Chapter 1   Overview of the study

1.1   Introduction

Traditionally, students enrolled for modules offered via distance education have at least a fixed abode and a postal address. They may even have access to learning support through a telephone or by visiting a learning centre close to where they live. But, for example, how would Gcagae Xade - a descendant of the first people of the Kalahari Desert, living a nomadic lifestyle in a very remote area of Botswana - cope with the demands of learning at a distance? It is learners like Xade who captured my interest while I worked as a regional manager of Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), responsible for the provision of learning support in settlements that are both remote and underdeveloped. During 2003 and 2004, I encountered poor academic performance and a low level of course completion by distance learners enrolled for Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE). Annually some learners did not sit for their externally administered end-of-course examinations and those who took their examinations attained poor 'E, F, and G' grades, they achieved less than 50%. Few attained 'C' grades meaning they achieved between 50% and 59% (*see Addendum 1*) This puzzled me as the provision of learning support is well established and aims to reduce the academic challenges faced by distance learners. However, the academic performance and through-put of BOCODOL distance learners at BGCSE level is generally inadequate compared to other programmes like Small Scale Business Management (SSBM), despite the provision of learning support in various modes. My study specifically explores the perspectives and experiences of Basarwa and Bakgalagadi distance learners in Botswana with special reference to learning support and is guided by the following critical question:

> *How do distance learners from marginalised communities perceive and experience learning support?*

I have endeavoured to make audible their voices by documenting their views on the efficacy of learning support in underdeveloped regions.

1.2   Brief contextualisation of the study

Since the 1960s Botswana's correspondence education has been similar to that of Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The similarity in the development of distance education in these countries could be because they are all former British colonies that adopted the British education system. However, in Botswana, distance education was only effectively introduced after 1998 when the Distance Education Unit at the Department of Non-Formal Education was transformed into the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL). The transformation was necessitated by the desire to expand access to and improve the academic performance of distance learners through the provision of effective learning support systems. Although situated in Gaborone, the work of BOCODOL is decentralised through a network of five regional centres and 90 learning centres that are strategically located across the country. The Kang Regional Centre that I managed for six years is one of the five regional centres (*see Addendum 2*) and is located in the western part of Botswana, an area inhabited by marginalised communities, namely the Bakgalagadi, Basarwa[1], BaHerero and Coloureds. Basarwa communities now live in very remote settlements since the government relocated them from the wildlife national parks. The government of Botswana prefers to refer to the Basarwa as 'Remote Area Dwellers', a term that is inclusive of other communities living in distant areas but some Basarwa do not accept this description.

The main resource in these remote, underdeveloped settlements is land albeit arid and sparse and these marginalised communities, commercial farmers and the government's Department of Wildlife, share it. This semi-desert area has a very low and unreliable rainfall (250 mm per annum), generally inadequate for cultivation. The land use policy adopted before independence in 1966 led to the creation of settlements, villages, national parks, game reserves and wildlife management areas. This forced change in territory has led the Basarwa - traditionally a nomadic people - to adopt less mobile ways of living while keeping domestic animals and working on farms. To a limited degree, they do still carry out their hunting and gathering activities as part of their subsistence survival but this occurs on a restricted scale as official hunting licences are now required. The settlements are located faraway from service centres and have limited employment opportunities.

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[1] The term Basarwa means more than one. For singular, we say Mosarwa. Whilst some Basarwa do not mind being called Basarwa, others prefer to be called 'Bushman' as this signifies their attachment to the land they call their ancestral territory, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) Other prefer to be called the San.

Despite limited employment, each settlement has a primary school and a health post built by the government. Communities have free access to these amenities. For instance, children attend school at no cost and the government provides school uniforms and feeding for all children at school. All households identified by government social welfare officers are provided with food rations every month and are at times engaged in the food for work programmes within their villages or settlements. The Basarwa communities that moved out of the game reserve and wildlife management areas were given at least five head of cattle or fifteen goats by government. However, some community leaders and international non-governmental organisations, have over the years, contested this scheme as they felt it interfered with the lifestyle of the Basarwa, a people for whom hunting was a significant activity.

In terms of secondary schools, the western part of Botswana has only two that are amongst the 28 senior secondary schools offering the Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) subjects. The schools are run by government. Young adults in the area who fail to get a place at any of these senior secondary schools after completing junior secondary schooling are restricted as far as proceeding to high school is concerned. A number of them end up enrolling at BOCODOL. The enrolment fee for those identified by social workers as poor is either paid for by the local government authorities or some non-governmental organisations. Obtaining an academic qualification is viewed as an opportunity for breaking the cycle of poverty. The out-of-school youths and adults in this area fervently believe it opens up the possibilities for employment in urban areas. Their academic performance and record of completing courses is poor percentage-wise (%), despite the claims of learning support. The reasons for poor academic performance and low completion rates remain speculative with no supportive empirical evidence. Their perceptions and experiences of distance learning support have not been documented. I shall endeavour to render their voice as clearly as print permits.

1.3   Rationale

Between 2002 and 2005 there were 497 enrollees from the 25 satellite learning centres in the Kang region and only 54 managed to complete their courses. Of the 443 remaining, only 132 were active and 311 were inactive in their studies (BOCODOL Kang Regional Office, 2005.) It is in the light of the low rate of completion and the overall poor BGCSE academic results despite the provision of learning support that I became motivated to undertake this study. My professional interest lies in acquiring an in-depth understanding of how Basarwa and

Bakgalagadi distance learners who have enrolled for the BGCSE, perceive and experience learning support in terms of its potential to enhance their academic performance.

From my experience as a regional manager from 2002 to 2007, I observed that the Remote Learner Strategy Consultancy Report (Lelliot, 2002) has not been transformed into a College policy document. It is still in its original state of being a consultancy report. It is this document that is meant to guide the delivery of learning support to distance learners in remote areas including those from marginalised communities. The strategy does not make any mention of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi despite their uniqueness. It is carefully worded and avoids being specific about any group and explains the term *remote learners* as

> *… within the context of the whole of Botswana, remote learners should be considered as falling on a continuum from those who are remote, isolated and inaccessible to those who are accessible but have no access to a community study centre (CSC)…"* (Lelliot, 2002:6).

The report assumes that learners from the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities fall at the extreme end of the continuum, which is remote, isolated and inaccessible (Lelliot, 2002). Whilst the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi fall within the said continuum, the report is meant to apply to all distance learners in the same way, disregarding the fact that the needs of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi at Inalegolo are different from the needs of the Bakwena[2] at Kopong just outside Gaborone, who can see aeroplanes landing and taking off as the airport is nearby. At Inalegolo, they wonder what kind of a bird flies so high and never comes to the borehole like other birds for water. Lelliot's (2002:6) continuum presentation is:

> *Remote, isolated and inaccessible* <-----------------------------> *accessible but not reachable*
> *CSC e.g. Inalegolo*   *e.g. Kopong*

Kopong is only 30 km from Gaborone and is well connected by tarred roads, has radio and television reception and households own such equipment and have access to libraries and other educational resources. The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi traditional educational system is culturally rich, and differs markedly from the other ethnic groups that are Bantu speakers and share interrelated languages and cultures.

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[2] The Bakwena are part of the dominant Tswana ethnic group which long are ago during pre-colonial times and after ruled over the lands of the Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi just like the other Tswana ethnic groups did. They own large herds of cattle and have the Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi as herd boys at their cattle posts.

I also observed that the need to plan for learning support is critical for enhancing the academic performance of distance learners. I recollect my first visit in 2002 to a learning centre that is 800 km away from the regional centre where I found learners who shared their experiences of isolation and alienation believing that it would lead to their poor academic performance and failure to complete their Botswana General Certificate in Secondary Education (BGCSE) programme. Apparently, the remote strategy recommended in the Remote Learner Support Consultancy Report (Lelliot, 2002) that BOCODOL had commissioned had not yet been implemented in the area at the time of my visit. Dzakiria (2005) records similar observations from Malaysian distance learners who had either limited or no access to learning support and experienced desperation, frustration and isolation. Learning support interventions in distance education in Botswana are new. This meeting with the learners prompted me to realise that there was more to learning support than just sending out study materials and feedback on assignments.

