

# Improving commitment to basic education for the minorities in Botswana: A challenge for policy and practice

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## Abstract

This paper is part of a study that assessed the level of commitment of primary schools of remote area dwellers (RADs) to basic education between October 2004 and April 2005. The research question focused on the level of commitment of schools to universal basic education, school-community partnership in school governance and parental involvement in the way the curriculum was delivered. Questionnaire and interviews were used. The results show a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions and variables such as district, qualifications, age, location, and experience. There is consistency between teachers' perceptions and children's academic performance. It has been found that learner achievement in RADs schools is low and that parents are not actively involved in their children's education due to the policy environment and school management practices.

*Keywords:* Basic education; School-community partnership; Parental involvement; Botswana

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## 1. Background

The 1948 United Nation Declaration of Human Rights pronounced education as a basic right for everyone. The declaration has since remained a blue print that guides the international community and governments to access educational opportunities for their citizens. Education is seen as "the key to sustainable development and peace and stability...for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century" (Coben and Llorente, 2003, p. 101). The 1990 Jomtein World Education Forum reaffirmed the world's commitment to basic education (Crossley and Watson, 2003, p. 95). To make the commitment achievable, the World Bank called upon governments to

encourage and increase community participation in school governance (Bray, 2001).

Botswana is a sovereign state in Southern Africa. It is a former British colony that obtained self-rule in 1966. It is a multicultural and multilingual society with several ethnic groups, including rural minority groups commonly referred to as remote area dwellers (RADs) (Nyathi-Ramahobo, 1996; Maruatona, 2005). RADs are those groups, the majority of whom are the Basarwa who live in remote areas (Botswana Government/UNICEF, 1995; Tshireletso, 1997).

At independence, Botswana adopted the principle of self-reliance and promulgated a policy of school-community partnership. This policy was meant to encourage parental involvement in school governance. In 1977, Botswana promulgated a new education policy. The policy encouraged the

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creation of educational opportunities for all its citizens. It advised the country to abolish school fees, introduce a daily school feeding programme, and influenced the building of more primary schools in many settlements in remote areas through a scheme known as the Remote Area Development Programme (RADP) (Republic of Botswana, 1977). Following a National Commission of Education in 1993, the 1994 Education Policy was developed. This policy focused on four main issues to improve the provision of basic education, namely access, equity, quality and relevance (Republic of Botswana, 1994). This policy coincided with the country's Vision 2016 that has envisioned the building of "an Educated and Informed Nation", and the implementation of the Education for All (EFA) agenda aiming at achieving universal access to basic education (Gaolathe, 2005).

The school–community partnership policy was redefined by the 1994 Education Policy to read "as much as possible the community should participate in the development and management of education" (Republic of Botswana, 1994, p. 11). This policy emphasised the importance of involving the community, and parents in particular, in decision-making on matters that affect the education of their children. The policy aims "to improve the partnership between school and community in the development of education" (Republic of Botswana, 1994, p. 5).

As a strategy for policy implementation, Parents and Teachers Associations (PTA) are to provide a communication link between the home and the school that the child attends. PTAs provide opportunities for teachers and parents to jointly take decisions on educational issues, including development of school-based policies. As echoed by Harding (1987, p. 69), through PTAs, parents are expected to influence the characteristics and overall aims and objectives of their school.

Both the 1977 and 1994 education policies paid significant attention to the inclusion of the RADs in remote areas in the education programmes. This researcher is of the personal view that the term "remote area" connotes an underclass model (Atkin, 2003) that explains the philosophy of rurality and the minority groups in social development. Rurality refers to the nature of socially disadvantaged groups in informationally and infra-structurally underdeveloped areas. Such rural locations are common in developing countries (Canen, 2003; Jimerson, 2005; Suzuki 2002) including

Botswana (Tshireletso, 1997). Rurality or remoteness also characterises the nature of social exclusion of the people from active participation in socio-economic and political activities driven from the centre. The common features of rurality include: languages used in school that exclude parents and children in the locality; school curriculum that lacks sensitivity to local context; curriculum that holds to monoculturalism and a homogenised view of child identity; education that is open to rejection of cultural diversity; and education system that creates social inequality.

In the case of Botswana, remote area schools are small in terms of enrolment. According to 2003 RADP Report (Republic of Botswana, 2003b) there are 65 RADs settlements with primary schools. In these settlements the medium of communication is through local community languages such as Sesarwa, Sekgalagadi, Seyeyi and Sembukushu, which are not recognised as official and are not allowed either in the school premises, or in the school curriculum. Effectively remote areas are distinguished by their traditional values, which also characterise their socio-economic and political cultures. The distinguishable ethnic minority groups in the RADs settlement are Basarwa, Bakgalagadi, Baherero, Bayeyi, Bambukushu and other non-Setswana speaking ethnic groups who live largely in the Central, North West, Kgalagadi, Kweneng, Gantsi and Southern Districts. These communities are detached from the mainstream of socio-lingual, socio-economic and socio-political activities, due to inadequate infrastructural development, low level of education of parents, minimal opportunities for economic empowerment, and lack of information and knowledge about human rights.

The history of education in Botswana shows that, by the late 1990s, the primary education system was made to realise that 15% of the children of school going age were missing from the school system (Kann et al., 1989). Kann et al. (1989) indicated that the policy on universal access to basic education had not been implemented effectively. The 1991 population census identified that 17% of 7–13 year olds were missing in the school system (Republic of Botswana, 1993). The 2001 census identified that 10% were missing in primary education and a higher percentage was missing in the secondary education (Molefe et al., 2006; Republic of Botswana, 2003a). The majority of the missing children were from ethnic minority populations in settlements in the west regions of the country.

