



## **21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic Forum Conference Proceeding 2015 Conference at Harvard**

### **Thinking in My Language to the Official Languages: What a Challenge!! A Case of the Basarwa (Bushmen/San) Children in Botswana**

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#### **Abstract**

The Botswana education system bases its philosophy on education for all using English and Setswana as the official languages for learning and teaching in schools despite the diversity of the society. Botswana has 8 Setswana ethnic groups with Setswana as their mother tongue and 26 minority languages. Some of them speak Sengologa/ Sekgalagadi; a language of their so-called masters. The Basarwa children find it difficult to converse in Setswana but are usually taught by teachers from the Setswana ethnic groups or those fortunate to be articulate in Setswana and English. When these teachers instruct Basarwa children whose languages are mutually unintelligible, it becomes a great challenge. Learning is burdensome; frustrating to both the teachers, parents of the Basarwa children; and the children themselves. The teaching of children in their mother tongue cannot be overemphasized. Education becomes a foreign concept from their indigenous culture leading to a higher risk of dropping out of school, a feeling of discrimination by the teachers who cannot communicate in their language, or understand their culture.

The study utilized the qualitative method to establish the difficulties the Basarwa children face in adapting to the Setswana and English ways of learning and the reasons for their high dropout rates. Greater attention was paid to the strategies and methods the teachers used to reach out to these children in order to assist them with their schooling. The study was carried out in a small settlement in the Kgalagadi Desert called Phuduhudu.

**Keywords:** Basarwa, mother tongue, indigenous culture, diversity

## **Introduction**

Botswana is a small country in terms of population (2.2) million according to the 2011 population census. Minute as is in population size, it is as large as France and the state of Texas at 580 000sq kilometers. It is surrounded by Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In the upper north people speak languages similar to what is spoken in Angola, Zambia and Namibia while in the north there is influence of Zimbabwe languages. Some people in the Kgalagadi desert areas have a language that is a mixture of Afrikaans and Hottentots language. Within the country there are Namibian communities that still speak Herero, a Namibian Language. The Basarwa have distinct languages despite their small population. It is difficult for a Mosarwa from one community to understand the language of another from a different community even though they may both speak in clicks; which surprises some Batswana since they classify this group of people as one.

In the eastern side of the country where most Batswana communities are found, and where the land receives adequate rainfall for farming and livestock to base all the modern infrastructure and facilities, a large number of the different ethnic groups can speak Setswana. This is a language spoken by the 8 Batswana ethnic groups. These individuals and many others in various parts of the country stand a better chance of communicating in Setswana and English, which are the two official languages.

The Basarwa are the indigenous people of Botswana who were dispossessed of their productive land and pushed deep into the Kgalagadi semi-desert. The Basarwa suffered under the oppression of the dominant Batswana communities, a situation which has not changed that much to date. Servitude contributed to elitism of most of the Batswana communities leading to a stratified society (Good, 2008). A whole Basarwa family would be owned through generations and the children denied the opportunity to attain education because they had to assist their parents, or take over their parents' responsibilities in the so called "master's" household.

Today poverty is still rife among the Basarwa and other Batswana communities that were not fortunate enough to own cattle or land. However, the present president, Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, is on a mission to reduce abject poverty through food baskets, poverty alleviation schemes and encouragement of the civil community to contribute towards building houses for the poor. This is a great challenge that requires effort to create job opportunities for the youth, women and rural populations mostly affected by poverty that includes the Basarwa.

### **The purpose of the study**

The major concern for the study was to understand the challenges that Basarwa children experienced in learning in Setswana and English while their ethnic language were different from the two languages of communication. The study established how the children managed to grasp concepts taught and how they translated their thinking to the languages of communication, namely Setswana and English. The researcher was able to identify the concerns the teachers had about the participation of the Basarwa children in their learning and how much the parents were involved in the education of their children.

### **Statement of the problem**

The researcher documented the experiences, perceptions and challenges of the Basarwa children learning in two foreign languages that they were unfamiliar with. Although these are the

official languages of communication in the country, the children in Phuduhudu spoke Sekgalagadi or Sesarwa language known as Sixasi.

