

## Silent Exclusion: The Unheard Voices in Remote Areas of Botswana

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**ABSTRACT** 'Education as a human right' and 'education for all' are common themes sloganeered in every education forum whenever politicians and bureaucrats gather. Little is however, heard from those who are denied educational opportunities and of teachers in some of the educationally disadvantaged zones. One wonders if these slogans will become stories of the past. The 'voice' of the children, parents and teachers in the hard-to-reach ethnic and often marginalised minorities in remote areas cannot be ignored if the goal of improving pedagogical practices and the teacher education programmes toward achieving 'education as a human right' and 'education for all' is to be realised. This paper, which is part of a qualitative case study carried out in Botswana, argues that the 'voice' of the 'child' and the 'teacher' in the poor ethnic remote communities is fundamental in improving inclusion. The study used 30 children, 15 parents and 15 teachers as participants in individual interviews and groups discussions in schools in remote area settlements. The study concludes that while open access to schooling in remote areas has increased, little learning takes place in the classroom and early school withdrawal is high due to several competing in-school factors.

### INTRODUCTION

**Education as a Human Right:** In 1948 the United Nations (UN) adopted a deliberate position on human development. UN Article 26 recognized and declared education as a human right, and subsequently, UN Article 28 - Convention on the Rights of the Child expressed the right of each child to education (Crossley and Watson 2003; Pansiri 2008). These Articles articulate categorically the world's commitment towards ensuring that every child has the opportunity to participate at least in basic education. This commitment was renewed in the 1990's Education for All (EFA) goals and reaffirmed in 2000 in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agenda on education for poverty reduction and improved life. This is revealed through its target on EFA Goal No 2 of "ensuring that by 2015 all children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minority, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality" (UNESCO 2008: 14). Consistent with this global agenda, Botswana has committed itself to "building an educated, informed nation" by 2016 (Gaolathe 1997: 28).

**Studies Related to Poor School Retention:** To establish a better context for the study, both the Western and African cases of in-school factors that contribute to poor school retention were explored. There is significant Western literature

on the problems of retention in the school systems of America and Europe dating as far back as 1960. Research questions in most of those studies have focused upon the work of teachers, the culture of school management, the conditions of infrastructure, nature and relevance of curriculum materials, pedagogical practices and learner achievement. There is still little work done in Africa and Botswana in particular on problems of participation in basic education. There are, however, some important studies which address the contemporary issues of engagement in schooling which are relevant to the conditions that obtain in Botswana.

Rumberger's (2001) study in the USA, for instance, suggests that children's academic disengagement is caused by teachers' characteristics. He confirms UNICEF's (1978) findings which claim that the gender of teachers also has an impact on learner engagement or disengagement. Teacher ethnicity is another factor that is seen to contribute to continuation or early school leaving. Teachers' attitude is yet another factor that is seen to be critical in determining learners' decisions to stay on or to withdraw from school. The quality of teaching is identified as a pertinent factor of engagement in Brazil and Colombia (Heyneman and Loxley 1983). It has also been found that poor quality of teaching contributes to early school leaving. This suggests that it is the children with low literacy skills who

are most directly affected by early school leaving. Insensitive instructional materials, which do not include the culture of the ethnic minority, cause much boredom and eventful academic disengagement of ethnic minorities (Kalia 1982; Armitage et al. 1986). It is also argued that irrelevant curricula are rejected by the children and this influences their decisions to exit early from schooling (Kalia 1982; Armitage et al. 1986). Gender stereotypes in textbooks, where boys and men are portrayed as better than girls and women were found to contribute to a rejection of schooling especially in some Asian countries (Ahmed and Hasan 1984). They also noted that, in some cases, it is a question of cultural or religious encounter or clash in the education system, where some prefer imbalances while others wish for the balance between boys and girls.

