

# Setswana mother tongue: Opportunities and challenges in Namibian schools

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## Abstract

The official language policy in Namibia states that schools should teach grade 1 to 3 pupils in their mother tongue, but it is seldom taught as a medium of instruction in those grades. Where it is taught, there are seldom qualified teachers to teach it. This research investigates the teaching of Setswana language in schools in order to assess the factors contributing to the gap between policy and reality. Setswana speakers in Namibia constitute 0.3% of households (NSA, 2012) (unlike in Botswana where they are the majority and in South Africa, they constitute a substantial group). The rationale is that knowing the challenges and opportunities to providing mother tongue education to Batswana people may contribute to policy formulation that allows achievement of Namibia's goal of Education for All (EFA). Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were the main qualitative data collection methods utilised for this study. Findings indicate that among the challenges of teaching in the mother tongue to Setswana children include; lack of qualified teachers, lack of teaching material, and conflict between curriculum panelists and Setswana subject advisor at NIED. Among the opportunities are collaboration with Botswana and South Africa governments on Setswana curriculum development in schools, Namibian schools, sourcing Setswana school materials and a pool of potential Setswana language teachers from Botswana and South Africa. It can be concluded that concerted efforts should be made by authorities to promote the use of local languages (such as Setswana) as a medium of instruction.

## Introduction

This research assessed the teaching of Setswana language in Namibian schools and the possibility of introducing the teaching of this language at the University of Namibia's lower primary education programme. The 2011 Namibian Population and Housing Census indicated that Setswana language is spoken in 0.3% of households (Namibia Statistical Agency [NSA], 2011, p. 30).

The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) affirmed the right to education without discrimination. Article 2 of the Declaration spoke against discrimination on the grounds of language. UNESCO supported education in the mother tongue:

*It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium. (UNESCO, 1953, p. 11)*

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Namibia has come a long way in declaring 'Education for All' and recognising that all ethnic groups are key players in attaining the International Declaration on Education. The government introduced *The Language Policy for Schools 1992-1996 and Beyond* (Ministry of Education and Culture [MEC], 1993, p. 4) to preserve languages, cultures, customs and traditions practiced by all ethnic groups. In line with Article 3 of the Namibian Constitution, the Policy specifies that all national languages are equal regardless of the number of speakers or their level of development. It stipulates that "education should promote the language and cultural identity of learners through the use of Home Language medium at least in Grades 1 to 3 and the teaching of Home Language throughout formal education, provided the necessary resources are available" (MEC, 1993, p. 4). It also states that "grade 1-3 (lower primary) is taught through one of the languages recognised by the MEC. In this phase, English will be offered as a subject for all learners. In Grades 4-7 (upper primary) English will be used as the medium of instruction for all promotional subjects, i.e. subjects relevant in order to be promoted to the next level. In grades 8-10 English will be the sole language of instruction." (Klein, 2011, p. 82) The goal "is to foster the language identity of the children through the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction during the formative years of schooling, so that they can develop the skills of reading, writing and concept formation using their mother tongue" (Davids, 2011, p. 126). Implementation of the language policy in Namibia is fraught with difficulties for the minority people (Hopson, 2011, p. 119).

Namibian languages are in three families: the Bantu languages, the Khoisan languages, and the Indo-European languages. Thirteen languages have been recognised in Namibia as national languages, including 10 Bantu languages spoken by 83.2% of the population and 3 Indo-European languages (English, German and Afrikaans) spoken by 14.7% of the population (NSA, 2011, p. 34). The "establishment of English as the official language would take place in the classroom" (MEC, 1993, p. 2), despite the recognition of all the 13 languages.

Official policy states that schools should teach grade 1 to 3 pupils in their mother tongue but, "there is a gap between the policy intentions and the reality in the Namibian schools" as "mother tongue is seldom taught as a medium of instruction from grade 1 to 3, and many schools do not offer Namibian indigenous languages as subjects from Grade 4 until Grade 12" (Klein, 2011, p. 82).

This research specifically investigates the teaching of the Setswana language in Namibian Schools in order to assess the factors contributing to the gap between policy and reality on the ground. The rationale for the research is find out the challenges and opportunities to providing mother tongue education to Tswana speakers contributing to policy formulation that allows achievement of Namibia's Education for All.

## **Objectives**

The general objective was to identify opportunities and challenges in teaching Setswana language in schools.

### **The specific objectives are to:**

- Investigate the challenges (availability of teachers, teacher's qualification, accommodation for teachers and learners) that affect the teaching of Setswana language;
- Investigate the process (timetabling, commitment, availability of material) and barriers affecting the teaching of Setswana language in schools;
- Investigate the potential for Setswana language teachers to enroll for tertiary level language courses; and
- Investigate support systems to be offered to the schools teaching Setswana language.

