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## **Role of mother-tongue in primary education: focusing on the experiences of contemporary hunter-gatherers in Botswana**

### **Abstract**

This chapter examines the experiences of indigenous communities in primary education, with a particular focus on language use in schools in Botswana. The Glui and Glana, two linguistic minorities categorized as Khoisan and recognized as post-hunter-gatherer communities, have faced significant challenges due to the Tswana-centric linguistic and cultural orientation of the education system. Since 2023, the draft language policy for education in Botswana has recognized thirty-one additional languages. These languages are introduced not as subjects but as mediums of instruction, intended to facilitate learners understanding by using languages more familiar to them (Republic of Botswana 2022). However, community members have expressed concerns that mother-tongues are treated merely as tools for adapting to the dominant languages. Additionally, debates persist regarding which orthographies should be standardized within these communities. Similar disputes emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when missionaries sought to standardize Setswana; literate Batswana criticized European assumptions of Tswana unity and the imposition of varying orthographic systems. This chapter provides a chronological overview of the Glui/Glana community's experiences with language and educational policy, and analyzes non-formal education as a recent educational framework within the community. Drawing on this context, the chapter explores how to effectively advocate for mother-tongue education that supports socialization, knowledge transmission, and decision-making within the Glui/Glana community. The discussion further addresses the ideal educational framework for navigating Botswanas multilingual reality.

**Keywords:** Botswana, Glui and Glana, Language policy, Mother-tongue education, Orthography standardization

## Introduction

This chapter explores the historical evolution of school education in Botswana and the experiences of indigenous communities within this context. The G|ui and G|ana<sup>1</sup> are two of linguistic groups commonly referred to as Khoisan, also known as post-hunter-gatherer communities. G|ui and G|ana languages belong to the Southwestern Kalahari Khoe branch of the Khoe-Kwadi family (Vossen 2013), and the number of speakers is estimated to be over 1,000 in the Ghanzi District of Botswana.

Since gaining independence, the government of Botswana has approved only Setswana and English as the mediums of instruction in primary schools. Children begin their early primary education in Setswana, with English introduced progressively in the upper levels. This policy disadvantages many children whose ethnic language is not Setswana, as it limits their access to education and adversely affects their academic performance (Republic of Botswana 2022). G|ui and G|ana children, in particular, have faced difficulties in their schooling experiences due to an educational system that is linguistically and culturally centered on Tswana norms.

In response to these challenges, the former administration drafted the Botswana Languages Policy in Education in 2022. Following the policy's development, interest in mother-tongue education has increased among community members.

This chapter will first outline the historical development of education in Botswana, followed by a chronological description of the schooling experiences of the G|ui and G|ana communities. It will also examine practices in non-formal education. Based on these accounts, the author will discuss the characteristics of an appropriate educational system for contemporary hunter-gatherer societies in the future.

For the purpose of this chapter, the following distinctions are made regarding educational settings: the Department of Basic Education under the Ministry of Basic Education in Botswana oversees both formal

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<sup>1</sup> The Khoisan languages employ a number of click-sounds. Five clicks represented by special signs have been known below, /ǀ/ (Bilabial), /ǁ/ ((post)alveolar), /ǃ/ (Alveolar lateral), /ǂ/ (Palatoalveolar), /ǁ̥/ (Dental). In particular, the G|ui/G|ana languages characterized in 4 clicks; (post)alveolar, Alveolar lateral, Palatoalveolar, and Dental.

and non-formal education. “Formal education” refers to school-based education. In contrast, “non-formal education” refers to out-of-school educational initiatives for children who have dropped out of the formal school system. Additionally, “informal socialization” describes activities to promote socialization within the local community.

## School education in Botswana

Botswana is a landlocked country in southern Africa, known for experiencing one of the fastest-growing economies in the region. Its development has historically been anchored in prudent macroeconomic policies and robust economic institutions. Since gaining independence in 1966, the government has prioritized education and training, allocating an average of 25% of its annual budget to the education sector alone (Republic of Botswana 2017).

