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Decolonising Special Education through Oshiwambo Epistemologies at Eluwa Special School

Preliminary findings from teachers parents and learners in the Oshana Region

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This preliminary study examines how Oshiwambo epistemologies may inform inclusive pedagogy at Eluwa Special School in Namibia's Oshana Region. It reports seven questionnaires from three teachers, two parents and two learners, against a planned Eluwa sample of 19. The respondent-specific instruments combined five-point Likert items with open-ended questions. The analysis uses thematic interpretation informed by decolonial theory and an Ubuntu-oriented Indigenous Knowledge Systems lens, alongside within-group rating counts. Five themes concern language mediation, cultural teaching resources, stigma and care, structural constraints, and home–school collaboration. Teachers described using Oshiwambo to explain concepts within an English-medium environment, although their ratings of its benefits varied. Parents endorsed cultural participation while reporting inadequate understanding of children who learn differently. Learners expressed belonging and requested clearer explanations and manageable lesson demands. No teacher agreed that support was adequate. These accounts suggest potential value in culturally familiar instruction, while identifying tensions between communal ideals and reported exclusion. The findings do not establish intervention effectiveness, saturation or patterns across Aawambo communities. Practical priorities include accessible Oshiwambo materials, teacher development and supported family participation, followed by evaluation with a fuller dataset.

Keywords: Decolonisation; Oshiwambo epistemologies; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; intellectual disability; neurodiversity; inclusive pedagogy; Ubuntu; Namibia

1 Introduction

Curriculum decolonisation concerns whose knowledge, language and experience are recognised in education. In Namibia, post-independence reform has created opportunities to reconsider inherited curricular assumptions, but research continues to question the place of Indigenous knowledge and teachers' participation in curriculum development (Matiki et al., 2023; Zulu & Lumadi, 2025). Coloniality of knowledge provides a framework for examining the persistence of unequal epistemic authority after political independence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Quijano, 2007).

For Oshiwambo-speaking learners, proverbs, storytelling, practical activities and communal child-rearing practices can provide familiar resources for explaining concepts and discussing belonging. Research in Northern Namibian secondary schools identifies tensions between English-medium instruction and learners' ability to participate through Oshiwambo (Iipinge & Banda, 2020). That secondary-school evidence supplies wider context; the present article examines inclusive pedagogy within a special-school department and does not assume that findings from mainstream secondary classrooms transfer directly to it.

Namibia's Sector Policy on Inclusive Education recognises barriers beyond the individual learner and calls for coordinated educational support (Ministry of Education, 2013). UNICEF Namibia (2020) also emphasises appropriate learning opportunities and practical teacher guidance. The question examined here is how these commitments relate to culturally and linguistically responsive teaching at Eluwa Special School, especially where learners require additional communication and learning support.

1.1 Aim objectives and research questions

The aim is to explore how teachers, parents and learners at Eluwa understand the contribution of Oshiwambo epistemologies to inclusive pedagogy. The objectives are to identify reported cultural and linguistic teaching practices, examine experiences of belonging and exclusion, and identify barriers and priorities for support. Three research questions guide the article:

RQ1 How do participants describe the use and perceived value of Oshiwambo language and cultural knowledge in teaching and learning?

RQ2 How do participants describe belonging, stigma and care in school and community relationships?

RQ3 What constraints and support priorities do participants identify for culturally responsive inclusive pedagogy?

1.2 Intellectual disability and the neurodiversity perspective

Neurodiversity refers to variation across human nervous systems, while neurodiversity approaches address how such variation is understood and supported (Dwyer, 2022). This article uses that perspective to question deficit-only explanations while recognising intellectual disability and associated support needs. It retains 'Department of Intellectual Impairment' as the department designation used in the source manuscript. Departmental placement is not treated as a verified diagnosis for either learner. One learner's record refers to visual impairment; visual impairment alone does not establish intellectual disability or neurodivergence. Eligibility and department membership therefore require confirmation against the recruitment record. 'Neurodiverse learners' is retained where it forms part of the original questionnaire wording; the analytic discussion otherwise refers to learners and their reported support needs.

2 Statement of the problem

The study addresses the relationship between culturally familiar knowledge and inclusive pedagogy in an Oshiwambo-speaking special-school setting. Existing work examines curriculum decolonisation in Namibia, language practices in secondary schools and Ubuntu-informed inclusion elsewhere in Southern Africa (Iipinge & Banda, 2020; Mpofu & Sefotho, 2024; Mutanga, 2023; Zulu & Lumadi, 2025). These contributions do not by themselves explain how Eluwa's teachers, parents and learners experience that relationship. The empirical gap is therefore a situated account of language, cultural resources, belonging and support in this department. The seven available questionnaires permit an initial exploration rather than a comprehensive assessment of the school or the region.