Empirical work on distance learning support in Botswana is limited (McLoughlin 2002; Wheeler, 2002; Robinson, 2004; Wheeler and Amiotte, 2005) and as such I was compelled to look at learner support literature of which learning support is a subset. Furthermore, I have also noted that inadequate planning for learner support in distance education, even in some parts of the developed world has resulted in some distance education providers ignoring the importance of planning for such services (Levy and Bealieu, 2003; Robinson, 2004). When distance education institutions fail to make plans for the provision of learner support services, the more likely outcome is that distance learners will drop out of their programmes or courses. A study by Passi and Mishra (2004) on selecting priority areas for research in distance education found that 60% of respondents advocated that research should be conducted on learners and learning. Prideaux (1989) quoted by Usan (2004) observes that the effectiveness of student support has not been adequately evaluated. Recently, Rowe and Wood (2008) have urged that research be conducted on student experiences in particular, of feedback. The need for empirical literature in the area of learning support is therefore critical for the development of effective distance education systems.

Robinson's (2004) review of literature on learner support, and earlier findings by Moore and Thompson (1997) arrive at the same conclusion, namely, that most of the literature available on learner support is more on general progress reports than on empirical studies. They agree that

research and publication on learner support has practical value. Robinson (2004) claims that most of the empirical studies on learner support lack theory and that some studies are unsubstantiated or lack validity when transferred to other contexts. She also argues that some studies have methodological shortcomings, particularly the use of small samples where quantitative approaches have been adopted. One study that lacks theory is by Sharma (2002) and the one with methodological shortcomings in terms of small samples, is a pilot study by Wheeler (2004).

Recent literature focusing on learner support in southern Africa (the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA), 2006; Nonyongo and Ngengebule, 2008) addresses the issue of learning support but not in an underdeveloped context. The literature tends to report progress made by distance education (DE) institutions in southern African countries. There is therefore need to conduct systematic research in the area of learning support. Understanding how learners perceive and experience learning support provision can help management improve on strategies of supporting learners in order to enhance completion and academic performance.

I was also motivated to undertake this study because, as a distance education practitioner, I was keen to have an understanding of how policy undertaking made by BOCODOL guides the provision of learning support to distance learners from marginalised communities in less developed contexts. I was particularly keen to understand how the different types of learning support enhanced distance learners' academic aspirations, knowledge, attitudes, and skills. I also aimed to document both positive and negative perceptions and experiences of the learning support programme as a part of my contribution to ODL policy and practice.

Literature on supporting remote distance learners in underdeveloped contexts in southern Africa appears to be sparse (ADEA, 2002, Dodds, 2005, DEASA, 2006, Ngengebule & Nonyongo, 2008). This study is distinctive as it documents the perspectives of Botswana distance learners living in remote geographical areas who are in transition from a traditional nomadic way of life to a more settled modern context. I explain the key terms I have used in my study in the next section in order to ensure mutual ground with the reader and to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of issues I discuss in my thesis.

1.4 Explanation of key terms

In this section I present, in alphabetical order, key terms used in this study and explain their contextual use in order to enhance a common understanding.

Academic performance - refers to learners' active participation in learning events, course completion, (Nonyongo and Ngengebule, 2008) and to achievements measured through grades achieved, for example, in assignments and examinations. Academic performance also encompasses things like self-perception of performance and learners remaining active in a programme as opposed to dropping out.

Developed context - refers to areas that are economically rich like most industrialised countries e.g. United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Developed countries are known as the 'First World' (Stuart, 1994). They have a high standard of living, have advanced technology, and are thus able to offer technologically supported learning that contributes to increased course completion compared to developing or underdeveloped contexts.

Developing context is made up of less industrialised countries or low-income countries that are developing economically (Stuart, 1994). The countries in a developing context may have reasonable necessities like housing, food, education and health services. They are, however, not rich and have a far lower standard of living compared to developed countries. Developing countries are as the 'Third World' and include countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Some of the developing countries have made significant strides forward towards developing technology although most of these countries still have areas that are underdeveloped. Examples of such countries include India and Botswana. Developing countries face major challenges when it comes to education matters and most have adopted distance education (DE) methodologies in order to circumvent the challenges they face. Nevertheless, completion of programmes and courses through DE remains a major challenge, particularly in remote rural areas where infrastructure including roads, transport and telecommunication systems are virtually non-existent.

Distance education - is the delivery of learning opportunities to out-of-school youths and adults who are separated mostly by time and space from those who are teaching. The teaching is done through a variety of mediating processes used to transmit content, provide tuition, and

conduct assessment or measure outcomes (Moore and Anderson, 2003). However, the unavailability of telecommunication infrastructure widens the digital divide and makes the print to remain the more user-friendly technology in delivering education in underdeveloped contexts.

Experience - refers to how a learner enrolled in distance education programme emotionally feels about the event. In this case, the learner may feel satisfied or dissatisfied by the types of learning support rendered by the distance education provider. However, the narration of the events may be subjective, in the sense that it may have errors, biases in terms of personal interpretation and perceptions (Van den Aardweg and van den Aardweg, 1993, Cook, 2006). In this study, distance learners' subjective experiences are described. Distance learners may also share positive or negative feelings: e.g. enjoyment, confidence, and success or confusion, isolation, frustration, and rejection.

Indigenous – this is a highly contested term. In this study, I use it to refer to the first people who occupied southern Africa before the arrival of the Bantu speaking groups and colonists. The first people to occupy southern Africa are the Basarwa or San and;

> *...share a distinct and identifiable cultural 'deep structure' that most commonly manifests in language, social organisation, economic activity, religion, and historical experience (Suzman, 2001:3.)*

They consider themselves distinct from other communities and other communities do recognise them as such. The Basarwa's social, cultural, and economic conditions distinguish them from other populations in southern Africa. They are determined to develop, preserve, and transmit their culture to their future generations (Begum and Al Faruque, 2005).

Learner - refers to an out-of-school youth or young adult enrolled for a distance education course. The age range of learners involved in this study is between 18 and 45. In open and distance learning (ODL) circles, the term 'learner' has become more common and its usage is preferred rather than the term 'student'. Recognising them as learners may help to foster positive attitudes towards learning. One of the functions of learner support is to cultivate and instil positive attitudes towards learning through the distance education mode.

Learner support - is a broad term referring to the services that are provided to distance learners so that they can overcome the barriers to learning and complete their studies successfully. Learner support consists of three subsections namely; learning support or academic support, personal support and administrative support (Simpson, 2000; Tait, 2000; Thorpe, 2002). In practice it is difficult to separate the three subsections. The provision of learner support is imperative in distance education and aims to enhance the academic performance of distance learners.

Learning support - is the academic assistance given to a learner enrolled for a distance education course in order to enhance academic performance (Simpson, 2000; Tait, 2000; Thorpe, 2002). The activities that make up learning support delivered to distance learners in an underdeveloped context are the subject of my investigation and include orientation seminars, group tutorials, assignment feedback, tutorial letters, radio, mock examinations, individual help by tutors, weekend tutorials, study skills, and motivational seminars. These activities are currently core in supporting distance learners from marginalised communities in Botswana.

Marginalised – means people deprived of access to social opportunities and financial or material means or otherwise of well-being and security (Commonwealth of Learning, 2004). In the words of Molteno, (1988:1):

> *The 'marginalised' are the poor and powerless, too busy with life at the edges of survival to be able to acquire the skills or material support that would let them get out of the trap they were born into, or have been pushed into. They are unable to scramble on board as the engine of change hurtles the rest of us onward – where, we can't tell, but we're holding on because the alternative is too scary. The marginalised remind us of that.*

In this study, 'marginalised' refers to the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities.

