

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **AN INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The new millennium heralded an influx of improved technology and technological communication in South Africa. Due to the fact that telecommunication has become central to the lives of learners, a child in the twenty-first century has at his/her fingertips a myriad of ways to communicate using technological means. However, rapid advancement in technology does not guarantee rapid attainment of high literacy levels. While the introduction of computers into South African businesses, homes and schools over the last ten years somehow suggests somekind of advancement, one realises that in South Africa most people still have to be able to read in order to start up the computer, to retrieve information from it, to use the Internet, and to send and receive e-mails. To those who have remained untouched by modern technology and telecommunication, for instance, the printed word as a means of communication still plays an insignificant role towards the development of their literacy levels. This is a sensitive issue precisely because a nation's progress through global communication can only be achieved when the larger portion of the population is literate. This study will argue that literacy is, and has always been, a prerequisite for liberty and empowerment, and thus membership in the global community.

The ability to read and write has potential to empower individuals to undertake many types of activities or tasks in life. For many, being able to read means the realisation of their dreams and ambitions. However, the ability to read and write can become a challenge to some, and so it cannot be necessarily taken for granted that reading comes naturally. In South Africa, the inability to read causes, amongst others, intense fear, frustration and low self-esteem,

especially if such reading is to be conducted in one's additional language. The causes of reading disabilities in a first language have been researched in every corner of the world, and, as such, successful strategies have been created to assist learners with most reading problems in the first language. But for many learners who attend schools whose medium of instruction is in a language they do not understand or have not heard before, reading tends to be an insurmountable problem. What is amazing is that many such learners are literate in their mother tongue. The question then arises as to why so many such learners experience reading and spelling problems in a second language.

## **1.2 ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM**

In this section attention is given to the study's awareness of the problem and the initial research question is investigated in the literature study and refined to a final question giving form and scope to this research.

### **1.2.1 Awareness of the problem**

Research by Henning, Gravett and Daniels (1998), National Association Education of Young Children (1996), and others has shown that when children with English as their mother tongue enter Grade one, they are usually able to communicate comfortably in the spoken form. Most of them have very little, sometimes no difficulty at all in identifying visually an object or picture and labelling it in English. When spoken to they are able to discriminate auditorially the different sounds that form the word. In order to enhance this ability learning a language in its written and spoken form is supported by the introduction of phonetics and sight vocabulary. However, a learner whose mother tongue is not English, such as Zulu for instance, and receives instruction via the medium of English, such a learner experiences difficulties in areas of reading, reading comprehension and spelling. Furthermore, the problem is even compounded and gets more complicated when the teacher is

not literate in Zulu. Verbal instruction to such a learner is not understood since it is in an additional language. The Zulu-speaking learner often has never spoken, heard, or had sufficient amount of exposure to English. The learner is lost in a sea of foreign words. When shown an object or picture, most of Zulu-speaking learners cannot name it in English. How then do such learners manage to identify the initial sound? Is it fair to have such expectations? These are crucial questions given the principles propounded by the Outcomes Based Education (OBE), among which is the idea of working from the known to the unknown (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture 1997: 29). For a learner who does not have "the known" in a language it is difficult to even begin, let alone reaching "the unknown". Sight vocabularies that are not concrete in nature have no meaning to such a learner. Inevitably, the learner lacks attention and loses interest. These realities put the Foundation Phase teacher in a dilemma as he/she attempts to implement education policies that have little bearing on the implications for Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking English second language (L2) learners.

As findings in this research will demonstrate later, this trend is reflected in most KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture (KZNDEC) schools, especially in the larger Durban area. Almost all L2 learners in Kwa Zulu-Natal (KZN) are Zulu first language speakers. I have observed and heard views expressed by colleagues during my tenure as a Foundation Phase Head of Department about the various problems experienced by Zulu-speaking L2 learners, as well as problems experienced by teachers themselves who are not literate enough in Zulu. Both learners and teachers expressed frustration at the lack of interest, poor performance and discipline problems.

What compounds the situation even more is the fact that teachers are still trying to come to grips with understanding OBE and its jargon with just a week's training. Through my experiences I have observed that whatever little progress was being made at school was undone at home because learners

reverted to their mother tongue. Care-givers do not reinforce the English that is taught at school and my awareness of the problem prompts me to raise the following question: What are the main barriers to the acquisition of reading and spelling as experienced by an Zulu-speaking L2 learner?

### **1.2.2 Preliminary literature investigation**

Literature (Henning et al, 1998; NAEYC, 1996; Han and Ernst, 1999; to name a few) suggests a variety of factors that have been advanced to explain the lack of progress of the Foundation Phase English second-language learner in the areas of reading and spelling. One needs to take into consideration factors affecting reading development of the first language learner as a point of departure to understand reasons for the problems experienced by the L2 learner. Thorough analysis of reading development in the first language has potential to enhance our understanding of this phenomenon in the L2. The L2 learner has to contend with barriers that may have nothing to do with reading disability. It is my intention to draw on some of the barriers identified in the literature and to test their applicability to explanations in the limited context of my study.

The literature reviewed in this study is an explication of possible barriers to the development of reading and spelling of Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners within an English medium school. It has to be noted, however, that these possible barriers are highly interdependent and are seldom responsible for reading difficulties of and in themselves. Once an L2 learner experiences difficulties in reading, ripple effects manifest in his/her poor performance in other learning areas in the grade, in delays in their emotional development and in the onset of concomitant socio- environmental problems.

Specific socio-environmental problems are directly linked with Curriculum 2005 ideals. Educators of the Foundation Phase, for instance, because of minimal training in the intricacies of this model of the curriculum, still find the

workings of OBE somekind of a mission. Vakalisa (2000:18) states that " ... one of the criticisms which has been levelled against OBE oriented Curriculum 2005 has been the complexity of the language in which it is couched". What Vakalisa's point exposes to us is the fact that teachers first need to receive guidance on how to get past OBE jargon before actual implementation. Henning et al (1998:197) furthermore, go so far as to suggest that teacher development programs in OBE training for Foundation Phase teachers focus on skills of facilitation before using terminology that label these skills. They argue that " ... one of the rules for the language game in OBE speak seems to be the fluent use of the language, and not the grasping and application of reading in the fullest sense possible ... OBE speak appears to be mostly limited to recognition mode" ( Henning et al 1998:198).

Because of this, one may argue that Zulu-speaking learners in Grades 1, 2, and 3 are not proficient in reading and writing in Zulu. The initial rate of learning may be slower where young children are concerned because they have not fully mastered their first language. English second-language learners, on the other hand, may not be as competent as their English monolingual peers by the time they start school, and yet they need to compete with them. Okagaki and Diamond (2000:77) found that L2 children who speak a language other than English are exposed to varying amounts of language repertoire and are socialised to use different languages in different contexts. Probably this is why the National Association Education of Young Children (NAEYC; 1996:4) maintains that individual differences exist in how children, whose home language is not English, acquire English.

Care-givers to children who speak Zulu as a first language are not in a position to reinforce the English that is taught at school. Most learners who speak English as a second language and attend schools in the larger Durban area live in low socio-economic environments with the single parent or both parents working long hours. Bringing this reality in relation to OBE, Vakalisa (2000:16)

states that “ ... the individual family settings from which learners come are the main factors that determine whether or not the outcomes ... are attained”. Han and Ernst (1999: 144) believe that entrance to school can be a transition marked by significant discontinuities between the new structured school environment and their prior experience with their families and communities. The educative style of families shape the literate experiences of children. Huss (1995:772) endorses the role of the home in learning a language by examining what the home and community influences are in children’s literacy development. Parents and teachers usually play significant roles in assisting learners in overcoming their reading and spelling difficulties as Han and Ernst (1999:153) and Blackledge (1999:192) have discovered in their research.

One of the Learning Programme Statements for Literacy in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture (1997:22) is that this learning programme emphasises that language is not an end in itself, but a means to interacting with others. It is about integrating new knowledge into existing knowledge, accompanied by obtaining and conveying ideas and information in an effective and informed way. The outcomes will be a profound transferability of knowledge to real life. The Grade 1 L2 learner does not experience this until very late in the Foundation Phase, yet in South African Department of Education (2000:13) it is highlighted that “ ... an educator will demonstrate sound knowledge of subject content and various principles, strategies and resources”. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a Foundation Phase educator unable to uphold such needs of the curriculum since most teachers were not trained in bilingual education and have little or no experience of multicultural education. I tend to agree with Loubser (1997:28) who argues that the new integrated system means that almost no teachers will have been educated for this approach. Many are battling to cope with the present demands of the curriculum, especially the requirement that a teacher spends most of the time in the classroom. Chisholm (2000:11) is of the opinion that the implementation of OBE and the new curriculum has been

confounded by inter alia “ ... the inadequate training of teachers”. Vakalisa (2000:24) states that “ ... the teacher has no understanding of the learner’s home language. The result of this is that the teacher cannot trace the mistakes the learner makes to the latter’s home language and guide him from there”. Okagaki and Diamond (2000:78), on the other hand, have discovered that parents of L2 learners are not fluent in English and teachers are not fluent in the home language. This in itself causes a major problem in the education of second language speakers.

Children at schools reflect the great racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of our society whose members of families speak languages other than English, families that have different social customs and families that have different beliefs about child development and expectations for their children. These beliefs and practices may affect children’s adjustment to early childhood settings. Societies have different expectations for members of their communities (Okagaki & Diamond 2000:74). A lack of congruence between the teacher’s and parent’s expectations contributes to the child’s additional burden of making the transition from home to the classroom. Blackledge (1999:192) found that the language of interaction in and with, the school was solely in English. The teachers demanded that the L2 learners’ parents play by the cultural and linguistic rules of the dominant majority, or put at risk their children’s academic progress. This scenario could prove problematic should the parents also be non-English speaking. The NAEYC (1996:4) suggests that educators can best help second language children by acknowledging and responding to the importance of the child’s first language and culture. Cultural beliefs and practices may affect children’s adjustment to early childhood settings. Okagaki and Diamond (2000:76) make suggestions for working with young children who bridge two cultures as they make the transition between home and the early childhood classroom.

