

Manifestations of Namibian Boy's Underachievement in Education

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Abstract

An analysis of the 2012 grade 10 and grade 12 Namibian examination data indicate that girls received higher grades than boys across the then 13 education regions (Educational Management Information System, EMIS, 2012). University of Namibia graduation statistics for the period of 2002 to 2012 revealed that the institution consistently produced graduates in many fields that were more than 60% female (University of Namibia graduation reports of 2002-2012). The Polytechnic of Namibia also produced graduates in various fields for the period of 2006 to 2011 that were more than 60% female (Polytechnic of Namibia graduation reports of 2006-2011). All this is consistent with data from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region which reveal that Botswana, Mauritius, **Namibia**, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia now have a higher proportion of young women than men in tertiary education. SADC data also reveals that Botswana, Lesotho, **Namibia**, Seychelles, South Africa and Swaziland have 50% or more young women than young men in Secondary School (SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2013). Similar data were yielded in studies conducted in several Commonwealth countries (Jha and Kelleher 2006).

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the manifestations of Namibian boys' underachievement in education by considering various childhood education issues. The first issue is the background to Namibian boys' underachievement in education, the second issue is on the nature and scope of the underachievement in Namibia Primary and Secondary schools, with special reference to boys who underachieve and those who do not. The third issue is on how the phenomenon is manifested in terms of boys' participation and performance in education, enrolment rates, grade repetition rates, school dropout and retention in school, survival rates and promotion rates from grade to grade. The fourth issue focuses on matters pertaining to gender parity in education, boys' socialization and development and social-cultural values that could impinge on boys' performance in education. The fifth issue will deal with quality of education, education theory and practice, teacher education and curriculum development implications of Namibian boys' underachievement in education.

Introduction

Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UN 1981) stipulates that women should not be discriminated against in education at all levels and in all contexts. Eight years later in 1989, this principle was reaffirmed in articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (UNICEF 1989). The CRC urged all state parties to recognize the right of all children to education. Soon after this, it was recognized that the girl child was, all over the World, discriminated against in education and in other spheres of life. She needed special support to enable her to access education and remain in school. In the year 2000 The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) was established to facilitate and concretize this support. Although a lot of progress has been made in ensuring that the girl child receives as much quality education as the boy child, gender disparity in education has not yet been eliminated in many countries of the World. In fact, girls appear to continue to lag behind boys in terms of access to and retention in education in several developing countries (UNICEF 2015).

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Notwithstanding the situation of girls depicted in the preceding paragraph, there exists in countries as diverse as Australia, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Mongolia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Lesotho the relative under-achievement of boys in education. In these and other countries, more boys than girls underperform on national examinations, more boys than girls drop out school and more boys than girls receive corporal punishment due to misbehaviour (East Asia and Pacific United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, 'EAP UNGEI' 2011). The under-achievement and under-participation of boys in education has become a serious concern in many Educational systems of the world.

My task in this paper is a modest one. I have merely decided to discuss five childhood education issues that pertain to Namibian boys' underachievement in education. Premised on the gender perspective in primary and secondary school education, the five education issues are:

1. The Background to Namibian boys' underachievement in education;
2. The nature and scope of Namibian boys' underachievement in education;
3. Some characteristics of Namibian boys' underachievement in education;
4. Apparent causes of Namibian boys' underachievement in education;
5. Theoretical and practical implications of Namibian boys' underachievement in education.

I cover the four education issues in the paper as follows:

Background to Namibian boys' underachievement in education

According to UNESCO (2004), the term 'gender'

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

This definition encapsulates the ethic and rhetoric of gender equality. In practice, girls and boys do not seem to be valued and treated equally in many countries of the world. It depends on where you are in the world. If you are in Finland and Norway, this definition may be adhered to in practice. However, if you are in Pakistan or Kaduna, Nigeria, the situation is entirely different. There, girls and women are not treated as people who are equal to men in every respect. Substantiating this from a global perspective, UNICEF (2015) has just published a report entitled: *Progress for Children Beyond Averages: Learning from the MDGS*. In this report, UNICEF gives a progress report on achieving the third millennium goal which was on the empowerment of women and the elimination of gender inequality by the year 2015. In education the report stipulates that in 2012 whereas 31 million primary school age girls were out of school, 27 million boys in the same age cohort were out of school. This meant that globally, 13% more girls were out of primary school than boys. This gender gap was narrowed substantially at lower secondary school where 32 million girls were out of school whereas 31 million boys were out of school. The report also indicates that in Sub-Saharan Africa, 84 girls were enrolled in secondary school for every 100 boys in 2012.