## **Literature review**

**Importance of language:** Language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture (De Wet, 2002, p. 121) and is especially important in the cultural identity of children. Similarly, Klein (2011, p. 83) argued that many indigenous peoples have experienced multiple forms of exclusion. These have origins in colonial domination as well as present political dispensations that permit economic and social discrimination. Consequently, indigenous people suffer relatively higher levels of illiteracy, poverty and lower life expectancy. Lack of access to basic services such as education has led to lower literacy levels among many indigenous populations (Haneman, 2005, p. 3). According to Klein:

*In the educational system, drop-out rates are often higher and success rates lower among indigenous groups. Formal educational systems often fail to meet the specific needs and knowledge constructions of indigenous people both in relation to curricula and teaching methodologies. Academic knowledge is generally preferred and traditional wisdom and skills are devalued. Lack of mother tongue education has contributed to lower literacy levels within indigenous populations compared to the national averages (2011, p. 83).*

The view that ignoring the mother tongue is detrimental to child development is supported by Bloch and Edwards (1998, p. 13) who argue that “the tendency to ignore or trivialise home languages in school may have very damaging effects hardly conducive to the feelings and comfort which go hand in hand with successful learning”. Additionally, there is the concern that children that are taught in English may become anglicised - at the expense of their own cultural heritage (De Wet, 2002, p. 119). De Wet and Wolhuter (2009, p. 359) added that among parents there was a “deep-seated distrust and fear that home-language education would lead to impoverishment, social and political isolation, and disempowerment”. This resulted in the majority of South African learners indicating preference for English as the language of primary instruction instead of their native tongue (De Wet & Wolhuter, 2009, p. 362). Similarly, Bagwasi (2003, p. 212) argued that the use of English marks it as an economic, education and social status marker in Botswana. It is also in this regard that Nyati-Ramahobo (1991, p. 21) found that a decline in morale in the teaching and learning of Setswana in Botswana schools was connected to its low status in society. Lack of efforts to train manpower in Setswana reflected the low value attached to it by educators as a national language, a subject and a career.

**Benefits of mother tongue:** Students attending schools that give classes in their mother tongues will have fewer difficulties in learning than those who need to translate the information due to, for instance, lower richness of vocabulary or poorer understanding (Worswick, 2004, p. 66). Chiswick and Miller highlighted the importance of students feeling accepted in their social environments, they therefore tend to get closer to people who speak the same language. Students will feel more comfortable in schools where people share the same mother tongue (1994, p. 120). According to Bialystok (2001, p. 25), subjecting learners to education in a language they do not quite understand may impede on school competence and cognition. De Witt, Lessing and Dicker (1998, p. 119) indicated that mother tongue is the most appropriate medium for imparting the skills of reading and writing, particularly in the initial years of schooling. Similarly, Heugh, Benson, Bogale and Yohannes (2007, p. 28) and Uys, Van der Wait and Botha (2007, p. 70) lauded mother tongue education as more effective than bilingual or second language medium of instruction. The mother-tongue can be instrumental in enabling the acquisition of English proficiency and the mastering of other academic content (De Wet, 2002, p. 121). Trudell and Shroeder (2007, p. 167) argued that using one’s mother tongue is a qualitatively better learning experience. It may also improve educational participation and outcomes (Benson, 2010, p. 329) and literacy and numeracy outcomes (Heugh, et al., 2007, p. 42; Benson, 2010, p. 327).

**Benefits of multilingualism:** The ability to understand and speak several languages seems to have cognitive benefits. According to the results of the studies by GilLacruz and GilLacruz (2012, p. 167), children raised bilingually develop a specific type of cognitive benefit during infancy. Although immigrant children's initial academic achievement is said to be disadvantaged by their lack of English speaking abilities, literature seems to indicate that there are cognitive advantages to being bilingual (Cummins, 2000, p. 30; Diamond, 2010, p. 336). There are mutually reinforcing relationships between non-linguistic and linguistic intellectual functioning and bilingualism (Cummins, 2000, p. 34). For South Africa, Chick and McKay (2001, p. 165) claimed that "learners learn the mother languages (including the dominant language) most effectively when there is the continued educational use of the learners' first languages and, therefore, respect for the cultural assumptions and values implicit in them, that is, an additive approach." It is in the same spirit that De Wet (2002, p. 119) argued that "learners are therefore more successful in acquiring second language literacy if they have already mastered strategies for negotiating meaning in print in their home language. Learning and changing over to a second language is a traumatic experience; it takes a learner up to seven years to acquire adequate skills in a second language". Psychologist Bialystok (2001, p. 27) demonstrated that bilingual children have metalinguistic awareness earlier than monolingual children and they are more creative and have enhanced cognitive flexibility. Similarly, Barac and Bialystok (2011, p. 37) contend that children who are educated initially in their mother tongue then learn a second language, seem more proficient and achieve more academic success than those who have not.

**Difficulties in teaching the mother tongue:** According to Benson (2004, p. 22) poverty presents a challenge to the provision of mother tongue-based schooling. This is because mother tongue education is often provided to the marginalised people who lack basic services and human basic needs. This situation negatively affects student performance. School feeding programmes, remission of fees and relative incentives may help alleviate this challenge.