Zulu-speaking L2 learners are severely linguistically under-prepared for academic study. Linguistics provides learners with a thorough knowledge of syntactic systems, phonetics and semantics. Day and Bamford (1998:12) describes the reading process as follows:

- ❖ Reading begins with the accurate, swift and automatic visual recognition of vocabulary, independent of the context in which it occurs, referred to as sight vocabulary.
- ❖ The automatic calling up of words, its meanings and its phonological representation; which, when in a sentence, holds the words in working memory long enough for comprehension to occur.
- ❖ Comprehension draws on the reader's prior knowledge of the language.

Attention and noticing are very important factors in second-language acquisition and learning. What is said for beginning readers in Day and Bamford (1998:15) is that the slowly down and paying of conscious attention to recognising words interferes with the construction of meaning. Beginning English second-language learners are forced to switch their attention back and forth from decoding to constructing meaning, which is slow, laborious and frustrating, thereby hindering the fluency and comprehension of reading. The hypotheses were substantiated by Wade and Siegal (1997: 387) that “ ... poor readers would spell more poorly than average readers and that second-language readers display phonological deficits relative to native speakers ... and that this deficit would also be obvious in spelling accuracy”. They may have inadequate phonological representations in their second-language, which causes difficulty in listening comprehension and oral expression.

Difficulty in accessing reading material hinders progress in reading and Kreuger and Braun (1998:415) note that accessibility of reading material for the L2 learner is often neglected and that teachers trying to get children to the library are often overtaken by the “ ... constant barrage of demands on

teachers and children (especially in overcrowded classrooms)". Koskinen, Blum, Bisson, Phillips, Creamer and Baker (1999:432) on focusing on the impact that resources that are available have, discuss how book access in school and at home, as well as audio-tapes, helped L2 learners enhance reading motivation and achievement. They state further (1999:434) that " ... children who are not in book-rich environments read less, are less likely to read at home and are unable to develop automaticity necessary for comprehension".

One also needs to be cognisant of the L2's reduced self-image and self-confidence on entering an English medium classroom, as well as the lack of motivation to continue. Kreuger and Braun (1998:410) mention the challenges that the L2 learner has to meet with regards to learning a new language and learning to read simultaneously in the absence of any external support. They describe a peer-tutoring programme used in the Foundation Phase and shows how progressive the gains were in reading fluency, comprehension and spelling. These had positive effects on reading attitudes, social skills and self-esteem.

From the above preliminary literature study it is clear that the L2 learner battles with numerous barriers in acquiring language and reading skills in school.

### **1.2.3 Statement of the problem**

Learning to read is a requirement not only for acquiring the basis of education, but also for everyday life. The ability to read instruction on a bottle: POISON – DO NOT DRINK, to be able to read and follow directions to a certain destination, to avoid getting lost, to keep abreast with world news, to read what's on sale to save money, are just some of the reading activities that occupy our daily lives. When it is a language you speak at home and at school it becomes easier to read. But imagine the difficulty experienced when it is in

a language that is foreign, a language that has never been spoken or heard of before.

On the one hand when English-speaking children begin schooling it is with much trepidation, on the other when a Zulu-speaking child attends school for the first time and hears foreign language (English), it may be the beginning of problems for the child, which may have far-reaching consequences. In addition, the Zulu-speaking child now has to learn through the medium of a language foreign to him. Teachers themselves are not always acquainted and aware of the language and cultural barriers, and experience difficulties themselves. The majority of them are not literate in Zulu, and have had little or no training in bilingual teaching. They thus have to contend with teaching the new Outcomes Based educational system with great difficulty.

There are no specific studies aimed at the barriers to learning as experienced by Zulu-speaking L2 learners. From experience and interviews with teachers, it is clear that Zulu-speaking learners are experiencing difficulties with reading and spelling. The final question which will direct this study is: ***What are the barriers in acquiring basic English reading and spelling skills by Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase learners?***

### **1.3 AIMS OF THIS RESEARCH**

I intend to draw on the literature referred to in this study in order to explore and analyse the explanations by educators and parents of Foundation Phase English L2 learners, as well as some education authorities. The categories of barriers identified in the literature review and the extent to which there might be additional researched intervention, which might be held to influence the situation, will be used.

The purpose of this study is thus geared towards investigating barriers experienced by Foundation Phase learners with a Zulu mother tongue. This will be undertaken with specific reference to basic reading and spelling skills to cope with OBE through the English medium at a KZNDEC school in the larger Durban area. In particular, the investigation will attempt to discover what the realities are in the English second-language Foundation Phase classroom and the barriers and possible solutions that can be proposed to redress the situation.

### **1.3.1 General aims**

This research study has the following general aims:

To determine from literature:

- ❖ the nature of reading and spelling in the Foundation Phase,
- ❖ the problems experienced by Foundation Phase L2 learners and,
- ❖ the barriers that hamper the learner's progress in reading in a second language.

### **1.3.2 Specific aims**

The specific aims would be to determine why Foundation Phase L2 learners in the larger Durban area of the KZNDEC experience problems with reading and spelling in English. The method of obtaining data would be by means of a questionnaire.

## **1.4 RESEARCH METHODS**

The literature study will undertake to determine what barriers Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking L2 learners experience in an English medium school in

the acquisition of basic reading and spelling skills. Preceding this, will be an attempt to determine what problems they experience in the aforementioned areas. Reasons for these problems will be proposed, as well as researched interventions that might be held to change the situation.

There will be a theoretical stage involving an in-depth analysis and identification of issues from the literature review.

This will be followed by the empirical stage that involves the collection of data with the use of a questionnaire. Issues identified in the literature study direct the items on the questionnaire. The administration of the data collection will require a large, but practical number of respondents.

The results of the survey from the questionnaire will assist teachers to make positive headway in assisting Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking L2 learners towards proficiency in reading and spelling English.

### **1.5 DEMARCATION OF THE RESEARCH**

The choice of the larger Durban area for the research will limit the generalisability of the findings in terms of other levels of analysis. However, an attempt will be made to make the findings of this research as representative as possible given the limited context the study is to cover. The number of English second language learners is too large for the total to be included in the study, but a sufficiently large sample is required for analysis. A research design will be built in a large part of a survey approach.

The point of departure in this investigation is to determine the problems experienced by Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase L2 learners and thereafter to determine the barriers that create these problems in reading. The questionnaire will be distributed to a sample of 104 Foundation Phase

educators in the larger Durban area who teach Zulu-speaking children via the medium of English. These learners, including the child who failed Grade one the previous year, would have either some or no knowledge of English, while having previously either not attended school or attended a Zulu medium school. These schools would be at present implementing OBE. Teachers who have professional qualifications that exclude OBE, but have received OBE training by the KZN education department, as well as those who have professional qualifications inclusive of OBE, will form part of the sample.

The results of the investigation will be significant, not only to educators and parents confined to the demarcated areas, but also to those in the rest of the country who have Foundation Phase L2 learners.

## **1.6 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS**

A clear description and explanation of the different concepts highlighted in the investigation is given in order to obviate ambiguities and to provide the reader with a clear understanding of what is being investigated.

### **1.6.1 Barriers**

This study conceives barriers as factors that hinder the Zulu-speaking child in his progress towards literacy in English. In order to understand what the barriers are, one has to decipher the problems in reading. These could include language proficiency, achievement, cognitive factors, affective factors, motivation, attitude, teaching instruction, teaching factors, social environment, parental involvement, age, as well as psychological and physical factors (Cann 1992:38).

### **1.6.2 Zulu-speaking learners**

By Zulu-speaking learners this study refers to children whose mother tongue is Zulu. Most Zulu-speakers can be found in KZN, South Africa. With the newly found democracy in the country, many Zulu parents sought to send their children into English medium schools. The thinking is that English is a universal language, so their children's proficiency in using it will enable them to be successful competitors at a global level. It is a language that will be a passport to fitting in with the rest of the world.

### **1.6.3 English Second Language (L2)**

A second language is another language used by people who are proficient in their mother tongue. In South Africa English is used mostly in business, commerce, education, communications, government and industry. At school entry level most children whose mother tongue is not English have to be taught in a different method from the English-speaking child. Mahlobo (1999:18) believes that the levels of proficiency depend on whether the social context is rural, urban, predominantly black or white and of low or high socio-economic class. For the purposes of this research L2 refers to English that is learnt as a second language by learners whose mother tongue is Zulu.

### **1.6.4 Reading**

A child who recognises words at random or is able to decode a word is not reading. Day and Bamford (1998:12) define reading as " ... the construction of meaning from a printed or written message. The construction of meaning involves the reader connecting information from the written message with previous knowledge to arrive at meaning-at an understanding". This entails the recognition of sight-vocabulary that is either basic words and other sight words and the ability to use word attack skills using phonetics, morphology context clues and dictionary skills. In addition, the need to understand the words and ideas or what is termed *comprehension* requires the ability to infer, to

recognise literal meanings, to evaluate and to appreciate. An inability to do any of the above renders the person with a reading disability.

### **1.6.5 Reading problems**

When children are found to be unable to read they are described as being dyslexic. Their inability to read may be affected by a number of factors such as intellectual, psychological, physical or socio-economic factors. Reading problems include word-by-word reading, poor pronunciation, omissions, repetitions, insertions, poor word attack skills, inadequate vocabulary, low reading speed, inability to locate information and inadequate comprehension.

### **1.6.6. Outcomes Based Education**

One of the core reasons for the introduction of Outcomes Based Education was the need to equalise educational opportunities after the unequal educational systems of the past apartheid regime. This system was developed in the interests of the minority sectors of the population and produced an elitist and class/cultural barrier to the educational advancement of the majority. OBE required a paradigm shift from the old system in which the educator was the dispenser of knowledge (Tema 1997:6). The OBE methodology involves techniques such as group and project works, child-centred discovery and process learning, moving from the known to the unknown. Focus is on teaching and learning of established knowledge within its various disciplines. The syllabus is open-ended and situational, allowing educators to develop their own learning programmes. Learners are assessed through continuous assessment programmes involving self-assessment, group assessment, peer assessment and individual assessment by the educator (Schollar 1997:12). The process of discovery takes place through stated outcomes.

## **1.7 RESEARCH PROGRAMME**

The investigation under discussion will proceed in the following manner:

**Chapter 1:**

The background, analysis of the problem, the aims of the research, research methods, demarcation of the research, clarification of concepts and the research programme are discussed.

