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Teacher absences in an HIV and AIDS context:

evidence from nine schools in Kavango and Caprivi (Namibia)

Vanessa Castro
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List of abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral treatment
AWDL	Average walking distance for learners
BETD	Basic Education Teacher Diploma
EFA	Education for All
GDP	Gross domestic product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HoD	Head of department
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
MoBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoHETEC	Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation
PGC	Primary grade certification
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive summary

The present document is an exploratory study that aims at gaining understanding of how some schools in areas with high rates of HIV and AIDS prevalence are managing the issue of teacher absences. This is a complex and sensitive topic that cannot be dealt with through a quantitative survey. Indeed, answers obtained on such issues are never straightforward. The research involves in-depth observations and interviews with different informants, and applying triangulation techniques so as to check the consistency and reliability of the information obtained.

Carrying out such research is time-consuming and expensive. Hence IIEP and the Ministry of Education of Namibia chose to cover only a limited number of schools in selected regions. Therefore the results obtained from the research cannot be generalized to the whole of Namibia. Further investigation is required, and it would be necessary to conduct the research on a larger scale to draw conclusions that can be fully generalized. It was felt, however, that the findings derived from the observations in these selected schools are interesting. Useful suggestions can already be made to assist countries facing increased teacher shortages and difficulties in achieving the EFA goals if teacher absenteeism worsens in the future due to such reasons as increased prevalence of HIV and AIDS.

This study could not have been done without the support of the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Namibia, the UNESCO Windhoek Cluster Office, and the UNESCO National Commission.

Introduction

This exploratory research sought to gather qualitative data in order to:

- understand the extent, nature and effects of teacher absences in some communities, notably on school operations and student learning processes;
- understand the community's role in helping schools cope with the problem;
- determine what elements – if any – of the local models are more successful in handling the problem, and whether these could be improved and disseminated;
- determine what suggestions could be derived from the empirical evidence provided.

The study includes a review of teacher policies and a qualitative empirical study conducted in nine schools in two regions in the northeast of Namibia: Kavango and Caprivi.

Caprivi and Kavango were selected because of their similar educational and socioeconomic situations yet contrasting rates of HIV prevalence: 43 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. The qualitative research was carried out in nine primary schools selected at random. The fieldwork was planned to be done over five school days in February 2006 and used eight different types of instruments to collect data from various sources. This allowed for the 'triangulation' of information, which has increased the credibility of the data, enhancing the reliability of the information collected.

Due to lack of records and observers' data, only information on seven out of the nine schools visited has been used for the analysis.

Two working premises guided the preparation of this report.

1. The first is an understanding that although absenteeism in some of these nine schools might be related to the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the community, no direct link could be established between the two. No direct questions on this issue were asked to respect the teachers' confidentiality and their personal lives, and also due to the stigma attached to HIV and AIDS. The study therefore does not aim to measure teachers' absences that are due to HIV and AIDS, but rather to analyze the issue of teacher absences in an HIV and AIDS context.
2. The second premise is an understanding that problems related to HIV and AIDS are not the only cause of teacher absences: Lack of leadership and supervision in schools are another cause. Fieldwork results show that absenteeism may be an important consequence of management problems and of the working style of educational leaders in the school and the community.

Findings

The sampled schools have many common problems: lack of school materials, textbooks and teaching aids; lack of lodging for teachers; great distances that students have to walk to get to class; student absenteeism due to child labour during harvest time; and, in some schools, high teacher absenteeism.

Among the school samples, three schools had shown very high levels of teacher absenteeism over the last two years:

K1: 7 teachers, 100 absences in 2005;

C7: 6 teachers, 35 absences for the heads of department (HoDs) in 2004;

K7: 3 teachers, 48 absences in 2005.

Observers recorded that these schools lacked discipline for teachers; teachers were found to be late for classes or absent during the fieldwork period; and large groups of learners were wandering around during class time, disturbing learning activities.

There were also three schools which had very low numbers of absences in 2005:

C27: 3 teachers, 14 absences;

C3: 5 teachers, 6 absences;

C1: 2 teachers, 10 absences.

Observers' records indicate proper operation and discipline in these schools.

The study data throw light on the following research questions:

- The likelihood of teachers being absent is increased by:
 - behavioural problems, such as alcoholism, lack of self-discipline and low levels of accountability;
 - chronic illness;
 - lack of training;
 - unplanned workshops during class time.
- Teacher absences have very negative consequences if:
 - learners do not receive classes and/or are left by themselves for hours;

- learners wander around making noise and disturbing the learning process of students in class;
- teachers are overburdened as they take on other classes without being duly prepared;
- learners are frustrated.

Suggestions and pending issues

Differences in teachers' absences and discipline observed during the fieldwork and in the school records are linked to different problems and ways of managing these problems at the schools. The results of our investigation indicate the following:

1. People are very much in denial of HIV and AIDS due to the stigma attached. HIV and AIDS were never mentioned as direct causes of teachers' absences. Teachers, for example, were reported as being very frequently absent without a clear cause (sickness), or as having behavioural problems (sleeping in front of a class, sitting silently in the classroom), but there is no proof that such incidences can be related to HIV or AIDS. The most significant observed impact of the pandemic on the schooling process in fact concerns attendance at funerals and burials.
2. On the other hand, absences do not follow a clear historical trend. In light of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, it was expected that there would be a sustained increase in absences between 2003 to 2005 due to increased compassionate and sick leave. This was not the case however; unless, that is, records are not reliable.
3. Management problems are causing great disruption to pupils' learning and the good functioning of these schools. A comparison of the levels of discipline and absences observed in the three schools in Caprivi and the two in Kavango affirms this. Given the high rate of HIV and AIDS prevalence in Caprivi, it was expected that there would be a greater number of schools in that region with serious absenteeism problems. However, this was not the case. On the contrary, the three schools in Caprivi were among the group of schools with the lowest number of absences. Conversely, two of the schools in Kavango were in the group with the greatest absenteeism and discipline problems, along with two others in the region, which also appear to have problems, although this could not be verified due to a lack of proper records.
4. There are problems related to lack of compliance with the established educational procedures. Bad record-keeping of absences is one of them, and this may contribute to underestimations of the number of absences due to illness in these schools. Examples of non-compliance include the following incidences:
 - Not all absences are reported.
 - The system responds slowly to chronic problems such as alcoholism and illness of teachers who attend class but are not in a condition to teach effectively.
 - Norms and procedures set by the MOE are frequently violated. Sick leave with full remuneration should not surpass 87 days in every three year cycle, but according to records some schools do not comply with this regulation.
 - Classes are left unsupervised in the schools with high levels of teacher absenteeism.
 - Principals do not always exercise leadership and strict discipline.
5. A major factor that emerged during the study is that a well-functioning school, where teachers' absences are properly managed, has generally established an effective partnership with its main stakeholders: inspectors, principals and school boards. If these stakeholders are active

and harmonize their efforts to ensure that the school operates well, they make a difference. Within this harmonization of efforts, each stakeholder plays a specific role in the schools.

In the schools identified to be well-managed:

1. Principals tended to:

- be trained and experienced in school management;
- be conscientious and apply MOE procedures and norms regarding signing leave forms and submission of medical certificates for sick leave;
- communicate with teachers, members of the school board and the inspector, and find solutions by consensus to the school's problems.

2. Inspectors were found to:

- frequently visit and supervise school performance;
- address requests from the school and respond speedily to its demands;
- encourage the staff to perform their duties promptly;
- give advice on school matters.

3. School boards:

- met teachers to let them know what was expected from each of them;
- talked to teachers, discouraging them from being absent from school;
- visited the school on a scheduled, weekly basis;
- discussed with the principal problems involving learners and teachers who tended to be absent;
- visited parents of learners with problems;
- followed up with the inspector to request action whenever a teacher continued to have behavioural problems.

It can be stated that, although the system is promoting "collaboration and partnership with all stakeholders in education ... in the process of democratic decentralization..." (Republic of Namibia, 2006b: 1), this decentralization has not yet sufficiently materialized, nor has a proper 'partnership' been achieved in the schools visited that were characterized by high absenteeism and mismanagement.

The system is also experiencing difficulties in responding to chronic problems, such as teachers who turn up for class but are ill or not in a condition to teach effectively.

The general issue emerging from the study is that teacher absenteeism in the schools visited is a serious problem and it has major consequences on the organization of the teaching process and pupils' learning opportunities. This problem has been aggravated by the HIV epidemic, although the silence that surrounds it makes it impossible to accurately assess how many of the absences observed are directly related to the pandemic.

HIV and AIDS constitute a serious problem, and care and support must be provided for those who are infected and/or affected. Yet it has to be addressed as a management problem, and some solutions can be identified; unless this is done, the system may be seriously damaged, quality may suffer, and inequalities worsened.

General suggestions¹

The decentralization process could be accelerated, granting more authority to local stakeholders, thereby enabling them to address problems in the most remote schools swiftly and efficiently.

The bottlenecks in the management of the problem of absenteeism could be resolved in the following ways:

- modernizing and computerizing the statistics system;
- increasing accountability in each school with accurate record-keeping;
- establishing a system of sanctions and speeding up the mechanisms for dismissing teachers who systematically violate workplace regulations and procedures;
- organizing the in-service training system, including workshops, at a convenient time that is least likely to disrupt the teaching process;
- speeding up the decision-making mechanisms for replacing teachers and for opening new positions.

The school boards could be strengthened by providing opportunities for training and close technical assistance. School board members could receive training and support on how to do their job.

The recruitment of principals could be reviewed: Principals ought to be interviewed and recruited on the basis of their competences rather than on the strict basis of seniority. They would greatly benefit from training on how to lead a school and on pedagogical management before taking up their position. Principals ought to be sensitized to the consequences of teacher absences. They should receive the *Guidelines for school principals* (Republic of Namibia, 2005) and be encouraged to apply it.

Addressing absences related to AIDS and other chronic illnesses

The case of chronically sick persons would need to be addressed differently for obvious reasons. The government is encouraging teachers and other civil servants to be tested so as to receive free antiretroviral medicines if needed. Once they receive their treatment, teachers – as all other government employees – are supposed to continue working as usual. It is suggested that access to life-prolonging antiretroviral treatment (ART) be extended to their immediate family.

The specific measures proposed below apply to any chronically ill teacher considered by a medical doctor to be severely handicapped by his/her sickness:

- The protocol for early retirement could be reviewed so as to allow a chronically ill person, who is considered by a medical doctor to be severely handicapped by his/her sickness, to retire early and claim a full pension. This measure of course does not depend on the Ministry of Education.
- The Ministry could recommend to principals to give a lighter teaching load to a chronically ill teacher, certified as being so by a medical doctor. Our recommendation is that such a person not be assigned to teach any highly sensitive grades, such as Grade 1.

The issue of creating a group of relief teachers, whose responsibility would be to replace missing teachers, is presently being discussed in the Ministry. The difficulty would be to make sure that

1. Several of these suggestions have been discussed, or emerged from the discussions that took place, in a workshop with the directors and the staff of the regional offices in Caprivi and Kavango regions and representatives of the Central Ministry.

these relief teachers are made available on short notice. Hence the scheme may not constitute a solution to replace those teachers who are absent from time to time. Another problem is that to be efficient the scheme may turn out to be costly.

One solution that could be considered is the possibility of creating a 'contingency fund' to pay external teachers to take over the classes of those who are ill and can no longer teach. Such a fund, if it was created, could allocate special amounts to those schools that have a very high rate of recorded teacher absences and very low school development funds, so as to allow them to recruit members of the community (unemployed secondary education graduates) to replace the missing teachers.

The question of the high number of teachers who miss school to attend a funeral or are granted compassionate leave is a delicate matter. A conference might be organized involving different stakeholders and members of society to discuss the best way of handling these issues, including the impact of very long funerals on the economy.

1 Introduction

There is a great deal of controversy in education about the factors that contribute to effective learning in school. However, it is acknowledged that the most important aspects of education are that: i) students attend school; and ii) lessons are delivered by a teacher whose role is to guide the learning process. Many studies report that teachers are the most important factor in the school learning process of students; thus it is only logical that learning is greatly affected if the teacher is not present (Harbison and Hanushek, 1992; Park and Hannum, 2002; Liman and Shikongo, 2006) and that students' performance declines when they do not receive lessons. Among the factors that contribute most to pupils' learning, the following are the most frequently quoted: teachers' knowledge, teachers' preparation, staff co-operation and dedication, leadership and discipline (Heneveld and Craig, 1996; Verspoor, 2005).

Liman and Shikongo, who prepared a study on teacher absences in Namibia, indicate that "the wealth of research tells us that teacher presence in school does matter" (2006: 2). According to SACMEQ I and II, over 60 per cent of all Grade 6 learners were enrolled in schools suffering from 'teacher absenteeism', 'teachers arriving late at school' and 'health problems' (Makuwa, 2005: 150). According to this same report, the late arrival of teachers had a 0.35 correlation with students' tardiness, and 0.36 with students' absenteeism. In the same sample schools, teachers' absenteeism correlated 0.23 with students' absences and 0.39 with students skipping classes (Makuwa, 2005: 155).

If one student is absent one day more than the rest of the group, his/her performance can be almost two points below that of his/her classmates (Uribe, Murnane, Willet and Somers, 2006: 260). As for frequent teacher absences, it is to be expected that this would have a more negative effect on the learning of the entire group of students in the class or affected grade. Further, if teachers' frequent absences are correlated with absenteeism, tardiness, class skipping and bad behaviour of the students, the schools most affected by the problem will find it difficult to address the low quality of teaching and limited academic performance.

Frequent teacher absences are simultaneously a result of and an aggravating factor in the inequity that exists between rural and urban populations. International studies indicate that teacher absenteeism is more pronounced in poor and rural schools than in urban schools and in areas with better socio-economic conditions (Liman and Shikongo, 2006). These authors quote a study in Bangladesh, which concludes that "teacher absence in secondary schools increases with the remoteness of the school: 10.8 per cent in major metropolitan areas, 13.5 per cent in small towns and 19 per cent in rural areas" (Liman and Shikongo, 2006: 3). According to the study, "a factor that could have contributed to these uneven levels of absenteeism is the relative lack of parental involvement in school activities in poor rural areas, whereas in urban areas, parents are usually better educated and more likely to be involved in the school activities".

Systematic teacher absences have different causes. The 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report indicates that these causes tend to be related to (i) teachers being reassigned to other classes or schools; (ii) teachers having to travel to obtain their monthly pay; or (iii) teachers taking a second job to supplement insufficient salaries. Even participating in in-service training has been identified as a cause of teachers' absences as it is often organized during regular teaching hours. Teachers'

absences and mismanagement are making it increasingly difficult for countries to meet the EFA goal of quality education for all by 2015.

In recent years, the spread of HIV and AIDS has generated greater concern about teachers' presence in schools. While attention was initially focused on the potential loss of massive numbers of teachers from the school system as a result of the epidemic, it is currently shifting to how HIV and AIDS are affecting the regular functioning of schools. Teachers, principals and students are having to care for sick relatives, attend funerals, or they may even themselves suffer from chronic illness in the later stages of HIV infection.

The lack of reliable data makes it difficult to accurately assess the extent of absenteeism in schools, although a series of reports shed some light on the issue. In a study conducted in two provinces in South Africa (Schierhout, Kinghorn, Govender, Mungani and Morely, 2004), school principals reported that 1.5 per cent and 2.6 per cent of all staff employed in each province were absent from school for more than 30 consecutive days in the year, while 7 per cent and 11 per cent of learners confirmed missing between 4 and 10 lessons in the two weeks prior to the study due to teachers being absent. Extended absences were more prevalent in secondary schools than in primary schools, and 15 per cent of all schools reported more than one teacher to be absent for more than 30 consecutive days. Small schools were at greater risk of losing their ability to deliver education due to prolonged teacher absenteeism. The problem was exacerbated by the high number of vacant posts reported unfilled. That study did not investigate teachers' absences due to funeral attendance – a common practice that seems to significantly distort the regular functioning of schools.

A 2005 study on teacher absenteeism in Uganda shows that it is a serious problem. On average it was estimated that teachers miss between four to eight days per month (ActionAid, 2005). Moreover, they found that teachers' absences do not merely imply physical absence from the classroom, but also refer to teachers who leave early and do not teach for the prescribed duration of the class; teachers who are physically present in the school but who do not go to class; and teachers who attend class but do not deliver the lesson.

A report completed on Namibia entitled *The impact of HIV/AIDS on education in Namibia* by Kinghorn *et al.* (2002) presents similarly worrying findings. Absences due to illness or funeral attendance were reported by school principals to be on the increase, particularly in the north of the country. There were also reports of poor teacher performance as a result of their debilitated status. Around 3 per cent of staff were reported to have taken more than 15 days' sick leave in 2001. Although most school principals claimed to record teacher absences, interviews suggested that many individuals were absent from their positions for longer periods of time without taking indefinite sick leave. Principals were concerned that if they recorded actual absences and enforced rules, staff would resent them – a factor which increased the ineffectiveness of the management. Lack of information on existing norms regarding leave, together with the absence of clear guidelines on dealing with mass demands for leave to attend funerals, makes it difficult for school principals to effectively manage their school.

