5
4th Year	60	7.4
5th Year	17	2.1
Postgraduate	1	.1
No response	64	7.9
Total	807	100.0

Table 36: University and VTC students' institution of origin

Institution	Frequency	Percent
UNAM	520	64.4
NUST	145	18.0
IUM	43	5.3
VVTC	40	5.0
RVTC	22	2.7
ZVTC	21	2.6
No response	16	2.0
Total	807	100.0

Note:

UNAM = University of Namibia

NUST = Namibia University of Science and Technology

IUM = International University of Management

VVTC = Volambola Vocational Training Centre

RVTC = Rundu Vocational Training Centre

ZVTC = Zambezi Vocational Training Centre

To include all fields of study in the project, all 8 Faculties at the University of Namibia and all 6 Faculties at the Namibia University of Science and Technology were included in the sample. Using the systematic sampling technique, 122 lecturers from the two institutions were included in the sample. The mean age of the lecturers was 42 years. The lecturers' demographic data is described in Tables 37 and 38.

Table 37: Lecturers' gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	73	59.8
Female	49	40.2
Total	122	100.0

Table 38: Lecturers' highest academic qualifications

Qualification	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor's Degree	9	7.4
Honour's Degree	22	18.0
Master's degree	55	45.1
PhD	35	28.7
No response	1	.8
Total	122	100.0



To answer qualitative research questions, we used a number of qualitative research sampling techniques. In order to form focus discussion groups, we employed the criterion sampling and case study sampling (i.e. intrinsic, instrumental and collective cases) techniques. These techniques were used to select information rich teachers, learners, University students and parents for focus group discussion sessions (Patton, 2002; Mertens, 2010).

Research instruments

For the quantitative part of the study we used teacher, lecturer, university student, learner and parent structured questionnaires. In addition, we used assessment documents in the form of EMIS statistics, grades 10 and 12 examination results, and tertiary institution examination results and graduation records. Grades 10 and 12 results from the 14 education regions were used to get a picture of the comparative performance of boys and girls in the country. Moreover, as shown in the background section of this report, graduation statistics were used to obtain tertiary education level comparative male and female academic performance data. Appendices of copies of questionnaires and focus group discussion guides are attached to this report.

For the qualitative component of the study, we used interview guides for the focus group discussions and data recorders.

Procedure

We first formed 3 pairs of research teams. Whereas, research team 1 collected data from Kavango East, Erongo, Kunene, and Omusati education regions; research team 2 collected data from Oshana, Oshikoto, Ohangwena, Kavango West and Zambezi education regions; research team 3 collected data from Karas, Hardap, Omaheke and Otjozondjupa education regions. All researchers were involved in collecting data from the Khomas education region, the University of Namibia, the Namibia University of Science and Technology and the International University of Management.

Before fieldwork commenced, all researchers were involved in constructing research instruments and in making data collection logistical arrangements. Researchers were required to attend workshops that were organized to perform these tasks.

To ensure their reliability, validity and trustworthiness, research instruments were piloted amongst persons who were part of the research population in the Khomas education region. All research teams participated in the pilot study.

After obtaining permission to have access to research sites and after making logistical arrangements, research sub teams administered questionnaires to research participants in education regions of their jurisdiction. Research sub teams also formed focus groups and undertook focus group discussions. In addition, research sub teams conducted interviews with some research participants. With the consent of research participants, researchers used data recorders to record proceedings of focus group discussions and interviews. Furthermore, research teams reviewed EMIS statistics, learner/student achievement related documents, reports and records. To apply the pragmatic parallel mixed methods design, research sub team members shared responsibilities in the manner that while one member of the research sub team would be administering questionnaires to some research participants, another member of the research sub team would be conducting focus group discussions with other



research participants. For instance, while one member of the research sub team would be administering questionnaires to grade 10 learners, another research sub team member would be holding focus group discussions with either some teachers or some parents who would have been specially assembled for the purpose.

Data analysis

In addition to frequencies and crosstabulations, inferential statistics in the form of analysis of variance, the chi-square and the t-test were used to analyse quantitative research data obtained through structured questionnaires. We used the SPSS software when creating a data code book at a research team's workshop. We engaged research assistants to use the code book when entering the questionnaire quantitative data we obtained from teachers, learners, parents, University lecturers and University and VTC students. We then analysed the entered data using frequencies, the chi-square test, the t-test and the one-way Analysis of Variance.

After transcribing and coding focus group discussion data obtained from teachers, parents, university students and learners, researchers used typological data analysis, content analysis and narrative analysis to make sense of the data. We used a seven-step qualitative data analysis procedure to do this.

Research ethics

To apply ethical research principles in concrete terms, researchers took the following actions:

1. The research project only commenced after receiving institutional ethical clearance and approval from the University of Namibia Ethics Committee and from the national, regional and local officials of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.
2. Informed consent was sought and obtained from all research participants at the beginning of data collection sessions. This was done by informing research participants about the purpose, significance, expected duration of interview sessions and procedures of the study. In addition, informed consent was obtained by asking if it would be all right for each of them to participate in the study and have either their voices recorded or their images taken. Moreover, an information sheet on the study was given to research participants. They were asked to read through this document before signing an informed consent form which certified that they had decided to participate in the study voluntarily and not under duress or coercion.
3. Researchers informed research participants about their right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the research exercise once participation had begun.
4. Research participants were informed that their responses to research questions posed in questionnaires, interview sessions and focus group discussions were to be treated as confidential. It was explained to them that this meant that their identities would not be divulged at any point during the conduct of the study and during the reporting of the research findings. In addition, access to their responses and voice recordings (which were to be erased after the study) was restricted to researchers only.
5. Researchers assured research participants that participation in the research would not cause them psychological, emotional, spiritual and physical harm because all research activities would be undertaken in a humane and respectful manner. To ensure that this was adhered to, no information about any possible physical and psychological risk emanating from participation in the research was withheld from research participants.



PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Our main goal in this section of the report is to present quantitative and qualitative research findings that provide some answers to research questions that we posed as part of the background to this report. For ease of reference, these research questions were:

1. What is the nature and scope of Namibian boys' underachievement in education?
2. How do sociological, cultural, economic, political, curriculum-based and quality of education, psychological development, inclusive education and social media factors influence boys' underachievement and under-participation in education in the Namibian context?
3. How do international, continental, regional and national gender-related interventions and policies influence boys' achievement in education in Namibia?
4. What support do schools, tertiary education institutions and communities provide to boys and young men in the Namibian Education system?
5. What should the education system and communities do to prevent boys' under-participation in education?
6. What suggestions do teachers, lecturers, parents and students/learners have about educational and social programmes that could be put in place to enhance the academic performance of boys who underachieved and under-participated in education?

We have to some extent already answered the first research question by providing evidence in the background of this report on how the disparity in academic performance between male and female learners/students at Namibian secondary schools and tertiary education institutions was displayed. This evidence is presented in Tables 1-20. In terms of the scope of Namibian boys' underachievement in education, the evidence that has been presented portrays the problem as a national one. For instance, at the secondary school level, challenges of boys' low survival rates, lower promotion rates from grade to grade and high dropout rates affect boys' academic participation in all 14 education regions. At the tertiary education level, evidence shows that more female than male students have been enrolled in *all* public and private Namibian educational institutions for three decades and that in general, according to examination and graduation statistics, female students have consistently, for 30 years, academically performed better than male students.

To elaborate on the nature of Namibian boys' underachievement in education, we present some grade 10 and grade 12 examination results in History, Biology, Geography and Physical Science for the period of 2016 to 2018 that were adapted from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Directorate of National Examinations and Assessment (DNEA) statistics of 2016, 2017 and 2018. As already presented in Tables 1 and 2, girls consistently performed better than boys at the grade 12 level in English second language and in Mathematics during the period of 2016 to 2018.



Table 39: Performance in History, Grade 10: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 10											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	962	5.46%	1088	5.28%	919	4.81%	1041	4.79%	817	3.84%	888	0.37%
B	1276	7.24%	1236	6.00%	1327	7.04%	1309	6.02%	1439	6.76%	1375	5.83%
C	2250	12.7%	2089	10.1%	2383	12.6%	2219	10.2%	2605	12.2%	2507	10.6%
D	4767	27.0%	5059	24.5%	5047	26.8%	5443	25.0%	5434	25.5%	5766	24.4%
E	3658	20.7%	4615	22.4%	3860	20.4%	5022	23.1%	4235	19.9%	5175	21.9%
F	2849	16.6%	4000	19.4%	3186	16.9%	4236	19.4%	3647	17.1%	4376	18.5%
G	1346	7.63%	1883	9.14%	1506	7.99%	1845	8.48%	2170	10.2%	2575	10.9%
U	401	2.27%	411	1.99%	472	2.50%	398	1.83%	723	3.39%	609	2.58%
I	111	0.62%	200	0.97%	132	0.70%	219	1.00%	196	0.92%	300	1.27%
X	0		0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0.0094%	3	0.0127%
	17 620		20 581		18 832		21 732		21 268		23 574	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

As can be noticed from Table 39, more Namibian female learners, in general, consistently performed better than male learners in History at the grade 10 level during the 2016 to 2018 period. According to Table 40, this relative performance between female and male learners was also displayed at the grade 12 level during the same period.



Table 40: Performance in History, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 12											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	8	0.53%	5	0.28%	9	0.57%	10	0.55%	5	0.33%	17	0.91%
B	16	1.07%	21	1.20%	16	1.02%	25	1.38%	28	1.88%	39	2.10%
C	52	3.48%	73	4.17%	58	3.71%	68	3.77%	57	3.82%	57	3.07%
D	83	5.56%	83	4.74%	106	6.78%	114	6.32%	94	6.31%	92	4.95%
E	208	13.9%	157	8.98%	202	12.9%	198	10.9%	200	13.4%	247	13.3%
F	306	20.5%	321	18.3%	273	17.4%	334	18.5%	254	17.05	323	17.4%
G	512	34.3%	618	35.3%	570	36.4%	717	39.7%	519	34.8%	690	37.1%
U	252	16.8%	376	21.5%	260	16.6%	278	15.4%	251	16.8%	338	18.2%
I	46	3.08%	73	4.17%	54	3.45%	38	2.10%	65	4.36%	40	2.15%
X	9	0.60%	21	1.20%	14	0.89%	21	1.16%	16	1.07%	12	0.64%
Total	1492		1748		1562		1803		1489		1856	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Table 41: Performance in Biology, Grade 10: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 10											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	945	5.35%	1205	5.85%	775	4.11%	1003	4.61%	1085	5.09%	1288	5.46%
B	1434	8.12%	1626	7.78%	1401	7.43%	1518	6.97%	1469	6.90%	1736	7.36%
C	2402	13.6%	2759	13.3%	2668	14.1%	2981	13.7%	2887	13.5%	3256	13.8%
D	4260	24.1%	4725	22.9%	4298	22.8%	5077	23.3%	5181	24.3%	5798	24.5%
E	3549	20.1%	4167	20.2%	3714	19.7%	4445	20.4%	4140	19.4%	4632	19.6%
F	2769	15.6%	3426	16.6%	3188	16.9%	3768	17.3%	3339	15.6%	3640	15.4%
G	1452	8.23%	1623	7.88%	1670	8.86%	1836	8.44%	1894	8.90%	2029	8.60%
U	700	3.96%	835	4.05%	998	5.29%	913	4.19%	1095	5.14%	905	3.83%
I	130	0.76%	230	1.11%	135	0.71%	211	0.97%	186	0.87%	299	1.26%
X	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0.0093	2	0.00847%
Total	17 641		20 596		18 847		21 752		21 278		23 585	



Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Table 41 shows that at grade 10 level during the period of 2016 to 2018, more female learners performed better than male learners in Biology. However, at the grade 12 level, there appeared to be no difference in performance in Biology between female and male learners during the same period (see Table 42).

Table 42: Performance in Biology, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 12											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	19	0.32%	10	0.14%	20	0.32%	15	0.20%	17	0.25%	20	0.25%
B	39	0.66%	51	0.74%	52	0.84%	56	0.76%	59	0.87%	56	0.71%
C	255	4.36%	237	3.46%	288	4.66%	310	4.25%	334	4.95%	335	4.29%
D	758	12.9%	717	10.4%	779	12.6%	801	10.9%	938	13.9%	829	10.6%
E	865	14.7%	888	12.9%	891	14.4%	1007	13.8%	980	14.5%	1130	14.4%
F	1092	18.6%	1284	18.7%	1207	19.5%	1364	18.4%	1250	18.5%	1514	19.4%
G	1146	19.6%	1396	20.4%	1153	18.6%	1417	19.4%	1216	18.0%	1459	18.7%
U	874	14.9%	1134	16.5%	1040	16.8%	1301	17.8%	1094	16.2%	1467	18.8%
I	782	13.3%	1076	15.7%	717	11.6%	975	13.3%	815	12.0%	935	11.9%
X	15	0.25%	39	0.57%	28	0.45%	44	0.60%	40	0.59%	51	0.65%
Total	5845		6832		6175		7290		6743		7796	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018



Table 43: Performance in Geography, Grade 10: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 10											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	842	4.7%	1036	0.6%	764	4.0%	944	4.3%	761	3.5%	879	3.7%
B	1508	8.5%	1489	7.2%	1428	7.5%	1430	6.5%	1456	6.8%	1422	6.0%
C	2607	14.7%	2445	11.8%	2951	15.6%	2838	13.0%	3074	14.4%	2879	12.2%
D	4548	25.7%	4717	22.9%	4723	25.0%	5013	23.0%	5102	23.9%	5484	23.2%
E	5109	28.9%	6423	31.1%	4904	26.0%	6159	28.3%	5244	24.6%	5872	24.8%
F	2139	12.1%	3187	15.4%	2538	13.4%	3467	15.9%	3197	15.0%	4037	17.1%
G	665	3.7%	925	4.5%	1079	5.7%	1346	6.1%	1625	7.63%	2003	8.4%
U	97	0.5%	156	0.7%	324	1.71%	342	1.5%	639	3.0%	707	2.9%
I	122	0.6%	209	1.0%	136	0.7%	213	0%	179	0.8%	300	1.27%
X	0	0%	1	05	0	0%	0	0%	1	0%	1	1%
Totals	17 637		20 591		18 847		21 752		21 278		23 584	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Table 43 shows that in general, more female than male learners obtained higher scores in Geography at grade 10 during the 2016 to 2018 period. Another point was that there were more female than male learners taking this examination during the period under consideration. This was also the case for examinations taken in other subjects, not only at grade 10 level but at grade 12 as well.



Table 44: Performance in Geography, Grade 12: 2016-2018 by gender

Symbol	Grade 12											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	11	0.28%	18	0.42%	17	0.42%	28	0.63%	16	0.37%	18	0.38%
B	55	1.40%	33	0.78%	87	2.17%	56	1.27%	55	1.30%	53	1.12%
C	140	3.58%	111	2.64%	187	4.67%	127	2.89%	162	3.84%	125	2.66%
D	374	9.57%	264	6.29%	341	8.52%	243	10.6%	331	7.85%	291	6.20%
E	689	17.6%	581	13.8%	678	16.9%	594	13.5%	686	16.2%	612	13.0%
F	826	21.1%	806	19.2%	936	23.3%	993	22.6%	1056	25.0%	1067	22.7%
G	993	25.4%	1161	27.7%	1061	26.5%	1216	27.6%	992	23.5%	1211	25.8%
U	621	15.8%	876	20.9%	504	12.5%	792	18.0%	664	15.7%	883	18.8%
I	179	4.58%	300	7.15%	172	4.29%	307	6.98%	230	5.45%	398	8.48%
X	20	0.51%	41	0.97%	18	0.44%	37	0.84%	23	0.54%	35	0.74%
Total	3908		4191		4001		4393		4215		4693	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

It is clear from Table 44 that more female than male learners obtained A symbols in examinations in Geography during 2016 to 2018 at the grade 12 level. However, a perusal of the entire table reveals that more male learners than female learners obtained passing grades in the subject at this level during the period under consideration.



Table 45: Performance in Physical Science, grade 10: 2016-2018, by gender

Symbol	Grade 10											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	1414	8.01%	1468	7.12%	1128	5.98%	1272	5.84%	1325	6.22%	1444	6.12%
B	1719	9.74%	1620	7.86%	1701	9.02%	1700	7.81%	1887	8.86%	1832	7.76%
C	2805	15.9%	2816	13.6%	3112	16.5%	3150	14.4%	3027	14.2%	3393	14.3%
D	3881	21.9%	4385	21.2%	4257	22.5%	4953	22.7%	4517	21.2%	5140	21.7%
E	3686	20.8%	4802	23.3%	3027	16.0%	3794	17.4%	3077	14.4%	3459	14.6%
F	2598	14.7%	3454	16.7%	2452	13.0%	3153	14.4%	3076	14.4%	3489	14.7%
G	1065	6.03%	1436	6.97%	1623	8.61%	2048	9.41%	2096	9.85%	2362	10.0%
U	373	2.11%	413	2.00%	1408	7.47%	1466	6.73%	2071	9.73%	2159	9.15%
I	100	0.56%	205	0.99%	139	0.73%	216	0.99%	200	0.93%	305	1.29%
X	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	2	0.0%	2	0.008%
Total	17641		20599		18847		21752		21278		23585	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Although Table 45 shows that more female than male learners obtained the grade of A in Physical science at grade 10 level during the 2016-2018 period, there appears to be no significant difference in obtaining lower grade marks between male and female learners who took the grade 10 Physical Science examinations during this three year period.



Table 46: Performance in Physical Science, grade 12: 2016-2018, by gender

Symbol	Grade 12											
	2016				2017				2018			
	Male		Female		Male		Female		Male		Female	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
A	94	1.63%	66	1.03%	85	1.44%	72	1.06%	86	1.32%	38	0.52%
B	267	4.65%	253	3.97%	239	4.06%	246	3.63%	195	3.01%	159	2.20%
C	491	8.56%	546	8.58%	500	8.49%	518	7.64%	524	8.08%	538	7.46%
D	848	14.7%	850	13.3%	902	15.3%	899	13.2%	937	14.4%	919	12.7%
E	1077	18.7%	1151	18.1%	1119	19.0%	1222	18.0%	1210	18.6%	1314	18.2%
F	1128	19.6%	1253	19.7%	1188	20.1%	1375	20.2%	1291	19.9%	1480	20.5%
G	1272	22.1%	1510	23.7%	1238	21.0%	1543	22.7%	1257	19.4%	1438	19.9%
U	485	8.45%	615	9.67%	518	8.80%	729	10.7%	756	11.6%	982	13.6%
I	50	0.87%	81	1.27%	66	1.12%	122	1.80%	179	2.76%	293	4.06%
X	21	0.36%	33	0.51%	30	0.50%	48	0.70%	43	0.66%	46	0.63%
Total	5733		6358		5885		6774		6478		7207	

Adapted from DNEA Statistics, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Whereas more male than female learners obtained the average grade of A, more female than male learners obtained the average grade of C in the grade 12 Physical Science examinations of 2016 to 2018 (see Table 46). In general, there was no significant difference in performance between male and female learners in the grade 12 Physical Science examinations during this period.

A general statement that we wish to make is that during the three year examination period of 2016 to 2018, *at the national level*, grade 10 and grade 12 female learners performed better than male learners in English second language, Mathematics and History. In Biology, at grade 10, whereas female learners performed better than male learners, there was no difference in performance between male and female learners at the grade 12 level.

In Geography, female learners obtained higher grades than male learners at grade 10 and 12 levels during the three year period. In Physical Science, whereas female learners obtained higher grades than male learners at the grade 10 level there appeared to be no significant difference in performance in the subject at the grade 12 level. From all this it appears to us that differences in academic performance between female and male learners are school



subject sensitive. However, in some form, female learners perform better than male learners in the majority of school subjects. This manner of performance is displayed in all 14 Education Regions because the data we used covered all schools in the country.

In considering the data in response to the rest of the research questions, we present analysed quantitative and qualitative data collected from each group of respondents in the manner that follows.

PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM LEARNERS

As described under the learner sample, quantitative questionnaire data were collected from 4659 learners from all 14 Education Regions of Namibia with a mean age of 17.48 years, the lowest age being 11 years and the maximum age being 32 years. Whereas 54.2% of the learners were female, 45.3% of them were male. In addition, whereas 11.8% of the learners were in grade 8, 21.5% were in grade 9, 16.3% were in grade 10, 21.1% were in grade 11 and 29% of them were in grade 12 (see Tables 21 and 22). Moreover, whereas Table 23 is about learners' region of origin, Table 24 is on learners' school location.

In the questionnaire for learners, we wished to find out from them whether they thought boys performed better than girls at school work and vice versa and about:

- their views on boys' work habits, and behaviour that might affect their achievement in education;
- the impact of cultural aspects on boys' academic achievement;
- their views on why boys under-participated in education;
- their views on available learning support for boys and
- their views on boys' task behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and hopes.

We present data pertaining to each of these aspects in the following way:

Table 47: Whether boys performed academically better than girls at school

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2055	44.1
No	2553	54.8
No response	51	1.1
Total	4659	100.0

As can be noticed from Table 47, about 55% of the 4659 learners thought that overall, girls performed better than boys in Namibian schools.

Data on learners' views on boys' work habits, and behaviour that might affect their achievement in education is provided in Table 48.



Table 48: Learners' views on boys' work habits and behaviour

In my classroom, girls perform better than boys because boys:	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Are not focused.	501	10.8	1170	25.1	2076	44.6	850	18.2	62	1.3	4659	100
Are absent from classes.	607	13.0	1241	26.6	1675	36.0	1075	23.1	61	1.3	4659	100
Are in-disciplined	444	9.4	1092	23.4	1888	40.5	1099	23.6	136	2.9	4659	100
Believe that they can be employed without education.	857	18.4	1154	24.8	1464	31.4	1101	23.6	83	1.8	4659	100
Find the subject matter boring.	502	10.8	1395	29.9	1946	41.8	753	16.2	63	1.4	4659	100
Find the subject matter irrelevant.	616	13.2	1817	39.0	1592	34.2	500	10.7	134	2.9	4659	100
Are given less attention by teachers than girls.	2214	47.4	1368	29.4	489	10.5	504	10.8	88	1.9	4659	100
Are more affected by family poverty than girls	1974	42.4	1654	35.5	573	12.3	396	8.5	62	1.3	4659	100

As can be noticed from Table 48, whereas 62.8% of the learners sampled agreed with the statement that boys might underachieve in education because they were not focused on their school work, 59.1% of them agreed that boys were more frequently absent from their classes, 64.1% agreed that boys were more in-disciplined, 55% agreed that boys believed that they could be employed without education and that 58% of the learners agreed that boys found school subject matter boring. In contrast to this, 52.2% of the learners disagreed with the statement that boys found the school subject matter irrelevant, 76.8% of them disagreed with the statement that boys might perform worse than girls because they were given less attention by teachers. In addition, 77.9% of the sampled learners disagreed with the statement that boys might perform worse than girls because they were more affected by poverty than girls. Data on the impact of cultural aspects on boys' academic achievement is provided in Table 49.



Table 49: Learners' views on the impact of cultural aspects on boys' academic achievement

Boys academically perform worse than girls because :	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Traditionally, they are allowed to put in minimum effort in education.	2165	46.5	1568	33.7	613	13.2	263	5.6	50	1.1	4659	100
They are allowed to defy authority.	1217	26.1	2273	49.8	875	18.8	203	4.4	91	2.0	4659	100
They are allowed to engage in mischief.	1378	29.6	2045	43.9	887	19.0	242	5.2	107	2.3	4659	100
They are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society.	1542	33.1	1667	35.8	970	20.8	407	8.7	73	1.6	4659	100
They find the subject matter irrelevant.	702	15.1	1618	34.7	1659	35.6	608	13.1	72	1.5	4659	100

Table 49 reveals that cultural aspects which learners were asked to express their opinions on had little impact on boys' academic achievement. This was the case because whereas 80.2% of the sampled learners disagreed with the statement that traditionally boys were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, 75.9% disagreed that they were allowed to defy authority, 73.5% disagreed that they were allowed to engage in mischief, 68.9% disagreed that they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society and that 49.8% of them disagreed that boys found the school subject matter irrelevant.

Data on learners' views pertaining to why boys under-participated in education is presented in Table 50.



Table 50: Learners' views on why boys under-participate in education

According to my experience as a learner:	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
More girls drop out of school than boys.	975	20.9	1260	27.0	1259	27.0	1109	23.8	56	1.2	4659	100
More boys leave school because of misbehaviour than girls.	366	7.9	511	11.0	1995	42.8	1738	37.3	49	1.1	4659	100
More girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programs (e.g., Windows of Hope; My Future is My Choice etc.).	256	5.5	694	14.9	1836	39.4	1787	38.4	86	1.8	4659	100
More boys participate in sport activities than girls.	256	5.5	480	10.3	1813	38.9	2048	44.0	62	1.3	4659	100
More girls participate in class learning activities than boys.	227	4.9	415	8.9	1674	35.9	2278	48.9	65	1.4	4659	100
Boys' energy and participation are stifled by the structured nature of classrooms.	310	6.7	865	18.6	1892	40.6	1469	31.5	123	2.6	4659	100

With respect to why boys under-participate in education, Table 50 shows that whereas 50.8% of the learners agreed with the statement that more girls drop out of school than boys, 80.1% of them agreed that more boys than girls leave school because of misbehaviour, 77.8% agreed that more girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programmes, 82.9% agreed that more boys participate in sport activities than girls, 84.8% agreed that more girls participate in class learning activities than boys and 72.1% of the learners agreed with the statement that boys' energy and participation are stifled by the structured nature of classrooms.

Learners' views on available learning support for boys are given in Table 51.



Table 51: Learners' views on available learning Support for boys

Boys academically perform worse than girls because:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Boys are given less psycho- social support in school than girls.	475	10.2	1291	27.7	1907	40.9	891	19.1	95	2.0	4659	100
Boys are more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than girls.	681	14.6	1033	22.2	1735	37.2	1141	24.5	69	1.5	4659	100
Teachers are more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities.	724	15.5	1127	24.2	1692	36.3	1037	22.3	79	1.7	4659	100
Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls.	752	16.1	1986	42.6	1340	28.8	478	10.3	103	2.2	4659	100
There are more educational support girl targeted programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes.	2325	49.9	1547	33.2	314	6.7	392	8.4	81	1.7	4659	100
Boys get less educational support from their fathers than girls.	686	14.7	923	19.8	1686	36.2	1261	27.1	103	2.2	4659	100
Boys get less educational support from their mothers than girls.	851	18.3	1292	27.7	1552	33.3	833	17.9	131	2.8	4659	100

What is presented in Table 51 is about whether some boys underachieve in education because of the type of education support they are provided with by the school and the family. In response to this, whereas 69% of the learners disagreed with the statement that boys were



given less psycho- social support in school than girls, 61.7% of them disagreed that boys were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol and drug abuse) than girls, 58.6% disagreed that teachers were more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities, 63.3% disagreed that boys got less educational support from their fathers than girls and 51.2% disagreed that boys got less educational support from their mothers than girls. In contrast to this, whereas 58.7% of the learners agreed that boys were provided with less counselling support than girls, 83.1% agreed that there were more educational support girl targeted programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes (see Table 50).

Table 52 is about learners' views on boys' task behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and hopes that could influence their academic achievement.

Table 52: Learners' views on boys' task behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and hopes

Study habits:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls.	915	19.6	1562	33.5	1461	31.4	612	13.2	109	2.3	4659	100
Boys are more disengaged than girls on class activities given by female teachers.	602	12.9	1022	21.9	1902	40.8	1041	22.3	92	2.0	4659	100
Girls are more collaborative on learning tasks than boys.	545	11.7	978	21.0	1922	41.3	1137	24.4	77	1.7	4659	100
Boys prefer to work in isolation than girls.	1604	34.4	2012	43.2	675	14.5	289	6.2	79	1.7	4659	100
Girls are more eager to share academic information than boys.	876	18.8	1573	33.8	1576	33.8	544	11.7	90	1.9	4659	100
Boys do not care about their academic achievement.	1137	24.4	2223	47.7	910	19.5	275	5.9	114	2.4	4659	100
Socialization stifles the boy-child's ability to express his feelings with regard to the negative consequences of his underachievement.	712	15.3	1879	40.3	1580	33.9	365	7.8	123	2.6	4659	100
Boys are less concerned about the future.	1186	25.4	1854	39.8	1019	21.9	462	9.9	138	3.0	4659	100



Learners' views on boys' task behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and hopes are presented in Table 52. On this issue, whereas 53.1% of the learners agreed that boys spent less time on academic activities than girls, 77.6% of them agreed that boys preferred to work in isolation than girls, 52.6% agreed that girls were more eager to share academic information than boys, 72.1% agreed that boys did not care about their academic achievement, 55.6% agreed that socialization stifled the boy-child's ability to express his feelings with regard to the negative consequences of his underachievement and 65.2% of them agreed that boys were less concerned about the future. Notwithstanding these views, whereas 63.1% of the learners disagreed that boys were more disengaged than girls from class activities given by female teachers, 65.7% disagreed that girls were more collaborative on learning tasks than boys.

In addition to analyzing learners' responses to questionnaire items using frequencies, we applied the chi-square statistic to make comparisons by learners' gender, age, school location and grade. Data on selected comparisons are presented in the manner that follows.

Table 53: Whether boys perform better than girls by gender

Gender	Boys perform better than girls		Total
	Yes	No	
Male	1221	861	2082
Female	823	1679	2502
Others	3	7	10
Total	2047	2547	4594

Note: Chi-square = 305.9; df = 2; $p < .001$

We notice from Table 53, that significantly more females than males disagreed with the view that boys performed better than girls.

Table 54: Boys are not focused by gender

Gender	Boys are not focused				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	316	554	898	308	2076
Female	179	613	1169	536	2497
Others	2	0	7	2	11
Total	497	1167	2074	846	4584

Note: Chi-square = 104.2; df = 6; $p < .001$

According to Table 54, significantly more male learners than female learners disagreed with the statement that boys underachieved in education because they were not focused on school work. Female learners held the opposite view.

Table 55: Boys are absent from classes by gender

Gender	Boys are absent from classes				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	320	599	768	388	2075
Female	283	635	901	680	2499
Others	0	3	3	5	11
Total	603	1237	1672	1073	4585

Note: Chi-square = 58.9; df = 6; $p < .001$



We note from Table 55 that significantly more female learners than male learners agreed with the statement that some boys under-participated and underachieved in education because they absented themselves from classes.

Table 56: Boys are in-disciplined by gender

Gender	Boys are in-disciplined				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	259	577	839	359	2034
Female	184	506	1041	734	2465
Others	0	4	3	4	11
Total	443	1087	1883	1097	4510

Note: Chi-square = 130.5; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 56 shows that significantly more female learners than male learners held the view that some boys underachieved in education because they were indisciplined.

Table 57: Boys believe that they can be employed without education by gender

Gender	Boys believe that they can be employed without education				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	strongly agree	
Male	536	576	601	354	2067
Female	316	572	856	741	2485
Others	3	2	3	3	11
Total	855	1150	1460	1098	4563

Note: Chi-square = 202.2; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 57 revealed that significantly more female than male learners agreed with the statement that some boys might under-achieve in education because they believed they could be employed without education.

Table 58: Boys find school subject matter boring by gender

Gender	Boys find school subject matter boring				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	262	662	860	292	2076
Female	237	728	1073	458	2496
Others	0	2	7	2	11
Total	499	1392	1940	752	4583

Note: Chi-square = 29.2; df = 6; $p < .001$

Although the majority of the learners expressed the view that some boys underachieved in education because they found the subject matter to be boring, Table 58 revealed that significantly more female than male learners held this view.

Table 59: Boys are given less attention than girls by teachers by gender

Gender	Boys are given less attention than girls by teachers				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	766	653	313	340	2072
Female	1442	712	175	163	2492
Others	6	3	1	1	11
Total	2214	1368	489	504	4575

Note: Chi-square = 274.7; df = 6; $p < .001$

According to Table 59, significantly more female learners than male learners expressed the view that some boys' underachievement in education could not be explained by the reason that they were given less attention than girls by teachers.

Table 60: Boys are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society by gender

Gender	Boys are allowed to hold the view that education has no relevance to their roles in society				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	733	793	393	153	2072
Female	799	866	571	254	2490
Others	4	3	4	0	11
Total	1536	1662	968	407	4573

Note: Chi-square = 28.4; df = 6; $p < .001$

According to Table 60, both female and male learners firmly disagreed that boys were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to boys' roles in society.

Table 61: More girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programmes by gender

Gender	More girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programmes				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	167	440	865	590	2062
Female	86	250	962	1189	2487
Others	1	2	4	4	11
Total	254	692	1831	1783	4560

Note: Chi-square = 247.8; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 61 shows that more female learners than male learners agreed that more girls than boys participated in psychosocial development programmes.

Table 62: More girls participate in class learning activities than boys by gender

Gender	More girls participate in class learning activities than boys				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	100	115	714	1143	2072
Female	125	298	951	1124	2498
Others	2	1	5	3	11
Total	227	414	1670	2270	4581

Note: Chi-square = 84.0; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 62 shows that more female than male learners agreed that more girls participated in class learning activities.

Table 63: Boys are given less psycho-social support in school than girls by gender

Gender	Boys are given less psycho-social support in school than girls				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	232	642	837	350	2061
Female	239	640	1062	538	2479
Others	2	4	4	1	11
Total	473	1286	1903	889	4551

Note: Chi-square = 30.0; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 63 shows that significantly more female learners than male learners disagreed that boys were given less psychosocial support in school than girls.

Table 64: There are more educational support girl targeted programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes by gender

Gender	There are more girl targeted education support programmes than boys targeted educational support programmes				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	901	806	185	163	2055
Female	1412	733	127	227	2499
Others	7	3	0	1	11
Total	2320	1542	312	391	4565

Note: Chi-square = 96.6; df = 6; $p < .001$

It is clear from Table 64 that both male and female learners agreed that there were more girl targeted education support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes.

Table 65: Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls by gender

Gender	Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	435	749	649	219	2052
Female	477	809	811	390	2487
Others	3	4	1	3	11
Total	915	1562	1461	612	4550

Note: Chi-square = 32.4; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 65 shows that both male and female learners agreed that boys spent less time on academic activities than girls.

Table 66: Boys do not care about their academic achievement by gender

Gender	Boys do not care about their academic achievement				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	376	943	557	172	2048
Female	755	1272	349	100	2476
Others	5	4	1	0	10
Total	1136	2219	907	272	4534

Note: Chi-square = 207.8; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 66 revealed that significantly more female learners than male learners agreed that boys did not care about their academic achievement.

Table 67: Boys are less concerned about their future by gender

Gender	Boys are less concerned about their future				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	436	843	531	227	2037
Female	744	1010	485	235	2474
Others	6	1	3	0	10
Total	1186	1854	1019	462	4521

Note: Chi-square = 63.7; df = 6; $p < .001$

As was the case for Table 66, Table 67 revealed that significantly more female learners than male learners agreed that boys were less concerned about their future than girls were.

The next six comparison tables are by age

Table 68: Boys perform better than girls by age

Age category	Boys perform better than girls		Total
	Yes	No	
11 -15 years	251	492	743
16 - 20 years	1582	1924	3506
21 - 25 years	199	125	324
26 - 32years	5	4	9
Total	2037	2545	4582

Note: Chi-square = 73.1; df = 3; $p < .001$

We notice from Table 68 that proportionally, significantly more learners aged 11-20 years than those aged older than 20 years responded in the negative to the statement that boys performed better than girls in school.

Table 69: Boys are not focused by age

Age category	Boys are not focused				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
11 -15 years	64	174	345	162	745
16 - 20 years	381	909	1588	620	3498
21 - 25 years	48	75	135	63	321
26 - 32years	2	5	1	1	9
Total	495	1163	2069	846	4573

Note: Chi-square = 24.1; df = 9; $p < .004$

According to Table 69, the majority of learners from age categories of 11-15 years, 16-20 years and 21-25 years agreed that some boys underachieved in education because they were not focused on learning in school.

Table 70: Boys find school subject matter boring by age

Age category	Boys find school subject matter boring				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
11 -15 years	67	182	339	159	747
16 - 20 years	379	1094	1467	554	3494
21 - 25 years	47	106	131	39	323
26 - 32years	4	2	2	0	8
Total	497	1384	1939	752	4572

Note: Chi-square = 47.4; df = 9; $p < .001$

As was the case in Table 69, Table 70 shows that the majority of learners from age categories of 11-15 years, 16-20 years and 21-25 years agreed that some boys underachieved in education because they found school subject matter boring.

Table 71: Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls by age

Age category	Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
11 -15 years	138	319	206	72	735
16 - 20 years	553	1540	1008	367	3468
21 - 25 years	54	120	112	35	321
26 - 32years	5	1	2	0	8
Total	750	1980	1328	474	4532

Note: Chi-square = 23.5; df = 9; $p < .005$

According to Table 71, the majority of learners from all age categories agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were provided with less counselling support

Table 72: Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls by age

Age category	Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
11 -15 years	168	273	221	78	740
16 - 20 years	688	1169	1138	473	3468
21 - 25 years	55	114	97	56	322
26 - 32years	2	0	4	2	8
Total	913	1556	1460	609	4538

Note: Chi-square = 21. 0; df = 9; $p < .01$

According to Table 72, the majority of learners from age categories of 11-15 years, 16-20 years and 21-25 years agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they spent less time on academic activities than girls.

Table 73: Boys do not care about their academic achievement by age

Age category	Boys do not care about their academic achievement				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
11 -15 years	210	361	130	33	734
16 - 20 years	851	1699	706	205	3461
21 - 25 years	70	153	68	29	320
26 - 32years	1	1	3	3	8
Total	1132	2214	907	270	4523

Note: Chi-square = 32. 9; df = 9; $p < .001$

According to Table 73, the majority of learners from age categories of 11-15 years, 16-20 years and 21-25 years agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they did not care about their academic achievement.

The next 13 comparison tables are by school location.

Table 74: Whether boys academically perform better than girls by school location

School location	Whether boys perform better than girls		Total
	Yes	No	
Urban	1109	1685	2794
Rural	773	582	1355
Peri-urban	153	254	407
Total	2035	2521	4556

Note: Chi-square = 120. 3; df = 2; $p < .001$

Table 74 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools disagreed with the statement that boys performed better than girls in school.

Table 75 Boys are not focused by school location

School location	Boys are not focused				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Urban	276	681	1283	550	2790
Rural	182	388	562	216	1348
Peri-urban	33	87	208	77	405
Total	491	1156	2053	843	4543

Note: Chi-square = 37.6; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 75 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were not focused on school work.

Table 76: Boys are absent from classes by school location

School location	Boys are absent from classes				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Urban	347	696	1045	703	2791
Rural	192	390	471	294	1347
Peri-urban	59	137	140	69	405
Total	598	1223	1656	1066	4543

Note: Chi-square = 30.4; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 76 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved and under-participated in education because they were absent from classes.

Table 77: Boys are in-disciplined by school location

School location	Boys are in-disciplined				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Urban	258	701	1149	641	2749
Rural	132	292	540	357	1321
Peri-urban	47	85	176	92	400
Total	437	1078	1865	1090	4470

Note: Chi-square = 14.0; df = 6; $p < .03$

Table 77 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were in-disciplined.

Table 78: Boys believe that they can be employed without education by school location

School location	Boys believe that they can be employed without education				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	strongly agree	
Urban	473	688	924	691	2776
Rural	311	356	393	284	1344
Peri-urban	62	96	132	115	405
Total	846	1140	1449	1090	4525

Note: Chi-square = 35.6; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 78 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they believed that they could be employed without education.

Table 79: Boys find school subject matter boring by school location

School location	Boys find school subject matter boring				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Urban	263	783	1249	492	2787
Rural	178	475	509	188	1350
Peri-urban	50	125	164	66	405
Total	491	1383	1922	746	4542

Note: Chi-square = 46.7; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 79 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they found school subject matter boring.

Table 80: Boys are given less attention than girls by teachers by school location

School location	Boys are given less attention than girls by teachers				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Urban	1378	802	280	325	2785
Rural	633	432	158	125	1348
Peri-urban	187	120	45	49	401
Total	2198	1354	483	499	4534

Note: Chi-square = 12.5; df = 6; $p < .05$

Table 80 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools disagreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were given less attention than girls by teachers.

Table 81: Boys are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society by school location

School location	Boys are allowed to hold the view that education has no relevance to their roles in society				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Urban	911	988	629	253	2781
Rural	482	516	238	114	1350
Peri-urban	132	143	96	33	404
Total	1525	1647	963	400	4535

Note: Chi-square = 17.0; df = 6; $p < .01$

Table 81 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools disagreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society.

Table 82: More girls than boys participate in class learning activities by school location

School location	More girls than boys participate in class learning activities				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Urban	134	248	1006	1399	2787
Rural	72	137	513	630	1352
Peri-urban	17	26	133	227	403
Total	223	411	1652	2256	4542

Note: Chi-square = 14.3; df = 6; $p < .03$

Table 82 shows that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools overwhelmingly agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they participated less in learning activities than girls.

Table 83: Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls by school location

School location	Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Urban	479	1259	773	250	2761
Rural	197	531	435	176	1339
Peri-urban	72	176	114	42	404
Total	748	1966	1322	468	4504

Note: Chi-square = 32.4; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 83 shows that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were provided with less counselling support than girls.

Table 84: Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls by school location

School location	Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Urban	611	939	855	359	2764
Rural	235	461	460	188	1344
Peri-urban	68	151	127	57	403
Total	914	1551	1442	604	4511

Note: Chi-square = 17.3; df = 6; $p < .01$

Table 84 shows that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they spent less time on academic activities than girls.

Table 85: Boys prefer to work in isolation by school location

School location	Boys prefer to work in isolation				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Urban	974	1259	387	155	2775
Rural	459	566	217	105	1347
Peri-urban	157	165	61	22	405
Total	1590	1990	665	282	4527

Note: Chi-square = 15.8; df = 6; $p < .01$

Table 85 shows that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they preferred to work in isolation instead of collaborating with other learners.

Table 86: Boys do not care about their academic achievement by school location

School location	Boys do not care about their academic achievement				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Urban	725	1362	526	139	2752
Rural	288	638	311	99	1336
Peri-urban	116	199	57	33	405
Total	1129	2199	894	271	4493

Note: Chi-square = 38.0; df = 6; $p < .001$

Table 86 reveals that the majority of learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they did not care about their academic achievement.

The next comparison tables are by school grade.

Table 87: Whether boys academically perform better than girls by grade

Grade	Whether boys academically perform better than girls		Total
	Yes	No	
Grade 10	297	450	747
Grade 12	586	755	1341
Grade 11	456	520	976
Grade 9	442	559	1001
Grade 8	270	263	533
Total	2051	2547	4598

Note: Chi-square = 17.3; df = 4; $p < .002$

Table 87 shows that except for grade 8 learners, the majority of learners from other four grades disagreed that boys academically performed better than girls in school.

Table 88: Boys are not focused by grade

Grade	Boys are not focused				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Grade 10	64	198	344	149	755
Grade 12	136	320	654	229	1339
Grade 11	129	249	418	174	970
Grade 9	113	230	450	198	991
Grade 8	59	169	205	100	533
Total	501	1166	2071	850	4588

Note: Chi-square = 35.4; df = 12; $p < .001$

Table 88 shows that the majority of learners from each of the five grades agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were not focused on their learning activities.

Table 89: Boys are absent from classes by grade

Grade	Boys are absent from classes				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Grade 10	110	206	259	177	752
Grade 12	212	402	448	277	1339
Grade 11	87	232	413	241	973
Grade 9	126	257	358	251	992
Grade 8	70	142	192	129	533
Total	605	1239	1670	1075	4589

Note: Chi-square = 50.9; df = 12; $p < .001$

Table 89 shows that the majority of learners from each of the five grades agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were absent from their classes.

Table 90: Boys are in-disciplined by grade

Grade	Boys are in-disciplined				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Grade 10	99	210	284	153	746
Grade 12	134	364	547	265	1310
Grade 11	80	218	401	262	961
Grade 9	91	214	432	232	969
Grade 8	40	85	217	186	528
Total	444	1091	1881	1098	4514

Note: Chi-square = 90.3; df = 12; $p < .001$

Table 90 shows that the majority of learners from each of the five grades agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were in-disciplined.

Table 91: More girls than boys participate in class learning activities by grade

Grade	More girls than boys participate in class learning activities				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Grade 10	34	46	276	393	749
Grade 12	55	115	475	694	1339
Grade 11	54	116	375	428	973
Grade 9	53	68	341	527	989
Grade 8	30	68	203	234	535
Total	226	413	1670	2276	4585

Note: Chi-square = 51.2; df = 12; $p < .001$

Table 91 shows that the majority of learners from each of the five grades overwhelmingly agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they participated less in learning activities than girls.



Table 92: Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls by grade

Grade	Boys are provided with less counselling support than girls				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Grade 10	131	341	198	75	745
Grade 12	197	626	383	119	1325
Grade 11	161	405	285	113	964
Grade 9	188	421	271	105	985
Grade 8	73	189	200	66	528
Total	750	1982	1337	478	4547

Note: Chi-square = 44.6; df = 12; $p < .001$

Table 92 shows that the majority of learners from each of the five grades agreed with the statement that some boys underachieved in education because they were provided with less counselling support than girls.

Table 93: There are more educational support girl targeted programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes by grade

Grade	There are more girls than boys targeted education support programmes				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Grade 10	375	254	59	61	749
Grade 12	642	473	91	119	1325
Grade 11	493	314	69	94	970
Grade 9	508	339	72	73	992
Grade 8	306	162	21	45	534
Total	2324	1542	312	392	4570

Note: Chi-square = 21.6; df = 12; $p < .04$

Table 93 shows that the majority of learners from each of the five grades agreed with the statement that there were more girl targeted educational support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes.

As indicated in the methodology section, we used a parallel pragmatic mixed methods research design in which we collected both quantitative and qualitative data from our research participants. Consistent with this we collected and analysed focus group discussion data from some learners residing in the Kavango East, Erongo, Kunene and Omusati regions. We present two complementary reports in the manner that follows.

REPORT ON THE LEARNERS' FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS FROM THE KAVANGO EAST, OMUSATI, ERONGO AND KUNENE REGIONS

Several learners from each participating school in the above mentioned regions were selected upon completion of the questionnaire to take part in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The FGDs comprised of either Grade 9 or Grade 12 learners. The groups consisted of either a selected number of learners or whole classes. These groups ranged from as few as 25 learners and to as many as 41 learners. Learners were eager to be part of the FGDs. Both boys and girls formed these FGDs though in most cases the girls were in the majority. The learners were asked seven questions related to the underachievement of boys in the school setting. The discussions were chaired by the researcher(s) without the school's staff to ensure the learners had freedom to express themselves without fear of their teachers or head teachers. Furthermore, such settings ensured confidentiality of the learners' identity and responses since they were not asked to state their names. During the FGDs the researcher(s) directed the discussions and let them flow without interruption.

Policy changes needed to enhance boys' education

The learners were asked to discuss what in their view were the necessary changes they thought should be made to the education policies in the country that would be of benefit to the boy child's academic performance in the school. Various responses were provided and a few are presented here.

The respondents cited the lack of organizations that addressed the boy child's needs and wants for their observed underachievement. They pointed out that the "*Girls are protected by two hands.*" They have received much more help from different organizations including FAWENA which has made it possible for girls to improve their achievement in school. They noted that "*there were specific movements or organizations for women in the country...while none existed for men.*" It was also interesting to note that the girls in most FGDs indicated that the boys did not take an active part in school programmes that they perceived as "girls programmes", such as "Window of Hope" and "My Future is My Choice". The boys echoed this view and indicated that they did not join such programmes at school, because "*... these programmes addressed normally girl issues such as drug use and pregnancy*", and one boy referred to "*peer pressure*" as a reason for not doing well at school and that "*others will look down upon a boy who attends such 'girl programmes'*". There is therefore, need to also address the boy child's pressing needs in these organized programmes if boys are to attend them.

The learners suggested movements and/or organizations for boys. Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether their participation in such programmes would improve the boy child's performance in school, since the materials covered in these programmes is not examinable or part of the school curriculum. Probably, the extracurricular nature of these programmes puts off the boys and hence their non-participation. It was clear that gender perceptions clouded learners' choices to participate in existing programmes and thus missing opportunities for self-development. It should be kept in mind that schools are gendered spaces in which it matters who initiates which programmes and by implication, who will participate in such.

It should be pointed out though that the respondents seemed to have difficulties in actually identifying policies in the school that needed changing to enhance the boy child's performance. Most of their responses seemed to centre on activities of the teacher and the boy



child or practices in schools, rather than the changes in the education policies. Most of them were not even aware of the existence of these policies. The lack of awareness of education policies among learners was a cross-cutting finding.

Classroom practice changes to enhance boys' academic performance

Teacher classroom practices may have a great impact on the learning that goes on in the classroom and on student performance. What the teacher does in the classroom might enhance or hinder learners' learning. The following practices were raised in the focus group discussion sessions.

Sitting arrangements

In most classrooms in Namibia, the learners choose where to sit. This is mostly due to the fact that learners move from class to class for their lessons. Often, they do not have "permanent" classrooms. In such a situation, learners tend to naturally sit with their friends, who happen to be of the same sex. Teachers rarely change this "normal" sitting. The learners were asked whether they favoured sitting with a boy child in a pair.

They noted that,

"With respect to sitting as a pair (Boy and Girl), girls were of the view that "they did not want such sitting arrangement because they can't discuss female issues with a boy". One girl said, "boys are mentally challenged and have problems in school."

The two quotations here seem to suggest that female learners did not think the male child added value to their learning experience. This was further confirmed by the ways in which boys conducted themselves in groups aimed at allowing learners to play a central role as per the learner-centred approach. One boy in the Kunene region said:

"When the teacher says: 'divide into groups', mostly we boys start to play around; sit at the back and start discussing our things. The girls do the task and because they have good handwritings, they complete the task and present for the group. So the girls learn more while we are playing around".

It seems that this state of affairs continues without the teachers' intervention and had become normalized. In one school in the Erongo region, there was reference made to a boy "who hangs with girls and had chosen Home Economics". When the researcher asked the group if that was wrong (for a boy to choose Home Economics and hang with girls), the group said there's nothing wrong, but one of the boys shouted "*moffie*" (a derogatory term for someone who is gay). A change in attitudes may pave the way for the creation of a community of learners who study together for the good of both sexes.

Encouraging the boy child to learn

The learners further suggested that the male teachers should create closer relations with the male learners and advise them regarding the problems experienced in class. They indicated that, teachers should:

"Sit with the boy-child and talk about life; about the bad things that will happen if you don't study." In addition, "teachers must advise them; Motivate them; Encourage them."

These views reflect the need for teachers to show a caring attitude towards their learners especially boys who feel "neglected" by teachers in the classroom. Girls in some areas, especially in the Erongo region, lamented the freedom given to boys to leave the hostel and

come back way later than the time expected of girls. This special treatment, the girls argued, was not in favor of the boys because by the time they come back, they go straight to bed without completing their homework. Even during the focus group discussion, boys were shouting: *"You are girls, what do you want to do late outside!"* This is a clear demonstration of how gender roles from the community are carried over to the school and perpetuated by school rules.

How socialisation affects boys' achievement

The family (including the larger community) and the school are important socializing agents. Indeed, the way the boys and girls are brought up may have far reaching effects on how the children behave in life. Consequently, this may affect the way they behave in class and interact with others. The learners were asked to indicate how socialization impacted the boy child's achievement. The responses centred on parents' attitude towards the boy child, the boy child's study habits and attitudes toward schooling.

Parents' attitudes toward the boy child

Parents were perceived to care less for the education of the male child in that they often let the boy child run around aimlessly and freely while they controlled the behaviour of the girl child. The learners observed that:

"Boys have the freedom to do anything because they do not get pregnant, go drinking and smoking."

Other responses were:

"Parents-controlled girls more than they controlled boys because if a girl got pregnant the parents become ashamed (emphasis added) than if a boy made a girl pregnant" and also "Parents do not care about what boys do and some parents drink with their sons."; "the boys do not have much work at home: but then they don't even use the time they have to study. They will rather go hang with friends in the streets!"

It would be difficult for a parent who drinks alcohol with his son to encourage him to work hard at school or show him the importance of education.

Study habits of the boy child

Girls tended to put in more effort in studying in order to achieve better results at school than the male child. The learners indicated that:

"Girls spend more time studying, boys are playing, drinking and smoking".

An example was given by one female learner who indicated that her brother had repeated *"Grade 10 four times"* and she had *"caught up with him, but continues playing with his friends and failing"*. This example seems to show that the boy child cared less for school than 'playing' around. This behaviour results in poor achievement since the boy child is not paying any attention to the instruction taking place in class. He is more concerned with activities that he is involved in after school and sometimes skipping school or 'bunking' lessons to be with his friends. As indicated by the learners during the FGDs *"Boys ... don't want to study"*, hence resulting in underachievement.



In one school, the learners maintained that “*boys cannot concentrate when they hear music from the shebeens outside*”! This points to the fact that boys are easily distracted and if classroom activities do not effectively compete to retain their attention, the boys will not focus in class. This issue of shebeens was raised by teachers in all the regions. In a rural school in Erongo region, the teachers revealed that they had to negotiate with shebeen owners to at least keep their noise low, especially during examination times. In another school in the Kavango East Region, boys planted a marijuana shrub on the school premises, with the support of the community members. These incidences demonstrate that there remains a power struggle for the attention of boys between the school authorities and the community forces, to the extent that schools had to “negotiate” with communities. Could this be that, although communities want their children to be educated, they have not reached a satisfactory level of responsibility to play an active part in the facilitation of the education journey of learners, and especially of the boy-child?

Attitude towards schooling

The learners in the FGDs indicated that boys cared less about school. One girl had this to say:

“The boys say they do not need to complete school they will open up a car wash or become taxi drivers to earn money, while the same girl said she wants to become a barrister.”

Other learners said the boy child was more interested in keeping friends than being in school. One of them said:

“Boys want to copy friends/peer pressure. They want more clothes to impress others and end up drinking.”

It is our firm conviction that communities and schools should ensure adherence to the age limit of those allowed to purchase alcohol and opening and closing times of bars in their locality to reduce the boy child’s spending valuable time drinking in bars with toxic friends for company instead of studying. As the learners said,

“Boys should take education seriously. In this way their achievement will improve for the better”

In almost all the regions, boys and girls affirmed that boys were easily attracted to money and believed they were better off if they started working (i.e. driving taxis, forex trading, selling clothing, fixing laptops, etc.) rather than remaining in school.

In the Kunene region, some boys revealed that they wanted to study, but their parents wanted them to herd cattle and take charge at the “ohambo”(cattle posts).

“The boys that did this were often more appreciated and praised than us who go to school! The situation is worse when you go to school and fail at the end of the day!” one boy said.

(There was laughter in the group, almost affirming what the boy was saying, and others started to add to the conversation).

In this same Kunene region school, the girls questioned why the school insisted that they (girls) had to shave their hair in order to focus on school, yet, the boys whose hair was normally kept short/ shaved were still not doing well. When the researcher turned to the boys to ask: what was actually the issue preventing them from doing well in school, the boys said “*there is not enough food at the hostel*”! This was supported by more boys who started shouting “*two slices*”. They said that sometimes they only got two slices of bread for dinner



and this so-called dinner was served too early, at 18h00. *“So if you are hungry, you sneak to the location to go find food and end up having fun!”* one learner stated. This social practice seemed to be acceptable to the school authorities.

How teachers, schools, the community, parents and fellow learners could support boys’ education.

Learners were asked during the FGDs to indicate the roles the above mentioned stakeholders could play in order to improve boys’ academic achievement. We present their responses as follows:

Teachers

Teachers play an importance role in the learning process. They provide instruction, motivate learners to do their best and act as models for the learners to perform well in class. A caring teacher needs to place the interests of his/her learners at heart, be a ‘friend’ to all the learners, go an ‘extra mile’ for their sake and encourage them to set achievable high academic goals. The learners regarded their teachers in such manner and stated that the teachers should be fair to all learners. However, learners made the following statements about how teachers viewed boys:

- *“They are not kind toward boys. They are not fair. They suspend boys.”*
- *“Teachers always complain about, and toward boys. They barely have anything positive to say to boys.*
- *When a teacher comes in a class, they say bad things to boys or look at them ‘nomesho mayi’ (with bad eyes – negatively or with disapproval)”*.

In such a hostile environment one can’t expect boys to perform optimally. The learners also pointed out that,

“Teachers concentrate more on girls’ social problems...than those of the boy child”.

Moreover, learners noted that teachers should:

“Motivate boys on the importance of education, find out what problems the boys are facing because boys keep their problems to themselves. Even when they are suffering, they try to play tough”.

This finding was confirmed by teachers when they said that boys did not seek counselling or any support.

“You only see that they are starting to be absent from school, and when you investigate, you hear that they have this and that problem at home!” (Life Skills Teacher, Erongo Region).

In most cases, when prompted on how then boys problems deterring their educational success could be identified and addressed, most teachers had limited answers, some shrugging their shoulders and asking, *“How can we help them if they don’t scream for help?”*

But the learners said, boys talk to other boys! So if the friends can tell the teachers, boys with problems can be helped (Learners FDG, Erongo).

“Boys should approach men in their family, even if they do not live with their fathers, and tell them how they feel before taking a decision to leave school (Learners FDG, Kavango East)”.

These findings reveal that, due to gender expectations, boys do not use the self-disclosure technique when they have problems. To respond to this situation, other strategies should be



invested into to save boys from their adolescence-related problems and help them to remain in school and achieve to their maximum potential.

The school

Learners spend almost half of their waking time in school interacting with their peers, teachers and other school personnel. It was therefore deemed essential to ask the learners during the FGDs what the schools needed to do to improve boys' academic achievement. These were some of their responses.

Need of psychological counselling

The learners were of the view that boys did experience personal problems in school which needed to be addressed for them to improve their performance. According to them, *“Psychological counselling (was) needed for boys.”* Hopefully, this might help them focus on school work and improve their achievement. Nonetheless, this might prove difficult to be implemented countrywide given the few school counsellors available in the country.

Use of drugs and alcohol

It was also pointed out by the learners that the boys tended to be involved in “toxic behaviour” while at school or home such as drug abuse that impacted negatively on their school work. Other learners had said that boys:

“Should ... stop abusing alcohol and drugs.” “Boys need to be controlled.”

These comments seem to suggest the need to curb the ‘freedom’ given to the male child in the home. This will require changes in the rearing of boys, emphasizing the importance of school and monitoring their activities. It seems that, both girls and boys are affected by problems related to puberty and adolescence, which might lead them to “toxic solutions”, but girls have various outlets to their problems, such as extra-curricular programmes such as ‘Windows of Hope,’ ‘My Future is My Choice’ and Girls’ Clubs, but boys have none.

Treatment of boys by teachers

During the FGDs it emerged that boys were often unfairly treated by teachers. One of the reasons for the unfair treatment of the boys that was given was their disdain for authority. The learners had this to say:

*“Boys are disobedient and disrespecting to the teachers.” “The boys **climb on top of teachers**”.*

In response to this, teachers tended to leave no space for any misbehaviour from the boys. In the process, the teachers become unapproachable, leaving the boys hungry for love and guidance and being termed as “attention-seekers”. Even if the boys seek child-like love and attention, the teachers take offense. Others said *“When the teacher wants to control a boy, the boys say ‘it is my own life, don’t mind me’”*. It is possible that the teachers’ treatment of the boy child might be contributing to such behaviour and consequently resulting in his underachievement. This would be the case because the boy would stop paying attention to teachers’ classroom lessons.

The learners called for the school authorities to place themselves in the boys’ shoes in order to help them academically achieve better. They communicated this sentiment in this way:



“Schools should understand how boys feel and should be concerned about how boys experience school.” Schools should give equal treatment and understanding of the boys ...in order to reach them and cultivate a warm caring relationship with them”. In this way the boy child will feel ‘valued’ by the teacher and expend more effort in their studies in order to please their teacher resulting in better school achievement.”

In our view, to create this sense of concern and responsibility in teachers, teacher-preparation programmes, both pre-and in-service, should impart specific skills to be used when understanding and helping boys to academically excel in school.

The community

The community is another important education stakeholder that sends its children to school and expects the school to provide quality education to them. The learners during the FGDs were asked to indicate what the community could do to improve boys’ academic achievement. We captured the following learners’ responses to this question:

It was suggested by the learners that the boy child lacked appropriate role models in the society and as such got into mischief and paid scant attention to his school work. They indicated that:

“They (boys) don't have role models”, “There should be models in the community.” “These models should be able to impart the love of education in the boy child they mentor, by word and action.”

The absence of fathers in families and the general invisibility of male role models in communities, seem to have a negative impact on the extrinsic motivation of boys to succeed in school. Although there are a considerable high number of male teachers in secondary schools, some of them are not good role models as a learner in a Focus Group Discussion in Erongo revealed:

“Some teachers buy drugs from learners”, “yes, some even have relationships with learners and go clubbing with boys in the school”.

Such teachers might not be respected by both boys and girls in class resulting in underachievement.

Parents

Parents were identified by learners as not paying attention to the needs of boys. As indicated earlier in this report, this could be due to the rearing practices in Namibia that views boys as not needing parental oversight.

The learners suggested a number of actions that parents could take to ensure the boys performed as well as the girls. They indicated that:

“Parents should ...do their best for their children (by providing their basic needs including buying proper school uniforms) to enable them to perform better. Parents should be involved in children’s activities and the friends they hang around with. That is the children should ask parents the kind of friends they (should) have.”

For learners staying in the school hostel, they suggested that parents should



“...give children money to buy extra food. Hostel food is not enough. Parents should... be stricter with boys than with girls. Boys should attach themselves to good friends that will support them in learning.”

By keeping an eye on their sons, parents would be in a position to monitor and direct their activities after school which might result in improved academic performance at schools. School Management in the majority of the schools sampled for this research project revealed that School Board election meetings had to be postponed over and over due to not forming a quorums, as parents were reluctant to attend school meetings. This spoke to parents’ lack of interest and involvement in the education of their sons and daughters.

Learners/peers

Schools are communities of learners. Learners come from different backgrounds and as such enrich each other’s lives and learning experience. Since the classroom is a micro cosmic of the community the learners need to depend on each other and help each other learn. In this study it emerged that boys tended to look down on help that the female learner offered and usually did not seek help from female counterparts. As a result, boys failed to use the great resource available to them in the classroom in solving their learning difficulties. As one girl opined:

“if boys have a problem ask a girl, she will help out. Girls we should help boys with problems -we are intelligent.”

Another girl said *“Boys should not feel inferior for asking a girl for help.”*

These views seem to suggest that the female learners were willing to help the male learners, if they so approached them. They also suggested that in order to improve their achievement, the boy child should *“Form study groups that meet regularly.”* Indeed, such community of learners should be encouraged among learners so that they benefit from the help obtained from their peers. This would be the case because learners learn better from their peers than from teachers.

The learners also suggested during the FGDs that in order to enhance the boys’ academic performance,

“it was necessary to reintroduce corporal punishment”, “talk to boys on how to behave and find out how the school could be of help to the boy child.”

Other learners suggested that the government should *“create boys’ hostels (because) some walk a long distance.”*

Learners staying far from the school might be disadvantaged in that they would reach school tired and pay little attention to the lessons and have little time for home study after school. At one school visited by the researchers in the Kavango East Region, learners in examination classes who did not have relatives near the school had erected tents in the school grounds as “hostels”. Some did not have mattresses to sleep on and slept on cardboards, and cooked their meals in the open, which did not help in their studies. This brings to the fore the need for hostel space to be provided for all learners so as to encourage them to focus on their studies.



Learning resources

Textbooks are important in the learning process. In most cases textbooks determine the content taught in schools, how it is to be taught, the extra resources needed to ensure learning of the subject and provides extra information to the learners. The learners were of the view that the Ministry should provide “*textbooks for all learners*” and should “*construct labs for practicals*.” It should be pointed out that in some schools in which this research was carried out textbooks were being shared among more than two learners, while in some schools, textbooks were collected after the lesson. This makes it difficult for learners to do individual research after the lessons of the day.

On the other hand, lack of laboratory space and buildings makes the carrying out of experiments almost impossible, which reduces understanding of the science subjects which require experiments. As the learners and teachers pointed out in this study “*boys like hands-on subjects*”. As a result, lack of laboratories reduces boys’ participation in the science subjects which eventually leads to their underachievement.

The lack of practical subjects, and especially those related to the culture in a particular region, were also lamented by teachers. It is hoped that, with the basic revised education curriculum which makes provision for the implementation of pre-vocational and vocational subjects in schools, the regions will capitalize on this opportunity and enhance boys’ education.

Ministry of education, arts and culture (MOEAC)

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture is responsible for education in the country. It directs what goes on in the schools and classrooms. In addition, it prepares policies affecting the conduct of education, develops the curriculum followed in the schools via Subject Panels, employs teachers and other personnel in the school system. It has oversight of the education enterprise in the country. Accordingly, it has an invested interest in the learners’ performance, both boys and girls and should be concerned that boys in the system were performing below par. The learners were asked how the MoEAC could help enhance boys’ academic performance.

The learners indicated that the Ministry should “*provide computers and books*” to the learners to enhance their performance. In addition, “*Provide enough food so that children feel that school is better...*” referring to the school feeding programme that provides meals for learners especially in the rural areas. This programme enables learners to remain in school and has been credited with keeping large numbers of learners in school. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture had recently revised the School Feeding Programme to include secondary schools and include more children faced by food insecurities. Hopefully, this will result in improved performance at this level of education in the country.

School hostels

Learners in some school hostels lamented negative attitudes of hostel matrons, especially toward boys. In some cases, hostel supervisors were blamed for targeting boys and labelling them as “bad” and “provoking them” (Learners, Kunene Region). In addition, school hostel officials were blamed for giving preference to boys and allowing them more “time-out”,



which impacted negatively on their school work (This view was expressed in Kunene, Erongo and Omusati regions).

Summary of key findings/ implications from learners' focus group discussions

Policy knowledge

Teachers, learners and community members seemed to be poorly informed about educational policies. In the absence of such knowledge, they won't be in a position to advocate for policy implementation or revision to advance the cause of boys' education.

Classroom practice changes to enhance boys' academic performance

Classroom practices are highly gendered and seem to more benefit girls than boys. Teacher-education, schools and communities need to embark on awareness raising on the educational rights and needs of the boy-child and implement programmes to disrupt current practices disadvantaging the boy-child.

How socialisation affects boys' achievement

While socialization is an important part of any given society, communities should consider enriching their cultures and traditions by eliminating practices that seem to be detrimental to their wellbeing. Some gender-related masculinity beliefs (e.g. the belief that it is shameful for a male learner to receive help from a female learner) do not seem to enhance boys' education and might need to be changed. Elaborating on this point, in our view, classroom practices are informed by community belief systems. The freedom given to boys, the promotion of certain careers, the portrayal of men as bread winners and the lack of expression of emotional needs of boys, all these have a negative impact on the education of boys. Teachers need to be reminded of focusing on the whole child and applying inclusive education by focusing on all children, including boys.

How the Ministry of Education and culture, teachers, peers, parents and communities could enhance the boy child's achievement

Teachers, the Ministry of Education and culture, Peers, Parents and Communities need to collaborate to promote the education of boys by developing, implementing and promoting programmes that are aimed at addressing their educational needs. If the current situation is allowed unabated, we will have a gender-unequal society which would have serious repercussions for peace and harmony in the family, community, society and nation.



REPORT ON LEARNERS' FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA FROM THREE KAVANGO EAST SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND ONE SECONDARY SCHOOL FROM THE ERONGO REGION

Introduction

This section of the research report is on analysed learners' Focus Group Discussion data from three secondary schools in the Kavango East Region and one secondary school in the Erongo Region of Namibia. At each school, the Learners' Focus Group discussions took place after the learners had completed the research questionnaire. The Learners' Focus Group Discussions comprised of either a selected number of learners from a specific class or a whole class. The number of learners constituting the Learners' Focus Group Discussion ranged from 25 to 41 learners depending on the number of learners in a participating class. We have conducted four Learners' Focus Group Discussions at the participating schools.

The learners belonging to the four Learners' Focus Group Discussion groups were asked to respond to the following seven focus group interview issues:

1. Whether policies support the education of boys.
2. How socialisation of boys has an influence on their academic performance.
3. What teachers should do to support and improve the academic performance of boys.
4. What the community should do to support and improve the academic performance of boys.
5. What schools should do to support and improve the academic performance of boys.
6. What learners should do to support learning and academic performance of boys?
7. What resources would be needed to enhance the academic performance of boys?

In this section, the Research Team presents its analysed learners' responses to the seven issues as follows:

1. Whether policies support the education of boys

According to Table 50 that is on learning support available to boys, 82.3% of the sampled learners from the 14 Regions agreed with the statement that "there were more educational girl targeted support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes". To elaborate on this finding, we, in focus group discussions, sought for learners' views on how educational policies in Namibia support the education of boys and girls.

When we analysed learners' responses to this focus group discussion issue, we identified four categories in which to place the responses. These were: (i) *Girl targeted educational support programmes versus boy targeted educational support programmes*, (ii) *why boys do not participate in girl targeted educational support programmes*, (iii) *what should be done to enhance boys' participation in targeted educational support programmes*, and (iv) *general work habits and behaviour of boys inhibiting them from participating in educational support programmes*.

(i) *Girl targeted educational support programmes versus boy targeted educational support programmes*.



Many of the learners during the Learners' Focus Group Discussions noted that '*there were specific movements or organisations for women in the country.*' This and other views expressed during the focus group discussions affirmed that in terms of policies and programmes, the focus of the specific movements and organisations were more on girl targeted educational support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes

. Another observation was that educational boy targeted programmes might exist, but that parents were not informed or were not aware of such programmes. As a result, they did not encourage boys to participate in such programmes to enhance their academic performance. Learners during the focused group discussions identified programmes such as "Window of hope, and my Future is my Choice", as educational support programmes in which boys could participate to support their education and to improve their academic performance.

(ii) Why boys do not participate in targeted educational support programmes

In responding to this interview issue, learners identified diverse reasons why boys did not participate in these programmes. Below is a summary of some of the reasons that were expressed:

"Boys indicated that these programmes normally address girl issues such as drug use and pregnancy."
"One girl said, boys are mentally challenged and have problems in school."
"One boy referred to peer pressure as a reason for not doing well at school and others will look down upon a boy who attends such 'girl programmes.' One girl asked, do you come to school to be seen by others?"

In a nutshell, and according to the reasons from the learners, boys did not participate in targeted educational support programmes because the programmes appeared to address "girl issues" and did not target "boy issues." Secondly, boys feared that other boys would look down upon them if they attended "girl" programmes. Thus, peer pressure played a role in influencing boys not to attend targeted educational support programmes. Table 49 of the quantitative data of learners from all 14 Regions support the view expressed during the Learners' Focus Group Discussion that boys did not participate in targeted educational support programmes. This support is demonstrated when 77.8% of the learners agreed that

"more girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programs (e.g. Windows of Hope; My Future is My Hope etc.)"

This finding was confirmed by teachers who maintained that even at school level, more girls than boys sought the services of Life Skills Teachers whose key responsibility was to provide psycho-social support to all learners.

(iii) Participation in education targeted programmes

Some of the suggestions that learners had made during the Learners' Focus Group Discussions included:

- Parents should be informed about policies and educational programmes relating to their children, including their sons.
- Create vocational streams for learners.
- Enforce the implementation of educational policies on all learners including boys.

(iv) General habits behaviour and attitudes of boys inhibiting them to participate in educational programmes



The general behaviour and attitudes of boys towards educational programmes were expressed as follows:

‘Boys have the freedom to do anything because they do not get pregnant, go drinking and smoking. Girls are always ‘closed up’ at home. They are told education first.’

From this quotation, it is evident that it is not only about supporting policies to enhance boys’ academic performance, but also about the general behaviour and attitudes of boys towards their education compared to girls. According to learners, boys tend to focus on destructive activities such as involvement in sexual activities, drinking and abusing alcohol, and abusing drugs instead of engaging in educational activities.

Key issues emanating from learners’ responses to the focus group interview question of whether policies support the education of boys are:

- Current education policies and programmes are more in favour of girls than boys.
- Educational support programmes might exist, but boys see them as addressing ‘girl’ issues.
- Parents might not be aware of boy targeted educational programmes to encourage boys to participate.
- Peer pressure prevents boys from participating in educational support programmes that have the appearance of ‘femininity’ as their peers would regard them as participating in programmes addressing ‘girl’ issues.
- The general negative attitude of boys when it comes to participating in educational programmes meant to enhance their academic achievement.

2. Influence of socialisation on boys’ academic performance

Many of the learners who had participated in the Learners’ Focus Group Discussion were generally of the opinion that socialisation of boys had an influence on their academic performance. We categorized the responses to this focus group interview issue into *habits of boys themselves towards social life, influence of peer pressure on academic performance of boys, general attitude of boys towards life, and boys’ beliefs.*

(i) Habits of boys themselves towards social life

The learners during the focus group discussions noted that boys like to socialize, and this influenced their academic performance. The quotation below illustrates this observation:

‘Boys like socialising, therefore, have no time for study. Girls spend more time studying, boys are playing, drinking, and smoking. A girl gave an example of her brother who has repeated Grade 10 four times, and she has caught up with him, but continues playing with his friends and failing.’

According to the quotation above, boys’ socializing habits of playing, drinking, and smoking influence their under achievement in education. These activities did not leave them adequate time to focus on their schoolwork.

Some learners noted that the laziness of boys originated from their homes where they were given little work to do and no responsibilities. It appeared to learners in the focus group discussions that parents were more concerned about the academic performance of girls and not of boys. To this effect one learner opined that boys were *‘lazy where they are coming*



from and lazy where they are going.’ Some learners explained that parents, in the upbringing of children, were more concerned about girls’ welfare and education. Because of this, they were more concerned about the academic performance of girls than that of boys.

(ii) Influence of peer pressure on academic performance of boys

Some learners during the focus group discussions supported the view that peer pressure had an influence on the academic performance of boys. For example, according to them, boys tended to copy the behaviours of friends, were involved in mischief with their friends and they tended to waste their time on keeping appearances to impress others instead of spending enough time on academic tasks. Some learners articulated the influence of peer pressure on academic performance of boys as follows:

‘Boys want to copy friends/ peer pressure. They want more clothes to impress others and end up drinking.’
‘ Think and do and conform, it is right for me because of peer pressure.’

According to Table 51 of the quantitative data on learners from the 14 regions, 53.1% of the learners agreed with the statement that ‘boys spend less time on academic activities than girls.’ This response is consistent with the influence of peer pressure on the study habits of boys. An interesting finding captured in Table 51 with respect to peer conformity and socialisation was that 55.6 % of learners from all 14 regions agreed with the view that ‘socialization stifles the boy-child’s ability to express his feelings with regard to the negative consequences of his underachievement.’ Learners who participated in focus group discussion described this as an effect of ‘Guy mentality’.

(iii) General attitudes of boys towards life.

We also explored during the Learners’ Focus Group Discussions the general attitude of boys towards life, which we thought might have an influence on their under-participation and achievement in education. Diverse views and explanations were provided by the learners when responding to this question. These responses included boys’ belief that they could obtain employment without education and the belief that parents provided more financial support to girls than to boys. This created the desire in boys to drop out of school and go out there to “make money.” Boys believed they could do this without education. Another view was that boys took unnecessary risks that were detrimental to their education and wellbeing.

The quotations below from some of the learners illustrate the views expressed by learners during focus group discussions regarding the general attitudes of boys towards life that negatively influenced their academic achievement.

“The boys say they do not need to complete school. They will open a carwash or become taxi drivers to earn money, while the same girl wants to become a barrister.”

“ Girls given more money by the parents, then boys do something to get more money, such as stealing and doing drugs and drop out of school.”

“Girls understand the purpose of education.”

“Boys have something to do, hence drop out of school.”

“Boys see themselves as a man and do what they want. Boys drinking and drugs open up brain to peer pressure.”

“Some boys sometimes think that education is not for them. They think they can go straight to vocational training centres.”

“Sometimes boys do not respect young/small teachers. They undermine them.”



Table 51 of the quantitative data contains findings on learners' views pertaining to boys' work habits and behaviour that support many of the above reported general boys' attitudes towards life. These attitudes distract them from educational activities. For instance, 55% of the learners who responded to the questionnaire agreed that girls performed better than boys in their classroom activities because boys believed that they could be employed without education. This finding is consistent with the expression during the focus group discussions which indicated that boys thought that they did not need to complete school to earn money. Another finding to note from the quantitative data reported in Table 51 is the one in which 72.1% of the learners agreed with the statement that boys did not care about their academic achievement. This confirms boys' general uncaring attitude towards education and life in general that was expressed in focus group discussions.

(iv) Boys' beliefs

Learners also expressed the view that boys underachieved and under-participated in education because they held to beliefs that did not promote education. These included the belief that education was not important and that parents were more concerned about ensuring that girls did not engage in mischief. Learners in focus group discussions thought that parents were not concerned in this way when it came to the mischief and misconduct of boys.

The belief that parents focused on the girl child more than on the boy child was expressed as follows:

'Parents controlled girls more than they controlled boys because if a girl got pregnant the parents become 'ashamed' than if a boy makes a girl pregnant.'

3. What teachers should do to support and enhance the academic performance of boys

During the Focus Group Discussions learners generated various ideas regarding what teachers could do to support and enhance the academic performance of boys. We categorized their key suggestions into the following themes: *Support of teachers towards the boy child, supporting emotional development of boys, encouragement and fairness in classroom practices, and parental and teacher support of the boy child.*

(i) Teachers' support of the boy child

Some of the learners indicated during the focus group discussions that teachers tended to favour girls over boys due to various factors. These included the ill-discipline of boys, and that as a result, teachers paid more attention to girls than boys. In addition, teachers reported to be more sensitive to 'girls' issues', including pregnancy, than boys' issues. Against this background, learners suggested that male teachers could support the education of the boy child by doing the following:

- Pay attention to boys' issues, as *"Boys' issues were not dealt with in school."*
- Encourage boys and instill the need for discipline in them.
- Teachers should stick to school rules to control boys.
- Life Skills Teachers should identify problem boys and encourage them through counselling



(ii) Supporting emotional development of boys

Some learners explained during the focus group discussions that girls showed their emotions and sought support from teachers while boys sought support from friends. This view was explained by stating that *“boys to be boys do not show emotions.”* Female learners encouraged boys to express pressures they were experiencing, if they needed others to help them. Some learners observed, however, that *“boys get support too, but they are ignorant, they do not want to study.”* Another reason why boys were less supported than girls by teachers was said to be because:

“boys are disobedient and disrespectful to teachers. When the teacher wants to control a boy, the boys say it is my own life, do not mind me.” Moreover, *“boys climb on top of teachers.”*

Some boys explained their disrespectfulness and disruptive behaviours towards teachers as a result of teachers who make bad comments about them. For example some teachers would say to some boys: *“you are good for nothing.”*

Some learners explained that the under achievement of boys was not due to lack of support or the fault of teachers. It was because

“the boys sit together talking in groups. When the teacher says stop talking and work in groups, they continue talking. That’s how they miss on learning. Boys should stop banking school and they will do better.”

(iii) Encouragement of fairness in classroom practices

Some learners ascribed the poor academic performance of boys to treatment in class by teachers and relevance of the curriculum. Some of the learners explained that *“teachers paid more attention to girls than boys and more favoured girls than boys”* in class. Furthermore, they said that *“boys’ issues”* were not dealt with in schools. Another aspect was that teachers should entertain during teaching, as *“some teachers are boring”*. In addition, learners observed that they were distracted from learning by the dress code of teachers. One learner indicated that *“boys do not focus on learning material because the dress code of mostly female teachers. Teachers thus need to dress appropriately.”* In reference to the relevance of the curriculum, learners suggested that because boys were practically-orientated, vocational subjects should be emphasized in schools.

(iv) Parental and teacher support to the boy child

The key issue on this pertained to the need for the father figure as role model for the boy child. This view was illustrated by the following opinion:

“Boys and fathers together just as girls are with mothers. Mothers are more responsible than fathers.”

In summary, the message here was that the boy child needed attention and support from male teachers and fathers in educational activities to enhance his learning outcomes.



4. What the community should do to support and improve the academic performance of boys

The main suggestions that were highlighted during the learners' Focus Group Discussions related to parental support, targeted programmes, activities to support the boy child, and behavioural molding.

(i) Parental education

To suggest the matter of parental education some learners pointed out that the “*community should discuss things with their children.*” These “things” were elaborated upon as including talking about the importance of education with boys, fathers being role models in communities, and that parents should be interested in their children’s activities and friends they hang around with. For instance, some learners said that “*parents should ask children the kind of friends they have.*” Some learners also suggested contributing to the renovation of school infrastructures as parental and community contribution and involvement in education. An example was in the form of this statement: “*We have burned classrooms that have been standing like that since 1986.*”

The impact of alcohol on education was also mentioned, and the remedy to this was that bars should not allow entry to kids, and that shebeens should close at 22 hours “*to give boys two hours to study.*” The message here was that there were distractions that took place in communities which could have an impact on boys’ academic performance. It was suggested for instance, that communities could play a role in limiting access to alcohol by learners. An important observation that learners made was that parents did not talk to their children about the importance of education in guaranteeing a more prosperous future for them.

(ii) Programmes and activities to support the boy child.

The learners’ focus group discussions generated ideas about programmes and activities that the community could embark upon to support the education of the boy child. These programmes and activities included boy-child focused policy interventions or what learners called “*affirmative*” *action for boys* such as boys and men conferences, community meetings under the authority of chiefs to talk about education, and education achievement awards for high academic performers. The voices below explain the suggested programmes and activities:

“Affirmative action for boys. Girls have been catered for, now it is boys.”
“Hold boys and men conferences to talk about male issues and build boys’ self-esteem.
Call learners and encourage them by holding a party for those who do well at school.”
“Chief in the area should organize meetings with the boys.”

Some learners expanded on the issue of holding parties for those who do well by suggesting programmes called Young Achievers Club, Window of Hope etc., as avenues through which the community could support the education of the boy child by talking about the importance of education. Some learners, although in the minority, argued that interventions will not help unless boys take personal responsibilities. They gave examples supporting their arguments that boys are “*into TV/shebeen / soccer, and thus do not have time for support programmes.*” One example highlighting boys taking personal responsibility was explained as follows, “*to be responsible the boys should be forced to marry the girl they make pregnant.*”



(iii) Behavioural molding

Few suggestions related to behavioural molding were parents, especially fathers, being role models to the boy child, and limiting access to alcohol by limiting trading hours, and not allowing boys under 18 access to shebeens and bars. It was also suggested that boys should be encouraged to spend time reading in libraries.

The key messages from community support to enhance the academic achievements of boys were:

- Parental discussion with the boy child on educational matters.
- Teachers and fathers acting as role models for the boy child.
- Limiting access to alcohol in communities.
- Targeted community conferences, meetings, and activities to support education of boys.’
- Encouraging boys to spend time in libraries.

5. What should schools do to support the education of boys

This question generated many suggestions during the Learners’ Focus Group Discussions. For the purpose of not omitting any suggestions, we have decided to reproduce all the suggestions as follows:

- Provide psychological counselling for boys.
- Address drug use among boys.
- Schools should abolish expelling boys who do not pass.
- Teachers should have time with boys and encourage them.
- Schools for boys and girls – *separate girls and boys*. “Boys have ‘eyes-eyes’ when they see girls they misbehave.”
- Schools should form learning support groups, with boys being paired with girls.
- Equal treatment and understanding of boys by the school.
- Try to have clubs for boys too.
- Schools should understand how boys feel and should be concerned about how boys experience school.
- Life Skills Teachers should ask boys: “*What can I do for you?*”
- Talk with boys on advantages and disadvantages of anti-social and prosocial behaviours.

6. What learners should do to support learning and academic performance of boys

As pointed out earlier, Table 52 contains data to the effect that 72.1% of learners agreed with the statement that boys did not care about their academic achievement. This response presupposes that the boy child needs support, including from fellow learners to achieve academically. We categorised the learners’ focus group discussion responses to this question into *seeking assistance from other learners, support from close friends, intermediary and open communication, and peer academic support*.



(i) Seeking assistance from other learners

Some suggested that boys should seek help from other learners if they have academic-related problems. They indicated that girls especially would assist them to master what they did not understand. Seeking assistance from girls was explained as follows during the focus group discussions:

“Boys, if you have a problem ask a girl, she will help out. Girls we should help boys with a problem- we are intelligent. Boys should stop undermining girls.”

The suggestion that girls would be eager to support boys who experienced learning problems is supported by the quantitative data reported in Table 49 which indicates that 84.8% of the learners agreed with the statement that “ more girls participated in class learning activities than boys.” Because girls do this, they would be expected to master academic content and be in a position to help those who were experiencing learning problems.

(ii) Support from close friends

One of the problems leading to boys’ underachievement in education that some learners highlighted during focus group discussions was the attitude boys had of keeping matters to themselves and not disclosing them. To ameliorate this problem, one learner suggested that

“Close friends should try to find out what is the problem and find a solution to it.”

(iii) Intermediary liaison and open communication

Some learners suggested that fellow learners could support the boy child to perform academically better by acting as intermediaries when providing and facilitating communication links between learners, teachers, and parents. By so doing, the learning difficulties that boys might be experiencing could be identified and resolved. The communication link between learners, teachers, and parents was expressed as follows:

“One girl narrated a story about one boy she noted was not performing as previously as follows. I noticed he was not the same. I asked him what the problem was. He told me what had happened to him back home and was not willing to talk to the teacher. I told the teacher his problem, who called his parents, and the problem was resolved, and he improved.”

(iv) Peer academic support

During focus group discussions learners generated the following views on how other learners could provide academic support to enhance the academic achievement of boys:

- Hold campaigns to discuss academic matters.
- Learners with higher marks should help those with lower marks.
- Learners should help each other. “ If we behave like a family we should help each other.”
- Share learning materials although boys are not eager to share materials.
- If stressed, talk to a friend to overcome the stress.



7. What resources would be needed to enhance the academic performance of boys

According to Table 51, 83.1% of the learners agreed with the statement that there were more girl targeted educational support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes. Against this background, we asked the learners during focus group discussions about the resources that were needed to enhance the academic performance of boys. The following were their responses:

- Textbooks should be provided. “Not everyone has textbooks.”
- Classrooms should have projectors.
- Teachers should be provided with a teacher’s desk and chair. They pointed to small desks and chairs that teachers were using. “These discourage teachers.”
- Laboratories with equipment should be made available.