Cultural differences among children in schools are widely reported to affect engagement. For example, according to Rumberger (2001) social disengagement in American schools where children do not get along with each other contributes to low retention. Hunt et al. (2002) also found that in Georgia, ethnic minority children could not get along with their peers from the main English speaking groups hence they decided to quit schooling. This case confirms an argument raised by Bourdieu and Passeron (1979 : 68) that school systems “produce individuals that are selected and arranged in a hierarchy once and for all, for their whole lifetime.” This is particularly so because many schools in former colonies of Western Europe do not make allowances for social handicaps such as ethnicity, culture and language. As Tikly (2004) argues, schools contribute in creating social hegemonies rather than emancipating the poorest and marginalised communities out of poverty and destitution.

School culture and environment are also some of the issues that contribute to poor engagement in some African countries. For example, Higgins and Rwanyange (2005:17) argue that in Uganda, “professionalism, competency and attitudes of teachers together with the quality of leadership provided by the headteacher ... have a huge impact on whether children stay in school”. The school culture also reflects on the gender stereotypes in schools. Wondimagegnehu and Tiku (1988) found that some children in Ethiopian schools leave school because the curriculum materials are not gender sensitive. According to Davison and Kanyuka (1992), sch-

ools in Malawi, for example, are better places for boys and they are more in number in upper classes than girls. These schools are dominated by male teachers most of who teach upper classes. Male teachers in these rural schools expect boys to be academically stronger than girls. Secondary and university education are viewed as options suitable for boys. Textbooks predominantly reflect the status of the male folk. Davison and Kanyuka (1992: 457) argue that “Girls were expected to be shy and submissive”. Tjiuepa (2001) also shares the same about what is expected of girls’ in Namibia. Gender awareness campaign helped to increase girls’ willingness to stay on in school and to compete academically with boys (Tjiuepa 2001).

In Bangladesh, poor school infrastructure is one element contributing to decisions to leave school (Ahmed and Hasan 1984). Good classrooms, toilets, electricity and other stimulating factors are seen to make children enjoy school and encourage them to stay on. On the contrary, poor buildings or, in some cases the absence of classrooms, toilets, dining hall and other facilities make children, particularly girls, decide to leave school early. This is more problematic in boarding schools. Girls, like women, need privacy especially when they start menarche. Ahmed and Hasan argue that girls need proper infrastructure and toiletry system, but when these are not provided, some children react by leaving school to avoid shaming. Many countries run short of classrooms and some classes are taught outside in harsh weather (cold/hot/dusty) and when children resist such conditions, one common option is disengagement and withdrawal.

Socio-economic conditions also contribute to poor school engagement. It has been found that cost of fees and other financial requirement at school is one critical factor affecting engagement from primary to tertiary levels. For example, due to the user-fee policy in Kenya, children from poor families either fail to attend school or drop out altogether (Mukundi 2004: 447). In Namibia, children drop out of schools mainly due to lack of money for schooling including the cost of textbooks and uniform (Tjiuepa 2001).

### **Background to Botswana and RADs Education**

Botswana was a colony of Britain for 81 years. It gained its independence in 1966 through a

democratically elected system. The country is made up of major and minor tribes. The eight major tribes are BaNgwato, BaNgwaketse, BaKgatlwa, BaLete, BaTlokwa, BaTawana, BaRolong and BaKwena. All these tribes have Setswana, which is the current national language as their mother tongue. The ethnic minority tribes include BaSarwa, BaKgalagadi, BaBirwa, BaTswapong, BaKalanga, BaKhurutshe, BaYei, BaHerero, BaSubiya and BaMbukushu. These use languages different from Setswana. English is an official language in the country and a medium of instruction in the education system (Republic of Botswana 1965).

In 1974, a Remote Areas Dwellers Programme (RADP) was introduced in Botswana to assist in the improvement of the livelihood of people who lived in remote areas who came to be referred to as Remote Area Dwellers (RADs). This programme came up with specific strategies and projects for addressing the educational needs of people in the disadvantaged areas of the country particularly the BaSarwa communities in the most remote settlements.

