

# Reviewing published information on reading in Botswana secondary schools

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The main purpose of this review on published information on reading in Botswana schools is to seek ways of providing instruction and assessment that result in children becoming proficient readers. Botswana has made impressive progress in literacy growth since independence. However, a lot still needs to be done if literacy is to become all that it needs to be in the lives of the youth. One conclusion from this review is that there is an urgent need in Botswana to teach reading in ways that meet the needs of all students, especially those from Khoesan-speaking backgrounds. There is also a clear mismatch between policy and practice in the teaching of reading and this greatly disadvantages the students. Two important recommendations emanating from this review are, firstly, the teaching of reading should be linked more explicitly to that of writing; secondly, the Ministry of Education and concerned stakeholders need to encourage a marriage of policy and practice in the teaching of reading in Botswana.

## Introduction

In 2007 the authors were awarded a grant to conduct a review of the languages of literacy education in Botswana. That review was used, in part, for a case study the co-author completed on San Junior Secondary students' understanding of literacy in school and at home. The initial review has made possible this more focused examination of reading education in secondary schools. Our interest has been that of educators who seek ways to provide instruction and assessment that result in children who become proficient in reading printed materials to achieve their personal and academic goals. The definition we shared in conducting this review is that reading is constructing meaning through a dynamic process that involves the reader, the text and the context. Theoretically this definition represents three influences: (1) Anderson and Pearson's (1984) schema-theoretic view of reading, (2) Rosenblatt's (1969) transactional theory of reading and (3) Goodman's (1967) psycholinguistic explanation of reading. We also shared a critical theoretical stance in doing this review of literature because we seek transformations in the teaching of reading in primary and secondary schools that will result in reading education that promotes individual learner needs, diversity, multiple literacies and multiculturalism. We agree with Kellner (1989:8) that 'critical theory is boundary-crossing and mediating, bringing together various dimensions of social life in a comprehensive normative and historical thinking'.

## The Botswana context

Botswana was once called Bechuanaland. It is a landlocked country that shares borders with South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Bechuanaland became a British Protectorate in 1885 and remained so until independence in 1966. The Protectorate was established when Chief Khama III of the Bamangwato, Chief Gaseitsiwe I of the Bangwaketse and Chief Sechele of the Bakwena accepted the 1890 Order of Council that recognised nine chiefs who would rule their people under the ultimate power of a British High Commissioner. This was a means of gaining protection from the aggressions of the Boers in South Africa.

In 1966, when Botswana declared independence, it was considered to have one of the lowest literacy rates in the world (Youngman 2002). Education became a major development priority. The government chose to retain British English as the official language of the country, whilst Setswana, the language spoken by eight Tswana groups, became the national language. Setswana was accepted as the medium of instruction for the first two to three years of primary school; thereafter, English is supposed to be the medium of instruction.

Educational development in Botswana can be attributed to two major educational policies: the 1977 National Commission on Education Report and the 1994 Revised National Commission on Education Report. The 1977 report, 'Education for Kagisano', was the brainchild of the first president, Sir Seretse Khama. Kagisano was a philosophy of education based on four pillars:

1. democracy
2. development
3. self-reliance and unity
4. social harmony.

The policy also focused on increasing access to education. A 9-year basic education system was the goal, with Setswana as the medium of instruction for the first two to three years and thereafter English was supposed to be the medium of instruction.

In 1994 a Revised National Policy of Education (RNPE) was issued. A 10-year basic education programme became the goal. In that programme, students would develop critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities whilst also developing their awareness of literacy. This included developing speaking and writing proficiencies in English, Setswana and a third language. These and other goals were to be pursued whilst also acquiring knowledge and appreciation for the different languages, traditions, songs, ceremonies, customs and social norms in Botswana society.

The schools of independent Botswana are government, government-aided, or privately funded institutions; the government's goal is that all Botswana children should attain the minimum level. Children are expected to learn to read and write in Setswana and English in the first three years of primary school. At the end of seven years of primary education all students sit for Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) in Mathematics, English, Science, Social Studies, Agriculture, Religious and Moral Education (RME) and Setswana. Those who pass can proceed to junior secondary level and, thereafter, to senior secondary school. Junior secondary school is three years (Forms 1–3) and students are assumed to be bilingual in English and Setswana even if their mother tongue was another language. Senior secondary school is two years (Form 4–5).

