Why We Drop Out of School: Voices of San School Dropouts in Botswana

Eureka B. Mokibelo

Communications and Skills Unit, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Among San communities in Botswana, the rate of student disengagement from both primary and junior secondary school is an ongoing concern for educators. San learners leave school at all levels of primary and junior secondary education. Students who leave school have tended not to provide reasons as to why they are dropping out. This study investigated some of the reasons why San learners decided to drop out at primary and junior secondary school levels in the Central District in Botswana. In-depth interviews were undertaken with 20 former students living in five cattle-posts where the participants worked as cattle herders. The results indicate that some San drop out of school for reasons of survival, both within and outside school. The findings of the study offer insights into some of the issues that impede students within San communities in achieving their educational goals. Further, the findings could assist educational authorities in their review of current educational practices in Botswana so that that all citizens can be appropriately accommodated within the education system.

❚ **Keywords:** San, disengagement, remote areas, cattle-posts

In 2004, the Government of Botswana announced in the Millennium Development Goals Status Report that from 1995–2000 the estimated enrolment rate for children aged from 7 to 13 years was consistently above 95%, and peaked at 100% in 1999 and 2000 (Government of Botswana & United Nations, 2004). However, recent studies have shown that dropout rates have increased, especially in primary and junior secondary schools in Remote Area Dweller Settlements (RADS). These schools are attended mostly by San children who reside at residential hostels built specifically for those students who live far away from school. In these communities it has been found that between 17 to 25 students drop out of school each year for various reasons (Mokibelo, 2008; Mokibelo & Moumakwa, 2006). According to Polelo (2004), there were 5,349 students who left school in the year 2000, and in 2001, 5,253 students dropped out. In the same study, 1,713 students dropped out of junior secondary school in 2000 and 1,776 dropped out of school in 2001. Polelo's (2004) study further indicated that girls were more likely to leave school. This issue remains a clear challenge for policy makers, stakeholders, educators and the broader public (Monyatsi, 2009).

The 1994 *Report on the Revised National Policy on Education* (RNPE) found that most learners in RADS dropped out of school for various reasons, including socio-economic and cultural differences (Republic of Botswana, 1994). A further review of the RADS program in 2003 found that pervasive ethnic discrimination often resulted in the emotional abuse of remote area children at school that consequently led to some abandoning their schooling (Greener, 2003). As Hunt (2008) has noted, school dropout is a process that needs to be understood because of its relevance for educational policies, as well as for achieving both national and international educational goals.

This study was conducted in primary and junior secondary schools attended by San students, and initially focused on teachers' speculations about the reasons for this high rate of dropout. The San learners had left school without communicating the reasons for their departure, and teachers were left to reach their own conclusions about the reasons for these students dropping out. The reasons for high dropout rates provided by the teachers included: loss of interest in school; negative attitude towards school; and parents' lack of formal education and, as a result, parents' failure to encourage their children to complete their education. While giving insight into the teachers' own perspectives on students dropping out, these could not provide a complete analysis of the many and multifaceted

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Eureka B. Mokibelo, Communications and Skills Unit, University of Botswana, Private Bag 0022, Gaborone, Botswana. Email: mokibeloeb@mopipi.ub.bw.

reasons informing the students' decision to leave school. Interviews were then undertaken with San students who had left school at various stages and who were working or residing in the cattle-posts as cattle herders, to determine some of the reasons for their disengagement from school. Although the Education for All goals launched in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 emphasised that education is the right for every child of school-going age, the high school dropout rates in San communities continues. Even though enrolment in schools has significantly improved, some learners still do not complete their education at different levels of education for various reasons, and children who disengage from school before completion of the program remain missing in most aspects of Botswana society — academically, socially, economically, and politically.

