Impact of Culture on Communication Interactions: Case of Mixed Ethnic Secondary Schools in Botswana

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Abstract
Culture can be defined as a complex concept that is central to our own communication interactions. In this study I examined circumstances under which differences in cultures among students at Community Junior Secondary School level in Botswana impact or do not impact communication in all aspects of their everyday life. The advent of globalization coupled with an increase in inter-tribal marriages has turned our classrooms into potential melting pots for multiculturalism and multilingualism. On the other hand, very little research has been conducted on intercultural communication between culturally diverse students' populations in the country. In order **to** assess this hypothesis, this research relied on theoretical and empirical data from a survey conducted among 26 participants in schools in the North and North West Districts of Botswana. I used part of multiple case studies, interviews and questionnaires to collect data and obtain multiple views from participants. Summative evaluation results based on 26 secondary school going students, revealed that 96.2% of the participants maintained social interactions and communication with schoolmates of cultural background other than their own despite instances where the intercultural experiences were unpleasant due to lack of respect, feelings of inequality, and non acceptance.

Keywords: Culture; impact; communication interactions; mixed ethnic; Botswana

1.0 Introduction

1.1 *Overview*

The government of Botswana provides free educational opportunities for all, no matter their nationality, gender, political and religious affiliation. The education policy is inclusive of the under-represented groups (minorities and people with disabilities). However, problems which pertain to differences in language and

culture have received little attention from the government in the past decades; resulting in the practice where minority groups have been absorbed or incorporated into a dominant culture (Molosiwa, 2009).

There are many languages spoken in Botswana. The diversity in languages creates a distinction between major and minority tribes. Whereas the major tribes speak Setswana which is a dominant mother tongue language, minority tribes speak a variety of dialects (Jotia & Pansiri, 2013). Both ethnic groups speak English for communication purposes with foreigners. However, the issue of language distinction is complicated because dialects are often blurred, but reflective of the variations found within Botswana languages and culture. Setswana is widely spoken in the country and students are often taught in Setswana the very first time they are admitted into school. Setswana is a compulsory subject for Batswana children who sit for final examinations at Form III and Form V levels. As Molosiwa (2009) claims, " English is not merely a dominant medium of instruction at secondary school levels in public schools but a subject that is examined as well, and therefore, students are encouraged to speak in English at all times."

While classrooms remain multicultural and multilingual hosting many students and teachers who are culturally and linguistically diverse, Molosiwa (2009), Jotia & Pansiri (2013) argue that government has been for a long time reluctant to establish multicultural and intercultural system of education in public schools for peaceful co-existence. In steady this has resulted in the marginalisation of minority tribes. Therefore, this study looked into the communication interactional differences among Non-Batswana speakers in Community Junior Schools in Botswana to uncover how these minority ethnic groups interact among themselves. The non-Setswana groups were chosen for study because of their unique diversity in language, culture and tradition, the question then becomes:

What are the circumstances under which differences in cultures among students at lower secondary school influence (or do not influence) patterns in their communication in social interactions?

2. The Education System in Botswana

Education in Botswana spans three broad levels: Primary level, secondary level, and tertiary level. The system, particularly below the tertiary level, is government controlled. The education system does not cover pre-school but the significance of kindergarten schooling has been recognised at political level. This means, for children between the age of three and the start of basic education, attendance is optional before the age of 5 years. However, students take 7 years to complete primary education, and they can be placed at any schools in the country. Education at the primary level flows into the secondary phase, where the first three years is viewed as junior secondary education, and the remaining two years viewed as

senior secondary education. Each grade year at the primary level is regarded as a 'Standard', whereas each Grade at the secondary level is a 'Form' (*Botswana, 2012)*. In this arrangement, compulsory education includes the entire primary (Standard I-VII) up to the junior secondary (Form I- III) level.

Admission to the senior secondary school (Form IV-V) programme depends on successful performance in the Junior Certificate programme. Thus, transmission from junior secondary to senior secondary is not automatic. Only those students whom academic grades fall at average or above on the Junior Certificate Examination are admitted to the senior secondary programme (*Botswana, 2012)*. The admission rate to senior secondary schools has been increased since 2003 (stabilizing at about 98.5% currently), as a result of not just improved performance but also additional senior secondary schools being built nationwide. Furthermore, Botswana is currently building unified secondary schools, especially in most regions.

Entry to tertiary is selective, depending on academic achievement in the senior secondary programme. There is a prevocational preparation in not just the junior secondary but also the senior secondary education programme, which acts as a buffer for students who do not qualify to transmit to the university level. In any case, regardless of the level of education, inter-tribal and inter-ethnic interaction is an ongoing social factor in the communication and interaction among students and teachers in the education system.