The 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) worked within the framework of EFA and reinforced the commitment of the education sector *inter alia*, towards reducing the growing percentages of non-enrolled children of school going age. The education sector embarked on activities aimed at achieving access, relevance, equity and quality in basic education. Since then energies and resources from both the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Local Government (MLG) are committed to address these issues. The MLG, through RADP, provides infrastructure, educational materials, school uniform, and transport for remote area schools (Koketso, 2001), while the MoE takes care of the teaching staff and school curriculum.

However, the problems of non-enrolment of some RADs children in schools continued. Literature argues that the problems were caused by poverty, distances between school and home, cultural values and negative public attitudes (Bangale, 1995; Botswana Government/UNICEF, 1995; Hitchcock, 1988 cited in Tshireletso, 1997; Mafela, 2002; Republic of Botswana, 2003b).

School–community relationship as a strategy to achieve basic education has not been explored. In my view, the philosophy of school–parent partnership was introduced to the school systems indiscriminately. It does not prove to be working in some places, for example, in boarding RADs schools, where some parents are not accessible. The policy overlooks the cultural diversity of the country and the nature of boarding provided in primary and junior secondary schools for the RADs. Unlike, for example, parents in urban areas, who choose a school for their children (Suzuki, 2002), parents in rural schools have no choice. In the era of decentralisation, commercialisation and privatisation of education, parental choice in urban areas may mean added responsibility and accountability in school governance. In remote areas, a school is an imposition by the central government. Parental participation in decisions about education of their children is limited. Suzuki (2002) illustrates the Ugandan situation of rural schools quite well, where he found that parents only carry out instruction from school authorities without contributing any inputs. From my experience in working with primary schools, the Ugandan rural situation is similar to rural schools set up in Botswana.

The idea of school–community partnership in relation to improving commitment to basic education in schools of the minority in Botswana is not

documented. However, it is logical that while government's commitment to basic education for the RADs is desirable, it is equally necessary to ensure that parents participate in the education of their children.

Given this background, the purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of teachers and parents in RADs schools towards their level of commitment to improve and increase school enrolment, reduce dropouts and improve children's academic performance in pursuance of national commitment to basic education. To focus the study, the following research questions were used:

- (1) Are RADs schools committed to national basic education for RADs?
- (2) Do teachers and parents in RADs schools collaborate in school governance?
- (3) Do RADs schools involve parents in the school curriculum-related activities?

## 2. Focus of the study

This study focuses on three main aspects according to the research questions. First, it investigates how much RADs schools are committed to basic education. Secondly, it explores the degree to which parents and teachers collaborate in school governance. Thirdly and lastly the study finds out how much effort that RADs school management make to involve parents in instructional activities. With this focus the study intends to come up with a comprehensive understanding of how policy and practice could improve commitment to basic education for the RADs in Botswana.

### 2.1. *National basic education for RADs*

The 1977 Botswana Education Policy overlapped with the National Development Plan 5 (NDP5). These two instruments introduced some interventions to facilitate efforts for achieving universal access to primary education. Some of the policies included abolition of school fees and the introduction of the school feeding programme. Consequently, there was rapid increase in school enrolment leading to the expansion of primary school facilities.

During NDP6, the government of Botswana redefined basic education and made it "primary plus two years of junior secondary education" (a nine-year basic education programme) in order

to create more opportunities for pupils to have access to junior secondary education. During the NDP8, basic education was further redefined to cover “seven years of primary education plus three years of junior secondary education” (a 10-year basic education programme). The 10-year basic education programme is concerned with basic learning needs that include acquisition of skills and knowledge, development of attitudes and appreciation of values that are necessary for one to survive and improve his/her quality of life. This trend is in response to Botswana’s need to react to global patterns of development that emphasise the human capital for national development (NDP 7, NDP 8 and NDP9).

The objectives of education during NDP 8 included improving and providing hostels for primary schools where they were needed. In their study, Letshabo et al. (2002) recommended implementation of policies that required the construction of one-to-two teacher schools to service remote areas, and the design and implementation of a well-programmed in-service course aimed at sensitising teachers in remote areas to cultural differences. These recommendations were aimed at doing away with the idea of boarding for RADs. The study also called for the equitably distribution of quality teaching materials and improvement of school infrastructure of the remote schools. As per government policy, inter-ministerial partnership between the MoE and Councils through the RADP department remained a key policy approach. The RADP’s specific function is to manage, coordinate and provide some educational equipment, facilities and amenities over and above the normal provision in non-RADs districts.

The Botswana Government (BoG) and UNICEF made an agreement to cooperate in developing a national basic education programme for children of RADs (Botswana Government/UNICEF, 1995). The aim of the BoG–UNICEF partnership was to increase enrolments, reduce or eradicate dropouts and enhance RADs academic performance. This cooperation attempted to improve instructional settings in primary schools, boarding environment in RADs schools and the development and implementation of pre-school programmes in RADs areas. Projects were carried out in Kweneng, Central, Gantsi and Kgalagadi districts. While these are clear indications of the government’s commitment in the area of providing basic education, the importance of school–parent partnership remains

critical for the success of the government’s efforts. However, little is known about the schools’ level of commitment to ensuring the success of the government’s efforts in the basic education project.