These reports suggest that while teacher absences might be on the increase because of HIV- and AIDS-related factors, there might be many other factors related to the teacher policy framework, accountability systems, incentives and career options that contribute to the problem of teacher absences.

The present study aims at gaining some understanding into how schools are managing teachers' absences in areas with high rates of HIV and AIDS, and how this affects the teaching-learning process. It is exploratory research that seeks to gather qualitative data on the following issues:

- understanding the extent of the problem of teacher absences in a context of high HIV prevalence, and understanding how these absences affect school operations and the students' learning process;
- understanding the community's role in helping the school cope with the problem of teacher absences;
- determining what elements – if any – of the local models are more successful in properly handling the problem, and understanding which elements of these models could possibly be improved and disseminated;
- determining what type of suggestions could be derived from the empirical evidence provided by the schools studied.

The topic is complex, sensitive and cannot be dealt or analyzed through a simple quantitative survey. In-depth observations and interviews with different informants are required to explore the issues, applying triangulation techniques so as to check the consistency and the reliability of the information obtained. Carrying out such research is time consuming and expensive; hence IIEP and the Ministry of Education of Namibia chose to cover only a limited number of schools in two regions. The results obtained cannot be generalized to the whole of Namibia. For this it would be necessary to conduct the research on a larger scale throughout the country. Some of the findings are nevertheless interesting, and useful suggestions can be derived from observations in the selected schools that are of interest to any country facing increased teacher shortages and absences due to HIV and AIDS.

This study was undertaken in Namibia with the support of the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Namibia, the UNESCO Windhoek Cluster Office and the UNESCO National Commission. It was thought that the study could complement the recently launched Global Initiative for Education and HIV and AIDS in Namibia in the context of EDUCAIDS, and provide useful information to education stakeholders and officials.

The study includes a review of teacher policies and a qualitative empirical study conducted from February to April 2006 in nine schools located in two north-eastern regions of Namibia: Kavango and Caprivi. The findings were discussed in a workshop attended by the directors and staff from the regional offices in Kavango and Caprivi, as well as by different representatives of central level departments. Some of the recommendations appearing at the end of this report emerge from this workshop.

Section 2 is devoted to the description of the education system in Namibia and the education context. *Section 3* discusses Namibia's teacher policy framework. *Section 4* presents the research model, *Section 5* describes the major results of the study, and the last section discusses these results and presents some policy suggestions and pending issues.

2 The Namibia education context

Namibia and its education system²

The Republic of Namibia gained national independence from the former apartheid South African Government in 1990 after many years of a political, diplomatic and armed national liberation struggle. The country covers an area of 824,269 square kilometres and is one of the driest countries south of the equator, characterized by frequent droughts. The distribution of its 1.8 million population follows the rainfall pattern, with over 60 per cent in the northern parts, and the remaining 40 per cent sparsely distributed across the rest of the country. With a population growth rate of between 2.6 and 3.0 per cent per annum, the demand for school places is ever increasing and exerts further pressure on the available resources.

Namibia may well be regarded as a middle-income country with a per capita income of US\$2,000 and endowments of uranium, diamonds and other minerals; however, 65 per cent of the country's income is concentrated in the hands of 10 per cent of society. As a result, the ratio of per capita income between the top 5 per cent and the bottom 50 per cent is about 50:1. This extreme socio-economic inequality is important to understanding the inequalities in the development of the Namibian education system.

The education system in Namibia is divided into primary (grades 1-7) and secondary (grades 8-12) schooling. Primary education itself is divided into two phases: lower primary (grades 1-4), where one teacher teaches all subjects; and upper primary (grades 5-7), where subject teaching is introduced.

A total of 486,252 pupils were enrolled in grades 1-12 in 1995. By 2003 this number had increased to 553,017 (EMIS, 2003: 46). The number of teachers also increased from 15,531 in 1995 to 18,771 by the year 2003 (EMIS, 2003: 67).

The net intake rate was 104.6 per cent in 2004, roughly equivalent for males (106.3 per cent) and females (102.9 per cent). The gross enrolment rate in primary education reached 118.8 per cent in 2004³ and the net enrolment rate 94.0 per cent for the age group 7-13 years. The average repetition rate for primary school was 15.1 per cent in 2003, higher in grade 1 (18.8 per cent) and grade 5 (20.5 per cent), when English becomes the medium of instruction. Drop-out rates are relatively low, but higher in grade 1 (4.8 per cent) and from grades 5 upwards (5.2 per cent). The survival rates to grades 5 and 7 were 86 per cent and 76 per cent respectively in 2003 (EMIS, 2004: 58). The survival rate to grade 5 is often considered as the proportion of the grade 1 intake that will retain functional literacy skills. A specific characteristic of the Namibian education system is that survival rates are higher for females than for males.

2. The background information on Namibia and its education system presented in this paper is derived from the SACMEQ II country report (Makuwa, 2005) and from the 2003 and 2004 'Education statistics' published by the Ministry of Education (EMIS, 2003 and EMIS, 2004).

3. Due to repetition and over-age learners.

Quality of education and the issue of frequent teacher absences

Ten years ago, when Namibia gained independence, the education system was characterized by unequal access (for regional and ethnic groups), waste and an irrelevant curriculum (Kahivere, 2000). The Namibian Government began to invest 10 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) in education and on average the country has increased its basic education expenditures to approximately 20 per cent of its budget.⁴ As a result of these efforts, Namibia has achieved relatively high education coverage among the 7- to 13-year-old population.

However, some problems persist. Two of the most significant are:

- the inequality of the education system: “some of the inability to address historical inequality has been the result of poor management” (Goveia, 2000: 41); and
- the problem of educational quality (Makuwa, 2005).

The level of achievement of grade 6 pupils in the 2000 SACMEQ survey was rather preoccupying (Ross, Saito, Dolata and Ikeda, 2004). A third of all grade pupils did not reach level 3 (the point at which pupils are supposed to be able to read single isolated sentences) and 70 per cent did not go beyond level 3 – the level normally required to survive at the next stage of schooling. According to Makuwa, “There has been increasing concern about the quality of the education that is being provided in relation to the increasing expenditure on education. There are growing demands about efficiency in the administration and management of education at the various levels of the educational system and the need for a more equitable distribution of educational resources” (2005: 1).

“It is worrisome to note that there has not only been a decline in the competence of learners, but also that the competence of teachers, especially in mathematics, is very low compared to other SACMEQ countries (2005: 212)”.

Is it conceivable that the low quality of learning is related to teacher absences and to HIV and AIDS? For the time being there is no evidence that this could be the case.

The paper mentioned in *Section 1 on The impact of HIV/AIDS on education in Namibia* (Kinghorn *et al.*, 2002) indicates that, although “data on illness and death trends among education sector employees is limited, anecdotal evidence from schools and the pension fund, particularly for northern regions, suggested increasing occurrence of illness and deaths among younger staff. In the 116 schools that supplied data, the death rate averaged 1.5 per cent per annum over the previous two years, with a higher rate (2 per cent) in the North” (Kinghorn *et al.*, 2002: 45). Therefore it is conceivable that teacher absences are increasing as HIV prevalence and AIDS illnesses increase. Among the regions in the north-east – which are poorer, more rural, and have a greater population density – there are some areas with a greater prevalence of the pandemic. Consequently, it should be expected that the disparity in the quality of services provided will worsen if emergency measures are not taken in these regions.

“[There are] rising trends in absenteeism for funerals (60 per cent of heads [principals] in the north; 31 per cent in south and central areas) but no clear trends emerged for teachers’ absences due to other causes. In Caprivi, 40 per cent of heads cited funerals as the most common reason for absenteeism. However, the main reason cited overall by school heads for staff absenteeism was employee illness (55 per cent), followed by funeral attendance (23 per cent). Around 3 per cent of

4. According to the SACMEQ II report, “these figures are quite high compared to other SACMEQ countries” (Makuwa, 2005).

staff were reported to have taken more than 15 days' sick leave in 2001 (although this percentage ranged from 0-40 between schools) with slightly higher levels in the north" (Kinghorn *et al.*, 2002: 41).

If teacher absences increase, the quality of educational services is affected, as fewer hours of class will be given and teaching will be of poor quality, as other teachers attend to students from the class of one or more absent teachers. The result is that classrooms become overcrowded with students from various grades. This decrease in the quality of teaching will have the most negative impact on the poorest regions and areas where the impact of HIV and AIDS is highest.

Management constraints of the education system create bottlenecks that aggravate the complex problem of absenteeism and thus affect quality. One of the most striking examples of bottlenecks is the lack of funds to hire substitute teachers and, when there are funds, the delay in hiring new people, which takes from two weeks to two months (Kahivere, 2000).

In Namibia, there is no policy regarding relief teachers, except in the case of very long absences, and new teachers can only be recruited if there is a vacancy (i.e. if a teacher has died, resigned, retired or been transferred). Hence, when a teacher is absent, the following are likely scenarios:

- another teacher takes the class;
- students join another class;
- students are left alone or are supervised by older learners or community members.

Undoubtedly, these situations have a negative effect on the attendance of students in class and on their learning. The first SACMEQ report on Namibia states concern about the high percentages of student absenteeism in Namibian schools. However, this problem is worse in the north where:

"Learner absenteeism rates were disturbingly high in the four northern regions, with the highest rates reported in the Rundú and Ondangwa East regions: 12 per cent during the month of July, and 16 per cent on the day of the survey" (Voigts, 1998: 29).

In addition, SACMEQ II establishes that "repetition is a function of being absent and enough progress not having been made during the school year" (Makuwa, 2005: 62). In Caprivi and Kavango in the north-east, the primary school repetition rate in Kavango was high,⁵ confirming the existence of the vicious circle of absenteeism and repetition.

Indeed, Kinghorn *et al.* affirm that:

"... these factors – poor quality of teaching by chronically ill teachers, loss of skilled teachers, complication of inadequate relief teachers system – have significant impact on system function and quality of education. Many students, teachers and managers indicated that continuity of learning was disrupted. Seventy-two per cent of heads reported that staff absenteeism was a serious problem or sometimes a problem to the quality of education at the school" (2002: 33).

According to this brief summary of the literature reviewed, the problems caused by teacher absences, in addition to negatively affecting student learning, lead to a deterioration in the quality of the overall educational service. These absences create difficulties both because they give rise to "student behavioural problems" that have an impact on the attendance and discipline of a good group of students, and because they increase the burden of work for other teachers in the school to the detriment of the learning of the students for which they are normally responsible. As HIV prevalence increases, it is to be expected that this situation will worsen and create greater inequity.

5. 48.5 per cent and 44.1 per cent in Caprivi, according to Makuwa, 2005: 62-63.

Populations with fewer resources tend to be concentrated in the north where teachers are often less qualified. Thus the importance of this study is clear.

The research

The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) planned a study to investigate teacher absences in Namibia's primary schools and assess the capacity of schools and of the system to respond to this issue. This qualitative exploratory study aims at assessing how some schools in high HIV prevalence areas in the country are managing teachers' absences and analyzing the types of school management that allow schools to deal with teacher absences in the most efficient way.

IIEP believed that a qualitative study using in-depth observations and interviews with different informants in the school system would cast light on the level of teacher absenteeism and how it affects schools and students. It also felt that useful suggestions could be made to assist countries such as Namibia, where efforts are being made to respond to the problem of increased teacher shortage due to absences related to HIV and AIDS, among other reasons, as well as the subsequent difficulties in reaching EFA goals if teacher absences continue to increase.

A teacher was defined as absent when out of the school for part of or an entire day. Causes of absence were taken from those established by MOE: sick leave, maternity leave, urgent private matter, compassionate leave, special study leave, vacation leave, quarter leave, leave without pay, and other (including workshops).

The qualitative methodology was chosen to gain deeper insight into the aspects of the educational culture that have an impact on teacher absences, while studying their consequences and management procedures at school level.

The study was organized as follows:

1. The IIEP team, with the support of MOE and the regional UNESCO office, gathered information on policy issues related to teachers' training, recruitment, and norms ruling their absences and subsidies. In addition to visiting different officials at the central offices, the team gathered information at the regional level. The results of these interviews are summarized in *Section 3*.
2. A pilot study was organized to test the instruments in the field. Several schools in Rundú, Kavango, were visited; the final pilot was conducted in Windhoek.
3. A consultant firm from Namibia – SIAPAC – was hired by IIEP to conduct the fieldwork. SIAPAC hired experienced local researchers, who were fully bilingual or trilingual, to conduct observations and interviews at the schools. SIAPAC was in charge of supervising the fieldwork.
4. The fieldworkers were trained by the IIEP team during a period of one week. The training topics were, among others: use of qualitative methodology, nature of qualitative work, and use of the particular instruments to be applied in this research.

The pilot study conducted in four schools proved that teacher absenteeism and HIV and AIDS are very sensitive issues, and that addressing both of them simultaneously was extremely complicated. Indeed, seven individual interviews and six group interviews took place in the pilot, in which it was impossible to get people to talk about HIV. Teachers avoided talking about absenteeism in general, and when the questions insinuated that absences could be due to HIV and/or AIDS in some cases, there was absolute silence. The team then decided to concentrate on gaining an in-depth understanding of absenteeism, tackling it from a general perspective, and to avoid references to HIV and AIDS so as not to jeopardize the possibility of gaining an in-depth understanding of the problem through a qualitative survey.

3 **The teacher policy framework**

In order to understand better the functioning of schools and to establish the necessary links between the practices observed in the schools surveyed and the policies in place, the management and teacher policy framework had to be reviewed. An analysis of existing policy and administrative documents was completed, as well as a series of interviews with key officials and researchers at the central level and with local officials, principals and teachers at the regional level in Kavango. The aim was to get a better understanding of how the current teacher policy framework may or may not be contributing to the effective management of teachers and to the problem of teacher absences. A summary of the key findings is presented below.

Administration and management of education

The whole country was sub-divided into 13 regions at the end of 2002. While the Ministry retains overall responsibility for the running of the education system, it is the regional education offices that carry the bulk of education programme implementation on a daily basis by working closely with schools and communities in their respective regions.

According to the Education Act of 2001 (Republic of Namibia, 2001), the responsibilities are distributed as follows:

The Ministry

The Minister of Education determines the national policy on basic education and ensures that consultations with consultative bodies are undertaken prior to the determination of the policy.

After consultation with the regional council or a local authority council, the Minister establishes a Regional Education Forum in each region, whose function is to initiate and facilitate educational development in that region.

The regional office

The regional education office is responsible for the administration of all affairs related to education.

Inspectors

Inspectors normally have a three-year tertiary teaching qualification (BETD) and at least 11 years of teaching experience, but there is no specific training for newly-appointed inspectors.

All schools, classes, hostels and programmes are subject to inspection and investigation to ascertain whether they are in compliance with the specifications of the Education Act. Inspectors, based at the regional level, are responsible for assisting the principal in the management of the school: They approve the request for new posts; they are in charge of the in-service training of principals, heads of departments and teachers; and in theory they are meant to assist teachers in the classroom.

In practice, inspectors focus on ensuring that the principal is effectively managing the school, but even so there are not enough of them: In Kavango there are nine inspectors for 320 schools, i.e. 35 schools per inspector; the situation is better in Caprivi where there are five inspectors for

95 schools, each one then supervising 19 schools. Yet inspectors' visits to schools are rather irregular.

Increasingly, cluster heads give advice to school principals (there are normally five to seven schools per cluster). At school level, the task of the advisory subject teachers is to advise teachers so that they properly deliver the subject content. They are supposed to assist teachers in lesson delivery and implementing the curricula. Cluster centres and advisory services are expected to play a significant role in the in-service training of teachers in the 2006-2011 Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP, see Republic of Namibia, 2007).

School boards

School boards have been established in an effort to strengthen principals' and teachers' accountability to the community. Every state school has a school board in which the school community (parents, teachers and learners at secondary level) is able to participate in the administration of the school and its activities and promote its development. The overall aims of the school board are to promote the development of the school and the best interests of its learners. A school board consists of no less than five and no more than 13 voting members who must be: (a) parents who are not employed at the school; (b) teachers who teach at the school; (c) the principal of the school; and (d) in the case of a secondary school, no more than two learners at the school nominated by the Learners' Representative Council. Elected members hold office for a term of three years. Parents must constitute the majority of the members on the school board. The school board is involved in teacher appointments,⁶ monitoring teachers' conduct, absences and tardiness, as well as all aspects regarding the administration of the school development fund – i.e. defining the minimum level of parental contribution and the approval of the annual budget.

Principals

Principals are selected among heads of departments. They are appointed by the Permanent Secretary of the MOE upon recommendations by the regional office. They are expected to play a key role in ensuring that the members of the school board are properly elected and that it functions as expected. Jointly with the heads of department, principals are responsible for the implementation of programmes at the school level, ensuring high quality teaching and creating an environment conducive to learning. All principals are supposed to teach 75 per cent of the time.

Teachers

Teachers are considered as public servants in Namibia. They are responsible for providing education that is appropriate to the different age groups, abilities, aptitudes and needs of the persons receiving it, and to serve the educational interests and needs of all the people of the Republic of Namibia. Teachers are appointed by the regional office upon recommendation of the school board.