3 Literature review

The review draws primarily on scholarship from 2020 onward, alongside key foundational works on decolonial theory, disability beliefs and qualitative inquiry. It is a focused narrative review supporting an empirical study rather than a systematic review.

3.1 Curriculum decolonisation and Indigenous knowledge

Zulu and Lumadi (2025) question the alignment of Namibian curricula with Indigenous realities and propose an emancipatory approach to reform. Matiki et al. (2023) examine teachers' involvement in curriculum development and identify limits to participation. Together, these studies connect epistemic recognition with the institutional conditions through which teachers can influence instruction. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) situates such questions within wider debates about epistemic freedom. These arguments justify examining how locally meaningful knowledge enters classroom practice, without assuming that Indigenous content automatically produces inclusion.

3.2 Oshiwambo knowledge and beliefs about disability

Iipinge and Banda (2020) report constraints on meaningful English-language classroom participation in six Northern Namibian secondary schools. Their findings support attention to language hierarchy but concern a different setting from this study. Oshiwambo epistemologies are understood here as locally situated ways of knowing conveyed through language, oral tradition and practical community activity; they are not treated as a uniform body of beliefs shared by every Aawambo person.

Haihambo and Lightfoot (2010) identify both exclusionary explanations of disability and positive, changing attitudes in Namibia. Their study cautions against equating communal values with universal acceptance. It also provides a basis for examining how care and stigma may coexist in family and educational relationships. Cultural resources must therefore be considered critically, with attention to whose participation they support or restrict.

3.3 Neurodiversity and inclusive pedagogy

Dwyer (2022) distinguishes neurodiversity from the approaches developed around it and argues that valuing neurological variation can coexist with recognition of disability and the provision of support. Crompton et al. (2024) likewise explain differences in everyday experience through neurodiversity. Azuka et al. (2024) discuss inclusive instructional design for learners with varied cognitive needs. For this study, these perspectives direct attention to accessible explanations, participation and learner agency, while avoiding the inference that positive attitudes remove requirements for specialist or individual support.

3.4 Inclusive education policy in Namibia

The Sector Policy on Inclusive Education addresses systemic, pedagogical, cultural and attitudinal barriers and assigns responsibilities across educational services, schools and communities (Ministry of Education, 2013). UNICEF Namibia

(2020) provides practical awareness and identification resources. These sources support examining inclusion as a process of enabling participation, rather than equating it with placement alone. The present study examines pedagogy inside a special school; it does not evaluate whether separate schooling achieves system-level inclusion.

Haitembu and Maarman (2023) specifically investigate the policy's response to gender nonconforming learners. Their account of cultural, religious and training-related barriers is relevant as a comparison of implementation processes, but it is not direct evidence about intellectual disability or the participating learners. Policy implementation must be examined with attention to the group and setting concerned.

3.5 Ubuntu and community engagement

Mpofu and Sefotho (2024) explore relationships between Ubuntu philosophy and inclusive education principles. Mutanga (2023) considers Ubuntu-informed disability inclusion in South Africa and Zimbabwe in a chapter within a higher-education handbook. Its relational principles are useful here as a conceptual resource, while its geographical and educational context differs from Eluwa. These works support attention to collective responsibility and deliberation, but their proposals require empirical examination in locally specific relationships.

3.6 Synthesis and research gap

The literature connects epistemic recognition, language access and relational inclusion, while showing that cultural practices can support or limit participation. This article contributes a preliminary account of how these issues intersect in one special-school setting. Its contribution lies in comparing participant perspectives and identifying tensions for further investigation, rather than establishing a universal account of Oshiwambo pedagogy.

4 Theoretical framework

4.1 Coloniality of knowledge

Quijano's (2007) account of coloniality and modernity provides a primary reference for examining unequal authority among knowledge traditions. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) develops the related concern with epistemic freedom in Africa. This lens directs analysis toward the status accorded to English and Oshiwambo, the examples treated as legitimate curriculum knowledge, and teachers' reported scope to adapt instruction. Teachers' accounts can illuminate these tensions but cannot establish their causes without further institutional evidence.

4.2 Ubuntu and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The Ubuntu-informed lens focuses on relational belonging, mutual responsibility and participation (Mpofu & Sefotho, 2024; Mutanga, 2023). It helps interpret accounts of family support, shared practical activity and involvement of cultural knowledge holders. Ubuntu is used as an interpretive and ethical orientation, not as a synonym for all Aawambo practices. Reports of stigma and exclusion are examined as tensions within relationships rather than excluded from the analysis because they challenge an inclusive cultural ideal.