### **Research questions**

The major research question was to identify challenges that Basarwa children faced when learning in Setswana and English. Subsequent questions included;

- Finding out the children's, parents' and teachers' mother tongue
- Identifying the children's experiences in learning in the 2 official languages
- Demonstrate the challenges the teachers faced in teaching the Basarwa children in Phuduhudu
- Outline how much the parents were involved in assisting teachers to interpret their mother tongue to help their children learn.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is significant since it will assist the government, Ministry of Education and Skills Development, academics, curriculum developers, parents and other educational stakeholders appreciate the challenges faced by teachers and children in the country's remote areas. This may encourage the government to find ways of incorporating innovations to teach a diverse population. Although this is controversial, research has shown that teaching children in their mother tongue facilitates learning. The hope is that the government of Botswana may revisit the recommendations of the Revised National Policy on Education and introduce innovations that could enable schools teach children in their mother tongue at lower levels. This may encourage the Botswana government to review its education system, train teachers from different ethnic groups to assist children from the marginalized communities. There are high rates of drop out among the Basarwa communities and teaching them in what they are familiar with may motivate them to stay in school. The government may develop better strategies and change the pedagogy to suit the needs of Basarwa children. The study will add to the research pool on issues affecting education the marginalized communities such as the Basarwa.

## **Literature review**

### **Educational policies**

Botswana's educational philosophy is based on two policies that share the same sentiments of education and access as a fundamental right for all. In addition, living in harmony, as purported by the first national philosophy of *Kagisano* (social harmony/peaceful co-existence) with its 4 principles of development, democracy, unity and self reliance (Botswana government, 1977) is embraced. The intention was to move the country from the traditional agro-based economy to an industrial one in order to compete with the rest of the world. This philosophy was a milestone and closed the dependence on colonization by the British, however, although the sentiments expressed were exciting, very little was said about how to transform the Basarwa communities and embrace them politically, socially and economically to be at par with other Botswana social groups. The discussions pertaining to education and access to all was a "one size fits all" ignoring the enormity of the problems created by diversity within the nation. Though the intention was to provide education for all there were and still are children missing out on education, with no mechanisms within the government arena to advocate their involvement or account for their absence. Some of these children live with their parents in the remote areas

known as the Kgalagadi Game Reserve Conservations (KGRC) where they were later re-located into smaller settlements for the provision of other social amenities. International bodies such as International Survival have fought what appears to be a losing battle: to persuade the government to allow the Basarwa to remain within the hunting and game reserve areas.

The first philosophy of education known as Education for Kagisano (social harmony) advocates the 4 national principles of democracy, development, self-reliance and unity. Due to the diverse Botswana population, it has been difficult to develop independent, democratic and self-reliant individuals with a uniform curriculum. The reason for this is that the curriculum is more academic based, is examined theoretically with limited experiential learning to cater for the non-academic students. The most successful principle is that of unity since Botswana are able to co-exist in harmony despite their diversity. Every Botswana has a right to settle in any place they choose without being discriminated against or harassed by those who might feel they have the birth right to a location. Unfortunately most Botswana have congregated in the east where industrial development is confined, at the expense of other parts of the country. Therefore most people migrate to these areas in search of job opportunities and better lives. However although not backed by research, a small number of Basarwa may be found to hold high positions or any other within the economic arena.

Most Basarwa still prefer to co-exist with nature and do not seem to care about the effects of modernization. It is mostly the highly educated people who move to mining areas, towns and cities such as Jwaneng, Orapa, Selibe Phikwe, Gaborone and others. Ironically villages close to these mining towns do not enjoy the economic gains from these minerals. Most of the money from diamonds, copper and other minerals are used to develop cities/towns/large villages far from the communities where mining takes place. The Basarwa, too, in some instances were removed from their ancestral homes, and they too suffer the same fate because they can no longer hunt wild animals which has been their way of life for centuries.

