

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE



Rationale

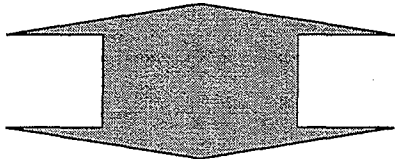
1.1 Introduction

Have you ever thought of those who are so privileged to be able to walk through the passages of the supermarket, trying to find what they need but who are unable to carry out a basic action like reading the labels to ascertain what products are sold? They are people who have the privilege of eyesight but who are unable to make full use of this wonderful side of being alive: to be able to read. They are people who are blind to interpretation of the written word, disabled by an illness – the incapacitating illness in a world of words, viz. illiteracy. Fortunately, illiteracy can be treated and even better - be prevented. Eyesight is a basic natural gift of many people who are not physically blind. Compare the following model:

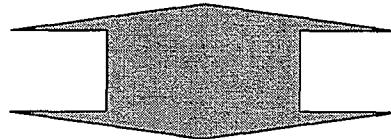
READING BOOK



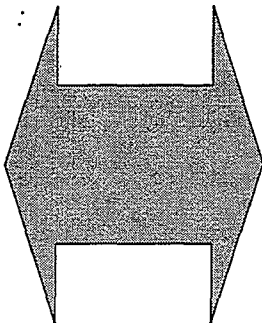
seeing-reading-comprehending



seeing-reading-writing



*E
Y
E
S*



Energy - exertion to interpret picture/letters/ shapes

Youth- the target group - educating the young

Emotions involved: response and experience

System - methods employed-

- * socio-linguistic variables*
- * cognitive processes involved when reading*
- * empirical method*

The EYES-are-for-reading approach embraces all aspects to be covered in this study. It includes the experience of using one's eyes (or fingers in case of blindness) to make meaning of the written word. This study is aimed at second-language learners aged 11-14 as that is the phase of development during which many readers disappear from the library, engage in many sports activities, sit riveted to the television screen absorbing every video possible they are able to lay their hands on. It is also the phase where young writers are moulded and influenced to become authors one day. Reading involves a certain process from which the readers' ideology and emotions in the process of response cannot always be separated. Behind all these biased responses to reading, lie the socio-linguistic influences on the readers' frame of reference. In order to hypothesise about reading behaviour and problems, one has to decide on a research method or a system according to which response can be organised to promote the realisation of newly-equipped learners who yearn to read because they love what they read.

The EYES-approach emphasises the act of reading and the influences at work in encouraging learners to read and write. It further supports the notion of making full use of the EYES-wide-open effect to venture to look, read and learn. The EYES-approach also contends that the final picture created in the mind's eye does not only consist of written words, but emotional experiences and colourful pictures. What are the eyes without the hands? Reading is an activity that can break the barrier of isolation and loneliness, more especially in the case of disabled people. Authors are therefore very important - as important as the readers reading their texts, forming a link in a communicative chain reaction of stimulus and response.

Whatever educational approach is mooted in a given situation, reading constitutes an integral part of basic daily living within a westernised context. Basic needs and the satisfaction of those needs have, however, tended to become a privilege instead of a right.

Certain main issues will be briefly dealt with in the course of this rationale in which an attempt is made to emphasise the need and relevance of this thesis.

- ◆ The first issue is illiteracy - the scourge of our country at this stage of its development.
- ◆ The general availability or otherwise of reading books
- ◆ The unsuitability of present readers for purposes of inculcating a love of reading in learners.
- ◆ Socio-linguistic issues have cropped up in newspapers as causative factors of illiteracy and they need to be addressed in order to meet the challenge of authors to act on the symptoms of illiteracy - the underestimated illness of our time - by supplying in the basic needs of the learners.

1.1.1 Illiteracy

Literacy may not be included in any bill of rights in the world; illiteracy ought to be regarded as a crime against humanity. For it stunts the human spirit (Gordimer, 1997:38).