Financing education in Namibia

Education is free and compulsory for all learners between the ages of 6 and 16, or from grade 1 up to the end of Grade 7, depending on which comes first. The government has declared education to be the highest among all the priorities in Namibia, and education has thus continued to receive the largest share of the national recurrent budget since independence. Out of the estimated total

6. The board recommends the appointment of teachers to the Permanent Secretary. Requests concerning the transfer or dismissal of a teacher are very difficult.

government current expenditure of N\$8.35 billion for the 2001/2002 financial year, N\$1.86 billion was earmarked for basic education only, representing about 20 per cent of the budget.

Of the total amount allocated to basic education, N\$986.56 million was earmarked for primary education and the rest for secondary education. However, almost 90 per cent of the money allocated for primary education was to be spent on personnel costs, leaving only about 10 per cent for all the other services and school supplies. The personnel costs incurred by the government include salaries and/or subsidies to teachers in a number of private schools. This means that only a very little amount of the money allocated to primary education is actually spent on learners' classroom resources such as textbooks.

The government allows school boards to collect contributions from parents for the school development fund. The yearly contribution is compulsory and is fixed by the school board. The funds collected are essentially used to cover school supplies and equipment for educational, sports and cultural activities. The school board may partially or fully exempt parents from paying the school development fund contribution if they cannot afford it.

Schools in urban areas, where most parents have jobs and earn a monthly income, are able to collect a good amount of money from parents – much more than schools situated in remote parts of the country where the majority of the parents are peasant farmers with no income. For example, one government primary school in Windhoek collects N\$260 per learner per term, a fee which most parents are able to pay, whereas a rural primary school in the Caprivi region collects only N\$10, a small sum but which some parents cannot afford. So, while it is possible for some urban schools to generate substantial additional funds to operate, some schools in rural areas are solely dependent on the meagre government funding, which may not be enough to meet all their needs at the classroom level (textbooks and supplies).

The Education Act (Republic of Namibia, 2001) specifies that a child cannot be discriminated against if his/her parents do not pay the contribution. AIDS orphans in particular can be fully exempted if their foster parents do not have the means to support their education. The Education Act specifies that the school boards can claim the equivalent of the missing contributions from the national Education Development Fund, but this fund is not yet operational.

Teacher policy framework

Attractiveness of the teaching profession

One of the issues reviewed was the relative attractiveness of the teaching profession. It was assumed that if the candidates attracted to the profession were not necessarily those most talented and committed to the sector, there could be a greater likelihood of them being absent from school.

It was found that in principle in Namibia, teaching can still be considered an attractive career with a certain status and recognized benefits.

Generally speaking, teachers' salaries are considered very reasonable in Namibia. The starting salary for a teacher with three years' recognized tertiary teaching qualification is N\$58,462 (about USD\$1,000) per month and N\$83,202 (about USD\$1,300) per month for upper secondary teachers with four years of training. According to the Collective Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Namibia (MoE) and the Namibia National Teachers' Union, salaries increased in April 2006 and will be further increased by approximately 3.7 per cent in 2007. Thus, according to the agreement, "Namibian teachers [are] amongst the better paid teachers in Africa". In addition to the advantages associated with the job, such as extended vacation periods and stability, teachers

are offered a series of benefits to facilitate their housing, a pension upon retirement, and health coverage.

A government scholarship is offered to teacher trainees, which covers their fees in an attempt to facilitate their studies. This scholarship is to be paid back through three years of service after qualification. This type of financial support does not exist for other professions and contributes to making teaching an attractive choice, at least for those without sufficient resources to afford other choices.

Entry to teacher education programmes is possible after completion of grade 12. It is supposed to be selective, but in fact when quotas are not filled with the necessary candidates (e.g. in maths, science and English), the criteria become more lenient and less competent candidates are accepted.

However, in general it is noted that teaching is not often a candidate's first choice, and if they were accepted by the University of Namibia for another programme, they would drop out of teaching.

There are indications that shortage problems exist. In Kavango, for example, interviews with high level officials revealed that shortages exist in lower primary: There are not enough teachers with the necessary language competencies since the training colleges are not producing the necessary numbers. There are also shortages in certain subjects in upper secondary. The region hires grade 12 graduates on a temporary basis and recruits expatriates from Zimbabwe and Nigeria, or volunteers to help them address these shortages.

While teaching remains an attractive profession in Namibia with a relatively high salary and associated benefits, it is likely that the system is not attracting the most talented candidates and that regional disparities may exist in terms of teacher shortages.

Developing the necessary competences

If teachers do not have the necessary competences to effectively carry out their job, they might be inclined to skip classes to avoid feeling inadequate in the face of their students and the school principal.

The teaching body seems to be quite heterogeneous in terms of qualifications, given the recent changes in raising the admissions criteria. For example, some old teachers had only completed grade 10 before entering teacher training, while now a grade 12 education is required. Teacher training programmes have also changed over time, not always matching the changes in student curricula and language of instruction, with evident consequences for practising teachers. For example, the adoption of English as the official language after independence and as the medium of instruction from grade 5 has had serious implications for teachers who do not have the necessary language competencies.

The problem of teachers not having the necessary competencies is exacerbated by the fact that there are no provisions for teachers to participate in in-service training as part of government policy. The only incentive in place is the INSET Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) for unqualified and under-qualified teachers.

The number of unqualified or under-qualified teachers has been reduced in recent years to 3.7 per cent (EMIS, 2004). Also, many are working towards completing the BETD while in service. There are substantial salary incentives associated with having met this requirement, and the government has entered into an agreement with NANTU to upgrade teachers' qualifications by 2007 (in the

agreement mentioned above). Between 1999 and 2004, about 2,367 teachers completed the BETD INSET programme.⁷

It was not possible to clarify who is responsible for providing, and in fact delivering, support for teachers' development. There are some teacher advisors in the regional office who seem to have that responsibility, but it is not clear how they operate and how their activities might differ according to the region.

A draft National Professional Standard for Teachers (Republic of Namibia, 2006a) has been developed by the Namibian Qualifications Authority in the framework of the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP), which outlines 30 key competencies that a professional Namibian teacher should have in different areas. It is quite elaborate, but there is still a long way to go before all teachers are effectively trained.

At present, there seems to be a great variation in terms of teachers' backgrounds and personal histories. An effort is being made to help under-qualified teachers in the system to catch up and meet the requirements through providing distance courses. Still, there is no systematic programme of in-service professional development for teachers, which does not help alleviate the problem. Even if qualifications are acquired and requirements met, it is unlikely that all teachers will be equipped with the necessary competencies in the immediate future.

Recruiting and managing teachers

If those recruited and appointed do not have the necessary competencies, and if the system does not provide the necessary support to promote teachers' development and effective practices in the classroom, it is likely that some teachers might be more inclined to skip class or perform their tasks to a standard below what is expected.

The recruitment process

In order to become a teacher, candidates are required to have completed the BETD or an equivalent qualification. However, in the case of shortages, temporary teachers (who usually do not have the necessary qualifications) can be appointed for a period of 12 months. If at the end of this period a qualified teacher has still not been found, the contract can be renewed.

Teacher vacancies are advertised and candidates have to apply. The vacancy list of all 13 regions is compiled at the end of the year by the MOE. Teachers apply both for an ordinary position and for promotion through this vacancy list.

Applications are handled by the regional office's personnel department. They screen applications to verify that candidates meet the requirements for the positions and compile a short-list of candidates for interviews.

Interviews are conducted for the positions of principal and heads of department. In the case of teachers, the school board can decide if an interview is needed. Candidates are interviewed by a panel, which then makes recommendations to the regional office on whom to appoint. Teachers and heads of department are appointed by the regional office. Principals are appointed by the Permanent Secretary of the MOE. The Public Service Commission needs to review and approve the appointments of ordinary teachers that are hired directly as principals without having been head of department, contrary to the usual protocol for hiring principals.

7. There are four teachers' colleges in Namibia, one of which is located in Kavango and one in Caprivi.

Interviews are time-consuming and generally lead to significant delays in the appointment process. Yet according to the regional directors, the time taken to appoint a person to a post has been reduced.

A teacher is first appointed on a probationary basis for 12 months. A satisfactory evaluation by the school principal is required before the teacher is offered a permanent position. In practice, one informant reported that all teachers become tenured after probation “because the principal does not want to have problems”.

Regional officials report that every year there are frequent requests from teachers to be transferred to other schools. These requests are handled by school boards and inspectors of the corresponding schools. If the request is accepted and agreed on by both schools, then it goes to the regional office, who then verifies the existence of the vacancy before approving it. When there are teacher surpluses, the inspector can initiate the transfer. However, in general teachers do not like to be forced to transfer. They have been known to take the MOE to court to appeal the decision. This has been a common problem in southern regions that are experiencing a drop in the population. It was also reported that occasionally teachers were transferred by inspectors without authorization from the corresponding personnel department.

It was noted that all personnel records at the regional level were kept in handwritten files. This can contribute to delays and errors in processing information.

Teachers' careers and benefits

Teachers' careers and promotions follow a very structured hierarchical path dominated by seniority. After 12 years of experience, a teacher can apply for a head of department (HoD) position (the number of years of experience is reduced to three for those teachers with a university degree). Once HoDs are confirmed in their position, they can apply for a position as school principal. School principals can apply to become inspectors.

Salaries vary considerably for different positions in the teacher's career ladder: The entry salary for a HoD is N\$123,555 – twice the salary of a primary school teacher; a school principal earns N\$130,593 at entry, and in the case of upper secondary it is N\$144,669 – again almost twice the salary of an upper secondary teacher. However, there is no salary difference associated with performance since it is not evaluated.⁸ Salary increments are in large part determined by seniority.

The situation regarding other benefits and pensions is more complex given the different administrative and financial arrangements. Teachers retire at the age of 60 and receive a monthly pension from the Government Institutions Pension Fund. The possibility to apply for early retirement at 55 is said to have become more popular recently, especially with older teachers who do not speak English and prefer to retire rather than have to study in order to meet new qualification requirements.

In the case of early retirement on the grounds of continued ill health, there seems to be some concern among the people interviewed with the way the pension fund allocates the benefits, as allocations differ depending on the type of disability for which retirement is sought. In some cases, teachers can get up to 75 per cent of their salary, but they lose their housing allowance, and hence loan repayment becomes difficult; in other cases they receive only 50 per cent of their salary.

8. There are plans to introduce a performance monitoring system in the Namibian civil service and the MoE has been selected for pilot implementation.

If a person is too sick to teach, a specific request can be made to the medical board and to the Public Service Commission to ask for early retirement. According to our informants, however, the board meets only occasionally in Windhoek. It may therefore take a long time for the request to be processed and accepted. This practice, as well as the wage differences, does not favour the teachers that should be retiring, as AIDS or mental illness affects their capacity to teach. They do encourage teachers who are too weak to teach to continue attending school sporadically, to the detriment of the learners. In the meantime the schools cannot appoint a new teacher until the sick teacher has actually terminated his/her services.

Education sector employees living with HIV have the same rights and obligations as all other education sector employees (Republic of Namibia, 2004: 8). Testing for HIV is not compulsory, but voluntary testing is encouraged in accordance with normal medical and ethical rules, including total confidentiality. Teachers are civil servants and have access to free ART. The stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV make people reluctant to be tested, let alone disclose their HIV status. It is hoped that this measure will encourage more teachers to go for testing and treatment.

Staff leave

Many forms of leave are possible in Namibia for all public servants, in particular for teachers. In addition to school and official holidays, the following leave options exist:

- maternity leave: 12 weeks;
- accumulative vacation leave (in addition to regular school holidays): eight days per year;
- sick leave: 87 days in every three-year cycle, with full remuneration and an additional 87 days with half remuneration;
- non-accumulative compassionate leave: five days per year;
- accumulative study leave: 12 days.

In the case of maternity leave, teachers have the right to 12 weeks of paid leave covered by the social security fund to a ceiling amount of what represents about half of a teacher's salary (plus allowances). There were some indications that because of this reduction in salary some teachers preferred not to take the corresponding maternity leave and continue working full-time taking off instead just 15 days' sick leave.

If a staff member is absent for more than three consecutive days and can provide a medical certificate, he/she will be granted sick leave.

Compassionate leave with full remuneration may be granted in the case of serious illness in the family and/or death of a close family member. Such leave is limited to five days per year. Since the upsurge of HIV and AIDS, the number of requests for compassionate leave – to attend funerals – has increased substantially. In principle, the application is to be supported by a death certificate or by a letter from a recognized authority. Any further absences beyond the authorized five days may be granted under vacation leave, otherwise teachers have to take leave without pay. All leave must be requested by submission of a completed leave form duly signed by the principal, who recommends (or not) the granting of leave. This official request is forwarded to the Regional Personnel Office for approval. At the end of each term the principal must complete a report and send it to the inspector. If a teacher takes leave without permission, the principal can recommend leave without pay. Any staff member who is absent without permission for 30 consecutive days will be discharged from public service (Public Service Act in Republic of Namibia, 2003).

In brief

In principle, in view of all the benefits attached to the profession, teaching can still be considered an attractive career in Namibia. Retaining teachers does not seem to be a problem since most stay in the profession until retirement. However, this does not mean that the system is being selective and retaining the most effective teachers; in fact, it is reported to be quite difficult to fire teachers and there are only a few occasional suspensions.

The system provides incentives by means of promotion, which is essentially determined by seniority; little attention is given to performance. The system is quite structured and hierarchical, not offering much in terms of professional opportunities at the horizontal level. There seem to be some misalignments in the pension and benefit systems that encourage teachers to continue to work when pregnant or sick.

As mentioned earlier, the framework appears to be weak in terms of accountability and does not reward teachers who are present and carry out their teaching duties effectively.

While the national policy on HIV and AIDS for the education sector mentions the possibility of making available an “adequate pool of substitute staff ... so that employees that are temporarily incapacitated due to illness are replaced without delay”, this has not yet been implemented.

4 The qualitative study

The field research gathered qualitative data on the following:

1. The level of teacher absenteeism in the sampled schools and the main causes.
2. How teacher absences influence learning processes.
3. How different schools cope with the problem.
4. The community's role in helping schools to cope with absenteeism.
5. Elements, if any, of the local models that are more successful in properly handling the problem, and understanding which elements of these models could be improved and disseminated.

The study also collected information at the regional level and from the supervisors of the schools in the sample. This information should serve to contextualize the situation of the schools to be visited and to obtain a deeper understanding of the problem created by teacher non-attendance.

Research questions

The study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- How does teacher absenteeism disrupt the normal functioning of the schools in the sample?
- What conditions increase the likelihood that teachers will be absent from work?
- Do teachers who tend to be absent share certain characteristics?
- How do schools respond to teacher absences and what factors influence those responses?
- How is student learning impacted by those responses?
- Which schools are in a better position to respond to teacher absences and what factors influence their capacity to respond properly?

Sample

The sample design followed the qualitative tradition: “qualitative researchers usually work with small samples ... nested in their context and studied in-depth – unlike quantitative researchers who aim for larger numbers of context stripped cases and seek statistical significance” (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 27). The regions where the research was to be conducted were selected purposefully, searching for contrasting contexts in similar socio-economic and geographic conditions. However, the schools were chosen randomly from among all the schools in the two regions and were classified by size using two proxies: number of teachers and number of students. School size was considered an important issue and it was assumed that it might have an impact on teacher management, the assumption being that the impact of teacher absences could be greater in smaller schools.

Organization of the sample

The sampling was done in stages and consisted of three layers or components. The first stage involved selecting the regions; then the schools were chosen; and the final stage involved determining who would be interviewed and observed at each level of the education system, on the basis of who was

considered to have information significant to the study. While regional level officials, inspectors, principals and school board members were selected according to their responsibility regarding the regional system and the schools in the sample, teachers and learners were selected simply at random from the larger schools. In the smaller schools all available teachers and learners in the upper grades were interviewed.

Selection of the regions

In Namibia, despite its high per capita income (US\$2,000), the majority of the population lives in rural areas with a per capita of \$100-200 dollars. The education system is affected by this unequal distribution of income and resources. The population and schools in the north and northeast of the country in particular are highly disadvantaged, having a concentration of “large percentages of teachers who have low academic and professional training. These teachers teach large classes with few teaching and learning materials” (Makuwa, 2005: 123).

The selection of the regions for the sample was based on two criteria:

- the prevalence of HIV and AIDS;
- the unequal availability of teachers and the consequent high student-to-teacher ratio.⁹



It was expected that, with a higher incidence of HIV and AIDS, there would be a higher absence rate among teachers and that the management of this absenteeism would be given great importance

9. Caprivi has a general ratio of 25.2 students per teacher, and 26.8 in primary; and Kavango 24.9, and 30.9 in primary. The national average is 29.64, or 31.6 for primary level (EMIS, 2003: 67).

in the schools with the highest number of students per teacher. The combination of these two criteria influenced the selection of areas affected by inequity, both in the distribution of educational resources and in other more general factors.