One key objective of primary schooling is for students to be literate, first in Setswana and then in English (*Botswana, 2012)*. Thus bilingual communication is an emphasis. At the same time, focusing on two languages, without regard for the mother tongue of children from other tribes, where these languages are 'foreign', has been an area of contention among minority groups (Durham, 2001).

2.1 *Early signs of inter-tribal group communication challenges*

The communication challenges for minority groups at school begin as early as the primary and junior secondary school levels. In government primary schools, medium of teaching in the first four years is Setswana. Non-Setswana speaking students in government primary schools are obliged to communicate and learn in Setswana for the first four years of schooling. In other words, these students are required to interact with peers and teachings in a language and school environment with which they are unfamiliar. The importance of language in inter-ethnic groups or inter-tribal group communication is clear. Irresponsible language use (i.e., terms and labels) leads to stereotyping and can be viewed as offensive (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992).

In addition, message-coding and message-decoding patterns in interethnic exchanges have shown to have multiple impacts on social interactions (Gudykunst

& Kim, 1992; Molosiwa, 2009) but these have not been explored among inter-tribal student groups at schools in Botswana. Nyati-Ramahobo and Chebanne (2003) highlighted the pain many minority teenagers felt after being ridiculed about the 'tone and accent' in their voice when they participate orally in the official language of instruction at school.

Furthermore, the communication challenges for minority groups in primary schools begin with challenges in achievements in the teaching and learning situation. In a comparative study to assess the literacy skills of Setswana and non-Setswana speaking students in primary schools in Botswana, Nyati-Ramahobo (2006) found that Setswana speaking students performed satisfactorily at standard 5 in Setswana, and continue improving their English Language proficiency in terms of ability in comprehension, speaking, reading and writing throughout primary school. However, she reported, by contrast, that for students of non-Setswana speaking background comprehension (when the teacher speaks in class) in Setswana and writing skills in Setswana were quite low at standard 5. As these students progress from standard 5 to upper standard levels, their comprehension and writing skills in Setswana improve but their reading and speaking ability in the language stagnate. Achievement in English Language starts much later, merely picking up when the students are about to exit primary school.

The differential in Setswana and English Language ability for non-Setswana speakers at primary school is quite evident in achievements in class. Records of students achievements at primary school level for 2005 and following years continues to indicate that regions or districts in Botswana where Setswana is not often spoken by citizens always have a lot of students withdrawing from schools and repeating a certain standard. The problem is exacerbated by large numbers of untrained teachers (RETENG, 2007).

Moreover, the inability of non-Setswana speaking children to articulate their ideas in Setswana or English when they enroll at school is a barrier to social interaction and inter-tribal or intercultural communication at school. Interethnic (or cultural) communication involves a process in which there is "sending, receiving and interpreting of verbal and non-verbal messages between members of different ethnic groups within societal boundaries" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992). In this communicational exchange, in-group and out-group sentiments have shown to develop. For instance, Kim (1986) reported that in a study by Stephen McNabb entitled "Stereotypes and Interaction Conventions of Eskimos and non-Eskimos", which identifies and analyzes variables of interaction and communication among Alaskan, it emerged that non-native stereotypes and judgment of the character of the 'Inuit' people were the result of "faulty inferences about the meanings of communication conventions." In other words, the assessment of one group of another resulted limited understanding of their communication conventions. While a study of this nature has not been done among ethnic groups in Botswana, it

suggests misunderstanding may influence how minority groups may be judged as they communicate and interact with other tribal groups in school.

2.1.1 Omissions in previous research work

Brown (2004) and Martin (2002) argue that since cross-cultural studies in the school contexts are either based on the idea that ethnic diversity determines the way students communicate in a school environment, therefore, ethnic diversity becomes responsible for moulding the behaviour of an individual to realise his or her sense of national identity (Hofstede, 1997 & Kim, 2005). Previous research has also emphasized intercultural communication as specifically dealing with situations in which people of different cultures (e.g., tribes within a nation) communicate. Past studies have also distinguished between intercultural and interethnic communication, with the latter sometimes used interchangeably with inter-tribal communication, to refer to communication between two people from different ethnic (tribal) groups (Orbe, 2007).

By contrast, Nyati-Ramahobo (2006); Jeremiah (2008) and Adeyemi (2008) postulate that there is no clear distinction how cross-cultural differences in mixed ethnic primary and junior secondary school change communication patterns of students. The conditions at school level that influence whether or not students and staff experience pleasant or unpleasant intercultural communication encounters on issues of use of mother-tongue remains problematic. On the other hand, differences concerning contexts of communication between students from different cultures at school level must be explored further because people from different cultures have a different view of the world.

