

Why do they quit? Educational Stakeholders' perspectives on early school dropout among the San learners in the Ohangwena region of Namibia

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Abstract

The early school dropout rate among San children in the Ohangwena region of Namibia is a significant concern, as it represents a waste of resources and undermines the potential for community and national development. Integrating Critical Theory with Critical Indigenous Pedagogy, this study investigates the factors contributing to the premature dropout of San learners from primary schools, focusing on the perspectives of educational stakeholders. A qualitative case study design was employed, utilizing purposive, criterion, and convenience sampling techniques to select participants from four circuits in the Ohangwena region. Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal two main categories of factors influencing dropout rates, namely school-based factors and socioeconomic/home-based factors. School-related factors include long distances to school, bullying, excessive schoolwork, irrelevant curriculum content, and an unconducive learning environment. Socioeconomic/home-based factors include nomadic lifestyle, hunger and poverty, early marriage and pregnancy, and domestic work. Based on these findings, the study recommends the review and effective implementation of policies related to school feeding programmes, transportation for San learners, and free education. Additionally, it suggests the development of a tailor-made educational programme for San parents and learners to raise awareness of the value of education.

Keywords: *Namibia, Ohangwena region, San learners, school dropout, educational stakeholders' perspectives, premature dropout*

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Introduction

Educational access and retention among indigenous communities remain critical challenges in Namibia's post-independence era. While significant strides have been made in expanding educational opportunities since 1990, certain marginalized communities, particularly the San, continue to face substantial barriers to completing their education. This study examines the complex factors contributing to early school dropout among San learners in the Ohangwena region, with particular attention to the intersecting social, cultural, and institutional dynamics that shape educational outcomes. Education undeniably plays a formative role in children's experiences, fostering self-esteem and facilitating self-actualization (UNESCO, 2015a). However, despite a high registration rate of Namibian children in schools, the country faces an alarming rate of school dropout (UNESCO, 2015c).

In response, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has made considerable efforts at both the policy formulation and implementation levels to create an environment conducive to learning. This aims to ensure that all Namibian children, in accordance with the Namibian Constitution, complete at least five years of schooling (MOE, 2004). The dropout rate has been described as a silent epidemic and has recently gained recognition as a national crisis. The dropout of San learners, for instance, jeopardizes not only their futures but also adversely impacts their communities and the nation, leading to the loss of potential productive citizens. It is important to note that dropping out of school is not a sudden act but rather a gradual process of disengagement. Furthermore, the issues surrounding school dropout are complex; there is no single factor responsible for a student's decision to leave school and no one-size-fits-all solution to retain all learners within the education system (Haileselassie, 2011).

Since gaining independence in 1990, Namibia has made significant strides toward developing an inclusive and equitable education system. Various laws and specific policies have been established to protect and enhance children's development. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [MoEAC] has prioritized four major goals: access, equity, quality, and democracy (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2004). Recently, lifelong learning has been integrated as a fifth goal. According to the latest Education Management Information System (EMIS) report, there were 30,466 San learners enrolled in Namibian schools at the beginning of the 2014 academic year, with 52% being female and 48% male (MOE, 2015). The report indicates that 37% of these learners dropped out of school at the primary level, highlighting that the Ohangwena region ranks among the top five for primary school dropouts among San learners.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors leading to primary school dropout among San learners and to assess the implementation of existing policies regarding school dropout by the MoEAC. Additionally, the study explored strategies that could be employed to mitigate dropout rates among San learners in the Ohangwena region.

Background and Context

The San Communities of Ohangwena

The San communities in the Ohangwena region primarily comprise the !Xun and Hai||om groups, each with distinct historical and cultural traditions (Dieckmann et al., 2021). Rather than representing a homogeneous entity, these communities exhibit diverse linguistic and cultural practices that have evolved through centuries of adaptation and interaction with neighboring communities. The !Xun, traditionally hunter-gatherers, have maintained strong

connections to their ancestral practices while adapting to contemporary socioeconomic conditions. The Hai||om, historically more integrated with agropastoral communities, have developed unique hybrid cultural practices (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [MoEAC], 2023).

Sociolinguistic and Power Dynamics

The term "Aakwaghala," commonly used by the Ovakwanyama and other Oshiwambo speaking communities to refer to the San, carries complex sociological implications that directly impact educational experiences. This designation, while seemingly neutral, often functions as a marker of social differentiation and carries implicit assumptions about learning capabilities and social status. Recent studies indicate that such linguistic markers can significantly influence teacher expectations and peer interactions within educational settings (Hays, 2021).

The power dynamics between the San communities and the majority Ovakwanyama population manifest in various ways that affect educational participation. These include:

1. Access to resources and decision-making processes
2. Representation in educational leadership
3. Cultural recognition within the curriculum
4. Language of instruction policies

Current Educational Context

According to the latest Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture's (MoEAC) Education Management Information System (EMIS) statistics, San learner enrolment in Ohangwena primary schools has shown modest improvement, from 456 learners in 2020 to 487 in 2023. However, the dropout rate remains significantly higher than the regional average, with 28.3% of San learners leaving school before completing primary education, compared to the regional average of 6.7% (MoEAC, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Despite Namibia's constitutional commitment to universal primary education and various policy initiatives aimed at supporting marginalized communities, San learners in the Ohangwena region continue to experience disproportionately high dropout rates. This study investigates the complex interplay of factors contributing to this persistent challenge, examining both institutional and community-based dynamics that influence educational retention.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do educational stakeholders perceive and understand the factors contributing to San learner dropout in Ohangwena region?
2. What role do cultural and linguistic dynamics play in San learner retention?
3. How do institutional structures and practices influence San learner participation in formal education?
4. What strategies do stakeholders identify as potentially effective in improving educational retention among San learners?

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Critical Theory with Critical Indigenous Pedagogy (CIP) to provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding San learner dropout rates. This integrated approach enables a nuanced examination of both systemic power structures and indigenous educational experiences.

Critical Theory Foundation

Critical Theory serves as the primary theoretical foundation, emphasizing how power relationships structure human societies and influence all forms of knowledge (Turner, 2016). Within educational contexts, Critical Theory illuminates how standardized educational models can simultaneously serve as tools for empowerment and potential instruments of oppression (Calhoun, 2020). This theoretical lens is particularly relevant when examining the educational experiences of marginalized communities like the San.

Drawing from Freire's (2018) concept of the "culture of silence," this framework helps explain how marginalized learners may become trapped within their circumstances, unable to fully realize their educational potential. Freire's work is especially pertinent to understanding how San learners might internalize societal messages about their educational capabilities and prospects.