Arguably, the status of education for the ethnic minority groups in the remote areas of Botswana is that there are still a lot of issues that go unaddressed. For example, according to Republic of Botswana (1991, 1993), Bangale (1995) and Koketso (2001), the North West, South and Kweneng West Districts are overrepresented in the numbers of children missing from basic education school system. Many of these children have limited access to educational opportunities while others leave school before they complete the basic education programme. Many perform poorly in the basic education programme. These reports have been confirmed by some studies which show that RADs in these regions are the most affected (Tshireletso 1997; Letshabo et al. 2002; Polelo 2006; Pansiri 2008). RADs are rural ethnic minority people who live in remote settlements. According to Pansiri (2008), RADs usually live in small numbers; are politically disempowered, economically disadvantaged, socially underprivileged, marginalized and discriminated against in terms of linguistic and cultural identity. Such communities in Botswana often survive on government social security programmes such as handouts and secondary sector employment which is largely labour intensive and non-durable goods producing. Settlements are not easily accessible due to lack of roads and telecommunications.

Chilisa (2002) argues that educational policies relating to early pregnancies of children in Sub-Saharan Africa schools contributed a lot to early withdrawals of the girl-mothers. This is also specific to minorities in Botswana. She argues that “there is a close correspondence between a country’s socio-political environment and the type of policy adopted” (p. 22). Chilisa also argues that policies constructed from cultural and religious values often violate the human right of the girl child, influencing her to disengage from schooling. She argues that schools are gendered institutions and have adopted an ideology of exclusion. She further argues, for example, that under an ideology of exclusion, a school girl who falls pregnant is suspended for a year to go for maternity and would not be re-admitted in the same school. Polelo (2006) argues that pregnancy is the second major factor contributing to dropout in the Botswana junior secondary school system. To support this argument, Botswana Daily News of 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2005 quote a Senior Teacher of a junior secondary school in the North West District who addressed a public meeting reporting that 20 students dropped out of his school between January and October 2005 and that six of them were cases of pregnancy (Republic of Botswana 2005). The story says that the teacher blamed parents for children’s action to quit school. Parents were, therefore, victims of blame.

There are also indications that some minorities resist certain dispositional practices in the education management system. For example, the Botswana Daily News of 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2007 carries a story that “some ... residents attempted to force their children out of the hostels as a protest over ... discrimination against BaSarwa and abuse of their children at the hostels” (Republic of Botswana 2007). In this story, it is reported that “few standard one pupils left with their parents”. The Botswana Daily News of 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2006 carries a story that “at least four Form Three students [in one junior secondary school in Ngamiland] did not write their preparatory examination for home economics because the council failed to transport them back to school from their homes on time” (Republic of Botswana 2006). According to the story, these children automatically failed the National Junior Certificate Examination - Home Economic Course - as a result of poor management of the education system.

### **Challenges for the Education for Minorities in Botswana**

Tshireletso (1997) and Polelo (2006) argue that children in minority communities in Botswana are prohibited from the use of the mother tongue in favour of national and official languages. They also argue that curriculum materials which are developed only in Setswana and English languages and cherish the culture and values of the dominant Tswana tribes and western systems are insensitive to minorities. This problem was found to contribute to desertion, which is the main reason for school dropout in remote junior secondary schools. Such insensitive curriculum material, school culture and rules are push-out factors particularly to the low academic achievers. Predicated on the views of teachers and pupils in school, Tshireletso (1997), Letshabo et al. (2002) and Polelo (2006) argue that cases of corporal punishment, bullying, unfriendly rules and stigmatization of ethnicity emerge as some of the issues contributing to low school retention in rural minority schools. Poor pedagogy and classroom management are some of the major push-out factors (Tshireletso 1997; Letshabo et al. 2002; Polelo 2006). However, the voice of those who withdrew from school is not heard yet.