Open learning - refers to an educational philosophy that emphasises giving learners choices about media, place of study, pace of study, support mechanisms, entry and exit points (Commonwealth of Learning, 2004). It refers to policies and practices that permit entry to learning with no or minimum barriers with respect to enrolment time, assessment, age, gender or time constraints and with recognition of prior learning. These policies need not be part of a distance education system but complement it. The importance of this approach is to place the

responsibility of self-direction in learning on the learner (Commonwealth of Learning, 2004). The perception of access has led out-of-school youths and adults from marginalised communities to enrolling for DE courses.

Perception – in the context of this study, perception means the belief, strong or weak, that influence reactions in terms of learning support activities (Van den Aardweg and Van den Aardweg, 1993). The beliefs may be true or false, close to reality or far from it, but still influence the learner to make subjective judgements on the impact of learning support interventions in terms of whether they are effective and good or ineffective and bad. Perceptions can be positive or negative and even erroneous. The higher the percentage of participants who indicate a positive perception, the more likely that the learning support activity may have made a positive difference. However, if a higher percentage of participants indicate a negative perception, then the more likely that the learning support intervention was less effective. Given possibly errors in perception, I have undertaken to employ triangulation of data sources in this study to disprove or confirm assumptions that might emanate from participants' perceptions.

Poverty - refers to an inability to meet one's basic needs. Basic needs refer to nutrition, access to adequate shelter, clothing, recreation and the ability to meet social commitments (Nteta et al., 1997). Poverty also implies a lack of choices, in other words, having no alternatives. The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities living in the remote settlements are reliant on government food subsidies.

Remote learner - is a learner who studies independently without access to a learning centre as a result of geographical isolation, unavailability of appropriate facilities, lack of transport or the fact that there are not enough other learners to run a viable centre. Remote distance learners fall on a continuum from those who are geographically isolated and inaccessible to those who are easily reached but have no access to a learning centre (BOCODOL, 2002).

Psychological distance - Psychological distance (as described in Moore's (1993) theory of transactional distance) is created or exists between the learner and the tutor (or DE provider) whenever there is an absence of or inadequate dialogue. In other words, a psychological communication gap or space has the potential to create misunderstanding between the tutor and the learners. A learner, who experiences acceptance by or closeness with the DE provider

or has a sense of belonging to a learning community, has a minimal psychological distance from the DE provider. When the course structure is rigid and has less dialogue a psychological distance is also experienced. Dialogue is a purposeful and constructive exchange between tutors and learners, learners and learners, with each party valuing and respecting the contributions of the other. On the other hand, structure is the extent to which the course's instructional design is rigid or flexible, for instance; the extent to which the course objectives, teaching strategies and evaluation methods respond to each learner's needs. A course structure that is too rigid makes it hard for the distance learner to interact with it, or make sense out of it, and this creates a psychological distance that can adversely affect academic progress and result in negative experiences for the learner, especially if learning support measures are inadequate (Moore, 1993, 2003).

Underdeveloped context - refers to a physical area within a developing country characterised by distorted or inadequate development. Mainly those in power impose change and the community suffers (Stuart, 1994). The area is characterised by very low economic development in that it lacks investment, public infrastructure and offers a very low standard of living. This is the case in most remote rural parts of sub-Saharan African countries. All the sites involved in this research study experience acute unemployment as there are barely any investment opportunities.

1.5   Scope of the study

Open and distance education in underdeveloped contexts has a recent history particularly with regard to the provision of decentralised learner support systems. This study focuses on open distance education provision in the remote areas of Botswana. It explores distance learners' perceptions and experiences of learning support offered by BOCODOL. The study covers the period from 2003 up to 2007 in terms of the description. The quantitative and qualitative data sample and interviews relate to the 2006 cohort of learners. Forty distance learners from the Bakgalagadi and Basarwa communities living in remote rural settlements in the western part of Botswana acted as research participants. In this study, I did not look at other programmes like Diploma programme and the Small Scale Business Management (SSBM). The two programmes attracted employees and were not living at the settlements. There was no problem of completion and academic performance in the SSBM since it was a paced programme. The Diploma programmes were all new.

1.6   Research design and methodology

In this section I briefly justify the theory that informs this study, substantiate and explain the research design, methodology, methods and ethical considerations undertaken to carry out this study.

This study is informed by Holmberg's (2003) *theory of conversational learning*. I use Holmberg's (2003) conversational theory in interpreting data about the learning events, that is, data from both contact (face-to-face) and non-contact support (written) in order to establish distance learners' perceptions and experiences of learning support in a less developed context. My initial assumption was that the theory would be limited in the sense that this study focuses on distance learners studying secondary school level programme in an underdeveloped context. Holmberg's theory was previously applied in a study that focused on MBA learners in a developed context by Kanuka and Jugdev (2006) rather than at a secondary school level.

The research design I use in this study falls within the interpretivist paradigm (Creswell, 2005). An interpretive paradigm involves taking people's experiences as the essence of what is real for them. I thus made sense of my participants' perceptions and experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to what they told me. The interpretive paradigm was pertinent to my study because it helped me explore, in a natural setting, learning support as perceived and experienced by distance learners from marginalised communities.

The interpretivist paradigm assumes that each individual constructs reality, thus multiple realities exist in any given situation (Creswell, 2005). In this paradigm, I relied on the voices and interpretations of the research participants, a method commended by other scholars such as LeCompte and Preissle (1993), Creswell (1994) and Leedy and Ormrod (2001). The advantage of an interpretive position is that it recognises the existence of multiple social realities and the need for a researcher to explore how individuals interpret and make sense of their social experiences (Clarke and Dawson, 1999). I therefore approached the research context with an open mind and allowed multiple perspectives of learning support to emerge.

In my inquiry, I let the research design unfold as the research progressed, guided by the research participants and my interpretations of them as suggested by Clarke and Dawson

(1999). The reasoning behind this was to have an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the perceptions and experiences of participants on learning support and its influence on their academic performance. From an interpretive standpoint, the context can help one understand a social programme, like the BOCODOL learner support model. I spent a total of six years as an employee and a researcher in an underdeveloped area and experienced the context within which the learner support programme operated.

I used mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative techniques) to collect data. The qualitative techniques were dominant, because my focus was on an in-depth understanding of the distance learners' perceptions and experiences of learning support. I chose to combine qualitative and quantitative techniques since they have complementary strengths and can be used sequentially or simultaneously as noted by Neuman (2000). Clarke and Dawson (1999) and Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), encourage the use of mixed-methods on the basis that they are now an established feature of research and policy evaluation studies. The mixing of methods or techniques has the advantage of being able to accommodate both the subjective, where insights, feelings and emotions count and are obtained through the use of more qualitative methods, and the specifically numerical quantitative data. The mixing of methods also provides the breadth and depth necessary in understanding and interpreting learner perceptions and experiences.

In order to have an in-depth understanding of the research participants as the unit of analysis, I decided to use a case study. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context using multiple sources. In a case study, a particular individual or a group of persons, programme or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Creswell, 1994; Leedy and Ormrod, 2001; Yin, 2003). Whilst one may not be able to generalize from a single case study, this technique was, however, an ideal design for my study as I focused on discovery, insights and understanding the perspectives of the participants. A case study offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base, policy and practice of education in a local context (Merriam, 1988), and it allows for the use of rich and varied strategies and data sources which Descombe (1998) notes is one of the strengths of the case study approach in data collection.