Background Information

Botswana is a landlocked country situated in Southern Africa. It shares borders with Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia. It has a population of 2,024,904 (Population and Housing Statistics, 2011, p. A1). It is a multilingual country with about 28 spoken languages (Batibo, 2005; Molosiwa, 2005). At independence in 1966, there was no clear policy regarding the medium of instruction in schools. The understanding was that English, the official language, would constitute the medium of instruction. Due to the low qualifications of teachers and their lack of proficiency in English language, the use of Setswana was tolerated in lower grades; hence, there was code-switching (i.e., the practice of moving back and forth between two languages) by teachers, between Setswana and English (Republic of Botswana, 1977). In 1974, 8 years after independence, the first president appointed a commission to assess the entire education system and make recommendations for implementation. The commission recommended a transitional model of bilingual education. The recommendation was that Setswana be used as a medium of instruction for the first 4 years of primary schooling, with a switch to English at Standard 5.

In 1992, the second president appointed a further commission to reassess the education system and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, with a view to forging a way forward into the next millennium. The commission recommended the reduction of the number of years schools used Setswana as a medium of instruction from 4 years to 1 year, and argued that the previous policy denied students the opportunity to master English, which was needed for examinations, further education and work (Republic of Botswana, 1994). English is valued because it exposes learners to the language of technology, social mobility and globalisation (Nyati-Ramahobo, 2004). In 2000, the resulting policy adopted the use of Setswana at Standard 1, and English is taught as a separate subject. At Standard 2, English becomes the medium of instruction, and Setswana is taught as a distinct subject. English then remains the primary mode of instruction through to tertiary level. Current policy and practice fails to place any formal value on teaching or instructing in minority languages as there are currently no requirements for their inclusion. As a result, the current policy disadvantages learners from ethnic minority groups who speak different languages other than Setswana. These students must go to school and learn, what would be to them, a second language (Setswana), and by the second year are required to learn their third language (English). These students inevitably struggle with the content and structure of the two languages of instruction.

Despite the recognition of only two languages in formal education, ethnic groups have continued to use their languages. For example, the Naro language Project in D'kar is supported by the Netherlands Christian Reformed Church (Hays, 2006, p. 26). The main task of the project is to translate the Bible into the Naro language and teach people to read and write Naro, regardless of the learners' education status. The Kamanakao association's main focus has been on the production and publication of materials in Shiyeyi, and these materials are used to teach children and adults to read and write the Shiyeyi language (Hays, 2006). There is also a substantial literature in the Ikalanga language, with the purpose of promoting and preserving Ikalanga. Through the Society for the Promotion of Ikalanga Language, the Bible was translated to Ikalanga (Hays, 2006). The Bakgalagadi are also printing some literacy materials for reading and writing in the Sekgalagari language. These are some of the developments in various languages of the country in cognisance of their languages and cultures.

Brief History on the San

At a conference held on Mother Tongue Education in 2005 in Gaborone, Botswana, the terms *San*, *Bushmen* and *Basarwa* were used interchangeably depending on the context and preference of the speakers (Hays, 2006, p. i). The San groups affiliated with The Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) contested the terms *Khoe* and *Khoesan* and prefer the term *San* (Hays, 2006, p. i). It is for this reason that in this article, *San* is used to mean the *Basarwa* in the Central District. The term *voice* is used to mean 'what the San themselves say about the reasons for leaving school'.

The San in Botswana are a small minority group that is disadvantaged academically, politically, economically, and socially. Although the San are known to be historic hunter gatherers and nomadic, in the Central District the San have been affected by political, educational, economic and social changes of society, and they have taken advantage of such changes. For example, most of the San are herders of cattle and some stay in small villages with government provisions. The San are scattered throughout the country, with a population of about 50,000 (Batibo & Tsonope, 2000). Their traditional economy has been eroded over

many decades by loss of land and access to important natural resources (Nguluka & Gunnestad, 2011). Most of the San live in rural settlements and/or cattle-posts owned by their employers. The cattle-posts are where farmers rear cattle and livestock, and are normally located in remote areas on the outskirts of villages and towns. The historical low respect for San people has created a stigma on their ethnic identity and this has caused a reduction in their self-esteem and further poverty in their lives (Saugestad, 2001). The socio-economic dependency of the San on government provisions and facilities has pushed them to the far end of society.