2.1.3 Importance of inter-tribal and cultural communication

The effort to embrace multicultural and intercultural education in a multilingual country like Botswana has not yielded the desired results. The increasing awareness of the importance of multicultural and intercultural education has raised a lot of debate among scholars in Botswana. According to Jotia and Pansiri (2013), marginalised minority tribes want the government of Botswana to respond to their request of peaceful co-existence by introducing mother tongue education in public or government aided schools. Similarly, instruction in mother tongue with an addition of English at a later stage, improves children's ability to cope with more difficult work at universities (Pinnock, 2012). Molosiwa (2009) cited in Hays (2002) reported that Basarwa students including many other minority students who attend primary schools in remote areas of the country did not progress in their studies due to schools lack of trained educators who are responsive and sensitive to cultural diversity in the classroom and unwillingness of educational institutions to deliver quality education to students in rural areas. Similarly, Pinnock (2012) agrees with Hays that when schoolwork lacks quality and proper guidance, it poses difficulties

and challenges to a student who cannot cope with the vocabulary and concepts from course work if instruction is in a second language. In this view, many students become frustrated and end up leaving school. However, for many who remain, they struggle to improve their performance as the majority of subjects are taught in a second language, a condition rare to achieve by most students. By the contrary, teaching students in their first language has a positive result in that it improves quality of learning and teaching and propels a learner's ability for success in higher education**.** Molosiwa (2009) contends that there are reasons why students leave school or are unsuccessful at school. She cites unfamiliar language, ethnocentrism, and unfriendly behaviour between students, teachers and their peers. Dropouts contribute to a larger percentage of failures in National Examinations in the country. This means that, a multicultural educator must be not able to embrace students and others' cultural diversity only but also be able to nurture each individual's academic growth.

The research of inter-tribal/cultural communication among students of minority (non-Tswana) and other (Tswana) cultural groups is important not only because of the potential at the school level to begin addressing what is a national problem, but also because of the importance of classroom climate in promoting effective inter-tribal communication. Tribal issues are and can be an emotional and personal topic for both teachers and students not just at school but outside school. For instance, Pettigrew and Tropp (2000) cautioned, in a study by Singh and Rampersal (2010) that "merely asking diverse races and cultural groups to come together and engage in spontaneous conversation can evoke intractable differences" because their values and beliefs are different. This is especially noticeable for non-Tswana Botswana citizen students who "feel that their self-esteem is lowered" by the social construction of their position in society. However, the reality in schools in the country is that whereas the English Language is a foreign language, Setswana is the only official indigenous language. In other words, of the two official languages, one is indigenous and the other is foreign. Although Setswana is the official indigenous language, and although some 90% of the citizens speak Setswana as their mother-tongue, or as a second language Nyati-Ramahobo & Chebanne (2003), argue that there are many citizens (and non-citizens) at school who do not speak this language at home. Furthermore, because they are of non-Tswana tribe backgrounds, they have to learn it, and thereafter be taught using it as a medium of teaching. This means, minority children and teachers at school have to, in addition to their mother-tongue, acquire two more languages in order to 'fit-in', participate, or communicate with others in certain activities, including education in society.

3. **Literature Review**

In 2005, the Minister of Education at the Regional Mother Tongue Conference (RMTC, 2005), expressed interest in ensuring that minority languages were taught at schools in Botswana. The Minister recognised mother tongue education as an important element in the child's intellectual development, the means by which the

child can realise his or her sense of belonging and grow into a productive citizen. The Minister stated that:

"Mother tongue is a language a child learns from parents, it helps the child to think, behave and develop positive attitudes towards his community. It is also true that culture and language are very important because they are the unifying elements that allow different groups to communicate and live in harmony. Through culture and language an individual can be proud of showing his or her national identity in the globalised world. However, researchers have articulated that when children are taught in their mother tongue when they are first admitted into school they can produce positive results."

The Minister of Education acknowledged the fact that the idea to provide education in local languages was farfetched because of lack of enough resources. In this view, the Commission on Revised National Policy on Education was mandated to review the entire education system and come up with an Education Policy that would move the country into the 21st century (Republic of Botswana, 1994). The report has frustrated the efforts of many scholars who want multicultural education in the country. Furthermore, the official minority languages act has up to now not been promulgated by the government of Botswana. Instead RNPE instructed schools to make appropriate arrangements with parents who wanted their languages to be taught so that schools would teach them as co-curricular activities. This study has shown that government's failure to promote instruction even in minority languages, immediately after independence, was because teaching such languages would have caused disagreements or hostilities between citizens. Such a move would not have been a remedy for people who were aspiring for national unity. The government felt that instruction in minority languages would leave the country fragmented into tribal regions, promote local and regional identity, instead of national unity. In this view, local and regional identity would promote an "enclosed" society that would neither be exposed nor compete favourably in a globalised economy (Republic of Botswana, 2005).