**Chapter 2:**

The literature study focuses on Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase learners' acquisition of basic skills in English reading and spelling, their reading problems and reasons for these problems.

**Chapter 3:**

This chapter focuses on the empirical research, which includes the research hypotheses, discussions on the method of research, the questionnaire as a research tool, its administration, and the sampling method.

**Chapter 4:**

Findings from the literature study and the empirical research will be discussed in order to provide insight into the investigation.

**Chapter 5:**

Conclusions will be drawn, limitations of the study discussed, recommendations made and a summary of the preceding chapters will be highlighted.

## **1.8 SUMMARY**

Reading forms the core of children's ability to cope with school. Take that away and the children are left with a void that renders them unable to progress successfully in any field in their lives. The inability by English second language speakers to just speak English causes them much anguish, embarrassment, lack of motivation and feelings of being useless. They find themselves unable to progress academically in the other learning areas at school, retarding their journey towards self-actualisation. The educator faces the additional problem of learners' poor attitudes towards their work at school, other people and other aspects of their lives. An investigation into what barriers hinder the Zulu L2 child in acquiring basic reading and spelling skills will provide valuable information into what interventions can be implemented to eradicate the obstacles to reading. It is evident from the preliminary review that a wide range of barriers to the acquisition of reading and spelling skills for the Foundation Phase L2 learner have been proposed and many explanations advanced. By clearing the pathway for the introduction of reading English for the Zulu-speaking L2 child is a means of opening up the whole world to him.

In the next chapter a literature study of the barriers that affect the acquisition of basic reading and spelling skills of L2 learners are explained. The status of English and the mother tongue is also investigated.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS BY ZULU-SPEAKING FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter an overview of, and rationale for, undertaking the study were given. In this chapter the factors that hinder the acquisition of basic English reading, spelling and reading comprehension skills by Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners are explained. However, it is necessary to first examine the status of English as a second language in the lives of Black South Africans before discussing the role of the mother tongue in the process of the acquisition of a second language. Attention is also given to mother tongue proficiency in second language acquisition, as well as barriers with which L2 learners are faced in acquiring basic reading, spelling and comprehension skills.

## **2.2 THE STATUS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE LIVES OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS**

Questions have been raised since the inception of the new multilingual language policy about whether Zulu or English should be the medium of instruction in KZN schools, taking into account that the majority of its citizens' mother tongue is Zulu. An analysis of dominant home language use in South Africa reveals that English is the dominant home language in the Johannesburg and Durban metropolitan areas (Broeder & Extra 1999:18).

The South African Department of Education (2002:20) advocates that in a multilingual country like South Africa, learners:

- ❖ need to achieve high levels of proficiency in at least two languages, and
- ❖ need to be able to communicate in other languages.

Policymakers in the South African Department of Education (1997a:23) promote the advancement of bi- or multilingualism as a major resource so that learners are afforded the opportunity to:

- ❖ develop and value their home languages, literacy and their culture,
- ❖ develop and respect other languages, literacy and cultures in a multicultural society, both locally and internationally, and
- ❖ have a shared understanding of a South African culture that is common to each of its citizens.

Mahlobo (1995:10) describes a second language as a “ ... language used by a people in addition to their native language for communication between different language groups”. The hegemony of English serves to foster inter-group communication among South Africa’s different ethnic groups. English enables one to understand and be understood by other speakers of English, both in and out of South Africa. It has become the most used language in almost all the higher institutions - be it in politics, government, education, courts, media, etc. Ngubane (2002:17) believes that English enjoys maximum usage in government and all public spheres and that English has become the *lingua franca* in public life. English is only one of the eleven official languages in South Africa. Approximately only 9% of the 40 million people of South Africa speak English as a first or home language (South African Department of Education 1996:4-6). Yet, ironically, English is the most often used language of most institutions in the country (Sharski 1997:52).

Kamwangamalu (2002:16) believes that “ ... all the population groups in South Africa perceive English as an open sesame by means of which one can achieve unlimited upward social mobility. They see English, as some linguists put it, as a language with no sell-by date attached to it”. Fouche (Moonsamy 1995:4) is of the opinion that the acquisition of English has become a status symbol among Blacks, and young urban Blacks prefer to speak English instead of their own first languages. African-language speakers attach high value to English education in South Africa.

Parents show concern about their children's future opportunities for tertiary education, employment prospects and status in society and thus, concern emanates from their dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning experiences that are prevalent at most Black schools where Zulu is the medium of instruction from the Foundation Phase. This stems from the discovery that the mother tongue, Zulu was being taught inadequately by unqualified and underqualified educators. To compound the problem further, in Zulu medium schools, where English is taught as a second language, learners are taught English by educators who themselves are not proficient in the language. Subsequently, these learners are exposed to incorrect English which, when used, is incorrect and often causes embarrassment to the learners who also experience difficulty when communicating in English. Often these very learners experience difficulties when they join the predominantly English work force or tertiary institutions.

In KZN those parents who can afford it send their children to former Indian and White schools, where the medium of instruction is English. The trend, at least at present, is for parents to commence their Zulu-speaking Grade R to Grade 3 children's education at English medium schools, even if the learner has never been exposed to English before. The majority of these parents is adamant that their children be educated through the medium of English only. Lemmer (1996:333) maintains that English L2 learners are discouraged from using Zulu in both informal and formal school situations, as well as at home. The belief is that their acquisition of English skills will be hindered by mother tongue usage.

Mother tongue instruction has met with opposition from black communities. It is associated with apartheid ideology where the development and use of indigenous languages are perceived as forming part of a strategy to prevent upward black mobility (Lemmer 1996:327). Black parents are very clear that they will not have their children taught in Zulu under any circumstances, even as a means of translation for those experiencing difficulties in English. One

could understand this need since most educators who are not proficient in Zulu use *fanakalo*, a type of pidgin Zulu. Linguistically, the learner could end up going through more harm than good. Any suggestion that an African language be used is seen with a lot of suspicion (Kamwangamalu 2002:16).

Exposure to English is not the same for all learners. Those learners whose L2 experiences have been an acquiring one tend to develop proficiency in the language better than those learners whose experiences have been a learning one.

## **2.3 ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE VERSUS LEARNING A LANGUAGE**

With the introduction of a single education system for all learners in the mid-1990's, and the introduction of eleven official languages, there has been an increased interest in how learners acquire a second language. Often, the terms "learning a language" and "acquiring a language" are used interchangeably. However, a distinction between the two does exist.

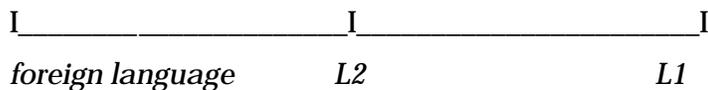
### **2.3.1 ACQUISITION**

According to Yule (1999:191), the **acquisition** of language refers to the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations. Activities associated with acquisition are those experienced by the young child who picks up the L2 from long periods spent in social interaction.

### **2.3.2 LEARNING**

Yule (1999:191) refers to **learning** as the application to a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language. Activities are associated with language teaching, resulting in knowledge about the language.

English L1 learners are exposed to the language more often than those learners for whom English is a second language. It can therefore be argued that the status of English for learners in South Africa can be located along a continuum. **Figure 1** below illustrates the continuum that varies from English as a foreign language (no exposure outside the classroom), English as a second language (L2; exposure outside the classroom) to English as a first language (L1; home language). This depends, mostly, on whether the social context is rural or urban, predominantly black or white, and of a low or high socio-economic background (Mahlobo 1999:18).



**Figure 2. 1 Continuum of the status of English for learners in South Africa**  
*This figure is adapted from Mahlobo (1999:18)*

Although English is chosen as the language of instruction, the position of the mother-tongue in the life of its people must not be compromised. Although Zulu speaking learners experience difficulties and are at a disadvantage in their acquisition of English as compared to their English L1 counterparts, they nevertheless also have the same capacity to learn as their fellow English L1 school mates. English L2 learners are not as exposed to English as their English L1 counterparts in terms of correct exposure to English, be it speaking regularly with English-speaking peers, listening to English radio, watching English programmes on television, exposure to English print media or singing English songs. Should these be provided, English L2 learners will be able to achieve proficiency in English at the same or higher levels as their English L1 peers.

#### **2.4 THE ROLE OF MOTHER-TONGUE PROFICIENCY IN SECOND-**

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Although Stotsky (1999:227) believes that language is more than an instrument or product of culture, Moonsamy (1995:2) maintains that “ ... language and culture are inextricably interrelated and consequently influence each other. The social context within which language is used dictates the type of proficiency as demanded by context. Most children gain the knowledge of the language implicitly during the socialisation process”.

Curriculum 2005, an OBE curriculum, defines the outcomes of language proficiency in terms of a learner’s ability to:

- ❖ make and negotiate meaning and understanding;
- ❖ show critical awareness of language usage;
- ❖ respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in the text;
- ❖ access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations;
- ❖ understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context;
- ❖ use language for learning ; and
- ❖ use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations (South African National Department of Education, 1997b:23).

Learners’ home languages can be used to great advantage as a classroom resource, albeit judiciously, for learning and teaching a second language. This is particularly important in the Foundation Phase where the foundation for reading and writing is laid. The Languages Learning Area Statement of the South African Department of Education (2002:20) follows an additive approach to multilingualism and requires learners to:

- ❖ learn their home language and at least one additional language,
- ❖ become competent in their additional language, while their home language is maintained and developed.

Parents of L2 learners need to make a concerted effort to preserve their mother tongue while simultaneously providing their children with an education in a second language. This is crucial because proficiency in the second language, as some research has shown, is a consequence of proficiency in the mother tongue, and mother tongue proficiency is a strong barometer of second language development. Wang (1996:149), for instance, argues that the maintenance of the mother tongue promotes positive orientation toward the facilitation of English proficiency.