The San who participated in this study live in the Central District of Botswana and on the outskirts of Serowe village, at cattle-posts and other small villages in close proximity to Serowe. They speak Kua and Tshwa, and a few individuals speak Xaise (Hasselbring, Segatlhe, & Munch, 2001, p. 129), but most of the children are neither proficient nor competent in their ancestral language, Tshwa, or Setswana, which is widely spoken in the area. For example, Hasselbring, Segatlhe, and Munch (2001, p. 121) point out that as a second language, Setswana is the one that is spoken and understood by most people, but proficiency in Tswana, even among those who have attended upper primary or secondary school is, in many cases too insufficient for individuals to engage in higher levels of discourse. Setswana is widely spoken in the surrounding villages and cattle-posts. However, the San languages have no lingua franca in various areas of the Central District, due to their geographical spread. Although the distance between villages and cattle-posts could be around 40–100 kilometres, the languages the San speak are distinct.

San children drop out of school at different levels of education, from primary schooling to secondary level. For example, at Motshegaletau Primary in 2005, in Standard 1 classes, 20 children dropped out. The number dropped slightly in Standard 2 classes when about 17 learners dropped out. Although the enrolment might start with about three classes in Standard 1, by the time they complete primary education at Standard 7 level, half the students who enrolled at Standard 1 would have dropped out. In 2008, at a junior secondary school that admits learners from the same primary school, it was reported that between 17–20 San children dropped out of school every year (Mokibelo, 2008). Comparatively, in the Ghanzi District (Nguluka & Gunnestad, 2011, p. 11) the enrolment rate of San children in primary education is the lowest, and many children drop out in Standard 1. The dropout rates in some primary schools in Ghanzi are 30%. The high dropout is across levels from Standards 1–7 (Nguluka & Gunnestad, 2011) and the high dropout rate is a serious problem because it impedes the achievement of educational goals and means some learners cannot proceed to tertiary education. The high unemployment rate is increased because of unskilled manpower and the lack of self-development and growth. Further, such learners can-

not effectively contribute towards the development of the country; instead, they eat into the government's money for poverty alleviation. This study investigated the reasons for students' dropping out to gain an understanding of the cause of the problem.

Review of the Literature

In Botswana, Polelo (2004) conducted a study in four community junior secondary schools in Kgalagadi District to explore why learners drop out of school. Polelo argued that there were multiple reasons why learners disengage from school, including poverty, child labour, corporal punishment, resistance to school rules, and language barriers. However, this study did not explore the perspectives of the students themselves, but relied on the perspectives of teachers, students who were not dropouts, matrons, and boarding masters. In another study conducted in South Africa, the researchers (Fleisch, Shindler, & Perry, 2012) found that family structures, disability, children whose mothers had died, children living in rural communities, and the poor were significantly affected by low enrolment and high dropout rates. This study was conducted through a community survey and Statistics South Africa dataset. However, although the study was not focused on San communities, it also shed light on why some learners were not even enrolled in school or dropped out, which negated the *South Africa Schools Act* that requires every child to attend school up to the ninth grade. In Ghana, Ananga (2011) conducted a study in two educational circuits in the Central Region of Ghana. The participants were selected from two rural schools, and the study also identified student dropouts who had returned to school. Ananga (2011) found out that students dropped out of school for economic needs, critical events in their lives, and difficulties with learning at school. Of significance in this study was that Ananga gained the perspectives of the student dropouts, including those who previously dropped out and returned to school, to access first-hand information on why they had disengaged from school. Chung and Mason (2012) conducted a study in a junior secondary school in Northeast China on why primary school students drop out in poor, rural communities of China. They argued that the problems originated from parents' illiteracy, differences in the distribution of cultural capital among villagers, a curriculum with textbooks full of concepts foreign to the village children, teaching methods that expected teachers to change but who resist change, and a lack of teachers to accommodate students' diverse interests. Shah, Amir, Akhtar, and Din (2011) conducted a study to find out if there was a class trend of dropout rates in government primary schools in District Mardan in 2005–2006, using questionnaires on sampled dropouts, their parents/guardians and school head teachers. The results revealed the difficulties learners go through that eventually lead to students dropping out,