4.3 Integrated analytic use

The two lenses address different aspects of the research questions. Coloniality informs interpretation of language and curricular authority in RQ1 and RQ3. Ubuntu informs interpretation of belonging and collaborative support in RQ2 and RQ3. Participant accounts remain the basis of the themes; neither framework establishes an unobserved classroom practice or a causal learning effect.

5 Methodology

5.1 Orientation and design

The study adopts an interpretive qualitative orientation to participants' accounts of teaching, learning and cultural belonging, consistent with qualitative design principles discussed by Creswell and Creswell (2018). This article reports a preliminary single-site case from Eluwa Special School. The supplied questionnaire was designed for a wider two-school multiple-case study, with targets of six teachers, eight learners and five community participants per school. The present analysis is restricted to seven Eluwa records and does not include a second school or cross-school comparisons. The rationale and date for narrowing the original protocol remain to be confirmed by the authors.

5.2 Setting and participants

The manuscript identifies Eluwa Special School in the Oshana Region as the setting and the Department of Intellectual Impairment as the recruitment focus. The intended participant groups were staff supporting the department, learners and connected parents or cultural knowledge holders. The available records comprise three teachers, two parents and two learners. Teachers and learners were intended to be selected purposively; maximum variation was planned for community participants. The two parent records do not demonstrate the broader planned representation of elders and community leaders. Recruitment eligibility, especially the department placement of the learner whose record mentions visual impairment, requires checking.

5.3 Sample adequacy

The planned Eluwa sample was 19. Malterud et al. (2016) propose information power for qualitative interview studies, relating adequacy to the study aim, sample specificity, theoretical grounding, dialogue and analysis. These principles inform cautious appraisal here; written questionnaires do not provide the same opportunity for probing as interviews. Hennink and Kaiser (2022) report saturation commonly within 9–17 interviews in studies with relatively homogeneous samples and narrow aims. That empirical range is not a requirement of 9–17 participants per subgroup, nor proof that the proposed subgroups of six, eight and five are sufficient. The current subgroups of three, two and two are exploratory, and neither saturation nor sufficient information power is claimed.

Table 1 Planned and reported Eluwa sample

Group	Planned	Reported
Teachers	6	3
Learners	8	2
Parents and other community participants	5	2
Total	19	7

5.4 Questionnaire structure and rationale

The respondent-specific instrument combines 23 teacher rating items, nine learner rating items and nine parent/community rating items with open-ended questions. It covers Indigenous knowledge, language, teaching practices, belonging and community involvement. The rating scale is 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. Different groups answer different statements, so their responses are not pooled into common scale scores. Appendix A reproduces the substantive questions in editable form, retaining the original wording and section identifiers.

The hybrid format gives participants a common set of prompts and an opportunity to supply examples in their own words. Its suitability depends on accessible administration: a written questionnaire can limit depth or exclude learners requiring communication support. The supplied instructions permit English or Oshiwambo responses and offer facilitated, verbal or translated administration, particularly for learners. These provisions establish what was offered, but not which participant received support or how it was delivered. No psychometric validity, reliability or equivalence of translated versions is claimed.

5.5 Data boundaries and document checks

The teacher scans contain three response sets; one teacher's language section is scanned twice and is counted once. Parent and learner scans contain two response sets each. Participant identifiers T1–T3, P1–P2 and L1–L2 follow their order within the relevant scans and correspond to the source manuscript profiles. Rating marks were checked visually. The questionnaire PDF titled Lovy Qualitative Research Questionnaire contains an additional completed parent section, but provides insufficient linkage to determine whether it is a separate eligible response, a duplicate or an illustrative entry. It is excluded from the seven-record analysis pending confirmation of its provenance. It is not treated as a blank master or as evidence of piloting.

5.6 Analysis and quotation conventions

The open-ended accounts are interpreted through the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, initial coding, development and review of candidate themes, definition and naming, and analytic reporting. The five themes in the source manuscript are retained and checked against the supplied accounts. Table 5 provides supporting sub-codes, participant identifiers and questionnaire locations; it is a transparent summary of the revision, not evidence that an original codebook or inter-coder reliability exercise was completed.

Ratings are reported as raw counts within each group. Multiple marks without a clear final selection are coded X, and unmarked items M. Neither is imputed. Item-level valid counts can therefore be smaller than the group size. No percentages, means, reliability coefficients or significance tests are used. Contradictions between ratings and written examples are retained. Quotations preserve the wording and grammatical irregularities of the source responses; ellipses indicate omitted text. Interpretation and paraphrase appear outside quotation marks.