Integration with Indigenous Perspectives

Building upon this critical foundation, the study incorporates Critical Indigenous Pedagogy (CIP), as developed by Chakraborty and Ahmed (2023), which emphasizes:

1. Recognition of indigenous knowledge systems
2. Cultural preservation within educational contexts
3. Community-based learning approaches
4. Resistance to cultural assimilation through education

This integration allows for analysis of how traditional Critical Theory intersects, specifically, with indigenous experiences of educational marginalization (Kapoor, 2022).

Analytical Framework Components

The combined theoretical framework examines three key contextual dimensions:

1. **Power Relations and Educational Access**
 - Institutional power structures
 - Cultural dominance in educational settings
 - Resource allocation and control
 - Decision-making processes
2. **Socio-Cultural Dynamics**
 - Family background and socio-economic status
 - Cultural preservation versus integration
 - Community influences and traditions
 - Intergenerational educational experiences
3. **Institutional Structures**
 - School demographics and resources
 - Teacher preparation and cultural competency
 - Educational policies and practices
 - Support systems and interventions

Application to San Educational Experience

This integrated framework enables analysis of:

1. How power relationships within educational institutions affect San learner retention
2. The intersection between traditional San cultural practices and formal education
3. Institutional barriers facing San learners and their manifestation in daily educational experiences
4. Community agency and resistance strategies within the educational system

Theoretical Implications

The framework suggests that addressing San learner dropout rates requires:

1. Recognition of systemic power imbalances within educational institutions
2. Integration of indigenous knowledge systems into formal education
3. Development of culturally responsive pedagogical approaches
4. Empowerment of San communities in educational decision-making

This theoretical approach builds upon recent work highlighting the importance of culturally responsive educational systems (Chakraborty & Ahmed, 2023) while maintaining focus on institutional structures that perpetuate educational marginalization (Kapoor, 2022).

Literature Review

Khan et al. (2011) define a school dropout as a learner who has attended primary school but has left before completion for any reason excluding death or transfer. Education is universally recognized as a fundamental catalyst for social justice, emancipation, and economic empowerment (Casey, 2014). In Namibia, the National Planning Commission (NPC) identifies education as vital for achieving national development goals articulated in Vision 2030, aiming for an industrialized nation with a robust scientific base (NPC, 2004). However, this objective remains unachievable if communities like the San are neglected, leading to their children's inability to complete schooling like their peers from other communities in Namibia.

In-school Factors Contributing to Early School Dropout

Research on dropout prevention reveals a multifaceted understanding of influences on school dropout rates. Mokibelo (2014) classifies these factors into four overarching categories: school-related, student-related, community-related, and family-related. He emphasizes that the interplay of these factors significantly heightens the likelihood of students withdrawing from school.

In-school factors pertain to individual pupil characteristics, such as attitudes towards learning, motivation, achievement expectations, low self-esteem, and health complications (Haileselassie, 2011). This suggests that learners' emotional connections to education significantly impact their academic outcomes. Mphale (2014) notes that children displaying high motivation and strong academic performance are more likely to persist in their studies, while early academic failure could engender a failure-oriented mindset, diminishing motivation and expectation of success. Furthermore, health issues detrimentally affect school attendance; for instance, Mphale (2014) states that wellness is crucial for concentration in class. Illnesses like malaria and other common ailments can obstruct attendance.

Additional factors involve the quality of teacher interactions, commitment to teaching, and rapport with students. Research by Mike et al (2008) indicates that poor teaching quality combined with a lack of teacher engagement can reduce educational quality and thus, student attendance. Teachers' expectations and attitudes towards students' performance also significantly affect learners' academic engagement (Mike et al., 2008). Realistic expectations from teachers can motivate students to exert greater effort and enhance their performance. Moreover, as Haipinge and Kamusheteetha (2014) found, dropout rates tend to escalate in rural areas as compared with urban settings. Haaveshe et al. (2013) further indicate that the distance students must travel to school can lead to dropout due to fatigue, food scarcity, and other challenges faced during their journey.

Out-of-school factors also play a crucial role, as they encompass elements beyond the control of educational institutions. Jackline and Tikoko (2014) establish a relationship between students' socioeconomic status and their academic progress, noting that many repeaters or dropouts originate from economically disadvantaged families, particularly in rural locales. Poverty often limits access to essential school supplies and food, as noted by Haileselassie (2011). Consequently, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may experience diminished self-esteem, affecting their willingness to participate in school, exacerbating the risk of dropping out.

Home-Based Factors Influencing School Dropout

In addition to health issues, child labour stands out as a predominant home-based factor contributing to school dropout rates, particularly within the San communities. Mphale (2014) notes that many children begin engaging in labour at a young age, which limits their ability to attend school regularly. Likewise, Mike et al. (2008) highlight that over half of children aged 4 to 15 in these communities identify child labour as their primary activity. This early engagement in work often conflicts with educational commitments, resulting in significant disruptions in school attendance.

A child's educational experience is also closely linked to their parents' level of education. Research by Jackline and Tikoko (2014) suggests that parental education is the strongest predictor of a child's academic tenure and performance (Chirimbana, 2013). Educated parents are more likely to assist their children with homework, allocate resources to their education, and provide the motivation necessary for academic success. Unfortunately, this positive influence is largely absent in the San communities, where the incidence of parental education is low. Consequently, many parents within these communities harbour limited faith in the educational system, often perceiving schooling as a means that removes children from their cultural context, thus undermining their value of education (Haileselassie, 2011).

Moreover, the experiences of some San children who have attended school but failed to achieve academically can negatively affect parental perceptions about education. Disappointing outcomes may lead to disillusionment with the schooling system, thereby influencing parents' decisions to withdraw their children from school (Makhopele & Moghale, 2013).

Another significant factor contributing to school dropout is the prevalence of early marriage and teenage pregnancy within certain cultures, where these phenomena are often deemed normal or even essential for young girls (Mphale, 2014). In such contexts, parents

may prioritize marriage over education, viewing these traditional practices as more beneficial for their daughters than formal education. This cultural inclination poses a considerable barrier to achieving long-term educational retention for young girls, as the societal norms weigh heavily against continuation of schooling.

In summary, various home-based factors including child labour, parental education, cultural beliefs regarding education and marriage, as well as socioeconomic challenges, collectively contribute to the high rates of school dropout among the San community. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach that considers the interplay between education, culture, and socioeconomic status to foster a conducive environment for educational attainment.

Selected Case Studies on School Dropout Factors

Several case studies reveal critical insights into the factors influencing school dropout rates, highlighting the interplay of cultural, social, and educational elements impacting students' retention. In the Rongai District of Kenya, research by Jackline and Tikoko (2014) identified early marriage and teenage pregnancy as the most common causes of dropout. The findings emphasized that home-based factors significantly hinder students' retention in school. Additionally, Shadreck (2013) classified school dropouts into four distinct groups: quiet dropouts, disengaged dropouts, low achiever dropouts, and maladjusted dropouts. A noteworthy characteristic of the quiet dropout is their unobtrusive presence in school; they typically exhibit low motivation and poor academic performance without displaying behavioural issues, making their disengagement difficult to detect until the point of withdrawal.