FIGURE 1

(Colour online) Map of Botswana showing the different districts.

including unattractive teaching methods, teachers using harsh punishment, ill health, poverty, extreme weather conditions preventing children from attending school, and child labour opportunities. These studies indicated a trend in the reasons why learners drop out of school. It is also important to hear the voices of former students who have dropped out to explore why they disengaged in school.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach to investigate why San learners drop out of school. The main aim of the study was to inform the government on why there is a high dropout rate for San learners. The study focused on why San learners dropped out of school. Hence, participants were asked the following questions: (1) What were the reasons for dropping out of school? (2) At what level did you drop out of school? (3) How do you think the issues you have raised could be addressed for you to go back to school? The participants were given pseudonyms for confidentiality.

The map of Botswana (see Figure 1) shows the area of study and the main districts of Botswana shaded in different colours. San people are found in eight out of nine

districts. The Central District is where this study was conducted, and it is one of the largest districts in Botswana with a population of 180,500 (Population and Housing Census, 2011). The study was conducted at cattle-posts where some of the San in the Central District are found. These cattle-posts are on the western side of Serowe, which is the main village. Cattle-posts in Botswana are areas where farmers keep their cattle and livestock on the outskirts of villages and towns. The distance from the cattle-posts to Serowe is about 40 to 70 kilometres and the distance between the cattle-posts is 8 kilometres.

The San school dropout participants were living in cattle-posts where they were working as cattle herders, or staying for an extended visit. The cattle-posts, such as Moitshopari, Nxanakau, Mogabaladi, Kuatshepe, and Palamakue, were chosen on the basis of their close proximity to the Remote Area Dweller (RAD) school where the original study was conducted from 2005–2006. A total of 20 participants (11 females and 9 males) aged between 15–45 years who had dropped out of school were invited to participate in the study. Because previous research indicated that females were more likely to drop out than males (Letshabo, 2002; le Roux, 1999; Polelo, 2004), the study focused more on female participants. The study involved

school dropouts from Standards 1 to 7 at primary school, and Forms 1 to 3 at junior secondary school. Because the study was a follow-up to the original study, participation was first negotiated orally with the participants. Participants were then given consent forms to sign. A brief meeting was then held during the first visit with the participants about the implications of their involvement in the study. All the participants agreed to engage in an interview instead of filling in a questionnaire because it had been some years since they left school.

Interviews are a form of specific human interaction in which knowledge evolves through dialogue (Kvale, 1996, p. 125). An initial interview and then follow-up interviews were conducted with each participant. In-depth interviews lasted for 40 minutes with each participant and were conducted in the Setswana language, which was the language preferred by all participants. A tape recorder was not used because the participants tended to be quite sensitive and shy, and it would have been a distraction. As a result, information was recorded by hand and follow-up questions were used.

The information collected was read and reread to participants to ensure their meaning had been accurately captured. Each participant provided more than one reason for dropping out of school. The information was then sorted and analysed into themes and subthemes that frequently emerged from the study. For validity and reliability purposes, the data was also given to a colleague to interpret the different answers recorded in the interviews. Since the study was only conducted in the Central District and was limited to a few cattle-posts, the results are not representative of other San in other districts.

The Results of the Study

The interviewees dropped at various levels of primary school. At Standard 1, only one participant dropped out (5%); at Standard 2, two participants dropped out (10%); at Standard 3, three participants dropped out (15%); while at Standard 4, four participants dropped out (20%). At Standard 5, two participants dropped out (10%); at Standard 6, three participants dropped out (15%); and at Standard 7, two participants dropped out (10%). The results are presented in percentages in the pie chart shown in Figure 2. According to the chart, most of the participants dropped out in the middle levels of primary schooling in Standards 3, 4 and 6, while an insignificant number dropped out in Standard 1. At Standard 7, two students dropped out. At junior secondary school level the dropout rate was one at each level.