## 2.2. *School–parent partnership in school governance*

Education policies have given much attention to decentralisation with particular reference to widening community participation and parental involvement in school management (Bray, 2001). For example, post-independence South Africa put in place a policy for school governing bodies with a strategy to encourage and guarantee parents school citizen status (Sayed, 1997). The Ghana education policy regards community involvement as a central element of the education system (Pryor, 2005). Most of the West African Sahel countries have adopted the policy of decentralisation and participation as a way of addressing economic constraints and expanding national education systems (Maclure, 1994). Similarly, Botswana’s education policy states that

...Parents Teachers Associations provide an effective forum for schools to keep in close contact with the communities that they serve, and therefore ensure that parents take an interest in, and contribute to the education of their children. Governments will therefore mobilise communities to form PTAs to assist schools. (Republic of Botswana, 1994)

The idea of parental involvement in school governance in Africa as elsewhere in the world is viewed from the context that schooling is a public good and it appeals to all social groups. With this understanding, innovative school leaders would believe that parents will not be helpful if they are ignorant of the school’s expectations. It is argued that “the greater the involvement of parents in schools the stronger their power base in bringing an influence on decision-making in schools” (Sullivan, 1991, p. 101). This confirms the idea that as the spearhead, an effective instructional leader has a “responsibility to ensure that his school has a Parent Teachers Association that is functioning effectively” (Eshiwani, 1993, p. 100).

Research reveals that in rural communities where parents have a low educational background, PTAs tend to be too bureaucratic, dominated by teachers and a few either economically or educationally empowered parents (Maclure, 1994). Such a

scenario affects parents negatively and discourages them from attending PTA meetings. To create effective PTAs, some school leadership identify training needs of parents and orient them to school programmes. For example, Hiatt-Michael (2001, p. 15) said “parent education...is provided to parents by schools and agencies to aid them with parenting skills and developmental, academic, social and health issues of their children”. In Botswana’s case, there are a lot of trained extension workers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that could be used to mobilise and strengthen the School Management Team (SMT) and parent partnership in school governance in disadvantaged communities.

### 2.3. Parents in school curriculum activities

The school improvement literature argues for parental involvement in curriculum activities (Macbeth, 1989). The trend therefore is that school leadership is encouraged to involve parents in curriculum-related activities. Sergiovanni in Blasé and Blasé (1998) says that instructional leaders are pedagogical leaders and have a responsibility to build a learning community. Parents are part of a learning community. Contributions of parents on curriculum matters cannot be overlooked. However, the African context is quite different. In my experience parents in rural areas are largely illiterate and therefore often do everything under the authoritarian of the Ministries of Education and teachers. Yet it has been argued that children from literate and better socio-economic African families tend to do better in classroom work than children from those families where the parents are illiterate and poor (Davison and Kanyuka, 1992; Maclure, 1994; Yongmin, 1994). Davison and Kanyuka (1992) found that in one rural district in Malawi the attitude of parents affected the performance and persistence of their children in attending school. Research also shows that parental involvement in school curriculum activities allows parents to learn strategies of helping their children from the teaching staff, leading to improved learner attainment. Stacey (1991, p. 49) suggested that “Unless [parents] have information, it is not easy to take an active constructive part”. There is, therefore, a relationship between parental involvement and the children’s achievement in the classroom. Innovative school leadership makes sure that school-parent committee members, parents and their children are

fully informed of their responsibility and trends of their children’s education. Dekker and Lemmer (1993, p.168) argue that “The attitude of the parents to education influences the child’s attitude to his school work”. They suggest that for an education system to be effective, it has to mount parental orientations to their duties. They suggest, “the parent must be made aware that his rights in respect of the education of his child only extend as far as the degree to which he realises and practices his duties” (p. 165).

It has been found that economic and socio-cultural background has great influence on children’s classroom performance in Malawi (Davison and Kanyuka, 1992) and in Botswana (Letshabo et al., 2002). Letshabo et al. (2002) recommend the creation of a child-friendly school particularly in remote areas. They argue that a child-friendly school “creates opportunities for parents to play a role in the teaching and learning processes” (p. 18). To build a child-friendly school, one begins with the creation of an effective home-school relation. According to research, such a relation improves the child’s academic achievement. It improves the child’s attendance in school. It improves the child’s behaviour. It also improves community support for the school activities (Dekker and Lemmer, 1993; Stacey, 1991).

Given the effort and level of attention that Botswana government attaches to rural development, there is also a reason to expect schools for the RADs to be equally active in driving the education development goal. Against this backdrop, the study wanted to determine RADs’ school perceptions towards the level of commitment, collaboration and partnership that the SMTs and parents have established for school effectiveness.

### 3. Methods

The research used a mixed method approach, that is, quantitative and qualitative designs. Mixed methods have been used because they meet the desire to compare and describe (Rallis and Rossman, 2003), hence the approach of this study to compare and describe situations in the sampled districts and schools using various variables. Data were collected from teachers through a questionnaire. In addition, fieldwork was carried out where interviews were conducted and data collected from parents and teachers in remote schools. During the fieldwork, on-site observation of school hostels was

made. The teachers from 31 schools (62% of the initial plan) were selected from five districts, namely Gantsi, North West, Central, Kweneng and Kgalagadi. These participated in the study through questionnaires. At each school, sampling methods of cluster and simple random sampling (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Seaman, 1997; Bryman, 2001) were utilised to select teachers and parents. In this way, a minimum of seven teachers in each school was selected to fill in the questionnaire.

