

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

**by
Godson Gatsha**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES**

**Department of Education Management, Law and Policy
University of Pretoria
SOUTH AFRICA**

**Supervisor: Dr Rinelle Evans
January 2010**



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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Rinelle Evans, for her exceptionally supportive role, interest and dedication throughout my study. Her encouragement and professional expertise greatly inspired me.

I am grateful to Daniel R. Tau, for his exemplary academic and leadership achievements. He has been a role model and a mentor. His principle of growing leaders at BOCODOL has been a great source of inspiration. I thank BOCODOL Kang Regional Centre staff, for their unwavering support throughout my study. I am also grateful to all colleagues at BOCODOL as a whole for taking interest in what I was doing. I am grateful to BOCODOL management for allowing me to study whilst working full-time as this provided me the opportunity to apply immediately what I was learning.

I also owe gratitude to all my research participants at Kang, D'Kar, New Xade and Inalegolo, for their time, engagement and interest in my study. Without your participation, it would not have been possible for me to make this contribution.

I extend my gratitude to Jonathan Jansen, whose intellectual expertise and thought-provoking engagement in the initial phase of my PhD training prepared me well for my journey. I thank the University of Pretoria for the financial assistance at the time I needed it most. I am also grateful to colleagues for engaging and encouraging me at every turn: Monty Moswela, Tichapondwa Modesto, Tichatonga Nhundu, Gabriel Kabanda and Setshego Phiri. I am grateful to Chalusa Elarm, Ingrid Booyesen and Joel Rapinyana for their computer skills when I needed help. I am grateful to Rina Owen, the statistician for her superb assistance and to Liz Archer for assistance in using Atlas. ti®. I am very thankful to Joan Fairhurst for the kind assistance in language matters and encouragement. I am grateful to all my friends I have not listed here due to space; I know you were very supportive.

To my wife, Catherine, my mother, my sons - Dumiso and Ayanda and my brothers, I am grateful for your support, prayers and love. I am more than privileged to have you around me. Finally, I am grateful to the Almighty God for His love, grace, protection and for enabling His people to assist me in achieving my academic goal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	viii
ADDENDA	ix
DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP AND COPYRIGHT WAIVER	x
ABSTRACT	xi
Chapter 1 Overview of the study	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Brief contextualisation of the study	2
1.3 Rationale	3
1.4 Explanation of key terms	7
1.5 Scope of the study	11
1.6 Research design and methodology	12
1.7 Anticipated research constraints	14
1.8 Outline of study	15
1.9 Conclusion	16
Chapter 2: Marginalised Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities in context	
2.1 Introduction	18
2.2 Geographical and social context of marginalised communities	18
2.3 Marginalisation of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities	28
2.4 Conclusion	36
Chapter 3: Literature review	
3.1 Introduction	38
3.2 The provision of education to marginalised communities	39
3.3 Open and distance learning (ODL)	41
3.4 Theoretical frameworks underpinning distance learning	43
3.5 Learner support and learning support in distance learning	47
3.6 Factors that influence perceptions and experiences in distance learning	50
3.7 Learning support experiences in developed and developing contexts	52
3.7.1 Learning support experiences in developed contexts	53

3.7.2 Learning support experiences in developed contexts	58
3.8 The nature of learning support at Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL)	60
3.9 Conclusion	60
Chapter 4: Research design and methodology	
4.1 Introduction	67
4.2 Research paradigms	67
4.3 Research process	70
4.3.1 Pilot study	70
4.3.2 Participants	71
4.3.3 Research sites	72
4.3.4 Role as the researcher	74
4.4 Data collection strategies	75
4.4.1 Ethical considerations	75
4.4.2 Research tools	76
4.5 Data analysis	80
4.6 Trustworthiness	82
4.7 Conclusion	83
Chapter 5: Presentation of data and analysis	
5.1 Introduction	85
5.2 Learners' perceptions and experiences of learning support	85
5.2.1 Learners' reasons for enrolling	85
5.2.2 Learners' conceptualisation of learning support	87
5.2.3 Learners' expectations of learning support	89
5.2.4 Learners' perceptions and experiences: biographical data	90
5.2.5 Learners' perceptions and experiences: of learning support	97
5.2.6 Learning support: cross-cutting curriculum issues	122
5.2.7 Learners' perceptions and experiences: academic achievement	126
5.3 Discussion of findings	133
5.3.1 Transition	134
5.3.2 Transactional presence	135
5.3.3 Tension	137
5.4 Summary: main findings	140
5.5 Conclusion	142