Resource allocation to the mother tongue is also often problematic. To this end, Ninkova (2009, p. 33) and Davids (2011, p. 128) pointed to the lack of housing and other services for teachers that are involved in teaching of the mother tongue to San children in Namibia. Teachers' lack of basic facilities, just as non-bilingual schools are, leads to inadequate school performance (Benson, 2004, p. 11). "A serious investment of time and resources, along with a commitment to collaboration between linguists, educators and community members is required to prepare materials" (Benson, 2004, p. 9), if mother tongue education is to be realised. Unfortunately, this often lacks in many countries. According to Heugh, et al. (2007, p. 94), there are also difficulties in keeping qualified teachers who are mother tongue speakers. Curriculum departments that developed, published and distributed appropriate mother tongue material in Ethiopia were faced by a problem of insufficient funds, leading to severe shortages of textbooks, especially in rural primary schools (Heugh et al., 2007, p. 67). There are also structural challenges to the implementation of mother tongues that are dependent on political decision-making (Benson, 2004, p. 19), and this includes top-down introduction of mother tongue without adequate piloting and resourcing.

### **Methodology and approach**

The data collection tools used were qualitative and, more specifically, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Among the Key Informants were:

- Setswana Teachers
- School Principals
- Batswana Traditional Authority

- Setswana language Care-taker at Omaheke Regional Education Directorate
- Setswana Subject Advisor at NIED
- Setswana Curriculum Panelists
- Batswana Parents and Community Members

FGDs were held with Batswana parents, community members, traditional authorities and teachers. Each FGD had a minimum of four (4) and a maximum of eleven (11) people. There were five (5) FGDs, all mixed. Because the groups comprised of men, women and youth, the researcher took care to observe the hierarchical cultural norms in the community. FGDs aimed at firstly, soliciting the Batswana's concerns and feelings about preserving the language at home and it being taught at school. Secondly, assessing the support parents and traditional authority members provide and could provide to children and schools in the implementation Setswana language teaching in schools. The researcher also inquired from the respondents the best ways to attract Batswana learners (former and current) to study Setswana language at tertiary institutions. Potential hindrances that could inhibit students at tertiary level were also discussed.

**Population:** The Namibian population is currently estimated at 2.1 million (National Planning Commission 2011). Batswana people mainly reside in Omaheke region in the following constituencies: Kalahari, Steinhausen, Gobabis Urban and Aminuis. The 2011 Census estimates that there are 1,328 Tswana households, constituting about 0.3% of Namibia's population (NSA, 2011).

**Sampling:** The sample of Setswana language speakers included in this study was only from the Omaheke region. There are seven schools in Namibia teaching Setswana language, varying from grade 1 to grade 12. Only 4 of the seven schools were included into the sample, due to time limitations, financial constraints and distances involved due to the vastness of the country. The schools selected in the samples were Epukiro Roman Catholic primary School and Mphethuto Primary School offering grade 1 to 7; Mokaleng Combined Roman Catholic School offering grade 1 to 10, and Johannes Dohren Roman Catholic High School offering grade 8 to 12 was also included. Although three other schools were not included in the sample, information about their learners' enrolment and teaching staff was obtained from the Omaheke Educational Regional Directorate.

Principals and Setswana teachers at the selected schools were interviewed. Six (6) teachers at Epukiro Roman Catholic Primary School, eight (8) teachers at Mphethuto Primary School, sixteen (16) teachers at Mokaleng Roman Catholic Combined School and 1 teacher at Johannes Dohren Roman Catholic High School were interviewed. In total, thirty-one (31) teachers including principals were included in the sample. FGDs were held in all the schools. The exception was at Johannes Dohren Roman Catholic High School because the interviews were conducted over the weekend.

Furthermore, at two of the selected schools, community members and parents were interviewed. At Epukiro School, six (6) parents and community members (5 women and 1 man) were interviewed. At Mokaleng, a focus group discussion was held with the Batswana Traditional Authority Council. Four (4) respondents were council members and three (3) were community members. Two key informant interviews were with Omaheke Education Directorate (i.e. the Education Officer for Lower primary and the Inspector of Education - representing the Setswana Language Care-taker). At NIED the Setswana Language Officer was also included in the study.

**Data analysis:** The investigators firstly met to review the study’s major objectives and questions in the interview guide. Secondly, they developed categories for the topics discussed by the various Focus Groups and KIs. They then selected statements that represented given topics from the transcript and gave interpretations of what they meant. Thus each investigator first independently scanned the transcripts for comments from respondents about Setswana education issues. They then systematically examined interview data and established themes and located examples within the transcripts on ways in which these themes were portrayed in the participants’ own words. The use of multiple analysts was strategic as it provided us with the opportunity to assess the reliability of coding of major themes and issues. The investigators again met to compare notes and to identify commonalities, including examples from participants’ quotes. The discussions showed that there were not only many similarities in our individual analyses, but also some differences were noted. These differences were discussed until an agreement was reached.

The themes that emerged as challenges to developing the Setswana languages were: schools teaching the Setswana language and dialects; problems in material development; and availability and challenges faced by Setswana learners. Among opportunities, the themes included tracing Setswana learners, Setswana language teachers and interest in studying the Setswana Language, and Networking and Collaboration in order to source teaching materials from Botswana and South Africa.