A sample of 10 schools was used in interviews. These included three schools (two boarding and one day school) in North West district, two boarding schools in Kweneng district, four schools (two boarding and two day schools) in Gantsi district and one boarding school in Central district. Focus group interviews were held. These were made up of SMT members, boarding staff and parents, some of whom were either current or former members of the PTA and/or the village development committee.

Data from the questionnaires were computed and analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. It was then analysed statistically through the analysis of variance (ANOVA) to arrive at a meaning. Graphs were also generated from the data to help in understanding the relationships between variables used in the study. Descriptive data from interviews are used to establish a narrative position and to express views and feelings of participants (Bogdan and Beklen, 1998). Quotations from informants are used to illustrate issues as they emerge in the discussion, and to complement the interpretation of data from the SPSS.

Records of Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), a national examination for primary school leavers, were also analysed. The results were used to explore the relationship between the performance of districts and schools with the perceptions of teachers and parents.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

##### 4.1. Demographic data

The study drew its respondents from 31 schools out of a total of 65 RADS school in the country. At an average, RADS school has seven teachers each except for boarding schools which would have more. This study involved an average of six teachers per school and eventually involved 208 teachers from five districts that have RADS schools. The

choice of the districts' and schools' samples was based on the size of population of RADS schools. Most respondents came from North West and the lowest respondents were from Kgalagadi districts. The distribution of respondents were 27.1% from North West, 20.6% from Central, 20.1% from Gantsi, 18.6% from Kweneng, and 13.6% from Kgalagadi districts. Of the total of 208 respondents, 40% were male and 60% were female teachers.

The 69% of the respondents were teachers whose age ranged between 20 and 33 years old. The next age range included teachers who were between 36 and 49 years of age. The study involved 6% respondents who were 50 years of age.

In terms of qualifications, 5% held Degree in Primary Education, 50% held Diploma in Primary Education, 34% were Primary Teaching Certificate holders and 11% were untrained and inexperienced temporary teachers. The diploma holders were largely newly recruited teachers from the teachers' training colleges whose teaching experience ranged between one and three years. Certificate and degree holders were those whose teaching experience was more than 10 years. This shows that over 50% of teachers in remote schools were less experienced in teaching.

The study revealed that 70% of the teachers in remote area schools neither spoke nor understood the language that their pupils spoke at home. This finding is similar to what was found by Tshireletso (1997) in a Diphuduhudu settlement in Kweneng District where none of the teaching staff came from the local community. Tshireletso (1997, p. 182) concluded in his study that teachers "lack understanding of the life culture and even belief of the minorities". The scenario confirms Le Roux's (2000) observation that teachers in remote schools served as agents who helped the government in facilitating integration of minority groups into the dominant cultural societies of Botswana.

##### 4.2. Commitment to national basic education

The ANOVA was used to determine the views, perceptions and experiences of teachers. It indicated that there were significant differences in the teachers' views towards schools' commitment to National Basic Education by district, and by their length of stay in a particular school or experience in teaching.

There was a significant difference in the level of commitment among the five districts involved in the

study. In rank order, the Gantsi Districts with the mean value of 3.00, followed by North West with the mean value of 2.99 and Kweneng District with the mean value of 2.60 had the lowest level of commitment to national basic education. In terms of the mean value, all districts were equally committed to the provision of national basic education. However, the comparatively higher level of commitment in Gantsi district is also reflective of the higher performance in the PSLE as shown below. The four primary schools (GA, GB, GC and GD) in Gantsi district show a consistent performance that is slightly higher than the schools in other districts. This is consistent with Figs. 1a–c on the pattern of PSLE performance in A and B pass between 2002 and 2004. Even then, performance is quite low since it averages consistently below 30% in A and B scores against the national average range of 30% and 33% between 2003 and 2005 (Republic of Botswana, 2005). However, as Figs. 1a–c show, schools in Gantsi district are consistently doing well.

These 10 schools were visited by the researchers. Interviews, observations and analysis of the schools performances were made, and the results are indicated in Figs. 1a–c. The Gantsi schools were GA, GB, GC and GD. The North West schools were NA, NB and NC. The Central district had only one school that was visited and this was CA. The Kweneng Schools were KA and KB.

Teachers' length of stay in the same school was used as a variable to determine their commitment to basic education. The study assumed that despite their length of stay in a particular school, teachers would have the same level of commitment to national basic education. However, the ANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference in the level of perceptions of schools' commitment to national basic education according to the respondents' length of stay in a particular school. Those that were less than a year (4.4%) in their school presented a mean value of 3.27. Those above 10 years (7.8%) presented a mean value of 3.20. These two groups of respondents perceived the level of commitment to national basic education as high. The 1–3 years group (43.2%) presented a mean value of 2.87, 4–6 years (30.1%) with a mean value of 2.70 and 7–10 years (14.6%) presented a mean value of 2.98. Thus, these perceptions on commitment to basic education at school level were lower. The difference could be due to the fact that the newer teachers had not yet realised what was to be gained from the school system. The more experi-

enced teachers were likely to be those in higher positions of responsibility and were likely to be protective of their positions.