Meanwhile, in Botswana, research conducted by Makhopele and Moghale (2013) focusing on the San communities revealed several barriers to educational participation. Key obstacles included the need to walk long distances to school, mistreatment by teachers and peers, inadequate food, financial constraints related to school fees, and language barriers. This study posits that the educational framework in Botswana neglects the unique challenges faced by San children, which leads to a disconnect between formal education and their lived experiences (Mutambatsere et al., 2014). Furthermore, Madhumbe (2013) discussed how children from areas lacking schools are sent to boarding institutions that provide meals and accommodation. However, this arrangement conflicts with San cultural practices, where separation from parents is distressing for these learners, exacerbating feelings of alienation and reinforcing the challenges they face in adapting to the educational system.

In another study in Botswana, Mphale (2014), identified multiple factors leading to increased dropout rates, including home background, student behaviour, and negative school experiences. High costs of school fees, health-related issues, early marriages, pregnancies, corporal punishment, and substance abuse were also noted. The study highlighted that rising dropout rates undermine the initiatives implemented by school management, such as career guidance and counselling, which aim to improve student retention. Similarly, Shadreck's (2013) study of Zhombe cluster secondary school in Gokwe District in Zimbabwe established that poverty and financial constraints were critical issues in the dropout phenomenon. It further revealed that school dropout is primarily grounded in school problems such as distance from school and inadequate teacher-student relationships, inadequate resources and facilities, as well as an irrelevant curriculum that fails to meet the individual's vocational and intellectual needs (Shadreck, 2013).

In Angola, various factors contribute to school dropout rates, affecting not only the San community but also the educational landscape as a whole. Key issues include poor health, malnutrition, lack of motivation, child labour, poverty, teacher absenteeism, inconvenient school locations, and long distances to schools. Additional factors such as inadequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, inappropriate language of instruction, concerns about school safety, and overall poor quality of education have also been linked to high dropout rates (Sabates et al., 2010). In particular, for San children, the mixing of different ages and abilities in classrooms hampers meaningful access to education, leading to frustration and eventual dropout (Sabates et al., 2010).

Studies indicate that poverty, child labor, corporal punishment, resistance to school rules, and language barriers significantly contribute to the disengagement of San children from school (Imtiaz, 2001). However, research by Imtiaz predominantly reflected the perspectives of teachers, overlooking the experiences of learners (Imtiaz, 2001). While historical insights are valuable, newer literature should be sought to evaluate current conditions.

Internationally, dropout rates are similarly concerning. For instance, Mexico has been noted to have alarmingly low primary school graduation rates, attributed mainly to economic pressures, boredom, and a perception among learners that their education lacks relevance (Jensen, 2012). Issues of inadequate educational infrastructure, including a scarcity of qualified teachers and proper learning environments, exacerbate the dropout crisis (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2012).

The classifications of school dropouts include disengaged dropouts, who demonstrate slight improvements in academics but harbour negative feelings toward school, low achiever dropouts who suffer from severe performance issues (Haileselassie, 2011), and maladjusted dropouts characterized by high levels of misbehaviour and poor motivation (Shadreck, 2013).

In Namibia, similar factors have been identified. Research by Ninnes indicates that while parents profess the importance of education, their support often wanes when children wish to attend school (Ninnes, 2011). School dropout among San communities can be traced to various interconnected influences, including a lack of mother tongue education, cultural discrepancies between home life and schooling, and traditional practices such as hunting trips and initiation ceremonies (Ninnes, 2011). In the Ohangwena region, the predominant school language is Oshiwambo, while San languages, such as those in the !Khomani language family, lack representation in the educational materials available. The Ministry of Education report from 2012 highlighted that, while school attendance for San children had doubled over a decade, materials for mother-tongue education remain critically under-resourced, limiting access for most San dialects (DNEA, 2009).

In a commissioned study by UNESCO Namibia titled *Improving Quality and Equity in Education for the Marginalised Namibians*, Ninnes (2011) conducted a trend and gap analysis, focusing on seven regions primarily populated by marginalized groups. The study identified several barriers hindering these children from enrolling in formal education and while some managed to enrol, their retention rates were comparatively low. Key factors contributing to this low retention included a lack of understanding of the value of education, long distances to schools, poverty, and bullying (Ninnes, 2011). To address these issues, Ninnes recommended that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) conduct a systematic organizational review to identify inefficiencies and bottlenecks related to school

dropouts. Despite its valuable insights, Ninnes' study took a broad approach, encompassing all marginalized children across Namibia. In contrast, the current study sharply focuses on the San learners in the Ohangwena region for a more in-depth understanding of the dropout phenomenon.

Another relevant study by Zimba and Nuuyoma (2002) examined how to ensure access to education for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) through safe hostel/boarding facilities. The research aimed to evaluate how well existing government and informal hostels met the needs of OVCs and other marginalized children. A notable finding of this study was that marginalized children, including those from the San community, often chose to distance themselves from peers due to discrimination based on tribal affiliations perpetrated by students from more privileged backgrounds (Zimba & Nuuyoma, 2002). Consequently, some San children ran away from school to join their parents working on distant farms. In efforts to escape discrimination, some also adopted identities from other ethnic groups, such as the Nama or Damara. Although this study contributed valuable background information regarding the schooling experiences of San children, it can be argued that its findings were somewhat generalized and did not specifically explore factors influencing premature dropout among San learners (Zimba & Nuuyoma, 2002).

Overall, these selected case studies underscore a myriad of interrelated factors - ranging from socio-cultural to systemic - affecting school dropout rates, particularly among marginalized communities such as the San. Understanding these dynamics is critical for developing targeted interventions to enhance educational retention and success among all learners. Collectively, these studies emphasize an urgent need to expand and adapt educational curricula to meet the diverse interests, needs, and aptitudes of students, thereby creating a more relevant school experience aligned with real-world demands. However, due to the unique cultural and social context of the San people, it is essential to undertake a detailed investigation grounded in robust theoretical frameworks to better understand their educational challenges and experiences. For additional insights into the current context, it would be beneficial to review more recent literature that explores these dynamics in modern Namibian education.

Policies implementation in Namibia

Since Namibia's independence, the nation has implemented affirmative action aimed at providing special support to individuals who have faced historical discrimination. This approach emphasizes the importance of equity, necessitating differentiated policies to meet the unique needs of various groups within the population. The UNESCO report on Education for All (EFA), published in 2015, underscores that assessing the success of the education system should involve considering not only enrolment figures but also promotion and completion rates.