The discussions with the learners seem to suggest the willingness of the girl child to help the boy child excel at school, even though the boy child appears to be reluctant to accept this hand of help. Further it seems the teachers were not helping the boy child excel by “name calling” and as such the boy child was not able to confide in the teachers when they faced a problem of a social or academic nature, leading to their under-achievement and under-participation in education. The FGDs have highlighted several ways in which the boy child could be helped achieve better academic results by the different education stakeholders and these need to be followed up by the appropriate education authorities.

PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM TEACHERS

As described under the teacher sample, quantitative questionnaire data were collected from 528 teachers from all 14 Education Regions of Namibia with ages ranging from 20 to 61 years. According to Figure 1, the mode of the teachers’ age was in the category of 20-30 years. Whereas 58.7% of the teachers were female, 39% of them were male (see Table 25). In addition, whereas 65.3% of the teachers taught in schools located in urban areas, 28.6% of them taught in schools located in rural areas and 4.4% of the teachers taught in schools located in peri-urban areas (see Table 27). Moreover, according to table 28, 63.3% of the teachers held degrees in education as their highest qualification, 24.2% had diplomas in education and 4.4% had certificates in education. Data on Educational Regions where teachers taught is provided in Table 26.

In the questionnaire for teachers, we wished to find out from them:

- Whether there were differences in academic achievement between boys and girls;
- The overall comparative academic performance between boys and girls;
- About comparative academic performance between boys and girls in specific teachers’ subjects;
- Reasons why girls performed better than boys in their subjects;
- Their views relating to the impact of cultural aspects on academic achievement of boys;
- Their views on why boys under-participated in education;
- Their views on available learning support for boys;
- Their views on learners’ task attitudes, beliefs, hopes, and behaviours.

We present data pertaining to each of these aspects in the following way:



Table 94: Whether there were differences in academic achievement between boys and girls

Response	Frequency	Percent
Valid Yes	421	79.7
No	93	17.6
NR	14	2.7
Total	528	100.0

As depicted in Table 94, whereas 79.7% of the 528 teachers answered in the affirmative that there were differences in academic performance between boys and girls, 17.6% of them responded in the negative to our question.

Table 95: Overall comparative academic performance between boys and girls

Comparative statement	Frequency	Percent
Girls performed better than boys	355	67.2
Boys performed better than girls?	74	14.0
There is no difference in academic performance between girls and boys	87	16.5
No response	12	2.3
Total	528	100

When we asked teachers specifically about whether, in general, girls academically performed better than boys, 67.2% of them reported that girls performed better than boys, 14% indicated that boys performed better than girls and 16.5% of the teachers expressed the view that there was no difference in academic performance between girls and boys (see Table 95).

Table 96: Comparative academic performance between boys and girls in specific teachers' subjects

In my classroom or subject, girls academically perform better than boys	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	106	20.1
Agree	259	49.1
Disagree	124	23.5
Strongly disagree	26	4.9
NR	13	2.5
Total	528	100.0

According to Table 96, whereas 69.2% of the teachers agreed that in their specific subjects girls academically performed better than boys, 28.4% of them disagreed with this statement.



Table 97: Reasons why girls perform better than boys in specific teachers' subjects

Girls perform better than boys in my subjects because boys	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Are not focused.	96	18.2	198	37.5	180	34.1	34	6.4	20	3.8	528	100
Are absent from classes.	157	29.7	234	44.3	91	17.2	18	3.4	28	5.3	528	100
Are in-disciplined	121	22.9	238	45.1	133	25.2	28	5.3	8	1.5	528	100
Believe that they can be employed without education.	27	5.1	169	32.0	262	49.6	53	10	17	3.2	528	100
Find the subject matter irrelevant.	42	8.0	163	30.9	252	47.7	51	9.7	20	3.8	528	100
Find the curriculum content not appealing	32	6.1	182	34.5	238	45.1	56	10.6	20	3.8	528	100
Are given less attention by teachers than girls.	26	4.9	58	11.0	230	43.6	199	37.7	15	2.8	528	100
Are more affected by family poverty than girls.	41	7.8	96	18.2	245	46.4	133	25.2	13	2.5	528	100

Table 97 reveals that whereas 55.7% of the teachers agreed that girls performed better than boys because boys were not focused, 74% of them agreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they were absent from their classes and 68% of the teachers agreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they were in-disciplined. In contrast to this, 59.6% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they believed that they could be employed without education, 57.4% of them disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they found the school subject matter irrelevant, 55.7% of them disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they found the school curriculum unappealing, 84.1% of them disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they were given less attention than girls by teachers, and that 71.6% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they were more affected by family poverty than girls.

Table 98: Teachers' views relating to the impact of cultural aspects on academic achievement of boys

Boys academically perform worse than girls because:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Traditionally, they are allowed to put in minimum effort in education.	28	5.3	91	17.2	251	47.5	148	28.0	10	1.9	528	100
They are allowed to defy authority.	21	4.0	119	22.5	257	48.7	121	22.9	10	1.9	528	100
They are allowed to engage in mischief.	19	3.6	116	22.0	260	49.2	119	22.5	14	2.7	528	100
They are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society.	22	4.2	78	14.8	251	47.5	168	31.8	9	1.7	528	100

On the issue of cultural aspects impacting on comparative academic performance between boys and girls, Table 98 shows that whereas 75.5% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that boys academically performed worse than girls because traditionally they were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, 71.6% of them disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they were allowed to defy authority, 71.7% of them disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they were allowed to engage in mischief and 79.3% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society.



Table 99: Teachers' views on why boys under-participate in education

According to my experience as a teacher:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
More girls drop out of school than boys.	80	15.2	216	40.9	188	35.6	35	6.6	9	1.7	528	100
More boys leave school because of misbehaviour than girls.	124	23.5	318	60.2	64	12.1	16	3.0	6	1.1	528	100
More girls complete their secondary education than boys.	141	26.7	247	46.8	111	21.0	16	3.0	13	2.5	528	100
More girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programs (e.g., Windows of Hope; My Future is My Choice etc.).	207	39.2	249	47.2	52	9.8	14	2.7	6	1.1	528	100
More boys participate in sport activities than girls.	198	37.5	251	47.5	62	11.7	11	2.1	6	1.1	528	100
More girls participate in class learning activities than boys.	144	27.3	253	47.9	113	21.4	16	3.0	2	0.4	528	100
Boys' energy and participation are stifled by the structured nature of classrooms.	36	6.8	182	34.5	253	47.9	45	8.5	12	2.3	528	100

To express their views on why boys under-participated in education, 83.7% of the teachers agreed with the statement that more boys than girls left school because of misbehaviour, 73.5% of them agreed with the statement that more girls completed their secondary education than boys, 86.4% of them agreed with the statement that more girls than boys participated in psychosocial development programs (e.g., Windows of Hope; My Future is My Choice, etc.), 85% of them agreed that more boys participated in sport activities than girls, and 75.2% of the teachers agreed that more girls than boys participated in class learning activities.

Inconsistent with all this, 56.4% of the teachers disagreed that boys' energy and participation were stifled by the structured nature of classrooms (see Table 99).

Table 100: Teachers' views on available learning support for boys

Boys academically perform worse than girls because:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Boys are given less psycho-social support in school than girls.	69	13.1	161	30.5	224	42.4	67	12.7	7	1.3	528	100
Girls are given more psycho-social support in school than boys.	91	17.2	165	31.3	209	39.6	56	10.6	7	1.3	528	100
The fact that boys are expected to quickly "grow up" and fend for themselves stifles their self-esteem.	49	9.3	227	43.0	205	38.8	40	7.6	7	1.3	528	100
Boys tend to seek less academic support than girls.	103	19.5	287	54.4	112	21.2	13	2.5	13	2.5	528	100
The curriculum is more feminized and thus does not appeal to boys.	11	2.1	46	8.7	317	60.0	140	26.5	14	2.7	528	100
Boys are more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than girls.	250	47.3	225	42.6	41	7.8	8	1.5	4	0.8	528	100
Teachers are more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities.	22	4.2	68	12.9	287	54.4	142	26.9	9	1.7	528	100
Teachers are more willing to support boys than girls in learning activities.	8	1.5	40	7.6	339	64.2	134	25.4	7	1.3	528	100

Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than of boys' education.	72	13.6	168	31.8	202	38.3	76	14.4	10	1.9	528	100
National policies in general are more supportive of girls' education than boys' education.	70	13.3	151	28.6	219	41.5	79	15.0	9	1.7	528	100
There is more economic support for needy boy-children than girl-children.	12	2.3	64	12.1	344	65.2	99	18.8	9	1.7	528	100
There is less economic support for needy girl-children than for needy boy-children.	26	4.9	81	15.3	316	59.8	96	18.2	9	1.7	528	100

With respect to teachers' views on learning support available to boys in schools, Table 100 shows that whereas 55.1% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that boys were given less psycho-social support in school than girls, 86.5% of them disagreed with the statement that the curriculum was more feminized and thus did not appeal to boys, 81.3% of them disagreed that teachers were more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities, 89.6% of them disagreed that teachers were more willing to support boys than girls in learning activities, 52.7% disagreed that gender policies in education were more supportive of girls' than of boys' education, 56.5% disagreed that National policies in general were more supportive of girls' education than boys' education, 84% of them disagreed that there was more economic support for needy boy-children than needy girl-children, and 78% of the teachers disagreed that there was less economic support for needy girl-children than for needy boy-children. In contrast to all this, 48.8% of the teachers agreed that girls were given more psycho-social support in school than boys, 52.3% of them agreed that the fact that boys were expected to quickly "grow up" and fend for themselves stifled their self-esteem, 73.9% of them agreed that boys tended to seek less academic support than girls, and 89.9% of the teachers agreed that boys were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (e.g. engaging in alcohol & drug abuse, hubbly-bubblely etc.) than girls.



Table 101: Teachers' views on learners' task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours

Learners' on task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours	Responses											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Boys spend less time on academic activities than girls.	159	30.1	271	51.3	80	15.2	12	2.3	6	1.1	528	100
Boys are more disengaged from class activities given by female teachers than girls.	85	16.1	189	35.8	217	41.1	31	5.9	6	1.1	528	100
Girls are more collaborative on learning tasks than boys.	128	24.2	287	54.4	94	17.8	14	2.7	5	0.9	528	100
Boys prefer to work in isolation than girls.	51	9.7	240	45.5	206	39.0	23	4.4	8	1.5	528	100
Girls are more eager to share academic information than boys.	100	18.9	281	53.2	121	22.9	18	3.4	8	1.5	528	100
Boys do not care about their academic achievement.	68	12.9	226	42.8	196	37.1	31	5.9	7	1.3	528	100
Socialization stifles the boy-child ability to express his feelings with regard to the negative consequences of his underachievement.	82	15.5	275	52.1	145	27.5	17	3.2	9	1.7	528	100
Boys are less concerned about their future.	87	16.5	239	45.3	159	30.1	39	7.4	4	0.8	528	100

With respect to teachers' views on learners' task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours, whereas 81.4% of the teachers agreed that boys spent less time on academic activities than girls, 51.9% of them agreed that boys were more disengaged from class activities given by female teachers than girls, 78.6% of them agreed that girls were more collaborative on learning tasks than boys, 55.2% of them agreed that boys preferred to work in isolation than girls, 72.1% of them agreed that girls were more eager to share academic information than boys, 55.7% of them agreed that boys did not care about their academic achievement, 67.6% of them agreed that socialization stifled the boys' ability to express their feelings with regard to the negative consequences of their underachievement and 61.8% of the teachers agreed that boys were less concerned about their future (see Table 101).



After analyzing teachers' responses to questionnaire items using frequencies, we applied the chi-square to make comparisons by teachers' gender, age, and school location. Data on selected comparisons are presented in the manner that follows.

Table 102: Boys believe that they can be employed without education

Gender	Boys believe that they can be employed without education					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Male	6	52	115	26	7	206
Female	20	116	140	24	10	310
Others	1	1	7	3	0	12
Total	27	169	262	53	17	528

Note: Chi-square = 20.3; df = 8; $p < .01$

What we can deduce from Table 102 is that both male and female teachers largely disagreed with the statement that boys believed that they could be employed without education.

Table 103: More girls than boys complete their secondary education

Gender	More girls than boys complete their secondary education.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Male	48	86	55	9	8	206
Female	92	156	50	7	5	310
Others	1	5	6	0	0	12
Total	141	247	111	16	13	528

Note: Chi-square = 22.0; df = 8; $p < .005$

Table 103 shows that both male and female teachers substantially agreed with the statement that more girls than boys completed their secondary education.

Table 104: More girls than boys participate in psycho-social development programmes

Gender	More girls than boys participate in psychosocial development programs					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Male	66	106	24	5	5	206
Female	136	139	25	9	1	310
Others	5	4	3	0	0	12
Total	207	249	52	14	6	528

Note: Chi-square = 16.0.0; df = 8; $p < .04$

Table 104 reveals that significantly more female than male teachers agreed with the statement that more girls than boys participated in psychosocial development programmes.

Table 105: More girls than boys participate in class learning activities by gender

Gender	More girls than boys participate in class learning activities.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Male	47	101	48	8	2	206
Female	95	149	59	7	0	310
Others	2	3	6	1	0	12
Total	144	253	113	16	2	528

Note: Chi-square = 15.7; df = 8; $p < .05$

According to Table 105, significantly more female than male teachers agreed with the statement that more girls than boys participated in class learning activities.

Table 106: Teachers are more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities by gender

Gender	Teachers are more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Male	17	33	107	46	3	206
Female	5	34	171	94	6	310
Others	0	1	9	2	0	12
Total	22	68	287	142	9	528

Note: Chi-square = 21.2; df = 8; $p < .01$

Table 106 shows that significantly more female than male teachers disagreed with the statement that teachers were more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities.

Table 107: National policies in general are more supportive of girls' education than boys' education by gender

Gender	Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than of boys' education.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Male	42	77	61	22	4	206
Female	29	87	136	52	6	310
Others	1	4	5	2	0	12
Total	72	168	202	76	10	528

Note: Chi-square = 24.8; df = 8; $p < .002$

Table 107 shows that significantly more male than female teachers agreed with the statement that national policies in general were more supportive of girls' than boys' education.

Table 108: In my classroom or subject, girls perform academically better than boys by age

Age category	In my classroom or subject, girls perform academically better than boys					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
20-30	31	83	45	2	2	163
31-40	38	75	34	8	2	157
41-50	10	32	12	6	3	63
51-60	7	10	4	1	2	24
61+	1	2	0	0	1	4
Others	19	57	29	9	3	117
Total	106	259	124	26	13	528

Note: Chi-square = 31.9; df = 20; $p < .04$

According to Table 108, proportionally, teachers from all age categories generally agreed that in their classrooms, girls performed academically better than boys.

Table 109: More girls than boys complete their secondary education by age

Age category	More girls than boys complete their secondary education					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
20-30	53	66	34	7	3	163
31-40	40	82	33	0	2	157
41-50	19	25	13	2	4	63
51-60	4	13	7	0	0	24
61+	0	2	0	0	2	4
Others	25	59	24	7	2	117
Total	141	247	111	16	13	528

Note: Chi-square = 63.4; df = 20; $p < .001$

According to Table 109, significantly more teachers in the age category of 31-40 years than in other age categories agreed with the statement that more girls than boys completed their secondary education.

Table 110: Boys are more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment than girls by age

Age category	Boys are more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (e.g. alcohol & drug abuse) than girls.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
20-30	79	66	13	5	0	163
31-40	80	64	11	1	1	157
41-50	35	22	4	1	1	63
51-60	10	10	4	0	0	24
61+	1	1	1	0	1	4
Others	45	62	8	1	1	117
Total	250	225	41	8	4	528

Chi-square = 49.9; df = 20; $p < .001$

Table 110 shows that proportionally, teachers from all age categories affirmed that boys were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment than girls.

Table 111: Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than boys' education by age category

Age category	Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than of boys' education.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
20-30	22	46	65	29	1	163
31-40	18	64	52	20	3	157
41-50	9	20	22	11	1	63
51-60	3	5	14	2	0	24
61+	0	0	1	1	2	4
Others	20	33	48	13	3	117
Total	72	168	202	76	10	528

Chi-square = 68.6; df = 20; $p < .001$

Proportionally, according to Table 111, teachers in all age categories largely disagreed with the statement that gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than boys' education.

Table 112: Boys believe that they can be employed without education by school location

School location	Boys believe that they can be employed without education					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Urban	21	116	168	30	10	345
Rural	5	45	79	19	3	151
Peri urban	1	5	12	4	1	23
Others	0	3	3	0	3	9
Total	27	169	262	53	17	528

Chi-square = 34.2; df = 12; $p < .001$

Table 112 reveals that substantially teachers from all localities disagreed with the statement that boys believed that they could be employed without education.

Table 113: More girls than boys complete their secondary education by school location

School location	More girls than boys complete their secondary education					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Urban	97	186	45	8	9	345
Rural	35	46	59	7	4	151
Peri urban	5	11	6	1	0	23
Others	4	4	1	0	0	9
Total	141	247	111	16	13	528

Chi-square = 52.3; df = 12; $p < .001$

Table 113 shows that teachers' school location did not seem to influence the manner in which they agreed with the statement that more girls than boys completed their secondary education.

Table 114: More girls than boys participate in class learning activities by school location

School location	More girls participate in class learning activities than boys.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Urban	106	172	61	4	2	345
Rural	30	65	45	11	0	151
Peri urban	5	12	5	1	0	23
Others	3	4	2	0	0	9
Total	144	253	113	16	2	528

Chi-square = 27.7; df = 12; $p < .01$

It is clear from Table 114 that the majority of teachers from all school geographical locations agreed with the statement that more girls than boys participated in class learning activities.

Table 115: Boys tend to seek less academic support than girls by school location

School location	Boys tend to seek less academic support than girls.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Urban	71	200	60	6	8	345
Rural	29	70	44	6	2	151
Peri urban	2	11	6	1	3	23
Others	1	6	2	0	0	9
Total	103	287	112	13	13	528

Chi-square = 26.3; df = 12; $p < .01$

As was the case in Table 113, it is clear from Table 115 that the majority of teachers from all school geographical locations agreed with the statement that boys tended to seek less academic support than girls.

Table 116: Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than boys' education by school location

School location	Gender policies in education are more supportive of girls' than of boys' education.					Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	
Urban	48	98	138	51	10	345
Rural	23	54	56	18	0	151
Peri urban	1	14	5	3	0	23
Others	0	2	3	4	0	9
Total	72	168	202	76	10	528

Chi-square = 25.0; df = 12; $p < .02$

According to Table 116, the majority of teachers from all school geographical locations disagreed with the statement that gender policies in education were more supportive of girls' than boys' education.

As a consequence of using a parallel pragmatic mixed methods research design in which we collected both quantitative and qualitative data from research participants, we collected and analysed focus group discussion data from some teachers residing in all 14 educational regions. As was reported in the methods section, the research team was divided into three sub research teams. Each research sub team was assigned a number of educational regions to collect data from. Because of this, we present below three separate teachers' focus group discussion reports prepared by the three sub research teams that were assigned to particular educational regions. All sub research teams used the same interview questions and procedure when conducting focus group discussions in their respective educational regions. We present the three teachers' focus group reports as follows:



REPORT ON TEACHERS' FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA FROM OSHANA, OSHIKOTO, KHOMAS, OHANGWENA, KAVANGO WEST, AND ZAMBEZI REGIONS

Introduction

As has been indicated in earlier sections of this research report, we sought answers to six research questions by administering structured questionnaires to 528 secondary school teachers. The secondary school teachers were from all 14 Namibian Education Regions. In addition to administering questionnaires to the teachers, we conducted Focus Group Discussions with them on matters pertaining to the research questions.

This section of the research report is on teachers' Focus Group Discussion data from Oshana, Oshikoto, Khomas, Ohangwena, Kavango West and Zambezi Education Regions. Although 214 teachers from these regions provided quantitative data, 23 teachers' Focus Discussion Groups yielded qualitative data that are reported on in this section. Because each focus discussion group consisted of 3 to 5 members, about 115 teachers from the 6 Education Regions participated in the focus group discussions.

Based on the study's six research questions, teachers belonging to the 23 Focus Groups were asked to respond to 8 focus group interview questions on:

- the review of the national educational policies to enhance Namibian boys' academic achievement,
- the influence of boys' socialization on their underachievement in education,
- what teachers did to support the learning of boys in their classes,
- how classroom practices could be changed to enhance boys' academic achievement,
- what else teachers could do to support the learning of boys,
- resources teachers needed to enhance the learning of boys,
- how the subject syllabi of grade 10 and grade 12 learners could be revised to meet the educational needs of boys better, and
- on suggestions teachers had on how boys should be supported by the school, teachers, the community and fellow learners in order to improve their academic achievement.

In this section of the research report, we present our analysis of teachers' focus group discussion responses to the 8 interview questions. We present the analysis interview question by interview question in the manner that follows.

1. What needs to be done at the policy level to enhance the academic achievement of boys in school?

According to Table 100, quantitative data related to educational policy showed that whereas 52.7% of the 528 teachers from all 14 Education Regions disagreed with the statement that gender policies in education in Namibia were more supportive of girls' than of boys' education, 56.5% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that national Namibian policies in general were more supportive of girls' education than boys' education. The converse of these data is that more than 40% of the 528 teachers in fact agreed with these statements. In the light of this, we sought for teachers' views in focus group discussions on what they thought needed to be done at the policy level to enhance the academic achievement of boys in school.



When we analysed teachers' responses to this interview question, we identified 12 themes which we divided into 4 categories. The four categories were: *boy child education targeted programmes, educational policy review to highlight boys' educational issues, teachers' in-service programme to sensitize teachers on boys' needs and parental education.*

1.1 Boy child education targeted programmes

Four themes consisted the category on *boy child education targeted programmes*. In the first theme, teachers suggested that a variety of tasks and activities could be undertaken in the programmes targeting the boy child. These could include:

- Encouraging and motivating boys to work hard in school and to change their negative attitudes and behaviour towards education;
- Establishing after school initiatives and other initiatives to empower, inspire and counsel boys who underachieve to, from an early age, be serious in school, stay in and work hard in school;
- Discouraging boys from dropping out of school to engage in casual manual labour, become security guards, become taxi drivers, etc.;
- Establishing clubs and community based projects whose main objective would be to encourage boys to pay attention in school, focus on education and not be distracted by activities that are irrelevant to education;
- Exercising in school and in the home **firm** ways of disciplining misbehaving boys who underachieve.

One teacher illustrated some of these suggestions in the following way:

"In my opinion I think maybe it would help if there was a like an after school program or something just like the way we have these 'girls and goals' kind of things, maybe there has to be something specific for the boys which are probably led by male colleagues who would encourage them to be serious with their studies. Because in most cases they just don't care."

The second theme under this category was on specific initiatives targeted at boy child education. Teachers explained that such initiatives should focus on enhancing boys' academic achievement in school. Whereas the first of such initiatives would be a school and a community based intervention to deal with alcohol and drug abuse amongst boys, the second one would be an intervention focused on empowering boys to manage negative effects of dysfunctional peer pressure.

The third theme under this category was on the socialization of boys. Teachers indicated that it was not the educational policy that should be focused on but on how boys were raised. The difference in performance between boys and girls, the teachers clarified, resulted from differential socialization of boys and girls. Boys were allowed more freedom and independence to be irresponsible and not pay attention to education. Two teachers illustrated this reasoning in the following way. The first one stated the following:

"I don't know now where to start with the question but to me the.... maybe it started at home, it started with the parents. Now through my observation if you look the way the boys are treated at home it's not the same as the girls, the way they are raised nowadays. Because you can find that they can be in the same house of the same age, let us say maybe they are all both 12 of age or 13 years of age. You can find that boys are given more independence. They can go out to cukashop (i.e. as small retail community shop that may act as an alcohol selling outlet) they come back any time they want in the house while girls are more controlled. In such a way I can say they are more left to behave the way they want so if the policy can also start there with the parents how to raise up the boys. That's what I can say."



The second teacher said the following:

“ I think I would like to add. In as much as the policies are there, I’d like to think these disparities between boys and girls sometimes are probably inbuilt from the upbringing in the sense that, when I grew up, for example, as a boy child you are kind of told to behave in of course in some ways, there are things that if they happen to you and the same thing happen to a girl you’re not treated the same, you are not given the same attention. And now me as a teacher having grown up with that I come to school even though I read that policy I have got this thing that is inbuilt from home so it will of course influence how I treat girls and how I treat boys. In as much as the policies are there and I can read and understand them, because that upbringing that I have, the treatment will still be not the same.”

In addition to raising boys not to be serious in education, this quotation implies that because of differential socialization, boys are treated by teachers in a manner that is different from the way girls are treated in class. Less focus and attention to education from boys may be expected by teachers. They may, however, expect girls to be more focused on education and act towards them in a manner that is responsive and supportive. This disparity in treatment by teachers may enable girls to academically perform better than boys.

In the fourth theme under this category, teachers indicated that although there was too much focus on the girl child, focus should also be placed on creating awareness that the boy child was underachieving in education. To do this, awareness campaigns on boys’ underachievement could be instituted in schools and in the communities. Such campaigns could focus on how to support and enhance boys’ education.

Pertaining to this, one teacher shared the following in a focus group discussion:

“I also feel like a lot has to be done for the boys to be in school and maybe creating awareness of things that may have negative impact on their studies and their performances. It could be the activities they are partaking in, for example maybe being member of a gang in a community or being in a community of only people who are not going to school so I feel there should be that awareness giving among them.”

1.2 Educational policy review to highlight boys’ educational issues

We identified six themes under this category. In the first theme, teachers indicated that there was no need for another policy focusing on boys because the current policy of Inclusive Education covered both boys and girls. There was however, need to review the policy of inclusive education to ensure that boys’ educational issues such as underachievement were clearly highlighted and focussed on. To clarify this point, one teacher pointed out the following:

“I think from that point of what she said I could say now there is a need for the review of the policy but this policy shall be looked at or should reviewed in a way that now there would be a part strictly for the boys and a part strictly for the girls.”

In addition to this view, several teachers expressed the opinion that existing gender policies in education were implemented in a manner that appeared to discriminate against boys. Boys appeared to be overlooked, neglected, not focused on and not attended to. The following quotations from three teachers elucidate this point of view. The first quotation indicated the following:

“I think that in as much as the policies are made to cater for both the boy and the girl child, the practice I think we are reverting in the issue of doing more for the girls than for the boys. Perhaps yes we must try and find a



balance, change the policies in a way so that we include all of them and we give equal attention because the attention for me is not equal.”

The second quotation stated the following:

“I think at that level, focus is put so much on the girls. In the planning you see that all the policies are designed in such a way that they talk more on the girl child, they are more designed to focus on the girl child, they lost focus on the boy child, the boys are not motivated from the start; from the policies... from the document itself.”

The third quotation on this theme is as follows:

“To add more to what he said, specifically that the girls are getting more attention, even the policies that we have are emphasizing girls to be in schools, girls should be there, attention is more given on girls and it enhances their self-esteem, that make them feel like; “I should be doing better, I should be performing, really I am in school, really I am there so that people can understand that I am really there”, and not like give me more attention as if I am not part of the system.”

Moreover, several teachers indicated that to ameliorate the situation, current youth programmes such as *“Teenagers against Drugs and Alcohol (TADA), the Future is my Choice and Windows of Hope”* should include specific focus on boys’ underachievement in school.

In theme two under this category, some teachers pointed out that one way of ameliorating the boys’ underachievement in education problem could be that of increasing the number of “boys only secondary schools” in the educational system. Such schools would enable boys not to be compared to girls but to compete amongst themselves.

In the third theme under this category, teachers pointed out that special boy child educational programmes or initiatives should be based on an understanding of specific problems that may cause boys’ underachievement in education. They indicated that during the review of current educational policies to ensure that boys’ underachievement issues are adequately covered there was need to first understand the causes of the underachievement.

In the fourth theme under this category, teachers indicated that any changes in policy should note that boys prefer subjects that lead to practical jobs. For instance, they, in general, prefer science and mathematics. They should be given the opportunity to choose these subjects.

In fifth theme under this category, teachers expressed the view that any policy review intended to enhance boys’ academic achievement should emphasize vocational training for increased industrial growth in Namibia. To do this, as a policy issue, vocational training for boys who may not be academically inclined should be accentuated. However, such boys should not be forced to take vocational training but the policy should provide vocational training opportunities to both boys and girls.

In the sixth theme under this category, teachers suggested that for boys to be disciplined, obedient, and focus on education, educational policies should be reviewed to include religious studies and its application to the socialization of boys. This implies that schools and communities should deploy religious knowledge and virtues when socializing boys to enhance their academic achievement. From a Christian perspective, such virtues could include prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude (i.e. commitment, dedication and single-mindedness) (Lewis, 2016).



1.3 Teachers' in-service programme to sensitize teachers on boys' needs.

One theme was identified under this category. In this theme, teachers suggested that there should be established teachers' in-service programmes to sensitise teachers on the academic achievement needs of boys and on how not to apply negative socialization expectations that discriminate against boys in a stereotypic way.

1.4 Parental education.

As was the case in category 3, we identified one theme in this category. In the theme, teachers suggested that to enhance boys' academic achievement, there should be established a parental educational programme on how to raise boys. One teacher described the need for such a programme in the manner that follows.

"I want to add something there. I don't think there is a need to be a policy but I think there should be an education, parents should be educated, just country wide, on how to handle boys because those boys are coming from home and where they are already demotivated. They are looked at as a herder of cattle, of animals, and they are not sent to school and come learn, and when they come here at school, those who are at school, they are not serious with their education and it is a result that it come back from it might be a cultural background or it come back from each individual house. I think there should be education for all parents."

2. How does socialization of boys promote under achievement in education?

According to Table 97 of our quantitative data, more than 70% of the 528 teachers from all 14 Educational Regions disagreed with several questionnaire statements pertaining to the impact of culture on boys' academic achievement. Specifically more than 70% of them disagreed with statements which indicated that boys academically performed worse than girls because traditionally they were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, they were allowed to defy authority, they were allowed to engage in mischief, they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society and that they found the subject matter in many school subjects irrelevant.

To triangulate these quantitative data with qualitative data, we sought to find out from teachers in focus group discussions whether culture in the form of the socialization of boys had any impact on the academic underachievement of several of them.

In response to the question on how the socialization of boys could promote the academic underachievement, teachers provided us with a variety of answers. Out of these responses, we identified 27 themes which we divided into five categories. These were categories on *parental laxity over boys' socialization, gender socialization, cultural expectations for boys and girls during socialization, fathers' behaviour and fathers' absence from home and on consequences of dysfunctional boys' socialization*. We present data under question 2 category by category as follows:



2.1 Parental laxity over boys' socialization that may promote boys' underachievement in school

We identified seven themes under this category.

In the first theme, teachers argued that parents were stricter in the socialization of girls than they were in the socialization of boys because girls were perceived to be more vulnerable than boys. For instance, teachers pointed out that parents did all they could to keep their daughters at home to prevent them from getting pregnant before marriage. In contrast to this, several parents allowed their sons freedom to 'roam around' unhindered by any restraint. One consequence of this was that boys were not perceived as vulnerable as girls were and let off the hook when they engaged in wrong doing that was similar to that committed by girls. The following interchange between one interviewer and one teacher illustrates this.

“Question: *But what if the boy makes a girl pregnant?*

Answer: *Not really a big issue because then you know, as she said, more harm is on the girl because the girl is the one that will carry that child for nine months and at some point in school she will get out for some time for delivery and what not. But then for a boy we are never taking them so serious to educate them on the disadvantages of these things, so we are never taking the boy serious because we assume they are strong to protect themselves”*

Another teacher made a similar statement which indicated the following:

Also sometimes we think boys are good compared to girls, they can protect themselves unlike girls and all that. And that makes boys feel powerful, they don't even pay attention when it comes to school work.”

One important implication of all this is imbedded in the preceding statement made by one teacher. This is that the unrestrained freedom given to some boys by their parents encourages them not to focus on learning activities in school and thereby they academically underachieve.

In theme two under this category, teachers amplified on this reasoning by stating that differential socialization between boys and girls instilled different personality qualities. By being treated more strictly than boys, girls internalized obedience, fear of sanctions, respect for their fathers and they learnt to exercise self-control. Boys on the other hand internalized defiance, lack of fear of parents and lack of fear for sanctions that go with infractions. One teacher exemplified the girls' internalization of prosocial qualities of behaviour in the following way:

“I think there is a sense of responsibility and there is a sense of also like you know the consciousness there at the back of the mind that I should be doing the right thing. For the boy you know here and there they'll lapse. I can take an example of my own boy, everyday almost every day we have to struggle for him to keep on his shoes but whenever his cousin was there she always has her shoes (on) and then you'll say 'but why can't you be more like her and wear your shoes?' So there is always that sense of responsibility and the consciousness that they (girls) know that if I do this wrong probably I will get scolded more.”

To further clarify the effects of differential socialization between boys and girls, teachers were asked about what they would do if, one day, their daughter returned home at 1 AM and their son returned home at 3 AM. In response to this scenario, the interviewer had the following interchange during a focus group discussion:

“Question: *What would you do to your son when he comes home at 3AM in the morning?*



Answer: The son I'll probably just tell him you must be careful its dangerous out there and then he is off the hook but the girl will get a whipping. Where was she? Doing what, where, with who? One o'clock...hmm.

Question: When you make it that different, what do you think the boy learns when he is treated like that, what does the boy learn when he is treated like that?

Answer: With spanking?

Question: No, let off the hook...

Answer: Just let go...

Question: Yeah, nothing happens to him, he misbehaves, nothing happens to him, what does he learn?

Answer: He learns nothing. Probably he learns that he is free, that you allow him to.

Question: He's free he is allowed to do anything. When he comes to school what does he do?

Answer: The same."

The other source of differential socialization was displayed when several teachers said that girls were guided and advised more intensely than boys. In addition, girls were more reprimanded, sat down for counselling and instructions than boys. Girls were taught more clearly about what was wrong and what was right. This was not done for boys.

Culturally, the message that was communicated by all this was that parents were stricter with girls than they were with boys. They condoned misbehaviour of boys. They let boys do whatever they wanted. This made boys not to be disciplined and not to concentrate in school. So, they academically underachieved. However, because they were strictly controlled, girls were disciplined, concentrated on education and academically excelled.

To illustrate the differential socialization practices between boys and girls further, one teacher said the following:

"And another thing is also what she said that parents in the culture where we come from, parents are more lenient on a boy child than on a girl child. Discipline wise is more on a girl child than on a boy child. You do like this, you do like this, you stay like this, but for a boy child you can do whatever you want, you are a boy; statements made to a girl child include: 'how can you do like that as if you are a boy?!', so then a boy learns, 'I can do anything, there is no limit'."

Our interpretation of this is that to enhance their academic achievement in school, boys should be more firmly disciplined, monitored, controlled, guided and taught what to do by their parents during socialization.

In theme three under this category, teachers expressed the view that parents displayed a lack of concern for the wellbeing and welfare of their sons. Teachers justified this by saying that boys learnt not to be serious with education at home in their families where they were allowed to goof around without any adverse consequences. According to teachers who were interviewed during focus group discussions, many parents did not care about what their sons did because they did not even ask about their whereabouts. They did not care about the boys goofing off. In contrast to this, parents did not allow their daughters to do this.

One teacher described this state of affairs in the following way:

"Me I want to say something, just from what you've asked I could already see that the way we are bringing up the boys is so different from the way we raise girls. If the girl comes home late it's a whip and then most of the times the parents will go on 'where have you been?!' and all that but with the boys, it's fine for a boy to come in the morning at home, he can go to his room and sleep and get up maybe during the day and what I think culture has a role to play somehow. That boy might even want to continue, want to go out again the following day the mother, the parents will not even like question him so much but rather ask the girls to cook for him so that he doesn't go out on an empty stomach and that will also contribute, this will also influence the way they take their education in that at school they don't get serious and most of the times as teachers. Okay you can talk to them,



advise them that to take their education serious but we don't care about them, they like sometimes you feel like they are strong enough or maybe they can do it on their own. Also sometimes we think they are good compared to girls, they can protect themselves unlike girls and all that. And that makes them feel powerful, they don't even pay attention when it comes to school work."

Another teacher expressed similar sentiments in the following way:

"Okay I'm coming from the culture where by parents are not really strict on the boys. Even if a boy child comes home in the evening it is not a big deal, but if a girl does that then it is a big issue. So again in our culture our morals and values are more strict on the girls than on the boys. A boy can be drunk, can be to fighting in the streets and do funny things but it's not a taboo, but a lady doing that it's a big issue and that results in parents being more strict on the girls and then girls are becoming more disciplined and concentrating on their studies and then boys are now tending to do whatever they want to do because nobody tells them to stop what they do. So that also impact negatively on the performance of their results at the end of the day."

In theme four under this category, several teachers expressed the view that many parents exercised no sanctions against boys who committed a variety of infractions. Such parents exercised strict control when dealing with girls but they were relaxed when dealing with boys who they did not reprimand and to whom they gave unfettered freedom to roam aimlessly about in the streets. Girls were, however, scolded and reprimanded by parents if they behaved the way boys did. Teachers indicated that this form of socializing boys should be changed as it did not encourage them to focus on education. One teacher illustrated this view in the following way:

"For me there is uh, you know culturally there is a little, I cannot say it that parents are relaxed but somehow they are in a way. You'll find that they would have a strict control mechanism on to girl's child more than a boy's child. A boy child will leave a house any time to go and, you know this street soccer, then he will come back late, later in the day but there is nothing that is being said or that has been done about that particular child but for a girl if they leave a house for even minutes and they are not being seen where they are you have a problem. So you see the parents often reprimand the girls compared to boys, boys are left to roam and to move on their own without really being reprimanded. So I think it's some that related to culture, it's a cultural thing."

Our interpretation on this issue is that it appears as though boys are expected by society not to be at home but out there, where parents do not know what they are doing. If they are out there, they may be learning habits unsupportive of education. In addition, if parents do not sanction their sons' misbehaviour, their sons learn to defy their authority and that of others such as teachers.

In theme five under this category, teachers communicated the view that there were occasions when there was parental cultural confusion in homes on how boys should be raised. This particularly occurred when fathers did not intervene when their sons engaged in misbehaviour. In many Namibian societies, mothers expect fathers to handle their sons' misbehaviour. When fathers fail to do this, mothers refrain from intervening because traditionally they are not supposed to. Teachers indicated that when mothers intervened, they tended to be hated by their sons for doing so. This occurrence was exemplified by one teacher as follows:

"Now you as a woman you are also having the fear that if the father doesn't say anything who I am, but to the girl you always say that 'no you must not, you must be like this'. And the boys take the advantage to say if my father doesn't even say anything but when mom I go out but only my mom, they end up hating the mother. I have seen such."

In our view, this should not be the case. Fathers and mothers should work consistently in unison when raising their sons and daughters. Cultural expectations of what fathers and



mothers should do when socializing their children are intended to be complimentary and not contradictory in practice.

In the sixth theme under this category, teachers indicated that boys who underachieve in education seemed to get the message that because their parents were not strict with them, they did not expect them to succeed in school. The message seemed to be that they should not worry if they failed in school because they were men who should persevere under all circumstances and succeed- even without education. In addition, according to teachers, the message from parents' laxity in the socialization of boys seemed to be that men, merely because they were men could succeed without education. One implication of this, according to teachers, was that boys who underachieved in education were not raised to succeed in school but they were raised not to care about education. This was the case because such boys got the message from the uncaring behaviour of their parents that they could get jobs such as those performed by taxi drivers and manual labourers on construction sites without studying, without education.

The seventh theme under this category was on consequences of parental laxity during boys' socialization. Under this theme, teachers intimated that because parents were not strict with boys who underachieve in education, such boys at times joined gangs which influenced them to engage in crime, drug dealing and other anti-social behaviours. Because these actions may keep them out of school, they would under-participate in education. One teacher said the following to illustrate this view:

"The addition is just that maybe because of the values or the moral values that are not very strict to the boys, they tend to associate with wrong people. For example in the street, like with those ones that live in the city they can do drugs because the parent can question where were you but it's not really tough like you cannot, just a matter of awareness like where were you but no any punishment, no anything that is going to be done. That lead them to join gangs and when they join gangs sometimes they pay more attention what they are getting from the gang instead of their school work."

In relating this to academic performance in school between boys and girls, one teacher expressed the following view during a focus group discussion:

*" but let's say for example you move around the streets of Katutura, the ones that you find outside playing in the streets are boys. The girls are more kept at home or inside the house. Whether they are studying or whether they are busy with other things I don't know but it seems **as if it's culturally accepted that boys should rather be outside there getting involved in whatever I don't know.** So I think that will have of course an influence on their performance in schools because that's where they get to learn of all the other mischievous things while somebody who's probably kept at home under the supervision of parents, for example now in this case the girls, then they do not get to learn or get involved in those mischievous things and therefore perhaps perform better."*

2.2 Gender socialization that may promote boys' underachievement in school

We identified four themes under this category.

Theme one was on the fact that boys were not given as many chores as girls at home to learn how to be responsible. Teachers reported that while girls learnt to be responsible through many chores assigned to them at home, boys were spared of these chores and so did not learn to be responsible. In addition, teachers indicated that girls learnt to multi-task from being given multiple chores to perform at home. This enabled them to learn how to manage time wisely and how to work under pressure. Boys did not learn these skills that were essential in learning at school and they did not learn from home how to cope with pressure. One teacher illustrated this as follows:



“I think ah how the boys are raised up; you know us growing up, if you have a boy child and a girl child in the house, most of the duties are assigned to the girl. That is from cooking, washing, cleaning of the house and so forth. So I think growing up girls are growing up in such a way that they, they, they know how to be responsible enough because of the duties that are assigned to them back home. So coming back to the classroom also, if you give them a class work, a girl child will finish that before the boy child. And what does the boy child do? He just asks for the girl’s book and then he copy then he have the answer without him really working out for those solutions.”

To clarify the issue further, teachers indicated that while boys were pampered at home, girls did the household chores. As indicated earlier, this taught girls how to work under pressure, to juggle many tasks at one time, to multitask and to focus. This prepared girls to work hard in school. In contrast, boys’ socialization did not teach them how to handle pressure in life and at school. While boys waited to be served, girls learnt to serve and take charge. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“For me the way we grew up, I feel the girls are having more responsibilities at home compared to the boys. So I think somehow this tends to make boys relax since they are not also used to too much pressure at school. At home the girl must cook, she must do dishes, she must do what, she must do what, she must do what, I feel somehow girls tend to handle the pressure more. Then the boys all they is ‘ah cook for the boys, the pup is not hard enough for the boys’, so they are treated and they tend to just want to be pampered every time and then teachers in school don’t have time to pamper anyone”

Our interpretation of this is that to encourage boys’ academic achievement in school, they must learn how to be responsible at home by actively participating in the performance of a variety of household chores. Parents should ensure that boys do not goof off but take part in, for instance, cooking, doing dishes, mopping the floors, taking out the trash bins, washing cars, taking care of livestock, and helping parents when they need help. They should not be encouraged to be ‘couch potatoes’, waiting to be served food by mothers and sisters.

Theme two under this category was on boys as inheritors of property from their parents. Teachers expressed the view that some boys who underachieve were distracted from school work by the expectation that they would take over their parents’ businesses, their property, their farms, livestock, etc. Boys with such an expectation saw no need to focus on education. In many Namibian communities, boys, as men were expected to inherit their parents’ property. Knowing that they had this privilege, teachers indicated, some boys did not wish to concentrate on education. One consequence of this was that they would underachieve in education. One teacher expressed this view as follows:

“Yeah maybe I can still repeat this, I said previously, the way we raise up our boy child is in such a way that we, we assume, because he’s a man, he is supposed to provide for the house and everything, so especially the fathers maybe in most cases, we raise them in such a way that we want them to either go take over our business and not continues with his studies and in most cases that discourages them to perform in schools because they are just, they have the mind of I’m already going to work in my father’s business so whether I pass or not it’s not a problem. So that can maybe also contribute to the under achievement.”

Theme three under this category was on the perception that girls excelled in education because they were favoured and given more attention than boys during socialization. A number of teachers indicated that because girls seemed to be given more attention by parents during socialization, boys who underachieve in education felt neglected, isolated and abandoned. Such boys, teachers indicated, thought that because no one cared about them, why should they care about their education. One teacher expressed this in the following way:



“Also if you look at the issue how boys grow up, the attention they receive also is quite different. Parental they give more attention to the girls and I feel boy are neglected. Let’s say maybe a boy child is crying so he is told to like “you don’t cry you are a boy”, such things, it’s a girl she’s embraced, she’s comforted. Yeah so such, I think now in their developmental they grow up and they feel isolated and all that perhaps makes them to produce poor results in school.”

Theme four under this category is on cultural/traditional division of labour between boys and girls in the household. Some teachers expressed the view that it was wrong to accuse boys of not doing their fair share of household chores because they were prevented by cultural/traditional division of labour not to perform chores that were not meant to be performed by them but by girls. The teachers indicated that most of the chores girls performed in the household were meant for them culturally and not meant for boys. According to the cultural/traditional division of labour, there were chores reserved for boys and chores reserved for girls. Currently, using this division of labour, there are fewer chores in the household reserved for boys than chores reserved for girls. One teacher illustrated this reasoning by saying the following:

“In the household we often say “boys do not do that” even yourself, the mother we tell the boys do not do that, they do not learn responsibility; we ask, what kind of a boy are you if you are doing that? Why can’t you be strong, be that, is what we put on them really. I think boys do not have a lot of responsibilities, as a mother I would rather let my son go out to the friends than my daughter, because for the daughter is a bit more dangerous, so now the boy grows up with that “I do not have a lot of responsibilities”,

In our view, this reasoning is unhelpful to the boy child as it does not encourage him to become responsible. Because of this there is need to review and reframe the household cultural/traditional division of labour that some parents in Namibia ascribe to.

2.3 Cultural expectations for boys and girls during socialization that may promote boys’ underachievement in school

In this category, we identified five themes.

In theme one, teachers reported that boys were permitted, by cultural expectations, to spend most of their time outside their family homes. Teachers indicated that while outside the home boys learnt, from an early age, not to be on task engaging in educational activities but playing with friends on the street. Through this, they were mainly socialized not by the family but by friends. In contrast, girls, from an early age, were required by culture to stay at home and perform domestic chores and work on their educational tasks.

One teacher illustrated this by saying the following:

“For the girl it will be a very huge issue, that will never stop, even if she tries to do something similar they will always refer them to what happened previously, but for a guy, for a boy it’s always it’s okay for a boy child to go out until late but it is never okay for a girl child to go out until late.”

In fact, teachers intimated, parents did not firmly sanction misdeeds of the boy committed inside and out of the home but came down heavily on the girl for offences similar to those committed by the boy. In addition, teachers indicated that boys were given more freedom to waste time outside the home than girls who were given many chores to perform at home. As was reported in an earlier section of this report, girls learnt from this experience to be responsible and hard working. In contrast, boys learnt to be lazy and not to care about education. In our view, although culturally acceptable, these habits contribute to boys’ underachievement in education



Theme two under this category was on the teachers' cultural view that because they were perceived to be more vulnerable than boys, girls needed to be protected and kept at home. Teachers indicated that based on this cultural view, several parents were more restrictive and protective of girls than boys. Two teachers illustrated this cultural view as follows:

“For the girl to come home very late at night will be a very huge issue, that will never stop, even if she tries to do something similar to what the boy does, they will always refer back to what happened previously, but for a guy, for a boy it's always okay for a boy child to go out until late but it is never okay for a girl child to go out until late.”

“Just to add to this, this has to do with the vulnerability, the girls are more vulnerable compared to the boys, so for the girls to be out for so long we will be obviously thinking of so many things but defence mechanism the boys stand a good chance again to protect themselves compared to the girls”

The following interchange between the interviewer and one teacher during a focus group discussion further illustrates this cultural view point:

“Question: *What would happen to the girls do you think? Why are they vulnerable?*

Answer: *To the girls, nature wise, nature wise they are not really strong to protect themselves.*

Question: *What can happen to them?*

Answer: *Okay there are so many things, they can be raped. They can engage themselves in sexual activity. Whereby if we are to compare boys and girls engaging themselves in sexual activity the damage is more on girls than on the boys so the parents try to be stricter on the girls than the boys.*

Question: *What comment do you have on that, the damage is more on the girls than boys, what damage?*

Answer: *The damage that is being referred to here, and that is what most parents are scared of, its most fear for most of the parents, they believe if the girl is out until that late there is only one thing and that is hanging out with boys or involved in sexual activities and that will lead into pregnancies. And that is the most fearful thing by parents.”*

To us, the perceived vulnerability of girls does not justify parents' tendency to use a 'hands off' approach when socializing boys – an approach that gives boys the licence to goof off and not focus on education. As has been explained earlier, this would partly lead to boys' underachievement in education.

In theme three under this category, teachers pointed out that the unrestrained freedom that parents allowed boys to exercise taught them to feel independent early, look for jobs and drop out of school. According to the following illustration from one teacher, boys use their freedom of action and perceived independence to 'rush into the future' unprepared.

“...getting more freedom also teaches the boy to be irresponsible and also become more independent and I think that make them rush into future even if they do not or they are not yet supposed to be there. They start going to look for jobs, dropping out of school to go look for some job because they feel like they are independent, they are free to do so even if it was not supposed to be.”

In our view, this implies that the unfettered freedom and independence some boys are allowed by their parents to exercise early in their lives, promotes their under-participation in education.

In the fourth theme under this category, teachers pointed out that several Namibian cultures expected boys to spend most of their time outside the home. They would be considered or labelled as not male enough if they did not spend most of their time outside the home.

To illustrate this, one teacher expressed the following view:



Men are brought up in such a way that if you stay at home all the time, they will ask 'why are you here? Why are you always home? Your friends are out there... what are you doing here? You are just following your mother.... You would be considered or labelled as not male enough if you do not go out.'

Although this may sound contradictory to what was said earlier in this report, it appears to us that some cultures in Namibia force some boys to spend most of their time outside the home where they would not be expected to participate in responsibility-inducing household chores. This in itself does not justify the antisocial behaviour such boys may engage in outside the home- antisocial behaviour that may prevent them from doing well in school.

Theme five under this category was on the fact that during socialization, girls were more shamed for their infractions than boys were. Teachers pointed out that girls culturally were shamed more for infractions such as pregnancy, drinking and smoking. Even if they impregnate girls, boys on the other hand were not as ashamed as girls were. It seemed as if the entire society was against girls when they become pregnant while at school. To avoid the shame, girls either ensured that they did not get pregnant while in school or if they got pregnant they would work hard at school after giving birth. Some boys who underachieved in education did not seem to be ashamed of their poor performance as they did not care about doing well in school.

We interpreted this to mean that shame and disgrace as cultural sanctions against antisocial and other undesirable behaviours seemed not to be effective when applied to boys who underachieve in education. They appeared to be undeterred by these cultural tools of censure.

2.4 Fathers' behaviour and fathers' absence from home that may promote boys' underachievement in school

We identified two themes under this category.

In theme one, teachers pointed out that in the absence of fathers from home, a number of boys turned out to be in-disciplined, disrespectful and lazy. Imbued with these personality traits, teachers indicated, such boys would turn out to be in-disciplined, disrespectful, lazy and academically underachieving in school.

In theme two under this category, teachers reported that fathers spoiled their sons when they did not sanction them for wrong doing. Such sons thought that their wrong actions were fine if they were not condemned by their fathers. If mothers condemned the wrong actions, they were hated by their sons. One teacher illustrated this by stating the following:

"Because what they do is ignored boys think that the wrong actions are not important and no one cares- the process of IN-SIGNIFICATION. No one cares if boys underachieve because their fathers keep quiet about it"

2.5 Consequences of dysfunctional boys' socialization which may promote boys' underachievement

In this category we identified four themes.

In theme one, teachers expressed the view that one consequence of the fathers' absence from home was that boys learnt **not** to respect and obey their mothers or grandmothers who were in charge of them. In adolescence, teenage boys became rebellious to their mothers and grandmothers who represented them when they misbehaved at school. It appeared to teachers



that such boys were raised in the context where they were a law to themselves. One teacher described this state of affairs in the following way:

“I would say that most of, almost all of the boys they come from single parent families and there is no father figure so there is not discipline, so if the mother is there you will find that not all boys would probably respect their parents or they are with their grandparents. We have cases here at school where we call the parents and most of the time the people that turn up here are the mothers or the grand mothers and it’s very difficult for them once these boys reach a certain age then they become rebellious and then they decide if I get this much pressure at school why should I be at school, probably they will feel like they want to drop out. I think that could also contribute to their underachievement in school”

According to teachers, another dysfunctional consequence of boys’ socialization with regard to the disrespect they showed their mothers and grandmothers was that which was sometimes displayed when fathers seemed to train their sons to be misogynistic by putting them in charge of households in their absence. From this, boys learnt to underrate their mothers and not listen to them when they advised them about education.

According to us, misogyny robbed boys of valuable educational counsel from their mothers and grandmothers who are always present in their lives and available to them. This finding was consistent with what parents expressed in their focus group discussions.

In theme two under this category, teachers pointed out that another consequence of the dysfunctional process of socializing boys was that they tended to be more distracted from focus on education than girls. This was the case, according to teachers, because boys were more side-tracked from education than girls by social relationships with girls, sport, social clubs and entertainment in general.

In theme three under this category, teachers indicated that some parents resorted to corporal punishment to reign in their misbehaving sons. This mode of sanction was employed under the guise that it was permitted by the African culture as a legitimate way of disciplining wayward children.

One teacher expressed this in the following way:

“But can I come in? That question of what will I do to my son. As an African man, raised from an African house, I learnt that rules when they are broken there should be a punishment, yes, and so if my son comes home late on the first incident I would make sure that I apply corporal punishment. Not in a way to abuse him, but in a way to teach him that it is wrong and Daddy is angry. And also explain to him that Daddy was also brought up in such a manner. If you do wrong, I beat. Yes.”

Although this type of sanctioning children is popular amongst some parents in Namibia, its use in schools is illegal under the Namibian Constitution. We are aware that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture does not condone the use of corporal punishment in schools. Should it be barred from being used as a deterrent of chronic misbehaviour in the upbringing of boys in families?

In theme four under this category, teachers indicated that during socialization, boys seemed to learn more from their peers than from their families and society. The peer group in the community from which they learnt many negative things might not be interested in education. According to some teachers, this happened because boys were paid less attention to than girls by society. This was expressed in the following way by one teacher:



“When a boy is facing a problem, always he turns to his peer group and the peer group pressure is more for boys. Since the girls are getting enough support in, not fully but at least they are getting some support from the family and the society, they are able to solve these things from the experts but the boys they are not getting any support from any expert, they are guided by their peer group”.

When asked about what boys did in the peer groups, teachers reported that they discussed music idols, how to make money quickly and **not** how to stay in school. Teachers further said that because they were not interested in education boys under-performed and dropped out of school.

Teachers further stipulated that socialization at home might not necessarily influence boys’ underachievement in education at school but the underachievement may in fact be more influenced by bad peer pressure and negative influences of friends at school. According to teachers, parents might raise their son to be responsible at home. At home their sons might be respectful, compliant and obedient. They might learn antisocial behaviour from friends. Based on their dealings with parents, some teachers indicated that some parents were, for example, surprised when they were told that their sons had been caught abusing alcohol and drugs. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“I think peer pressure is much in boys than in girls. When they are far from home they behave differently from the same way they behave at home. The parents at home they know they are good boys but at school it is different.”

3. What do you do to support the learning of boys?

In the questionnaire we administered to all 528 teachers from the 14 Educational Regions, we asked teachers to assess some statements on how they supported the learning of boys in their classes. According to Table 100 of our quantitative data, 55.1% disagreed with the statement that boys academically performed worse than girls because they were given less psychosocial support in school than girls. Conversely, 50.2% of the teachers disagreed that boys academically performed worse than girls because girls were given more psychosocial support in school than boys. From these data, it appeared to us that although not in the majority, a large proportion of the sampled teachers agreed with the statement that boys academically performed worse than girls because girls were given more psychosocial support in school than them. Inconsistent with this deduction, 81.3% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that boys academically performed worse than girls because teachers were more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities. From this it appeared to us that teachers gave equal support to boys and girls in learning activities.

Given these quantitative data we sought to find out in focus group discussions the specific types of support teachers gave to boys during their classes.

Under question three of the focus group discussion interview for teachers, we identified 24 themes of data. We grouped these themes into four categories. These categories were *pre-conditions for teaching boys, encouraging boys to participate in learning in class, teachers’ interaction with boys and teaching methods for reaching boys in class*. We present question three data category by category as follows:



3.1 Preconditions for teaching boys

In this category, we identified eight themes.

Theme one was about basing the teaching support of boys on the identification and assessment of learning problems associated with their academic underachievement. According to teachers, the first precondition for teaching boys was to first find out learning problems they were experiencing. This should be the foundation of any learning support that teachers should provide to boys.

Theme two was on the precondition of sitting arrangements. Teachers indicated that because boys who academically underachieve tend to hide behind those who do well, they should be urged to sit in front of the classroom where they could be monitored by the teachers. In addition, learners should be mixed in the classrooms in such a way that boys should not sit next to those who would distract them. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“So what I do is I make them sit closer to me, I make them sit closer to me, I split them, because what they do, they just like bundling up on one side of the class and not with others. So I split them, I mix them up, a boy with a girl or maybe one side it’s just balance both boys and girls”

In theme three under this category, teachers pointed out that the other precondition for teaching boys was to encourage boys to participate in class by basing subject matter or relating subject matter to what they were interested in. For instance, the teaching of English comprehension, conversation, grammar and literature could be linked to soccer, basketball or any other sport which boys were interested in.

Theme four was on the precondition of ensuring that boys took their school work seriously. According to teachers, this should be done by holding boys accountable if they did not submit their homework, by letting boys see the importance of education in their lives, by following up tasks given to them, by ensuring that they were on task, by monitoring and seeing that they were learning and doing what they were expected to do, and by ensuring that they were submitting their assignments on time and by ensuring that teachers marked the assignments and gave informative feedback on time.

Theme five was on the precondition of letting boys who academically underachieve to be aware that they were underachieving. Teachers pointed out that this could be done by comparing boys’ performance to that of girls and seeing if that could inspire them to compete with girls and work harder at their academic tasks.

Theme six was on the precondition of ensuring that boys were present in class to learn. Teachers indicated that because boys who academically underachieve usually bunk or stay away from classes, they must physically be looked for and brought back to the classroom. Once physically present in class, teachers should ensure that such boys were *mentally* present and engaged by conversing with them, counselling and guiding them. To illustrate all this, one teacher said the following in a focus group discussion:

“like with what I do with my junior grades, I tell them they should not leave their books behind because they have this tendency “Miss I forgot my book at home”, that means they did not write, yeah you always have to push them to do things, you are not leaving my class until you submit your book you know. That is how you have to be on their case every time.”



Theme seven was on the precondition of discipline. Teachers indicated that it was difficult to support the learning of boys who were ill-disciplined. This was exacerbated in situations where parents were unable to control their sons and discipline them. One teacher expressed this in the following way:

It is difficult to teach boys who misbehave, boys whose parents are unable to control them; you as a teacher can be tough with them but the home environment is unsupportive.

To discipline such boys, teachers suggested one needed to have the boys sign statements or contracts in which they pledged not to misbehave. When the contracts were breached, such boys should be made to apologise to their classmates.

Theme eight was on the precondition of encouraging boys who academically underachieve to assume a future perspective. On this, teachers indicated that as a precondition, boys should be made to understand that their present underperformance in education would negatively affect their future life.

3.2 Encouraging boys to participate in learning activities

In this category, we identified six themes.

Theme one under this category was on encouraging boys who were unwilling to learn. Teachers indicated that a number of barriers to learning made it very difficult for teachers to encourage boys who academically underachieve in education. Some of these barriers were the boys' unwillingness to participate in class, boys' un-eagerness to ask questions when they did not understand in class and boys' uneasiness in class and in school because they seemed to be forced to come to school. In addition, some boys who underachieve seemed to be always angry, were quiet, did not wish to be bothered and appeared to have given up. One Mathematics teacher explained some of these barriers in the following way:

“For me I disagree with the boys concentrating more in the women’s class. I don’t know, maybe it’s because of my subject, my subject is mathematics. So my boys are just very angry, they don’t want to take part, they are just quiet, they are not active at all, the boys are actually the most quiet ones in the class. And me being a female teacher again sometimes I’m afraid of them beating me also, it’s true, sometimes the person didn’t do the homework, you give him what, you can’t talk sometimes cause you’re also afraid they can beat you. They are very angry in the Math class so I disagree with them participating with female teacher’s classes.”

To overcome these barriers, teachers indicated that they did not stop trying to involve boys despite the fact that they were disinterested.

Theme two under this category was on the involvement of all learners in class. Teachers suggested that it was important to ensure that no boy hid behind the responses to questions of other learners. To do this, teachers were urged to be alert to and pay attention to boys who did not participate in learning activities. They needed to do so by asking such boys to answer questions in class and to ask questions when they did not understand.

Theme three under this category was on providing boys with specific opportunities to participate in class. Teachers said that they encouraged boys to participate in classes by giving them opportunities to take charge and lead class learning groups and by ensuring that they were not bullied/intimidated into silence by those (e.g. girls) who performed better than them. All this would enable boys to become responsible, encourage them to participate in



learning activities and enhance their recognition as valuable members of their classrooms. One teacher expressed this in the following way:

“ What I do is sometimes boys are shy especially they feel intimidated more especially when the class is dominated by girls. So what I do is to encourage them to speak out, also give them chances where they are strong most, encourage them to take over and also prevent bullying from the girls or the other boys because once they are bullied they tend to retract then they might not perform again. So it's mostly kind of encouraging them, pampering them, telling them it's okay to fail, its part of learning but then you have to work on it.”

Theme four was on paying attention to and treating all learners equally. A number of teachers were of the view that in the process of encouraging boys to actively participate in learning activities, they should not be treated in a special way. Instead, as was the case with any other learners, each boy's learning problem should be treated on its own merits. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“I just wanted to say that I treat all of them equally, because if that time I can negate some, then he'll result in school dropout, feel like ‘miss don't love me, or don't like me so there is no need for me to be attending a class’.”

Theme five under this category was on the preventing of bullying of boys who academically underachieve by other learners. Teachers said that doing this was important boys who academically underachieve tended to retreat or withdraw from participating in learning activities if they were bullied by girls and other learners who excel in education.

Theme six was on promoting boys' participation in class by employing gender balance in learning groups. One teacher explained the functioning of this learning strategy in the following way:

“ Okay, few points just to assist the boys to improve on their performance; one is to have gender balance in groups like when a class is divided into groups so we have equal number of girls and boys, let us have gender balance so that they can see their participation; another one is to have classroom competitions, between boys and girls just to come up with some forms of motivation, so that they can improve on their participation in classroom activities. The other one is, normally we have top achievers, let say, if we have top ten and out of that, we have only three boys, we need to come up with motivation and say: “among top ten, we have only three boys”, ask: “where are you boys”, we can even go extra mile to call an external motivator, just to talk to them, if they are amongst the top ten achiever, let us award them.”

Another teacher had the following to say:

“ With me I also like the boys sitting in front as she do, and also in my subject I like them to do presentations but when they are doing presentation, when I'm giving presentation I make sure I'm giving either to one boy, one girl or two boys, two girls so that they can go and prepare for the presentation. Not giving to one gender”. Our comment on the theme of gender balance in the classroom is that it would be difficult to implement as boys in secondary schools are in the minority in several educational regions. The focus should be on encouraging boys and girls to work together in learning activities and thereby enriching each other's educational experiences.



3.3 Teachers' interaction with boys

Under this category we identified three themes.

Theme one under this category is about creating rapport between teachers and boys. Teachers expressed the view that to promote boys participation in learning activities, there should be cordial relationships between boys and their teachers. Teachers pointed out that such rapport was important because boys opened up and participated in classes taught by teachers who were responsive to their issues and needs. Boys' participation in class depended on the manner in which they were treated by teachers. To exercise good relations, teachers were urged to promptly resolve any misunderstanding they might have with any boys, create rapport with all of them and be in good terms with them.

Theme two under this category was on teachers not neglecting boys in their interaction and teaching. This should be the case in order to partly correct the disparity in which the focus of attention in educational policies and educational intervention programmes was on girls. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“Even when it comes to policies, that okay I know there is pregnancy policy focus more on the girl, almost everything is focused on the girl so as a result maybe in our subconscious minds just behind without thinking, without having to say it straight we can pick up that the girl child is having more privilege. Even just simple things like in the class there is a boy and a girl and the girl provokes the boy and the boy retaliates and the girl comes and reports, then the boys says she started first, we'll listen to the girl. Even when it's just outside in the community, if the woman provoke me and I end up hitting her and I go and report the case and the woman makes a counter case, the police will come and get me. And so it's just I don't know somehow in the culture. If you ask what are we doing to benefit the girl child we'll tell a book but the boy is neglected and as a result the follow up will do more if a girl drops out, is more than what we'll do when the a boy drops out.”

To ensure that boys were not neglected, teachers were encouraged to have one-on-one conversations on the importance of education with them and to individualize lessons in a manner that enabled them to participate.

Theme three under this category was on providing guidance and counselling. It was suggested that in order to enhance the academic achievement of boys, teachers should provide individualized psychosocial and career counselling to them. Their interaction with boys should focus on building them up through academic guidance and advice. It should not focus on blame, shaming and emotional abuse.

3.4 Teaching methods for reaching boys in class

We identified seven themes under this category

Theme one was on not having special instructional methods tailored to meet special needs of boys. Some teachers expressed the opinion that there was no special support provided to boys who academically underachieved because the Namibian educational policy was that of equal educational opportunity. In this policy educational equality was advocated. This justified the use of the same teaching methods for all learners. In addition there was no need to give boys special support and use special teaching methods if they were already performing well and in some instances, performing better than girls. This applied especially in subjects where boys were performing better than girls.



Our view is that there is in fact room for special support for learners who need it in Namibia's Sector Policy on Inclusive Education.

Theme two was on teachers suggestion that to enhance the academic achievement of boys who under achieve, rewards should be used for any success in learning such boys display.

Theme three was on valuing boys work. In order to communicate the message that they cared and were concerned about the academic achievement of boys, teachers should value such achievement. They should do this by showing concern when boys underachieve and by closely monitoring the performance of the boys in class and in school.

Theme four was on the use of practical/activity oriented teaching methods. To enhance the academic achievement of boys, teachers suggested the use of practical and activity-based lessons as boys were usually motivated and inspired by such methods.

Theme five was on peer tutoring. Teachers indicated that to enhance boys' academic achievement, peer teaching could be used. This would involve pairing boys who underachieve with those who perform better than them. This would encourage the process of learners supporting each other's education. One teacher explained how this was applied in the following quotation:

“ Usually what I do in my classes, I'm sure if you walked around you'll notice that we have sort of separation, the boys tend to sit together, they will probably just like they are nine in a class of thirty-six so the girls also I scatter all over the place but they always tend to huddle together but then the problem is these boys are all under achievers so I usually discourage them from sitting together because if they are all not performing obviously they cannot learn, there is no one helping anybody. So you have people like girls that are performing or maybe there is a boy that is performing, I will take this group of learners and then you assign them to people that are, I mean group them with a person that I know that they can understand things quickly, then that person will be the one helping everybody else all the time.”

Theme six was on the use of mentoring, modelling and scaffolding when encouraging boys to excel. Teachers explained that they used these methods in a variety of ways. For instance, they encouraged boys to ask for help from teachers and other learners when they needed to. In using scaffolding, teachers informed boys that they were not self-sufficient but needed the help of others from time to time. Because of this, they should not keep to themselves and think that they could make it in education and in life on their own. When the interview asked in a focus group discussion how all this was done, one teacher provided the following explanation:

“You tell them, cause they have this picture of teachers, okay our principal actually tell us we should be encouraging kids a lot so my encouragement usually I don't tell them what to do but I remind them that I didn't skip any step, I just didn't wake up and become a teacher, we have mistakes and we tell them about how they are going to fail in the future, how they are failing now, there is nothing that is perfect. So no matter how proud they are they should always remember that you are going to need somebody. There is nothing like keeping to yourself and you feel you can make it on your own, you need somebody to make it today, you'll need somebody to make it tomorrow and then you tell them a little bit you know, crack jokes your personal stories that happened to you like it's a joke then they laugh about it.”

Theme seven was on the use of motivational speakers. In order to inspire boys who underachieve in education, teachers proposed the use of motivational speakers who would talk to boys about how to focus on education and how not be distracted from educational activities by toxic entertainment in the form of excessively using intoxicating substances such as alcohol and drugs.



4. How should classroom practices change to enhance boys' academic achievement?

The classroom practices we were concerned with in this question were on teaching methods, learner-teacher interaction, learner-learner interaction, learner assessment and learner motivation.

Some of the quantitative questionnaire data we obtained from 528 teachers residing in all 14 Educational Regions touched on some of these practices. For instance, with respect to learner-teacher interaction, some data presented in Table 96 revealed that 81.3% of the teachers disagreed with the statement that girls performed better than boys in sampled teachers' subjects because boys were given less attention than girls by teachers. In table 98, the data showed that 75.2% of the 528 teachers agreed with the statement that more girls than boys participated in class learning activities. In Table 99, some of the data revealed that about 74% of the teachers agreed with the statement that boys tended to seek less academic support from teachers than girls. In addition, some of the data presented in Table 100 showed that whereas 78.6% of the teachers agreed with the statement that girls were more collaborative on learning tasks than boys, 55.2% of them agreed that more boys than girls preferred to work in isolation.

As can be noticed in all these quantitative data, in one way or the other, related to learner-teacher interaction, learner-learner interaction and to learner-teacher-learner interaction. We wished to triangulate these and other quantitative data with qualitative data obtained from focus group discussion data.

With respect to teachers' responses to question 4 of the focus group discussion interview, we identified 19 themes which we divided into 5 categories. These categories were on *strategies for learner-learner interaction, appropriate teaching methods applicable to the teaching of boys, strategies for learner-teacher interaction, learner motivational strategies and appropriate assessment strategies*. We present these data category by category as follows:

4.1 Strategies for learner-learner interaction to enhance boys' academic achievement.

Under this category, we identified 4 themes.

Theme one was on employing girls who perform well in some subjects to act as coaches for boys who academically underachieve. Teachers said that such girls should be rewarded for their work. One teacher explained this as follows:

“One thing that I have done also is the coaching or teaching where I found that some boys are performing very poorly, I used to allocate them to some girls to help them. To the best one I would say I want that boy to pass, you make him pass then I will reward you this”.

Theme two was on mixed gender grouping. Teachers indicated that whereas they assigned boys and girls to projects to ensure that the projects were done by learners of mixed gender and mixed ability, they used mixed gender seating arrangements to enable boys and girls to interact with each other. According to teachers, these strategies prevented boys from sitting at the back of the classroom and misbehave. Moreover, the strategies encourage boys and girls to actively participate in class and learn from each other. Two teachers explained how they implemented the strategies in the manner that follows.

The first teacher said the following:



There is a need to change the seating arrangement...in classrooms, mostly girls chose to sit in front while boys chose to sit at the back. You hardly find boys mixed with girls... mostly boys are far... sometimes they cannot even hear properly...they do not participate... the whole period... the person is there not saying anything... you only see the one who participate... there is a need to change... to encourage them to participate...

The second teacher said the following:

One method is; when we give projects we can give project where we can assign learners to groups. Do not let them pick themselves, in most cases, girls pick themselves and boys pick themselves, sometimes they pick friends... where they know... even if they did not contribute, they would still get the marks. You can also allow them, in most cases... we are trying to practice learner centeredness, some kids understand the topic before you teach a topic, you can pick some of the learners to discuss, not to teach but to explain the topic to others rather than a teacher explaining it to the learners.

Theme three was on boys who do well coaching boys. Teachers proposed that a variety of ‘boys only’ initiatives could be put in place to enhance the academic achievement of boys. For instance, after school activities for boys only could be established to enable boys to open up and air their views freely without pressure of appearing stupid in front of girls. In addition, doing this may motivate boys to open up and use the after school initiatives as a form of psychosocial support. Similarly, subject specific boys only holiday classes could be formed to focus on the enhancement of boys’ academic achievement.

Another proposal that teachers made under theme three was that of highlighting issues pertinent to boys’ academic achievement in the curriculum. For instance, alcohol and drug abuse could be highlighted in Life Skills, Guidance and Counselling, English and in Biology with the view of explaining how the abuse interfered with boys’ academic achievement.

One teacher explained this proposal in the following way:

“ I think there is no specific topic in any subject focussing mainly on boys but somehow there is a topic on teenage pregnancy that focus on girls but there is no focus on boys. For example I want the topic of alcohol and drug abuse to focus mainly on boys because it’s only the boys that use drugs, they drink alcohol but not girls. Yeah there are some but not all of them. I want that topic to focus mainly on boys like there is a focus on teenage pregnancy in girls. That topic alcohol and drug abuse is just general and I believe it must be focussing on the boys. I think even this topic of teenage pregnancy it also needs something about the boys, not only girls because you can find that the teenage boys who impregnate the teenage girls but the topic it just focusing on the girls. They also need something there, yeah some highlight on the boys also.”

Consistent with this, teachers suggested that although all school subjects should be open to boys and girls, boys should be given the opportunity to take activity oriented and practical subjects such as woodwork, metal work, plumbing, bricklaying and gardening. One teacher justified the need for boys to take these subjects that appeal to them in the following way:

“I think also probably it’s because of the subject, maybe we should introduce more subjects that are more on boys like we have wood work and other subjects. Maybe they would like to take those subjects unlike studying home economics on how to cook that is more on females.”

Theme four was on peer tutoring. To put this strategy into practice, teachers reported that they would, for instance, let boys and girls who solved mathematical problems go around the class and help those who did not solve the problem. According to teachers, this enabled boys and girls to interact with each other. Boys who acted as tutors felt valuable to the class and were inspired to continue working hard at school. Moreover, according to teachers, peer tutoring of



this kind discouraged personal attacks amongst learners and promoted personal relationships based on mutual respect.

4.2 Use of appropriate teaching methods to enhance boys' academic achievement

We identified seven themes under this category.

Theme one was on using learner-centred methods. To apply learner-centred methods, teachers based their lessons on boys' interests in sport, cars and relationships with girls. In addition, teachers let learners who understood learning material to explain it to their classmates.

Theme two was on parents' involvement in the education of their sons. Teachers pointed out that parents should get involved in their sons' education by showing interest in their sons' education, monitoring their sons' homework at home, attending school meetings when they were called to hear about how their sons were doing, encouraging their sons to focus on education and by motivating them at home. One teacher explained this in the following way:

" We keep motivating our learners here at school but then at home they also need the motivation from home. So the parents also needs to talk to their kids, motivate them on whatever they are doing, showing up at parent meetings at school when being called to come check their books they should show up so that at least their kids know they are interested in what they are doing."

In addition to this, teachers implored parents to monitor their son's use of leisure time by ensuring that they did not overly waste time on activities that were irrelevant to education.

Theme three was on relating school work to physical and social reality. Teachers reported that to make education authentic to boys, they related what they were teaching at school to what was happening at home and anchored in reality. According to them, doing this was important because boys easily 'switched off' in class when they were forced to learn material that was overly theoretical.

Theme four was on using teaching technologies. Teachers proposed that because boys loved technological gadgets it was advisable to use electronic media and e-learning strategies when teaching them. Examples of electronic media mentioned were video cameras, power point projectors, smart phones, laptops, digital cameras, smart boards and other types of teaching technologies. Examples of instructional e-learning platforms were zoom, google meet, video conferencing, and Moodle.

Theme five was on the teaching method of giving boys responsibilities. Teachers reported that in order to motivate boys, they should be given responsibilities in class. Such responsibilities could include either leading focus group discussions or heading learning groups.

Theme six was on teaching boys to plan. Teachers proposed that to promote their academic achievement, boys should be taught how to plan and schedule their educational tasks. For instance, they should be taught how to schedule the time for homework, play, attending to school work and time for socializing.

Theme seven was on removing gender bias from some school subjects. Teachers indicated that to encourage boys to academically achieve in some subjects, gender bias must be removed from them. An example of such subjects is home economics. To avoid gender bias,



all subjects should appeal to girls and boys equally. This would increase boys' interest in subjects that are biased against them. The justification for this is that boys sometimes performed poorly in some subjects because they were put off by the apparent gender bias contained in them. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“But that one I cannot buy the ideas, we cannot have a subject only for the boys. Like now what we are saying the pre vocational subject you know when it comes to these home economic, hospitality they were more advised in the south. It is just come to this area now in the north, that's why people they do not understand it. So it was like whenever you enrolled the learners, you introduce them to different field of the subject, the boys try to say wood work and they think wood work is only for the boys and home economics, needle work and hospitality is only for the girls and we will want to break that stereo type. We don't want to say this subject is only for the boys because you find the boys who is good at cooking and he became a chef, the best chefs in the world are the boys, if you just used to check on those programs, they are the men. Once a man knows how to cook he will be the best person. And then It's these designers, you cannot say only female who can design clothes. Both people can be, it depends on the talent and the capability of a person. So now with that encouragement we have girls who are good at designing, drawing, they can go for woodwork or metal work and so on. We have women who are working in mining in the mines now, engineering. It's all about encouraging them. You cannot say this one fits who. We want them to involve both talented people if you know you are able to do it then just go on.”

4.3 Strategies for learner-teacher interaction that enhanced boys' academic achievement

We identified two themes under this category.

Theme one was on the interaction between boys and male teachers. Teachers proposed that to enhance boys' academic achievement, male teachers should establish boys' clubs at school that would meet on a weekly or a monthly basis to encourage and motivate boys to work hard in school. The clubs would also instil moral values in boys by teaching them what was right and what was wrong.

“What I wanted to say is most probably to get the male teachers on board, maybe if they can come up with a group, cause like in this school specifically we have a girls club, I don't know if there is a boys club. So if the male teachers can come and then maybe on a regular basis monthly, whatever depending on how busy their schedules are then they keep encouraging these boys 'let's do this, lets study, lets what, lets what, lets what', and it will only work maybe if it comes from a male teacher. It starts now from motivating the male teachers then and then male teachers to bring in to their boys.”

Theme two was on enhancing teacher-boy interaction when encouraging boys' academic achievement. Teachers in focus group discussions reported that in school teachers tended to have positive interactions with girls but not with boys. They tended to be more approachable to girls than to boys. This made it easier for girls to ask for help from teachers who they were in good terms with. Boys however tended to be distant from teachers and they tended to be afraid of teachers. This made it difficult for them to approach teachers when they experienced learning problems. One teacher explained all this as follows:

“Yes I think so because even when it comes to socializing with learners, not to a personal level but just the interaction, you'll find that most teachers they prefer to associate with the girl learners than the boys. You'll see that the girl learner is the one who can be given the key, 'go get what, what in my office, collect the books', the boys are never given those opportunities. And sometimes the girls feel comfortable because you interact with the teacher and feel comfortable to come to the teacher and say 'Sir' or 'Miss I don't understand this and this and this', but the boy learner since they don't have that socialization with you, they are always afraid. What is ill offend her because she hasn't shown signs of wanting me close to her? So those kinds of things sometimes maybe we need to change as educators.”

To change this way of interacting with boys, teachers should relate to underachieving boys in such a way that they did not embarrass them in front of their peers, especially girls. Teachers



in focus group discussions indicated that doing this ‘crashed boys’. Teachers should instead respect boys’ humanity and self-esteem in the classroom. In other words, to enhance boys’ academic achievement, teachers should apply the approach of scaffolding when relating to boys. They should stop being unapproachable to boys. One teacher explained why doing this was important in this way:

“I think so because even when it comes to socialization with the learners... just interaction, I think most teachers prefer to associate with the girls than boys. Girls get the keys to go get something from the office, go collect the books... but not boys... girls feel comfortable to approach the teachers but boys have no socialization... they seem to be always afraid of teachers, “what if I offend her...? She shows no sign of wanting me closer to her... we need to change this”

4.4 Motivational strategies for enhancing the academic achievement of boys

Under this category we identified three themes.

Theme one was on community male motivators. Teachers proposed that to motivate boys who underachieve, schools could periodically invite successful men (i.e. perceived as role models) from various fields in the communities to come and motivate them and encourage them to be serious with education.

Theme two was on inspiring boys to learn. Teachers proposed that the delivery of the curriculum should be inviting and inspiring to boys and girls. The manner in which subject matter was delivered should not be dull, dead, unappealing. It should be inspiring. One of the teachers explained this in this way:

“ With me, not really to change the curriculum right now for maths and physical science, maybe just to include a motivation in the subject matters. I like the saying that says ‘teaching is not only about the subject content but at least you must include the real life’s situation’. Giving an example on the real life situation, motivating them for them to prosper.”

Theme three was on challenging boys to learn. Teachers expressed the view that to challenge boys to learn, one needed to create an atmosphere in which competition between boys and girls prevailed. In this atmosphere, boys should be encouraged to prove themselves and seen to be succeeding in learning. One teacher explained this process as follows:

“ My method is more the actually bruising the ego because from my observation I’ve realized that boy’s tend to be more competitive in nature so when you have a topic, you tell them about that topic beforehand so the following day when they come to class you say stuff like don’t you want to show them and they stand up and try to prove a point so next time when they fail they come back to class with that enthusiasm cause they will try to prove a point to prove to everybody else that they can do it.”

4.5 Appropriate assessment strategies to enhance boys’ academic achievement

We identified one theme under this category. To enhance boys’ academic achievement through assessment, teachers are implored to provide informative feedback on marked work promptly. In addition, they should use process and product based assessment in which both the process of arriving at solutions and the solutions are graded.

5. What else do you think can be done by teachers to support the learning of boys?

After analysing teachers’ responses to this question, we identified 22 themes which we divided into 6 categories. These categories were: *Boys’ educational support initiatives, resourcing of boys’ education, career guidance for boys, parental involvement in and support*



for boys' education, appropriate teaching strategies and school/community partnership. We present our analysis of the data under this question, category by category as follows:

5.1 Boys' educational support initiatives

We identified six themes under this category.

Theme one was on awareness campaigns on boys' educational underachievement and drug abuse. Teachers in focus group discussions proposed that to increase security for teachers who fear that boys on drugs may attack them in class, awareness campaigns on boys who underachieve and abuse drugs could be organized. In addition, through these campaigns, boys who underachieve could be made aware of their academic underachievement.

Theme two was on forming clubs whose purpose could be to sensitize boys on their rights and responsibilities, obligations, and duties as learners in schools. Such clubs could also implore the boys to appreciate the importance of education in their lives. One teacher made this point as follows:

"I think the campaign or outreach that we spoke of in the beginning, I think that is more less what we need and more of the boy club thing because these kids just need to be spoken to and then just their minds to open so that they realise that I'm in school for a, b, c and this is what is expected of me, because now they are teenagers they feel they are growing up, they are busy using drugs and you just don't know who is using drugs, go in class people are looking fishy. I think at the end of the day it's just talking to them."

Theme three was on providing psychosocial support. The point under this theme was that teachers were implored to act as positive role models for boys by being mentors who encouraged and motivated them to focus on their education. Teachers also proposed that this type of psychosocial support could be provided in boys' clubs where boys would be empowered to think, behave and relate to others in prosocial ways that would promote their academic achievement. In addition, teachers proposed that for them to succeed in school, boys should be guided and counselled.

Theme four was on character building and citizenship training through the Scouts movement. Teachers proposed that the Boy Scouts Movement could be used as a support tool for boys when developing qualities in them focused on character building, respect, discipline, commitment, service to others and citizenship training. These qualities could enhance boys' academic achievement when adapted to education. One teacher explained this in this way:

"I don't know whether this fits but I think we are lucky enough here to have the boy scouts club and I think there they are more taught about respect, being reliable and I think on that key note generally boys that are in that club are learners that are respectful and you know that type of thing. So maybe if we can encourage, even if they are from the outside, just to come and tell probably what the Boy Scout is about because they just see those boy scouts but yet they don't know what it is. So I think that can also help."

Theme five was on special programmes for boys. Teachers proposed that although the official policy focuses on equality of education for boys and girls, there should be boys' after school special programmes such as support clubs for boys on substance abuse, motivation and how to handle peer pressure. One teacher explained this as follows:

"That would be a difficult one. Should it happen in future that it must happen? Because I think our government looks at things that everybody should be treated equal. That's the first problem and then they also think that it's the girl child that is much more in danger like they say to circumstance, but I don't know if they have grown to understand that nowadays boys are also in danger; that boys are also being raped. So I think that the same way



they are setting up policies for the girl to not get pregnant is the same way they should also just set aside a rule or a policy to protect boys as well.”

Theme six was on community action against alcohol and drug abuse, and other misdemeanours perpetrated by boys. Teachers proposed that instead of condoning boys' inappropriate behaviour, owners of bars and adult patrons of bars should collectively agree to prevent boys from abusing alcohol in their presence. Adults, including parents, in the community should be responsible enough to guide and sanction boys who abuse alcohol or do any wrong things. One teacher elaborated on this as follows:

“The community as you said. If we say if we think of the community as a big, big place. So now this involves different activities that prevent boys from getting participative in activities of the school, so now I once talked to one of the business men and I asked him why would do you allow these children under 18 years old to enter the bar? and he just said what should I do? But for me once these learners of the school I find them in the bar they try to run away but they know that its only parents, the parents and the people in the community are around they don't even go away and run away. Which means the community has to be also focused on the learners whereabouts, because if we leave them just freely going to the bars and they drink whatever they want then back to school their performance will also be affected. So the parents also at home they should bring up the boys the way it's supposed to be in par with school activities. I think that is what the community is supposed to do.”

Teachers elaborated on this by pointing out that an *UBUNTU neighbourhood watch style of boys' community support* should be used when combating alcohol and drug abuse amongst boys in the community. The partners in this should include owners of cuka shops (i.e. small scale community based retail shops selling merchandise that include alcohol), parents, teachers and the Police. One teacher explained this in this way:

“Um they should also not only about the selling, I believe that can also include looking at the activities that they are doing, things that they are not doing right. Then they can at least consult either their parents or the school so that they can come and sometimes you are a parent you see someone's child that is doing something wrong but you are just passing by like it's non of your business but at the end of the day it's the whole society that is dying. So they can talk to the school to report such a case then the teachers can consult the parents. At least that way they are helping out and they will be afraid where ever they go they know if I am doing something wrong in the community I might find myself in hot water.”