Finally, after reviewing information on several regions, two were selected: Caprivi (Katima Mulilo) and Kavango (Rundú). The two regions are very similar (*Appendix 1*) in socio-economic, educational and geographic terms,¹⁰ but there is a great difference in the HIV prevalence: 43 per cent and 18 per cent¹¹ respectively.

Caprivi region¹²

This region is the furthest from the capital city, Windhoek. Apart from Katima Mulilo town, the rest of the region is rural and most of its population consists of subsistence farmers. It has all the high-risk elements that promote the spread of the HIV pandemic: poverty, a high rate of unemployment (estimated at 80 per cent), instability, and the fact that it is a transport corridor used by long-distance truck drivers. According to the Ministry of Health and Social Services, this is a region which had the highest infection rate of HIV in 2002. It has an area of 14,538 square kilometres of land and had a total population of 79,826 in 2001. The region has a total of 84 primary and combined schools, almost all of them state schools, 17,052 learners and 604 teachers (EMIS, 2004). The region briefly experienced some political disturbances in 1999, but calm has since returned to the region.

Kavango region

Much of this region is mainly rural and inhabited by subsistence crop farmers. The only urban centre is Rundú town. The region has seen a rapid increase in the number of learners since 1995, partly due to migration. The region is spread over an area of 48,463 square kilometres with a population of 202,694, most of which is concentrated along the Kavango River for easy access to water. The region has 312 primary and combined schools, with 52,587 learners and 1,674 teachers (EMIS, 2004).

Selection of schools

The sample was composed of nine schools: five from Kavango and four from Caprivi. As mentioned earlier, they were selected randomly from among primary education centres in these two regions. The research design discussed and approved by IIEP established that at least two of the schools should be small, two large and two of medium-size, determined by the number of teachers working at each centre and the proportion of students enrolled in each school.¹³ Also, a number of replacement schools were selected using the same approach. *Table 1* shows the schools visited by their code, size, the number of teachers and learners and the grades represented in each one.

10. *Appendix 1* details the similarities among these two regions.

11. Data from 2004 obtained by antenatal clinic surveillance sites in all Namibian regions.

12. Information taken from SACMEQ II on Namibia (Makuwa, 2005: 9-10).

13. The large schools have 5 teachers or more and should have more than 140 students; the medium ones between 2 and 4 teachers and between 70 and 139 students, and the small schools less than 2 teachers and 69 students.

Table 4.1

	Caprivi	Teachers/ learners	Grades	Kavango	Teachers/ learners	Grades
Large	C7	6 and 234	1 to 7	K 1	7 and 291	1 to 7
	C3	5 and 134	1 to 7	K0	6 and 150	1 to 7
				K5	6 and 201	1 to 7
Medium	C27	3 and 90	1 to 7	K7	3 and 92	1 to 4
Small	C1	2 and 49	1 to 4	K 35	2 and 58	1 to 4

Types of instruments used, people interviewed and main activities carried out during the fieldwork

In order to have a vision well adapted to the reality of the processes of each school in the study, it was planned that the study be conducted in one full week of classes. During this week, the fieldworkers were to implement a set of activities that began slightly before the first hour of class and took up most of the day. The central activities of the study were to:

- observe the school activities for at least three hours during the week, and observe the development of some classes in randomly selected grades for at least three more hours. The observers were to take notes of the comings and goings of teachers and students, the level of discipline of teachers and students, and the attitude of the teachers during class;
- collect data about the school: number of students, teachers, teacher absences, tardiness, causes of absences, and teacher and student discipline during class, etc.;
- interview a group of people whose work in the school is relevant to the quality of the teaching. It was established that this would include interviewing the principal, most of the teachers, at least a group of students from the upper primary grades, the school board and the inspector in charge of supervising the school.

In all, in the schools with the largest numbers of students, the fieldwork should include at least six interviews with teaching personnel – including the principal and a focus group of teachers – one or two focus groups of students and an interview with parents from the school board. A minimum of six hours of observation was required. A total of 24 teachers were interviewed individually, while 11 teachers were interviewed in two focus groups. Eight principals were interviewed, eight school boards, three inspectors – who together covered five of the nine schools in the sample –, and 10 focus groups with learners.

This study used eight different types of instruments (see *Appendix 2*) to collect data from various sources. This allowed for the ‘triangulation’ of information, a highly valued practice for increasing data credibility. The interviews with different educational stakeholders made it possible to collect a wealth of information reflecting different perspectives of the same problem. By triangulating data on absence records, it was found that in some schools the absences recorded tended not to correspond with the number of teachers absent during the fieldwork. This is a finding related to absence management, which proves the importance of practicing basic standards for methodological quality.

Data and analytic method

Most of the data collected were of a qualitative nature: opinions, perspectives and assessments derived from the interviews and from field observations regarding the following issues:

- support given to the school, inspectors' visits, follow-up, etc.;
- role of the inspector in helping the school to deal with absences;
- changes in teaching staff, suspensions, etc.;
- absences: number and administrative procedures for recording them (use of leave forms, etc.);
- number of absent or tardy teachers during the fieldwork;
- means of handling absences, what the schools do with learners whose teachers are absent, hiring replacements, etc.;
- role of the community and the school board;
- learners' perspectives: how they feel and what they do when their teachers are absent;
- teachers' perspectives: what they have to do when a colleague is absent; what types of teachers tend to be absent; what they believe the principal, the school board and the regional authorities should do in response to teacher absences.

In addition, a guide was used to collect statistical data and information about the physical characteristics of the schools and the classrooms, the number of teachers, the number of students per classroom, the efficiency of the school measured by the number of students successfully completing the year, the number of students that fail and repeat a year, the characteristics of the teachers in terms of experience, qualifications, number of absences per year and reasons for the absences. Not all of the schools had data on teachers' absences or their causes, but information was available on their academic training and work experience. Some data on teachers' absences were inconsistently kept; numbers did not coincide between files on days of absence and files on causes of absence for the same year.

The data was analyzed using the Max QDA programme. This programme encodes segments of text from an established list of categories. Categories and codes were developed using the research questions as a reference, by which output tables were created for the most significant coded segments. The output tables were used to develop a matrix for each school, which incorporated the statistical data collected.

Through the organization and analysis of each matrix, distinct tendencies were detected in each school regarding teachers' absences and teachers' and students' behaviour and discipline. Among the nine schools, some showed extreme absenteeism and tardiness as well as a general lack of discipline, while others had few absences and better discipline. Analyzing the data from the interviews and observations for each school, this information on teacher and student absences and discipline was associated with aspects of the work of the principal, the inspector and the school board and the roles that each one assumed.

The information gathered on management and implementation of standards for teachers' absences was complemented with information on the following issues:

- self-discipline at the school among teachers;
- students' discipline when their grade teachers were absent during the observation week;
- number of absences of teaching personnel and the principal for 2005 and 2006.

Based on the school-by-school analysis of this data, two working premises guided the preparation of this report.

1. Understanding that although absenteeism in some of these nine schools might be linked to HIV prevalence and AIDS, it would be very difficult to confirm this due to the stigma attached to this illness.
2. Problems caused by HIV and AIDS are not the only causes of teacher absences; lack of leadership and discipline in schools are other causes.

The fieldwork results show that absenteeism is indeed a consequence of management problems, of different leadership styles of principals, and different community environments.

Outstanding among the factors established in the second premise are:

- support from the school inspector;
- the role of the school board at the school;
- the principal's awareness of the school's problems, and his/her training and capacity to confront and manage teacher absences.

Combining the information collected on these last factors and the data on absenteeism and overall school functioning, three sub-groups of schools were identified.

The first sub-group, consisting of three schools, shows what is referred to as 'improper management of teachers' absences'. In addition to having high levels of repetition, these schools had a large number of teacher absences during 2005 and 2006, a rather inactive school council and a new principal. They do not get much support from the inspector. Two of these schools are located in Kavango and one in Caprivi.

The second sub-group – schools for which data is missing as their statistical records and school observations were not complete – seems to be in a situation similar to that of the above group. Nevertheless, as the information from these schools is incomplete (they were not observed for the minimum hours required, and they lack information on discipline), it has not been included in the analysis as much of it would be based on speculation. There are two schools from Kavango in this group; one of them (K5) has complete information only on teachers' and learners' conduct as observed over two days. The fieldworker reported that on the third, fourth and fifth days of the week the learners had to prepare for or sit exams, and that the principal therefore asked him not to interfere. He left on Wednesday afternoon. The other school (K35) was added to the sample after a last-minute negotiation with SIAPAC. The agreement reached with the consultant firm was that they would visit the school for only three days. Unfortunately, the school being located in a very remote area 110 km from the nearest town, the fieldworker in charge of the visit failed to be on time on each one of the three days and consequently little data was collected on the school. Moreover, the focus group interview with the school board was not carried out and the school kept no records of absences. Therefore there is not enough information available for a thorough analysis.

The last sub-group is comprised of four schools with data that indicate that they are managing – some schools better than others – the problem of teachers' frequent absences. Consequently, the historical absence rate for these schools is much lower and, in addition, the reports by the fieldworkers indicate fewer teacher absences and strong discipline among students and teachers. One of these schools is in Kavango and three are in Caprivi.

5 Findings

The schools visited have a series of common problems which were detailed by most of those interviewed: lack of school materials, textbooks and teaching aids. In some schools it was reported that teacher absenteeism is a hindrance, but in other schools other issues were emphasized, such as lack of lodging for teachers, the great distances that the students had to walk to get to class, and student absenteeism due to hunger and child labour during harvest time.

Scarcity of teachers appears to be a serious problem. According to one inspector, it is difficult to find teachers to teach primary school because they have low salaries that correspond to their qualifications rather than their category. Others interviewed also attributed this shortage of teachers to the new norms set by the MOE. These establish that every teacher must teach a classroom of at least 31 students, which, according to those interviewed, forces rural schools to combine various grades. This practice seems to be creating difficulties in those schools as a number of teachers interviewed mentioned that they were not able to manage such large classes and/or that they simply did not feel comfortable teaching combined grades.

Other problems reported were high failure rates of learners and language difficulties – some teachers complained about not having a mastery of English, while others mentioned that their students did not have a mastery of English and that all teaching materials were in English. Some parents also indicated that some teachers do not know how to teach English.

Shortages of water and electricity, lack of school fences and latrines were also reported.

General characteristics of the schools and their organization

Group 1. Schools not properly managed

Table 5.1

School	Location and distance from MOE Regional Office	Size of school and infrastructure	Number of teachers and qualifications in 2006	Teachers' conduct and absences according to fieldwork data	2005 absences according to records kept
K1	Kavango: 77 km.	Large. No piped water. No electricity. AWDL: 2 km.	1 unqualified, 1 National Education Certificate, 1 Lower Primary Certificate, 2 BETD.	There was one teacher teaching awkwardly. Interviewees reported a teacher as mentally ill. Discipline was low. The 7 grades were left unattended for different days of the week on 11 occasions. A total of 37 hours of classes were lost during the school week. On Friday, 2 teachers were absent.	100 days. In 2004, 103 days. Average absence per teacher = 14.3 days per year. In 2004, two teachers were absent for 100 days, 50 each. Cited causes of absences: sickness and urgent private matter.
C7	Caprivi: 91 km.	Large. Piped water. No electricity. AWDL: 8 km.	6 qualified teachers. Principal and 2 teachers: Ed. Primary Certificate Grade 12; 1 teacher: BETD; HoD: LPTD; 1 teacher: National Educational Certificate.	Monday: 2 teachers absent. Wednesday: Principal and 1 teacher absent. Thursday: 3 teachers absent (two sick and one at a burial). Friday: classes ended "early." Low discipline among learners.	26.* HoD: 12. In 2004, the HoD was absent for 35 days.

* Absences seem to go unreported. The school board mentioned that the biggest problem in school C7 is teacher absences. Observations of records confirm the interviewees' opinions.

*Teacher absences in an HIV and AIDS context:
evidence from nine schools in Kavango and Caprivi (Namibia)*

School	Location and distance from MOE Regional Office	Size of school and infrastructure	Number of teachers and qualifications in 2006	Teachers' conduct and absences according to fieldwork data	2005 absences according to records kept
K7	Kavango: 40 km.	Medium. No piped water. No electricity. AWDL: 1 km.	1 unqualified out of 3. Other 2: one BETD and other a High Diploma in Education.	8 teachers absent during the first three days of the observation. School board reports absenteeism as a big problem. Tardiness among teachers and poor student conduct.	48 days. One of the teachers was absent for 45 days and in 2006 was absent for 27 days. No information on reason for absence.

Legend: AWDL = Average walking distance for learners
 BETD = Basic Education Teacher Diploma
 HoD = Head of department

The three principals have been in their position for less than one year. The student-teacher ratio is as follows:

- C7: One teacher to every 39 students
- K1: One teacher to every 41.5 students
- K7 : One teacher to every 31 students

The three schools have school boards. Visits by inspectors are not frequent, and school K1 has had a new inspector since the beginning of 2006. In school K7, the high number of absences might be attributed to a mentally ill teacher who is frequently absent.

Group 2. Schools with incomplete data

Table 5.2

School	Location and distance from MOE Regional Office	Size of school and infrastructure	Number of teachers and qualifications	Teachers' conduct and absences according to fieldwork data	2005 absences according to records kept
K5	Kavango: 100 km.	Large. Piped water. Electricity. Brick floor. AWDL: 4 km.	6 teachers including principal and 1 unqualified. Not enough information.	Interviewees report a teacher with alcohol problems. Not enough information from observations.*	Principal and teachers absent for a total of 50 days,** an average of 8.3 in 2005. No information on reasons for absence.
K35	Kavango: 110 km.	Small. No electricity. No piped water. Bush toilet. AWDL: 5 km.	Principal: BETD, PGC LPTC.	Not enough information.***	Past absences not recorded.

Legend: PGC = Teacher Lower Primary Grade Certification

LPTC = Lower Primary Teacher's Certificate

AWDL = walking distance for learners

* As mentioned earlier, this school has information on discipline for only one day.

** The average number of absences in 2005 was 8.3 days per teacher.

*** Failure of the fieldworker to be on time, early release of learners during the days of the visit, plus no records for absences caused lack of information for a thorough analysis.

The student-teacher ratios are as follows:

- K35: One teacher to every 29 students;
- K5: One teacher to every 33.5 students.

According to three teachers at K5, the school board is "not effective". The school board, on the other hand, mentioned that they have to deal with a teacher with an alcohol problem. The inspector visited school K5 in March 2006 but did not send a report.

In school K35, there is a school board but the principal believes that its members are “lazy”; the last full inspection was carried out in 2004.

Group 3. Better managed schools

Table 5.3

School	Location and distance from MOE Regional Office	Size of school and infrastructure	Number of teachers and qualifications	Teachers' conduct and absences according to fieldwork data	2005 absences according to records kept
K0	Kavango: 125 km MOE.	Large. No electricity. Bush toilet. No piped water. AWDL: 5 km.	6 teachers: 3 BETD including the principal; 2 grade 10; 1 grade 12.	Medium high. There were some learners out of class.	65 (Average 10.8).
C27 Multigrade except 7th.	Caprivi: 35 km.	Medium. Piped water. No electricity. 6 classrooms. 2 offices. AWDL:10 km.	3 teachers, all qualified. 1 BETD; 1 M plus 2 HEP; 1 ECP.	Good classroom discipline and attendance. No problems or absences reported.	14 absences (average 4.6 days per person), no sick leave.
C3 Grades 1-3; 3-4 combined.	Caprivi: 16 km.	Medium. No electricity. AWDL: 10 km.	5, all qualified: 2 BETD, 1 Education Primary Certificate; 1 M plus 2 and 1 FDM, EDH.	Good classroom discipline and attendance. No problems or absences reported.	6 days, 1.2 day per teacher.
C1 Grades 1 and 2 combined.	Caprivi: 29 km.	Small. No electricity. No piped water. AWDL: 1.5 km.	2 qualified: 1 BETD and 1 LPTC.	Good classroom discipline and attendance. No problems or absences reported.	10 days, 5 days per teacher.

These schools have working school boards according to the majority of the interviewees. The principal of school C1 has been there for 13 years. The school board conducts regular visits of school C27 and encourages learners to take education seriously. In C3, the school board works to minimize teacher absences; the principal is new and had been there for only two months at the time of the fieldwork. In school K0, the school board members take turns to supervise school activities. The school has a management committee and, according to the school board, the principal has found a solution for a teacher who tended to be absent very frequently. The number of students per teacher is as follows:

- K0: One teacher to every 25 students;
- C27: One teacher to every 30 students;
- C3: One teacher to every 26.8 students;
- C1: One teacher to every 33.5 students.

Presented below is the information on all the issues compiled by groups of schools: first, Group 1 or the group of schools with the most difficulties in managing teachers' absences; and secondly, the group with more advantages, called Group 3. In addition, the schools in each group have been organized according to the data and interviews, showing their capacity to manage absenteeism, attendance and discipline. Therefore, the schools in each group are listed in descending order from the most effective to the least effective in managing teacher absences, overall discipline and adherence to school procedures. This will allow us to perceive the trends that emerge from the data.