### 4.3. SMT and parents partnership

Achieving universal access and retention to basic education depends on the partnership between schools and their larger community (Republic of Botswana, 1994). One critical factor for school effectiveness is the relationship between the school and the community. The study wanted to determine the level of partnership between the SMT and parents in remote areas. It would be expected that all schools have similar approaches to school governance, in which case, SMTs would be expected to strengthen school–community relations by involving parents either as individuals or through bodies such as PTA. However, the study revealed that the perceptions of teachers of remote schools towards school–community partnership did not differ according to gender, qualification and level of responsibility. Instead, there was a significant difference in teachers' perception towards SMT–parent's partnership by district. The perceptions of SMT and parents partnership were higher in the North West district with a mean value of 2.70 and were lower in the Kweneng district with a mean value of 1.96. These mean values suggest that teachers' perceptions towards SMTs and parents partnership in school governance were generally not very high in remote schools.

While it was expected that teachers would have similar perceptions towards SMT and parents partnership in school governance, the study revealed that there was significant difference in the teachers' perceptions according to their age. The mean value of those in the age range of 36–49 years old was higher at 2.57; followed by those who were above 50 years with a mean value of 2.51. The age group between 20 and 35 years showed a mean value of 2.20, therefore reflecting less concern with parental involvement in school work. This could be suggestive of the fact that older teachers, the majority of whom held positions of responsibility, might have accumulated reasonable experience in the field of teaching and school management, making them keen on working closely with parents. The younger teachers had not gained adequate insight in the area of school management to appreciate the value of parental involvement because the mean value did not suggest a stronger

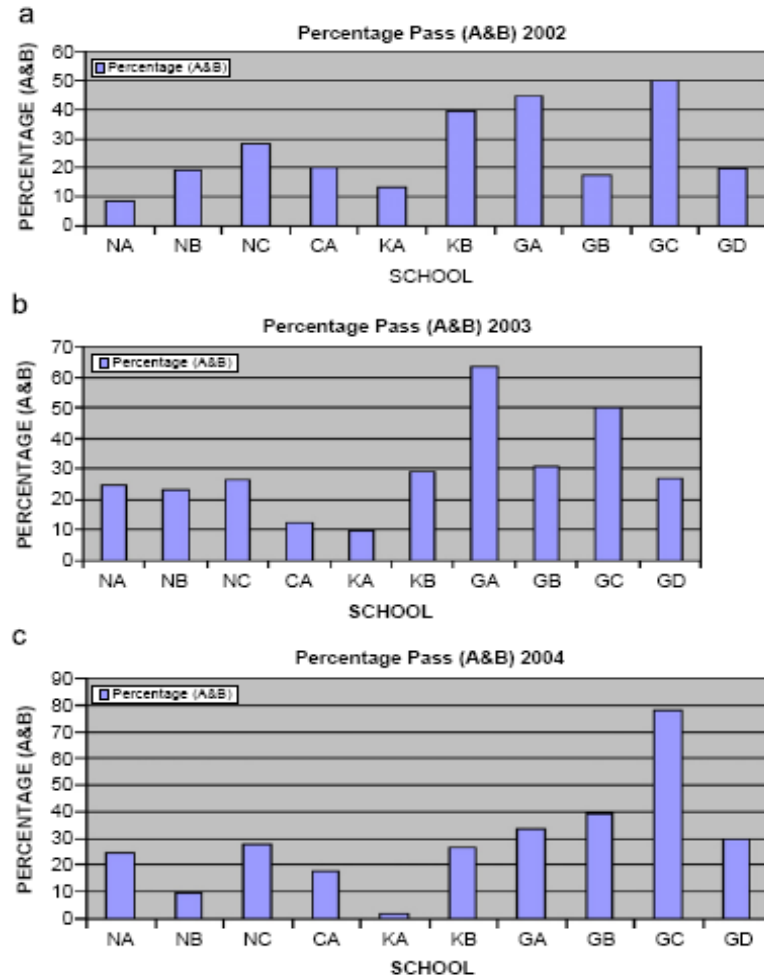


Fig. 1. (a) The 2002 percentage pass in A and B grades. (b) The 2003 percentage pass in A and B grades. (c) The 2004 percentage pass in A and B grades.

concern for parental involvement in school governance.

It was anticipated that teachers would have a similar perception towards SMT and parental partnership in school governance. However, the study revealed that teachers' perceptions differed according to their length of stay in a school. The teachers with a tenure of 10 years and above in a particular school appreciated the value of SMT and parents' partnership in school governance. This was indicated in their mean value of 2.70. Those with 1–3 years in a particular school showed an average mean value of 2.14.

Partnership between parents and SMTs in school governance was low. For example, 90% of the respondents indicated that parents did not participate in decision-making on the school calendar. This means that the SMTs were scheduling the school calendar without the involvement of parents. This approach of the management may not accommodate the expectations of parents. In another variable, 61% of the respondents said that parents did not participate in framing of rules on school attendance. Some studies have identified low participation of parents in school governance in rural African communities (Maclure, 1994;



Yongmin, 1994). The bureaucratic type PTA governance is dominant in remote schools.

An interesting finding was that 66% of the teachers said that they were uncertain as to whether parents ought to participate in framing rules on the management of school's finance. This is indicative of a communication gap that exists between the school management and the teachers.