Another teacher made a similar point in the following manner:

“I just wanted to add something on what he said that I think there is a need for unity between the school and the near by community. The way that if the community sees for example a boy jumping the fence, they having that right to come to principal and say I see this boy, they are having a list or he is having the right to catch that boy and bring him to the school”

The Police outreach to sensitize learners in school about alcohol and drug abuse using rehabilitated male prisoners was also highlighted and illustrated by teachers as follows:

“In the community as the question says, we have the police which usually come and they are still having a program to come, it will come on the 7th or the 11th, just to talk about alcohol and drug abuse to the learners. They bring in the prisoners, a prisoner who are rehabilitated just to talk to the learners, I think that one can also help because anyway the police they will talk to call the learners because like in Ongwediva we have girls who are also involved in taking drugs, especially in one of the school that I cannot mention, there are a lot of them now the girls taking drugs. So in that way they are doing something, or though it will include everybody who know already that most of the group that will be targeted are the boys.”

5.2 Resourcing of boys' education

We identified three themes under this category.



Theme one was on providing physical resources to enhance boys' academic achievement. Teachers advised that to motivate boys to stay in school through sport, physical resources in the form of serviced soccer, netball, basketball and rugby fields, balls, and boots are needed. In addition, instruments, materials, chemicals and working computers are needed in physical science, chemistry, accounting and Mathematics (subjects that boys usually like). The point was that in the absence of these physical resources, it would be difficult to offer appropriate education to boys.

Theme two was on financial resources. Teachers pointed out that financial resources were needed to pay for field trips that may motivate boys to stay in school, extra mural activities, additional school materials in the absence of a school fund and in the absence of schools asking parents to contribute to the education of their children, including boys. One teacher explained the need for financial and other resources thus:

"I also think that with the current situation that we are in now with schools not being able to have funds, it also puts a constraint on certain things we would want to do project stages. Like you said resources, we have the school bus but then sometimes we cannot use the school bus because of lack of money and we are told that there is not enough money to put fuel in the bus, but then sometimes you know when you expose somebody to something then people tend to do things better. Many kids that are around here probably haven't been to Swakop, they haven't seen the ocean. Now if you try to expose these learners and say okay so this weekend we gonna go to Swakop and then you know coming back here like all these things are so nice but now if you know that if you want to be on the soccer team you have to behave at school, you have to be at class every day, you have to pass all your tests then and then if you say we are going to where, where, I think it will help the learners but then with the constraints we have and with all this economic down turn it puts a lot of strain on us with the lack of resources that we have. We can only go a certain mile. Even the other day the minister said that we cannot even ask the learners to do any contributions. Yet we had a day when the kids were wearing civvies, we say okay now you pay two dollars but nowadays, I mean it was in the newspaper that they said that even if you say you'll withhold their report card then they will lock you up. So I mean also coming to resources, the books, I mean that was one way of us keeping our resources at school. Like text books. Because if a learner loses all the text books I mean are we still obliged to give that learner his report card? Because probably he should return those books isn't it? Because it's not his books but then now where do we draw the line."

Theme three was on resource mobilization through public/private partnerships. Teachers in focus group discussions in one school agreed with the suggestion that financial resources could be raised through public/private partnerships. For instance, it was suggested that schools could approach industries such as mines and private companies such as Waltons, Pupkewitz, and several fishing companies to solicit sponsorships for boys' clubs and other boys' educational initiatives.

5.3 Career guidance for boys

We identified one theme under this category.

The only theme under this category was on creating a variety of curriculum options on which to base careers boys could choose from. Teachers suggested that boys should be provided with comprehensive career guidance after the Educational System increased curriculum options. This would enable boys to have a variety of career options to choose from. This meant that the school curriculum should be open enough to support a variety of boys' career interests and needs. One teacher explained the need for increasing curriculum options this way:

"I think also when it comes to options we only have, when it comes to grade 8, a few subject choices that you have and sometimes when you look at somebodies report card and then you ask 'what do you want to become?'"



and then this person will still tell you 'I want to become a doctor' or when they write an essay then he says he wants to become a doctor but you know for a fact that this guy there is really, you can see, even mathematics, you know those subjects that he needs. But then if you take this learner to the next class probably the history class then the learner is better there. So sometimes you don't sensitize those other subjects, you only sensitize mathematics and science but the other subjects we don't sensitize them to say that even if you don't have the subjects you can still do this."

5.4 Parental involvement in and support for boys' education

We identified four themes under this category.

Theme one under was on responsibility-inducing parenting of boys. Teachers proposed that parents should raise boys to care by giving them tasks to do and chores to perform at home. Boys should be made responsible by letting them achieve particular family goals such as tending to a vegetable garden, looking after livestock, running a family business, helping parents at the farm, helping parents at home, taking the garbage bin out, being in charge of family obligations, going to buy groceries for the family, doing dishes and participate in civic duties.

In addition, to help boys succeed in school, teachers implored parents to raise them in a manner that was firm, consistent and instructional. Parents were urged not to give boys too much freedom at home and not to spoil them by allowing them to do whatever they wished to do without restraint, without boundaries and without consequences for wrong doing. One teacher illustrated this reasoning by saying the following:

"Just to cement there. Maybe as parents we should not allow too much freedom that we give to the boys, because the same freedom that they have at home is the one that they try to have at school and then that leads them to lose focus. Because when they come to school they also want to have the same freedom and then that one leads them to disrupt the classes and so forth because they want to have the freedom that they used to have at home."

Theme two was on parental involvement in the education of sons. Teachers urged parents as members of their communities to be interested and involved in the education of their sons. One teacher expressed this view by indicating:

"I think parents should show, it's more like what my colleague said, they should just show more interest in their school, their sons and daughters education because here we don't see parents calling to ask about their children's progress at school but for me personally if I had a son I would obviously have my son's teachers number, but here hmm mm. So I think they should show, they should really be interested and be supportive to their kids."

In addition, teachers pointed out that the laissez-faire attitude parents had towards their sons undermined the sons' interest in and focus on education. As a result of this, boys underperformed and in a number of cases dropped out of school. One teacher expressed this view as follows:

"And even us parents we favour our boys. Even if they go out and they come in the middle of the night, even if they come the next day, we don't even ask them where they have been. You were not supposed to go out this time so you were supposed to do your school work. And that tendency, if that person, if they happen to go with that tendency of going and not being given some correction from their actions then it will become a habit and then they will not know what they are doing it's immoral and that contribute to their poor performances at school and all what they do its dropping."



Moreover, teachers disapproved parents tendency not to care when their sons dropped out of school. Teachers observed that to some parents their sons' dropping out of school was taken as a normal act. Teachers advised that to be supportive to boys, parents and the community should be seriously involved in their education and their lives. One teacher explained parents' lack of care of their sons' education in this way:

“Even if they drop the parent they will not even ask why did you drop out. Why are you not going to school? They just look at it as a normal thing to do, but if parents intervene and the community at large if they intervene, I believe they will make an impact. A small change and a small change it matters. It's better than nothing.”

Theme three was on contextualizing human rights when socializing boys. Although controversial, teachers expressed the view that the human rights perspective of boys' socialization undermined communities' ability to adequately raise them unfettered. According to teachers, this perspective should be reconsidered with the view of adjusting it to the African way of raising children. The support for this was that other societies in the world had opted out of some sections of the Convention on the rights of the child. For instance, some Muslim nations and the United Kingdom had done this. The United States of America took a long time to ratify the convention on the rights of the child. Teachers argued that consistent with this trend, African parents should be allowed to use corporal punishment in moderation when raising sons. In addition, this was consistent with article 31 of **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** (AU, 1990) which stipulated that “Children have responsibilities towards their families and societies, to respect their parents, superiors and elders, to preserve and strengthen African cultural values in their relation with other members of their communities.” One teacher expressed the following to support the argument that African parents should be allowed to raise their sons according to their cultural values.

“ Because the government also needs to come in here, it's now government, it's now community and its parent because if it's only a parent and community then there is nothing we can do. But if the government also comes in I believe we will make an impact on the behaviour of the boys because if you see now these laws of this government that they have put even. It's even restricts us. As a teacher and as a parent, you have to discipline your child because the moment you want to discipline your child the government have already now put up some limits. “It's the right of the child” and with those rights like she have mentioned, those are the rights that are spoiling and destroying our kids and we have to make sure that actions they are suffer consequences attached to it. So that one is destroying our kids. The government must come in and rectify this process.”

Teachers also argued that human rights and women empowerment should be reframed to concretely focus on men and boy empowerment as well. In other words, boys should be as empowered as girls were. Doing this would support the enhancement of boys' academic achievement.

“People were raised very well but now after independence it's where the problem came from. Maybe when the human rights were introduced, now the parents start withdrawing from their responsibility of raising their sons. It's not their responsibility so that's why they just leave. And I think it also starts with when the empowerment come because when traditionally the girls were just for you it's just to cook, give birth and so forth and to raise the children but when the women empowerment comes, now the boys become more neglected and then we focus more on the girls. That's why.”

To us, the importance of teachers' arguments on reframing the human rights perspective of socializing boys hinges on opening up the debate regarding updating and strengthening the socialization of children in the African context. The central question to be answered here is: ‘What are appropriate values for raising African boys who become useful to their communities and to themselves?’



Theme four was on equal treatment and provision for boys and girls. Teachers expressed the view that boys and girls should be provided for equally. Boys tended to be given less material, financial and social support by parents than girls. According to teachers, this unequal provision of resources and support discriminated against boys and undermined their academic achievement. One teacher provided this view on this:

“I wanted to say the parents also discriminate the children, boys and girls. Like for example you are sending your child to school, you give the girl whatever she may need from the groceries, the stationeries and everything but for boy you will just get a little then you say go to school, you are a boy you don’t need to have everything.”

Another teacher explained the apparent discrimination of boys by their parents in this way:

“Maybe we should inform the parent during the parent meeting to just weigh the children as the same, not again to say I have to buy this for the girl especially when it come to blankets because this time they can feel cold, this is the time they are feeling cold and you can find them even sleeping together because they want to put those two blankets together. But the girls are having nice bedsheets and so on. It start with the parent, it is already discouraging, you know whatever you give to the girls you cannot give to the boys. So It’s to talk to the parent during parent meeting just to treat the children equally.”

5.5 Appropriate teaching strategies to enhance boys’ academic achievement

We identified three themes under this category.

Theme one was on gender mixed grouping. Teachers suggested that to promote boys’ academic achievement, girls who academically perform well should support boys who do not perform well and vice versa. Teachers should be implored to encourage friendships between boys and girls by asking them to work in gender mixed pairs. Boys and girls should be encouraged to mingle closely and talk or converse with each other. Teachers indicated that it was only after this that girls could be of support to boys and beware that boys were having problems. In addition, teacher should monitor the activities of boys and encourage girls who wish to support boys.

Theme two was on learner-centred classrooms. To avoid boys getting bored in the classroom, teachers suggested that they should make their classes more interesting by using learner-centred methods than teacher-centred methods of teaching. Examples of learner-centred teaching methods that teachers gave were scaffolding, peer tutoring, cooperative learning and peer assessment. One teacher explained how peer assessment worked as follows:

“Peer assessment is where I make use of the learners to assess themselves, maybe they comment on, let me say it’s a group discussion, or group presentation then you ask others to bring in their views and all those types of things or maybe it’s a learner demonstrating a work on a chalk board, you ask others what do they feel or it’s on paper, it depends on what is going on in the class.”

Theme three was on gender-based competition. Teachers proposed that because boys were competitive and they hated to loose, one way of motivating them to learn was to let them compete with girls, as two separate gender-based groups. According to teachers, this would inspire boys to actively participate in their own learning. Two teachers explained how they would put this teaching strategy into practice. The first teacher had the following to say:

“I think putting up competitions against different genders could also motivate because if you give an activity where girls are competing against the guys then the boys will not be willing to be defeated by the girls and the girls will do hard to defeat the boys.”



The second teacher illustrated the teaching strategy as follows:

“Yeah I am supporting what she have said because what I do with my junior, before they write a test I tell them that the gender that performs well, I will buy them sweets. Then at one instance the boys got the highest percent when I calculated the average. So that would also improve.”

5.6 School-community partnerships

We identified two themes under this category.

Theme one was on encouraging men to assume leadership positions in society in order for them to become effective role models for boys. Teachers suggested that the community should encourage men to assume leadership positions in all social institutions such as schools, churches, clubs, companies, and political parties in order to let them act as role models for boys. Men should not be PASSIVE and let women take over leadership roles in all spheres of life. Boys were to emulate men who were active in their communities and not emulate men who were drunkards at drinking outlets such as *Shebeens*.

In addition, they should not emulate men who were complacent and acted like vegetables. One teacher explained this as follows:

“Yeah that’s what I was saying, I think that it’s maybe time that the community must educate itself to give back the male what he has lost. We have lost leadership. Everything is just going to women and the men have now started sitting with their hands folded. You can see the statistics, even in the class, like my class, the male class captain is just fade out there, the girl is doing everything. Now today when I ask him he say ‘no I’m not a class captain for a long time’. We have seen even in churches, leadership roles have changed. The men are sitting in the benches now and the women are active. Everywhere you can see, you can just look at our school (Laughs). I don’t have to go far. We are just there, we have become passive. I think community has robbed the man of leadership roles and as a result we just like ‘ah let the women do it, us we are going to sit there at the shebeen’. That’s how the boys drop out”.

Theme two was on school-home partnership. Teachers suggested in this theme that to reduce boys’ lack of participation in education school should follow up boys who absent themselves from school frequently and find out why they stayed away from school. Schools should let parents of such boys know about their son’s absenteeism.

In addition, teachers expressed the view that schools and parents should advise boys on cyber hygiene and cyber intelligence. The two partners should encourage boys to use the internet and social media for educational purposes only. To ensure that this takes place, parents should monitor what boys do on the web.

To further amplify on this teachers suggested that parents should concretely be encouraged by schools to actively participate in the motivation of their sons. They should be called to school to discuss with teachers and their low performing sons about what should be done to improve the boys’ performance. One teacher described this like this:

“The school must also call the parents of the boys that are under performing, must call the parents to school, maybe the parents can talk to their kids better than we do at school because kids tend to understand their parents better than the teachers”.

Another teacher affirmed the suggestion on involving parents in the education of their sons as follows:



“May I come in here? It sounds like a very good observation and I couldn’t resist making a suggestion. If we start that same practice already at grade eight it might reduce the number of parents you need to contact at grade ten because you have already changed their pattern and the earlier we do it actually the better chances we have, because sometimes once the pattern has gone on they say all habits die hard. So the parent will come in, the teacher will talk but for one or two these children will continue in that poor performing trend but if we have acted earlier they might have managed to change by grade nine or first term grade ten.”

Teachers further suggested that the church as an institution in the community should collaborate with the school in the socialization of boys. According to them, the church could be brought into the school to instruct boys about what life is and how it can be made better. One teacher expressed this suggestion in the following way:

“ And also this one I am speaking under correction, maybe the church is part of the community. The church also need to come in now, that way to talk to boys because we can see the dangers that they are going in and if the church comes in just to speak to boys because most of the times, maybe it started with the women empowerment because of the culture that was that the boys are the ones but now the boys are now neglected. So now it’s a high time that the church comes in just to speak to boys how life should be, how they must socialize and all these things and how they must go in line with the word.”

6. What resources do you need to enhance the learning of boys?

We identified ten themes under this question which we divided into four categories. These categories were on *material resources, human resources, financial resources and social resources/services*.

6.1 Material resources that would be needed to enhance boys’ academic achievement

We identified two themes under this category. Theme one was on consumables for ARTS and other practical subjects as physical science, biology and chemistry. Teachers pointed out that in ARTS and other practical subjects, materials, science labs, equipment and chemicals that enable boys to work with their hands, create things and experiment should be procured. One teacher expressed the need for these materials as follows:

I think like in most of our schools we don’t have these resources that are needed like in arts, wires, threads, where boys can learn to do things with their hands because those are the things they are interested in and even create a remote driven car, those kinds of experimentation. But in most of our schools in Namibia, we don’t, we are not exposed to such resources, we don’t have them. Mostly in arts either they are dancing or singing or drawing, they are not creating something with their own hands.

Theme two under this category was on sports facilities. Teachers expressed the view that to motivate boys to stay in school and do well, there was a need to make available to schools specialized play grounds in the form of soccer and rugby pitches, basketball, netball and tennis courts. In addition, sportswear, soccer balls, rugby balls, net balls, basketballs and tennis balls would be required by schools.

6.2 Human resources needed to enhance boys’ academic achievement

We identified one theme under this category. Teachers expressed the need for more male teachers who would act as role models for boys. This was necessitated by the fact that there were more female teachers than male teachers in the Namibian schools. One teacher said the following on this:

“Me I feel there is a need for more male teachers or male educators because in most of the schools you’ll find that the ratio even between the teachers, there are more women than men.”



6.3 Financial resources needed to enhance boys' academic achievement

We identified one theme under this category. Teachers pointed out that in addition to the fact that money was needed to purchase materials and equipment and pay for sport facilities, scholarships were needed to pay for the education of boys who came from poverty-stricken backgrounds. This would prevent such boys from dropping out of school. One teacher explained this need as follows:

I also feel that we should, there are boys that drop out of school maybe because of financial issues and all that. I would believe that there should be some scholarships to fund their studies while as they go to school. We have girls being given sanitary pads, some help, toiletries, if we can also have that to look at boys who are coming from disadvantage backgrounds then at least they are receiving things like that then maybe we can retain them in school."

6.4 Social resources/services needed to enhance boys' academic achievement

We identified three themes under this category.

Theme one was on dedicated social initiatives/services to enhance boys' academic achievement. Teachers suggested that boys should be provided with practical experiences in order for them to stay in school and academically achieve. These experiences could be availed to boys in boys' social and sports clubs. One teacher had this to say on this:

If we want to enhance the performance of the boys in schools we should introduce more practical lessons, boys are more left brain and girl are right brain, so boys are more logical, they like more practical things. They will touch here and make the desks, they like more IT and computer lessons, girls are more theoretical. Our schools are more theoretical, that is why girls are performing better, if we had more practical, boys would also do better."

Theme two was on enhancing boys' academic achievement by availing to them leadership positions. Teachers proposed that to encourage boys to remain in school instead of dropping out of school, they should be provided with leadership positions. They urged schools to create leadership positions for boys where they did not exist. For instance, teachers suggested, boys could be given leadership positions in sport to encourage them to come to school and remain in school. One teacher explained the need thus:

"One thing that I think we have to involve these boys maybe in leadership positions or sport activities because if we have to assign a leadership, sometimes it will encourage the person to come to school just because of that leadership, just because if I didn't come to school then how will the teachers say about me, I'll just go and by coming he'll get one thing or two. And also sport is very important because that's what they like, most of the boys they like sport. If he feels like maybe he is not part of the schools team then he feel like I'm not part of that school so why should I go and participate."

Theme three under this category was on boys' representation in text books to enhance their academic achievement. Teachers were of the view that boys' images were under-represented in textbooks. The majority of the pictures in school textbooks did not speak to the lives of boys. This did not inspire them to excel in school. One teacher explained this as follows:

"And resources like text books they must involve too much pictures also of boys because currently the pictures they are just more like girls, even if you can see here (points at book), it's already showing a lot of girls."



7. How can the school subject syllabi (Grades 10-12) be revised to meet the needs of the boys better?

We identified nine themes under question 7 which we divided into three categories. These categories were on *all school subject syllabi should include practical components, translating all subject syllabi in a manner that speaks to boys' interests and no review of the syllabi is required to meet special needs of boys.*

7.1 All school subject syllabi should include practical components

We identified two themes under this category. Theme one was on enhancing practical components in all subjects to promote boys' academic achievement. Teachers proposed that because boys preferred the hands on approach rather than the theoretical approach to education, practical components should be enhanced in all school subjects. For instance, boys tended to do well in Physical Science and Mathematics because these subjects were taught in practical ways.

Theme two was on including practical training in all subjects. Teachers indicated that in order to link theory to practice in all subjects and in order to enhance relevance of the curriculum to boys' experiences, practical training in the form of field visits and excursions should concretely be implemented in all subjects.

7.2 Translating all subject syllabi in a manner that speaks to boys interests

We identified six themes in this category. Theme one was on translating all school subjects' curricular in practical ways. Teachers indicated in this theme that the main issue was not to revise the curriculum but to translate it in practical ways. For instance, excursions, tours and research projects are part of the Geography curriculum. These practical experiences make Geography more accessible to boys.

Theme two was on making financial resources available for practical subjects. Teachers argued that it was not sufficient money to translate the curricular of subjects practically. Money should be made available to buy requisites for practical teaching.

Theme three was on including boy-related content in all subject curricular. Teachers argued that the educational system should not only feminise but also masculinize curricular in all subjects. For instance, content in the curriculum on gender based violence, alcohol and drug abuse, gang violence, and sport science should be included in biology, life skills, history, languages and science to speak to the needs of both boys and girls. One teacher expressed the following on this point:

"Maybe it's not too much of revision but remember those days it was more of masculine portrait of them but maybe we should try to strike a balance again, or though we are still trying to balance it with female characters being represented in text books and all that but maybe we should also include maybe a certain thing like in the life skills or a cross curricular that pertain more to the boys. Especially that is have to address with issues that are mostly with boys like the violence and the abuse of substances that mostly impact them so like we have teenage pregnancy that impacting girls, we have included it in the curriculum so maybe if we can have the social impact of alcohol and violence and gangs in some of the curriculum maybe we can help them being informed."

In addition, the social sciences curriculum like Life Skills should include psychosocial support content on boys who are not normally attended to when they are depressed or they



are going through emotional problems. Another teacher expressed the following in support of this view:

“Maybe this is not part of it but in some culture they feel like boys or men are strong. You cannot cry, you cannot express your emotion but there you have a lot of problems that you are going through so sometimes we ignore or we just look a blind eye on the emotional problems of these boys.”

Teachers further stated that the biology and life skills curricular should highlight and accentuate the male anatomy in their coverage. This would enable boys to understand how their physical sexuality could be mustered at a biological level. This would also enable them to understand sexual abuse from a male’s or boys’ perspective. This was elaborated upon in this way:

“ Maybe also in life science we have, we talk about the menstrual cycle but nobody really knows what goes on when a boy is having a ‘wet dream’, so nobody when they are becoming teenagers they are also confused, they don’t really understand the emotions and what is going on and I feel like when we are teaching reproduction the focus is more on the female anatomy, they only really focus on the girls. It’s like we just pass it by like know that there is a private part for males but then there is no focus for them where you put the boys like they should understand their body and how if they find themselves in certain situations how are they supposed to deal with it. So I feel like maybe that part of it should also be included so that they also feel like when I’m going to school I’m also part of it. They have a lot of questions and they giggle a lot. But they don’t have the confidence to ask when things are being spoken, especially being a female teacher, teaching their part, they feel like what do you have to do with this and why in public but when you begin to talk about the females they want to hear but for them why in the public and sometimes there are questions that are not answered, they are shy to ask those questions and I believe if they had the clubs and those things they can ask such questions.”

In theme four, teachers proposed that boys could be reached in teaching not by revising the curriculum per se but by identifying their needs, interests and strengths and then relating the content of the curriculum to these aspects. This implies that the teaching of boys should be informed by their needs, interests and strengths. It also means that the curriculum should be boy-friendly by being activity-oriented, relevant to boys and related to boys’ physical and psychological needs. One teacher depicted this as follows:

“ What we teach is mostly theory in most of subject... boys are more practical... if you say they should come up with a model...of a car then you would see very nice things... so if you say my car is broken down there are boys who always try and say “my father does this at home...” if we change the syllabi to a syllabi that will meet the boys needs... like using their hands and get marks... it will take them forward... like now boys who are doing vocational training courses at Kayec...”

Theme five was on the fact that all school subjects should be open to boys. Teachers expressed the view that to demystify the belief that boys should not take subjects that are meant for girls only (e.g. Home Economic), they should be allowed to take any subject they may wish to take. This would enable them to be open minded and become less misogynistic.

7.3 Curriculum review is not required when attempting to meet special needs of boys

The only theme we identified under this category was the one in which teachers stipulated that there was no need to revise the curriculum when enhancing boys’ academic achievement because it equally catered for boys and girls and the subject choices were gender neutral.

In our view, this does not mean that the curriculum should not be ‘domesticated’ or contextualized to meet the needs and interests of boys. It should still be made relevant to boys’ concerns and learning styles.



8. What suggestions do you have on how boys should be supported by the school, teachers, fellow learners and the community in order to improve their academic achievement?

We identified 38 themes under question 8. We divided these themes into 9 categories. These categories were:

- 8.1 School support suggestions*
- 8.2 Teacher support suggestions*
- 8.3 Community support suggestions*
- 8.4 Fellow learners support suggestions*
- 8.5 School and community support suggestions*
- 8.6 School and teacher support suggestions*
- 8.7 Teacher and community support suggestions*
- 8.8 School, teacher and community support suggestions*
- 8.9 School, teacher and learner support suggestions*

We present data under question 8, category by category as follows:

8.1 School support suggestions

We identified nine suggestions under this category. Theme one was on highlighting and displaying boys' academic achievement amongst boys and not in comparison with girls. Teachers suggested that individual boy performance should be compared with other boys and not with the performance of girls. To motivate boys, this would enable them to experience success amongst themselves and not in comparison with girls.

One teacher explained this in this way:

“I think so far the school is involved in trying to motivate the boy child to catch up to the points or the marks and maybe apart from branding the kids as the highest or the top performers in the school maybe we can just also separate the ranking in gender also, then just to try to encourage the boys to do more also maybe when you rank them as these are the top ten boys and the top ten girls maybe that will also give them courage because there already a few in the school or at secondary level, it's also a disadvantage because definitely more girls will perform than the number of boys because they are already less so maybe we can also separate the gender in ranking wise in the school.”

Theme two was on making male teachers as role models for boys. Teachers suggested that schools should encourage male teachers to act as role models, guides, counsellors, mentors and advisors for boys. One teacher gave the following example on this point:

“like sometimes we group them as male learners and then the male teachers will talk to them, will try to discourage them from drug and what not stuff. Maybe that can also just continue because that's what right now the school is doing.”

Theme three was on enabling boys to be visible in class. Teachers suggested that schools should make rules that stipulate that boys should not be invisible in class by sitting at the back of the classroom. They should instead be allowed to sit either in front or in the middle of the classroom where they could be involved in classroom activities. In addition, boys could be enabled to work in pairs with girls who excel in learning activities. This is explained in the following quotation:



“Involve them in many of the activities and maybe even change the sitting arrangement cause even maybe if you have time and we could go around the whole school you’ll find that the boys are at the back. So that can be one of the things that we make it as a rule that every class, cause I see that in all of our classes they are sitting like in pairs. Maybe we can encourage them that boy, girl, boy, girl kind of sitting and it has to be compulsory. Maybe that is a start for me.”

To increase the visibility of boys further, teachers suggested that schools should recognize the presence and achievement of boys in school. They should do this by using activities that have boys highlighted and stand out in science, computers, reading and in sport. This was illustrated as follows:

“I would suggest, having a well-equipped and functional science laboratory, the library, functional computer centres and also to let boys be fully involved in sports.”

Moreover, teachers proposed that boys’ visibility could be increased by making their issues such as underachievement in education topical and discussed at school. The focus should not just be on girls’ topics such as teenage pregnancy. In addition, boys should be enabled to lead organizations such as the SRC and boys’ clubs in which the importance of education would be promoted.

Theme four was on refraining from stereotyping boys as individuals who were ill disciplined. Teachers suggested that to promote their academic achievement, boys should not be grouped together as those learners who were ill disciplined. They should not be labelled as those with behavioural problems just because they were boys. This stereotype should be refrained from because it might be used by teachers to pick on boys and blame them of acts they might not be responsible for. According to teachers, boys should not be unjustly treated because they were boys. One teacher communicated this view as follows:

“And also just maybe to do away with the perception that boys are mostly associated with indiscipline. Lets not treat them as different as such which might lead to the extent of seeing or that they are labelling them. Yes so if we can shift away from that.”

Theme five was on operating school feeding schemes. Teachers suggested that to ensure that they were not discouraged from coming to school, it was prudent to run school feeding schemes in all schools to support

boys from poverty-stricken homes. This would enable such boys to focus on education and prevent them from dropping out of school.

Theme six was on establishing fund raising social clubs for boys in need. Teachers suggested that schools should encourage the formation of boys’ clubs to raise funds and buy toiletries such as washing powder, soap, tooth paste, etc. This would promote hygiene amongst boys and raise their self-worth. The boys’ clubs could organize this by being in partnership with the public and private sectors. One teacher elaborated on this as follows:

“there are those that are a bit less fortunate but still that does not mean that you have to come on a Monday morning to school with a shirt that is dirty. So probably at the boys club you can say ok now we have this collected a little bit of money. P.P.P. Okay this is the boys club we need this probably washing powder, you know those little things on Fridays we say ok all the boys that don’t have come get your things and then you go and do your laundry or whatever because I think cleanliness will be always next to godliness because once you are clean you feel that you are amongst people, now if you don’t have that deodorant you will feel left out but now if you say that ok if there’s nothing you can come but then just the sense of responsibility but not for them”



Theme seven was on establishing awareness campaigns in schools on boys' academic underachievement. Teachers suggested that in order for boys who underachieve to receive help and support others in school (e.g. other learners and teachers) must be aware that such boys were underperforming. For instance, teachers in school should be aware that these boys are underachieving before they can focus on them. Because of this awareness campaigns on boys' underachievement should be the basis of the enhancement of that achievement. One teacher expressed this view as follows:

“I don't know now whether I should say this will be on the part of the university's thing but I was looking at also if this information that we are, all this research, all this findings from 1992, these statistics if they can be exposed to them probably it to provoke them somehow to be jealous so they can see 'oh we are remaining behind'.”

The interviewer affirmed this view by stating that one objective of the study was to make the Educational System, parents, teachers and policy makers aware that there was the problem of boys' underachievement in education that had not been paid attention to for a long time and that time had come to pay attention to it.

Theme eight was on motivating boys who underachieve in education. Teachers suggested that one way of motivating boys who underachieve in education was for schools to enable them to think about not just the present but most importantly about their future-about what would happen to them and their lives in future if they failed and dropped out of school.

Theme nine was on counselling boys who underachieve in education. Teachers suggested that schools should ensure that boys who underachieve in education had access to counsellors who would help them to understand themselves, to understand why they underperform and to understand what they could do about it.

8.2 Teacher support suggestions

The only suggestion under this category was on how to communicate with boys who underachieve in education. It was suggested here that to enhance the academic achievement of these boys, teachers should mind the language they used when communicating with them. Teachers should not use insulting language when talking to these boys. They should not ridicule, shame, embarrass, disgrace and belittle them in front of their peers. Instead, teachers should hold meetings with the boys at regular intervals to discuss their concerns, challenges and difficulties they face in school. In other words, teachers should demonstrate care and concern for these boys when they communicate with them.

8.3 Community support suggestions

We identifies twelve themes under this category. Theme one was on the suggestion that parents should be 'real parents' not only to girls but to boys as well. Teachers suggested that parents as members of the community should provide care, guidance, discipline and correction to boys as they do to girls. One teacher exemplified this suggestion by saying the following:

“So involved in such a way that they are being role models outside, in such a way that they are being parents, they are being real parents, just as much as they are being real parents to the girl child. They should just do the same thing to the boy child. If they are seeing a boy child hanging around in the street at the time that is not right, they must just do exactly the same thing that they would have done if it was a girl child and just to give them that support”



In addition, parents should realize that boys were as vulnerable as girls. Because they were unable to protect themselves they needed care, protection and guidance from parents as girls needed protection, care and guidance from parents. Moreover, parents should encourage the development of responsibility in boys by assigning household chores to them that were in the past reserved for girls. The following quotation is on this.

“The support they need and they should not assume boys are there they can protect themselves, no that thing, we should leave that thing in the past and the fact that they are only assigning certain duties to girls that is also making boys lazy and making them not responsible enough, hence when you see them coming to school they are not taking up their school work seriously, they are not doing their homework instead they wait for the girl child to complete before they copy. So if you could just treat these kids as kid regardless of boy or a girl. Yes.”

Teachers further suggested that parents should raise boys as strictly as they raised girls. One of the teachers explained this as follows:

“let the community also see them almost in the similar lens with the girl child, what cannot be done by the girl child should not be allowed by the boy child. If cultures could be changed, let the same strictness that parents give to the girl child also be given to the boy child because if it helps the girl child it will also help the boy child.”

When doing this parents and the community should not neglect boys by failing to discipline them when they misbehave and by giving them too much freedom to do as they please. They should discipline them as they do with girls. They also should care for their sons by monitoring their movements, whereabouts and behaviour. Moreover, they should pay as much attention to boys as they do to girls. One teacher explained this as follows:

“They must pay more attention to boys because nowadays if a boy is in the streets, like at ten o’clock and anyone is passing by and recognize that no it’s a boy, you just drive straight, you won’t be bothered, but if you see it’s girl, if you are a parent you might even say ‘where are you going?’, please go back home. So the fifty, fifty attention should be given to both genders. And again to the parents, they should give more attention to boys, they should not neglect the boy child if it has been happening”.

Theme two under this category was on changing the ‘pigeon-hole’ type of socialization for boys and girls. Teachers suggested that there should be community changes in the manner socialization of boys and girls was arranged and organized. In addition, there should be changes in socialization conventions of what was right for girls to do and what was right for boys to do. This should be done because the disparity in the socialization of boys and girls creates conditions under which the boy child becomes prone to misbehaviour, antisocial behaviour, self-destructive behaviours and underachievement in education. Teachers gave the following examples to demonstrate this view:

“Even some teachers, sometimes if you go to a bar then you find a female learner there you might chase her out, but a male one he will leave him. Sometimes you can even buy them beer yourself but the girl you will chase her away, ‘what are you doing here?! Go and Study!’ It’s not only teachers even the families themselves. So we have crafted some places we know only boys can be there. It’s for them. It’s fine for them. So I think that kind of arrangement also in the society that set up needs to be changed at home.”

“Its fine for a girl child to go to the choir, it’s fine for the girl child to be at church but it’s not fine for the boy child to be at church otherwise he is labelled a woman but its fine for a boy child to be at a Cuka shop, at the bars. Even being the one to sell at the parents bar.”

“It’s fine for the boy child to go play street soccer but not the girl child standing around in the streets.”



To us, all this implies that if we really want boys who underachieve in education to improve their academic achievement, communities should institute changes in beliefs and practices about how such boys are socialized and treated. As is the case with girls, boys' socialization should lead to disciplined behaviour and a focused attitude towards education.

Furthermore, teachers suggested that communities should beware that boys were emotionally as weak as girls. Because of this, boys should be socialized to express their emotions and learn how to deal with them, learn that strength does not emanate from violence and learn how to handle frustrations including failure in school. According to teachers, when this is not done, boys who face problems such as being bullied in school, choose to stay from school and not seek help to have the problems solved. They bottle up everything, become irritable, lash out at everyone and become violent and sometimes become criminals. Instead of looking on, the community should reach out to such boys and help them work through their problems. This would help them remain in school. This was explained in the following way by one teacher:

“We had a case [child's name] he was not coming to class because there was a boy somewhere that the boys they were bullying him. So he chose to stay away because of that pride of not reporting. You know girls when they get bullied they will report and then the situation is handled, it's taken care of and then the child is safe but for boys I don't know, the child can be bullied so instead of reporting these things they just come home and then they have these anger tendencies. They start getting angry and start lashing out at everybody, committing suicide and instead of them seeking for help they keep all this anger to themselves until eventually they become perpetrators, that's the violence. So instead of going back to school they drop out, then that's how you find that there a lot of criminals that we have here. It starts off small with this small crimes, stealing to look for attention, breaking, vandalism, these things like we have at our schools but then we like no its just how boys are, that's the community, because boys will always be boys”

To avoid situations as depicted in the above quotation, teachers suggested that communities should make available to boys who underachieve in education counselling, guidance, psychosocial support and care facilities where they could be helped, encouraged and nurtured. Families in communities, NGOs, UN agencies and Faith based organizations should also provide such services and facilities to support boys who underachieve in education. One teacher expressed the need of such services and facilities in the following way:

“But then nobody is actually realizing that these kids they are crying out for help. So we will be like you are suspended, but nobody really takes it, they are not really nurtured and talked to like how we talk to our girls because most of the times when we talk to our girls here they end up crying and get really emotional, like no I'm going to change but for boys it's like this mentality has been embedded in them ever since they were small, grade one like no boys they don't cry, boys don't seek for help, you must be strong but then they have this violence things, become criminals, by the time they end up seeking for help the child is in jail.”

Theme three under this category was on empowerment of men to become competent role models for boys. Teachers expressed the view that the low self-esteem and stress experienced by men because of not being effective heads of households should be addressed in the community. According to teachers, men experience low self-esteem and stress because of low education attainments and because of earning less money than women. As a result of this they tended to engage in gender based violence and child abuse. The children – including boys- who experienced this abuse tended not to do well in school. To avoid this, teachers suggested, men should be empowered in the community in order to become effective role models for boys. In addition, a link should be made in the community between men's poor educational attainments and gender based violence and child abuse. The quotation that follows expresses this suggestion.



“How they are affected by the way they were brought up. All those things. Because nowadays you will find that it’s true that most women are more successful than the male and now men tend to feel to have this low self-esteem because you are supposed to be this man that provides for your family but now it’s the opposite. The women have more money than the men. So the low self-esteem brings even stress even no peace and stuff like that. Those kinds of things towards the woman and even towards the children so those kinds of things they need to see they are brought up by way you were taking your education. If you don’t take it seriously this is what will happen.”

Theme four was on community support for boys. Under this theme, teachers suggested that communities could sponsor boys who are disadvantaged to remain in school, schools could invite speakers from the community to inspire and motivate boys and as they were doing for girls, communities should provide targeted support to boys. In addition, communities should provide boys with empowerment opportunities as they did with girls. The following quotation illustrates these suggestions:

“Okay maybe we start with the motivation as it’s usually the one that we always get from outside people, outsiders. The focus is more on the female, that is the girls, the girl child, even the bursaries that they offer sometimes, females are more at the advantage of receiving or being given bursaries so maybe if the community members or the sponsors, the motivational speakers, each one can focus again more on the males then it will help because the reason why I think girls are more empowered nowadays because in the past women were disadvantaged and then the concentration became more on the female and we started neglecting the male.”

Theme five was on community crime prevention amongst boys. Teachers made a number of suggestions under this theme. These were that

1. By preventing crime amongst boys, communities would enable them to remain in school and focus on education.
2. Municipalities could enforce by-laws on loitering to keep boys off the streets. One teacher expressed the following on this point: “Say for example the by-laws, people are not allowed to sit on the pavements on the streets, playing soccer in the street, those are municipal by-laws but are not enforced. The boys are everywhere and the police will just pass there and those guys are sitting there and they are planning their next crime of whatever things they want to do.”
3. Communities should be worried and do something about schools being used as sources of drugs and that some learners, especially boys, were dealing in drugs.
4. The law enforcement agencies such as the police should be involved in solving the serious community problem of alcohol and drug abuse. For instance, in some schools which are located in formerly disadvantaged communities, where drug dealing targets boys, support from the police to arrest drug dealers and prosecute them was urgently needed.
5. Boys who were targeted by drug dealers underperformed in school and emotionally struggled to make sense of what was happening to them. Such boys should be supported by communities in the form of regional, city, town and village councils.

Theme six was on community campaigns to sensitize people about boys’ educational needs. Teachers suggested that campaigns should be organized in the community to sensitize people about the educational needs of boys and how families and other members of the community could support them in education. Messages, initiatives, programmes and community projects could be organized around the education of the boy. This could involve all aspects of boys’ education, including moral education, values education, citizenship education, prosocial behaviour, beliefs and practices. The following quotation illustrates these suggestions:



“I think like how the campaign for circumcision started out, if they do something like that where they come with full force education based on boys like boys are, they are not robust. Make something like that so that they go from home to home anywhere where they are able to spread this message. I feel like it will get somewhere because our community really needs education. They need moral realization.”

Theme seven was on providing parental education on childrearing beliefs and practices. Teachers expressed the concern that because boys were allowed by parents, wide latitude to be on the street and away from home, they learnt to engage in a lot of mischief. The tragedy, according to teachers, was that parents themselves were rarely at home during most of the day and night. Because of this, the home ceased to be a site of child rearing and socialization. For boys to change and remain in school, parents must change first. For the socialization regime in the community to change, parents must directly be taught how to raise children in varied social-economic contexts. This need for parental education was justified by one teacher as follows:

“Yes exactly. So if, you see and I get to think some of these things where we indirectly allow boys to get involved in these things where parents allow the boys to be outside the houses until night. I know for example when I was growing up before sunset I should be home which is not the case now because parents themselves are not at home and the kids are allowed to be in the streets and of course in the streets that’s where we know we have got the drugs and everything else available. So if the mentality of the parents could also change and be at home and keep everybody at home and off the streets, that could also help indeed.”

Theme eight was on societal and community change with the purpose of socializing boys to focus on education and realize that crime and corruption were wrong. Teachers expressed the view that rampant corruption usually engaged in by male ‘tenderpreneurs’, male briefcase businesspeople without much education and male thieves in the public and private sector created an environment in which boys learnt the devaluation of education and the normalization of what was wrong. Boys entered into this environment and saw little need for education. According to teachers, to improve boys’ education, this corrupt environment must be changed. There is need for societal and community transformation. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“Excuse me, it’s also a societal problem like here in Namibia those who were mostly involved in quick rich schemes are males. The most ‘tenderpreneurs’ are males. Those who do corruption and everything so it becomes the norm. I don’t need education, I can become a ‘briefcase tenderpreneur’ or I can go and steal or whatever or so it’s that mentality.”

Theme nine was on parents’ rights. Consistent with what was reported in section 5.4 of this report, teachers suggested that the community and the government should look into reviewing children’s rights so that parents rights of raising children according to prosocial cultural norms were not eroded. According to them, children’s rights should not override parents’ prerogatives to socialize their children properly. Children should not act as ‘parents to their parents’. One teacher explained this in the following way:

“ Like you said, when we were growing up those years, on who’s house are you gonna go 5 o’clock in the morning, you already know that when the sun set you are supposed to be home but now you go into the street nowadays and the parents sometimes don’t even bother like to know where my child is or where the person is because they know in the end it’s going to be a fight. Those kids have so many rights and they know exactly it’s my right to be where this time and to do what but if we just go back to our old selves, like those old upbringing, maybe just go back there and do all those things. You stay with your boy in the house until whatever time that you are supposed to be there but if you are comfortable with the boy and you not being in the house at night then it’s a problem.”

Theme ten was on fathers as role models who were present and available to their sons. Teachers suggested that to act as role models fathers should make time to be at home with



their sons. They should not leave the job of parenting to their womenfolk because this led to boys growing up with the understanding that men did not stay home to look after their families. They stayed outside the home, away from their families. Teachers illustrated this reasoning in the following way:

“I wanted to add that parents must be role models for their children. Especially fathers to their sons. Fathers are very much absent in their children’s lives. Really they give that job to the mothers, the mother must do the disciplining, the mother must stay at home with them and all that and they will go wherever they want and do their business and so the boy child will always say ag a man is supposed to be outside the house and not be home.

Teachers also suggested that the absence of the father from the home may lead to boys growing up in ‘their own image’ of what a man should look like and how he should behave. One teacher explained this in the following way:

Because they don’t even have that role model as a man in the house, because a lot of these cases happen with boys that didn’t grow up with their fathers. Most of the cases are like that so they don’t have someone that they can look up to, that is they make their own perception of what a man is.”

Under this theme, teachers further suggested that to act as examples to their sons, fathers should participate in household chores when at home. Boys would resist performing such chores if they saw their fathers not performing domestic duties at home. The resistance would deny boys the opportunity of learning how to be responsible. This suggestion was articulated in the following way:

“Change the roles of the parents, what we hear from cultural point of view, men are just there, seated and everything running to them, change the roles where the fathers can also get involved in the household chores and the boys can see that we should be doing it too”

Theme eleven was on parents socializing boys to be as serious about education as girls were. Teachers suggested that parents should be as serious with boys’ education as they were serious with girls’ education. They should put as much pressure on the boys to perform well in school as they put pressure on the girls to perform well in school. In addition, parents were urged to give boys as many chores in the home as they did with girls. The point of these suggestions was that parents should put as much focus on boys’ education as they did with girls’ education. The underlying assumption was that boys performed worse than girls in education because their parents paid less attention to them than they did to girls. This reasoning was illustrated in the following way:

“ Parents should consider that, what they are doing wrong is; they focus more on the girls than the boys because they are afraid of girls to fall pregnant. They always try to encourage them to be independent and be successful. My upbringing, was similar, the boys that came after me was a thing of “if I want to go to school I can go, if I do not want to go to school I can stay, I can abscond”, at the end, the pressure is; if the girl did not perform your parents will be on your case, but not the boys. As parents, we should stop focusing only on the girls and focus on both the boys and girls, and bring a balance in everything between the girls and the boys. It is equally important to both. The responsibilities, everything is on the shoulders of the girls, making us feel like we need to achieve at school, we need to excel in our education, we need to go forward because everybody is looking upon us. The moment boys feel that the pressure is on them, they will also bring their part. If the house is dirty, they should as well be asked just like the girls “why didn’t you clean? They must bring a balance from waking up and make a bed, there should be a balance to girls and boys not separate the boys from the girls. “I am the man, I do not need education, I do not need a grade ten”, some are saying, they only want to get grade ten certificate to go, whether it is a zero as long as it is grade ten and get a job not that they want to pass. Girls want to pass and want to become who and who. I think they should also put pressure on their boy child as well



Teachers further elaborated on this by suggesting that parents should be interested in the education of their children, both boys and girls. They should be in touch with their children's teachers and ask about their children's educational progress. One teacher explained this in the following way:

"I think parents should show more... (like what he just said) parents should show more interests in their sons' and daughters' education... we do not see parents calling the school to ask about their children's progress. As a parent myself... I would personally have my child's teacher number "I would inquire about my child's progress" ... parents should show interests and be supportive to their children in their children's education."

Theme twelve under this category was on providing community based initiatives to support boys' education. Teachers suggested that initiatives, clubs, projects and community support groups such as the Physically Active Youth Centre in Katutura, should be made available to underachieving boys. One teachers explained this suggestion in the following way:

"One aspect that we cannot leave out is educating a boy child, education at school is equally important but other activities that use to take place in schools in the past, such as my future is my choice, I do not see them happening anymore, they helped a lot of boys and girls to do well for their future. I think we need clubs at schools where community can be involved, where the teachers can be involved, where learners can be involved both boys and girls. Girls clubs like FAWENA should also give scholarship to the boys to motivate them to do well at school."

8.4 Fellow learners support suggestions

We identified two themes under this category.

Theme one was on peer support groups. Teachers suggested that fellow learners could support boys who underachieve in education in the following ways:

1. Fellow learners could support boys' education by providing emotional support when boys were bullied or when they were depressed because of poor performance.
2. Fellow learners could protect boys in distress by providing them company, encouragement, companionship, friendship and peer tutoring help.
3. Learners who were able to could help boys from dropping out of school due to poverty and lack of money by donating material and money to them.
4. Fellow learners could raise funds for needy boys so that they remained in school.
5. Boys who were excelling in education and recognised as leaders amongst their peers should be deployed as peer tutors in subjects where they excelled. The justification for this was that young people listen to their friends more than they listened to teachers and parents. So, peer tutoring would be a useful tool of improving boys' education.

One of the teachers explained these suggestions in this manner:

"I think with the regard to the boys among themselves, because I realized that there is a way you can talk to young people. Then when they themselves talk amongst themselves there are those with influence, if those with influence can have the opportunity to be empowered to teach others then that, that will be working because normally young people when the adult speaks they say let him finish speaking, but they'll not take it far because they say that is how, they can even say "yes, yes!", they will say that but they normally listen to the others more than they are listening to you. Even for example what you tell them as a parent and what his friend tells him, he'll pay more attention. He'll just make sure that the parent doesn't find out. He'll hide it, but the real one he trusts is the friend. The one that feed him the information. So that is why I think that if there are those that are influential because they are always influential learners, influential youth that normally others follow, when they say something others follow. Those ones should be empowered if they can be identified they can be empowered to speak to others."



Theme two under this category was on sharing learning materials. Teachers suggested that some learners who had the means to do so could share learning materials with some boys who underachieved and were at risk of dropping out of school because of poverty.

8.5 School and community support suggestions.

We identified two themes under this category.

Theme one was on applying orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) programme strategies to vulnerable boys who underachieved in education. Teachers suggested that the community and the school could use official educational programmes that were designed for orphans and vulnerable children to support boys who underachieve in education due to poverty. This was explained as follows:

“ And I also think the reason why the males are bullied are away from studying, they are learners that are coming from vulnerable backgrounds. As a result the boy might not have proper shoes, or proper school uniform and he want to be part of a certain group, because of that now he is forced to stay home because you don't have proper shoes, proper school uniform and then you don't want to come to school with torn shoes, people are going to make fun of you. So those are some of the reasons why they are staying behind, their vulnerability and poverty. It is also contribute to the dropping out.”

Theme two was on schools and communities stopping/preventing boys from having easy access to alcohol and drugs. Teachers suggested that communities should curtail and restrict the availability of alcohol and drugs to boys. In addition, schools should seriously prevent the selling, dealing in, and buying of drugs at school premises. According to teachers this would prevent some boys who underachieve in education from being lured into crime and away from school. One teacher explained this in focus group discussions as follows:

“Maybe the other thing is also the availability of drugs and alcohol in the streets and perhaps at home. In the schools as well because they feel like some of them are the drug dealers in the school. So they feel like I'm already making so much money, what is school for?”

Another teacher amplified on this as follows:

Generally, like the community where our school is, it is very difficult because we are, or some of our learners have a problem with drugs and alcohol abuse. Mainly boys and most of the boys are involved in this types of activities. I think it is not only the community members, teachers, parents, but also outside people like police, let them come in and sort out this people who are selling such things. They are abusing boys to sell this substance. This is a very very big part of the problem as to why our boys are not performing. They are being targeted, we are certain that this is the most difficult thing they have to struggle with, boys rather do these things to get extra money and I think more than just the school or the community, all of us must get involved. Boys are being targeted, it is a big struggle with drugs and alcohol. We have teenage in our school and thus it is a main concern. We are not targeting the main problem which is alcohol and drugs abuse. It is the biggest issue.”

Teachers also suggested that to reduce alcohol and drug abuse amongst boys who underachieve in education, municipalities, town councils and village councils should enforce by-laws against alcohol abuse by minors such as underage boys. This was articulated by one teacher as follows:

“The other thing is also, if you go to Shebeens like me, you will find school going children there so municipal bi-laws are also not enforced. Those people who are selling alcohol or allowing minors inside their bars should also be brought to book, fines or whatever.”



8.6 School and teacher support suggestions

We identified three themes under this category. Theme one under this category was on the use of hostels to promote boys' education. Teachers expressed the view that boys' academic performance was increased in schools with hostels. This was the case because it was easier to maintain discipline and control over boys in the school hostel setting. Out of the school hostels, boys were negatively influenced even by their own parents to abuse alcohol. This was one of the main reasons such boys underperformed in school. Based on this reasoning, teachers suggested that boarding schools with hostels be increased to accommodate more boys and thereby promote their academic achievement.

One teacher explained the need for increasing the number of school hostels in the manner that follows:

"I have been the hostel supervisor, learners that lived in the hostel were easier to control, teachers were interacting with the learners, it was better but; the day learners that we are teaching today, it is not easy, we teach them here... after school, we do not know what happens. Sometimes you find learners drinking with their parents, although you may feel like grabbing the bottle... your hands are tight because the person is with his father or mother. It could be better to build a hostel, but that will require a lot of money. I think hostels helped a lot of learners in the past, some schools with hostels are performing better because of that control that is very strict."

Theme two under this category was on monitoring boys' school absenteeism. Because under-participation is one of the reasons some boys under achieve in education, teachers suggested that their absenteeism from school should be monitored. One teacher explained how this should be done in the following way:

"Absenteeism and we should compare them with girls. It might be that boys absent themselves more... now as a school... what is required is to monitor the records of how many days boys absents... monitoring of attendance and speak to them..."

Theme three under this category was on strengthening discipline amongst boys. Teachers suggested that discipline amongst boys in school could be promoted by asking them to do little things such as walking in a straight line when changing classes and not making too much noise in class. This would aid the effort of enhancing boys' academic achievement.

8.7 Teacher and community support suggestions

We identified two themes under this category. Theme one was on the police enforcing the law against drug dealers who target school boys in their trade. Teachers suggested that in doing this, the Police should work with schools throughout the country.

Theme two was on collaboration between teachers and parents on boys' education. Teachers suggested that in attempting to enhance boys' education, teachers should work closely with parents.

8.8 School, teachers and community support suggestions.

We identified three themes under this category. Theme one was on psychosocial support provided to boys who were sexually abused. Teachers suggested that schools, teachers and communities should provide emotional and psychosocial support to boys who were sodomised, sexually abused and in some instances raped. This should be done because



usually such boys suffer in silence. In addition to this, teachers suggested that the protection of boys from physical, emotional, sexual and relational abuse should be part of the effort to enhance their academic achievement.

Theme two was on career counselling and guiding boys against depending on offering unskilled labour that did not require education. Teachers noted that apart from selling *Kapana* and washing cars, there were several SMEs opportunities that lured some boys away from school. Girls were not lured to these opportunities as much as boys. Given this situation, teachers suggested that schools, teachers and communities should put in place mechanisms of guiding and warning boys against leaving school early to earn money by offering unskilled labour. In support of this, one teacher made the following statement:

“ But firstly I also want to think, maybe before I come to what the community’s should do, I think outside there, there are things that perhaps directly promote the poor performance of boys in schools. There are things like if you look at the number of people driving taxis, its males. People that are having this small jobs like for example where you have to go clean the yard of somebody, its males. People selling Kapana, its males. People building these small buildings for a small living, it’s males. So, car washes, its males. So I would like to think it creates a certain impression of the mind of a male child that even if I don’t do well in school I’ve got something that I could fall back to which is less for the girl.

Theme three was on monitoring/censoring boys’ access and use of the social media. To protect boys who underachieved in education from wasting time on the social media, teachers suggested that such boys’ access to the internet and other electronic gadgets should be censored by schools, teachers and parents in the community. One teacher justified this by saying the following:

we are giving our kids too much freedom... look at these search engines there is not control... kids can search whatever they want and watch whatever they want... but if the government can come in and control the search engines and focus on the educational purposes... internet also does a lot of havoc.”

8.9 School, teacher and learner suggestions

We identified one theme under this category. This theme was on ensuring that all schools had viable e-learning platforms for boys and other learners. Teachers noted that access to computers and the internet was vital in e-learning. They further observed that boys enjoyed working with computers. To enhance their academic achievement, teachers suggested that boys should have access to computers with internet connectivity and stable WI-FI. For this to happen, all schools should be stocked with adequate numbers of computers for all learners. One teacher said the following on this point.

“If there would be money in the schools, having observed that boys really hate carrying bags, they hate books and such, maybe the school could purchase computers and they could learn directly from computers and there should be a huge supply of internet, they would learn better.”

REPORT ON TEACHERS’ FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA FROM KHOMAS, KAVANGO EAST, ERONGO, KUNENE AND OMUSATI REGIONS

This section of the research report is on teachers’ Focus Group Discussion data from Khomas, Kavango East, Erongo, Kunene and Omusati Education Regions. The focus group discussions were carried out in order to triangulate the information provided by teachers from the questionnaire data. We did this to obtain more information from teachers on the achievement of boys from the five regions. Although 243 teachers from these regions provided questionnaire quantitative data, a selected number of them from 28 schools



participated in the focus group discussions and yielded qualitative data that are reported on in this section.

As was the case in other regions, teachers belonging to Focus Discussion Groups in the five regions were asked to respond to 8 focus group interview questions that were based on the study's six research questions. The interview questions were on:

- the review of the national educational policies to enhance Namibian boys' academic achievement,
- the influence of boys' socialization on their underachievement in education,
- what teachers did to support the learning of boys in their classes,
- how classroom practices could be changed to enhance boys' academic achievement,
- what else teachers could do to support the learning of boys,
- resources teachers needed to enhance the learning of boys,
- how the subject syllabi of grade 10 and grade 12 learners could be revised to meet the educational needs of boys better, and
- on suggestions teachers had on how boys should be supported by the school, teachers, the community and fellow learners in order to improve their academic achievement.

In this section of the research report, we present our analysis of teachers' focus group discussion responses to the 8 interview questions. We present the analysis interview question by interview question in the manner that follows.

Review of the national educational policies to enhance Namibian boys' academic achievement

In order to ensure learning to take place, the Ministries of Education the world over, have in place policies that spell out how teachers and learners should conduct themselves in the school environment in order for quality learning to take place. We asked the teachers during the focus group discussions what policies should be introduced in schools to enhance the boy child's academic achievement. A variety of responses were provided by the teachers. For example, some of the teachers noted the "lack" of policies that addressed the needs of the boy child as indicated by the following quotations:

"I think all the Policies we have only focus on girls. There are no policies on boys."

Some of the teachers referred to the "pregnancy Policy" as one such policy that favours girls, at the expense of boys. Another teacher indicated:

"Girls are supported by Government. Mother-Learners are supported through FAWENA. When boys impregnate girls they don't get support." And yet another teacher said: "Learner mothers receive more support. Learner fathers are left traumatized and leave school to become security guards."

Moreover, commenting specifically on the policies in existence, some respondents had this to say:

"I think at that level, focus is put so much on the girls. In the planning you see that all the policies are designed in such a way that they talk more on the girl child, they are more designed to focus on the girl child, they lost focus on the boy child, the boys are not motivated from the start; from the policies... from the document itself."

Another respondent had this to say.



“To add more to what he said, specifically that the girls are getting more attention, even the policies that we have are emphasizing girls to be in schools, girls should be there, attention is more given on girls and it enhances their self-esteem, that make them feel like; I should be doing better, I should be performing, really I am in school, really I am there so that people can understand that I am really there, and not like give me more attention as if I am not part of the system”

Nonetheless, these sentiments seem to misinterpret the “pregnancy” policy in that it does refer to the boy child also if he was responsible for a girl child’s pregnancy. Notwithstanding this, other respondents were of the view that schools tended to misinterpret these policies as referring to girls only:

“Implementation of policies should be monitored because even if the policy is for both boys and girls, people are only concerned with girls.”

Other respondents suggested the formulation of a policy that would be boy child specific so as to fill the gap left by the “lack” of boy child policies in the country. They suggested that the Government should,

“Introduce boys’ clubs as a compulsory school requirement. In the past, we had “Oshinyanga” [a family gathering around the fire where issues are discussed] at family level where boys were educated and shaped by the male members of the family and girls by the female members. Schools should respond to the gaps in society.”

Other respondents suggested making Religious and Moral Education compulsory in the school curriculum. They acknowledged its inclusion in the school curriculum, but decried the fact that it was optional for learners and those who taught were not trained to do so;

“Introduce religious and moral education. Yes, it is there (in the curriculum), but it is not compulsory and it is taught by people who are not qualified to teach it. It is better if it is taught like Life skills but by someone who specialized in Theology and/or Psychology.”

We treat boys and girls totally differently. There is too much emphasis on girls when learner-pregnancy is discussed? The girl is pampered and the boys do not carry a sign of pregnancy so nobody sympathize with them. Hence, they do not receive support. And the suffering of boys is under-rated. We have a boy here in the school whose mother is a complete alcoholic. The boy does not have a father. If he does not work, how will he survive? He is forced to work even the law says children may not work. Now he sells drugs.

From the above quotations, it is clear that some of the respondents were not aware of the existence of policies addressing gender issues in education, while others were not clear about the contents of one of the “policies” that were meant to guide them in their day to day interaction with their learners. In addition, their responses seem to suggest that, the boy child was not being fairly treated in the education system due to lack of specific policies addressing his needs and this “contributed” to his poor academic performance in school.

This conclusion suggests that a program should be undertaken to raise awareness about the ministerial policies, the contents and the implications thereof for teachers and learners. Teachers are the implementers of policies by virtue of their roles as adults in *loco parentis*. It is the teachers who should model positive behavior on gender equality, respect, response to children’s vulnerabilities in a positive manner, etc. as regulated by the education sector policies. The teachers’ inadequate knowledge about the policies and their content renders ineffective the process of policy implementation and by implication the change of the dynamics that negatively affect the education of the boy-child.



The influence of boys' socialization on their underachievement in education

It should be pointed out that learners grow up in a particular social environment augmented by cultural and traditional values, belief systems, all of which inform behaviour patterns and coping mechanisms. Their world view is therefore shaped by that environment (Rens J. in Gous and Roberts, 2016). During the focus group discussions, respondents were asked to indicate whether the way the boy child was socialized at home had an impact on his achievement in school.

Their responses seem to suggest parents being protective of the girl child. Some of the responses were the following:

"I think boys do not have a lot of responsibilities, as a mother I would rather let my son go out to the friends than my daughter, because for the daughter is a bit more dangerous, so now the boy grows up with that 'I do not have a lot of responsibilities',". Another respondent said, "The girls are indoors and do take time to read and do homework, but when a boy is indoors reading, he is perceived as a sissy."

On the other hand, the boy child is left to pick his own direction in society, to be independent of his parents. That is, *"They are raised to be tough and not complain. They end up doing drugs because they cannot handle the stress."*

This "freedom" tended to lead them astray, into drug and alcohol abuse and often resulted in the boy keeping bad company, with boys who were not interested in school, and usually joined gangs. One respondent opined,

"You will never find them (boys) talk about Bible study or work. So they are vulnerable to peer pressure" whose emphasis was 'Let's go drink'; 'let's do what?'"

The respondents also seemed to suggest that the lack of a father figure in most homes where the learners came from, which were headed by females also contributed to the boy child's poor underachievement in school work.

"Now there are more single mothers and children no longer belong to the community." "Boys no longer do what they are culturally expected to do. They don't help with planting, building houses, etc. and so they miss on traditional education. In the past, boys were substitutes to the father. When he was not there, all duties continued as usual. Now they imitate others in doing wrong things. They prefer loitering in the streets and using substances."

Further, the boys tended not to respect or hold high regard for their mothers. *"In our society, the way we are raised, the culture make them superior especially in Oshiwambo culture. A boy can eat up your "Oshikwiila" [traditional bread] and all you can do is cry. Your mother cannot act"* said one respondent. Another had this to say: *"... some female teachers even cry because the boys want to take the class over based on that power they are given at home."* This disrespect of mothers and single mothers in particular by boys was vividly illustrated by one respondent who shared an episode in her school where a boy said to his mother; *"... You don't go to school and use your big mouth at school. You will come see me at home"*.

The cultural way of raising boys differently from girls was demonstrated by this point: *"We stigmatize girls when they smoke, do drugs or use alcohol. We make a big deal out of it and everybody is ready to advise such a girl. But with boys, it's as if we say, it's okay, after all, those are normal things boys do. And this is how we lose them"*.



This demonstrates the continuation of community practices in the school. Schools are microcosms of the society in which they operate and unless there are deliberate efforts to disrupt practices that are detrimental to certain individuals or groups, such practices will continue unabated and normalized and boys will continue under-performing in school.

What teachers should do to support the learning of boys in their classrooms

Learners spend a substantial amount of time at school than at home with their families. It is also true that in most cases the majority of learners hold teachers in high esteem and learn from them as real life models. The teachers are in this regard agents of socialization of their learners and might be better agents of change in the learners' behaviour for good and higher achievement. Accordingly, in the focus group discussions, teachers were asked to indicate how they promoted the boys' education in their classes. A variety of ways were indicated as shown in the following quotations:

*"I try to have everyone engaged in class. When I give homework, I focus on boys."
"I give them more tasks to do like the ladies; they like sitting in the back. I invite the naughty one to come to the front. I ensure that they participate."*

"We conduct meetings in dormitories. In these meetings, we discuss their lifestyles and focus on things like drugs; gangsterism; pregnancies; poor performance in school."

*We have more clubs addressing girls' issues than boys' issues.
We need to call boys and motivate them. This will break up those gangs they form and transform them into positive clubs.*

Teachers should identify boys with social problems. This should become a Policy matter: to accommodate those with social problems in the hostel and pay special attention to them.

There ought to be holiday camps for boys who used to perform well and have fallen behind, just like vacation classes that are organized.

We need to empower boys through sport activities. Boys enjoy outdoor activities. And one can use those opportunities to have man-to-man talks with them.

Some respondents were truthful enough and indicated that they did nothing to improve the boy child's achievement in their classrooms, because they were not aware that the boy child was at risk of failing or dropping out of school:

"Honestly, some of us don't have knowledge and skills about these issues. We did not even realize the boys are in danger. We do very little." "I never knew that boys under-perform. Only now I see the reality. I will start paying attention to them."

They further indicated that they lacked information on what boys liked;

"I think we lack information on what interest the boys, just to have an understanding, than it will be easier for us at classroom level to adjust and use methods that are appealing to the boys also."

Some respondents blamed the policy on abolition of corporal punishment for doing nothing:

*"Learners have an attitude that you can't tell them anything. You cannot touch or push them or anything. So we teach and hope they grasp anything. Without corporal punishment, **we are toothless dogs** (emphasis added). Policy should address this freedom of learners."*

In such an environment teachers are scared to do anything that might "offend" the boy child even if it was for the learner's good and improvement. Throughout the data, there was very



little reference made to the alternatives to corporal punishment. This could be indicative of non-acceptance of such alternatives to mitigate learner-misbehaviour (Kamenye, 2019).

How classroom practices could be changed to enhance boys' academic achievement

It should be pointed out that Namibia has encouraged the use of learner centred philosophy as a mode of classroom practice (NIED, 2003; NIED, 2015) even though van Graan (1999) found that its practice varied from teacher to teacher and that often it was only group work that was emphasised at the expense of the other aspects that define learner centred teaching. In order to identify reasons for the observed boys' under-performance in education, it was necessary to find out whether classroom practices needed to be changed to enhance the boys' performance. The responses below reflect the different aspects of the classroom practices that needed to change to improve the boy child's achievement.

One aspect indicated was the seating arrangement. In Namibian classrooms, learners sit as they please and often with their friends. Changing the seating arrangement often might reduce the temptation to chat among friends. This might enhance learning and hence achievement for both boys and girls in the classroom.

The other aspects of classroom practice identified that might improve performance by the boy learners included: increased boys' participation in classroom activities, increased responsibilities and the introduction of practical subjects in which boys were said to be interested. To illustrate all this, teachers stated the following:

"We can also help the boys by involving them more in academic work: we should establish peer tutoring programmes...", *"Some subjects require practical exposure, but we just teach theory. We should do more practicals. Boys like action. They will get involved especially if we do gardening."* *"For me I feel like there should be more of the practical subjects, because boys tend to be more practical, like the subjects we have in schools, boys cannot perform better than girls because they need to study more, they do not like to study, they like more practical subjects."*

Other teachers pointed out that:

"The curriculum is so crowded. We are always in a hurry. Learners are not allowed to take notes from the chalkboard. We don't have time for dictation. When you make summaries on the chalkboard, the girls will write, while the boys will only write one sentence and start fooling around..." and *"I am now thinking: we should take control of the group work and instead of mixing them, we can separate boys from girls. Otherwise the boys pass all the drawing, writing on the poster, presenting, etc. to girls. In this process, the girls learn the content and the boys miss it."*

They also cited class management as a problem to enhance boy child performance and should be changed thus: *"Classroom Management: When I select class captains, I make sure I have a boy and a girl and give them 50/50 responsibilities."* Teachers tend to call upon learners who are likely to give the correct response to their question(s) because they "have to rush in order to cover the syllabus" and as such boys are likely to be overlooked given that they often sit at the back of the classroom and fool around.

While pre-service teachers are equipped to deal with classroom management issues, this preparation does not emphasize gender dynamics in the classroom. The focus group discussion findings have implications for teacher-education and teacher development programmes. These seem to suggest that the teacher preparation curriculum, both for pre- and in-service teachers, should include gender issues in classrooms management courses.



What else teachers could do to support the learning of boys

According to the respondents,

“Subject teachers should know the learning needs of their learners and plan according to their learners. Some learners, actually the majority likes listening to audios and videos. We just have excuses not doing this kind of things.”

This comment suggests that teachers are aware that differentiated teaching and learning approaches can be helpful in retaining the attention of boys, yet they do not use these approaches for a variety of reasons. One of which we believe is the perceived lack of time to cover the content before the end of the academic year. Respondents also suggested curbing the boys’ apparent “freedom” that they enjoyed. One teacher indicated:

“Teachers can lock the boys in [not leaving the hostel], like they do for girls. Currently, boys have too much freedom. They have time to go out and do whatever they want.”

Probably this is a reflection of the freedom the boys enjoy in the larger community and the protection of girls who are regarded as at “risk” in society, especially the fear of the girl being raped or getting pregnant as a result of frequently being out late at night.

The important role that male teachers could play in enhancing boys’ academic achievement was also highlighted as shown by the following quotation:

“We should involve male teachers to talk to them: man to man!” and “Also have individual talks.”

Further, holding meetings at which problems being experienced by boys were discussed and hopefully resolved were also proposed as ways of enhancing the boy child’s performance in school as indicated below:

“We call girls to have a Girls’ talk! These do not often happen for boys. The only time it was done was in relation to the use of the toilet. We can invite men who grew up here and can talk to the boys.”
“Have boys’ meetings.”

“Give them platforms to talk about their problem.”

Resources teachers need to enhance the learning of boys

The question on what resources teachers required to improve the boy child’s achievement was posed. Teachers identified several resources that they thought would improve boys’ academic performance. Examples of such resources were:

“Computers: Boys like working with computers.”

“There should be more reading [textbooks] (instead of only concentrating on sport activities).” *“We need fully functioning labs, chemicals, etc. When we do not have the chemicals, we can at least show the YouTube videos.”*

“I use the projector: it catches their attention. They like hearing the sound and seeing what you are presenting.”

“Sometimes our rules also are barriers: We say no cellular phones at all. But some of the things we need are ICT-related.”

“We need fully functioning labs, chemicals, etc. When we do not have the chemicals, we can at least show the YouTube videos.”



“Sport resources.”
“Hands-on material to support practical subjects.”
“Exposure to schools in other regions or even other countries.”
“Debate clubs: for learners to participate in these, there must be some incentives.”
Vocational subjects and equipment.

The Kavango was known for thatching and wood crafting like making canoes. I asked the boys at rugby, who knows how to do thatching. No one! These are the vocational subjects to be introduced here and also be used to raise funds for the schools and the boys themselves.

Sport equipment. ‘The Ministry does not care with sport. All they are interested in is the ranking of schools and regions in academic achievement! We need all sport activities. A healthy body hosts a healthy mind’.

Overhead and digital projectors.
Videos and internet connectivity.

The above resources seem to fall into three categories of first, ICTs that could be used in the teaching process, such as cell phones, videos and computers among others. The second seems to refer to the lack of appropriate infrastructure, such as laboratories and consumables in schools which, might affect the learners’ performance in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects while the third seems to refer to reading materials, such as textbooks which the respondents felt were “not enough”.

Another issue arising from this data is the lack of importance accorded to non-promotional subjects like Sport, Wood crafting and Life skills. These appear to be school subjects in which boys may excel because of their practical nature, in which the boy child is said to do better than the theoretical subjects.

How the subject syllabi of grade 10 and grade 12 learners could be revised to meet the educational needs of boys better

Teachers were asked to indicate what changes they thought should be made to the curriculum to enable boys improve their classwork. Their responses were indicated as follows:

“Bring out the practical element to all the subjects and hold teachers responsible. Right now, teachers can really do just what they want. They can skip things without anyone noticing. At the end of the day, who suffers: the learners! They cannot handle the map work, measurements, science experiments, etc. in the exams.”

“We should pay attention to Vocational Training. Some boys are not intellectually inclined. They can do well in vocational trades.”

“Just add vocational subjects.”
“Cut the curriculum shorter and let’s spend time on things that matter for life.”

“Maybe if we assume that boys are... maybe not in theory like girls, they are more practical we need to bring more vocational subjects, more practical subjects I can relate to my son, he loves the drawing in design and technology, he scores excellent in that subject, because it is more practical, he learned making a car... which tools to use, most of their brain are more on practical level... maybe instead... they are not good with theory most of our kids are not so good... we should try and get a little bit of vocational subjects into the mainstream schools and not just keep it in special schools... So that boys can get to whatever direction, where they feel more comfortable instead of being thrown out of the system.”

Most of the suggestions made are already captured in the curriculum. What seems to lack however, is the implementation of the flexibility provided for in the curriculum. The respondents appeared to be of the view that the introduction of practical subjects should be the main change in the Grade 10 and 12 curricula. The reason given for this suggestion was



that the male learners were practically oriented as compared to the female learners who were mainly theoretically oriented. Other respondents suggested the reduction of the content covered in these curricula since for them it was “too long” and more than what was necessary.

Suggestions teachers had on how boys should be supported by the school, teachers, the community and fellow learners in order to improve their academic achievement.

The education of the learners involves the working together as a team of different stakeholders. In this study, teachers were asked to discuss how the school, teachers, the community and other learners/peers could support the boy child achieve better in school. Their responses are given under each stakeholder subheading as follows:

The School

The respondents were of the view that the school could play an important role in enhancing boys’ academic performance through a variety of ways including the implementation of vocation or vocational subjects in which boys have special interest. One respondent said this:

“The school should implement vocational subjects. We must choose vocations that are interesting for boys and not only the easy ones. We can for example use Wood crafting and then run competitions for traditional skills with the community participating as tutors and also as judges.”

In addition, the school should:

“Keep the boys busy with reading and other interesting activities.”

“Hold debates on the issues of boys’ education and other pressing matters.”

“Expose the boys to different roles. Everything happening in the school, we should draw them in.”

During the learning process, we motivate boys to claim their place as leaders. In Life Sciences, we identify their issues and try to address them.

I recall a time when I was a boy: we had activities with soldiers and learned a lot of life skills: team work; discipline, camping; surviving in nature.

In sport, we have good cohesion with our learners. They develop trust and talk to us when they have problems. Bring back Biblical Studies: not by choice as it is now.

The discussion under this theme points to more individual than group efforts. Teachers, even in the same school, are not on the same page with their efforts to uplift boys’ achievement and by implication make school a good space for their physiological and emotional needs. Some teachers are already implementing good strategies, but without the support and knowledge of the others. This lack of sharing of “best practices” results in limited successes. Indeed, these individual efforts tend to be less effective than group interventions. It might be useful for teachers to receive guided workshops, seminars and webinars specifically geared at empowering them to support boys in school.

Teachers

With respect to the role of the teachers in improving the boy child’s performance in school, the respondents were of the view that teachers needed to play an important role in the social and academic life of boys. The male teachers should be “role models” to the boys,



*“show that they care” and they **should** also, “...pay more attention to boys” and “...Motivate boys.” They were further of the view that, “Teachers should take the initiative and also support the learners. If we leave it to learners, they might not be able to sustain it.”*

Other teachers had this to say:

Boys are distracted by what they believe to be boys’ characters in society (the roughness they see in games, alcohol, drugs, etc.) They need to know that someone cares.

Come up with the boys club again and as said earlier, do not make it Bible study and too much theory. Talk to boys. Listen to boys.

When a boy has a problem and they report it to a teacher, they are regarded as a “sissy” or a “moffie” [derogatory term referring to a feminine/ female-like boy].

Teachers pay more attention to girls.

If a girls smokes or does something, everyone is alarmed. But if a boy does the same thing, it is accepted. That way, boys receive less support and are left on their own.

These views seem to suggest that currently the teachers were not paying as much attention to the male learners as they were expected to. Maybe this is a reflection of what transpires in the larger community where the male child is given the freedom to roam freely and expected to be capable of looking after himself. In all interviews, the teachers made reference to an over-emphasis on the girl-child in terms of both policies and extra- and intra-curricular activities at schools, a claim to which one teacher participant responded:

Female teachers took the responsibility for girls’ education and succeeded. Male teachers should take charge of the boys, listen to them and mentor them. They must stop complaining about emphasis on girls and do something for the boys. Female teachers are attempting to support boys, but the boys tend to misinterpret these efforts as affection.

This response shifts the attention from macro-level responsibilities to micro- and meso-systemic responses (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It suggests that schools can implement interventions that can reverse the situation instead of concentrating on what have been done for girls and waiting for government to take the lead.

Community

Communities around the school needed to play a crucial role also in the education of the children who are offsprings of their members. The community should take an interest in what goes on in school and be available for any demands from the school that would be necessary for the provision of quality education. Lack of parental involvement in the affairs of the school leave school staff powerless in disciplining the erring learners or motivating them to work hard.

The respondents were asked to indicate how the community could help in enhancing the boy child’s achievement in school. The teachers had this to say:

“The Community and school should work together. They should let us know what the needs and circumstances of learners are. They just send learners to the hostel without sharing important information.”

“We should engage bar –owners and share some principles with them. We can discourage them from selling alcohol to learners and not just thinking about making a dollar!”



“Parents need to be totally involved and discourage them (learners) from hanging in wrong crowds.”

The respondents decried the powerlessness of the parents in the community with respect to disciplining their children which explained the reason for misbehavior in the school. To this effect one teacher said: *“You call parents because their children have misbehaved and the parent says: ‘My child, I also have the same problem’.”* And sometimes the parents defended their child, *“We have cases where parents come to defend their children, in front of the learners!”* This made it impossible for teachers to control the misbehaving child (usually the boy child), resulting in teachers taking the “hands off” approach even if the child did not do his homework.

The respondents, especially those in schools in rural areas, felt that the communities promoted boys’ underachievement in education by selling alcohol and/ or drugs to them. In support of this view, one teacher indicated:

*“We have bars and **Wit Huis**” [White House] (where drugs are sold). “The Community is the one selling drugs and alcohol to learners- **shebeen** owners must be punished!”*

“Our learners snick out of the hostel, go buy alcohol and come drink here and disturb others.”
In the past, any parent or adult could reprimand any child. Now, you will be sued if you dare correcting someone’s child. You will be asked: Who are you?! Some parents around the school tell us how they observe boys jumping the school fence and going to “eekamba” (drinking places). They are prepared to tell us, but when you tell them to tell the parents, they refuse. We try to inform the parents, but we don’t have evidence, so they do not believe us.

Another teacher said:

We had a case here when children planted marijuana here on the school premises. This was done with the support of the community. In fact, our investigation revealed that people in the community came to help the boys plant this and keep giving the boys money to take care of this plant. Does such a community want its children to prosper? I doubt it! The very same people who do these things send their children to schools in Grootfontein, Tsumeb and Windhoek.

“It seems in the community, it is ‘important to have okapi (knife)’ and use it to stab someone.”

These responses further showed that the bars near the schools especially in the rural areas, made it easier for boys to purchase alcohol, because these beer outlets did not seem to follow the laws and operated outside the regular opening and closing times. Some teachers indicated:

“They know it is school children, but they still sell them alcohol.”

“There is continuously noise of music coming from the bars. Sometimes the learners in the class starts dancing. We have to negotiate with them during examination time to lower their music. Can you imagine us negotiating with them instead of them assisting us to keep the learners here and rather bring them food and things they need to study better.”

In these communities that have mines in the vicinity, boys quit school to go become cleaners at the mine to buy cars.

Peers/other learners

What came through the focus group discussions was the encouragement of group study among learners to enhance peer to peer interaction and teaching and learning. The respondents said the following to emphasise the point of peer education:

“Most of the time, they (boys) study individually. They should create study groups to help those who struggle to learn.”



“Learners who score good grades should do peer education. But we must try to make sure that a boy takes a group of boys who underperform and not girls tutoring boys.”

“They can organize peer-teaching.”

“Form study groups with boys as group leaders.”

“Peer support programmes.”

“Have teachers mentoring programmes (teachers to mentor boys).”

“Boys who knows the problems of their friends should share in confidence with other teachers what their friends are going through. That way, the problems of boys will be identified early and they will be assisted before they drop out”

Concluding remarks

It is clear from the teachers’ responses during the focus group discussions that boys seemed to have been disadvantaged by a variety of factors. Some of these emanate from the freedom that they “enjoy” in their upbringing. This freedom makes the teachers and their society leave the boy child to do whatever he wants to do including trying to be the authority/boss in class, and challenging their female parents in the majority of the female headed homes. In addition, the schools seemed to look the other way when it came to restricting the boy child’s movement. The community does not seem to care much about what the boy child does, even though they pay much more attention to the care of the girl child. The rampant existence of bars in the community does not seem to help matters at all, in the sense that bar owners appear to encourage the learners (especially boys) to buy and consume beer without restrictions. These factors among others should be addressed in order to improve boys’ academic performance in school.

The lack of role models who care enough for boys to listen to them, identify and respond to their needs and build their resilience to “pull factors” from outside the school seems to be a huge setback to the education of boys both at school level and in higher education.

It became clear from this research that the majority of teachers were not aware of the additional needs of boys. Many asserted that this research raised their awareness about the support needs of boys and they committed to paying more attention to boys going forward.

REPORT ON TEACHERS’ FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FROM KARAS AND OTJOZONDJUPA REGIONS

This section of the research report is on teachers’ Focus Group Discussion data from Karas and Otjozondjupa Education Regions. Although 67 teachers from these regions provided questionnaire quantitative data, a selected number of them from 8 schools participated in the focus group discussions and yielded qualitative data that are reported on in this section.

As was the case in other regions, teachers belonging to Focus Discussion Groups in the two regions were asked to respond to 8 focus group interview questions that were based on the study’s six research questions. The interview questions were on:

- the review of the national educational policies to enhance Namibian boys’ academic achievement,
- the influence of boys’ socialization on their underachievement in education,
- what teachers did to support the learning of boys in their classes,
- how classroom practices could be changed to enhance boys’ academic achievement,
- what else teachers could do to support the learning of boys,



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- resources teachers needed to enhance the learning of boys,
 - how the subject syllabi of grade 10 and grade 12 learners could be revised to meet the educational needs of boys better, and
 - on suggestions teachers had on how boys should be supported by the school, teachers, the community and fellow learners in order to improve their academic achievement.

In this section of the research report, we present our analysis of teachers' focus group discussion responses to the 8 interview questions. We present the analysis interview question by interview question in the manner that follows.

Review of the national educational policies to enhance Namibian boys' academic achievement

The teachers who participated in the interview sessions suggested several ideas on what needed to be done at the policy level to enhance the academic achievement of boys in schools. Some of these ideas were:

- Revision of the curriculum since it is **not** appealing to boys.
- The revision of the curriculum should be based on needs and interests of boys. This would prevent boys from the boredom they currently experience in school.
- The review of the policy should ensure that it is relevant to boys' real life situations. This should emphasise practical subjects as boys do well in these subjects.
- The review of the policy should include the establishment of rehabilitation centres for boys who underachieve in education
- The review of the policy should recognise the need for vocational oriented curricular for boys that emphasises 'hands-on' activities.

The quotations below illustrate teachers' suggestions on what need to be done in order to enhance the academic achievement of boys in schools:

"There should be more studies on the differences between boys and girls because I think, to sit in a class for five hours per day in school for a teenage boy, it is unnatural it is more natural for a girl. It is more difficult for the boys to sit and study, if they could play or dance or hunt or do anything that is more appealing to the boys, they could do better academically."

Another respondent had this to say:

"I believe that there are a lot of other external factors that play a role as to why there are fewer boys who continue or further education up to grade 12. We cannot say that the subjects are more appealing to the girls. I feel it is gender balanced. The contents are gender balanced. Now, those things they are being taught in my opinions, are not correlating with things they find in real live, thus they seem to loose interests in schools and they want to do their own things."

One teacher put it like this:

"I found out that girls are getting more privileges, coming to many things here at school. Let's not talk about boys who are performing, but let us come up with things for boys who are crazy. Let us come up with a place where those crazy boys can go for some time, like girls who become pregnant, are sent home and come back after a while. Let us also have a policy on a crazy boy for rehabilitation."



The influence of boys' socialization on their underachievement in education

The teachers were also asked to express their views on how the socialisation of boys promoted their underachievement in education. When we analysed teachers' responses to this question we identified the following thematic issues:

- Boys hang out more than girls and were easily influenced by peer pressure.
- Boys socialised with some disruptive friends.
- Boys were less focused on school work.
- Women's empowerment initiatives encouraged girls to take school seriously
- Most teachers tended to motivate girls more than boys.
- Boys' socialisation includes taking many risky actions such as abusing alcohol and drugs. Such actions negatively influence boys' academic achievement.

Some of the quotations to corroborate these themes indicated above are provided below.

"I think, socialisation in a big way has great impact on our boys, because many times, if you look at the two groups boys versus girls, boys have a tendency of socialising with groups with no positive impacts on them. Many a time that is the contributing factor, while some become hyper active in class "I am with my friend in the same class, I cannot sit still", how if I sit still what will my friends think about me"? Peer pressure is the problem."

"I also think boys socialize more than girls... they are exposed to more things than girls, like alcohol and drugs... girl are only exposed to boys unlike boys... At school such things, do have an impact on their performance... yes, if someone uses drugs... somehow the mind is affected and the performance is hindered... they come drunk; they come and disrupt... it is also affecting them, as the come to school they will be sleeping and not pay attention."

What teachers do to support the learning of boys in their classes

The following points below emerged from the analysis of views expressed in answer to the question about what teachers did to support the learning of boys.

- Teachers did not focus on gender, did not observe differences in performance that were due to gender;
- Some of the teachers were not observant of gender disparity in academic performance in their classrooms.
- Home factors such as lack of support, weak up- bringing, in-discipline at home (which made boys unmanageable at school), lack of love and attention at home (which made boys seek for attention from teachers) affected some boys' performance at school. Teachers did not know how to handle such home factors;
- Male teachers did not act as role models at schools to inspire boys and share their experiences about how they could learn and cope in school;
- Teachers provided career guidance to boys who were not sure about career paths to follow;
- Teachers provided counselling to boys who dealt in drugs.

To elaborate on the above points, some teachers had this to say:

"I agree that; first we need find out the factors affecting boys' performance, for us to focus on the boys, there must be something specific, which we can address. The current system does not allow the teachers to distinguish between boys' and girls' achievement during teaching. e.g., We have a subject, (office practice), it was earlier considered to be for the ladies, but to date, we also have boys taking that subject (office practice) and so in a classroom set up we cannot really differentiate, but can differentiate those who are strongly academically, there is no specific difference between the boys and the girls."



Other teachers put it this way:

“It is a bit difficult in that regard, especially if the problem is big and beyond the issues of classroom, there are more outside problems coming from home, what is being done; teachers talk to learners, encourage them especially boys to work hard and give the career paths that they can follow. If we realize that it is an issue, that has to do with drug, we refer them for counselling.”

“Usually the boys are more involved in drug staff. We motivate them to refrain from part take in those staff. We sort out those who have difficulties in some subjects... we give them extra learning...”