5.7 Trustworthiness and limitations of verification

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria guide appraisal of trustworthiness. Comparison across respondent groups contributes source triangulation but does not independently verify reported events. Participant-linked examples and contextual description assist assessment of transferability. The revision supplies an item-level record of rating decisions and a theme-to-source summary to support dependability. The supplied files do not establish that member checking, an original audit trail or systematic reflexive journalling occurred; these are not reported as completed procedures. Brief responses, uneven item completion and the small sample constrain interpretation.

5.8 Researcher positionality

Nafenya Secilia is affiliated with the International University of Management, and Kathindi Kylliky with the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture. Neither author has an institutional, employment or personal relationship with Eluwa Special School. Their professional affiliations provide relevant educational perspectives but do not constitute a connection to the study site.

The researchers' professional backgrounds and perspectives on decolonisation and inclusive education may influence their interpretation of participants' accounts. This positioning warrants reflexive attention, particularly when interpreting culturally situated experiences of disability, language and belonging. The analysis therefore distinguishes participants' reported experiences from theoretical interpretation and considers divergent responses alongside recurring patterns.

5.9 Ethics consent and confidentiality

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Ministry of Education through the Office of the Director of Education in the Oshana Region. This permission authorised access to the study setting and the conduct of the research; it is reported as administrative permission rather than research ethics committee approval.

The questionnaire specified that participation was voluntary, participants could withdraw without penalty, and questions could be left unanswered. Documentation of learner consent and assent, including parental or guardian consent where applicable and any assessment of consent capacity, remains necessary to establish how these provisions were implemented.

Confidentiality was maintained within the relationship between the researchers and participating learners. Information exchanged with learners was treated as confidential, and learner responses are presented using participant codes rather than names. Eluwa Special School is identified in the manuscript; therefore, institutional anonymity is not claimed. Given the small sample and named setting, participant codes reduce direct identification but cannot eliminate the possibility of identification through contextual details.

5.10 Scope and limitations

This article reports seven completed questionnaires: three teachers, two parents and two learners, from one site. It does not establish the experiences of the other 12 planned Eluwa participants. No data collection completion date or ongoing recruitment status is inferred from the scans. Self-report, lack of probing, possible acquiescence and social desirability, and undocumented facilitation may influence the responses. Specific learner diagnoses and subgroup comparisons are not established. These limitations preclude generalisation to the school as a whole, Aawambo culture or Namibian special education.

6 Findings

6.1 Participant profiles

All seven records indicate Oshiwambo as home language. The teacher records indicate fluent Oshiwambo: T1 is a class teacher with 11–15 years of experience and inclusive/special needs training; T2 is a remedial/special needs teacher with 16–20 years of experience and such training; T3 is a class teacher with 0–5 years of experience and no such training. P1 and P2 are female parents in the 30–44 age group, and P2 also marks school board membership. L1 records male sex and age 17; L2 records female sex and age 18. Both record senior-phase placement. L2's handwritten response includes a reference to visual impairment. These self-reported details do not verify clinical diagnosis or departmental eligibility.

6.2 Rating counts by group and item

Tables 2–4 report every closed item in the seven scanned response sets. The shortened labels identify the items; Appendix A gives their full wording. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neutral; A = agree; SA = strongly agree. M = unmarked and X = multiple marks without a clear final choice. Valid n excludes M and X.

Table 2 Teachers rating counts

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	X	Valid n
B1 Understand decolonisation	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
B2 IKS underrepresented	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
B3 Confident incorporating IKS	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
B4 Decolonisation could improve learning	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
C1 Use proverbs idioms or storytelling	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
C2 Elders could be classroom resources	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
C3 Cultural metaphors aid concepts	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3

Continuation of Table 2

C4 Welcome training on Oshiwambo epistemologies	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	2
D1 Familiar with neurodiversity	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
D2 Genuine participation and belonging	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
D3 Natural difference rather than only deficit	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
D4 Adequate training resources and specialists	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	3
E1 Adapt teaching to cultural backgrounds	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
E2 Communal activities support learners	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
E3 Cultural responsiveness builds belonging	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
F1 Oshiwambo alongside English aids understanding	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
F2 Language barriers affect participation	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
F3 Oshiwambo supports decolonised education	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	3
G1 Parents and community actively involved	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
G2 Cultural knowledge holders consulted	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
G3 Community involvement aids belonging	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
H1 Restructure curriculum for more IKS	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2
H2 Policy should recognise cultural dimensions	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3