The second educational policy termed “The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE)” emanated from the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All. Based on this, education in Botswana continued to advocate for access to all including adults. Its objectives were to discuss the basic learning needs of children, youths and adults especially to improve the quality of education as well as revitalizing the commitment and support of all sectors and institutions interested in realizing the educational objectives (Botswana government, 1994).

Schools have been set up in the remote areas with boarding facilities to enable Basarwa children to access education. The only problem was that the education was a new concept among the Basarwa and no initiatives were taken to introduce schooling to the communities in phases. Basarwa children were separated, and still are, from their parents, which poses a social problem since the Basarwa are a closely knit community. Separating children from their parents has always been traumatic, hence causing some children to abscond from school; high rates of absenteeism; dropout or at times death since some children attempt to go back to their communities only to get killed by wild animals. In some cases, when their children were separated from their parents, some Basarwa parents would set up their temporary shelters around the school to observe what would happen to their children especially concerning corporal punishment that is still common in Botswana. Basarwa discipline strategies do not include corporal punishment. The government has tried to keep the Basarwa children in school by providing them with the basic needs including waiving fees to buy uniforms, but this does not encourage them to stay in school.

### **Botswana's language policy**

In addition to Botswana's 2 official languages namely Setswana, the national language and English, there are 26 minority languages. A minor language would be the one that does not belong to the eight Setswana ethnic groups with different dialects. This power dynamic has caused agitation amongst non-Setswana speaking groups (Nyathi-Ramahobo & Chebanne, 2004).

Due to the fact that 80% of the population speaks different Setswana dialects, teaching all at levels of education is in English and Setswana. In primary and secondary schools Setswana is taught as a subject. At tertiary institutions it may be termed as African Languages. The greatest challenge is that the orthographic version of the language differs significantly from the spoken form. Setswana as any other languages has evolved such that the young generation cannot complete a sentence without adding an English word. In the past, parents/grandparents used to tell stories around the fire using the traditional proverbs and idioms. This provided children with skills to read between the lines to get meaning from the experiences related in the story. This process allowed the children the prospect to transfer this knowledge to learning Setswana in the classroom. This traditional concept has died off and contemporary parents do not have the competency or time to spend telling traditional stories to the children. Most of the children give up on learning Setswana because it is difficult for children from affluent families who do not understand or speak Setswana completely. Therefore if the language of interaction and learning in school eludes and evades the children from the Setswana communities how would the ones speaking a different language learn?

All children from various ethnic groups study in Setswana and English. At the lower levels standard 1 and 2 children learn through the "Breakthrough" method to Setswana and English which introduce children to concepts by relating pictures to words thus leading to learning how to read and write. Even though this system sets the foundation for learning from a young age, it precludes the young Basarwa children who cannot speak either Setswana or English leading to the death of their languages, culture and their indigenous knowledge (Chebanne, 2012).

Several attempts have been made to formulate a language policy in Botswana but there has not been any progress. Some strong culturally based ethnic groups have set up committees or tribal/ethnic groups to write books and translate the Bible to their languages such as Ikalanga and the Wayeyi as a means to promote their languages through the registration of linguistic association. The Bakalanga set up a society known as Promotions of Ikalanga Language (SPIL) in 1986; the Wayeyi the Kamanakao Association in 1995; the Batswapong formed the Lentswe la Batswapong in 1998 (Kamanakao Association, 2001). Currently there are thirteen of these organizations, which aim at developing the languages and cultures of the respective ethnic communities, which were viewed as dying due to non-recognition, leading to non-use.

In 2002, these organizations formed a coalition called RETENG, (meaning we are there/ we are alive/we are present) such as the Multi-cultural Coalition of Botswana in order to speak with one voice (Nyathi-Ramahobo, 2004 & Chebanne). Although this did not make a great impact on influencing the mother tongue to be taught in school lately these minority groups can showcase their culture through dance and music which assists them command some form of respect from the nation. They are also involved in developing multilingual materials with the goal of developing some of Botswana's unwritten languages.