Reasons for Dropping Out of School

The reasons why learners drop out of school vary (see Figure 3). Speaking English was the main barrier cited by participants. Corporal punishment was the second barrier, with 50% of the participants highlighting it as a problem
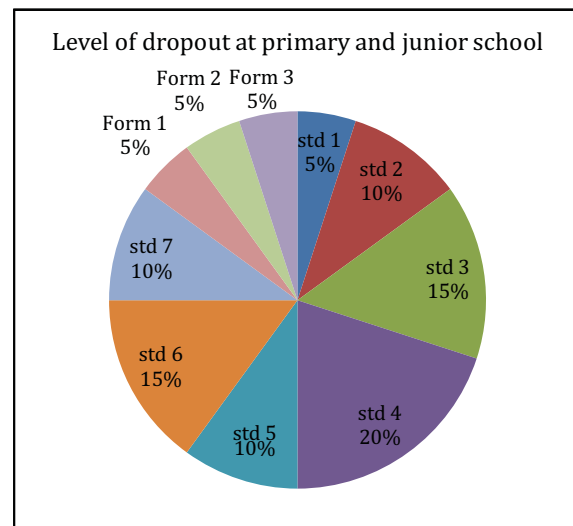

FIGURE 2
(Colour online) Level of dropout.

that drove them away from school. Marriage was mentioned by 10% of the participants, and all of these participants were women. Abusive employers (often termed 'masters' in Botswana) were mentioned by 15% of the participants, which involved two male and one female participant. Inhabitable hostel conditions were also mentioned by 40% of the participants, especially female participants. Conflict of cultures was another problem discussed (40% of the participants). Homesickness was mentioned by 10% of the participants.

Discussion of Findings: Reasons for School Dropout

Dropouts differed dramatically across levels of education from primary to secondary schools. For example, at primary school, there are seven levels from Standard 1 to 7 and the participants ranged from across levels. At junior secondary, the participants ranged from Form 1 to 3. The times when the participants dropped out were different throughout the academic year. At Standards 1–4, the participants dropped out mostly because of abuse at the hostel, rather than from the language barrier. Those who dropped out from Standards 5–7 mostly noted the language barrier and other reasons, such as abusive employers. The students who dropped out at secondary school expressed different reasons for dropping out that included marriage, corporal punishment, language barriers and the long school duration from primary to secondary school. More than half of the participants also expressed that among other reasons that had contributed to their dropout, they were not performing well academically.
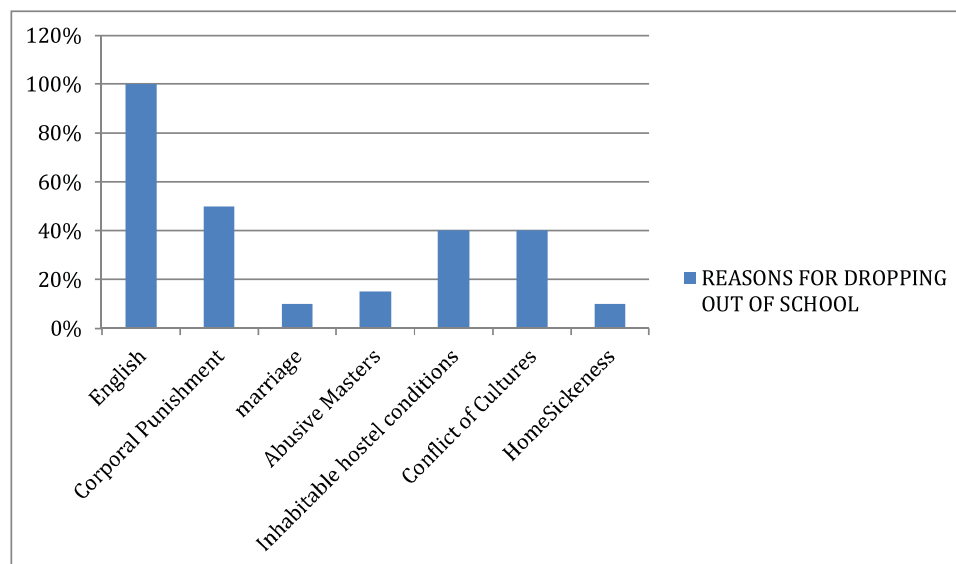
FIGURE 3
(Colour online) The reasons for dropping out of school.