Chapter 6: Significance and implications of study

6.1 Introduction	143
6.2 Overview of study	143
6.3 Significance of study	146
6.4 Implications for policy and practice	148
6.5 Recommendations for further research	156
6.6 Conclusion	158
REFERENCES	160

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	ODL scenario	43
Table 3.2	The foci of the three distance education theories	47
Table 4.1	Difference in foci between positivist and interpretivist paradigms	69
Table 4.2	Research sites (2007)	73
Table 4.3	Interview guide	78
Table 4.4	Summary of strategies for trustworthiness	83
Table 5.1	Level of satisfaction: face-to-face support	99
Table 5.2	Weekly tutorial attendance at Kang during October and November 2005	107
Table 5.3	Weekend tutorial attendance during November 2006	107
Table 5.4	Level of satisfaction: mediated support	111
Table 5.5	Assignment submission by 23 rd May 2007	115
Table 5.6	Distribution of exit exam scores with respect to BGCSE	127
Table 5.7	Academic achievement at Kang site 2003 -2006	127
Table 5.8	Academic achievement at satellite learning centres 2003 -2006	128
Table 5.9	Learner progression after BGCSE	131

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Map showing Botswana and the research study sites	19
Figure 2.2	Traditional shelter at D'Kar	24
Figure 2.3	Traditional shelter at New Xade and a pit latrine	25
Figure 2.4	Traditional dance during the 2006 Kuru cultural festival	26
Figure 2.5	An elderly woman playing a traditional game during the Kuru cultural festival in 2006	27
Figure 2.6	Cattle at New Xade given by government	27
Figure 3.1	Decentralised learner support system	63
Figure 3.2	Community study centre's activities	64
Figure 3.3	Satellite learning centre's activities	65
Figure 5.1	Perception by gender	92
Figure 5.2	Perception by age	93
Figure 5.3	Perception by location	94
Figure 5.4	Perception by language most widely spoken	96
Figure 5.5	Learners' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with learning support	97
Figure 5.6	2005 Kang region examination achievement compared to urban centres 2006	129
Figure 5.7	2006 Kang region examination achievement compared to urban centres	130
Figure 5.8	2007 Kang region examination achievement compared to urban centres	130
Figure 6.1	Learning support network strategy	154

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

ADDENDA

1 Sample of learners' achievement	183
2 BOCODOL regional offices	186
3 Letter of permission to register for PhD	187
4 Letter of permission from host institution to carry out research	188
5 Ethical clearance letter	189
6 Consent letter for participants	190
7 Questionnaire	191
8 Interview guide	194
9 Study leave letter	195
10 Learner Charter	196
11 Sample of journal entries	197
12 Sample of assignment submission figures	198
13 Letters of former learners	199
14 Photographs of learners and tutors	201
15 Reflection on the research journey	210

**DECLARATION of AUTHORSHIP
and
COPYRIGHT WAIVER**

I declare that this submission is my own work and that it has been written in my own words. All citations from published or unpublished works have been acknowledged in text and referenced in full.

I understand that all rights with regard to intellectual property in the work vest in the University of Pretoria who has the right to produce, distribute and/or publish the work in any manner deemed fit.

My supervisor and I agreed that, subject to the authorisation of the University as owner for all intellectual property rights in this work, the approved version may be placed in the UpeTD archive (<http://upetd.up.ac.za/ETD-db/>) with the following status:

Release the entire work immediately for worldwide access.

I certify that this version of the work is the same as that which was approved by my examiners and that changes to the document as requested by them have been effected.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

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.