Upon attainment of independence, the Namibian government has prioritized educational reform, actively addressing deficiencies and seeking effective solutions to enhance the lives of all Namibians. Article 20 of the Namibian Constitution enshrines the principle that primary education is compulsory and mandates the state to provide reasonable facilities to ensure this right for every resident (NPC, 2003). To actualize this commitment, free primary education was instituted in January 2013, freeing public school learners from the burdens of school fees, textbooks, and stationery costs, and eliminating mandatory contributions to School Development Funds (SDFs). Additionally, the Constitution states that children should not be allowed to leave school until they have completed their primary

education or have attained the age of sixteen, whichever comes first (Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, 1990). Despite these measures aimed at achieving universal access to primary education, challenges persist, particularly in relation to school dropout rates.

In response to the ongoing issues faced by educationally marginalized children, a comprehensive document outlining policy options was approved in 1998. Subsequently, the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC) published the *National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalised Children* in 2000, recommending the development of a flexible policy framework tailored to the specific needs of diverse marginalized groups. This framework emphasizes the need to shift negative attitudes toward educationally marginalized children by improving the educational infrastructure available to them.

The series of recommendations includes ensuring compliance with directives regarding school fees and uniforms for economically disadvantaged families, enhancing outreach campaigns to parents about the value of formal education, and increasing the use of informal hostels to minimize boarding costs for low-income families. Furthermore, the policy advocates for the provision of transport facilities for children in remote areas, early childhood development initiatives for marginalized communities, and the creation of mobile schools. It also highlights the importance of gender and cultural sensitivity training for teachers to better support diverse student populations.

The Inclusive Education Policy is a key initiative aimed at enhancing the capacity of Namibia's education system to ensure that all learners, especially those from marginalized communities like the San, have equal access to educational opportunities (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2013). This policy is grounded in the fundamental belief that education is a human right and serves as the foundation for a just society. By promoting inclusive education, the policy advocates for accessible, equitable, and high-quality education for all, emphasizing efficiency and democracy in educational practices and the promotion of lifelong learning. It encourages the adoption of adaptable and comprehensive approaches in budgeting, programme planning, and development processes.

Another significant policy is the Education Sector Policy for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), which broadens the definition of vulnerable children to encompass those with disabilities, learning difficulties, abuse histories, HIV positive status, and other at-risk groups, including indigenous minorities like the San (MOE, 2008a). This policy affirms the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture's (MoEAC) commitment to empowering OVCs so they can develop skills and qualifications necessary for self-reliance and confidence. It seeks to identify barriers to education and devise strategies to enhance the enrolment and retention of OVCs in schools. The goal is to ensure that all school-aged OVCs are able to participate fully in education, overcoming obstacles related to financial constraints, social stigma, and discrimination (Ministry of Education, 2008b). Additionally, if an OVC drops out of school, the policy emphasizes the need to facilitate their return or provide alternative educational pathways.

Furthermore, the Education Sector Policy on Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy addresses the challenges faced by pregnant students. Under this policy, pregnant girls are allowed to remain in school until their confinement, and after giving birth, they are entitled to re-admission to their original school or another school of their choice, regardless of age, within twelve months (Ministry of Education, 2008a). The policy also supports their participation in examinations if they meet school standards, and makes arrangements for those

who prefer separate exam environments. Despite these supportive measures, learner pregnancy remains a leading cause of school dropout among young girls. Discrimination against pregnant students further complicates the situation, contributing to their exclusion from educational opportunities (Human Resource Circular No. 8 of 2013, MOE).

The Namibian School Feeding Programme (NSFP) plays a crucial role in the government's efforts to combat educational inequalities and broaden access for disadvantaged groups, particularly Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2012). The programme aims to enhance enrolment rates, ensure consistent attendance, improve retention, support academic progression, and promote better health and focus among students (Ellis, 2012). Initially designed to assist OVC and other underprivileged learners in primary education, the NSFP has evolved to include any child in a participating school who expresses a desire to benefit from the initiative. The influence of poverty and unemployment significantly affects dropout rates, especially when combined with the expenses of sending children to schools that are far away or when local schools lack secondary education offerings (UNESCO, 2015). High levels of stunting and malnutrition further exemplify the adverse impact of poverty, highlighting the value of the school feeding programme in boosting primary school attendance.

Furthermore, the Repetition Policy in Namibia, which aims to reduce excessive academic repetition, allows learners to repeat only once during each educational phase: Grades 1 to 4, Grades 5 to 7, and Grades 8 to 10 (UNESCO, 2015a). This means that if a student fails Grade 1 and chooses to repeat it, they will be automatically promoted to the next grade without the opportunity to repeat any of Grades 2, 3, or 4, regardless of their grasp of the essential competencies.

These policies demonstrate the Namibian government's strong commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable education system. However, the ongoing challenge of school dropout rates remains a significant issue that requires sustained focus and intervention. While the government aims to promote inclusivity, the reality is that the implementation of these policies has not achieved the desired outcomes. Despite the benefits provided to marginalized groups, such as the San and pregnant learners, there is a lack of evidence showing that these educational initiatives have truly empowered these communities or enhanced their understanding of education's value.

This situation raises important questions regarding whether the government's curriculum development has adequately considered and addressed the unique needs and challenges of these vulnerable populations. The absence of measurable improvements indicates a pressing need for a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness and application of these educational strategies. Such evaluations should be informed by relevant data and statistics to better understand the educational landscape impacting these marginalized groups.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach utilizing a case study research design. A case study often serves to illustrate a broader concept (Gay et al., 2012). Using a qualitative approach enabled the researchers to gain deeper insights into participants' experiences by examining their language, actions, and relevant records pertaining to San learner dropout, while also uncovering factors leading to this unwholesome situation.

Three different sampling techniques were employed: purposive sampling was used to select inspectors of education (IoEs) and school principals; criterion sampling was used for selecting teachers and dropouts and; convenience sampling was applied to parents or guardians. Criterion sampling identifies participants who meet specific criteria for inclusion in the study (Gay et al., 2009). For the parents/guardians of dropouts, convenience sampling was used due to the nomadic nature of the San community. Participants were identified based on their availability and willingness to provide information, as well as their consent to participate in the study.

Data collection involved administering self-administered questionnaires with open-ended questions to IoEs, school principals, and teachers, while face-to-face interviews were conducted with dropout San learners and their parents/guardians. Furthermore, secondary data were collected and analyzed through document analysis of official reports and policies, serving as a triangulation method to validate the qualitative data gathered from interviews and questionnaire.

Findings

Participants identified a range of factors contributing to the dropout of San learners from primary school, resulting in the emergence of fifteen distinct factors. These were categorized into two groups: five school-based factors and ten home-based factors. Below, we provide a detailed discussion of these factors:

School-Based Factors

The research identified several key school-based factors impacting learner retention. Specifically, the factors that were most frequently noted included distance to school, excessive school work, bullying, the relevance of the curriculum content, and the learning environment, which received the least attention. Table 1 summarizes responses from various participant groups.