Finchilescu and Nyawose (1998:58) report that " ... there was a strong feeling that children should start their education in Zulu, so that they get a strong grounding in Zulu". The development of the mother tongue also serves to promote the acquisition of the L2, English. Jordaan (1993:8) further confirms that second language proficiency will be partly dependent on the competency of the learner in the first language. It is important for the L2 learner to first acquire the basic concepts in his mother tongue, thereby minimising the frustrations the L2 learner may experience when learning the second language. More effective conceptual learning occurs when the learner understands the concepts in the more developed language, usually the mother tongue, and is then able to add the L2 to this concept. This enriches their understanding of both the concept and the two languages (Martin 1996:21). According to the OBE curriculum, a learner has to progress from the known to the unknown. Therefore, learners have to be able to make use of their proficiency in the existing knowledge (L1) in order to make sense of incoming, new information (L2), in this case, the English language.

First graders are still in the process of acquiring competence in their first language which, when developed, will facilitate the processing of information and the development of cognitive skills. This, it may be argued, makes for easier transference to the second language. But there has been increasing

calls for the expansion of high quality pre-school opportunities for all children (National Research Council Institute of Medicine 1998: 16-18) in order to develop and maintain language from an early age. With reference to the Foundation Phase OBE curriculum, South African National Department of Education (1995:33, par.73) acknowledges that “ ... the care and development of young children must be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of human resources development strategies from community to national levels”. Language proficiency is the result of a combination of co- and extra-curricular activities that the learner is exposed to at school and socio-culturally. The transition from home to school can be made easier and quicker simply by the use of the mother tongue.

It is a commonly held notion that academic failure of L2 learners is primarily attributable to a lack in proficiency in the L2 because, as Wang (1996:8) puts it, “ ... the higher the proficiency in English, the better the academic achievement”. The National Research Council Institute of Medicine (1998:10) further emphasises that “ ... the use of the child’s native language does not impede the acquisition of English”, thereby indicating that language transfer does play an important role in second language acquisition. When learners have to make a transition from their home language to an additional language for learning and teaching, particularly in the Foundation Phase, careful planning is necessary (South African Department of Education 2002:20). A possibility exists that L2 learners may suffer adverse results if they don’t continue to develop their first language alongside the second language. Given research pronouncements referred to above, it is apparent that proficiency in the first language can facilitate scholastic achievement in the second language. This explains, rather simplistically, why children who have limited language proficiency in the language of instruction perform poorly scholastically.

However, although Moonsamy (1995:5) endorses the value of the mother tongue, she highlights the position of the indigenous official African languages

in the present school system. These languages are underdeveloped and cannot, at present, present the required vocabulary in subjects like Mathematics and Science, for example. One must also be cognisant of the fact that it takes longer to learn a language that is typologically very different from the mother tongue than one that is relatively similar.

## **2.5 BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS**

English is taught as a second language at Foundation Phase level to provide L2 learners with firm basic reading and spelling skills. The logic behind this is that it will enable L2 learners to communicate, that is speak, read and write, effectively in English. The assumption is that this will enhance their confidence in language skills needed for oral skill in English in the Intermediate and Secondary Phases, and subsequently for later tertiary education and the job market.

This is crucial because languages are closely linked, first, to individuals' personal identities and to their social identities, as well as to communities in which they operate. Multilingualism, a characteristic of the South African society, is a valuable platform on which to develop a learner cognitively. Within such a context language is crucial to cognitive development and can subsequently have an impact on scholastic performance. Language learning is not only a matter of linguistic knowledge. According to Sharski (1997:57), learners who lack cognitive development might not understand ideas expressed, although they might have a good vocabulary base. It is for this reason that an investigation is being conducted on the performance of English L2 learners in reading and spelling. It also investigates reasons for the difficulties such learners experience in English second language acquisition.

The factors affecting reading development of the English first language speaker need to be taken a step further in the analysis of reading and spelling problems experienced by Zulu-speaking learners in English medium Foundation Phase classes. Various reasons can be cited for the difficulties these L2 learners experience with English as a medium of instruction. It is therefore imperative that an analysis of the realities existing at our schools, homes and communities is conducted. In terms of the boundaries of this study, I intend to research the problems associated with English as medium of instruction. The concomitant challenge of effective teaching, the key role of language and content, the implications for teacher education and in-service teacher training programmes in multicultural and multilingual classes (Lemmer 1996:325) are some issues that need investigation. Various types of barriers occur, inter alia, contextual, language factors and school factors.

### **2.5.1 Contextual barriers**

There are various contextual barriers to the acquisition of English by L2 learners in the Foundation Phase. The influence of the learner's socio-economic environment, language factors, parental involvement, family configuration, parent's educational status and the language and culture of the community will now be discussed.

#### **2.5.1.1 Socio-economic environment**

The socio-economic background plays a pivotal role in the language development of the L2 learner. The success at school of a learner from a normal non-dysfunctional middle class family may be ensured by full participation of the adults in the family. Very often, these learners get a glimpse of the classroom ambience by parents creating such events for their children before attending formal schooling. The transition from the home to

formal schooling becomes easier. One must not, however, be drawn to the fallacy that L2 learners come only from low socio-economic backgrounds. L2 learners can be found in any one of the wide spectrum of backgrounds ranging from the professional to the semi-literate to the illiterate, in cities to suburbs to townships and squatter camps to rural areas.

However, the very people who need to acquire English to empower themselves are the very people who could hardly afford their day-to-day basic requirements such as food, shelter, water, transport and electricity (Baloyi 2002a:3). Many English medium schools in the city of Durban and the larger Durban area admit Zulu speaking learners in the Foundation Phase. A large number of these learners live in squatter camps in and around Durban. On a daily basis they attend school thirsty for the knowledge that may take them away from the debilitating poverty that is their lives to the possible realisation of their dreams of a better life. However, the stark reality of their poverty comes in the form of a life that is close to starvation. It is the researcher's observation that too many of these learners attend school on empty stomachs, not just from a lack of not having had breakfast that morning, but probably two or three days without a meal, not to mention the absence of proper nutrition. Hungry, they fall off to sleep within an hour to two hours into a lesson.

It is the researcher's observation as a Foundation Phase educator that the learners' lethargy is also the result of their leaving home at unrealistic hours of the morning. They walk (or are transported) to schools that are situated in areas that are not a comfortable walking distance away from their homes. They arrive at school tired and late, causing them backlogs in the day's lessons. In addition, their homework has not been done for lack of proper lighting. Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995:307) have discovered that due to low and unstable incomes, there is often no electricity in their homes. This results in learners not having a restful and stimulating study environment as well as an experiential world that is limited. They believe that the learners' socio-

economic status is, in many respects, a major impediment to their progress. They do not have the luxury of electricity or mothers that arrive home from work during daylight to spend quality educational time with them. The learner attempts to complete the homework under candlelight and without adult supervision. This is the reality of a large majority of Zulu-speaking learners attending English medium schools.

"Children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds also face general linguistic deprivation. There is frequently a lack of books, magazines and newspapers, educational radio and television in the home, as well as the practice of communicative styles that are not consonant with those in the school. This kind of dissonance between home and school further diminishes the chances of school success" (Lemmer 1996:335). The Pan South African Language Board's (PSALB) Policy Discussion Paper (1995:18) further confirms that low literacy levels and language proficiency correlates with high unemployment levels and other forms of social ills. The constant disruption of schooling in Black communities in the past has resulted in backlogs in learning and the cumulative disadvantage of inferior education, thereby causing gaps in content knowledge which has made language learning difficult.

#### ***2.5.1.2 Parental involvement***

Calteaux (1996:153; 184) indicates that the most important support system for youth to remain at school is their families. Without the support of their families in terms of mental stimulation as well as sustained nutritional care, they will drop out of the school system. Parents of L2 learners have an important role to play in the education of their children and in preparing them for school. Correlational studies have reported positive relationships between parents' attitudes and learners' school performances (Wang 1996:12). As the primary care-givers of their children, it is imperative that they instil a sense of who they are, where they come from and to which ethnic group they belong, thereby

ensuring an identity and knowledge of their culture. Research on the role of parental involvement of L2 learners suggests differential effects of parents' involvement in different cultures (Wang 1996: 12). Morgan Naidoo (Baloyi 2002b:6) comments that one of the reasons for low pass rates is " ... the lack of commitment from parents in the affairs of their children".

### ***2.5.1.3 Family configuration***

Parents are sometimes neglectful of their children's education, among other things, because of the fact that they lack commitment and participation in the affairs of their children in general. Commenting on some of the reasons for the poor performance of learners, Morgan Naidoo (Baloyi 2002b:6) states that many English L2 learners in KZN come from families whose dynamics are not conducive to supporting the learning environment. According to research findings, many learners live with grandparents or with people who are not family, and the absence of biological parents makes it difficult for school personnel to relay the problems the learner could be experiencing. Furthermore, care-givers are sometimes not as committed to the education of their wards as natural parents would be. Henning (1998:14) reminds us of the fact that most parents have normal desires for their children, but the burdens of poverty and unemployment so many of them carry become obstacles in performing their parental role.

### ***2.5.1.4 Parent's educational status***

Not all parents of L2 learners who send their children to English medium schools ensure congruence between the language of instruction at school and the mother tongue spoken at home. The main reason for this, among others, is that they themselves received little, and sometimes no, schooling and are thus not proficient enough in English. Because of differences in the type of education received by parents and their children, and the paradigm shift in the

education system from the old traditional apartheid school system to the new OBE, parents are grappling with assisting their children at home. Low literacy levels in L2 among parents in the black communities contribute to their inability to function as proper primary educators of their children, which is exacerbated by a myriad of social difficulties. Lemmer (1996:334) explains that non-English parents may feel ill-equipped to assist their children with homework and assignments, or may fail to understand the special educational needs that stem from the learners' limited English proficiency. They may lack sufficient knowledge of the language of instruction at school. This creates a further gap between parents and their children.

Lemmer (1996:334) further states that important written communication in English from the school dealing with arrangements for homework, transportation, the learner's progress, parent-teacher conferences and codes of conduct lose their effectiveness when parents themselves have difficulty in understanding English. Calteaux (1996:150) explains that English, the standard language learnt at school, is neither the language of the father nor that of the mother, resulting in the learner having no recourse to a role model other than the class teacher, who may, or may not, be an ideal English teacher him/herself.