GROUP 1. Schools not properly managed

School functioning and discipline

K1

The principal of K1 was not at the school during four days of the week. There was only one officially-reported absence of a teacher during the week; however every day there were classrooms left unattended and 210 learners were reported as wandering around the school during the week. There were 290 students enrolled in 2005.

- On Monday, the fifth grade class was left unattended for the entire morning and there were 26 learners out of class during the four morning sessions.
- On Tuesday, the fifth grade class was left unattended during the first and second periods, the sixth grade class during the second and third periods, and the fourth grade class during the fourth period. Several teachers chatted with each other, were somewhat late for class or left the classroom during teaching time. The total time thereby lost to teaching first, second, fourth, sixth, and seventh grades totalled 70 minutes. Meanwhile, 35 learners were out of class that morning.
- On Wednesday, tardiness, early releases and chatting totalled 41 minutes and the teachers involved were from grades 1 to 4. Sixth graders were left unattended for two hours, and learners from fifth and seventh grades were left unattended for one hour. There were 31 learners wandering around on that day.
- On Thursday, fifth grade was again left unattended for three hours, seventh grade for one hour, and 49 learners were wandering around during morning classes: five during the first period, 17 during the second, 11 during the third and 16 during the last period.
- On Friday, two teachers were absent, one reportedly was at the bank, the other left in the middle of the morning to attend a funeral. The fifth grade teacher missed a total of 17 minutes of teaching due to tardiness: 10 during the first session and seven minutes after the break. This same teacher chatted to the seventh grade teacher for six minutes and left the class for another six minutes. Tardiness, chatting and early releases amounted to 66 minutes. The second, third and sixth grades were left unattended for the entire morning and 69 learners remained out of class: 18 during the first period, 10 and 12 during the second and third periods respectively, and 19 for the last session of classes.

Class observation revealed lack of discipline among students and, according to some of the data, the teachers do not pay much attention to this. For example:

“Ten learners make noise. The teacher sees them, but she turns a blind eye to them. She does not tell them to stop making a noise” (March 9, 2006, third grade observation).

C7

In school C7, absences seem to go unreported as the records present a different perspective from the field data. First, according to the school board, the biggest school problem is teachers' frequent absence. Secondly, during the fieldwork there were eight absences among the six teachers, and on Friday there was no class. Below are the details:

- On Monday, the fourth and fifth grade teachers were absent the entire day. The learners were left without teachers for all but one period – the period after break – when the third grade teacher came in as a substitute and worked with the learners. It was reported that one of the absent teachers was in hospital and the other at a funeral.
- On Tuesday, the second and third grade teachers were absent; one of which was the principal. Both were reported to be attending a funeral.
- On Wednesday, the seventh grade teacher was absent attending a funeral.
- On Thursday, three teachers were absent: Two were sick and one was at a burial.

Classes began 20 minutes late every day, and the sessions ended before 1 pm. Learners were released at 10:20 on Tuesday, 11:10 on Wednesday, and 11 am on Thursday. (Total hours of classes taught amounted to 16 instead of approximately 30.)

Learners were mostly in their classrooms. On Tuesday, second and third graders were noisy but they were by themselves. There is only one record of two learners wandering around during the week.

K7

In school K7, the observer recorded a great deal of tardiness among teachers; also, 65 learners were seen out of class for long periods during the week. This school has approximately 90 learners.

There are records for three days of classes, during which there were eight teachers absent, mostly affecting the second and third grades. No causes were reported for seven of these absences.

- On Monday, the first grade teacher was 42 minutes late for the first session. The second and third grades did not have a teacher and were attended to by two older learners. That same day, the fourth grade was left unattended for the second period.
- On Tuesday, first graders did not come to school, their classroom was locked. The fourth grade teacher arrived 30 minutes late, and again the second and third graders were unattended for the whole morning. That day, there were 38 learners from the unattended grade wandering around: 11 during the first period, 17 during the second and 9 during the third.
- On Wednesday there were three teachers absent: The first grade teacher was in a workshop; the others were just reported as absent. The principal began to teach 25 minutes late because he was doing paperwork, leaving the fourth grade unattended. The second and third grades were left unattended for the entire morning, and the fourth grade was left alone for the entire third period. There were 27 learners wandering around the school: six during the first period, four during the second, 12 during the third and five during the last period.

There were no observations on Thursday and Friday.

Problems reported: teacher absenteeism and its impact on learners

K1

Absenteeism is a severe problem in this school, aggravated by other problems: the lack of a teacher for the fourth grade, lack of training of some teachers, and general misconduct, tardiness and lack of discipline.

Teacher absences totalled 165 days in 2003 and 103 in 2004. In *Table 5.1* it is noted that there were 100 days of absences in 2005. The principal himself was outside the school for 13 days in 2002, 13 days in 2003 and 12 days in 2004. Of the 368 days of absences between 2003 and 2005, 212 were due to illness (sick leave). In 2003, there were 165 absences, 100 of which concerned only two teachers. These teachers, referred to as T7 and T8 in the records, changed this tendency in 2004.

Regarding the problems with training, the social sciences teacher indicated: "I have a big problem in teaching mathematics and social studies because I lack proper knowledge in those subjects".

The school board members made it evident that the teachers from first to fourth grades do not have a mastery of the English language.

Participant 1: "We have a problem with grades 1-4, whose teachers are not competent in teaching English. Teachers of grades 1-4 do not know how to properly speak, read and write English. This is the problem we are facing in these grades 1-4" (school board interview).

Corroborating the existence of a serious absenteeism problem, one teacher reported: "There are two teachers who are currently absent because of private matters and the principal is also absent because he is sick."

Learners also expressed that there are teachers that tend not to come. In the focus group, participants 2 and 4 emphasized that the English teacher for seventh grade frequently does not come to teach class.

Other students expressed the same opinion, criticizing their teachers for not coming to teach class:

"Mostly our social science period is a problem. Our social science teacher misses our classes once a week. You see her at the school, but she does not come to our class. Why?" (learner 3).

"Our English teacher does not come to our classes once a week. I do not know why" (learner 6).

In addition, the students complained of tardiness, thus corroborating what was revealed in the report during the week of fieldwork.

The students believe that these absences have a negative impact on them. They agreed that "at times we are told that the teacher went to a workshop or training for three days or a week. And we do not get another teacher to teach us. We struggle to study on our own" (learners' focus group, learner 1).

The absences also overload the teachers. One of the teachers interviewed stated: "Normally I find it difficult to prepare for my learners and those of a teacher who is absent" (teachers' focus group).

This school has a teacher who suffers from mental problems. There is no replacement teacher for her and according to several interviewees she tends to be absent for one or two weeks in a

row (school board). As a result of her absence, her learners are improperly attended to by another teacher or they are left alone. Teachers and school board members believe that these learners “are likely to fail” (teacher 1).

C7

The principal of school C1 reported that:

“The biggest problem is the shortage of teachers and frequent teacher absences. This problem has been reported to the circuit inspector and the director of education. There is a problem with staffing norms for second and third grades which have almost 64 learners in one classroom”.

The school board members interviewed also believed that teachers’ frequent absences are problematic, providing as an example the fact that “only two teachers are present (today) and we were told that the other two will be absent the whole week”.

“From our grade there are two teachers who do not always come to teach us or come to teach at all”.

“There are days when he (the teacher) just comes and sits in class without teaching us” (learners).

The principal, when about what were the main characteristics of teachers who tended to be absent, responded that they are “mostly males and drunkards”.

When asked about absences in his school, he pointed out that there are three teachers in the school “who have been absent at least once a week in the last month”. He explained that the causes of these absences were illness and funerals.

K7

There is a problem in this school with one teacher who is very often absent, although information was also collected on teachers who go to school and do not teach class. One of these teachers seems to have problems with alcoholism (said the principal).

“The problem has reached a chronic stage now, it happens in every week of school days” (principal).

It is likely that this is the same teacher that some of the members of the school board and some of the students mentioned.

The school board member expressed that, “There is a female teacher, to be specific, this teacher does not teach. She likes to be absent, even today. This week she did not come to school”. Students from two different focus groups stated that they have teachers that are often absent. One of them said, “My teacher is absent for three weeks in a row. She does not teach much”.

Others made references in the interviews to teachers that come to school and do not teach class: «Yes, our teacher is lazy; when she comes she sleeps in the class during the first period [other learners laugh]” (learner 6).

Roles of the inspector and the principal

K1

The school board members interviewed at this school indicated that the inspector had not reacted to two requests submitted to him: to find a teacher for the fourth grade (school board) and to find a replacement for the teacher who was said to be mentally ill.

Meanwhile, in the teachers' focus group, the interviewees stated:

“The inspector should come to the school and investigate the issue based on information he or she receives from parents or learners we teach. We need proper supervision from both the principal and the inspector. Currently the inspector does not visit us regularly. This is the problem and I do not know why the inspector does not supervise the principals properly.”

The principal was sick and could not be interviewed. He was new to his position at the time of the observation.

C7

The principal here has been working as a teacher for 34 years and as principal for 25 years. He has been at this school for one year. He had taken two courses on management and school leadership. It seems that neither the principal nor the inspector at this school are fulfilling their roles.

“The inspector has no role at all in this school, because we do not receive [visits from the] inspectors, we go January to December without seeing them” (principal).

The chairwoman of the school board stated:

“I had several talks with the principal asking him whether there are some improvements from the teacher's side. He told me that nothing has actually changed. *He is also to be blamed because he is not strong and cannot talk straight to the teachers in question* [italics ours]. He also does not let them sign leave forms, or report them to the highest authority”.

K7

The principal of school K7 had been teaching for eight years and was appointed as principal of this school five months prior to the observation. He has taken a course on “How to run a school” and has attended two additional workshops on subject teaching and HIV.

The inspector of this school was criticized by the principal, first because he had not responded to a letter that was sent to him about the problem of teacher absences, and secondly because he does not make visits or provide any support.

“In 2006, the circuit inspector passed by our school. He wanted to go to a certain school and he got lost and ended up at our school. During that time he did nothing to our school, no meeting, no advice. The information I got is that in the past years no inspector visited the school”.

The principal, however, has not been able to solve the problem of the alcoholic teacher: “We had more than 10 meetings with her but she did not change. That's why I am saying the principal did not find a solution to this problem.” Another participant continued, “To add to that, the principal told me that he let her fill in unpaid leave but she did not change, and she is absent as we are talking now” (school board).

Role of the school board

K1

This school board seems to know its job and, according to four teachers who gave opinions on the school board's role, frequently visits the school and gives verbal warnings to the teachers who tend to be absent. However, one teacher said he did not know what the school board does. The school board has talked to the mentally ill teacher but her frequent absences are still a problem.

It seems that greater co-ordination is needed among the inspector, the principal and the school board to deal more effectively with the problems in the school.

C7

In this school the school board is not providing much leadership in managing the problem of absenteeism. One teacher believes they need to receive academic education because most of them cannot read or write (according to an interview with a teacher), but the main failure is the chairman's lack of leadership.

“From our side as school board we have been failed by the chairman as you can see that he is not present here also. Every time we want to convene a meeting, such meeting will be cancelled because of other commitments” (secretary, school board focus group).

This was reinforced by a teacher who said that the school board is currently not active in school issues due to death and sickness of relatives.

K7

It seems that this school board needs to organize its work better. According to one of the participants in the school board focus group, they still have no scheduled visits, but when questioned about the issue said that they would prepare it the following week (participant 1, school board focus group). Another participant indicated the following:

“Our prevention normally comes through verbal warnings that we used to make in the past meetings. As a school board we never did school observation such as coming to school and seeing how many teachers used to come to teach and those who absent themselves” (participant 2, school board focus group).

GROUP 3: Better managed schools

School discipline and classroom conduct

C27

Every day during the fieldwork, school C27 was reported as being “in order, no learners running around. Teachers were very busy teaching their classes and the learners were listening without making any noise” (school observation). However, one teacher for the combined first, second and third grades was reported on Tuesday as “teaching for 20 minutes and then reading a book”. There was no report of tardiness, chatting or absences. The principal was there every day.

C3

There were no major discipline problems detected during the observation week in school C3. On Monday, it was reported that the “fifth grade teacher was out of class for second period; he was with the principal” (school observation). This same fifth grade teacher also “arrived 10 minutes late for the first period, but there wasn’t any other tardiness reported during the whole week” (school observation).

C1

The school functioned in a disciplined fashion during the entire week. There were three incidents reported in the school observation log:

- Tuesday: “One teacher for first and second grades was absent the whole day, reason being that he was attending a court case in Katima Mulilo. There was only one teacher present who is the principal and could not manage to handle four grades at the same time”.
- Thursday: The first and second grade teacher was five minutes late after the break.
- Friday: The school was released at 11:30 due to funeral arrangements and a burial.

K0

The report for this school stated that two teachers arrived 12 minutes late to class on Wednesday, and two teachers started classes 14 minutes late on Thursday. There were two teachers absent during the week; both were in workshops, one of which was on HIV. The other irregularity was that students were out of class, totalling 43 in four days of observation, an average of 10.7 per day. The school had 150 students registered in 2006.

Schools’ problems, teacher absenteeism and its impact

C27

The main problem mentioned in this school was the multi-grade system and the excess number of students per classroom. The principal and a teacher expressed the following:

“One teacher ends up teaching three grades in one classroom and it is not manageable. Upper primary grades (i.e. fourth, fifth and sixth grades) are also in one classroom (combined); it is difficult to handle” (principal).

“I am not able to handle my classes, the multi-grade system, three grades in one class. This is a new system that I cannot understand easily” (teacher 1).

Another teacher indicated that when a teacher is absent, given that there are only three members of staff, including the principal, the workload becomes quite heavy (teacher 2).

Also, the principal believes that “There is lack of communication between the school and the parents at this school because parents do not want to be involved in school issues”.

Absenteeism was not mentioned by any interviewee and the average number of absences per year is under 2.6 days per teacher. In addition, in 2005 there were eight absences with no specified motivation, and the absences reported as specified leave totalled 14: five for study leave, four for urgent personal matters, three for compassionate leave and two to “attend workshops”.

C3

The inspector mentioned that “Because of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, there are funerals every day, and teachers are attending these funerals of their loved ones and this was one of the main causes of teacher absenteeism”. But he also said that he had come across problems related to absenteeism in the schools in his circuit, but this school was not one of them. Rather he highlighted the following problems:

“For the selected school, the major problem is that the lower primary school is without teachers because of the salary difference in teachers’ payroll depending on the qualifications. People do not want to teach the lower primary school grades anymore, they are going for further studies to enable them to teach higher grades to earn more money”.

This is corroborated by the data compiled; in this school there are no reports of teachers being absent during the observation week and there were only six days of absence in 2005, concerning five teachers. Five of these absences were for study leave and one for vacation leave.

According to the principal, the problems experienced at the school are that:

- teachers’ accommodation is not well maintained;
- the multi-grade system adopted at the school is difficult to understand;
- there are transportation problems for teachers who commute from Katima to the school every day;
- there are long walking distances for some learners (e.g. 10-15 kilometres every day on foot).

Nevertheless, the chairperson of the school board declared in somewhat contradictory statements that “The principal indicated that there is a teacher who was constantly absent during the last year and during these past months. This teacher is constantly absent because he is sick. When asked what is wrong with him, he indicated that he doesn’t know what type of sickness he has. This teacher *normally comes to teach* but is always tired and there are times that he does not come to school at all”.

Another member of the school board was probably referring to this same teacher when he spoke of a teacher that had “recently transferred back to [the] school who likes sitting without teaching his classes”.

C1

The major problems indicated by interviewees at this school were:

- lack of co-operation between teachers and the community: “The school board does not take the education of the learners seriously. There are no accommodations available for the teachers at the school” (principal; school board);
- lack of textbooks for the learners: Some subjects have only one to four textbooks for the learners” (principal; school board);
- lack of teachers: “The only primary teacher they have cannot manage to teach all four grades.” In addition, the teacher is a sick man, therefore “He constantly misses lessons and sometimes he missed a whole day” (school board);
- the long distance that learners have to walk from home to school in the mornings and back in the afternoons (school board).

The records indicate that the total number of absences in 2005 was 10 days between two teachers; seven days were due to sick leave and three were taken for urgent private matters. It is possible that the problem reported by the school board chairwoman is not being duly reported.

This is the only school where it was mentioned that some inspectors and principals “favour their friends and relatives” (teacher 1).

K0

This school does not appear to have major absenteeism problems. During the observation week, the principal indicated that a teacher was absent to attend a workshop. For him, the two most serious problems in the school are:

1. “Lack of payment of school fees is the biggest problem. Parents of learners are unemployed and they cannot afford to pay the school fees.”
2. “Our school also has many orphans whose parents have passed away because of illnesses. We have over 100 learners who are orphans. Since last year we do not have problems with teachers’ absenteeism. We are okay on that.”

Such a number of orphans is very high for a school with 150 students, representing approximately 75 per cent of the learners.

In the school board focus group, one of the participants mentioned that “There is one teacher who is always absent. In fact, the teacher is absent once or twice a week. We reported the case to the inspector and we let that teacher fill in unpaid leave. The inspector knows the problem” (participant 4).