Illiteracy has lately been recognised as a serious problem, not only in Africa, but also and more especially in South Africa. Rademeyer (2000:4) investigated the educational plan of action for the new millennium in South Africa and asserts that Kader Asmal, the Minister of Education, is working on a programme to tackle the shockingly high illiteracy rate by relying on voluntary teaching and community formations to mobilise a social movement to break the back of illiteracy in South Africa. He addressed the issue of illiteracy on literacy day during September 1999:

Literacy is about retaining dignity and self-respect in a lettered world. It is about functioning to the full as a human being among one's peers.

It is about the empowerment of the spirit, the informing of judgement, the development of skill and understanding, fulfillment of citizenship (Asmal, 1999).

Kader Asmal (1999) urges South Africans to haul themselves from the morass of illiteracy, a prison isolating man from basic rights (according to the Bill of Rights). He points out that illiteracy prevents man from interpreting the law and choosing a profession besides enslaving many in a situation where they are doomed to remain domestics and manual labourers. Illiteracy is said to leave man without the right of freedom of expression as the word has little lasting power unless read or written.

Sensitivity to the basic needs of South African learners illuminates the importance of researching **reader interests** and **forces that exert an influence on the learner** in the bilingual multicultural second-language reading classroom which plays a cardinal role in facilitating literacy in a country where the **estimated number of illiterate citizens in South Africa exceeds the official 28%**. Asmal deems the number of illiterate citizens to be an appalling 40% (Van der Westhuizen, 1999a:1). He (1999) maintains that 140 million sub-Saharan Africans cannot read or write. More than 60% of them are said to be women and a shocking six million people are shut off from the written word. 3.5 million adults over the age of 16 have never attended school and at least another 2,5 million have stayed a few years in school but through the lack of practice can no longer even remember how to read or write.

Mfenyana (1993:208) illuminates the fact that **illiteracy can kill**, by warning against interpretation of even a symbol such as a traffic light. Such a basic need as being able to interpret a traffic sign is also part of literacy and if one cannot read, one may find oneself caught up in a potentially life-threatening situation. **Literacy should make plain messages digestible** to the people of a country that deserves and needs a winning literate nation.

The following heading in *The Star* attracts immediate attention as it is such a shocking revelation in a world in which information races across computer screens in seconds,

the internet houses a myriad sites, television entertains millions of viewers and new and ever more amazing scientific inventions are streaming all over the globe:

Millions of children receive no education (Tubane, 1999:5).

The study under consideration, compiled by a network of international aid agencies, reveals the following critical evidence. Oxfam International discovered that 125 million children between the ages of six and eleven throughout the world do not attend schools and 150 million leave the school before they can read or write. In Africa it was found that in, for example, Mozambique, a child can expect to attend school for an average of three years whereas in America a child spends almost seventeen years on the school benches. During the 1990 Jomtien conference, 155 governments committed themselves to eliminate the word “**illiteracy**”. If the current problem continues, it is predicted that by the year 2015 nine million African children would have grown up with no education. The issue is not only a shortage of money, but also the choice to **spend available money politically correctly** in accordance with responsible priorities (Tubane, 1999:5).

At a more anecdotal level, the importance of reading and literacy through education and reading books is vividly underlined by the story of Lydia Khumalo, a 58-year old woman of Vosloosrus in South Africa who made headlines in newspapers. She empowered herself by learning to read for the first time in her life (Anon, 1999a:12). It stresses the pressing need for shaking off the humiliating shackles of illiteracy and investigating reading and reading books to address and eliminate the problematic situation not only in South Africa but all over the globe. Many other countries, such as, for example, Zambia are reported to be suffering a great deal because of a shortage of schools and a lamentably high (and growing) rate of illiteracy (Chela, 1999:13).