## Findings

### Challenges of Promoting Setswana Mother Tongue

**Schools teaching the Setswana language:** The schools teaching Setswana are all in the Omaheke region. In total, there are seven (7) schools teaching Setswana, varying from grade 1 to 12 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Schools teaching Setswana**

School	Grades
Epukiro Roman Catholic (RC) primary school	1 to 7
Motsomi primary school	1 to 7
Mphethuto primary school	1 to 7
Mokaleng RC combined school	1 to 10
Mokganeedi high school	8 to 12
Wennie Du Plessis high school	8 to 12
Johannes Dohren RC high school	8 to 12

Source: Omaheke Education Regional Directorate

All the schools (Table 1) have Setswana on their time table. An exception is Wennie du Plessis high school where Setswana is taught after school. The designated Setswana teacher at Wennie du Plessis is a full time employee of the school. The reason why Setswana is offered after school is because of the low number of Setswana learners.

### Number of learners learning

**Setswana:** Batswana parents generally enroll their children in school and the retention rate is high across all school levels. An exception is a few female learners who drop out due to teenage pregnancies, mainly in secondary school. Many of these are in poor socio-economic circumstances. Across all research sites, enrollment figures were provided for various years. Similarly, the pass rate of Setswana was also highlighted.

**Table 2: Number of Setswana learners enrolled in Omaheke schools during 2012**

School	Lower and Upper Primary	
	Grades	Number of learners
Lower Primary	1-4	560
Upper Primary	5-6	560
Mokaleng RC Combined school	8	68
	9	34
	10	25
Wennie du Plessis	8	9
	9	1
	10	3
	11	0
	12	1
Johannes Dohren RC senior secondary school (SSS)	8	44
	9	24
	10	15
	11	18
	12	14
Mokganedi Tlhabelo high school (HS)	8	21
	9	15
	10	3
	11	0
	12	1

Source: Omaheke Education Regional Directorate

At Epukiro and Mokaleng schools, all learners are doing Setswana as a school subject. However, in Mphethuto and Johannes Dohren high school learners choose between Setswana and Khoekhoegowab as the mother language. At Epukiro primary school, enrolment in 2010 was 260 and in 2011, the overall enrollment was 254 learners. Mphethuto primary school enrolled 129 learners in Setswana during the year 2012 and these were from grade 1 to grade 7. Although the enrolment of San learners at Mphethuto primary school is higher than that of Batswana speaking learners by 254 learners, San languages are not taught. All learners are either doing Khoekhoegowab or Setswana. Table 2 shows the number of Setswana learners enrolled in Omaheke schools during 2012.

**Proficiency in Setswana:** The researcher enquired about Setswana skills in schools. This question was asked because many Namibians teaching Setswana have low qualifications, ranging from grade 10 to 12. There were many views on current teachers' proficiency in Setswana. Both the NIED Education Officer and the Setswana Examiner for high schools said that the quality of Setswana taught was of lower standard as the teachers were not well-versed in Setswana. Most did not have tertiary education in Setswana. According to the NIED Setswana Examiner, there seemed to be a decline in the pass rate of Setswana. She attributed the disappointing results to the fact that the South African expatriate who had been teaching Setswana, left. This was a South African Motswana speaking teacher attached to one of the secondary schools in Omaheke Region. He introduced the teaching of Setswana at the Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) for grade 12 level and several teachers enrolled to improve their Setswana.

The researcher enquired about the ability of parents and adults to assist children with Setswana homework. Both the Batswana Traditional Authority and the parents in Epukiro were concerned about the lack of interest of children in speaking and learning Setswana. They blamed parents for preferring to teach Afrikaans or English to their children at the expense of Setswana language. Parents conceded the point but argued, that “as much as we would want to speak Setswana at home, children are not interested. They cannot see how the language will benefit them in the future. The only prospect they see with Setswana is working at the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) Setswana radio. What else can one do with the language after graduating from school? It does not give them an advantage to study at tertiary institutions even if learners pass it with good grades. It is not taught anywhere else” (Parent FGD, Epukiro).

Focus Group Discussants also said that the Setswana that learners currently learn at school differ from the version parents speak at home. “*The Setswana learners learn is foreign, that is, the Setswana from NIED. We only know spoken language, whilst our children have advanced their Setswana. This makes it difficult for us to assist our children with homework.*” (Parent, Epukiro) According to them, Batswana speak “Setlhwaro” dialect of “he” whilst in books it is written “re”. Setlhwaro is only spoken at home (Parents FGD, Epukiro). Written Setswana and spoken Setswana differ, although the differences should not be exaggerated. Illiteracy amongst parents, however contributes to parents not knowing the “modern Setswana”. They further explained that parents cannot catch up with the ‘modern’ Setswana due to lack of material for parents to read at home. “*Someone once brought a Setswana book from Republic of South Africa (RSA), parents in the village had to compete over that single book, because they all wanted to read it.*” (Parents FGD, Epukiro) It has become difficult to preserve Setswana because of a limited number of qualified teachers in the language and on radio (as announcers).