Pinnock (2012) postulates that mother-tongue education is most important because it develops the child's learning skills, motivates the learner and eventually restrains the number of dropouts. However, in a situation where children receive instruction at school in a language that is not spoken at home contributes to low pass rate. Furthermore, issues of language exclusion can cause violent conflicts between different cultural groups as exemplified in Bangledash in the 1950s. However, in the Botswana context, government's nondisclosure of the reasons for not implementing mother tongue education reduces the risk of inflaming a sensitive issue from public debate. Pinnock (2012) argues that children who receive instruction in a second language have the largest chance of obtaining lower scores than those children taught in their mother tongue. The study exemplifies students from Guatemala and Zambia who participated in bilingual programs that they performed better than students in monolingual programs who even received instruction in their mother

tongue. This shows that students who receive instruction in their mother tongues first become more successful second language learners.

In reviewing research on mother-tongue education, Nyati-Ramahobo (2005) in a study by Jotia and Pansiri (2013) points out that mother-tongue education (MTE) is a major part of multicultural education because it is through language and culture that children and teachers can express their world view in classrooms. This means that language is a channel through which different cultures can express their world view. Similarly, language influences the way we think and our thinking is also influenced by the language we use, and both are influenced by culture (Singh & Rampersad, 2010).

4. METHODS

4.1 *The participants*
Subjects for this study were participants at three Community Junior Secondary Schools (CJSS) in the North and North-West of Botswana. I used multiple case studies with Ba Sarwa, Ba Kalanga, Ba kalagadi, Ba Yei, Ba Herero and Ba Mbukushu student groups, because there is no other study to date which has actually based research on cross-cultural/cross-ethnicity communications of real students in real classroom situations in Africa. I used interviews and questionnaire because I needed multiple views from participants. Interviews and questionnaires were conducted in English which is a third language for participants. I distributed ten questionnaires first to participants who volunteered to take part in the study at each of the schools visited and conducted informal interviews on the presented questionnaires. Out of thirty students I chose only twenty-six for the semi-structured interviews as some participants failed to complete the questionnaire properly. The interviews lasted thirty minutes for each student because participants speak English on different levels of fluency. Some switched from English to Setswana and vice versa. I recorded interviews on tape-recorder and transcribed verbatim. Then, I coded the transcriptions using the exact language of the participants and manually compared data from recordings and questionnaires for each of the participants into specific themes and sub-themes. Letters: A, B, C.....were used together with tribe names to ensure confidentiality of participants and to minimize researcher bias.

5.   PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The data from the questionnaire was analyzed using the descriptive statistical methods. Thus, where closed type questions were used, frequency, percentages and means make up that section of the analysis. The analysis of the data is presented in the study. In terms of the qualitative (text) data from the interviews and from the open ended items on the questionnaires, a comparative method of content analysis

was used in the study. The technique involved playing and listening to the tapes then categorising information heard. The questionnaires were read twice and compared with the information heard from the tapes in order to obtain a clear picture of what was said. The reason is that students cannot write and express themselves in English. When the scripts were complete, the information was coded and then categorised into themes.

Two data analysis approaches were used. First, descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyse data from parts of the questionnaire where closed ended questions were asked. In this part of the analysis, summary statistics such as frequency, percentages, and means were used. The data from these analyses are presented in tables. Whereas frequency is represented as Freq; and percentages represented as (%); mean is indicated as bar X.

The second analysis technique used was Glassier and Strauss's (1982) Constant Comparative method. This technique was applied to the qualitative (text) data from the interviews and from the open ended items on the questionnaires. The process involved reading the verbatim, isolating units of meanings, coding and categorising these units, and constantly comparing and contrasting units for overlaps. The themes indicated in the findings section below emerged from this process of analysis.

5.1   Profile of participants

The profile of the participants in this study is described in Table 5.1 below. A total of 26 students participated. The table shows information on five demographic variables: ethnic groups of participants, their gender, age groups, grade level at school, and whether or not the participants had friends at school of different ethnic groups and languages.