According to Nyati-Ramahobo & Chebanne (2004), “Botswana’s language education policy is not written; it is understood, inferred and observed from reality” (p. 52). Documents such as the national constitution merely allude to language policy, but stop short of fully declaring a position.

### **Teacher training in Botswana**

Botswana has 2 primary education training colleges in Serowe and Francistown. Tonota and Molepolole Colleges of Education train teachers for junior secondary school (grades 8-10) while the University of Botswana trains teachers for grades 11-12. However, teachers with a diploma in education teach in both junior and senior secondary school. Lately, the government has decided to upgrade almost all the teachers to a degree level for quality assurance in high schools.

The teacher training curriculum is based on generic educational theories of the Western world. There are no indigenous theories of teaching Botswana to enhance the children’s learning. The training of the teachers is in English and Setswana. Some of these teachers end up placed to schools in the most remote areas of Botswana to teach children who speak some of the 26 so-called minority languages. There are very few teachers from some of these minority groups and the placement of teachers to schools is based on where there is a shortage; and therefore it is very rare for a teacher to teach in their own locality. Another challenge is that there are very few graduates from most of the so-called minority groups. There are no mechanisms in place that ensure the training of teacher aides from these 26 ethnic languages such as high school dropout who could assist the Setswana speaking teachers to educate the children.

Teachers become disillusioned due to the lack of modern infrastructure, poor communication links and no means of entertainment in these areas. For this reason, teachers sometimes abscond from work, or refuse to teach in these areas. Sometimes when they go to large villages and towns/cities to receive their pay they tend to spend more time there thus missing lessons. The government pays the teachers some remote area allowance which most teachers feel is insufficient compared to the inconveniences they experience. The author’s wish is for the government to train those dropout students who have gone through junior and senior secondary schools as interpreters for languages that the conventional teachers do not understand.

## **Methodology**

### **Study site: The village of Phuduhudu**

This village is one of those Basarwa areas known as “settlements”. When the nomadic way of life dwindled, the Basarwa had to look for places to live. One group settled in Phuduhudu, which was originally their “masters” cattleposts (cattle rearing places in Botswana). These Basarwa worked for Bakgalagadi, Bangologa and other Botswana groups. Other Basarwa groups chose places with small water pans. Water pans are areas in the desert where water collects during the short rainy season from October to January and can be stored for longer periods of time after the rainy season. However, unfortunately the Phuduhudu Basarwa group settled in a place without water pans.

Phuduhudu village is sandy, flat and hot with very little vegetation. There are literally no other physical features except sand. This area has no access to modern amenities such as electricity and piped water. Although the school has electricity there is no internet connection or cable television for the children to view different features and be able to visualize how these look

like. The irony of this is that the curriculum in Standard 6 and 7 require children to identify several features such as hills, rivers, valleys, etc. which they have never seen. There is a main road that passes through to other larger villages such as Kang and Ghanzi and Jwaneng, one of the diamonds mine that the children have never been to. The only familiar features are big trucks that pass through the village to the nearest towns and neighbouring country, Namibia.

There are about 500 people with a small primary school of 142 pupils from standard 1 to 7 and the school is the centre of the village activities. During the time of the study, there were a school head, deputy school head and 7 teachers and between 18-20 students per class.

## **Sampling**

### **Parents**

The researcher used semi-structured to interview 11 parents and their children for the purpose of comparison. Three of the parents were Basarwa, 1 a Zimbabwean, while the rest (7) were Bakgalagadi. Only one of the Basarwa parents could speak Sexasi (the community's Sesarwa Language).

Three parents were individually interviewed, 2 together, and a group of 5 as a focus group. It appeared that some parents were embarrassed to mention their ethnicity because the researcher had to encourage them to speak out about their identity. Most of them were shy, similar to their children and did not provide adequate information. These parents were requested to express the concerns, contributions and challenges they faced in assisting their children with their school work.