Table 3 Parents rating counts

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	X	Valid n
B1 Stronger cultural knowledge in schooling	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
B2 More involvement of elders	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
B3 Proverbs stories and practices are valuable	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
B4 Strengthen Oshiwambo in schools	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
C1 Children with differences understood and supported	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
C2 Equal inclusion in cultural activities	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
C3 Culture and community support learning	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
D1 Willing to share cultural knowledge	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
D2 Stronger school community partnerships	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2

Table 4 Learners rating counts

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	X	Valid n
B1 Belong at school	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
B2 Teachers respect culture	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
B3 Stories proverbs and songs help learning	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
B4 Comfort speaking Oshiwambo	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
C1 Supported with difficult schoolwork	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
C2 Classmates respectful	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
C3 Teachers use different methods	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
D1 Cultural learning produces pride	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
D2 Family traditions respected	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2

All three teachers agree or strongly agree that IKS are underrepresented and decolonisation could improve learning. Two are confident incorporating Indigenous knowledge; T3 is neutral. On regular use of proverbs, idioms or storytelling, T2 disagrees and T3 strongly disagrees; T1 marks both disagree and neutral, so that item is ambiguous. Elders as classroom resources receive two neutral responses and one strongly agree response. Adequate support receives two neutral responses and one strongly disagree response. Thus, no teacher endorses adequacy, but it would be inaccurate to describe all three as disagreeing.

Teacher language ratings are mixed: one agrees and two are neutral that Oshiwambo alongside English improves concept understanding. T2 disagrees that strengthening Oshiwambo supports decolonised education, despite providing a written example of explaining a term. Such differences qualify claims of uniform endorsement. T1's curriculum restructuring item also has two marks and is not assigned a final value; T2 leaves the training-interest item unmarked.

Both parents strongly agree on the educational value of cultural knowledge, elder involvement and equal cultural inclusion. Both reject the statement that children who learn differently are currently understood and supported, one disagreeing and one strongly disagreeing. On strengthening Oshiwambo, P1 is neutral while P2 strongly agrees. Both strongly support partnerships and sharing cultural knowledge. Learner ratings are positive: all items are strongly agree except L2's responses on culturally familiar teaching and support with difficult work, both agree. These ratings describe the two learners' reported experience, not independently measured outcomes.

6.3 Themes and supporting accounts

Table 5 Themes sub-codes and supporting records

Theme	Supporting sub-codes	Participants and sources
Language mediation	English-medium constraints; local examples; concept explanation	T1–T3 teacher B2 and F1–F2; L1 learner B1
Cultural teaching resources	Songs; proverbs; practical activity; familiar knowledge	T1–T3 teacher C1–C3 and E1–E2; P1–P2 parent B1–B2; L1 learner B1
Stigma alongside care	Disability myths; exclusion; patient support; belonging	T1–T3 teacher D1–D2; P1–P2 parent C1–C2; L1–L2 learner B and C ratings
Structural and instructional constraints	Training; resources; specialist support; access; lesson demands	T1–T3 teacher D3 and F2; P1 parent C2; L1–L2 learner C1–C2 and E1
Home and school collaboration	Parental knowledge; cultural events; shared responsibility; chores	T1–T3 teacher G1–G2; P1–P2 parent B2 and D1–D2; L1–L2 learner D1 and E2

Source notation: in Table 5, teacher B2 means the second open question in Section B, while learner B and C ratings refer to the closed statements. The table shows examples supporting each theme; it does not quantify theme prevalence or imply mutually exclusive coding.

6.3.1 Oshiwambo as a resource for explaining concepts

Teachers describe an English-medium environment in which Oshiwambo provides familiar explanations. T1 writes, "I teach in English and give example in Oshiwambo". T2 links English phonics and communication to the medium-of-instruction constraint and identifies local-language expertise as a need. T3 describes explaining the water cycle in Oshiwambo after learners had difficulty with English explanations. L1 similarly describes objects and examples translated into Oshiwambo. These accounts address RQ1, while the mixed F1 ratings show that favourable examples do not amount to a shared judgment across all teachers.

6.3.2 Cultural resources valued but inconsistently used

T1 discusses a traditional song for teaching respect and describes learners' enjoyment of a cultural activity. T2 refers to cultural practices and Heritage Week. T3 describes using videos and learners' prior knowledge to support participation. P1 offers a proverb about reciprocal treatment, while P2 discusses a hard-work proverb and practical household responsibilities. These examples demonstrate reported or proposed uses of cultural resources. The low valid teacher C1 ratings suggest that routine use of oral traditions cannot be assumed. They do not measure lesson frequency directly.