Erasmus (2000a:5) claims that six million of the total population of South Africa are illiterate and comments on the growing awareness of the government evidenced by their tackling the issue of illiteracy. On 8 September 2000, Project Literacy sent 6 000

red and white balloons up in the air as a symbol of their awareness of this invidious situation, focusing attention on the importance of promoting a reading nation. In the light of the tremendous potentially negative impact of illiteracy, reading and reader interests seem to be a very topical issue for discussion on the present educational scene (this can be derived also from the high profile this issue has enjoyed in local and other newspapers).

1.1.2 Availability of reading books

The problem of the **availability of reading books** and achievement in South African schools has often been ascribed to apartheid. *Roget's Thesaurus* defines literacy as knowledge, foresight, mastery or cognisance. It can consequently be inferred that the problem of illiteracy can be said to be a problem of being kept back from becoming informed and knowledgeable. At the turn of the new millennium, President Mbeki lashed out against people resting on their laurels exempting themselves in any possible way from taking up responsibilities to teach effectively. There was a strong emphasis on the lingeringly shattering effects of apartheid, and its destructive influence on the learning nation. South Africa has in fact become replete with slogans such as *down with apartheid* (Tsedu, 2000:11).

Apartheid is also blamed as being one of the reasons for the shortage of reading books in schools. One particularly invidious effect of the lack of the serious culture of reading has been that parents settle their children in front of the television with a packet of popcorn. Television has in many senses become an undermining force of and in many instances the substitute for the mother of reading, viz. the reading book. Many parents do not buy reading books any more (one could infer that the low sales of readings books might have to do both with the economic situation, which precludes "luxury" items such as story books, and the fact that providing a child with a book often requires of the parent an input, such as having to answer questions and guiding the younger children while reading). Books are thus not all that readily available to readers as the video is an easier way to occupy lively children at home. Reading a

book has not, since the advent of television, enjoyed the same status anymore, and although some critics have much to say for education through the medium of the television, reading books do not need an electrical cord fastened to a plug and reading can be done anywhere. It is of concern that the reading book is under threat and therefore reading books should be promoted and the writing of suitable books that can compete with the powerful medium of television encouraged. The situation of the reading book as threatened medium of education is so serious that Parr (1996:70) fears *the death of the reading book is about to become a reality.*

Hobbs (2000:59) refers to the words by D.T. Max stressing that even though a book may fall into a bathtub and be dried on the radiator, it can still be read, as it represents a technological stronghold which the computer may never invade. Reading books should anyway not be seen as under threat by television and computers, as good texts still need to be supplied by writers for both of these mediums. Authors will always be in demand to serve the reading, listening and looking market. Giblin (2000:5) comments on the disappearance of books because of the disappearance of publishers from the literary scene such as long-established companies like Macmillan, Scribners, Lodestar and Bradbury. Publishers tend to be impatient with slow-selling titles that do not come perform strongly. This slow-down trend in publishing has concomitantly and inevitably lead to fewer reading books in print. Then there is the tendency to make use of internet and Giblin (2000:5) also voices his concern that it is believed that the internet will render the reading book obsolete and unnecessary for it has influenced the way in which people buy books. He is, however, fairly encouragingly of the opinion that although no one can be absolutely certain, he doubts that books will completely disappear.

The fact that reading books are not that freely available to a large percentage of the population is also observed by Kader Asmal, the minister of education (Asmal, 1999:Internet). Reading books in the form of letters appearing on the screen of the television are still a comparative rarity and computers still a luxury for many. If learners are not granted the opportunity to read, how can literacy be facilitated?

If literacy should be promoted and readers be educated to read, texts (reading material) must be available. A new learner-centred outcomes-based education system was initiated in 1997. **The OBE policy**, also known as Curriculum 2005, emphasises among many other essential requirements suitable English second language (ESL) reading material. There is a dire need for appropriate reading material in the classroom that will suit the new interactive educational system (Wessels, 1996:187). Pretorius (1997:17) deems unavailability of teaching material to be the prime handicap facing implementers of the new educational policy. Despite the announcement of a new educational policy to be followed in South Africa, Taylor (1999) observes that the budgetary crisis for the provision of textbooks had a definite effect on the purchase of textbooks. It dropped from R895 million in 1995/6 to R80 million in 1997/1998. Taylor regards textbooks as an essential aid in equipping readers at school and advocates the re-establishment of the textbook as reading books are even scarcer than textbooks and textbooks are sometimes the only books available at school.

