

**Book security in senior secondary schools in Botswana  
– an imperative to quality education  
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**Abstract**

This article examines the state of senior secondary school libraries in Botswana, focusing particularly on book losses and how such losses can be averted. School librarians were the informants for this investigation, and information supplied by them led to the conclusion that the high rate of book losses is due to poor library security systems. The majority of school libraries still use outdated and ineffective measures against book losses. The implications of the findings are discussed in relation to the quality of education. The paper advances the argument that the continued neglect of security in Botswana school libraries will affect the quality of the school products and that this can negatively affect the economic productive workforce of the country. With poorly equipped libraries, students will graduate wanting in terms of knowledge and information, as there is a limit to the quality of education a teacher can provide to students in the classroom. Quality education, it is argued here, necessarily depends on the industry and sustained reading culture of the individual student supported by a well equipped library.

**Introduction**

Botswana, a middle income developing country, attained self-determination in the mid 1960s. Since then, its economy has been growing steadily due mainly to rich minerals, particularly diamond mining. The country's *per capita* income averaged 9% between 1967 and 1997. Its nominal GDP was US\$9.2 billion in 2004/05. During the same fiscal year, the *per capita* income stood at US\$5 336.00. Since the country's independence, the Department of Education has been getting the biggest share of the national budget allocation, averaging 21% per annum (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1830.htm> accessed 16 May 2007). It would be expected that a country endowed with such a buoyant economy, relative to other developing countries in Africa, and with a relatively small population (1.76 million, *ibid*), would have educational facilities such as school libraries that are sufficiently stocked with books that are safely secured under modern security systems.

The first library in Botswana was introduced in the 1930s by Robert Moffat, a London Missionary Society (LMS) priest. The LMS in Serowe (the biggest village) provided the first reading room for use by students and converts. In 1938 the Cornegie Trust provided a grant of US\$1 000.00 to establish libraries for Africans in Bechuanaland (present Botswana) in keeping with its activities in neighbouring South Africa. The government used the money to finance a travelling library, which consisted of book boxes that were distributed to serve centres around the country. The process ended in 1950. Between 1950 and 1963, libraries were available only in government departments, schools and colleges (Wedgeworth, 1993:65). During the Botswana pre-independence days, secondary school libraries were housed in classrooms. In some schools, there were

so few reading books that they were contained in a trunk which was carried from class to class. Schools did not have librarians, since the work in the libraries did not justify the cost of hiring librarians on a regular salary. Library issues were handled on a rotational basis by teachers, especially teachers of English. Under this rather loose arrangement, books were likely to disappear in large numbers. The improvement in the country's economy following independence in the 1970s through to the 1990s saw new physical infrastructures in schools being built, including purpose-built libraries. Yet, book security in these libraries still had not improved much and mechanical methods such as physical searches of students were still being used. In Western countries, in contrast, library books (irrespective of how many or how few) stayed on shelves in libraries that were open during the day and locked after hours. As the number of schools in Western countries increased and the need for reading increased, books and materials became more accessible to students. All these books and materials were placed on shelves and stringent measures were employed to guard against losses (Woolls, 2004:98).

Although several studies were conducted on school libraries, little focus was placed on the security of library books. Rather, studies tended to concentrate on the purpose and role of libraries as storehouses of knowledge and information and as media for the new technology. This is perhaps the case because most of those authors are from countries where the security of library stock is not an issue. In the researcher's view, since books are now very costly, the need to protect the few that are on the shelves is imperative if school libraries are to continue serving their vital role of advancing knowledge and information to the learners.

### **Aim of study**

This study was carried out to determine the extent to which library books are being protected against losses in senior secondary schools in Botswana. The study was prompted by the realisation that school libraries in Botswana are poorly funded (Moswela, 2005:27) and that if the security of the few books that are available is not ensured, the provision of quality learning in schools will be compromised.

### **Problem statement**

In his research on school libraries, Moswela (2005:27-28) concluded that a small budget allocation to the libraries was a constraining factor for the effective use of school libraries worldwide. School libraries all over the world are obliged to operate with a shoe string budget, and in Botswana the situation is no different. Approximately seven years ago, senior secondary schools in Botswana were allocated a student *per capita* budget of only about P21.00 or US\$3 per student per annum (current exchange rate). As a result of the less than tight security systems for library books in schools as well as the meagre budget allocation, there are insufficient library books for the large number of students enrolled in schools in Botswana. Senior secondary schools have an average student enrolment of 1200. It is important to study the nature and dimension of library book losses, so that a criterion may be found for circulating the limited available stocks among the school readership.

### **Research questions**

In order to investigate the problem of library book security in schools, the paper addressed the following questions:

- What is the current budget allocation for libraries?
- What is the state of libraries and of book security systems in libraries?
- What methods do students use to steal library books and how can the books be protected against such loss?
- What penalties are imposed on defaulters and how effective are these?

