

**Learning support: perceptions and experiences of remote distance
learners from marginalised communities in Botswana**

**by
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DEDICATION

For my wife, two sons and my mother – For the moral support, understanding, love and friendship, which inspired me to undertake a transformational journey in my lifetime.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ADEA	Association for Development of Education in Africa
AERA	American Educational Research Association
BEC	Botswana Examination Council
BGCSE	Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education
BOCODOL	Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning
CKGR	Central Kalahari Game Reserve
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
CSC	Community Study Centre
DE	Distance Education
DEASA	Distance Education Association of Southern Africa
HSB	Human and Social Biology
ICT	Information and communication technology
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
LMC	Learner Management Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
RADO	Remote Area Development Officer
RLA	Remote Learner Advisor
RNPE	Revised National Policy of Education
SAIDE	South African Institute of Distance Education
SSBM	Small Scale Business Management
TGLP	Tribal Grazing Land Policy
UB	University of Botswana
UK	United Kingdom
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria



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ABSTRACT

This study pertains to the provision of learning support to remote distance learners from the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities in Botswana who enrolled for a secondary school-leaving certificate. The purpose of this case study was to document these learners' perceptions and experiences of learning at a distance and to improve service delivery. The literature on distance learning support emphasises the importance of making learners' voices audible as these help gauge the efficacy of learning support. The study was informed by an interpretive paradigm using a mixed-methods approach and is underpinned by Holmberg' theory of conversational learning (2003). Qualitative data methods collection involved semi-structured interviews, journals, document analysis and observations while a questionnaire provided nested quantitative data. Data sets were triangulated and trustworthiness was enhanced by using Atlas.ti® for qualitative analysis and SAS version 8 software to generate percentages. The key findings showed that distance learners exhibited high intrinsic motivation and 72.1% of them were satisfied with the learning support provided. This substantiates that learner motivation remains a key attribute for successful distance learning in any context. However, policy and managerial flaws did frustrate and unintentionally disadvantage these remote distance learners. Despite their adverse circumstances positive perceptions and experiences were exhibited where learners had access to personalised academic and affective support from empathetic tutors. Implications for practice include policy reviews, ODL staff training and adoption of best practice. A needs assessment to establish learner needs, expectations and aspirations is critical for the design and development of relevant learning materials, and for the delivery of quality learning support to enhance the academic experience of remote learners from marginalised communities. Recommendations may be applicable in other underdeveloped distance learning contexts. Topics for further research exploration in learning support, policy and curriculum issues have been suggested.

Key words: Developing country, Distance learning, Experiences, Instructional dissonance, Learning support, Marginalisation, Perceptions, Remote distance learner, Transactional presence.