### **Teachers**

A total of 6 teachers were interviewed including the school head. Among these teachers one was the Guidance and Counseling teacher and the other, the Learning Disabilities teacher. The Standard (grade) 1, 4 and 7 teachers were part of the sample since the researcher chose to study children in these classes. None of the teachers were from the village.

### **Children**

A total of 30 pupils were interviewed, 15 girls and 15 boys; 10 standard 1s, 10 standard 4s and 10 from standard 7 were identified by their teachers. For each class an equal number of boys and girls were sampled by their class teachers who chose those children they thought were more assertive enough to participate in the study. The rest of the children would hide behind each other when spoken to, or they looked down.

### **Research tools/data collection**

The researcher utilized the interviews, document analysis and observations. The researcher conversed with the Basarwa and stayed among them for a week, moving around the village documenting their ways of life.

The Basarwa are mostly illiterate and interviews and observations were the best tools to use in data collection. Observations were carried out as the teachers taught and when the children were waiting in line to collect their food ration. In the classroom the teacher did most of the talking more while the pupils sat and listened quietly.

When reviewing documents, such as the school register, it could be observed that the children were punctual and that there was a high rate of attendance. It may be assumed these children attended school due to the meal programme.

### **Ethical considerations**

The researcher submitted a proposal requesting permission to carry out this research to the Ministry of Education and Skills Development Research Department. Access to the school was easy since the deputy school head was the researcher's former student.

A month before data collection the researcher spoke to the deputy school head about her interest to carry out the study. The deputy school head called a Kgotla (traditional meeting) to sensitize the community about the study and its importance. The villagers were receptive that although consent and assent forms were provided, none of the participants completed them.

## **Findings**

### **Ethnicity**

The respondents were asked what languages they spoke. One parent interviewed was Zimbabwean married to a Mokgalagadi and articulate Ndebele, English and Sekgalagadi. Only one Mosarwa parent out of the 3 could speak her mother tongue "Sixasi" which is a Sesarwa language. The 2 Basarwa parents could only speak Sekgalagadi while rest (7) were indigenous Bakgalagadi.

The children were asked the same question about the languages they spoke, and all the 30 pupils spoke Sekgalagadi with limited Setswana and English. Among the 30, 10 of them were Basarwa but could not speak their language. When asked when they [children] came in contact with Setswana and English, all of them indicated that they used the 2 languages at school but not at home. The researcher asked the parents if they had ever been to school. Two parents had never been to school while the rest went through standard 1 up to Form 3 (grade 10). Both the parents and children were asked if they found it difficult to learn in Setswana and English and their response was in the affirmative. The parents stated that they only spoke Sekgalagadi to their children and that was the reason why the children found Setswana difficult. None of the parents ever spoke English to their children.

The teachers were asked what ethnic groups they belonged to. One teacher and the school head were of the Bakgalagadi origin; 1 was Khalanga, while (6) teachers were from the Setswana speaking ethnic groups. The Khalanga speaking teacher was very fluent in Setswana. The Khalanga teacher is one of the ethnic groups found in the eastern part of the country where Setswana is commonly spoken.

### **Educational level**

When asked about the level of education attained, 2 parents pointed out that they had never been to school while 3 had dropped out of primary school. Five of them had been to secondary school but dropped out before completing the cycle. When quizzed why they did not complete their studies all of them said they found it difficult to separate from their community. Only one of the parents stated that she had completed Form 5 and continued to study courses in Purchasing, and was at the time of the study working for the school as a cleaner.



The teachers were asked to state their level of education and their qualifications ranged from a diploma in education to an academic degree. Their teaching experience ranged from 2.5 to 32 years. However, the Learning Disability teacher had never gone for formal training other than attending a few workshops although he was expected to deal with children with learning challenges.

### **Language of communication**

When the children were asked what language they spoke when they first came to school all of them signified that they were communicated in Sekgalagadi. One teacher added that most children in Botswana were taught in a third or fourth language and this made communicating in Setswana and English difficult.