“To add on..., the school is doing something like, if a learner is found to be using drugs... there is a point where they get counseling. If not improving there is a referral. There is a social work in and out of school to help learners in such situations... there is mechanism in school in place to address issue of a boy child...”

How classroom practices could be changed to enhance boys’ academic achievement

Several ideas were expressed on this question as shown below:

- Boys need to be engaged in activities after school (extra mural activities after school).
- The focus of education should change from being mainly theoretical to being pro-vocational.
- Teachers should use hands-on activities when teaching science subjects.
- To encourage boys’ participation and interest in class activities, teachers should use stories related to sport and cars in their teaching to capture their attention.
- Young male teachers should mentor boys through extra mural activities and act as role models for boys in the absence of fathers who are usually absent from their households
- Because boys are interested in practice-related activities, teachers should balance theory and practice in their teaching.
- To view themselves as responsible and valuable boys should be given chores and responsibilities in school and in the classroom.
- Boys were not usually provided with career guidance. Because of this, there should be assessments at school to determine career paths for boys.
- Although most boys have reading difficulties teachers have limited time to give personalised attention to individual boys
- Because there were limited resources to meet varied learning needs and interests of boys, schools should source more teaching materials that would help engage boys and rouse their interests. .
- Life Skills was mainly taught by female teachers. To ensure that boys have role models to relate to, there should be gender balance amongst Life Skills teachers.
- Schools should apply motivational strategies that would inspire and sustain boys’ learning.
- Teachers had limited time to engage with all learners, including boys, at the individual level because the school curriculum was overloaded with too much content.
- Teachers seemed not to make the relevance of education in itself salient apart from its employment purchase value. Because of this boys were not inspired to remain in school
- Boys were not closely supervised and monitored to promote their academic achievement
- Teacher training needs to be reformed in order to focus more on practical/hands-on teaching and learning strategies. Such strategies would appeal to boys.



- To enhance boys' education, peer coaching and peer-teaching should be promoted in schools.

The following quotations were extracted from teachers' responses to corroborate the summarised points indicated above.

"If we focus now on having stories that appeal to boys, there will be another scenario where that girls finding them boring."

"When you look at individual regions and schools, there are differences. We need to ask young teachers to be extra-mural activity mentors, or become soccer coaches, so that they become role models and strong role models for the boys. If this problem also exists at university level, it means we have a back lock, we will have a national problem."

"I do not think the problem is in assessment and teaching; when you teach you teach all. What I think causes this whole issue is absent fatherhood in our society... what boys are exposed is, mom needs to provide mom need to work hard. Dad is not there; this perception is modelled into our children. This translate to our children, that the girl child see that I need to perform I do not know in the future who will be there for me."

What else teachers could do to support the learning of boys

The participants suggested interesting ideas on what teachers could do to support the education of boys. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

- A need for assessment to determine career interests of all learners, including boys
- Equality and fair treatment of boys and girls in the classroom
- Teachers could teach boys and girls separately to avoid unnecessary comparison and competition due to gender
- Teachers should ensure that they include boys' interests in their teaching.

Some participants expressed themselves on the above issues as follows:

"There must be an assessment in grade 8 to help the child go in the field which suits them. Some, are good at listening, some pick up when they see, they can be assessed, with relevant tools and aids. In my field, if you want to deal with certain topics e.g responsibility, the time span you have, is limited to reach the inner person, especially in academic setting or academic context, sometime it is difficult."

"In one conversation, boys indicated that sometimes, the texts in the exam are boring. I asked why they said, texts are boring. If you look at the information or the text in the exams in my view seem to be interesting e.g., things you apply in real life, how to prepare for exam, and discipline. These are good reading texts, but children are not interested, they want latest music, musicians related stories. Kids do not enjoy those thing. If they are not interested, they will not want to read it."

Resources teachers needed to enhance the learning of boys

The following suggestions were given.

- We need *more teaching resources* to be used in practical/technical subjects that help engage boys/rouse boys' interests.
- Need for more teaching materials to promote learner-centred activities that focus on learners' interests and boy-sensitive teaching methods which involve hands-on experiences

Below are some of the quotations to corroborate the points indicated above:

"If we want boys to perform and see whether they are doing well, set up a boys' school like the vision school. With resources where they take the top boys. In addition, I am interested to know 'who are the top on the school enrolment'? It will give a true picture to see who are not performing."



“We need to find out what boys actually want to do. Some boys do not want to come to school. They do not want to sit in class, they want to fix things... they want to be creative... we can bring auto mechanic, from grade 5 boys cannot memorize things.”

“Yes, we need extra resources to make learning interesting for boy, they can easily get bored, they are extra hyper, they need activity that engage them. Extra resource where they can feel part of learning, instead of being left out, boys are sitting, there no activities they get bored and start doing funny things, always start to talk to the neighbor, try to provoke others to talk... that is if they are not engaged, we need more teaching resources, change our teaching methods from lecture methods, to a more learner-centered, the learner-centered approach can be a problem in school...based on two things; time and resource, you need to finish the syllabus, if you do not have resource, it is a problem.”

How the subject syllabi of grade 10 and grade 12 learners could be revised to meet the educational needs of boys better

Some of the participants had the following to say on the above issue:

*“I would say like my colleague said, there are many factors, that play a role, **the syllabus which is revised**, for grade 8 and 9 is basically now a trial run. We will see if they will readjust.”*

“To add, more specific to my life skills in the region, there are very few male life skill teachers, male life skill teachers are very soft. So in big schools if there are two positions for life skills we need to have one strong mother figure and one father figure. If they want something from the mother figure they can go to the female life skills teacher and if they need a father figure, they can go to the male life skills teacher. I think, life skills teachers are neglecting the boys.”

*“I think boys need to know, learn that you have to learn things even when you do not like them. Some things are being forced on them because of culture, tradition and they might not agree or like them. We cannot have everything to accommodate all of them **because of the syllabus**. In a class, I do not like this teacher but I have to work, or this topic but it is part of what I have to do. Things they will need to apply in future, they may not understand now.”*

It appears from these quotations that teachers were not talking about revising the curriculum but they were talking about reviewing the manner in which the curriculum was implemented.

Suggestions teachers had on how boys should be supported by the school, teachers, the community and fellow learners in order to improve their academic achievement.

The participants made the following suggestions on how boys should be supported in order to improve their academic achievement:

- Boys need role models who have demonstrated in their lives the link between education and high status employment.
- There is need to help boys to shift their mind sets and their preconceived notion that the future is bright without education.
- Boys need to be motivated and inspired about the importance of education.
- **Relevance of education in one’s life, despite the many available opportunities, education seem to only be associated with making money in the future.**
- **There was need to highlight the relevance of education with respect to not only providing employment opportunities but also with respect to entrepreneurship.**
- Boys should be allowed to follow their passions after identifying their areas of interest when they are young.
- Because individual schools have unique contexts, boys’ challenges with academic achievement should be addressed at the school level.
- Because of their understanding and experience, parents’ should help their sons make informed career choices.



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- Teacher education should be reformed in such a way that it takes into account boys' struggles with education and their underachievement in education.
 - There was need for initiatives for boys, such as centres where they can be engaged to showcase their talents.

Some of the quotations below corroborate the points highlighted above as follows:

"We need to shift their mind sets from thinking that even if they do not excel they can get better jobs without education. The mind set needs to be changed. How can teachers change their mind-set?"

"We should let boys to do what they are passionate about. What they love. In other countries, they identify the area the young child has interests in, they let the boy to study in the area they want, our curriculum is one size fits all. It does not benefit some learners. Even this thing of gender issue 50/50 because we want gender balance this things are confusing people. If they go for interviews, if there is a lady, boys are already discouraged, he counts how many ladies. Their chances are minimised. Ladies are being give priorities".

"Suggestion, if you set something specifically for the boys, a school for boys, you can compare what is really happening you can be able to compare. That out of this class, this learner did well. One guy did well but this semester he falls out; he usually uses to be in the top 10. He promised that he will come back to the top ten, maybe there was something distracting him."

PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM PARENTS

As described under the parent sample, quantitative questionnaire data were collected from 182 parents from all 14 Education Regions of Namibia with the lowest age being 26 years and the maximum age being 62 years. Whereas 63.2% of the parents were female, 35.2% of them were male. Moreover, whereas Table 32 is about parents' qualifications, Table 33 is on parents' region of origin.

In the questionnaire for parents, we wished to find out from them about their:

- Views on work habits and behaviours of their sons;
- Views on boys' and girls' work habits, motivation and support received;
- Views on school support for their sons;
- Expectations of their sons' achievement in school.

We present data pertaining to each of these aspects in the following way:



Table 117: Parents' views on work habits and behaviour of their sons

My son:	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Works hard at school.	14	7.7	44	24.2	89	48.9	31	17.0	4	2.2	182	100
Does his homework when I keep on checking on him.	13	7.1	34	18.7	103	56.6	27	14.8	5	2.7	182	100
Wants to do well at school.	5	2.7	18	9.9	94	51.6	59	34.4	6	3.3	182	100
Does his homework regularly.	3	1.6	50	27.5	91	50.0	37	20.3	1	0.5	182	100
Misbehaves (messes about) at school.	54	29.7	59	32.4	49	26.9	18	9.9	2	1.1	182	100
Is motivated to do well at school.	5	2.7	20	11.0	96	52.7	58	31.9	3	1.6	182	100
Knows what he wants to do when he leaves school.	20	11.0	42	23.1	67	36.8	50	27.5	3	1.6	182	100
Is not bothered about doing well at school	32	17.6	66	36.3	64	35.2	16	8.8	4	2.2	182	100
Has many friends who distract him from doing his school work.	38	20.9	47	25.8	62	34.1	32	17.6	3	1.6	182	
Always tries his best.	6	3.3	42	23.1	82	45.1	48	26.4	4	2.2	182	
Absents himself from school sometimes.	65	35.7	59	32.4	50	27.5	7	3.8	1	0.5	182	

According to Table 117, whereas 65.9% of sampled parents from all 14 Educational Regions agreed that their sons worked hard at school, 71.4% of them agreed that their sons did their homework when they kept on checking on them, 86% agreed that their sons wanted to do well at school, 70.3% agreed that their sons did their homework regularly, 84.6% agreed that their sons were motivated to do well at school, 64.3% agreed that their sons knew what they wanted to do when they left school, 51.7% agreed that their sons had many friends who distracted them from school work, and 71.5% of them agreed that their sons always tried to



do their best. In contrast to all this, 62.1% of the parents disagreed that their sons misbehaved at school, 53.9% disagreed that their sons were not bothered about doing well at school and 68.1% of them disagreed that their sons absented themselves from school sometimes.

Table 118. Parents' views on boys' and girls' work habits, motivation and support they received

Parents' views	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Boys are less motivated to work at school than girls.	27	14.8	51	28.0	71	39.0	32	17.6	1	0.5	182	100
Girls work harder than boys.	13	7.1	17	9.3	89	48.9	62	34.1	1	0.5	182	100
Boys need more help than girls to achieve their potential.	9	4.9	23	12.6	76	41.8	73	40.1	1	0.5	182	100

Table 118 shows that whereas 56.6% of the parents agreed that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls, 83% of them agreed that girls worked harder at school than boys and 81.9% of them agreed that boys needed more help than girls to achieve their full potential at school.



Table 119: Parents' views on school support for their sons

Parents' views on their sons' school support	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
School has good facilities to help my son.	11	6.1	40	22.0	108	59.3	22	12.1	1	0.5	182	100
School has good teachers	4	2.2	23	12.6	115	63.2	39	21.4	1	0.5	182	100
School has good discipline	11	6.1	35	19.2	86	47.3	47	25.8	3	1.6	182	100
School supports my son to perform well academically	3	1.6	25	13.7	96	52.7	57	31.3	1	0.5	182	100
School is important for my son's future.	1	0.5	2	1.1	65	35.7	113	62.1	1	0.5	182	100
School keeps me informed of my son's progress.	2	1.1	19	10.4	88	48.4	72	39.6	1	0.5	182	100
Teachers help my son learn.	3	1.6	13	7.1	102	56.0	58	31.9	6	3.3	182	100
My community and my school work closely together.	17	9.3	58	31.9	84	46.2	21	11.5	2	1.1	182	100

Table 119 reveals that whereas 71.4% of the parents agreed that their sons' schools had good facilities, 84.6% of them agreed that their sons' schools had good teachers, 73.1% agreed that their sons' schools had good discipline, 84% agreed that their sons' schools supported their sons to perform well academically, 97.8% agreed that schools were important for their sons' future, 88% agreed that schools kept them informed of their sons' progress, 87.9% agreed that teachers helped their sons learn and 57.7% of the parents agreed that their communities and their sons' schools worked closely together.



Table 120: Parents' expectations of their sons' achievement in school

Parents expect their sons:	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
To do well at school.	1	0.5	3	1.6	54	29.7	121	66.5	3	1.6	182	100
To pass with good grades in their final exam.	1	0.5	1	0.5	56	30.8	122	67.0	2	1.1	182	100
To complete school and get jobs.	9	4.9	11	6.0	57	31.3	103	56.6	2	1.1	182	100
To complete school and go for further studies.	1	0.5	2	1.1	44	24.2	134	73.6	1	0.5	182	100
To leave school early (drop out) and assist with family responsibilities.	136	74.7	26	14.3	12	6.6	7	3.8	1	0.5	182	100

According to Table 120, whereas 96.2% of the parents agreed that they expected their sons to do well at school, 97.8% of them agreed that they expected their sons to pass with good grades in their final examinations, 87.9% of them agreed that they expected their sons to complete school and get jobs, 97.8% of them expected their sons to complete school and go for further studies and 89% disagreed that they expected their sons to leave school early (i.e. drop out) and assist with family responsibilities.

After analyzing parents' responses to questionnaire items using frequencies, we applied the chi-square statistic to make comparisons by parents' gender and age. Data on selected comparisons are presented in the manner that follows.

Table 121: Boys are less motivated to work at school than girls by gender

Gender	Boys less motivated to work at school than girls					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response	
M	5	16	32	10	1	64
F	22	32	39	22	0	115
Others	0	3	0	0	0	3
Total	27	51	71	32	1	182

Note: Chi-square = 16.3; df = 8; $p < .04$

According to Table 121, the majority of both male and female parents agreed that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls.

Table 122: School keeps me informed of my son's progress by gender

Gender	School keeps me informed of my son's progress					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	NR	
M	0	4	36	23	1	64
F	2	12	52	49	0	115
Others	0	3	0	0	0	3
Total	2	19	88	72	1	182

Note: Chi-square = 31.3; df = 8; $p < .001$

Table 122 shows that significantly more female than male parents agreed with the statement that the school kept them informed of their sons' progress.

Table 123: Teachers help my son learn by gender

Gender	Teachers help my son learn					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response	
M	1	3	39	17	4	64
F	2	10	61	41	1	115
Others	0	0	2	0	1	3
Total	3	13	102	58	6	182

Note: Chi-square = 15.7; df = 8; $p < .05$

Table 123 reveals that the majority of both male and female parents agreed that teachers helped their sons learn

Table 124: My son's school has good teachers by age category

Age category	My son's school has good teachers					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response	
21-30	1	4	8	4	0	17
31-40	0	11	43	13	0	67
41-50	1	8	43	14	1	67
51-60	1	0	19	8	0	28
61-70	0	0	1	0	0	1
Others	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total	4	23	115	39	1	182

Note: Chi-square = 34.3; df = 20; $p < .02$

Table 124 shows that the majority of parents from all age categories agreed that their sons' schools had good teachers

Table 125: The school keeps me informed of my son's progress by age category

Age category	The school keeps me informed of my son's progress					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response	
21-30	0	1	7	9	0	17
31-40	0	7	37	23	0	67
41-50	2	8	36	20	1	67
51-60	0	1	8	19	0	28
61-70	0	0	0	1	0	1
Others	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total	2	19	88	72	1	182

Note: Chi-square = 37.5; df = 20; $p < .01$

Table 125 shows that the majority of parents from all age categories agreed that schools kept them informed of their sons' progress.

Table 126: Teachers help my son learn by age category

Age category	Teachers help my son learn					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No response	
21-30	1	1	9	6	0	17
31-40	0	6	36	25	0	67
41-50	1	6	39	16	5	67
51-60	0	0	17	11	0	28
61-70	0	0	1	0	0	1
Others	1	0	0	0	1	2
Total	3	13	102	58	6	182

Note: Chi-square = 60.4; df = 20; $p < .001$

Table 126 reveals that the majority of parents from all age categories agreed that teachers helped their sons learn.

We indicated when presenting our analysis of teachers' focus group discussion data that as a consequence of using a parallel pragmatic mixed methods research design in which we collected both quantitative and qualitative data from our research participants, we also collected and analysed focus group discussion data from some parents residing in all 14 educational regions. As was reported in the methods section, the research team was divided into three sub research teams. Each research sub team was assigned a number of educational regions to collect data from. Because of this, we present below three separate parents' focus group discussion reports prepared by the three sub research teams that were assigned to particular educational regions. All sub research teams used the same interview questions and procedure when conducting focus group discussions in their respective educational regions. We present the three parents' focus group reports as follows:

REPORT ON PARENTS' FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA FROM OSHANA, OSHIKOTO, KHOMAS, OHANGWENA, KAVANGO WEST, AND ZAMBEZI REGIONS

Introduction

The project on Namibian boys' underachievement in education was based on the **Sustainable Development Goal 4** which stipulates that educational systems should “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities *for all*” (Emphasis added) and, as pointed out earlier in this report, on six research questions.

This section of the research report is on the analysis of parents' Focus Group Discussion data from Oshana, Oshikoto, Khomas, Ohangwena, Kavango West and Zambezi Regions. Although 96 parents from these regions provided quantitative data, 13 parents' Focus Groups yielded qualitative data that are reported on in this section. Because each focus group consisted of 3 to 5 members, we can say that up to a maximum of 65 parents from the 6 Education Regions participated in the focus group discussions.

Based on the study's six research questions, parents belonging to the 13 Focus Groups were asked to respond to 6 focus group interview questions on some aspects that could cause Namibian boys' underachievement and under-participation in education. These issues were on whether boys were less motivated to work at school than girls, whether girls worked harder than boys, why more boys than girls dropped out of school, how boys could be supported by the community to perform better academically, how partnerships between communities and schools could be strengthened to promote boys' academic achievement and how culture could be used to support the retention of boys in school.

In this section of the research report, we present our analysis of parents' focus group discussion responses to the 6 interview questions. We present the analysis interview question by interview question in the manner that follows.

1. Whether boys were less motivated to work at school than girls

According to Table 118 of the quantitative data, 56.6% of the 182 parents from all 14 education regions agreed with the statement that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls. The majority of parents in the 13 focus groups from the 6 education regions on which this report is based, affirmed this finding. When we asked the parents why they thought this was the case, they gave explanations that were placed into two main categories. In the first category were placed responses in which parents thought that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls because of holding attitudes and beliefs and taking actions that were not conducive to academic achievement in education. These aspects were labelled *boys' internal motivational factors* that reduced their motivation for working on educational tasks. In the second category were placed responses in which parents thought that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls because of adverse *external motivational factors* that collectively conspired to reduce their motivation for focusing on educational activities.

An overwhelming majority of the parents in the 13 Focus Groups indicated that boys were, at the *attitudinal level*, less motivated to work at school than girls because they were NOT *responsible, goal directed, aiming to achieve anything in life, interested in education,*



concerned about education, self-motivated and they were NOT willing to do their school work without being closely supervised. In addition, according to the parents, when compared to girls, boys who underachieve do not want to be told what to do, have negative attitudes towards education, do not challenge themselves, lack self-motivation, have no will power, are lazy, are uncooperative, lack understanding of the value of education and that they take too long to take education seriously.

According to the parents in the Focus Groups, these boys' internal motivational factors, created personal tendencies and conditions in which boys who underachieved lacked the zeal to apply themselves to educational activities in school. The majority of the school girls on the other hand are intrinsically motivated and have positive, self-directed, supportive and cooperative attitudes toward education. Unlike in the case of boys who underachieve, these prosocial attitudes enable the majority of girls to excel in education.

Another aspect that pertains to boys' dysfunctional internal/personal attributes that reduce their motivation for educational pursuits is on *beliefs* they hold towards education. Three such beliefs were described by parents in the Focus Group discussions.

Firstly, parents reported that boys who underachieved believed that they could succeed in life and be rich without education. They based this belief on their community role models who were rich but uneducated. In addition, they did not believe in the link between education and the acquisition of good things like beautiful cars. In fact some of them believed that they did not need education to get manual jobs such as those on farms, at the mines and at construction sites.

Secondly, boys who underachieve, parents indicated, live in the present and are led by the desire to have good things 'now', in the short term. These boys believe in immediate gratification- a belief that does not encourage them to focus on education but on the immediate acquisition of good things and live good lives.

Thirdly, a number of parents in the Focus Group Discussions expressed the view that some boys who underachieve in education hold misogynistic opinions of masculinity. Using these opinions, the boys underrate and ignore educational advice and encouragement offered by women such as their mothers who are more available to them than their fathers. Girls on the other hand are inspired by their mothers' words of advice and encouragement regarding the need to do well in school. One parent expressed boys' misogynistic beliefs as follows:

"Looking at the issue of single parent mostly are mothers and like she said boys grow up with the notion that they are the leaders, they are the care takers, they are the provider, why would they listen to a woman?"

In terms of their *behaviour*, the majority of parents indicated that boys who underachieve in education are less motivated to work at school than girls because they do NOT take initiative, ask for help when they need to, listen to teachers, cooperate with teachers, and they do NOT accept encouragement from teachers. Instead, they spend most of their time socializing, on social media, doing things that are irrelevant to education, and abusing drugs and alcohol. In other words, boys who underachieve in education, according to parents, have a lot of distractions that keep them away from education. They are more motivated to engage in activities unrelated to education than focus on education tasks. Girls in contrast, take initiative, ask for help when they need to, listen to their teachers, cooperate with their teachers from whom they accept encouragement. In addition, most girls who excel in



education remain focused on educational matters and do not engage in alcohol and drug abuse.

To illustrate the point that boys who underachieve spend more time away from educational activities, one parent said the following:

“Always when I go home now, I’m going to see him playing with a lot of boys and then I reprimand him but if it come to girls they are doing the opposite. Instead of going out they are always indoors mostly reading their books while boys are busy socializing the girls are reading so even at schools here you are going to see that boys are going to be doing irreverent activities, socialization instead of studying they are writing letters to girls when the girls are busy studying, that is the difference. So the question of socialization in terms of boys should also be taken into account.”

These findings communicate to us the general message that any psychosocial programme to promote boys’ academic achievement motivation should seriously address their dysfunctional attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that have been delineated here.

When we looked at parents’ responses pertaining to the issue that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls because of adverse *external motivational factors* we identified six themes. We labelled these themes as *peer pressure, mothers’ role in boys’ motivation, fathers’ role in boys’ motivation, the absence of intervention programmes targeted at motivating boys to focus on their education, boys’ preoccupation with too many household responsibilities and lack of supportive family environment.*

With respect to the theme of *peer pressure*, parents pointed out that boys who underachieved in education were less motivated to work at school than girls because they easily succumbed to the negative influences of their friends who enticed them not to engage in educational activities. For instance, instead of focussing on their education, boys who underachieve are negatively influenced by peer groups who use ‘intoxicating’ substances such as alcohol and drugs. In contrast to this state of affairs, girls who excel in education resist peer group temptations to be distracted from their focus on educational activities.

Under the theme of *the mothers’ role in boys’ motivation in education* several parents in the focus group discussions described the situation in which boys were less motivated to work at school than girls because their mothers did not encourage and motivate them about school matters as much as they did with their sisters. Parents in the focus groups stated that mothers encouraged and motivated their daughters more passionately than they did with their sons who underachieved in education.

To illustrate this, a parent expressed the following view:

“ To exemplify, a mother who has two children a boy and a girl, takes time to talk and motivate the girl child more at length in terms of parental expectations and work habits and behaviour once she goes to school. On the other hand, the boy child would also be spoken to but not firmly and there are no high expectations for the boy child in terms of school achievements.”

The explanation that was given for this view was that unlike the boy child who can find manual work at mines and construction sites and work as taxi drivers without much education, a girl child cannot easily find such jobs without education.



Another explanation according to the quotation that follows was that some single mothers provided more educational support, encouragement and motivation to their daughters because they wished them to be better prepared for future challenges.

“And then with girls we have these issue when you are bringing up a child, the girl child, you have this issue of you don’t know what will become of you tomorrow, I will not be there as a mother and I will not be there always to provide and so on so study and become somebody. And also with the girls the back ground of the mother being a single mother also influences that, that I need to become somebody, I need to be focused in order to change the situation at home. That could be also another issue.”

The third explanation regarding why mothers appeared to provide more education support, encouragement and motivation to their daughters than to their sons who underachieve in education was that they were prevented by their culture to usurp the role of the boys’ fathers. According to cultural beliefs- especially amongst the Oshiwambo peoples of Northern Namibia- it was the fathers’ duty to intimately support, encourage and motivate boys not only on educational matters but on life in general. According to this belief, boys were prevented from interacting too closely with their mothers.

This cultural understanding is more clearly expressed in the following quotation:

“Culture does not give mothers equal amounts of time with the boy child because boys from a young age are chased away from “epata” [kitchen, a place in the house were food is prepared] where the mother often moulds the values of the girls. Instead boys are culturally expected to stay at “Olupale” [a male dwelling space during the evening in the house equivalent to a sitting room] with the head of the house for similar guidance and character building. Unfortunately owing to the absence of their fathers from the home stead the boy child never receives the same guidance/encouragement or motivation from their fathers because fathers spent most of their time at the cuca-shops.”

The fourth explanation was that some mothers perceived that from a gender perspective, it was not the boy child who needed to be motivated to remain in school but in order to prevent the girl child from dropping out of school due to possible pregnancy, she needed more motivation to remain in school.

This position was explained by one parent as follow:

“ I take it for granted that boys are, they are well motivated, that they know that there is a duty to do. So in that case as a parent I normally concentrate to a girl because I know a girl might get pregnant and that won’t go to school and all those things so strictly even as a parent I know girls might do something which might hinder them to continue with their education so the concentration might be more to a girl than to a boy because of the pregnancy, because of all those stumbling blocks. So while you are losing focus thinking maybe a boy is well up in terms of he might go well in school then you concentrate to a girl at the end of the day the girl will do better than the boy.”

It is noteworthy that the four explanations communicate the message that the boys may partly be less motivated to work in school than girls because they do not, for various reasons, receive as much encouragement and motivation from their mothers as they should. Notwithstanding this, as pointed out earlier in this report, there are times when some boys who underachieve in education spurn their mothers’ encouragement and motivational overtures due to misconceived masculinity beliefs.

Under the theme of *fathers’ role in boys’ educational motivation*, several parents in focus group discussions expressed the point that some boys were less motivated to work at school than girls because their fathers did not act as effective role models in providing them with guidance, encouragement and motivation on school matters. According to the parents, many



fathers tended to be uninvolved, unavailable, psychologically distant and disinterested in their sons' educational activities.

As quoted above,

“Unfortunately owing to the absence of their fathers from the home the boy child never receives the same guidance/encouragement or motivation from their fathers because fathers spend most of their time at the cuca-shops (i.e. small shopping facilities that may include the sale of alcohol).”

This means that some boys who underachieve in education may be doing so partly because they do not receive as much educational support, guidance and motivation from their fathers who tend to be socially, psychologically and in some cases physically unavailable to them.

Under the theme of *the absence of intervention programmes targeted at motivating boys to focus on their education* a number of parents in the focus groups expressed the view that some boys who underachieve in education were less motivated at school work than girls because unlike in the situation of girls, they did not have specific programmes focused on motivating them to excel in school activities. In the absence of such programmes, parents explained, several boys who underachieved in education appeared to be left behind, not taken care of, not encouraged to take their studies seriously, not motivated, despised, neglected, abandoned and left out of the educational system.

Two quotations illustrate this parents' interpretation succinctly. The first one is the following:

“ Now they started thinking about how can they really push women and now girls are part of women that's why the boys were really left behind simply because sometime they might also, sometimes some of these boys might even drop out the reason being because there is no one who is really taking care, because they are not really how can I say encouraged for them to take their studies seriously or sometimes they can even opt for them instead of pursuing their education, they can even drop out and look after cattle. Or sometimes like you know I remember boys sometimes even leaving school for them to join the army and all those kind of things and then sometimes they might even not, because you know if there is no one who is really motivating, encouraging or you are just despised, they don't even care about you, you might not even have that fire, burning fire for you to even study, I think that's one of the factors that I think maybe is also contributing or leaving boys for them to take their studies seriously.”

The second quotation on this is the following:

“No I agree that they are less motivated because after the emergency of encouraging girls only all the programs that have been in existence they were just abandoned, they were just like there, like nobody was seemingly saying anything to them to encourage them, that in its own was a factor. From what I could see they began to feel like girls were a little bit upper, encouraging them that they have to do well in school with all the necessary support but then the intention was not to discourage them, the intention was to encourage girls but in itself they felt discouraged, so that was my observation.”

To emphasize their point on this, several parents expressed the opinion that although boys did not have intervention programmes focused on motivating them, there were government supported programmes supporting, motivating and empowering girls to take their education seriously and excel in academic achievement.

To us, parents in the focus group discussions seemed to communicate the message that programmes that Namibia put in place and implemented for several years to promote and support girls' education produced a backlash to the effect that a numbers of boys appeared to remain unsupported, uncared for and neglected in education. Their underachievement in



education seemed, to some extent, to symbolically express some kind of ‘collateral damage’ emanating from the successful implementation of girls’ educational support programmes.

Under the theme of *boys’ preoccupation with too many household responsibilities*, a number of parents in the focus group discussions, especially those from the Kavango West Region, expressed the position that some boys who underachieved in education were less motivated to work at school than girls because they were given too many responsibilities at home in their families. These may include looking after livestock and providing needed helping hands in the day to day subsistence farming and income-generating activities. Because of this, such boys may be discouraged from going to school and they may not be motivated to stay in school and learn. All this may lead to their under-participation in education.

With respect to the theme of *lack of supportive family environment*, a number of parents voiced the view that the home environment had a lot to do with whether boys were motivated or not. If boys were negatively motivated at home, they would not be motivated to do well in school. Conversely, a supportive family environment would motivate the boys to succeed in school. To explain the influence of the family environment in boys’ and girls’ academic achievement, a parent in one of the focus group discussions shared the following experience:

“Yes I’ve received the benefits of education, once I go home I ask for this, I know it’s going to be provided due to the fact that in our family at least I’m having people who are inspiring me. So you can be a girl, if where you come from no one reached matric (i.e. grade 12) here at school you don’t have an inspiration, you just end up in other bad things.”

The theme of the supportive family environment communicates the message that some boys who in fact excel in school may be inspired to do so by their stimulating and supportive family circumstances. Some girls from unsupportive family environments may, because of this, underachieve in education. In these cases, the main cause for underachievement in education or excelling in education may not be inherent in the learner and his or her gender but emanate from unsupportive and unstimulating family conditions.

To build on this kind of reasoning, a minority of parents in some focus group discussions disagreed with the statement that boys who underachieve in education were less motivated to work at school than girls. They held this position because to them, parents and teachers equally encouraged and motivated boys and girls to work hard. Although this may be the case in some educational and family contexts, it does not explain some boys’ dysfunctional internal attitudinal factors and thinking tendencies that influence them not to be inspired to work hard in school.

2. Whether girls work harder than boys

When we looked at Table 45 of the quantitative parents’ questionnaire data from all 14 Education Regions, 66% of the 182 parents agreed with the statement that their sons worked hard at school and 86% of them agreed with the statement that their sons wished to do well at school. According to the quantitative data captured in Table 46 however, 83% of the 182 parents from all the 14 Education Regions agreed with the statement that girls worked harder at school than boys. The majority of parents in focus group discussions from the 6 Education Regions, affirmed this finding. When we asked these parents why they thought that girls worked harder than boys at school, they gave a variety of responses which we divided into 9 categories.



The 9 categories were on *girls' work habits, girls' work ethic dispositions, support given to girls, boys' work habits, boys' work ethic dispositions, lack of intervention support provided to boys, parents' roles/influence in girls' and boys' work habits, mothers' role, and fathers' role*. A number of themes constituted each of the 9 categories. We present our analysis of this part of the report category by category in the manner that follows.

2.1 Girls' work habits

We identified 4 themes under this category. In the first theme, the majority of the parents in the focus group discussions indicated that girls work harder at school than boys because the many household chores they are asked to perform at home give them the opportunity to manage time wisely and spend it on school work. They learn to work hard through the household chores. For instance, girls learn to work hard from taking responsibility and taking charge at home in the absence of parents. Unlike boys who 'lazy around', girls take responsibility for their studies without being supervised. One parent supported this assertion by saying the following:

"Yes I agree. The reason being girls they are more focused, they are hardworking cause normally, let me say maybe there is a boy and a girl in the house so girls sometimes after school if they are not in a boarding school the girl can go to an extent of cooking, preparing food, washing dishes, sometimes even doing the laundry, mopping the house if they are from urban area and then they are more focused but the reason being is that they take matters seriously because as I'm talking now as a teacher I'm also a father, I'm having two daughters who are graduates."

In the second theme, a number of parents in the focus group discussions stated that girls work harder than boys because unlike boys, they are able to multi-task by juggling a lot of household chores and still find time to perform school tasks such as doing homework.

In the third theme, several parents expressed the view that girls work harder than boys because they stay on school tasks, focus and concentrate on their educational activities. To illustrate this, one parent stated the following:

"Girls are more really concentrating in class and even when you go to the class, the most people who you are criticizing there, not the girls, it's only the boys who you are criticizing much because they are not doing their best on their academic or they are not concentrating in class but the girls they mostly they concentrate. Because they are willing to learn that time while boys just engage themselves in activities that does not involve that."

In the fourth theme, several parents in the focus group discussions said that girls work harder than boys because they put in a lot of effort in their school work, put in extra time reviewing their work, take advantage of being included in education by working hard and they turn their suffering when growing up into hard work at school to achieve their goals. In the quotation that follows, girls' work ethic demonstrates that they work harder than boys.

"Take an example of you give homework, say as today is Friday, you give homework maybe mathematics or whatever there is, you ask them to submit on Monday, mostly it is girls that will submit their books than boys. Boys they will give you excuses, no my book, where, where and what, what and what, what, what. So mostly it is girls and they are the first people to collect their books in the morning."

To illustrate the issue of girls turning past suffering into hard work at school, one parent member of a focus group stated the following:

"You see the percentage is actually high showing that the girls are actually working harder than the boys are doing. I don't know what really is in the boy's mind, especially with education they do not really put more effort"



to see that they should work extra hard but with the girls and when you look at the girls I don't know if it's with the suffering. You if I suffered so much in my growing it means that I am going to work extra hard that I should achieve my goal and become somebody who is going to actually bring bread on the table by the end of the day"

Another point that parents raised with regards to girls putting in extra effort in their school work was that they were more competitive than boys. The two quotations that follow from our raw data speak to this point. The first of these is as follows:

" girls are competitive by nature, they bench mark their subject scores against fellow girls and boys alike and aims to achieve the same score as the best learners if not better. For example, if someone in their group performs better in the assessment task other female learners will strive and work harder for a better grade for the next assessment task. "

In the second quotation, one parent stipulated the following:

"Also, girls are competitive compared to the boys. In order to be the best among your peers, one needs to work hard."

2.2 Girls' dispositions (i.e. personality or tendencies)

In this category, we present focus group discussion data that we have analysed according to 4 themes. In the first theme, a number of parents said that girls work harder than boys because they understand the value of education and understand what is good and what is bad. In contrast, boys who underachieve do not assume this disposition.

In the second theme, several parents expressed the view that girls worked harder than boys who underachieve because they did not want to be embarrassed by failure. According to the parents, girls did not want to be embarrassed but they wanted to maintain good names and reputations by working hard. In addition, girls did not want to embarrass their parents by failing. They wished to promote good family reputation and recognition. This view is made clearer in the following statement that one parent made:

" Girls they don't want to be embarrassed in most cases so they want to do their best to be rewarded as you are a good girl, you are a good girl so boys are too bully in most cases. So now that one keeps girls on the safe side, they don't want to embarrass even in class when you are teaching, as a parent, let me put it not as a teacher, as a parent you always be told your girl is behaving well at school, at school than a boy. So girls normally don't want to be embarrassed even in public, even in class they don't want those funny things so that one makes"

In the third theme, parents pointed out that girls were disposed to work harder than boys who underachieve in education because they are more willing to learn than boys, listen to advice, readily follow teachers' instructions and obey teachers, are alert, are worried about the future, are serious, they do not easily give up but persevere, they take time to consult teachers where they do not understand, are disciplined to work hard and have an organized work ethic that demands that they excel in all that they do. To some degree, the quotation that follows supports what parents are saying here.

" Girl child is always alert. They are very scared of their future and I think they are also willing to learn, just like I said of my kids, my boy will always want to be 'I'm now a man' but when you talk to the girl she always want to listen, she want to learn, even if she take your phone what she do is just to learn different things, 'tomorrow we are writing arts can you borrow me your phone I want to learn how to draw the national flag, I want to learn how to draw the Namibian map' but when it comes to the boy they always say 'yeah I know what to do, I know what to do, don't worry about me'."



In the fourth theme, as alluded to in the above quotation, parents expressed the view that girls worked harder than boys because they had a future perspective in view. They made a link between education and success in future. According to the parents in focus group discussions, boys thought they could get good jobs in future without education. The quotation that follows expresses the view that girls use their concern about the future to work hard in school.

“ I think the future is scary. Sometimes girls are scared, who am I in future? Will I be just somebody on street? It’s a lot of things that they are scared of.”

2.3 Support provided to girls

Under this category, we identified two themes. In the first theme, parents shared the view that girls were encouraged and motivated to work hard in support programmes they were offered. In these programmes, girls, according to parents, were motivated to put in extra effort. As has already been presented on pages 5 and 6 above, no such programmes existed to encourage boys to work hard. We interpret this to mean that a social context has been created in which girls are focused on (i.e., have policies and services that are targeted at them) and encouraged to work hard on educational tasks. Boys on the other hand do not have policies and services that are geared at motivating them to work hard at school.

In the second theme, some parents in the focus group discussions expressed the view that girls who excel in school work harder than boys because they are provided with more material support than boys are by their parents, NGOs, and donors. Several boys who underachieve in education do not receive such support and as a result they ‘go out there to hustle’ to meet their needs. Being ‘out there’ means not being in school and not working hard in school. In contrast, because most of their financial and other needs are catered for by their parents and others, girls worry about their school work only. So they work harder at school than boys. In our view, this position, although justified by the fact that girls have programmes that are designed to serve them but not to serve boys, may not be sustained in all contexts where girls outperform boys in education.

2.4 Boys’ work habits

This category consists of 4 themes. In theme 1, parents indicated that girls worked harder than boys because boys wasted time on non-educational activities which communicated the message that they were not concerned with and/or did not care about educational achievement. Two quotations illustrate what parents meant by this. In the following first quotation, one parent explained what boys spent time on.

“ Football, stories, you know if you find boys they only want to join a group where they are discussing who is having a nice car, who is doing what but go to girls many of them they don’t even know which one is a corolla and which one is a BMW but the boys they know all those latest cars and all the fancy things. So by that they don’t pay attention to their work but girls they always do.”

In the second quotation, one of the parents stipulated the following:

“I agree; girls are more focused than boys. Majority of boys go and play with their friends, drink alcohol, or/and watch TV right after school without doing their homework. In most cases a boy child has to be pushed to do his homework”

In theme 2, parents highlighted the view that girls worked harder than boys who underachieve in education because boys bluffed and pretended that they knew what to do and



asked parents not to worry about them. In most cases girls who excelled in education did not do this.

In theme 3, parents pointed out that girls worked harder than boys who underachieved in education because these boys were distracted by several things. Some of them were distracted by the fact that they were not patient but in a hurry to get rich. They were perceived to be in a hurry to make money and acquire property. Others, it was pointed out by the parents, got distracted by possessive and jealousy ridden relationships with girls. To please the girls and buy things for them, the boys went out to make money by any means. All these and other things distracted them from educational activities. Girls, in contrast, were not distracted in this manner.

In theme 4, a minority of parents disagreed with the notion that girls worked harder than boys. According to them, many boys worked as hard as girls and in some instances, some boys worked harder than girls. To them, the amount of effort expended on educational activities depended on types of school subjects. For instance, some boys worked harder than girls in science and technical subjects. Moreover, the parents indicated that the effort boys and girls put into educational tasks depended on family backgrounds. Some boys from supportive family environments worked harder at school than girls from unsupportive family environments. The converse to this would also be true.

2.5 Boys' dispositions (i.e. personality or tendencies)

Three themes were identified under this category. In the first theme, parents indicated that unlike girls who were responsible for their school work and independent, boys who underachieved in education tended to limit themselves, to be dependent on teachers and needed constant supervision. One parent expressed this boys' disposition in the manner that follows:

“girl take so much responsibilities on their studies than boys. I remember there was a time in a class where I taught to grade 12 learners last year where I got an answer like no madam, God did not create us the same, some of us will be fishermen while the others are... so you already see the negativity in them. Thinking that no if this where it ends, they limit themselves so they will always want teachers to be following them to read, they want to see a figure in front that forces them to do things while girls takes responsibility of just doing things without any supervision.”

In the second theme, parents characterised the boys' disposition of not being patient but always being in a hurry to make money and live a good life that did not necessarily depend on educational achievement. Two parents explained this boys' disposition in the following quotations. In the first quotation a parent said the following:

“Boys tend to like short-cuts in life. For example, they want to find a job quickly and money in a short period of time. Thus VTC is a better option since it takes only 3 years to complete compared to a university which requires 4 years. Also they look up at rich men in the society who are illiterate as role models. Boys believe that one does not need education to make money, without taking into account how long their 'role models' took to amass the said fortune.”

In the second quotation, a parent expressed the following view:

“Boys want shortcuts in life where I can make quick bucks, get employment fast, make quick bucks, buy what I need to. Whereas with the girls it's the other way round. I need to work hard to get what I want. For me that's it.”



The point here is that girls who excel work harder than boys who underachieve in education because the boys tend not to be patient enough to pay attention in educational settings. They wish to be rich fast.

In the third theme under this category, a number of parents expressed the view that some traditional cultural socialization beliefs and practices created in a number of boys who underachieve in education a sense of anomie (i.e. alienation, isolation). In this condition, the boys implicated are not encouraged to learn from and motivated by their fathers who are unavailable to them. At the same time they are labelled as misfits if they closely align themselves to their mothers who are available to them. The result of this is that the boys feel neglected, not cared for and not nurtured by both parents. One parent in a focus group discussion explained the boys' sense of anomie in the following way:

“the boy child lack role models from their fathers. And culture does not encourage the interaction between mother and son, because if a boy-child is seen spending too much time with his mother he is labelled as mommy’s boy or a ‘sissy’ and would be asked: ‘do you want to become a girl or gay?’ if not then he should stop spending too much time with his mother and be the man of the house at a very young age. Consequently, a boy child is left to grow in isolation and learns to bottle up his feelings and emotions, because the parent he has access to (his mother) at home he cannot talk to her because of fear of being reprimanded and the parental figure that culture expects to guide him ignores his presence because he was a ‘man’ instead of a child that needs care and nurturing.”

2.6 Support not provided to boys

As explained in Sections 2.3 and 2.5 above, girls work harder than boys who underachieve in education because, according to parents in the focus group discussions, boys did not have intervention programmes geared to encouraging and motivating them to work hard in school. In addition, they received little social, emotional, financial and material support from their parents and NGOs. This forced boys concerned to seek any early employment with the aim of satisfying their personal and financial needs. From a cultural point of view, the support they were supposed to receive from their fathers and mothers left them in limbo where they experienced a sense of anomie.

2.7 Parents’ roles/influence on girls’ and boys’ work habits

Under this category, parents in the focus group discussions pointed out that girls worked harder than boys in school because boys were permitted to waste time outside the home while girls were told to stay at home and perform domestic chores. In addition to attending to domestic chores, girls used this time to focus on school matters. This state of affairs was explained by the fact that parents wished to protect girls because they thought they were more vulnerable than boys. By so doing, the parents gave boys the freedom not to be serious with school. One effect of this was that while they stayed home, girls learned to focus on and concentrate on school work. We interpreted this gender bias in which girls were provided with apparent protection while boys were allowed to goof around as a lapse in effective parenting and socialization. This kind of socialization worked against the development of educational qualities of focus, concentration and seriousness in boys. Moreover, the cultural expectation that holds that girls should do domestic work at home while boys goof around does not encourage boys to work hard but illustrates a misconstrued view and practice of masculinity.

To provide evidence for this ineffective type of socialization that influenced girls’ and boys’ work habits differently, one parent stated the following:



“ In most homes we would rather not have our girls go out but it is not the case with the boys. So we make because we feel girls are vulnerable and then we want to protect them in the houses and then we teach boys, you are a man behave like one, but then we forget that they also have emotions so when they grow up with that, that culminates into them not being serious with most of the stuff like I said. And the girls will definitely concentrate on one thing to be completed and achieved while for boys they want to do a lot of things at once and we cannot multi-task and then the parents make it even harder because at home we tell them okay girls stay at home, a boy will come, dad I want to go and watch football somewhere, you tell them they must come back at eight and for a girl we tell them please make sure that at five you are already walking and if five is struck and the girls is not home you start calling where are you? I’m coming to pick you up. So it lacks the focus on things to be accomplished and that is what makes them even more hard working than the boys.”

To illustrate a misconstrued view of masculinity, one parent made the following statement in a focus group discussion:

“That no ‘you have to stay at home and cook because you are a girl, you have to cook. So given that scenario, it qualifies to say girls work harder than boys while they are just there waiting to receive while girls have to sweat”

2.8 Mothers’ influence on girls’ work habits

In this category, a number of parents in the focus group discussions expressed the view that girls worked harder in school than boys because girls were raised, coached and taught to work hard by their mothers who took time to do this. The parents reported that socialization of girls included clear instructions from mothers on working hard.

To illustrate this point, one parent said the following:

“This is because girls were constantly advised and reminded on how to behave at school. Their mothers took time to coach them on how they should interact with adults e.g. teachers and elders of the community.”

Another issue that the parents in focus group discussions raised was that mothers and their successful female relatives acted as role models of hard work to their daughters. Girls were directly instructed to strive for success in education in order to succeed in acquiring jobs in future. The hope for a better future was linked to present efforts at school. A better life in future was linked to hard work at school. To illustrate this point, one of the parents made the following statement:

“The mother would use examples of herself e.g. how old she was when she first fell pregnant or started dating. And they also make reference to family members and encourage the girl child to emulate aunt “who” who succeeded in school.”

It appeared to us that this kind of guided socialization was offered to girls by their mothers.

2.9 Fathers’ influence on boys’ work habits

A number of parents in focus group discussions reported that girls worked harder at school than boys because fathers (even men in general) did not act as appropriate role models of hard work to the boys at home as they expected women to do all the work while they goofed around. This reflected cultural gender roles that did not instil a spirit of hard work in boys. In fact, the parents pointed out, because of the cultural practice, boys were sluggish (i.e., inactive, lazy, indolent, expressing poor response to stimulation, lacking vigour and energy) and spent much of their time “socializing” and goofing around. As a result of this, they did



not work hard at school. To symbolically justify all this one parent shared the following apt statement:

“That’s why they say behind every successful man there is a tired woman.”

3. Why more boys than girls dropped out of school

Although at the beginning of the educational process there are more male than female learners enrolled in Grade 1, there are progressively more female than male learners in Namibia enrolled in the educational system from Grades 6 to Grade 12. From Grades 6 to 12, more boys drop out of school than girls because of failing at school, discipline problems, feeling old, going to work and because of demands from their parents that they leave school (EMIS, 2017). One of our aims in this study was to gauge the views of parents on why more boys than girls dropped out of school.

The majority of parents in focus the group discussions from the 6 Education Regions on which this report is based, affirmed the finding that more boys than girls dropped out of school. This led to their under-participation in education. When we asked these parents why they thought that more boys than girls dropped out of school, they gave a variety of responses which we divided into 6 categories. These categories were *discipline problems, school/educational related factors, the lure of quick success, peer pressure, boys’ disposition (i.e. personality, personal tendencies) and unsupportive social factors.*

3.1 Discipline problems

In this category, we identified four themes. In the first theme, parents explained that a number of boys dropped out of school because of in-discipline or misbehaviour. This included boys not following teachers’ instructions, disobeying teachers, disobeying parents (particularly mothers), disobeying school rules, being arrogant, expressing macho pride (i. e. as males, they were their own bosses), and defying parents’ and teachers’ authority. It seemed as though some boys who underachieved in education were raised not to fear and respect authority.

In the second theme under this category, parents from all 6 Educational Regions reported that a number of boys who underachieve in education dropped out of school because of alcohol and drug abuse. This included excessive drinking of alcohol, experimenting with drugs, selling drugs to make money, acting as drug couriers to make money, sniffing intoxicating substances and smoking dagga. We were informed that there were occasions when boys who underachieved in education engaged in drug dealing and drug abuse because these activities were more interesting than school and earned them popularity (i.e., keeping up the appearance of being cool) in school. One parent explained this in the following way:

“Substance abuse is a very serious challenge. Take an example we have an event in the school, the majority of the people that you would find drunk are boys. They are taking alcohol. Almost all of them and when you look at that it means their mind is not much into the thinking capacity of the school and that which they want to achieve but it’s that which the fame that is around there because they feel if I take alcohol it’s cool and everyone knows I’m the coolest in the school you see. So my concentration is somewhere else, make money, sell drugs and also experiment with drugs than sit in a class listen to this teacher that is telling me ‘x’ and what, what and I can already see the ‘x’ is there and now they are asking me to find it you understand? So it becomes boring for them.”



To amplify on this and to provide a concrete example from a school hostel context, one parent shared the following experience:

I think let me start. I think maybe because of the pressure of life. I can maybe speak out of experience as a teacher, like this year we suspended around 31 boys out of the hostel, because they involved themselves using drugs and also the using of alcohol without us not even knowing that these boys used to climb into the ceiling on top there, they used to smoke there and then also take alcohol. As I mentioned, 31 were suspended from the hostel, it already affected them academically.

Parents further explained that the negative effects of abusing drugs included creating confusion, loss of concentration on education, loss of focus on school and the loss of the future perspective in boys who engaged in the activity. The following quotation elaborates this:

“Now the offences which they commit is mostly on the issue of smoking, for example sometimes they can even go beyond and smoke these dagga things, these unwanted weeds. So those are some of the things that makes the boys to drop out of school because you know when you take those things you feel so high, they are confused, they don’t know your future, only concentrate just for things that are surrounding you no future and at the end of the day you lose your focus”

Moreover, it was pointed out that more boys than girls dropped out of school due to alcohol and drug abuse. It was rare to find girls caught using drugs and found drunk at school.

Some parents in the focus group discussions made an insightful point when they said that in addition to the fact that some boys who underachieved in education dropped out of school due to alcohol and drug abuse, society allowed them not to be ashamed of engaging in this vice but encouraged girls to be ashamed of the vice. Some parents explained this insight by saying the following:

“Boys are more likely to be tempted to go to the bar and drink alcohol. But for a young girl she will feel ashamed to be seen in public at the bar drinking alcohol. Again it is boys who are likely to engage in sniffing and smoking drugs and dangerous substances compared to the girls. Boys lack the shame to be seen drinking alcohol in public and at bars and in some instances they will drink at the same bars with their fathers because ‘man will be man’. Culturally, it is normal for a boy child to go out until it’s late, but for a girl child, it’s wrong. For this reason, a boy child spends less time being disciplined by the parents and more time being involved in bad activities with his peers, e.g drinking alcohol. At the end of the day, the boy child’s performance in school goes down and the consequence is a drop out.”

It appears to us that to some degree, culture promotes more indiscipline in the boy child than in the girl child. This sets him up to be prone to and to be exposed to vices such as alcohol and drugs. These vices promote truancy and undermine his performance in school. In some instances, the boy child drops out of school due to this.

In the third theme under this category, parents indicated that more boys than girls dropped out of school because of sexual misconduct. According to them, some boys dropped out of school because of their involvement in early marriages and because of being distracted by rather possessive and protective love relationships with girls that were anchored on jealousy. With respect to early marriages one parent stated the following:

“ Sometimes maybe because of, how can I say, they are rushing into things while they are not even ready, maybe relationships, they want to get married while they are not even ready or sometimes maybe rushing into things like sometimes dropping out of school they think life is easy, they end up maybe becoming street boys or even just you know become nonentities.”



Regarding possessive and protective love relationships, parents indicated that boys lose focus when they fall in love with girls and spend a lot of time on love affairs than on school activities. They become addicted to illicit and immature love relationships with girls and drop out of school. The manner in which this happens was explained by one parent as follows:

“The moment the boy falls in love he begins to be protective. Protects the girlfriend so you end up not studying every time his eyes will be on the girl and the girl she is busy doing what? Studying and the boy is busy fighting with jealousy.”

In the fourth theme under the category of discipline problems, parents indicated that more boys than girls dropped out of school because they engaged in criminal activities after emulating role models who become rich through crime. In some cases, the boys get caught in crime, are imprisoned and then drop out of school.

To explain this, one parent stated the following:

“ But now they become business men or they become rich in dubious means. Now this boy does not know how this wealth was accumulated but he thinks he can also do it. How do they do it? They begin to smuggle, that is the way they think that would make them rich. So in the process they are caught up by the police, they are in custody, you have to explain, you have to be questioned, there is this process now. It disturbs education, so you simply drop out. “

3.2. School/educational related factors

In this category, we identified four themes. In theme one, parents reported that more boys than girls dropped out of school because boys perceived that education did not seem to lead to employment, it did not prepare them for life after school and it did not cater for their need for practical subjects that they could turn into vocations such as plumbing, electrical work and bricklaying. In other words, they dropped out of school because school did not meet their vocational interests as it largely focused on theoretical subjects. One parent explained this in the following way:

“ So this is why you’d find that sometimes they’ll drop out because they want to go and work, because they want to go and maybe fix cars but they are not taught in school so they will rather do that.”

In response to the boys’ dissatisfaction with the school curriculum that to them did not offer practical subjects that they were interested in, we note that Namibia is making very good progress in elevating the status and availability of vocational subjects in schools. For instance, the latest basic education curriculum makes provision for pre-vocational and vocational subjects. However, according to parents who participated in the focus group discussions, several boys were not yet impacted by the availability of vocational subjects in some schools.

In theme two of this category, parents expressed the view that more boys than girls dropped out of school because there were no industry/school partnerships to encourage boys to stay in school through internships and other initiatives.

In theme three, parents indicated that more boys than girls dropped out of school because boys thought that school was uninteresting, boring and a waste of time. One parent illustrated this by saying the following:

“ So my concentration is somewhere else, make money, sell and also experiment than sit in a class listen to this teacher that is telling me ‘x’ and what, what and I can already see the ‘x’ is there and now they are asking me to find it you understand? So it becomes boring for them.”



In theme four of this category, parents said that some boys dropped out of school because of repeating grades for several years. The repeated failure that these boys experienced during these years, reduced their self-esteem, increased their feeling of inability to succeed in school and increased their desire to drop out of school. Two parents made the following illustrative statements on this. In the first statement, one parent said the following:

“ I think the outside world is also playing a role in changing the mind-set of the boys. For example boys who have been repeating a grade for so many years, they will always have ideas of dropping the school taking up informal employment. For example in our region most of the boys who’d like to go live in Windhoek and take up security company jobs and others end up at the commercial farms and they are being employed. So the main reason is that like they are fed up with the system so they don’t want to become a laughing stock of others so then they just decide to leave the system and join the employment”

In the second statement, another parent said the following:

“ they keep on repeating the grades and it gets to a point where they are now with kids that are very young compared to them. So that begins to demoralize them so with time they decide to drop out because of the class mates that they have now they feel not really motivated to go to school because the situation they are finding themselves in.”

3.3 The lure of quick success

In this category we identified one main theme. In the theme, several parents from the six regions informed us in the focus group discussions that a number of boys who underachieved in education dropped out of school because they were lured by the temptation to get jobs, become rich quickly without much education. This was illustrated by one parent in the following way:

“ so eventually a boy will try to take a short cut, he want to achieve, he want to be successful, he want to drive a nice car, he want to live a nice life but not through education because it is not exemplary any more. So with rich resources we have boys they believe, many of them they believe if they go out they can find a job and they can do this and the next thing they are driving a nice car. So they want to achieve, they want success quicker without the process of going through education.”

In some instances, these boys do not necessarily wish to get rich but to earn money by any means. Some of them drop out of school to provide cheap labour at construction sites, become taxi drivers, work as security guards, and work on commercial farms. Taking up these kinds of jobs does not need much education. One parent explained this in this way:

“ --you can even survive on your own, you can see that even if I don’t do school maybe I can end up being a security, I can take it from there, maybe I can even join people who are building the house, builders. So instead of concentrating too much on school at least for a boy there are many things you are looking at. So I think that is one of the things contributing things.”

3.4 Peer Pressure

In this category, parents from all the 6 regions emphasized the point that in several instances more boys than girls drop out of school because of negative peer pressure influences. They may belong to gangs and other groups of friends which do not place priority on education but on antisocial activities such as abusing alcohol and doing drugs (e.g. smoking dagga). To these boys, “it is a sheer waste of time to sit behind a desk and listen throughout the day”



A parent in one of the focus groups made the following statement to explain the influence of peer pressure:

“Maybe the other reason is the issue of peer pressure. Peer pressure also tends to make these boys drop out from school. Here is a young man who comes from a well to do family, comes here meets with one who is coming from a poor family, when they meet they form up a very good gang. You know when someone comes from a poor family and another one from a rich one and tells you lets go and drink, you’ll follow definitely and in the process they will think maybe drinking is actually a priority, you’re wasting time in class and in the end they will end up dropping out from school but with girls of course there is a smaller percentage of girls that can be pulled out easily but mostly they tend to persist, they don’t give up easily but with the boys I think it’s a sheer waste of time for them to sit behind a desk and listen throughout the day, they would just rather ha ah, big money like someone was saying.”

To give another example, another parent illustrated the influence of peer pressure in the following way:

“ This person each and every time over the weekend, for instance, they meet, they do whatever they want to do. Drinking, smoking, whatsoever you see. So as days go on this person finds out going to school and leaving my colleagues I think it’s a waste of time, let me join them and start continuing with our activities. So peer pressure is one of the factors”

3.5 Boys’ disposition (i.e. personality, personal tendencies)

Under this category, parents pointed out that more boys than girls drop out of school because they tend to lack motivation for school, lack perseverance and lack concentration on educational activities. In addition, because they lack foresight but live in the present, boys tend to drop out of school because they are not guided by a future perspective as they do not form a link between their current educational behaviour and future prospects for employment and a good life.

To illustrate the issue of boys who underachieve in education not being guided by a future perspective, one parent pointed out the following:

“Now the offences which they commit is mostly on the issue of smoking, for example sometimes they can even go beyond and smoke these dagga things, these unwanted weeds. So those are some of the things that makes the boys to drop out of school because you know when you take those things you feel so high, they are confused, they don’t know your future, only concentrate just for things that are surrounding you no future and at the end of the day you lose your focus”

To further illustrate this point, the researchers in one region were informed that boys had planted dagga at school!

On the issue of lack of perseverance, one parent made the following metaphorical statement:

“Boys are not so strong, they are easily pulled by the wind wherever it blows”.

3.6 Unsupportive social factors.

Under this category, parents expressed the view that more boys than girls drop out of school because of experiencing social problems without support and because of being given by parents too many responsibilities at home. Social problems may include boys dropping out of school to go to work and earn money for supporting orphaned families. They may also drop out of school to make money and take care of children of their teenage girlfriends. This would enable them to fulfil their responsibilities, duties and obligations. One parent elaborated on this as follows:



“ Let me say for example if a boy impregnates someone somewhere, and then that boy is going to receive pressure based on what happened that you know now you have a child and as a father you need to take care of your. Let me say the boy is in grade nine and then he will not hold on, he will not hold that problem until he reaches grade 12. The pressure that he is receiving from the community and others will make him drop out because so that at least maybe he can look for employment somewhere and take care of the child. Those factors are the ones that are affecting them most.”

With regards to boys being given too many responsibilities at home, some parents in focus group discussions expressed the view that some parents who did not fully understand the value of education did not encourage their sons to remain in school but forced them to take up responsibilities such as looking after livestock, helping out in the family business and in farming activities. These responsibilities forced some boys concerned to drop out of school. Two statements by two parents in focus group discussions explains this state of affairs more clearly. In the first statement a parent said the following;

“ but apart from that, responsibility also, yeah because sometimes up to the time that we are living now, not all parents are fully aware of how important is education. Once they see that maybe their child have been struggling with education, they already conclude that no this person is not for school, they never encourage those learners and also sometimes what happen that they start giving responsibility in the house to these boys compared to how they would do it to females so all this in the process would affect the learner of even ending up dropping out.”

In the second statement, another parent said the following:

“ The other reason I think is because of too much work at home where by they are loaded with a lot of things to do at home. For example after school hours they go and heard cattle, then from there they are already tired, later on they just end up dropping out of school because of a lot of work and they won't even concentrate much. I think that is one of the contributing factors.”

4. How boys can be supported by the community to perform better academically

In the current research project questions 4 and 5 our aim was to find out the type of support Namibian communities could give to improve boy children's education. To partly obtain qualitative data on this we asked parents in focus group discussions about what they thought communities could do to enhance boys' educational attainments.

In response to the question: 'How can the boys be supported by the community to perform better academically?' parents from the 6 Educational Regions on which this report is based provided a variety of responses. We coded these responses into fourteen themes. We then grouped these themes into five categories. The five categories were: *transforming boy child and girl child rearing beliefs, values and practices; family and community counselling and support of the boy child; school/community collaboration on boys' education; private sector and family collaboration on boy's education and creating an UBUNTU community boy child support system.*

As we have done in response to the 3 parents' focus group discussion questions above, we present the data here category by category as follows:

4.1 Transforming boy child and girl child rearing beliefs, values and practices

According to several parents in focus group discussions, the foundation for supporting boys' education should first be built in early childhood development and education. To these



parents, to enhance boys' educational attainments later in school, child rearing beliefs, values and practices in Namibia should be adapted to current societal values that are informed by human rights, inclusivity, equality and equity. One parent illustrated this reasoning in the following way:

“Starting with the family, yes, but then also lets move down to society. I think for us the black children or African, let me put it that way, I think we have this up bringing where we deny male children a lot of things psychologically speaking. Where you as a man you should be treated differently as opposed to the female. For instance we come to a boy child and then we say a boy child should not do home chores, that is girls thing, a boy should not cry, that is then you are associated with women. So maybe we should go back to the society, traditionally the way that the upbringing of our children that should go through a change. That is where for me authority while girls respect authority.” The expressions and arrogant attitude of boys, and that is where the most dangerous area is, the way we bring up children we already have a way for how girls should be, how boys should be, what should be boys and what shouldn't be girls and all that. That should be changing because by the time when you are going to change that and we are bring boys and girls up as equal partners I think that, that already would change them.”

This means that from an early childhood development and education perspective, the family and the community should raise boys to respect the value of education and be motivated to focus and work hard in education from an early age. A developmental approach should be taken by families and communities when supporting the education of boys. The implication of this is that boys should be socialized from an early age to distinguish right from wrong attitudes and behaviours towards education and distinguish supportive from unsupportive thinking and actions towards education.

One parent put this succinctly as follows:

“ So it has to start from a younger age where by they have to grow knowing that education is important to them.”

To express all this concretely, parents pointed out that as was the case for girls, there must be established in the communities programmes to empower boys to value education from an early age. To do this, early childhood development programmes should support boys to take advantage of educational services to stay in school and teach them about their gender roles in the society. To a number of parents, this meant that boys should be prepared from an early age to become in future heads of household who are educated. In addition, this suggests that parental programmes should be embarked upon to make parents understand the value of education for their children.

4.2 Family and community counselling and support of the boy child

At the family level, parents advised that boys can be counselled and encouraged to focus on education and remain in school not only by their parents but also by their influential and knowledgeable relatives such as uncles, educated older siblings and educated relatives that can be listened to because of what they achieved in life through education. One parent illustrated this by saying the following:

“Before the community can even do something I think it's where the families should come in because maybe you are having a single mother who is raising you, you find problems. There are usually family members where by you have maybe an influential uncle or a grandpa or somebody like that, then they can start from there to help and to spend more time to spend with this child because sometimes kids also want things that they see. My friend is always talking about his dad or I can see a relationship maybe it was father's day, people are there



maybe I also on Facebook or these social media and they see and sometimes they also long for having relationships like those”

According to the parents, an influential family figure that should be actively involved in the counselling, guidance and support process of boys is the father. Some parents indicated that because the boy child comes from the ‘conjugation’ of the mother and the father, fathers should be more involved in the upbringing of their sons as sons look up to them. Fathers should be good role models to their sons by taking time to talk, motivate and encourage their sons to work hard at school. They should, parents emphasized, be career counsellors to their sons by explaining the advantages of education and the disadvantages of offering unskilled labour for jobs that are temporary, risky, without security and without medical aid.

One parent articulated this reasoning in the following way:

“most of the time in the single parent issue or even not only single parent issue, even for those that are married you find that it’s always the mother that will come for meetings. It will be the mother that will come and hear what the child have done and it’s just the mother figure that you see always and when you see a mother figure you wonder where is the father. So I think for the boy to see or to be motivated, the boy need to see the father’s role right from home. Even if they are not married the father should be involved in the upbringing of the child cause that will help. Cause every change that you want, even if you want the boy child to change, change should be instigated by the father cause they tend to listen to the fathers, they tend to take after the father, they consider the father as everything so in the absence of the father the child will be demotivated and in the absence of the father that child will grow up that okay what am I going to do even one day if I’m going to be a father, I will be exactly be like my father. Was not there, was not responsible but the child also succeeded. So I’m going to lay back and also wait. So it should start there. Cause we really have very few male that are participating in the upbringing in the education of the children. Very few. Cause when the child is progressing it’s our child, when the child is failing it’s your child. So where are you, it takes two to tango.”

In addition, both parents should provide moral support to boys who are underachieving in education. Instead of being discouraged and made to feel dull and of low ability, parents should build the self-esteem of their sons by motivating them and not harshly criticising them. They should care for their sons’ wellbeing and be there for them when they are depressed due to failure in school. One parent clarified this by pointing out the following:

“You know I’ve seen parents where a child comes home with a report and the child has failed and they will receive negative, you know those negatives where you know you are dull, you are what. And it clicks in the mind of a child that I’m dull even if I continue there is nothing I will do but if a child comes home and gives you a report, they tell you and you see that they have failed, you tell them no, what you have done here is not good but I know you can still do it. You can still do it, the only thing you have to do is do A, B, C and D, you can move forward, you can progress. So we really need to motivate our children positively”

At the community level, parents indicated that the counselling and guidance of boys to excel in education could be facilitated by successful and educated individuals resident in the communities. Such individuals should be mentors, opinion makers and people who are looked up to in the community. They should be identified as community resource persons that would motivate boys to stay in school and academically achieve. Parents further noted that any member of the community could provide guidance and direction to boys about what is right and what is not. This view was illustrated by one parent in the way that follows.

“ The community can use different gatherings or initiate a season or time for sharing information based on those ones who succeed in their life. Maybe a general meeting for young boys plus men those one who also there are big men that did not succeed also, using the successful one to be an example and also encouragement them to be able to solve whatever problems that they may encounter as they can also be as successfully as others. So if we use others successful men who completed school and so on, to talk to the young ones, they will be also helped not to drop out of schools.”



The general message here that parents in the focus group discussions were communicating was that boys needed from families, societies and communities *care, nurturance, pastoral care, rearing support and adults' directional scaffolding*.

4.3 School/community collaboration on boys' education

Parents proposed that one way of supporting boys who underachieve in education is to put in place school/community collaboration initiatives. The point here, according to parents, is that the community can support boys' education by putting in place discipline regimes at home, in the families.

Families should focus on teaching boys what is right and what is wrong at home during child rearing and socialization. Before boys go to school, they would have been taught the value of education in their families. This thinking was illustrated in the manner that follows:

“ If we start from the beginning, we discipline the boys we tell them the advantage and disadvantage of going to some places at home. Then the teacher will top up with the same idea, maybe the kids will realize on what's going on in life because now you find the learners like my colleague here said, they drink beer, they don't know the problem of drinking beer, they don't know if it's wrong or correct “

To further implement the school/community collaboration, parents indicated that schools could arrange days when mentors and other resource persons, especially men, could come from the community to school to act as boys' role models by encouraging and motivating them to focus on school. One parents explained this as follows:

“ And also that partnership the community and the schools, we should bring more people, mostly men to come talk to the boys. And even at the school where I was last year we were having these motivation day and then we also discovered boys are also less motivated so we brought lawyers, especially magistrate men to come and give an example like 'me I was here at this school and I completed and so on' it will also do that. And also as parents who say this a parent of who, who, who, your class mate, so you can also do it as a parent also did it. So those communication as teachers and parent we should have a partnership and influence more parents to come to school each and every day and set as an example so that even those single parents children that are coming from single parent they also know that okay there are people that are also coming from the same back ground like me but they are also successful in their life. Parents should not be far from the school.”

Some parents also suggested that for the school/community collaboration initiatives to be effective, community members should be made aware by schools of educational underachievement problems and challenges boys have in school. Schools should run boy child underachievement and boy child under-participation in education awareness/outreach programmes. Parents further suggested that such programmes could be based on empirical achievement data from schools and be facilitated by educational regional officials and staff from tertiary educational institutions. The explanation provided below by one parent further strengthens this suggestion:

“ Parents in the community should closely monitor the educational progress of their sons. Boy support should be provided at the micro community level, at the family level. Parents and guardians should provide this support in the form of checking whether or not their children are making educational progress, whether they are on task in school and class rooms, whether they require financial and material support; whether they are have social-emotional problems. They should work closely with schools to be able to do this.”



4.4 Private sector and family collaboration on boy's education

Under this category, parents suggested that the private sector could be mobilized to support and finance boy child empowerment programmes and activities such as motivational seminars, psychosocial development workshops, anti-alcohol and drug abuse seminars, youth development seminars for boys and gender sensitization workshops. For instance, business men and women based in the communities could be organized to initiate and support recreation facilities for boys. Such facilities would provide services to boys in order to keep them away from toxic entertainment in the form of alcohol and drugs. In addition, the private sector could be mobilized to offer material and financial support to boys who are in need of such support in order for them to pay school fees, buy uniforms, pay for hostel accommodation, etc.

A parent clarified this suggestion by stating the following:

“let's say if we have those boys that have issues in school and so forth, let us talk to them because some of the problems might be financial cause some might not feel they need to come to school because they don't have certain materials or uniforms or are unable to keep upcoming because of where they are staying and so forth. So as a community we can get the business people involved, let us identify such type of boys that are in need so the businesses can actually come in and assist these boys to make sure that they don't drop out so that they continue with their school.”

Moreover, to support some boys who underachieve in education due to psychosocial and emotional problems, the private sector could be mobilized to financially support community boy child social programmes run by regional school counsellors, social workers, and psychologists.

4.5 Creating an UBUNTU community-based boy child support system.

Before we present our analysis of parents' responses under this category, we wish to give a synopsis of the UBUNTU African philosophical world view and belief system. Zimba (2002) states that consistent with the conception of the indigenous African family, the individual can only exist *corporately* as part of the community. Made, created and produced by the community, the individual becomes conscious of his being, *corporate* duties, responsibilities and privileges through his existence and relationship with others. Because of this Mbiti (1990, p. 106) says that when the individual:

“suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does the wife 'belong' to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father's or mother's name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'.”

The Zulu of South Africa succinctly express this view of the individual by noting that *umuntu umuntu ngabantu*, literally meaning that “‘a person is only a person with other people’”. In other words, “it is only within a community that a person can be said to truly become a person. Through a person's contributing to the community, the community in turn adds human qualities to that person” (Higson-Smith and Killian, 2000, p. 206).



Some parents recognized that although the community support for the boy child could be based on this philosophy of life and world view, it does not exist and function in the way it used to function in the past. One parent expressed this point as follows:

“It is not like in the old days when we believed that a child was the responsibility of the community. Now it is not like that. The child is the responsibility of the parents than the community. The support would really take a bit of time because now we are not forging relationships like they were before.”

Expressing a similar view, another parent had the following to say:

“I know in Africa that my child does not only belong to me, he is supposed to belong to the whole community but now the thing have changed. My child is my child. The neighbour does not have a right to talk about even if they see something bad that my son or my daughter is doing, them they say you are not invited in my family members. These are some of the things that may contribute because we have adapted purely hundred percent western life.”

Parents noted that to support the boy child corporately, in the community, new ways of community support have to be structured. New community mobilization around the boy child has to be brought about. The society itself must be transformed in a manner that it socializes boys and girls in the same way and not to be strict with the girl and relaxed with the boy; permit the boy to do wrong things but punish the girl if she does wrong. To support the boy, the community should be transformed and turned into a supportive and empowering collective. Some parents articulated this type of reasoning as follows:

“Exactly, we have to change, it’s about the mind-set, the community have to change the mind-set. The way we look at boys is totally different from the way we look at girls. The way we are raising a boy child is totally different from the way we want to raise a girl child. You are looking at a child you want your child to, if it is a girl you are still guarding the girl that I want at five she must be home, you have done your homework, but with boys sometimes it’s like go. As a community, as a society we let boys down because we are not involved in their development. It’s a mind-set, the way we are adjust our mind, we have to adjust our mind as a society so that we be inclusive with all the kids’ boys and girls. Treat them equally. At the moment we are not treating them equally, we are letting the boy. A boy at fourteen can come here with a knife and nobody is saying no that’s my man. It’s true, that’s not a man, that’s wrong but a girl, when a girl did anything wrong she’ll be punished twice than the boys but a boy can do something and you’ll let him go because that’s a boy, that’s a man. So we have to change our mind-set as a society. In my opinion to articulate more I think we should go back to the traditional notion that it takes a village to raise a kid. If we can go back there we can not only support the boys but everyone else because right now even if you support the boys, you motivate them, you provided everything, there will be still that chance when they will be influenced that lets go out for a beer or something and back then when you find some young child at the bar you chase, you beat the child to go home and eventually just study-“

According to this thinking, parents thought that any community intervention to support the boy child should be based on the understanding that the whole community ought to be responsible for raising not only the boy child but all children. To do this there should be a code of conduct, a cultural blueprint, to use when raising children. The traditional values should be the starting point, the foundation of the blueprint.

In practice, as was the case in the past, every adult in this system should be on the look out to sanction unacceptable behaviour of boys and girls where ever they are found. To do this, according to parents in the focus group discussions, there should be established in the community the norm that all adults have the societal power and authority to sanction all children, including boys. For instance, according to the parents in the focus group discussions, the community should have a collective responsibility of sanctioning boys who engage in antisocial and unacceptable behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse. One parent explained how this could be done in the following way:



“We must sanction practices that are not acceptable, boy that are under age should not be seen nearby alcohol outlets and again because some of us are from the surrounding, it’s my social responsibility to talk to these boys. If I find him somewhere I have to tell him the truth, you are not yet ready to be taking alcohol, the journey is still long. These are some of the things I think we have also to do.”

Another parent indicated that this should be based on the following understanding that community members should ascribe to.

“ It is causing us problems, we need to revert to our concept of Ubuntu. You are a member of the community because you have responsibilities. Your child is not only your child, it’s a child of the community. You are a parent not only to your children but to the community, to other people who are in the community, that concept also can help.”

One would ask how concretely in the *UBUNTU* community-based boy child support system the community would develop new norms of raising boys that would enhance their educational achievement. The parents in the focus group discussions proposed a number of programmes that could be deployed. The first one of these is that to support the boy child to stop misbehaving and self-destructive behaviours such as alcohol abuse and drugs, goofing around, wasting time etc, communities could recreate or reclaim the UBUNTU community support system by operating ***a neighbourhood watch for boys’ education and social welfare network***. In this network, community members could look out, and watch out for boys in trouble in bars, streets, Shebeens, clubs, nightclubs and crime dens/hot spots. If unable to handle them on the spot, any adult could report them to parents, community leaders or law enforcement officers. This could be done because there are limited opportunities nowadays where families take time to guide/instruct boys on what to do in order to improve their academic achievement. To support boys, families and communities could provide such opportunities for family counselling and guidance of boys.

One parent, in the following statement, explained why this should be done:

“ The negative part of it is that in our times people are on their own. It is unlike in the olden days where there is an African saying, an African proverb that says it takes a whole village to raise a child but nowadays you see my child has done wrong but the other elderly person will just pass by, will not even reprimand or not even say whatever that is. So such things they also, you know, but how can the community come in?”

The second programme that parents suggested was that of establishing foster care programmes for boys who do not receive adequate care and support from their families. According to the parents who made this suggestion, the programme would be necessitated by the need expressed in the following statement:

“ I think people support, the community, those who don’t have children but want kids and have a lot of things, they are supposed to take other kids in their houses and make them their own kids for example just to guide them and so forth, I think that one can be done.”

The third programme that was suggested was that of revamping the school boards to ensure that they initiated and operated programmes to support boys’ education.

5. How partnerships between communities and schools could be strengthened to promote boys’ academic achievement

In response to the question: ‘How can partnerships between communities and schools be strengthened to promote boys’ academic achievement?’ parents in focus group discussions made a variety of suggestions and proposed a number of boy child support strategies. We



identified twelve themes on these suggestions and strategies which we divided into four categories. These categories were *boy child school/community programmes*, *boy child school/community initiatives*, *parents' involvement in school activities and entrepreneurship programmes for boys*. We present our analysis of parents' suggestions on how schools and communities can work together to promote and strengthen boys' academic achievement category by category in the manner that follows:

5.1 Boy child school/community programmes

In our coding of parents' responses, we identified 3 themes under this category. In the first theme, parents proposed that before schools and communities networked on how to strengthen boys' academic achievement, they should build a boy child support vision. To do this the communities should be retooled, trained and empowered to work with schools in support of boys according to the UBUNTU Philosophical world view and belief system. According to parents, this entailed that competencies, common understanding and skills should be developed amongst community members for them to work in support of boys. This implied that a common community vision, blueprint, worldview of how to improve boys' education achievement should be created before embarking on the networking process between schools and communities. For instance, schools and communities should hold teacher-parent meetings to work out ways of helping and supporting specific boys.

One parent expressed the need for the creation of a common vision of how to improve boys' academic achievement in the following way:

“ So now as much as parent want to control a child that is found smoking, in our tradition if I'm smoking anybody can beat me, even parents can beat me because it's supposed to not be like that but now our parents, our community, our society are not empowered to control the society. Now even if a parent is a school board member, the moment he is trying to discipline your child you come in as a parent, “that's my child, leave out my child”. So as much as we have school boards, they are not that empowered to stamp in their authority because of these I don't know whether its cultural, European culture we are following, something is just not right.”

In the second theme under this category, parents in focus group discussions, proposed that schools could create boy support programmes and ask parents to mobilize financial and other resources to implement the programmes. They also proposed that the school/community partnership should not only focus on boys' misbehaviour and misdeeds, it should also focus on how to improve the educational attainments of boys. To do this, the partnership could use human resources from the community to empower and encourage boys to succeed in school. One parent expressed this view as follows:

“So when we have like a community that is willing to support they must first understand what is it that I'm supporting, what is it that I have to achieve for the school, is it achievable? When can it be achieved? So that approach to me would be the best. School boards if empowered, like right now school boards are empowered to deal with the discipline of learners. The problem is they will only come speak to these boy child when there is a disciplinary case. We want them to come speak to the boy child even when there are no cases because we are bombarding them with stop smoking, stop doing that but we are not giving them that this is what the market is out there. You can become this if you do this, if you do that. We only come and tell them you boys smoke so much, you drink a lot. Then they feel this is what society feels about us so why not continue with that. But it can be strengthened if society can come and speak to boys about issues of academic, issues of success, things like that. I think that can also work.”

Our interpretation of this was that parents in focus group discussions were talking about schools, for example, inviting motivation speakers from the community who had either succeeded, were educated, held high jobs, high position jobs or they were business men and



women- individuals who made it because they had gone to school to come to schools and act as role models for the boys. Furthermore, consistent with this, the school could collaborate with the community in showing how lack of education leads to unemployment. To do this, unemployed persons from the community could be used as resource persons to explain to boys the negative effects of dropping out of school.

In addition, parents indicated that the school/community boy support programmes could be used to cultivate in boys the passion for particular professions and careers. One parent illustrated this by saying the following:

“ So I think one way is that lets identify somebody who grew up in that certain community who became a public figure and then you bring that person, so either at school or at a public meeting, to motivate the boys, at least maybe to tell them his stories, the challenges that he went through until he became somebody. So one or two boys will pick up at least that no I also want to become successful like someone who came from my village, so use people from their village to inspire them, who became public figures. That is also one way you can motivate the boys”

In theme 3 under this category, parents proposed that communities and schools could establish ethical codes of conduct/ethical blueprints that they would jointly use to enhance, revamp, improve morals and behaviour of boys. One parent articulated this proposal as follows:

“I think that the community should be involved in teaching them ethical manners, this ethical manner has to do with if learners are not at school then they should be in church, if they are not in church then they are there out there in the community and then what ever these social organization are having that will offer to these learners it should be in an ethical way.”

5.2 Boy child school/community initiatives

Under this category, we identified 4 themes. In theme 1, parents in focus group discussions suggested that there should be established teachers’/ parents’/ learners’ working group initiatives. In such initiatives, links, interactions and commitment amongst teachers and parents should be put in place to support specific boys who underachieve in education. Parents and teachers should jointly develop plans to support specific boys displaying specific learning problems. Three parents illustrate this in three quotations. In the first quotation, one teacher expressed the following:

“There should be a direct link and commitment from all stakeholders, if we are too just leave everything to the school then the teachers will not know how, which specific individual from my class I should pay attention to. So the parents and whoever is the guardian must come together and discuss and share ideas that oh my boy has this tendency so that at school at least it will help the teachers to understand and even the school at large to understand how to go about the boys. What practice to bring in, what practice to ban and banish from the school and eventually I think that will somehow pick three or four, five boys from the rest and motivate them to keep on going to school.”

In the second quotation, another teacher said the following:

“School must organize ‘teachers-parents’ meeting to share experiences within the school and the hostel. Parents need to hear that from the teachers because some parents do not come to the school to this sort of thing. Also teachers needed to hear from the parents the general behaviour from the learner at home and then from this we can come up with ideas of how to help let’s say a specific boy, these boys that are problematic at school and at home. It’s when you can start thinking of how to help that specific boy.”

In the third quotation, another teacher said the following:



“I don’t want to want to repeat what my colleague was saying but one thing again I have to add that the community and the school have to work together and even the school have to make sure that they have a teacher-parents and learner talk, that one can motivate the learner and also can bring the learner to attention that if I did this at school the parents at home will know and if I did this at home then the teachers will know, that one can help them out”

In the next initiative under the theme of teachers/parents/learners working groups, parents in focus group discussions proposed that school boards should be sensitized and made aware of the boys’ underachievement in education. Then, they should be enabled to identify and implement strategies of supporting the boy’s education. Specifically, school boards should put in place specific programmes on how to support boys’ education. They should have specific annual plans on how members of the school boards would be involved in, for instance, visiting schools to encourage and motivate boys to academically work hard in school. One parent articulated all this in the following way:

“For me there should be a program to link a school board to have time to come to school to talk to the boys. But if there is no program which invites them specifically to come and talk to the boys, talk to them, encourage them, motivate them. So sometimes if that link is not there, because the school board they are there for the parents, they speak on behalf of them but now if there are no programs the whole term, the school board does not come to school, they don’t talk especially to the boys to motivate them so everything will not work. So I think there should be a program, an internal policy which relates to the school.”

In the other initiative under the theme of teachers/parents/learners working groups, parents in focus group discussions suggested that schools should reach out to communities by holding public meetings to sensitize the communities on the educational underachievement of boys and asking communities for their suggestions on how they could work with schools to support boys’ education. One teacher elaborated on this in the following way:

“Maybe one of the thing that can be done is that the school also can go out, have meetings with the community rather than inviting people to come in all the time. So school should also reach out for example you know that like this school, with this village, then you see a number of learners maybe coming from around the villages then you see then later you decide where maybe it will be suitable to make a meeting with the community inviting the headman, the chief then address what is the problem teachers are experiencing at school you know coming from learners, whatever concern they have.”

In the other initiative under the theme of teachers/parents/learners working groups, parents in focus group discussions suggested that school open days/parents-teacher meetings could be used to sensitize parents and the community about boys who underachieve. This time could be used to discuss strategies of how the boys in question could be helped at home and in school.

In theme two under this category, parents proposed the initiative that the church should be involved in motivating boys and providing spiritual guidance to them. To effect this, pastors from various denominations and congregations in the communities could be invited to schools to talk to boys about appropriate spiritual morals, beliefs, values and practices that would enable them to work hard in school and prepare them for worthwhile future lives.

In theme three under this category, parents proposed that schools in partnership with communities could work to enhance boys’ educational attainments by establishing father/son interaction initiatives. In these initiatives, fathers could be involved in their son’s educational and other school extracurricular activities. For instance, boys in school could be encouraged to engage in fund raising activities such as car wash bazaars. In this activity, members of the



community could bring their cars to school to be washed. This would bring boys and their fathers closer to each other. Fathers would be involved in their sons' education in an indirect way.

In theme four under this category, parents proposed that programmes to incentivise boys' education could be established. In such programmes, parents from the communities could, for instance, donate articles of various kinds to schools for use in ceremonies to recognize boys' academic achievement. Such recognition would encourage boys to excel in education. One parent expressed the need to incentivise boys' education in the following way:

"The communities and schools should create incentives that will motivate a boy child to work hard and do well in school. For instance, a prize giving ceremony each year, where the best students in school receive incredible gifts that will motivate children to do well next time."

5.3 Parents' involvement in school activities

Under this category we identified 3 themes. In theme 1, parents suggested that schools should involve parents in the communities in its initiatives to support the education of the boy child. For instance, schools and communities could have joint plans/initiatives of how to support boys' education. To concretise this example, parents from local communities could sponsor competitions in which money would be raised to fund boys' education support initiatives. One parent contextually explained all this in the following way:

"The community or members of the community especially business people can come up with some sponsorship. Sponsor boys. Okay who is going to score high in mathematics that the school is going to get five thousand dollars or a trophy. This is specifically for boys, you will see competition actually happening"

Parents in the focus group discussions also suggested that parents, especially fathers, could be involved in schools' extracurricular activities.