Botswana's first National Policy on Education, introduced in 1977, was grounded in the philosophy of *Kagisano*,<sup>2</sup> which emphasized the principles of democracy, development, self-reliance, and unity. The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Republic of Botswana 1994), placed significant emphasis on the education and training of children, youth, and adults. Since 2015, the Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP), administered by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, has aimed to improve learning outcomes by addressing issues related to quality, relevance, access, equity, and accountability across the entire education system, from preschool to tertiary education. This sustained investment has yielded visible improvements in key educational indicators. For example, the net enrolment rate in primary schools, which was below 40% at independence, has increased to approximately 90%, with the transition rate from primary to junior secondary school reaching 98% (Republic of Botswana 2017).

Despite these achievements in expanding access to education, Botswana continues to face challenges related to child schooling. Approximately 10% of children have not attended primary school. This group

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<sup>2</sup> When Botswana gained independence on 30 September 1966, the new nation adopted *Kagisano*, meaning social harmony, as its philosophy of survival.

includes children from socio-cultural backgrounds that are not conducive to modern education, as well as those from economically disadvantaged families (Republic of Botswana 2017). These challenges are particularly pronounced in remote rural areas (Republic of Botswana 2015). Previous research has identified multiple reasons for school dropout in these areas, including language barriers, limited access to schools, and various economic and social factors. Language differences between children from minority communities and their teachers often result in miscommunication due to the exclusive use of Setswana and English as the mediums of instruction in formal schools (Kiema 2010; Mokibelo 2014).

These challenges faced by socio-cultural minorities are closely tied to the trajectory of Botswana's nation-building. Botswana has maintained plurality politics and this has enabled its peaceful and democratic transition since independence. On the other hand, in regard to the national policy, it has reflected the intention of the Tswana as majority in the country in spite of its multilingual and multicultural status. Le Roux (1999) argued that the government has adopted a policy of promoting one official language and one official "tribe" – Setswana and the Tswana ethnic group – regarded as the national majority. In alignment with this policy, the RNPE approved only Setswana and English as mediums of instruction in formal education, despite the existence of at least 26 language groups in the country (Chebanne 2016). Consequently, many minority groups have expressed opposition to the lack of official recognition of their linguistic identities and the resulting limitations in access to quality education.

The fact that the neglect of their languages is often aired simultaneously with their complaints about the lack of land and political representation of minorities has given the issue of mother-tongue education in Botswana a politically sensitive slant. Therefore, the recommendation to the Ministry of Education by the Task Force for establishment of the Botswana Languages Council in 1997, that the mother-tongue education be allowed in schools in Botswana, had been shelved by parliament until recently. While in theory the principle has been given the green light, in practice the implementation is still problematic due to lack of government programmes to develop materials in languages other than Setswana (Le Roux 1999: 34–35).





## Recent situation in G!ui/G!ana children's schooling

The author began field research in 2022, focusing on child socialization and education within the contemporary G!ui/G!ana community. By comparing informal socialization practices within households and formal, school-based education, the author has reported conflicts arising from the contrasting nature of these environments. In response, the study has also examined the role of non-formal education in resolving such conflicts (Noguchi/Takada 2024). The fieldwork was conducted in collaboration with a G!ui-speaking research assistant residing in Qχ'úisà-kínī, who is also proficient in G!ana, Nharo,<sup>4</sup> Setswana, and English. Interviews with community members were conducted in G!ui/G!ana, whereas interviews with schoolteachers were carried out in English and facilitated by the assistant, using Setswana.

According to official records, over 500 children were registered at the primary school in Qχ'úisà-kínī as of 2025. The majority of these children are Khoisan language speakers, primarily G!ui/G!ana. Children speaking Nharo and †qχ'áú-!ʔàǎ were also identified. In contrast, nearly all teachers were non-local and spoke Setswana or neighboring Bantu languages as their mother-tongues. Only one G!ana-speaking teacher had been permanently employed, and a few assistant staff were recruited through the Tirelo Sechaba Programme to support classroom activities. Tirelo Sechaba (hereinafter referred to as TS) Programme is the National Service Programme which is responsible for the creation of opportunities for unemployed young people to gain skills and experiences across various industries (Government of Botswana 2022). The medium of instruction was Setswana in Standard 1 and English from Standard 2 onwards.

