

# *Mosenodi*

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# ***Analysis of the Report of the National Commission on Education, and the Government White Paper No. 2 with Respect to Private English-Medium Primary Schools***

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**ABSTRACT** *This article summarizes the report of the survey on private English-medium primary schools in Botswana. The findings and recommendations of the survey suggest a need for these schools in the educational system of the country. The article reviews the 1993 Report of the National Commission on Education as it affects the private English-medium primary schools, in which the advantages of these schools in the educational system of the country are highlighted. The Government White Paper No. 2 as it affects the private English-medium schools is also reviewed. It was recommended that the present government policy on private English-medium schools should be maintained, while the fees of Botswana children attending such schools should not be subsidized.*

## **Introduction**

Educationists seem to be in agreement with the view that a solid educational background in the early stages of the educational process can provide a good basis on which future educational achievements are built. Consequently, the quality of educational instructions and experiences provided at the primary school level have been issues of concern to educationists and parents. Parents tend to select schools where they think their children can get the best education. In Botswana, some parents have expressed preferences, and educationists seem to be in agreement with them that a solid educational background in the early private English-medium primary schools, confirming the belief that children who attend such schools are likely to perform better at the primary level of education. Botswana's Independence in 1966 ushered in numerous changes in various sectors: industry, agriculture, health, and education. The late 1960s and 1970s saw steady modifications and redirection of the educational system to integrate and respond to the changing needs of Botswana. Expansions in the then existing sectors and establishment of new ones

led to increased demands for skilled and semi-skilled personnel. The limited number of trained and qualified Batswana, particularly after independence, created dependence on a large foreign labour force. Expatriates' involvement was critical to the development of the economy. A few early English-medium primary schools, were therefore started to receive and cater for children of expatriates who could not fit into the public primary schools, where Setswana is used as the medium of instruction.

### **Literature Review**

The 1977 report of the first National Commission on Education strongly addressed the need for the country to establish and adhere to one system of primary education (Botswana, 1977). According to some observations made in the 1977 report, it was noted that dual primary education (English-medium and Setswana-medium versions) would go against the concept of national integration and unity that the government aimed at fostering. National Development Plan 6 also regrettably noted that the introduction of English-medium schools, though then an exigency for the development of the country's economy, was perhaps a serious miscalculation as far as cultivating the principle of national integration and unity. The duality in the educational system seriously negated the philosophy of 'Education for Kagisano' or social harmony. Government felt that there was a need to focus its resources and attention on the education of the majority. Government eventually discontinued its subsidy to the private schools of the privileged few to face up to societal and national realities. The continuation of subsidies would have meant that the government was funding schools which were inter alia, responsible for creating a class of privileged Batswana at public expense (Botswana, 1985: 53-54).

Despite these developments, the government's stance concerning the purpose of English-medium schools remained unequivocal. As far as the government was concerned, English-medium schools had to operate and continue as long as there were expatriates serving in Botswana, but they had to assume complete self-sufficiency. The inequality in educational provision did not only lead the government to withdraw its subsidy but, to 'also transfer English-medium schools' ownership and management to independent private boards of trustees (Mogasha, 1987). The establishment of English-medium primary schools has continued, while local parents both citizens and expatriates patronise these schools. The private English-medium primary schools usually have pre-schools attached to them, a facility that is lacking in state primary schools. This facility seems to attract those parents who appreciate the importance of this level of education in the development of the child. The admission of children in the pre-schools of these private English-medium primary schools is certainly an advantage. This is because the subsequent admission of children in to the primary level of education in the private English-medium primary schools, is believed to improve the quality of education at subsequent levels of the educational system. Parents are also of the opinion that children attending day care centres are better prepared for primary school because they are taught how to read and write. They also learn how to socialize apart from receiving custodial care (Otaala, Njenga and Monau, 1989: 41).