6.3.3 Stigma and care within the same relational setting

Teachers describe negative labels and myths concerning learners who communicate or behave differently. T1 pairs such beliefs with an emphasis on patience and responding to individual needs. T3 describes professional contact challenging prior myths. P1 reports exclusion from school and community opportunities. P2 recounts a family being discouraged at a mainstream school and then receiving confusing placement messages; this is a reported experience, not a verified institutional decision. These accounts contrast with the learners' positive ratings of belonging and respectful treatment. The theme answers RQ2 by preserving both experiences, without treating either as a complete account of the community.

6.3.4 Support needs extend beyond teacher attitudes

Teachers identify shortages of teaching aids, focused training and specialist assistance. T2 describes “lack of resources, CPD and unavailable of specialists”. T3 stresses preparation for working with learners requiring additional support. P1 extends the concern to school places, accommodation and the possibility of families relocating or withdrawing a child. Learners identify instructional needs: L1 asks for detailed explanations and louder speech in a noisy environment; L2 describes too much content in a day, practical mathematics and clearer indications of what is being taught. These accounts address RQ3 across institutional and classroom levels.

6.3.5 Collaboration through cultural and everyday activities

T1 describes parental information helping teachers understand learners. T2 reports inviting cultural experts during Heritage Week. T3 describes psychosocial support from some parents and proposes community contributions to agricultural practice. P1 proposes support groups and joint attention to children’s needs; P2 proposes demonstrations, song and other cultural participation. L1 refers to respect and helping others, and L2 to cleaning and household chores. These accounts connect home and school through practical relationships. They do not establish a regular, school-wide partnership programme.

7 Discussion

7.1 Language and epistemic recognition

RQ1 identifies a tension between the reported usefulness of local explanations and the institutional status of English. Coloniality of knowledge helps interpret why Oshiwambo may appear as supplementary clarification rather than a planned resource (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Quijano, 2007). The accounts are consistent with concerns about language access in Northern Namibian secondary schools (Iipinge & Banda, 2020), while the settings differ. Mixed teacher language ratings prevent a claim of universal agreement. The study identifies a pedagogical possibility that requires observation and evaluation; it does not demonstrate that Oshiwambo instruction raises attainment.

7.2 Ubuntu belonging and disability stigma

RQ2 shows that relational care and reported exclusion coexist. Ubuntu is useful as an orientation toward belonging, but the parent accounts do not support presenting it as an already realised community condition (Mpofu & Sefotho, 2024; Mutanga, 2023). Haihambo and Lightfoot (2010) provide Namibian evidence that disability beliefs can be negative, positive and changing. The present findings add a local tension rather than evidence about all Aawambo beliefs. Two parent accounts cannot represent a culture, and the accounts should be understood as situated perceptions.

A neurodiversity approach also makes the learner accounts analytically important: their expressed belonging and instructional preferences should inform decisions about support. Recognising variation does not diminish disability-related needs (Dwyer, 2022). Cultural inclusion must therefore be combined with communication access, pacing and individual assistance. The learners’ favourable ratings and the adults’ reported stigma may concern different relationships or settings; the evidence does not resolve that difference.

7.3 Implementation and support conditions

RQ3 identifies resources, professional learning and specialist support as priorities. These findings relate to the Sector Policy’s broader understanding of barriers and coordinated responsibilities (Ministry of Education, 2013). Haitembu and *Maarman (2023) provide a comparison from gender nonconforming learners, not a direct test of disability-related provision.* The Eluwa accounts cannot evaluate national policy implementation, but suggest questions about how staff and families obtain practical support. The fact that no teacher agrees support is adequate deserves attention, although two responses are neutral rather than negative.

7.4 Practical implications

School and curriculum support teams could co-develop accessible Oshiwambo explanations and culturally familiar practical materials with teachers, learners and families. Materials should respond to individual communication and sensory needs rather than assume a single preferred mode of learning. Professional development could connect culturally responsive teaching with lesson pacing, clear goals, communication support and access to specialist advice, consistent with the instructional concerns identified here and the broader design literature (Azuka et al., 2024).

Family engagement could include discussion of disability beliefs, shared practical activities and voluntary contributions from cultural knowledge holders. Learners’ own views should shape those activities. Implementation should be followed by observation of participation, comprehension and unintended barriers. These are recommendations derived from preliminary accounts, not interventions already implemented or evaluated in this study.