A Setswana-speaking teacher described the current linguistic challenges as follows:

Every time the children and I face a language barrier. Even if I tell them something funny, their faces remain serious. Once the assistant staff translate it, they start smiling. We need someone who speaks the children's mother-tongue.

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<sup>4</sup> The largest linguistic group among the Central San. Most Nharo speakers live in and around the town of Ghanzi, and the great majority of those working on the farms run by the whites in Ghanzi belong to this group (Tanaka 1980).

In 2025, three Standard 1 classes were in operation. Setswana-speaking teachers led most classes and could not speak G!ui/G!ana. The G!ana-speaking teacher taught a single class, and TS assistants rotated weekly across classrooms. During lessons, teachers instructed in Setswana or English. When students or teachers encountered communication difficulties, the G!ana-speaking teacher or TS assistants provided translation support. Such situations were frequently observed during Term 1, in which many children experienced their first exposure to Setswana.

Even those who had completed pre-primary education – known as “reception” and targeted at 5-year-olds in the village – often did not fully understand classroom instructions. Teachers frequently repeated simple commands, but some children were unable to respond appropriately. In some cases, teachers resorted to shouting or corporal punishment. Ultimately, when teachers were unsuccessful, they provided individual instruction after school. However, given that each teacher was responsible for more than 30 students, devoting sufficient time to individual support was not feasible.

The author observed that communication breakdowns were especially common among novice teachers, who sometimes expressed frustration over their inability to communicate effectively with students. A few experienced teachers attempted to use simple phrases in G!ui/G!ana, even though it was not their native language. Despite varied pedagogical strategies, teachers continued to face persistent challenges in classroom communication.

Community members also shared their views on the current educational environment. One G!ui-speaking participant, MS, commented:

When children are still at a low level, the language barrier destroys them. [...] Because they speak *kúā* [G!ui/G!ana] at home. When they enter school, they hear only Setswana and English, and they can't understand. [...] Teachers become tired of the children. Because *kúā* children don't understand what the teachers are saying. They get tired of speaking and end up teaching in a useless way.

MS further added:

You see that the number of children in Standard 1 is 90. But 6 years later, in Standard 7, how many children graduate? When they move to junior level, they fail and come back to the village. They don't progress to senior level because the requirements are too strict. Only a few children succeed. They are always surrounded by speakers of unfamiliar lan-

guages and cannot understand the content. Even if the teacher motivates the child, the child realizes that the teacher is talking about things unrelated to the community.

Another community member, |XN, commented on how language use by both children and teachers affects educational outcomes:

Children go to school every day, but no one is teaching them in their language. I see children fail to understand too much. Even when the teacher gives children homework and they come back home, the child didn't understand because the child didn't understand Setswana properly. [...] Teachers face many challenges because teachers speak with children, and the child doesn't properly understand what the teacher is saying. So, the teachers performance goes down. [|XN, a Glana speaker]

|XN further elaborated on her own experience with her child's schooling:

I helped my son [with his homework]. I read the assignment, then I explained it in *kúā*. The son understood, and he said, Ehe! This one means this one and enters here. Do like this, do like this. Then I saw that the child understood.

Community members repeatedly expressed concerns about the consequences of miscommunication between children and teachers. They voiced their frustration with the current school system, noting that children were unable to succeed academically due to fundamental language barriers – despite the fact that success is possible when children receive appropriate support. Miscommunication between teachers and students led to misunderstandings, incomplete homework, and poor performance on exams for progression to junior and senior secondary levels. However, the narratives also reveal that, with adequate explanation in their mother-tongue, children are capable of understanding and engaging with the content.