The children further explained that the languages of communication at school were Setswana and English, which were too difficult to learn. When persuaded to explain where they got help when they faced difficulties, they stated that their siblings who had dropped out of school assisted them at times. The children said that it was very rare for their parents to assist them with their school work or how to express Setswana concepts. Only the Zimbabwean parent spoke to her children in English and Sekgalagadi.

It was observed that all the teachers spoke fluent Setswana and English. When asked if they would like to learn Sekgalagadi, all the 6 teachers stated that they had no interest in learning the language.

### **Likes and dislikes**

The children were asked to specify which language they preferred and which they disliked most. All of them pointed out that they enjoyed Setswana and English, but when asked to say some words in both languages they found it challenging to do so. To determine that the children enjoyed Setswana as they claimed, the researcher requested the standard 1 pupils to recite traditional stories in Setswana. The children failed to but instead told the stories in Sekgalagadi.

### **Reading ability**

The standard 4 pupils were asked if they could read and were offered a standard 1 English textbook and all the 5 girls and 2 boys were able to do so. The standard 1 pupils were able to read a sentence by putting words on flashcards to make sentences. Eight standard 1 pupils were able to write their names.

It could be inferred from the findings that it was challenging for all the pupils to learn in English.

### **Curriculum**

The teachers were asked to describe the structure and content of the primary school curriculum. All the teachers felt that the curriculum was had too much abstract content which was overwhelming for them as teachers. They commented that most of the concepts were difficult for the pupils who one teacher referred to as “slow learners”.

The teachers further explained that there were several innovative strategies to use in the classroom but with the caliber of students they were handling; it was difficult to utilize these strategies. Most of the strategies in the curriculum required self directed learning which was not possible for the students/pupils/children in that school.

*Teacher 1: “We have unique problems. We shouldn’t adopt teaching methods that do not work for us. If we could sit down as the Kgalagadi region and think of methods that could work for us, maybe it would work”.*

Two teachers referred to the curriculum as “poor” since the content was too advanced for the pupils to comprehend. One teacher said,

*Teacher 2: “The biotechnology I did at the college is the one done by these pupils now”.*

*Teacher 3: “Mathematics is too much. You try to break it down to make it a little bit simple, but it is so difficult”.*

One teacher indicated that the children could not transfer learning. They found it difficult to identify concepts that were common among the subjects.

*Teacher 3: “We did population in standard 6 and are repeating it in standard 7 but none of my students remember anything from the previous lessons”* However, she mentioned that the students did better in practical subjects and sports activities such as football and netball.

The Guidance and Counseling teacher informed the researcher that most of the children in Phuduhudu settlement had never travelled outside the settlement and lacked exposure to modern facilities and other features required to be studied in the curriculum. This placed the children at a disadvantage when the children were expected to concepts and features they have never seen or experienced. She gave examples of physical features such as a hills and river and that since the settlement was in a sandy area, all what the children were familiar with were sand dunes.

Guidance and Counseling teacher: *“The curriculum requires them to possess knowledge about mining in Botswana, deal with transport systems when they have never been to a mining town, seen a train, ferry or aeroplane”.*

Due to the challenging curriculum, one of the teachers indicated that there was high failure rate in the school.

Another teacher stated that for the years (2011-2014) the children were taught by untrained temporary teachers who left before they completed the syllabi they were teaching. The untrained teachers lacked the knowledge of teaching methods and of the subject matter.

### **Lack of intrinsic motivation**

When asked what they thought caused poor performance at the school, all the teachers mentioned that the pupils lacked intrinsic motivation and did not have any role models in their communities to emulate. Another issue was that they felt the children had a short attention span. The teachers further explained that the children never took books home to study, and if they did at times the books would be returned to school dirty or torn. When the teachers asked the children about the state of their books, they would state that their parents used the books as cigarette wrappers. When the teachers asked the children to do their homework, some instead hide the books in the sand.

One teacher expressed concern about the poor attention span of the pupils. He stated that he went to an extent of asking the nurse if there were any medical issues involved. He indicated that the nurse elucidated that some of the parents drank and smoked during pregnancy leading to underweight babies. According to the nurse this affected the children’s brain systems. Other children were born at home under poor and unhygienic facilities.

