

# AN INVESTIGATION ON HOW SCHOOL LIBRARIES SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH READING DIFFICULTIES: THE CASE OF KANYE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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## Abstract

This study sought to investigate how school libraries support students with reading difficulties and focusses on junior secondary schools in Kanye. The study is informed by Gibson's Critical Library Service Categories Framework on library policies, facilities, services and staff training needs. The research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods for dual benefit. Participants of the study consisted of school managers, teacher librarians and students with reading difficulties. Purposive sampling was used to select school managers and teacher librarians while census sampling was used for the 133 students with reading difficulties. Observation, survey, document analysis and interview techniques were used as data collection tools. The study established that students with reading difficulties were not helped adequately and that schools lack policies for dealing with such students. Based on the salient findings, the study makes recommendations pertaining to how school libraries can enhance their support for students with reading difficulties.

**Keywords:** Library services, school librarianship, Botswana, secondary school, education policy

## 1.0 Introduction

Reading is one of the skills associated with information literacy. Eisenberg (2008) posits that information literacy skills consist of reading, writing, searching, locating, retrieving, organizing, processing, analysing and presenting information. Busayo (2011) states that reading is the art of interpreting written words and is the most effective process of conscious learning. It is a complex mental activity that involves recording, thinking, interpretation and vision (Şahin, 2013). The prime objective of reading is comprehension of written texts and it is critical for both academic and lifelong learning (Zheng, 2014). Reading comprehension can be defined as intentional thinking that occurs when readers actively engage in and reflect on text they have read to extract meaning (Cain, 2010; Zheng, 2014). Reading is thus not passive but an active skill as it requires thinking, practice and exercise.

People read various documents for different purposes such as academic, pleasure, improvement and/or solve problems, etc. (Rahman, 2007). The ability to read is very important for knowledge acquisition, for teaching literacy, and for accessing information and benefitting from it (Kutay, 2014). The American Association of School Libraries (2007) regards reading as a foundational skill for 21st century learners. To successfully access, retrieve and use information, it is imperative that learners be capacitated with reading skills.

While students can perform badly academically due to poor reading habits, others perform badly because of reading difficulties. Hartney (2011) refers to reading difficulties as the lower tail of a normal distribution of reading ability in the population. The author argues that students with reading difficulties are those whose achievement levels are lower than the rest of the students in the distribution. Lerner (2000) submits that students can have reading difficulties because of a poor start in reading and this poor start causes delays in the acquisition of the reading skill. Shaywitz and Shaywitz (2005) note further that learners with reading difficulties are otherwise intelligent and have the motivation to acquire information.

The role played by the library in helping students with reading difficulties cannot be over-emphasized. Most of the secondary schools in Botswana have a library to support its education programs, but the extent to which the school library contributes in supporting learners with reading difficulties is an area that needs to be investigated especially in this era of information explosion.

## **2.0 Education system**

Botswana has over 239 secondary schools, 34 of which are senior secondary schools and the rest junior secondary schools (Mphale, 2014). Junior secondary school education runs from Form 1 to Form 3 while the senior secondary education runs from Form 4 to Form 5 (Mphale, 2014). Vocational subjects have been integrated in junior secondary schools as per the recommendations of Government of Botswana (1994). Due to the country's quest for skills development, secondary school education has been diversified to allow students to have choice in practical and business subjects which they take along with core subjects English, Mathematics, Setswana and Science (Government of Botswana, 1994).

There are six junior secondary schools in Kanye with approximately 700 students each. These are Ngwaketse JSS, Ntebogang JSS, Bathoen II JSS, Mathiba JSS, Tlhomo JSS and Mookami JSS. Most of these secondary schools were built in the 1980s. The schools are scattered across Kanye and have feeder primary schools in their vicinity. All schools have school libraries together with teacher librarians. Among the six teacher librarians, one holds Bachelor's Degree in Library and Information Studies, two hold Certificate in School Library and Information Studies and the other two have no librarianship qualification.