The tools I used to collect data were a questionnaire, interview schedule, journals, and observation. In the first phase of data collection, I administered a questionnaire designed with closed and open-ended items. In the second phase, I conducted interviews that were tape recorded and later transcribed. I coded the transcribed data to identify themes. I also used journals that I had requested research participants to keep and I kept my own journal. I consulted documents, including official records that were available at the Regional Centre. Quantitative data were analysed using the statistical package SAS Version 8 from which percentages were generated while themes emerged after a qualitative data analysis using Atlas.ti®. I therefore, applied mixed methods research techniques in this study for purposes of triangulation and trustworthiness of data as recommended by other scholars (Creswell, 1994; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Before and during the process of data collection I endeavoured to adhere to internationally accepted ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, informed consent, safety in participation, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, trust and withdrawal of participants at any stage. I respected my participants and made sure that I used non-discriminatory language as advocated by others (Creswell 2005; AERA, 2006). I was very aware that my participants were less privileged and from the marginalised communities and I thus took time to explain the purpose of my research in order to help them understand the implications of their participation, a point Chilisa and Preece (2005) emphasise. I also explained to all participants how the information I would gather was going to be used and how it was likely to help improve the provision of learning support but also contribute towards my PhD qualification.

The research design, methodology and ethical considerations I have briefly described in this section, are explained in detail in chapter 4 of this study. Despite the rigour I applied in developing the research design and applying it, I experienced constraints undertaking this study. The next section briefly explains those I anticipated and how I minimized them to enhance the trustworthiness of my study.

1.7   Anticipated research constraints

The participants in this research were distance learners from marginalised communities living in an underdeveloped context in the western part of Botswana. My intention, in the first place, was not to generalise. I have, however, provided a detailed description of the profile of the

participants of this study and their contexts in Chapter 2 to enable readers to make sound judgments should they be interested in transferability to similar contexts.

Another constraint is the possibility of bias and subjectivity as I conducted this research as an employee of the DE provider under scrutiny. At the commencement of this study, I was a regional manager, responsible for the provision of learner support in the area in which this study was undertaken. As an ODL practitioner and a product of learning at a distance, I have my own beliefs on learner support. I experienced learner support services in the past in different capacities, that is, as a distance learner, a distance facilitator and as a regional manager. During data collection and analysis, I was aware of possible limitations due to my bias emanating from my past experience. In order to overcome all these constraints and challenges, I used a variety of sources such as, multiple participants, official records and journals.

Whilst I had six years of experience working amongst the participants, my grasp of their mother tongue, namely, SeKgalagadi and Sesarwa language is poor, so I sought assistance from two educators in the area who are proficient in both these languages spoken by participants. In order to adhere to ethical considerations and protect the research participants, the two educators were requested to sign a confidentiality clause. For the Sesarwa language, the Naro Language Project co-ordinator, who is a linguist and a specialist in the Sesarwa language helped with the translation. My secretary spoke SeKgalagadi as her first language and assisted wherever translations were needed. Translations were shared with those participants who were accessible and no discrepancies were identified. In the next section I provide the outline my inquiry.

1.8   Outline of study

In my systematic investigation, I focused on the research question stated at the beginning of this chapter and employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the perceptions and experiences that remote participants had of learning support from their anecdotal and empirical evidence. Documents, a brief questionnaire and interviews with facilitators and tutors were used to corroborate the evidence given by the main participants of this study.

The thesis comprises six chapters. In this chapter, I have focused on the research background and given an overview of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide an account of the geographical and socio-cultural context of the communities from which the participants of the study were drawn. The chapter describes the rich context of the participants and their status in Botswana. Chapter 3 focuses on the literature I reviewed which helped to contextualise my study. It also provided a theoretical framework that helped in the processing and interpretation of findings. It enabled me to position my findings within the existing body of knowledge related to DE learning support. Chapter 4 focuses on the research design and methodology. I document my reflections on my epistemological stance and the implications that it had for the knowledge creation in this study. I explain and justify my choice of using the qualitative approach, multiple methods of data collection and analysis. I also explain the strategies that I used to enhance the trustworthiness of my study. Chapter 5 constitutes the presentation of the empirical findings and my interpretation. It provides quantitative and qualitative evidence using numbers and thick descriptions (quotations) which I interpret within the context of this study. Chapter 6 focuses on the significance, implications for policy and practice and recommendations. I suggest possible areas for further research in the area of learning support.

1.9   Conclusion

In this chapter, I explained how I located the study within the available literature and drew on my practical experience as a regional manager (2002 to 2007) of a DE service provider responsible for the provision of learner support. I clarified the rationale for this study by highlighting the possible silence in the literature related to learning support provision to distance learners from marginalised communities in underdeveloped contexts. I justified the necessity of this study by indicating the importance of providing learning support to distance learners (Tait, 2000; McLoughlin, 2002; Thorpe, 2002; Shin, 2003; Robinson, 2004; Dzakiria, 2005) regardless of context. I highlighted the uniqueness of this study and explained the key terms that are to be understood within the context this study. I also, stated and justified the research design and methodology I adopted to conduct a systematic investigation of the problem. I justified my choice for adopting a qualitative approach by indicating the need for an in-depth understanding of distance learners' perceptions and experiences of learning support. I also indicated the research constraints and steps I took to

minimise these. In the next chapter, I provide a detailed description of the participants'
context and their socio-cultural and economic status within the Botswana society, in order
for the reader to appreciate who these distance learners are as well as the significance of
the findings of this study.

Chapter 2   The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities in context

2.1   Introduction

In Chapter 1, I presented an overview of this study and highlighted the need to have an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of learning support of remote distance learners from marginalised communities in Botswana. In this chapter, I describe the research site's geography and refer to its history, socio-economic, political and cultural features in order for the reader to appreciate the unique circumstances in which the research participants live and learn. They belong to one of the two marginalised communities - the Basarwa[3](also called the San or Bushmen) and the Bakgalagadi. I describe their traditional lifestyle and how these communities have been marginalised. I also briefly discuss the provision of educational facilities in their areas. This contextual description provides background for understanding the perceptions and experiences of these learners studying via distance mode in remote areas of western Botswana.

2.2   Geographical and social context of marginalised communities

Botswana is a landlocked country, roughly the size of France or Texas (Nage-Sibande, 2005; Tlhalefang and Oduaran, 2006). It is located in southern Africa and shares borders with Zambia to the north, South Africa to the south, Zimbabwe to the east and Namibia to the west (**See Figure 2.1**). It has an area of 582 000 square kilometres, of which 84% is covered by the Kalahari Desert (Hanemann, 2006; Pfotenhauer, 2009). The eastern part of the country is occupied by the Tswana-speaking groups and has good soils and rainfall for agriculture. The Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi communities, along with other ethnic groups currently inhabit part of the Kalahari Desert in the western part of Botswana. This semi-desert area has no permanent surface water, poor soil, great variation in rainfall (between 150 mm and 375 mm) and frequents droughts (Saugestad, 2005). It also has extreme seasons with temperatures reaching 39˚C in summer and dropping to below 2˚C in winter (Botswana Government, 2003). The climatic conditions are not favourable for practising even subsistence crop cultivation, hence, the communities are not able to produce enough food for survival from arable farming initiatives. However, the area has bush and shrub savannah vegetation that

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[3] I use the appellation Basarwa since it is the official term used in Botswana.

attracts wildlife, hence hunting and gathering activities have been part of the communities' traditional lifestyle for a long time.