A majority (77%) of the respondents said that they were not certain if parents participated in decisions related to management of corporal punishment or matters of discipline in their schools. Teachers did not seem to know the role of parents in the management of pupil's behaviour. However, some of the parents interviewed expressed regrets on the use of corporal punishment by teachers. "Teachers are cruel on our children, they beat them severely" and "Teachers insult my children" were some of the comments from parents interviewed. Another parent in another school said, "Our teachers use vulgar language to our children". In yet another school parents gave an example of a physically disable boy of Standard II who, they claimed was beaten by the class teacher and eventually, the child ran away from school.

In one school, parents cited an example of a child of Standard V who consumed potassium permanganate in an attempt to commit suicide, claiming that he did not want to be taught by a certain teacher who was allegedly ill-treating him. In the same school, the relationship between teachers and parents was reported by both parties as sour. There were indications that some parents felt intimidated by teachers as echoed by Macbeth (1989), hence their minimal participation in school activities.

Cooperation between the school and the community was said to be very low. While on one hand, the school-community relationship remained poor, on the other, the PSLE consistently showed pupils' low achievement. For example, Figs. 2a–c show that schools consistently achieve only around 12% A and B passes in the PSLE each year.

Most of the respondents (66%) said that they were not certain if parents in their school were involved in the selection and purchasing of the pupils' school uniform. This might be influenced by the fact that children in RADs schools were supplied with clothing and other needed school requisites by the local authority through RADP.

The study shows that school management and parents in remote areas were not working together, despite the fact that they needed each other if the

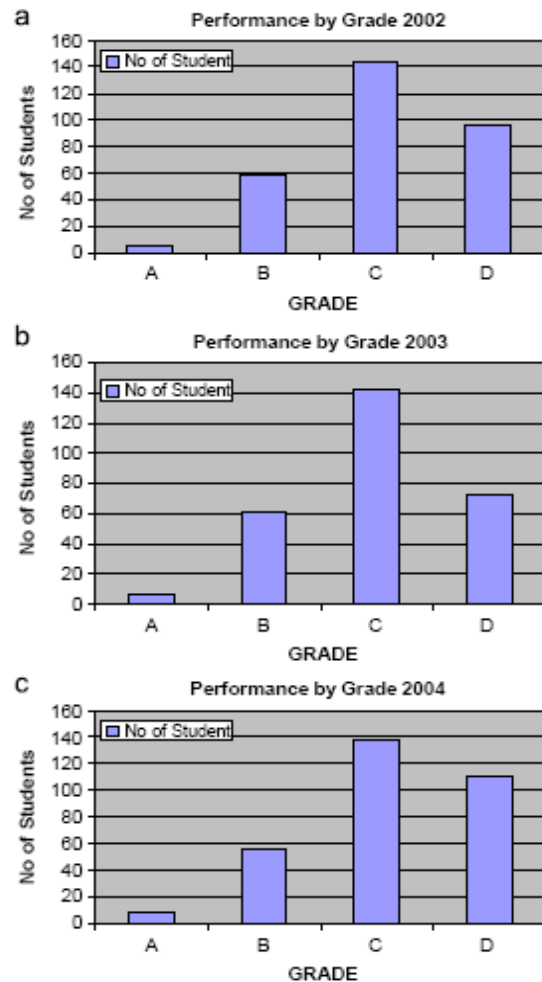


Fig. 2. (a) The 2002 PSLE results for 10 schools. (b) The 2003 PSLE results for 10 schools. (c) The 2004 PSLE results for 10 schools.

schools were to be effective. It is evident from the study SMT in remote schools were doing too little to bring parents into school governance structures, where they would arrive at some decisions on education development jointly. Parents were at the periphery of the school level decision-making arena.

#### 4.4. PTAs level of contributions in schools

In each school there was a PTA committee. When interviewed PTA members mentioned that their role was to raise funds for the school. They did not have

scheduled PTA meetings. In all cases, PTA executive committees met as and when the school heads asked them for a meeting. In all the districts, a PTA was only concerned with issues that relate to non-boarding children.

On their responsibilities in recruiting and admitting children into their schools, PTA members did not know if they were required to assist the school in the exercise. In KA School, the vice-chairperson of PTA said, “We do not know what we are supposed to do; we must be trained on our duties”. This was a clear indication as Lontos (1992) discovered that parents felt inadequate and only played a passive role in school activities. PTAs played no role in helping schools to reduce absenteeism and late coming. PTAs were also not assisting schools to reduce dropout rates in schools. This was also confirmed by 68% of the respondents who said parents did not participate in helping the school to develop rules that reduced dropout. PTAs did not participate in helping the schools to manage disciplinary cases, including the use of corporal punishment. PTAs did not get opportunities where they visited schools specifically to interact with children on academic issues. PTAs were not involved in cases related to children’s pregnancies.

In NC school, one parent said, “PTA represents us in school meetings”. The PTA felt that parents did not have to go to the school because members of the PTA represented them. In KA school some parents said, “Matechere baitse gore sekwele ke sa bone” meaning “teachers know that the school is theirs”. These were clear testimonies and indications that some parents had very little knowledge on the role of the PTA and that of a parent and child in school. It was evident that the school management did not involve parents in the framing of school rules and in the development of school policies. There were no school-based written policies developed jointly by teachers and parents on strengthening the delivery of basic education in any of the visited schools. It was apparent that SMTs lacked the skill on how to develop school-based policies to guide their operations. Parents and PTAs were marginalised as far as school governance was concerned.