These testimonies highlight the importance of translating instructional materials into the Glui/Glana languages and incorporating culturally familiar concepts into the curriculum. Community members acknowledged the difficulties teachers face and recognized that, despite utilizing various pedagogical strategies, these often remain ineffective for Glui/Glana-speaking children without adequate linguistic support.

Moreover, some parents expressed empathy and appreciation for the teachers' efforts. They noted that although challenges persist – particularly those arising from language use – the overt discrimination against Glui/Glana children and communities reported during the !ʔú!ùm period appears to have diminished. Nevertheless, the issue of language

mismatch in classroom instruction continues to hinder effective teaching and learning.

## **Community perceptions of the draft of the former governments mother-tongue education policy**

In response to ongoing educational challenges, the previous administration introduced a draft of a new language policy in 2022. This policy recognized a total of thirty-one minor languages, including Glui/Glana, which was included in Phase 2 due to the development of its orthography. The policy proposed the initial use of these languages as medium of instruction rather than as separate subjects (Republic of Botswana 2022).

However, in 2024, a significant political shift occurred. Although the Botswana Democratic Party had governed the country since independence, the opposition coalition, the Umbrella for Democratic Change, achieved a historic victory in the general elections. This change in leadership was largely driven by public dissatisfaction with the country's economic situation – particularly the downturn in the diamond market, which had severely affected GDP growth and youth employment (Savage 2024). Following this transition, the future implementation of the Botswana Language Policy in Education became uncertain. Despite the uncertainty, community members expressed strong support for the mother-tongue education initiative.

One Glui speaker, TN, emphasized the practical benefits of such a policy:

If it [the language policy] is there, students can ask for help from you when the student doesn't understand. He asks you, and if it's done, children can never go and return and just sit. [TN, a Glui speaker]

Another community member, MS, elaborated on the immediate advantages of instruction in the mother-tongue:

If you teach him [a child] in *kúā*, he understands immediately. When you teach a child about the field [agriculture], you say that "you first put a seed in the sand; if it rains, that seed germinates." If you teach him this in English, he could say, you are teaching me things that don't exist." But if you teach him in the San language, he immediately thinks and understands, "wow, like this." He immediately understands. You say "seed" in English and he's confused, but when you say *lχúri* ["seed" in Glui/Glana], he understands immediately.

TN also spoke to the broader implications for the children's future development:

Because, if the child goes from here [village] without speaking [Setswana/English] properly and stays quiet, they go to junior school and form exclusive groups among the Glui and Glana. They don't get along with other children. They don't feel comfortable [talking to them], and after graduating [from junior secondary school], they return and stay [in the village] and don't apply [for jobs]. It is difficult to speak to them in proper Setswana. Nowadays, school only prepares them for drought labor.

Community members thus recognized that mother-tongue education is crucial not only for helping children understand classroom content but also for enhancing their future employability. As MS pointed out, although children possess rich knowledge from their village lives, this knowledge often fails to align with concepts taught in school through Setswana or English. For children socialized in Qχ'úĩsà-kínī, many textbook concepts are unfamiliar. This disconnect has also been described by Kiema: "One strategy many of us attempted was to memorize the whole sentence, but without internalizing the concept" (Kiema 2010: 39).

Introducing mother-tongue instruction could help bridge the gap between community-based knowledge and formal education. It could also improve the social climate among youth in Qχ'úĩsà-kínī, many of whom currently face chronic unemployment and are only temporarily hired for government drought relief projects. As TN's narrative suggests, mother-tongue instruction in the early grades may positively influence long-term self-reliance and social integration. Therefore, community members hoped that the implementation of mother-tongue education would not only enhance early childhood learning but also contribute to the adolescents' future career development.

## **Importance of community members writing in the mother-tongue**

During the interviews, participants frequently referred to the orthography that should be adopted for mother-tongue education. Currently, two orthographies exist. One was introduced by Hiroshi Nakagawa (a Japanese linguist), and is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The other was developed at KURU in D'kar, Ghanzi District, as

part of the activities of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Linguists Hessel and Coby Visser have been involved in the development of the Nharo dictionary and the publication of various materials to promote literacy (Bolaane 2014; Kuru Family of Organisations 2016; Wynne 2014).