In the historical records, for the years 2004 and 2005 there are two teachers with high absences, above the 10.8 average. But the highest recorded absence for any one teacher was 16 and 14 days’ absence in those two years respectively. Most of the absences reported in 2004 fell into the following categories: vacation leave = 24 days; sick leave = 23 days; and urgent private matters = 13 days. In 2005, more than 50 per cent of absences were due to sick leave, 38 in all: There were 19 for vacation leave and 6 for urgent private matters.

Other problems mentioned were:

- shortage of teachers caused by the staffing regulation that limits the number of teachers at a school based on the total number of learners (teacher 1 and teacher 2);
- teaching combined grades in one classroom (teacher 3);
- learners lacking knowledge of English, therefore “They find it hard to grasp easily what I teach them. I have to repeat over and over until they understand” (teacher 2).

Roles of the inspector and the principal

C27

The principal has been a teacher for 11 years, and he has worked as a principal for 14 months. For six years he was head of department, but at this school he has only been acting principal since the beginning of 2005. He mentioned that he “attended two workshops on leadership and management; both were for two weeks each”.

It seems that the inspector, the school board and the principal are working together. The principal is new but according to the interviewees seems to be providing leadership to solve longstanding problems:

“Yes, this new principal found the solution; that’s why we do not have problems anymore with our teachers” (secretary).

“Yes, he has found a solution because the teacher who used to be a problem had been called in several times until he was forced to transfer” (Vice Chair, school board).

The principal seems satisfied with the role of the inspector:

“In the beginning of March, the inspector was to come and solve the problem of a teacher who refused to teach lower primary school. Even though he does not visit the school regularly, one of the last visits that he made, toward the end of last year, was to come and encourage the entire staff to perform their duties promptly”.

The principal also believes that the inspector plays a positive role in helping him manage teachers’ absences and behavioural problems “By advising me [the principal] on how I should implement government policies with the entire staff, taking the opportunity to meet and discuss with them, advising them accordingly in reference to policies and procedures”.

C3

The principal of this school has 24 years of teaching experience and has worked as a principal since 1995. He has participated in many workshops and took a course in leadership and a course on ‘Managing schools’. He became principal of the school one month prior to the observation (March 2006) and the chairperson of the school board believes that “the new principal deserves to be given a chance to prove himself”.

The following are the principal’s opinions about how to manage teacher absences:

1. “All teachers, including myself, should fill out the leave forms and attach the doctor’s certificate to them.”
2. To manage absenteeism, “the normal government policy for schools should be applied”. These policies include regular school meetings/visits.
3. The school board “seems to co-operate. If there is a problem, we always come together and call in teachers especially on absenteeism and advise them to take their work seriously”.

The inspector commented that, when he visits the schools under his supervision, he “always invite[s] the teachers and give[s] them a platform to air their problems that might hinder their teaching”.

According to the inspector:

“The principals are aware of how they should solve this problem and they are in fact doing so. Teachers are given a verbal warning and if no changes occur then the principal tells the inspector to intervene. The principal has also been given authority to approve or not to approve leave days and teachers just have to understand this, that the principal is in charge of the school and that they have to adhere to his rules if his attention is for the benefit of the school and learners.”

As the principal is new, it is difficult to establish conclusions about his work in this school, but his training and the willingness to follow the norms considered appropriate by the inspector may

contribute to overcoming the problems of the teacher or teachers (not clear in the interviews) that come to school but do not teach class.

C1

The principal has been a teacher for 40 years and principal for 33 years. He has been principal of this particular school for 13 years. He has also taken courses in administration and leadership.

In talking about how to manage teacher absences, the principal mentioned that “he applies the Ministry’s policies and regulations at all times and also keeps on advising them (teachers) to take their work seriously”. However, he indicated that when teachers do not fill in their sick leave “... they are given unpaid leave or a deduction is made in their salary. If they continue that, they are recommended for suspension after several warnings”.

It appears that there are not good relations between the principal and the school board, given his comment that the “school board does not take the education of the learners seriously”. He also mentioned that they do not co-operate at all and they favour teachers that are within the vicinity of the school, those coming from the nearby villages and areas.

It seems that the inspector does not visit frequently. According to the principal, “The last visit was on October 15, 2003. In 2004 and 2005 there were no visits from the inspectors. On March 1 (2006), he only came to deliver books for the school”.

K0

The principal of this school had been directing this school for five years prior to the observation and has 18 years of experience in teaching. He has undertaken a week-long workshop on how to manage a school.

In this school there seems to be a good relationship between the principal and the inspector. According to the principal, the inspector visited the school twice in 2005 despite working a lot with other schools in the same circuit. The principal recognized during the interview that the visits by the inspector were helpful:

“During the visit ... I discussed the school’s problems with the circuit inspector. The circuit inspector normally advises me as to how to run the school. The circuit inspector usually has meetings with teachers and informs each teacher about his/her responsibilities as a teacher. By so doing, the circuit inspector helps me with how to run the school.”

However, the school board pointed out that since 15 February 2006 (fieldwork was carried out in March of the same year) they have been waiting for a response to a letter they sent to the inspector asking the regional authorities to replace a teacher who was “used to being absent”.

The principal and school board seem to work alone. They meet twice per term and during these meetings discuss and solve school problems. The school board considers that the principal solves the problems at the school:

“He does solve. We had a meeting with the principal who helped us to write a letter to the inspector about the teachers who are absenting themselves from school without valid reasons” (participant 2).

“I think the principal has found a solution because nowadays teachers are teaching well” (participant 4).

The principal seems to be a strict manager. In his own words:

“I personally think that teachers need to be attended to, and thereafter no teachers would have any excuse to be absent for no apparent reason. I normally invite the teacher who has such a problem to meet with me and we discuss the problem”.

Role of the school board

C27

The school board and the principal seem to work in harmony with each other:

“By having a good relation where the school board meets with the principal in order to find out what problems the teacher – who is involved in absences – have. We talk to the concerned teacher seriously, before taking further steps if teacher does not change at all” (principal).

The school board members offered a similar opinion:

“The school board created a good working relationship with the principal and by doing so problems are jointly handled by both and solutions are reached fast and effectively” (secretary, school board).

One of the participants explained that the school board normally makes regular visits to the school. The chairperson also stated:

“If there is a problem, the principal will bring it to the attention of the school board. The school board will then, with the assistance of the staff, sit down and solve the problem; the same goes for teacher absenteeism.”

C3

“The school board is active; they create a platform and talk to the teachers, discouraging them from being absent from school. If any teacher ignores their policy without a valid reason, they prepare a letter with the help of the principal directed to the attention of the inspector. The school board is also involved with learner absenteeism, whereby they visit the parents of those children and discuss the reason for not attending school and also the importance of education. For now, the writing of a letter to be forwarded to the inspector is enough of a ‘scare’ because those teachers do not want to lose their jobs” (inspector).

“The school board at this school seems to co-operate. If there is a problem, we always come together and call in teachers, especially on absenteeism and advise them to take their work seriously” (principal).

The school board focus group agreed with this opinion:

“We regularly visit the school. We make time to talk to the principal and teachers about problems being experienced. This gives us the opportunity to give advice to teachers” (secretary, school board).

C1

This school was somewhat different from the others in the group. First, the inspector believed that neither in this nor the other schools in his circuit – which includes school C7 from the first group – are there successful experiences of working with the school board. He criticized the members of the school board, saying:

“They think they have the power for recommending teachers for recruitment. They even think that they have authority to approve transfer and recruitment. They seem to think they are a structure which has wholesale authority above the Ministry.”

A teacher held a negative opinion as well, stating that “Our school board does not do anything and is not currently active. I did not see them come to the school. I only saw the chairman passing by the school once”.

Nevertheless, in the opinion of the school board, they are working well and do the following:

- apply and implement all the Ministry’s policies and regulations on sick leave that are outlined in the school board manual;
- visit the school regularly to monitor whether teachers are in school every day of the school week;
- meet with the principal to check on the absenteeism problem at the school;
- check attendance registers to see if teachers report to the school at the right time;
- call teachers and have discussions with them on a regular basis.

K0

According to the principal and one of the teachers, this school board has five members, who work as follows:

“... Meet teachers and tell them what is expected from each teacher at our school. Fortunately, our school board has a weekly school visit and observation programme in which each school board member visits the school” (principal, teacher 1).

The school board members explained similar activities, adding:

“... we have school visits and a school supervision programme. Each of us has a turn to supervise the school activities one day in a week. I usually sit in the classroom” (participant 5).

The same interviewed teacher stated “I view them as doing well and they know their work, looking at their school visits and the school observation programme they have in place. They are okay.”

The school board also feels satisfied with its work, which it considers to be effective:

“Oh yes, through our programme – as my colleague has just said, we prevent teachers from being absent without a valid reason, you know” (participant 3).

6 Discussion on findings

Overall aspects

The study results confirmed firstly that stigma generates denial over HIV and AIDS in the two regions, and secondly that this pandemic has a serious impact in some schools. HIV and AIDS were never directly mentioned as a cause of teachers' absences; in fact sickness was never mentioned as affecting either teachers or learners. Only in one school was the presence of a high number of AIDS orphans mentioned, and only by one informant. Yet the pandemic was present in the school sample and was causing damage to the education system. The most important manifestations of the pandemic in this research concerned the attendance of funerals and burials, but it is possible that some teachers reported as being very frequently absent without a clear cause (sickness) or having behavioural problems (remaining silent in front of a class) are living with AIDS. In one school (K0) the principal mentioned that there were approximately 100 orphaned learners, representing 75 per cent of all the students in that centre. In the same school one member of the board reported the fact that one teacher was very frequently absent, that he was allowed to take unpaid leave, and that "the inspector knew about it". This may be an indirect way of alluding to what might be a very serious issue. But it is not possible to conclude from such a comment whether the teacher was HIV-positive, sick with another illness, or taking care of a close relative. In brief, it is not possible to isolate the impact of HIV and AIDS on teacher absences, but it is possible to conclude that the problem of teacher absences in an HIV and AIDS context is serious.

Management problems are also causing great damage to learners' learning and the good functioning of these schools. The contrasting mode of operation, discipline and numbers of absences between three schools in Caprivi and two in Kavango support this affirmation. Given the high HIV and AIDS prevalence in Caprivi, it was expected that there would be a greater number of schools in this region with serious absenteeism problems. This was not the case. On the contrary, the three schools in Caprivi are among the group of schools with the greatest discipline and lowest number of absences. Conversely, two of the schools from Kavango are in the group with the highest amount of teacher absenteeism and numerous discipline problems, along with two others from the region which also seem to have problems, although this could not be verified due to a lack of statistics.

Bad record-keeping of absences might also lead to underestimations of the effect of sickness-related absenteeism and HIV and AIDS in these schools. According to the records kept (see *Table 6.1*), absences do not follow a clear historical trend. A sustained increase in absences classified as compassionate and sick leave was expected as a consequence of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. However, this was not the case. The number of absences ostensibly increased by 18 days in only one school from 2004 to 2005, although it had decreased in that same school between 2003 and 2004. The rest of the schools for which there are statistics continued in the same trend: Two schools (K1 and C1¹⁴), had fewer instances of non-attendance or absences from 2004 to 2005. There are three schools which experienced slight increases: C3 and K0 with an increase of five absences in each, and K7 with an increase of nine.

14. The latter is the part of the group that has better managed this problem.

The records show that in 2005 there were fewer absences due to sickness than in 2004: 28.5 per cent of total absences were due to sickness in 2005, compared to 58 per cent in 2004. Absences due to compassionate leave only appear in the 2005 records and total 14, or 4.6 per cent of total absences. In that same year there were 37 absences under the pretext of urgent private matters, which is almost three times as many, and 12.4 per cent of the total. Bad record-keeping might have influenced these results; indeed, inaccurate records cannot be disassociated from management problems.

First, there seems to be a lack of knowledge of how to categorize some absences. There was some confusion reported on what is meant by 'urgent private matter', which in one school included going to the bank. Second, some categories of leave, such as compassionate leave, are quickly exhausted, with only five paid days of absence per year allowed for that reason. Thus it is likely that the principal tries to comply with teachers' demands by classifying compassionate leave absences in a different category. This is a plausible explanation for the decrease in absences due to compassionate leave.

Table 6.1 Teacher absences in the sampled schools

CODE	Number of teachers*	2003	2004	2005	2006	2005 average days per teacher/principal
K7	3	31	39	48	28	16
K0	6	57	60	65		10.8
K5	6	67	32	50	9	8.3
K1	7	167	64	79	21	11.28
K35	2	NR	NR	NR		NR
C1	2	16	16	10	7	5
C27	3			14	6	4.6
C3	5	1	5	6	8	1.2

* The number of teachers remained the same in all schools from 2003 to 2006. This number includes principals (they all teach).

NR = no records.

A factor that seems to influence trends in absence is the distance between the school and the regional MOE office. In this study, three of the four schools at an advantage in the so-called third group are situated less than 35 kilometres away from the MOE office in Caprivi, and two of the schools in the first group – at a disadvantage – are more than 77 kilometres away from the MOE office.¹⁵ However, there are exceptions: School K0, located 125 kilometres from the MOE office in Rundú, is in the third group and is one of those reported as being well managed. School K7, just 40 kilometres away from the MOE office, is in the first group of those at a disadvantage. The study did not collect data on the quality of the roads, thus any expansion on this theory would be

15. In Kavango, bank offices are all located in Rundú, which might be a reason for teachers going to the bank to cash checks. However, banks are also open on Saturday and checks could be cashed then.

mere speculation. However, distance may be an element to consider and it might also be a factor associated with rurality. There were also other factors in the study related to distance that seem significant:

- participation of the school board in school issues, with the less distant schools having greater community participation. This resonates with the studies cited by Liman and Shikongo (2006: 3) that state that there tends to be less community participation in rural schools;
- attention given by the inspectors, with the expectation that this attention diminishes when the distance to a school is greater. This study revealed that the attention and supervision by inspectors and subject teachers was more constant for schools that were closer.

Teachers' absences disrupt the normal functioning of the schools in the sample

The study shows the negative impact of teacher absences in at least the four following ways:

- learners do not receive classes at all and are left by themselves for hours;
- learners wander around making noise, disturbing the learning process of students who are in class;
- teachers are overburdened with work and take on another classroom for which they are not duly prepared, simply because they did not receive training to teach that content or because they did not have an opportunity to prepare given the unforeseen absence;
- learners are frustrated because they have made an effort to get to class and, as many of those interviewed indicated, do not even receive an explanation as to the whereabouts of the teacher.

The study shows how frustrating it is for the students, who have sometimes walked long distances, when the teacher is in school but does not teach, is not in class, or is sick and does not teach a quality class. The 'mentally ill' teacher in school K1 showed erratic behaviour with the children and had very little control over her pupils during the observed classes. This has a negative impact on the learners as they do not have the opportunity to receive a quality or comprehensive education. The opinion of one teacher in school K1, which has high absence rates, illuminates the problem:

"The learners' academic performance is disturbed, and meagre resources of learners' parents are wasted if learners are not taught accordingly. As more learners fail at school, the school's image is tarnished badly in the end" (teacher 2).

Although academic rigour and school discipline was not a specific focus of the study, it was noted that many schools teach fewer hours than is required of them. Educational quality is impaired by the absence of teachers as well as suspension of classes or release of learners before the scheduled time. In most of the Group 1 schools – i.e. those at a disadvantage – it was noted that they did not follow the standard schedule (7 am to 1 pm). In fact, one of them held 16 hours of class during the observation week instead of the established schedule of 30 hours (or 6 hours per day), partly because of early release of pupils and partly because they suspended classes on Fridays.

What increases the possibility that teachers will be absent?

Characteristics of absent teachers and reasons for absence

Youth

The interviewees provided information on some characteristics of the teachers who tended to be absent more often. One principal indicated that the young teachers are among those that are more frequently absent. This may not be the case if it were not for teaching majors who enter the profession without a vocation and who use the opportunity granted by the teachers' college to get into university. However, it is possible that such teachers that were not able to use their teaching preparation as a springboard to university continue to teach classes unenthusiastically and thus have poor motivation and little self-discipline. This frustration makes these young teachers more inclined to be absent, as noted in *Section 3* above.

Behavioural problems

Most interviewees that talked of teachers with poor attendance records blamed this on excessive alcohol consumption, indicating that many of the absent teachers are "drunkards". This was confirmed in two schools where alcoholism was the cause of frequent teacher absences.¹⁶ One teacher was so often absent that those interviewed agreed that it was "a chronic problem".

Lack of discipline and accountability

Other teachers were reported by the interviewees to lack self-discipline and a sense of responsibility. An inspector who was interviewed declared that there are teachers that tend to falsify doctors' certificates, and others that say they are going to funerals where "the staff member concerned is not related to the deceased but they have somehow obtained such copy through a friend of the deceased" (inspector of C1 and C7).

These problems create an environment of unruliness and chaos in the schools, frustrating the students and their parents, and that cannot be disconnected from the breakdown in the management of the education system and some of its norms. Staff that manifest such behaviour could be seen as taking full advantage of the system rather than acting as responsible professionals.

There are two other problems that contribute to absences, the effects of which should not be underestimated.