Heale (1998:36) remarks that South Africa is still, as far as the new political circumstances are concerned, in its toddling years, since the books that children are largely exposed to are the textbooks at school. OBE has come under relentless fire from the side of educationalists and is described as the “dumbing down” of South African learners (Mulholland, 1997:22), another Titanic approaching an iceberg (Ellis, 1997:10), and even an outdated train timetable or an antiquated atlas (Meintjies, 1998:24). There are, however, those who believe that OBE is the key to encourage critical thinking and problem-solving methods (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997:25).

As for reading material in the form of textbooks, it should also be noted that the department has still not succeeded in delivering the goods as far as the supply in the need of textbooks is concerned (whatever the educational policy that is espoused and/or enforced). Schools in South Africa started in 2000 without the required and

promised number of textbooks (Erasmus, 2000b:1). Mbeki's message, looking very much like a wielding of a big stick to a struggling country, points out that a dedicated teacher must muster the courage to even teach under a tree with whatever resources are available to him – and this is of course, ironically enough, the one method of teaching where reading from books forms an integral part (Tsedu, 2000:11).

Heale (1998:36-37) comments on the strong need for having books published for the upper primary level. She provides the following statistics with regard to the South African situation:

Jenkins (1998:50) claims that only three or four hundred children's books in South Africa's nine officially recognised African languages have ever been published. Most of these books are also no originals, but translations and only a tiny number of these books have been written by native speakers. The general quality of these books is also very poor. The same can be said about the amount of fiction in English and Afrikaans, but the only difference is that the quality is much better. These numbers also point out the **pressing need of children's reading books** in South Africa.

This point then leads directly to the subsequent cause for concern in this study, which centres on the actual quality of the books that are available.

1.1.3 Unsuitability of reading books available

Despite the fact that many new reading books are being written, it is thus clear from the above mentioned that few suitable books have been and are being published. Books published are also being criticised for being unsuitable when they eventually do get published. Reading books provided to the screening committee of the Department of Education and Training in the North West region during 1998, for example, revealed that reading books at present available to learners are of an unsuitable level, with only a few illustrations (and these primarily portraying setting). A study of these readers revealed a rather dull profile involving no colourful pictures and no intriguing illustrations to enhance and support characterisation. There was no introduction in any of the examples studied, a characteristic according to Hill (1997:63) that should form

an integrated part of a graded reader. A further feature was the absence of summaries to help the learners to grasp the most essential development of the story by means of pre-reading support. There were no judicious aids such as vocabulary support and as for the fonts used, the general impression was that the size was too small, creating a cramped effect. The books were given to the screening committee and names of authors and covers were removed so as to avoid biased assessment. According to a member of the above-mentioned committee, Dr. Sue De Villiers (1999), it became evident that the current Afro-centric readers available are generally of a low standard. Reviews in terms of character, setting and plot were not very favourable and only a few exceptions were considered fit to be recommended as possible class readers. Kader Asmal (1999) admits that the Afro-centric readers published in African languages are also on the decline and little is thus available for a large population to read.

Heinking (1999) has encouragingly observed that books are seemingly available to be purchased from huge bookstores and supermarkets and that there is therefore a real need for children's literature to be written to feed the growing market. Non-fiction is also needed, as there would seem to be a neglect of fields which need to be covered such as biographies and books on science. She advocates a more focused and co-ordinated use books dealing with science for purposes of inculcating in young minds an awareness of the world around them – reading about the world would also inculcate more of an intellectual engagement with the unknown world and be an aid towards development of learners' minds (it would be equivalent of making learners aware of substantive intellectual nourishment rather than the metaphoric intellectual junk food available via other media). She pleads for "living books", books sending readers on the "magic carpet ride", touching hearts and intellect. She is concerned about the unsuitability of some of the books published and says that although many of the books are delightful, beautifully illustrated and well-written, there are alongside these many dull, unremarkable and truly objectionable books on sale to the (often unsuspecting and uncritical) public.