### **Theoretical framework**

An abundance of natural resources can translate into nothing of significance to a country if its people do not have the knowledge and skills to exploit the resources to benefit society. Governments have established schools in their countries for the prime purpose of information and knowledge acquisition for economic development. Schools are established in an attempt to provide students with information, so that their intellects may be developed. Most countries in the developing world make these efforts in spite of the economic hurdles they often experience (Ogunrombi & Sanni, 2005:17-18; Kargbo, 2005:19). The importance of knowledge and information as prime resources and inputs for producing national, organisational and individual wealth in any country cannot be overemphasised. If teachers were to exclusively rely on textbooks in their teaching, assuming that the provision of information in this way is all what education entails, the incentive to use books and other materials will be lacking. Such a situation will be limiting educationally, since it presents knowledge as something finite and education as the simple accumulation of facts (Ray, 1979: 98-99).

The more educated the population of a country, the higher the productive efforts of its citizens, and the higher the national and *per capita* incomes of the country (Nakpodia & Anho, 2004:52-53). The role of knowledge and information in the development of nations has been apparent since the introduction and development of education many centuries ago (Stankosky, 2006:6-7). The more developed nations are those that have invested in the acquisition of knowledge and skills by their people. Third world countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and industrialised countries such as Japan, the UK, the USA, and the Scandinavian countries are examples of countries that are experiencing sustained economic growth as a result of the knowledge and skills they have invested in their people (Moswela, 2005:19). Economically these countries are performing even better than countries with rich natural resources such as countries in the Eastern Block and Africa (Human Development Report, 2001:180-181). In Japan, emphasis on schooling is not intended to further the social, personal and political development of pupils. Rather, it is intended to promote the Japanese economy (Bottery, 1993:115). The investment in human knowledge and skills as a determinant of the economic quality of a country has also been corroborated by Livingstone and Goodall (1970:10-11).

To emphasise the importance of a library as a knowledge and information centre, a principal of an ill-equipped school library will often issue stern warnings against students who steal library books. The culprits would receive severe punishments, more so than those who committed other punishable offences. It will be stressed that stealing a book comes down to impoverishing a whole school by removing knowledge and information. Such firm administrative stances epitomise the value of knowledge and the importance of sharing a book, as a scarce and precious commodity. Students who were inclined to steal books will be deterred by these warnings, and this would ensure that the few remaining books can keep circulating among the student readership. In this manner, a gradual annual stockpile of library books was built at one such a school.

Cognisant of the importance of knowledge for economic development, in 1999 Botswana committed itself to a long term vision that aspires to “have a system of quality education that is able to adapt to the changing needs of the country as the world around [it] changes” and to “an educated, informed nation” by 2016, “when the country will have been an independent nation for 50 years” (Vision, 2016:5). The vision aspires to increase the opportunities for young people for independent study and add to their ability to become literate and functional citizens capable of lifelong learning in a rapidly changing world.

With the realisation that school library budgets in many countries are decreasing instead of increasing (Durand & Daschko, 2001:11; Hatfield, 2005:9), the few books that are on the shelves need to be protected and optimally utilised to offset the existing mismatch between the students’ reading needs and the miniscule number of books in school libraries. This is particularly the case in developing countries like Botswana where students are still more dependent on books for information than on the internet or on digital resources. The concern that “[g]overnment is facing a dilemma on how to deal with secondary school completers who owe their schools money for books” (The Botswana Guardian, 2006:4) suggest that an effective book recovery system in schools is lacking. It paints a bleak picture of the state of libraries and the quality of education schools can provide under the circumstances.

## **Methodologies**

### *Participants*

The study was conducted to identify ways in which secondary school libraries in Botswana can manage book losses. This was preceded by first gathering facts about the current state of affairs in the school library. The librarians, more than any other role players, are the best persons to provide factual information about school libraries. A sample that does not include school librarians would at best provide opinions and guesses and would yield little reliability and validity, because responses would not be informed by facts and expert knowledge. School librarians keep records of book issues, book returns, book losses and book volumes. Responses were obtained from subjects who were informed of the purpose of the researcher’s data collection. These participants provided the information or opinions asked of them. They could also provide more than what was being required because of their expert role in libraries (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:65). For the above reasons, school librarians were purposively selected as the study population. A

similar study by Moswela (2005:23) targeted 27 senior secondary schools in Botswana. In the current study, the researcher decided to target the same 27 senior secondary schools and their librarian population, but with the focus on the security aspect of libraries. The target population was therefore 27 school librarians.