Learners who are very good in Setswana at primary school do not always get a chance to study Setswana as they progress to high school. If they go to a high school where Setswana is taught, they are eager to do it but if they go where it is not taught they divert and end up studying other languages. Parents also deliberately send learners to non-Setswana schools because they want quality education for their children. Few good quality secondary schools teach Setswana as a mother language. Wennie du Plessis secondary school, is a good quality school in Gobabis but has the lowest Setswana learner intake. It is in this context that members of the Traditional Authority emphasised: “*We want Setswana also to be introduced in urban areas and not be confined to rural schools only.*” They also argued for adult literacy material on Setswana. One of the council members said: “*We can read and write Afrikaans but we are forgetting how to read and write Setswana. It is also difficult to get Setswana teachers at all levels; as a result, schools resort to recruiting unqualified teachers because tertiary institutions are not training any teachers.*”

When asked how Setswana teaching should be supported, all respondents mentioned the need to have trained Setswana teachers at both primary and secondary school levels; “*The majority of the trained Batswana teachers are about to retire and the new generation is mostly unqualified temporary teachers.*” The respondents in Mokaleng Combined School and Johannes Dohren High School expressed appreciation for the South African Setswana Teachers that get recruited on contract: “*They have made an immense contribution towards the development of Setswana.*” (Teacher, Mokaleng) The respondents, however, stated that the current arrangement is not sustainable, as there are no formalised arrangements on how the South African Teachers are attached to their schools. They proposed that in future they would consider formalising the arrangements.



**Development and availability of Setswana teaching materials:** Setswana is taught in schools from grade 1 to 12 and its teaching material is supposed to be developed at NIED, like all other languages in Namibia. NIED has appointed an Education Officer who is responsible for Setswana and Lozi. The Education Officer is, however, not conversant in Setswana. To complement the functions of the Education Officer, Setswana language has Curriculum Panelists responsible for translating and reviewing school material sought from publishers in South Africa and/or in Botswana.

Several concerns were raised regarding the development of Setswana teaching material at both school level and NIED which contributes to a lack of teaching material at the school level. The Setswana Curriculum Panelists have problems with teaching materials. According to them, other language curriculum panels translate books from English to their languages. However, Setswana curriculum panelists do not because Setswana teaching materials are accessible in neighbouring Botswana and the Republic of South Africa. There is, however, no budgetary provision made to order books from any of these neighbouring countries, neither are Setswana curriculum panelists sent to identify and source books from the two countries.

Sourcing Setswana books is a long process. Rules stipulate that NIED should instruct publishers to identify Setswana books from RSA or Botswana for review by Setswana curriculum panelists. Once the panelists agree on a book, it should be listed on the NIED catalogue. However, when the catalogue is printed, the books recommended are not listed. At NIED, the researcher was told that books cannot be printed as both Botswana and South Africa are changing their curriculums. The Education Officer, however, accused the Setswana curriculum panelists of not following the laid down procedures to get books to NIED for recommendation.

The Education Officer at NIED stated that Setswana Curriculum panelists do not have tertiary qualification in the language. Consequently, their Setswana comprehension is limited. On numerous occasions they have rejected material that was sought from Botswana/RSA without any justification and have also queried the standards of the materials from these countries. In this fight the student suffers. There is tension in the working relationship between the NIED Education Officer responsible for Setswana and Silozi and the Setswana Curriculum Panelists:

*The time allocated for meetings and translation work is very short compared to other language groups. Curriculum meetings are for 3 days, twice a year in February and July. During this time translations must take place, material must get developed and Setswana educational material from RSA or Botswana must be reviewed. The time allocated for Setswana curriculum panelists to meet for translations and material review is just too short (Setswana Curriculum Panelists).*

The NIED calendar shows that the Setswana curriculum panel meets twice a year, over a period of 2 weeks, to translate material. *“This amounts to 1 month for translations and is not enough to finish with our workload”* (Setswana Curriculum Panelists). As a result, teachers at schools do their own translations and share with other schools whatever they come up with. The *“teachers put pieces together just to be able to teach Setswana”* (Setswana Curriculum Panelists). The NIED Setswana Education Officer is aware that material development and translations take place at schools but nothing is done to remedy the situation.

There is a backlog of material development. *“While we and the teachers at the schools are translating the old curriculum, new curriculum gets introduced.”* (Setswana Curriculum Panelists) This increases the teachers' workload. At the Omaheke Regional Education Directorate, the person who is assigned to Setswana (i.e. the Setswana Care-taker) mainly

does administrative duties. He is not involved in the development of Setswana language as such, for he is the subject advisor for mathematics. However, many felt that this was an untenable situation.

Several challenges were highlighted that could impede the teaching of Setswana in schools. The teachers said that school books delivery is not timely and not in required quantities. The teacher from Johannes Dohren high school said: *“Material distribution through the regional office is very unreliable and sporadic - they give us 1 book whilst we ordered 15.”*

All school books are ordered from NIED through appointed publishers. But, *“publishers decline to print Setswana school books because of the low number of Batswana schools and learners”* (Teacher, Johannes Dohren). This encourages Setswana teachers to translate material and make photocopies for distribution to learners. Illegal copies are made for distribution to schools and teachers continue to make copies for learners without NIED’s involvement.