In theme 2 under this category, parents proposed that to teach boys the sense of responsibility, they could be asked to work as community volunteers helping community members meet their basic needs (e.g. collecting water and firewood for the elderly). To institutionalize this, schools and communities could establish volunteer programmes in which boys could learn how to be responsible not only for their own wellbeing and welfare but also for the wellbeing and welfare of others. In addition, communities could organize projects in which they would demonstrate to boys about how to be responsible. To do this, they could organize school clean-up campaigns in which parents, teachers and learners would be involved.

One parent illustrated this as follows:

"Yes because one problem boys have is not being responsible so that would be one way of teaching responsibility that actually they are being helpful to not only their parents but to anyone in the community who needs help. They can see why it is important for them that they have lives of value and that they can make use of these lives for the benefit of others. Responsibility."

In theme 3 under this category, parents suggested that to enhance boys' education, school/community partnerships could establish school/boy child's family link programmes. In such programmes, schools should encourage and enable teachers to develop the habit of taking time to really know, understand, be concerned of and care for the welfare and wellbeing of boys who underachieve in education. Teachers could do this by familiarising themselves with and knowing the family situation of boys who underachieve in education or



boys who experience difficulties, challenges and problems in their families. It is only after doing this that teachers/schools and communities can devise viable ways of helping boys enhance their educational attainments. One parent lucidly expressed the need for this in the following way:

“ in the 70’s and 80’s, the 70’s I was not there, let me talk in the 80’s, yeah those maybe starting from 83’, 84 there when I was still very young, those teachers by then, if any learner who’s schooling at that particular school they might know in which house this learner is coming from and how is the life of the house where this learner in coming from but things have turned around like us teachers, some teachers, they only care about you know meeting a learner in the class but not really knowing the background of the learner they are teaching and it also sometimes you don’t communicate whatever you are seeing, hearing from this learner that you are teaching from the parents. That can also affect their relationship between you and the parents and that sometimes also traumatize because these learner need to be loved and cared for and you must also pay attention because sometimes we have a tendency some of the teachers say okay if you don’t study that is your problem but me end of the month I’ll get paid, I have this qualification, have this and this and this.”

5.4 Entrepreneurship programmes for boys

Under this category we identified two themes. In theme one, parents suggested that schools and communities could enhance boys’ education by organizing internships or school/community boy support programmes in which boys learn what is entailed in particular professions by visiting and learning from companies, job establishments, industries and institutions such as educational institutions, factories, retail companies, law firms, chambers of commerce and industry, Accounting firms, etc. By doing this, the boys would cultivate interest in particular jobs and create a link between education and employment.

In theme two under this category, parents in focus group discussions suggested that to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship amongst boys, parents and schools could organize bazaars at which homemade objects and food items would be sold. Boys could be encouraged to bring their own wares to be sold at the bazaars.

6. How culture could be used to support the retention of boys in school

It is important to couch this section of the report within a clear understanding of what *culture* is. This will inform our analysis of Namibian parents’ responses on how culture could be used to support the retention of boys in school. Brislin (1990, as cited in Zimba, 2002) uses a number of characteristics to describe what is meant by the concept of *culture*. Some of the characteristics are the following:

- (i) Culture consists of the part of the environment that people make. In the social environment, culture relates to constructions of concepts, ideas, values, norms, categories and assumptions about life and wellbeing.
- (ii) Culture is instantiated when ideas and ways of being are transmitted, *rarely with explicit instruction*, from generation to generation by representatives of older generations of human communities. Some of these representatives are parents, teachers, doctors, sages, religious leaders, journalists, politicians, academics and in today’s world, by the social media.
- (iii) Culture confers group membership on people. This comes about through an internalization (or co-construction) of identifiable and particular customs, traditions, values, beliefs, practices and ways of reasoning about human life and ways of being such as those of *interdependence, relatedness, separateness, independence, ‘communalism’, and connectedness* (Keller and Greenfield, 2000; Eckensberger and Zimba, 1997).



(iv) Kim, et al. (2000), state that in addition to providing meaning, direction, and coherence to its members, *culture* allows people to define who they are, to decide what is meaningful, to communicate with others and to manage and utilize their physical and social environmental resources according to *their* desired ends. It is through culture that people think, feel and behave (Shweder, 1991; Berry et al., 1992)

Although all the four components of culture that have been described above will enable us to understand and interpret parents' focus group discussion responses, component (iii) resonates in a special way with our study in general and with this report in particular. The point for us is to capture how Namibian customs, traditions, values, beliefs, practices and ways of reasoning about human life and ways of being can be used to support the retention of boys in Namibian schools.

In response to question 6 of the focus group discussion interview that was on **how culture could be used to support the retention of boys in school**, parents shared with us a variety of responses. In our coding of the responses we identified 20 themes. We divided these themes into 6 categories of *cultural values for parenting boys and girls; circles of care, guidance and help around the boy child; acceptable and unacceptable cultural values; reframing the position of the boy in society; cultural metaphors in the education of boys and girls; and dysfunctional families.*

As we have done in the other sections of this report, we shall here present our analysis of parents' responses category by category as follows

6.1 Cultural values for parenting boys and girls

In this category we identified 5 themes. The first theme we present is on teaching boys the cultural value of respecting, obeying and caring for parents. A number of parents in the focus group discussions pointed out that before boys desire to remain in school they must be taught ethics of respect for their parents, caring and helping their parents. According to the parents in focus group discussions, boys should learn to respect and obey their parents before they can live by school rules and school constraints. In addition, boys should be taught good morals and respect for elders and other people in society.

The second theme that we present under this category is on fathers' assumption of their cultural roles in the upbringing of their sons. In this theme, parents from almost all the 6 regions on which this report is based, advised that fathers should assume their cultural role of teaching their sons to behave well at school and in the community. They should take time to encourage their sons how to conduct themselves at home and in school. In addition, they should actively participate in the education of their sons. One parent indicated that doing this is important because boys value the guidance from their fathers. The parent expressed this sentiment in the following way:

"The boy child holds their fathers in high regards. If fathers Place more effort in motivating their sons to learn, the boy child will obey the father's authority and will work hard."

Notwithstanding the wish described in the preceding paragraphs, it was acknowledged by some parents that many boys lived in households without father figures. In these households there is the absence of fathers from the lives of boys- fathers who are supposed to play their cultural duties of mentoring, counselling and guiding boys are absent. To deal with this situation, it was noted that communities could support the education of boys by urging fathers



to become viable role models and mentors for their sons. They could do this by performing their fatherly roles well and by being available to guide, counsel and mentor their sons. This was what all cultures in Namibia required of them. The parents further noted that communities might not adequately support boys' education if fathers abrogated their responsibilities as role models for their sons.

Other parents furthermore noted that fathers should not only be present in their homes but they should, during socialization, be close to their sons. It was noted that some fathers withdraw their support of their sons during socialization too early. Unlike mothers who remain close to their daughters throughout their daughters' lives, fathers tend to be distant from their sons. To avoid this, cultures in Namibia should be changed in such a way that boys remain close to their fathers and learn from them.

The third theme that we present in this category is on the issue of 'parents acting as parents' for boys during socialization. On this issue, parents in focus group discussions proposed that to encourage boys' retention in school, parents, from a cultural perspective, should stop treating boys as if they did not need help and guidance, as if they were self-sufficient and that they could look after themselves unaided. Moreover, parents should stop perceiving boys as people who could take care of themselves without scaffolding support. Consistent with this, parents should stop glossing over and ignoring boys' misconduct and wrong doing. When parents do not take heed of this advice, they partly create the problem of boys underachieving in education by being lenient to them and by the way they raise them up.

To emphasize the need for parents to care for, guide and nurture their sons during socialization, parents in focus group discussions advised that parents should stop perceiving their sons as self-sufficient men when they are mere boys who are unable to independently care for themselves without support. Instead, parents should monitor and exercise control over their sons' whereabouts, who they spend time with, at whose houses they socialize, know how discipline is maintained at those houses, and know the parents who own the houses and whether such parents are dependable, honest and present at the houses.

One parent in the focus group discussions supported this view by saying the following:

" but if you do not know where he was then you should be worried because that is exactly where everything else is turning out, where everything is going wrong. We are letting loose the kids so early. That's what I think"

What is implied here is that boys' behaviour and actions are not monitored and controlled by parents while they use a culture of neglect and carelessness when raising boys. However, parents in the focus group discussions reported that the 'girl child is required to abide by the rules of the house, her movements are monitored, if she violates the rules she is beaten, physically punished'. In contrast, the boy child is not subjected to parents' monitoring and control. The boy's wrong doing is left unpunished. From a cultural point of view, this is a wrong tradition and a wrong practice that should be changed.

Another wrong cultural belief that parents in the focus group discussions alluded to was that of using vulnerability to justify the strict control exercised over girls. It was indicated that because boys were as vulnerable as girls, they should also be strictly monitored and controlled. One parent expressed this view as follows:

" Because um for me boys we are looked at as if there is nothing else around us that can harm us but that is wrong, the reality is we are all vulnerable to everything but we don't need as much attention as the girls."



Parents in focus group discussions further pointed out that in addition to culturally recognizing that both boys and girls were vulnerable, parents should, as was earlier indicated in this report, equally motivate girls and boys to stay in school and excel. The cultural tendency of providing more educational motivation to girls than boys should be discouraged. One parent expressed this view as follows:

“ In addition, culturally, the girls are more motivated by parents to stay and do well in school compare to the boys. Hence, the low performance of boys on school. Parents, therefore, need to motivate all children equally, and the importance of education must be instilled in both girl and boy children equally.”

The fourth theme that we present under this category is on creating a cultural blueprint for raising boys and girls. In this theme, parents in the focus group discussions suggested that there was a need to have agreed upon ideas, beliefs and practices of how to raise boys who would value their lives, their parents, their communities and education. According to the parents, communities should construct child rearing practices and beliefs on which to base the raising of boys who would excel in education. Parents in the focus group discussions grappled with how concretely this could be done.

Let us look at two quotations on how parents struggled with this. In the first quotation, a parent said the following:

“ But now if we go back to that, how do we integrate the western culture with our own culture and create that culture that is beneficial to boys. That is where the whole problem is. Society should construct a cultural blueprint that is supportive of boys’ wellbeing and boys’ education. How do we construct a transformed UBUNTU Worldview that is supportive of boys’ education?”

In the second quotation, another parent said the following:

“ let’s go back to our African way of doing things because we are integrating too many things at once and then it’s like we are now drunk, it’s like we are drunk. Here we are practising this but then we are now preaching the other one so you find we have too many things that are circulating and they are confusing people. This one they want you to believe that, the other one they will believe the other- so it’s not common, let’s be African, lets change our minds and heart because at the moment our mind-set is more of the European, it’s more of the, that’s another culture, that’s another tradition, that’s another way of doing things so we are trying to imitate them but we are not fully imitating them because we are not them. There must be an agreed upon African/ Namibian culture we should use to mould boys into people who value education as a tool for a sustainable way of living. How do we build this culture? How should society be transformed into a community that is supportive of boys’ education?”

An answer to these questions was provided in section 4.5 above where it was proposed that communities could recreate or reclaim the UBUNTU community support system by putting in place and operating **a neighbourhood watch for boys’ education and social welfare network**. In this network, for instance, community members could look out, and watch out for boys in trouble in bars, streets, Shebeens, clubs, nightclubs and crime dens/hot spots and sanction their antisocial behaviour in a corporate way.

An UBUNTU philosophy of raising children in which the boy child or any child for that matter is the responsibility of the entire village, the entire community could be reinstated in this way.

The Firth theme we present under this category in on prosocial values for raising boys and girls. In this theme, parents in focus group discussions proposed that to retain boys in school, specific cultural values and practices should be enforced not only amongst girls but amongst



boys as well. They itemised these values and practices to be those of *observance of, adherence to and obedience of rules; respect for order in life; respect for time/curfew hours in households; communication of information on boys' and girls' whereabouts, activities and friends; insistence on observance of compliance, discipline and obedience in households amongst boys and girls and consistent application of sanctions and consequences as useful tools of socialization in households.*

In addition, parents itemised values and practices of *co-workmanship/cooperation; hard work; honesty; trust; truth; trustworthiness; and faithfulness.* Parents suggested that boys and girls should learn these values at home and then apply them in school.

To highlight these values, one parent shared the following in focus group discussions:

“ Be honest and trust, telling the truth, being faithful. Like in our culture when you give an elderly person even water you fill in a cup and you put in a plate and you kneel and you clap at least. So if such things are not installed in our boys then some way, somehow they'll be derailed. But now if it stays on their minds most of the times they will know that okay fine this is what I'm taught at home so when I go to school this is what I'm taught at school. So it is a common belief among a group of people so and then it becomes normal and then it becomes their culture or their way of doing things “

The main point being advanced here is that one important way of encouraging boys to stay in school is to instil in them cultural beliefs and values of respect, honesty, truth, hard work, etc. In order for them to stay in school and excel boys should learn to respect their parents and others in the community, they need to be honest, tell the truth at all times, be disciplined, be responsible, be trustworthy, and be caring.

6.2 Circles of care, guidance and help around the boy child

Under this category, we identified 3 themes. The first theme was on the use of culture for instilling the sense of responsibility in boys. In this theme, parents in focus group discussions suggested that boys should be prepared to stay in school and work hard from an early age. Before they are enrolled in school, boys should be given tasks during socialization at home that would groom them to be responsible learners in school.

In the second theme under this category parents suggested that to use culture for retaining boys in school, there should be a paradigm shift in the Namibian cultural view system that pertains to the raising of children. In the shift, the raising of children should be the responsibility of whole communities, villages, neighbourhoods, and families. In these social collections, circles of care, guidance, counselling, and help around the boy child should be created. These would include the nuclear family circle, the relatives circle, the peer group circle, the youth group circle, the church group circle, and the community support group circle. According to the parents, the circles of care around the boy child idea would help transform the current individualistic way of raising children into a collective way of raising children. In the transformed and collective way of raising children, the goal would be to enable boys to become useful not only to themselves and their families but also to their communities and the society in general.

One parent articulated this reasoning in the following way:

“ At culture now I can say I will include traditional ways of doing things, norms, dogma's, beliefs, we have to go back to our traditional way of doing things then we have to live as Africans. Now if we are living as Africans, every parent have a responsibility to safe guard a child away from the European way of my child for myself. If your child is messing up I cannot say anything because that is not my child. We have to get away from that and



live as a society, we have to tackle the problem together whether it is my child or not I have full authority to discipline this child the same way I'm disciplining mine."

The third theme under this category was on the creation of a prosocial cultural milieu for the support of boys' education. In this theme parents proposed that adults in communities and society should transmit beliefs, values and practices that promote healthy life styles. They should not, for instance, promote promiscuity, drunkardness, drug abuse, corruption of morals and tolerance of wrong. When these are conveyed as normal, we should not be surprised to see boys emulating them and engaging in self-destructive behaviours. Before boys are transformed into people who benefit from positive cultural beliefs, values and practices, adults should be transformed first. Cultural transformation should start from adults.

Parents further suggested that as boys are encouraged to remain in school, communities should deal with perverse alcohol abuse, drug abuse, corruption of morals, gender based violence and other vices that are rampant in the society. To turn away from these vices, communities should set aside time, resources and resource persons to teach boys cultural values that would support their education. As was done in the past, parents and other members of the community should be available and willing to groom boys into useful members of their society. Boys could do this by learning responsibility from acquiring useful skills when performing chores such as looking after livestock, helping out at home, participating in community youth centre activities, etc.

6.3 Acceptable and unacceptable cultural values

We identified three themes under this category. The first theme was on reinstating cultural norms against antisocial behaviour. In this theme, some parents proposed that norms against antisocial behaviour that were practiced in the past should be reinstated. For instance, the use of shaming those who smoke and drink at a young age should be used in school to discourage these behaviours. In addition, the use of ridicule against those who engage in undesirable behaviour and actions should be redeployed in the community and in the school.

The second theme under this category was on redefining acceptable and unacceptable values. In this theme, parents suggested that there was need to redefine acceptable and unacceptable ways of thinking and behaving in the community when raising boys. For instance, members of the community should not tolerate goofing, indolence and self-destructive behaviour amongst boys. This was taken to be important because as a way of life, culture should communicate beliefs, values and practices that promote society's and individuals' wellbeing.

The third theme in this category was on the corruptive effects of the social media. In this theme parents suggested that the moral corruption effects of the social media should be considered when thinking about positive cultural norms that would promote and support boys' education. For instance, boys and the youth in general should be educated about the negative influences of the social media that are in the form of distraction from education, pornography, cyber-bullying, cyber-crime, plagiarism, cyber-abuse, and cyber-terrorism.

6.4 Reframing the position of the boy in society

In this category, we identified three themes. The first theme was on initiation ceremonies for boys. In this theme parents expressed the view that the revival of initiation ceremonies like Olufuko for girls, whose goal is to, among other things, communicate good messages of how



to live as married persons and how to relate to others in society as adult women, should include initiation ceremonies for boys. These would focus on boys acquiring attributes of discipline, responsibility, duty, care and hard work. These qualities could be taught to boys in school with the help of resource persons from the community. In addition to the initiation ceremonies for boys, boys and girls from schools could also be required to attend cultural festivals in the communities in order to learn important cultural lessons that are communicated at the festivals. Whereas boys and girls would learn at the festivals how men and women should relate to each other, boys would learn to be responsible, dependable and be encouraged to reflect on what kind of persons they wish to become in today's world. Moreover, boys would be encouraged to interrogate the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural festivals.

The second theme under this category was on explaining/reframing boys' apparent future cultural role of head of household. In this theme, parents expressed the view that boys' socialization as preparation of a life of service to one's family and one's community includes education as a major ingredient. Because of this, boys should be told that culturally they were heads-of-households to be. To perform this role adequately in future, they needed to remain in school and be educated. This would be important for them to do because the role entails responsibilities and duties. As heads of households in future, boys shall be responsible for and in charge of households. It will be their duty to promote and grantee the welfare and wellbeing of their families in the households. They shall be required to provide shelter, food, health, education, protection and security to their families. According to parents in the focus group discussions, culturally, this is what boys are expected to become as viable members of their communities. One parent illustrated this thinking in the following way:

" Maybe just to sum it up, whenever I talk to the boys in my class I tell them as a man you marry, a woman is married, already that speaks to you that if you are marrying you have to be responsible for everything, but if I'm getting married you have to be responsible for me. So as a man you need to be focused so culturally speaking the children, the boys they have to be also sat down and told to say when you are a man, just the word man itself it tells you that us we are women meaning that we are coming from you, it's a rib coming from you meaning you have to take care of that rib, how do you take care of that? You have to be focused in education, be progressive."

To strengthen their position, parents in the focus group discussions used the metaphor of Adam and Eve when using the role of head of household as a cultural tool to motivate boys to remain in school. The following statement is an illustration of the use of the metaphor of Adam and Eve:

"It was the responsibility of that man to teach the woman what was there. It is you a man who should provide for the family so you should not be weaker. That is your responsibility, that's your primary responsibility, even our grandparents they grew up knowing that it is their own responsibility to make sure that there is cattle, there is farming of crops, there is a house, there should be food and the wife must be clothed and be happy and be fed because she is taking care of my children. This element of culture must be reinstated, reinvested that boys must know."

The role of heads of households for boys was also discussed by parents in focus group discussions from a gender issues perspective. Some parents expressed the view that for them not to be subordinate to women in future boys should be as educated as girls. One parent expressed this in the following way:

" Culturally speaking always the man is the head of the family meaning that even when a child is growing as a boy, one day he is going to be a head of a family. In today's world you cannot head a family when you know nothing. If you are going to head a family and then maybe your wife knows better than you then you are going



to be perceived as being subordinate to your wife. And I think the children are supposed to be told, but especially the boys that, because I remember the words of President Geingob said education is the best equalizer. So meaning if the boys are also going to be educated, they are going to look better so they cannot live better without education”

6.5 Cultural metaphors in the education of boys and girls

Under this category, parents in focus group discussions expressed their disappointment with the fact that cultural values that were supposed to guide boys’ education were not strictly followed in several instances. They used what we have labelled cultural metaphors. The first one of these is the cultural metaphor of 5 dresses girls should wear during the course of their lives in a sequential order. The second one is the cultural metaphor of 5 ties boys should wear in the course of their lives in a sequential order and the third one is the metaphor of multiple teachers of culture.

The five dresses that girls should symbolically wear in a sequential order during the course of their lives are the school uniform, the matric farewell party dress, the graduation gown after completing university education, the wedding dress and the maternity dress. According to the parents, this metaphor teaches girls to focus on education before they get married and raise children. However, this cultural practice is not obeyed or practiced when a girl gets pregnant before completing her education. This would be the case because by doing this, she would have disrupted the cultural sequence of wearing the five dresses. One parent described metaphor of wearing 5 dresses and its abrogation in the following way:

“ Like with girls we always say they are five dresses that a girl needs to put on. It should be a school uniform and then a farewell party dress after grade 12 and then a graduation gown. That is the third one, and then wedding dress and then a maternity. And then with us its starts with maternity while in the uniform so we lost it there. And these days a teacher is pregnant, learner is pregnant, we all go. That is where we also lost it.”

Similar to the cultural metaphor of five dresses, the cultural metaphor of 5 ties boys should wear in a sequential order pertain to the school uniform tie, the matric farewell tie, the bachelor’s degree graduation gown tie, the bridegroom shirt tie and the first father’s day tie. According to the parents, this cultural metaphor, could be used to encourage boys to stay in school and complete their education before they marry and have children.

With regards to the metaphor of teachers of culture, parents in focus group discussions expressed the understanding that there exist several teachers of culture from which boys can either be supported to remain in school or discouraged to focus on education. The parents itemised 10 such teachers of culture. These are *parents as teachers of culture, schools and teachers as teachers of culture, friends as culture teachers, social media as a culture teacher, the internet as a culture teacher, the mass media as a culture teacher, television as a culture teacher, movies as culture teachers, music as a culture teacher and the church as a culture teacher*. According to parents, it is essential to appraise the positive and negative lessons boys might learn from the various multiple teachers of culture before putting in place interventions for supporting boys to remain in school. Because the African culture is either completely lost or diluted to a point where it is not useful, communities and schools should reframe, adapt and transform the various teachers of culture into unified and coherent beliefs, values and practices before they can be used to support boys’ education. One parent elaborated on this in the following way:

“ The learners when they come to school their parents are their teacher, their friend is their teacher, social media is their teacher and television is their teacher, there iare a lot of teachers so to bring in tradition is very



hard and one of the things is that even us parents, even teachers, they are hardly following or practising culture for these learners or for these kids to observe and emulate. So then if maybe parents and us teachers can work together and see if we can bring back culture or at least to practice it maybe... but at this time culture into education is very hard.”

6.6 Dysfunctional families

Under this category, parents in the focus group discussions expressed the view that it was unreasonable to expect broken homes which may not follow any cultural values to support the call to retain boys in school. According to the parents, families experiencing social turmoil should first be rehabilitated and empowered before they could support boys' education. As was presented in section 6.2 above, this could be done through the creation of a prosocial cultural milieu for the support of boys' education. One parent expressed the gist of the constraint of dysfunctional families in the following way:

“There are already broken families there where they are coming from, there is not charisma where they are coming from, there is no father figure to look up to, uncle figure to look up to and because from what I understand and my experience, that father figure who was really there for his children, the children could look at him more. It is not the same the children's are growing with a mother only and if a boy, during the adolescence stage, the trying times, he begins to experience all such kinds of teachers that he has referred to”.



REPORT ON PARENTS' FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA FROM ERONGO REGION, KAVANGO EAST REGION, AND FROM ONE SCHOOL IN THE KHOMAS REGION

This section of the research report is on the analysis of parents' focus group discussion data from Erongo Region, Kavango East Region, and from one school in the Khomas Region. According to Table 34 of the quantitative data, 32 parents from Erongo and Kavango East Regions had completed the parents' questionnaire.

Parents constituting eight focus groups were invited to respond to six (6) focus group interview questions of the Study. On average, 4 parents belonged to a focus group discussion with the smallest group constituting four members while the biggest group consisted of 14 parents. 14 parents from one school in the Khomas Region participated in the discussion, and this was the biggest parents' focus discussion group. The parents responded to the following research questions:

1. Boys are less motivated to work at schools than girls. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
2. Girls work harder than boys. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
3. In your opinion, why do more boys drop out of school than girls?
4. How can the boys be supported by the community to perform better academically?
5. How can communities and school partnerships be strengthened to promote boys' academic achievement?
6. How can culture be used to support the retention of boys in schools?

The questions solicited views and opinions from parents on the reasons for boys' underachievement and under participation in education with particular focus on work ethics, habits, and motivation of boys compared to girls, reasons why more boys than girls dropped out of school, community support needed for boys to perform better academically, strengthening of community and school partnerships to promote the academic achievement of boys, and the use of culture to support the retention of boys in school.

We present the analysis of responses to the six focus group interview questions in the following manner.

1. Motivation of boys to work at school compared to girls

According to table 120 of the quantitative data, 56.6% of the parents from the 14 Regions agreed with the statement that boys were less motivated to work hard at schools than girls. The majority of parents in the focus group discussions from Erongo Region, Kavango East Region, and one school in the Khomas Region affirmed the quantitative data finding that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls. When we asked them to explain their answers, with reference to why boys were less motivated to work at school compared to girls we received various reasons. These included results of policies of human and children's rights, upbringing, attitudes of boys towards their education, the impact of single parenthood, peer pressure, societal and home environments, and absence of role models.

Regarding **policies of human and children's rights**, some of the parents emphasized that the concepts of human rights and rights of children were misunderstood by the boy child and children in general. According to the parents, this misunderstanding resulted into teachers and parents having diminished and limited roles when enforcing discipline and rules at home and



at school. Parents were discouraged from motivating their children to focus on education because the children claimed that they had rights not to listen to their advice. According to some parents, the overemphasis on children's rights without responsibilities created conditions in which boys became less motivated to work at school than girls as they were not obligated to academically achieve well. To illustrate the overemphasis of rights without accompanying responsibilities, some of the parents during the focus group discussions stated the following:

"The underachievement of boys is due to human rights and rights of the child. The Constitution overemphasizes rights of the child than on responsibilities, and this makes boys not to work hard at school. There is lack of rules enforcement in public schools, and private schools have strict rules."
"Emphasis on the right of the child challenges the status of teachers. Parents and teachers have no powers."

The parents also raised **upbringing and attitude of boys** towards education compared to girls as affecting their motivation to work hard at schools. The issues highlighted included boys' focus on friends instead of their schoolwork, involvement in gangsterism, access to alcohol, and drug abuse, and division and assignment of responsibilities to boys at home when compared to girls. The parents suggested that boys compared to girls were less motivated to work hard at school, because they were generally not motivated to work hard at home, they focused on their friends instead of schoolwork, they focused on toxic activities, and because they were allowed to lazy around at home.

To explain boys' lack of motivation, lack of focus, negative belief systems, habits, and their behavior towards education compared to girls, some of the parents during the focus group discussions stated the following:

"It starts at home at an early age. If a child is motivated at an early age (between 3 -7 years), they will remain motivated for school throughout. In most cases, girls at home are made to do chores, while boys are just left to play. The boys do not make up their beds, water the garden, cook etc. The parents will do it for them."

"Boys challenge authority and have work opportunities without education. There is always a way without education."

"no purpose in life, no focus and determination and just follow others, and like quick benefits."

The voices from the parents' group discussion inform us that boys need external motivation to encourage and support them to work hard at school, they need role models, require support programmes to provide guidance, they require close attention and supervision to prevent them from having easy access to alcohol and drugs.

One of the parents during the focus group discussions did not agree that boys were less motivated than girls. The parent argued that motivation is "gender neutral" and is dependent on the individual. Some quantitative data that we reported in table 119 seem to support this view. This is the case because 42.8% of the sampled parents from the 14 Regions disagreed that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls.

Impact of single parenthood on the motivation of boys to work at school.

Some parents during the focus group discussions highlighted the impact of single parenthood and absence fathers on the upbringing of boys and on their motivation, participation, and underachievement in education. The dominant view during the parents' focus group discussion was that single mothers in the absence of fathers found it difficult to motivate boys to work hard at school. One parent expressed this challenge as follows:



“Single parenthood contributes to the problem of raising boys. Mothers are softer in raising boys and fathers are nowhere to be found. This is a big problem. Mothers are overwhelmed and have to balance jobs and raising children. Boys tend to be influenced easily and become difficult towards their mothers.”

Peer pressure.

Some parents were of the opinion in their responses that in addition to beliefs, behavior, and attitude of boys to work hard as contributing to their lack of motivation compared to girls, peer pressure was also identified as a contributing factor. This seem to be supported by the quantitative data we presented in table 118 where 51.7% of the parents’ agreed with the statement that their sons had many friends who distracted them from doing their schoolwork. The influence of peer pressure and lack of intrinsic motivation of boys was illustrated by the following during the parents’ focus group discussion:

“School-going boys hang out with dropouts and are demotivated to continue with school. They are misled in believing that this easy life is better than the struggles of school (waking up early, homework, school uniform, examinations etc.)”

“Girls think about the future.”

Societal and home environments.

Social and home factors such as poverty, alcohol, and drug abuse, and involvement in criminal activities were some of the factors that parents had raised as contributing to the motivation and underachievement of boys in education. According to some parents during the focus group discussions, these societal factors and home environments made boys less motivated to work hard at school, and to achieve in education. Lack of parental involvement in education to support the children with homework and discussing school matters were also raised as some of the societal issues. Below are some of the voices of some parents expressing negative societal and home environmental factors which influenced the motivation and academic performance of boys.

“There are lots of problems in the community affecting boys: Music, alcohol, and drugs. No assistance is rendered by the Police regarding these. Whenever you approach the Police, they tell you that they do not get involved in domestic issues. And they are friends with criminals. I help my children with homework and discuss with them about school. But how many parents do that? We expect the teachers to do everything.”

“Poverty is another contributing factor. Sometimes because boys grow up with their grandparents, they are allowed to do whatever they want. Their grandparents do not understand certain things and they also do not have the skills to monitor children. When the child says, I am going to school, they just believe them. Their grandparents come from the olden cultural times. Some boys bring girls home. There is no supervision, no home education.”

The impact of the absence of role models on the motivation and work habits of boys.

Some parents during the focus group discussions ascribed the lack of motivation and work habits of boys to work hard at schools compared to girls to the absence of role models to inspire them to work hard and perform well academically. The quotations below explain the impact of the absence of role models on work ethics, behaviour, and habits of boys and their education:

“Most men spend their time at shebeens (bars). The boys see what happens and think that it is what it means to be a man (manhood). They adopt what they see as a norm. While their mothers are working hard on piece jobs and try to teach their children to spend sparingly, the children do not seem to realise how crucial it is to save



resources. Children need to be taught the responsibility of work at early stage. The mothers are exhausted, and they get home to find a mess and also wastes.”

“Teachers should become role models in the general way we conduct ourselves both in the class and outside the classroom.”

2. Girls work harder than boys

Table 119 revealed that 83% of parents agreed with the statement that girls worked harder than boys in school. An overwhelming majority of the parents during focus group discussions agreed that girls worked harder than boys. To explain this view, parents pointed out that the socialisation of boys at home was not geared towards making them take responsibility, more support was given to girls by parents and government in terms of policies and programmes, girls naturally wanted to do well in school, and that girls respected authority while boys challenged authority.

The majority of parents indicated that the **socialisation of girls** at home required them to carry out many household chores, and these taught them multiple skills that they brought to school. One of these skills was that of working hard. Another point raised was that whereas parents gave support to girls, they did not pay sufficient attention to boys.

Parents during one of the focus group discussions explained the differences in the socialisation of girls and boys and its impact on work habits and life in general as follows: “Yes, boys only want to compose music and they think that that will take them anywhere. Girls work harder. It is a motherly thing. Boys waste time on hip-hop. Boys do not want to be reprimanded. They become difficult and pushing them will push them away and become a closed book. Then they become stubborn, and the parents cannot get them to pay attention to schoolwork.”

Regarding government **policies and programmes**, many parents argued that current Government policies and programmes favour girls over boys, and that there was limited government support for boys to encourage them to work hard at school.

Other relevant matters that the parents highlighted during the focus group discussions were that whereas girls were focused on education and always tried harder in school, boys put in minimum effort and challenged authority instead of working hard. In addition, boys engaged into toxic activities of alcohol and drug abuse, and lived by the belief that “*boys have work opportunities without education, and that there is always a way without education.*”

3. Reasons why more boys drop out of schools than girls

The majority of the parents identified social **factors such as poverty, peer pressure, differential support for boys and girls that parents and teachers offer, involvement in sport, pressure from parents, and criminal activities** as the main causes more boys than girls drop out of schools.

Some parents explained that social factors such as home background, emotional impact of divorce cases, and poverty at home, are some of the factors more boys than girls drop out of school. The parents also highlighted peer pressure in the form of involvement in ‘*gangsterism*’ and arrogant attitude of boys towards teachers as factors leading to boys dropping out of school. To illustrate this one parent pointed out that “*Boys challenge false beliefs that they would be ‘someone in life’ without education are illustrated by the following quotations from some of the parents:*



“Boys will be boys.”
“There is always a way even without education.”

The parents also explained that more support and attention both at home and school that is provided to girls alienates boys and encourages them to drop out of school. One parent summarized the reasons as follow: *“friends, drugs, and alcohol. Boys need discipline.”* It is important to observe that alcohol and drug abuse as a major cause of boys dropping out of school was highlighted at every focus group discussion both in urban and rural schools.

Some parents explained that some boys dropped out of school because parents pressurized them to seek employment in order to support the family instead of remaining in school. The pressure and desire to seek employment is illustrated by the following:

“Girls are more likely to put up with poverty and stay in school. But boys go find work to feed their needs and sometimes also for the family.”

Two other reasons that parents gave on why more boys than girls dropped out of school pertained to participation in sport (e.g. soccer) and inferiority complex. Parents indicated that some boys dropped out of school because they were distracted by their involvement in playing soccer. They lost concentration in class because their minds were focused on playing soccer. Another reason was that boys felt inferior to girls when they were academically outperformed. They felt ashamed, and dropped out of school. Parents expressed **the inferiority complex of boys** as follows:

“Some boys feel threatened by girls who are smart. So, they quit school. It is a fact that in most cases, girls are more intelligent than boys. The boys start to feel inferior.”

The other cause of more boys than girls dropping out of school was negative peer pressure. This pressure includes belonging to gangs, alcohol and drug abuse and keeping up appearances in peer group circles. All this is illustrated as follows:

“Boys keep wrong friends who teach them to use drugs, and they think it is part of being man.”

The erosion of traditional and cultural values was given as another reason for the drop out boys from school. It appeared that communities had stopped playing their cultural role of raising children corporately. This erosion was illustrated as follows:

“It takes a village to raise a child. Local practices, taboos and rules should apply in the upbringing of children.”

Parents decried lack of community involvement in the education of children and lack of partnerships between schools and communities to enhance boys’ education. The explanation was that if all stakeholders in education were involved, they would support the boy child not to drop out of school.

4. How the community could support boys to excel in education

With respect to how the community could support the enhancement of boys’ education, parents made the following suggestions:

- communication links between schools, community, and parents,
- societal factors that hamper boys’ academic performance



-
- enhanced educational support for boys, that would include life skills and career guidance,
 - targeted boys learning support programmes,
 - role models.

Regarding linkages, parents suggested that there should be strong communication links amongst teachers, parents, schools, social communities, traditional authorities, community leaders, and churches. Doing this would promote the enhancement of boys' education. In Some parents observed that the spiritual part of educating children was being neglected in the education system, hence the suggestion for churches to get involved. These suggestions seem to indicate to us that the establishment of participation structures such School Boards, and Regional Education Forums, to support schools and teachers were not satisfactory. The following quotations explain the need for parental involvement, community support, and strong links between schools and parents/homes to enhance boys' education:

"Parents must be helped to change their attitudes and get involved in children's school work and upbringing. These are new times with new challenges so parents cannot continue to raise children the old way."

"There is a lack of parental participation. The school and home should become friends, and put adult education centres to help parents with the above."

Societal factors that hamper boys' academic performance included limiting easy access to clubs and alcohol, changing the socialisation of boys to gear them towards taking responsibilities, establishing communication links between teachers and parents, establishing support groups to deal with disciplinary issues of boys, and clarifying roles and expectations of stakeholders in education. Establishing strong linkages between teachers and communities is captured by the following:

"All must be teachers, teachers and community members."

With respect to enhanced educational support for boys, that would include life skills and career guidance, parents recommended that teachers should identify learners with learning difficulties, establish study groups, and provide them the necessary learning support. This support was illustrated by the following:

"Teachers must be teachers, role models, and guide and advice learners."

Parents also suggested the appointment of more Life Skills Teachers to assist with guidance and counselling, and also to develop support programmes to address the underachievement of boys in education. In addition to education support, some parents suggested extramural activities to keep the learners busy.

The quotation below explains life skills and centres to support boys in education:

"Introduce youth clubs like Star for Life. It makes a huge difference in our school. We also need skills development centre like KAYEC. There are no recreational activities here. And when someone tries to put up something, the same members of the community come steal your stuff. They even cut trees and destroy the environment. Sustainable environment projects should be introduced here."



Regarding the **need of role models for boys**, some parents pointed out that schools could invite motivational speakers to speak to the boys and encourage them to focus on their schoolwork. This was regarded as important in the absence of father figures amongst some of the boys. It was also to emphasise the importance of education from life experiences.

5. How can communities and school partnerships be strengthened to promote boys' academic achievement?

Parents identified communities, churches, traditional, and governmental structures such as Headmen and Community Development Structures, School Boards, and family structures, especially husbands as partners in education. The collective stakeholder engagement in education and partnerships were expressed in the following statements:

“It takes a village to raise a child.”

“A child is a child of everyone, every member of the community should discipline every child.”

These expressions according to our understanding and interpretation illustrate that academic performance and discipline of children in general and boys in particular should not be the responsibility of teachers and schools only. Instead, *“all must be teachers.”* It should rather be the collective responsibility of parents, and communities as a collective, and other societal structures such as churches, traditional, and governmental authorities.

Some parents emphasized that boys' participation and underachievement in education should be community concerns and require combined actions. The involvement of community and church leaders was particularly stressed during the focus group discussions. Some parents alluded to family structures that are falling apart, and husbands as heads of households who were not playing their roles effectively. Because of this, there was a need to strengthen family structures to promote academic achievement of boys.

Regarding concrete actions to strengthen communities and school partnerships to promote academic achievement of boys, parents identified the establishment of education support groups, boys' clubs, holding of education community meetings, involvement of churches and community leaders in education, motivational talks by former learners, empowerment of communities through workshops and seminars, and strengthening the roles of School Boards.

With reference to family structures that were falling apart, and the absence of husbands as heads of households, some parents suggested that *“males should reclaim their responsibilities, as absence fathers are not conducive for the upbringing of the boy child.”*

6. How can culture be used to support the retention of boys in schools?

Parents shared with us various views and opinions about the use of culture to support the retention of boys in schools. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines culture as *“the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2001).”*



Grounding our understanding of culture in this definition, we group the responses of parents during the focus group discussions into:

- cultural practices,
- instilling values, and
- strengthening family structures and roles.

Some parents during the focus group discussions bemoaned the lack of incorporation of traditional and cultural values and practices in the education system to instill cultural values and norms in the learners. They asserted that the education system ought to instill cultural values of hard work and studying to become someone in life, and not to tolerate laziness that many boys seemed to exhibit in education.

Many parents recalled past gatherings around the fire called “*vinyanga*” used to teach the boys about life and responsibilities. These gatherings were not there in many instances anymore, hence the erosion of traditional values and norms.

Parents emphasized that these traditional gatherings around the fire could serve purposes of strengthening the role of fathers in education, teaching of values and norms, including respect for elders, and husbands effectively playing their roles in education. In a nutshell, our interpretations of the parents’ responses are that culture plays a role in supporting the retention of boys in school by instilling in them values of hard work, by explaining to them their purposes in life, the need of learning to take responsibilities, the necessity of obeying rules and the obligation to respect parents, elders and those in authority.

The role of culture in education was explained as follows:

Get rid of the drugs and hubbly-bubbly. These were never part of our culture and will never be.”
“Bring back corporal punishment. When this was legal, children used to listen to elders. Now they are equal to elders. Children come home drunk. Close the shebeens. Whose responsibility is it to close the shebeens?”

REPORT ON PARENTS’ FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA FROM KARAS AND OTJOZONDJUPA REGIONS

This section of the research report is on the analysis of parents’ focus group discussion data from Karas and Otjozondjupa Regions. Parents from these regions responded to six interview questions as follows:

Whether boys were less motivated to work at school than girls

On this specific question, four out of six parents agreed that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls because of various reasons such as limited options (subject choices) offered by schools, feminism toward some subjects (e.g., Home Economics), societal influences on what is expected from a boy, issues of alcohol and drugs abuse affecting boys than girls, boys getting easily distracted and influenced by peers, and boys preconceptions that they can succeed in life without education. One parent expressed the view that boys shy away from careers of their interest due to societal expectations and perceptions toward some careers as indicated in the following quote:

“I have a problem with my son, he wants to do something but he gets bored. My son failed grade 10... he is just at home and he is not interested in anything. Could it be that the subjects he was doing were not interesting... hmmm, he could do better with technical subjects...? I asked him to go to COSDEC but



he is not interested... but things such as electricity or plumbing... he does not want... at home he likes to cooking... I want to put him in hospitality... he was accepted but now I do not know what to do..."

On the issue of feminism towards some school subjects as well as societal influences on what is expected from a boy, this is what one parent had to say:

"Vocational should start in grade 8. Sometime when they get this hospitality while in grade 8 they take it up to grade 12 then they go to university. Here we do not have anything... here we have Design and Technology but no hospitality in this school... There is also Home Economic... it sounds like it is for girls only. That is the problem... maybe change the name. My views about the name of Home Economics... boys shy away because it is perceived for women even when they want to do it."

Interestingly enough, one of the parents mentioned that there seemed to be some kind of external motivation for boys than girls out there. The citation below illustrates this view:

"I do agree that there is a sort of motivation for boys. They believe that they can succeed without education. I think it is perceived that boys can become successful business men without education, no need for a degree. Boys believe that they can become successful without education. Just a myth."

Whether girls work harder than boys

The following themes emerged from discussions with parents on whether they thought girls worked harder than boys. Parents expressed the view that girls put in more efforts in their school work; they were more elevated and uplifted due to gender equality as opposed to boys who seemed to pay less attention to their school work because of various reasons. One respondent had this to say:

"Gender equality is the problem... maybe we are spoiling the girls. We should not ignore the boys; we want the best. Maybe if you are a parent, you are a doctor here, you're a counsellor, you are a pastor... we are doing a lot to our children."

Another parent put it this way.

"Yes! Sometimes boys are spoiled, treated special not to do anything at home. Boys are given special attention at home... but sometimes this boy of mine is the first born, I have tried my best."

However, these two parents seemed to have a different perspective about girls as indicated in the expressions below.

"In my view, I think boys work harder than girls. I believe boys work harder than girls." [Respondent 1]

"I agree too, if I look at the results. Boys seem to be doing well. Girls seem to be failing. When it comes to work ethics, boys are working harder. Individual case, not in general. My observation, boys are working harder. I think, boys are fewer but that fewer number of them, they stand out and perform better. Girls are many but their performance is worrisome, not that they work harder but just because they are many compare to boys." [Respondent 2]

Why more boys than girls dropped out of school

On the question 'why more boys than girls dropped out of school' this particular focus group expressed different opinions with emphasis on gender equality, lack of discipline, and society expectations, just to mention a few. One parent had this to say:

"What I think is the issue of gender equality that is being introduced, it makes boys underperform. This 50/50 put boys and men down... now the priority of the government is about women, they are empowering"



women every time women are encouraged to apply, where are men, it is women even in parliament... they are empowering women... they are over doing it... at the end men feel left out. At university...lecturers are to bring up women... they support women and let boys to swim on their own... Look at you it is just women correcting data where are men? Your group has only women... why not equal...? in classes most women are more, in church it is just women...so women are a lot... men are very few... the statistics are saying men are few and women are more... wherever you go.”

Another respondent had this to say:

“Why are boys drop out...being a man, you see that you grow, you see life is getting difficult... they cannot do anything... boys you see other men working and bring something home. After school, you want to play your role as a man to help your family. Also the drugs is a problem once they grow they want to learn what they see in the community, they start doing drug in the streets and they want out, be on street they want to be out... parent cannot say anything, if you say something... you are regarded as a bad parent... they want to socialize... you can try your best... they will run a way... girls come back and they know what they can do is to learn... they do not think about currently taking care of the house as young as they are, they focus on school... boy think I am a man... I need to bring something home, when they bring something they feel proud, I have brought something... this is what contributes to men doing what they do.”

Other parents responded like this:

“Boys are more deceived by everything that comes, they are everywhere, sport they are there as extra mural activities, arts, they are there, they are the participants of every activity. They also happened to drop out due to peer pressures, they follow wrong people and drop out. Girls not much, only pregnancy that force them out of school.”

“I can generalize by saying, maybe we as parents, we are paying more attention to the girls. Knowing that if girls are out of line, there will be visible outcomes compared to boys. It is hard to immediately tell that the boy is out of line. For girls it is easier to notice that she is pregnant.”

“Boys especially from single parents’ family drop out. They are culturally pressured that they must help the family. Even when there is an elder sister, the sister must stay in school and the boys must drop out to find means to help the family.”

How boys can be supported by the community to perform better academically

Parents made various suggestions on how the communities could support boys to perform better academically. They proposed things like parental involvement, equal treatment of boys and girls, advocacy for the importance and relevance of education, vocational education could keep boys in school as well as scholarships for university education. One parent had this to say on this matter.

“From my side, educators have done a lot to help and encourage both genders, the problem is, I put the blame on us parents. Parents only think if a child goes to school, it is a responsibility of the educators, we give away all the responsibilities on teachers and forget that we too have duties to do. We have to encourage children and inform them about the importance of education and its relevance for them in future. These motivations are done in schools at various platforms, but learners do not take it serious. If parents get involved to encourage their children, they (children) are likely to take education serious. Parents need to be guided and assisted, “how I do not know”. I think educators has done a lot. Parents must come on board.”

Another respondent put it this way:

“I am a strong believer in extra mural activities. Boys get involved in other things if they have nothing to do, schools have moved away from sport activities nowadays. Sports keep them busy in the afternoon. Boys love sport, in the afternoon, it keeps them busy, it is better to educate them through sport.”



Another parent put emphasis on vocational training by saying this:

“I developed an idea from his point. Boys are involved in sport activities. Government lately has re-introduce vocational education. They have started offering various vocational courses in various schools. Boys can be kept in school by introducing them to these vocational subjects. In America and elsewhere, kids who are good at sport get scholarships or being funded and remain in school and play for the school team.”

How partnerships between communities and schools could be strengthened to promote boys’ academic achievement

The parents on this particular focus group discussion proposed the following ideas on how the communities and the schools could strengthen the bilateral partnerships that could promote boys’ academic achievement as follows:

“Boys who have behavior problem at school, take them somewhere, take them for counselling and all that, have motivational talks, even the church can go around the schools. Boys who are involved in dagga, and those kinds of things, take them to a place for rehabilitation, tell them more about the danger of such substances and the advantages of staying in schools; completing your school, maybe they will change.”

“I think, “I am not that person from ancient time as far as I can remember”, parental involvement faints as we move the ladder to higher education. In society parents should not be in isolation. In the past, ‘the child was raised by the whole village’. If I find a child anywhere doing wrong things, I would intervene. It is not a case anymore in today’s society. We need to go back to the past to put the child between us parents, as long as it is to bring the child into the correct direction.”

When we probed them further to explain more by asking them “How can we sensitize the communities to do this?” These were some of the responses we received as shown below:

“It could be a school, but so far, schools are doing that through parents’ meetings. Parents react better if it is communicated by the ministry. Schools alone are not enough to convenience parents, but if it is done through the ministry, parents might take it serious. Example was with the cleaning campaign, parents responded, if it is taken up with the head of state or ministry, they might react.”

“Boys must be controlled from home, boys must be guide, they must have time to do their school work even at school, they must not do what they want, and they must do their work. Boys have more freedom at home. They have a tendency of sitting and do nothing. Their freedom must be controlled. They have cellphones and all they do is to play music; some have lost focus”.

How culture could be used to support the retention of boys in school

Culture is a very important trait in any society and hence we asked our participants to explain how culture could be used to support the retention of boys in schools. Below are some of the responses we received during the focus group discussion.

“Culture can also be a strong item we can use to motivate our boys. For me I grew up knowing that as a man, you are the bread winner in the family. If you are not doing good academically or dropping out of school, your chance of succeeding is minimal. Some boys are dropping out of school because of alcohol, only few will succeed without education. We need to tell them that as men they are expected to be the bread winners; how will they fulfil their responsibility if they are not serious in school?”

“I agree, we were brought up that the man is a head of the house, if you are not educated, you will be nobody. Nowadays, economy is down, things are changing, bread price is up. If no education you will have no job, and may not be able to afford anything. We need to facilitate and encourage boys to understand from home



that they are the head of the house, ‘as long as you’re a man, you will be the head of the house’. They need to be made aware about the relevance of education to business. In business, you may not also run the business successfully if you are not educated. Our boys need role models”

“Society play big roles, in the news; it is men killing the wives, the boys are growing with such information, teenagers think it is good to be bad and that if I kill I will be all over the news. When boys hear men killing; some boys get the impression that a man has to be aggressive, which can influence their mind. You can refrain from that if you are somehow being guided through. We need to guide them through. Boys need to be guided, if we drop them without giving them support, boys believe that they should fight back, throw back the words to the teachers. Girls are more submissive and obedient, if the teacher say something, girls keep quiet, but boys feel it is a status, they talk back, act back, they speak back they think they are man enough, I am a boy enough, I need to talk back”.

Interesting enough, this particular parent seemed to have a different opinion on the matter under discussion as shown by the excerpt below:

“This thing of boys not performing or boys remaining behind, I think we should look at the figures and statistics to confirm that boys are indeed remaining behind. I am not convinced that they are lagging behind. I have observed that there are more girls in classes, remember, girls are more, it might be the case, check the ratio whether it is indeed the case. If it is really so, consider giving boys the bursaries to motivate others, otherwise they will remain behind forever.”

Although the parents seemed to have different opinions on how culture could be used to the retention of boys in school, it somehow emerged that there was overall agreement that culture plays a big role in this matter of boys’ underachievement. Therefore, stakeholders should not ignore learners’ cultural background when dealing and addressing curriculum matters.

PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

As described under the lecturer sample, quantitative questionnaire data were collected from 122 University of Namibia (UNAM) and the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) lecturers with a mean age of 42 years. Whereas 59.8% of the lecturers were male, 40.2% of them were female. Whereas 28.7% of the lecturers had doctoral degree qualifications, 45.1% of them had Master’s degree qualifications, 18.0% had honours degrees and 7.4% had bachelor’s degrees.

In the questionnaire for lecturers, we wished to find out from them:

- Whether there were differences in academic achievement between male and female students;
- Comparative examination performance between male and female students;
- Reasons why female students performed better than male students;
- Their views relating to the impact of cultural aspects on academic achievement;
- Their views on why male students under-participated in education;
- Their views on available learning support for male students at their Universities; and
- Their views on students’ task attitudes, beliefs, hopes, and behaviours.

We present data pertaining to each of these aspects in the following way:



Table 127: Whether there were differences in academic achievement between male and female students

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	63	51.6
No	49	40.2
NR	10	8.2
Total	122	100.0

Note: NR= No response

According to Table 127, 51.6% of the lecturers indicated that there were differences in academic performance between male and female students.

Table 128: Overall comparative examination performance between male and female students

Comparative statement	Frequency	Percent
Female students performed better than male students	46	37.7
Male students performed better than female students	12	9.8
No difference in performance	56	45.9
No response	8	6.6
Total	122	100.0

Table 128 shows that whereas 37.7% of the lecturers agreed with the statement that female students performed better than male students, 45.9% of them expressed the view that there was no difference in academic performance at the University between male and female students. It is important to also note from Table 127 that only 9.8% of the lecturers thought that male students performed better than female students.

Table 129: Reasons why female students perform better than male students in examinations

Female students perform better than male students in examinations because male students	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Are not focused.	9	7.4	38	31.1	20	16.4	11	9.0	44	36.1	122	100
Are absent from classes.	15	12.3	28	23.0	26	21.3	12	9.8	41	33.6	122	100

Are in-disciplined	10	8.2	16	13.1	42	34.4	11	9.0	43	35.2	122	100
Believe that they can be employed without education.	6	4.9	15	12.3	35	28.7	22	18.0	44	36.1	122	100
Find the subject matter boring.	2	1.6	16	13.1	37	30.3	24	19.7	43	35.2	122	100
Find the subject matter irrelevant.	3	2.5	11	9.0	41	33.6	24	19.7	43	35.2	122	100
Find the curriculum content not appealing	4	3.3	15	12.3	41	33.6	20	16.4	42	34.4	122	100
Are given less attention by teachers than girls.	3	2.5	4	3.3	31	25.4	42	34.4	42	34.4	122	100
Are more affected by family poverty than girls	8	6.6	13	10.7	28	23.0	31	25.4	42	34.4	122	100

Table 129 shows that more than 34% of the lecturers did not respond to the questionnaire items reported on in the table.

However, whereas 38.5% of the lecturers agreed that female students performed better than male students in examinations because male students were not focused, 35.3% of them agreed with the statement because they thought that male students absented themselves from classes more frequently than female students.

Notwithstanding all this, whereas 43.4% of the lecturers disagreed with the statement that female students performed better than male students in examinations because male students were in-disciplined, 46.7% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they believed that they could be employed without education, 50% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they found the subject matter boring, 53.3% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they found the subject matter irrelevant, 50% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they found the curriculum content not appealing, 59.8% of them disagreed that female students performed better than male students because they were given less attention by lecturers than girls and 48.4% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were more affected by family poverty than girls.



Table 130: Lecturers' views relating to the Impact of cultural aspects on Academic achievement

Male students academically perform worse than female students because:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Traditionally, they are allowed to put in minimum effort in education.	7	5.7	18	14.8	58	47.5	28	23.0	11	9.0	122	100
They are allowed to defy authority.	1	0.8	24	19.7	59	48.4	25	20.5	13	10.7	122	100
They are allowed to engage in mischief.	6	4.9	19	15.6	59	48.4	24	19.7	14	11.5	122	100
They are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society.	7	5.7	10	8.2	55	45.1	38	31.1	12	9.8	122	100

In Table 130, data revealed that whereas 70.5% of the sampled lecturers disagreed with the statement that male students academically performed worse than female students because traditionally they were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, 68.9% of them disagreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because they were allowed to defy authority, 68.1% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were allowed to engage in mischief and 76.2% of the lecturers disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were allowed by society to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society.



Table 131: Lecturers' views on why male students under-participate in education

According to my experience as a University lecturer	Responses											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
More female students drop out of the university than male students.	3	2.5	27	22.1	66	54.1	17	13.9	9	7.4	122	100
More male students leave the University because of misconduct than female students.	6	4.9	46	37.7	47	38.5	13	10.7	10	8.2	122	100
More female students graduate on time than male students.	23	18.9	39	32.0	36	29.5	15	12.3	9	7.4	122	100
More female students than male students participate in psychosocial development programs such as clubs and professional societies.	16	13.1	48	39.3	40	32.8	7	5.7	11	9.0	122	100
More male students participate in sport activities than female students.	16	13.1	68	55.7	27	22.1	2	1.6	9	7.4	122	100
More female students participate in class learning activities than male students.	15	12.3	47	38.5	46	37.7	10	8.2	4	3.3	122	100
Male students' energy and participation are stifled by the structured nature of University classrooms.	4	3.3	20	16.4	68	55.7	24	19.7	6	4.9	122	100

Table 131 shows that whereas 68% of the lecturers disagreed that more female students dropped out of the university than male students, 75.4% of them disagreed that male students' energy and participation were stifled by the structured nature of University classrooms. In contrast to this, whereas 42.6% of the lecturers agreed that more male students left the University because of misconduct than female students, 50.9% of them agreed that more female students graduate on time than male students, 52.4% of them agreed that more female students than male students participated in psychosocial development programs such as clubs and professional societies, 68.8% of them agreed that more male students participated in sport activities than female students and 50.8% of them agreed that more female students participated in class learning activities than male students.

Table 132: Lecturers' views on available learning support for male students at their universities

Male students academically perform worse than female students because:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male students are given less social-emotional support at the University than female students.	7	5.7	42	34.4	54	44.3	12	9.8	7	5.7	122	100
Female students are given more social-emotional support at the University than male students.	13	10.7	40	32.8	51	41.8	12	9.8	6	4.9	122	100
The fact that male students are expected to "grow up" and fend for themselves early stifles their self-esteem.	7	5.7	42	34.4	55	45.1	8	6.6	10	8.2	122	100
Male students tend to seek less academic support than female students.	27	22.1	58	47.5	23	18.9	7	5.7	7	5.7	122	100
The curriculum is more	2	1.6	8	6.6	65	53.3	40	32.8	7	5.7	122	100



feminized and thus does not appeal to male students.												
Male students are more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than female students.	23	18.9	66	54.1	15	12.3	8	6.6	10	8.2	122	100
Lecturers are more willing to support female students than male students in learning activities.	3	2.5	17	13.9	67	54.9	29	23.8	6	4.9	122	100
Lecturers are more willing to support male students than female students in learning activities.	1	0.8	4	3.3	82	67.2	28	23.0	7	5.7	122	100
Gender policies in education are more supportive of female students' education than of male students' education.	16	13.1	43	35.2	45	36.9	11	9.0	7	5.7	122	100
National policies in general are more supportive of females than males.	17	13.9	56	45.9	35	28.7	8	6.6	6	4.9	122	100
There is more economic support for needy male students than female students	7	5.7	0	0	83	68.0	24	19.7	8	6.6	122	100

Table 132 shows that whereas 54.1% of the lecturers disagreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because they were given less social-emotional support at the University than female students, 51.6% of them disagreed that male



students academically performed worse than female students because female students were given more social-emotional support at the University than male students, 51.7% of them disagreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because they were expected to “grow up” and fend for themselves early stifled their self-esteem, 86.1% of them disagreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because the curriculum was more feminized and thus did not appeal to them, 78.7% of them disagreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because lecturers were more willing to support female students than male students in learning activities, 90.2% of them disagreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because lecturers were more willing to support male students than female students in learning activities and 87.7% of the lecturers disagreed that male students academically perform worse than female students because there was more economic support for needy male students than female students.

In contrast to all this, 69.6% of the sampled lecturers agreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because they tended to seek less academic support than female students, 73.1% of them agreed that male students academically perform worse than female students because they were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than female students, 48.3% of them agreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because gender policies in education were more supportive of female students’ education than of male students’ education and 59.8% of the lecturers agreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because national policies in general were more supportive of females than males.

Table 133: Lecturers’ views on students’ task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours

Students’ on task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours	Responses											
	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students.	16	13.1	53	43.4	39	32.0	10	8.2	4	3.3	122	100
Male students are more disengaged than female students on class activities given by female lecturers.	8	6.6	29	23.8	60	49.2	15	12.3	10	8.2	122	100
Female students are more collaborative on learning tasks than male students	12	9.8	62	50.8	31	25.4	9	7.4	8	6.6	122	100
Male students prefer to work in isolation than female students.	8	6.6	45	36.9	46	37.7	12	9.8	11	9.0	122	100
Female students are more eager to share academic information than male students.	9	7.4	65	53.3	30	24.6	8	6.6	10	8.2	122	100



Male students do not care about their academic achievement.	4	3.3	25	20.5	72	59.0	14	11.5	7	5.7	122	100
Socialization stifles the male student's ability to express his feelings with regard to the negative consequences of his underachievement.	8	6.6	53	43.4	44	36.1	6	4.9	11	9.0	122	100
Male students are less concerned about the future.	7	5.7	23	18.9	62	50.8	22	18.0	8	6.6	122	100

According to Table 133, whereas 56.5% of the sampled lecturers agreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students, 60.6% of them agreed that female students were more collaborative on learning tasks than male students, 43.5% of them agreed that male students preferred to work in isolation than female students, and 60.7% of them agreed that female students were more eager to share academic information than male students. In contrast with this, 61.5% of the sampled lecturers disagreed that male students were more disengaged than female students on class activities given by female lecturers, 70.5% of them disagreed that male students did not care about their academic achievement and 68.8% of the lecturers disagreed that male students were less concerned about the future.

After analyzing University lecturers' responses to questionnaire items using frequencies, we applied the chi-square statistic to make comparisons by lecturers' gender and age. Data on selected comparisons are presented in the manner that follows.

Table 134: Male students find university subject matter irrelevant by gender

Gender	Male students find university subject matter irrelevant				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	0	3	26	14	43
Female	3	8	15	10	36
Total	3	11	41	24	79

Note: Chi-square = 8.3; df = 3; $p < .04$

According to Table 134, the majority of both male and female lecturers disagreed with the statement that male students found university subject matter irrelevant.



Table 135: Male students are more affected by family poverty than female students by gender

Gender	Male students are more affected by family poverty than female students				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	4	12	14	14	44
Female	4	1	14	17	36
Total	8	13	28	31	80

Note: Chi-square = 8.9; df = 3; $p < .03$

It appears from Table 135 that more female than male lecturers disagreed that male students were more affected by family poverty than female students.

Table 136: Male students are allowed to engage in mischief by gender

Gender	Male students are allowed to engage in mischief				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	5	6	37	16	64
Female	1	13	22	8	44
Total	6	19	59	24	108

Note: Chi-square = 8.3; df = 3; $p < .04$

According to Table 136, significantly more male lecturers than female lecturers disagreed that male students were allowed to engage in mischief.

Table 137: The fact that male students are expected to grow up and fend for themselves early stifles their self-esteem by gender

Gender	The fact that male students are expected to grow up and fend for themselves early stifles their self esteem				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	1	31	30	5	67
Female	6	11	25	3	45
Total	7	42	55	8	112

Note: Chi-square = 10.1; df = 3; $p < .02$

According to Table 137, proportionally, the majority of both male and female lecturers disagreed that male students were expected to grow up and fend for themselves early stifled their self-esteem.

Table 138: Socialization stifles the male student's ability to express his feelings with regards to the negative consequences of his underachievement by gender

Gender	Socialisation stifles the male student's ability to express his feelings with regards to the negative consequences of his underachievement				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	1	30	32	3	66
Female	7	23	12	3	45
Total	8	53	44	6	111

Note: Chi-square = 10.9; df = 3; $p < .01$

It appears from Table 138 that the majority of both male and female lecturers agreed that socialization stifled the male students' ability to express their feelings with regards to the negative consequences of their achievement.

Table 139: Male students are more affected by family poverty than female students by age

Age category	Males students are more affected by family poverty than female students				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
24 - 33 years	2	0	1	7	10
34 - 43years	2	8	6	11	27
44 - 53years	4	0	7	3	14
54 - 63 years	0	2	7	0	9
Total	8	10	21	21	60

Note: Chi-square = 27.9; df = 9; $p < .001$

According to Table 139, the majority of lecturers from all age categories disagreed that male students were more affected by family poverty than female students.

Table 140: Female students are given more social emotional support at the university than male students by age

Age category	Female students are given more social emotional support at the university than male students				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
24 - 33 years	2	9	4	2	17
34 - 43years	3	18	7	5	33
44 - 53years	3	3	13	1	20
54 - 63 years	3	3	5	0	11
Total	11	33	29	8	81

Chi-square = 18.3; df = 9; $p < .03$

According to Table 140, except for lecturers in the 44-53 years category, lecturers from other age categories agreed that female students were given more social emotional support at the University than male students.

Table 141: Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students by age

Age category	Male students spend less time on academic activity				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
24 - 33 years	5	2	8	2	17
34 - 43years	8	13	10	2	33
44 - 53years	0	16	4	0	20
54 - 63 years	1	4	7	2	14
Total	14	35	29	6	84

Chi-square = 24.3; df = 9; $p < .004$

Table 141 shows that the majority of lecturers from the 4 age categories, agreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students

Table 142: Male students are less concerned about the future by age

Age category	Male students are less concerned about the future				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
24 - 33 years	0	2	13	2	17
34 - 43years	4	11	12	6	33
44 - 53years	0	2	13	3	18
54 - 63 years	0	0	10	4	14
Total	4	15	48	15	82

Chi-square = 19.4; df = 9; $p < .02$

Table 142 revealed that the majority of lecturers from the 4 age categories disagreed with the statement that male students were less concerned about the future.

PRESENTATION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM UNIVERSITY AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE (VTC) STUDENTS

As described under the University and Vocational Training Centre student sample, quantitative questionnaire data were collected from 807 students whose mean age was 23.4 years. Whereas 44% of the students were male, 55.3% of them were female. In addition, whereas table 36 depicts students' year of study, Table 37 describes students' institution of origin. In the questionnaire for students, we wished to find out from them:

- reasons why female students perform better than male students in classes;
- views relating to the Impact of cultural aspects on academic achievement;
- views on why male students under-participated in education;
- views on available learning support for male students at their Universities;
- views on students' task attitudes, beliefs, hopes, and behaviours.

We present data pertaining to each of these aspects in the following way:



Table 143: Reasons why female students perform better than male students in classes

In my classes female students perform better than male students, because male students:	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Are not focused.	171	21.2	254	31.5	283	35.1	89	11.0	10	1.2	807	100
Are absent from classes.	109	13.5	208	25.8	323	40.0	150	18.6	17	2.1	807	100
Are in-disciplined	178	22.1	338	41.9	175	21.7	91	11.3	25	3.1	807	100
Believe that they can be employed without education.	244	30.2	201	24.9	218	27.0	133	16.5	11	1.4	807	100
Find the subject matter boring.	132	16.4	299	37.1	273	33.8	88	10.9	15	1.9	807	100
Find the subject matter irrelevant.	173	21.4	361	44.7	186	23.0	63	7.8	24	3.0	807	100
Are given less attention by teachers than girls.	344	42.6	236	29.2	111	13.8	96	11.9	20	2.5	807	100
Are more affected by family poverty than girls	346	42.9	247	30.6	91	11.3	110	13.6	13	1.6	807	100

Table 143 displays that whereas 52.7% of the students disagreed with the statement that female students performed better than male students because male students were not focused, 64% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were in-disciplined, 55.1% of them disagreed with the statement that female students performed better than male students because male students believed that they could be employed without education, 53.5% of them disagreed with the statement that female students performed better than male students because male students found the subject matter boring, 66.1% of them disagreed with the statement that female students performed better than male students because male students found the subject matter irrelevant, 71.8% of them disagreed that male students were given less attention by lecturers than female students and 73.5% of them disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were more affected by family poverty than female students. In contrast with all this, 58.6% of the students agreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were more frequently absent from their classes than female students.



Table 144: University and VTC students' views relating to the Impact of cultural aspects on Academic achievement

Male students academically perform worse than female students because:	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Traditionally, they are allowed to put in minimum effort in education.	356	44.1	296	36.7	102	12.6	38	4.7	15	1.9	807	100
They are allowed to defy authority.	243	30.1	406	50.3	107	13.3	26	3.2	25	3.1	807	100
They are allowed to engage in mischief.	264	32.7	367	45.5	117	14.5	31	3.8	28	3.5	807	100
They are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society.	336	41.6	320	40.6	96	11.9	36	4.5	19	2.4	807	100
Male students who come from rural areas perform worse than female students.	321	39.8	279	34.6	120	14.9	71	8.8	16	2.0	807	100
They find the subject matter irrelevant.	196	24.3	364	45.1	181	22.4	51	6.3	15	1.9	807	100

Table 144 shows that more than 80% of the students disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because traditionally, they were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, they were allowed to defy authority, and because they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society. In addition, the table shows whereas 78.2% of the students disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were allowed to engage in mischief, 74.4% of them disagreed with the statement which stipulated that male students who came from rural areas performed worse than female students. Moreover, 69.4% of the students disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they found the subject matter irrelevant.



Table 145: University and VTC students' views on why boys under-participate in education

According to my experience as a student:	Responses											
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
More male students drop out of university or college than female students.	141	17.5	170	21.1	277	34.3	206	25.9	13	1.6	807	100
More male students leave the tertiary institution because of misbehaviour than female students.	78	9.7	148	18.3	377	46.7	190	23.5	14	1.7	807	100
More female students complete their University education than male students	69	8.6	170	21.1	294	36.4	251	31.1	23	2.9	807	100
More female students than male students participate in psychosocial development programs (e.g., clubs and professional societies)	83	10.3	177	21.9	326	40.4	204	25.3	17	2.1	807	100
More male students participate in sport activities than female students.	44	5.5	84	10.4	280	34.7	370	45.8	29	3.6	807	100
More female students participate in class learning activities than male students.	83	10.3	216	26.8	306	37.9	175	21.7	27	3.3	807	100
Male students' energy and participation are stifled by the structured nature of University classrooms.	135	16.7	367	45.5	205	25.4	79	9.8	21	2.6	807	100



According to Table 145, whereas 60.2% of the students agreed with the statement that more male students dropped out of universities or vocational training centres than female students, 70.2% of them agreed that more male students left tertiary education institutions because of misbehaviour than female students, 67.5% agreed that more female students completed their University education than male students, 65.7% agreed that more female students than male students participated in psychosocial development programs (e.g., clubs and professional societies), 80.5% agreed that more male students participated in sport activities than female students and 59.6% of the students agreed that more female students participated in class learning activities than male students. In contrast to all these data, 62.2% disagreed that male students' energy and participation were stifled by the structured nature of University classrooms.

Table 146: University and VTC students' views on available learning Support in their tertiary education institutions

Male students academically perform worse than female students because:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male students are given less psycho- social support at the University than female students	139	17.2	206	25.5	297	36.8	145	18.0	20	2.5	807	100
The fact that male students are expected to “grow up” and fend for themselves early stifles their self-esteem.	128	15.9	207	25.7	297	36.8	147	18.2	28	3.5	807	100
Male students are more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than female students.	142	17.6	334	41.4	223	27.6	87	10.8	21	2.6	807	100
Lecturers are more willing to support female students than male students in learning activities.	318	39.4	305	37.8	96	11.9	62	7.7	26	3.2	807	100

Table 146 indicates that whereas 42.7% of the students agreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because they were given less psychosocial support at the University than female students, 59% of them agreed that male students



performed worse than female students because they were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than female students and 77.2% of them agreed that male students performed worse than female students because lecturers were more willing to support female than male students in learning activities. Inconsistent with this, 55% of the students disagreed that male students academically performed worse than female students because their self-esteem was stifled when they were expected to “grow up” and fend for themselves early.

Table 147: University and VTC students’ views on male students’ task behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and hopes

Study habits:	Responses											
	Strongly agree		agree		disagree		Strongly disagree		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students.	131	16.2	137	17.0	318	39.4	197	24.4	24	3.0	807	100
Male students are more disengaged than female students on class activities given by female Lecturers.	249	30.9	345	42.8	143	17.7	48	5.9	22	2.7	807	100
Female students are more collaborative on learning tasks than male student.	127	15.7	249	30.9	331	41.0	76	9.4	24	3.0	807	100
Male students prefer to work in isolation than female students.	195	24.2	364	45.1	155	19.2	67	8.3	26	3.2	807	100
Female students are more eager to share academic information than male students.	149	18.5	286	35.4	243	30.1	92	11.4	37	4.6	807	100
Male students do not care about their academic achievement.	181	22.4	269	33.3	204	25.3	121	15.0	32	4.0	807	100
Socialization stifles the male student’ ability to express his feelings with regard to the negative consequences of his underachievement.	86	10.7	200	24.8	297	36.8	191	23.7	33	4.1	807	100
Male students are less concerned about the future.	140	17.3	320	39.7	244	30.2	74	9.2	29	3.6	807	100



Table 147 shows that whereas 73.7% of the students agreed that male students were more disengaged than female students on class activities given by female lecturers, 46.6% of them agreed that female students were more collaborative on learning tasks than male students, 69.3% of them agreed that male students preferred to work in isolation than female students, 53.9% of them agreed female students were more eager to share academic information than male students, 55.7% of them agreed that male students did not care about their academic achievement and 57% of them agreed that male students were less concerned about the future. Inconsistent with all this, 63.8% of the students disagreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students and 60.5% of them disagreed that socialization stifled male students' ability to express their feelings with regard to the negative consequences of their underachievement.

After analyzing University students' and VTC students' responses to questionnaire items using frequencies, we applied the chi-square statistic to make comparisons by students' gender, age and institution of origin. Data on selected comparisons are presented in the manner that follows.

Table 148: Male students are not focused by gender

Gender	Male students are not focused				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	105	101	113	30	349
Female	65	151	167	59	442
Total	170	252	280	89	791

Note: Chi-square = 28.7; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 148 shows that more female than male students agreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were not focused.

Table 149: Male students are absent from classes by gender

Gender	Male students are absent from classes				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	57	103	144	43	347
Female	51	103	176	107	437
Total	108	206	320	150	784

Note: Chi-square = 20.8; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 149 revealed that significantly more female students than male students agreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were absent from classes more frequently than female students were.

Table 150: Male students are in-disciplined by gender

Gender	Male students are in-disciplined				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	102	144	67	27	340
Female	73	192	107	64	436
Total	175	336	174	91	776

Note: Chi-square = 24.4; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 150 shows that the majority of both male and female students disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were in-disciplined.

Table 151: Male students believe that they can be employed without education by gender

Gender	Male students believe can be employed without education				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	strongly agree	
Male	139	94	74	43	350
Female	103	105	143	89	440
Total	242	199	217	132	790

Note: Chi-square = 34.1; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 151 indicates that the majority of both male and female students disagreed that male students believed that they could be employed without education

Table 152: Male students find university and VTC subject matter boring by gender

Gender	Male students find university and VTC subject matter boring				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	70	138	102	35	345
Female	62	157	169	53	441
Total	132	295	271	88	786

Note: Chi-square = 10.4; df = 3; $p < .02$

According to Table 152, more female than male students agreed that male students found university and VTC subject matter boring

Table 153: Male students are given less attention by lecturers than female students by gender

Gender	Male students are given less attention by lecturers than female students				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	108	97	73	66	344
Female	234	139	35	30	438
Total	342	236	108	96	782

Note: Chi-square = 70.5; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 153 depicts that more female students than male students disagreed that male students were given less attention by lecturers than female student.

Table 154: More female students complete their tertiary education than male students by gender

Gender	More female students than male students complete their tertiary education				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	35	99	135	74	343
Female	33	70	157	175	435
Total	68	169	292	249	778

Note: Chi-square = 37.3; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 154 shows that the majority of male and female students agreed that more female than male students completed their tertiary education

Table 155: More female than male students participate in psycho-social development programmes by gender

Gender	More female than male students participate in psychosocial development programmes by gender				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	45	89	137	78	349
Female	37	87	185	126	435
Total	82	176	322	204	784

Note: Chi-square = 9.9; df = 3; $p < .02$

According to Table 155, the majority of both male and female students agreed that more female than male students participated in psycho-social development.

Table 156: More female than male students participate in class learning activities by gender

Gender	More female than male students participate in class activities				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Male	55	114	124	51	344
Female	27	100	180	123	430
Total	82	214	304	174	774

Note: Chi-square = 41.5; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 156 reveals that the majority of male and female students agreed that more female than male students participated in class activities.

Table 157: Male students are given less psycho-social support at the University than female students by gender

Gender	Male students given less psychosocial support at university				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	85	108	107	47	347
Female	54	96	187	97	434
Total	139	204	294	144	781

Note: Chi-square = 37.5; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 157 shows that more male than female students agreed that male students were given less psychosocial support at tertiary institutions than female students.

Table 158: Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students by gender

Gender	Male student spend less time on academic activities than female students				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	92	80	117	55	344
Female	38	55	200	140	433
Total	130	135	317	195	777

Note: Chi-square = 76.7; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 158 reveals that more female than male students disagreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students.

Table 159: Male students prefer to work in isolation by gender

Gender	Male students prefer to work in isolation				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	61	156	89	39	345
Female	134	204	66	27	431
Total	195	360	155	66	776

Note: Chi-square = 30.2; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 159 shows that the majority of both male and female students agreed that male students preferred to work in isolation

Table 160: Female students are more eager to share academic information than male students by gender

Gender	Female student are more eager to share academic information than male students				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
Male	74	136	97	32	339
Female	73	148	145	60	426
Total	147	284	242	92	765

Note: Chi-square = 8.8; df = 3; $p < .03$

Table 161: Male students do not care about their academic achievement by gender

Gender	Male students do not care about their academic achievement				Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Male	63	114	114	51	342
Female	116	153	90	69	428
Total	179	267	204	120	770

Note: Chi-square = 17.5; df = 3; $p < .001$

Table 161 indicates that significantly more female than male students agreed that male students did not care about their academic achievement.

Table 162: More female than male students participate in class learning activities by age

Age category	More female students participate in class activities				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
17 - 24 years	53	148	238	129	568
25 - 32 years	28	51	47	35	161
33 - 40 years	1	11	13	4	29
41+	1	6	8	7	22
Total	83	216	306	175	780

Note: Chi-square = 19.9; df = 9; $p < .02$

Table 162 shows that the younger the students were, the more they agreed with the statement that more female than male students participated in class learning activities.

Table 163: Socialization stifles the male students' ability to express their feelings with regard to the negative consequences of their underachievement by age

Age category	Socialisation stifles the male students' ability to express feelings regarding negative consequences of their underachievement				Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
17 - 24 years	54	138	219	156	567
25 - 32 years	23	50	55	28	156
33 - 40 years	3	6	16	5	30
41+	6	6	7	2	21
Total	86	200	297	191	774

Note: Chi-square = 22.0; df = 9; $p < .01$

Table 163 reveals that the majority of students from the 4 age categories disagreed that socialization stifled the male students' ability to express their feelings with regard to the negative consequences of their underachievement.

Table 164: Male University and VTC students are not focused by institution

Name of institution	Male University and VTC students are not focused				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
UNAM	94	177	194	50	515
NUST	52	32	43	17	144
IUM	5	10	17	11	43
VVTC	6	14	13	5	38
RVTC	10	8	1	1	20
ZVTC	2	8	8	3	21
Total	169	249	276	87	781

Note: Chi-square = 52.9; df = 15; $p < .001$

Table 164 shows that except for those from IUM and ZVTC, the majority of the sampled students from other institutions disagreed that male students were not focused on their studies.

Table 165: Male university and VTC students believe that they can be employed without education by institution

Name of institution	Male university and VTC students believe that they can be employed without education				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	strongly agree	
UNAM	168	127	132	86	513
NUST	44	42	35	21	142
IUM	7	8	17	11	43
VVTC	3	9	19	9	40
RVTC	11	3	5	2	21
ZVTC	7	6	6	2	21
Total	240	195	214	131	780

Note: Chi-square = 30.6; df = 15; $p < .01$

Table 165 shows that the majority of the sampled students from the six educational institutions disagreed that male university and VTC students believed that they could be employed without education

Table 166: Male students are given less attention by lecturers than female students by institution

Name of institution	Male students are given less attention by lecturers than female students				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
UNAM	233	152	70	54	509
NUST	57	47	24	15	143
IUM	18	14	5	4	41
VVTC	14	6	5	13	38
RVTC	9	4	3	4	20
ZVTC	7	8	2	4	21
Total	338	231	109	94	772

Note: Chi-square = 26.0; df = 15; $p < .04$

Table 166 shows that the majority of students from all the six educational institutions disagreed that male students were given less attention by lecturers than female students.

Table 167: Male students are allowed to hold the view that education does not have relevance to their roles in society by institution

Name of institution	Male students are allowed to hold the view that education has no relevance to their roles in society				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
UNAM	227	205	57	20	509
NUST	61	59	18	3	141
IUM	12	17	9	3	41
VVTC	7	20	4	7	38
RVTC	9	10	3	0	22
ZVTC	10	5	3	3	21
Total	326	316	94	36	772

Note: Chi-square = 38.2; df = 15; $p < .001$

Table 167 shows that the majority of students from all educational institutions disagreed that male students were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society

Table 168: More male than female students leave tertiary institutions because of misbehaviour by institution

Name of institution	More male than female student leave tertiary institutions because of misbehaviour				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
UNAM	46	95	248	123	512
NUST	18	40	65	20	143
IUM	2	5	20	14	41
VVTC	2	1	18	17	38
RVTC	1	4	9	8	22
ZVTC	4	1	9	7	21
Total	73	146	369	189	777

Note: Chi-square = 37.7; df = 15; $p < .001$

Table 168 shows that proportionally the majority of students from all the six institutions agreed that more male than female students leave tertiary institutions because of misbehaviour

Table 169: More female than male students participate in class learning activities by institution

Name of institution	More female than male students participate in class learning activities				Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	
UNAM	54	144	202	105	505
NUST	15	45	53	29	142
IUM	1	8	14	16	39
VVTC	2	9	14	12	37
RVTC	9	2	6	5	22
ZVTC	2	1	11	7	21
Total	83	209	300	174	766

Note: Chi-square = 42.1; df = 15; $p < .001$

Table 169 shows that except for students from RVTC, the majority of students from other five educational institutions agreed that more female than male students participated in class learning activities.

Table 170: Male students are given less psycho-social support at the University than female students by institution

Name of institution	Male students are given less psychosocial support at university than female students				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
UNAM	84	131	195	101	511
NUST	26	43	57	16	142
IUM	7	7	18	9	41
VVTC	10	12	9	7	38
RVTC	7	7	1	6	21
ZVTC	4	1	11	4	20
Total	138	201	291	143	773

Note: Chi-square = 27.8; df = 15; $p < .02$

Table 170 shows that except for students from VVTC and RVTC, the majority of students from the other four educational institutions disagreed that male students were given less psychosocial support at their institutions of learning than female students.

Table 171: Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students by institution

Name of institution	Male students spend less time on academic activities than female students				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
UNAM	73	84	203	148	508
NUST	27	28	65	22	142
IUM	5	6	20	10	41
VVTC	12	9	9	8	38
RVTC	8	6	5	1	20
ZVTC	4	1	10	5	20
Total	129	134	312	194	769

Note: Chi-square = 37.4; df = 15; $p < .001$

Table 171 shows that except for students from VVTC and RVTC, the majority of students from the other four institutions disagreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students

Table 172: Male students prefer to work in isolation by institution

Name of institution	Male students prefer to work in isolation				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	
UNAM	121	240	102	43	506
NUST	37	56	35	15	143
IUM	15	21	3	2	41
VVTC	12	21	2	1	36
RVTC	5	7	6	4	22
ZVTC	2	14	2	1	19
Total	192	359	150	66	767

Note: Chi-square = 27.5; df = 15; $p < .03$

Table 172 shows that the majority of students from all the six sampled institutions agreed that male students preferred to work in isolation.

Table 173: Male students are less concerned about the future by institution

Name of institution	Male students less concerned about the future				Total
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
UNAM	89	217	163	38	507
NUST	19	53	44	24	140
IUM	11	20	9	1	41
VVTC	6	15	13	3	37
RVTC	4	6	5	5	20
ZVTC	7	6	5	1	19
Total	136	317	239	72	764

Note: Chi-square = 29.9; df = 15; $p < .01$

Table 173 shows that except for students from RVTC, the majority of students from the other five institutions agreed that male students were less concerned about the future.

We indicated when presenting our analysis of parents' focus group discussion data that as a consequence of using a parallel pragmatic mixed methods research design in which we collected both quantitative and qualitative data from our research participants, we also collected and analysed focus group discussion data from some students studying at UNAM, NUST and IUM. We present the following report on the analysed students' focus group discussion data

REPORT ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION DATA

Introduction

This section of the research report is on the analysis of University Students' Focus Group Discussion data from the University of Namibia (UNAM), Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) and the International University of Management (IUM). Although 708 students from these Universities provided quantitative data, five students' Focus Groups yielded qualitative data that are reported on in this section. Whereas 10 students formed a focus group at UNAM, 20 students formed three focus groups at NUST and 15 students formed a focus group at IUM. In total, 45 University students from the three institutions participated in the focus group discussions.

Based on the study's research questions, University students belonging to the 5 Focus Groups were asked to respond to 7 focus group interview questions on:

1. whether they agreed with the statement that male university students were less motivated than female students to work at academic tasks,
2. whether female students worked harder than male students,
3. how the socialization (i.e. the upbringing) of male students promoted underachievement in education at the universities,
4. why more male students than female students took longer to graduate from Universities,
5. how male students could be supported to perform better academically,
6. what resources would be needed to enhance the learning of male university students, and
7. suggestions students had regarding how male students could be supported by universities, lecturers and communities in order to improve their academic achievement.

In this section of the research report, we present our analysis of students' focus group discussion responses to the 7 questions, interview question by interview question as follows:

1. Male students are less motivated to work at academic tasks than female students. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your answer.

According to Table 143, quantitative data related to student motivation showed that whereas 53.5% of the 807 students from the three universities and Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) disagreed with the statement that male students found the subject matter boring, Table 144 showed that 82.2% of them disagreed that they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society. In the light of this, we sought for students' views in focus group discussions on whether they agreed with the statement that male students were less motivated than female students to work at academic tasks.



When we analysed students' responses to this interview question, we identified 9 themes which we divided into 4 categories. The four categories were: *reasons why female students were more motivated than male students, factors other than gender that influenced students' motivation, reasons why male students were more motivated than female students and whether there was no difference in motivation between female and male students.*

1.1 Reasons why female students were more motivated than male students

We identified four themes under this category.

Theme one was on the affirmation that female students were more motivated than male students. Students responded that female students were more motivated than male students because it was in their nature to work hard and unlike male students who did not care whether they passed or not in their studies, female students cared about their studies and worked to excel in them. One student explained some of this reasoning in the following way:

"From my side I agree, because what I observe in life, men always have other opportunities in life, even if they do not do well. A friend of mine once said that even if he passes or fails he does not care. He can go and get a drivers' license to become a truck driver and in fact, as we speak, he is a truck driver."

Theme two under this category was on the fact that women were more motivated because they wished to be independent of men and own their own property. One student amplified on this as follows:

"I feel like male students are not motivated as female students are because female students are more motivated, other than that, just that women are more aware of the roles they play in our society e.g. want to be independent and they want to own their stuff and what not, so and they strive to work as hard as they can, whilst male just literally go with the flow, they have this thing in their minds that even if education does not work out, they can lean on becoming businessmen."