Figure 2.1   Map showing Botswana and the research study sites
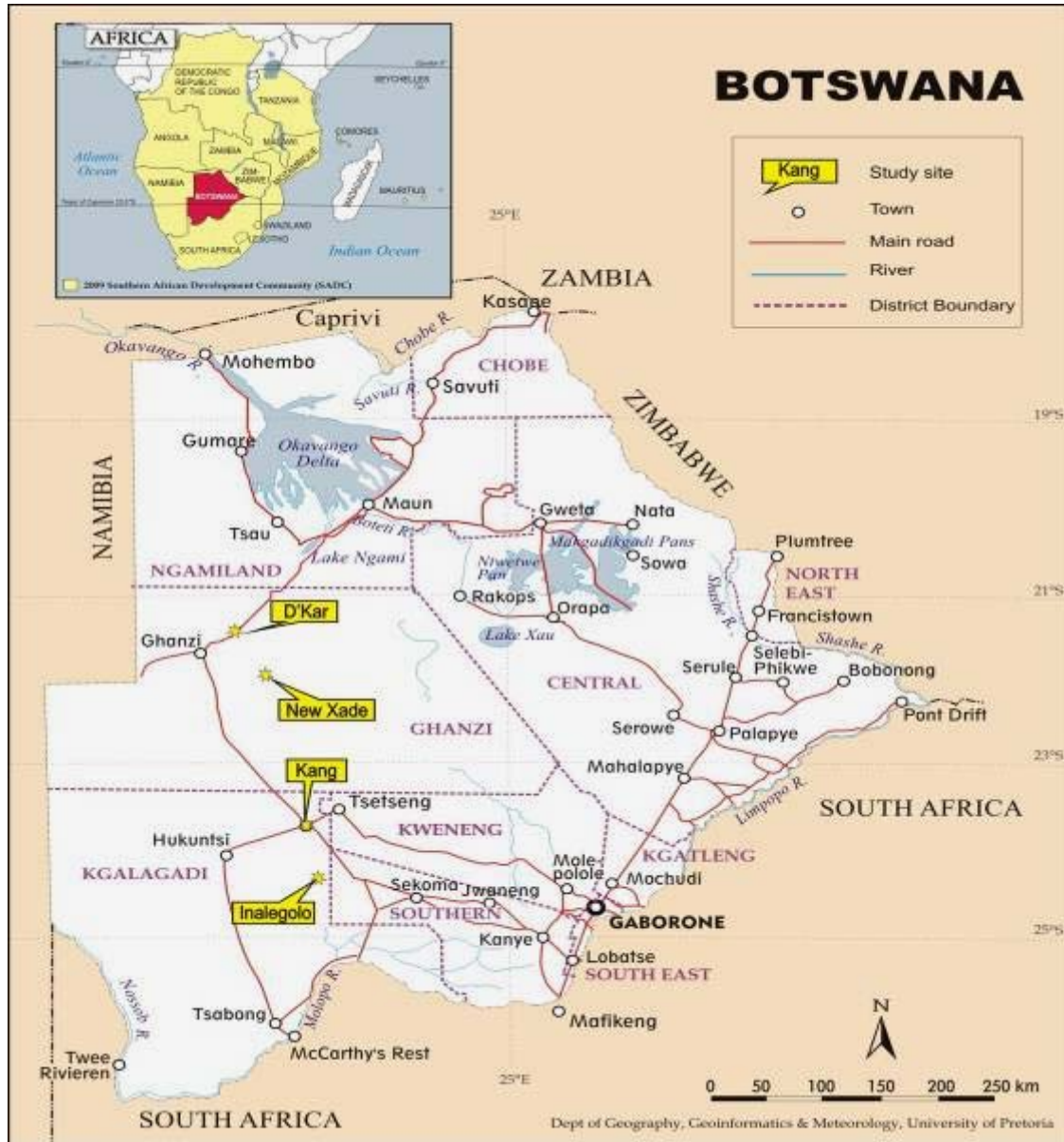
Botswana has a relatively small population, estimated to be about 1.85 million (Pfotenhauer, 2009). The Tswana-speaking group account for almost 90% of the

population whilst the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi, each account for about 3% of the population (Beaugrande, 2000; Wagner, 2006; Hanemann, 2006; Pfotenhauer, 2009). The Basarwa are part of the Khoisan-speaking group whilst the Bakgalagadi are a Bantu-speaking people. The Bakgalagadi came into Botswana from South Africa just before the Tswana-speaking groups around 1600. The Basarwa had lived in Botswana for centuries before the arrival of the Bakgalagdi, the Tswana, and the Europeans (Hitchcock, 2002; Gjern, 2004; Pridmore, 2006, Modiba, 2008).

The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi have, cohabited and developed highly flexible land use strategies in order to cope with an uncertain environment. The Basarwa are historically considered the 'First People' of the Kalahari or the 'indigenous' people of Botswana and are generally recognised as such (Hitchcock, 1999; 20002, Saugestad, 2001; Valadian, 2002; Boko, 2002, Bourne, 2003; Campbell, 2004; Gjern, 2004; Begum and Baroque, 2005; Pridmore, 2006, Wagner, 2006; Modiba, 2008). It is problematic defining who is indigenous and who is not. Bourne (2003) quotes the International Labour Organization's Convention 169 of 1989, which defines indigenous as:

> *...tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.*

Another definition of indigenous is one quoted by Begum and Al Faruque (2005) from the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations 1986 that states:

> *Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those, which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed in their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form, at present, non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.*

I find the above definition more comprehensive and it is thus the preferred term in this study. Begum and Al Faruque (2005) further point out that indigenous peoples the world over, are still being deprived of their land and access to life-sustaining resources and that some governments appear to be reluctant to formally recognise indigenous rights to land. Land has a deep cultural and spiritual meaning to indigenous people. For

instance, in Botswana, the Basarwa believe their removal from their ancestral lands would make them extinct (Mogwe, 1992). The Basarwa argue that historically they are the original inhabitants of Botswana because they have lived undisturbed for years, together with the wildlife, long before the arrival of the Tswana-speaking groups and the Europeans. Furthermore, they contend that the land they had come to know as theirs was taken away from them by other Africans and Europeans (Mogwe, 1992). Historical evidence that includes rock paintings supports the view expressed by the Basarwa that they are the indigenous people of Botswana (Hermans, 1980; Good, 1993; Tlou and Campbell, 1996). However, the government of Botswana does not recognise that the Basarwa have a culture and way of life different from other ethnic groups in Botswana (Modiba, 2008). It rejects the notion that the Basarwa are indigenous and says all Batswana are indigenous (Hitchcock, 2002; Campbell, 2004; Modiba, 2008). This rejection appears to be based on the government's need to ensure unity rather than on any historical evidence. This meant the assimilation of the minority groups into the dominant and majority Tswana group (Boko, 2002; Wagner, 2006). The unintended consequence of this policy decision has given rise to problems unique and specific to the Basarwa, Bakgalagadi and other minority groups and to the fact that they have been neglected (Wagner, 2006).

Nevertheless, the Basarwa have distinct socio-cultural, religious, and economic activities that qualify them to be deemed indigenous (Suzman, 2001.) As a people, they meet the criteria that define indigenous people. The defining criteria for recognition of an indigenous people include occupying a position of non-dominance, being a numerical minority, having livelihoods based on the adaptation of resources and territories that differ from those of the majority. The criteria also include perceiving and being perceived by others as different from the majority and defining themselves as indigenous (Bourne, 2003; Campbell, 2004; Begum and Al Faruque, 2005).

The Bakgalagadi on the other hand, were the first Bantu speakers to settle side by side with the Basarwa. The Tswana-speaking groups found them living on the fringes of or within the Kalahari Desert (Hitchcock and Smith, 1982). In Setswana, the language of the Tswana, the word *Mokgalagari* refers to a person who lives in the Kalahari Desert by foraging and is of inferior status (Hitchcock and Smith, 1982). Historical evidence shows

that years back the Bakgalagadi lived in a similar way to the Basarwa. They trapped game and eked out an existence by collecting wild plants and hoeing with a sharpened stick, did not have fixed homes, were mobile and lacked centralised leadership and political organisation (Hitchcock and Smith, 1982). Their marginalised status is yet another common factor although the Basarwa are in a worse position than the Bakgalagadi. The Bakgalagadi are slightly better because they have been practising agro-based economy for years unlike the Basarwa who have been hunter-gatherers. This is elaborated on in section 2.3. Out of approximately 50 000 Basarwa in Botswana, only a handful are able to pursue their traditional hunting and gathering on a significant scale (Dube, 2002; Gjern, 2004; Hanemann, 2006). The majority of Basarwa lack access to vital resources as they were relocated to government settlements outside the national parks and wildlife management areas. As a result, many of them have become increasingly dependent on government-sponsored aid programmes. This dependency perpetuates the loss of cultural identity and their alienation from the age-old traditions, skills and lifestyle (Gjern, 2004). The Bakgalagadi, on the other hand, engage in agricultural activities. They mainly keep domestic animals and when there has been a good rainy season, they do try cultivation of crops, but due to frequent droughts this is usually not successful. The Bakgalagadi also face problems in their pastoral farming activities as water sources dry up and predators kill their livestock.