Table 1
Responses on School-Based Factors Leading to San Learners Dropping Out of School

School-based factors	IoEs	School principals	Teachers	Dropped out learners	Parents /guardians	Total
Distance to school	2	1	2	7	3	15
Bullying by others	0	1	2	6	0	9
Too much school work	0	1	4	4	0	9
Curriculum content relevance	0	0	0	6	0	6
Unconducive learning environment	0	1	2	3	0	6
Total	2	4	10	26	3	45

As outlined in Table 1, it is evident that multiple interconnected factors contribute to the dropout rates of San learners, rather than a singular cause. This notion is supported by Wangeci (2013), who posits that various risk factors work in tandem to increase the likelihood of early school departure among students. The study raises questions regarding whether schools have an effective learner-tracking system in place to identify and understand the reasons behind student dropouts. Such a system could provide valuable insights into addressing the challenges faced by San learners.

Distance to School

The issue of travelling long distances to school was raised by fifteen respondents from various categories, predominantly those who had dropped out. According to Sabates et al. (2010), difficulties in accessing schools are closely linked to challenges in school completion. One dropout learner shared their experience, stating “our home is many kilometres away from school, and it takes me several hours before I arrive at the school; it is tiring.” Another dropout noted, “the school is very far, and I was expected to wake up very early to walk to school. Sometimes it is just too cold or too dark.”

This study found that some San learners, particularly those from areas like Omapundo, face significant barriers due to the absence of nearby schools, requiring them to undertake exhausting daily commutes. Such long distances not only consume time but also lead to physical fatigue and potential hazards along the way, ultimately impacting attendance and increasing the likelihood of school dropout. The Namibian Government stipulates that a child should not walk more than five kilometres to school (MOE, 2013), yet this research indicates that some students are required to travel farther.

The findings align with UNESCO's (2015a) conclusions that lengthy commutes negatively impact students' health and educational performance. Furthermore, long walks to school can impair children's ability to concentrate in class. The report indicates that children often arrive at school physically and psychologically drained as well as sweaty and stressed, which undermines their academic performance (UNESCO, 2015a).

Additionally, the distractions encountered on the way to school - such as engaging in play with peers or being hindered by adverse weather conditions like heavy rain or extreme heat - can delay arrivals and disrupt academic focus. Minor interruptions during these walks can divert attention and reduce learners' motivation to attend school regularly.

Bullying by Fellow Learners

This study highlights the ongoing prevalence of bullying within schools, particularly within the Ohangwena region, affecting San learners significantly. The experiences of nine participants across various respondent categories illustrate the multifaceted nature of bullying, which includes name-calling and labeling informed by poverty and social deprivation of some learners. A notable comment from a parent reveals the extent of this issue:

... although it is discussed regularly that learners should not call each other names, this thing of calling San learners ‘ovakwanghala’ still does exist and it belittles the San children and makes them uncomfortable in the school environment. This scenario demoralizes them and eventually forces them to abandon school and stay at home or at cucashops.

This sentiment was echoed by two other respondents who observed that bullying not only occurs among San learners but also among students from various ethnic backgrounds, including other tribes. Interestingly, some San learners also engage in bullying against their peers, illustrating the complex dynamics of victimization and power within the school setting. Bullies typically target those perceived as weaker or quieter, revealing a stark social hierarchy among students.

One dropout learner recounted an emotional experience, stating:

When they see me with a new school uniform or even a nice pencil case or a new pen, they ask where I borrowed it from and when I am going to take it back. The question will be repeated for many days, and some will even pull my clothes or grab my belongings. I tried my best to shield off those bad remarks, but it was too much to bear.

Another unfortunate narrative came from a learner who noted:

Bullying drove me out of school. When I pass by a group of learners, especially boys, one will put an obstacle in my way (like a stone or their feet) to make me fall so that they can see my underwear. Sometimes they would make one of my belongings fall on the ground, and when I bend to pick it up, one will lift my skirt to enable them to look at my underwear. They would go on and on whispering about the colour of my underwear whenever they got a chance. It was embarrassing.

Support for these findings is grounded in research conducted by Sam (2011), which explored bullying in selected secondary schools within the Oshana region. Sam's study found that a majority of teachers and students were aware of the bullying occurring in their schools. The findings identified common forms of bullying, including physical and emotional harassment. Notably, larger and underperforming schools reported higher instances of bullying compared to medium-sized or high-performing institutions. The study also pointed out that inadequate school regulations, an unconducive educational environment, and peer pressure contribute significantly to the prevalence of bullying.

The negative repercussions of bullying extend beyond immediate distress and discomfort; it markedly affects academic performance, attendance, and overall discipline within schools, as well as individual self-esteem. This lowered self-esteem and victimization can ultimately push affected students towards disengagement from the educational system and may contribute significantly to school dropout rates.

Too Much School Work

The findings of this study indicate that excessive schoolwork, particularly in the Ohangwena region, significantly contributes to school dropout rates among San learners. Nine respondents from four different categories highlighted this issue, noting that an overwhelming workload acts as a deterrent to their educational engagement. One dropout learner shared a poignant reflection on their experience:

I was stressed as I felt overloaded by schoolwork. I hated memorizing, I still do. I could not take it anymore but there was nothing I could do because I had no idea what will happen if I leave school. When I dropped out of school and my grandmother said nothing, I felt relieved.

This sentiment captures the intense pressure faced by learners, which prevents them from engaging in social activities outside of school. The demands of studying for tests, completing examinations, and fulfilling homework responsibilities diminish opportunities for relaxation and peer interaction. Another dropout learner expressed their struggle, stating:

I try everything I can, and sometimes it is not good enough. I do not have enough time to see my friends any longer, and it took me to the edge. But it's better now that I have grown up. I guess I was just too young for school then. I do think school is important, but it should be easier and more relaxing for learners.

The experience of feeling burdened by excessive schoolwork is not unique to the San learners in this study. Shadreck (2013) corroborates these findings, suggesting that for children and teenagers, an overload of academic tasks coupled with insufficient time for play can generate significant pressure. This is especially true if young learners are not adequately guided on how to balance their academic responsibilities effectively with their social lives.

Furthermore, research by Haaveshe et al. (2013) supports the conclusion drawn from this study, indicating that the demands of homework along with other educational activities can demoralize San learners. They experience a reduction in free time - an essential element for healthy childhood development. The accumulation of academic pressure can lead to heightened anxiety and depression among students, particularly if they lack the necessary skills to manage stress. Unfortunately, some San learners find themselves overwhelmed, which ultimately results in their decision to drop out of school.