Notwithstanding global and the Sub-Saharan African gender statistics, gender disparity in education in Namibia has been effectively reversed in favour of girls. Now, more Namibian boys under-participate and under-achieve in education than Namibian girls. Could this be due to differential support and treatment of

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boys and girls in the education system? Have Namibian boys and girls been equally supported and valued in education for the past 25 years of the country's independence from apartheid and colonialism? Although this is not an easy question to answer, we need to conjecture whether the differential levels of support between Namibian boys and girls can by itself explain why substantially large numbers of Namibian boys underachieve in education. A search for other explanations is warranted.

Before we focus on other explanations, it is instructive to show how, over more than two decades, girls in general have been given more educational support than boys. This support has been based on, amongst other things, the rallying cry: "The surest way to keep a people down is to educate the men and neglect the women. If you educate a man you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family" (Dr. J. E. Kwegyir Aggrey, Ghanaian educator [1875-1927]).

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

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

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

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

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

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

The conceptual framework that could be employed in the research on Namibian boys' under-achievement in education would be informed by the rights-based approach to education, the gender equality in education perspective, the girl child education support ideology, the feminist transformative orientation perspective and the democracy, equality and freedom perspective. All these perspectives are embodied in the

constructivist and transformative research paradigms whose main agenda is to conduct research in education or any other field for the purpose of understanding how the meaning of any phenomenon is created and for the purpose of social change and the enhancement of the wellbeing of individuals who are the subject of the research. In Namibia, the goal of such research would be to use its findings to promote the academic wellbeing of Namibian boys in education.

The nature and scope of Namibian boys’ underachievement in education

In general, the nature of boys’ underachievement in education is in the form of under-participation and under-performance (Jha and Kelleher 2006). The statistics that will be provided in the next section of this paper speak to the existence of a situation in which more Namibian boys than girls under-participate and under-perform in education at primary and secondary school levels. For instance, boys under-participate in education when they drop out of school earlier and at higher rates than those of girls. They demonstrate under-performance when substantially more of them repeat grades (i.e., spend more than 1 school year in a grade) than girls.

On average, the scope of Namibian boys’ underachievement when learning the content of most of school subjects covers grades 1 to 12. In addition, the boys’ under-achievement is displayed in all 14 education regions of Namibia (EMIS 2012). The quantification and distribution of the Namibian boys’ under-achievement in education across all subjects, grades and education regions has yet to be profiled in specific ways through the research that has been planned. Notwithstanding this, the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) (2011) data show that at grade 6 level, Namibian girls outperform Namibian boys in reading in all the 14 regions of the country. There is however, gender parity in Mathematics performance between boys and girls at grade 6 level in the country as a whole. Specifically, the situation is that whereas girls outperform boys in Mathematics at grade 6 level in 5 education regions, boys outperform girls in the other 5 education regions. There is no significant difference in the grade 6 girls’ and boys’ performance in Mathematics in the remaining 4 education regions of the country (SACMEQ 2011).

Some characteristics of Namibian boys’ underachievement in education

An analysis of the 2012 grade 10 and grade 12 Namibian examination data reveals that girls received higher grades in examinable subjects than boys across the then 13 regions. Namibian female learners from grades 1 to 8 had higher promotion rates and lower repetition rates than male learners. In addition, from grades 1 to 8, a higher percentage of male learners left school than that of female learners. Whereas school survival rates were consistently higher for females than for males from grade 6 to grade 12, the percentage of male learners was declining in many educational regions of the country while that of female learners was increasing. All this implies that a large number of male learners were not only under-performing but also under-participating in the school system (EMIS 2012; Jha, Bakshi and Faria 2012).

This gender disparity in favour of girls is not limited to primary and secondary education. It continues at tertiary education level. For instance, the University of Namibia graduation statistics for the ten-year period of 2002 to 2012 reveal that except for the field of natural sciences where gender parity was maintained with male students performing as female students, the institution consistently produced graduates in all other fields that were more than 60% female (University of Namibia graduation reports of 2002-2012). Table 1 clarifies this with respect to 2012 University of Namibia graduation statistics. Overall, 68% of the university’s graduates in 2012 were female and 32% were male. In Science, as can be noticed from table 1, there was an almost equal number of male and female graduates.