7.5 Limits and further research

The available evidence supports a preliminary thematic interpretation of seven records. It cannot establish saturation, causal effects, the views of all staff and families, or a single Aawambo position on disability. The planned sample is not

the achieved sample, and even 19 returns would require appraisal of richness and variation rather than a numerical saturation claim (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Malterud et al., 2016). Future work could include accessible follow-up conversations, classroom observation, explicit eligibility verification and broader community participation. A documented account of facilitation and consent is necessary for readers to assess learner contributions. The additional completed parent section should be considered only after its provenance is resolved.

8 Conclusion

The seven Eluwa questionnaires identify language mediation, cultural resources, stigma alongside care, support constraints and practical collaboration as areas for further investigation. Oshiwambo explanations and familiar activities feature in participants' accounts, but rating differences qualify claims of shared endorsement. Learners' reported belonging coexists with adults' descriptions of exclusion and inadequate understanding. The theoretical contribution is a situated interpretation in which epistemic recognition and relational inclusion require practical support and critical attention to community beliefs. Accessible materials, targeted professional development and learner-informed family participation are plausible priorities. Their effectiveness remains to be evaluated, and the findings should be read as preliminary evidence from one site.

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Appendix A Questionnaire items

This editable transcription reproduces the substantive questions used in the supplied forms, with responses removed. Section and item identifiers are retained. The original instrument describes two schools and targets 6 teachers, 8 learners and 5 parent/community participants per school; this appendix does not retrospectively change that protocol. The contextual header and information below summarise the supplied instructions rather than replace the original approved participant information or consent form.

Participants complete the part relevant to their role. Rating responses use 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. Open questions may be answered in English or Oshiwambo. The instructions offer facilitated, verbal or translated administration and estimate 35–45 minutes. Participants may skip questions or withdraw without consequence. The original school-anonymity promise must be reconciled with naming Eluwa before publication. A consent checkbox alone is not a substitute for documented consent and assent procedures.

Part I Teachers and school staff
A Background information

Sex; age group (20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50+); current role (class teacher, subject teacher, remedial/special needs teacher, HOD, counsellor); teaching experience (0–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, 20+); inclusive/special needs training (yes, no, partial); Oshiwambo as home language (yes/no); fluency (fluent, moderate, basic, none).

B Decolonisation and Indigenous Knowledge Systems
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. I understand what "decolonising education" means in the Namibian context.
2. Indigenous Knowledge Systems are currently underrepresented in the school curriculum.
3. I feel confident incorporating Indigenous knowledge into my lessons.
4. Decolonising the curriculum could improve teaching and learning at my school.

Open questions

1. In your own words, what does "decolonising special/inclusive education" mean to you, based on your day-to-day teaching experience?
2. Can you describe a specific moment when you noticed that Western teaching methods did not quite fit your learners'
3. What Indigenous or local knowledge do you feel is currently missing from what you are required to teach?

C Oshiwambo Epistemologies in Teaching Practice
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. I use Oshiwambo proverbs, idioms, or storytelling (eengano) as part of my teaching.
2. Elders and cultural knowledge holders could be valuable resources in my classroom.
3. Cultural metaphors from Aawambo life can help learners with learning barriers grasp difficult concepts.
4. I would welcome further training on integrating Oshiwambo epistemologies into my teaching.

Open questions

1. Describe a specific Oshiwambo proverb, story, song, or cultural practice you have used, or could use, in your classroom. How did (or would) learners respond?
2. What gaps do you notice in your own knowledge of Oshiwambo cultural teaching resources, and what kind of support would help close them?
3. How do you think Oshiwambo ways of explaining the world differ from the way concepts are presented in the standard curriculum?

D Neurodiversity and Inclusive Education
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. I am familiar with the concept of neurodiversity (e.g., autism, ADHD, dyslexia).
2. Neurodiverse learners at my school are given genuine opportunities to participate and belong.
3. Neurodiversity should be understood as a natural human difference rather than only a deficit.
4. I have adequate support (training, resources, specialist staff) to support neurodiverse learners.

Open questions

1. Without naming any learner, describe a specific classroom situation involving a neurodiverse learner that stands out to you. What worked well, and what was difficult?

2. In your view, how does Aawambo culture generally understand children who learn, behave, or communicate differently from others? Has this shaped how you teach?
3. What barriers, if any, prevent you from adapting your teaching more fully to neurodiverse learners' needs?

E Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. I adapt my teaching methods to reflect learners' cultural backgrounds.
2. Group work and communal activities (reflecting Aawambo communal values) support neurodiverse learners.
3. Culturally responsive practices help build a stronger sense of belonging among neurodiverse learners.

