



Exploring Alternative Teaching Methods and Embracing Cultural Diversity: An Exchange Experience in Gaborone, Botswana

Before departure

I heard about Minor Field Studies during my first year at KTH, and I immediately decided that I wanted to do it. It is a great way to conduct research in a real environment and put my skills to the test. I started planning for MFS in late August 2022. As it is uncommon for a third-year student in my program to do their thesis work abroad. It took some time to sort out all the practicalities, as there is no standardized routine. However, with some convincing, everything worked itself out.

I chose Botswana for a couple of reasons. One of them was my personal interest in the Southern Africa region, and living here was a goal of mine to better understand the society and history of this part of Africa. The second reason was the Global Development Hub (GDH), a program coordinated by KTH and developed by a number of universities in Africa. The main focus of the program is to create sustainable solutions to local challenges. Thanks to GDH and MFS, I was able to work on two projects simultaneously and also connect with local students in Botswana.

Before departure, I didn't have to do much. In Gaborone, there is no problem with malaria, so I didn't need to take any medications. However, it is recommended if you are planning to travel to the northern part of the country. The COVID situation is also under control, and no one has asked me for vaccination proof in the country. During autumn 2022, I stayed in touch with Botho University, where the student exchange took place, and they assisted me with everything. My contact person was also working there and had many contacts that helped throughout the process. Since my stay stretched from January to the end of May, I had to apply for a visa, but that was also resolved after my arrival. Most European citizens can stay up to 90 days without a visa, so if your project is shorter than three months, you don't have to go through the immigration process.

Upon arrival

I arrived in Gaborone, Botswana, in early January, a couple of days after the normal semester began here. At the airport, I was welcomed by the staff from Botho University, and after that, we drove to the university campus for a short introduction, and then to my accommodation.

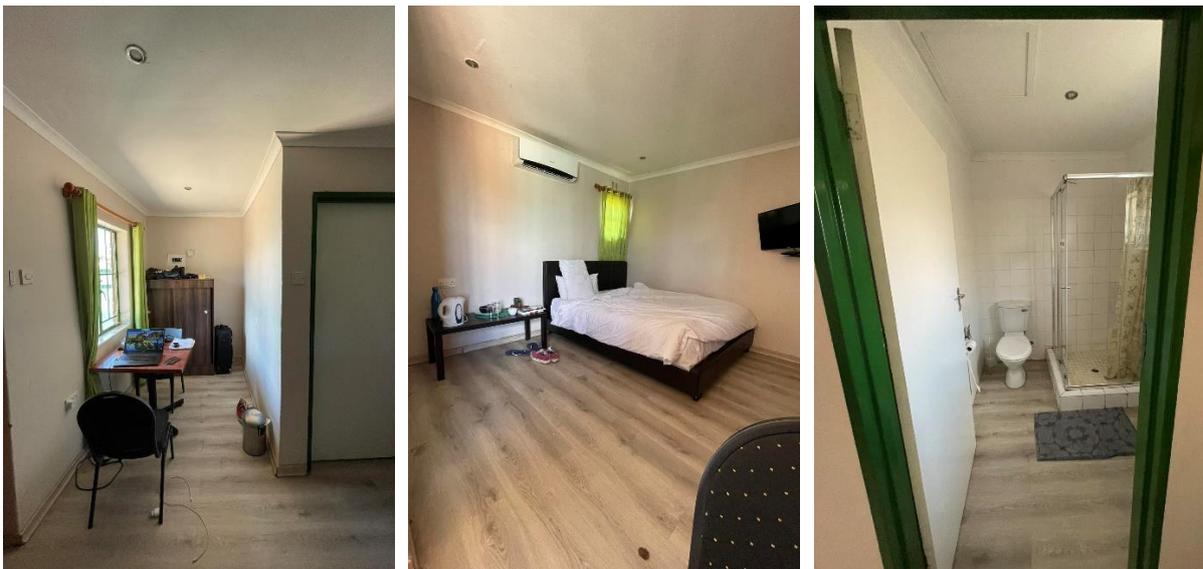
A couple of days later, I had my first meeting with my contact person, where we discussed expectations and the level of support I would require. My initial plan was to start my project in early February, but it took some time to obtain the research permit. So, my recommendation is to be a little bit pushy and send emails if the person responsible is not responding. My contact person provided me with the contact details of a local school, and from then on, I had contact with the principal and teachers at the school where my research was conducted.

Financials

In my opinion, Botswana is generally an affordable country to stay in. The scholarship and CSN are definitely more than enough to enjoy a good life and travel during the stay. Things like eating out are quite affordable compared to Sweden, and food is also cheaper than in Sweden. Throughout my entire stay, I used public transport called "combis," which is extremely affordable (7 BWP = 5.5 SEK). It takes a little time to figure out how the system works because there is no map or anything like that, just numbers indicating the line in front of the minivan. As a foreigner, I stood out there, but after some time, I stopped caring if some people stared at me. I think combis are a good way to travel (although it can be slow) and a great way to interact with locals. There is also an app called "InDrive" where taxis can be booked. A single ride costs around 50 BWP (approximately 40 SEK).