Language of Instruction

Without exception, all participants raised the critical issue about English as the language of instruction and the difficulties they had with this. According to the Revised National Policy on Education (Republic of Botswana, 1994), Setswana is used as a medium of instruction at Standard 1 while English is taught as a subject. However, at Standard 2, English is used as a medium of instruction across subjects while Setswana is taught as a subject. This situation does not favour ethnic groups such as the San and other ethnic minorities who start school speaking only their home languages. The learners struggle with Setswana at Standard 1, and when they are still struggling with the structure of Setswana, a foreign language, English, is introduced. Further research is needed to find out how English is taught and with what strategies and learning styles. It is reasonable to conclude that the teaching and learning styles may not be appropriate for the San learners. It is not that these learners do not want a formal education: the fact that they left their homes to go to school and the fact that some stay within school systems for some years indicates that they have a drive to learn, but struggle with the language of instruction.

Chebanne (2002) and Batibo (2005) have observed that English acts as a significant barrier for San students because it is so different from the San language. Further, some of the characters used in the San language do not appear in a normal computer keyboard. The learners pointed out that they sit in the classrooms without understanding; they cannot communicate in the target language and they cannot express themselves in English, and hence they find no reason to sit in the classroom when they cannot benefit from the education system. Other researchers have also indicated that San learners cannot cope with English being used as the language of instruction (e.g., Bagwasi, 2005; Bolaane & Saugestad, 2006; Hays, 2006; Ketsitlile, 2009; Mafela, 2010; Mokibelo & Moumakwa, 2006). In other countries, researchers have also identified language as a barrier for understanding concepts (e.g., Banda, 2000; Broom, 2004; Kioko & Muthwli, 2001; Kyeyune, 2003; Pavlenko, 2003). Drong (2009), from Bangladesh, argued that it is impossible to increase literacy rates among ethnic minority groups if the government cannot introduce education in ethnic minority groups' mother tongue.

Corporal Punishment

Data from this study indicated that excessive corporal punishment at school and by employers at home contributed to a high dropout rate for San students. For example, according to the participants, corporal punishment was applied for various reasons such as being late for school, not providing the correct answers, not communicating in English, and one of the female participants said sometimes they did not even understand why they were beaten. A female participant pointed out that she ran away from school because their science teacher beat them during a science lesson. The participant believed that science was difficult as a subject; it was taught in English and also used technical language. However, if they did not provide appropriate answers they were beaten on the buttocks, palms, and head. The participants were quite emotional as they expressed their stories about beatings. At another cattle-post, a male student who had dropped out showed a damaged thumbnail that resulted from the corporal punishment at school. Consistent with this argument is Shah et al.'s (2011) study, where the researchers found that students had dropped out due to teachers' harsh

punishments. Although it was not clear what these harsh punishment involved, beatings can be classified as a harsh punishment. Such beatings can contribute to low motivation and absenteeism of students from school, and eventually lead to desertion. If the reason for dropping out of school is corporal punishment then it should not be administered in school. The learning process should not be regarded as a punishment; otherwise it may not achieve the intended goals of learning.

In informal education in San homes, parents do not teach their children by beating them; instead, they nurture their learning and understanding of concepts. Parents educate their children at home using different styles that suit their children; the schools should be even better than this, rather than being abusive environments for learning. Another important point to note is that corporal punishment is allowed in the traditional law (*kgotla*), but in schools it has to be administered according to regulations. For example, corporal punishment may be administered by the school head with a stick that is one centimetre wide and one metre long. Only three lashes are allowed. Also, girls are not supposed to be beaten on the buttocks, but on the hands only. When the punishment is administered, there must be a witness (*Education Act, 1976*). However, the law seems to be overlooked, because learners are punished many times during the day, by anybody, and on the wrong parts of the body. The other issue that is not clear is whether the learners should be punished for not knowing the answers or providing wrong answers.