Open questions

1. Describe one culturally responsive activity or lesson you have tried (or would like to try). What effect did it have, or do you expect it would have, on learner engagement?
2. How do you adapt culturally familiar teaching approaches specifically for learners who experience learning barriers?

F Language Empowerment
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. Learners understand academic concepts better when Oshiwambo is used alongside English.
2. Language barriers negatively affect the participation of neurodiverse learners in my classroom.
3. Strengthening Oshiwambo language use in schools would support decolonised education.

Open questions

1. Describe a specific example of when using Oshiwambo (or switching between Oshiwambo and English) helped a learner understand something better.
2. What Oshiwambo-language teaching resources do you currently lack, and how would having them change your teaching?

G Community Engagement
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. Parents and community members are actively involved in supporting inclusive education at my school.
2. Traditional/cultural knowledge holders are consulted on teaching and learning matters.
3. Community involvement helps learners feel a stronger sense of cultural belonging.

Open questions

1. Describe any experience you have had involving parents, elders, or community members in supporting a neurodiverse learner. What happened, and what did you learn from it?
2. What would a stronger, more meaningful partnership between your school and the surrounding community look like in practice?

H Curriculum Design and Closing Reflections
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. The Namibian curriculum should be restructured to give more space to Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
2. Policy on inclusive education should explicitly recognise the cultural dimensions of neurodiversity.

Open questions

1. If you could redesign one part of the curriculum to better reflect Oshiwambo epistemologies while supporting neurodiverse learners, what would you change and why?
2. Is there anything else about decolonising inclusive education in your school or community that you would like to share?

Part II Learners
A About you

Sex (male/female); age; grade; home language (Oshiwambo/other).

B My Culture and My Learning
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. I feel like I belong at my school.

2. My teachers understand and respect my culture.
3. I learn better when my teacher uses Oshiwambo stories, proverbs, or songs.
4. I feel comfortable speaking Oshiwambo at school when I need to.

Open questions

1. Tell me about a time a story, proverb, or cultural activity at school helped you understand something better. What happened?
2. What do you enjoy most about learning at your school?

C How I Learn and What Helps Me
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. I feel supported when I find schoolwork difficult.
2. My classmates treat me with respect, even when I learn differently from others.
3. My teachers use different ways of teaching so that everyone can understand.

Open questions

1. What makes it easier for you to learn? What makes it harder?
2. Is there anything you would like your teachers to do differently to help you learn better?

D My School and My Community
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. Learning about Aawambo culture at school makes me feel proud.
2. My family's knowledge and traditions are respected at school.

Open questions

1. Can you tell me about something your family or community has taught you that you also use at school?

E In Your Own Words
Open questions

1. If you could change one thing about how you are taught at school, what would it be?
2. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience at school?

Part III Parents guardians and community knowledge holders
A Background information

Sex; age group (below 30, 30–44, 45–59, 60+); relationship (parent/guardian, grandparent, traditional/cultural leader or elder, school board member, church/community leader, other); Oshiwambo as home language (yes/no).

B Indigenous Knowledge and Education
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. Aawambo cultural knowledge and traditions should play a stronger role in how children are taught at school.
2. Elders and cultural knowledge holders should be more involved in school activities.
3. Oshiwambo proverbs, stories, and practices carry lessons that are valuable for children's education.
4. The use of Oshiwambo language should be strengthened in schools.

Open questions

1. Can you share a proverb, story, or cultural practice from your own upbringing that you believe carries an important lesson for children today?
2. What role, if any, have you personally played in passing on Oshiwambo knowledge to children in your family or community?

C Views on Neurodiversity within Aawambo Culture
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. Within Aawambo culture, children who learn or behave differently are understood and supported.
2. Children with learning differences deserve to be included in cultural and community activities in the same way as other children.
3. Cultural understanding and community support can help children with learning differences do better at school.

Open questions

1. In your understanding, how does Aawambo culture traditionally view and support children who learn, communicate, or behave differently from others?
2. Have you, or have someone you know, experienced challenges in getting support for a child with learning differences? What happened?

D Community Role in Supporting Inclusive Education
Rating statements use the five-point agreement scale

1. I would be willing to share cultural knowledge (stories, proverbs, practices) with the school to support teaching.
2. Stronger partnerships between schools and the community would benefit all learners, including those with learning differences.

Open questions

1. What role do you believe elders and community members should play in supporting schools and teachers?
2. What would you like to see change in how schools involve the community and use local cultural knowledge?

E Closing Reflections
Open questions

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about how Aawambo culture and knowledge could better support children's education?

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