Botswana has conducted two national surveys of literacy (in 1993 and 2004); yet there is no equivalent term in Setswana for the English word 'literacy'. This presented Ketsitlile (2009) with a challenge when she interviewed students in Setswana about their literacy practices. To ask the students about literacy Ketsitlile said, '*O tlhaloganya go nna le kitso kana go itse ele eng?*' [What do you mean by knowing or to know?]. There are words for reading and writing in Setswana, which is important for those conducting interviews in Setswana. To read is '*go bala*' and to write is '*go kwala*'. The 2003 survey found that 81% of adults over 15 years old could read and write in English and Setswana (Hanemann 2005). This was a significant increase from the 1993 survey, which found 69% of the same population to be literate (Commeyras & Chilisa, 2001).

Most students (99%) make the transition from primary to secondary schooling (Lee, Zuze & Ross 2005). Advancement from junior secondary to senior secondary has increased over time. In 2006, 61% of students went from primary to

junior secondary school (Molowisa 2007). These results are tempered by the increasing awareness of and attention paid to a high rate of failure and school dropouts, especially amongst those known as remote area dwellers. Remote area dwellers are socio-economically marginalised people; they lack access to basic services and facilities and live outside recognised villages.

The education gap for remote area dwellers is evident in the results of the second national literacy survey jointly conducted in 2003 by the Department of Non-Formal Education and the Central Statistics Office. The literacy rates for those living in Gaborone, Francistown, Lobatse, Selibe Phikwe, Orapa, Jwaneng and Sowa Town were between 92% and 98%, whilst those living in Kweneng West, Ghanzi, Ngamiland West, Kgalagadi North, Kgalagadi South and Central Boteti had literacy rates below 70%. There are some 64 recognised remote area dweller settlements located in these seven districts: Central, Ghantsi, Kgalagadi, Kgatleng, Kweneng, Northwest and Southern. The remote area dwellers are those who speak Khoesan and other languages such as Wayei, Bambukushu, Herero, amongst others. They are the educationally disenfranchised citizens of Botswana. Efforts to understand the San's experiences with schooling have been made (Hays 2002; Pridmore 1995). For example, Ketsitlile (2009) conducted research with San students in a junior secondary school. At first they told her that literacy was getting good grades in school, but when they knew her better they talked about literacy as being proficient in anything that conveys an important message. For them this meant storytelling, dancing, games, riddles and knowing the medicinal properties of plants.

## Methodology and method

The disparities in literacy rates amongst districts in Botswana and educational disenfranchisement of the San people and other minorities led us to think about this review from a critical theoretical perspective. Critical education theory is rooted in Marxist ideology (Apple 1996; Giroux 1983; Maruatona 2002). Marxist ideologists believe in a critique and reformation of education. The Marxist school of thought offers alternative theories and practices for education. It strongly denounces the established bureaucratic and elite ideologies and pedagogies that perpetuate the status quo and further result in people becoming imprisoned in capitalist ideas and ideals. This is denying people the right to social transformation by forcing curricula, ideologies and pedagogies of those in power. There is some literature in formal schools and non-formal settings to corroborate the latter (Bowles & Gintis 1976; Freire 1972; Freire & Macedo 1995). Gramsci (1971), for example, was against Italian education and culture that represented the ideas of the elite as dominant in society. He called for ideologies that would address the oppressive pedagogies in schools and called for pedagogies that promote democratic social transformation and development of individuals in Italy. In Africa, Julius Nyerere (1968) came up with 'education for self-reliance' in Tanzania to localise the curriculum and call for African

teaching methodologies to be used in formal schooling. The perception at the time of its formulation in 1967 was that western forms of education had caused much damage to African traditional ways of learning and teaching and therefore needed to be de-emphasised (Semali 1999).

Colonial and post-colonial educational systems, curricula, pedagogies, and specifically the teaching of reading in Botswana, were designed for the promotion of functional literacy amongst its citizens. Missionaries such as David Livingstone taught some people to read and write so that they could read the Bible and spread Christianity (Landau 1995; Schapera 1961). With time, Batswana (people of Botswana) wanted an education that went beyond what the missionaries offered, but what they got was an education that met the needs of colonial administrators (Mgadla 2003). After Botswana gained independence from Britain in 1966, the teaching of reading was constructed to develop a workforce that would gain reading and writing skills almost exclusively for the labour market.

In Botswana, what is needed is reading pedagogies to meet the needs of diverse students. We agree with Dewey (1995) that there is a need to teach for democracy, specifically for this review, the teaching of reading as part of a democratic process in primary and secondary schools in Botswana. It is time we do away with the traditional teaching of reading in favour of pedagogies that are suited to the needs and aspirations of the society and age we live in. Hence, it is important for the teaching and learning process to educate the educator too. For example, Cervero & Wilson (1994) note that educational planners should be front runners in representing those disadvantaged in the curriculum development, program planning, teaching and selection of texts. Planners need to use their technical and political astuteness to overcome any form of oppression, cultivate an invaluable culture of resistance and counter hegemonic strategies that will thwart our efforts towards democracy in education, specifically meeting the needs of the students in the teaching of reading in Botswana (Youngman 2000).