## **Objectives**

The National Commission on Education commissioned the survey of private English-medium primary schools in Botswana mainly to provide an up-to date picture of the nature and operation of these schools and specifically:

1. To provide historical data on enrolments by sex, number of classes per year, average class size at different levels and the overall teacher pupil ratios.
2. To describe the curriculum, the nature and availability of learning materials, the length of classes and the school day, homework frequency, and the use of specialist teachers.
3. To describe the policy and practice in relation to pre-school preparation for entry into standard one (including age specifications).
4. To identify policy and practice in relation to promotion from standard to standard, repetition and remedial work, and to supply information (if any) on dropout rates.
5. To describe the nature of extra-curricular activities (including library facilities and use) and the staffing and provision of infrastructure for these activities, and to provide an analysis of the mode of financing them.
6. To provide data on the numbers, qualifications and experience (and national origin) of teachers, the salary structure for teachers and other teacher incentives, and to provide an analysis of the mode of financing them.
7. To describe the schools' organization in terms of administration and departmentation.
8. To identify the relationship of the schools to government, and in particular to the Ministry of Education.
9. To identify the nature and extent of parental involvement in the schools and the mode of governance.
10. To provide data on the socio-economic background (including national origin) of the student body of the schools.
11. To provide information on infrastructure and equipment, including design specifications for regular and specialist classrooms and building and equipment costs.
12. To provide historical data on the capital and recurrent costs of the schools and the mode of financing (including grants, donations, loans, debentures, fees etc.

## **Methodology**

The researchers employed a survey research method using a structured questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted in Gaborone with two well established English-medium primary schools. The questionnaire was then sent to all twenty English-medium primary schools in Botswana. Data generated was based on the responses received from 13 private English-medium primary schools as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Location and Name of Schools in the Sample

Location	School
Gaborone	Al-Nur
Gaborone	Broadhurst
Gaborone	Khyber
Gaborone	Northside
Gaborone	Thornhill
Francistown	Clifton
Francistown	John Clifton
Jwaneng	Acacia
Lobatse	Crescent
Maun	Matshwane
Mogoditshane	Legae
Serowe	Swaneng Hill
Sowa	Flamingo

### Findings

Alao and Kandjii-Murangi (1994) came up with the following findings in their study of private English-medium primary schools in Botswana:

1. There is a steady increase in the population of students enrolled in private English-medium primary schools. The grand totals for enrolment across the three years, 1990, 1991 and 1993 revealed a steady growth in student population. For instance from 1991 to 1992, there has been a growth rate of 13 percent for girls and 12 percent for boys.
2. The curriculum in the private English-medium primary schools offers more than is prescribed by the Ministry of Education, while the school duration is about 5 hours. Home assignments are as frequent as four to five times a week or about 22 times in a month. These schools tend to provide a variety of school activities to attract patronage.
3. There is agreement among the private English-medium primary schools as to the need for pre-school exposure prior to commencement of standard 1.
4. Progression from one standard to another is dependent on academic achievement.
5. A variety of extra-curricular activities is available in the private English-medium primary schools.
6. The private English-medium primary schools are adequately staffed and the teachers adequately remunerated. The qualifications of teachers in the surveyed schools ranged from O-Level certificate to masters degree. Salaries depended on qualification and experience. A good number of schools reported that they follow the Debswana salary scales while others cited Patterson's salary stratification as their guide.
7. The ultimate authority in most private English-medium primary schools is usually the Council or Board of Governors. The headteacher is, however, in charge of the day-to-day running of the school.

8. The relationship between these schools and the government is usually formal. Officials of the Ministry of Education are usually members of the school's decision-making body.
9. Parents were reasonably involved in the provision of financial resources and in the physical development of the school, but not extensively involved in the policy formulation of the school, and even less so, in school discipline.
10. Pupils from varying socio-economic backgrounds attend private English-medium primary schools with about half of the pupils from middle socio-economic background. Approximately half of the students in enrolment in the schools surveyed were Batswana.
11. School infrastructure varied according to the age of the school. The infrastructure and equipment in most private English-medium primary schools were considered adequate in terms of what is expected at this level of education.
12. Capital and recurrent expenditure varied according to size, need and age of the schools surveyed. Most schools were financed solely from fees, while some had a system of debentures.

### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, the researchers came up with the following recommendations:

1. Since the enrolment in English-medium schools continues to grow and the demand for access to these schools is seemingly endless, it is recommended that private individuals and private companies be allowed to establish such schools. The government, however, needs to determine the number of schools that can be established in a year. The government should continue to monitor the school fees charged, their regulations, the localization policy, the curriculum and the governance of the schools.
2. The Ministry of Education curriculum should be a skeletal starting point in primary school teaching. Teachers' creativity and innovation should be called to the fore, and to realise that the more diverse the curriculum, the more children will stand to benefit. The curriculum should be added to and expanded in order to be responsive to the diverse learning and developmental needs of learners.
3. The foundation skills in reading, writing and numeracy should be integrated in the primary and early secondary socialization of a child. Parents and pre-school teachers should equally share the responsibility of cultivating these fundamental skills.
4. One's achievement in education is usually regarded as an index of upward mobility in life. Poor performance negates such mobility. Achievement-based progression is recommended in primary schools as this is a good indicator of one's self appraisal and, perhaps, the best approach for ascertaining general future advancement in life.
5. Extra-curricular activities should be considered an integral part of the intellectual and social development of learners and should be given due recognition at the primary school level. Such activities enable pupils to

- develop in the affective domain in addition to the development in the cognitive domain through the conventional teaching-learning approach.
6. In private English-medium primary schools the ultimate authority in the school management is better centralized in a body rather than an individual for administrative efficiency. The school Principal or Head should then report to this body and not to one person who perhaps has established the school.
  7. For effective guidance, it is recommended that a representative of the Ministry of Education be a member of the governing body of each private English-medium primary school.
  8. Parents should be more involved in school discipline. This could be facilitated through regular parents' and teachers' consultations. Parents could be informed of the behaviour of their children from time to time.
  9. There is growing interest in English-medium primary schools. The attractions offered by these schools could be made available in Setswana-medium schools. Alternatively, the establishment of more English-medium primary schools could be encouraged.
  10. The possibility of inviting of private English-medium primary schools to seminars or workshops organized by Government should be explored.

### **Report of the National Commission on Education and the Survey on Private English-Medium Primary Schools**

The report of the National Commission on Education (Botswana, 1993) discussed the two types of private schools in the country, the private Setswana-medium community schools and the private English-medium primary schools. The private community schools are self-help schools established by small communities where no council schools exist. Such schools lack adequate facilities as well as staffing, unlike the private English-medium primary schools which are the focus of this article.

The report of the second National Commission on Education also noted that the first National Commission on Education advised against dual primary education, which in its view would run counter to the concept of national integration and unity. In order to focus attention on the education of the majority, subsidies to English-medium primary schools were discontinued.

The private English-medium primary schools thus became self-financing and funds were raised for these schools through fees, grants, donations, loans and debentures. Although fees charged by private English-medium primary schools tend to be on the increase, Batswana parents continue to demand such education for their children because of the better performance of such schools.

The survey of the 13 schools revealed that the lowest percentage of Batswana pupils in attendance was 34 while the highest percentage in attendance was 64. The researchers also noted that these schools depend on school fees for their revenue, and that these fees have become the main source of regular income to meet the school's capital and recurrent expenses. At the same time, the researchers are of the view that these schools should encourage pupils from different socio-economic

backgrounds to attend them, through a system of scholarships such as at Maru a Pula High School.

From the 13 schools surveyed, the proportion of pupils from Botswana was approximately 54 percent. It must be borne in mind, however, that the support given by government to private English-medium primary schools would not create elitist schools. The idea that the gap between the state owned primary schools and the private English-medium primary schools would close as the performance in the state schools improved, is also endorsed. As contained in the recommendation of the report of the Presidential Commission on Review of Incomes Policy (1990), government provides land for the establishment of private English-medium primary schools in recognition of the important role they play. Some of the 13 schools surveyed would want the Department of Surveys and Lands to make efforts to provide land within six months of application. This is an administrative issue that could be attended to, provided land is available.

Fees charged by private English-medium primary schools will continue to be of concern to parents. The schools on one hand will want the fees they charge to reflect the economic situation and the inflationary rate, while on the other, parents need to be protected from arbitrary increase of school fees by these schools. Perhaps the parents' and teachers' associations should be involved in determining increases in school fees?

The amendment to the Education Act (1991) as contained in the Botswana Government Gazette, supported the involvement of the Ministry of Education in settling fee disputes. This will definitely check some of the English-medium primary schools who may be more interested in financial gain than in providing quality education for children.