Theme three was on the issue that women were more motivated than men as a result of women empowerment programmes. According to students in the focus group discussions, women were more motivated than men because they wished to perform as well as or better than men. Benefiting from the gender equality programmes, women had realised that they could excel in education and outperform men. One student justified this reasoning in the following way:

"Women are more motivated because of the women empowerment, in olden days' people always put down women, and always assume that the males should have the best position, best education, women were not allowed to access, in today's life I think women are more motivate in becoming better because of equality. They realise they can do well. They can become the best they wish to be. Women are more motivated because now they have realised what they are able to achieve and they can actually do it, so with this in mind they go about doing things having thoughts that yes 'I can be better than males or I can be as good as males in the society', so yes this realisation play a big role."

Theme four was on the fact that female students were more motivated than male students because they did things with passion. Male students, however seemed to lack passion and drive when working on academic tasks.



1.2 Factors other than gender that influenced students' motivation

We identified two themes under this category. Theme one stipulated that motivation amongst students was not based on gender but it was subject specific and based on the level of difficulty of subject matter. According to students, some students may be motivated to do easy subjects and not hard subjects. Others may be motivated to work hard in their major subjects and less hard in their minor subjects.

Theme two was on the fact that motivation was based on students' interests and not necessarily on their gender. One student explained this in the following way:

"Maybe, it can be a thing of interest as well, so if they find the topic or the subject interesting they can be motivated to work hard, if they feel that "what will I do with this," they tend to sit back, if they do not realize the relevance of the course they are doing.

1.3 Reasons why male students were more motivated than female students

Under this category, we identified two themes. In theme one, some of the students interviewed disagreed with the view that female students were more motivated than male students. In contrast, they expressed the view that male students were more motivated than female students because they were expected to do well and take up positions of authority in society. In addition, male students were more motivated because they wished to be seen as individuals of high status and as individuals who wished to keep up appearances.

Theme two under this category was on the point that not all men were less motivated than women. As indicated in theme one under this category, some men were more motivated than women. This was the case because men's motivation depended on whether they valued education or not. In addition, some men were more motivated than women because they were more competitive than women.

One student explained some of this in the following way:

"I think male students are motivated, some are motivated, some are not. Men believe in struggles, that is how guys are, they always find a way for something else, they believe education is not the key actually."

1.4 There was no difference in motivation between female and male students

We identified one theme under this category. In the theme, some students expressed the opinion that because male and female students were subjected to the same academic standards and because they were treated equally, they were equally motivated.

We gleaned the following insights from students' responses to question one:

1. According to some respondents, female students were more motivated than male students because they cared about their studies and valued educational success. In contrast, male students did not do this and as a result they underperformed in their studies.
2. Female students were more motivated in education because they wished to be independent from men and acquire their own property by excelling in education. In addition, female students wished to demonstrate their equality with men through education.



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3. Women were more motivated because they were more passionate about their studies than men.
 4. According to some respondents, it was not only gender that influenced students' motivation. The nature of the subjects they studied either inspired motivation or not. In addition, their interest in the subjects they were taking also determined their motivation.
 5. It was important to recognize that there were men who were more motivated than women because they tended to be competitive and tied their status in society to success in education. Some men were also more motivated than women because they wished to earn good reputations and keep up appearances by doing well in education.

We note that these motivational anchors may be less stable because they are not intrinsic but extrinsic (i.e. contextual) and therefore dependent on external influences.

2. Female students work harder than male students. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your answer

We identified 16 themes under this question which we divided into five categories. These categories were: *Reasons why female students work harder than male students, reasons why male students work less hard than female students, factors other than gender that influence students' work ethic, negative allegations of why female students appear to work harder than male students and reasons why male students work harder than female students.*

2.1 Reasons why female students work harder than male students

We identified 6 themes under this category. Theme one was on the fact that female students worked harder than male students to avoid being ostracized by parents who did not care about whether the male students succeeded or not. In addition, students pointed out that female students worked harder than male students to avoid dropping out and 'going home to make babies'. One student poignantly explained this as follows:

"From my point of view, female really work harder, because one thing for us, we know we have less privileges, once you drop out of the University, your parents will hardly look at you, they do not want to see you, you will start making babies, all over, that's what females do not want. As for the males, even if they drop out, to the parents it's like they have more freedom, they do not really control them. The parents already know that boys can easily get a job, there is no chance of them getting pregnant and stay at home. Even if they make a baby, they can still go to school or they can choose to work, is their choice. Whereas, for the females, when you get pregnant, there is no choice, so they work harder just to make sure to bring bread on the table."

Theme two under this category was on female students working harder than male students because they persisted and did not give up easily. They were resilient. In contrast to this, male students who underachieve easily give up- especially when they take courses they were not interested in. One student explained this as follows:

"I would agree that female students work hard than male students, but relating to his point that it depend on the course they are doing, so e.g. For male students, if he chose the course he does not like, this later on affects, him not to take it serious, but female students, if there are no other options but to take only the course that is there, even though not her dream course. Once she enters the course, she will do her best, to work harder, to perform at her level best. While for the males, he will say: "this is not what I chose", they will end up slowing down and later drop out. But for female, they will have a vision, "I chose this course so I will do my best for me to get something out of it".



Theme three under this category was that female students worked harder than male students because they were given more support by society than male students. According to this view, male students did not work harder than female students at educational tasks because they were not encouraged to do so in educational empowerment programmes that were made available to female students. This view was illustrated in the following quotation:

“We talk about motivation, motivation really plays a huge role as to who will perform the most, let us look at the current situation, the status quo is that girls are currently being more motivated, Why? Because gender equality, they want to get to the equilibrium, men are currently dominating the industry and they want the women to get to their level, boy child has been neglected, they are no longer talking about a boy child unless “I am loved by my mother my father”, those are the people motivating us to do well, but the society does not do that anymore, society focuses on the girl child only, that part has also contributed to who works harder.”

In theme four, students pointed out that female students worked harder in assignments and other academic tasks than male students. In addition, female students worked harder because they sought out information on what they did not understand from sources such as library books.

One student explained that:

“I agree with the statement, because I have worked with students in a group assignment with both females and males, but those who contributed more are females and the females really had to lead them, so that they do their work. If you don’t push them (males), they will not do their work. Coming to the class! when the lecturers give feedback on tasks done, females do better than males and it can be one male out of ten females that did better.”

To strengthen the point, students pointed out that female students worked harder because they put in more effort in their studies than male students who put in little effort. Moreover, male students did not care about female students academically performing better than them. They did not compete to do well in their studies and did not care about their low academic performance. All this was explained thus:

“I agree that females work harder than males simply because females put more efforts in their work, so that they do not feel like staying behind, but male students put less efforts, they don’t care, even if others are passing and go forward, they do not compete with others, to make them go forward. They let their friends go while they stay behind; when they have modules behind they don’t care, as long as they are going forward.”

In theme five, students said that female students worked harder than male students to fight against discrimination that they experienced in society. According to students, female students had to work harder than male students in order to get jobs that men easily got. In addition, they fought for equality with men by working harder than men in education. To explain all this, one student said the following:

“Yes, to add on what she said... female students tend to work harder because society has already put in the past that men can get away with anything. They don’t need to work hard because they know that, even if he is less qualified than the female counter part, they are likely to get the job that they are applying for. In that regard, society has indoctrinated in us that men cannot work hard, because everything is there for them already, it is catered for, so for the women to get to the level of a men, she has to work twice harder. In that aspect I feel that women work harder so that they can be taken as serious as male counterparts because of the society.”

Students further indicated that some male students worked less hard than female students because they had more job options that did not require much education. In contrast to this, women worked harder than men because they wished to buy their own property and because they wished to avoid being abused. This was clarified as follows:



“Men are aware of options outside, they believe there are more options and opportunities to survive life, “even if I do not make it in studying, I can go back and look for a job in a mine and get a lot of money”, I think being aware of options outside. Men have more options in life. Women, if she does not go to school, she gets married and the husband abuses her, women work harder to get their own things, to avoid being abused in life, and all those things.”

In theme six, students pointed out that female students worked harder than male students because they had a sense of responsibility towards their families. Because of this, they took their studies seriously. In contrast, some male students who underachieved did not have this sense of responsibility. This was explained as follows by some students from NUST:

“I think women are working very harder, if you look at architecture department right now, there are lots of women than men, and then in real life, we see that women are taking care of their husbands and their families. I think women are working harder than men. To add... from what I have seen, I think some women, from having babies at an early age, they need to find the ways to support their children, so they are motivated to work harder because they have somebody to care of, while men do not feel that they have that much responsibility to do it.”

2.2 Reasons why male students work less hard than female students

We identified four themes under this category. In theme one, students pointed out that male students worked less hard than female students because they did not care to work hard on academic tasks. To demonstrate this, most male students did not take notes in class and did not bring books to class. Most of them captured the notes on their smart phones- a practice that was perceived not to be effective in storing the notes because they could easily be lost when smart phones were stolen. In contrast to this, most female students took notes in class and reviewed them regularly after the classes. One student explained all this in the manner that follows.

What follows is that, some use it but the possibility to lose your phone immediately after class is high and you lose everything that you have captured. From there, you do not make use of those notes because you do not have them in written form and it may be hard to get them back and the time you get them, time is gone and you may not have enough time to go through.

In theme two under this category, students expressed the view that male students worked less hard than female students because they took courses they did not have aptitude for and thus underperform in them. The implication of this tendency was that some male students took hard courses to show off. One student explained this as follows:

“School was not meant for everybody, everyone has his own passion, sometime they are good at sport or something else, which is not offered in schools. They are forced to do stuff they do not want to do, that is why they underperform. Most are not doing the courses they like, some are doing courses just for the title or to show off or to say, I am an engineering student although they might not be enjoying the course, they want to be seen as major Icons, studying Engineering thus they fail.”

In theme three, students pointed out that some male students worked less hard than women because they abused alcohol.

In theme four, students expressed the view that some male students worked less hard than women because they did not put in a lot of work in academic studies but opted to drop out of school and go to work.



2.3 Factors other than gender that influence students' work ethic

Under this category, we identified three themes. Theme one was on the view that the practice of working hard did not solely depend on the variable of gender but on any student's aims and goals in life. One student explained thus:

"For this statement, I disagree, my point of view to see who is a hard worker does not matter which gender, we are all different, not the same, there are boys that work harder, there are girls that work harder. We have our different motivations, we know what we are doing, if I come to school, I know what my aims are, what my goals are, if I came to play, the girl that came to achieve her goals, will work hard, it is not that they work harder than us, it depends who the person is"

Theme two under this category was on the proposition that the family background determined whether or not one worked hard at academic tasks. A student's driving motive, vision and goal for instance, might be to help his or her family, including brothers and sisters. This would not depend on whether you are male or female. One student explained this by stating the following:

"I think it is not about male or female, when I was about to come here I spoken with my father during the holiday and he said: "go study, I want you to get 100%, I do not know, if you get 50% I do not know, we are going to see, next year we are going to be together", my father told me if I want to go outside the country, with those 50% I am going to come back, because they do not accept students with 50% so since that day I worked very hard, because I wanted to come here, I think it is about the focus and the background. If I am saying, it is just my mother there along and I have small brothers, I have to work harder because I have to come back and support my brothers. Current situation, my mother is working for me but I have to do something also to support her. So because of the background, I have to see what I want for my life and for the future, it is not about being male or female, it is about the background situation, the focus there, I want to graduate so I work harder."

In the third theme, student indicated that there was no difference between men and women when it came to expending effort in educational activities. This was perceived to be the case because male and female students collaborated and worked hard together to accomplish group goals.

2.4 Negative allegations of why female students appear to work harder than male students

We identified two themes under this category. In theme one, some students alleged that female students appeared to work harder than male students because they were favoured by male lecturers. One male student expressed this allegation in the following way:

lecturers go much easier on women than men, they try to push women and also "sexual marks" which is a huge problem. It is easier that the lecturers be easier and lenient to her than to males. Male lecturers are more favouring female students. They give more support to women that is why women are performing better than us males nowadays.

Another student disagreed with this allegation by stating the following:

"I disagree to what he said: it depends on individual, and depends on the university. I disagree on 'sex for marks'. It can happen but not everywhere, in general you cannot see it like this. This has nothing to do with female students performing better."

In theme two under this category another view that was alleged was that female students appeared to work harder than male students because they got other people to do assignments for them. In our view this allegation was largely without merit because the alleged practice



was rumoured to implicate both male and female students. However, it remains a rumour that needed to be verified with concrete facts.

2.5 Reasons why male students worked harder than female students

We identified one theme under this category. Some students in focus group discussions expressed the view that male students worked harder than female students because they were more engaged in university classes than female students. From our experience in teaching at universities for decades, this data piece would be applicable to few instances.

A number of insights were gleaned from students' responses to question two. These were:

1. Female students worked harder than male students because of fear of being ostracized by their parents who required them to succeed in education. Such parents however, did not hold a similar requirement for male students. In Addition, it was reported that female students worked harder because they feared dropping out of the University.
2. Female students worked harder because they expended more effort in their studies, were persistent and cared about their success in education. Male students did not care whether or not they succeeded in education. As a result they underperformed.
3. Female students worked harder because they were fighting against gender related discrimination through excelling in education.
4. Female students worked harder because they were coached and encouraged to do so in empowerment programmes that were available to them but were not available to male students.
5. Female students worked harder because they were more responsible than male students and took their studies seriously.
6. Male students worked less hard because they abused alcohol, did not value academic success, expended little effort in their studies and took hard courses to show off.
7. There were non-gender related factors that explained why female students worked harder than male students. Some of these factors were one's aims, goals and the need to help one's family after graduation.

3. How does socialization of male students promote underachievement in education at the University?

Question 3 was misunderstood by students from UNAM, IUM and by some NUST students as *socializing*. This concept means going out there to have a good time. In fact the question was on the process of growing up, upbringing, and raising children. We were enquiring into the impact of socialization as a child developmental process on male students' underachievement in education.

When the question was understood to be on the practice of *socializing*, we identified seventeen themes which we divided into four categories. These categories were on:

- *Alcohol and drugs during socializing undermine academic achievement*
- *Socializing as a distraction from educational activities*
- *Examples of socializing activities that undermine academic achievement amongst University male students*
- *Upbringing influences the impact of socializing on academic achievement of male students*



3.1 Alcohol and drugs during socializing undermine academic achievement

Under this category, we identified three themes. Theme one was on the **abuse of alcohol** when socializing as a **barrier** to academic achievement and a **distraction** from academic activities. This was illustrated as follows:

*“I think that male students are **drinking a lot**; **alcohol** is the biggest problem in Namibia. If you drink a lot you won't have time to study, you will spend most of your **time drinking** and having fun, more friends and all these stuffs. But girls are more conservative when it comes to alcohol, they do not drink that much, they drink with some limits and boys drink and drink, I think that is it.”*

Another illustration was as follows:

*“I think, it does because most of the time when males have free time, they spend it playing soccer games, or play physical games and **go out to drink**, while female spend time to study even just reading a story book that contribute to their studies. More time on education related activities, males spent time to sport activities.”*

Theme two under this category was on the influence of **peer pressure**. Students expressed the view that **peer pressure** forced male students to associate with friends or people who did not focus on education. They focused on alcohol, quick money schemes, girls and drugs. They associated with people who went for short cuts and did not focus on education. This view was illustrated in the following way:

“Imagine something, if I came from a poor family and I am forced to go to school, after school I go out with my friends, I will find people that are always stressed with their lives, while they are drinking they can be talking about things, those ideas can take me out from school, if they say, no, “let us go out and try to get money easily”, may be if I am not focused, I can follow them easily because everyone want to get money easily, and then when we are chilling, if I am not careful, anything that people say, we are going to do, because while drinking we won't talk about school, we just talk about girls, about money, talk about drugs. Us men, we are the head of the family. Girls can have someone that can support her while in school but for us, it will be hard for a woman to pay for our school or help us to buy our things, that is why for us men, if we are not concentrating, we can go out for short cuts to get our things. Men are easily influenced from my point of view.”

In addition to this, students stated that more male students than female students were easily influenced by **peer pressure**, wasted time socializing and going to parties and bars where the consumption of alcohol was the norm. As a result of this, male students got easily influenced by friends to do wrong things such as stealing and losing focus on education. This reasoning was illustrated as follows:

*“I believe that guys get easily **influenced by other people** like what she said. One thing also about the men, we are designed in a way that we focus on what we are doing. We put all our focus on specific staff, we do not focus on many different things at the same time. We just focus on that and you give 100% in that, if it is in school you do that, if other people come and disturb that way of you, then you go to the way of drinking alcohol and doing that type of staff because you find it fun and you give your whole attention.”*

*“Also the thing of **impressing people**, it is true, they try to impress friends because with the friends comes the girls and so on.”*

*“The current lifestyle which is promoted within **our peers** is that males are striving to work hard just to get girls, and live this life, they are stuck in the same cycle. They are working hard trying to make money but not working hard in school, they try to make money but use it on wrong things.”*



3.2 Socializing as a distraction from educational activities

We identified three themes under this category. In theme one, students indicated that unlike female students, male students were not focused on education when socializing. They did not inspire or encourage each other, were not serious with and committed to education. They did not talk about how to do assignments and did not plan how to tackle educational challenges. They merely joked, goofed around and chased ladies. In contrast to this, female students remained focussed on education because they even discussed assignments during socializing. Instead of doing this, male students might be talking about how they would cheat at tests or get finished assignments from friends. All this was illustrated as follows:

“To add, how this promote under achievement in education amongst males is that, when males are together, they do not have the thing of inspiring one another, they tend to make jokes about everything, e.g. even though we are from the same class and we can see, we have an assignment, when we come together we do not really have the mind of saying, guys let us go sit down, we have an assignment or brainstorm or do something about the assignment, let us do research or anything, they always talk about other things in life which they believe will build them, but not about school work, they can even make a joke that, they are going to cheat or have that assignment from somebody, they do not have the mind of inspiring or building one another, instead they make jokes about everything, but for the female students, you will find them even in the time of socializing like at a break, or before one class you will find them doing an assignment. But us boys you will find them moving around or chasing about ladies, or doing something else, they do not have the mind of inspiring one another related to school works.”

Theme two was on socializing as a distraction from education. According to the respondents, more male students than female students were distracted from education because they had too many **extra-curricular activities** to do. They spent a lot of their time away from educational activities and made arrangements to have assignments done for them. Respondents also pointed out that male students were not interested in learning and education but in degree certificates as a number of them did not care about the fraudulent means to use to get degree certificates. More female students than male students resisted doing this. All this is illustrated as follows:

*“I think for the males we are having a lot of things to do... it is like when it comes to Friday... you have to or want to go out, so during the day, we have a lot of things to do, like e.g. me I **go to the gym**, in the morning because I work with a lot of people there and then I have to manage to come to classes, after class, I have to attend French lessons at night, so it is me, I have a lot of things to do, but I still have my focus, I have a lot of things such as my assignment, because I want to graduate, after two years. There are a lot of guys, they do that and at the end of the day they say: “I am tired do not want to study”, some of us know, I will go there and someone will do my assignments for me and they just want to graduate because they have a job already, he is just there to get the paper any how they get it they do not have to work harder for it.”*

*“I think, it does because most of the time when males have **free time**, they spend it **playing soccer games**, or play physical games and go out to drink, while **female spend time to study** even just reading a story book that contribute to their studies. More time on education related activities, **males spent time to sport activities**.”*

In theme three, students reported that more male students than female students used socializing as an outlet to excel at activities unrelated to education. This was the case because during socializing male students outperformed female students in activities such as sport and debating. Such activities, however, distract male students from educational activities. The content of theme three was illustrated as follows:

“They feel ‘this is where I dominate, this is my area, this is where I am supposed to shine’. In terms of class setting they know female counterparts will outperform them. In other areas, they would want to dominate because they feel female dominate in class performance.”



3.3 Examples of socializing activities that undermined academic achievement amongst university male students

We identified five themes under this category. In theme one, respondents reported that male students' academic achievement was undermined by their habit of not reading but wasting time on watching movies. This was illustrated as follows:

Female students spend time reading while male students do not read for pleasure. They watch movies on YouTube. This wastes study time. They read sport news or rather watch videos on YouTube about sport. Unless there is a test the next day or in few hours, you will not find male students reading something academic, unless if it is for assessment purpose, not love stories.

In theme two respondents indicated that male students' academic achievement was undermined by the fact that they were unable to multitask. This worked against them when they focused on one wrong thing such as alcohol or doing drugs. This was illustrated as follows:

"I believe that guys get easily influenced by other people like what she said. One thing also about the men, we are designed in a way that we focus on what we are doing. We put all our focus on specific stuff, we do not focus on many different things at the same time. We just focus on that, and you give 100% in that, if it is in school you do that, if other people come and disturb that way of you, then you go to the way of drinking alcohol and doing that type of stuff because you find it fun and you give your whole attention."

Theme three was on male students' tendency of being distracted by 'keeping up appearances, by wishing to impress friends and thereby get girls'. This was exemplified as follows:

Also the thing of impressing people, it is true, they try to impress friends because with the friends comes the girls and so on."

In theme four, respondents indicated that male students were not interested in learning and education but in getting degree certificates. A number of them were not bothered by the fraudulent means they employed to get the degree certificates. More female students than male students resisted doing this. This was illustrated as follows:

"They just want to graduate because they have a job already, he is just there to get the paper any how they get it they do not have to work harder for it."

Theme five was on male students' **lack of self-control and self-discipline**. According to respondents, male students underachieved academically because they did not exercise self-control when engaging in a variety of socializing acts. In addition, they did not exercise self-discipline when they were required to choose between performing academic tasks and engaging in entertainment activities. They were easily lured into entertainment activities. All this was explained in the following way:

*"I believe, the men can get easily influenced than women. They get **easily lost in society and get lost with their actual goals** and what they supposed to do. This can affect their initial goals. They tend to overdo things; they hang-out with friends who are not at university, who can drag and pull them down with them, this can contribute to them losing focus on their initial goals and follow the crowd basically."*

*"They (men/boys) do focus on school, but there is always a little room for enjoyment, but when they do that they **tend to overdo it**. If I know I have a test tomorrow, I will tell myself that "I am going to have one beer, and I am going to study", the beers become two and they continue to multiply, men have **difficulties controlling themselves**."*



3.4 Upbringing influences the impact of socializing on academic achievement of male students

We identified two themes under this category. In theme one respondents expressed the view that the nature of socializing male students opted for depended on their upbringing and family influence. They pointed out that their family background determined whether they would go after quick money or value education and work to academically excel. For instance, a male student who comes from a family which values education will not be influenced by friends during socializing to turn his focus away from educational activities to ‘quick money schemes’ such as engaging in ‘shady deals’ and dealing in drugs. This was partly illustrated as follows:

“There is many ways to get quick money, for me it depends on where you come from, maybe your family, if you know where you are from, if you know what to do, then you know whether you want quick money or you want education”

Consistent with theme one, theme two was on the view that some male students were distracted from education by the belief that there were other pathways to succeed in life. Education was not the only guarantee to success. For instance, some male students were lured away from working hard at their studies by examples of some community role models with little education who amassed a lot of wealth. This was explained in focus group discussions as follows:

“Also... I think, a lot of guys are taking short cuts, if they hear that someone got rich because he did ABC..., he did not go to school, they will want to follow those footsteps e.g. selling drugs and making quick money.”

When the question was understood to be on *socialization* as a developmental process, we identified two themes. Theme one was on parents’ **socialization laxity** when it came to raising male children. Respondents communicated the message that parents pampered male students and allowed them to do whatever they wished to do. Because they were frequently absent from home, some parents did not exercise control over the behaviour of their sons. As a consequence of this laxity, male students, as they were growing up, behaved in a ‘layback’ manner, did not manage their time well but wasted it on entertainment activities such as playing soccer and did not focus on education.

Theme two was on the fact that female students were brought up to work hard because most household chores were assigned to them. As they were always pushed to the limit during socialization, female students learned to be organized in undertaking any activity, including learning activities in school. They also worked hard to prove themselves and succeed at educational activities. Because of these qualities, female students performed better than male students at academic tasks.

A number of insights were gleaned from students’ responses to question three. These were:

- The abuse of alcohol when socializing acted as a barrier to some male students’ academic achievement and as a distraction from their academic activities.
- Peer pressure during socializing negatively influenced some male students to waste time in ‘quick money schemes’, alcohol and drug abuse and in the vain practice of chasing after young women.
- Some male students, unlike the majority of female students, did not encourage each other on educational matters during socializing but wasted time goofing around, making jokes, chasing after young women and copying assignments from friends.



- Some male students were distracted from education by having too many extra-curricular activities, by not being interested in learning and by obtaining degree certificates through any means possible, whether fraudulent or not.
- Some male students' academic achievement was undermined by the fact that they were unable to multitask. This worked against them when they focused on one wrong thing such as alcohol or doing drugs.
- Some male students underachieved academically because they did not exercise self-control when engaging in a variety of socializing acts. In addition, they did not exercise self-discipline when they were required to choose between performing academic tasks and engaging in entertainment activities.
- Because of employing **socialization laxity** some parents pampered male students and allowed them to do whatever they wished to do. As a consequence of this laxity, some male students learnt to behave in a 'layback' manner, did not manage their time well but wasted it on entertainment activities such as playing soccer and did not focus on education. All this led to such male students' underachievement in their studies.

4. In your opinion, why do more male students take longer to graduate from the University than female students?

Under this question we identified thirteen themes which we divided into four categories. These categories were on *male students' work habits, male students' personality dispositions, University curriculum issues and family support matters.*

4.1 Male students' work habits

Under this category, we identified three themes. Theme one was on male students' failure to multitask. Respondents indicated that male students took more time to graduate because they tried to make money to support their families, girlfriends, children out of wedlock and businesses they engaged in as they studied. They focussed on these activities and their businesses and neglected their studies. They failed to do business and study at the same time. In other words, they failed to multitask. This was illustrated as follows:

"From my own experience, I am an entrepreneur, when I came here, I started my business, I registered in 2014 but in 2015 I dropped out and resumed my study in 2016. I received more customers and concentrated into the business. I had responsibilities to take care of my family with the profit I was making. I did not take my academic as a priority before the business, so my business came first before my academic work, men cannot multi task to concentrate on both the business and the academic and excel in both. I did not take academic work as a priority but I know within a given time frame I will graduate, I am not rushing because I have income from somewhere at the moment."

The point of male students not graduating on time because of doing too many things at the same time was further illustrated as follows:

*"Yeah, ... I believe that **males are occupied in life**, they have more things occupying them like; they can be studying and at the same time and have a job, because that is life for the males, life start from the males, you have to have money to just be happy, males believe that no money, no happiness. They have jobs, while studying just to make money so that they can be happy. They also have a lot of things like socializing.*

*"To add.. guys e.g. if he has a job and see that he is making a lot of money, **they drop out of school** for a year and **focus on the job** for the whole year and only go back to school the following year, that is how men are."*



In theme two under this category, respondents pointed out that male students took too long to graduate because they did not like to study and not merely because they wished to make money and that they were unable to multitask. They took too long to graduate because they were not serious with their studies, they missed tests and assignments, they were not organized and they were not focused on education. One female student exemplified this by saying:

“I think, girls are trying to study hard, not because they do not have the business, or not that boys are the head of the family, nowadays girls can also be the head of the families, I can do my business and still studying, I do not see a point, I think boys just do not like to study, this is the point.”

Theme three was on the point that male students underachieved and took too long to graduate because they **wasted time socializing, abusing alcohol and engaging in sport excessively**. In addition, it was reported that male students supplemented the money parents gave them with money they earned doing part time jobs. Because of doing this, they did not leave themselves enough time to study and graduate on time. Moreover, although women focused on education to help their parents after graduation, male students did not have such vision but spent time making extra money to pay for their entertainment and socializing. Students explained all this in the following way:

“I think what is causing these males not to perform is socialization, this thing of going to buy alcohol, watch soccer. There is also money involved in most cases, parents cannot afford to maintain that, so males go out of school, to get part time jobs, they will make an income out of that, then they do not have enough time on their books any more. Thus, they will take long to graduate than the females. When females come to school, they try to study to finish so that they can help their parents, males do not have that thing of helping their parents later, but instead they want to make their own living at that time. They want to do everything possible to enjoy their time, mostly where they come from is not allowing them because of financial problems. They take time to do other things, they engage in other activities to earn money to make socialization possible.”

4.2 Male students' personality dispositions

We identified two themes under this category. In theme one, respondents indicated that **male students took too long to graduate because they took too long to mature**. They demonstrated this by wasting time drinking, playing around, goofing around, partying and not taking their studies seriously. According to respondents, male students took too long to realize that they should take their studies seriously. One student explained this in the following way:

“Just to be on a little bit different direction, I would say that why guys take longer in schools is because it is said that guys take longer to mature than ladies do, so even in university you will find some guys who are childish. Ladies grow up quick e.g. if a lady is in the third year or second year, she is going to click in her mind that no “I cannot play” I am at a university, I have to make a living out of this, I have to work harder, not to fail any longer, but for the guys if he is not grown yet which takes a while, he is going to play around, he can fail and even his friends wont motivate him, they will laugh at him that “ooh you have failed”, I have failed because I drink too much or something like that and then it will take him a while to come back to his senses to realize that he is there to make a living, not to play so I think it is about maturity, they do not mature very quick thus even if they fail, they will continue to play instead of getting serious.”

Another student disagreed with this point of view vehemently by expressing the following opposing view:

“Let me disagree strongly, when we talk about maturity, what is maturity? For your own information boys take responsibility from the young age, like I said, guys especially where I come from they start to look for money from young age, some to support their family, some to have fun, this is maturity, me taking responsibility for my



family, this a sound level of maturity, with maturity I would think that women grow up physically fast, but when it comes to thinking, we are all able to mature the same.”

In our view, although the two positions are both valid, a number of male students who do not graduate on time exhibit a lot of immature behaviours that have been depicted in the quotation above.

In theme two under this category, respondents expressed the view that male students took too long to graduate because they believed that they could make it at university without studying. This view was explained in the following way:

“I think a lot of male students take longer to graduate because they think they can make it without studying, females know they have to study for them to pass, males can even go to exam without studying, the course such as hospitality, they think it is easy so they feel that there is no need for them to study, they think they are superior.”

4.3 University curriculum issues

We identified three themes under this category. Theme one was on overcrowded University curricular. Students noted that men might take too long to graduate because of heavy workloads emanating from taking too many modules. They failed to cope with too crowded University programmes with too many modules.

In theme two under this category, respondents indicated that male students might not apply themselves to their studies because of not being interested in what they were studying. Because of this they might take too long to complete their studies and graduate. This was explained in the following way during focus group discussions:

“I would think, it is also because of lack of interests, the choice to do that type of course was initially not theirs, and probably parents forced them to do that. So interest is not there, they would not sit and make sure that okay, “I want to become a doctor, I have to sit down and open my books and graduate”. Instead, they would say, “I supposed to do journalism, or media or ABC”, because of that, they lack interests in the modules, no efforts, so, they will not pass them for that reason. I think they will take longer to graduate due to lack of interests.”

To amplify on this, another respondent indicated that some male students did not graduate on time because they were forced by their families to study what they did not wish to study. This was articulated as follows:

“Why they take longer is because they perhaps do courses they do not want to do, they are forced to study certain courses. They are forced by parents, family and friends, like if people believe that you better fit in becoming a doctor or an engineer, but personally you wanted to do fashion designer, the friends will force you to become a doctor because they believe that you will earn a lot of money, you will be fine and famous, the family will be happy, and so on even though they do not have their passion of becoming a Doctor.”

Theme three under this category was on male students taking courses they did not have the aptitude for. The point here was that male students sometimes did not graduate on time because they took courses that were too hard for them. In addition, some male students might take too long to graduate because of being forced by their sponsors to study courses that were too difficult for them.



4. 4 Family support matters

We identified three themes under this category. Theme one was on the proposition that male students graduated late to honour family responsibilities. Respondents indicated that male students who wished to make money and support their families were those who came from disadvantaged backgrounds and poverty-stricken families. Such students took long to graduate because they studied and tried to make money at the same time. The other group of male students who did not graduate on time were from well to do families. These did not go through any financial hardships. However, they did not ‘mature early’, goofed around and wasted their parents’ money socializing instead of studying. As a consequence of this, they either took a long time to graduate or dropped out of universities all together. This was illustrated as follows:

“I agree with his point, not to debate, as he said, guys, yes of course they take responsibilities, those are guys that grew up in tough life, but those who grew up in the city where life was good to them, this guys think that, the incomes from the parents are good and enough, so probably they have nobody else to take care of and because of this, they remain childish, we see a lot of guys in universities and even in high schools where we came from, we see a lot of guys who did not grow up in their minds because life was not tough for them but we see ladies, it is in their nature, when they come to universities, even in our classes, even in our groups, they become more matured in their minds about their schools work more than guys.”

Theme two was on male students honouring the ‘**head of the household**’ role. Respondents expressed the view that some male students graduated late because they were encouraged by their families to start taking responsibility early as part of their training for assuming the role of the ‘head of household’. To encourage the male students to do this they were provided with insufficient money for upkeep by their families. To supplement the insufficient money, they took up part time jobs which left them with little time for their studies. This reasoning was illustrated as follows:

“If men supposed to be the head of the house, he need to grow up in a way in which they can take responsibility much quicker, if you keep giving him money he might lose focus on working hard and become dependent on the family, it is much better not to support him too much, men are tough, in my own opinion, I would not also support my boy child like I would for the girls, I would support them equally only at a tender age, when they grow up, the man must start taking responsibilities while he is young, they will lose focus.”

To amplify on this thinking, respondents pointed out that the expectation was that male students should be trained to be independent of the family so that they learnt to lead early in life. Even mothers expected their sons to become strong enough to withstand hardships. They however raised their daughters from an early age to become caring and nurturing. This thinking was exemplified in the following way:

“Men are more independent, even the mothers, if a baby boy cries, the mother would say ‘why are you crying, you are a man’, but if it is a baby girl, she will be comforted, men by nature are independent, in the past, men used to go and work and support our mothers while women looked after the house.”

Two students gave the following examples to demonstrate the follies of not learning to be independent of the family and the wisdom of learning to be independent of the family:

“I have a friend who grew up with his rich parents, the guy used to get things from the parents, after the parents died, the guy became a thief, because he was always depending on the parents, the parents gave him everything, they always gave him bread and did not teach him how to get the bread by himself. I have another friend whose parents were rich but he decided that he want to work for himself. It is a rare situation. But he worked hard to earn his own money.”



“For us males as I said before we are the head of the family, for us we have to start trying to get something for our families, we cannot wait after five years, because after we graduate, we will be needing girls to stay with us, you know, sometimes while we are studying we can impregnate a girl and be expected to give something to the girl and the child, we do not have a lot of time to lose. We have to start sooner to get something.”

To justify the importance of men assuming the role of the ‘head of household’ from a biblical point of view, respondents expressed the view that it was unnatural and unbiblical for a woman to become the head of the household. This was the case because when a woman became the head of the household and the man looked after the children, she might become arrogant and insult him. However, if the man was working, the woman would not insult him. So, according to the respondents, it was imperative that male students were trained early through earning their own money to assume the role of the ‘head of household’. Part of this thinking was illustrated as follows:

“The bible says so. It comes with nature; the bible says that man should be the head of the family. You know, in society, if the girl is working and the guys look after the kids at home, it is considered not normal in society, the girl can come and insult me because she is working but if a man is working for his family the girl will not insult me because I am supporting her.”

Theme three under this category was on the point that some male students took too long to graduate because they were not financially supported by their parents as well as their female counterparts were. Due to this, they needed to work for money to support themselves at the Universities. In contrast, female students were financially supported adequately by their parents because they feared that if they did not do this, their daughters would compromise themselves and get money from men “with strings attached”. This was illustrated as follows:

“Mine is not an issue for ladies at Universities, even it is not a big issue for girls, and they receive support from parents. Parents try to avoid girls from asking money from the guys. We have the stories of “blessers and blessees”. They try to avoid these things, so whenever, most of my girlfriends do not have money issues, as much as we boys experience, so for me I know I will not receive financial support from my family. In the past I have also not been asking for money from my parents, if I start now, for my own pride, I will not feel free or comfortable, going to ask for money from people. It is not a priority for ladies to look for money, but it is a priority for us boys to look for money because by nature we are independent.”

This view was counteracted by a female student who said:

“From my point of view, I think their reasons why male students need more money and why they drop out of Universities for a year; compare the spending of males and females, males spend a lot e.g. just for the shoes, a guy can spend about N\$ 1000.00 and whereas for a lady I can just spend N\$ 150.00 on shoes, so guys need more money thus, they end up dropping or they take longer to graduate. Us we need money but not as much as guys need it, that is why they put money first and they drop a year or two and they end up graduating after more years of studying.”

To us the message was that one main reason a number of male students took too long to graduate was that they were ‘moonlighting’ to earn extra money for either their entertainment or for meeting their basic needs at the Universities.

We gleaned the following insights from students’ responses to question four:

Some male students took too long to graduate because they:

1. were not serious with their studies, they missed tests and assignments, they were not organized and they were not focused on education,



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2. engaged in too many non-educational activities. For instance, they tried to make money to support their families, girlfriends, children out of wedlock and businesses they engaged in as they studied.
 3. failed to cope with too crowded University programmes with too many modules.
 4. were forced by their families to study what they did not wish to study and had no interest in these programmes.
 5. took courses that were too hard for them.
 6. were forced by their sponsors to study courses that were too difficult for them.
 7. studied and tried to make money to help their families at the same time.
 8. did not mature early, goofed around and wasted their parents' money socializing instead of studying. As a consequence of this, they either took a long time to graduate or dropped out of universities all together.
 9. were encouraged by their families to start taking responsibility early as part of their training for assuming the role of the 'head of household'. To encourage the male students to do this they were provided with insufficient money for upkeep by their families. To supplement the insufficient money, they took up part time jobs.
 10. Were not financially supported by their parents as well as their female counterparts were. Due to this, they needed to work for money to support themselves at the Universities. In contrast, female students were financially supported adequately by their parents because they feared that if they did not do this, their daughters would compromise themselves and get money from "sugar daddies" or working young "with strings attached".

5. How can male students be supported to perform better academically

When we perused through our quantitative data, we noted from Table 38 that whereas about 65% of the 807 students from tertiary educational institutions **disagreed** with the statement that male students were given less psychosocial support at the Universities than female students, 77% of the students **agreed** with the statement that lecturers were more willing to support female students than male students in learning activities. To triangulate these quantitative data with qualitative data, we asked 45 students from UNAM, NUST and IUM to respond to the above stated question in focus group discussions.

In our analysis of students' responses to question 5, we identified 15 themes which we divided into three categories. These categories were on *using effective learning strategies, using learning support mechanisms and making University curriculum content user friendly to all learners*. We present the analysis of the responses to question 5 category by category as follows:

5.1 Using effective learning strategies.

Under this category, we identified six themes. Theme one was on making e-learning platforms accessible and user friendly to male students. The respondents suggested that Universities should make their e-learning platforms user friendly to encourage male students to study online.

Theme two was on the suggestion that Universities should not overload students with classes but provide them with more time to study and do their assignments more adequately. One student justified this suggestion by saying the following:



To conclude my point, yeah, sometimes we have 7h00 classes till 17h00 if I want to do something I will not get time, if they decrease the time it could be fine, e.g. if I come 7h00 until 13h00, o'clock, I will have time to do my other things. It is a lot of time that we are spending on classes.

Theme three was on the suggestion that to promote their academic achievement, male students' learning should be monitored more closely by lecturers. This would enable lecturers to identify male students with learning or other problems early and support them to work through their problems.

Theme four was on the suggestion that to encourage male students to study they should be placed in study groups made up of male and female students. In such co-educational groups male students would benefit from working on assignments with female students.

Theme five was on the suggestion that teaching at the University level should engage all five senses through activity oriented teaching and through the use of a variety of teaching media and teaching technologies. Doing this would be advisable because male students learnt better when such teaching strategies were used.

Theme six was on the suggestion that Universities should establish and use support groups and support programmes for male students. Respondents suggested that lecturers should identify students who underachieve or at risk of failure and work with them in support groups such as tutorials. To effect this, Universities should mandate that the teaching of every module should be accompanied by tutorials. These suggestions were explained as follows:

"I think like e.g. here they have support programs, but I think lecturers should step up, if you notice that males are underperforming, talk to them, if it really requires to bring in counselling, they should and should focus on proving help. Create support groups for underachieving males to get together and help them collectively at once. At the main campus, it is hard for a lecturer to focus on one person because there are too many students, they instead focus on getting their work done. They need to start focusing on identifying male students that are underperforming and try to put them into groups and should not be a choice but be as part of the curriculum."

In addition, respondents suggested that lecturers should, wherever possible work one on one with male students who underachieve in education.

5.2 Using learning support mechanisms.

We identified six themes under this category. Theme one was on the suggestion of using motivational speakers. The respondents suggested that Universities could use motivational speakers to motivate male students to study and be focused on education instead of being distracted by non-educational pursuits such as alcohol and drug abuse. Respondents justified this suggestion by indicating the following:

We can use successful people, the hard working people, who have testimony in their life of working hard. I have an example of madam Twapewa Kadhikwa, the owner of Gwama Restaurant in Wanaheda. I think she is a good example because; she worked harder both in the business and academic, she is a graduate.

Theme two under this category was on the suggestion of using psychosocial support. It was proposed that male students should be provided with psychosocial support for them to realise who they were and what they needed to do in life. To enhance their academic achievement, male students should be empowered in psychosocial programmes where their self-esteem could be developed and maintained. In such programmes, male students could be warned about the consequences of their academic underachievement and its implications on their future lives and professional careers.



Theme three was on the suggestion that male students should reduce their socializing distractions by focusing on their studies. Respondents expressed the view that male students should get their priorities right and be taught that whatever they wished in life must be worked for. This included succeeding in education.

Theme four was on the suggestion that Universities should establish mentorship programmes for male students. In such programmes, conferences and workshops could be organized to raise awareness on the need to support male students' education and on coming up with effective strategies on how such support should be provided.

In theme five, respondents suggested that the word of God should be used to guide male students about what was expected of them not only in education but in life as well. This would be particularly wise when making decisions about what was right and what was wrong at home and in school.

Theme six was on the suggestion that Universities should, in collaboration with NGOs, faith based organizations and gender-based government entities, establish and operate empowerment programmes for male students. Such programmes should promote gender equity in education that would highlight both female student and male student educational support challenges and their ameliorative strategies.

5.3 Making University curriculum content user friendly to male students.

We identified three themes under this category. Theme one was on reducing redundancy in the curriculum. Respondents suggested that to enhance the academic achievement of male students, Universities should reduce the number of modules they were required to take. This could be done by ensuring that the curricular were not inundated with similar modules. This means that duplication of subject content should be avoided as much as possible.

Theme two was on the suggestion that to support male students' learning, University curriculum content should reflect their interests. This was illustrated in the following way:

"Maybe relate the subjects' contents to their personal experience, e.g. if the math lecturer is teaching statistics or data analysis or something like that, they can incorporate the overall statistics in sports, they can try and use such data to make them think e.g. if Messi has scored so many goals and received the soccer boots something like that; such things can bring them back from day dreaming in the class to actually engaging in the class setting with the lecturers as well. Just to relate to the everyday experience or real life situation."

In addition, it was suggested that male students themselves should take courses that were aligned to their interests. This was justified as follows:

"Okay, I think to motivate them, they should take the courses they really want to do and which they have their interest in, such sport, or study media to read sport news, they should not just take anything or any course they see."

Theme three was on the suggestion that in order to support male students' education, Universities should offer more '**hands on**' content in the curriculum. Such content was more user friendly to male students than content that was laden with theories. This suggestion was articulated in the following way:

"They must be provided with more practical works, like some of the male students, they know themselves that "I am good at doing things like design", they prefer more practical works than theoretical works. They must be



provided with resources like; study guides so that they do not go to the library to read because that is too much work for them. I think to motivate male students is to make the modules more practical (calculations) instead of hearing, more on the application.”

We wish to highlight the following insights from our analysis of responses to question five:

1. Universities should make their e-learning platforms user friendly to encourage male students to study online.
2. Male students’ learning should be monitored more closely by lecturers. This would enable lecturers to identify male students with learning or other problems early and support them to work through their problems.
3. Teaching at the University level should engage all five senses through activity oriented teaching and through the use of a variety of teaching media and teaching technologies. Doing this would be advisable because male students learn better when such teaching strategies were used.
4. Universities should establish and use support groups and support programmes for male students. To effect this, lecturers should identify students who underachieve and work with them in support groups such as tutorials.
5. To enhance their academic achievement, male students should be empowered in psychosocial programmes where their self-esteem could be developed and maintained. In such programmes, male students could be warned about the consequences of their academic underachievement and its implications on their future lives and professional careers.
6. Universities should establish mentorship programmes for male students. In such programmes, conferences and workshops could be organized to raise awareness on the need to support male students’ education and on coming up with effective strategies on how such support should be provided.
7. The word of God should be used to guide male students about what was expected of them not only in education but in life as well. This would be particularly wise when making decisions about what was right and what was wrong at home and in school.
8. Universities should, in collaboration with NGOs, faith based organizations and gender-based government entities, establish and operate empowerment programmes for male students. Such programmes should promote gender equity in education that would highlight both female and male student educational support challenges and their ameliorative strategies.
9. Male students should be encouraged to study in groups, i.e., forming ‘communities of learners’ in order to improve their performance in the different modules they are studying.
10. To enhance the academic achievement of male students, Universities should reduce the number of modules they are required to take. This could be done by ensuring that the curricular were not inundated with similar modules. This means that duplication of subject content should be avoided as much as possible.



6. In your opinion, what resources would be needed to enhance the learning of male students?

We identified seven themes under this question which we divided into three categories. These categories were on *facilities for creating awareness on male student education challenges, learning support facilities and recreation facilities.*

6.1 Facilities for creating awareness on male student education challenges.

We identified two themes under this category. Theme one was on the suggestion that Universities should help communities to put up billboards for motivating and inspiring male students to excel in their studies. Such billboards could carry educational messages that would inspire male students to work hard.

Theme two was on the idea that Universities should establish mass media educational programmes on male students' education. Respondents proposed that the mass media in the form of public television, radio, print media and social media should broadcast educational, motivational and inspirational messages that promote male students education. Universities should facilitate the preparation and broadcasting of such messages.

6.2 Learning support facilities

We identified four themes under this category. Theme one was on the suggestion that Universities should provide efficient e-learning resources/facilities because male students learnt better by using teaching and learning technologies.

In theme two, students suggested that Universities should establish multipurpose/multidisciplinary learning centres where all students, including male students could learn a variety of things. Such learning centres could house internet resources, writing clinics and other resources that could encourage students to acquire learning how to learn skills.

Theme three was on the suggestion that Universities should provide male students from disadvantaged backgrounds with adequate support learning materials such as recorded lecture notes, books and internet connectivity gadgets.

Theme four was on **male students' counselling**. Respondents advised that Universities should provide counselling services tailored to the needs of male students. Professionals such as male therapists, psychologists and social workers could be deployed by universities to guide and counsel male students on their studies and career aspirations. This would be important because male students were more comfortable to talk to other males.

6.3 Recreation facilities

Under this category, respondents expressed the view that Universities should provide recreational facilities where male students could relax, exercise, refresh themselves and 'blow up steam'. This was important because a number of male students resided in neighbourhoods where they had no access to recreational facilities.



We gleaned the following insights from students' responses to question six:

1. Universities should establish multipurpose/multidisciplinary learning centres where all students, including male students could learn a variety of things. Such learning centres could house internet resources, writing clinics and other resources that could encourage students to acquire learning how to learn skills.
2. Universities should provide counselling services tailored to the needs of male students. Professionals such as male therapists, psychologists and social workers could be deployed by universities to guide and counsel male students on their studies and career aspirations. This would be important because male students were more comfortable to talk to other males.
3. Universities should help communities to put up billboards for motivating and inspiring male students to excel in their studies. Such billboards could carry educational messages that would inspire male students to work hard.
4. The mass media in the form of public television, radio, print media and social media should broadcast educational, motivational and inspirational messages that promote male students education. Universities should facilitate the preparation and broadcasting of such messages.

7. What suggestions do you have on how male students could be supported by the Universities, lecturers and the community in order to improve their academic achievement?

We identified 19 themes under this question which we divided into four categories. These categories were on *lecturers' communication with students that promotes their learning, establishment of learning support programmes for male students who underachieved, promoting the value of education amongst male students and community-related support initiatives for university male students*

7.1 Lecturers' communication with male students that promotes their learning.

We identified two themes under this category. In theme one, students expressed the view that lecturers should not be aloof but engage with their students in a caring and nurturing manner. Furthermore, lecturers should mentor and model qualities of excellence, hard work and respect for quality scholarship by expecting and demanding from their students assignment products of high quality. When this is done, students experiencing learning challenges feel valued, understood and supported. In this state, they open up and seek help whenever they confront learning difficulties. Some of this reasoning was illustrated as follows:

"Instead of being in the lecture to finish the course outline/content, they should engage with students, motivate them, talk to them about life that will motivate them. E.g. in my first year, he started like, if you know you are not supposed to be here, you must come in my office, I have NDF forms.....jokes." {Such jokes will sometimes push male students away rather than motivating them}

In theme two respondents pointed out that in order to engage with their students, lecturers could use e-learning platforms at their universities to monitor their students' work and interact with them. This would enable lecturers to motivate their students and find out if they were having learning problems. This view was expressed as follows:

"E-learning is the best platform that can help students, follow-up with the student, on e-learning, you can also see that this student did not logon, you can ask them why they have not logon the platform and you can have



interactive chats with these students and understand them on this platform. I was doing my project, there was a time when I felt I needed to quit, because I felt it was tough, but because my lecturer kept on asking, “I need your work, why are you not bringing your work even if it is just little”, just bringing it, it sort of motivated me to continue.”

7.2 Establishment of learning support programmes for male students who underachieved.

We identified eight themes under this category. In theme one, respondents suggested that Universities should have remedial/ tutorial programmes for students who faced learning problems in their courses. This would prevent male students from dropping out of the universities when confronted with challenging tasks and projects. This suggestion was expressed in the following way.

“For me and my experience, I only felt like dropping out once, I was always a good student, both first, second and third year, but in the fourth year, I had to do a project, I had to come up with a working system, now for me I felt I was not good enough on the programming so I was afraid of the programming part until IUM introduced Saturday classes for programming, when they introduced the programming classes I realized that this is a call for me.”

You responded to the call?

“Yes, and I used to go there. If we can have something like that, where if students can say what difficulties they have on a course or modules they are being taught, we focus on that part and will not have as much drop out as now.

Another student expressed the need for supportive University tutorial programmes as follows: *I believe that the university like main campus has tutors, they can have tutors in this campus as well who can help the male students with remedial classes, what they did not understand from the lectures they can attend those tutorials in order to reinforce what has been taught during the lectures.*

In theme two under this category, respondents advised that Universities should provide career guidance and counselling services to male students who underachieved in education. In particular, Universities should provide career guidance and counselling services to first year students so that they enrolled in programmes they were interested in. This would enable first year male students not to enrol in programmes they are not interested in and graduate earlier because they would not waste time changing courses.

In addition, respondents suggested that Universities should have guidance and counselling programmes that would encourage male students to focus on education and not drop out from universities to get jobs that did not require much education. University programmes should instil in the young men the value of education and why it was important to be educated in the modern world. Young men should be weaned from the belief that they were entitled to jobs, social and leadership positions just because they were men. Those who were educated and qualified were entitled to jobs. Men should realize that they would not make it in life without education.

*“Males should forget about what the society gives in terms of backups. E.g. things of not focusing on school and still get a job outside or you can make it in life without education, to make them aware that this is a new world and forget about males being in power, and their dominance and forget about men power and focus on **human power and equal rights**. They should be aware and, university male students should go out in society to let others know that they need education in order to be successful in life. They should not feel too secured in life that I have a job, think of people who have graduated and started businesses. I think they should focus more on educated people and they should not go for cheap labour, that is where the males are running to, cheap labour and no qualification and the influence is too much.”*



In theme three, respondents advised that lecturers in universities should periodically organize seminars and open discussions on materials covered in courses because men like to dominate discussions. They would participate in the learning process if they were given opportunities to do so. This would clarify concepts and principles covered amongst male students who underachieve. This view was illustrated as follows:

“One more suggestion, it will be good to have open discussion, once in a while, like a seminar type of thing, you have the notes, you read them and the whole class sits and engages on what they have learnt. Men like dominating, if they feel that their points must be heard, they will engage in the discussion, because they do not want to be out smarted by females.”

In theme four, respondents suggested that lecturers should employ responsive student centred assessment. In such assessment, lecturers should provide timeous informative feedback on students’ assignments. In addition, they should include the assessment of taking notes in class in the continuous assessment grades. This would encourage male students to take notes while attending classes. Part of this thinking was illustrated as follows:

More assessment tasks with follow-ups, you get an assignment, you do not do well in your assignment you get zero, the conclusion/expectation from the lecturer is that you as a student should do your work, if lecturers can get involved with the student at a somewhat personal level and understand why students behave the way they behave.

In theme five, respondents discussed the need for creating awareness on some male students’ underachievement in education. They advised that communities should create awareness regarding the fact that some male students were underachieving and that something should be done about it. This could be done at educational regional meetings such as Educational Forums.

In theme six, respondents suggested that Universities should mobilize material support for less privileged male students. This could include sourcing beds, mattresses, study materials, reading and writing study tables, solar-powered reading lamps and other basic provisions from the private sector and distributing them amongst male students who live in poverty-stricken informal settlements.

In theme seven, respondents suggested that to enhance the academic achievement of male students, Universities should offer academic programmes that appeal to them. Such programmes should provide practical and relevant education to male students.

In theme eight, respondents advised that to fully understand the phenomenon of male student underachievement, Universities should promote the conduct of more research on the subject. This would enable the institutions to respond to the needs of male students who underachieve in more informed ways.

7. 3 Promotion of the value of education amongst male students

Under this category we identified five themes. In theme one, respondents suggested that to encourage male students to focus on education, the private and public sectors should employ qualified people on merit. To respondents, this implied that the governmental institutions and private companies should refrain from corruption and nepotism when recruiting their new employees. Instead, they should recruit qualified personnel on merit. This was articulated in the following way:



“In our societies, is like if you go to a company, you will find a lot of people that did not get degrees, but for us who studied hard to obtain degrees, when we go and apply for job, they won’t give us jobs. For me, if the people that did not get a degree are getting jobs, I would conclude that a degree is just a paper. I will give up my school, may be they would also hire me without a degree. Community should hire people with qualifications to encourage people to study. It is happening because we just want to employ our friends and family, we do not care about others. They know they do not have knowledge, but they will get a job from those whom they have relationships/ connections. For us who are trying hard and have no relationship or connections; you are not closer to them, they will not employ us.”

In theme two, respondents suggested that Universities should employ competent and inspirational lecturers. Not only should such lecturers be inspirational in their teaching, but they should also understand their subject matter. Such teaching would inspire their students. To ensure that this takes place, Universities should recruit competent and knowledgeable lecturers. This suggestion was illustrated in the following two ways:

“I think lecturers as well should be inspirational figures on their own as well, they should once in a while motivate their students to perform better, not only by telling them that do better in your school work. Not in the simple things, in how you give your lectures. It should inspire us, If I know this lecturer know what she is doing or she is full of knowledge, just by me seeing that, I will be inspired, we have few lecturers who not matter how hard/tough the module is, if the lecturer knows what he is doing, and understands what he is doing, I am going to be inspired. If his /her mind is focused on rather saying that “university is learner centred”, “I do my part, you do your part”, she just walks in and he put the slides on there and everything he is doing is brief, I do not know if the lecture knows what he is doing or knows what she is teaching, or he just got information and place it there. If the lecturer knows exactly what he/she is doing, and I myself can see that this lecturer has obtained knowledge and wisdom, I will be inspired and I will say I want to be like this lecturer.”

In the second way the illustration was as follows:

“some lecturers can liven up their lectures, (what do you mean) make their lectures more interesting because if you just come there and you read your notes, I can also stay in my room and read them from my laptop, so engage with us, make it interesting so that we can follow you, laugh, make two or three jokes, even if it is dry jokes, just try, because as I said, on this point I stress that if it is interesting somebody will remember that information/ lesson, if it is interesting, learning will take place. If not, it will just be a faded memory in the back of the head. Some lecturers are very engaging with jokes that keep you engaging like you Ms.”

In theme three, respondents expressed the view that the adage that ‘If you educate a woman, you educate the nation’ should be complemented by the adage that stipulates that ‘If you educate a man you also educate the nation’. This change would communicate to male students the message that their achievement in education is as valuable to society as that of their female counterparts. This feeling was communicated as follows:

“The community must change their quote ‘that if you educate a woman, you educate the nation’, what if you educate the man? This mind set must be changed too.

In theme four, respondents advised that to provide male students with community male role models of repute, men should not be given leadership positions if they did not qualify to hold them. This should be done to prevent the spirit of entitlement developing in them. They should work hard and be qualified to earn the leadership positions. This would motivate and inspire male students to work hard at the universities- especially when they see that qualified people, including women get the leadership positions. This reasoning was expressed as follows:

“I think this thing of giving the positions to males even if they do not qualify for them; the fact that they are supposed... or people believe they are supposed to be there or leading us in a way of leading, it should come to an end, the position should be given to a person with relevant qualification regardless of you being male or female, then maybe it will motivate them to get that qualification because they want to be there to be leading.”



In theme five, respondents proposed that to support the education of male students under financial strain, Universities should source scholarships for them from different kinds of donors. Such donors could include philanthropic educational foundations, UN outfits on education (e.g. UNICEF and UNESCO), NGOs on education (e.g. Oxfam), Africa Development Bank, World Bank and the Bank of Namibia.

7.4 Community-related support initiatives for university students

We identified three themes under this category. In theme one, respondents advised that parents as members of the community should regularly monitor the academic records of their sons at the University to ensure that they were in fact focused on education. They should not wait until their sons dropped out of the University. This should be applied to male students who were immature and not responsible to be on task on their own. This view was presented as follows:

“That depends on individual person, if you are saying your parents know you well, some people can be influenced by others, you know you were a good person when you came from the village, but when you come here you change, just because of the people that you are associating with. In your case it cannot work but for some people it is different.”

In addition, respondents suggested that parents in the community should be strict with male children as they were with female children. When males were not pushed to work hard when growing up, they tended not to work hard at the University. This reasoning was articulated as follows:

“As we are growing up, our parents are mostly strict on female children compare to males, male children can do whatever they want to do, but it is not seen as a wrong thing, but you as a lady, you cannot even drop out of school, the parents feel like you are supposed to be there, but if a male feel like mom I cannot do this I think I need to do that, to her that is not really a problem, but males come with the same idea (mentality) at the university, it started from home, they are not pushed, parents need to be strict on both the children.”

In theme two, respondents advised that to prevent being distracted from their studies, University students should not have easy access to alcohol. To effect this, the availability of alcohol in the community should be regulated in such a way that male University students should not have easy access to it. To do this it was suggested that government should reduce the opening hours of alcohol outlets.

In theme three, respondents suggested that to instil a sense of discipline in them, University students who underperform in their studies should be required to spend some time at Namibia National Youth Service.

We gleaned the following insights from students’ responses to question seven:

1. In order to engage with their students, lecturers should use e-learning platforms at their universities to monitor their students’ work and interact with them. This would enable lecturers to motivate their students and find out if they were having learning problems.
2. Universities should have remedial/ tutorial programmes for students who faced learning problems in their courses.
3. Universities should have guidance and counselling programmes that would encourage male students to focus on education and not drop out from universities to get jobs that



did not require much education. Such programmes should instil in the young men the value of education and why it was important to be educated in the modern world.

Young men should be weaned from the belief that they were entitled to jobs, social and leadership positions just because they were men.

4. Universities should periodically organize seminars and open discussions on materials covered in courses because men like to dominate discussions. They would participate in the learning process if they were given opportunities to do so.
5. Universities should mobilize material support for less privileged male students. This could include sourcing beds, mattresses, study materials, reading and writing study tables, solar-powered reading lamps and other basic provisions from the private sector and distribute them amongst male students who live in poverty-stricken informal settlements.
6. Universities should employ competent and inspirational lecturers. Not only should such Lecturers be inspirational in their teaching, but they should also understand their subject matter. To ensure that this takes place, Universities should recruit competent and knowledgeable lecturers.
7. The adage that 'If you educate a woman, you educate the nation' should be complemented by the adage that 'If you educate a man, you also educate the nation'. This change would communicate to male students the message that their achievement in education is as valuable to society as that of their female counterparts.
8. To provide male students with community male role models of repute, men should not be given leadership positions if they did not qualify to hold them. This should be done to prevent the spirit of entitlement developing in them. This would motivate and inspire male students to work hard at the universities- especially when they see that qualified people, including women get the leadership positions.
9. To support the education of male students under financial strain, Universities should source scholarships for them from different kinds of donors such as philanthropic educational foundations, UN agencies on education (e.g. UNICEF and UNESCO), the Africa Development Bank and the World Bank.
10. Parents as members of the community should regularly monitor the academic records of their sons at the University to ensure that they were in fact focused on education. They should not wait until their sons dropped out of the University.
11. To instil a sense of discipline in them, University students who underperform in their studies should be required to spend some time at Namibia National Youth Service.



DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Our main goal in this section of the report is to interpret and create meaning out of the results we presented in the preceding section by reflecting on the rationale for the study, significance of the study and the manifestation of the boys' underachievement in education phenomenon in the Namibian context and by relating the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study to the six research questions that we originally intended to answer. This means that the quantitative and qualitative research results will be discussed according to each research sub-sample. As described in the methods section of this report, the research sub-samples consisted of secondary school learners, secondary school teachers, parents, University lecturers and University and VTC students.

As we discuss the results, we shall highlight the study's main theoretical and practical implications under each research sub-sample section. In addition, we shall use the identified study's main messages to suggest the Namibian boys' underachievement in education ameliorative interventions and strategies.

Based on this outline, we discuss the results of the study as follows:

REFLECTION ON THE RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY, THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE BOYS' UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN EDUCATION IN THE NAMIBIAN CONTEXT

It is important to start the discussion of the study's research findings with a brief reflection on what provoked the study. According to the study's background that we presented earlier in this report, we observed that substantially more boys than girls currently underperformed and under-participated in education, in several educational systems of the world. In Namibia, we provided evidence in the background section that there now exists gender disparity in academic achievement in the educational system that was in favour of girls.

The EMIS statistics for the 2012-2019 period revealed that more Namibian boys than girls dropped out of primary and secondary education because of failing at school, discipline problems, feeling old, going to work and because of parental demands that they leave school. In addition, more boys than girls displayed low promotion rates from grade to grade, low survival rates (i.e. low staying power in school) in the school system, high school leaving rates and high failure rates.

Moreover, more girls than boys persisted to remain in the school system after failing to pass in some subjects in either grade 10 or grade 12 examinations. This was supported by the evidence we presented in Table 8 which showed that in 2018, 90% of learners who enrolled at NAMCOL were female.

All this to some extent answered the first research question by providing evidence on how the disparity in academic performance between male and female learners/students at Namibian secondary schools and tertiary education institutions was displayed. This evidence is presented in Tables 1-20. In terms of the scope of Namibian boys' underachievement in education, the evidence that has been presented portrays the problem *as a national one*. For instance, at the secondary school level, challenges of boys' low survival rates, lower promotion rates from grade to grade and high dropout rates affected boys' academic participation in all 14 education regions. At the tertiary education level, evidence shows that



more female than male students have been enrolled in *all* public and private Namibian educational institutions for three decades and that in general, according to examination and graduation statistics, female students have consistently, for 30 years, academically performed substantially better than male students in all tertiary education institutions.

To elaborate on the nature of Namibian boys' underachievement in education, we presented some grade 10 and grade 12 examination results in History, Biology, Geography and Physical Science for the period of 2016 to 2018 that were adapted from the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Directorate of National Examinations and Assessment (DNEA) statistics of 2016, 2017 and 2018.

A general statement that we wish to make is that during the three year examination period of 2016 to 2018, *at the national level*, grade 10 and grade 12 female learners performed better than male learners in English second language, Mathematics and History. In Biology, at grade 10, whereas female learners performed better than male learners, there was no difference in performance between male and female learners at the grade 12 level. In Geography, female learners obtained higher grades than male learners at grade 10 and 12 levels during the three year period. In Physical Science, whereas female learners obtained higher grades than male learners at the grade 10 level there appeared to be no significant difference in performance in the subject at the grade 12 level (see Tables 39-46). From all these data, it appears to us that differences in academic performance between female and male learners are school subject sensitive. However, in some form, female learners perform better than male learners in the majority of school subjects. This manner of performance is displayed in *all 14 Education Regions* because the data we used covered all schools in the country.

This persistent picture of Namibian male learners performing worse than female learners in school and at tertiary educational institutions has prevailed for more than three decades without being paid attention to at the Namibian National and Regional levels. We also provided some policy-related documented evidence earlier in this report that showed that over the years, Namibia has had more nuanced targeted focus on girls' education than on boys' education. To some degree, this focus currently prevails not only in Namibia but in the world as a whole (UNESCO, 2020). Among other things, one main aim of our study was to raise awareness in the country about Namibian boys' underachievement in education, seek evidence from learners, teachers, parents, University lecturers and University and VTC students about why this was the case and use the evidence for planning how to ameliorate the situation.

As we indicated earlier, the significance of the intervention initiatives that were intended to be the main outcome of the study was to include preventing boys from dropping out of school early, promoting the retention of boys in school, increasing the boys' survival rates in school, reducing the boys' repetition rates and providing support to boys in order to enhance the quality of their educational attainments. Ultimately, the main benefit of the study was expected to be that of promoting the improvement of the quality of education in Namibia.

In addition, as earlier stated, the research project was expected to produce research findings that would provide evidence for a paradigm shift in understanding gender and education in Namibia. The evidence would require the country to shift the focus from understanding gender disparity in education in favour of girls to gender parity in education for the good of **both** girls and boys.



At theoretical and practical levels, the study was expected to give voice to an apparent backlash of gender parity initiatives in education. In Namibia, the gender-based initiatives to increase access to education and improve the quality of educational attainments amongst learners seemed to have bypassed many boys. The research project was partly intended to highlight the social-economic dangers of ignoring this backlash and the importance of putting in place mechanisms of ameliorating it to promote gender balanced social-economic development.

Based on the discussion of the rationale of the study, the manifestation of Namibian boys' underachievement in education problem and based on the discussion of the significance of the study that we have just undertaken, we turn to the discussion of findings related to specific research sub-samples in the manner that follows.

DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS

Discussion of secondary school learners' quantitative data

On the issue of *boys' work habits and behaviours that might affect their underachievement in education*, sampled learners from the 14 education regions provided two points of view. Firstly, according to Table 48, sampled learners, in their majority, agreed that some boys academically performed worse than girls because of not being focused on their school work, because they were more frequently absent from their classes, because they were in-disciplined, because they believed they could be employed without education and because they found school subject matter boring.

In response to the second research question, what all this means to us is that some Namibian boys perform worse than girls because they distract themselves from school work, because they under-participate in educational activities, because they engage in self-destructive behaviour, because they believed they could do without education and because they were not interested in education as it was boring to them. All these reasons, at a psychological level, pertain to some dysfunctional personal behaviours and work habits that can be viewed to cause boys' underachievement in education.

Secondly, according to Table 48, the majority of sampled learners overwhelmingly disagreed that some boys perform worse than boys because they found school subject matter irrelevant, because they were given less attention by teachers, and because they were more affected by poverty than girls were. To us this means that, according to the sampled learners, it was not the curriculum content, it was not the fact that they were ignored by teachers, and it was not about their economic conditions that caused some boys to underachieve in education. This interpretation will be reviewed later on in the discussion as we consider learners' qualitative data and data from 4 other research sub-samples.

Table 49 revealed that *cultural aspects which learners were asked to express their opinions on* had little impact on boys' academic achievement. This was the case because learners overwhelmingly disagreed that some boys underachieved in education because they were traditionally allowed to put in minimum effort in education, because they were allowed to defy authority, because they were allowed to engage in mischief, and because they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society. To us,



all this means that because these aspects were not permitted, culturally speaking, they could not be expected to influence some Namibian boys' underachievement in education.

When we asked for *learners' views on why some boys under-participated in education*, a large majority of them indicated that this was the case because more boys than girls left school because of misbehaviour, more girls than boys participated in psychosocial development programmes, more girls participated in class learning activities than boys and because boys' energy and participation were stifled by the structured nature of classrooms. In addition, it was indicated that some boys under-participated in education because they spent most of their time in sport activities (see Table 50). What this implies is that boys under-participated in education, according to learners, because they dropped out of school, they did not take advantage of psychosocial programmes that were organized to promote their participation in education, they did not actively participate in learning activities and because they did not wish to abide by the structured nature of schooling. All this seems to express their self-imposed exclusion from educational activities organized by schools.

What was presented in Table 51 was about *whether some boys underachieve in education because of the type of education support they were provided with* by the school and the family. In response to this, whereas the majority of the learners agreed that boys were provided with less counselling support than girls and that there were more girl targeted educational support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes, the majority of them disagreed that boys were given less psycho-social support in school than girls, that boys were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (e.g. alcohol & drug abuse) than girls, that teachers were more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities, and they disagreed that boys got less educational support from their fathers and mothers than girls. We discuss below some qualitative learner focus group discussion data that is inconsistent with a number of these assertions. In response to our research questions 4 and 5, this implies that according to learners, schools in general did not grant counselling support to boys that needed it and that when compared to girls, there was a paucity of boys' targeted support programmes in schools.

Learners' views on boys' *task behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and hopes that might influence their academic achievement* were presented in Table 52. On these aspects, most learners agreed that some boys underachieved in education because they spent less time on academic activities, preferred to work in isolation, were not eager to share academic information, did not care about their academic achievement, and they were less concerned about their future. Notwithstanding these views, most learners disagreed that boys were more disengaged than girls from class activities given by female teachers, and they disagreed that girls were more collaborative on learning tasks than boys.

We concur with sampled learners that spending less time on academic activities, not collaborating with others in class, and not caring about one's success or failure in school would lead to underachievement in education. Based on the data from teachers and University students that we shall discuss later in the report, we disagree with sampled learners on the view that girls were not more collaborative on learning tasks than boys. According to teachers and University students, one reason female learners performed better than male learners was because they were more collaborative in learning tasks. When we applied chi-square comparisons on some of the learners' data according to gender, three messages were revealed.



In the first message, boys seemed to disown views/characteristics/ attitudes/ behaviours that seemed to put them in bad light- even if most of the learners agreed with the views. This tendency was displayed in Tables 55 to 58 and in Tables 61 to 62 where more female than male learners significantly agreed that boys underachieved because they absented themselves from classes, that they underachieved because they were in-disciplined, that they underachieved because they believed that they could be employed without education, that boys underachieved because they found the subject matter boring, that boys did not care about their academic achievement and that boys were less concerned about their future than girls.

In addition, more female than male learners agreed that whereas more girls than boys participated in psychosocial development programmes, more female than male learners agreed that more girls than boys participated in class learning activities. It appears that boys tended to distance themselves from behaviours and dispositions that could cause their underachievement in education. For instance, Table 54 showed that more male than female learners disagreed that some boys underperformed in education because they were not focused on academic activities. This *distancing* does not mean that the description of these behaviours is without merit.

The second message is that there were no differences in the views of both male and female learners when both groups agreed that there were more girl targeted support programmes than boy targeted support programmes (see Tables 64 and 65). In addition, both male and female learners agreed that boys spent less time on academic activities than girls. This unanimity increases the credibility of these findings.

The third message is that girls appeared to be defensive when statements seemed to put them in bad light. This was exemplified when more female than male learners disagreed that boys performed better than girls (see Table 53) when more female than male learners overwhelmingly disagreed that boys underachieved in education because they were given less attention than girls by teachers (see Table 59) and when more female than male learners disagreed that boys were given less psychosocial support in school than girls (see Table 62). At the moment we reserve our judgment on this and await the discussion of more data from other 4 research sub-samples.

When we applied chi-square comparisons on some of the learners' data according to age, the majority of learners from all age categories agreed that girls performed better than boys in education. This finding is consistent with the finding that both male and female learners affirmed this.

When we considered the influence of age on several other findings we presented in Tables 68 to 72, we found that regardless of age category, the majority of learners agreed that some boys underachieved in education because they were not focused on educational activities, they found school subject matter boring, they were provided with less counselling support, they spent less time on academic activities, and because they did not care about their academic achievement.

This means to us that regardless of age, the sampled learners thought that some boys underachieved in education because they were not interested in school as they were bored by it, they were not adequately guided when they needed to be shown what to do, they spent a lot of time on non-academic activities and because they prioritized and cared about non-



academic activities. As we shall discuss later on in this report, the non-academic activities included taking up employment to make money, engaging in toxic entertainment (i.e. abusing alcohol and drugs) or merely goofing around. These interpretations to some extent, speak to research questions 2 and 4 that sought for reasons why some boys' under-participation in education and enquired about the nature of support that schools provided to support boys' education.

When we enquired about how learners' school location could influence their understanding of why some boys underachieved in education, we observed that it was of little impact in the matter. This was the case because regardless of school location (i.e. urban, rural and peri-urban locations), the majority of learners agreed that girls performed better than boys in school, agreed that some boys underachieved in education because they were not focused, they were frequently absent from classes, they were in-disciplined, they believed they could be employed without much education, they found school subject matter boring, they participated less in learning activities than girls, they were provided with less counselling support, they spent less time on academic activities, they preferred to work in isolation and because they did not care about their academic activities (see Tables 74 to 79 and Tables 82 to 86).

In addition, regardless of school location, most sampled learners disagreed that some learners underachieved in education because they were given less attention by teachers and because they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society (see Tables 80 and 81).

We note that girls' superior academic performance was acknowledged and recognized by sampled learners from urban, rural and peri-urban schools located in all 14 educational regions.

We also wish to communicate the message that the majority of sampled learners from all school locations thought that some boys underachieved in education because they focused on non-school related activities, they withdrew their participation from learning activities, they rebelled against the school system, they devalued education, schooling did not attract their attention as they were not interested in it, they withdrew from learning tasks, they were not guided to focus on education, they were not devoted to education, they did not benefit from collaborating with others in learning and because they cared about other things rather than about their academic achievement.

In addition, we discerned that most sampled learners disagreed with excuses that some boys underachieved because they were ignored by teachers in learning moments and because they were allowed to perceive education as irrelevant to their roles in society.

When we looked at the influence of sampled learners' school grade levels on their understanding of boys' underachievement in education, a similar picture as the one painted by the variable of school location emerged. This was that regardless of grade level (i.e., grades 8 to 12), most sampled learners agreed that girls academically performed better than boys in school (see Table 87). Most of them, regardless of their grades, also agreed that some boys underachieved in school because they were not focused on school learning, they were frequently absent from classes, because they were in-disciplined, they participated less than girls in learning activities, and because they were provided with less counselling support than girls (see Tables 88 to 92).



One important meaning of all this is that some boys' underachievement in education can be observed and witnessed in every secondary school grade.

In addition, regardless of their grade level, the majority of sampled learners agreed that there were more girl targeted educational support programmes than boy targeted educational programmes (see Table 93). To us this communicates the message that the nation, over the years paid more targeted attention to girls' than to boys' education. This also means that boys' educational concerns remained unrecognized in national educational discourses for a long period of time.

Discussion of secondary school learners' qualitative data

To triangulate some of the learners' quantitative data we discussed above, we conducted focus group discussions with a number of learners from Kavango East, Erongo, Omusati, and Kunene regions (see two reports on this that we presented in the results section). We now turn to an integrated discussion of the results contained in the two reports. As presented earlier, the two reports covered issues on the impact of educational policies on boys' education underachievement, the influence of socialization on boys' academic performance, the role of teachers in boys' education, what schools could do to support boys' education, community influence on boys underachievement in education, what fellow learners could do to support boys' education and on the provision of learning resources to support boys' education.

On the issue of *the impact of educational policies on boys' underachievement* in education, the majority of learners reported in focus group discussion sessions that there were more girl targeted educational support programmes than boy targeted educational support programmes. This finding is consistent with the quantitative data that we discussed above. In addition, learners indicated that whereas girls had received, over the years, targeted educational support from girl child education movements and organizations, boys had not received such targeted educational support. These programmes normally addressed girls' issues and not boys' issues. Because of this, boys were reluctant to participate in them as they feared to be ridiculed by peers if they did.

In reviewing educational policies to adequately accommodate boys' issues and concerns, it would be useful to put in place learner educational support programmes for both boys and girls. Educational support movements, organizations and governmental educational structures at all levels should, in partnership and collaboration, implement such programmes in a manner that ensures boys' participation and involvement. Moreover, such educational policy review should solicit parents' informed involvement and participation and cover vocational education streams of specialization to engage boys in practical-oriented empowerment.

With respect to *the influence of socialization on boys' academic performance*, learners implied that several parents undermined and sabotaged their sons' education by:

- Giving them too much freedom to roam and loiter around aimlessly without restraint while strictly controlling the behaviour and movements of their daughters;
- Allowing their sons to abuse alcohol and drugs, including, in some instances, sharing alcohol with them- alcohol they have easy access to through shebeen outlets and Cuca shops;
- Not caring about what their sons did and how they spent their time;



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- Not giving their sons responsibilities at home to cultivate in them ethics of hard work, discipline, commitment, persistence-virtues that promote academic achievement;
 - Providing more financial support to their daughters- it was reported that some boys would use this as an excuse to go out and earn some money by any means necessary that could include stealing, dealing in drugs and dropping out of school;
 - Not being concerned of their sons' education, welfare, misconduct, and misdeeds;
 - And in some regions, by forcing their sons to tend livestock instead of going to school and remaining in school. To ensure that their sons comply, sampled learners from one region reported, the boys involved were criticised, ostracised, ridiculed, shamed, and shunned for going to school instead of looking after livestock.

In addition, sampled learners explained that some boys who underachieve were socialized to hold attitudes that embolden them not to care about and take education seriously, wish to leave school and earn money by becoming taxi drivers, car wash owners, forex traders and sellers of second hand clothes. The socialization process also encourages/allows them to be more interested in keeping up appearances and being in good books with their peers than focussing on school work.

In our view, all this would undermine the education of some boys. Any intervention to enhance boys' education would have to propose strategies of how to bring into being a socialization process that enables them to value education and builds their love for learning.

While socialization is an important part of any given society, communities should consider enriching their cultures and traditions by eliminating practices that seem to be detrimental to their wellbeing. Some gender-related masculinity beliefs (e.g. the belief that it is shameful for a male learner to receive help from a female learner) do not seem to enhance boys' education and might need to be changed. Elaborating on this point, in our view, classroom practices are informed by community belief systems. The freedom given to boys, the promotions of certain careers, the portrayal of men as bread winners and the lack of expression of emotional needs of boys, all these have a negative impact on the education of boys. Teachers need to be reminded of focusing on the whole child and applying inclusive education by focusing on all children, including boys.

With regards to *the role of teachers in boys' education*, learners who participated in the focus group discussions communicated two messages. In the first message, they indicated that several teachers contributed to some boys' underachievement in education because they were:

- Not kind and fair to boys who they mistreated and easily suspended from school-in contrast to what was reported in the quantitative part of this discussion, teachers were reported to in fact treat girls more favourably than they treated boys;
- Hostile to boys and treated them disparagingly;
- Not supportive of boys' education and they did not motivate boys to learn;
- Not caring enough to find out what boys needed to succeed, and they did not counsel those who experienced learning and emotional problems;
- Not in 'loco parentis' for boys;
- Unapproachable to boys.

We judge that all these teacher dispositions are not supportive of boys' education.



In the second message, learners thought that teachers behaved the way they did towards boys because some boys who underachieved tended to bunk classes, to be in-disciplined, disobedient, disrespectful, and not wishing to learn. In frustration, some teachers give up on such boys and treat them with disdain.

In our view, teachers should be concerned about boys who underachieve in education and pay attention to their needs and challenges as the school system tended to overlook these boys' needs and challenges. In addition, teachers should encourage all learners to be disciplined and learn. They should counsel boys with learning and emotional problems and partner with parents in acting as positive role models for them. Moreover, in support of sampled learners, we urge female teachers to dress up professionally to avoid distracting boys from paying attention to their studies.

From learners' focus group discussion of research findings on *what schools could do to support boys' education*, we discerned that schools should provide learning and socio-emotional counselling services to boys who need them and create programmes to combat alcohol and drug abuse amongst learners in general and amongst boys who underachieve in education in particular. This could be done by reactivating the *teenagers against drugs and alcohol (TADA)* programmes that were run by learners in several schools in the past. Life Science teachers could be patrons for such programmes.

In addition, schools should show concern for boys who underachieve in education by treating them with understanding, fairness and by addressing their learning concerns and challenges in a responsive, warm, caring and nurturing manner. This would enable such boys to feel valued by teachers and schools. In concrete ways, schools could also form learning groups for boys and establish boys' clubs whose main purpose could be the promotion of boys' education and interests. To pre-empt situations where teachers become hostile to some boys because of their uncooperativeness, we suggest that pre-and in-service teacher preparation programmes should instil in teachers caring and nurturing attitudes towards boys who underachieve in education.

When learners in focus group discussions considered *community influence on boys' underachievement in education*, they observed that several communities lacked positive role models to inspire boys who academically underachieved to value education. They also observed that several households in the communities were not headed by fathers but by mothers. This robbed boys of fathers who could motivate them to love education and work hard in school. Moreover, learners noted that whereas many parents in the communities did not pay attention to the developmental needs of boys who they perceived not to require parental oversight, some teachers serving in the communities negatively influenced some boys who were dealing in drugs by becoming their customers. Some other teachers, learners observed, had sexual relationships with learners who they went 'clubbing' with at night clubs.

To us all this created a community environment that was not conducive to boys' education. To change this situation, we would suggest two strategies. The first strategy relates to parents involvement in their sons' lives and education. They could do this by talking to their sons about the importance of education, monitoring their sons' social relationships with the view of ensuring that they do not get side tracked from education by their peers, partnering with other community members in preventing boys from having easy access to alcohol, and by encouraging fathers to become responsive role models for their sons.



In the second strategy, communities could establish boy targeted educational support programmes whose main goal would be to create and implement community-based ‘affirmative action’ initiatives for boys’ education. Such initiatives could organize men/boy seminars, conferences, and public meetings at which the importance of education would be promoted. Chaired by local community leaders (including chiefs), such events would encourage boys to take personal responsibility for their education and not to be distracted from education by alcohol abuse, too much involvement in sport, TV watching, social media and video games. In addition, communities could use affirmative action initiatives for boys to form academic achievement boys’ clubs.

Fathers and father figures in the communities could be deployed as responsive role models to use these forums when moulding and transforming the behaviour, attitudes, and practices of their sons during socialization. For instance, they could do this by not allowing their sons easy access to alcohol served in Shebeens, bars, and Cuca shops and by encouraging their sons to use public libraries when undertaking their academic assignment and projects.

With respect to *what fellow learners could do to support boys’ education*, sampled learners reported that because of cultural reasons, boys were unwilling and hesitant to accept learning help from girls and that in general, boys did not seek for assistance when they needed it from their fellow learners. In addition, boys were reluctant to share their learning problems with close friends.

In our view, to enhance boys’ education, this state of affairs should be changed. This could be done by transforming classrooms into communities of learners who work and study together to promote quality education for all learners, including boys who underachieve. In such classrooms all learners would be encouraged to actively participate in learning activities, share learning problems with fellow learners and accept assistance (including peer academic support in the form of peer counselling) from them when needed and share learning materials. Acting as families, such learning communities should work in collaboration with teachers and parents.

In terms of learning resources to support boys’ education, sampled learners reported that there was a shortage of text books, labs, desks, chairs, teachers’ tables and chairs, e-learning equipment, Smart boards, power point projectors, etc. in many schools throughout the country. In our view, sufficient learning resources should be supplied to all schools not only to support boys’ education but to enhance the quality of education for all learners in the Namibian educational system.



DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Discussion of secondary school teachers' quantitative data

When we wished to ascertain from the 528 secondary school teachers representing the teaching force in the entire country, more than 2/3 of them affirmed that there were differences in academic performance between girls and boys. The nature of these differences were that girls performed better than boys in general and in specific subjects that teachers taught (see Tables 94 to 96). To us this finding confirmed what learners reported and what we gleaned from the latest EMIS statistics and from the document analysis we carried out on the DNEA grade 10 and grade 12 examination results for the period of 2016-2018.

When we looked at the reasons why more than two thirds of the sampled teachers thought that girls performed better than boys, the majority of them agreed that girls performed better than boys because boys were not focused, because they were absent from their classes and because they were in-disciplined. In contrast to this, the majority of the teachers disagreed with the statement that boys performed worse than girls because they believed that they could be employed without education, because they found the school subject matter irrelevant, because they found the school curriculum unappealing, because they were given less attention than girls by teachers, and because they were more affected by family poverty than girls (see Table 97).

We discern two messages from these findings. Firstly, boys who underachieved in education did so because, according to sampled teachers, they were not interested in education and excluded themselves from academic activities. When they happened to be in class, they were disruptive. Secondly, boys who underachieved in education did not do so because they devalued education and found it unappealing. They were just not interested in it. In addition, it was not because they were ignored by teachers or because poverty prevented them from performing well in school.

When we looked at teachers' views relating to the impact of cultural aspects on some boys' underachievement in education, we discerned, as was the case with learners' views on this matter, that these aspects had little influence on boys' academic underachievement. This was the case because an overwhelming majority of the sampled teachers disagreed that girls performed better than boys because, traditionally, boys were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, they were allowed to defy authority, they were allowed to engage in mischief and because they were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society (see Table 98).

According to the sampled teachers, cultures in Namibia did not give boys the authority and audacity to put in minimum effort in their school work, defy the authority of teachers and parents, misbehave wantonly and believe that education had no relevance to their future roles in society. This meant to us that according to the sampled teachers, boys' academic underachievement in school was not sanctioned by these suppositions.

With respect to sampled teachers' views on why some boys under-participated in education, an overwhelming majority of them indicated that this was the case because more of such boys than girls left school due to misbehaviour, did not complete their secondary education, did not participate in psychosocial development programs (e.g., Windows of Hope; My Future is



My Choice etc.) and they did not participate in class learning activities. In consistent with all this, the majority of the sampled teachers disagreed that boys' participation in academic activities was stifled by the structured nature of classrooms. However, it could have been undermined by boys' tendency to waste a lot of time on sport activities (see Table 99).

This implies to us that according to the sampled teachers, some boys under-participated in education because, for various reasons, they excluded themselves from learning activities and did not take advantage of educational opportunities made available to them.