### ***Data collection and procedure***

A questionnaire was developed to achieve the following four main objectives, among others:

- Assess the budget allocation to schools.
- Determine what type of library security measures are in place.
- Investigate whether these measures are adequate.
- Determine what penalties are imposed on library users who lose or steal books, or who fail to return borrowed books on the due date.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: one part required one word answers and the other sought the views of respondents on a more elaborate scale. Prior to the administration of the research instrument, permission to conduct the study with the school librarians had been obtained from the heads of participating schools through a letter. The questionnaire had been pilot-tested with three junior secondary school teacher librarians for its appropriateness, understandability and consistency. Twenty copies of the questionnaire were posted to the heads, while the other seven were hand-delivered to the schools that were close to the researcher's workplace. School heads were requested to pass on the questionnaires to the librarians. The researcher provided self-addressed and stamped envelopes for returning the completed questionnaires.

### ***Data analysis***

The analysis used a simple method of determining the frequency of responses to each of the closed-ended questions. The frequencies were expressed as percentages. Libraries use either mechanical or electronic measures as security. Where a description of a particular system was made, salient quotes were captured and cited to allow findings and conclusions to be based on the subjects' responses, rather than on other sources such as the researcher's pre-determined outcomes (Niu & Hump-Lyons, 2006:117). The quotes were then conceptualised and divided into relevant categories of the research questions.

### **Findings**

The findings from the survey were organised around the four research areas:

- (a) The budget
- (b) State of the library
- (c) Book losses and deterrent measures against losses
- (d) Penalties for offenders

The findings reported below are primarily factual information based on the actual experiences of the professionals running libraries, and not opinions, as is often the case with qualitative research paradigms. 23 of the 27 questionnaires were returned. 17 of the respondents were trained librarians, 3 were untrained and 3 did not declare their training status.

### Research question 1: What is the current budget allocation for libraries?

3 government schools respectively received P27 000, P30 000 and P30 000 (US\$4150 and US\$4615 equivalents respectively) in the 2006/07 fiscal year, but the other 16 government schools in this study all had a reduced library budget from P25 000 in the previous fiscal year to an average of P15 000 in the fiscal year relevant for this study. The 3 schools that received a budget almost double that of their previous allocations could not give an explanation of this difference in their favour. All schools should have received amounts calculated according to their student numbers. A per student formula or *per capita* criterion is used to allocate budgets for school libraries. In recent years, the *per capita* allocation stood at about P20 (US\$3). The schools whose budgets have been drastically cut also could not give an explanation for the reduction. The 4 government-aided schools each received a library budget of P60 000, P50 000, P45 600 and P25 000.

### Research question 2: What is the state of libraries and the book security system in libraries?

The majority of respondents (21) reported poor library security systems in their schools. Only two claimed to have conventional security systems such as book sensors. The selected comments below from the different respondents give a general impression of the nature of security in school libraries:

- “There is a security gate by the entrance where searches are conducted on students as they leave the library.”
- “Student monitors are posted as [guards] at the exit to frisk students. Boy library monitors frisk boys and girls frisk girls.”
- “At our school we intimidate students by our presence at the door and we threaten to search suspicious characters.”
- “There is always somebody at the issue desk and users are requested to show that the books in their possession have been formally processed and issued.”
- “Library assistants (students) are on constant surveillance to ensure that no one removes books from the library illegally.”
- “Gauze wire has been installed on windows to prevent users from [slipping books out] through windows.”
- “We do not allow bags in the library.”

Schools that have high rates of book losses are consistently those that have reported poor security systems. Only 3 librarians said their library book shelves were more than 75% full. 10 indicated that their book shelves were more than 50% but less than 75% full. 7 of the librarians reported shelves that were more than 25% but less than 50% full. Another 3 said their book shelves were less than 25% full. Whereas this state of affairs can be attributable to poor security, the annual low library budget allocation also has an effect on the number of books that are on library shelves.

### Research question 3: What methods do students use to steal library books and how can the books be protected against such loss?

Students use different ways of illegally removing books from libraries. Common methods include the following:

- Where a system of book detectors is used (few schools have such systems, though) students interfere with the magnetic tape fixed on the book.
- Books are thrown out through the window and collected at the other end.
- In the mechanically and the human operated systems, students are able to leave the library with books hidden under their coats.
- Students do not return the books they have legitimately borrowed.
- Students steal books from legitimate borrowers outside the library.

*Deterrent measures against book stealing*

- Generally, the feeling among the majority of respondents was that libraries should be modernised to international standards because the economy of the country and its relatively small population (1.76 million) can afford it.
- A few (6) respondents, however, were of the opinion that students should be educated on the need to share the few books among themselves and that this should be accompanied by severe punishment for offenders that would deter students from stealing the books.
- One respondent suggested that the offenders should be made to pay double the amount of the current price of the book, irrespective of the age of the book.

Research question 4: What penalties are imposed on defaulters and are these adequate?

The term “defaulter” or “offender” is used here to refer to library users who:

- (a) Do not return borrowed books on the due date.
- (b) Lose library books issued to them.
- (c) Steal library books.
- (d) Do not return the books at the end of their schooling.