Abusive Employers

From the analysis of the data, being abused by a parent's employer also contributed to the students dropping out from school. Two females and one male reported that their parents' employers moved them from the cattle-posts where their parents were working as cattle herders to the village to stay with the employers, as they started school. Some ran away from the cattle-posts because of verbal and physical abuse from their parents' employers. According to a female participant, the parents' employers constantly reminded the students that they were San. Such a statement carries the stigma of being 'a nobody' among the so-called majority groups of Botswana. According to this participant, she was expected to do housework until midnight. The employer's children would be sleeping or doing their homework while she was doing the household duties. One of the female participants showed a scar on her thigh where she had been beaten at night because she had not finished her assigned tasks. The female participant said: 'We were expected to pound corn or maize, fetch water from a distant water standpipe, fetch firewood, cook and wash the plates and pots. If we delay coming home after school, we were lashed.' Such practices eventually led students to desert school. A male participant painfully indicated the extent of abuse by pointing out that sometimes their blankets would be taken away so that they had to sleep wearing their clothes only. Further, they were not allowed to go to school if the employers wanted them to do other household duties. The above grievances demonstrate the stigmatisation, unfair treatment and abuse of human rights the San students encountered. This type of abuse reflects issues of slavery in Botswana. Further, the type of life the participants lived in their parents' employers home conflicted with the simple life they lived previously with their parents. Intervention is needed into the abuse experienced in these contexts.

Inhabitable Hostel Conditions

Violence at the hostels was cited by a significant number of participants who stayed at a hostel. Five female participants and three male students reported deserting school because of the physical and sexual abuse that occurred in the hostels, day and night. According to the participants, the violent practices that occurred at hostels were not reported either to the matron or the school administration. However, even when cases were reported to the matron, no action was taken. One of the female participants reported: 'Other students used to beat us for no good reason, it continued until I left school. I could not bear the beatings anymore.' Some participants reported that sexual abuse also occurred, at night and during the day. 'In most cases we never told the matron because we were shy and afraid to do so,' reported one participant. Other female participants reported that if they refused sexual advances, some students teamed up against them and beat them. Participants reported that the violence took place at night when students came from drinking spots and were under the influence of alcohol. For example, one participant noted: 'It could happen that we sleep late at the hostel due to harassment, physical abuse and sexual abuse and therefore wake up late for school. When we arrive at school, we were beaten at the gate for coming late. In addition, we would sleep in class, and if the teacher sees us, she/he beats us for sleeping in class.' The sexual abuse of vulnerable students was often done by students who were unaware of the risks of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. This issue needs to be addressed with care and sensitivity. The conditions of such hostels contradict a supportive learning environment that is supposed to enhance learning.

Conflict of Cultures

Another issue raised by participants was the conflict between San and school cultures. All the male participants reported they were beaten by teachers for smoking. According to the participants, in their culture they are allowed to smoke tobacco, but at school smoking is a taboo. One participant said, 'I remember when I had asked for permission to go to the toilets to smoke and when I came back the teacher beat me up because she could smell the tobacco from my breath and clothes.' The participant said because he could not hide himself anymore and would

want to smoke many times during school hours, he had to leave school. On the other hand, what would make students want to smoke several times during lessons? Could it be stress from corporal punishment or from not effectively learning, due to inadequate English language skills? Ryan (1998) argued that it is important to learn about the students' cultural background since this could help to harmonise classroom learning. Culture cannot be separated from students' lives (Samovar & Porter, 1995). This was also acknowledged by Polelo (2004), who noted that students were punished for being on the wrong side of the law. In our study, 55% of the participants said that due to excessive beatings they would be afraid to enrol their children at school. Because of the conflict of cultures, some children have never attended school.