With respect to teachers' views on learning support available to boys in schools, the majority of the sampled teachers disagreed that boys were given less psycho-social support in school than girls, that the curriculum was more feminized and thus did not appeal to boys, that teachers were more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities, that teachers were more willing to support boys than girls in learning activities, that gender policies in education were more supportive of girls' than of boys' education, that National policies in general were more supportive of girls' education than boys' education, that there was more economic support for needy boy-children than needy girl-children, and they disagreed that there was less economic support for needy girl-children than for needy boy-children.

In contrast to all this, the majority of the sampled teachers agreed that boys tended to seek less academic support than girls and an overwhelming majority of them agreed that boys were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than girls (see Table 100).

It appears to us that according to the sampled teachers, boys were provided with as much psycho-social support in school as girls were, the school curriculum did not disproportionately put boys at a disadvantage in school, more boys than girls did not seek for academic support when they needed it and both boys and girls were equally supported by teachers in learning activities. This implies to us that except for boys not seeking support when they needed it, schools did not act partially when providing learning support to both boys and girls. This is inconsistent with what learners reported when they indicated that some teachers in a number of schools were not supportive but hostile to boys.

The sampled teachers' view that educational policies in Namibia did not discriminate against boys, was inconsistent with our policy document analysis which showed that whereas a number of educational policies in the country highlighted girl targeted educational support interventions, they did not do so for boys in the educational system.

The sampled teachers' view that boys and girls were provided with equal economic support by parents and the society was inconsistent with learners' view that in fact some parents provided their daughters with more financial support than their sons. Because of this, some boys left school to provide for themselves by getting employed and earning money. In addition, learners reported that girl targeted support movements and organizations provided material support and some financial support to girls. This was not the case for boys. We interpret the sampled teachers' affirmation that more boys than girls engaged into toxic entertainment than girls to mean that such entertainment did not support but undermine boys' academic achievement.

With respect to teachers' views on learners' task attitudes, beliefs, hopes and behaviours, the majority of the teachers agreed that boys spent less time on academic activities than girls, that



boys were more disengaged from class activities given by female teachers than girls, that girls were more collaborative on learning tasks than boys, that boys preferred to work in isolation than girls, that girls were more eager to share academic information than boys, that boys did not care about their academic achievement, that socialization stifled the boys' ability to express their feelings with regard to the negative consequences of their underachievement and that boys were less concerned about their future (see Table 101).

From all this, it appears to us that according to sampled teachers, some boys underachieved in education because they withdrew from learning activities, were unwilling to cooperate and collaborate with fellow learners in learning, and they were not supportive of other learners' learning pursuits and they did not care about their own academic achievement and its impact on their future careers.

When we applied chi-square comparisons on some of the sampled teachers' data according to gender, three messages emerged. Firstly, whereas both male and female teachers disagreed that boys who underachieved in education believed that they could be employed without education (see Table 102), both genders agreed that more girls than boys completed secondary education (see Table 103).

In the second message, more female than male teachers agreed that more girls than boys participated in psychosocial development programmes (see Table 104), agreed that more girls than boys participated in class learning activities (see Table 105), and more female than male teachers disagreed that teachers were more willing to support girls than boys in learning activities (see Table 106). We note that these findings are consistent with what female learners expressed when we applied chi-square comparisons on these variables.

In the third message, more male than female teachers agreed that in general, national educational policies were more supportive of girls' than boys' education (see Table 107). This is consistent with what we reported when we carried out an analysis of some of Namibia's educational policy documents.

When we applied chi-square comparisons on some of the sampled teachers' data according to age, we observed that whereas teachers in all age categories agreed that in their classrooms girls performed better than boys (see Table 108), and that boys were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (see Table 110), they disagreed that gender policies were more supportive of girls' than boys' education (see Table 111) and that boys believed that they could be employed without education (see Table 112).

It appears from all this that age did not influence teachers' views when it came to their observations that some boys performed worse than girls and that some boys who underachieved abused alcohol and drugs more than girls. In contrast with this, more teachers in the age category of 31-40 years than in other age categories agreed that more girls than boys completed their secondary education (see Table 109).

The school locations of urban, rural and peri-urban areas did not seem to influence sampled teachers' views on four issues. This is that regardless of school location, the majority of sampled teachers agreed that more girls than boys completed secondary education, that more girls than boys participated in class learning activities and that boys tended to seek less academic support than girls (see Tables 113, 114, and 115). All this confirms a deduction we



made earlier which was that some boys underachieved in education because they withdraw from learning activities and were unwilling to ask for learning help when they needed it.

In addition, regardless of school location, most of the sampled teachers disagreed that gender policies in education were more supportive of girls' than boys' education (see Table 116). From this it appears that sampled teachers communicated the view that educational policies in Namibia were gender neutral. As indicated earlier in this section, our content analysis of several of the policies revealed that they were not gender neutral but were more supportive of girls' education.

Discussion of secondary school teachers' qualitative data

To triangulate some of the teachers' quantitative data we discussed above, we conducted focus group discussions with a number of teachers from Oshana, Oshikoto, Khomas, Ohangwena, Kavango West, Zambezi, Kavango East, Erongo, Omusati, Kunene, Karas and Otjozondjupa regions (see three reports on this that we presented in the results section). We now turn to an integrated discussion of the results contained in the three reports.

As presented earlier, the three reports covered issues on the impact of educational policies on boys' education underachievement, the influence of socialization on boys' academic performance, the role of teachers in boys' education, how classroom practices could be changed to enhance boys' academic achievement, what else could be done by teachers to support the learning of boys, resources teachers needed to enhance the learning of boys, how the school subject syllabi of grades 10 and 12 could be revised to meet the needs of boys better and on suggestions sampled teachers had on how boys should be supported by the school, teachers, fellow learners and the community in order to improve their academic achievement.

In discussing how *Namibia's educational policies could be reviewed/revised to enhance the education of boys who academically underachieve*, we wish to highlight the following educational policy review suggestions:

Firstly, we endorse the sampled teachers' suggestion that a variety of educational policy review tasks and activities could be undertaken in programmes targeting the boy child. These could include establishing after school initiatives and other initiatives to empower, inspire and counsel boys who underachieve to, from an early age, be serious in school, stay in and work hard in school, discouraging boys from dropping out of school to engage in casual manual labour, become security guards, taxi drivers, etc.; and establishing clubs and community based projects whose main objective would be to encourage boys to pay attention in school, focus on education and not be distracted by activities that are irrelevant to education.

Secondly, the policy review should focus on specific initiatives targeted at boy child education. An example of such initiatives would be on instituting a school and community based intervention to deal with alcohol and drug abuse amongst boys. The other one would be an intervention focused on empowering boys to manage negative effects of dysfunctional peer pressure. These interventions, according to teachers, should also deal with the fact that the difference in performance between boys and girls resulted from differential socialization of boys and girls. Boys were allowed more freedom and independence to be irresponsible and not pay attention to education.



Thirdly, we concurred with teachers when they indicated that although there was too much focus on the girl child, focus in the policy review should also be placed on creating awareness that the boy child was underachieving in education. To do this, awareness campaigns on boys' under-achievement could be instituted in schools and in the communities.

Fourthly, educational policy review could be instituted to highlight specific boys' educational issues. This should be so, according to teachers, because existing gender policies in education were implemented in a manner that appeared to discriminate against boys. Boys appeared to be overlooked, neglected, not focused on and not attended to. Several teachers indicated that to ameliorate the situation, current youth programmes such as *“Teen Aged against Drugs and Alcohol (TADA)”* should include specific focus on boys underachievement in school.

In addition, any policy review intended to enhance boys' academic achievement should emphasize vocational training for increased industrial growth in Namibia. To do this, as a policy issue, vocational training for boys who may not be academically inclined should be accentuated.

Moreover, we agree with the suggestion that for boys to be disciplined, obedient, and focus on education, educational policies should be reviewed to include religious studies and its application to the socialization of boys. This implies that schools and communities should deploy religious knowledge and virtues when socializing boys to enhance their academic achievement. From a Christian perspective, such virtues could include prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude (i.e. commitment, dedication and single-mindedness) (Lewis, 2016).

Fifthly, the policy review should include the establishment of teachers' in-service programmes to sensitise teachers on the academic achievement needs of boys and on how not to apply negative socialization expectations that discriminate against boys in a stereotypic way.

Sixthly, in the policy review, there should be established a parental educational programme on how to raise boys.

An educational policy intervention from the Namibian cultural perspective was suggested by some teachers in focus group discussions. This was described as follows:

“ In the past, we had ‘Oshinyanga’ (i.e.a family gathering around the fire where issues were discussed) at family level- where boys were educated and shaped by the male members of the family and girls by the female members. Schools should respond to the gaps in society.”

We propose that the *Oshinyanga* concept should be applied in the policy review to enhance boys' academic achievement by including and capturing the idea of teaching and learning in the family and the community. This would focus on the role of the family and the community in raising boys who ascribe to virtues of respect, usefulness, service, helpfulness, kindness, cooperation, communalism, cooperate responsibility and care.

Another suggestion from the teachers' focus group discussions worth noting was that the educational policy review in aid of boys' education should include the establishment of vocational rehabilitation centres aimed at empowering boys to acquire skills for self-employment and self-improvement. We support this suggestion.



The next aspect in the discussion that we turn to is on *the influence of socialization on boys' academic performance*. From the teachers' focus group discussion data that we presented in the results section, we wish to highlight the following four issues:

Firstly, we discuss *parents' laxity over boys' socialization that may promote their underachievement in education*. Teachers reported that parents were stricter in the socialization of girls than they were in the socialization of boys because girls were perceived to be more vulnerable than boys. Several parents allowed their sons freedom to 'roam around' unhindered by any restraint. One consequence of this was that boys were not perceived as vulnerable as girls were and let off the hook when they engaged in wrong doing. Our interpretation of this is that to enhance their academic achievement in school, boys should be more firmly disciplined, monitored, controlled, guided, and taught what to do by their parents during socialization.

Secondly, teachers expressed the view that parents displayed a lack of concern for the wellbeing and welfare of their sons when they allowed them to goof around without any adverse consequences. Furthermore, many parents did not sanction boys who committed a variety of infractions. Such parents exercised strict control when dealing with girls, but they were relaxed when dealing with boys who they did not reprimand and to whom they gave unfettered freedom to roam aimlessly about in the streets. Girls were, however, scolded and reprimanded by parents if they behaved the way boys did. If parents do not sanction their sons' misbehaviour, their sons learn to defy their authority. We judge that this form of socializing boys should be changed as it does not encourage them to focus on education.

Thirdly, there were occasions when there was parental cultural confusion over how boys should be raised. This occurred when fathers did not intervene when their sons engaged in misbehaviour. In many Namibian societies, mothers expect fathers to handle their sons' misdemeanours. When fathers fail to do this, mothers refrain from intervening because traditionally they are not supposed to. Teachers indicated that when mothers intervened, they were hated by their sons for doing so. In our view, this should not be the case. Fathers and mothers should work in unison when raising their sons and daughters. Cultural expectations of what fathers and mothers should do when socializing their children are intended to be complimentary and not contradictory in practice.

Fourthly, boys who underachieved in education seemed to get the message that because their parents were not strict with them, they did not expect them to succeed in school. The message seemed to be that they should not worry if they failed in school because they were men who should persevere under all circumstances and succeed- even without education. In addition, the message from parents' laxity in the socialization of boys seemed to be that men, merely because they were men could succeed without education. One implication of this was that boys who underachieved in education were not raised to succeed in school, but they were raised not to care about education. This was the case because such boys got the message from the uncaring behaviour of their parents that they could get jobs such as those performed by taxi drivers and manual labourers on construction sites without studying, without education.

Fifthly, because parents were not strict with boys who underachieved in education, such boys at times joined gangs which influenced them to engage in crime, drug dealing and other anti-social behaviours. Because these actions may keep them out of school, they would under-participate in education.



With regards to *gender socialization that may promote boys' underachievement in school*, we wish to discuss issues that follow.

According to the teachers' focus group discussion data, while girls learnt to be responsible through many chores assigned to them at home, boys were spared of these chores and so did not learn to be responsible. In addition, girls learnt to multi-task from being given multiple chores to perform at home. This enabled them to learn how to manage time wisely and how to work under pressure. Boys did not learn these skills that were essential in learning at school, and they did not learn from home how to cope with pressure. While boys waited to be served in the home, girls learnt to serve and take charge.

Our interpretation of this is that to encourage boys' academic achievement in school, they must learn how to be responsible at home by actively participating in the performance of a variety of household chores. Parents should ensure that boys do not goof off but take part in, for instance, cooking, doing dishes, mopping the floors, taking out the trash bins, washing cars, taking care of livestock, and helping parents when they need help. They should not be encouraged to be 'couch potatoes', waiting to be served food by mothers and sisters.

Notwithstanding this, some sampled teachers expressed the perception that girls excelled in education because they were favoured and given more attention than boys during socialization. Because of this, boys who underachieved in education felt neglected, isolated, and abandoned. Such boys thought that because no one cared about them, why should they care about their education? This means that some boys who underachieve in education may do so because of parental neglect and lack of parental support.

The *cultural/traditional division of labour between boys and girls in the household* is another socialization issue that was said to impact on boys' underachievement in education. Some teachers expressed the view that it was wrong to accuse boys of not doing their fair share of household chores because they were prevented by cultural/traditional division of labour not to perform chores that were not meant to be performed by them but by girls. The teachers indicated that most of the chores girls performed in the household were meant for them culturally and not meant for boys. According to the cultural/traditional division of labour, there were chores reserved for boys and chores reserved for girls. Currently, using this division of labour, there are fewer chores in the household reserved for boys than chores reserved for girls.

In our view, this reasoning is unhelpful to the boy child as it does not encourage him to become responsible. Because of this there is need to review and reframe the household cultural/traditional division of labour that some parents in Namibia ascribe to.

Regarding *cultural expectations for boys and girls during socialization that might promote boys' underachievement in school* we discuss and highlight issues that follow.

Firstly, it was reported that some boys who underachieved in education were permitted, by cultural expectations, to spend most of their time outside their family homes. While outside the home they learnt, from an early age, not to be on task engaging in educational activities but playing with friends on the street. Through this, they were mainly socialized not by the family but by friends. In contrast, girls, from an early age, were required by culture to stay at home and perform domestic chores and work on their educational tasks.



Secondly, parents did not firmly sanction misdeeds of the boy committed inside and outside the home but came down heavily on the girl for offences similar to those committed by the boy. In addition, as discussed earlier, some boys who underachieved in education were given more freedom to waste time outside the home than girls who were given many chores to perform at home. Girls learnt from this experience to be responsible and hard working. In one sense, boys learnt to be lazy and not to care about education. In another sense, the unrestrained freedom taught them to feel independent early, look for jobs and drop out of school. It seems boys use their freedom of action and perceived independence to ‘rush into the future’ unprepared. In our view, although culturally acceptable, these habits contribute to boys’ underachievement and under-participation in education.

Thirdly, because they were perceived to be more vulnerable than boys, parents believed that girls needed to be protected and kept at home. Based on this cultural view, several parents were more restrictive and protective of girls than boys. To us, the perceived vulnerability of girls does not justify parents’ tendency to use a ‘hands off’ approach when socializing boys – an approach that gives boys the licence to goof off and not focus on education. As has been explained earlier, this would partly lead to boys’ underachievement in education.

Fourthly, during socialization, girls were more shamed for their infractions than boys were for theirs’. Teachers pointed out that girls culturally were shamed more for infractions such as pregnancy, drinking and smoking. Even if they impregnate girls, boys on the other hand were not as ashamed as girls were. It seemed as if the entire society was against girls when they become pregnant while at school. To avoid the shame, girls either ensured that they did not get pregnant while in school or if they got pregnant, they would work hard at school after giving birth. Some boys who underachieved in education did not seem to be ashamed of their poor performance as they did not care about doing badly in school.

We interpreted this to mean that shame and disgrace as cultural sanctions against antisocial and other undesirable behaviours seemed not to be effective when applied to boys who underachieve in education. They appeared to be undeterred by these cultural tools of censure.

Pertaining to fathers’ behaviour and fathers’ absence from home that might promote boys’ underachievement in school, it was reported that in the absence of fathers from home, a number of boys turned out to be in-disciplined, disrespectful, and lazy. Imbued with these personality traits, teachers indicated, such boys turned out to be in-disciplined, disrespectful, lazy and academically underachieving in school. Furthermore, fathers spoiled their sons when they did not sanction them for wrong doing. Such sons thought that their wrong actions were fine if they were not condemned by their fathers. If mothers condemned the wrong actions, they were hated by their sons. In our view, fathers should be available, responsive, and supportive of their sons’ education and ensure that they work in unison with their spouses when sanctioning the sons’ wrong doing.

Some consequences of dysfunctional boys’ socialization which may promote boys’ underachievement related to the development of misogyny in boys, lack of focus on school matters and negative effects of peer pressure.

It was reported that one consequence of the fathers’ absence from home was that boys learnt **not** to respect and obey their mothers or grandmothers who were in charge of them. In adolescence, teenage boys became rebellious to their mothers and grandmothers who represented them when they misbehaved at school. It appeared to teachers that such boys



were raised in the context where they were a law to themselves. According to us, misogyny robbed boys of valuable educational counsel from their mothers and grandmothers who are always present in their lives and available to them.

Another consequence of the dysfunctional process of socializing boys was that they tended to be more distracted from focus on education than girls. This was the case, because boys were more side-tracked from education than girls by social relationships with girls, sport, social clubs and entertainment in general.

Furthermore, during socialization, boys seemed to learn more from their peers than from their families and society. The peer group in the community from which they learnt many negative things might not be interested in education. This would be the case because when with their friends, boys discussed music idols, how to make money quickly and **not** how to stay in school.

In addition, socialization at home might not necessarily influence boys' academic underachievement at school but it may in fact be more influenced by bad peer pressure and negative influences of friends at school. Parents might raise their sons to be responsible, respectful, compliant, and obedient. However, the boys might learn antisocial behaviour from friends. Due to this, some parents were surprised when they were told by schools that their sons had been caught abusing alcohol and drugs. To avoid all this schools should ensure that alcohol and drugs are not peddled and consumed on their premises.

As presented in the results section, the third issue that was covered in teachers' focus group discussions was on *what teachers did to support the learning of boys who academically underachieved*.

Teachers pointed out that before boys could be reached in learning, a number of preconditions were to be met. These included finding out what learning problems boys were experiencing, holding them accountable for their work, ensuring that they were physically and mentally present in class and enabling them to have a future perspective.

Identifying learning problems boys experience should be the foundation of any learning support that teachers provide to them. Teachers should then ensure that boys took their school work seriously. This could be done by holding them accountable if they did not submit their homework, by letting them see the importance of education in their lives, by following up tasks given to them, by ensuring that they were on task, by monitoring and seeing that they were learning and doing what they were expected to do, that they were submitting their assignments on time and by marking the assignments and giving informative feedback on time.

For all this to happen, boys who underachieve should be required to be physically and mentally present in classes. This means that teachers should ensure that such boys were *mentally* present and engaged by conversing with them, counselling and guiding them. All this should be done in the context of peace and calm as it was difficult to support the learning of boys who were ill-disciplined.

The other precondition that should be met pertains to encouraging boys who academically underachieve to assume a future perspective. This implies that such boys should be made to



understand that their present underperformance in education would negatively affect their future life.

Once the above and other preconditions have been met, boys should be encouraged to actively participate in learning activities. A number of barriers to learning made it very difficult for teachers to encourage boys who academically underachieved to get involved and participate in learning. Some of these were boys' unwillingness to participate in class, boys' un-eagerness to ask questions when they did not understand in class and boys' uneasiness in class and in school because they seemed to be forced to come to school. In addition, some boys who underachieved seemed to be always angry, quiet, did not wish to be bothered and appeared to have given up.

Instead of giving up on such boys, we endorse the suggestion that teachers should be alert to and pay attention to boys who did not participate in learning activities. They needed to do so by providing boys with specific opportunities to participate in class. This could include giving them opportunities to take charge and lead class learning groups and by ensuring that they were not bullied/intimidated into silence by those (e.g. girls) who performed better than them. In our understanding all this would enable boys to become responsible and enhance their recognition as valuable members of their classrooms. This stance would prevent them from retreating or withdrawing from participating in learning activities.

To further support the learning of boys who underachieve, teachers should interact with them. This means that there should be cordial relationships between boys and their teachers. This rapport is important because boys opened up and participated in classes taught by teachers who were responsive to their issues and needs. Their participation in class depends on the manner in which they are treated by teachers. To exercise good relations, teachers were urged to promptly resolve any misunderstanding they might have with any boys, create rapport with all of them, be in good terms with them and not neglect any of them in teaching and in their interaction with all learners in their classes. In addition, it was suggested that in order to enhance the academic achievement of boys, teachers should provide individualized psychosocial and career counselling to them. Their interaction with boys should focus on building them up through academic guidance and advice. It should not focus on blame, shaming and emotional abuse- tendencies, as we earlier discussed, learners reported a number of teachers exhibited.

Boys who underachieve could also be reached in class by teachers through teaching methods. One important example of such methods is that of valuing boys work. In order to communicate the message that they cared and were concerned about the academic achievement of boys, teachers should value their achievement. They should do this by showing concern when boys underachieve and by closely monitoring their performance in class and in school.

The other useful method is peer teaching. This involves pairing boys who underachieve with those who perform better than them. This encourages the process of learners supporting each other's education.

In our view, the use of mentoring, modelling, and scaffolding also encourages boys to excel. It was reported that teachers encouraged boys to ask for help from them and from other learners when they needed to. In using scaffolding, teachers informed boys that they were not self-sufficient but needed the help of others from time to time. Because of this, they should



not keep to themselves and think that they could make it in education and in life on their own. We support this position.

The fourth issue that teachers considered in the focus group discussions was **on how classroom practices could be changed to enhance boys' academic achievement**. We wish to highlight three points in the discussion of data on this issue.

Firstly, it was proposed that teacher-boy interaction should be enhanced to encourage boys' academic achievement. It was reported that in school teachers tended to have positive interactions with girls but not with boys. They tended to be more approachable to girls than to boys. This made it easier for girls to ask for help from teachers who they were in good terms with. Boys however, tended to be distant from and afraid of teachers. This made it difficult for them to approach teachers when they experienced learning problems.

In our view, to change this, teachers should relate to underachieving boys in such a way that they did not embarrass them in front of their peers, especially girls as doing this 'crashed boys'. Teachers should instead respect boys' humanity and self-esteem in the classroom. In other words, as was indicated earlier, teachers should apply the approach of scaffolding when relating to boys. They should stop being unapproachable to boys but inspire them to learn. They could do this by delivering the content of their subjects in an inviting and inspiring manner and not in a dull, dead and unappealing manner.

Secondly, to enhance boys' academic achievement, teachers should change and employ appropriate teaching methods. This meant that they should use learner-centred methods by basing their lessons on boys' interests in sport and cars and on relating school work to physical and social reality. In other words, to make education authentic to boys, teachers should relate what they teach to what happens at home and in their social and physical surroundings. Doing this is important because boys easily 'switch off' in class when they were forced to learn material that was overly theoretical and far removed from their experiences.

Moreover, because boys loved technological gadgets it was advisable to use electronic media and e-learning strategies when teaching them. Examples of electronic media that could be used were video cameras, power point projectors, Smart phones, laptops, digital cameras, Smart boards and other types of teaching technologies. Examples of instructional e-learning platforms were zoom, google meet, video conferencing, and Moodle.

Relating the use of appropriate teaching methods to what we covered under literature review, we reiterate the advice provided by Dweck (2017) who proposed that teachers would promote the growth of the intellect in all students when they set high standards for all their students in a *challenging and nurturing atmosphere*. In this atmosphere, teachers should express genuine affection, care, and concern for all their students; be warm to, accepting, and trusting of all their students as they believe that all of them can improve, learn and grow; create a 'disciplined' learning environment and treat all students as people worthy of their deep personal commitment.

In other words, teachers should be inspired by the mantra: "*Challenge and nurture learning and growth in all students*". They should live by this mantra by mentoring hard work and modelling the belief that for them to enhance their academic achievement, students who underachieve should work hard. To do this, teachers should truthfully and honestly inform



their students about their level of achievement, whether poor or good. Furthermore, they should realize that *no student stops caring* for their wellbeing even if they may temporarily stop working and become intransigent, uncooperative, stubborn, and disruptive.

To help such students to learn and improve, teachers themselves, must be eager to continuously learn about the students, about the subject matter they teach, and learn about themselves. They should always be curious, fascinated, and eager to discover new things and be willing to grow. They should keep abreast of new developments not only in their fields of specialization but in also how to relate to their students and keep abreast of new ways of being. They should be interested in learning and growing in all spheres of life.

Thirdly, learner-learner interaction in the classroom could be revamped to enhance the academic achievement of boys who underachieve. This could be done by using mixed gender grouping in learning activities. In this strategy, boys and girls could be assigned to joint projects to ensure that they are done by learners of mixed gender and mixed ability. In addition, mixed gender seating arrangements could be used to enable boys and girls to interact with each other. These strategies would prevent boys from sitting at the back of the classroom and misbehave. Moreover, the strategies would encourage boys and girls to actively participate in class and learn from each other.

The other strategy is on boys who do well coaching other boys. In this strategy, a variety of ‘boys only’ initiatives could be put in place to enhance the academic achievement of boys. For instance, after school activities for boys only could be established to enable boys to open and air their views freely without pressure of appearing stupid in front of girls. In addition, doing this may motivate boys to open up and use the after school initiatives as a form of psychosocial support. Similarly, subject specific boys only holiday classes could be formed to focus on the enhancement of boys’ academic achievement. In addition to such classes, issues pertinent to boys’ academic achievement could be highlighted in the curriculum. For instance, alcohol and drug abuse could be highlighted in Life Skills, Guidance and Counselling, English and in Biology with the view of explaining how the abuse interfered with boys’ academic achievement.

Peer tutoring could also be used to enhance boys’ academic achievement. To put this strategy into practice, teachers would, for instance, let boys and girls who solved mathematical problems go around the class and help those who did not. This would enable boys and girls to interact with each other. Boys who act as tutors would feel valuable to the class and be inspired to continue working hard at school. Moreover, peer tutoring of this kind discourages personal attacks amongst learners and promotes personal relationships based on mutual respect.

The fifth issue that teachers considered in the focus group discussions was on ***additional things teachers could do to enhance boys’ education***. In discussing data on this issue we highlight matters pertaining to boys’ education support initiatives, resourcing of boys’ education and parental involvement in aid of boys’ education.

To increase security for teachers who fear that boys on drugs may attack them in class, awareness campaigns on boys who underachieve, and abuse drugs could be organized. Through these campaigns, such boys could be made aware of their academic underachievement.



To augment this, youth clubs whose purpose would be to sensitize boys on their rights and responsibilities, obligations, and duties as learners in schools should be formed. Such clubs could also implore the boys to appreciate the importance of education in their lives. One other service that could be provided in the youth clubs is psychosocial support. In the clubs teachers could act as positive role models for boys by being mentors who encouraged and motivated them to focus on their education. This kind of support could empower boys to think, behave and relate to others in prosocial ways. In addition, for them to succeed in school, boys could be guided and counselled at the youth clubs. More services on the mitigation of substance abuse, negative peer pressure and lack of motivation amongst boys could also be offered at the youth clubs.

In addition to all this, the Boy Scouts Movement could be used as a support tool for boys when developing in them qualities of character building, respect, discipline, commitment, service to others and citizenship training. These qualities could enhance boys' academic achievement when adapted to education.

Another boys' support initiative could be community action against alcohol and drug abuse, and other misdemeanours perpetrated by boys. Instead of condoning boys' inappropriate behaviour, owners of bars and adult patrons of bars could be urged to collectively agree to prevent boys from abusing alcohol in their presence. The point here, in our view, is that adults, including parents, in the community should be responsible enough to guide and sanction boys who abuse alcohol or do any wrong things.

Teachers in focus group discussions elaborated on this by pointing out that an *UBUNTU neighbourhood watch style of boys' community support* could be used when combating alcohol and drug abuse amongst boys in the community. The partners in this could include owners of Cuka shops (i.e. small scale community based retail shops selling merchandise that include alcohol), parents, teachers and the Police. The Police could sensitize learners in school about alcohol and drug abuse using rehabilitated male prisoners.

With regards to the resourcing of boys' education, it was advised that to motivate boys to stay in school through sport, physical resources in the form of serviced soccer, netball, basketball and rugby fields, balls, and boots were needed. In addition, instruments, materials, chemicals and working computers were needed in physical science, chemistry, accounting and Mathematics (subjects that boys usually like). The point was that in the absence of these physical resources, it would be difficult to offer appropriate education to boys. We concur with this.

Financial resources were also needed to pay for field trips that may motivate boys to stay in school. Financial resources could be raised through public/private partnerships. For instance, schools could approach industries such as mining and other companies such as Waltons, Pupkewitz, and several fishing companies to solicit sponsorships for boys' clubs and other boys' educational initiatives. In our view, this kind of resource mobilization is viable and worth pursuing.

Parental involvement in and support for boys' education was another additional thing that teachers suggested could be done. In their first act of involvement, parents were urged to use a *responsibility-inducing parenting approach*. In this approach, parents should raise boys to care by giving them tasks to do and chores to perform at home. As presented in the results section, boys should be made responsible by letting them help achieve family goals and



perform a variety of household chores and other domestic tasks. In addition, parents were implored to raise boys in a manner that was firm, consistent and instructional. Parents were urged not to spoil boys by allowing them to do whatever they wished to do without restraint, without boundaries and without consequences for wrong doing.

In doing this, parents were urged to contextualize the human rights approach when socializing boys. We wish, in this discussion, to reiterate the finding that the human rights perspective of boys' socialization undermined African communities' ability to adequately raise them unfettered. To remove the fetters, African parents should be allowed to use corporal punishment in moderation when raising sons. This would be consistent with Article 31 of **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child** which stipulates that "Children have responsibilities towards their families and societies, to respect their parents, superiors and elders, to preserve and strengthen African cultural values in their relation with other members of their communities." Notwithstanding the fact that corporal punishment is illegal in Namibia, our view is that cognisance should be given to Namibian cultural values and practices when socializing boys to be responsible members of society.

In addition, based on teachers' focus group discussion data that we presented in the results section, we agree with teachers who argued that human rights and women empowerment should be reframed to concretely focus on men and boy empowerment as well. In other words, boys should be as empowered as girls in education and other spheres of life. We hold this view because to us reframing the human rights perspective of socializing boys hinges on opening up the debate on updating and strengthening the socialization of children in the African context. The central question to be answered here is: 'What are appropriate values for raising African boys who become useful to their communities and to themselves?'

After raising them to care and to be responsible, parents should be interested and actively involved in their sons' education. This was deemed important to do because the laissez-faire parenting approach undermined boys' interest in and focus on education and in a number of cases influenced their dropping out of school- an act that should not be tolerated and perceived as a normal course of action.

The sixth issue that teachers considered in the focus group discussions that we have chosen to discuss was on *the revision of school subject syllabi to meet the needs of boys better*.

It was proposed that because boys prefer the *hands on* approach rather than the theoretical approach to education, practical components should be enhanced in all school subjects. In order to link theory to practice in all subjects and in order to enhance relevance of the curriculum to boys' experiences, practical training in the form of field visits and excursions should concretely be implemented in all subjects. We endorse these views.

Furthermore, it was suggested that *all* school subject syllabi should be translated in a manner that speaks to boys' interests in practical ways. For instance, excursions, tours and research projects are part of the geography curriculum. These practical experiences make Geography more accessible to boys. Money should be made available to buy requisites for practical activities such as these.

Another aspect was on including boy-related content in all subject curricular alongside using methodologies that acknowledge and address the diverse needs of boys, especially in a society where fathers' absence from homes is rife. Teachers argued that the educational



system should not only feminise but also masculinize curricular in all subjects. For instance, content in the curriculum on gender based violence, alcohol and drug abuse, gang violence, and sport science should be included in biology, life skills, history, languages, and science to speak to the needs of both boys and girls.

In addition, the social sciences curriculum like life skills should include psychosocial support content on boys who are not normally attended to when they are depressed, or they are going through emotional problems. Moreover, the biology and life skills curricular should highlight and accentuate the male anatomy in their coverage. This would enable boys to understand how their physical sexuality could be mustered at a biological level. This would also enable them to understand sexual abuse from a male's or boys' perspective.

In our view, these suggestions are reasonable and could be implemented without much adjustment to Namibia's school curricular.

The seventh issue that teachers considered in the focus group discussions was about ***suggestions on how boys' education should be supported by the school, teachers, fellow learners and the community.***

Before we discuss what teachers indicated *schools should do to support boys' education*, we wish to endorse and highlight from the literature review section of this report two suggestions. Firstly, (Dweck, 2017) proposes that schools should let students (including boys) who underachieve to adopt a 'growth mind set' in which they base their achievement on effort, hard work, and love for learning new things (i.e. wish to become better and not stand still). Schools should be places where every student is encouraged to excel, become the best they can be and where their abilities are recognized and valued. They should be places where students take charge of their own learning, motivation and commitment by focusing on ***understanding*** and being interested in subject matter they are exposed to. In addition, schools should be institutions at which ***students are not given up*** but places where they are driven by their love for learning, curiosity and challenge. Moreover, by providing students who underachieve a network of support constituting parents, teachers, fellow students and members of the community, schools should provide conditions of learning that inspire, motivate, challenge and promote curiosity. By ascribing all these insights to Dweck (2017), we acknowledge that all children, including boys who underachieve in education, can learn and realize their potential to make a contribution to society.

Secondly, we discerned four insights on school support for boys who underachieve in education from the work of Diprete and Buchmann (2013). Firstly, Diprete and Buchmann (2013) point out that to enhance the academic performance of boys who underachieve, schools which they attend should be of high quality. According to them, poor quality schools diminish the academic performance of all learners. In order for schools to improve in their overall performance, they should work out ways of enhancing the performance of all learners, including all boys.

Secondly, schools should devise programmes that benefit boys ***in particular***, "regardless of their level of achievement" (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p.157). Such schools should put in place programmes that deal with learning barriers that boys face such as negative peer pressure, alcohol and drug abuse and dysfunctional views of masculinity (i.e. what it means to be a man).



Thirdly, because scholastic and social-emotional quality of teachers affect learner performance, schools should have in their employ teachers of high quality. Doing this would enhance the academic performance of boys who underachieve in education. Fourthly, to create a learning-oriented peer culture, schools should develop student bodies that are highly motivated and achievement-oriented. This implies creating school learning environments that prize academic achievement as a source of high status in peer group circles.

In support of Diprete's and Buchmann's (2013) position, Whitmire (2010) argues that the goal of schools should be to support boys who underachieve in education to improve. It should not be to produce gender equality/parity between boys and girls. Building on this, he suggests that the key to enhancing academic achievement amongst boys is not necessarily that of using targeted instruction strategies that meet boys' needs but that of overall improvement of learning at a given school. According to him, when quality of education improves at a school, it improves for all learners, including boys.

Advancing his position further, Whitmire (2010, p. 132) stipulates that "when you refuse to let even a single student to slide by, you end up helping boys the most because the boys are the big sliders". Although Whitmire (2010) has a point here, we also agree with Riechert and Hawley (2010) who assert that because children are not generic, you cannot have 'a one size fits all' approach when catering for the distinctive needs of boys who underachieve in education. Stating this is consistent with Whitmire's (2010) own proposal that schools should employ the 'Help One Student to Succeed' –HOST– approach as a responsive mentoring and tutoring approach in areas where boys have learning difficulties.

In addition to these suggestions we discuss the data on *what schools should do to support boys' education* which we obtained from teachers in focus group discussions.

Firstly, schools should highlight and display boys' academic achievement amongst boys and not in comparison with girls. To motivate boys, this would enable them to experience success amongst themselves and not in comparison with girls. To build on this, schools should make rules that stipulate that boys should not be invisible in class by sitting at the back of the classroom. They should instead be allowed to sit either in front or in the middle of the classroom where they could be involved in classroom activities. In addition, boys could be enabled to work in pairs with girls who excel in learning activities. To increase their visibility schools should recognize the presence and achievement of boys in school. They could do this by using activities that have boys highlighted and stand out in science, computers, reading and in sport.

Moreover, boys' visibility could be increased by making their issues such as underachievement in education topical and discussed at school. The focus should not just be on girls' topics such as teenage pregnancy. In addition, boys should be enabled to lead organizations such as the SRC and boys' clubs in which the importance of education would be promoted.

All this would counteract the tendency of stereotyping boys as individuals who are ill-disciplined. They should not be labelled as those with behavioural problems just because they are boys. This stereotype should be refrained from because it might be used by teachers to pick on boys and blame them of acts they might not be responsible for. They should not be unjustly treated because they are boys.



Secondly, to support boys' education, schools should establish awareness campaigns on boys' academic underachievement. This should be so because in order for boys who underachieve to receive help and support, others in school (e.g. other learners and teachers) must be aware that such boys were underperforming. For instance, teachers in school should be aware that these boys are underachieving before they can focus on them.

Thirdly, schools should provide community based Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) type of vocation training in areas such as wood carving, basket making, tailoring, etc. This kind of training would expose boys to survival skills of various kinds, team work and discipline. This would be the case because to work with wood and grass for instance, they would need to go into the bush, camp and collect raw materials.

Fourthly, to encourage teachers to work as teams when supporting boys' education, schools should organize workshops, seminars and Webinars to empower them to do this.

With regards to *teacher support suggestions*, it has been argued that providing targeted support to boys as a group would promote the masculinization of classrooms and the celebration of masculinity in education. This is because, it is asserted, it would support the narrative that boys underachieve in education because their "natural interests and skills" are not taken into account by the school curricular, teachers and schools (Martino and Kehler, 2007). We present some data in this report which support the position that teachers should, in their teaching, take into account special barriers to boys' learning because such barriers may not necessarily emanate from boys' 'natural interests' but from social issues that thwart their motivation to learn.

For instance, in our view, the establishment of 'boy friendly learning environments' (Sax, 2016), may provide learning spaces in which boys are welcomed, recognized, included, involved and invited to actively participate. To support boys' learning, teachers should, in practice, promote the functioning of such learning environments. Moreover, we agree with the assertion that teachers should encourage boys to "read more, listen and attend more to teachers and to other pupils, work harder and take more pride in their work, work collaboratively and articulate themselves better in all aspects of communication" (Francis and Skelton, 2005 as cited in Martino and Kehler, 2007, p. 424).

In addition to all this, we agree with the suggestion that to enhance the academic achievement of boys, teachers should mind the language they used when communicating with them. They should not ridicule, shame, embarrass, disgrace and belittle them in front of their peers. Instead, teachers should demonstrate care and concern for these boys when they communicate with them.

Regarding suggestions *on community support for boys' education*, we support the view from literature review that community gender-loaded perceptions (or stereotypes) regarding the abilities, attitudes and behaviours of boys and girls shape schools' and teachers' expectations about and attitudes towards boys' potential to grow and achieve well in school. For instance, community generated stereotypes such as those which portray boys as typically abrasive, rude, disrespectful, disruptive, uncooperative, self-destructive, self-absorbed and prone to aggression, violence, disorderly behaviour, etc., feed into teachers' negative self-fulfilling prophecies when interacting with boys in school and classrooms.



Because they expect some boys who underachieve to misbehave, teachers interact with them in a hostile manner. Instead of reducing or changing the boys' apparent negative behaviour, teachers' hostile demeanour exacerbates it. In this unsupportive context, the boys implicated underachieve. This implies that to ameliorate the negative stereotypes about boys which undermine their academic achievement in education and in schools, the community as the original source of the stereotypes should be sensitized and made aware about this. This should be the case because "a strong sense of community, racial identity and family support enabled (es) boys to be *resilient* against, or even try to prove wrong, negative stereotypes and low expectations" (Jha and Pouzevara, 2016, p.28).

To build on all this, teachers in focus group discussions expressed several views on how *the community could support boys' education*.

The first view was on the suggestion that parents should be 'real parents' not only to girls but to boys as well. Parents as members of the community should provide care, guidance, discipline and correction to boys as they do to girls. They should realize that boys were as vulnerable as girls. Because they were unable to protect themselves, they needed care, protection and guidance from parents as girls needed protection, care and guidance from parents. For instance, as was discussed earlier, parents should encourage the development of responsibility in boys by assigning household chores to them that were in the past reserved for girls. In addition, parents should raise boys as strictly as they raised girls.

When doing all this parents and the community should not neglect boys by failing to discipline them when they misbehave and by giving them too much freedom to do as they please. They should discipline them as they do with girls. They also should care for their sons by monitoring their movements, whereabouts, and behaviour. Moreover, they should pay as much attention to boys as they do to girls.

The second view was on the proposal that communities should change the 'pigeon-hole' type of socializing boys and girls. This implied that there should be changes in socialization conventions of what was right for girls to do and what was right for boys to do. This should be done because the disparity in the socialization of boys and girls created conditions under which boys becomes prone to misbehaviour, antisocial behaviour, self-destructive behaviours and underachievement in education.

To us, all this implies that if we really want boys who underachieve in education to improve their academic achievement, communities should institute changes in beliefs and practices about how such boys are socialized and treated. As is the case with girls, boys' socialization should lead to disciplined behaviour and a focused attitude towards education.

The third view was that communities should beware that boys were emotionally as weak as girls. Because of this, boys should be socialized to express their emotions and learn how to deal with them, learn that strength does not emanate from violence and learn how to handle frustrations including failure in school. When this is not done, boys who face problems such as being bullied in school, choose to stay from school and not seek help to have the problems solved. They bottle up everything, become irritable, lash out at everyone and become violent and sometimes become criminals. Instead of looking on, the community should reach out to such boys and help them work through their problems.

To do this, communities should make available to boys who underachieve in education counselling, guidance, psychosocial support and care facilities where they could be helped, encouraged and nurtured. Families in communities, NGOs, UN agencies and Faith based



organizations should also provide such services and facilities to support boys who underachieve in education.

The fourth view was on community crime prevention amongst boys. Teachers made a number of suggestions under this theme. These were that:

1. By preventing crime amongst boys, communities would enable them to remain in school and focus on education.
2. Communities should be worried and do something about schools being used as sources of drugs and that some learners, especially boys, were dealing in drugs.
3. The law enforcement agencies such as the police should be involved in solving the serious community problem of alcohol and drug abuse. For instance, in some schools which are located in formerly disadvantaged communities, where drug dealing targets boys, support from the police to arrest drug dealers and prosecute them was urgently needed.
4. Boys who were targeted by drug dealers underperformed in school and emotionally struggled to make sense of what was happening to them. Such boys should be supported by the regional, city, town and village councils.

In addition, to prevent crime amongst boys, societal and community change with the purpose of socializing boys to focus on education and realize that crime and corruption were wrong should take place. This should be done because rampant corruption usually engaged in by male ‘tenderpreneurs’, male briefcase businesspeople without much education and male thieves in the public and private sector created an environment in which boys learnt the devaluation of education and the normalization of what was wrong. Boys entered into this environment and saw little need for education. To improve boys’ education, this corrupt environment must be changed through societal and community transformation.

The fifth view was on community campaigns to sensitize people about boys’ educational needs. Teachers suggested that campaigns should be organized in the community to sensitize people about the educational needs of boys and how families and other members of the community could support them in education. Messages, initiatives, programmes and community projects could be organized around the education of the boy. This could involve all aspects of boys’ education, including moral education, values education, citizenship education, prosocial behaviour, beliefs and practices. To us this would be part of the effort to support the boys’ education through community transformation.

The sixth view was on providing parental education on childrearing beliefs and practices. Teachers expressed the concern that because boys were allowed by parents, wide latitude to be on the street and away from home, they learnt to engage in a lot of mischief. The tragedy was that parents themselves were rarely at home during most of the day and night. Because of this, the home ceased to be a site of child rearing and socialization. For boys to change and remain in school, parents must change first. For the socialization regime in the community to change, parents must directly be taught how to raise children in varied social-economic contexts.

The seventh view was on parents’ rights during the socialization of their own children. Consistent with what was discussed earlier, the community and the government should look into reviewing children’s rights so that parents rights of raising children according to prosocial cultural norms were not eroded. According to teachers, children’s rights should not override parents’ prerogatives to socialize their children properly. Children should not act as ‘parents to their parents’.



The eighth view was that as members of their communities, fathers should act as role models who were present and available to their sons. To act as role models fathers should make time to be at home with their sons. They should not leave the job of parenting to their womenfolk because this led to boys growing up with the understanding that men did not stay home to look after their families. They stayed outside the home, away from their families. The absence of the father from the home may lead to boys growing up in ‘their own image’ of what a man should look like and how he should behave.

To act as examples to their sons, fathers should participate in household chores when at home. Boys would resist performing such chores if they saw their fathers not performing domestic duties at home. The resistance would deny boys the opportunity of learning how to be responsible.

With respect to *fellow learners supporting boys’ education*, teachers suggested that:

1. Fellow learners could support boys’ education by providing emotional support when boys were bullied or when they were depressed because of poor performance.
2. Fellow learners could protect boys in distress by providing them company, encouragement, companionship, friendship and peer tutoring help.
3. Fellow learners could raise funds for needy boys so that they remained in school.
4. Boys who were excelling in education and recognised as leaders amongst their peers should be deployed as peer tutors in subjects where they excelled. This should be done because young people listen to their friends more than they listen to teachers and parents.

In addition to agreeing with these suggestions, we endorse Diprete’s and Buchmann’s (2013), position that the nature of the student body of a school affects student’s academic orientation and academic performance. This is the case because when the adolescent culture rewards academic performance, students are motivated to invest in their studies to gain status with their peers and to please significant others such as parents and teachers.

The converse of this is that when the adolescent culture values non-academic outcomes more highly (e.g. sport, popularity or opposition to school authority) “and especially when the adolescent culture denigrates academic achievement, it draws energy away from students’ academic achievement. Simply put, a highly motivated, achievement-oriented student body creates a learning-oriented peer culture” (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p.168). This means that schools can promote the formation of student bodies whose peer cultures are learning-oriented. Such student bodies would enhance academic achievement of all learners, including boys who underachieve in education.



DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM PARENTS

Discussion of parents' quantitative data

With regards to views on their sons' work habits, an overwhelming majority of sampled parents from all 14 education regions *agreed* that their sons worked hard at school, did their homework when they kept on checking on them, wanted to do well at school, did their homework regularly, were motivated to do well at school, knew what they wanted to do when they left school, and that their sons always tried to do their best. In contrast to all this, the majority of them agreed that their sons had many friends who distracted them from school work. In addition, the majority of them *disagreed* that their sons misbehaved at school, were not bothered about doing well at school and that their sons absented themselves from school sometimes (see Table 117).

To us all this implied that parents did not think that their sons practiced work habits that were inimical to their academic achievement.

According to Table 119, parents communicated the overall message that schools largely supported their son' education. We judge this to be the case because the majority of them agreed that their sons' schools had good facilities, had good teachers, had good discipline, supported their sons to perform well academically, were important for their sons' future, kept them informed of their sons' progress, teachers helped their sons learn and that their communities and their sons' schools worked closely together.

When we looked at what was captured in Table 120, we concluded that sampled parents from all 14 education regions held high expectations about their sons' success at school. This was so because an overwhelming majority of them agreed that they expected their sons to do well at school, to pass with good grades in their final examinations, to complete school and get jobs, or go for further studies. Moreover, the majority of them disagreed that they expected their sons to leave school early (i.e. drop out) and assist with family responsibilities.

In contrast with the above positive messages, the majority of the parents agreed that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls, girls worked harder at school than boys and that boys needed more help than girls to achieve their full potential at school (see Table 118). As was discussed earlier in this section of the report, these parents' views are consistent with those expressed by sampled learners and teachers.

When we used the chi-square to analyse parents' quantitative data according to gender and age, we noticed that whereas the majority of both male and female parents agreed that boys were less motivated to work at school than girls, the majority of both male and female parents agreed that teachers helped their sons learn (see Tables 121 and 123). In contrast to this, significantly more female than male parents agreed with the statement that the school kept them informed of their sons' progress (see Table 122). To us this could mean that female parents were more in touch with schools than male parents.

When we applied the chi-square to analyse parents' data according to age, the majority of the sampled parents from all age categories agreed that their sons' schools had good teachers, kept them informed of their sons' progress and that teachers helped their sons learn (see Tables 124-126). To us, these findings communicate the message that the majority of the



parents thought that schools served their sons well. Although in consonant with sampled teachers, this is inconsistent with the sampled learners' position that some boys underachieved in education because teachers were hostile to them.

Discussion of parents' qualitative data

To triangulate some of the parents' quantitative data we discussed above, we conducted focus group discussions with a number of parents from Oshana, Oshikoto, Khomas, Ohangwena, Kavango West, Zambezi, Kavango East, Erongo, Karas and Otjozondjupa regions (see three reports on this that we presented in the results section). We now turn to an integrated discussion of the results contained in the three reports. As presented earlier, the three reports covered issues on whether boys were less motivated to work at school than girls, whether girls worked harder than boys, why more boys than girls dropped out of school, how boys could be supported by the community to perform better academically, how partnerships between communities and schools could be strengthened to promote boys' academic achievement and how culture could be used to support the retention of boys in school.

In our discussion of data on the six issues we shall highlight the main messages parents communicated in the focus group discussions as follows:

Discussion of parents' views on whether boys were less motivated to work at school than girls.

As presented in the results section, an overwhelming majority of the parents indicated that boys were, at the *attitudinal level*, less motivated to work at school than girls because they were NOT *responsible, goal directed, aiming to achieve anything in life, interested in education, concerned about education, self-motivated and they were NOT willing to do their school work without being closely supervised*. In addition, according to the parents, when compared to girls, boys who underachieve *do not want to be told what to do, have negative attitudes towards education, do not challenge themselves, lack self-motivation, have no will power, are lazy, are uncooperative, lack understanding of the value of education and that they take too long to take education seriously*.

These *boys' internal motivational factors*, create personal tendencies and conditions in which boys who underachieve lack the zeal to apply themselves to educational activities in school. The majority of the school girls on the other hand are intrinsically motivated and have positive, self-directed, supportive and cooperative attitudes toward education. Unlike in the case of boys who underachieve, these prosocial attitudes enable the majority of girls to excel in education.

In terms of *beliefs*, boys who underachieve believed that they could succeed in life and be rich without education. They based this belief on their community role models who were rich but uneducated. In addition, according to sampled parents, boys did not believe in the link between education and the acquisition of good things such as beautiful cars and they lived in the present and were led by the desire to have good things 'now', in the short term. These boys believed in immediate gratification- a belief that did not encourage them to focus on education but on the immediate acquisition of good things and live good lives.

In terms of their *behaviour*, the majority of parents indicated that boys who underachieved in education were less motivated to work at school than girls because they did NOT take initiative, ask for help when they needed to, listen to teachers, cooperate with teachers, and



they did NOT accept encouragement from teachers. Instead, they spent most of their time socializing, on social media, and abusing drugs and alcohol. These boys had a lot of distractions that kept them away from education. Girls in contrast, took initiative, asked for help when they needed to, listened to their teachers, cooperated with their teachers from whom they accepted encouragement. In addition, they focused on education and did not engage in alcohol and drug abuse.

These findings communicate to us the general message that any psychosocial programme to promote boys' academic achievement motivation should seriously address their dysfunctional *intrinsic* attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that have been delineated here.

Boys who underachieved were also less motivated to work at school than girls because of adverse *external motivational factors* such as *peer pressure, mothers' and fathers' roles in boys' motivation, lack of supportive family environment and policies of human and children's rights*

Regarding *peer pressure*, boys who underachieved in education were less motivated to work at school than girls because they easily succumbed to the negative influences of their friends who used 'intoxicating' substances such as alcohol and drugs. In contrast to this, girls who excelled in education resisted peer group temptations to be distracted from their focus on educational activities.

With respect to *the mothers' role in boys' motivation in education* boys were perceived to be less motivated to work at school than girls because their mothers did not encourage and motivate them about school matters as much as they did with their sisters. Mothers encouraged and motivated their daughters more passionately than they did with their sons who underachieved in education. One explanation for this was that mothers were prevented by their culture to usurp the role of the boys' fathers. According to cultural beliefs- especially amongst the Oshiwambo peoples of Northern Namibia- it was the fathers' duty to intimately support, encourage and motivate boys not only on educational matters but on life in general. According to this belief, boys were prevented from interacting too closely with their mothers.

It is noteworthy that boys may partly be less motivated to work in school than girls because they did not, for various reasons, receive as much encouragement and motivation from their mothers as they should. Notwithstanding this, as pointed out earlier in this report, there were times when some boys who underachieved in education spurned their mothers' encouragement and motivational overtures due to misconceived masculinity beliefs and misogyny.

With respect to *the fathers' role in boys' educational motivation*, boys were perceived to be less motivated to work at school than girls because their fathers did not act as effective role models in providing them with guidance, encouragement and motivation on school matters. Many fathers tended to be uninvolved, unavailable, psychologically distant and disinterested in their sons' educational activities.

With respect to *the lack of supportive family environment*, the view was that the home environment had a lot to do with whether boys were motivated or not. If boys were negatively motivated at home, they would not be motivated to do well in school. Conversely, a supportive family environment would motivate the boys to succeed in school.



The supportive family environment communicates the message that some boys who in fact excel in school may be inspired to do so by their stimulating and supportive family circumstances. Some girls from unsupportive family environments may also underachieve in education. In these cases, the main cause for underachievement in education or excelling in education may not be inherent in the learner and his or her gender but emanate from unsupportive and unstimulating family conditions.

Another external motivational factor that influenced boys' underachievement pertained to *policies of human and children's rights*. According to some parents, concepts of human rights and rights of children were misunderstood by boys and children in general. This misunderstanding resulted into teachers and parents having diminished and limited roles when enforcing discipline and rules at home and at school. Parents were discouraged from motivating their children to focus on education because the children claimed that they had rights not to listen to their advice. According to some parents, the overemphasis on children's rights without responsibilities created conditions in which boys became less motivated to work at school than girls as they were not obligated to academically achieve well.

In attempting to understand from parent discussants **whether boys performed worse than girls in education because girls worked harder than them**, we identified categories on *girls' work habits, girls' work ethic dispositions, support given to girls, boys' work habits, boys' work ethic dispositions, and parents' roles/influence in girls' and boys' work habits*,

With respect to *girls' work habits*, amongst other things, the majority of the parents indicated that girls worked harder at school than boys because the many household chores they were asked to perform at home gave them the opportunity to manage time wisely and spend it on school work. Unlike boys who 'lazed around', girls took responsibility for their studies without being supervised, were able to multi-task by juggling a lot of household chores and still found time to perform school tasks such as doing homework, stayed on school tasks, focused and concentrated on their educational activities.

To us, all this means that, unlike boys who underachieve, girls who excelled in education did not withdraw from learning tasks but confronted them head on and used household chores as a reservoir of learning and development.

Consistent with their *dispositions*, girls worked harder than boys because they understood the value of education, they did not want to be embarrassed by failure but wanted to maintain good names and reputations by working hard, did not want to embarrass their parents by failing but wished to promote good family reputation and recognition.

In addition, girls were *disposed* to work harder than boys who underachieve in education because they were more willing to learn than boys, listened to advice, readily followed teachers' instructions and obeyed teachers, were alert, formed a link between education and success in future, were serious, did not easily give up but persevered, took time to consult teachers when they did not understand, were disciplined to work hard and had an organized work ethic that demanded that they excelled in all that they did. To us this was a recipe for success in modern education. Girls who excelled in education complied with the educational set up while boys who underachieved either withdrew from it or rebelled against it.

In another sense that smacked of apparent 'injustice done to boys', it was reported that girls appeared to work harder than boys because of *support provided to them*. Parents indicated



that girls were encouraged and motivated to work hard in support programmes they were offered. In these programmes, girls were motivated to put in extra effort. As was presented in the results section, no such programmes existed to encourage boys to work hard. We interpret this to mean that a social context had been created in which girls were focused on (i.e., had policies and services that were targeted at them) and encouraged to work hard on educational tasks. Boys on the other hand did not have policies and services that were geared at motivating them to work hard at school.

In addition to this, girls who excelled in school worked harder than boys because they were provided with more material support than boys were by their parents, NGOs, and donors. Several boys who underachieved in education did not receive such support and as a result they ‘went out there to hustle’ to meet their needs. Being ‘out there’ meant not being in school and not working hard in school. In contrast, because most of their financial and other needs were catered for by their parents and others, girls worried about their school work only. So they worked harder at school than boys. In our view, this position, although justified by the fact that girls had programmes that were designed to serve them but not to serve boys, may not be sustained in all contexts where girls outperform boys in education. This would be the case because there are situations in which girls from poverty stricken environments outperform boys ‘cohabiting’ the same environments.

It would also be the case because of *boys’ work habits* that largely do not promote their academic achievement. To substantiate this, girls who excelled in school worked harder than boys because boys wasted time on non-educational activities and were not concerned with and/or did not care about educational achievement as they bluffed and pretended that they knew what to do and asked parents not to worry about them. In most cases girls who excelled in education did not do this.

Boys in contrast were distracted by several things. Some of them were distracted because they were not patient but, in a hurry, to get rich. They were perceived to be in a hurry to make money and acquire property. Others got distracted by possessive and jealousy ridden relationships with girls. To please the girls and buy things for them, they went out to make money by any means. All these and other things distracted them from educational activities. Girls, in contrast, were not distracted in this manner.

By saying all this we do not imply that all boys are distracted as **there are** many boys who worked as hard as girls and in some instances, worked harder than girls. This is because it should be conceded that the amount of effort expended on educational activities depended, in some cases, on types of school subjects. For instance, some boys worked harder than girls in science and technical subjects. Moreover, the effort boys and girls put into educational tasks depended on family backgrounds. Some boys from supportive family environments worked harder at school than girls from unsupportive family environments. The converse to this would also be true.

In terms of *boys’ dispositions (i.e. personality or tendencies)* it was pointed out that some traditional cultural socialization beliefs and practices created in a number of boys who underachieve in education a sense of anomie (i.e. alienation, isolation). In this condition, the boys implicated were not encouraged to learn from and motivated by their fathers who were unavailable to them. At the same time they were labelled as misfits if they closely aligned themselves to their mothers who were available to them. The result of this was that the boys felt neglected, not cared for and not nurtured by both parents. This implies that once in this



condition, the boys concerned become self-absorbed, depressed and unwilling to participate in corporate learning activities.

Regarding *parents' roles/influence on girls' and boys' work habits* we interpreted gender bias in which girls were provided with apparent protection while boys were allowed to goof around as a lapse in effective parenting and socialization. This kind of socialization worked against the development of educational qualities of focus, concentration and seriousness in boys. Moreover, the cultural expectation that holds that girls should do domestic work at home while boys goof around does not encourage boys to work hard but illustrates a misconstrued view and practice of masculinity.

A number of boys under-participated in education, according to the literature we reviewed and according to parents' quantitative data and focus group discussion data, **because they dropped out of school**. They did so due to *discipline problems, school/educational related factors, the lure of quick success, peer pressure, and unsupportive social factors*.

Discipline problems as a cause of dropping out of school involved boys not following teachers' instructions, disobeying teachers, disobeying parents (particularly mothers), disobeying school rules, being arrogant, expressing macho pride (i. e. as males, they were their own bosses), and defying parents' and teachers' authority. It seemed to us as though some boys who underachieved in education were raised not to fear and respect authority but to defy it. With this kind of in-discipline, such boys seemed to operate in a reality characterised by lack of restraint, unruliness, disorder and disrespect of rules, regulations and defiance. To us, such a reality is uncondusive to learning, personal development and education.

Alcohol and drug abuse was another important discipline problem that sampled parents from all 10 regions reported caused boys who underachieve to drop out of school. As reported in the results section, this problem included excessively drinking alcohol, experimenting with drugs, selling drugs to make money, acting as drug couriers to make money, sniffing intoxicating substances and smoking dagga. Some boys who academically underachieved earned popularity (i.e. keeping up the appearance of being cool) in school by dealing in drugs.

Some parents in the focus group discussions made an insightful point when they said that in addition to the fact that some boys who underachieve in education dropped out of school due to alcohol and drug abuse, society allowed them not to be ashamed of engaging in this vice but implored girls to be ashamed of it. It appears to us that to some degree, culture promotes more indiscipline in the boy child than in the girl child. This sets him up to be prone to and to be exposed to vices such as alcohol and drugs. These vices undermine his performance in school. In some instances, he drops out of school due to this and due to engaging in criminal activities. For instance, some boys get caught in crime, are imprisoned and then drop out of school.

According to parents we talked to during focus group discussions, there were *School/educational related factors* that contributed to some boys dropping out of school and completely withdrawing from educational activities. Such boys perceived that education did not lead to employment, it did not prepare them for life after school and it did not cater for their need for practical subjects that they could turn into vocations such as plumbing,



electrical work and bricklaying. In other words, they dropped out of school because school did not meet their vocational interests as it largely focused on theoretical subjects.

In response to the boys' dissatisfaction with the school curriculum that to them did not offer practical subjects that they were interested in, we note that Namibia is making very good progress in elevating the status and availability of vocational subjects in schools. However, according to parents who participated in the focus group discussions, several boys were not yet impacted by the availability of vocational subjects in some schools. This situation could be improved if industry/school partnerships to encourage boys to stay in school through internships and other initiatives were established in the country.

Repeating of grades was given as another reason some boys dropped out of school. The repeated failure that these boys experienced, reduced their self-esteem, increased their feeling of inability to succeed in school and increased their desire to drop out of school. Schools should prevent this problem by closely monitoring the learning progress of all learners.

The lure of quick success was also identified as a common cause of school dropout amongst boys who academically underachieved. Several parents from the 10 regions informed us that such boys dropped out of school because they were lured by the temptation to get jobs and become rich quickly without much education. In some instances, a number of such boys did not necessarily wish to get rich but were lured by the desire to earn money by any means. So they dropped out of school to provide cheap labour at construction sites, become taxi drivers, work as security guards, and work on commercial farms. To prevent the adverse effects of the apparent lure of quick success with limited education, efforts should be undertaken by all educational stakeholders to make schooling more attractive to boys than for them irking a living through providing cheap labour.

The strategy of making schooling attractive would also mitigate the effects of negative *Peer Pressure* influences which include some boys belonging to gangs and other groups of friends which do not place priority on education but on antisocial activities such as abusing alcohol and doing drugs (e.g. smoking dagga) and engaging in crime.

It was reported that some boys dropped out of school because of becoming victims of *unsupportive social factors*. For instance, more boys than girls dropped out of school because of experiencing social problems without support and because of being given by their parents too many responsibilities at home. Social problems may include boys dropping out of school to go to work and earn money for supporting orphaned families. They may also drop out of school to make money and take care of children of their teenage girlfriends. This would enable them to fulfil their responsibilities, duties and obligations.

With regards to boys being given too many responsibilities at home, some parents who did not fully understand the value of education did not encourage their sons to remain in school but forced them to take up responsibilities such as looking after livestock, helping out in the family business and in farming activities. These responsibilities forced some boys concerned to drop out of school. To us, such parents should be empowered by all educational stakeholders, through education forum meetings and community based workshops, to value education and see the link between education and family social-economic advancement.

In research project questions 4 and 5 our aim was to find out the type of support Namibian communities could give to improve boy children's education. In response to the question: **'How can the boys be supported by the community to perform better academically?'** parents from 10 Educational Regions provided a variety of responses. As captured in the



results section, these responses were grouped into categories of: *transforming boy child and girl child rearing beliefs, values and practices; family and community counselling and support of the boy child; school/community collaboration on boys' education; private sector and family collaboration on boy's education and creating an UBUNTU community boy child support system.*

In this discussion we highlight key messages from each of these categories.

The main point of *transforming boy child and girl child rearing beliefs, values and practices* is that the foundation for supporting boys' education should first be built in early childhood development and education. This means that to enhance boys' educational attainments later in school, child rearing beliefs, values and practices in Namibia should be adapted to current societal values that are informed by human rights, inclusivity, equality and equity. The implication of this is that from an early childhood development and education perspective, the family and the community should raise boys to respect the value of education and be motivated to focus and work hard in education from an early age. A developmental approach should be taken by families and communities when supporting the education of boys. The point here is that boys should be socialized from an early age to distinguish right from wrong attitudes and behaviours towards education and distinguish supportive from unsupportive thinking and actions towards education.

As was the case for girls, there must be established in the communities, programmes to empower boys to value education from an early age. To do this, early childhood development programmes should support boys to take advantage of educational services to stay in school and teach them about their gender roles in the society.

The issue of *family and community counselling and support of the boy child* entails that boys could be counselled and encouraged to focus on education and remain in school not only by their parents but also by their influential and knowledgeable relatives such as uncles, educated older siblings and educated relatives who could be listened to because of what they achieved in life through education. An influential family figure who should be actively involved in the counselling, guidance and support process of boys is the father. Fathers should be good role models to their sons by taking time to talk, motivate and encourage their sons to work hard at school. They should be career counsellors to their sons by explaining the advantages of education and the disadvantages of offering unskilled labour for jobs that are temporary, risky, without security and without medical aid. In addition, both parents should provide moral support to boys who underachieve in education. Instead of being discouraged and made to feel dull and of low ability, parents should build the self-esteem of their sons by motivating them and not harshly criticising them. They should care for their sons' wellbeing and be there for them when they are depressed due to failure in school.

To us the general message here is that boys needed from families, societies and communities *care, nurturance, pastoral care, rearing support and adults' directional scaffolding.*

In the *school/community collaboration on boys' education*, community members should be made aware by schools of educational underachievement problems and challenges boys have in school. Schools should run boy child underachievement and boy child under-participation in education awareness/outreach programmes. Such programmes could be based on empirical achievement data from schools and be facilitated by educational regional officials and staff from tertiary educational institutions.



The main point of the *private sector and family collaboration on boy's education* is that the private sector could be mobilized to support and finance boy child empowerment programmes and activities such as motivational seminars, psychosocial development workshops, anti-alcohol and drug abuse seminars, youth development seminars for boys and gender sensitization workshops.

For instance, business men and women based in the communities could be organized to initiate and support recreation facilities for boys. Such facilities would provide services to boys in order to keep them away from toxic entertainment in the form of alcohol and drugs. In addition, the private sector could be mobilized to offer material and financial support to boys who are in need of such support in order for them to pay school fees, buy uniforms, pay for hostel accommodation, etc.

Moreover, to support some boys who underachieve in education due to psychosocial and emotional problems, the private sector could be mobilized to financially support community boy child social programmes run by regional school counsellors, social workers, and psychologists.

Before we discuss the process of *creating an UBUNTU community-based boy child support system* we wish to give a synopsis of the UBUNTU African philosophical world view and belief system. Zimba (2002) states that consistent with the conception of the indigenous African family, the individual can only exist *corporately* as part of the community. Made, created and produced by the community, the individual becomes conscious of his being, *corporate* duties, responsibilities and privileges through his existence and relationship with others. Because of this, Mbiti (1990, p. 106) says that when the individual:

“suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether dead or living. When he gets married, he is not alone, neither does the wife ‘belong’ to him alone. So also the children belong to the corporate body of kinsmen, even if they bear only their father’s or mother’s name. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’.”

The Zulu of South Africa succinctly express this view of the individual by noting that *umuntu umuntu ngabantu*, literally meaning that “a person is only a person with other people”. In other words, “it is only within a community that a person can be said to truly become a person. Through a person’s contributing to the community, the community in turn adds human qualities to that person” (Higson-Smith and Killian, 2000, p. 206).

Some parents recognized that although the community support for the boy child could be based on this philosophy of life and world view, it does not exist and function in the way it used to function in the past. Because of this, new ways of community support have to be structured. New community mobilization around the boy child has to be brought about. The society itself must be transformed in a manner that it socializes boys and girls in the same way and not to be strict with the girl and relaxed with the boy; permit the boy to do wrong things but punish the girl if she does wrong. To support the boy, the community should be transformed and turned into a supportive and empowering collective.

According to this thinking, any community intervention to support the boy child should be based on the understanding that the whole community ought to be responsible for raising not only the boy child but all children. To do this there should be a code of conduct, a cultural



blueprint, to use when raising children. The traditional values should be the starting point, the foundation of the blueprint. In practice, as was the case in the past, every adult in this system should be on the look out to sanction unacceptable behaviour of boys and girls where ever they are found. To do this, there should be established in the community the norm that all adults have the societal power and authority to sanction all children, including boys. For instance, the community should have a collective responsibility of sanctioning boys who engage in antisocial and unacceptable behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse.

One would ask how concretely in the *UBUNTU community-based boy child support system* the community would develop new norms of raising boys that would enhance their educational achievement. The parents in the focus group discussions proposed a number of programmes that could be deployed. The first one of these is that to support the boy child to stop misbehaving and self-destructive behaviours such as alcohol abuse and drugs, goofing around, wasting time etc, communities could recreate or reclaim the UBUNTU community support system by operating ***a neighbourhood watch for boys' education and social welfare network***. In this network, community members could watch out for boys in trouble in bars, streets, Shabeens, clubs, nightclubs and crime dens/hot spots. If unable to handle them on the spot, any adult could report them to parents, community leaders or law enforcement officers. This could be done because there are limited opportunities nowadays where families take time to guide/instruct boys on what to do in order to improve their academic achievement. To support boys, families and communities could provide such opportunities for family counselling and guidance of boys.

In addition, it was suggested that foster care programmes for boys who did not receive adequate care and support from their families could be established. Moreover, school boards could be revamped to ensure that they initiated and operated programmes to support boys' education.

Furthermore, there should be strong communication links amongst teachers, parents, schools, social communities, traditional authorities, community leaders, and churches. Doing this would promote the enhancement of boys' education. Some parents observed that the spiritual part of educating children was being neglected in the education system, hence the suggestion for churches to get involved. These suggestions seem to indicate to us that the establishment of participation structures such as School Boards, and Regional Education Forums, to support schools and teachers were not satisfactory. This is why such structures should be revamped.

As presented in the results section, two response categories of *boy child school/community initiatives, and entrepreneurship programmes for boys* were identified in response to the focus group discussion question on **how partnerships between communities and schools** could be strengthened to promote boys' academic achievement. In our discussion, we highlight main messages communicated under each category.

Under the *boy child school/community initiatives* category, it was firstly proposed that before schools and communities networked on how to strengthen boys' academic achievement, they should build a boy child support vision. To do this the communities should be retooled, trained and empowered to work with schools in support of boys according to the UBUNTU Philosophical world view and belief system we referred to above. This entailed that competencies, common understanding and skills should be developed amongst community members for them to work in support of boys. This implied that a ***common community vision, blueprint, worldview*** of how to improve boys' education achievement should be



created on the networking process between schools and communities. For instance, schools and communities should hold teacher-parent meetings to work out ways of helping and supporting specific boys. This could involve schools creating boy support programmes and then asking parents to mobilize financial and other resources to implement them. In addition, it was proposed that communities and schools could establish ethical codes of conduct/ethical blueprints that they would jointly use to enhance, revamp, improve morals and behaviour of boys.

Secondly, it was suggested that there should be established teachers'/ parents'/ learners' working group initiatives. In such initiatives, links, interactions and commitment amongst teachers and parents could be put in place to support specific boys who underachieve in education. In the initiatives, parents and teachers could jointly develop plans to support specific boys displaying specific learning problems.

Thirdly, it was proposed that school boards should be sensitized and made aware of some boys' underachievement in education. Then, they should be enabled to identify and implement strategies of supporting the boy's education. Specifically, school boards should put in place specific programmes on how to support boys' education. In addition to this, schools should reach out to communities by holding public meetings to sensitize the communities on the educational underachievement of boys and asking communities for their suggestions on how they could work with schools to address the problem. Educational regional directorates could facilitate all this.

The fourth initiative was that the church should be involved in motivating boys and providing spiritual guidance to them. To effect this, pastors from various denominations and congregations in the communities could be invited to schools to talk to boys about appropriate spiritual morals, beliefs, values and practices that would enable them to work hard in school and prepare them for worthwhile future lives. To us, to avoid some churches advancing false doctrines when working with boys, schools and communities should vet churches before they are asked to participate in the initiative.

Fifthly, schools in partnership with communities could work to enhance boys' educational attainments by establishing father/son interaction initiatives. In these initiatives, fathers could be involved in their son's educational and other school extracurricular activities. For instance, boys in school could be encouraged to engage in fund raising activities such as car wash bazaars. In this activity, members of the community could bring their cars to school to be washed. This would bring boys and their fathers closer to each other. Fathers would be involved in their sons' education in an indirect way. In our view, communities should be supported by schools to mobilize fathers. Schools could do this by reaching out to fathers through their sons.

Sixthly, programmes to incentivise boys' education could be established. In such programmes, parents from the communities could, for instance, donate articles of various kinds to schools for use in ceremonies to recognize boys' academic achievement. Such recognition would encourage boys to excel in education.

Seventhly, it was proposed that to teach boys the sense of responsibility, they could be asked to work as community volunteers helping community members meet their basic needs (e.g. collecting water and firewood for the elderly). To institutionalize this, schools and communities could establish volunteer programmes in which boys could learn how to be responsible not only for their own wellbeing and welfare but also for the wellbeing and



welfare of others. In addition, communities could organize projects in which they would demonstrate to boys about how to be responsible. To do this, they could organize school clean-up campaigns in which parents, teachers and learners would be involved.

Eighthly, to enhance boys' education, school/community partnerships could establish school/boy child's family link programmes. In such programmes, schools could encourage and enable teachers to develop the habit of taking time to really know, understand, be concerned of and care for the welfare and wellbeing of boys who underachieve in education. Teachers could do this by familiarising themselves with and knowing the family situation of boys who underachieve in education or boys who experience difficulties, challenges and problems in their families. It is only after doing this that teachers/schools and communities could devise viable ways of helping boys enhance their educational attainments.

Under the category of *Entrepreneurship programmes for boys* it was proposed that schools and communities could enhance boys' education by organizing internships or school/community boy support programmes in which boys would learn what was entailed in particular professions by visiting and learning from companies, job establishments, industries and institutions such as educational institutions, factories, retail companies, law firms, chambers of commerce and industry, accounting firms, etc. By doing this, the boys would cultivate interest in particular jobs and create a link between education and employment. In addition, it was suggested that to foster the spirit of entrepreneurship amongst boys, parents and schools could organize bazaars at which homemade objects and food items would be sold. Boys could be encouraged to bring their own wares to be sold at the bazaars.

In response to question 6 of the focus group discussion interview that was on **how culture could be used to support the retention of boys in school**, parents shared with us a variety of responses. As was presented in the results section, we divided these responses into 6 categories of *cultural values for parenting boys and girls; circles of care, guidance and help around the boy child; reframing the position of the boy in society; cultural metaphors in the education of boys and girls; and dysfunctional families*.

We discuss parents' responses category by category as follows:

Discussion of cultural values for parenting boys and girls

Firstly, it was suggested that before boys desire to remain in school they must be taught ethics of respect for, caring and helping their parents. This was important because boys should learn to respect and obey their parents before they could live by school rules and school constraints. In addition, boys should be taught good morals and respect for elders and other people in society. In our understanding, to facilitate all this, fathers should assume their cultural roles in the upbringing of their sons. Parents from the 10 regions advised that fathers should assume their cultural role of teaching their sons to behave well at school and in the community. They should take time to encourage their sons how to conduct themselves at home and in school. In addition, they should actively participate in the education of their sons. One parent indicated that doing this is important because boys value the guidance from their fathers.

Notwithstanding the wish described in the preceding paragraph, it was acknowledged that many boys lived in households without father figures. In these households there was the absence of fathers from the lives of boys- fathers who were supposed to play their cultural duties of mentoring, counselling and guiding boys were absent. To deal with this situation,



communities could support the education of boys by urging fathers to become viable role models and mentors for their sons. They could do this by performing their fatherly roles well and by being available to guide, counsel and mentor their sons. This was what all cultures in Namibia required of them. This was important to do because communities might not adequately support boys' education if fathers abrogated their responsibilities as role models for their sons. They should not withdraw their support of their sons during socialization too early. Unlike mothers who remain close to their daughters throughout their daughters' lives, fathers tended to be distant from their sons.

To augment this point, *'parents should act as real parents'* for boys during socialization. To do this and thereby encourage the retention of their sons in school, parents, should stop treating boys as if they did not need help and guidance, as if they were self-sufficient and that they could look after themselves unaided. Moreover, parents should stop perceiving boys as people who could take care of themselves without scaffolding support. Consistent with this, parents should stop glossing over and ignoring boys' misconduct and wrong doing. When parents did not take heed of this advice, they partly created the problem of boys underachieving in education by being lenient to them and by the way they raised them up. Instead, parents should monitor and exercise control over their sons' whereabouts.

What is implied here is that boys' behaviour and actions are not monitored and controlled by parents while they use a culture of neglect and carelessness when raising boys. However, the 'girl child is required to abide by the rules of the house, her movements are monitored, if she violates the rules she is beaten, physically punished'. In contrast, the boy child is not subjected to parents' monitoring and control. The boy's wrong doing is left unpunished. From a cultural point of view, this is a wrong tradition and a wrong practice that should be changed.

Another wrong cultural belief that was alluded to was that of using vulnerability to justify the strict control exercised over girls. It was indicated that because boys were as vulnerable as girls, they should also be strictly monitored and controlled. It was pointed out that in addition to culturally recognizing that both boys and girls were vulnerable, parents should equally motivate girls and boys to stay in school and excel. The cultural tendency of providing more educational motivation to girls than boys should be discouraged.

Instead, it was proposed that families should enforce specific cultural values amongst boys and girls. These values should include the *observance of, adherence to and obedience of rules; respect for order in life; respect for time/curfew hours in households; communication of information on boys' and girls' whereabouts, activities and friends; insistence on observance of compliance, discipline and obedience in households amongst boys and girls, consistent application of sanctions and consequences as useful tools of socialization in households, co-workmanship/cooperation; hard work; honesty; trust; truth; trustworthiness; and faithfulness.*

The main point being advanced here is that one important way of encouraging boys to stay in school is to instil in them cultural beliefs and values of respect, honesty, truthfulness, hard work, discipline, responsibility, caring and trustworthiness.



Discussing the idea of circles of care, guidance and help around the boy child.

Under this category it was suggested that to use culture for retaining boys in school, there should be a paradigm shift in the Namibian cultural system of raising children. As was the case in the past, the raising of children should be the responsibility of whole communities, villages, neighbourhoods, and families. In these social collections, circles of care, guidance, counselling, and help around the boy child should be created. These would include the nuclear family circle, the relatives circle, the peer group circle, the youth group circle, the church group circle, and the community support group circle. The circles of care around the boy child idea would help transform the current individualistic way of raising children into a community based collective one.

In the transformed and collective way of raising children, the goal would be to enable boys to become useful not only to themselves and their families but also to their communities and the society in general. To us, this is consistent with the UBUNTU ***neighbourhood watch for boys' education and social welfare network*** that was discussed above.

Moreover, a *prosocial* cultural milieu for the support of boys' education should be created to effect the circles of care idea. In the milieu adults in communities and society should transmit beliefs, values and practices that promote healthy life styles. They should not, for instance, promote promiscuity, drunkardness, drug abuse, corruption of morals and tolerance of wrong. When these are conveyed as normal, we should not be surprised to see boys emulating them and engaging in self-destructive behaviours.

The point here is that before boys are transformed into people who benefit from positive cultural beliefs, values and practices, adults should be transformed first. Cultural transformation should start from adults. This implies that communities should deal with perverse alcohol abuse, drug abuse, corruption of morals, gender based violence and other vices that are rampant in the society.

To turn away from these vices, communities should set aside time, resources and resource persons to teach boys cultural values that would support their education. As was done in the past, parents and other members of the community should be available and willing to groom boys into useful members of their society. Boys could do this by learning responsibility from acquiring useful skills when performing chores such as looking after livestock, helping out at home, participating in community youth centre activities, etc.

The *prosocial* cultural milieu should include the reinstating of cultural norms against antisocial behaviour. Norms against antisocial behaviour that were practiced in the past should be reinstated. For instance, the use of shaming those who smoke and drink at a young age should be used in school to discourage these behaviours. In addition, the use of ridicule against those who engage in undesirable behaviour and actions should be redeployed in the community and in the school.

In addition, in the *prosocial* cultural milieu, acceptable and unacceptable values, ways of thinking and behaving should be redefined in the community when raising boys. For instance, members of the community should not tolerate goofing, indolence and self-destructive behaviour amongst boys. This is important to us because as a way of life, culture should communicate beliefs, values and practices that promote society's and individuals' wellbeing.



Moreover, the moral corruption effects of the social media should be considered when thinking about positive cultural norms that would promote and support boys' education. For instance, boys and the youth in general should be educated about the negative influences of the social media that are in the form of distraction from education, pornography, cyber-bullying, cyber-crime, plagiarism, cyber-abuse, and cyber-terrorism.

Discussing ideas of reframing the position of the boy in society

The first idea was on initiation ceremonies for boys. The revival of initiation ceremonies like Olufuko for girls, whose goal is to, among other things, communicate good messages of how to live as married women and how to relate to others in society as adult women, should include initiation ceremonies for boys. These would focus on boys acquiring attributes of discipline, responsibility, duty, care and hard work. These qualities could be taught to boys in school with the help of resource persons from the community. In addition to the initiation ceremonies for boys, boys and girls from schools could also be required to attend cultural festivals in the communities in order to learn important cultural lessons that are communicated at the festivals. Whereas boys and girls would learn at the festivals how men and women should relate to each other, boys would learn to be responsible, dependable and be encouraged to reflect on what kind of persons they wish to become in today's world. Moreover, boys would be encouraged to interrogate the advantages and disadvantages of the cultural festivals.

The second idea was on explaining/reframing boys' apparent future cultural role of head of household. Here, boys' socialization as preparation of a life of service to one's family and one's community should include education as a major ingredient. Because of this, boys should be told that culturally they were heads-of-households to be. In the modern world, to perform this role adequately in future, they needed to remain in school and be educated. This would be important for them to do because the role entails responsibilities and duties.

In future, it will be their duty to promote and guarantee the welfare and wellbeing of their families in the households. They shall be required to provide shelter, food, health, education, protection and security to their families. Culturally, this is what boys are expected to become as viable members of their communities. In addition, from a gender perspective, for them not to be subordinate to women in future boys should be as educated as girls.

Discussing cultural metaphors in the education of boys and girls

Three cultural metaphors were proposed to encourage boys and girls to remain in school and excel. The first one was the cultural metaphor of 5 dresses girls should wear during their life time in a sequential order. The second one was the cultural metaphor of 5 ties boys should wear in their life time in a sequential order and the third one was the metaphor of multiple teachers of culture.

The five dresses that girls should symbolically wear in a sequential order during the course of their lives are the school uniform, the matric farewell party dress, the graduation gown after completing university education, the wedding dress and the maternity dress. This metaphor teaches girls to focus on education before they get married and raise children. However, this cultural practice is not obeyed or practiced when a girl gets pregnant before completing her education. This would be the case because by doing this, she would have disrupted the cultural sequence of wearing the five dresses.



Similar to the cultural metaphor of five dresses, the cultural metaphor of 5 ties boys should wear in a sequential order pertain to the school uniform tie, the matric farewell tie, the University Education degree graduation gown tie, the bridegroom shirt tie and the first father's day tie. This cultural metaphor could be used to encourage boys to stay in school and complete their education before they marry and have children.

With regards to the metaphor of multiple teachers of culture, the understanding that there exist several teachers of culture from which boys can either be supported to remain in school or discouraged to focus on education was expressed. Such teachers of culture are *parents as teachers of culture, schools and teachers as teachers of culture, friends as culture teachers, social media as teachers of culture, the internet as a culture teacher, the mass media as teachers of culture, television as a culture teacher, movies as culture teachers, music as a culture teacher and the church as a culture teacher.*

It is essential to appraise the positive and negative lessons boys might learn from the various multiple teachers of culture before putting in place interventions for supporting them to remain in school. Because the African culture is either completely lost or diluted to a point where it is not useful, communities and schools should *reframe, adapt and transform* the various teachers of culture into unified and coherent beliefs, values and practices before they can be used to support boys' education.

Discussing the issue of dysfunctional families

The main view under this category is that it is unreasonable to expect broken homes which may not follow any cultural values to support the call to retain boys in school. Families experiencing social turmoil should first be rehabilitated and empowered before they could support boys' education. As was discussed above, this could be done through the creation of a prosocial cultural milieu for the support of boys' education. In addition, the traditional gatherings around the fire called "*vinyanga*" could be reinstated and used to teach boys about life and responsibilities. Furthermore, these traditional gatherings around the fire could serve purposes of strengthening the role of fathers in education, teaching of values and norms, including respect for elders, and husbands effectively playing their roles in education.



DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM UNIVERSITY LECTURERS

Whereas 51.6% of 122 sampled lecturers from UNAM and NUST reported that there were differences in academic achievement between male and female students (see Table 127), 37.7% of them agreed that female students performed better than male students, 45.9% of them expressed the view that there was no difference in academic performance at their Universities between male and female students (see Table 128). From this it would appear as if differences in academic performance between female and male university students was non-significant. However, when we perused table 12, we noticed that in 2018, whereas 69% of UNAM students who passed examinations were female, 72% of students who passed examinations at IUM were female. At these Universities, female students performed in examinations substantially better than male students. In fact, except at NUST where 51% of students who passed examinations in 2018 were male, more female than male students passed their examinations in all public and private Higher Education Institutions (see Table 12).

This is consistent with the picture we obtained from UNAM graduation statistics of a number of years. Table 14 revealed to us that for a period of 25 years (i.e. 1992-2017), 2/3 of graduates from UNAM were female. In line with this, except for the field of engineering and IT, table 16 showed that during the period of 2016-2019, substantially more female than male students graduated from UNAM. In fact, 68% of medical doctors who graduated from the university during this period were female. This state of affairs also prevailed at NUST where except in the fields of computing and engineering, more female than male students graduated during the period of 2011-2016 (see Table 17).

To us these tertiary education examinations and graduation statistics communicate the unequivocal message that over the years, more female than male students excelled in their studies. Based on this we sought to find out from university lecturers why they thought female students performed better than male students academically.

Although more than a third of the 122 sampled lecturers did not respond to the question on why female university students performed better than male students, more than a third of them agreed that female students performed better than male students in examinations because male students were not focused and because male students absented themselves from classes more frequently than female students (see Table 129).

Notwithstanding this, more than 40% of the lecturers *disagreed* with the statement that female students performed better than male students in examinations because male students were in-disciplined, they believed that they could be employed without education, they found the subject matter boring, they found the subject matter irrelevant, they found the curriculum content not appealing, they were given less attention by lecturers than girls and because they were more affected by family poverty than girls (see Table 129).

To us, according to several lecturers, the underachievement of male students could be explained by their lack of focus and by their withdrawal from learning encounters. However, it was not because of their in-discipline, their lack of trust in the value of education, their lack of interest in university subject matter that they perceived to be irrelevant and unappealing, and it was not because they were granted less attention by lecturers.