The findings show that different schools impose different sanctions against library defaulters or offenders. The sanctions include measures such as suspension from using the library for a certain period of time, surcharge, corporal punishment and written warnings, depending on the gravity of the offence. Librarians generally do not think these measures are adequate because libraries continue to experience book losses at a high rate. With reference to the issue of suspension, one librarian remarked: “Suspension from the library is not effective because most students are not interested in reading anyway.”

In the absence of anything else that would serve as a deterrent, schools have “legalised” or are using their own strategy of recovering overdue books from students who have left school. Some schools withhold the offender’s certificate and testimonial until the books are returned or replacements made. Certificates and testimonials are prerequisite documents for employment and for admission to further education. Despite contentions about the illegality of this method, schools continue to use it, as it is working for them. Many books have been recovered this way, because defaulters soon return to the school to settle their library “debts”.

## Discussion

The discussion of the state of school libraries is made against a summary and distillation of the responses from the librarians. Library book security in schools is necessarily related to the school budget: a small budget allocation inevitably will result in a small growth of library collections. This, coupled with the reported high rates of book losses, has the potential of destroying the role of libraries as important places for the acquisition of information and knowledge acquisition. At the same time, it cannot be disputed that quality education comes at a price. For this reason, the Ministry of Education is allocated the biggest share of the national budget every year. To avoid further deterioration of school libraries, the Ministry of Education now needs to use its budget to the benefit of quality education, by among others investing in library security. With proper security, schools can gradually add to their existing stocks, even despite their small annual library budgets. Given the Ministry's annual budget, it should be possible to install decent security systems in a few schools annually at less than P40 000 00 per unit per school.

The poor state of libraries forces students to rely on the teacher for information. As a result, teachers become providers rather than facilitators of information and knowledge; a situation lamented by Ray (1979:98-99) as "limiting educationally". In Ray's perspective, no teacher can know everything at all times about his/her subject; and even if he/she did, quality learning cannot be assumed when the student leaves school. Arguably, students have previously passed examinations without much use of the library because teachers have taught in accordance with the test. The issue here, however, is not whether students have passed or not but rather whether they have learnt anything of significance that has developed their critical thinking and their problem solving ability, and whether they have learnt to be independent learners instead of blindly accepting the information provided by their teachers. In their theses, Nakpodia and Anho (2004) and Moswela (2005:19) also argue that the economic productivity of a country is a correlative of its quality of education. Japan has been cited by Bottery (1993:115) as a concrete example in this regard.

Schools as formal transformational institutions of knowledge need to be equipped with secure libraries that can promote the popular view that knowledge is tentative and not static, and as such the learner must continually add knowledge through reading. If security in school libraries is neglected, nothing will come of the above perspective or of the vision of Botswana to have an educated, informed nation by 2016. A secondary education that had not been supported and enhanced by good libraries can limit students' performance later at a higher level of learning. In Botswana, like in many education systems around the world, students must compete for admission to tertiary education and individuals are selected based on the number of credits or points they have accumulated in the school examination. Arguably, good tertiary education students are shaped in the secondary school; but even students with good credits or high points cannot be of high quality if they are products of schools with poorly resourced libraries. If schools could not help students reach their potential, tertiary institutions will neither be able to develop

this potential in terms of the breadth of knowledge and the skill acquisition needed for economic development.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study concludes that libraries in secondary schools in Botswana are ill-equipped partly because of lax book security systems and partly because of inadequate library budget allocations. This situation has the potential of limiting educational standards in the country. Based on the findings and conclusion of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- Students need to be educated on the value of libraries for their education and for the benefit of the nation. There should also be consequences for the library defaulters: a fine in the form of a replacement value which exceeds the current value of the book should be imposed on defaulters.
- A reasonable electronic library system would cost the government about P30 000 to install. In the long term, such a system would be a gain and not a loss to the government, as schools would be able to accumulate book stocks on an annual basis despite reduced library budgets. This could make a real difference to the quality of the students' learning, as they would not have to solely depend on the teacher for knowledge and information.
- Schools' efforts to reduce book losses could be strengthened by legalising the withholding of defaulters' certificates and testimonials, since the system has proved to be effective despite its controversial nature.

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The provision of maintained school education is the responsibility of local education authorities (LEAs). They employ teachers and other staff, provide and maintain buildings, supply equipment and materials, provide grants to students proceeding to further and higher education. No fees are charged to parents of children at maintained schools, and books and equipment are free. Education within the maintained school system usually comprises two stages – primary education and secondary education. Schools supported from public funds are of two main kinds in England and Wales: county schools and voluntary schools. Nearly a third of primary and secondary maintained schools in England and Wales are voluntary schools, most of them Anglican or Roman Catholic.