#### 4.5. *Teachers–parents partnership in school curriculum*

The study assumed that the principle of partnership between parents and teachers was a key

component for achieving national basic education. However, the results revealed a  $p$ -value of 0.006 of the significant difference in teachers’ perception of partnering with parents in curriculum delivery, according to the duration of one’s stay in school. The teachers who had more than 10 years of teaching experience (7.8%) presented a mean value of 2.87, while those between seven and 10 years (14.6%) presented a mean value of 2.70. Those having between four and seven (4.4%) years of experience in teaching, presented a mean value of 2.74. The staff with less than four years of experience (43.2%) presented a mean value of 2.34.

These findings suggest that most of the teachers (one to six years of teaching experience) felt the lack of parental involvement in activities relating to the delivery of the school curriculum in their schools. On the contrary, a few (those with over seven years of experience in teaching) suggested that there was parental involvement. This suggests that, overall, parental involvement in remote schools was inadequate. Teachers are not collaborating with parents in curriculum-related activities.

As suggested by data, there was a significant difference in the teachers’ perceptions towards the level of their partnership with parents in curriculum delivery, district-wise. Given the  $p$ -value of 0.01, the study revealed that the Gantsi and North West districts were higher than Kweneng. The teacher’s qualification was a significant variable that influenced how the respondents perceive parents and teachers partnership in curriculum delivery in remote areas. This was illustrated by the  $p$ -value at 0.003 significance level.

The degree holders who were 1.5% of the respondents presented a mean value of 1.90. This meant that they perceived parents and teachers partnership as quite low. The diploma holders, which made up 50.5% of the respondents, presented a mean value of 2.34. Like the degree holders, this category of teachers perceived the partnership as minimal. The certificate holders, which made up 34.8% of the respondents, presented a mean value of 2.47, which also suggested that the partnership was low. On the other hand, untrained teachers, for example, Cambridge school certificate level holders who made up 7.4% of the respondents presented a mean value of 2.98, which suggested that there was partnership.

The overall picture suggests that the better qualified teachers had a better understanding of

the importance of a partnership between parents and teachers in curriculum activities.

The study revealed that parents did not help their children to take care of their books. This was revealed by 78% of the respondents who said that parents did not help children to take proper care of the books they use at school. Regarding parents participating in teaching through activities like story telling, 92% of the respondents said parents were not forthcoming about it. As to whether teachers used stories about children's homes, 16% of the respondents said they were not certain, while 37% said they did not use stories from parents at home. This could have two implications; it could mean that teachers' methods of instruction were not learner-centric. It could also mean that since these were teachers in schools that were largely in non-Setswana speaking areas, they experienced difficulty in communicating with their learners on home experiences. Similarly, 35% of the respondents said they did not involve parents in pupils' homework. Another 24% of the respondents said they were not certain about the strategy of involving parents in pupils' homework. This was also reflected by 36% of the respondents who said that they did not give pupils homework which involved interviewing members of the community. Another 24% also said that they were uncertain of their methods of applying learning through school outreach approaches. This raises a question over the justification of a policy of curriculum that is monoculturalistic and eventually excludes parents from participation in their offspring's school.

Figs. 2a–c illustrate the degree of children's achievement in the PSLE in the three years as A, B, C and D grades. The data show that between 2002 and 2004, only five schools produced a total of 12% of A and B grades. From the primary school leavers who progressed to junior secondary education, 88% had obtained C and D in the PSLE.

The Figs. 2a–c show that RADs children's learning achievement is concentrated on C and D grades. A variety of reasons to explain the problems were advanced. For example, 70% of the respondents said that their school did not involve parents in developing a reading culture in pupils. Parents were not encouraged to assist pupils in reading or in visiting either classroom libraries or mobile ones where they existed. There was very little that motivated pupils to want to read in most of the remote schools, as schools did not involve parents. The situation in RADs schools reflected what was

revealed by Lam (2004). This minimal parental involvement could be used as an explanation for the low level of performance common in remote schools. Furthermore, lack of parental involvement in hostels combined with lack of educational and recreational materials for boarders contribute to low motivation of pupils.

On a related matter, 81% of the respondents reported that parents in their schools did not participate in decisions that encouraged pupils to do homework. Homework was seen as a business of the school alone. SMTs were doing very little to mobilise parents to develop interest in what children did at school.

The problem of homework was observable among all children or boarders in schools with hostels, who had no one to assist them in their homework. Parents were not available to assist or encourage their children to learn. Hostel staff was not helpful due, *inter alia*, to their low educational background. Indeed, Dekker and Lemmers (1993, p. 165) have indicated that "educational responsibility of parents cannot be transferred". Thus the hostel or boarding staff could not effectively play the educational role that parents would otherwise have had to perform. In addition, hostels had no lights, resources, equipment or educational materials such as books or play materials at their disposal.

Educational tours and excursions are necessary learning inputs, particularly for the learners from the less resourced areas. Despite this, 60% of the remote schools visited had not undertaken any educational tour to places of educational interests away from their schools since their inception. Other than sporting and club activities, pupils in these schools were only confined to their locality.

## 5. Summary and implications

This section summarises briefly the findings and the discussion of the study. The summary is also drawn from the context of the study and related literature. The emerging issues and their implications for both policy bureaucrats and teachers are pointed out.

The analysis of the demographic data shows that most of the teachers in remote schools are young and less experienced and hold diploma or certificate qualifications. The education sector recruits untrained teachers whose academic levels are junior certificate and general certificate of secondary education for remote schools. A majority of the

teachers in the remote schools could neither speak nor understand the mother tongue languages of children they taught. The teacher's characteristics have obvious effects on their teaching and the resultant low learner achievement.