Given the differences in literacy attainment between districts, we are compelled to embrace critical pedagogy because it 'places the experiences of the oppressed at the centre of the teaching learning universe' (Maruatona 2002:89). Consequently, the teaching of reading in Botswana should be student-centred and accord them a voice. This agrees with the current Communicative Language Approach syllabi in Botswana schools. According to Freire (1972), an emancipatory education is called for in schools to raise the consciousness of individuals to enable them to effectively participate in classroom interactions.

### Document collection

The literature for this review was collected over a period of years (2007–2010). Initially we conducted searches of databases including Dissertation Abstracts, ERIC at EBSCOhost, JSTOR and Web of Science. We searched with

the terms and limiters (read\*, literacy, literate or illiterate\*) and (botswan\* or batswan\*). Throughout the four years we periodically used Google Scholar to search for 'Botswana and reading or literacy'. At the University of Botswana we made use of the Botswana Collection, where at least one copy of every document published in Botswana is archived. It was here that we could read documents that we had identified whilst mining the bibliographic references in dissertations and published papers. Also at the university we met with key informants, including Professor Herman Batibo and Professor Lydia Nyati-Ramahobo. The writing of this review was informed by more literature than appears in the final list of references. We sought to learn as much as possible about the status of reading specifically and print literacy development across time. For archival purposes we have created an Internet site on Botswana literacy to share the full spectrum of documents that informed this review (Commeyras n.d.) and will inform our continued interest in the topic.

### Document selection

Most of the documents of interest to us pertained to the teaching of reading in secondary schools because we were aware that others have done a great deal of scholarly writing on adult literacy in Botswana (Maruatona 2001, 2002; Maruatona & Cervero 2004; Youngman 2000). Notes were taken on the documents that reported empirical studies that were explicitly about reading instruction or students learning to read. Information about participants, location, procedures, findings and implications were systematically noted. Similar information was taken from empirical studies that addressed related concerns such as code-switching in the classroom (Arthur 1996; Mokgwathi 2010), public library readers (Matenge 1984) or family literacy (Mathangwane & Arua 2006). We also took notes from non-empirical literature when it provided additional information related to findings from across empirical studies.

### Document analysis

The notes for each level of schooling were analysed to find instances of factual congruence or differences. This was an important step in our process of writing about what was disputed or undisputed knowledge in the current literature on reading in Botswana. Foremost in our minds throughout our document analysis was our intention to provide an account of what could be said about the status of reading education across time if one had read the extant literature.

Writing from the notes and from the documents themselves was also part of our analytic process. As proposed by Commeyras and Inyega (2007), writing is a useful method of inquiry and analysis when conducting comprehensive literature reviews. We engaged in a recursive process in which our writing led to rereading or seeking additional information to taking notes to writing anew. This process works well with multiple researchers because we serve as a reliability check on the accuracy and clarity of the information retrieved from the documents.

## Reading and secondary schools

Student performance on the 2009 examinations sets the stage for our review of what has been written about reading education in junior and senior secondary schools. Only fourth quarter of students got a grade of C or better on the English (26%) and Setswana (25%) subsections. As for students completing senior secondary school, there was a significant difference in performance on English and Setswana. Almost half of the students (47%) earned a C or higher on the Setswana section whereas not quite one-fifth of students (19%) earned a grade of C in English language usage (Botswana Examination Council 2009).

## 1977 National Commission on Education

Botswana was considered to have one of the lowest literacy rates in the world when it became independent in 1966 (Youngman 2002). There were only nine secondary schools at the time (Prophet 1990). In 1976 Botswana had 32 secondary schools with an enrolment of 13 991 students. At the 10-year anniversary of independence, a major survey was conducted on students' reading ability as it related to their school textbooks (Hamblett 1977). Most of the textbooks being used were written for students whose first language was English. The survey, sponsored by the Ministry of Education, consisted of four sections: inferential reading comprehension, reading speed, textbook readability and personal reading habits. Three tests and a questionnaire were administered to a sample of 450 secondary school students from 15 government and grant-aided schools. Approximately 90 randomly selected Form-1 students were included.

To assess inferential reading comprehension, students took a 100-item multiple choice test designed by Science Research Associates. The test had been validated in a pilot study. The Batswana students' results were compared with those of American students because English was the language of instruction in all secondary schools and was to some extent used for instruction in primary school standard 4 – standard 7 [Grade 6 – Grade 9]. There was an expectation that by Form-4 and Form-5 the Batswana students would be performing more like native speakers of English; however, as seen in Table 1, there remained a difference of about 20 points on the mean score between the Batswana and American students across the five levels of schooling.