It can be concluded from the few studies and official news stories in Botswana, that literature points to some dispositional and hegemonic practices that contribute to low school engagement in the basic education. Such practices can be classified under management practices (Republic of Botswana 2006, 2007), gender (Chilisa 2002), ethnicity and school culture (Tshireletso 1997; Letshabo et al. 2002; Polelo 2006). Parents and children are blamed for early school withdrawal. Given this background from literature, it was decided to adopt methods that were client-sensitive and more appropriate for this study, to listen to the usually unheard voices of parents, children and teachers in some remote areas of Ngamiland in Botswana.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

Following the reports about problems of RADs in basic education in Botswana, this study was carried out in four linked RAD schools (three primary schools and one junior secondary

school) in Ngamiland in the North West District. The aim was to determine factors that contribute to minimum participation in the basic education system. The main objective of the study was to identify in-school factors that lead children in RADs schools to withdraw early from school.

### **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

A qualitative research design was employed to accommodate ethnographic techniques. Key research methods consisted of participant observation and in-depth individual interviews that involved personal narratives and life histories. These methods allowed the researcher to investigate phenomena in detail within their own contexts, and were culturally sensitive and especially appropriate for studies of human relationships.

Four linked RAD schools in Ngamiland were used. These were three primary schools and one junior secondary school in three different RAD settlements. The three primary schools feed the secondary school. The informants were 30 children aged between 7 and 21 years (15 in and 15 out of school) and 15 parents and 15 teachers, all from the three settlements. Children and parents were identified and selected through opportunistic and convenience methods (Patton 2002; Ritchie et al. 2004). These methods allowed the involvement of any one who was accessible in the research constituency, thus "taking advantage of the unforeseen opportunities as they arise during the course of the fieldwork" (Ritchie et al. 2004: 81). A cluster (Gall et al. 1996) approach was used to select teachers.

Qualitative information obtained from interviews, quotations or verbatim comments from individuals' interviews, group discussions and life histories from informants was analysed. Sorting and creation of coding category (such as language of instruction, pedagogical problems) from the descriptive data as per the emergent specifications was used. Bogdan and Biklen (1992: 166) argue that in coding, "a researcher searches through data/information for regularities and patterns as well as for unusual topics that the data may reveal". Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) and Patton's (1987) models of coding and categories were used to come up with sub-themes and categories. In presenting the findings, some quotations or verbatim comments are used. In terms of limitations, it is to be noted that interpreta-

tions of findings could be viewed differently by another researcher, and this should be treated as a possible limitation. It is also possible that during transcribing informants' comments from the vernacular to English very significant intended meaning could have been lost. For ethical consideration, confidentiality and protection of informants, all names of settlements, schools and informants are pseudonyms; and names of informants are identified as C = child, T = teacher and P = parent.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

While there are many factors that emerged in the fieldwork, the key in-school issue which affect children's inclusion is language of instruction that result in problems of low self-esteem and blame-the-victim approach. This section discusses the findings in details.

It has emerged that the quality of teaching and learning is a cause for concern in the ethnic minority remote areas where mother tongue is not used in the school system. Many younger children have found it difficult to cope with the Setswana and English medium of instruction and consequently some failed school tests while others withdrew from school. The following comments suffice to illustrate the issue.

*I left Fumwa Primary School in February 2004 in Standard 1. I did not understand Setswana and English (C1, a boy aged 11 in Qokee settlement)*

*I do not understand what teachers say in Setswana or English. I prefer to stay home... I like the food that they give us at school (C2, a boy age 11 who left Motlhabeng Primary School in STD 1)*

*I left Motlhabeng School in STD 2. My class teacher used to speak very fast and I did not understand Setswana or English. I was not following learning instruction. I failed all the class tests. I then stayed home and when my mother asked me to go to school I ran and hid at my aunt's place in Qokee settlement (C3, a girl aged 12)*

On the other hand, teachers are not pedagogically confident enough to teach and develop literacy skills in the infant classes whose mother tongue is neither Setswana (national language)

nor English (official language). Some informants said,

*We use breakthrough, but because Setswana is a second language, it takes more than one term for them to cope. Otherwise children tend to be very quiet (T4, a teacher at Fumwa Primary School)*