The G|ui/G|lana languages have the largest phoneme inventory (90 consonants and 10 vowels) among the Khoe-Kwadi languages, and they are tonal (Nakagawa 2024). Hiroshi Nakagawa has worked with the G|ui/G|lana communities since 1992 (Nakagawa 1996; Nakagawa et al. in compilation). His work has provided a detailed phonological description of the G|ui language and has resulted in a practical orthography for both native speakers and researchers. This orthography is referred to by community members as “Nakagawa’s (writing)” (*nàk<sup>h</sup>ágàwà m̀ jì sì*), and it accurately represents the phonological system of G|ui/G|lana.

The other orthography, called “Nharo people’s (writing)” (*nàrō-kò χà ǹ jì sì*), is based entirely on the Latin alphabet and includes click sounds: the dental click is written as *c*, the alveolar click as *q*, the palatal click as *tc*, and the lateral click as *x*. This orthography is also used for official documents, such as citizen identification cards for individuals with names in Khoisan languages. Although easier to use due to its reliance on the Latin alphabet, this system often fails to fully represent the original sounds, leading to a loss of phonological distinction through the merging of different sounds into single letters.

During the former administration, a community meeting was held to decide which orthography would be adopted for mother-tongue education in the primary school at Qχ’úisà-kínī. At that time, four teacher aides were selected to participate in translation work for early primary education. One of them was |XN, whose testimony highlights the community’s perception regarding orthography in schools:

They [community members] said that we will write using Nharo people’s writing. [Then former] government agreed with Nharo writing, not with Nakagawa’s. They came and asked us which orthography we wanted. However, people didn’t understand Nakagawa’s method in detail. So, they responded that they wanted to use the Nharo orthography because it is simple. People will use Nharo writing. We [teacher aides] also learned its writing. We will attend the workshop and learn how to translate in Nharo.

If I can speak, teach, and write [in Nharo], children will do that. So, I will be taught with Nharo clicks, not the clicks of my language – not taught like in G|ui and G|lana. I feel too

much pain. I want to learn my language with my language. [...] It is not proper. [...] All my clicks will stay behind. But if I enter, clicks remain behind – Glui and Glana.” – |XN

MT, a Glana-speaking teacher who has worked in the primary school since 2014, emphasized the importance of simplicity in writing based on her experience:

Teacher aides will use Nharo’s one. They voted for Nharo (orthography), and it will be used. Nharo language and Glui/Glana language are a little bit different. But they meet somewhere. Nharo orthography is easy. It is good. But I see that it [Nakagawa’s orthography] is difficult for us. – MT

People expressed differing perspectives on orthography, particularly concerning the balance between phonological accuracy and writing simplicity. Some Glui/Glana words have already been exposed to Nharo orthography through use in birth certificates and citizen cards. Therefore, it could be familiar and easy to access Nharo writing for significant Glui/Glana-speaking populations. On the other hand, |XN voiced her frustration regarding the use of the Nharo orthography, which, in her view, compromises the phonetic integrity of her language. Specifically, she emphasized that the unique click consonants – defining features of Glana and other Khoisan languages – are either lost or misrepresented in the Nharo system. She noted that teaching using Nharo clicks would not align with the actual phonemic structure of her language, and that the distinctiveness of the Glana and Glui clicks would be neglected.

In contrast, MT highlighted the importance of simplicity in writing, especially within the context of classroom instruction, where teachers are responsible for educating many children simultaneously. From a practical standpoint, she argued that it is reasonable to prioritize an orthography that is easier to teach and learn, even if it sacrifices some phonological accuracy. Additionally, she noted that acquiring proficiency in orthography is generally challenging for teacher aides, further justifying the appeal of a simplified writing system. Although MT was aware that the Nharo orthography could not fully indicate the accurate phonemic distinctions of her language, she acknowledged it as a pragmatic compromise.