In some settlements, like New Xade and Inalegolo, foraging provides a crucial source of subsistence for the Basarwa and the Bakgalagdi. Some households combine searching in the wilds for food with the keeping of some goats and cattle. They also make handcrafts, especially bows and arrows and tan animal skins to sell. During my visits, I found a number of them idle at the settlements whilst others spent their time drinking and gambling.

A first time visitor to the settlements who is familiar with African rural life would at first not notice any suffering. Children play and some adults move about the settlements. Staying a little longer until around sunset time, the visitor will then be most surprised. Not a single fire can be seen aglow in any home. In any traditional African village setup, a fire is made in each home in the evening to prepare food. However, at the Basarwa settlements, in most cases, there is no reason to make a fire, as families do not have

any food to prepare. The only food they get is through monthly rations from the government. It is eaten sparingly in the morning and afternoon and there just is not enough to cover the usual three meals that other people enjoy. Should the visitor stay even longer than a full day at the settlement, the hardships, and suffering that the Basarwa endure daily will be revealing. It is not surprising that conclusions are made by some authors (Hitchcock 1999; Boko; 2002; Le Roux, 2002; Campbell; 2004) that the Basarwa suffer hardship at the settlements because of the loss of their traditional livelihood and they now lead a life of hopelessness and despair, manifested in unemployment, poverty, and alcoholism.

Some of the Basarwa have not found settlement life easy and, as a result, leave the settlement citing as reasons high levels of social conflict and that they do not have access to resources and employment opportunities (Hitchcock 1999; Boko; 2002; le Roux, 2002; Campbell; 2004). They go back to the bush surviving, living close to nature, relying on whatever remains to be hunted and gathered and risk being arrested whilst others go to nearby farms and cattle posts to be cattle herders (Boko; 2002). Boko (2002) further claims that the Basarwa work under conditions of slavery, or near slavery, and their situation is that of abject poverty and deprivation while the official position of government acknowledges the Basarwa to be the poorest of the desperately poor.

The Basarwa who live at D'Kar were displaced from their territories when ranches were created and they found themselves as squatters on a farm belonging to the Dutch Reformed Church. They lead a difficult life because they do not stay in a government-gazetted settlement. They are therefore not entitled to any District Council subsidies like other Basarwa in government settlements. However, they are helped by the Church and Kuru Development Trust. Some of them try to find jobs on the nearby farms. They lack respectable shelter. Their dwellings are made of temporary structures like the one shown in **Figure 2.2**. The shelter is made of mud stuck on poles and this is home to primary school-going children. The children of the Basarwa, living under such deplorable conditions, are nonetheless expected to attend school regularly and excel in their academic work just like those from villages and urban centres and compete for the limited spaces in government public secondary schools in order to do their BGCSE.

Figure 2.2   Traditional shelter at D'Kar

New Xade is one of the settlements that the government created for the Basarwa who were relocated from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. The government provided money for each household to construct permanent structures, yet the Basarwa continue to make their traditional grass shelters. This suggests that the communities are reluctant to break with the past and desire to maintain some kind of identity. They have, at least, built pit-latrines using bricks as shown in **Figure 2.3**. They were encouraged to build pit-latrines by governmental health educators.

The concern about identity has seen the Basarwa take the best of their traditions from the past into the present through their traditional education system. Their traditional education system is informal with a wide curriculum that includes history, culture, traditional beliefs, songs, dances, folklores, norms, values, ceremonies, language and survival skills like hunting, gathering, medicine, and defence (Tlhalefang and Oduaran, 2006). They teach the young ones in various ways. The common way is through songs, dances, games, story telling, sharing of life experiences, and celebrating special events. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like the Kuru Development Trust have helped the Basarwa celebrate their culture through sponsoring an annual cultural festival.

Figure 2.3   Traditional shelter at New Xade and a pit latrine

The Kuru cultural festival attracts participation of the Basarwa and other minority and marginalised ethnic groups in Botswana. **Figures 2.4 and 2.5** show a typical Basarwa dance performed during the 2006 cultural festival. The young and the old, the females and males, all dance together. This ensures inculcation of equality, respect and the transfer of knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. The Basarwa thrive on their culture as it values peace, non-violence and free interaction between adults and children (Le Roux, 2002).

Despite their marginalisation, other communities including the dominant Tswana tribes have adopted traditional Basarwa song and dance. Their songs and dances are now being exploited as they are being used as part of cultural tourism. Unfortunately, due to the lack of copy- or patent-rights, the Basarwa, as individuals or collectively as communities, are unable to claim any royalty money generated from their cultural pursuits that have been pirated by some commercial music groups from the dominant Tswana ethnic group.

Figure 2.4   Traditional dance during the 2006 Kuru cultural festival

The changes due to relocation from wildlife management areas and game parks have encouraged some of the Basarwa households to try agricultural ventures like keeping livestock. Livestock farming is part of the government's strategy to encourage the Basarwa to be more settled. During relocation, the Basarwa households had to choose either fifteen goats or five cattle. The government gave them the livestock at no cost as part of the package for agreeing to relocate. **Figure 2.6** shows some of the livestock at the New Xade settlement. The keeping of livestock is a departure from their nomadic lifestyle and has its own challenges. One restriction is that the grazing area lies between private ranches and the game parks or wildlife management areas. A limited grazing area prevents the Basarwa from engaging in the nomadic pastoral system that they were used to as is the case with the nomadic pastoralists in Kenya, Somalia and the Horn of Africa (Bosch et al., 2004).

Figure 2.5   **An elderly woman playing a traditional game during the Kuru cultural festival in 2006**

Figure 2.6   **Cattle at New Xade given by government**

2.3   Marginalisation of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities

The marginalisation of the Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi communities manifests itself in many ways, for instance, in the loss of their original territories, a Constitution that does not recognise them, national policies that are neutral and as such neglect their unique needs, their relocation to settlements that are remote and an education curriculum that neglects their needs and aspirations. Marginalisation in this study refers to being outside mainstream society and of not being part of the decision-making process with regard to national issues. Whilst marginalisation may not necessarily describe a state of disadvantage or poverty, in this study it does. I am aware that there are people who decide to choose a lifestyle other than the mainstream for religious, ideological, or other cultural reasons and are marginalised out of choice, an observation documented by Jahnukainen (2001).

In this study, the disadvantaged and poor Basarwa and Bakgalagadi are marginalised, not by choice, but because of a combination of many factors, including their geographical location, legislation, national policies, loss of land, and their socio-economic status. I fully realise that being marginal may take different forms, hence my contention in this study is that the Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi are marginalised because they find themselves in a state of poverty, where they are unable to meet their basic needs and aspirations as a result of being relocated far away from their original territories. In other words, they have experienced being deprived of what they regarded as their land. Marginalisation implies a lack of access to opportunities and means, material or otherwise, of well-being and security in terms that are important to individuals and their communities (Commonwealth of Learning, 2004). The marginalisation of the Basarwa in particular, also includes their inability to make use of opportunities to uplift themselves and participate fully in social and civil life. The absence of national political representation, access to their ancestral lands and other factors, such as easy access to secondary schools, make them feel socially isolated and deprived of their political and human rights (Peace, 2001; Campbell, 2004; Wagner, 2006).

The Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities have been marginalised for decades. Their marginalisation by the dominant ethnic group is institutionalised through the country's Constitution and national policies, which were designed to bring about unity and equality

amongst the diverse ethnic communities in Botswana. However, the unintended results of the policies are a complex phenomenon characterised by controversial decisions and subsequent perpetuation of marginalising the minority groups, including the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi. The Constitution and the national policies on land use, wildlife management, and conservation and on education have, over time, served as instruments that have deprived the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi of their rights and privileges.

The history of Botswana (Hitchcock and Smith, 1982; Good, 1993; Tlou and Campbell, 1996) shows how the Basarwa, the Bakgalagadi, and other minority groups were dispossessed of their lands by the more powerful Tswana-speaking groups and Europeans during the pre-colonial and colonial period. It also shows how the dispossession was systematically carried out through Acts, policies and programmes after Botswana gained independence in 1966. The Basarwa, the Bakgalagadi and other minority groups became marginalised, as they could not defend their rights over land and animal resources (Hitchcock and Smith, 1982; Good, 1993; Tlou and Campbell, 1996). Good (1993) singles out the Basarwa and argues that they were deprived of their humanity by those who had excess power, the Tswana speaking groups, and the Europeans.

The marginalisation of the Basarwa after Botswana gained independence in 1966 was more systematic as legal instruments and policies were enacted and implemented, (VonBen, 1988). For instance, through the 1975 Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP) implemented in the 1970s, the government promoted freehold land tenure. Actually, the TGLP guidelines specify that people should be compensated with land if their land is taken over for other purposes, and the Tribal Lands Act allows the Land Boards to gazette land in the name of the communities. However, in relation to land rights of Basarwa, the official government opinion has been that the Basarwa have always been true nomads and as such have no right of any kind to land except to hunt and gather (Mogwe, 1992). The implementation of the TGLP had the unforeseen effect of depriving the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi of their right to occupy land that they previously held communally, (VonBen, 1988). In practical terms, the effect of the loss of land through the TGLP was that the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi could not continue enjoying their

cultural livelihoods as before, especially hunting and gathering. Hunting and foraging, as a way of life for the Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi has been severely restricted due to the creation of commercial farming areas resulting in the two communities finding themselves virtually totally enclosed by ranches (Good, 1993). Furthermore, hunting has been almost terminated because exclusive hunting rights are the prerogative of the ranch owners, while the indigenous Basarwa and Bakgalagadi are perceived as potential poachers (Good, 1993).

Other government instruments that have further contributed to the current marginalisation of the two communities include gazetting of land and restrictions on hunting through the National Parks and Game Reserves Regulations of 2000 (Botswana Government, 2000) and the Wildlife Conservation and National Parks Act No 28 of 1992 (Botswana Government, 1992). These instruments, like the TGLP, have further restricted the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi traditional hunting and gathering activities. For instance, a large number of Basarwa have been rendered destitute, as they can no longer subsist without government assistance. This state of affairs in which the Basarwa have found themselves, with no land and in poverty, confirms their marginalisation (Boko, 2002; Campbell, 2004) and has had other consequences. For instance, loss of self-esteem, dignity, and identity and most of them have turned to excessive drinking of locally brewed beer.

The loss of land either to freehold farming or to government control has been a threat to the Basarwa's status. The Basarwa, believe that they belong to the land and the land belongs to them (VonBen, 1988; Boko, 2002; Wagner, 2006). The Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi who lost their traditional territories were either relocated to government-gazetted settlements or found themselves as squatters on farms and near Tswana villages (Wagner, 2006). The Basarwa of New Xade claim to have been forced to leave the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) in 1998, whilst government argues that they moved voluntarily (Wagner, 2006). Evidence provided during the 2006 High Court case in which the Basarwa took the Botswana government to court over the relocation, confirms the Basarwa claim of forced relocation (Minority Rights Group International, 2008, Modiba, 2008).

The majority of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi who were relocated are poor and marginal. The Basarwa are always associated with cattle posts and the bush and, as such, are deprived of any significant role in the village (VonBen, 1988) and during my seven year stay with them, I observed this to be still true. The Basarwa lack the means to meet their basic needs. They are poverty-stricken, lack employment opportunities and a dependable source of cash income. Those who are employed are in low-paying jobs (Boko, 2002; Wagner, 2006) and many D'Kar residents who are Basarwa, struggle on a daily basis to find adequate employment, acceptable nutrition and a means to stay healthy (Kuru D'Kar Trust, 2006). Hunting and gathering is no longer possible without acquiring a hunting licence and this has worsened their predicament. Changes in the lifestyle were confirmed during an interview with a learner at one of the research sites.

Interviewer: *Is it not your culture to hunt and gather?*
Learner: *Yes, it's our culture but these days things have changed and we are now in modern days.*
Interviewer: *Who changed them?*
Learner: *The government, it's now the law of Botswana. We only get the meat when we are called to the kgotla to cook the meat and we are supposed to finish it the same day at the kgotla.*
Interviewer: *Who usually hunt?*
Learner: *Boer, there is a white man who hunts.*
Interviewer: *Why and for whom?*
Learner: *Because he has a ranch and he kill for villagers who gather at the kgotla to cook and eat.*
Interviewer: *Are you allowed to take your share to your houses?*
Learner: *Only if there is plenty/enough meat but if there is not enough we eat at the kgotla (P 5:20 144:166)*
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Coupled with unemployment and unable to practise their traditional lifestyle, enrolling for distance education programmes is just one way of trying to overcome their predicament.

The Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi distance learners who were participants in this study live in four remote settlements. Remoteness in this case is defined in terms of more than 40 km distance from a service centre that provides essential services like hospitals, educational services, and shops. Because of their geographical isolation, they pay higher prices for commodities than people living in urban areas or in villages. The four settlements are: Kang which is 420 km from Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana; Inalegolo which is 476 km from Gaborone and is not accessible, except by a 4x4 vehicle; D'Kar is 840 km from Gaborone and New Xade is 910 km from Gaborone. These physical distances from the major service centre and the underdevelopment experienced

with the exception of Kang, make them remote. For example, they do not have a telecommunication infrastructure, reliable water sources, and good road networks. The settlements have poor radio reception and an unreliable cell phone network. Moreover, there is no public transport to help the inhabitants get to service centres. Inalegolo and New Xade settlements are located next to wildlife management areas whilst D'Kar is located inside a church farm. The settlements have few opportunities for employment. Whilst the three settlements, Inalegolo, D'Kar, and New Xade each have a primary school and a health clinic, none of them has a secondary school. The nearest secondary school for Inalegolo is 76 km, for D'Kar it is 40 km and for New Xade it is 110 km. These distances make it difficult for individuals to access secondary education from these three settlements without government assistance. Kang village on the other hand, has infrastructure that is better than the other three settlements in that it has telephone landlines, cell phone signals, a library, shops, and a number of government offices. It is located along the Trans Kalahari Highway that connects Botswana and Namibia. It has two secondary schools and a clinic with a maternity wing.

The economic development that occurred after 1980 because of diamond mining initiatives helped Botswana develop its educational system. At the time of independence, Botswana was among the 25 poorest countries of the world and today it is classified as a middle-income country by the World Bank (Hanemann, 2006). It then had only 8 secondary schools, but now boasts more than 234 secondary schools country-wide (Gatsha, 2004). Despite this progress, marginalisation of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi is also evident in the education system. There are only two senior secondary schools that offer the BGCSE in the western part of Botswana. The two schools are part of the allocation of 28 senior secondary schools run by the Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development and they do not have the capacity to accommodate all junior certificate graduates. Some junior certificate graduates end up being taken in by senior schools in other parts of the country, but due to the stringent academic competition and limited spaces at the 28 senior secondary schools in the country, not all learners can continue their schooling formally. Some therefore, opt to study for their BGCSE through distance learning provided by BOCODOL, which is able to reach all out-of-school youths and adults in the country because of its open access policy and its decentralised learner support model. Those who opt for distance

education are the youths whose academic achievement at Junior Certificate Level examinations did not earn them enough points to be admitted to any of the 28 senior secondary schools. The senior secondary schools have the capacity to accommodate 66% of the Junior Certificate level graduates based on how they fared in passing their examinations. The majority who fail to meet the cut-off points are usually from the western part of the country and are mainly Basarwa and Bakgalagadi.