Hamblett (1977) also tested students' rate of reading in relation to comprehension. As shown in Table 2, the number

of words read per minute in relation to their comprehension was poorest in Form-1 but with each succeeding school year there was improvement in both reading rate and comprehension.

The readability of 70 textbooks and other materials used in the schools was analysed by Hamblett (1977) using Fry's readability formula and a cloze test. The cloze tests were about 200 words long with every 10th word deleted, excluding numbers and proper names. Only exact words filled in were counted as correct and students were given as much time as they needed to finish. The passages were taken from textbooks on a list approved by the Ministry of Education and other texts frequently used in schools (most published outside Botswana). Student performance was scored as 'independent' with 51% correct responses, 'instructional' with 38% – 50% correct and 'frustration' with 0% – 37% correct. The results showed that few textbooks were at the students' independent reading level and over half the books were at their frustration level. Hamblett (1977:15) concluded that 'students' comprehension levels are low, even for students whose medium of instruction is a second language, and that they lack of familiarity with content registers'. She acknowledged that teachers would have to provide intensive instruction to make up for the fact that students were reading materials that were too advanced given their reading abilities.

Hamblett (1977) compared the reading levels of students with the levels of the textbooks by superimposing the scores on the inferential comprehension placement test on Fry's graph based on USA grade equivalents. She found that the average reading levels of students in Form-1 (Grade 8) through Form-3 (Grade 10) were at the mid-primary level. The average reading level of Form-4 (Grade 11) and Form-5 (Grade 12) students were at the upper primary level on Fry's index. The readability of the textbooks was above the upper primary level, which means students were being expected to read materials that were too difficult. This discrepancy is not surprising given that at this time it was typical to find textbooks and curricula being used that were not designed for students for whom English was a second or third language.

Hamblett's (1977) overall conclusions were that most students have weak reading skills and most of their textbooks are above their reading abilities. In Form-1 to Form-3 (Grade 8 – Grade 10), the difficulty seemed to be one of poor comprehension: the inability to recognise the main ideas and details or even

**TABLE 1:** The 1976 results of Reading for Understanding placement test.

Form	Number of students	Mean age	Batswana Mean score (SD)	Median	Mode	USA mean score	Grade of student
Form 1	90	15	48 (7)	46	47	68	8
Form 2	90	16	50 (6)	49	52	73	9
Form 3	88	17	56 (8)	56	54/61	77	10
Form 4	89	18	62 (6)	61	59	80	11
Form 5	90	20	63 (6)	62	62/64	84	12

SD, standard deviation.

**TABLE 2:** Results of the test of reading speed.

Form	Mean words read per minute	Mean comprehension score (%)
Form 1	116	47
Form 2	116	56
Form 3	128	61
Form 4	137	71
Form 5	146	71

recall enough to draw valid conclusions. In Form-4 and Form-5 (Grade 11 and Grade 12), the difficulties were attributed to weak inferential comprehension and slow reading rates. It was recommended that practice and instruction in reading comprehension be intensified, teachers should be given in-service training on teaching reading, students' oral reading should be limited to the study of poetry and drama, there should be more use of classroom and school libraries for pleasure reading at all levels, and the set books exam paper at the Junior Certificate level should be re-evaluated.

Another source of information on the status of reading in schools is the Secondary Curriculum Task Force report (Republic of Botswana, 1977). A nine-member panel chaired by Frank Jeffery (Molefi Secondary School) focused on English in the curriculum. The panel concluded that using English as the language of instruction was causing students to need intensive remedial instruction. The report pointed to several shortcomings with regard to reading education in junior and senior secondary schools:

- Too much oral reading by the class as a group with little attention to comprehension (pp. 5–26).
- Student dependence on the teacher for reading and explaining content (pp. 5–27).
- Not enough attention to reading speed to aid comprehension (pp. 5–24).
- Not enough guidance on how to select books for independent reading from class libraries (pp. 5–24).
- School library facilities vary widely from those such as Gaborone Secondary School that are well stocked and cataloged versus Ramotswa Private Secondary School with no library materials (pp. 5–29).

In 1988 the Ministry of Education initiated the Botswana Teacher, Classroom and Achievement study to evaluate efforts to improve teaching practices. A sample was drawn in 1989 that included 350 teachers, 9000 students in 44 junior secondary schools. A team of researchers observed the teacher four times over two years (1989–1990) and the literacy and numeracy skills of students were also assessed four times. Fuller's (1992) analysis of the 1989 data emphasised the following findings:

1. Teachers spent lots of time talking to pupils. Less than three questions were asked by the average teacher in a ten-minute period.
2. Few instructional tools were used although they were available.
3. The range of cognitive demands on students was limited. In just one-fifth of all class periods teachers assigned some writing.