Accommodation

The local university where I studied helped me with the accommodation arrangements. I stayed in a part of town called Tlokweg, which is around 10 km from the city centre. The apartment cost 2500 BWP (2000 SEK) per month, and it was a nice small apartment with my own bathroom. The only issue I encountered was that I didn't have access to a proper kitchen, but I managed to solve it by buying some basic equipment and a hot plate, which is a small cooktop with two heating elements. The location of the apartment encouraged me to use the local transport, which, in the end, turned out to be great! Otherwise, I would have spent a fortune traveling back and forth to campus every day using only taxis.



How the accommodation looked like.

Project

The study I conducted investigated a new learning method called the pure question-based method. This method is based on another method called question-based learning, which involves participants answering interactive questions to learn course content. In the pure question-based method, participants only answer questions without listening to or watching any learning material beforehand. The idea is that the course participant makes a well-thought-out guess at the answer and then learns through the following feedback. If the wrong answer is given, the feedback from the question must guide the course participant in the right direction without revealing the correct answer. Since this is a new method, it has never been tested in a school environment, and that is what the thesis aimed to investigate.

As I mentioned earlier, my contact person was extremely helpful, and I received ample assistance and support. All the people at the local school were extremely friendly and helpful, and they also tried to assist me as much as they could. Most of the time I spent there, I was with students from three different classes but the same grade, Standard Six in the local school, where the children were around 11 years old. We conducted tests and used the computer classrooms for the study. It was truly rewarding, and the students were genuinely curious about what I was doing in Botswana and Europe, so we had many conversations and shared experiences.



Bothale Cambridge International School

Country

The culture is extremely different from that in Sweden. In Botswana, strangers talk to each other, and it is not seen as something strange or unusual to have conversations with people on the bus. I found this to be extremely rewarding, especially during some of the taxi rides where the drivers shared their life stories with me. It provided me with a different perspective on various things. Additionally, the concept of time is different in Botswana. People are not in a hurry, and if someone is a little late, it's not a big deal. I found it extremely nice not to worry too much about time and just relax a bit without stressing too much. Time doesn't control life here as much as it does in many parts of Europe.

Leisure and social activities

Gaborone is a very small capital city, so the options for leisure activities are limited. There are many shopping malls and decent restaurants in the city, so when I was there, I tried the local cuisine, which is very meat-centered. I even tried Mopane worms, which are considered a local delicacy here!

However, what Botswana truly has to offer is its nature! Outside Gaborone lies Mokolodi Nature Reserve, which is a great starting point to explore the region's nature. I also had the opportunity to camp in Khutse Reserve, which was an amazing experience of being in the middle of nowhere with animals roaming around at night. Additionally, the northern part of the country is worth a visit. I managed to visit a city called Khutse and the Chobe National Park. Furthermore, Gaborone is only 10 km from the South African border, so I highly recommend visiting the country. I took a bus ride to Johannesburg, which was a very interesting experience.



Chobe National Park

Sustainability

Unfortunately, the only viable option to get to Botswana was by plane. However, once in the city, I tried to use public transport as much as possible. The railway system is not very extensive, so I didn't have a chance to use it. However, the bus system seems to be well-developed, allowing travel to almost anywhere in the country, as well as in South Africa. The only problem is that it can be difficult to find information about the buses, so I would recommend asking a local for advice or visiting the main bus station to gather more information about departure times, etc.

Regarding the Global Sustainable Development Goals, my research focused on two of the goals:

- **Goal 4 Quality Education:** this study aimed to provide a tool for creating an effective learning environment where everyone feels included and can learn at their own pace.
- **Goal 10 Reduced Inequality:** by promoting a good and inclusive school environment, it is hoped that in the long run, inequality will be reduced, ensuring equal opportunities for all genders and enhancing representation in decision-making.

Other recommendations and observations

I believe the biggest challenge I experienced was managing time. Things take longer than expected, so it's better to have more time allocated for the study rather than less. Fortunately, I had the entire semester to conduct the study, so I knew I had ample backup time in case things didn't go as planned. Another tip I can offer is to avoid making assumptions. I assumed that primary schools in Botswana operated in a similar way as in Europe, but that wasn't the case. The school year is divided into three semesters, which I was not aware of, leading to the realization that I couldn't begin working in schools in late March or early April due to the break. Therefore, it's essential to conduct thorough research well in advance and be prepared.

To sum it up, my stay in Botswana was incredible! My final recommendation is to step out of your comfort zone. Botswana is an environment vastly different from Sweden, and if you want to have a fantastic experience, you need to challenge yourself and actively engage in various activities. Initially, some places may seem intimidating or uncomfortable, but in most situations, they are perfectly safe, and exercising normal caution is sufficient.