Whilst government policy is to give the same opportunities to all citizens of Botswana, in practice, as stated before, there are no secondary schools amongst the Basarwa communities since the communities are regarded as too small and isolated to sustain any secondary school. Basarwa children are therefore sent to boarding schools that are far away from their settlements. The Basarwa children in boarding schools have experienced ill-treatment from their fellow students and non-Basarwa teachers (Mogwe, 1992; Polelo, 2003). By way of example, they have complained about the use of corporal punishment meted out to them for not knowing Setswana (Mogwe, 1992; Polelo 2003). Corporal punishment is detrimental and generally makes it difficult for the Basarwa children to progress academically. Corporal punishment administered to Basarwa children for not knowing Setswana is unfair and unjust given that it is either their second or even third language. It is tantamount to discrimination typical of that which the Basarwa are likely to face, both as individuals and as a community (Mogwe, 1992; Polelo, 2003).

The setup at boarding schools affords Basarwa children the opportunity to receive education but it is driven by a curriculum that lacks content that relates to the Basarwa's cultural and socio-economic needs. The curriculum is more orientated towards the dominant Tswana-speaking groups (Mogwe, 1992; Polelo 2003). The education provided to the Basarwa is therefore alien to their way of life and this raises some cultural fears. Basarwa parents view the education of their children at boarding schools with suspicion. Their concern is that their children at boarding schools are given food that is not the same as what they normally eat and because their children grow up away from home, it estranges them from their families and their culture, and that they end up not fitting into their communities again when they come back. This is the reality that the

Basarwa face - that education is changing individuals, their families and their culture (Mogwe, 1992).

Botswana followed a British system of education until 1998 when it localised its school curriculum. The current curriculum is benchmarked according to the University of Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE). The localisation of the curriculum meant that the contents of the subjects were enriched by incorporating themes related to the Botswana environment, history, and culture yet the British influence still prevails because of Botswana's historical link with the United Kingdom (UK) as a former colony. The current curriculum still does not seem to address the needs of all ethnic groups in Botswana.

My interaction with the Bakgalagadi revealed that their children are equally as affected as the Basarwa's children are. Their children are made to feel inferior and are teased by fellow students and non-Bakgalagadi teachers who are from the dominant ethnic groups. This is because of their limited command of the Setswana language. They speak Setswana with an accent so other ethnic groups can easily identify them as Bakgalagadi. This affects their self-esteem and identity. The curriculum in all schools in Botswana is delivered in English while the medium of communication in and outside the classroom is Setswana. Basarwa children therefore face serious language challenges right from primary schooling (Mogwe, 1992; Polelo 2003). The effect of instruction conducted in Setswana, is that some Basarwa children fail to proceed to secondary schools, despite the fact that there is automatic promotion (Mogwe, 1992). Failure to proceed with schooling (by passing BGCSE) results in the Basarwa being socially excluded. The consequences of this discrimination, at times, are that they are accused, arrested, and sentenced to jail for committing criminal offences. During my tenure in the western part of Botswana, the Regional Centre enrolled 25 youths from the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities who were in prison for alleged crimes that included; rape, stock theft and hunting without a licence.

One of the reasons why learners from the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities under-perform is that the educational infrastructure and resources necessary to enhance teaching and learning are below par. When it comes to information and communication

technology (ICT) infrastructure most remote settlements where marginalised communities live have none. This is despite the acknowledged importance of ICTs when it comes to addressing issues of educational equity and social exclusion (Gulati, 2008). Internet usage in Botswana is as low as 5% of the population as most rural areas lack electricity, (Isaacs, 2007). The disadvantage faced by Basarwa and Bakgalagadi in terms of ICT connectivity is similar to the Maori of New Zealand, who are also worse off in their country (Cullen, 2002).

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are perhaps the greatest tool to date for self-education and value-addition to any community's development efforts, yet poor rural communities do not have the necessary awareness, skills or facilities to enable themselves to develop using ICTs, (Gray & Sanzogni, 2004). The inadequate telecommunication infrastructure for rural areas where indigenous peoples are found across the world is a challenge. For example in South Asia, the majority and those with least resources are being left out of the benefits of the ICTs and more importantly, remote rural areas do not even have a foothold in the revolution that ICTs are ushering in, (Pringle & David, 2002). Similarly the Maori in rural areas of New Zealand are adversely affected by inadequate telecommunication infrastructure (Galpern, 2005) and as such are disadvantaged like the Basarwa and the Bakgalagadi in Botswana. However a study by Galpern (2005) indicates that Wireless Network technologies (WLAN) are raising new hopes for sustainable internet diffusion in the rural areas of the developing world as they allow drastic reductions in network deployment costs, particularly for last-mile connectivity in low-density areas. Although the digital divide remains, it needs to be addressed and the issues of geographical, weather and finances should not be an excuse in the near future. Galpern (2005) further argues that the new generation of WLAN technologies can significantly alleviate the constraints that limit internet connectivity to the wealthy and urbanised areas.

Another contributing factor for underperforming is that many Basarwa adults are still not able to read or write - a state of affairs that compares unfavourably with other ethnic groups in Botswana. Probably the most critical reason for underperformance is the use of languages unfamiliar Basarwa children as the medium of instruction. The official languages used in the country are Setswana and English and the later is the medium of

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instruction at upper primary and at secondary schools, while the former is used during the first three years in primary schools. The Basarwa, like any other community, are very proud of their mother tongue. They do not like being taught in Setswana. They want their children to be taught first through their mother tongue before learning other languages. The advantage that Setswana speaking group have is that they grasp concepts taught in Setswana faster than the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi do. The issue of teaching in mother tongue was addressed in the Botswana 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Botswana Government, 1994) yet it would appear that the government has been reluctant to implement this facet of the policy pronouncement. Most of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi parents aspire to an education that respects their own language, culture and traditions while assisting youngsters and the community to interact successfully with the dominant society (Bourne, 2003).

In Botswana, the social status of the Basarwa has been contentious for some time. In a symposium in 1997, the word marginalisation was prevalent in all discussions that focused on the Basarwa. The symposium report indicates that everyone seemed to agree that the Basarwa are marginalised (Nteta et al., 1997). The reports points out that the Basarwa were not consulted fully when they faced relocation. In the same symposium, a church minister remarked that the Basarwa were never understood by the British colonial government and, after 30 years of independence, the Botswana government still did not understand the Basarwa's unique needs. The church minister further argued that it was high time to find out why a child from the Basarwa community would never become a professor (Nteta et al., 1997). The debate of the social status and lifestyle of the Basarwa reached the highest point during the 2002 to 2006 High Court battle in Botswana, in which the Basarwa struggled for their land rights. Despite the High Court ruling in their favour, the Basarwa still face challenges in trying to return to their ancestral land to follow their traditional lifestyle.

2.4   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a description of the Basarwa and Bakgalagadi communities. The participants involved in this research study come from these remote communities and their experiences and views give this investigation a unique dimension. I endeavoured to create an understanding of the isolation in which these distance

learners try to complete their studies and the many challenges they face in terms of their socio-economic and political status. In the next chapter, I review the literature related to learning support and position my study within a theoretical framework to ensure that it is informed by theories in the field of distance education.