*A case in point in the 2012 NIED catalogue; there is only 1 Setswana book for grade 1 up to grade 3 for Setswana language. Other subjects such as Environmental Science, Mathematics and others, teachers do translation at NIED from English material. If one compares the books in the catalogue from one language to the other you can clearly see the discrepancy where Setswana only has 1 book and the other languages have a long list. From Grade 4 till grade 9, there is no Setswana teaching material in the NIED catalogue. Teachers just put pieces together to teach. Grade 10 to 12 books are in the catalogue, some are priced and others are not. If a book is not priced it cannot be ordered. In the case of Setswana books, even if a book is priced and the school submits an order for it, that book never gets delivered. The responsibility is left with the teachers and learners to access books* (Teacher, Johannes Dohren).

### **Challenges faced by Setswana learners**

Primary school principals indicated that school enrollment and retention rate among Batswana learners is high. Learners start dropping out of school when they move from primary to high school due to various factors. Poverty was highlighted as an issue that affects learners’ progress at all the research sites. Unemployment among the community members is high and most parents are without work. *“When children come to high school they compare themselves to others from more affluent families. This contributes to low self-esteem.”* *“Teenage pregnancy is a major factor in school dropouts mainly affecting the girl child.”* *“Lack of parental involvement also hampers learners’ academic progress, particularly amongst learners who are raised by grandparents”*. According to many respondents, it is the grandparents who always show up whenever schools are looking for parents. *“Biological parents are still alive but non-involved. It is the grandparents that pay school fees and other school related costs. When learners are suspended, parents are not interested but grandparents are the ones taking responsibility.”* (Teachers, Mokaleng and Johannes Dohren) Parents and members of the Batswana Traditional Authority complained that social morals have dropped. *“This is because Religious Studies is no longer taught in school. Children do not take responsibility for their actions and parents do not feel responsible for their children’s discipline.”* (Teachers, Mokaleng) Teachers also felt hampered to act and enforce discipline at school.

The members of the Traditional Authority emphasised the importance of discipline and speaking to children to prevent them from peer pressure. *“Children raised without a father figure develop ill behavior. If they grow in single mother homes they assume the responsibility of the absent father and that is not good. It is important that fathers must get involved in raising their children.”* (Member, Batswana Traditional Authority) According to the Batswana Traditional Authority, *“parents focus too much on disciplining the girl child fearing for them*

getting pregnant. However, most of the problems in the community are caused by the boy child who does not respect adults by coming home late in the evening, who steals livestock and abuses alcohol contributing to gender-based violence.”

### **Opportunities for Promoting Setswana Mother Tongue**

**Tracing Setswana language learners:** Respondent teachers said it was easy to trace their learners. Most of the learners that complete their primary school enroll at Johannes Dohren high school, Wennie du Plessis high school, Mokgamedi high school or Epako junior secondary school. All these schools are in the Omaheke Region. Even under exceptional cases, where learners do not go to the above-mentioned schools, they come to their home villages during vacations. Schools also trace learners through their younger siblings and relatives that enroll at school and through parent-teacher meetings. Teachers also enquire about the whereabouts of their former learners from friends and relatives. Parents and the Traditional Authority emphasised the importance of using Setswana radio and the church as means to communicate about learners. A respondent at Johannes Dohren high school mentioned that the majority of learners that complete grade 12 at the school join the Police Force, nursing, Namibian Defence Forces (NDF) or are employed as temporary teachers to teach Setswana. Less than 5% of the learners enroll at the University of Namibia or Polytechnic of Namibia (now Namibia University of Science and Technology) for further studies, lamented the respondent from Johannes Dohren high school.

**Setswana language teachers:** The majority of Setswana language teachers are Namibians. At lower primary school, the majority are former learners who failed grade 10 and 12 but passed Setswana with an average A, B and C grades. They get recruited on a temporary basis. The Omaheke Education Regional Directorate recruits unqualified teachers on a temporary basis on a one (1) year contract, renewable subject to failure to recruit qualified teachers. Most school principals said they face high staff turnover amongst the temporary teachers as they leave for other more permanent employment. At times, unqualified teachers (those with lower grades) remain for a long time as they do not get recruited elsewhere. There is a recycling of unqualified teachers as posts are advertised. *“The same teachers move from one school according to need - Schools have no option, but to use unqualified teachers.”* (Member, Omaheke Regional Directorate)

Most Setswana teachers at secondary schools are qualified and have extended teaching experience. There are, however, very few of them to meet the demand. There is currently one (1) South African and three (3) Namibian qualified Setswana teachers in secondary schools. The South African has a BA in Education while two (2) Namibians have BETD and one (1) has grade 12. The South African teacher works on a temporary permit which has been renewed several times. The two (2) Namibians with BETD are full time, whilst the unqualified Namibian is on a temporary contract. The South African teacher did Setswana at tertiary level, whilst the Namibian studied only up to grade 12. The overall picture is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: An inventory of Setswana language teachers at various research sites**