### **3.0 School libraries in Botswana**

At the inception of secondary education in Botswana, schools did not have libraries; the libraries would subsequently be established within schools as the need to improve the curriculum and support of school programs arose (Baffour-Awuah, 1997). School libraries came as a product of the first education policy document of Botswana commonly known as Education for Kagisano (Government of Botswana, 1977). Recommendation 48 made prescription that schools must have libraries to provide supplementary avenue for learning. This was realized in the 1970s when school libraries started (Tallman, Metzger & Jorosi, 2000). The Revised National Policy on Education (1994) recommended a revision of junior secondary school curriculum, resulting in a three-year student-centred, resource-based curriculum with a bearing on library services (Mooketsi, 2005). Mooketsi (2005) further noted that school libraries would facilitate independent learning in junior secondary schools. Mooketsi (2005) stressed the need for the libraries to be well stocked and ensure quality service to its users in the management of its resources.

Despite the availability of libraries, students struggle with reading and this has consequently resulted in low academic performance (Ketsitlile & Commeyras, 2014). Arua and Arua (2011) submits that the African continent suffers from a poor reading culture. Arua and Arua (2011) further posits that students in junior secondary schools in Botswana mostly read during school times and for the purpose of passing their tests and examinations. The need to cultivate a healthy reading culture among students has become evident (Boone, 2011). The International Federation of Libraries Association (IFLA) (2015) submits that libraries could be central and effective in cultivating a healthy reading culture among learners, and that teacher librarians should provide relevant resources to facilitate student research. The International Reading Association (IRA) (2005) adds that libraries could also provide reading programmes to cultivate a reading culture in the learners.

### **4.0 Statement of the problem**

Various studies report on the prevalence of reading difficulties among students. Hugo, Le Roux and Muller (2005) found that about 40% of students in primary and middle schools in parts of USA have reading difficulties. Denton, Bryan, Wexter, Reed, & Vaughn (2007) also report that middle school learners in Texas struggle with reading. Furthermore, Hlhalathwa (2013) reports poor reading skills among learners in most schools in South Africa. In Botswana, investigations established that students in upper primary and junior secondary schools had reading difficulties (Ketsitlile & Commeyras, 2014). A recent report from Kanye Regional Education Office revealed that around 51% of students in all junior secondary schools in Kanye struggle with reading (Government of Botswana, 2016). Moreover, Monyatsi and Monyatsi (2007) and Totolo (2014) reported that students in Botswana lack information literacy skills such as comprehension, reading and writing skills. However, studies have generally not shown the

role of school libraries in supporting students with reading difficulties, and this study thus seeks to contribute knowledge in this regard.

### 5.0 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

- a) Determine the availability of school library policy framework for supporting students with reading difficulties.
- b) Explore specific services which school libraries provide to students with reading difficulties.
- c) Identify the challenges that exist regarding support given to students with reading disabilities in school.

### 6.0 Methodology and research design

#### 6.1 Study paradigm and approach

This study adopted an interpretive research paradigm. According to Cresswell, (2014) an interpretive study seeks to understand reality through the views of the participants, their background and experiences. Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and inter-subjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. This study used a mixed method research design comprising both qualitative and quantitative within an interpretive paradigm for dual benefits. Mixed method is the incorporation of various qualitative and quantitative strategies within a single project (Morse, 2003). A case study design was employed together with the use of mixed methods approach.

#### 6.2 Population of study

The population for this study constituted of 600 students from six schools, making it 3600 participants. Each school has one School Head, one Deputy School Head, three Heads of Department and one Teacher Librarian. From statistics compiled by Heads of Department and teacher counsellors across all junior schools in Kanye, there are 133 students with reading difficulties. Census sampling was used to distribute questionnaires to all students with reading difficulties. Consider Table 1.