#### ***2.5.1.5 Language and culture of the community***

The use of the mother tongue is important for the preservation of the language and culture of a community in order to hold onto the identity of its people. The NAEYC's (1996:4) position on this is that parents should be encouraged to use and develop children's home language and early childhood educators should respect children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The retention of the mother tongue proponents insist on an L1 education for their children for fear of their language and culture becoming extinct. This is

especially true in the rural areas where the status of English is that of a foreign language (Lemmer 1996:330). When compared with the broader community, rural Black educators and learners are not sufficiently exposed to English. However, L2 learners from Black townships are often the objects of ridicule by their monolingual Zulu counterparts. They endure harsh criticism for adopting a language and culture other than that of their mother tongue. More often than not, non-English mother tongue speakers “ ... not only do not share the majority culture (of English first language speakers), but are subjected to a variety of acculturation pressures and social discriminations” (Mohanty 1995:775) in order to improve their social and economic success.

Blackledge (1999:181) argues that in order to acquire literacy in the L2, when language becomes the gatekeeper for higher education and employment, it may be necessary for the learner to adopt some cultural behaviours and values of the L2, and risk sacrificing cultural group identity. However, in reference to the mother tongue, he states (1999:183) that it is the core feature of their cultural identity, and should therefore take steps to maintain its use. Together with the language of a community, culture, traditions, group pride and attitudes, need to be maintained (Badenhorst, Calitz, van Schalkwyk, van Wyk & Kruger 1996:127). The NAEYC (1996:5) states that the loss of children's home language may result in the disruption of family communication patterns, which may lead to the loss of intergenerational wisdom; damage to individual and community esteem; and children's potential nonmastery of their home language or English. Saxena (Blackledge 1999:183) reports that Punjabi parents in Britain recognised the threat of loss of their language and cultural values in their communities. This spearheaded concerted efforts to open temples where their children could learn and appreciate their culture, religion and language.

L2 learners attending English medium schools are exposed to predominantly Eurocentric cultural literature, which is incongruent to what the learner is

exposed to at home. This is also true with English L1 learners who belong to cultures other than the Western cultures such as Chinese, Japanese, Indian and African. Rhymes, poems, songs, legends and fables of Eurocentric culture found in prescribed readers are alien to these learners. Curriculum policy makers must be cognisant that L1 and L2 learners from non-western cultures cannot identify with or comprehend the cultural content of the prescribed literature. This, to a large extent, impacts negatively on the learner's vocabulary and comprehension abilities. The Zulu-speaking English L2 learner also has a rich cultural background of indigenous folklore, as does the Indian, Chinese and Japanese English L1 learner. Sears (1998:79) reminds us that the " ... presence of such books affirm the existence of other languages and cultures. The class can derive meaning from the illustrations, and the texts provide a basis for talk about how different cultures express meaning in writing". When there is incongruence between the lifestyle and traditions of L1 and L2 learners, second language acquisition is slow and may even stop before proficiency is acquired (Lemmer 1996:336).

However, in the light of discussion about advocating multilingual and multicultural education in South Africa, one needs to take into account the necessity of adopting some of the culture and values of the L2 (as discussed by Blackledge above). The role played by the Anglo-centred childhood heritage of the native English-speaking learner's cultural world, which features strongly in the curricula, cannot be taken for granted. Textbooks and learning material draw on the Anglo-centred cultural background, presumably accumulated from the pre-school years. This repertoire of cultural knowledge is augmented during schooling, and references to the Western cultural background forms an important part of classroom practice in the English medium classroom (Lemmer 1996:336).

For most South African L2 learners, exposure to English is mainly limited to the classroom, television and radio stations. An L2 learner, whose home

background, social environment and wider community do not provide the necessary tools to communicate in English, experiences a great disadvantage. Therefore, when English is being taught, it must be made relevant to their daily lives, in and out of school. Consequently, learners become empowered by:

- ❖ attaining accuracy in speaking, reading and writing in English,
- ❖ comprehending what is conveyed when English is heard,
- ❖ reasoning logically in order to solve practical problems,
- ❖ relating to and communicating with others and
- ❖ using the proper personal and social skills when interacting with others, thereby improving their self-confidence and self-esteem in their progress towards self-actualisation.

### **2.5.2 Language factors**

With the main focus in this study centred on language, one needs to question what part language plays in our lives. Language forms an integral part of communication between people, taking either the primary verbal form or secondary written form, as well as being responsible for learning and cognitive development. The primary nature of language encompasses speaking and listening, while the secondary nature of language involves the written word, which is inclusive of reading and spelling.

#### **2.5.2.1 Language structure**

Universal to all languages is the language's multilevel structured system, which begins from the small single sound and builds up into larger units of words in sentences. Single sounds are combined to form a word, which when combined with other words give the words meaning. This in turn will make sense within the structure of a sentence.

In order to be able to read and spell in a second language the learner, as well as the educator, must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the principles of co-articulation and the physical properties of the sounds, inclusive of speech sounds or phonemes, of the L2. The foundation of language acquisition comprises phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.

**Phonology** forms the first level of language. Any alphabetic language comprises symbols that represent the sounds of the language, as Miller and Gillis (2000:221) put it: "It is the essential foundation upon which language is built. Many teachers are uninformed about the various levels of language. In order for their students to understand the foundation of any language, teachers themselves must understand how these parts fit together to form a whole".

**Morphology** is the second level of language. They give clues to meaning of words and an indication as to where these words fit into in sentences.

**Syntax** is the third level of language. This involves word order that leads into sentence structure.

**Semantics** is the fourth level of language. Words are finally put together in order so that they form a sentence, which has meaning. This is where comprehension becomes evident.

Miller and Gillis (2000:220) find that when children begin school they already have oral language experiences, which are then transferred into written language. They found that L2 learners who do not have any oral experience with the L2 would encounter difficulties in acquiring a second language.

Each language has specific sounds. To L2 learners these sounds are unfamiliar and would need to be taught to them as they do not form part of the learners' repertoire of phonetics from the L1. It has been the researcher's observation that although they may be able to identify the single sounds, L2

learners have difficulty in blending the sounds in the L2, resulting in poor spelling skills and an inability to decode difficult words in their readers. At times, L2 learners may be able to visually recognise the symbol of the sound quicker than auditory recognition, resulting in poor spelling abilities. Word attack skills are very poor, arising from problems in auditory and visual perceptual skills.

Various language disorders may be revealed due to interference of the mother tongue in the production and understanding of standard English. A common example is the interchangeable use of masculine and feminine forms of the pronoun, he or she, often used by African language speakers. When Pidgin English is used it causes problems of listening, interpreting, reading and writing (Lemmer 1996:335).

### ***2.5.2.2 Language as a learning barrier***

It is very clear that “ ... the motivation to learn English is extremely high among Black South Africans who assign a high value to English education” (Moonsamy 1995:4). The acquisition of more than one language needs to be encouraged among South African learners for reasons such as tertiary education, job acquisition, communication, personal fulfilment and finance. This is rightfully so if one would take into consideration the impact of being South African and not being proficient in English, (see 2.2). This in itself is a learning barrier, especially for those who want to proceed to tertiary institutions, the majority of which use English as a medium of instruction.

Language is seen as a barrier for most people in developing countries. This impinges progress upon most students who do not have this language at a proficiency level (Baloyi 2002a:3). However, one must be cautious so as not to place a higher status on one official language over others. Languages need to

enjoy equal status so that no language and no speaker of a certain language are inferior to others (Martin 1996:8). Despite this, communities can be accused of being the culprits responsible for attributing different levels of status to languages according to their utility. It is mostly for this reason that we find a lower status assigned to languages of the home and culture, and a higher status assigned to the languages of commerce, international communications and tertiary education.

Languages that are typologically different will pose problems when the learner attempts to transfer concepts from the mother tongue to the L2 (see 2.4). This is evident in the difficulties experienced by L2 learners of Mathematics and Science in finding appropriate vocabulary in their mother tongue to translate into English, thereby contributing to their poor performance in these subjects. There is great disparity between the learner's proficiency in the L2 and the level of proficiency required to master new subject content through the medium of English. A recent study by Shireen Motala, an education researcher at the University of Witwatersrand, found that when comparing the performance of learners in Biology, Mathematics and Physical Science, Mathematics had the lowest pass rate of 43%. The current OBE school curriculum has failed in encouraging literacy in these subjects (Pretoria News 11 July 2000:6). Kader Asmal, Minister of Education, found in a study of Grade Three learners, that learners who wrote the national reading and writing test in their home language performed better than those who wrote in a second or third language (Daily News 2003:1).

English, as a second language, is inadequate when describing the needs of the black child learning in English, in an English medium school. So too are the principles of L2 instruction for the effective teaching of the L2 learner. There is a lack of understanding and knowledge of the aims and processes involved in language learning in a multilingual society (Lemmer 1996:331). Education Minister, Kader Asmal's ministry and department considered " ... language as a

barrier to learning, not only in the Foundation Phase, but in the entire system" (Daily News 2003:1).

### ***2.5.2.3 Perceptions of illiteracy***

More often than not, their educators at English medium schools consider Zulu-speaking learners, who are not proficient in English, as being illiterate or as having learning disabilities (Ekwall & Shanker 1988:12). They may consciously or unconsciously refuse to learn the specific cultural codes and competencies authorised by the dominant culture's view of literacy. While cultures differ in what they consider their 'texts', and the values they attach to these, they will also differ in what they regard as literate behaviour. Often second language learners are looked upon as "language invalids" (Sears 1998:71). A person may be considered 'illiterate' in one culture but literate in another culture, depending on what that particular language deems acceptable. However, where a number of cultures co-exist within the same community it is possible that various versions of literacy will emerge (Blackledge 1999:181).

In the Black communities, speaking English is synonymous with being educated while speaking only a Black language is synonymous with being uneducated (Dlamini 1998:19). This is why learners who are not proficient in English now have to deal with the community's poor language value system. This does nothing to bolster their already flagging self-concepts.

Language learners are often perceived as being cognitively and conceptually slow, when in fact it might well be their linguistic ability that is lagging (Sharski 1997:52). And yet, these same learners are interdependent individuals, capable of sharing their knowledge and skills with others socially. Literacy is not about only being able to read and write, but also being able to utilise these skills in a socially appropriate context (Blackledge 1999:180). "There is a

difference between being knowledgeable and speaking a particular language" (Dlamini 1998:19).