*I force them to speak Setswana, but they are not able, instead they keep quiet (T1, a teacher at Fumwa Primary School)*

*'Teaching infant classes is difficult in this school, because children do not cope with Setswana and English and we do not know Sesarwa or Seherero. (T2, a teacher at Motlhabeng Primary School)*

The comments above show that teachers lack appropriate teaching skills and methods to teach second and third languages to replace the 'breakthrough to Setswana methods', a teaching strategy they were trained in during their pre-service teacher education. The 'breakthrough' approach is used by teachers who know the learners' first language. According to their views, the breakthrough approach was meant to teach learners whose first language is Setswana, and therefore, not applicable to their schools. This problem of teacher's professional and pedagogical disability in developing learners' literacy skills manifests itself in the low level of literacy skills that children acquire before they progress to secondary education, a concern that is raised by both children and teachers at junior secondary level. C4, a girl aged 16 at Richfield JSS commented,

*I am doing Form 2. I have realised that we who come from Fumwa and Motlhabeng are always backward in class. Other children perform better in almost all subjects. Since we started Form 1, we are always behind. I wonder what makes us so backward. This is frustrating and I sometimes feel like crying. I have given up. I wonder if we were taught properly at primary school! Why are we different?*

Corroborating comments were advanced by secondary school teachers. According to them, poor acquisition and mastery of literacy skills at primary school level affects these children's learning experiences. For example, T3 at Richfield JSS narrated,

*Children from the settlements come with very low literacy skills. Most of them cannot read and write both Setswana and English. It takes a long time for them to cope and improve on their learning achievement. They get frustrated and develop a fear for failure rather than the confidence to improve. All of them have developed low self-esteem with no confidence towards learning. For example, even those that improve leave before they complete. A case in hand is that Form 3s drop out more than other classes*

According to this comment, many children from remote area settlements of ethnic minority transit from primary to secondary schools when they are not ready. This lack of readiness develops into a bigger pedagogical problem in a secondary school classroom when these children are taught side by side with other children who come with better literacy background from other areas.

The Botswana education policy introduced a learner-centred pedagogy in the 1980s to improve classroom practices. The Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) and the Junior Secondary Education Improvement Project (JSEIP) of the 1980s (Tabulawa 2009) and the Primary School Management Development Project (PSMDP) of the 1990s (Pansiri 2008) are specific examples of initiatives towards learner-centred pedagogy in the basic education programs in Botswana. Despite these initiatives this study identifies four pedagogical problems affecting learners in RADs schools.

This first set of issues relate directly to “the linguistic mismatch hypothesis which argue[s] that children can’t learn in a language they don’t understand” (Cummins 2001: 43). According to this hypothesis, the home-school linguistic mismatch results in academic problems. The issue affecting RAD children relates to the medium of instruction in Setswana and English. These children come from non-Setswana and non-English family/community background.

Schools use practices that ensure that children are taught in these two languages as per the Botswana Education Policy of 1977 and the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994. These policy instruments are rigidly and unquestionably used by teachers to ensure homogeneity and uniformity of the curriculum activities in

Botswana schools (Tshireletso 1997; Polelo 2006). The researcher’s observation and interaction with both the teachers and children, is that children are not allowed to use their mother tongue in the school premises. The inflexible enforcement of Setswana and English medium of instruction policy is indicative of the legitimisation of the hegemony of Tswana and colonial cultural domination over the minorities (Maruatona 1994). The majority of the children in these remote schools are unable to speak these two languages of the curriculum. They learn these languages very slowly because the only time they hear and struggle to use these languages is when they speak to their teachers and/or interact with textbooks. This practice is a distance away from the principles of a true learner-centred pedagogy (Tabulawa 2009), because it makes the children develop fear of school. According to Maruatona (1994: 27), school practices are “despotic as opposed to being democratic”. This education policy has not empowered teachers to exercise their professional autonomy to allow children to use their mother tongue. Such school practices create a culture of silence among the children, which is visible in the classrooms. Factors of silent exclusion (Lewin 2007) reflected clearly in lower primary school classes where learners remain quiet, timid, shy and reluctant to talk because they did not have the Setswana or English vocabulary. As the teachers reported, children were unable to develop literacy skills required, and so, life was better outside the school than inside.