**Table 1: Number of Students with reading difficulties per School**

Name of school	Total number of students with reading difficulties
Tlthomo CJSS	21
Ngwaketse CJSS	33
Bathoen II CJSS	17
Mathiba CJSS	20
Ntebogang CJSS	22
Mookami CJSS	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>

### **6.3 Data collection, analysis, and the guiding framework**

Questionnaires, observation, document reviews and interview techniques were data collection tools for the investigation. To analyze the data for this study, thematic analysis suggested by Boyatzis (1998) was utilized to build up categories or themes with reference to the objectives of the study. An inductive analytical style was employed. Themes and topics were developed in line with what participants said during interviews. The themes were built from demographic information and the study's empirical data obtained from participants' views on policies, facilities, services and training needs. Subsequently, an interpretation of data was made to make sense of the findings of the study. This strategy was found fitting for both data generated from individual interviews and from questionnaires. For quantitative data, on the other hand, data was analyzed by means of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS was used to analyse quantitative data to produce frequencies and percentages. Quantitative data extracted from SPSS were presented using tables, charts and graphs.

Gibson's Critical Library Service Categories Framework was used as a guiding tool for this study. This Framework posits that a plan of service in a library must include a) policies and procedures, b) facilities and equipment, c) specific services, and d) library staff development (Gibson, 2006). Gibson's Framework has been found to be suitable for this study because it addresses school libraries support to students with special needs. Although Gibson (2006) specifically looks at learners with disabilities, the framework is considered suitable because students with reading difficulties require special services just like those with disabilities. The framework's four categories which are policies and procedures, access to facilities, specific services and staff development are effective strategies which school libraries ought to adopt in their endeavour to support students with reading difficulties. For school libraries to be able to meet the needs of students with reading difficulties, they must have policies, relevant equipment and facilities, specific services and trained staff to provide comprehensive access.

### **6.4 Validity and reliability**

A central concern in research is validity, which is also known as credibility or dependability (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). To secure internal and external validity, techniques such as triangulation were applied. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple sites, sources of data and methods of data collection in studying the same topics to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). A pilot study was conducted to test reliability and validity of quantitative data collection instruments. It was conducted at Maraka CJSS because this school is not included among the participating schools.

Mason (2002) posits that from an interpretivist's perspective, reliability is concerned with demonstrating that the researcher has not misrepresented or invented data or has been careless in data recording. To ensure reliability, an audit trail was carried out whereby detailed descriptions of the process of data collection, how categorizations were formed, and how interpretations made

were provided to ensure quality in the study. To guarantee that this exercise is well done, an A4 notebook was kept from the onset to record each aspect of data collection process and lessons learned. Details pertaining to the descriptions of the settings and events that could possibly influence participants were also recorded. Furthermore, the process of coding, categorization and formation of themes were also documented.

**7.0 Results and discussion**

**7.1 Demographic data**

**7.1.1 Heads of Departments (HoDs) and Teacher Librarians (TLs)**

Demographic details covered in this section include age, gender, work experience and educational qualification of HoDs and TLs. This is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Characteristics for HoDs (N=12) and TLs (N=12)**

Demographic details	HoDs N (%)	Teacher Librarians N (%)
<b>Age</b>		
20-30 years	0	0
31-40 years	0	2 (33)
41-50 years	4 (67)	3 (50)
51 years and above	2 (33)	1 (17)
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	1 (17)	4 (67)
Male	5 (83)	2 (33)
<b>Work experience</b>		
1-5 years	0	1 (17)
6-10 years	0	0
11-15 years	1 (17)	2 (33)
16 or more	5 (83)	3 (50)
<b>Educational qualification</b>		
Certificate in school Librarianship	1 (17)	3 (50)
Diploma in secondary education	4 (67)	4 (67)
Diploma in Library and Information Studies	0	0
Bachelor of Arts in Humanities	0	1 (17)
Bachelor of Education	3 (50)	4 (67)
Bachelor of Arts in Library and	0	0
<b>Information studies</b>		
Bachelor of Library and Information Studies	0	1 (17)

Table 2 shows that the age of four (67%) HoDs ranges from 41-50 and that of two (33%) is 51 and above. Of the six HoDs, only one (17%) is female and is the only one with a qualification

in librarianship. Five (83%) HoDs have been in the service for 16 years and more and only one (17%) has served for about 11 to 15 years. Most (n=4, 67%) of the HoDs hold a Diploma in Secondary Education, followed by Bachelor of Education (n=3, 50%) and Certificate in School Librarianship (n=1, 17%). Other HoDs do not have any qualification in librarianship.