Being in close contact with primary school pupils from multi-cultural backgrounds, it has become evident to me that South African learners, especially Black learners, have difficulty in relating to Eurocentric readers. Hill (1997:62) is also of the opinion that Eurocentric readers dominate the children's literary scene. Too few good Afrocentric stories in which Blacks feature prominently are available. The result has been an observed resistance among Black learners to reading due to a dearth in the reading culture in general and because they are exposed to stories written by authors concentrating on Eurocentric values. There is, among others, a *need for more suitable Afrocentric books* to add to the large corpus of existing literature and for European and other cultures to draw on as reading material. According to Hill (1997:62) only 1% of international reading books can be classified as Afrocentric literature. Considering the fact that African language speakers form considerably more than 50% of the linguistic community of South Africa (Wessels, 1996:172), it is alarming to note that Afrocentric literature is represented so poorly.

Nhlanhla (1988:161) ascribes the fact of only a handful of Black authors existing for readers to draw on to unequal educational opportunities in South Africa in the past – a factor that resulted, together with others, in the high illiteracy rate in our country. Consequently many potential authors who are rich in indigenous knowledge are illiterate and their contributions have consistently remained untapped - a valuable resource has thus remained unexplored and might remain so.

1.1.4 Sociolinguistic influences

In order for writers to remedy the problem of providing suitable reading material that will be approved of by publishers and readers, it is imperative to investigate the circumstances of the reader on his way to become literate. It thus remains critical to try and establish *a profile of the target readers* and to test reader preferences to be able to create an idea of what a suitable reading book should look like. It is important to investigate whether and to what extent sociolinguistics influences embracing cultural influences, socio-economic factors, age and stage of emotional and

intellectual development play a role in determining reader preferences for certain stories.

Daymond (1996:78) elucidates the role of cultural concerns in literature and approves of the prevailing focus in the educational policy on cultural issues. Various cultures should be willing to learn from one another if co-operation among diverse cultural groups in South Africa were to be promoted. Adendorf (1991:72) endorses an approach that encourages the various nations to grant each other a rightful place under the sun before unity can to any meaningful extent be achieved. Providing a reader that is of equal interest to all learners from multi-cultural backgrounds seems to be problematic. Radebe (1995:161) conducted a survey on the role of culture in determining the reading interests of Zulu-speaking Grade Four children. His conclusions reveal that culture plays a dominant role in determining reader interests, but that it is not the only factor to exert an influence. Polarised views are the order of the day when it comes to cultural concerns. Mphahlele (1997:40) warns against ignoring one's own cultural heritage and advocates a teaching approach that will expose learners to their past cultures before attempting to rub shoulders with foreign cultures. Nhlanhla (1988:162) also opts for an approach aimed at producing Black indigenous literature (literature generated by Black South African authors) and claims that familiar experiences like life in a squatter camp will be best understood and be adequately and vividly represented by people who are in close contact with the situation. Smith (1992:116) maintains that "[the] way in which we organize our perceptions of the world- obviously reflects our past experience, and even more the experience of others in the culture to which we belong".

Hobbs (2000) maintains that reading is the most essential skill for education, but expresses her concern that society is very blasé about supporting and enforcing it. She deems the tendency of children to "go off books" by the time they hit their teens as a national disaster. The multi-cultural classroom accommodates readers (learners) from a wide range of ages and interests. When learners become teenagers, emotional and cognitive development also exerts an influence on reading habits and interests.