### **Gender differences**

When the teachers were asked which children performed badly, one teacher alluded to the fact that the male pupils were more challenged than their female counterparts. The researcher observed the standard 4 pupils to read a standard 1 English book and found out that 3 out of 5 boys could not read.

### **Parental involvement**

The parents were questioned how often they visited the school to check on their children's performance or assist the teachers. Nine parents confessed that they never visited the school nor assisted the children with their school work, except for the Zimbabwean mother and the school cleaner. This was further articulated by the teachers who lamented about how difficult it was for them [teachers] to persuade parents to participate in their children's learning.

One teacher stated that poor parental involvement was such a concern that even the children vandalized the school property the parents failed to take responsibility to repair the damage. Teacher: *"Even when the children are destructive, they don't care"*.

### **Nomadic life**

One teacher brought up an important aspect about the lifestyle of the Basarwa of Phuduhudu. He mentioned that even though moving from place to place seemed to have disappeared, children and parents still practiced a nomadic way of life within the community. Children had the freedom to stay anywhere they wished; from one home to another which was not a matter of concern for the parents. Due to this parents would never know if the children attended school or did their homework. The school had the responsibility to follow up the parents to alert them about their missing children, when the children did not turn up for school. Some Children spent time at places known a 'Spot'-places where traditional beer was sold and slept late and would be fatigued and dozed off in the morning.

### **Cultural background**

The researcher wanted to know what cultural issues affected the performance of the children. One teacher alluded to the fact that the Basarwa community were not used to exerting themselves or work hard due to their original nomadic way of life; and therefore the children found it challenging to put effort in anything they did.

The teachers explicated that other cultural aspects that affected the children's performance were absenteeism of the girl child during their menstruation period. The girls stayed home for over a week undergoing some rituals and would never be allowed to do any school work at this time. He stated that the school at times offered to send work home for the child but the parents would refuse to allow the child do any school work since it was against their culture.

One teacher stated that the Basarwa/Bakgalagadi children were very shy such that even when they knew the correct answer, they would never pronounce it out loud or confidently. The shyness was coupled with a culture of secrecy to an extent that even when teachers identified abused children, it was difficult to get information from the child and a lot of abuse cases were never reported to the police or the social welfare department.

Sexual relationships were common among the youths because as one teacher alleged, the Basarwa parents performed the act in the presence of the children. The whole family could share a single traditional hut or sleep in the open with the children and it was difficult for the parents to resist the temptation of being intimate in the presence of their children. Some of the girls in standard 4-7 (10-13 years) were already married and lived with husbands who they cared for after school.

### **Poverty**

When asked about the economic state of the community, one teacher acknowledged that most of the children were malnourished because the parents had no sources of income. In some instances, the pregnant women did not visit the health facilities known as clinics but gave birth at home due to poverty and ignorance.

The children went to school hungry and the school fed them at 10am and 4pm. The main food was home-made bread and beans. Lining up to collect food was a difficult process that the teachers had to threaten the pupils to control them- a sign of hunger.

The school played a dual role of teaching and alleviating poverty. The old kitchen in the school was used by 2 women who provided the children with the food required and in turn the women made a living as a means to reduce poverty among the women.

One parent lamented that, *"I don't want to be a poor person, I want to change my status too and be called rich"*.

### **Personal hygiene/negligence**

The researcher wanted to find out why the children appeared uncared for and untidy and all the teachers expressed grief about the poor hygiene of the students. Most of the students' parents were either teenagers or middle aged and spent time drinking and smoking, hence neglecting the children. Some children had ringworms on their heads while some walked barefooted.

### **Observations and document analysis**

The school attendance was high due to the feeding programme. Unfortunately very few parents attended the PTA meetings. During the research the researcher sat in the classrooms to observe the learning and teaching. There were very few teaching and learning aids, especially in the lower classes. The school had started a pre-school section to try and help the children appreciate school and reduce the challenges faced in dealing with the Basarwa children. The pre-school children learnt in a classroom without toys or any modern learning equipment. They had pieces of papers to draw on and the school deputy head explained that the desks and chairs the children used had been borrowed from a nearby day care centre that was closed down.