The age range of TLs is as follows. Two (33%) are between 31 to 40 years, three (30%) are between 41 to 50 years and one (17%) is above 51 years. In terms of gender, there are five female TLs and one male. Working experience between them differs as one has a work experience of between one and five years, two have a work experience of between 11 and 15 years and one has work experience of above 16 years. Among these TLs, two have a certificate in school librarianship and one holds a Bachelor’s degree in Library and Information Studies. Only three TLs have qualifications in librarianship.

**7.1.2 Students**

Demographic details presented for students include age, gender, and level of study (Form) This is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Characteristics for students (N=130)**

<b>Demographic details</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Age</b>		
12 - 14 years	43	33
15 - 17 years	85	65
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	65	50
Gender	65	50
<b>Level of study</b>		
Form 1	40	32
Form 2	48	38
Form 3	37	30

**7.2 Quantitative and qualitative data**

**7.2.1 Response rate**

Findings are presented according to objectives outlined above using only two aspects of the categorization presented in the Gibson’s model, namely policy and services. Quantitative results are presented first followed by qualitative findings obtained from interviews, document reviews and observation.

Respondents were given a list of policies, were they had to tick either ‘yes,’ ‘no’ or ‘I don’t know’ in response to question asked for the policies. Interviews were conducted with the TLs with a 100 % response rate (n=6). One hundred and thirty-three questionnaires were distributed

to students and the response rate was 98% (n=130). School Heads were also given questionnaires and all six 100 % (n=6) were successfully returned. These were closed-ended questions with a column for comments.

### ***7.2.2 Policies and procedures***

The aim of the investigation was to determine the availability and efficiency of school libraries' policy framework in supporting students with reading difficulties. Responses from half (n=3, 50%) of the HoDs revealed that they are not aware of the availability of the Botswana Inclusive Education Policy (Government of Botswana, 1994) while 33% (n=2) of the HoDs indicated that they are aware of the policy. Still on the Inclusive Education Policy, (n=4, 67%) of the TLs indicated that this policy is not available in their school libraries. In regard to the Reading Policy, there was an equal distribution among HoDs with two (33%) saying the reading policy is available in their schools, two (33%) saying it is not available (n=2, 33%) and two (33%) saying they are not aware of the existence of the reading policy. Contrast to observations regarding HoDs, five (83%) of the TLs indicated that there is a Reading Policy in their school libraries while only one (17%) TL said there was no Reading Policy.

The study results pertaining to Selection Policy indicated that four HoDs (67%) do not know if the Selection Policy is available or not. Three (50%) of the TLs indicated that the Selection Policy is available in their school libraries, two (33%) indicated that the Selection Policy is not available in their schools while only one (17%) was not aware of the existence of the Selection Policy in their school library. Study results also revealed that four HoDs (67%) are not aware of availability of the Circulation Policy while four (67%) of the TLs indicated that the Circulation Policy was available in their school libraries and only one (17%) TL indicated that they are not aware of the existence of the Circulation Policy in their school library.

Four (67%) HoDs and two (33%) TLs indicated that they are not aware of the existence of the IFLA guidelines for libraries to assist persons with dyslexia, while five (83%) HoDs and two (33%) TLs indicated that they are not aware of the availability of the IFLA/UNESCO school library manifesto in their school libraries. Lastly, in regard to Access Policy only two (33%) HoDs and four (67%) TLs indicated that the Access Policy is available while four (67%) HoDs and one (17%) TL indicated that they are not aware of the existence of this policy.

As already mentioned, the study sought to identify library policy frameworks which TLs need to adhere to in their endeavour to support students with reading difficulties. The study further sought to investigate the level of awareness that HoDs and TLs have of these documents. The findings revealed that HoDs are not aware of school library policies like Access and Circulation policies. Some are aware of the Botswana Inclusive Education Policy, but they are not sure if it is available in and used by their school libraries. Findings further revealed that although most of the teacher librarians are aware of policies such as Botswana Inclusive

Education Policy, they do not utilize them. They further mentioned that although they have the School Library Policy, it does not cater for students with reading difficulties.