Attitude becomes foregrounded and response to reading books displays a critical consideration of what is acceptable according to the teenagers' value system. The stage between ages of approximately 7-11 is regarded as the stage of concrete operations, whereas the teenagers should be able to carry out formal operations and hypothesise and construct propositions (Coleman & Hendry, 1990:29). The peer group will of necessity exert a powerful influence on the teenager's reading choices. Leisure activities and choice of reading material that together comprise reading are therefore affected by the peer group's general feeling of acceptance or rejection.

It is equally important to investigate whether the emotional development of teenagers can also be deemed to be at the heart of the decline in readers belonging to this age group. Peer groups act as a sounding board for their ideas and they are keen to conform to the norms of this particular group (Gouws & Kruger, 1994:117).

The target group for this study (the senior primary phase) is at the age at which the learners seem to disappear from the library. Hill (1997:61) asserts that it is very difficult to find readers for advanced learners falling within the age group between eleven to fourteen, and most authors tend to believe that learners at the elementary stages are younger and the more senior learners are adults. This is a serious misconception, as there is a need for children's literature in the senior primary phase, a need that can only be satisfied if the writers who possess some relevant training will venture to start writing (Parr, 1996:73).

On the other hand it should also be noted that the current situation in South African schools, especially schools with Black learners, reflects the reality of a senior primary phase classroom occupied by learners from various ages, in many cases teenagers between the age of twelve to sixteen. Many learners, especially Black learners who come from Black schools to English-medium schools, have failed to progress for a variety of reasons - because of strikes and teachers who lack motivation and are under-qualified. Radebe (1995:170) has pointed out that Black teachers are also a product and therefore regrettably part of the vicious cycle of an educational system

that under-utilised books and that their training in many cases has neglected the importance of reading.

The reader's emotional and cognitive development also directly affects the choice of genre, for example the younger the reader the more he/she will fancy fables and the older the reader the more he/she will fancy romantic stories. Hill (1997:61) claims that general themes make up 32% and thrillers 20% of genres currently in print. Fables and adventures take up 14% of these genres. Testing reader response can cast light on whether learners from the senior primary phase prefer fables or science fiction. Males and females are said to prefer different genres and therefore sex-typing plays a profound role in compiling the profile of the reading book/material needed. Sex-typing subsequently needs to be explored as it of necessity affects reader choice. The choice of the hero's sex is also of relevance as authors have to cater for males and females as the population consist of two different sexes.

The generally prevailing low standard of language proficiency poses a serious problem especially among Black students (readers) coming from overcrowded Black classrooms, where seventy to eighty learners per classroom is no extraordinary phenomenon. These learners often need remedial teaching in order to remedy their backlog. An acceptable level of literacy should be the prime concern in education. Dlamini (1998:19) maintains that the low percentage of matriculants who pass can be primarily attributed to poor reading habits.

Hobbs (2000) asserts that there are many shelves full of books, but that most of them are too expensive and that there is a need for cheaper books in circulating library buses in areas where readers do not have access to a library in order to encourage reading. Radebe (1995:165) is also of the opinion that socio-economic background has a fairly profound effect on the readers' interests. Many readers (learners) come from a background of low socio-economic status and little money is available for buying reading books. There exists a need for affordable reading material so that readers from a low to average income group can also gain easier access to reading

material. Many of the parents of the learners belonging to the Black target group, are domestic workers. Many come from an overcrowded family situation and many members have to share the sparse reading material (in cases where it is available at all). A love for reading is also impeded by loose family structures and the almost lack of a proper reading corner where the reader can relax and read quietly and peacefully. Even if there is a high level of reading interest and no material is available, it will of course have a detrimental effect on reading habits. The unfavourable reading conditions and opportunities at home thus focus the attention even more sharply on the role and input of reading books in the classroom.

Kader Asmal (1999) focuses attention on the socio-economic constraints on the publication of reading books:

Even simple books are unaffordable for most people. Most homes therefore have few, if any, books, magazines or newspapers. Classrooms are often bare of books. Even the supply of ordinary textbooks has been restricted by financial constraints. Schools with well-used general libraries are extremely rare, and schools with adequate sets of class readers are hard to find.