The children ate their breakfast at 10am and served another meal at 4pm. Lining up to collect food was a difficult process that the teachers had to threaten the pupils to control them-a sign of hunger. Most students depended on the government for food and school supplies but their parents would sell the supplies to buy traditional beer. The school therefore took the responsibility to feed the children at 4pm to avoid being fed traditional beer.

Although the government provided school supplies, food and uniform to most children it was observed that there were some children who did not receive the packages. The deputy head explained that the Social Welfare department felt those ones were better off than the rest. Several

parents came into the school from early morning until lunch time and it was observed that those parents had HIV and AIDS infected children who needed to take their medicines at certain times. The clinic nurse preferred to supply the medication to the parents who would immediately walk to the school to give to the children. The reason for this was that when the parents were allowed to take the children's supply home, they would make the children take the medication with traditional beer.

From reading the newspapers about issues affecting the marginalized groups, some Bakgalagadi ethnic representatives and activists had registered their concern about the language called "Sekgalagadi". They explained that there was no such language because Kgalagadi is a description of the area they live in, meaning a dry place. The representatives/activists stated that the people in those areas spoke languages such as Sengologa, Setlharo etc. This was an important fact that requires more research and understanding.

### **Recommendations**

There are several ways in which the Basarwa children in Phuduhudu could be assisted to motivate them appreciate learning;

- Those parents who had dropped out of school and are fluent in Setswana and English and could be used as interpreters in the early years.
- The teacher training programmes in Botswana must develop robust curricula that prepare teachers to incorporate appropriate pedagogy in their teaching; train them to appreciate teaching in challenging environments. The teachers may visit the remote areas in Botswana before they start teaching to sensitise them on the conditions other Batswana communities live and learn in.
- The government needs to provide teaching and learning resources and ascertain that the remote areas have electricity/generators that could assist to operate computers, connect internet to enable these children see and observe some of the features, infrastructure they are unfamiliar with. The school could be adopted by other schools in cities and large towns, business people in the community to assist the government in by providing books, toys and other learning/teaching materials.
- All the children need to go for excursions to places with different physical features and modern facilities.
- The curriculum needs to be contextualized to meet the needs of the children in different communities. Botswana has diverse population and the one-size-fits-all curriculum has shown over time that it does not work for everyone. Most of the children from remote areas do not finish school or perform poorly and remain in abject poverty and dependence on the government.
- The Phuduhudu children need to be encouraged in sports, creative and performing arts since they prefer practical knowledge.
- Those children who can read and write in the school could partner with the ones challenged to form a "buddy" reading system.
- It is important that the teacher use more experiential learning with the students since it is easier for them when they practice.
- The government must have a quota of how many people from the minority groups must be employed in government and not made to compete for jobs and other opportunities with those who are already advantaged.

- Parents must be sensitized about the importance of education and their contribution to the learning of children. They could be asked to collect work from school for the girl children to continue learning during their menstrual cycle rituals.
- The government, NGOs and other stakeholders could educate parents and their children about the dangers of early marriages, the uncontrolled and non monitored movements of children, but not deny the Basarwa to practice those aspects of their culture that is important to them.
- Instead of providing food baskets to the Basarwa the government must find ways of providing job opportunities within the community to reduce poverty. Basarwa are a closely knit community that prefers to live in their settlements rather than mix with other communities.
- The social welfare department must monitor those parents who neglect their children.

### **Summary**

This study is about the challenges that Basarwa children face in learning in Setswana and English. A lot of issues emanated from this study which affected the learning of the children. Language barrier was one of complex issues that children in remote areas face as they attempt to learn. Problems such as cultural background, poverty and others contributed to the challenges children faced.

It is important for the government to review the curriculum to ascertain that it caters for the diverse Botswana population.

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