A study of the policies showed that the School Library Policy was scanty. Although it had sections on Access and Circulation, these sections were silent on students with reading difficulties. Policies are very critical to school libraries because they are a blue print on how school libraries are supposed to function. If TLs need to draw programmes for students, they need a policy to guide them. Subramaniam et al. (2013) alluded that school library policies ensure accountability. Policies hold the user accountable for any activity he or she does. Boone (2011) suggested that struggling readers need easy to read books and Hartney (2011) added that acquisitions done for students with reading difficulties require that a guide be followed. If school libraries do not have relevant policies to assist students with specific needs like those with reading difficulties, it implies that these students will continue to lack literacy skills. One of the informants, TLF3, confessed that although they have the school library policy it does not cover aspects on how students with reading difficulties may be catered for.

The Botswana Inclusive Education Policy demands that all students should have access to education irrespective of their ability, disability or background situation, and school libraries as learning resource centres are expected to cater for all students (Government of Botswana, 1994). However, libraries need the backing of sound library policies. If policy requirements are not adhered to, students with reading difficulties would not be able to access school library materials. This notwithstanding, school libraries do not have policies which explain or provide clear guidance on how to facilitate access or circulation for learning with this type of disability. On the issue of policies as road maps or blue prints on how teacher libraries could effectively serve students, Adams (2009) avers that policies give school librarians prescriptions on how to provide physically accessible library spaces and information that is intellectually accessible (International Federation of Library Associations, 2015).

### **7.2.3 Services**

The research also sought to explore specific services which school libraries provide to students with reading difficulties. HoDs and TLs were given a list of services and requested to tick the type of service they provide in their school library. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.: Response from HoDs (N=12) and TLs (N=12) on school library services**

Services	HODs	TLs
	N (%)	N (%)
Circulation service	5 (83)	5 (83)
Provision of easy to read print sources	4 (80)	3 (50)
Free choice reading	5 (83)	6 (100)
Provision of e-books	0 (0)	0 (0)
Extended circulations	2 (33)	3 (50)

Table 4 reveals that with regard to circulation services five HoDs (83%) and five (83%) TLs reported that the service is available. For the service of provision of easy to read print sources four (80%) HoDs and three (50%) TLs indicated that the service is availed to the learners. When asked about free choice reading materials service, five (83%) HoDs and six (100%) TLs said their school libraries offer these services. Provision of e-books was indicated to be unavailable by both the HoDs and the TLs. Respondents were also asked if they have a service on extended circulations. Only two (33%) HoDs and three (50%) TLs indicated that this service was available in their school libraries.

**7.2.4 Services offered to students with reading difficulties**

Follow-up interviews were carried out with TLs to get more insight on what specific services are provided for students with reading difficulties. The study findings revealed that in some schools in Kanye, students with reading difficulties are not catered for as noted by some interviewees who stated that “There is nothing in place for students with reading difficulties, except just catering for them when buying for the library” TLM5. Furthermore, participants elaborated that although there is nothing in place currently the intention is to procure books for their level of understanding and assist them in reading. It was also revealed that some libraries offer pictorial/illustrated stories and subscribe for educational television programmes as a way of supporting students with reading difficulties. TLF2 revealed that they have Digital Versatile Discs or Digital Video Discs (DVDs) with stories that can be listened to by students with reading difficulties. TLF2 said “There is nothing in place so far but since they have been assessed, the intention is to procure books for their level of understanding and assist them in reading. We also have DVDs with stories for listening. We offer pictorial/illustrated stories and also subscribe for educational television programmes which are suitable for them”

Other interviewees revealed that there are few services or programmes offered to students with reading difficulties. Some of the services include circulation service, provision of easy to read materials, extended circulations, reading tests, home reading assignments, word building, motivational talks and games.