Table 1: Graduation by Faculty and Gender

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Faculty School Name	Female	Male	Total
AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCE	63	48	111
ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT SCIENCE	335	206	541
EDUCATION	152	53	205
ENGINEERING & IT	10	20	30
FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES	197	58	255
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES	171	56	227
LAW	90	53	143
SCIENCE	64	66	130
EXTERNAL STUDIES - UNAM	505	190	695
Grand Total	1587	750	2337

The Polytechnic of Namibia also produced graduates in various fields for the period of 2006 to 2011 that were more than 60% female. For instance in October 2011, the institution produced 64.9% graduates that were female (Polytechnic of Namibia graduation reports of 2006-2011).

All this is consistent with data from the SADC region which reveals that Botswana, Mauritius, **Namibia**, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia now have a higher proportion of young women than men in tertiary education. SADC data also reveals that Botswana, Lesotho, **Namibia**, Seychelles, South Africa and Swaziland have 50% or more young women than young men in Secondary School (SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2013).

The statistics provided in the preceding paragraph do not, however, tell us why Namibian female learners and students outperform their male counterparts. They also do not tell us how this type of performance is expressed throughout the country. It is not clear how the differences in academic performance between female and male learners are displayed and distributed in the 14 educational regions of the country and in rural and urban schools. In addition, the statistics do not present a clear picture about fields of study in which female learners perform better than male learners and fields of study in which they do not. At the tertiary level, we do not have research data on the biographic and other characteristics of female students who outperform male students and those who do not.

We also do not know the academic and social profiles of male learners and male students who underachieve in education and those who may in fact be outperforming female learners and students. In other words, the nature, scope and presentation of Namibian boys' and tertiary level male students' underachievement in education is currently rather opaque and needs to be clarified through empirical study.

Moreover, we need to go beyond the process of capturing the profiles of male learners and male students who underachieve and look at the manner in which these learners, other learners, teachers and parents view and understand the phenomenon of academic underachievement. In other words, research is needed to understand in depth how a number of stakeholders in the Namibian education system view and think about academic underachievement that many boys and young men in the country exhibit.

What educational, social, economic, cultural and political ramifications do the various stakeholders in education ascribe to Namibian boys' under-participation and under-achievement in education? My view is that investigations on Namibian boys' under-achievement would yield empirical data on which to base ameliorative programmes for improving and enhancing the quality of academic attainments amongst male and female learners in the Namibian education system.

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The social benefits of the intervention programmes that would be the main outcome of the research would also include preventing boys from dropping out of school early, promoting the retention of boys in school, increasing the boys' survival rates in school, reducing the boys' repetition rates and providing support to boys in order to enhance the quality of their educational attainments. Ultimately, the main social benefit of the research would be that of promoting quality of education in the country.

Apparent causes of Namibian boys' underachievement in education

Although lack of targeted learning support for boys and boys' under-participation in education in Namibia could be attributed to their under-achievement, research evidence on *causes* of this under-achievement is scanty. Most explanations of Namibian boys' under-performance in education are anecdotal. In a rare study that provides some explanation of Namibian boys' underperformance in education, Nambala (2002) reported qualitative data that could mean that boys under-perform in school because they are ill-disciplined and naughty. The following vignette from Nambala's data illustrate this point.

Response from a primary school teacher: "I describe my male learners as naughty, who always need more direction as compared to girls".

In the summary of her data, Nambala (2002) states that "in the majority of the teachers' opinions, the dominant characteristics of girls are that girls are quiet and full of simplicity and sincerity. They have the patience, gentleness, zeal and affection necessary to maintain classroom order and to make other classmates' lives easier. On the other hand, boys are trouble makers, aggressive, domineering, and careless".

We can attribute Namibian boys' under-achievement in education to a myriad of causes that have been arrived at through research conducted in Australia and other Asian countries, in some Commonwealth countries, in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in some countries of the SADC region and in some Sub-Saharan African countries (Jha, Bakshi and Faria 2012).

In an analytical review paper, Jha, Bakshi and Faria (2012) categorized causes of boys' under-achievement in education into sociological, economic, schooling, cultural, political, and curriculum-based explanations. In this paper, I apply these and other explanations that are not common in the research studies on boys' under-achievement in education to Namibian boys' underachievement in education.

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

In terms of *socialization*, the thinking is that boys 'experience privileging' as they are not expected to have domestic responsibilities. This does not enable them to learn self-discipline that is required if one is to academically excel. Girls are socialized and expected to perform multiple domestic chores at home. Instead of disadvantaging them, this experience teaches them to be self-disciplined, to multi-task and to learn how to manage time and take responsibility- ingredients that are essential in academic achievement. This understanding would apply to many boys from many cultural backgrounds in Namibia. However, this explanation is inadequate because it does not help us to understand why some boys in the same socialization regimes excel as well as or even better than girls. What is more compelling is the view that the freedom and flexibility that boys are given in the home in many societies works against them as it teaches them to be rebellious, disobedient and to stand up to authority. Once in school, they tend to resist authority and flout school rules (EAP UNGEI 2011).