The second problem relates to teachers’ pedagogic limitations. Teachers in these schools lack skills to engage children in effective learning hence: ‘*Teaching infants classes is difficult,*’ and that they ‘*force*’ children to speak Setswana in order to make them learn. ‘Force’ is used as a method of teaching. In this regard, learning is a painful rather than fun and enjoyable activity. This means that instead of teaching methods that promote good educational, social and cultural values consistent with the aspiration of the community and children, teachers use authoritarian methods which instill fear, negative feeling towards schools and hatred for learning. Not only are children frustrated with such pedagogical practices. The teachers are equally frustrated. They realize that they lack expertise and competencies to teach in a trilingual context:

*...at the end of the day [children] cannot pass even simple tests...we do not know what to do (T3),  
If we stay longer in this school, I fear for our future in the teaching profession. A person can face dismissal or get no promotion (T2)  
Our education officers do not see these problems. Some of us will be dismissed from the job soon (T2)*

This comment illustrates the teacher's professional desperation. It is wary of teachers' pedagogical incompetence. They develop a concern over their job security in such difficult teaching environments.

They, therefore, lament their frustration in working in the RAD schools. They are caught between choices of meeting the needs of learners and that of fulfilling the curriculum policy that is at variance with community values and culture. This problem places them in ethical dilemmas that threaten their professional integrity. Their frustration affects the way they relate with children in their teaching.

The third problem is to do with teachers' ethnocentric attitudes of blame-the-victim approach. When learners react to the unfriendly pedagogical practices by running away or through absenteeism, teachers blame them. For example, one teacher said 'Children in this area are a problem'. This kind of blame is a manifestation of the paradigm of ethnocentrism (LiVine and Campbell 1972) prevalent in the school systems. The teachers, whose social background is cultured by the dominant Tswana tradition, adopt a blame-the-victim approach; thereby detract from classroom professional practice of care, understanding, motivation and support. In the context of ethnocentric paradigm, teachers perceive RAD children as a group of learners who are weak, unwilling, disobedient, fearful and distrustful (LiVine and Campbell 1972). They then use authoritarian teaching pedagogies, harsh and coercive methods to force children to learn.

A fourth problem stems from resistance against domination and subordination. Giroux (1983: 109) defined resistance as "a critique of domination, self-reflection and struggle for self-social emancipation". In this particular study the 'medium of instruction' in the classroom, coupled with harsh and coercive methods are the social nexus of domination and subordination

that the RADs resist. This coercive medium of instruction reflects the colonial model of the nation-state that aims for assimilation and the institutionalization of cultural hegemony (Bourdieu 1977; Fairclough 1989; Green 1997; Cummins 2001) through the school system. As observed by Watson (1979: 19), policies of unification "seek to create a unified sense of nationhood through school system, using language of instruction and centrally prescribed textbooks and curricula". The principle of 'unity' is therefore a model that denies cultural diversity. P1 summarizes this concern when she calls for the legal, moral and natural right to their local identity and indigenesness.

*We expected our children to be taught Setswana, English and Sesarwa so that in turn our children become teachers and teach their brothers and sisters. When children of the age of six or seven come to this school from Qaqanga, Xaraixarai or other settlements, where there are no Batswana, they only speak Sesarwa, they must find a teacher who speaks Sesarwa who can talk to them nicely, not those who harsh and only speak Setswana or English. This act angers them. We prefer to have Basarwa teachers in this school. As it is now, I do not see any future for our children from this school.*

This sentiment shows that RADs prefer an education system that also sustains their identity and indigenesness. It has been argued that in some developing countries, developing ethnic minority languages is problematic due to lack of curriculum materials and appropriate teaching staff (Watson 1979). Despite such problems, P1 argues that their ethnic language is as important as Setswana and English and it should be included in the school curriculum. She further draws attention to the importance of training their children to become teachers who can teach a curriculum that is inclusive of their linguistic heritage. This indicates that RADs attribute their children's poor academic performance to a system and pedagogy which ignores the linguistic culture of their own young entrants to the primary school system.