4. Teachers mostly spoke in English whereas Setswana is the lingua franca of the country.

5. Teachers did vary the organisation of lessons and interaction with pupils to some degree, although lecturing, oral recitation, close-ended questions and written work at the end of lessons were the typical modes of instruction. (n.p.)

Fuller and Snyder (1991) also published some findings related to reading and writing from the Botswana Teacher, Classroom and Achievement pilot study. Observations made of 154 junior secondary school teachers on three occasions for 40 minutes supported the view that pupils spend most of their time listening and little time reading and writing. For example, pupils were observed using a textbook only 11% of the time and reading another book or text 1% of the time. Reading and writing is interrelated, so it also of concern that pupils were observed writing essays 1% of the time. The observers found that more than half of the time was taken up with pupils listening to teachers in lecture mode; that accounted for 69% of the time. These findings indicate that in addition to the challenges of learning in English, the students were not given enough time to even engage in reading and writing to become more proficient.

### 1994 Revised National Policy on Education

The only reference to reading specifically in the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) (Republic of Botswana 1994) appears in Rec. 49 [para. 5.10.47]. The recommendation was for the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs to develop a National Book Policy to promote 'a culture of reading amongst Batswana' along with promotion of local book production. References to 'literacy' appear a number of times in the RNPE but never specifically with regard to how reading and writing will be taught in secondary school, although in the 1995 English syllabus for junior secondary school students reading objectives are included. Students were to learn to read a range of literature, including non-fiction for leisure, interest and general knowledge. Teachers were directed to teach comprehension strategies, including differentiating explicit from implicit meanings, making predictions, and sharing understandings with others. Furthermore, critical reading was included through teaching students to distinguish between fact and opinion, interpret evidence from varied texts, and make informed judgments. These reading objectives were to be achieved through intensive and extensive reading. Intensive reading is academic and calls for reading slowly and carefully, paying attention to each word and every idea, whereas extensive reading is about reading widely and longer texts for the reader's own purposes (Carrell & Carson 1997).

### Intensive reading

Mpotokwane (1986) found that what teachers do in the name of reading did not differ much across classrooms in six schools in south-eastern Botswana. Molosiwa (2007) examined secondary school teachers' lesson plans for teaching English and Setswana and found no indication of

the specific tasks students would engage in. The teachers confessed that they are not trained or equipped to identify students' individual literacy abilities and areas of need. Jankie's (2001:200) analysis of two teachers' records led her to conclude that there was 'minimal reflection in terms of specific strategies used, students' responses, teacher-student interactions'. Molelo and Cowieson (2003) reported after observing teachers of English for four weeks at one junior secondary school that most often reading instruction focused on how to pronounce words rather than on a variety of reading skills and strategies. Ketsitlile (2009) conducted a study in a junior secondary school in the Kgatleng District. She observed a teacher call four students to come to the front of the classroom to read aloud from a school text. The other students were instructed to listen or follow along in their copy of the text. Meanwhile, the teacher did not comment or offer corrective feedback, but rather sat at her desk marking papers. Ketsitlile's observation was that the students' oral reading was passionless in that they did not read with any expression.

A study of Form-4 students' knowledge of vocabulary by Moumakwa (2002) found that teachers only used direct explanation to teach word meanings and sometimes their explanations were partial or incorrect. Molosiwa (2007), who studied the perceptions of secondary school teachers who teach reading in English and Setswana, found that teachers concentrated more on topics that would be on the examinations than on the curricula objectives provided. As one teacher explained to Molosiwa (2007):

teaching according to the syllabus did not work for us positively. From then on we realized that it would be more meaningful to concentrate first on those topics that are examined, and teach everything else only if there was time to do so. (p. 130)

Mokibelo and Magogwe (2008), who studied a junior secondary school in the central district, were left with the impression that teachers had a negative attitude and approach to teaching reading. Teachers' lesson plans lacked variety with regard to methods of instruction and they were observed mostly lecturing to students.

When Mpotokwane (1986) provided in-service training for half the teachers in her study, they did significantly better than the comparison teachers on the survey of reading knowledge and their students improved on post-test of reading achievement. We have not found any other studies that found that in-service intervention on the teaching of reading assists teachers who understand the teaching of literacy through the lens of national examinations. Teachers seem well aware that their students struggle with reading on examinations (Molosiwa 2007). One teacher interviewed by Molosiwa explained:

over the years candidates have always found difficulties in responding to comprehension questions and this year's candidates are no exception. The responses clearly indicate lack of reading skills. For instance, candidates still need a lot of practice on responding to questions that deal with drawing inferences and giving reasons or providing for the statements that they make. (Molosiwa 2007:144-145)