These learners are very often sidelined, thereby not receiving the necessary assistance to uplift them to an acceptable standard in order to level the playing fields. When educators are unaware of the origins of a learner's problem, they label the learner as slow or dyslexic. More often than not, there are no support structures (bridging classes in the Foundation Phase) in place for them at mainstream schools. In addition, there is a shortage of qualified bi- or multilingual educators who have the expertise to teach L2 learners who are experiencing problems.

#### ***2.5.2.4 Readers/vocabulary***

The main problem with basic readers is the vocabulary that they contain, as well as the vocabulary that is absent. There is a lack of cultural coherence in these readers.

There is a paucity of literate words for the L2 learner in the prescribed literature. Most editors are not interested in literary considerations and the development of a strong reading vocabulary that utilises the variables of ethnicity, race, gender and self-esteem. The inclusion of these variables could be used to boost ethnic self-esteem, provide role models, shape learner's attitudes and feelings on social issues, etc., in order to promote the virtues of a multilingual population. What we find are selections that are not overly concerned with the quality of their language (Stotsky 1999:178-179).

Meaning is difficult for learners to express and understand in the L2 and, as a consequence, they have problems with sequencing and forming an

association between structure and ideas. Comprehension becomes problematic as the vocabulary of the L2, which forms an essential part of meaning, causes a block in L2 acquisition (Miller & Gillis 2000:221). Mastery of a language involves not only the grammar but also the vocabulary, which is attained by reading widely. Dlamini (1998:19) has also observed that the Black public is generally not a reading public, thereby leaving Zulu speaking L2 learners with no support system.

Learning to read formally begins in the Foundation Phase but should not end after the Foundation Phase. Many L2 learners are, at that stage, still not proficient in the L2 decoding and encoding of phonemes and graphemes. Hutchinson, Whiteley and Smith (2000:45) report that L2 learners who experience language related and decoding difficulties will have limited compensatory strategies to facilitate the word recognition process. Their reading comprehension, which is indicative of poor use of semantic and syntactic cues, is lower than their reading accuracy, suggesting that their difficulties lie beyond single word decoding.

Rosowsky (2000:46; 51) discusses cultural referencing in the comprehension of texts and the multifaceted nature of word meaning which, depending on the sophistication of the reader, reveals or conceals intended meaning. Deciphering the meaning of words used in various contexts confuses the English L2 learner. An important relationship exists between reading comprehension performance and cultural bias. For many children whose cultural knowledge is different from the L1 majority, items that for the L2 does not, as yet, form part of their theory of the world, will find comprehension of such items in a text presenting severe problems.

As Sears (1998:75) puts it, comprehensible input is the level of language that is just beyond what learners can produce themselves. They tune-out matters that are of no interest to them and which contain too many language items

that are unfamiliar to them. Beginning learners gain little from unmoderated language environments in which the level of language is way above their own functioning that they do not gain any meaning. Unfamiliar topics used for teaching lessons cause learners to be overwhelmed by a flow of unknown words (Sears 1998:76).

#### ***2.5.2.5 Cognitive academic language proficiency***

The limited English proficiency of most L2 learners is not always noticeable in the informal environment where conversations are in the already acquired conversational colloquial language. But when in the classroom the use of formal language results in the L2 learner lacking the sophisticated command of the language, namely, the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

Performance in content subjects such as Numeracy and Lifeskills indicates that L2 learners are deficient in reading and writing skills, as well as the learning programme's technical vocabulary which are all necessary for passing into the next grade. An early immersion into the L2 at Foundation Phase level allows the L2 learner plenty of time to acquire CALP, which is vitally essential for success in the Intermediate and Secondary Phases. This is dependent on an appreciating language learning, which simultaneously encourages the maintenance of the mother tongue (Lemmer 1996:333).

The effect of cultural schemata on the L2 learners' comprehension of texts is one of cultural bias towards aspects of the texts. Apparent fluency in reading can often disguise a paucity of comprehension. Presenting weaker L2 readers with modified texts would be thought of as a method to solve the problem. However, English L2 learners will not make the necessary progress towards CALP if they are presented with English texts and tasks, which are linguistically and cognitively unchallenging (Rosowsky 2000: 50-52).

### **2.5.3 School factors**

The very environment in which the L2 learner is placed to receive the desired education is in itself a barrier to the acquisition of English as a second language. The influence of school factors such as educators, learner-educator ratios, educator training, the OBE curriculum and resources will now be discussed.

#### **2.5.3.1 Educators**

South African Department of Education (2000:13) highlights the need for educators to have a sound knowledge of subject content, strategies and resources to conduct the job better and in an effective way. As the mediator of learning, the educator will do so in a manner that is sensitive to the diverse needs of learners, including those with barriers to learning. The National Teacher Education Audit (1995) revealed that the majority of South African educators are either underqualified or unqualified to teach or frequently absent, thus reducing essential teaching-learning time. In essence, our country's education is in the hands of poorly educated educators who might alter the stated curriculum negatively (Vakalisa 2000:21-22).

Most new Foundation Phase L2 school goers encounter English for the first time at school as it is a language never spoken or heard of at home. The L2 learner's proficiency is therefore dependent entirely on the Foundation Phase educator. What is concerning, however, is that educators are placed in a dilemma as to how to cater for the needs of L2 learners while simultaneously keeping L1 learners stimulated and involved (Van der Walt & Dreyer 1995:307). If educators are not schooled in the language of the second language learner, as Ragaven (1998:2) puts it, they may lose the interest of the learner.

At school children are placed in the care of educators who do not share their cultural background or speak the same home language and thus cannot supply bilingual input. Educators who speak English as a L1, handicapped by their inability to speak Zulu, are unable to allow for learners' responses in the mother tongue, for switching of codes or the use of translation while teaching (Lemmer 1996:330-331). In English medium schools L2 learners are not only learning English but are also learning in English. Educators thus have the arduous task of meeting specific language needs.

In some cases learners are taught English by educators who themselves are not fluent or qualified to teach in the L2, while Black learners get little practice in the language because they learn English through teachers who are not native speakers. The teachers themselves may not have mastered the language and they thus violate the important aspects of English without realising it. Learners inherit this and the problem is compounded and perpetuated (Dlamini 1998:19). These educators themselves find it difficult to understand basic readers and are unable to express themselves correctly, pronounce English words correctly according to its phonetics, have poor spelling in L2 and are unable to comprehend English texts due to their poor understanding of word meanings. This leads to learners, from as early as Grade R to Grade Three, learning incorrect forms of English pronunciation, spelling and meaning of words. Sounds, which have distinct meanings in English, are unclear to Zulu speakers, whose language does not share the same phonetics (Lemmer 1996:334). Secemski, Deutsch and Adoram (2000:241) realise that there are educators of English who do not have knowledge of the structured teaching of phonological awareness. Learners are asked to focus on vocabulary before they listen to the spoken text leading to interference with their listening comprehension due to exposure to unfamiliar vocabulary (Hasan 2000:149).

Learners' interactions with their educators have a significant effect on their cognitive, emotional and social development. Educators who are not equipped to cope with bi- or multilingual classes place at risk these areas of development in the learner. Educators who allow considerable latitude in varieties of spoken English are often at a loss as to how to evaluate and effectively correct the errors made in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary (Lemmer 1996:335). These educators may not be able to assess adequately English L2 learners' understanding of academic content because of their limited English proficiency (Rhine 1995:382). They lack sensitivity when they correct every mistake the young learner makes. This drains the L2 learner's fragile confidence and trust in the educator (Sears 1998: 77). Due to the teachers' lack of knowledge of the mother tongue of L2 learners, they find it difficult to guide learners from mistakes made in the L2 (Vakalisa 2000:24).

### ***2.5.3.2 Learner-educator ratios***

Educators complain that the classes are too big, with the result that they are unable to attend to learners' individual learning needs. OBE advocates that learners be taught either individually, in pairs, in groups or as a whole class, depending on the type of lesson for the day. This approach implies that learners can at least be able to move at their own pace through the different learning areas (Kokot 1997:21). Large classes hinder educators' implementation of most of these methods, leaving opportunities only for mostly group and whole class teaching. This further hampers identification of individual learner problems and learner progression at individual pacing. Sharski (1997:52) maintains that while some learners learn a language at a faster pace than others, the majority take time, need practice, and require repetition of one sort or another. Assessments of an individual learner's progress and provision of individual remediation becomes an almost impossible task for the educator. This flies in the face of lesson and

assessment preconditions set out in OBE. Educators needing to get to individual L2 learners who are experiencing problems in English, seldom do because of a teacher to learner ratio of 1 to 40 (Kokot 1997:21). L2 learners are further disadvantaged in comparison to their L1 peers.

KZNDEC's implementation of the Post-Provisioning Norms of 1:36,1 has resulted in these large classes and the loss of experienced educators, leaving some schools grossly under-resourced. This often leads to educators becoming frustrated and experiencing low morale. "The increase in student numbers is a ready excuse for implementing 'chalk and talk' methods: outcomes-based education is surely designed for classrooms with fewer children" (Kokot 1997:22).

### ***2.5.3.3 Educator training***

Most teacher training institutions do not equip educators in second language acquisition or the principles that underpin bi- and multilingual education. The new OBE curriculum training does not include training of educators in multilingual education (Loubser 1997:28). Chisholm (2000:11) is of the opinion that teachers not being trained adequately to cope with multicultural and multilingual classes have confounded the curriculum. They are trained in monocultural institutions and have no previous experience of teaching in the multicultural and multilingual classroom. They are certified to teach English as either L1 or L2 on the basis of an assessment of their own language proficiency. They seldom have the knowledge or the skills to support English language learning under these conditions or to teach literacy skills across the entire curriculum. Many resort to rote learning and drill and the use of more than one language medium to teach (Lemmer 1996:329-331). This is contrary to what Curriculum 2005 advocates.

Although the one week OBE training of educators seemed to fulfil the National Department of Education's obligation to the Government of South Africa to prepare Grades One, Two and Three educators for Curriculum 2005, the credibility of the reasons for doing so are questionable. Educators have found that after this training they were more confused than they were before they began the training. The terminology used in OBE has caused frustration among educators, especially the Grade One educators, since they were the first to begin implementing Curriculum 2005. Educators experience difficulties when planning their daily lessons because of OBE vocabulary. Criticisms have been levelled at the complexity of the language, believing it to be an elitist language that requires extensive in-service training from outside experts (Vakalisa 2000:19).