Curriculum Content Relevance

The relevance of the curriculum to the learners' lives is a critical factor influencing the decision of San learners to drop out of school. Six dropout learners indicated that the educational content they are taught does not resonate with their daily experiences or future aspirations. One learner articulated this disconnect by stating:

We are hunters; we expect to learn from school the new ways and methods of hunting so that we will be able to outsmart our forefathers with their old skills of hunting. At school, we are taught how to cultivate and different types of soil and so on. As much as that is important, it is not part of our culture and what we do on a daily basis. It is useless and a waste of time.

This sentiment indicates a significant gap between the curriculum being offered and the cultural and practical realities of the San learners' lives. The learners expressed a desire for education that delivers immediate benefits and life skills relevant to their context, rather than content that exhausts them and drains their motivation.

Considering the dynamic nature of curriculum development in Namibian schools, as noted by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2015), there is a pressing need for curricula to be regularly updated to meet societal needs. Makhopele and Moghale (2013) emphasize that curricula should be responsive and adaptable to the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental situations of local communities. In this context, the lack of connection between the curriculum and the lived experiences of the San community is a significant barrier to educational engagement, as highlighted by Smart (2005). Rumberger (2011) also critiques the uniformity of the national curriculum, arguing that it fails to accommodate the diverse

backgrounds of learners, particularly those of the San. Without seeing the relevance of their education, San learners are less likely to feel motivated to pursue their studies.

The situation regarding curriculum relevance can be understood through the lens of the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory posits that a child's development is influenced by the different systems they interact with, including their cultural environment. For San learners, the educational curriculum's failure to align with their cultural practices and needs creates a disconnect that undermines their educational motivation and leads to disengagement and dropout.

Unconducive Learning Environment

The learning environment is another critical factor that contributes to school dropout rates among San learners. Six respondents highlighted the challenges posed by overcrowded and poorly maintained facilities. One dropout learner noted: "There are insufficient classrooms and we sit in overcrowded classes. The chairs that we sit on are not comfortable either and we end up sitting on the floor which is not comfortable at all."

Such conditions can severely impact student engagement and overall educational experiences. Learners reported discomfort due to overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated infrastructure, and inadequate seating arrangements. The ideal teacher-learner ratio, as recommended by the government (1:35 according to MOE, 2013), is essential in providing conducive learning environments where teachers can effectively attend to individual students' needs.

An unconducive learning environment can be analyzed using the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory (Maslow, 1943), which highlights the importance of a stable environment for fostering learning and development. According to this theory, basic needs such as safety, comfort, and social belonging must be met before learners can effectively engage in the educational process. In the case of San learners, the lack of adequate facilities and comfortable learning spaces can create an atmosphere of anxiety and discomfort, ultimately discouraging them from attending school.

Moreover, if learners are subjected to a disruptive and uncomfortable environment, they may find it harder to focus on their studies, which can lead to decreased academic performance, reduced self-esteem, and increased dropout rates. To effectively support San learners, interventions must be implemented to improve classroom conditions and ensure that they are conducive to learning.

Socioeconomic/Home-based factors

The study identified home-based factors as the second major category contributing to school dropout among San learners. Table 2 presents a comprehensive analysis of these factors based on responses from multiple stakeholder groups, including Inspectors of Education (IoEs), school principals, teachers, dropped out learners, and parents/guardians.

Table 2

Socioeconomic/Home-based Factors Contributing to San Learners' Primary School Dropout by Stakeholder Group

Factors	IoEs	School principals	Teachers	Dropped out learners	Parents /guardians	Total
Nomadic life and cultural influences	4	4	4	4	12	28
Hunger and poverty	4	4	4	12	4	28
Early marriage and pregnancy	4	4	4	8	4	24
Child labour	1	2	3	4	8	18
Domestic work	2	2	4	2	6	16
Household chores and income-generating activities	0	0	1	4	9	14
Lack of parental involvement and poor understanding of the relevance of education	4	4	4	1	6	19
Laziness	3	3	4	3	0	13
Ill-discipline versus teachers' behaviour and punishment	2	2	3	1	0	8
Poor motivation	3	2	1	1	1	8
Total	27	27	32	40	50	176

Analysis of the data presented in Table 2 reveals several significant home-based factors influencing San learners' dropout rates. The most prominent factors, based on total response frequencies, were nomadic lifestyle and cultural influences (n=28), hunger and poverty (n=28), followed by early marriage and pregnancy (n=24). The data also highlights other contributing factors such as lack of parental involvement and poor understanding of education's relevance (n=19), child labour (n=18), and domestic work (n=16).

Notably, certain factors received varying levels of emphasis from different stakeholder groups. For instance, parents/guardians placed considerable emphasis on nomadic lifestyle and cultural influences (n=12), while dropped out learners more frequently cited hunger and poverty (n=12) as a significant factor. This divergence in perspectives suggests a complex interplay of socio-economic and cultural factors affecting San learners' educational persistence.

It is particularly noteworthy that factors such as laziness (n=13), ill-discipline versus teachers' behaviour and punishment (n=8), and poor motivation (n=8) received relatively fewer total responses, though they were consistently mentioned across most stakeholder groups except parents/guardians.

The following sections will examine each of these socio-economic or home-based factors in detail, analyzing their specific impacts on San learners' educational trajectories and their broader implications for educational policy and practice.

Nomadic Lifestyle and Cultural Influences

The study revealed that nomadic lifestyle emerged as a significant factor affecting San learners' educational continuity, with all stakeholder groups (n=28) identifying it as a primary concern. The San community's traditional mobility patterns, driven by food-seeking behaviours and seasonal employment opportunities, create substantial barriers to consistent school attendance. This finding is exemplified by one teacher's observation:

The way of living for the San community plays a major role in San children's dropping out of school. The environmental influences in urban life, like San children dropping out of school mainly to follow their parents to Cucashops and open markets to drink alcohol and search for food are also contributing factors.

The research identified distinct seasonal patterns in dropout rates, correlating with agricultural cycles and natural resource availability. Specifically, harvesting periods in Ovakwanyama's *mahangu* (pearl millet) fields and the ripening of wild fruits trigger temporary withdrawals from school as children accompany their parents in these sustenance activities. While mobile schools have been proposed as an intervention strategy, supported by the National Policy Options for Educationally Marginalized in Namibia, implementation has not yet been extended to the Ohangwena region.

Hunger and Poverty

The study identified hunger and poverty as equally significant factors (n=28) contributing to school dropout among San learners. The research revealed a complex relationship between economic hardship, employment-seeking behaviour, and substance use. San learners often engage in post-school and holiday employment to meet basic needs, but the income is frequently diverted to purchasing traditional beer (*otombo*), leading to addiction patterns that adversely affect school attendance. As one teacher noted:

Most San can only eat food for a day, once provided; the next day the food will be finished because of their habits. They either exchange with *otombo* or they cook more than they can eat, while the rest is left to spoil, and eventually thrown away.