Marriage

Marriage was one of the reasons stated by female participants for dropping out of school. Of eleven female participants, two pointed out that they left school because they thought it was time for them to settle down with their partners. These two female participants left school at primary school level when they were between 9–13 years. One participant said, 'My partner used to come and pick me up at the hostel and he was getting tired of the exercise and therefore I decided to leave school to stay with him. We have six children now.' The other participant noted, 'In our culture if a woman does not have a partner she is regarded as an outcast. It is important to have a partner of your own.' Participants argued that the school timetable was too long and as a result other cultural issues suffer, hence they preferred to leave school and address the issues that most affected their future.

Possible Solutions to the Reasons for Dropping out of School

Research conducted by Bolaane and Saugestad (2006), Hays (2002), le Roux (1999), and Ketsitlile (2009) has indicated the necessity of introducing mother tongue education for the benefit of the San communities. However, using the mother tongue is a controversial issue. Which mother tongue would be appropriate in this case, when there are about 17 distinct San languages in Botswana? These are issues that complicate mother tongue education in most African countries.

On the issue of corporal punishment, the participants suggested that teachers should stop beating learners, especially if they do not have the language to express themselves. According to the participants, they were beaten not because they did not know the answers, but because they did not have a language to express themselves. One of the participants noted, 'Due to corporal punishment at school I am afraid to register my children for primary education in case they go through the same kind of punishment.'

Concerning the issue of marriage, the female participants pointed out that the school program is too long and hence they should be allowed to drop out of school and settle with their partners. The participants said that in their culture if they waited too long for a partner they would be regarded as outcasts in their communities. This means the participants compromised their education to fulfil their cultural obligations. Regarding abusive employers, the participants argued that their parents should not allow them to stay with parents' employers in the villages. The participants claimed that the employers wanted them to serve as housemaids because that was the main job they were doing, rather than going to school.

According to the participants, hostels should be closely monitored and supervised to identify abuse; they suggested this would reduce the students' fears, anxiety and frustration, and also reduce the dropout rate. The hostels have been seen as inhabitable, especially for young learners and newcomers at primary school, due to violence. Hostels are also a contributing factor to the high rate of school dropout because learners are separated from their parents. These students and those who were separated from their parents to stay with their parents' employers suffered socially, emotionally, physically and academically. This suggests that there are links between separation between the child and the parents that drives learners away from school.

Conclusion

The participants' views on why they drop out that emerged from this study provide insights into the gaps and challenges of the current language-in-education policy and the adverse environment that San learners are exposed to in schools. The Botswana education system drives away some San learners from school and hence they often fail to complete their education. Further, it necessitates further research into the classrooms to see how English is introduced and taught as a foreign language to learners who start school with different home languages from the school languages. The reasons for school dropout given by participants differed significantly to what teachers thought caused the dropouts. Teachers believed that learners drop out of school because of a negative attitude towards school and a loss of interest in school, and yet there are other issues that are overlooked by the teaching and learning process, such as social factors. A number of studies have shown multiple factors lead to a high rate of school dropout in various countries. In this study, some of the reasons raised for disengagement are unique to the Botswana situation, including learners being abused by their parents' employers, and marriage. However, the results show a common trend observed in other countries, that students drop out of school due to corporal punishment, cultural conflict, language barriers, unsupervised school hostels, and a lack of tolerance from other ethnic groups. However, this study

has unearthed issues that cannot be ignored by policy makers, stakeholders, educational authorities and researchers, especially if they are to achieve the national and international educational goals that task every nation with making sure that all children, despite their ethnic groups, should have the opportunity to complete their education.

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About the Author

Eureka B. Mokibelo is a language educator at the University of Botswana. Mokibelo's publications focus on issues in language education, teaching pedagogy, and ethnic minorities' social and academic concerns at both primary and secondary schools of Botswana. She has written books for secondary school level learners in literature and the teaching of the Setswana language. Currently, she is pursuing a doctoral degree in language education on the implementation of the Botswana language in educational policy.