Because educators in English medium schools are unable to communicate in the Zulu mother tongue, they are in a quandary about supplying bilingual language input. Black educators in rural areas lack sufficient exposure to English as well as the opportunity to practise English, which can be deemed as a foreign language rather than a second language (Lemmer 1996:330).

Secemski et al (2000:241) are of the opinion that there is a shortage of trained educators. These educators have both the necessary tools for creating multisensory materials to meet the specific needs of their L2 learners and are *au fait* with the structured teaching of phonological awareness, which forms the foundation of reading. Teacher-training courses must include this provision for educators of L2 learners.

In-service training for educators of L2 learners is sadly lacking. Although many English-speaking educators have taken the initiative to learn basic Zulu they do not have the training in teaching a bilingual class. This means that in-service training for the Foundation Phase educator in the effective teaching of the

fundamentals of English as the L2 and the latest methods and materials in L2 education is essential because it is in this phase that the foundations of language are laid. However, the question is whether the Department of Education has the funds to implement this much-needed resource. Media reports have gone so far as to highlight the exhaustion of funds, even for the training of educators in OBE.

Hayes (1995:252) explains that in places where there are few opportunities to use English and the motivation to learn the language is limited, in-service training is essential. Classroom teaching methods are often unimaginative and heavily teacher-centred, further depressing learner interest. There is a general lack of effective teaching and learning activities by educators in bilingual classes. In-service training needs to hone on bilingual teaching and learning methods in South African schools. A teacher-training audit completed in 1997 showed how poorly served South Africa has been in this regard (Henning 1998:14). Kokot (1997:22) believes that " ... the responsibility of accommodating children at different levels of ability and interest will be the teachers' and, by implication, their trainers. There is no doubt whatsoever that pre- and in-service teacher training will have to be urgently revised if teachers are expected to deal with so many individual learners in the classroom".

#### ***2.5.3.4 OBE curriculum***

In most schools there has been a pattern of rote learning in the first years, which has been hard to break and has resulted in a loss of interest and curiosity on the part of both educators and learners alike. Existing teaching strategies, assessment and promotion regulations have not taken into account the need for more organised structures than those provided to enable the learners to develop satisfactorily, hence the poor matric results (Henning 1998:14).

With the recent curriculum paradigm shift to OBE educators are confounded and intimidated by the new terminology. Research results of a study by the Gauteng Institute for Curriculum Development (GICD) has shown unhappiness among educators about the Grade One implementation of Curriculum 2005 in 1998 (Vakalisa 2000:19).

### **2.5.3.5 Resources**

Effective lessons depend on the availability of resources such as readers, audio-visual aids, well-equipped libraries, electricity, furniture and resources from the home and surrounding environment. The success of lessons using OBE depends not only on resources available at the school, but also from the home or the surrounding environment. However, where OBE resources were being used, schools were experiencing difficulties with the distribution of learning manuals for Grade One (Vakalisa 2000:22). These materials were either in short supply, of inferior quality or arrived late at some schools. In some schools all of these have happened.

Since the majority of L2 learners entering the Foundation Phase do not speak English, schooling becomes their only exposure to the language and its accompanying culture. According to Kreuger and Braun (1998:410) "... this means that they must meet the challenge of learning a new language and learning to read simultaneously in the absence of any external support. For many children this twofold task is too great and they fall behind in their first year at school". The lack of accessibility to relevant resources further hinders the learner's acquisition of English as a second language. Accessibility to reading material and human resources, such as family and friends in English for most L2 learners is almost non-existent outside school.

Because of the historical inequalities of the former apartheid government, very few black townships have libraries that would provide some access to English

reading material. Those townships that do have newly established libraries are few and far between. Learners have to travel long distances to these libraries. For many they would have to do without such a luxury because of the high cost of travelling to such places regularly.

Learners attending schools that do have established library facilities find that accessibility is often neglected. Because of overcrowding in the classes, in addition to the endless demands made on them, educators very seldom utilise the media specialist or expose learners to the school library. Classroom educators have to experiment with limited resources in complex linguistic situations to meet a wide range of local needs (Lemmer1996:328). *Business Day* (2000:2) revealed that the 1995 school register of needs showed that only 30% of South African schools had libraries.

When educators request for English language resources, such as magazines or newspapers, to be brought from home for lessons, the educator is faced with a dilemma of having learners attend a lesson with no resources. Most Zulu homes do not have reading material in English. In addition, Calteaux (1996:184) found that " ... [p]oor homes lack books, newspapers, and periodicals which stimulate language and reading skills as well as positive values".

In classrooms where reading material are available, provision is not made for proper selection of readers that consider the plight of the L2 learner. Very often readers are selected at the level at which only English first language learners would be comfortable. Beginning L2 learners with low reading skills are often found with readers that are too difficult for them. Koskiken *et al* (1999:434) found that they read less, are less likely to read at home, and are unable to develop automaticity necessary for comprehension.

Due to the inequalities of the past, many schools are in a deplorable condition. It is with regret that these schools under the new democratic government, are

still disadvantaged by the education departments because of a lack of substantial funding that will bring them on par with advantaged schools. Foundation Phase educators, as a consequence struggle against all odds to provide supportive language environments in their classrooms for their L2 learners. Shortages of teaching media hinder the learner's journey towards proficiency in English. Teaching media are valuable in the explanation, consolidation and clarification of concrete and abstract concepts.

Historically in South Africa, the vast language differences have been seen as cultural handicaps. From Grade One educators need to instil in their learners respect for other languages and cultures, resulting in an additional resource, that of cultural resources.

#### **2.5.4 Intrinsic learner barriers**

Understanding the role intrinsic factors play in the acquisition of English as a second language requires important consideration. These factors include attitude, motivation, age, affect, anxiety, proficiency, etc. The linguistic knowledge and skills the L2 learner will acquire are largely dependent on the individual learner's characteristics.

##### **2.5.4.1 Proficiency**

In 1991 limited English proficiency Zulu-speaking Grade One learners entered the school system at former segregated white schools by passing the schools' own admission policy tests. However, although they had sufficient fluency in English to have passed the tests, they sometimes lacked the command of English that was necessary to pass Grade One. L2 learners being placed in the same classes as English L1 learners compounded this problem. They found themselves at risk of underachieving because, in addition to satisfying the

standards of English as a subject, they had to do so at the same level as their English L1 classmates (Lemmer 1996:331).

Sharski (1997:52) has found that the majority of the learners are being taught subject content in a language that they are still busy learning. A few Black learners have the basics of English, while the vast majority doesn't because they don't speak it at home, and they learn English through educators who are not English mother tongue speakers.

Zulu speaking Foundation Phase learners admitted into English medium classes " ... without simultaneous attention to the mother tongue means that the child is not allowed sufficient time to develop proficiency in his or her mother tongue. ... Failure to reach adequate levels of language skills in the mother tongue before the introduction of English means that many children suffer the negative effects of semilingualism" (Lemmer 1996:333). The implications are that the English L2 learner would only be able to speak about school in English and about their home environment in their mother tongue, rendering the learner functionally illiterate in both languages later in life.

#### ***2.5.4.2 Neuropsychological perspective on age***

Robertson (2000:206) reveals that brain activity, while listening to an unknown language, was reduced in the active language areas. This is in direct contrast to brain activity when exposure is to a known language. Increased language activation is found in the classic language areas of the left hemisphere, including the angular gyrus, as well as in the cerebellum in the right hemisphere. The authors suggest that the differences might be related to the age of exposure to the language and thus concluded that " ... the cortical areas are not responsive to a language after the age of seven years" (Robertson 2000:206). This represents the sensitive period of language acquisition (Jordens 1996:27).

A study by Perani *et al*, in Robertson (2000:206) demonstrates the importance of the age of acquisition and degree of proficiency of the second language. They found that low proficiency individuals with various brain regions are geared to cope with the dimensions of L2 as compared to L1. Increases in proficiency revealed that highly proficient bilinguals used the same neural mechanisms to deal with both languages. Only late bilinguals reaching high proficiency showed activation patterns similar to mother tongue speakers. Their data endorsed the notion that age of acquisition was the main determinant of proficiency. This is evident when older Foundation Phase learners spend a year or two at a Zulu medium school before admission to an English medium school. They often experience backlogs in proficiency in the L2, as compared to those Zulu-speaking learners who enter school for the first time at an English medium school. Although learners may begin learning English from Grade One, Dlamini (1998:19) is of the opinion that L2 learners need a lot of time to master it. Most of them hardly master English by Grade Twelve because they begin learning the L2 at the fifth or sixth year of school.

Educational policymakers should be cognisant of the age factor when formulating policies on second languages.

#### **2.5.4.3 Affective barriers**

Learners' individual attributes have a major role to play in second language acquisition. These include, among others, motivation, attitude, emotions, self-confidence, aptitude, anxiety and personality. For some young children, entering a new school environment can be intimidating. Educators of Foundation Phase L2 learners must recognise the feelings of loneliness, fear, bewilderment and abandonment these young children may feel when they are thrust into settings that isolate them from their home community and language (NAEYC 1996:5). These young children have the unenviable task of making

major adjustments to their lives. They have to adapt to the learning of a new language, a new school, relating to others who are initially strangers to them and to find a place in the social groupings of the class (Sears 1998:31). Further, black learners in formerly only-white schools have no black role models among their educators. Both educators and learners end up not understanding each other (Vakalisa 2000:24), leaving the learner feeling bereft of affective support and the educator helpless to provide this support to the learner.

The challenges that the L2 Foundation Phase learner has to endure at school are emotionally demanding. The learner encounters the formidable task of acquiring the cognitive academic proficiency of English while simultaneously mastering other subject content in English at the same pace as that of English L1 learners. The dichotomy of living between the two cultures of the home and the school places the Foundation Phase learner in a difficult situation - which of the two cultures to choose from. This difficult situation creates stress due to the continuous pressure placed on the young learner. Ford (1993:49) found that many black learners feel alienated, unaccepted and unconnected to learners whose culture, values and beliefs are different from theirs. Such learners may become introverted or withdrawn as a result of their poor social and emotional relationships.