Sickness

The importance of illnesses of teachers and of their close family members must be taken into account. It is a reason frequently mentioned by principals and board members to explain a teacher's absence. It is to be noted that no one mentioned the kind of illness from which teachers commonly suffer, nor the fact that teachers could be absent to take care of a sick relative. Yet in Caprivi as well as Kavango, the population, including teachers, is paying a heavy toll to HIV and AIDS, even though there is a clear denial of the extent of the problem, and the stigma surrounding AIDS seems difficult to break through. Whenever someone dies of AIDS, it is not AIDS which is mentioned but the related sickness, for example tuberculosis or gastro-enteritis. The fact that it is not possible to isolate the impact of HIV and AIDS on teachers' mortality and absences does not mean that it is not a problem. It is possible, but not certain, for example, that the chronically sick teachers in C1

16. One of those schools is K5, which does not have enough information on other issues.

or in K0 are actually suffering from AIDS. In K0, one teacher has 16 and 14 recorded absences in the last two years, some of which was taken as unpaid leave.

Also, during the observation week, there were several absences attributed to funerals. This was confirmed by the inspector for schools C1, C3 and C7, who indicated that "Many cases [of absences] are related to sickness and this is covered by reports from doctors for mild sicknesses or by death certificates of family members".

Chronic illnesses can do greater damage to the quality of education if they are not addressed; people with incurable diseases should not continue to be employed as teachers if they cannot fulfil their obligations. This may be a problem of norms and management rather than the individual desires of the sick teachers or their principals. It is actually possible to grant early retirement due to continued ill health, but most people do not request it because it would affect the amount of benefits the teacher would receive through their pension fund.

Consequently, the system is caught in its own trap: A replacement teacher cannot be appointed to substitute the sick teacher because of lack of funds yet neither is it possible to force the sick teacher to retire if a pension cannot be offered that enables the teacher to have an income similar to what he/she earned on the job. This has unfortunate repercussions on the learners.

Last, but not least, AIDS has a serious impact on a school's operation and on learning conditions due to the high number of orphans as in K0. Apart from the human and social tragedy that it represents and the consequences that this may have on the morale of pupils and their capacity to learn, it also has an impact on school resources since most of the pupils will not be able to pay the contribution to the school development fund.

Lack of training

In school K1, interviewees spoke about two teachers who did not teach classes regularly. Those teachers were not always absent from school, but they tended not to be present in the classroom. The pupils, as well as the parents and one of the teachers interviewed, reported a lack of mastery of two subjects: social sciences and English. The result is that a person who has been assigned classes for which they are not properly trained tends to avoid teaching them as she/he feels uncomfortable. Not teaching the classes avoids exposure of this limitation to the pupils.

According to the norms, these teachers should never have been hired as they do not have the ability to teach classes on the established subjects. However, two problems may occur here, as mentioned during the interviews. One problem is related to the attitude of some principals who wish to avoid conflict with anyone. Such an attitude is harmful to the school as teachers are appointed who were not given satisfactory evaluations after their first temporary 12-month teacher appointment.

The second factor is the scarcity of teachers, which may lead to hiring teachers who do not have proper training. It was mentioned in several of the schools visited that there is an insufficient number of teachers. Indeed, in Kavango shortages were reported of teachers with the necessary language skills in upper primary, as the training colleges are not producing enough qualified teachers. The regional directorate hired secondary school graduates on a temporary basis.

In-service training and workshops

Last, but not least, workshops must be mentioned as a cause of absence, as was observed during the fieldwork. Workshops do not appear as a category in the records as a cause of absence, but in two of the seven schools there were absences because of workshops filed under "other". There was

even one school where two teachers left in the middle of the morning to attend an HIV workshop. It is obviously important for teachers to have the opportunity to update their knowledge, but from the perspective of the schools it is clear that unplanned workshops cause disorder as no provision is made to replace the absent teachers. Ideally, workshops should be organized outside teaching hours, or if it is not the case they should be announced so that properly planned solutions can be found for the pupils while their teachers are attending the workshops.

Factors that influence teachers' absences

A major finding that emerges in this study is that an efficient, disciplined school where teacher absences are well managed has a *partnership* among its main stakeholders: the inspector, the principal and the school board as representative of the community. If these stakeholders are active and *harmonize their efforts* to ensure the good operation of the school, they make a difference. Within this harmonization of efforts, each stakeholder must play a particular role: The inspector supervises, provides timely assistance and facilitates the solving of problems that arise in each school; the principal puts the norms into practice, exercising leadership to promote fulfilment of the major school activities; the school board is concerned with the quality of education and the factors that affect it, taking action when there are disciplinary problems of both teachers and students.

This study revealed that in the schools with the most discipline and absenteeism problems, one or two of the stakeholders were not fulfilling their roles and there was not sufficient harmony among the parties. Exactly the opposite occurred in the four schools that were at an advantage, where the major stakeholders were clearly working in partnership. Using the data that emerged from this study, below is an analysis of the role of each stakeholder in the two groups of schools.

The principal

There were four schools in the sample with low numbers of teacher absences and efficient operation in terms of attendance and general conduct and discipline. These schools had principals who seemed to be strict and claimed to require compliance with MOE norms regarding the signing of leave forms, attaching medical certificates to these when the absence was for sick leave, etc. The three schools with more behavioural, discipline and absenteeism problems had new principals, two of whom had no experience or training. In fact, in one of these schools it was not possible to interview the principal because he was absent during the entire week due to illness. In the only school in Group 1 that had an experienced principal, the school board expressed that he was not a "strong leader". Consequently, for absenteeism to decrease in a school, it seems important that the principal exercise his or her functions firmly, be *strict, and direct the school with discipline*.

Another important feature of the work of principals that manage effective schools with good discipline and few teacher absences was the capacity to communicate with the teachers, the members of the school board and the inspector. In the four schools found to have better management, all the principals interviewed indicated that they attend to the teachers, talk with them when there are attendance problems, and convene the school board when there is a difficult situation in order to discuss a solution. In three of the schools, interviewees mentioned that they talked with the inspector to solve some problems and ask for assistance. This was corroborated by the school board and most of the teachers interviewed. In the other group of schools – those at a disadvantage in managing absenteeism – information of this type was not collected, and one of the teachers even stated, "I never see the school board" (C7).

Another factor is the authority and support that the system provides to the principal. It appears that in most of the schools, the principals do not have the authority they need to do their jobs. While it is

true that they have the ability to grant leave, they do not seem to fully exercise this function. In many of the schools with observed poor conduct and discipline, there were teachers who did not turn up during the observation week and, when the principals were questioned about them, they stated that they did not know why they were not in school. In school C7 – one with high levels of teacher absences – the principal reported, “Normally they [teachers] file leave forms, but sometimes they don’t ...”. In two other schools in the first group, the principals said, “We, the principals, should have the power to warn teachers who misbehave”, (K5) and “We principals have limited power to control teachers’ bad behaviour” (K7).

In that same school, the principal felt that he lacked support: “To be honest, I did not receive any support in my new position as a principal” (K7).

A possible element that hinders the principals from effectively carrying out their duties is that they all also teach classes. This limits the time available for administrative issues. One principal indicated that 99 per cent of his time was devoted to his classes, leaving 1 per cent for paperwork. It is likely that, if the principals have a heavy teaching load, they lack time to work on the supervision and discipline of the teachers.

Finally, it should be noted that there was a contrast between the training received by the principals in the advantaged group and those in Group 1 (at a disadvantage). The four principals of Group 3 had received training to be principals. All mentioned having participated in at least two courses: one on management and the other on leadership. There was even a principal that attended meetings with other principals to exchange experiences. However, two of the three principals of the schools at a disadvantage, in addition to being inexperienced, had received no training at all.

The principal, for example, has the possibility of not recommending approval of a leave request. He may also request that a staff member have deductions made from his/her salary for any unjustified or unapproved leave. But in the end it is the regional office that approves the leave. The principal therefore needs the support of the inspector.

In brief, although the system is promoting “collaboration and partnership with all stakeholders in education ... in the process of democratic decentralization ...” (MOE, 2006: 1), this decentralization has not yet sufficiently materialized in all the schools visited, nor has a proper ‘partnership’ been achieved where each figure of authority has its own influence within the school. Arguably, the principal would be among those most affected by the fact that the decentralization process has not been fully concluded. Part of this problem is that many important decisions are made outside the school or decisions cannot be implemented without support from above. Another problem is that some schools are too poor to be able to find local solutions and replacements. The lack of support mentioned by some principals decreases their arena for making decisions and taking action. These arenas are further limited in some schools because the principals lack sufficient training to carry out their functions.

The school board

There was a school board for all of the schools visited, although these committees did not operate well in all of the schools. Findings include the following:

The school boards acted in partnership with the principal in the schools with the least absenteeism and the best observed management and discipline, and they conducted actions such as:

- meeting teachers and telling them what is expected from each of them;
- talking to the teachers, discouraging them from being absent from school;

- planning and implementing weekly school visits and observations according to a schedule in which each school board member is assigned a day;
- discussing with the principal specific problems involving learners and teachers who tend to be absent;
- talking seriously to individual teachers who have problems before taking further steps if the teacher does not change at all;
- visiting parents of learners with problems and discussing with them the reason for not attending school and the importance of education;
- writing a letter forwarded to the inspector asking for action to be taken if a teacher continues to have behavioural problems.

Of the three schools with the greatest problems, one of the school boards did not seem able to get well organized; at the time of the visit, it did not have a supervision plan. In another case, the school board members themselves expressed that they lack leadership as the chairperson is not fulfilling his/her role. In addition, some interviewees indicated that the members of this school board do not have any training or enough academic schooling to be able to read the necessary documents for the job. Only in one of these schools does the school board appear to be functioning, but not in partnership with the principal or the inspector.

The inspector

The person with this responsibility plays a very important role in Namibia, where human resources decisions are in the hands of the regional office or sometimes the principal secretary. Neither the principal nor the school board can suspend a teacher for not fulfilling his/her duties. Nor can they appoint a supplementary or substitute teacher. Thus, the facility with which the inspector addresses requests from the school and responds to its demands seems to be crucial.

Consequently, in the schools where the inspectors failed to do their jobs effectively, the decisions to suspend or replace a teacher – and the mentally ill teacher is a case in point – were postponed, causing further discipline problems and a great deal of frustration among school board members and the principal. The principal of one school stated, “I never saw the inspector visiting the school or with me personally” (K7).

On the other hand, when the inspectors do attend the schools – as in the majority of the schools with effective management and low rates of absenteeism – synergy is achieved among all the participants in decision-making and a good number of the problems are solved. The characteristics of the work done by the inspector during frequent visits are as follows:

- the inspector has meetings with teachers and heads of department and informs each teacher about his/her responsibilities;
- the inspector encourages the entire staff to perform their duties promptly;
- the inspector meets with the principal and gives advice on school matters.

In one school (C3) the inspector mentioned that the principal was given the authority “to approve or not to approve leave days and teachers just have to understand this; that the principal is in charge of the school”.

The timely visit of the inspector, and the assistance, backing and support of the principal and the school board are all elements that contribute to the creation of a partnership among the figures of authority established by the education system in Namibia. Likewise, this partnership has made

it possible to motivate the teachers to work efficiently and to sanction those who do not perform their role in a timely manner.

The administrative context

In general, from the field visits to nine schools it can be deduced that the system is not sufficiently organized to guarantee maximum learning for the students. Many details of the study indicate that there is no compliance with the established procedures and norms of the education system. Below are some examples:

- not all absences are reported;
- the system may not be responding sufficiently to chronic problems such as alcoholism;
- the system seems unprepared to deal with an increased impact of AIDS – e.g. illnesses of teachers who come to teach class but are not able to fulfil that commitment; orphans not paying fees and school funds not being reimbursed. Teachers' absences are just part of a bigger problem that needs to be addressed in urgency. There is currently a policy that exists but which is not fully implemented;
- the norms set by the MOE are frequently violated. For example, the possibility of taking sick leave with full remuneration should not surpass 87 days in every three-year cycle. However, in school K7 the records indicate that one single teacher accumulated 108 days of absence in three years. In school K1, two teachers accumulated 101 days of absence in 2003. Moreover the observations made during the fieldwork in each school show that the number of days' absence is actually higher than that officially recorded. In view of the humane problem that headmasters and teachers have to face it may not appear such an issue, but if this phenomenon is occurring in many schools the impact on the teaching-learning process is much more serious than it appears. Other more appropriate solutions could be found that could render the tasks of headmasters easier in ensuring discipline;
- the supervision system, defined as "all those services whose main function is to control and evaluate and/or advise and support school heads and teachers" (De Grauwe, 2001: 10) is not fulfilling its purpose in the majority of the schools visited.

An explanation for the differences in attendance, management and levels of teacher absenteeism in the Caprivi and Kavango schools may be related to different capacities for supervision and management that appear in the two regions. Kavango has nine inspectors for 328 schools, which gives a ratio of 35 schools per inspector; on the other side, Caprivi has five inspectors for 96 schools and a ratio of 19 schools per inspector. Already in 2001, 45 per cent of the inspectors had an educational level below twelfth grade in Kavango, while in Caprivi only one inspector had such a low level of schooling (8.3 per cent). This may serve to illuminate the advantages revealed in the Caprivi schools regarding the problem of teachers' frequent absences (De Grauwe, 2001).

Policy implications

The results of this study indicate that there is a serious problem of teacher absences in the schools visited, and that this is having dramatic consequences on the organization of the teaching process and pupils' learning opportunities. In a few of the schools studied, the problem seems to have been aggravated by the HIV epidemic.

Vision 2030 sets Namibia a very ambitious target: that it should join the ranks of developed countries by 2030 and "afford all its citizens a quality of life comparable to that of the developed world" (Republic of Namibia, 2006a: 3). For this to happen, the country has to invest in its human

resources and dramatically increase the learning achievement of its children. It must seriously address certain inequalities and inefficiencies in the operation of its education system; the level of teacher absences is certainly one of them.

HIV and AIDS constitute a serious challenge to this long-term objective. It has to be addressed as a serious human problem, and care and support must be brought to those who are infected and affected. It has to be addressed as a management problem, and proper solutions must be found or the system will be damaged, resources wasted and inequalities aggravated.

The information provided by those interviewed and the data compiled during approximately 40 days of research demonstrate the importance of preparing for a possible further spread of the pandemic. Stronger measures could also be taken against unjustified absences.

Suggestions can be made that aim at addressing the ordinary problem of teacher absences which would specifically address HIV- and AIDS-related absenteeism. In a nutshell, the suggestion would be to apply much stricter sanctions to unnecessary and unapproved teacher absences, while being more lenient in addressing the issue of chronically ill teachers.

Curbing ordinary absences

The study identifies different practices for managing teachers' frequent absences in the schools visited. In the schools with a greater capacity to face this problem, the practices are positive and function through partnership between the principal, the inspector and the school board. These stakeholders harmonize their efforts and combine disciplinary mechanisms with persuasion to ensure that there is discipline in the school. Thus, they control a good portion of the behavioural problems of some teachers. The application of timely supervision and assistance is emphasized, along with frequent communication.

Absences in many of the schools appear to be due more to disorder and a lack of personal rigour or self-discipline, probably owing to a lack of good management and proper working standards. For example, the incidence of funerals was an ongoing cause of absence during the fieldwork. However, as one inspector stated, not all the absences for funerals can be considered legitimate.

System management

The decentralization process should be accelerated, granting more authority to local stakeholders, thereby enabling them to address problems in the most remote schools swiftly and efficiently.

Furthering the decentralization process begun some years ago, a series of measures could be envisaged to increase accountability, such as the following:

- improve school supervision and the technical assistance system. Analyze the possibility of increasing the number of inspectors, as, in the area covered by this investigation, the current number seems insufficient to cover all the schools. If this is impossible, the feasibility of prioritizing the inspection of those schools with more problems, practising a kind of 'positive discrimination' could be envisaged. Another possibility would be to strengthen cluster heads and give them more responsibilities in training and supporting principals. This may mean discharging them of any teaching activity or restricting it to a minimum;
- train heads of clusters and inspectors before they take up their position so that they become a professionalized body;

- implement an evaluation system for teacher performance that includes giving incentives for teachers who abide by the procedures and standards expected of them and sanctioning those who have chronic ‘bad behaviour’;
- design specific policies for rural schools, including introducing more flexibility in the norm regarding the ratio of 35 students per teacher in remote rural areas and incomplete schools;
- hone the recruitment policy and organize a system on location that allows the recruitment of teachers from the most remote communities.

A series of bottlenecks in the management of the problem of absenteeism must be cleared. Measures to address these include the following:

- increasing accountability in each school and accurate record-keeping;
- establishing a system of sanctions and speeding up the mechanisms for dismissing teachers who systematically violate workplace discipline, which affects learning. The chairperson of the C1 school board stated that “Serious steps need to be taken against those that are absent regularly, such as deductions from their salary for the days that they were absent. This will serve as a wake-up call to others who want to do the same thing”. Principals can actually do that in the present system, but some of them are not sufficiently trained or do not dare to do so in the fear of becoming unpopular. They would need to be trained, sensitized and supported in their tasks;
- organizing the in-service training system, including workshops, at a time that least disrupts the teaching process; organizing a harmonized plan that includes all the different national, regional and local efforts to avoid negatively affecting the schools, providing them with advance notice about events so that they can make arrangements to compensate for absent teachers. As far as possible, long courses should take place during school holidays. School-based or cluster-based courses should also be encouraged, preferably in the afternoon when no formal teaching takes place and yet teachers’ presence is required;
- speeding up the decision-making mechanisms for providing replacement teachers and opening new positions.