Also in the survey of private English-medium primary schools, Alao and Kandjii-Murangi (1994), a request was made by these schools that government should give grants or some assistance to citizen children who cannot afford the fees charged. The authors support the view expressed in the report of the National Commission on Education (Botswana, 1993) on this matter that the decision to send children to these schools is not based on a lack of places in primary schools, but on the parents' wish to give their children what they perceive to be better education, and therefore additional assistance is not warranted. Similarly, some parents seem to be attracted to private secondary schools as well. These private secondary schools are also very few. There is pressure on such parents to send their children to private English-medium primary schools where they assume their children are likely to perform better, thus giving them the advantage of admission into the private secondary schools.

### **Analysis of Government Paper No. 2 and the Revised National Policy on Education (1994) With Reference to the Survey on English-Medium Primary Schools**

The focus here will be on the accepted recommendations as contained in the White Paper (Botswana, 1994) with reference to the study on English-medium primary schools. The relevance of private English-medium primary schools, to the key issues vital to the development of education in the country will also be explored. The



accepted recommendations as contained in White Paper are that:

- a) Government should maintain its present policy on private English-medium primary schools.
- b) The fees of Batswana children attending private English-medium schools should not be subsidized.
- c) The Ministry of Education should encourage private schools to participate in its in-service training programmes (Botswana, 1994:20).

The current Government's policy towards private English-medium primary schools is that they should operate as any private venture, but within the broad guidelines laid down by the Ministry of Education. Since there are genuine efforts by government to continue to upgrade the state owned primary schools so that they can compete favourably with the English -medium primary schools, the government position of not subsidizing Batswana attending these schools seems logical.

The government is already making efforts to close the gap between the state run primary schools and the private schools. The share of the national budget to education for instance is substantial, as noted in the Report of the National Commission on Education (1993). Education has received the largest portion of the recurrent budget which in the 1993/94 financial year amounted to 22 percent of the total recurrent budget. The White Paper (Botswana, 1994) also stated that the overall objectives of the national system will raise educational standards at all levels as the government intends to improve quality of instruction, and to undertake a phased programme to eliminate shortage of physical facilities. This appears to be one of the problems identified as being responsible for the low level of achievement in primary education. As time goes on, a narrowing of the gap between the state schools and the private schools may be apparent once the objectives of Government are achieved.

With reference to in-service training, the participation of English-medium primary schools in in-service training programmes organized by Government for state owned primary schools would enhance the exchange of ideas between the two types of schools. It will also create the opportunity for interaction between the schools. Considering the seven key issues that are vital to the future development of education in the country, two factors that are closely related to private schools are:

1. Improvement and maintenance of quality of the education system; and,
2. Cost-effectiveness and cost sharing in the financing of education.

The National Commission of Education (1993) has revealed that academic achievement of standard seven completers in general is declining. The English-medium primary schools, if encouraged to operate, could contribute positively to the improvement of the quality of education in the country. These schools have been observed to maintain good quality education, based on their better qualified teachers, lower teacher-pupil ratios, and smaller classes. Their teaching methodologies are varied and they have a diversified curriculum.

The National Commission on Education (1993) noted that the share of the national budget allocated to education is substantial. Hence the need for cost sharing as a means of diversifying sources of educational finance which requires individuals, communities and employers to contribute more towards the cost of education and training. In the opinion of the authors, cost sharing in education can be addressed indirectly by encouraging the operation of schools. The interest expressed by Batswana in schools where fees are paid is an indication of their interest to share in the education of their children. It may be argued that one way of closing the gap between the state run schools and private schools is for the state to charge user (school) fees and re-channel the money to improve the situation. The researchers support the present policy of government of not charging fees for primary education. Primary schooling provides a basic education that should be accessible to all. In the view of the researchers, cost recovery through fees, if implemented in higher institutions of learning, or when implemented for working adults, seems to be more appropriate compared to its implementation at the first level, if the idea of minimum basic education for the people is to be realized.

## **Conclusion**

The relevance of private English-medium primary schools in the educational system of the country has generated debate for some time. However, there is indication that these schools will still be needed in the country, because of the reasons for their initial establishment. These schools also serve as an avenue for some Batswana to participate in the cost of education of their children. The attraction of Batswana to these schools is likely to diminish as the performance of children in state owned primary schools improves.

The English-medium primary schools can also provide educational standards which the state primary schools can emulate as they have consistently performed better than state schools in the Primary School Leaving Examinations.

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