The variable of *Social Economic Status (SES)* influences boys' under-achievement when more boys from low SES under-achieve than boys from high SES. What is intriguing is that even under the same SES

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conditions, research in a number of studies has shown that girls in many countries perform better in education than boys. This appears to be the case in Namibia. However, research evidence is required to confirm the phenomenon.

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

Jha, Bakshi and Faria (2012) have reported research data which indicates that in Latin America and in the Caribbean countries, boys' under-achievement in education is associated with the construction and application of negative *masculine identities* that promote the development of 'anti-feminine' and 'anti-school' attitudes. More Latin American and Caribbean boys from low income groups than those from high income groups perceive schooling as a 'feminine' activity that should be left to girls and boys who are 'sisis'. Because of this social-cultural mentality, they drop out of school early. I am not aware of research evidence that shows that this phenomenon operates in the Namibian context. How Namibian boys and girls value education needs explication through research.

Peer pressure influences boys' under-achievement when boys find anti-social behaviour such as bullying, gang membership and violence, crime, drug and alcohol abuse more attractive than going to school. So, they drop out of school early or under-participate in education by simply 'goofing' off and 'lazing' around (Gevers and Flisher 2012). Although school violence in Namibia is a problem in some schools, its association with boys' under-achievement in education has not yet been empirically ascertained (Burton, Leoschut & Popovac 2011).

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

One argument is that boys from poor backgrounds withdraw from formal education experiences in order to go away and work to raise income to support their families. They may also spend less time on school activities because they are required to supply labour to their families' subsistence or livestock undertakings. In Lesotho, for instance, many boys from poor backgrounds stay away from school because they have to look after their families' livestock (Jha, Bakshi and Faria 2012). In Namibia, this explanation may be used to explain the under-achievement in education of boys from some poverty stricken families. It does not however, explain why girls experiencing similar economic hardships outperform boys in school.

The "complacency" explanation which stipulates that some boys under-achieve at educational tasks because they believe they can get jobs that do not require much education may apply to some Namibian boys. This would be the case because with a national youth unemployment rate of 39%, there are more unemployed girls amongst the youth aged 15-34 years than boys (Namibia Statistics Agency 2014). To avoid unemployment, girls would be expected to work harder than boys in education and thereby outperform them.

A number of *School Processes* have been used to explain boys' under-achievement in education. It is stated that boys under-achieve in education because they are perceived to be lazy and inattentive to their studies, low academic expectations are held for them, they are expected and accepted to be aggressive and less disciplined. In addition, boys may under-participate in education because they receive more corporal punishment from teachers and their peers and so drop out of school (Jha, Bakshi and Faria 2012; Nambala 2002). All these aspects may speak to gender stereotypes that should, in the Namibian case, be verified through research.

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Political explanations of boys' under-achievement in education revolve around issues of ethnicity and marginalization. The point is that boys from marginalized communities tend to perform worse than girls in education. According to this, we would expect Namibian boys from marginalized ethnic groups such as the Ovahimba and the San (formerly referred to as bushmen) to perform worse than girls in education. This would be an oversimplification because both girls and boys from these communities would experience barriers to formal education. I have not come across research evidence to indicate that Namibian boys from Marginalized communities face more barriers to education than girls from these communities.

Curriculum – based and quality of education explanations are of two kinds. Firstly, the issue is that boys under-achieve because they are confronted in school with curriculum content that is perceived to be either irrelevant to them or does not relate to their needs and aspirations. In addition, boys appear to under-achieve in education because they are assessed on educational material such as reading, writing and Mathematics that they perceive to be unimportant to their lives. Nicholls and Hazzard (1993, p.177) clarify this vividly in the following quotation that is based on the thinking and behaviour of a grade 2 learner called Tim who displayed low performance on standardized tests:

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

This kind of reasoning provokes the following questions: What exactly do we mean when we say that boys are under-achieving in education? Are boys failing to learn or are they learning other things they perceive to be more worthwhile to them? Are boys ‘failing’ to extract meaning from what they experience in the world? How do we ensure that the curriculum captures boys’ and other learners’ interests and aspirations?