These differing viewpoints highlight a broader tension between linguistic identity and functional accessibility in the implementation of mother-tongue education. Introducing orthography to speakers of a

non-literate language is not a straightforward process. It involves navigating deeply held cultural values and concerns about the preservation of linguistic heritage.

Comparable issues were observed in the historical development of the Setswana orthography. Today, Setswana is widely used in both personal and public communication in Botswana, but its orthographic system originated during the colonial period and was largely shaped by early Christian missionaries. These missionaries developed orthographies to facilitate the dissemination of Christian texts and teachings. Settling in various local regions, they produced hymnbooks, catechisms, and newspapers in the vernaculars they encountered. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, efforts to standardize the Tswana language had gained momentum. A central debate emerged around whether the local languages were mutually intelligible dialects of a single language that could be unified under one orthography. Although a standardized orthography was eventually adopted, it attracted criticism from literate Batswana. Many were discontented with European assumptions of linguistic homogeneity and the imposition of externally developed orthographic systems (Volz 2003).

The history of Setswana orthographic standardization illustrates the frustrations experienced by local communities. It involved ascribing new value to spoken language through the written form, often at the expense of local dialectal diversity. Although the process enabled the development of a standardized language, it also resulted in the marginalization of many vernaculars. Given that even minute differences of languages can be a fundamental component of individual thought and identity, decisions regarding orthographic appropriateness are rarely simple or universally accepted.

Similar challenges have emerged in other contexts, particularly with the implementation of mother-tongue education. In Namibia – a neighboring country to Botswana – mother-tongue education has been promoted since independence, reflecting a broader rethinking of educational philosophy (Sguazzin/Graan 1999). For instance, in the Nyae Nyae village primary school, Jul'hoan language curricula are taught by Jul'hoan teachers during the first three years of schooling. In Grade 4, however, students have to transit to government-run schools in Tsumkwe. Notably, children who received three years of mother-tongue instruction in village schools were less likely to continue their education after this tran-

sition, compared with those who began their schooling in government schools from Grade 1. The difficulties appeared to stem from challenges associated with the medium of instruction in mainstream education, as well as from discrimination by peers (Hays 2016).

## **Prospects for non-formal education**

Thus far, the discussion has highlighted how the transition to formal school education has impacted the G|ui/G|ana community, particularly with regard to mother-tongue use. Language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a repository of daily practices, cultural knowledge, and collective history. As the G|ui/G|ana have been increasingly compelled to use dominant languages in school settings, they have experienced a disconnection from their traditional body of knowledge and cultural heritage, which are intrinsically linked to their language. Consequently, although mother-tongue education is important to promote educational participation among these communities, adapting teaching to reflect local knowledge and needs involves far more than merely translating textbooks from Tswana or English into local languages.

With this perspective in mind, this section examines the interaction between children and facilitators within non-formal education programmes in Qχ'úisà-kíní. By describing practices in non-formal education, this analysis seeks to identify potential strategies to overcome the challenges faced by formal school education today and to propose pathways for advancement in future mother-tongue education.

Non-formal education takes on diverse forms and serves various purposes, including general education, agricultural training, and vocational preparation. It is typically learner-centered and offers flexible programming tailored to specific local needs (Coombs 1973). In Botswana, the government has implemented a non-formal education initiative targeting the illiterate population, known as Out-of-School Education and Training. This program comprises the Adult Basic Education Programme, the Skills Development and Training Programme, and Out-of-School Education for Children (OSEC) (Republic of Botswana 2018). OSEC was introduced as a practical alternative, to ensure that Botswana fulfills its

commitment to universal education, especially catering to children from socio-cultural backgrounds less suited to modern formal schooling or those from economically disadvantaged families (Republic of Botswana 2017).

In 2007, the Yiaghuisi Community Learning Centre, part of the OSEC programme, was established in Qχ'úisà-kínī. The name Yiaghuisi (jìà gùì sì) translates as “help to climb up” in Glui/Glana, and was chosen by community members (Noguchi/Takada 2024). Most learners at Yiaghuisi have either never attended formal school or have dropped out; some are over-aged for primary school enrollment. Facilitators develop monthly teaching plans, but children can participate voluntarily, choosing whether to attend activities. In 2024, eleven learners from Qχ'úisà-kínī were registered at Yiaghuisi. Enrollment tended to be influenced by kinship ties, given that children are more likely to attend if their relatives do.