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Table 5.1: Profile of participants

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No.	Variables	Description of Variables	Freq	%
1	Ethnic Groups	Basarwa	3	11.5
		Bakgalagadi	2	7.7
		Mbukushu	3	11.5
		Kalanga	3	11.5
		Babirwa	1	3.8
		Basubia	3	11.5
		Yei	3	11.5
		Herero	4	15.4
		Bakgatla	4	15.4

2	Gender	Female	7	26.9
		Male	19	73.1
3	Age Group	13 Yrs or less	1	3.8
		14 to 15 Yrs	9	34.6
		16 Yrs or above	16	61.5
4	Grade Level	Form 1	4	15.4
		Form 2	4	15.4
		Form 3	18	69.2
5	Friends at school of different ethnic groups and language	Yes	25	96.2
		No	1	3.8

Table 5.1 shows that students from nine (9) different ethnic or tribal groups participated in the study. On average, three (3) individuals from the different groups participated. Although unintentional, boys made up the majority (73.1%) of the participants. They were the more willing to participate which may be a reflection of the patriarchal nature of the society.

Majority of the participants (61.5%) aged 16 years or above, and majority (69.2%) were in the Form 3 grade level. All but one of participants had friends at school of different ethnic groups and languages. All the districts and the respective schools where participants were sampled were multi-tribal / multiethnic.

Table 5.2 shows the languages spoken by the different ethnic or tribal groups who participated in the study.

Table 5.2: Languages spoken by different ethnic / tribal groups

N o.	Ethnic Groups	Mother tongue	N	Sesarwa	Sekgalagadi	Sekalanga	Seherero	Setswana	English	Ndebele	Setswana, Sekgalagadi, Sesarwa)	No other language
1	Basarwa	Sesarwa	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
		Setswana	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Bakgalagadi	Sekgalagadi	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Mbukushu	Sembukushu	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-
		Setswana	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Kalanga	**Setswana**	3	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	1
5	Babirwa	Sebirwa	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-

6	Basubia	Sesubia	3	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	-
7	**Yei**	**Setswana**	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
8	Herero	Seherero	4	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	-
9	Bakgatla	Setswana	4	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	2

The data in Table 5.2 indicates that for most of the ethnic groups, the mother tongue is consistent with their tribal or ethnic cultural groups. In other words, majority of the students from the different tribal groups speak their mother tongue at home. The exception in this sample was students of the Yei and Kalanga tribe respectively (and few from the Mbukushu and Basarwa tribe), who speak Setswana as mother tongue, instead of their respective indigenous tribal language. For instance, the indigenous language of the Yei tribe is Seyei; for the Kalanga it is Sekalanga, and for the Mbukushu it is Sembukushu. None of these were given as mother tongue languages spoken.

Furthermore, among the students who speak non-indigenous tribal language as home language, attachment to the language of their tribe appeared implicit. The student of the Kalanga ethnic group for example gave his/her tribal language as other language. And those from the Yei tribe did not even mention Seyei as other language(s) that they know or speak. The identification with other languages holds significant implications for the long term survival and ethnic identity of minority groups.

Quite the contrary, the Tswana and non-Tswana mother tongue speaker sampled valued intercultural communication. On average, the sample agreed that they engaged in intercultural communication for altruistic and extrinsic motives (see Table 5.3). For instance, the motivation to communication and get along with other Batswana (citizens of Botswana) of cultures other than their own is to support national unity at all levels of society. At the micro or school level, the groups agreed they interact with other cultures *not* just to find friends to study with (mean=4) but also to build trust with others (mean=4). On the basis of these sentiments, intercultural communication was highly valued by the participants.

Table 5.3: Reasons for engaging in intercultural communication

Variables	Description of variables	N	Min	Max	Mean*	Std. Error
Motivation	I interact with other cultures to get along with them at all levels of society	26	1	5	4	.215
	I interact with other cultures to find friends to study with	26	1	5	4	.215

	I interact with other cultures to build trust with others	26	1	5	4	.220
	I interact with other cultures to satisfy my peer's needs	26	1	5	3	.274
	I interact with other cultures to satisfy my own needs/ desires	26	1	5	3	.228
Cultural competence	I interact with other cultures to develop intercultural communication competence	26	1	5	4	.237
	I interact with other cultures to learn to respect and tolerate cultural differences with school mates	26	3	5	4	.123
	I interact with other cultures in order to have the ability to negotiate and interact well across cultures	26	3	5	4	.141
	I interact with other cultures to increase my level of discourse in the classroom	26	1	5	4	.214
cultural awareness	I interact with other cultures for cultural awareness: i.e., to understand similarities and differences	26	1	5	4	.183
	I interact with other cultures to be aware of the prejudices my peers may be harboring	26	1	5	3	.254
	I interact with other cultures to learn the behaviour of others who may believe their culture is superior	26	1	5	3	.209
	I interact with other cultures to learn the behaviour of other cultures	26	2	5	4	.160
Attitudes	I am critical of other cultures	26	1	5	3	.237
	I am critical of other cultures because of the influence from peers	26	1	5	3	.204
	I have difficulties to study with peers of my culture	26	1	5	2	.240
	I interact with other cultures to abuse students from other cultures	26	1	4	2	.149