Jankie (2001) also heard from teachers of Setswana that the government syllabus was narrowly focused on literary techniques and conventions. One teacher told Jankie (2001) that this interfered with:

calls for the reader to perceive literature texts as something they can transact with, interpret and make meaning of, based on their knowledge of the literary conventions as well as their personal experiences of the world around them or even that of the author. (p. 145)

Arua and Lederer (2003) surveyed first-year University of Botswana students about what they had been taught about reading in secondary school. Many students indicated that they were taught summarising, adjusting their reading rate given their purpose for reading and the difficulty of the text, taking notes about important information and recognising that reading is following signs on the printed page (Ketsitlile & Galegane 2010). Similarly, Chimbganda (2006) found that first-year science students at the University of Botswana were aware of appropriate reading, writing and self-monitoring strategies to use when summarising what they read when they were asked about this on a questionnaire. When Chimbganda analysed summaries written by these students he found that those with a history of academic achievement produced summaries that used paraphrasing to recast ideas, thereby writing more accurately than less academically successful students.

### Extensive reading

In secondary school, students are expected to engage in extensive reading beyond what is provided in textbooks. By the end of junior secondary school, students are expected to enjoy reading a range of literature that includes both fiction and non-fiction that interests them. There seems no doubt that something needs to be done to improve the reading ability of secondary school students, especially those who will proceed to study at the tertiary level. One area that repeatedly surfaces in the literature that would make a difference is getting students to do more reading both in and outside of school. Macheng (1982) reported that nothing much was done in the four school libraries she studied to encourage students' reading for their own purposes. She made several suggestions that remain unfulfilled to this day, such as organising book clubs for students to discuss and critique what they read. With regard to reading in Setswana, Macheng recommended clubs where members would read as widely as possible and read aloud to one another. She further suggested introducing poetry and drama clubs. Perhaps the lack of action regarding these suggestions is why Arua and Lederer (2003) found that only 18% of students they surveyed reported reading for pleasure in secondary school. (Ketsitlile & Galegane 2010) surveyed first-year humanities students at the University of Botswana. They found that less than 50% reported reading for leisure on a daily basis, although 24% did report reading daily on the Internet for pleasure. The future of reading beyond school assignments may lie in digital sources of text.

Mmui (2002) surveyed teachers and students at two schools about extensive reading. According to teachers, their students mostly read what was recommended to them by their peers. The teachers found that listening to students talk about what they read was more informative than giving them tests or having them do book reports. The teachers identified numerous advantages for those students who engage in extensive reading, which were all related to improving their English language proficiencies. The responses Mmui got from the students showed that girls more than boys engaged in extensive reading. They liked to read magazines, fiction, newspapers and non-fiction in that order. Reading comics was not popular in that only one of 83 students selected this as a preference. Students said that they sought help with their reading more often from parents or relatives than from their teachers. This was probably because they did most of their extensive reading at home. The responses of teachers and students seem to indicate that extensive reading exists, yet Mmui (2002) found that:

there was very little proof of students having understood what they read as some students when asked to write a paragraph on one of the books they read on their own directly picked paragraphs from the books. A few students however could relate some stories. (p. 22)

Extensive reading was pursued in two teacher action research studies (Maika & Freier 2003; Molelo & Cowieson 2003). Molelo and Cowieson (2003) observed teachers of English for four weeks. The observations revealed that the teaching of reading was mostly about identifying words and pronouncing them in a way that makes comprehension possible. Interviews were conducted with five teachers, 40 students, and the headmaster and public librarians. The students reported liking to read fiction, magazines and comics. They also reported reading as one of the most enjoyable parts of learning because it was an opportunity to learn about other cultures whilst enabling them to improve the English skills needed to pass examinations. The students preferred group or paired reading because they could help one another. We would add that reading with others is social and may be another reason that students preferred it over independent silent reading. The perspective of teachers is quite a contrast to that presented by students:

many of the students were spoken of as being 'backward readers'. A few were identified who could read but who did not seem to enjoy reading on their own. (Molelo & Cowieson 2003:121)

It seemed to the researchers that school personnel lacked knowledge of students' interests and preferences. Molelo and Cowieson (2003:125) concluded that there is a 'deep-seated conservatism' amongst teachers that leads them to stick with traditional pedagogical practices.

A change in pedagogy to promote extensive reading was undertaken at one school in Takatokwane where English was the third language of students after Sekgalagadi and Setswana (Maika & Freier 2003). Thirty-four Form-1 students participated in a group reading programme. They met in

groups of five or six based on their scores on the Primary School Leaving Examination. One student was appointed the leader of each group to oversee the distribution of books and activity cards. Students read easy and varied material before collaborating in answering the questions on the activity cards. Maika and Freier's (2003) analysis of students' performance on a cloze test of reading, responses to questionnaires and classroom observations led them to conclude that students' enthusiasm for reading increased along with their reading performance. During the study, teachers departed from the original activity cards in favour of a wider range of activities, such as drawing, summarising, dramatising and vocabulary exercises. The researchers saw a direct relationship between the kind of activities used and students' enthusiasm for the group reading time.