Three facilitators, all speakers of Glana or Nharo, have been employed at Yiaghuisi. Each holds a Form 3 certificate, awarded upon completion of junior secondary education. These facilitators are proficient in English, Setswana, Glui/Glana, and neighboring languages. Their responsibilities include daily lesson planning and teaching Setswana, English, Mathematics, and General Studies. Notably, facilitators and children maintain close relationships that extend beyond the classroom into village life.

Classroom activities at Yiaghuisi are organized for children of varying ages and learning levels. Facilitators do not constrain children's interests or behaviors to rigid classroom expectations. Communication among children, and between children and facilitators, primarily occurs in Glui/Glana. When a child struggles to respond, peers often provide guidance, or facilitators reformulate questions using concepts familiar to the learners. In situations where children are accustomed to completing assignments independently, facilitators sometimes use Setswana or English. This approach characterizes the Yiaghuisi learning environment as responsive to immediate face-to-face interaction, contrasting with the more institutionalized and predetermined methodologies typical of formal education. This environment fosters inclusive participation and actively promotes children's learning by incorporating their familiar linguistic and conceptual frameworks.

Several children who completed courses at Yiaghuisi subsequently returned to primary school and continued their formal education. Thus, the interactive and flexible learning environment of Yiaghuisi not only provides alternative educational pathways, but also offers critical insights into how to promote active learning among G|ui/G|ana children within mother-tongue education frameworks.

## Conclusions

All pedagogic action entails the imposition of a cultural arbitrary, by a power structure, whether it aims to reproduce the cultural norms of the dominant or the dominated classes. As the inculcation of a cultural arbitrary, pedagogic action operates within a communicative relationship that produces a specifically pedagogic effect precisely because the arbitrariness of the content being taught is never fully acknowledged. Consequently, this process constitutes a form of symbolic violence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, groups or classes subjected to pedagogic action that inculcates a dominated cultural arbitrary often internalize the devaluation of their own cultural achievements. Such groups come to accept the dominant culture as the legitimate culture, harboring a tacit awareness of the supposed inferiority of their own cultural heritage (Bourdieu/Passeron 1977).

The formal education system, often conceived as a vehicle for nation-building and universal education, has historically operated under dominant norms, including national ideals and global development discourses. Although it primarily serves to reproduce a particular habitus,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force (Bourdieu/Passeron 1977: 4).

<sup>6</sup> Habitus refers to the collective entity by which and into which dominant social and cultural conditions are established and reproduced. Habitus could be considered a subjective but not individual system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of a group or class. These internalized structures and schemes of perception structure subjects' (shared) world-view and their apperception of the world in which they expect to exist (Bourdieu/Passeron 1977: 86).

the arbitrariness of this reproduction is obscured behind claims of “universality” and is transmitted through pedagogic action. Minority hunter-gatherer communities, with distinct languages and socialization patterns, have faced significant challenges within formal schooling systems. When individuals fail to “adapt” to the dominant habitus, they are excluded from the mainstream social reproduction process and are compelled to develop alternative means to preserve and reproduce their socio-cultural identities.

This raises an important question: how can Botswana’s draft language policy for primary education address these international educational challenges faced by contemporary hunter-gatherer communities? Since independence, Botswana’s educational policy has largely overlooked the socialization needs of minority children, despite the country’s rich linguistic and cultural diversity. The attempt to assimilate non-Tswana groups such as the G!ui/G!ana through formal education has paradoxically heightened their ethnic consciousness rather than reinforcing a unified national identity (Noguchi/Takada 2024). A shift toward mother-tongue education, therefore, holds the potential to foster national sensitivity to cultural and linguistic diversity, facilitate mutual understanding between teachers and learners, and enhance the educational participation of the G!ui/G!ana. Beyond schooling, this approach could strengthen children’s capacities for future opportunities, including employment.