The study also uncovered concerning patterns regarding the utilization of government drought relief assistance, with food supplies often being exchanged for *otombo*. This finding aligns with Haileselassie's (2011) research, which establishes the critical relationship between nutrition and learning capacity. Hunger's physical and psychological effects can significantly impair students' ability to engage with educational content, leading to decreased attention spans and increased likelihood of classroom disengagement.

Early Marriage and Pregnancy

The study found unanimous agreement across all five stakeholder groups (n=24) that early marriage and pregnancy significantly contribute to school dropout among San learners. This finding is evidenced by testimonial data from education professionals. As one teacher observed: "One will just notice a child is no longer coming to school and later you will hear she is married or is pregnant." A school principal further elaborated on the cultural dynamics:

Some children are becoming pregnant on the advice of parents. As per custom, learners should get married and have children at the 'right productive age'. When the 'right age' arrives it makes no difference whether the learner is in school, she must get married and have children.

These findings align with research by Makhopele and Moghale (2013) in the Kavango region, where traditional practices, including arranged marriages and culturally-determined pregnancy timing, influence female learners' educational trajectories. While some learners return to school post-childbirth, others permanently discontinue their education.

Child Labour

Despite post-independence improvements in living conditions for many Namibians, the study revealed persistent socioeconomic challenges within San communities in Ohangwena. Education officials (IoEs, principals, and teachers) reported that the San's predominantly unskilled status often results in their provision of low-wage labour in rural areas. The research identified concerning patterns of under-18 employment, supporting Mokibelo's (2014) assertion that child labour not only contravenes legal frameworks but fundamentally undermines children's constitutional right to complete primary education. This economic pressure often results in decreased school attendance and eventual dropout.

Domestic Work

The study identified domestic work as a significant factor, with sixteen participants across all stakeholder categories noting San learners' engagement in activities such as cattle herding and resource gathering (water and firewood). Notably, some learners assume caretaking responsibilities for Ovakwanyama households whose owners work elsewhere, seeking economic support for themselves and their families. These findings support Segumba's (2015) analysis of San marginalization, which identifies multiple contributing factors including economic dependency, political marginalization, negative societal perceptions, low self-esteem, and cultural adaptation challenges.

Household Chores and Income-generating Activities

Fourteen respondents identified household chores and income-generating activities as significant factors affecting persistence in schooling. Despite not maintaining traditional Ovakwanyama agricultural practices, San communities engage in crafting traditional tools (*omaluvela*, *omaonga*, *omakuva*, *omaholo*) and seasonal harvesting work. One learner's testimony captured the immediate economic pressures: "There are no instant outcomes from school that justify the time spent at school, rather than doing something that can be immediately rewarding."

The research identified significant time management challenges for learners, including late arrival at school and reduced study time. These findings correspond with UNESCO's (2015a) research on the impact of domestic responsibilities on educational outcomes. The study highlights that essential household tasks - including wood collection, fetching water, livestock management, and sibling care - create substantial time demands that compete with academic commitments, potentially compromising educational achievement.

Parental Involvement and Understanding of Educational Relevance

The study identified a significant disconnect between stated parental values regarding education and actual support behaviours, with fifteen participants highlighting this disparity. While San parents verbally affirm education's importance, practical support for school

attendance often yields to immediate economic and domestic priorities. A teacher's observation captures this dynamic: "San parents are not taking interest in their children's education; they do not even attend the parents meeting, and do not keep a record of their children's attendance, nor do they follow up when they stop going to school."

The research revealed limited parental engagement with school-based involvement opportunities, such as parent meetings at each school term. An Inspector of Education noted the cascading effect of this disengagement noting that "San parents have no interest in their children's education. When San children notice that their parents have little faith and interest in education, they also tend not to take it seriously."

The study also uncovered concerning patterns of passive response to school dropout, with some parents/guardians demonstrating limited initiative in investigating their children's withdrawal from education. This finding suggests a need for more proactive school-family engagement strategies.

Perceived Laziness

Thirteen participants identified perceived laziness as a factor affecting San learners' educational outcomes. However, this characterization requires careful consideration within broader socio-cultural contexts. As one teacher noted:

Just like some children of other tribes, San learners are too lazy to do their schoolwork. These children do not want to do their homework, class work and let alone study for examination. Perhaps there are some driving forces behind this posture. They know their own motive for being lazy.

While Zachary (2014) connects academic disengagement to poor performance and eventual dropout, the study suggests a more complex dynamic regarding work motivation. The research indicates that San individuals often demonstrate high capability and work ethic in employment contexts, suggesting that perceived "laziness" may reflect cultural misalignment rather than inherent disposition.

Disciplinary Practices and Teacher-Student Relations

The research revealed concerning patterns in teacher-student interactions and disciplinary approaches. A particularly poignant testimony from a dropped out learner highlights the impact of discriminatory treatment:

Some teachers' attitude are horrible. They use languages like "look at how dirty you Kwanghalas are." Any single mistake you make it can be associated with the fact that we are Kwanghalas... Just because our fore parents did not make it in school does not mean we will not make it either.

The study identified ongoing use of corporal punishment despite its abolition, with San learners reporting targeted physical discipline. Alternative disciplinary measures, such as yard cleaning and detention, were found to be potentially counterproductive. This aligns with Makhopele and Moghale's (2013) emphasis on creating positive learning environments that foster engagement rather than alienation.

Motivational Factors

Eight respondents identified poor motivation as a significant factor, linking it to the absence of visible San role models in professional positions. As one parent observed: "There are no successful San people in the surroundings; teachers, nurses, cleaners, etc. are all from other tribes rather than the San."

The research revealed a complex interplay between self-esteem and academic persistence. While some learners internalize perceived limitations, others demonstrate resilience and determination to challenge existing social paradigms. This finding aligns with Jackline and Tikoko's (2014) research on the relationship between self-esteem and academic self-sabotage, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to build self-efficacy and resilience.

Integration of Findings and Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study reveal a complex interplay of school-based and home-based factors contributing to the high dropout rates among San learners in the Ohangwena region. These findings align with the theoretical framework of Critical Theory and Critical Indigenous Pedagogy (CIP) which emphasize the role of power dynamics, cultural relevance, and systemic barriers in shaping educational outcomes. The integration of these theories provides a nuanced understanding of how institutional structures, socio-cultural dynamics, and power relations intersect to marginalize San learners.

School-Based Factors and Power Dynamics

From the perspective of Critical Theory, the school-based factors identified - such as long distances to school, bullying, excessive schoolwork, irrelevant curriculum content, and an unconducive learning environment - reflect systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect marginalized communities like the San. The long distances to school, for instance, are not merely logistical challenges but also manifestations of resource allocation disparities. Schools are often located in areas more accessible to dominant ethnic groups, leaving San learners to bear the burden of long, exhausting commutes. This aligns with the Critical Theory's focus on how institutional power structures perpetuate inequality.