Teachers and parents also exert an undeniable influence on the reading market as they often tend to buy what is regarded as appropriate and acceptable according to their own judgements, preferences and beliefs. Writers and parents should therefore also form part of this investigation as they are manipulating the market through purchasing what they want their children to read. The tendency for some teachers to follow the approach of sticking to basic readers only when having reading periods, focusing on one book read by everybody in class and might well be an enforced one in terms of the probably absence of other options as a direct result of financial constraints. If more books were available at all schools, it could have been part of a policy of making available a variety of books. Palardy (1997:67) advocates reading across the curriculum, a more holistic approach that inspires the teacher to organise reading in the classroom in terms of trade books instead of only the traditional basal readers. The so-called whole approach also known as holistic reading includes reading organised by the teacher in the classroom as reading across the curriculum including any

material thus that would enhance learning about the topics discussed in other subjects as well as focusing on learning the second language. The holistic approach which has been emerging has to some extent come to the rescue of availability of reading books and can alleviate the need for reading material for the moment, but a good story will always remain a popular incentive to hook learners on reading. Holistic reading should therefore not be seen as the substitute for reading (story) books, but a means to encourage learners to read about everything and everywhere and then to be on the lookout for a good book to read.

It is of fundamental importance to research all the problems discussed here in order to cast light on the current situation and to focus on the reader, his development and factors that exert an influence on the reader's choices in order to inspire writers to take up their pens and address a serious need not only in South Africa but all over the world. Even writers can learn from fellow writers and therefore hints on how to write for the specific target group are included. Writing can take place as soon as the market has been studied in order to write what is needed. To combat the impending *death of the reading book* and to prevent suffering by many learners, it is also imperative to investigate response to current reading books available, which involves a direct look at the target reader of the new millennium.

1.2 Questions that arise

The problems discussed above lead to a number of important questions to be asked:

- 1 What is the profile of the learner as ESL reader in the senior primary phase in a multicultural classroom, in other words, what is the complex set of variables one should take into consideration in the determination of this profile?
- 2 What should the profile or shape be of the *reader/book* which would appeal to this learner as reader; and
- 3 What would the criteria be that one could derive for the writing of such readers, given the profiles developed?

1.3 Aims

These critical issues would lead to the following aims being formulated for the study:

- 1 to arrive at an accurate profile of the ESL learner as reader in the senior primary multicultural classroom;
- 2 to arrive at an accurate profile of the book(s) that would be suitable for such readers; and
- 3 to derive from this profile the apposite criteria for the writing of such books. Determining criteria for the writing of a book can help the creative author to reach the educative goal of writing for the ESL reader in order to enable such learners to acquire the second language more effectively.

1.4 Central theoretical statement

It is postulated that, having obtained an accurate profile of the ESL learner as reader in the multicultural classroom, and having thus taken cognisance of the apposite cultural and other variables constituting such a profile, it would be possible to compose a profile for the kind of book/reader that would appeal to such learners as readers, and at the same time to derive from this profile a set of criteria to be used as guidelines in the writing of such readers.

1.5 Appropriate methods of research

1.5.1 A theoretical methodology: a sociolinguistic investigation

The factors exerting an influence on readers' preferences for reading material are all in fact speech variables identified by sociolinguists such as Labov (1972:284). According to him ascribed status, ethnic and religious membership, caste, sex, family and achieved status, education, income, occupation, and peer group membership all form part of sociolinguistic variables which are factors that have an effect on reader

preferences. A theoretical outline of these variables and their influence on reader interests will be constituted in the chapter on theory.