Botswana’s increasing embrace of multiculturalism suggests a growing recognition of its minority populations; however, it also risks reinforcing hierarchies among languages, identities, and cultures.

Implementing mother-tongue education presents particular challenges, notably regarding orthographic standardization. Within the G!ui/G!ana community, divergent opinions exist about which orthography to adopt. One practical option is to modify the existing Nharo orthography, which has been developed and used by the Nharo population for a considerable time. However, this involves not only phonological but also socio-cultural conflicts. In contrast to the G!ui/G!ana, most Nharo speakers have historically lived in urban areas and accessed resources both inside and outside Botswana, including the Nharo orthography project. This has created power dynamics between the Nharo and G!ui/G!ana communities, based on differing levels of social and international

engagement. Some community members have expressed a desire to preserve a more “accurate” G!ui/G!ana orthography, advocating the adoption of the IPA-based framework developed by Nakagawa. This tension reflects a broader conflict between inherited cultural values and those introduced through contemporary experiences. In other words, this can be understood as a form of resistance to “Nharo-centrism,” which carries its own complex history as a written language among Khoisan languages.

The draft language policy in Botswana emphasizes improving school attendance by acknowledging learners’ diverse cultural backgrounds; however, it does not explicitly aim to build a multilingual society through comprehensive mother-tongue education. Minor languages are introduced primarily as mediums of instruction rather than as subjects in their own right (Republic of Botswana 2022). Consequently, linguistic minorities remain primarily subject to assimilation into the “mainstream” education system. Each mother-tongue mainly functions as a steppingstone toward Setswana and English, which continue to dominate formal education and national reproduction. Thus, although the policy recognizes linguistic and cultural minorities, it may inadvertently reinforce existing cultural-linguistic hierarchies.

Education broadly encompasses any process intended to bring about changes in attitudes and behaviors (Hamadache 1991). It is a fundamental system through which individuals develop skills within their socio-cultural contexts – contexts that are co-constructed through direct, face-to-face interactions. Therefore, education should be understood as a process of negotiation among individuals sharing a particular context, rather than an imposition of a singular, arbitrary purpose. Learning processes are diverse, reflecting differences in methods and social partners. Recognizing this diversity should be part of the vision for universal education. Schools can no longer claim exclusivity over education or its societal role (Hamadache 1991). Instead, alternative educational approaches that advocate for minorities must be embraced.

A core question emerges: how can the attitudes of communities be reconciled with the political rationale underpinning mother-tongue education? This chapter’s final section examines non-formal education practices in Qχ’úisà-kínī, offering a fresh perspective on promoting education within the G!ui/G!ana community’s current system. Analysis of Yiaghuisi’s practices reveals educational methods aligned with informal

socialization patterns among G!ui/G!ana children (Takada 2020). This approach prioritizes teaching and learning as responses to immediate, situational needs, contrasting with formal education's institutionally prescribed teaching methodologies. Local language-speaking facilitators play a vital role in organizing such educational environments, although challenges remain – such as funding constraints, limited educational materials, and facilitator training (Siegrühn/Grant 2021).

In Botswana, non-formal education aims to provide alternatives for children whose socio-cultural backgrounds are incompatible with school-based education or whose families face economic hardship (Republic of Botswana 2017). Historically, it has served marginalized and vulnerable individuals within the nation-building process. Rather than merely integrating these individuals into mainstream education, non-formal education has fostered their capacity to advocate for multiple learning modalities. In Qχ'úisà-kínī, non-formal education is thus characterized not only by mother-tongue instruction led by local facilitators, but also by the adaptation of formal education to incorporate interactive elements from the G!ui/G!ana's informal socialization practices. Documenting the organization of classroom activities across non-formal settings nationwide can deepen understanding of diverse learning processes and social interactions, offering valuable insights for formal education. In this way, minorities can actively participate in national reproduction, potentially facilitating an alternative nation-building process that respects and reflects their cultural identities.

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