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

The explanations of boys’ under-achievement in education in general and that of Namibian boys’ in particular that have been described in the preceding paragraphs of this section of the paper are not exhaustive. More research is required to demonstrate how inclusive education, developmental psychology, resilience in learning and social media explanations can be ushered to elucidate boys’ under-achievement in education. How, for instance, does cyber bullying influence boys’ and girls’ learning achievement?

Theoretical and practical implications of Namibian boys’ underachievement in education.

Part of the vision on Gender enunciated in Namibia’s VISION 2030 is that by the year 2030, “girls remain in school as long as boys, and girls and women are participating equally in the fields of science and technology” (Government of the Republic of Namibia 2004). Contrary to this vision, the picture that emerges from the 2012 EMIS statistics is that of gender *disparity* and not gender *parity* in education. This disparity is in favour of girls. It is important to create awareness of this disparity and propose how boys can be supported to come back to parity with girls.

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According to Namibia's fourth National Development Plan (NDP4), "since independence, the Namibian education system has often failed to deliver quality in its graduates. Issues surrounding the quality of education provision persist at practically every level and in almost every type of training institution. Passing standards are generally low, and the knowledge required to achieve the marks is often considered insufficient by global standards" (Office of the President, National Planning Commission 2012). One of the main strategies proposed by NDP4 to enhance education quality is that of improving learning standards and curricular development. This implies that the quality of boys' and girls' educational outcomes should be enhanced with the view of promoting education for economic skills transfer.

The other theoretical outcome of the discourse on Namibian boys' under-achievement in education is the need to conduct gender-related research and produce research findings that would provide evidence for a paradigm shift in understanding gender and education in Namibia. The research evidence will require the country to shift the focus from understanding gender parity in education in favour of girls to gender parity in education for the good of **both** girls and boys. Doing this would be important because it would fill in several research gaps in this area that have been identified in this paper.

Moreover, the discourse on boys' underachievement in education gives voice to an apparent backlash of gender parity initiatives in education. In Namibia, the initiatives to improve girls' access to education and enhance their educational attainments seem to have bypassed many boys. It is important to highlight the social-economic danger of ignoring this backlash and the importance of putting in place mechanisms of ameliorating it to promote gender balanced social-economic development.

An intriguing insight that emanates from the economic explanation of Namibian boys' under-achievement in education is that despite their superior performance in education, more Namibian female youths aged 15-34 years are unemployed than male youths in the same age category. In addition, whereas 26.7% of female youths are not in employment, education and training, 21.3% male youths are in this category (Namibia Statistics Agency 2014). This is counter intuitive because according to the 2012 EMIS statistics, enrolment figures for Namibian primary and secondary school boys and girls are almost at parity, with girls having a slight edge. It would be important to understand why the gains Namibian girls have achieved in education over the years have not necessarily translated into unemployment rates that are lower than those of boys, several of whom are under-achieving in education. Another interpretation of this is that many girls between the ages of 15 and 34 years may be unemployed because while boys drop out of school early, they remain in school and in tertiary education institutions. This may enable girls to get better jobs than those of boys in future. In the long run, the current apparent higher employment rate for boys is in fact an expression of one negative consequence of their underachievement in education.

One issue that should not be ignored when ameliorating the adverse effects of Namibian boys' under-achievement in education is that of teacher education. Pre-service and in-service teachers should be sensitized by teacher education institutions about the prevalence of boys' under-achievement in school and how it should be dealt with when promoting quality education amongst **all** learners.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this paper was to discuss childhood education issues pertaining to manifestations of Namibian primary and secondary school boys' under-achievement in education. In addition to defining boys' under-achievement in terms of under-participation and under-performance, the paper has discussed how the phenomenon is manifested in the Namibian education system. Moreover, the paper has provided several research-based explanations of how boys' under-achievement in general and Namibian boys' under-achievement in particular could be caused. In the Namibian educational context, the explanations reveal

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several research gaps. These gaps should encourage Namibian educational researchers to unpack the intricacies of boys' under-achievement in education.

Theoretically, it is urged in the paper that stakeholders in the Namibian education system be made aware of gender disparity in academic achievement between boys and girls. This disparity is now in favour of girls. To ameliorate this disparity, initiatives that are put in place in the country to enhance education quality should include support that target both boys and girls.

Another important theoretical issue that is emphasized in the paper is that of recognizing the backlash of educational gender parity initiatives that have been applied in Namibia for more than two decades to benefit girl education. It appears that learning achievement benefits that resulted from these initiatives have bypassed many boys. The Namibian educational system should note this backlash and attend to it in its future gender mainstreaming programmes.

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