A theoretical investigation into what is known about the target readers' response will also form an integral part of this study. It should also be noted that the process of reading in the reading communication chain is informative and relevant as it briefly explains the basic processes which are of relevance when reading problems occur. A reluctance to read can in some cases be directly linked with a learner feeling swamped by a morass of material he is unable to handle because of problems experienced with the processes of reading. As reading and specifically response form an important element of reception aesthetics, the influential factors identified by reception aesthetics will briefly be dealt with, although the focus is not so much on theory as on behaviour and response. These findings will then be supplemented by empirical research to cast light on the hypothesis and current knowledge and insights concerning the phenomenon of reading and reader choices.

1.5.2 Empirical method of research

1.5.2.1 Use of literature

Results accumulated by studying journals, newspaper clippings, books and theses will be scrutinised to determine in what way they can be useful to the purpose of this study. The literature will provide what Creswell (1994:20) describes as the framework for establishing the importance of the study and also the benchmark for comparing results. The focus will be on the issue of how it is used. In planning the quantitative study the literature is used deductively as a framework for hypotheses. Integrative methods triangular will therefore also be incorporated. The theory is therefore integrated at the beginning of the consideration of the method (cf. the priority of the literature reviewed in this particular study).

The following databases were consulted for information:

Human Sciences Research Council (CSD) database;

Nexusview (Star search);

ERIC (journal articles); Internet: EBSCOHost articles and articles searched through the Aardvark search engine. These data were studied and journal articles, books related to the topic and dissertations and theses consulted for information on the topic of discussion.

1.5.2.2 Empirical study

1.5.2.2.1 Design

The design can be characterised as a quantitative empirical study, working deductively, supplying theoretical underpinnings at first and then testing the hypotheses by means of the instrumentation. The predominantly quantitative design is also supplemented by the qualitative method using interviews to elicit response.

1.5.2.2.2 Study population

Radebe (1995:164) asserts that it is more or less between the ages of nine to twelve that learners start developing their own points of view and can articulate their own preferences. It is also towards the end of the primary school phase that reader interests in reading books show a decline. Conniff (1993:19) reports that readers seem to lose interest in reading books between the ages of eleven to fourteen. The study population involved will therefore include learners falling within the age group of 9-14. Approximately 200 Grade 6 and 7 learners, representing four multicultural schools in the North West, were asked to participate. The survey was further supplemented by making an in-depth study of 40 learners within the Potchefstroom District. These 40 learners were randomly selected from the chosen schools. The learners are all second-language speakers of the English language. Ellis (1986:5) defines second language acquisition as "the study of how learners learn an additional

language after they have acquired their mother tongue". The second-language learners of relevance to this study are all learning and reading English as a second language in the senior phase of the primary school. As indicated, all learners come from Grades six and seven.

1.5.2.2.3 Instrumentation

Sidhu (1984:116) defines normative survey testing as the description of current conditions in order to reflect on prevailing circumstances with regard to the area of research. This investigation involved a descriptive analysis of reader responses to reading material and reading books by means of a questionnaire and interviews. A questionnaire was compiled to evaluate reader preferences according to the variables such as the role of culture, age, cognitive and emotional development, socio-economic background, position in the family and gender. The questionnaire included three types of questions, viz. personal background information on socio-economic status, educational background and class. The second group of questions concerned the pupils' reaction to the physical appearance of the book and a third category of questions involved questions set on extracts from reading books, because availability of books and the distribution of books when being subjected to the questionnaires posed a practical problem. The actual study was preceded by a pilot study mainly consisting of a tentative questionnaire testing reader preferences, which was adjusted in order to arrive at the final questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with the learners participating in the in-depth study.

1.5.2.2.4 Procedure

The questionnaire was drawn up and distributed. A contact person assisted with the distribution of the questionnaires and also acted as an agent to remind and encourage less co-operative participants. Official permission was sought for conducting research and the schools and the principals involved requested by means of a cover letter, a stamped and addressed return envelope and a personal phone call to co-operate and to

follow specific instructions. The cover letter also gave assurance of the confidentiality of the project. Interviews were conducted individually and open questions posed to the participants.

1.5.2.2.5 Analysis

Results were analysed by means of descriptive statistics and means and frequencies calculated in order to make suggestions.