* Table 5.3: Shows A 5 Point Likert Scale in which 1=SD, 2=D, 3=N, 4=A and 5=SA

Case study: A

The following case studies highlight the cultural and communication problems students and their peers who are linguistically and culturally diverse often encounter in a multicultural learning environment. During school visits I was able to see very diverse schools in terms of students' population. I had the chance to interact with students from non-Setswana speaking backgrounds and talk about issues related to research. This means the research was not inclusive of Setswana speaking students. Interactions with students at schools gave me some insights on the problems of cross-cultural/intercultural communication in a multicultural learning environment. The interview data supports the sentiments expressed through the questionnaire survey. Across the tribal groups interviewed, members spoke of reasons why communicating with other nationals of different ethnic origins or language groups is significant. For example, one member of the Mbukushu tribe stated:

> *My experience interacting with members of other tribes has been good and friendship relation has been well because when I am with others [other tribe members] I am able to learn their way of life even if there is a little misunderstanding [difference] between my way of life and theirs* (Person A, Mbukushu).

Member of the Yei tribe expressed similar sentiments, noting that intercultural communication is useful for nationalism:

> *Without understanding properly, you may think that maybe he or she [member of other cultures] is insulting you in his or her language* (Person C, Yei).

> *I experienced that many people are willing to learn our language (Seyei) so they ask me questions or words in Setswana and I will translate them in Yei, we have good conversations, we laugh and all that stuff* (Person A, Yei).

Intercultural communication across tribal groups then is valued for various reasons, some altruistic, others extrinsic, and still others intrinsic. The reasons intercultural communication are valued is related to the motives for engaging in it in the first place. Another point that emerged from the data is that participants perceived that inter-tribal communication builds cultural awareness. In other words, it raises awareness of one's own cultural identity and background. The participants were fully aware of the journey they were on in developing awareness. As Table 5.3 indicates, on average, members of the Basarwa, Bakgalagadi, Mbukushu, Kalanga, Babirwa, Basubia, Yei, Herero, and Bakgatla tribes all agreed that when they interact with other cultures they do so to learn, i.e., to understand similarities and differences of other cultural groups, and to learn the behaviour of other cultures.

However, as Table 5.3 shows, on average, the sample was unsure or disagreed that the reason they interact with members of other cultural group was to learn of any behaviours by any group who may believe their culture is superior or any prejudices they may be harbouring.

Case study: B

The building of cultural understanding, awareness and appreciation came out as a strong theme during interviews as a determinant to establish intercultural communication and interactions. For many, without understanding, communication proved difficult. The perception that intercultural communication contributes to building of cultural understanding and awareness was a common thread that cuts across members of all the tribal groups:

> *Interacting with other friends helps me to learn their cultures and also you end up knowing how they conserve their environment, as we focus on indigenous knowledge system such as their totem, norms* (Person B, Basarwa tribe).

Another tribe member stated a typical point, indicating: "…I ask them (other group members) about their cultural groups and they ask me about our culture so we get to know and understand each other well" (Person B, Kalanga tribe).

Case study: C

The sense of asking or general curiosity about otherness was a persistent and powerful theme throughout the interviews. The most succinct commentary showing the enigmatic influence of cultural curiosity was shared by Mbukushu tribe who described his experience:

> *I just talk about our traditional way of life, like fishing, dancing and food. Some of them (other ethnic group members) get interested in our way of life of Mbambukusho so they start asking me what favourite food Mbumkushu like... then I tell them, some of them who are different from my tribe become my friends* (Person C, Mbukushu).

Case study: D

Cultural awareness is developed. The knowledge and understanding that develop contributed to particular kind of experiences during intercultural communication. For many of the participants, the experience interacting with members of a culture other than their own has been positive, and those relationships began outside school. Unlike in some other countries in other parts of Africa, interethnic group perception of each other among students in this study appears affirmative. But the

learning and experience from communicating and interacting with other ethnic groups was equally transformational for members of other tribal groups. A Bakgalagadi commented:

> *When I see other friends speaking their language, I like their language…*
> *Then I tell them to teach me their culture and language, and how they share*
> *their knowledge with each other. I speak their language when I am around*
> *with them because I love their language* (Person A, Bakgalagadi)

Clearly, at a linguistic level, there seemed to be ongoing informal learning taking place across ethnic group members, outside the formal curriculum at school. In all of this learning, and transformation, cultural awareness is being developed and positive interaction enhanced.