School	Number of Setswana teachers	Qualification of teachers	Grade taught	Opportunities
Johannes Dohren RC SS	1 teacher	Grade 12 and Education Diploma	Grade 8-12	The teacher handles all Setswana classes. Due to limited staff prospective Setswana learners are turned away.
Mphethuto Primary School	8 teachers	1 BED Honors 3 BETD Diploma 1 HED 3 Unqualified	Unqualified teachers handle lower primary while qualified teachers handle upper primary classes	Majority of the teachers did Setswana up to grade 10 or 12. Unqualified teachers do not qualify to enroll at UNAM. There is a need to consider an access course for unqualified teachers with teaching experience.
Mokaeleng RC Combined School	16 teachers	1 BA Ed 3 HED (sec and prim) 4 ED 8 unqualified	Unqualified teachers are at lower primary while qualified teachers teach upper primary classes	The highest qualification of the unqualified teachers is a failed grade 10 or 12 but a good pass in Setswana. Majority of the unqualified teachers have been teaching for more than 3 years, uninterrupted. They all showed an interest to want to improve their qualification.
Epukiro RC Primary	6 teachers	3 BETD Diploma 3 Unqualified	Unqualified teachers teach lower primary. Qualified and senior teachers teach in upper primary	The highest qualification of the unqualified teachers is a failed grade 10 or 12 but a good pass in Setswana. Majority of the unqualified teachers have been teaching for more than 3 years, uninterrupted. They all showed an interest to want to improve their qualification.

Source: Research findings

The Omaheke Regional Education Directorate confirmed that no Namibian teacher has a tertiary qualification in Setswana at the 7 schools where Setswana is taught. The number of teachers teaching Setswana with no teacher qualification is more than those with teacher qualifications. The only teacher with a Bachelor Degree is a South African employed on contract. The unqualified teachers in lower primary are expected to develop teaching aids, including material to engage learners. Using unqualified Setswana teachers to lay the language foundation of learners is problematic. Staff turnover of qualified South African teachers is also problematic. Over the years, Namibian schools had a standing arrangement of recruiting foreign Setswana teachers, especially from RSA. They were employed on a contract basis with a work permit. Since Setswana was introduced in secondary

schools, seven (7) teachers had been recruited and six (6) of these have returned to RSA. The remaining teacher will be leaving soon. These South African teachers have put in place various initiatives to improve the Namibian Setswana teachers. Their return to South Africa is a huge blow to the development of Setswana in Namibia. A lack of initiatives to improve the qualification of local teachers in Setswana further exacerbates the development of Setswana language in schools. On the positive side, a group of Namibian Batswana teachers have enrolled at NAMCOL in order to upgrade their Setswana. Below, find a list of the people who upgraded their Setswana through NAMCOL. All of them are in the education sector with the exception of one, who is with the trade unions (Table 4).

**Table 4: Teachers who completed grade 12 in Setswana through NAMCOL**

Gender of person	School where person is teaching	Level where person is teaching
Male	Mokaleng Combined	lower primary
Female	Mphethuto primary	lower primary
Female	Johannes Dohren high school	secondary
Female	Epukiro primary	primary Lower
Female	Mokaleng Combined	upper primary
Female	Wennie du Plessis high school	secondary
Female	Nossobville primary	lower primary
Female	UNAM-student	upper primary and secondary
Female	Omaheke Education Directorate	upper secondary
Male	NAPWU	upper primary
Female	Motsomi primary	lower primary
Female	Epukiro primary	lower and upper primary
Male	Omaheke Education Directorate	secondary
Male	Mphethuto	primary
Female	Retired teacher	

Source: Omaheke Education Regional Directorate

**Interest to Study Setswana Language:** There was an overwhelming willingness to want to improve teachers' qualifications, especially among school principals and education officers. They were particularly concerned that there was too much reliance on unqualified teachers to teach Setswana. They were also concerned with staff turnover among the unqualified teachers. Such turnover creates a learning gap, as it takes a while to fill vacancies. Both qualified and unqualified teachers expressed interest in acquiring a tertiary qualification in Setswana. It emerged during discussions at NIED, Omaheke Regional Education Directorate and various schools that within Namibia, there is no one with a Master's Degree qualification to teach Setswana. Similarly, among the South African Batswana teachers in Namibia, none is qualified to teach at the University of Namibia. However, a list was provided of potential individuals who could teach Setswana at tertiary level, provided that their capacity is enhanced.

**Table 5: List of potential individuals to teach Setswana at University of Namibia**

Gender	Qualification	Observation
Female	BETD	She has more than 32 years teaching experience. Has served on the Setswana Curriculum Committee for over 15 years. Has grade 12 Setswana qualifications and is Namibian.
Male	Bachelor in Educational Management and Teacher Training Diploma	Taught for more than 20 years. Has grade 12 Setswana qualifications and is Namibian.
Male	BA Education	South African citizen on work permit. Plays an important role in supporting the development of Setswana teaching materials through the Setswana curriculum panel. Has more than 8 years teaching experience.
Female	University Diploma for secondary school	She received her teacher qualification in RSA. Has more than 22 years teaching experience. She is the examiner for Setswana at NIED. Works closely with Curriculum Panel Committee.