What is evident in both of these case studies is that reading books was at the core of efforts to promote a culture of reading. Yet what is available to students in their school libraries is 'dreary' (Molelo & Cowieson 2003:124). Arua *et al.* (2005) also found a shortage of new or recent book titles in the six schools they studied. The teachers and administrators they interviewed insisted that their schools need well-stocked and up-to-date materials and equipment including computers, CD-ROMs and DVDs. Reading materials may also be available in students' homes. In 1987 and 1988 Losike conducted interviews in Gaborone North and Moshupa village with the parents of 52 students. She wanted to learn about the relationship between the use of reading materials in the home and students' English reading comprehension. Losike (1987) was pleasantly surprised to find that all the homes had books and three-quarters of the parents reported reading books and other materials for self-education and personal development. To estimate students' reading comprehension, Losike administered the cloze reading test that Davis (1987) used in her needs assessment of English language proficiency. Students read a 132-word passage with 25 blanks where their task was to write in the missing words. Losike (1987) found that students whose parents reported helping them at home scored higher on the cloze test of reading. It is important to note that these findings were consistent across the various socio-economic statuses of the participants.

### Reading across the curriculum

In the three years of junior secondary school (Form 1–3) and two years of senior secondary school (Form 1–5), instruction on how to read and write in all subjects is primarily the responsibility of those who teach English. There is no evidence that teachers of mathematics, science or history attempt to teach students how to read those disciplines. One study found that 86% of 59 teachers across subject areas in six junior secondary schools thought their most important responsibility was developing conceptual knowledge in their subject area and that developing language, literacy and study skills was less important (Arua *et al.* 2005). Yet most of these teachers also thought that Form-1 students lacked adequate reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Similarly,

Adeyemi's (2010) study of the teaching of writing by three Form-1 teachers concluded that a weak reading culture was one of the reasons for students' poor competence as writers. Also, none of the teachers liked teaching composition writing because of the students' lack of interest. Adeyemi recommended that a process or modelling approach that links reading and writing be adopted. Such a model could be taken up by subject matter teachers as well. Arua *et al.* found that fewer than half of the teachers indicated having had any pre-service or in-service education on how to teach literacy generally or within their subject areas.

## Reading in a foreign language and multiculturalism

Those who have studied Khoesan students' experiences with school literacy emphasise that learning to read in English is very difficult for them because it is at least their third language (Ketsitlile 2009; Mokibelo 2010; Mokibelo & Magogwe 2008). San students told Ketsitlile that they preferred reading in Setswana, which is a language they have more oral proficiency in than English. San students were able to find stories, poems and proverbs in their Setswana books that they could personally relate to. San students told Mokibelo and Magogwe that speaking English was difficult, resulting in serious problems comprehending what they were supposed to read in English. The San students talked of being afraid to ask their teachers for help. This is not surprising given that teachers spoke of these students as being un-teachable. San students at Mothamo Community Junior Secondary School mostly earn E-grades on tests of literature comprehension (Mokibelo 2010). The students attributed their poor performance to difficulties with English and teachers not explaining concepts to them. Mokibelo (2010) observed the students reading slowly and barely able to pronounce words. This resulted in teachers reading the texts to the students.

Ketsitlile (2009) explains that San students' indigenous literacy practices and ways of reading the world through animals, spirits and rock art are not included in formal education. Clearly, the need to support San students along with all students attending government schools depends on markedly improving the development of language and literacy instruction. One such effort has been pursued by Jankie (2004a, 2004b). She offers a course for teachers at the University of Botswana on multicultural literacy education. Jankie's (2004a:1) goal is to prepare in-service and pre-service teachers to teach students from diverse backgrounds. She wants teachers to guide their students to 'examine and make connections among issues of identity, knowledge construction, equity, power, representation and education'. Jankie's goals are in keeping with the policy outlined by the Ministry of Education that in secondary schools students should develop an appreciation for their own culture as well as for other cultures that may be similar or different from their own. Jankie (2004a:14) used action research to investigate the views of four junior secondary school teachers and found

they were unanimous that multicultural literature could be used to lead students to 'interrogate cultural practices and sensitise students to issues of diversity'. The teachers varied on whether they would engage students in readings and discussions on issues such as gender, sexuality, and religion. What Jankie's course and research did not do is use literature to engage students in thinking about social justice amongst the various language and ethnic groups in Botswana. This may be why Jankie concluded that a semester course on multicultural education was not sufficient to engage teachers in self-interrogation of their own beliefs about diversity.