A member of the Mbukushu tribe who has friends who are Herero explained:

Being able to speak in a common language is at the core of the cultural awareness development trajectory among the student participants, as a Herero remarked:

> *…We use common language and we usually try to explain for one another*
> *so that we can know each other's language. We try to learn each other's*
> *language through Setswana; we also try to teach each other our own*
> *languages by using Setswana as a medium of communication* (Person B,
> Herero).

The role of language in cultural discourse is clearly evident. The language that is known is used as the basis to build scaffolds towards learning the languages of others and building cultural understanding. The emphasis on knowing the language of the other is further indication of the intimacy between language and culture. The participants evidently recognised that language is a significant marker of cultural identity, and when in use it allows them to refer to, and access, phenomena beyond the language itself. In other words, deeper understanding develops.

A Form 2 student from the Yei tribe noted how students from other cultures appeared to have been taught to "not appreciate" the cultural practices of others: "…*The problems... in languages, dress codes of other tribes, and the food they eat...*" (Person A). Herero also spoke of the dialectical interpretations of nonverbal communication at school. The cultural difference was "...*in speaking my friend's language; eating their food; appreciating their attire; [and not knowing why they] always being in their tribal groups*" (Person B). Language, behaviour patterns, and values form the base upon which meaning is exchanged in and across cultures. Thus, dressing communicates nonverbally as is group cohesion. However, some cultures prefer to be individualistic, whereas others are more collectivistic in orientation. The

cultural differences pertaining to these values impact communication. Managing differences is necessary for effective intergroup communication.

The student participants of this study managed potential conflict points. One of the central mechanisms to cope with differences was their *increased language ability*. Some participants made attempts to learn the language of other tribes in order to maintain friends. As the evidence indicated, students from minority tribes, i.e., the non-Tswana cultural orientations made greater effort to learn. Hereros explained:

> *...I wanted to know the language he speaks... at first we spoke Setswana because we know the language; we ended up knowing each other's languages. Example: we became friends because of playing boxing together* (Person D, Herero);

Minority tribes actively learn the language of other groups, but they also actively teach their languages to others. In other words, they were both active recipient and provider of the knowledge. Furthermore, by learning and speaking other languages they develop the competency to interact with different cultural groups. Minority tribes teach the majority tribe members the language of the minority group. Bakgatla acknowledged the experience, noting: "*...they teach us different language…*"

6. DISCUSSION

In Botswana issues of multicultural societies, national unity and cross-cultural communications are key links to educational quality and equity. The purpose to provide inclusive education that would usher the country into the 21st century is noticeable in the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) and vision 2016 Report (Molosiwa, 2009). The National Development Plan (NDP) speaks to the need to upgrade the quality of education so that we can be an Educated and Informed Nation. However, after independence from Britain the government passed a law to allow Local government (1965) to run primary education while the Ministry of Education took responsibility for secondary education (Jotia & Pansiri, 2013). The Botswana government maintained English as an official language, while Setswana was declared the dominant language that would be spoken by all ethnic groups in the country. Some minority Languages that were taught in schools, heard on radio and used for meetings at the tribal court (*kgotla)* were phased out. Public officers for example, nurses, teachers and the police who were posted in non-Tswana speaking parts of the country were expected to uphold the Setswana language and customs. According to RETENG (2007) this was intended to create peace (*Kagisano*) and unity in a country where the minorities are in the majority. However, the problems of unity and pluralism are noticeable everywhere in the country.

This study has observed that the previous studies emphasized the use of mother-tongue education (MTE) because of its importance in developing the child's

language skills that can deliver high quality outcomes. Arguably, instruction in mother tongue does not reduce the skills or attained cognitive development by the child in a second language (English) but it helps the child in learning the second language much easier. By contrast, learning to read in a second language is more demanding because the child spends more time learning a new vocabulary. Furthermore, instruction in an unfamiliar language, possess serious problems to the child who has not only to build a new vocabulary but adjust to new terminologies and concepts within a short space of time. The previous studies argue that by choosing Setswana and English as a medium of instruction in schools meant other cultural groups and their languages were inferior in education (Jotia &Pansiri, 2013).