Source: Research findings

Respondents alluded to the various dialects and variations of written and spoken Setswana in Southern Africa (i.e. Namibia, South Africa and Botswana schools). The respondents said that the South African Setswana (from the North West Province and Pretoria area) is more attuned to the Setswana in Namibia. This is the reason why Namibian schools seeking experts turn to the North West Province (South Africa) to assist in Setswana school material development. They proposed that if a qualified lecturer is to be recruited, graduates from the University of Pretoria or University of the North West with Setswana as a major, would be suitable.

**Networking and Collaboration:** Three (3) out of the seven schools teaching Setswana, are managed by the Roman Catholic Church. They are Epukiro Primary School, Mokalleng RC Combined School and Johannes Dohren RC High School. Over the years, the church has contributed immensely to the development of Setswana language. The remaining four schools are government schools: Motsomi Primary, Mphethuto Primary, Mokganedi High School and Wennie du Plessis Senior Secondary School. Over the last 15 years, an informal collaboration has been established between the schools teaching Setswana and an individual history lecturer at the University of the North West (South Africa). This has led to several South Africans teaching Setswana in Namibian schools. It has also helped Namibian Batswana teachers upgrade their qualifications; hence the NAMCOL Setswana courses that assisted many teachers to enroll for Setswana at grade 12. The collaboration amongst South African and Namibian teachers has assisted in the development of Setswana teaching material as most of the South African teachers served on the Setswana NIED curriculum panel. The recruiting of Setswana teachers from South Africa is not formalised, although the Principal at Mokalleng RC Combined School pledged that her school will formalise the relationship for the continuity of Setswana teachers and capacity building. Schools teaching Setswana are collaborating by sharing question papers and teaching materials. To this end, schools also work closely with NIED and the Omaheke Regional Educational Directorate.

## **Conclusions**

There are many challenges to teaching Setswana as mother language in Namibia. Some have to do with perceptions of the language prospects in Namibia. De Wet and Wolhuter (2009, p. 359) argued that in South Africa there is a “deep-seated distrust and fear that home-language education would lead to impoverishment, social and political isolation, and disempowerment” This has resulted in the majority of South African learners preferring English. Bagwasi (2003, p. 214) and Nyati-Ramahobo (1991, p. 22) pointed to the language as a marker of status and to the fact that Setswana has less status than English. Similarly, in this study some parents and children do not see how the Setswana language will benefit their future in Namibia, other than working at the NBC Setswana radio. Even if learners pass Setswana with good grades, it does not give them an advantage to study at tertiary institutions as it is not taught anywhere. There is a dearth of interest among learners to study indigenous languages as they see no direct benefits. It is, therefore, proposed that the Language Policy be reviewed to make a pass in an indigenous language compulsory in order to pass grade 10 or grade 12.

There are also issues that face minority languages in many places, for example, resources. A lack of access to educational materials for indigenous languages (Klein, 2011, p. 88; Hanemann, 2005, p. 5; Heugh, et al., 2007, p. 67; Benson, 2010, p. 331) is a major issue in the teaching of the mother language. There is a dearth of teaching material, including Setswana school books. These are catalogued as: *“They could give us 1 book whilst we have ordered 15. There is only 1 Setswana book for grade 1 up to grade 3 for Setswana language.”* *“Setswana only has 1 book and the other languages have a long list. For Grade 4 till grade 9, there is no teaching material in the NIED catalogue. Teachers at school level are just putting pieces together to teach.”*

Given the challenges in translating teaching and reading materials of indigenous languages, this study proposes the establishment of a National Translation Centre responsible for all indigenous languages. This centre will address the problems of isolated and uncoordinated translations done by individual teachers in schools. Furthermore, the study proposes that the National Board should be responsible for coordinating activities in all the indigenous languages, such as teacher training, dictionary making, text-book writing, setting of exams, ordering and distribution of educational materials in indigenous languages.

Resource shortages extend to a lack of teachers, thus many Namibian teachers teaching Setswana do so with low qualifications ranging from grade 10 to 12. Most do not have tertiary education qualifications and none have tertiary qualifications in Setswana. The majority of the trained Batswana teachers are about to retire and the new generation are mostly unqualified temporary teachers. The recruitment of qualified South African Setswana teachers on contract basis seem to have stalled, but Setswana language is in the privileged position because it is not only spoken in Namibia, but also in Botswana and South Africa. This means that both resource material and teachers can be sourced from neighboring countries. Collaboration and networking with South African schools and universities present a future opportunity. There are also Setswana speakers that can access tertiary education and these can be encouraged to be Setswana teachers. To encourage studies in indigenous languages, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must consider incentivising the study of indigenous languages by providing scholarships or a reduction in tuition fees for students pursuing a qualification in indigenous knowledge.

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