While it is argued that "parental cooperation with the school is a fundamental democratic and pedagogic necessity for a healthy system of public education" (Dekker and Lemmer, 1993, p. 165), children in hostels are isolated from the society. They lack support and attention from their teachers. Community leadership organs such as PTA and VDC have nothing to do with them. The boarders do not have access to their parents even in times of need, such as when they are ill or when girls start menstruation. This condition exposes the boarders to social and psychological frustration because they do not belong to anybody other than the untrained and less educated boarding staff members who also do not seem to cope with the workload nor have any skill to meet the needs of boarders. Conditions in some of the hostels are too poor for human habitation and pose danger to children's health. The situation in 2005 is as bad as it was found by Letshabo et al. (2002) in 2001. The hostels do not have any educational materials or equipment or facilities for the children.

Partnership between SMTs and parents on school governance in remote areas is weak. PTA committees do not know what they are expected to do. Unfortunately, no one takes the responsibility to orientate parents on their expected roles and duties in remote schools. As such, PTAs and parents in remote area schools do not actively participate in or support the government's effort towards achieving the goals of national basic education. Like in other African contexts (Davison and Kanyuka, 1992; Maclure, 1994; Yongmin, 1994), parents in RADs schools do not perceive themselves as significant partners in the education of their children. The school heads dominate the management system and marginalise parents in a variety of ways from the school systems. This confirms Maclure's (1994) and Suzuki's (2002) arguments that bureaucrats have a tendency of dominating decision-making processes and marginalise parents because of their low educational background. The teacher-parent partnership in curriculum activities is weak in all remote schools. The SMTs do not mobilise parents to assist teachers in instructional activities. This also confirms Lontos's (1992) view that teachers' and school administration's lack of commitment to parental

involvement becomes a barrier to parents' active participation in the education of their children. Parents are not involved in homework. Dekker and Lemmer (1993, p. 165) observe, "In the absence of [parental] responsibility, genuine parenthood and education is impossible". Learners in most of the remote area schools lack genuine parenthood and this is a major concern affecting boarders.

Communication systems between schools and communities in remote areas schools are weak. As Nyathi-Ramahobo (1996) and Maruatona (2005) observe, language is a barrier to effective communication between teachers and parents in RADs schools because as identified by earlier studies (Tshireletso, 1997; Le Roux, 2000), the teachers do not understand the language that is spoken in the communities they teach. The teachers are not trained and do not get adequate support regarding teaching Setswana as second and English as third languages at the same time. As a result of inadequate teaching skills, the system promotes children from infant classes to upper primary classes before they acquire the basic literacy skills. Schools are not competent enough to develop a reading culture. Consequently, learner achievement in remote schools is low, so that between 2002 and 2004, 88% of children progressed to secondary education with C and D pass grades.

The use of corporal punishment is rampant in schools despite the fact that the education policy is against the practice. Teachers still favour the use of cane or stick to instill discipline and enforce learning. Unfortunately, the system of corporal punishment is acceptable as a tradition of moulding the behaviour of children as per Botswana laws (Molefe et al., 2006). There is a possibility that teachers take advantage of this traditional understanding to engage in illegal and unrecorded use of corporal punishment, yet some RADs communities do not accept its use on their children.

As summarised, the study reveals a number of issues that have implications for policy, practice and further research. The problems of boarding, language, teacher training in multicultural education and teaching of second and third languages are policy matters that need further interrogation. At school level, SMTs face a challenge to improve instructional leadership, mobilise and motivate parents, empower teachers to help learners in hostels with homework and control indiscriminate use of corporal punishment. The policy issues such as monoculturation of the school curriculum,

language as medium of instruction, use of corporal punishment and RADs hostels need to be studied further by both researchers and policy makers. The one-to-two teacher school policy, which is not yet implemented, could be explored. These factors are emerging issues for further investigation and research. The factors militate against government's effort towards providing basic education for the children of remote areas in Botswana.

## 6. Conclusion

Notwithstanding the issues for further research, the study reveals some interesting findings. Perceptions of teachers suggest that there is a low level of commitment to national basic education in remote schools. Comparatively, teachers in Gantsi and North West districts feel that their schools are committed while those in Kweneng district are of the view that their schools' commitment is very low. Relatively, the PSLE results between 2002 and 2004 show positive correlation between PSLE and district level of commitment because Gantsi and North West schools do better than Kweneng schools in the academic attainment. However, the length of a teacher's stay in one school influences their perception of the level of commitment to national basic education. For example, the less experienced and newly transferred teachers to the schools feel that their communities are less committed to national basic education, while those who have more than 10 years of experience in teaching feel that the commitment is better. On the other hand, teachers' length of experience influences the way they perceive parental involvement in school management. Those who have more than 10 years experience feel that parents are not actively involved in the school management systems, while the newly recruited do not feel strongly about it. Qualification also influences the teachers' perception of parental involvement in curriculum activities. Degree holders have very strong desire for parental involvement in their teaching. Diploma holders are the next, followed by the certificate holders, and then the untrained ones. This suggests that the higher the qualification the more the teacher understands the need to work with a parent in his/her teaching.

Finally, the study does not provide readymade answers or clear-cut solutions to problems of less commitment to national basic education for children in remote area. It, however, raises issues upon which lessons for both policy and practice could be

drawn and better strategies explored to improve the current situation in remote schools.

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