The role of the community

The school boards could be strengthened through opportunities for training and close technical assistance. School board members need support in learning how to do their job. The MOE manual provides the norms for compliance, but does not address how to comply with them in a stringent fashion. If the members of the board have low levels of schooling, it is difficult for them to organize themselves. Therefore they need assistance, at least initially. An inspector who was interviewed stated that “They tend to draw conclusions without alternatives” (Inspector of C1 and C7). This way of thinking, criticized by the inspector, may be changed with direct support and training.

The possibility of conferring upon school board members the authority to visit the school on an ad hoc basis to monitor whether the teachers who are in the classroom are actually teaching could be explored.

Parents may be of great assistance in replacing teachers, provided that the teachers leave a lesson plan and tasks aimed at reinforcing knowledge of content already covered and not providing new content.

Principals and teachers

The process of recruiting principals could be improved. Suggestions were made during the workshop to discuss the research results that principals should be more systematically interviewed and recruited on the basis of their competences rather than on the strict basis of seniority.

They should receive training on how to lead a school and pedagogical management before assuming their position. They should all receive the 'Guidelines for School Principals' and be encouraged to apply it.

Principals should be sensitized on the issue of teacher absenteeism and how seriously it disrupts the teaching-learning process and endangers the quality of learning. Supervisors and heads of clusters should be similarly trained and encouraged to support principals in their tasks.

Teachers would benefit from training, both at teachers' colleges and during in-service training, on how to manage multi-grade schools. Teachers' frustration in managing combined grades was evident, although this is a common way of working in education that can be very effective if the teacher is properly trained.

Other

Working with teacher unions is essential. A communication programme addressed to teachers could be designed and implemented jointly with them on the problem of frequent teacher absences and create awareness of the damage that this does to learners and of the importance of accountability.

The problem of lack of teachers' accommodation, which forces them to travel long distances daily, needs to be addressed.

The education fund envisaged in the 2001 Education Act (Republic of Namibia, 2001) is yet to be set up so that it can reimburse schools' development funds that lack resources and/or that exempt poor students.

Addressing absences related to HIV and other chronic diseases

Cases of chronically sick people need to be addressed differently. Suggestions cannot be made for only HIV- and AIDS-related absenteeism as, for obvious reasons, the school administration does not know the HIV status of the teachers. Rumours are numerous, but no principal or inspector really knows whether a teacher is HIV-positive until he or she chooses to disclose the information. However, due to the stigma attached to the issue, teachers and other employees are afraid to announce their status.

The government is encouraging teachers and other civil servants to go for testing so as to receive free life-prolonging ART. Once they receive their treatment, employees are supposed to continue working as usual. If such a measure were extended to the sick employee's immediate family, it could reduce the absences of teachers who care for sick relatives.

The specific measures proposed below apply to any chronically ill teacher who is considered by a medical doctor as being severely handicapped by his/her sickness:

- the protocol for early retirement needs to be reviewed. The current protocol implies a long process before a teacher considered unfit to teach can be granted early retirement. As one inspector said, "We cannot keep slugging waiting for the person to recover at the expenses of the children". Accordingly, a seriously ill person thus certified by a medical doctor should be

allowed to retire early with a full pension. The process should be accelerated, but of course this does not depend on the Ministry of Education;

- it is suggested that a chronically ill person, as certified by a medical doctor, be given a lighter teaching load. Many HIV-infected persons go through periods of extreme fatigue. Such persons should not be assigned to teach in any highly sensitive grade, such as grade 1, where pupils learn how to read and write, nor in high-stakes grades involving preparation for an external examination;
- the issue of creating a group of relief teachers whose responsibility would be to replace missing teachers is presently being discussed. The difficulty is how to make sure that these relief teachers will be made available very quickly where they are needed. Also, to be effective, the scheme would have to recruit many teachers, which may turn out to be costly. Another concern expressed is that it could discourage infected teachers to teach altogether, even if they undergo treatment. Last, but not least, the scheme would not necessarily provide for those teachers who are only absent from time to time;
- another solution to be considered is the possibility of creating a 'contingency fund' to pay external teachers to take over the classes of those who are absent. This fund would allocate special amounts to those schools that have a very high rate of recorded teacher absences and very low school development funds, so as to allow them to recruit members of the community – i.e. unemployed secondary education graduates – to replace the missing teachers. Such community or assistant teachers would be appointed by and placed under the direct authority of the principal and the school board. This solution is more likely to respond to another major problem of absences due to funeral attendance;
- the question of funeral attendance and compassionate leave is quite sensitive. Present regulations concerning the number of days granted for compassionate leave have to be enforced. But it is unlikely to be sufficient in certain communities, and teachers may very well continue to take more than five days a year under that pretence. There is already a new trend of organizing funerals on Saturdays and Sundays so as to reduce the impact of such events on economic life. The organization of a conference with different stakeholders and members of society to discuss issues of burials and funerals and their impact on the economy may be necessary.

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Appendix I. Characteristics of the regions (taken from SACMEQ)

SACMEQ I and II

Region	Differences	Similarities	Similarities	Similarities	Similarities
	HIV and AIDS prevalence	Quality of learners' homes*	Teachers' possessions at home**	Percentages of reading teachers with only primary education	Teachers' experience (mean)
Caprivi	Katima Mulilo*** 42%	7.5	6.2	17.2%	7.2
Kavango	Rundú 18.2%	7.5	6.2	18%	7.9
Namibia	19%	8.4	6.4	13.6%	9.3

* Following the SACMEQ studies conducted in 1995 and 2000 (Ross, Saito, Dolata and Ikeda, 2004), IIEP used the data collected to create different indexes for measuring students' socio-economic status and home environment; schools' conditions; and teachers' and principals' characteristics.

** The possessions were a newspaper, a weekly or monthly magazine, a TV set, a VCR, a radio, a cassette player, a telephone, a refrigerator, a car, a motorcycle, a bicycle, piped water, electricity and a table to write on (Ross, Saito, Dolata and Ikeda, 2004: 57)

*** Table 1 Surveillance sites 1992 and 2004.

Appendix II. Sample of guides for interviews and observations

Guide for interviewing the inspector of the school

Record properly the answers to these items and questions.

General information

2	Name of interviewer	
3	Date and day of interview	Monday___Tuesday___Wednesday___Thursday___Friday___ Date___Month___
4	Time of the interview	Begins___ Ends ___
General data on the school or schools that this inspector supervises or visits		
5	Code of school(s) in the sample inspected. <i>Just in case s/he supervises more than one of the sampled schools.</i>	A) B) C)
6	Circuit name	
7	Region	Kavango___Caprivi___
8	Gender of respondent <i>(optional)</i>	

Personal data

Record properly the answers to these questions

1. Could you please tell me a little bit about yourself, how many years you have been working as an inspector and particularly as inspector of this circuit? Could you also tell me a little bit about your professional experience?
2. Were you a teacher and a principal before? How many years have you been working in education?
3. What type of support have you received to carry out your job as an inspector? Have you received any form of in-service training? Could you please give some details? (*TYPE AND LENGTH OF COURSES*)

Assessment of the sampled schools under his/her supervision

4. What are the most important problems in the circuit that you supervise? What information can you give specifically about the school(s) included in the study? (You will have to obtain information on each school in the sample that is under his or her supervision individually.)

School 1

School 2

School 3

5. What do you usually do during your visits to the schools of the circuit? What are the issues that are given priority during the visit?

Absenteeism

6. Is there a problem of teachers' absenteeism or behaviour in the schools you inspect that are included in this study? (Provide the name of the school or schools if s/he supervises several of the schools in the sample.)
7. Has the trend in teachers' absences varied in the last three or four years? If so, what do you think are the causes of this change?

Dealing with teachers' absences

8. How do you feel about the way the principals of these schools are dealing with teachers' absences and behavioural problems? (Provide the name of the school or schools if s/he supervises several of the schools in the sample and take notes of the information one by one.)

School 1

School 2

School 3

9. What recommendations do you give to principals to deal more effectively with teachers' absences and behavioural problems?
10. What action do school boards take in response to teachers' absenteeism and behavioural problems? (If none, what role should they play?)

School 1 code

School 2 code

11. Have the school boards and the principals in your circuit found a way to prevent absences and diminish behavioural problems that impact negatively on learners' learning? Could you please give examples of these successful experiences?
12. How do you handle teachers with serious behavioural problems and high absenteeism?
13. Have any teachers in your circuit been suspended or dismissed in the last year because of excessive absence and serious behavioural problems?
14. What else do you believe could be done to help the schools prevent absenteeism and behavioural problems among teachers?
15. What suggestion would you make to the Regional Director that could improve the way the education system is dealing with absenteeism and behavioural problems among teachers?

School board focus group

It is very important to have as many members as possible present in the interview. Call the meeting in advance to allow the participators to include it in their personal schedule.

Give every person a name tag, and address the person by name to make the conversation more personal.

Ensure that everybody participates in the discussion and gives their opinion about the issues addressed. Do not let the meeting be monopolized by one or two persons. Kindly ask the silent persons about their feelings and opinions on the issues raised. You should emphasize that to know what each one of them thinks is very important for this study.

Do not repeat the question to each participant using the same words; try to link previous answers with new questions on the issues addressed.

General information

1	Name of interviewer	
2	Date and day of interview	Month___/Day___ Monday___Tuesday___Wednesday___Thursday___Friday___
3	Time of the interview	Am___ Pm ___
4	Duration of interview	
5	Code of school	
6	Number of persons present	
7	Gender of persons participating	Male Female
8	Responsibility in the school board	Person 1___ Person 2___ Person 3___ Person 4___ Person 5___ Person 6___ Person 7___

1. What do you believe is the most important problem in this school?
2. Are some teachers frequently absent in the school or coming to class unable to teach?
3. Do you know why?
4. Has the principal found a solution to deal with teachers' absences or behavioural problems?
5. What is the school board doing to help the school reduce teachers' absences and incorrect behaviour?
6. What else could be done?

Interview guide for teachers' focus group to be used in schools with more than two teachers

General information

Name of interviewer	
Date of interview	Month_____Day_____
Code of school	
Region	Kavango____Caprivi____

It is very important to have at least three teachers present in the interview. Call the meeting in advance to allow them to include it in their lesson timetable.

Give every person a tag with a number, and address the person by this number to reassure them that their opinions will remain confidential and private. Try to make the conversation personal, and ensure that everybody participates in the discussion. Do not let the meeting be monopolized by one or two persons. Kindly ask the silent persons about their feelings and opinions on the issues raised. Emphasize that finding out what they think is very important for this study.

Do not repeat the question to each participant using the same words, try to link answers with new questions on the issues addressed.

In India, which is a remote country of Asia, there is a small school called Taj Majal. Taj Majal has four teachers and 186 learners from grades 1 to 4. Parent groups and a school committee are organized.

Very few learners have benches or textbooks, and most of them have no pencils, rubbers or exercise books. Many learners do not go to school every day.

In the last six months, one of the teachers has been coming to teach only five or six days every month. The other three teachers have to teach his learners because the inspector gets very upset if the learners are sent back home and miss school.

Taj Majal has poor academic results, a high drop-out rate, and overcrowded classes.

The regional authority wants to find a solution to help the school, its teachers and the learners who are learning little because their teachers are absent.

QUESTIONS to brainstorm teachers and stimulate active discussion.

1. What would you recommend to the principal of a school where a teacher is absent most of the time, like in Taj Majal?
2. What solution do you believe could be implemented by the educational regional authorities to solve the problem created by this teacher's absences and to prevent similar problems later?
3. What do you think a school committee – like the one in Taj Majal (which is very similar to the school boards in Namibia) – could do to deal with the problem of teacher absences?
4. What impact does this teacher's absence have on the school?
5. Do you have a similar problem in some Namibian schools? Do you know how schools deal with it?
6. Can the parents do anything?

Guide for observing the functioning of schools

School observation log

Day by day

Name of observer	
Date of observation	Month_____Day_____
Code of school	
Region	Kavango____Caprivi____

Starting time_____

Ending time_____

(Use “-“ for the grades and groups that do not exist.)

Y = Yes; N = Not present; NA = Not available

Teachers

The following three issues are very important for this research study. Therefore you should pay ATTENTION to them, observe silently what happens and take notes every day.

1. Are teachers in their classrooms?
2. Are teachers in their classrooms teaching?
3. Are learners in their classrooms?

Observe these issues throughout the school day, and take notes for every day of the week that you are in the school. You will have to ADAPT the formats of the tables below to the school size.

NAMES ARE NOT NEEDED. The important information is classified by grade or class group.

MONDAY

1A. Are teachers in their classrooms?

Starting time _____

Ending time _____

(Use “-” for the grades and groups that do not exist.)

Y = Yes; N = Not present; NA = Not available

SITUATION	Grade 1			Grade 2			Grade 3			Grade 4	
	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group A	Group B	Group C	Group A	Group B
Teacher present											
Late for the first session (<i>record minutes</i>)											
Late after break (<i>record minutes</i>)											
Learners released early											
Teacher teaching learners of a teacher who is absent											
Other											

1B. Are teachers in their classrooms?

SITUATION	Grade 5		Grade 6		Grade 7	
	Group A	Group B	Group A	Group B	Group A	Group B
Teacher present						
Late for the first session (<i>record minutes</i>)						
Late after break (<i>record minutes</i>)						
Learners released early						
Teacher teaching learners of a teacher who is absent						
Other						

2A. Are teachers in their classrooms teaching?

You should carefully take note of these possible situations and others that might occur even if not included in this table.

Please note any specific situation that seems important for the research focus.

SITUATION	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4	
	Group class A	Group class B	Group class A	Group class B	Group class A	Group class B	Group class A	Group class B
Teacher not in condition to teach*								
Teacher chatting by phone or to another teacher during the lesson								
Teacher out of class								
Teacher sitting in class and children outside or playing inside								
Other								

* Write down the condition: drunk, sickness or emotionally stressed (be specific).

2B. Are teachers in their classrooms teaching?

SITUATION	Grade 5		Grade 6			Grade 7		
	Group class A	Group class B	Group class A	Group class B	Group class C	Group class A	Group class B	Group class C
Teacher not in condition to teach*								
Teacher chatting by phone or to another teacher during the lesson								
Teacher out of class								
Teacher sitting in class and children outside or playing inside								
Other								

* Write down the condition: drunk, sickness or emotionally stressed (be specific).

3. Are learners in class but not learning, or out of class and unattended?

SITUATION	First period	Second period	Third period	Fourth period
	Number	Number	Number	Number
All the learners of a grade without a teacher (unattended)				
Group of learners wandering around				
Other				

Others

1. Is the principal in the school most of the day?

Yes ____

No ____

2. (Use Y, N)

Is the principal in the office? _____

Teaching? _____

Talking to community members that visit the school? _____

Supervising classes? _____

Other _____

3. Write down information about persons visiting the school and what they did during their visit.

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The book

With the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Namibia, teacher absenteeism is becoming a pressing issue for the country's education system, particularly in the areas most affected by the epidemic. This study examines how some schools in the hardest hit areas are managing this problem. Due to the complexity of the issue, the research was conducted using qualitative methodology, requiring in-depth observations and interviews. The quality and validity of the data collected were optimized through measures such as triangulation of informants and techniques.

IIEP and the Ministry of Education of Namibia chose to cover only a limited number of schools in selected regions. The results obtained can therefore not be generalized to the whole of Namibia. However they do provide useful suggestions for countries where teacher absenteeism may worsen due to increased prevalence of HIV and AIDS, thus causing severe teacher shortages and difficulties in achieving the EFA goals.

The authors

Françoise Caillods is Deputy Director of IIEP. She heads IIEP's research project on 'Quality education for all', including the project on 'Planning and managing education in a context of HIV and AIDS'. Her areas of specialization include economics of education, school mapping and micro-planning, strategies for expanding secondary education, alternative strategies for disadvantaged groups, and education and poverty. She is the author of a number of publications in these fields.

Vanessa Castro Cardenal is an expert in qualitative research methods for impact evaluation and has taught numerous courses on the subject. During her 30 years in education and research, she has focused on education policy, early childhood development, community participation in schools and its impact on learning, and adult education. She has worked extensively in Latin America and Africa for different international agencies, and has authored several publications on education and qualitative research methods.

Yael Duthilleul worked for almost 10 years at the World Bank as Senior Education Specialist in charge of sector analysis and lending operations in several Eastern European and Latin American countries. She was also part of the OECD team that completed the review leading to the 2005 report *Teachers matter*. She worked for two years at IIEP on issues of teacher attraction, recruitment and development. She is now a technical advisor at the Council of Europe Development Bank.

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