As argued by Hogan-Brun and Ramoniene (2005) elsewhere, the RADs do not seem to be against Setswana language and its unifying and

integrative mission of a shared identity. They however, argue that Sesarwa could be an additional component in the medium of instruction in their local schools. One parent thus commented: *'our children should be free to speak Sesarwa at school ... they should be taught and pass just like other Batswana'*. Many other informants echoed the same concerns about an education system that marginalises them through denial of the use of their indigenous language in the school curriculum.

Language is a great social tool that helps people to develop, grow, link up and understand their being (Fairclough 1989). Development of one's indigenous language is, therefore, essential for society's wellbeing. It can be argued that it is on the basis of this understanding that the RADs are concerned about a lack of recognition of their indigenous language in the school system. On the basis of the statement: *'We expected our children to be taught Setswana, English and Sesarwa...'*, it can be argued that RADs are aware and much appreciative of the instrumental and integrative nature (Hogan-Brun and Ramoniene 2005) of learning the national and official languages, but they view the current practice as a betrayal of their need for a culturally and contextually relevant education system.

The act of early withdrawal is in itself resistance against a "home-school language mismatch" (Cummins 2001: 41), because the children's mother tongue is not part of the curriculum. The classroom pedagogy subjects them to institutionalized silent exclusion (Lewin 2007), reflective in the higher rates of failure in classroom tests and national examinations. Children's comments confirm the views of parents that primary school beginners needed to learn first in their mother tongue, taught by teachers who can speak and teach in their mother tongue.

One adverse pedagogical tool that teachers are fond of using is corporal punishment. According to Tshireletso (1997), Letshabo et al. (2002), Tafa (2002), Polelo (2006) and Pansiri (2008), the use of corporal punishment is one of the biggest problems in the Botswana education system and one that is disapproved repeatedly by the public and local media commentaries (Keoreng 2004; Vavani 2006; Molefe et al. 2009). Many commentaries have called for a review of corporal punishment regulations and for a change of practice in schools. Corporal punishment is seen as causing huge physical,

emotional and psychological harm to RAD children. Molefe et al. (2009) argue that the Botswana education system has adopted an attitude of silence, reflective of moral indifference on the part of the bureaucrats, towards the plight of the RAD children who are victims of corporal punishment practices. Tshireletso (1997), Letshabo et al. (2002), Tafa (2002), Polelo (2006) and Pansiri (2008) argue that the practice of corporal punishment in the Botswana school classroom shows that the education system was a champion of some learner-unfriendly pedagogies. There is much evidence in this study to argue that corporal punishment contributes hugely to early school withdrawal.

## CONCLUSION

This study identified many in-school factors that contribute to early school withdrawals in RADs schools. The policy of language of instruction encourages teachers' poor pedagogy. Teachers' ethnocentric attitudes of blame-the-victim result in instilling in RAD learners high level of low self-esteem. The attitude of silence or moral indifference and process of cultural assimilation as influenced by the language policy are the key problems. These contribute to pedagogical practices whose consequences include systematic silent exclusion of RAD children from effective learning. Main cases of concern are the use of corporal punishment and their cultivation of low self-esteem on these children. These factors could be mediated through improved language and pedagogical policies and attention to improving teacher education programmes. It is, therefore, advisable for the education system to adopt pedagogical policies and practices that are learner-friendly and sensitive to the culture of RAD communities. It is also necessary that both pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes are improved in order to train and prepare teachers for these not-easy-to-reach remote areas of RADs.

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