Bullying, particularly the use of derogatory terms like "ovakwaghala," highlights the socio-cultural power dynamics within schools. The term, used by the Ovakwanyama community to refer to the San, carries implicit assumptions about social status and learning capabilities. This linguistic marginalization, as noted by Hays (2021), reinforces negative stereotypes and undermines the self-esteem of San learners, leading to disengagement and dropout. The findings suggest that bullying is not just a peer issue but a reflection of broader societal attitudes that are perpetuated within the school environment.

The irrelevance of the curriculum content to the San learners' cultural and practical realities further exacerbates their disengagement. As Rumberger (2011) argues, a uniform national curriculum often fails to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of learners, particularly those from indigenous communities. These disconnect between the curriculum and the learners' lived experiences undermine their motivation to stay in school, as they see little immediate benefit from their education.

Home-Based Factors and Cultural Dynamics

The home-based factors, such as the nomadic lifestyle, hunger and poverty, early marriage, and child labour, are deeply rooted in the socio-economic and cultural realities of

the San community. The nomadic lifestyle, driven by seasonal employment and food-seeking behaviours, creates significant barriers to consistent school attendance. This finding resonates with the Critical Indigenous Pedagogy (CIP) framework, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices within educational contexts. The lack of mobile schools or flexible educational models that accommodate the San's nomadic lifestyle reflects a failure to integrate indigenous perspectives into the education system.

Hunger and poverty, identified as significant factors by both learners and parents, highlight the intersection of economic hardship and educational disengagement. The diversion of government drought relief assistance to purchase traditional beer (*otombo*) underscores the complex relationship between poverty, substance use, and school attendance. This aligns with Haileselassie's (2011) research, which links nutrition to learning capacity, suggesting that hunger not only affects physical health but also cognitive functioning and academic performance.

Early marriage and pregnancy, particularly among female learners, reflect cultural norms that prioritize traditional practices over formal education. As Makhopele and Moghale (2013) note, these practices are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the San community, making it challenging to reconcile traditional values with the demands of formal schooling. This tension between cultural preservation and educational integration is a central theme in Critical Indigenous Pedagogy, which advocates for educational models that respect and incorporate indigenous cultural practices.

Implications for Teachers and Non-San Parents

The findings of this study have significant implications for teachers and parents who are not from the San community. For teachers, the study highlights the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that acknowledges and addresses the unique challenges faced by San learners. Teachers must be trained to recognize and counteract the socio-cultural biases that contribute to bullying and marginalization within the classroom. Additionally, teachers should be equipped with strategies to make the curriculum more relevant to the lived experiences of San learners, thereby increasing their engagement and motivation.

For non-San parents, the study underscores the importance of fostering a more inclusive school environment that respects and values the cultural heritage of the San community. Parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. By promoting positive interactions between San and non-San learners, parents can help reduce the stigma and discrimination that contribute to bullying and dropout rates.

Critical Analysis of Policy and Practice

The study's findings also call for a critical analysis of existing educational policies and practices. While initiatives such as the Inclusive Education Policy and the School Feeding Programme aim to address some of the challenges faced by marginalized learners, their implementation has not been fully effective in reducing dropout rates among San learners. The lack of culturally relevant curricula and the absence of mobile schools for nomadic communities highlight the need for more adaptive and inclusive educational models.

Conclusion

The integration of findings from different participants with the theoretical framework of Critical Theory and Critical Indigenous Pedagogy provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to San learner dropout. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions that address both the systemic and socio-cultural barriers faced by San learners, while also highlighting the critical role of teachers and non-San parents in fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

The study concludes that school dropout among San learners in the Ohangwena region remains a persistent issue, influenced by a combination of socio-cultural, home, and school-based factors. The high dropout rates reflect broader systemic challenges within the educational framework, including long distances to school, bullying, an uncondusive learning environment, and a curriculum that often fails to resonate with the learners' cultural context and daily lives. Additionally, socioeconomic pressures and cultural dynamics at the household level further hinder the ability of San learners to complete their primary education. These factors collectively contribute to the learners' disengagement from schooling, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address the unique circumstances of the San community.

The study also underscores the absence of a specific policy tailored to address the dropout rates among San learners. However, existing policies, such as the inclusive education policy, pregnancy policy, and free education policy, introduced by the Government of the Republic of Namibia, align with the constitutional provision under Article 20 and could potentially support the retention of San learners in primary education. Furthermore, initiatives such as school feeding programmes and the Back to School and Stay campaign have been identified as potential mechanisms to mitigate some of the educational challenges, including dropout rates. Despite these efforts, there is a pressing need for future policies to be more adaptive, ensuring they accommodate diverse forms of learning and acknowledge the cultural heritage of marginalized groups like the San.

Recommendations

To address the multifaceted challenges contributing to school dropout among San learners, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Policy Revision and Inclusive Curricula:** Education policies should be revised to incorporate inclusive curricula that are culturally relevant and tailored to the context of San learners. This would help make learning more meaningful and applicable to their daily lives, thereby increasing engagement and retention.
2. **Infrastructure and Accessibility:** The Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture (MoEAC) should prioritize the construction of schools closer to San communities to reduce the long distances learners currently travel. Improved infrastructure, including adequate classrooms and learning resources, is essential to creating a conducive learning environment.
3. **Enhanced School Feeding Programmes:** The school feeding programme should be expanded and improved to address hunger-related dropout. Ensuring that learners have access to nutritious meals can significantly improve attendance and concentration in school.
4. **Teacher Training and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Teacher training programmes should be implemented to equip educators with skills in culturally responsive pedagogy. This would enable teachers to better understand and address the

unique needs of San learners, fostering a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

5. **Community Engagement and Literacy Programmes:** San parents and community members should be actively engaged in literacy programmes to emphasize the value of education and encourage their children's continued schooling. Awareness campaigns should also be conducted to highlight the importance of education in navigating an increasingly globalized world while preserving cultural heritage.
6. **Anti-Bullying Measures and Teacher Supervision:** School principals and teachers must effectively implement the Learners' Code of Conduct to address bullying targeted at San learners. Additionally, school leadership should actively supervise and monitor teachers to address negligence and negative attitudes toward San learners.
7. **Partnerships for Resource Mobilization:** The MoEAC should seek financial and technical assistance from non-governmental organizations, such as UNICEF and UNESCO, to fund the renovation of dilapidated classrooms and the provision of adequate teaching and learning resources. This would help create a more conducive learning environment for San learners.

These recommendations aim to address the systemic and socio-cultural barriers faced by San learners, ensuring that they have equitable access to quality education. By aligning these interventions with the broader objectives of inclusive and adaptive education policies, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational equity and the retention of marginalized groups in Namibia in the education system.

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