In addition, students were also asked to state the services that the school library provides to enhance their reading skills. This is shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Response from students on school library services (N=130)**

Services	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Choice of reading materials	122	95	7	5
Home book delivery service	37	29	92	71
Provision of e-books, talking books	32	25	97	75
Reading assistance	59	45	70	54
Provision of easy to read print sources	95	73	34	26

As can be seen from Table 5, service on choice of reading materials was selected by 122 (95%) students. They were also asked about home delivery service and 37(29%) of them said this service is offered while 92(71%) said the service is not offered by their libraries. When they were asked about the school library providing them with e-books and talking books, 32(25%) agreed that they receive this service but 97(75%) said they do not receive this kind of service. The students were also asked about reading assistance service by their libraries. Fifty-nine (45%) students indicated that they receive reading assistance while 70(54%) students said they do not receive this service from their libraries. Lastly, 95(73%) students indicated that they are provided with easy to read materials while 34(26%) students said there is no such service in their libraries. Respondent 102NGW said “I wish the library could provide us with past exam papers, this would help us perform very well”.

It was revealed that few services were offered to students with reading difficulties. The findings were that these students are offered some simple words and sentences to read by some teacher librarians; others said they provide them with story books though they are not enough. As for most librarians, they confessed that they do not have any specific services for students with reading difficulties.

Findings on services for students with reading difficulties revealed that most TLs do not have any specific services to support these learners. Teacher librarians used words such as “there is nothing in place,” and “students with specific needs are not assisted” (TLM1, TLM5). Some TLs said they give the learners simple words and sentences to read (TLF3). TLM5 said that he has identified the students with reading difficulties but does not have any service for them because he does not have skills on how to assist them. Services in these cases referred to specific assistance which school libraries render to students with reading difficulties (Subramaniam et al., 2013). According to Gibson (2006), for the sake of students with specific needs, information

should be put in easily accessible formats to allow them to access it. Students with reading difficulties need information stored in a format that they can easily access.

When students were asked on services provided by their school libraries, their responses also revealed that they are inadequately catered for. One student said their school library had picture books and some easy to read books which they can access any time they are in the library. Both TLs and students reveal inadequacy in service provision to students with reading difficulties. As already stated, the Government of Botswana (1994) posits that every student should be given access to education irrespective of their circumstances, abilities or background. The lack of provision of specific services to students with reading difficulties often leads to poor performance in school (Boone, 2011; Hartney, 2011). Specific services may include the provision of e-books and audio books (Socol, 2010). Almost all school libraries have computers and Wi-Fi connection as rolled out by the Botswana Government (2015-2020) through the Botswana Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (ETSSP 2015-2020). This connectivity provides teacher librarians with opportunity to download e-books and videos specifically for students with reading difficulties and reading comprehension (Hartney, 2011).

### **7.2.5 Challenges**

The findings show that most TLs do not have qualifications in librarianship. Lack of training is a challenge in most school libraries in Botswana (Totolo, 2014). This lack of relevant qualifications possibly made librarians oblivious to the needs of some disabled users, hence the numerous challenges facing both librarians and students in accessing services. The other challenges found in this study pertain to reading. According to the findings, students with disabilities experienced reading challenges. Literature abounds on the correlation between reading challenges and school performance (Boone, 2011; Hartney, 2011).

### **8.0 Conclusion and recommendations**

The study has demonstrated that the support given to students with reading difficulties in school libraries is very inadequate. This might be due to lack of imperative tools such as policies, facilities, specific services and lack of expertise from most of teacher librarians. These are critical in school libraries as they are the means by which school librarians support all library users including those with reading difficulties. The study also showed that Kanye school libraries do not have enough materials necessary for supporting students with reading difficulties. On the positive side participants reported that the library was open for students to use library materials or to read. This was noted as a good outcome but the need to have sufficient and easy to read materials for students with challenges was emphasized. The study further recommends that authorities should consider in-service training to equip librarians. Such training should include workshops via accredited library graduate programmes or in-service professional development.

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