In addition according to Table 130, the majority of sampled lecturers did not think that female students performed better than male students because traditionally and culturally male students were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, were allowed to defy authority, were allowed to engage in mischief and because they were allowed by society to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society. Whereas these findings were consistent with those provided by sampled secondary school teachers and learners, they implied that some male students' underachievement in education was not sanctioned by these kinds of beliefs.

Another factor that was perceived to influence male students' academic underachievement in their studies was their under-participation in learning activities. The majority of lecturers affirmed this when they agreed that more female students graduated on time than male students, that more female students than male students participated in psychosocial development programs such as clubs and professional societies, and that more female students participated in class learning activities than male students. In addition, the majority of the sampled lecturers agreed that more male than female students left their studies uncompleted because of being found guilty of misconduct (see Table 131).

When we enquired into the kinds of support male students who underachieved received from lecturers, we inferred from the responses that male and female students received equal social-emotional support, the curriculum content was not designed to discriminate against male students, and lecturers were equally supportive of female and male students in learning activities.

Lecturers seemed to communicate the message that male students who underachieved in their studies did not do so because of lack of instructional and social emotional support from teaching staff. However, they underachieved because they tended to seek less academic help when they needed it and because they were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than female students (see Table 132).

Although we inferred from lecturers' responses that female and male students were equally engaged in class activities given by female lecturers, cared about their academic achievement and they were equally concerned about the future, we judged from lecturers' responses that some male students performed worse than female students because they spent less time on academic activities, were not collaborative on learning tasks as they preferred to work in isolation, and were not as eager as female students to share academic information (see Table 133).

As presented in the results section, after analyzing University lecturers' responses to questionnaire items using frequencies, we applied the chi-square statistic to make comparisons by lecturers' gender and age. We discuss some of the comparisons in the manner that follows.

Whereas the majority of both male and female lecturers disagreed with the statement that male students found university subject matter irrelevant (see Table 134), the majority of both male and female lecturers agreed that socialization stifled the male students' ability to express their feelings with regards to the negative consequences of their achievement (see Table 138). To us these findings imply that although both male and female lecturers did not attribute some male students' underachievement to the irrelevance of university curriculum



content, they seemed to think that some male students' underachievement might be due to their inability to talk and do something about their academic challenges.

In addition, whereas more female than male lecturers disagreed that male students were more affected by family poverty than female students (see Table, 135), significantly more male lecturers than female lecturers disagreed that male students were allowed to engage in mischief (see Table 136). According to these findings, while more female than male lecturers thought that poverty could not be used as an explanation of some male students' academic underachievement because it affected both male and female students equally, more male than female lecturers seemed to hold the view that some male students academically underachieved NOT because they were allowed to misbehave without any constraints.

In essence, poverty and apparent unrestrained misbehaviour of some male university students are inadequate explanations of their academic underachievement. This interpretation is consistent with the finding that the majority of lecturers from all age categories disagreed that male students were more affected by family poverty than female students (see Table 139).

On another issue, whereas the majority of sampled lecturers from all age categories agreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students (see Table 141), the majority of lecturers from all age categories disagreed with the statement that male students were less concerned about the future (see Table 142). To us, while spending less time on academic activities would lead to academic underachievement, caring about and preparing for the future would motivate students to work hard and academically excel in education.



DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM UNIVERSITY AND VTC STUDENTS

Discussion of University and VTC students' quantitative data

As presented in the results section, quantitative questionnaire data were collected from 807 students whose mean age was 23.4 years. Whereas 44% of the students were male, 55.3% of them were female. Table 36 describes students' institution of origin. In this section, we discuss questionnaire data on a variety of possible explanations for some male students' underachievement in their studies.

On the issue of reasons why female students performed better than male students, the majority of sampled students gave two types of responses. Firstly, they reported that some male students performed worse than female students because they were more frequently absent from their classes than female students. Secondly, the majority of them disagreed with statements which indicated that female students performed better than male students because male students were not focused, were in-disciplined, believed that they could be employed without education, found the universities' curricular boring and irrelevant, were given less attention by lecturers than female students and because they were more affected by family poverty than female students (see table 143). To a large extent, these findings collaborated what lectures reported above. To us, this implies that according to sampled lecturers and students, some male students' underachievement in their studies was mainly due to absenting themselves from learning activities.

In addition, according to the majority of sampled students some male students performed worse than female students NOT because traditionally and culturally, they were allowed to put in minimum effort in education, were allowed to defy authority, were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society, and because they were allowed to engage in mischief. To us, these indicators of culture seemed not to have any impact on some male students' underachievement in their studies (see table 144).

According to table 145, some male students underachieved in their studies because they under-participated in activities that would promote their academic achievement. The majority of sampled students confirmed this by reporting that more male students dropped out of universities or vocational training centres than female students, more male students left tertiary education institutions because of misbehaviour than female students, more female students completed their University education than male students, more female students than male students participated in psychosocial development programs (e.g., clubs and professional societies), and because more female students participated in class learning activities than male students. In addition, the majority of sampled students disagreed that male students' energy and participation were stifled by the structured nature of University classrooms. We interpret all this to mean that some male students' lack of participation in learning events led to their underachievement.

We predicted that some male students would underachieve in their studies because of not being provided with adequate learning support at the universities. This prediction was supported when sampled students asserted that female students performed better than some male students because they were given less psycho- social support at the University than female students, they were more susceptible to engage in toxic entertainment (alcohol & drug abuse) than female students and because lecturers were more willing to support female



students in learning activities than male students (see table 146). It is essential that those male students who underachieve in education because they abuse alcohol and drugs are provided with rehabilitation services and facilities by universities.

We expected that some male students would academically underachieve because of engaging in behaviours and activities that would undermine that achievement (see table 147). Some of the data we obtained supported this expectation because the majority of the sampled students affirmed that male students were more disengaged than female students from class activities given by female lecturers, female students were more collaborative on learning tasks than male students, male students preferred to work in isolation than female students, female students were more eager to share academic information than male students, male students did not care about their academic achievement and that they were less concerned about the future. It is reasonable to expect some male students to underachieve if they disengage themselves from learning activities, they do not cooperate with others when learning, and they do not care whether or not they succeed in learning.

Our expectation was not supported when the majority of the sampled university and VTC students disagreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students. This is inconsistent with quantitative data we obtained from secondary school teachers and learners who reported that some male students underachieved because they spent less time on academic activities. Moreover, focus group discussion data we discussed on this from learners, teachers and parents, supported the view that some male learners underachieved because they wasted a lot of time on activities that were unrelated to education provided by schools. Because of all this, we endorse the view that some male students underachieve at universities because they spent limited time on academic tasks. They would do this, for instance, when they withdraw from participating in learning events.

As reported in the results section, after analyzing University students' and VTC students' responses to questionnaire items using frequencies, we applied the chi-square statistic to make comparisons by students' gender, age and institution of origin. We discuss some of the comparisons as follows:

On the variable of gender, whereas more female than male students agreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were not focused (see table 148), and significantly more female students than male students agreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were absent from classes more frequently than female students were (see table 149), the majority of both male and female students disagreed that male students performed worse than female students because they were in-disciplined (see table 150) and disagreed that male students believed that they could be employed without education (see table 151). It appears to us that although more sampled male than female students did not acknowledge that some male students' academic underachievement was due to lack of focus on academic tasks and because of absenting themselves from those tasks, it did not mean that these factors did not influence academic underachievement of some male students. Female sampled students thought they did. Similarly, in-discipline and devaluing the employment purchase of education would remain plausible explanations of some male students' academic underachievement whether or not both male and female sampled students unanimously agree that this was not the case.

To us, judgments that more female than male students agreed that male students found university and VTC subject matter boring (see table 152) and that more female students than male students disagreed that male students were given less attention by lecturers than female



student (see table 153) would need to be verified by sampled students' focus group discussion data because it is difficult to decipher why they were made.

We endorse the comparative data that revealed that the majority of male and female students agreed that more female than male students completed their tertiary education (see table 154) and that the majority of both male and female students agreed that more female than male students participated in psycho-social development (see table 155) because they confirm what was reported by the frequency data that we discussed above.

Whereas we judge the finding that the majority of both male and female students agreed that more female than male students participated in class activities (see table 156) to strengthen the understanding that lack of participation in class activities negatively influences some male students' academic achievement, we judge the finding that more male than female students agreed that male students were given less psychosocial support at tertiary institutions than female students (see table 157) as a confirmation of what we discussed above. This was also the case when more female than male students disagreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students (see table 158).

In our view the findings that the majority of both male and female students agreed that male students preferred to work in isolation (see table 159), that the majority of both male and female sampled students agreed that female students were more eager to share academic information than male students (see table 160) and that significantly more female than male students agreed that male students did not care about their academic achievement (see table 161), confirm the interpretation that these factors would undermine some male students' academic underachievement.

Although the younger the students were, the more they agreed with the statement that more female than male students participated in class learning activities (see table 162), age did not influence the finding that the majority of the sampled students disagreed that socialization stifled the male students' ability to express their feelings with regard to the negative consequences of their underachievement (see table 163).

The majority of the sampled students from all six educational institutions of origin disagreed that male students believed that they could be employed without education (see table 165), that male students were given less attention by lecturers than female students (see table 166), and disagreed that male students were allowed to hold the view that education did not have relevance to their roles in society (see table 167). This means that tertiary institutions of origin as an independent variable did not have a major impact on the sampled students' responses to questions on these matters. Similarly, this was the case when the majority of sampled students from all the six institutions of origin agreed that more male than female students left tertiary educational institutions because of misbehaviour (see table 168) and agreed that male students preferred to work in isolation (see table 172).

Except for those from IUM and ZVTC, the majority of the sampled students from other institutions disagreed that male students were not focused on their studies (see table 164). This implies that the majority of sampled students from the two institutions agreed that male students who academically underachieved did not focus on their studies.

Except for students from RVTC, the majority of students from other five educational institutions agreed that more female than male students participated in class learning



activities (see table 169) and the majority of students from the other institutions agreed that male students were less concerned about the future (see table 173). This confirms that except for sampled students from RVTC, sampled students from other institutions understood that some male students underachieve because they diminished their involvement in educational tasks and because they did not form a link between their performance in education and their future wellbeing and employment prospects.

Except for students from VVTC and RVTC, the majority of students from the other four educational institutions disagreed that male students were given less psychosocial support at their institutions than female students (see table 170) and the majority of students from other four institutions disagreed that male students spent less time on academic activities than female students (see table 171). We interpret this to mean that the majority of sampled students from VVTC and RVTC agreed that some students who academically underachieved were given less psychosocial support at their institutions and that they spent less time on academic activities.

Discussion of University students' qualitative data

We indicated when presenting our analysis of parents' focus group discussion data that as a consequence of using a parallel pragmatic mixed methods research design in which we collected both quantitative and qualitative data from our research participants, we also collected and analysed focus group discussion data from some students studying at UNAM, NUST and IUM. We now turn to a discussion of these students' focus group discussion data.

As presented in the results section, although 708 students from UNAM, NUST and IUM provided quantitative data, five students' Focus Groups yielded qualitative data that are discussed in this section. Whereas 10 students formed a focus group at UNAM, 20 students formed three focus groups at NUST and 15 students formed a focus group at IUM. In total, 45 University students from the three institutions participated in the focus group discussions.

Based on the study's research questions, University students belonging to the 5 Focus Groups were asked to respond to 7 focus group interview questions on:

1. whether they agreed with the statement that male university students were less motivated than female students to work at academic tasks,
2. whether female students worked harder than male students,
3. how the socialization (i.e. the upbringing) of male students promoted underachievement in education at the universities,
4. why more male students than female students took longer to graduate from Universities,
5. how male students could be supported to perform better academically,
6. what resources would be needed to enhance the learning of male university students,
7. suggestions students had regarding how male students could be supported by universities, lecturers and communities in order to improve their academic achievement.



In this section of the research report, we discuss students' responses to the 7 questions as follows:

On whether University students agreed with the statement that male students who academically underachieved were less motivated than female students to work at academic tasks, we surmised from the responses that female students were more motivated than male students because they cared about their studies and valued educational success. In contrast, male students did not do this and as a result they underperformed in their studies. In addition, whereas female students were more motivated in education because they wished to be independent from men and acquire their own property by excelling in education and they wished to demonstrate their equality with men through education, they were also more motivated because they were more passionate about their studies than men.

From a gender perspectives, these findings mean that the fight for equality and independence from men motivated female students to excel in education. Caring for their studies made this fight winnable. For them to succeed, male students could also be motivated to academically achieve by caring about their studies.

According to some sampled students, it was not only gender that influenced students' motivation. The nature of the subjects they studied either inspired motivation or not. In addition, their interest in the subjects they were taking also determined their motivation.

Moreover, it was important to recognize that there were male students who were more motivated than female students because they tended to be competitive and tied their status in society to success in education. Some male students were also more motivated than female students because they wished to earn good reputations and keep up appearances by doing well in education. We note that these motivational anchors that male students tied themselves to might be less stable because they were not intrinsic but extrinsic (i.e. contextual) and therefore dependent on external influences. Because the motivational anchors female students used were mainly intrinsic, they would lead to stable academic achievement that would be context independent.

Pertaining to the issue of whether female students worked harder than male students, we gleaned from the responses that female students worked harder than male students because of fear of being ostracized by their parents who required them to succeed in education. Such parents however, did not hold a similar requirement for male students. In Addition, it was reported that female students worked harder than male students because they feared dropping out of the University. It would appear that male students who underachieved in their studies were not held accountable for their studies by their parents and they were not afraid of the prospect of dropping out of the universities.

It was further reported that female students worked harder because they expended more effort on their studies, were persistent and cared about their success in education. In contrast, male students did not care whether or not they succeeded in education. As a result they underperformed.

From a gender perspective, it was reported that female students worked harder because, as indicated above, they were fighting against gender related discrimination through excelling in education. In addition, female students worked harder because they were, earlier in school, coached and encouraged to do so in empowerment programmes that were available to them but were not available to male students.



The fight against discrimination sounds plausible. However, the issue about being coached sounds like an excuse for not working hard at educational tasks. This interpretation makes sense because it was reported that female students worked harder because they were more responsible than male students and took their studies seriously. However, it was reported that male students worked less hard because they abused alcohol, did not value academic success, expended little effort in their studies and took hard courses to show off.

Furthermore, it was reported that there were non-gender related factors that explained why female students worked harder than male students. Some of these factors were one's aims, goals and the need to help one's family after graduation. Male students who underachieved did not seem to have aims and goals that were commensurate with educational attainment.

Regarding how the socialization (i.e. the upbringing) of male students promoted underachievement in education at the universities we gathered that the abuse of alcohol when socializing acted as a barrier to some male students' academic achievement and as a distraction from their academic activities. In addition, peer pressure during socializing negatively influenced some male students to waste time in 'quick money schemes', alcohol and drug abuse and in the vain practice of chasing after young women. Moreover, some male students, unlike the majority of female students, did not encourage each other on educational matters during socializing but wasted time goofing around, making jokes, chasing after young women and obtaining finished assignments from friends. All these misdemeanours were not conducive to academic achievement.

Furthermore, whereas some male students were distracted from education by having too many extra-curricular activities, by not being interested in learning and by obtaining degree certificates through any means possible, whether fraudulent or not, other male students' academic achievement was undermined by the fact that they were unable to multitask. This worked against them when they focused on one wrong thing such as alcohol or doing drugs.

Another finding was that some male students underachieved academically because they did not exercise self-control when engaging in a variety of socializing acts and they did not exercise self-discipline when they were required to choose between performing academic tasks and engaging in entertainment activities.

Consistent with some of parents' focus group discussion data that we discussed above, we learnt that because of employing **socialization laxity** some parents pampered male students and allowed them to do whatever they wished to do. As a consequence of this laxity, some male students learnt to behave in a 'layback' manner, did not manage their time well but wasted it on entertainment activities such as playing soccer and did not focus on education. All this led to such male students' underachievement in their studies.

With regards to *why more male students than female students took longer to graduate from Universities*, we gleaned from the sampled students responses that some male students took too long to graduate because they were not serious with their studies, they missed tests and assignments, they were not organized, they were not focused on education, and they engaged in too many non-educational activities such as trying to make money to support their families, girlfriends, children out of wedlock and businesses they engaged in as they studied.



It seems to us that the combination of disorganization, irresponsibility, and over-exerting oneself produced academic underachievement in some male students who underachieve. This interpretation is consistent with the finding that some male students did not mature early, goofed around and wasted their parents' money socializing instead of studying. As a consequence of this, they either took a long time to graduate or dropped out of universities all together.

From a university curriculum point of view, it was reported that some male students underachieved because they failed to cope with too crowded University programmes with too many modules, were forced by their families to study what they did not wish to study, took courses that were too hard for them and because they were forced by their sponsors to study courses that were too difficult for them. To us these problems could be ameliorated through revamped academic guidance and counselling that Deans of Students' offices and the Registrars' offices could offer at the universities.

Relating to families, it was reported that some male students underachieved at the university because they were encouraged by their families to start taking responsibility early as part of their training for assuming the role of 'head of household'. To encourage the male students to do this they were provided with insufficient money for upkeep by their families. To supplement the insufficient money, they took up part time jobs and /or ran businesses.

In addition, some male students underachieved because they were not financially supported by their parents as well as their sisters were. Due to this, they needed to work for money to support themselves at the Universities. In contrast, female students were financially supported adequately by their parents because they feared that if they did not do this, their daughters would compromise themselves and get money from either 'sugar daddies' or unscrupulous men "with strings attached". All this depends on the social-economic standing of families involved.

The universities' role here should be to mobilize resources from the private sector, academic foundations and other sources to finance the education of male and female students in need. In addition, government funding should, in an affirmative action fashion partly be disbursed according to the financial standing of male and female students. Those students from poverty-stricken families should be prioritized for financial support.

With regards to *how universities could support male students to perform better academically* we discerned from students' responses that male students' learning should be monitored more closely by lecturers. This would enable lecturers to identify male students with learning or other problems early and support them to work through their problems. In order to engage with their students, lecturers should use e-learning platforms at their universities to monitor their students' work and interact with them. This would enable lecturers to motivate their students and find out if they were having learning problems.

This suggestion would require that universities establish and use support groups and support programmes for male students. To effect this, lecturers should identify students who underachieve and work with them in support groups such as tutorials. In other words, universities should have remedial/ tutorial programmes for students who faced learning problems in their courses. In addition, they should establish mentorship programmes for male students. In such programmes, conferences and workshops could be organized to raise



awareness on the need to support male students' education and on coming up with effective strategies on how such support should be provided.

Teaching at the University level should engage all five senses through activity oriented teaching and through the use of a variety of teaching media and teaching technologies. Doing this would be advisable because male students learn better when such teaching strategies were in use. To augment this, universities should make their e-learning platforms accessible and user friendly to encourage male and female students study online with ease. Moreover, to enhance the academic achievement of male students, universities should reduce the number of modules they are required to take. This could be done by ensuring that the curricular were not inundated with similar modules. This means that duplication of subject content should be avoided as much as possible.

Another essential suggestion is that the social-emotional domain should be employed to enhance male students' academic achievement. This means that male students should be empowered in psychosocial programmes where their self-esteem could be developed and maintained. In such programmes, male students could be warned about the consequences of their academic underachievement and its implications on their future lives and professional careers. To cement this, universities would, in collaboration with NGOs, faith based organizations and gender-based government entities, establish and operate empowerment programmes for male students. Such programmes would promote gender equity in education and highlight both female and male student educational support challenges and their ameliorative strategies.

To strengthen such programmes, the word of God should be used to guide male students about what was expected of them not only in education but in life as well. This would be particularly wise when making decisions about what was right and what was wrong at home and in school.

On the issue of *resources needed to enhance the learning of male university students*, we surmised from students' responses that universities should establish multipurpose/multidisciplinary learning centres where all students, including male students could learn a variety of things. Such learning centres could house internet resources, writing clinics and other resources that could encourage students to acquire learning how to learn skills.

In addition, at such centres universities should provide counselling services tailored to the needs of male students. Professionals such as male therapists, psychologists and social workers could be deployed by universities to guide and counsel male students on their studies and career aspirations. This would be important because male students are more comfortable to talk to other males.

Another resource initiative would be on mobilizing the mass media in the form of public television, radio, print media and social media to broadcast educational, motivational and inspirational messages that would promote male students' education. Universities should facilitate the preparation and broadcasting of such messages. To build on this universities could help communities to put up billboards for motivating and inspiring male students to excel in their studies. Such billboards could carry educational messages that would inspire male students to work hard at acquiring competencies for use in their future career and professional lives.



On suggestions students had regarding how male students could be supported by universities, lecturers and communities in order to improve their academic achievement, we distilled a number of messages. Firstly, it was affirmed that universities should have guidance and counselling programmes that would encourage male students to focus on education and not drop out from universities to get jobs that did not require much education. Such programmes should instil in the young men the value of education and why it was important to be educated in the modern world. Young men should be weaned from the belief that they were entitled to jobs, social and leadership positions just because they were men.

Secondly, since a number of male students underachieve because of poverty, universities should mobilize material support for less privileged male students. This could include sourcing beds, mattresses, study materials, reading and writing study tables, solar-powered reading lamps, laptops and other basic provisions from the private sector and distribute them amongst male students who live in poverty-stricken informal settlements. It was further suggested that to support the education of male students under financial strain, universities should source scholarships for them from different kinds of donors such as philanthropic educational foundations, UN agencies on education (e.g. UNICEF and UNESCO), the Africa Development Bank and the World Bank.

Thirdly, as was pointed out in the literature review section, some male students underachieve because they are provided with educational services of low quality. To remove this barrier to academic achievement, sampled students proposed that universities should employ competent and inspirational lecturers. Not only should such lecturers be inspirational in their teaching, they should also understand their subject matter. To ensure that this takes place, Universities should recruit competent and knowledgeable lecturers.

Fourthly, it was also suggested that the adage that ‘if you educate a woman, you educate the nation’ should be complemented by the adage that ‘if you educate men and women, you educate the *entire* nation’. This change would communicate to male students the message that their achievement in education is as valuable to society as that of their female counterparts.

Fifthly, to provide male students with community male role models of repute, it was suggested that men should not be given leadership positions if they did not qualify to hold them. This should be done to prevent the spirit of entitlement developing in the male students. This would motivate and inspire male students to work hard at the universities- especially when they see that *qualified* people, including women get the leadership positions. The point here is that occupational, academic, political and social positions earned on *merit* would be more of a source of inspiration to male mentees than those which are obtained through graft and other forms of corruption.

Sixthly, parents as members of the community should regularly monitor the academic records of their sons at the Universities to ensure that they were in fact focused on education. They should not wait until their sons dropped out of the universities.



RECOMMENDED INTERVENTIONS

In this section, we base the recommended interventions on the purpose of the research project, the literature review we used to understand and clarify the research problem, the theoretical framework, the research findings we obtained and their discussion. We shall do this in three steps. In step one, we shall anchor the recommended interventions to the main objective of the research project and to principles of the interventions. In step two, we shall draw from the study general interventions that will provide a framework for enhancing male learners'/students' academic achievement in school and at tertiary education institutions. In step three, we shall propose specific recommended interventions. These will include educational policy-related interventions, school-based interventions, teacher support interventions, learner-focused interventions, parent-focused interventions, community-focussed interventions, university-based interventions and other educational stakeholder-based interventions.

1. Linking recommended interventions to the main objective of the research project and basing them on principles of gender equality in education discourse

What provoked our interest to undertake the research project was the observation that a substantial number of Namibian male learners/students performed worse than female learners/students in school and at tertiary educational institutions for more than three decades without being paid attention to at the National and Regional levels. To support this observation, we provided some policy-related documented evidence earlier in this report that showed that over the years, Namibia has had more nuanced targeted focus on girls' education than on boys' education. To some degree, this focus currently prevails not only in Namibia but in the world as a whole (UNESCO, 2020).

Among other things, one main aim of our study was to raise awareness in the country about Namibian boys' underachievement in education, seek evidence from learners, teachers, parents, University lecturers and University and VTC students about why this was the case and use the evidence for planning how to ameliorate the situation.

The significance of the intervention initiatives that were intended to be the main outcome of the study was to include preventing boys from dropping out of school early, promoting the retention of boys in school, increasing the boys' survival rates in school, reducing the boys' repetition rates and providing support to boys in order to enhance the quality of their educational attainments. Ultimately, the main benefit of the study was expected to be that of promoting the improvement of quality of education in Namibia.

The recommended interventions that we provide in this section are based on the evidence from the search process and from research findings we have presented and discussed above.

In terms of basing the recommended interventions on gender equality in education discourse, the research has produced research findings that provide evidence for a paradigm shift in understanding gender and education in Namibia. The evidence requires the country to shift the focus from understanding gender disparity in education in favour of girls to gender parity in education for the good of **both** girls and boys. This can be done by developing specific programmes consistent with the expressed gaps in educational approaches pertaining to boys' education as expressed by various stakeholders in this study.



At theoretical and practical levels, this study's research findings give voice to an apparent backlash of gender disparity initiatives in education. Some findings of this study communicate the message that in Namibia, the gender-based initiatives to increase access to education and improve the quality of educational attainments amongst all learners seemed to have bypassed and continue to bypass many boys who underachieve in education and in some cases drop out of the educational system all together. We provide recommended interventions in this section of the report to highlight the social-economic dangers of ignoring this backlash and the importance of putting in place mechanisms of ameliorating it to promote gender balanced social-economic development.

As covered in the literature review, four other principles on which to further base the general recommended interventions are as follows:

Firstly, in our view, we should not use statistics on boys' underachievement in education that we provided in the background of this report as justification for claiming that the boy child has become a victim of unfair treatment in the educational system. However, the statistics should be used to communicate the message that because the boy child is underperforming and under-participating in education, he needs policy support and other support in the form of ameliorative strategies which when applied in schools and other educational institutions would enhance his academic achievement (Mills, et al., 2007; Golding, 2010). In other words, we should conceive boys' underachievement in education in the context of learning outcomes from schooling and not necessarily in the context of equality between boys and girls (Lingard, 2003). Emanating from this, is the principle that the education system needs to "develop pedagogical practices which meet the needs of boys as well as those of girls" (Mills, 2003). This is partly the focus of the recommended interventions that we shall cover in this section.

Secondly, according to (Dweck, 2017), schools should let students (including boys) who underachieve to adopt a 'growth mind set' in which they base their achievement on effort, hard work, and love for learning new things (i.e. wish to become better and not stagnate). Schools should be places where every student is encouraged to excel, become the best they can be and where their abilities are recognized and valued. They should be places where students take charge of their own learning, motivation and commitment by focusing on *understanding* and being interested in subject matter they are exposed to. In addition, schools should be institutions at which *students are not given up* but places where they are driven by their love for learning, curiosity and challenge. Moreover, by providing students who underachieve a network of support constituting parents, teachers, fellow students and members of the community, schools should provide conditions of learning that inspire, motivate, challenge and promote curiosity.

By ascribing all these insights to Dweck (2017), we acknowledge that all children, including boys who underachieve in education, can learn and realize their potential to make a contribution to society. A number of recommended initiatives that we shall provide below shall draw from this principled gender nuanced position.

Thirdly, the focus on boys' education should not *homogenize* boys' and girls' academic performance in school but focus on boys who underperform and girls who underperform. In addition, it should focus on sources of differences in performance such as those of social-



economic status, poverty and socialization (i.e., upbringing). This would be important to do because *not all* boys perform worse than *all* girls and *not all* girls perform better than *all* boys (Mills, et al., 2007). As was presented in the results section, issues of poverty and socialization implicate both boys' and girls' underachievement in education. We present a number of recommended initiatives below that speak to the impact of socialization on some boys' underachievement in education.

Fourthly, the focus on boys' education should not create the impression that women and girls are no longer discriminated against in some educational settings. It should however, acknowledge that there are aspects of the educational system that may be construed to cause men and boys experience disadvantaging discrimination because of their gender (Mill, et al., 2007). Our view is that the failure to recognize factors that promote boys' underachievement in education constitute some form of discrimination against them and educational neglect of their needs, concerns, problems and challenges. We later in this section provide some recommended initiatives to mitigate factors that may influence some boys' underachievement in education.

2. General recommended interventions that provide a framework for enhancing male learners'/students' academic achievement in school and at tertiary education institutions.

2.1 Creating national awareness on male learner/male student underachievement and under-participation in education.

As indicated in the literature review, when we reviewed Namibian education policies that appeared to cover the needs of all learners equally, we discovered that they, in addition, targeted the girl child and not the boy child for special support. For instance, whereas the *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalized Children (2000)* among other things, singled out the girl child as one of the vulnerable children to be provided with targeted educational support, the *Education Sector policy on Inclusive Education (2013)* also identified the girl child as one of the vulnerable and marginalized children to be provided with targeted educational support. Similarly, whereas the *Basic Education Act, 2020 (Act No. 3)* includes the issue of the prevention and management of learner pregnancy, the *5th National Development Plan (NDP5) (2017)* singled out girls and women for special support under its section on gender equality.

Moreover, *Namibia Vision2030: Policy Framework for Long Term National Development (2004, p.52)* identified the girl child as a recipient of targeted support so that by the year 2030 "girls remain in school as long as boys, and girls and women are participating equally in the fields of science and technology".

The point we are making by pointing out that the girl child was *specifically* paid attention to in these policy documents is that it would not be out of the ordinary to ask that the boy child, due to his identified concerns, needs and peculiar challenges, should also be made a subject of targeted support in Namibia's educational policy goals and objectives. This position would be consistent with Namibia's practice of designing educational policies for children requiring targeted attention. For instance, over the years, Namibia designed and implemented the *National Policy on HIV/AIDS for the Education Sector (2003)* and the *Education Sector Policy for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (2008)*.



We raise this matter knowing that the boy child underachievement in education issue has not yet risen to widespread public concern in Namibia because the focus on girls' issues has not yet waned and because the focus on girls still attracts funding and international moral and political support. However, it is partly because of this *that we strongly recommend* that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should highlight and create awareness on boys' education and assuage fears of those who think that the process of mitigating boys' underachievement in education would undermine girls' gains in education (Yates, 1997; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). We also make this appeal because our data revealed that several teachers we interviewed and interacted with during field work were unaware that in comparison to female learners, several male learners in their schools were seriously underperforming and in some cases, dropping out of school. Several teachers were also unaware of Namibia's educational policies related to gender in education. Notwithstanding this, we wish to point out that whereas women and women's organizations played a crucial role in raising awareness about threats to the education of the girl-child, the future will require men who are committed to running with the agenda of the boy-child and ensure that gender parity in education is achieved.

2.2 Reframing the Namibian boy child's socialization and education nexus.

The focus group discussion data from learners, teachers, parents and university students that we have presented and discussed have revealed a strong relationship between some boys' academic underachievement and modes of their socialization. Although we shall provide specific recommended initiatives on this later on in this section, we wish to offer the following broad suggested initiatives as gleaned from parents' focus group discussion data.

The first initiative is on explaining/reframing boys' apparent future cultural role of head of the household. Here, boys' socialization as preparation of a life of service to one's family and one's community should include education as a major ingredient. Because of this, boys should be urged that culturally, they were heads-of-the households to be. In the modern world, to perform this role adequately in future, they needed to remain in school and be educated. This would be important for them to do because the role entails responsibilities and duties. In addition, they must be informed that in future, it shall be their duty to promote and guarantee the welfare and wellbeing of their families in the households. They shall be required to provide shelter, food, health, education, protection and security to their families. Culturally, this is what boys are expected to become as viable members of their communities.

The second broad recommended initiative pertains to cultural metaphors in the education of some boys who academically underachieve in education. One such metaphor is on multiple teachers of culture. In this metaphor, the understanding is that there exist several teachers of culture from which boys can either be supported to remain in school or discouraged to focus on education. Such teachers of culture are parents, schools and teachers, friends, social media, the internet, the mass media, television, movies, music and the church as a teacher of culture.

Our recommendation is that it is essential to appraise the positive and negative lessons boys might learn from the various multiple teachers of culture before putting in place interventions for supporting them to remain in school. Because the African culture is either completely lost or diluted to a point where it is not useful, communities and schools should *reframe, adapt and transform* the various teachers of culture into unified and coherent beliefs, values and practices before they can be used to support boys' education.



The third general recommended initiative is on what teachers referred to as *parents' laxity over boys' socialization that may promote their underachievement in education*. Several parents allowed their sons freedom to 'roam around' unhindered by any restraint. Our recommendation is that to enhance their academic achievement in school, boys should be more firmly disciplined, monitored, supervised, guided and taught what to do by their parents, especially fathers, during socialization.

2.3 Taking an ecological developmental systems approach when enhancing boys' academic achievement.

As we described in more detail in the literature review section, based on the social cognitive developmental perspective, we used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach to anchor the study to the understanding that as developing persons, boys derive their developmental impetus and support from a variety of social contextual systems (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). In a concentric fashion, these systems envelope different social contextual 'ecologies' or environments that influence the boy child's (or girl child's) developmental, learning and academic achievement resources of support. We shall use the boy child's circles or networks of support idea when recommending specific initiatives meant to enhance his academic achievement.

3. Specific recommended interventions

It should be noted that in each section of this report, the reader would find many suggested interventions to enhance the boy child's academic achievement. Because we cannot capture all of them in this section, we advise that the reader looking for ideas to implement should feel free to source them from any part of this report. This means that in this section we shall merely highlight some core recommended interventions that we have deemed critical in the process of improving the academic achievement of some boys who underperform in educational institutions.

3.1 Educational policy-related recommended interventions

Our goal under this heading is to propose interventions aimed at reorienting, reviewing, reinterpreting, updating and transforming national educational policies to ensure that they include, attend to and focus on the boy child's existential educational concerns, challenges and needs. The objective of doing this is to let the policies reflect and acknowledge the changed circumstances of boys in the educational system and recognize their need for help. In other words, the proposed interventions are intended to create a policy and conceptual framework within which to cater for and support boys who underachieve in education. With this in mind, we offer the following policy-related recommended interventions:

3.1.1 To create an enabling educational environment for promoting and enhancing Namibian boys' educational performance, global, continental, regional and national educational-related conventions, instruments and policies should be reoriented, reinterpreted, reviewed, updated, and implemented in ways that take into account, attend to and recognize the boys' academic underachievement, under-participation in education, learning support deficits, concerns and challenges.

Whereas at the global level, examples of the educational policy documents to be reoriented, reviewed and reinterpreted are the *Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Sustainable*



Development Goals 4 and 5, at the continental level, the example of the policy instrument is the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, the *SADC Gender Protocol Barometer of 2018* instantiates the regional level educational related instrument.

Examples of educational policies to be reoriented and reinterpreted at the national level are *the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015)*, *Child Care and Protection Act of 2015*, *Basic Education Act, 2020 (Act No. 3)*, *5th National Development Plan (NDP5) (2017)*, *Education Sector policy on Inclusive Education (2013)*, *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalized Children (2000)*, *Namibia Vision2030: Policy Framework for Long Term National Development (2004)* and the *Namibian Constitution, Chapter 20 (1990)*.

We strongly recommend that the process of educational policy reorientation, reinterpretation and review to take into account and attend to Namibian Boys' underachievement and under-participation in education shall be spearheaded by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Innovation in collaboration and partnership with the National Council for Higher Education, Tertiary Education Institutions, Teachers' Unions and other national and international educational stakeholders.

3.1.2 Based on the data we obtained from sampled secondary school learners, ***we strongly recommend that*** in reviewing educational policies to adequately accommodate boys' issues and concerns, learner educational support programmes for both boys and girls should be put in place. This means that educational support movements, organizations and governmental educational structures at all levels should, in partnership and collaboration, implement such programmes in a manner that ensures boys' participation and involvement. Moreover, such educational policy review should solicit parents' informed involvement and participation and cover vocational education streams of specialization to engage boys in practical-oriented empowerment.

3.1.3 Endorsing one of the sampled teachers' suggestions, ***we recommend*** that a variety of educational policy reorientation, reinterpretation and review tasks and activities could be undertaken in educational programmes targeting the boy child. These could include establishing after school initiatives and other initiatives to empower, inspire and counsel boys who underachieve to, from an early age, be serious in school, stay in and work hard in school, discouraging them from dropping out of school to engage in casual manual labour, become security guards, become taxi drivers, etc.; and establishing clubs and community based projects whose main objective would be to encourage boys to pay attention in school, focus on education and not be distracted by activities that are irrelevant to education, activities such as alcohol and drug abuse, goofing around, gang violence and crime.

3.1.4 ***We strongly recommend*** that an educational policy review should be instituted to highlight specific boys' educational issues and concerns. This should be so, according to sampled teachers, because existing gender policies in education are implemented in a manner that appears to discriminate against boys. Boys appear to be overlooked, neglected, not focused on and not attended to in the policies. To ameliorate the situation, current youth programmes such as *“Teen Agers against Drugs and Alcohol (TADA)* should include specific focus on boys underachievement in school. In addition, any policy review intended to enhance boys' academic achievement should emphasize vocational training for increased industrial growth in Namibia. To do this, as a policy issue, vocational training for boys who prefer hands on experiential learning should be accentuated.



In addition, to take into account their propensity to learn from practical experience, we recommend that the policy review on boys' education should include learning out of school in industry, factories, on farms, construction sites, adult learning centres, in markets, shops, fishing boats, etc. (Golding, 2010). Such practical learning would form a valuable link between school and the world of work for boys.

3.1.5 An educational policy intervention from the Namibian cultural perspective was suggested by some sampled teachers in focus group discussions. This was described as follows:

“ In the past, we had ‘Oshinyanga’ (i.e.a family gathering around the fire where issues were discussed) at family level- where boys were educated and shaped by the male members of the family and girls by the female members. Schools should respond to the gaps in society.”

We recommend that the *Oshinyanga* concept should be applied in the policy review to enhance boys' academic achievement by including and capturing the idea of teaching and learning in the family and the community. This would focus on the role of the family and the community in raising boys who ascribe to virtues of respect, usefulness, service, helpfulness, kindness, cooperation, communalism, cooperate responsibility and care.

3.1.6 Because according to our findings, possible causes of boys' underachievement in education are multifaceted, *we strongly recommend* that the educational policy reorientation and review pertaining to such underachievement should focus on redressing negative effects of poverty, marginalization, lack of access to educational opportunities, resources and materials, rurality, remoteness, drought, lack of shelter, poor sanitation, lack of amenities of various kinds, hunger, lack of transport to and from school, alcohol and drug abuse, peer pressure, family instability, lack of affirming role models, etc. (Lingard, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

3.1.7 Related to recommendation 3.1.6, *we strongly recommend that* the policy reorientation and review on boys' education should aim at empowering civil society, faith based organizations, teacher unions, government agencies, partner organizations (e, g, UN, the Private sector,), etc., to advocate for boys' education.

3.2 School-based interventions

According to UN (2021, p. 34), “COVID-19 has wreaked havoc worldwide on children's learning and well-being. Before the pandemic, progress in education was already too slow to achieve Goal 4 by 2030. One year into the crisis, two in three students were still affected by full or partial school closures. **One hundred million more children than before fail to demonstrate basic reading skills** (emphasis added)..... Many risk never returning to school; some are forced into child marriage or child labour. Special efforts are required to recover learning losses caused by COVID-19”.

We interpret this crisis to implicate learners in Namibia where teaching and learning have been and continue to be adversely affected by COVID- 19. Based on this research report, we expect many learners who fail to demonstrate basic reading skills to be boys. It is in this crisis-filled context that we propose recommendations that follow on how schools should support the learning of Namibian boys who academically underachieve and under-participate in education.

3.2.1 Some of the data we obtained from secondary school learners, teachers, parents and university students indicated that girls academically performed better than boys because they



were more willing to learn, worked harder, cared about their academic achievement, were self-disciplined, self-controlled and motivated to learn.

Reframing this difference in academic performance, Sax (2016), suggested that to support boys who underachieve in education, schools should recognize that they learn differently from girls. For instance, consistent with our findings, Sax (2016) states that girls are more likely to share common aims and values with adults, more likely to listen to instruction and do what they are asked to do, see things from the perspective of adults, wish to please teachers, try harder and care about the quality of their work. In addition, girls tend to be self-disciplined and self-controlled. However, several boys, in general, do not display these dispositions. Instead, many of them are inspired to learn when they are provided with experiential and theoretical knowledge.

To avoid impairing their ‘curiosity for learning’, we strongly recommend that schools should provide boys with a balance between experiential and theoretical knowledge. In such a context, schools should provide ‘boy friendly’ learning environments where boys are welcome, free to be their authentic selves (Cox, 2018) and where they are provided with space to play, compete and thrive without feeling embarrassed, humiliated and slighted due to failure at learning tasks.

3.2.2 Based on sampled secondary school learners’ focus group discussion research findings, we strongly recommend that schools should provide learning and socio-emotional counselling services to boys who need them and create programmes to combat alcohol and drug abuse amongst learners in general and amongst boys who underachieve in education in particular. This could be done by reactivating the *teenagers against drugs and alcohol (TADA)* programmes that were run by learners in several schools in the past. Life Science teachers could be patrons for such programmes.

In addition, schools should show concern for boys who underachieve in education by treating them with understanding, fairness and by addressing their learning concerns and challenges in a responsive, warm, caring and nurturing manner. This would enable such boys to feel valued by teachers and schools. Schools could implement this recommendation by forming learning groups for boys and establishing boys’ clubs whose main purpose would be the promotion of boys’ education and interests. Moreover, to pre-empt situations where teachers in school become hostile to some boys because of their impudence, impertinent, insolence, uncooperativeness and stubbornness, we suggest that pre-and in-service teacher preparation programmes at tertiary education institutions should sensitize and instil in teachers caring and nurturing attitudes towards boys who underachieve in education. Classroom management strategies that include ways of working with boys should be highlighted in the teacher preparation programmes.

3.2.3 From the sampled teachers’ point of view, some boys underachieve because they withdraw from participating in learning events by being ‘invisible’ in schools and classrooms. We recommend that to increase their visibility, schools should make every effort to recognize the presence and achievement of boys in learning environments. They could do this by using activities that have boys highlighted and stand out in science, computers, reading and in sport. Moreover, boys’ visibility could be increased by making their issues such as underachievement in education topical and discussed at schools. In addition, boys should be enabled to lead organizations such as the SRC and boys’ clubs in which the importance of education would be promoted.



All this would counteract the tendency of stereotyping boys in school as individuals who are ill-disciplined and labelled as those with behavioural problems just because they are boys. This stereotype should be refrained from because it is used by some teachers to pick on boys and blame them of acts they might not be responsible for. Refraining from this stereotype would also prevent boys who underachieve from being unjustly treated because they are boys.

3.2.4 From a Namibian cultural perspective, we strongly recommend sampled teachers' suggestion that schools should provide community-based Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) type of vocation training in areas such as wood carving and furniture production, basket making, tailoring, music and dance, healing using locally available medicinal herbs, etc. This kind of training would expose boys to survival skills of various kinds, team work and discipline. This would be the case because to work with wood, grass and herbs for instance, they would need to go into the bush, camp and collect raw materials.

3.2.5 According to sampled teachers, an integrated whole school approach is required to support boys' education. We strongly recommend that to encourage teachers to work as teams when supporting boys' education, schools at the regional level, should organize workshops, seminars and Webinars to empower them to do this.

3.2.6 According to some of the data from sampled secondary school learners and sampled secondary school teachers, some schools undermined learners' (including boys') academic achievement by providing environments that were not conducive to learning but promoted poor quality education. For instance, it was reported that in some of such environments alcohol and drug abuse existed without restraint and some unhealthy sexual relationships took place. In addition, it was reported that in some cases, Cuca shops were located near schools which encouraged boys' indulgence in alcohol and other vices.

All this goes against Diprete and Buchmann (2013)'s advice that to enhance the academic performance of boys who underachieve, schools which they attend should be of high quality. According to them, poor quality schools diminish the academic performance of all learners. In order for schools to improve in their overall performance, they should work out ways of enhancing the performance of all learners, including all boys. In supporting this advice, ***we strongly recommend*** that schools should put in place programmes that deal with learning barriers that boys face such as negative peer pressure, alcohol and drug abuse and dysfunctional views of masculinity (i.e. what it means to be a man).

Moreover, in addition to employing teachers of high quality and creating learning-oriented peer cultures, ***we strongly recommend*** that schools should develop student bodies that are highly motivated and achievement-oriented. This implies creating school learning environments that prize academic achievement as a source of high status in peer group circles.

3.2.7 In agreement with Whitmire (2010), ***we strongly recommend*** that the goal of schools should be to support boys who underachieve in education to improve in their academic attainments. It should not be to produce gender equality/parity between boys and girls. Instead, the focus should be on recognizing that when quality of education improves at a school, it improves for all learners, including boys. According to Whitmire (2010, p. 132)



“when you refuse to let even a single student to slide by, you end up helping boys the most because the boys are the big sliders”.

Our recommendation here is also consistent with Riechert’s and Hawley’s (2010) position that because children are not generic, you cannot have ‘a one size fits all’ approach when catering for the distinctive needs of boys who underachieve in education. Instead, schools should employ the ‘Help One Student to Succeed’ –HOST- approach as a responsive mentoring and tutoring approach in areas where boys have learning difficulties.

3.2.8 One main finding of this study, according to sampled learners, teachers and parents is that some boys who underachieve do so because they goof around, are not focused on education, do not work hard, are lazy, are given freedom by their parents to aimlessly roam around, are not interested in school, do not actively participate in performing household chores at home, do not actively participate in their classes and frequently absent themselves from school. To us such boys partly underachieve because they do not engage in meaningful work either at home or at school.

According to Cox (2018), to foster maturity in boys, they must be taught to work with their hands, taught skills to accomplish *meaningful tasks* and taught interesting new things. To him, the “school needs to be infused and driven by the spirit of vocation” (Cox, 2018, p.96). We agree with Cox’s view and *strongly recommend* that schools should promote learning by *doing* and learning by *doing useful things*. For instance, boys should be given opportunities of doing things by being of service to others in school, in the family and in the community. This is consistent with Samuels’s (2019, p. 108) assertion that “man’s meaning (over the centuries) has come from *doing*” and that work is “the most obvious way to seek some sort of meaning in life”.

Another important finding of our study that relates to doing meaningful work is that some boys underachieve in education because they waste a lot of time socializing with their friends, goofing around and playing. They procrastinate and lazy around. They appear not to be in a hurry to accomplish any meaningful task.

In agreeing with Cox (2018) *we strongly recommend* that schools should develop qualities of *URGENCY and NECESSITY* in boys in order to enable them to value learning and thereby enhance their academic achievement. *Urgency and necessity* promote the development of the feeling that something important needs to be accomplished right away. As we proposed in the literature review, to develop the desire in boys not to procrastinate in doing the needful and to serve others, schools should facilitate the establishment of service clubs such as the Red Cross Club, Nutrition Club to distribute food amongst the poor in the community, cleaning school yards, helping parents build chicken runs, caring for livestock, buying groceries, changing car tyres, washing cars and growing vegetables, among other activities.

3.3 Teacher support interventions

As we reported in the results section, sampled parents expressed the view that schools that their sons attended had good teachers who helped their sons learn. Teachers themselves affirmed that they were supportive of boys’ education when they reported that except for boys not seeking support when they needed it, they did not act partially when providing learning support to both boys and girls.



This was inconsistent with what learners reported when they indicated that some teachers in a number of schools were not supportive but hostile to boys. Given this situation, as earlier reported and discussed, we obtained suggestions from learners, teachers and the literature review on what teachers could do to support the education of boys who academically underachieve. We capture the gist of some of those suggestions in the recommended interventions that follow.

3.3.1 Based on what learners reported, we ***strongly recommend*** that teachers should be concerned about boys who underachieve in education and pay attention to their needs and challenges as the school system tended to overlook these boys' needs and challenges. In addition, teachers should manage classrooms in ways that encourage all learners, including boys, to be disciplined and learn. They should counsel boys with learning and emotional problems and partner with parents in acting as positive role models for them.

3.3.2 We ***strongly recommend*** that after identifying learning problems boys who underachieve experience, teachers should ensure that such boys took their school work seriously. This should be done by holding them accountable if they did not submit their homework, by letting them see the importance of education in their lives, by following up tasks given to them, by ensuring that they were on task, by monitoring and seeing that they were learning and doing what they were expected to do. For all this to happen, boys who underachieve should be required to be physically and mentally present in classes. This means that teachers should ensure that such boys were *mentally* present and engaged by conversing with them, counselling and guiding them. All this should be done in the context of peace and calm as it is difficult to support the learning of boys who are in-disciplined.

3.3.3 Related to recommendation 3.3.2, we ***strongly recommend*** that teachers should encourage boys who underachieve to actively participate in learning activities. We recommend this knowing that a number of barriers to learning made it very difficult for teachers to encourage boys who academically underachieved to get involved and participate in learning. Some of these were boys' unwillingness to participate in class, boys' un-eagerness to ask questions when they did not understand in class and boys' uneasiness in class and in school because they seemed to be forced to come to school. In addition, some boys who underachieved seemed to be always angry, quiet, uncooperative, did not wish to be bothered and appeared to have given up.

3.3.4 We ***strongly recommend*** that instead of giving up on boys who seem to have surrendered and given up, teachers should be alert to and pay attention to them. Teachers could do this by providing boys with specific opportunities to participate in class. This could include giving them opportunities to take charge and lead class learning groups and by ensuring that they were not bullied/intimidated into silence by those (e.g., girls or other boys) who performed better than them. All this would enable such boys to become responsible and enhance their recognition as valuable members of their classrooms. In addition, this stance would prevent them from retreating or withdrawing from participating in learning activities.

3.3.5 We ***strongly recommend*** that teachers should genuinely interact with boys who underachieve. Cordial relationships between boys and their teachers is important because boys open up and participate in classes taught by teachers who are responsive to their issues and needs. Their participation in class depends on the manner in which they are treated by teachers. To exercise good relations, teachers are urged to promptly resolve any misunderstanding they might have with any boys, create rapport with all of them, be in good terms with them and not neglect any of them in teaching and in their interaction with all



learners in their classes. Their interaction with boys should focus on building them up through academic guidance and advice. It should not focus on blame, shaming and emotional abuse- tendencies sampled learners reported a number of teachers exhibited. Instead, teachers should mind the language they used when communicating with boys. They should not ridicule, shame, embarrass, disgrace and belittle them in front of their peers. Instead, teachers should demonstrate care and concern for these boys when they communicate with them.

3.3.6 We ***strongly recommend*** the establishment of ‘boy friendly learning environments’ (Sax, 2016) in which boys are welcomed, recognized, included, involved and invited to actively participate. To support boys’ learning, teachers should, in practice, promote the functioning of such learning environments by encouraging boys to “read more, listen and attend more to teachers and to other pupils, work harder and take more pride in their work, work collaboratively and articulate themselves better in all aspects of communication” (Francis and Skelton, 2005 as cited in Martino and Kehler, 2007, p. 424). Doing this would inhibit boys who underachieve from lazing around, working alone, and from not caring about their academic achievement- tendencies sampled teachers and learners reported these boys exhibit.

3.3.7 Based on the work of Dweck (2017) and on this study’s finding that boys who underachieve do not care about their academic achievement, are not motivated to learn and absent themselves from learning, ***we strongly recommend*** that teachers should believe in the *growth* of the intellect in all students, *including boys* and be fascinated about the process of learning that students can demonstrate and display. The growth of the intellect can be shown by individual students when they understand the subject matter they are exposed to and when they discover new ways of solving problems and when they discover new things.

Teachers would promote the growth of the intellect by setting high standards for all their students in a *challenging and nurturing atmosphere* where they should express genuine affection, care, and concern for all their students; be warm to, accepting, and trusting of all their students as they believe that all of them can improve, learn and grow; create a ‘disciplined’ learning environment in which they would treat all students as people worthy of their deep personal commitment.

To help students who underachieve to learn and improve, teachers themselves, must be eager to continuously learn about the students and about the subject matter they teach. They should always be curious, fascinated, and eager to discover new things and be willing to grow. To mentor intellectual growth, teachers should be interested in learning and growing in all spheres of life.

3.4 Learner-focused interventions

One of the main focus of this study was to find out why a substantial number of secondary school girls performed better than secondary school boys and why such boys underachieved in education. We looked at some boys’ beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that undermined their academic achievement. In addition, we considered how schools’ learning and teaching practices and social-emotional resources could be changed to enhance some boys’ academic achievement. As presented in the literature review, results and discussion sections of this report, we obtained and discussed findings on these matters from sampled learners and sampled teachers. Based on those findings, we propose the following learner-focused interventions.



3.4.1 According to sampled learners and sampled teachers, some Namibian boys performed worse than girls because they distracted themselves from school work, withdrew from learning activities, engaged in self-destructive behaviour, believed they could do without education and because they were not interested in education as it was boring to them. In addition, some boys under-participated in education because they dropped out of school, did not take advantage of psychosocial programmes that were organized to promote their participation in education, and did not actively participate in learning activities.

All this seems to express their self-imposed exclusion from educational activities organized by schools.

To ameliorate this situation, ***we strongly recommend*** that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should design and implement a targeted programme for boys who underachieve in their studies. This programme should be aimed at motivating these learners to learn, encouraging them to participate in learning activities, include them in all aspects of school life, enable them to value education and prevent some of them from dropping out of primary and secondary schools. Educational Regional Directorates should be enabled, resourced and empowered to concretely implement this programme in primary and secondary schools.

3.4.2 As presented in the discussion section, the majority of sampled learners agreed that some boys underachieved in education because they spent less time on academic activities, preferred to work in isolation, were not eager to share academic information, did not care about their academic achievement, and they were less concerned about their future.

In light of this, ***we strongly recommend*** that tertiary education teacher preparation institutions in collaboration with Regional Educational Directorates, NIED and other education provision stakeholders, should organize decentralized in-service online school and classroom management seminars, workshops and meetings to empower primary and secondary school teachers on how to reach and teach boys who apply learning strategies which are prone to promote academic underachievement and failure in learning.

3.4.3 To recognise fellow learners of boys who academically underperform in school as a valuable teaching and learning resource, ***we strongly recommend*** that primary and secondary school classrooms in the country should be strengthened and transformed into communities of learners who work and study together to promote quality education for all learners, including boys who underachieve. In such classrooms all learners would be encouraged to actively participate in learning activities, share learning problems with fellow learners and accept assistance (including peer academic support in the form of peer counselling) from them when needed and share learning materials. Acting as families, such learning communities should work in collaboration with teachers and parents.

3.4.4 ***We strongly recommend*** that to enhance boys' academic achievement, primary and secondary school teachers should use learner-centred methods by basing their lessons on boys' interests in sport and cars and on relating school work to their physical and social reality. This is that to make education authentic to boys, teachers should relate what they teach to what happens at home and in their social and physical surroundings. Doing this is important because boys easily 'switch off' in class when they are forced to learn material that is overly theoretical and far removed from their experiences. In addition, because boys love technological gadgets, teachers should use electronic media and e-learning strategies when



teaching them. Examples of electronic media that could be used include video cameras, power point projectors, Smart phones, laptops, digital cameras, Smart boards and other types of teaching technologies. Examples of instructional e-learning platforms which could be used are zoom, google meet, video conferencing, Moodle, etc.

3.4.5 *We strongly recommend* that a variety of ‘boys only’ initiatives should be put in place at schools to enhance the academic achievement of boys. For instance, after school activities for ‘boys’ only should be established to enable them to open up and air their views freely without pressure of appearing stupid in front of girls. In addition, doing this may motivate boys to open up and use the after school initiatives as a form of psychosocial support. Similarly, subject specific ‘boys only’ holiday classes could be formed to focus on the enhancement of boys’ academic achievement. In addition to such classes, we strongly recommend that issues pertinent to boys’ academic achievement should be highlighted in the curriculum. For instance, alcohol and drug abuse could be highlighted in Life Skills, Guidance and Counselling, English and in Biology with the view of explaining how the abuse interferes with boys’ and girls’ academic achievement.

3.4.6 According to Diprete and Buchmann (2013), the nature of the student body of a school affects student’s academic orientation and academic performance. This is the case because when the adolescent culture rewards academic performance, students are motivated to invest in their studies to gain status with their peers and to please significant others such as parents and teachers. The converse of this is that when the adolescent culture values non-academic outcomes more highly (e.g. sport, popularity or opposition to school authority) “and especially when the adolescent culture denigrates academic achievement, it draws energy away from students’ academic achievement. Simply put, a highly motivated, achievement-oriented student body creates a learning-oriented peer culture” (Diprete and Buchmann, 2013, p.168).

Given this understanding *we strongly recommend* that Namibian primary and secondary schools should promote the formation of student bodies whose peer cultures are learning-oriented. Such student bodies would enhance academic achievement of all learners, including boys who underachieve in education. In our view, school boards in Namibia should ensure that schools they oversee do not degenerate into institutions that breed alcohol and drug abuse, crime of various sorts, high failure rates, rampant disobedience, chaos, and high rates of school drop outs.

3.4.7 Adolescent peer cultures are not uniform but vary in their values. For instance, in schools where academic performance is prized and leads to status raising in the peer group, research has shown that boys compete more for high grades and school performance. However, in schools where this is not the case, some boys underachieve in education. Moreover, differences in academic performance between boys and girls are attenuated and considerably reduced in schools with higher average academic performance. One implication of this is that high quality education practised in an education institution leads to a reduction in academic achievement disparity between boys and girls. Because of this, *we strongly recommend* that schools in Namibia continue to promote high quality education by ensuring that teachers remain committed to high academic standards and by ensuring that their learners, including boys, are inspired to excel in education.



3.4.8 According to Cox (2018), research has shown that boys use the peer group as a source of their legitimation, status, attention, respect, and standing amongst their peers. Due to this, *we strongly recommend* that instead of attempting to obtain the attention of individual boys, teachers or parents should ‘capture’ the peer group by using performance in school as a source of high status and recognition. This could be done by raising a school’s image through academic performance. Notwithstanding this, teachers should encourage some boys who underachieve to detach themselves from dysfunctional peer groups if they wish to become their ‘own person (s)’ and academically achieve.

3.4.9 As presented in the discussion section, an overwhelming majority of sampled parents indicated that boys who underachieved were less motivated to work at school because they were NOT responsible, goal directed, aiming to achieve anything in life, interested in education, concerned about education, self-motivated, had negative attitudes towards education, did not challenge themselves, had no will power, were lazy, were uncooperative, and lacked understanding of the value of education.

In addition, they believed they could succeed in life and be rich without education, did not believe in the link between education and the acquisition of good things such as beautiful cars and believed in immediate gratification- a belief that did not encourage them to focus on education but on the immediate acquisition of good things and live good lives.

In practice, boys who underachieved in education did NOT take initiative, ask for help when they needed to, listen to teachers, cooperate with teachers, and they did NOT accept encouragement from teachers. Instead, they spent most of their time socializing, on social media, and abusing drugs and alcohol.

In the light of all this, *we strongly recommend* that schools should establish psychosocial programmes to promote boys’ academic intrinsic achievement motivation by addressing their dysfunctional motivational attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that have been delineated above. Such programmes should also attend to the boys’ adverse external motivational factors such as negative peer pressure and lack of supportive family environments. Moreover, boys who underachieve should be motivated to succeed by being enabled by schools and teachers to recognise the relevance, value, importance, necessity, and purpose of education in their lives. For this to happen, teachers should present educational tasks to boys who underachieve in inspiring, competent, attractive, interesting and humorous ways. In addition, teachers should coach, guide and scaffold such boys during instructional activities.

3.4.10 As presented in the discussion section, girls performed better than boys who underachieved because they worked harder as they took responsibility for their studies, were able to multi-task, stayed on school tasks, were focused, concentrated on their educational activities, understood the value of education, did not want to be embarrassed by failure but wanted to maintain good names and reputations by working hard, did not want to embarrass their parents by failing but wished to promote good family reputation and recognition.

Moreover, girls were more willing to learn than boys, listened to advice, readily followed teachers’ instructions and obeyed teachers, did not easily give up but persevered, took time to consult teachers when they did not understand, and were disciplined.

To us, girls who excelled in education complied with the educational set up while boys who underachieved either withdrew from it or rebelled against it. Due to all this, *we strongly recommend* that to support boys’ education, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture



should mobilise all education stake holders to establish strategies for keeping boys who underachieve in school where they should be enabled to focus on education and work cooperatively and collaboratively with teachers and their fellow learners.

3.5. *Parents-focused interventions*

We have, in the literature review, results, discussion and general recommendations sections of this report, covered several proposals and suggestions on how parents should support the education of their sons who underachieve and under-perform in education. Lack of space prevents us from highlighting all of the suggestions we have made. Because of this we recommend that interested readers who wish to understand how parents should enhance their sons' academic achievement should source ideas not only from this section but from other sections of this report. In this section, we highlight the specific recommendations that follow.

3.5.1 As discussed in the preceding section of this report, learners and teachers implied that several parents undermined and sabotaged their sons' education during socialization by giving them too much freedom to roam and loiter around aimlessly without restraint while strictly controlling the behaviour and movements of their daughters; allowing their sons to abuse alcohol and drugs, including, in some instances, sharing alcohol with them- alcohol they have easy access to through Shebeen outlets and Cuca shops; not caring about what their sons did and how they spent their time; not giving their sons responsibilities at home to cultivate in them ethics of responsibility, hard work, discipline, commitment, persistence- virtues that promote academic achievement; not being concerned of their sons' education, welfare, misconduct and misdeeds; and in some regions by criticising, ostracising, ridiculing, shaming and shunning their sons for going to school instead of looking after livestock.

We strongly recommend that parents who practice this mode of raising sons should be provided with parental education in which they would be counselled to change their attitudes towards their sons' education, be empowered to value education and to build their sons' love for learning. In doing this, they should *avoid the investment approach in parenting boys* by focusing support on meaningful accomplishments that are not based on parents' goals but on boys' ideals, interests and goals. This would promote academic achievement that enables boys to discover who they are and what they wish to become.

3.5.2 ***We strongly recommend*** that parents should use a *responsibility-inducing parenting approach* in which they should raise boys to care by giving them tasks to do and chores to perform at home. As discussed earlier, boys should be made responsible by letting them help achieve family goals and perform a variety of household chores and other domestic tasks. Parents should not spoil boys by allowing them to do whatever they wished to do without restraint, without boundaries and without consequences for wrong doing. Instead, they should raise boys in a manner that was firm, consistent and instructional. After doing this, parents should be interested and actively involved in their sons' education. This is important to do because the *laissez-faire* parenting approach undermined boys' interest in and focus on education and in a number of cases influenced their dropping out of school- an act that should not be tolerated and perceived as a normal course of action.

3.5.3 Based on parents' focus group discussion data, ***we strongly recommend*** that *'parents should act as real parents'* for boys during socialization. To do this, they should stop treating boys as if they did not need help and guidance, as if they were self-sufficient and that they could look after themselves unaided. In addition, parents should stop glossing over and



ignoring boys' misconduct and wrong doing. Instead, they should monitor and exercise control over their sons' whereabouts.

Consistent with this, in order for them to adequately support the learning and academic achievement of their sons, parents should foster the growth-mindset which affirms that children are developing persons who need to be nurtured and supported in their quest for and pursuit of development and learning (Dweck, 2017).

Specifically, parents should avoid praising their son's intelligence or talent but praise their effort at having things done, diligence in studying, persistence, and their hard work; assure their sons that they would improve and do well in school if they worked hard, studied and did what they were supposed to and learnt the material; tell their sons not to be devastated by failure but learn from it and focus on what should be done to succeed in future; want the best for their sons in the right way "by fostering their interests, growth and learning" (Dweck, 2017, p. 192); inspire their children to grow and learn for the sake of learning and for the sake of acquiring skills with 'purchase power'- skills which enable children to do things competently and thrive in life and they should not compare their children with ideal children conjured in their minds. Instead, they should focus on their children's 'becoming', and 'growing' into valuable human beings to themselves and to society.

3.5.4 As was discussed earlier, sampled parents indicated that because boys were as vulnerable as girls, they should also be strictly monitored and controlled. Based on this, ***we strongly recommend*** that parents should equally motivate girls and boys to stay in school and excel. The cultural tendency of providing more educational motivation to girls than boys should be discouraged. Instead, ***we recommend*** that families should enforce specific cultural values amongst boys and girls. These values should include the observance of, adherence to and obedience of rules; respect for order in life; respect for time/curfew hours in households; communication of information on boys' and girls' whereabouts, activities and friends; insistence on observance of compliance, discipline and obedience in households amongst boys and girls; consistent application of sanctions and consequences as useful tools of socialization in households; co-workmanship/cooperation; hard work; honesty; trust; truth; trustworthiness; and faithfulness.

3.5.5 ***One general recommendation we offered*** earlier was on multiple teachers of culture that may either enhance or undermine some boys' academic achievement. One of such teachers of culture was in the area of electronics. ***We now strongly recommend*** that for them to effectively support the education of their sons, parents should beware of the influence of electronics in their lives (Cox, 2018). One major adverse effect of electronic gadgets such as pcs, laptops, mobile phones, i-pads, etc. is the promotion of boys' tendency to be *self-absorbed*. In this state, boys waste a lot of time in trivial amusement and participating in the spectator culture which weakens their capacity to create, innovate and bring things into being. According to Cox (2018, pp.72-73), video games and other electronic engagements such as spending a lot of time on social media lead to a 'kind of paralysis' for many boys. In this state boys express no commitment to anything, they do not know what is authentic or real and what is fake. They become so self-absorbed that they find it difficult to relate to others in empathetic ways. Due to all this, ***we recommend*** that parents should monitor the manner in which their sons use the internet, the social media and electronic gadgets.

3.5.6 Some sampled teachers and parents raised the issue that some boys partly underachieve in education because they are not raised according to Christian values and that these values



are not seriously relied upon when teaching in schools. Based on this and according to Seagraves and Leavine (2018), *we strongly recommend* that parents should be aware that:

- Tolerance is not that all views are valid; none is better than the other. Tolerance is disagreeing with someone while still respecting them as persons. However, parents should let their sons know that disagreements should not be on matters of truth, empathy, trust, helpfulness, honesty or other qualities that are aimed at enhancing their wellbeing and that of other persons.
- Negative influences that may derail their sons' quest for academic, social-emotional and spiritual wellbeing emanate from multiple sources- the social media, music on mobile phones, movies on NETFLIX, YOU TUBE, messages from peers, etc. *We strongly recommend* that parents should advise their sons about such negative influences and counsel them about how to handle these sources of information and entertainment wisely.
- Their faith in God and their conviction to lead Christian lives may give their sons the opportunity to clarify their own values, beliefs and their need to care for the welfare of themselves, their families and other people. So, if they are Christians, *we recommend* that parents should demonstrate genuine faith in God by leading lives that are consistent with His word.
- "It will never be loving to support something that God is against, and it will never be loving to encourage someone to act contrary to how God has designed them" Seagraves and Leavine (2018, p. 39). Although this is controversial in today's world, *we recommend* that parents should be free to support and guide their sons' education according to their faith in God if indeed they are Christians who are commanded to love God first and then love their neighbours as themselves.

3.6 Community focussed interventions

This study revealed that a multifaceted approach is required when providing support to boys who underachieve in education. The community provides an arena in which multiple educational stakeholders can be engaged to deploy their collective resources in support of the enhancement of boys' education. The recommended interventions that we offer below have been couched with this perspective in mind.

3.6.1 As discussed earlier, sampled learners observed that several communities lacked positive role models to inspire boys who academically underachieved to value education; several households in the communities were not headed by fathers but by mothers; whereas many parents in the communities did not pay attention to the developmental needs of boys who they perceived not to require parental oversight, some teachers serving in the communities negatively influenced some boys who were dealing in drugs by becoming their customers and that some other teachers had sexual relationships with learners.

After judging that all this created a community environment that was not conducive to boys' education, *we recommend that* parents in the communities should be actively involved in their sons' lives and education. They could do this by talking to their sons about the importance of education, monitoring their sons' social relationships with the view of ensuring that they do not get side tracked from education by their peers, by partnering with other community members in preventing boys from having easy access to alcohol, and by encouraging fathers to become responsive role models for their sons.



3.6.2 To further ameliorate the adverse effects of toxic community environments, *we recommend* that communities should establish boy targeted educational support programmes whose main goal would be to create and implement community-based ‘affirmative action’ initiatives for boys’ education. Such initiatives could organize men/boy seminars, conferences and public meetings at which the importance of education would be promoted. Chaired by local community leaders (including chiefs), such events would encourage boys to take personal responsibility for their education and not to be distracted from education by alcohol abuse, too much involvement in sport, TV watching, social media and video games.

3.6.3 Related to recommendation 3.6.2, *we recommend that* communities should use affirmative action initiatives for boys to form academic achievement boys’ clubs. Fathers and father figures in the communities could be deployed as responsive role models to use these clubs when moulding and transforming the behaviour, attitudes and practices of their sons during socialization. For instance, they could do this by not allowing their sons easy access to alcohol served in Shebeens, bars, and Cuca shops.

3.6.4 To augment recommendation 3.6.3, *we recommend that* youth clubs whose purpose would be to sensitize boys on their rights and responsibilities, obligations, and duties as learners in schools should be formed. Such clubs could implore the boys to appreciate the importance of education in their lives. One other service that could be provided in the youth clubs is psychosocial support. In the clubs teachers could act as positive role models for boys by being mentors who encourage and motivate them to focus on their education. This kind of support would empower boys to think, behave and relate to others in prosocial ways. In addition, for them to succeed in school, boys could be guided and counselled at the youth clubs. More services on the mitigation of substance abuse, negative peer pressure and lack of motivation amongst boys could also be offered at the youth clubs.

3.6.5 Based on data from sampled parents, *we recommend that* to enhance the education of boys who under achieve in education, communities should transform boy child and girl child rearing beliefs, values and practice. This foundation should be built in early childhood development and education. To enhance boys’ educational attainments later in school, child rearing beliefs, values and practices in Namibia should be adapted to current societal values that are informed by human rights, inclusivity, equality and equity. From an early childhood development and education perspective, the family and the community should raise boys to respect the value of education and be motivated to focus and work hard in education from an early age.

3.6.6 Sourced from sampled parents’ focus group discussion data, *we strongly recommend that* communities should *create an UBUNTU community-based boy child support system*. This support system would be based on the understanding that the whole community ought to be responsible for raising not only the boy child but all children. To do this there should be a code of conduct, a cultural blueprint, to use when raising children. The traditional values should be the starting point, the foundation of the blueprint. In practice, as was the case in the past, every adult in this system should be on the look out to sanction unacceptable behaviour of boys and girls where ever they are found. To do this, there should be established in the community the norm that all adults have the societal power and authority to sanction all children, including boys. For instance, the community should have a collective responsibility of sanctioning boys who engage in antisocial and unacceptable behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse.



For instance, to prevent the boy child from misbehaving and engaging in self-destructive behaviours such as alcohol abuse and drugs, goofing around, wasting time etc., communities could recreate or reclaim the UBUNTU community support system by operating *a neighbourhood watch for boys' education and social welfare network*. In this network, community members could watch out for and sanction boys in trouble in bars, streets, Shebeens, clubs, nightclubs and crime dens/hot spots. This should be done because there are limited opportunities nowadays where families take time to guide/instruct boys on what to do in order to improve their academic achievement.

3.6.7 As an extension of the *UBUNTU community-based boy child support system*, we *recommend that* communities should establish *circles of care, guidance and help around the boy child's education*. The gist of this recommendation is that to use culture for retaining boys in school, there should be a paradigm shift in the Namibian cultural system of raising children. As was the case in the past, the raising of children should be the responsibility of whole communities, villages, neighbourhoods, and families. In these social collections, circles of care, guidance, counselling, and help around the boy child should be created. These would include the nuclear family circle, the relatives circle, the peer group circle, the youth group circle, the church group circle, and the community support group circle. The circles of care around the boy child idea would help transform the current individualistic way of raising children into a community based collective one. In the transformed and collective way of raising children, the goal would be to enable boys to become useful not only to themselves and their families but also to their communities and the society in general. This is consistent with the UBUNTU *neighbourhood watch for boys' education and social welfare network* that we explained in recommendation 3.6.6.

3.6.8 To support recommendation 3.6.7, *we recommend that* a *prosocial* cultural milieu for the support of boys' education should be created to effect the circles of care idea. In the milieu adults in communities and society should transmit beliefs, values and practices that promote healthy life styles. They should not, for instance, promote promiscuity, drunkenness and drug abuse, corruption of morals and tolerance of wrong. When these are conveyed as normal, we should not be surprised to see boys emulating them and engaging in self-destructive behaviours.

The point here is that before boys are transformed into people who benefit from positive cultural beliefs, values and practices, *adults should be transformed first*. Cultural transformation should start from adults. This implies that communities should deal with perverse alcohol abuse, drug abuse, corruption of morals, gender based violence and other vices that are rampant in the society.

3.6.9 To strengthen recommendations 3.6.6, 3.6.7 and 3.6.8, *we recommend that* school and community boy child support networks be formed. To do this schools and communities should build a boy child support vision in which communities would be retooled, trained and empowered to work with schools in support of boys according to the UBUNTU philosophical world view and belief system we referred to above. This would entail that competencies, common understanding and skills should be developed amongst community members for them to work in support of boys' wellbeing and education.

This means that the school/community boy child support networks would be based on a *common community vision, blueprint, and worldview* of how to improve boys' education



achievement. For instance, schools and communities should hold teacher-parent meetings to work out ways of helping and supporting specific boys. This could involve schools creating boy support programmes and then asking parents to mobilize financial and other resources to implement them. In addition, communities and schools could establish ethical codes of conduct/ethical blueprints that they would jointly use to enhance, revamp, improve morals and behaviour of boys.

3.6.10 We recommend that there be established a *private sector and family collaboration on boy's education* in which the private sector could be mobilized to support and finance boy child empowerment programmes and activities such as motivational seminars, psychosocial development workshops, anti-alcohol and drug abuse seminars, youth development seminars for boys and gender sensitization workshops. For instance, business men and women based in the communities could be organized to initiate and support recreation facilities for boys. Such facilities would provide services to boys in order to keep them away from toxic entertainment in the form of alcohol and drugs. In addition, the private sector could be mobilized to offer material and financial support to boys who are in need of such support in order for them to pay school fees, buy uniforms, pay for hostel accommodation, etc.

3.6.11 We discussed data from sampled learners which revealed that in a stereotypical way teachers were hostile to boys because they expected them to be rude, disruptive and uncooperative. With this in view, ***we recommend that*** to ameliorate the negative stereotypes about boys which undermine their academic achievement in education and in schools, the community as the original source of the stereotypes should be sensitized and made aware about this. This should be done because community gender-loaded perceptions (or stereotypes) regarding the abilities, attitudes and behaviours of boys and girls shape schools' and teachers' expectations about and attitudes towards boys' potential to grow and achieve well in school.

For instance, community generated stereotypes such as those which portray boys as typically abrasive, rude, disrespectful, disruptive, uncooperative, self-destructive, self-absorbed and prone to aggression, violence, disorderly behaviour, etc., feed into teachers' negative self-fulfilling prophecies when interacting with boys in school and classrooms. Because they expect some boys who underachieve to misbehave, teachers interact with them in a hostile manner. Instead of reducing or changing the boys' apparent negative behaviour, teachers' hostile demeanour exacerbates it. In this unsupportive context, the boys implicated underachieve (Jha and Pouzevara, 2016).

3.6.12 We discussed data from sampled learners which indicated that in some regions some parents criticised, ostracised, ridiculed, shamed and shunned their sons for going to school instead of looking after livestock. This meant to us that such parents did not value education. According to Atthill and Jha (2009), community traditions of valuing education and learning promotes boys' academic achievement in education. To them, it is not just a matter of marginalization or poverty and lack of community resources that may cause boys' underachievement in education. Rather, it is a matter of the extent to which education and learning are valued in a given community. Taking this reasoning into account, ***we recommend that*** the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture should continue to elevate and popularise the value of education in some Namibian communities where some boys underachieve because education is devalued.



3.7 University-based interventions

At the tertiary education level, we have ascertained in this report that more than two thirds of students who have been enrolled in public and private Universities in Namibia for three decades have been female and that in general, according to University examination and graduation statistics, female students have consistently, for 30 years, academically performed substantially better than male students in all tertiary education institutions.

When we enquired from sampled University lecturers, University students and sampled VTC students about what accounted for these differences in performance between female and male students, a variety of explanations and reasons were provided. In general, these reasons pertained to students' motivation, work ethics/habits, use of time, participation and self-exclusion from learning activities. In summary, it was reported that female students academically performed better than male students who underachieved because they were motivated, worked harder, did not waste time socializing in dysfunctional ways (e.g. abusing alcohol and drugs), participated in learning activities, were collaborative, were willing to learn, were organized, were persistent and they did not easily drop out of universities (see detailed and comprehensive information on all these aspects from the results and discussion sections of this report).

In this section we provide recommendations on what universities in collaboration with Ministries of Education could do in supporting schools in their efforts to enhance boys' education in primary and secondary schools. In addition, we offer specific recommendations about how universities could support the learning of their male students who underachieve and under-participate in their studies, about how the universities could mobilize resources to support boys who underachieve because of social-economic constraints and about any other support that universities could garner to facilitate the learning of male students who may be at risk of dropping out of the universities due to prospects of failure.

3.7.1 To increase male students' enrolments in tertiary education institutions, ***we recommend that Universities*** in collaboration with the Ministries of Education and other education stakeholders should put in place programmes aimed at supporting schools in their efforts to prevent boys from dropping out of school, to increase boys' survival and promotion rates, to reduce boys' school leaving rates, to reduce boys' failure rates and to reach out to parents of boys who may keep them out of school because of not valuing education.

3.7.2 To facilitate the implementation of recommendation 3.7.1, ***we recommend that Universities should*** include in their teacher preparation programmes modules on how pre- and in-service teachers could reach out to boys, meet their peculiar learning needs and mentor academic work habits that promote boys' academic achievement. In addition, we recommend that the existing teaching and learning improvement programmes that some Universities have should be adapted to include targeted in-service teacher empowerment projects on the teaching and learning of boys in primary and secondary schools.

3.7.3 ***We recommend that Universities should*** make their e-learning platforms user friendly to encourage male students to study online. In addition, in order to engage with male students, lecturers should use e-learning platforms at their Universities to monitor these students' work and interact with them. This would enable lecturers to motivate male students who academically underachieve and find out if such students were having learning problems.



3.7.4 ***We recommend that*** male students' learning should be monitored more closely by lecturers. This would enable lecturers to identify male students with learning or other problems early and support them to work through their problems.

3.7.5 ***We recommend and endorse the strategy that*** teaching at the University level should engage all five senses through activity oriented teaching methods and through the use of a variety of teaching media and teaching technologies. Doing this would be advisable because male students learn better when such teaching strategies were in use.

3.7.6 ***We recommend that Universities should establish and use*** support groups and support programmes for male students. To effect this, lecturers should identify male students who underachieve and work with them in support groups such as tutorials. In other words, ***we recommend that Universities*** should have remedial/ tutorial programmes for male students who faced learning problems in their courses.

3.7.7 ***We recommend that to enhance their academic achievement,*** male students should be empowered in psychosocial programmes where their self-esteem could be developed and maintained. In such programmes, male students could be warned about the consequences of their academic underachievement and its implications on their future lives and professional careers.

3.7.8 ***We recommend that universities should*** establish mentorship programmes for male students. In such programmes, seminars, conferences and workshops could be organized to raise awareness on the need to support male students' education and on coming up with effective strategies on how such support should be provided.

3.7.9 ***We recommend that the word of God*** should be used to guide male students about what is expected of them not only in education but in life as well. This would be particularly wise when making decisions about what was right and what was wrong when engaging in socializing activities.

3.7.10 ***We recommend that Universities should,*** in collaboration with NGOs, faith based organizations and government entities on gender, establish and operate empowerment programmes for male students. Such programmes should promote gender equity in education that would highlight both female and male student educational support challenges and their ameliorative strategies.

3.7.11 ***We recommend that*** to enhance the academic achievement of male students, Universities should reduce the number of modules they are required to take. This could be done by ensuring that the curricular were not inundated with similar modules. This means that duplication of subject content should be avoided as much as possible.

3.7.12 To promote quality education for the benefit of male students and other students, ***we recommend that*** Universities should establish multipurpose/multidisciplinary learning centres where all students could learn a variety of things. Such learning centres could house internet resources, writing clinics and other resources that could encourage students to acquire learning how to learn skills.

3.7.13 ***We recommend that Universities should*** provide counselling and guidance services tailored to the needs of male students. Professionals such as therapists, psychologists and



social workers could be deployed by universities to guide and counsel male students on their studies, **alcohol and drug abuse** and on career aspirations. This would be important because our data revealed that several male students who underachieved in education did so because they abused alcohol and drugs. In addition, such programmes would encourage male students to focus on education and not drop out from universities to get jobs that did not require much education. Such programmes should instil in the young men the value of education and why it was important to be educated in the modern world. Young men should be weaned from the belief that they were entitled to jobs, social and leadership positions just because they were men.

3.7.14 **We recommend that** to advocate for male students' and boys' education in Namibia, Universities should help Ministries of Education to put up billboards for motivating and inspiring male students and boys to excel in their learning. Such billboards could carry educational messages that would inspire male students to work hard.

3.7.15 In addition to recommendation 3.7.14, **we recommend that** the mass media in the form of public television, radio, print media and social media should broadcast educational, motivational and inspirational messages that promote male students education. Universities should facilitate the preparation and broadcasting of such messages.

3.7.16 **We recommend** that Universities should mobilize material support for less privileged male students. This could include sourcing beds, mattresses, study materials, reading and writing study tables, solar-powered reading lamps and other basic provisions from the private sector and distribute them amongst male students who live in poverty-stricken informal settlements. In addition, we recommend that to support the education of male students under financial strain, Universities should source scholarships for them from different kinds of donors such as philanthropic educational foundations, UN agencies on education (e.g. UNICEF and UNESCO), the Africa Development Bank and the World Bank.

3.7.17 **We recommend** that to provide male students with community male role models of repute, men should not be given leadership positions if they did not qualify to hold them. Instead of the spirit of entitlement developing in them, this would motivate and inspire male students to work hard at the universities- especially when they see that qualified people get leadership positions.

3.7.18 **We recommend** that Universities should help parents to regularly monitor the academic achievement of male students who academically underachieve at the Universities to ensure that they were in fact focused on education. This would encourage parents not to wait until their sons dropped out of the Universities.

3.8 Other educational stakeholder-based interventions.

We explained earlier in this report that boys' academic underachievement and under-participation were manifested at the global, continental, regional and national levels. In our view, any intervention to enhance boys' education at the national level would be unsustainable if it is not linked to the global, continental and regional levels. This would be the case because what happens nationally in education is symbiotically connected to the world of educational theory and practice at the other three levels. Based on this reasoning we make the following recommendations that follow.



3.8.1 At the global level, there exists the *United Nations Girls' Education Initiative*. **We recommend that** as a matter of gender equality in education, Namibia should raise the issue of boys' education in the UN system. This would be important to do because it is difficult to put the issue of boys' education on the UN agenda if it is not recognized as an issue of priority to be attended to.

3.8.2 At the AU level, there exists the *Continental Education Strategy for Africa, 2016-2025*. In this strategy, some extensive coverage is given to the African girls' education. There is no reference in the strategy to African boys' education. **We recommend that the AU member states, including Namibia,** should acknowledge this omission and include the African boy child's education in the continental educational strategy.

3.8.3 As referred to earlier in this report, there is the *SADC Gender Protocol Barometer*. Before 2019, this barometer included sections on boy and girl comparative education statistics covering all countries in the SADC region. This information has been dropped from the barometer since 2019. **We strongly recommend that** the gender aggregated data on education in the SADC region be reinstated in the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer because it informs gender and education reasoning and practice at the national level in the SADC member states.

3.8.4 We are aware that in Namibia, FAWENA exists to mainly attend to the educational needs of the Namibian Girl Child. As has been the focus of this report, **we recommend that** the Namibian Educational System recognizes that the Namibian boy child's education also requires support. We have extensively proposed in this report how this should be done. In addition, we recommend that the Namibian boy child's educational concerns, challenges and constraints be included in the national educational programming framework that is done in partnership with the UN system and other educational stakeholders.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

According to the study's background that we presented earlier in this report, we observed that substantially more boys than girls currently underperformed and under-participated in education, in several educational systems of the world. In Namibia, we provided evidence in the background section that there now exists gender disparity in academic achievement in the educational system that was in favour of girls.

In terms of the scope of Namibian boys' underachievement in education, the evidence that has been presented portrays the problem *as a national one*. For instance, at the secondary school level, challenges of boys' low survival rates, lower promotion rates from grade to grade and high dropout rates affected boys' academic participation in all 14 education regions. At the tertiary education level, evidence shows that more female than male students have been enrolled in *all* public and private Namibian educational institutions for three decades and that in general, female students have consistently, for 30 years, academically performed substantially better than male students in all tertiary education institutions.

This persistent picture of Namibian male learners performing worse than female learners in school and at tertiary educational institutions has prevailed for more than three decades without being seriously paid attention to at the Namibian National and Regional levels. Among other things, one main aim of our study was to raise awareness in the country about Namibian boys' underachievement in education, seek evidence from learners, teachers,



parents, University lecturers and University and VTC students about why this was the case and use the evidence for planning how to ameliorate the situation. In other words, the main purpose of the study was that of promoting the improvement of quality of education in Namibia.

We are pleased to conclude that we gathered and discussed data which we used for making recommendations on how Namibia's educational policy framework should be reviewed, reoriented, adapted, updated and transformed to cater for the needs of boys who underachieve in education; how schools, teachers, learners, parents, communities, University lecturers, University students and other educational stakeholders should be enabled to enhance Namibian boys' education. The interventions we have proposed are intended to prevent boys from dropping out of school early, to promote the retention of boys in school, to increase the boys' survival rates in school, to reduce boys' repetition rates and to provide support to boys in order to enhance the quality of their educational attainments. At the tertiary education level, the recommended interventions have been designed to enable universities to establish frameworks, networks, structures, procedures, strategies and introduce curriculum adaptations that would support, improve and enhance male students' academic outputs and products.

With regards to future research, we offer the following ideas in no particular order of viability:

1. A study could be done to replicate this project's focus group discussions amongst learners, teachers, and parents in education regions where they could not be undertaken due to logistical challenges and financial constraints.
2. Case study types of action research studies could be undertaken in sampled schools to produce prototypes of how the enhancement of boys' education could be implemented at the school level.
3. Education Region-specific studies to gather baseline data for use in mainstreaming boy child education approaches in schools could be conducted.
4. A research evidence-based project could be designed to advocate for and popularise boys' education in Namibia.

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