Therefore, the present system of education has failed minority school going children who cannot progress in education because they have been forced to learn Setswana language and culture (Nyati-Saleshando, 2011). Menchu agrees with Nyati-Saleshando that: "many people who understand what it entails to struggle in school and unconditionally drop out become more frustrated and disappointed by the decision to teach in an unfamiliar language." This means that a child who receives instruction in a language other than his or her own cannot cope with learning.

This study also observes that in a study conducted by Nyati-Ramahobo and Chebanne (2003) from the 2001 census, people who speak Setswana in their homes account for only 78% of the population. This percentage is inclusive of Setswana and non-Setswana speakers. However, Gantsi, Kgalagadi and Ngamiland reported 20%, 53% and 59% respectively for the use of Setswana in the home. While 80% of the children in Gantsi, 47% in Kgalagadi and 41% in the Ngamiland district, speak their own ethnic languages at home. Statistics for 2005 reveal that the exclusion of mother tongue or multicultural education in schools where Setswana is not spoken at home has impacted national examination results. Similarly, these districts have the highest number of student drop out, repeaters and untrained teachers.

However, the findings of this study show practical implications in three major domains: First, intercultural communication in schools in plural societies takes place even without multicultural education; second, Culture and language in a plural school and classroom environment are respected to minimize misunderstandings and maintain unity among diverse student populations and third, social interactions among students take place with minimum caution because interactions are mostly confined to friends within the tribe. Therefore, not only did the study observe mother tongue differences but also observed that students were either defensive of their language during interactions or offensive as they sought the need for identity in a learning environment devoid of multicultural education.

I found that individuals of different cultures who share common citizenry, and live in a national orientation that encourages national unity, can contribute to multilingualism. For most of the ethnic groups, the mother tongue was consistent

with their tribal or ethnic/ cultural groups. Some tribal groups were willing to communicate in their language, and proud of it. But, there were instances among minority tribes where, the language they gave as their home language was different from the tribal language. The tribal language was relegated to other language. This study has shown that the attitudes that students held towards their own tribal language impact on language usage. The findings are similar with past research conducted by Braber (2003) in Germany, following the unification of East and West Germany which stated that the attitude of the East to learning the language of the West, concluded that the asymmetrical relationship between the two German people contributed to how the East felt about their own language and how they felt about learning the language of the West. Asymmetrical relationship between the tribal groups in this study may partly account for the willingness of some minority groups to displace their tribal language as other language. But the finding may also be due to expediency and pragmatism. Minority tribes face the challenge of learning the official and national languages of Setswana and English used at school while at the same time learning their mother-tongue (RETENG, 2007). The willingness to learn the majority language may be linked to efforts among parents to prepare their children to cope with the language of instruction at school. The capability of speaking the official and national languages at an early age prepares minority children to quickly adapt to the teaching and learning situation at school where Setswana and English are medium of instruction. Minority languages are not a medium of instruction.

7.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Several important findings can be concluded from the study. First, the study found various circumstances which influenced different outcomes in intercultural communication among the tribes. Among these were respect for differences; social acceptance of otherness; multi-lingualism; different values and beliefs and opportunities for contact with differences. Where these were absent, inter-tribal communication among the groups was unproductive, and led to defensiveness. I also explored the problems non-Tswana speakers encounter in communicating with other ethnic groups in a learning environment dominated by Setswana.

Non-Tswana mother-tongue students (of Yei, Kalanga, Basarwa, and Herero tribes) and Tswana mother-tongue students perceive inter-tribal communication with each other in both pleasant and unpleasant ways, depending on the conditions. Where the perception was related to the benefits that may accrue from intergroup communication, intergroup communication was positive - which were that inter-tribal communication is valuable; inter-tribal communication builds cultural awareness and respect and cultural competence. Otherwise, the perception was different, which implies a level of self-interest in the process.

Encounters of cultural differences are handled with apprehension and silence in inter-tribal communicational interactions. While various cultural differences related

to verbal and non-verbal cues in communication existed among the tribes, the verbal-cues included language and speech patterns, cultural values and assumptions, customs, and power relations in communication. Interpretation of nonverbal cues such as waving held different meaning which were not commonly understood. Increased language ability; use of popular language and in-group friendship and courtesy were the main mechanisms that were applied to cope. The major limitation of this research is that only minority ethnic groups from three schools in three districts of Botswana were used. Thus, sample size and the contextual nature of the study limit generalisation of findings. Further studies should be conducted to include Tswana speaking students in order to form a more balanced view of whether or not there are circumstances under which differences in cultures among diverse students at lower secondary school influence patterns in their communication in social interactions.

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