## Summary

Botswana has made impressive progress in literacy growth since independence. However, a lot still needs to be done if literacy is to become a vehicle for self-empowerment, democratic participation and active citizenship amongst the youth. We have arrived at the following conclusions in the review of the literature in reading in Botswana secondary schools.

In Botswana, there is an urgent need to teach reading in ways that meet the needs of all students, especially those who come from Khoesan-speaking backgrounds. The status quo with regard to reading instruction in secondary schools is a detriment to students, although the government and policymakers have introduced policies that support more student involvement and an emphasis on authentic communication. The mismatch between policy and practice is a cause for concern. More interaction amongst the reader, the text and the environment is needed.

The studies reviewed also point to the fact that teachers in Botswana secondary schools lack preparation for teaching reading. This is not surprising as they teach the way they have been taught when they were in secondary school. This is why teachers of subjects other than English do not show secondary students how to learn from reading texts in mathematics, science and the humanities. Teachers fail to see the connection that exists between their content subjects and reading. This lack of skills and strategies in the teaching of reading results in teachers compartmentalising reading and not connecting it to writing and diverse literacies. This disadvantages all students, especially those for whom English is a third language and for whom literacy is not only limited to reading and writing, but extends to telling stories, poems and riddles. There is an urgent need to encourage extensive reading of both students and staff in schools.

## Recommendations

Firstly, we recommend that the teaching of reading be linked more explicitly and specifically to the teaching of writing. We support Adeyemi's (2010) call for taking a multidisciplinary approach to teaching concepts across more than two subjects or disciplines in Botswana schools. With regard to reading and writing this means emphasising reading and writing processes and strategies across subject boundaries. In other



words, students should learn to be readers and writers in mathematics, science and social studies as well as in their English and Setswana courses. This is also referred to as reading and writing across the content areas.

Secondly, we recommend that local writing and publishing be expanded. We support efforts such as the Bessie Head Heritage Trust (n.d.) founded in 2007 because it sponsors an annual writing competition for residents of Botswana. Efforts such as these encourage the development of a literary culture because the winning novels, short stories poetry and children's stories are published locally. The expansion of the current culture of reading depends on there being a wider variety of materials that people want to read and in a variety of formats.

Thirdly, we recommend that a concerted effort be made by all those involved in education to find ways for a culture of reading and writing to complement the oral literacy tradition. The promotion of storytelling and other forms of oral literacy should remain strong and vibrant whilst improving students' reading and writing abilities. Intergenerational and family literacy needs to be a part of this effort to maintain the past whilst embracing the new literacies, including those that are digital. The ubiquity of mobile phones is being used in other African contexts to support literacy development, for example the mobile phones for literacy project in South Africa has published novels for youth in English and isiXhosa which they access from their mobile phones. Teachers will need a lot of support in learning how to use mobile phones and other technologies to meet government curriculum objectives. There is a need to promote a culture of reading for pleasure; teachers should be given instruction on how to encourage recreational reading and students (from early age) should be taught to read not only for academic purposes, but also for pleasure to increase their literacy skills and become lifelong readers.

Fourthly, there is a need to provide more relevant and better reading (in schools, libraries and homes), especially high-interest, low-level books for students who are speak English as a second or third language.

Fifthly, the Colleges of Education and the University of Botswana should be at the forefront in the teaching of reading to pre-service and in-service teachers. This will help in equipping teachers with the important skills that they will need to impart reading skills and strategies to students in schools. Students will in turn be properly guided in both their academic and extensive reading. We agree with Ketsitile and Galegane (2010) that students' leisure reading influences their academic reading.

Sixthly, the Ministry of Education and concerned stakeholders need to encourage a marriage of policy and practice in the teaching of reading in Botswana. In addition, teachers need to be sensitised to the fact that reading cannot be isolated from writing (Adeyemi 2010). We suggest that this could be done through workshops, seminars and refresher courses during the school holidays so that many teachers can attend.

## Conclusion

Botswana's 'Vision 2016' clearly states that all peoples in Botswana should be educated and healthy, amongst others, by 2016. The same goals are expressed in the National Development Plan (10) and most recently in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which strive to improve education and literacy in Botswana by not only getting more children in schools, but also equipping students with the necessary skills to make them independent and self-reliant citizens who can think critically and engage in other forms of literacy, for example digital and indigenous literacy. This is important for Botswana children to allow them to be able to compete and make a mark in the global world.

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The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

L.K. (University of Botswana) and M.C. (University of Georgia) contributed equally to the writing of this article.

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