A lack of congruence between parents' and educators' expectations creates an additional burden on L2 learners who are left on their own to determine the implicit rules and expectations that govern the classroom (Okagaki & Diamond 2000:76). A chasm is formed between the home and the school, causing a dissociation of learning from the home. As a result of schooling learners adopt new behaviour patterns that are not understood by older members of the family (Lemmer 1996:336), thereby causing undue stress to the young learner.

The impact of emotional trauma, bewilderment and frustrations has resulted in severe backlogs in the acquisition of English L2 by Zulu-speaking learners. The ongoing violence in Black townships in South Africa has resulted in learners experiencing severe emotional trauma. They experience frustrations when they know the answers to questions posed, but lack the adequate vocabulary to express it. Stress negatively affects the learners' academic progress and acquisition of English (Lemmer 1996:336).

Reading material that espouses only Western folklore and not from that of the L2 learners' cultures may create feelings of loss of self-respect and pride in their cultures and traditions (Sears 1998:79). According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, learners in a less-than-optimal state will experience a mental block which prevents them from utilising linguistic input fully for language acquisition (Wang 1996:13).

#### **2.5.4.4 Motivation**

Gardner and Tremblay (1998:31) consider motivation to be the major factor influencing second language acquisition. Day and Bamford (1998:27) believe that " ... a failure to have positive attitudes or the appropriate materials would result in a lack of the necessary motivation for a learner to decide to read the second language". Despite massive effort and input by the school, some learners may be closed to language instruction. Language development can only result from English input when motivation is high, self-confidence is strong and anxiety is low (Lemmer 1996:337).

Educators who correct every slip the L2 learner makes will find that the learner may not want to utilise the trial and error method of L2 learning, which is at the core of language acquisition. Learners who go through this feel down-cast and demotivated from making further efforts (Sears 1998:77). Low-level abilities to read lowers expectations of success, and, consequently, lowering the

motivation to read (Day & Bamford 1998:29). Gardner's (1979) earlier research confirmed that motivation was one of the determinants of second language acquisition. However, other studies supported bi-directional causality between motivation and achievement (Wang 1996:14).

#### ***2.5.4.5 Attitude***

An attitude is a disposition of a person to respond favourably or unfavourably towards an entity. Any valuable input that L2 learners receive from the school will fail to be processed if they are emotionally insecure and lack a positive attitude (Lemmer 1996:337). L2 learners who refuse to move away from the traditional conservative attitude regarding English as a threat to their cultural identity will experience stumbling blocks in L2 acquisition (Van der Walt & Dreyer 1997:220). This is illustrated by Day and Bamford (1998: 23-24) who found that learners " ... for whom first language reading is less attractive or important will come to second language reading with less than positive, or even negative, attitudes. [N]egative attitudes cut across reading proficiency, and can be held by students who are considered successes in terms of learning to read".

#### ***2.5.4.6 Anxiety***

Researchers in L2 proficiency have recognised the potentially negative effect anxiety can have on language learning. Repeated negative experiences during the year may have contributed to a heightened form of anxiety along with poor performance (Van der Walt & Dreyer 1997:219). When one experiences difficulties with aspects of one's mother tongue, it may contribute to poor performance in an L2 class, thus causing undue anxiety.

#### ***2.5.4.7 Cognitive perspective***

Reading, comprehension and spelling difficulties of English L2 learners can be viewed from a cognitive perspective. Listening plays a major role in language acquisition. Goh (2000:55) examines these difficulties within the three-phase model of language comprehension.

Problems occur during cognitive processing phases of perception, parsing and utilisation. Low-level processing contributes significantly to reading, comprehension and spelling problems. **Perception** problems include problems with recognising sounds as distinct words or groups of words and attention failure. Problems with **parsing** include difficulties with developing coherent mental representation of words heard during, for example, a spelling test. The **utilisation** stage includes difficulties with understanding the intended message due to an inability to process the text because of a lack of or inappropriate application of prior knowledge.

English L2 learners are just beginning to learn English in the Foundation Phase and their speech perception skills are not fully automatised. Limited short-term memory capacity is responsible for the little or total lack of availability of mental capacity, which is absolutely necessary for high level processing which forms meaningful associations with existing knowledge in long-term memory. English L2 learners' listening capacities are underdeveloped, making texts transient and containing unfamiliar phonological and lexico-grammatical features (Goh 2000: 59-69).

#### **2.5.4.8 Learning styles**

Educators teach reading with the knowledge that all their learners in the class should be able to comprehend what they are reading, ignoring the fact that second language learners also possess different learning styles. The NAEYC (1996:4) advocates that early childhood educators should respect their learners' diverse learning styles. Each learner's way of learning a new

language needs to be viewed as acceptable, logical, and part of the ongoing development and learning of a new language. Educators not trained in bilingual education are in a quandary about how to base instructional decisions regarding the different learning styles. "Occasionally new children have difficulty in making sense of the learning and teaching modes" (Sears 1998:78) of the school.

Educators' assessments of English L1 learners differed from their assessment of L2 learners, underestimating the performance of L2 learners (Rhine 1995: 383). This is because they fail to take into consideration the effects of cultural schemata on learners' comprehension abilities. Educators should show greater sensitivity to the needs of such learners by making adjustments to set methods of teaching reading (Rosowsky 2000:51).

Huss (1995:768) found in her research that beginning English L2 learners used learning strategies that ranged from the interactive to the independent by using adults and their peers. One of the styles used was that of using educator and peer mentors. This can have dire consequences in the South African context in Foundation Phase classrooms if the educator is not a bilingual role model, or the peer is not proficient in English as an L1 or L2.

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

Language is the gateway to communication and in order to communicate, the acquisition of proficiency in the language is paramount. Therefore, learners need to be proficient in the language of instruction in order to derive the full benefit of an education. This is not always easy, especially for black L2 school beginners who are sent to school for the first time to learn in a language that is foreign to them and amongst people they perceive as linguistically, culturally and physically different from them.

The difficulties experienced by Foundation Phase English L2 learners as school beginners are compounded by barriers against which they come up. These barriers are inclusive of contextual factors, learner factors and school factors. More importantly, is the inter-relatedness of the barriers, depending on the circumstances in which learners find themselves.

From the aforementioned literature study it is evident that Foundation Phase L2 learners are disadvantaged even before they enter the classroom. The relevant stakeholders in the lives of Foundation Phase L2 learners must be cognisant of the impact they have on the holistic development of these school beginners. Where some of us take literacy for granted, the L2 learner battles to come to terms with it. Each L2 learner's experience of reading, spelling and comprehension is individual and different, depending on each one's circumstances. Socio-economic status, the degree of parental involvement in L2 acquisition, resources, funding and curriculum planning are extrinsic barriers over which L2 Foundation Phase learners have no control. However, the learner does have a degree of control over some intrinsic barriers such as attitude, motivation and self-esteem, among others. This is the starting point for the learner, which will in turn affect the manner in which English is acquired as a second language. The learner has to be able to use the second language independently and proficiently to be successful in it. It is no great wonder that Foundation Phase L2 learners do not experience success in the L2 when they have to contend with a barrage of barriers over which they have very little control.

Parents, educators, the community, Departments of Education and Government have to work together with L2 learners to provide an education for them that will yield well-developed individuals who will contribute to the success of the communities in which they live.

In the next chapter the research design of the empirical investigation of the barriers affecting the acquisition of English by Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase learners will be described.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the preceding chapter the barriers in acquiring basic English reading and spelling skills by Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase learners were explored through literature study. In this chapter the research design will be used to assess the factors that affect the Foundation Phase L2 learner's acquisition of basic English reading and spelling skills as well as the relationship between the two.

Attention will be given to the research question, the hypotheses, selection of the participants, a description of the measuring instruments used, development and administration of the questionnaire, data collection and analysis of the data collected.

#### **3.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM**

The general research problem, as stated in Chapter one (section 1.2.3), is:

What are the barriers in acquiring basic English reading and spelling skills by Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners?

Therefore, in view of the preceding literature study, the following specific research problem questions were identified. It is these questions which will direct the hypotheses and the empirical investigation.

- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between parental involvement in their children's education and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between L2 learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of prescribed literature that includes the L2 learner's culture?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between the L2 learner's proficiency in English language structure and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and the proficiency of the educator in the teaching of English as a second language?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learners' ability to converse in English?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between the L2 learner's fear to respond to tasks and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English?
- ❖ Is there a significant relationship between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure?

Information on possible barriers was identified during the literature investigation. It was this information that was used to compile the questionnaire.

The aim of the empirical investigation is to apply the information gleaned from the questionnaire to the contextual, language, school and intrinsic factors in order to determine the outcome, which will then be compared with the literature findings.

The investigation will concentrate on parental role, socio-economic background, the L2 learner's knowledge of English language structure, the educator's proficiency in the English language structure and the L2 learner's fears. It becomes necessary to determine whether these factors hinder Zulu-speaking learners in their acquisition of basic English reading and spelling skills, and the extent to which these factors are related to their performance in the English-medium classroom. Therefore, in view of the aforementioned aim and the preceding literature study, it becomes necessary to test the following hypotheses.

### **3.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses are formulated from the research questions:

#### **Hypothesis 1**

##### *Null-hypothesis*

H01: There is no significant correlation between parental involvement and the learner's ability to converse in English.

#### **Hypothesis 2**

##### *Null-hypothesis*

H02: There is no significant relationship between L2 learners who come from

poor socio-economic backgrounds and their ability to converse in English.

### **Hypothesis 3**

#### *Null-hypothesis*

H03: There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of prescribed literature that includes the L2 learner's culture.

### **Hypothesis 4**

#### *Null-hypothesis*

H04: There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's proficiency in English language structure and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

### **Hypothesis 5**

#### *Null-hypothesis*

H05: There is no significant relationship between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure.

### **Hypothesis 6**

#### *Null-hypothesis*

H06: There is no significant relationship between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and the proficiency of the educator in the teaching of English language structure.

### **Hypothesis 7**

#### *Null-hypothesis*

H07: There is no significant relationship between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learners' ability to

converse in English.

### **Hypothesis 8**

#### *Null-hypothesis*

H08: There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's fear to respond to tasks and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

### **Hypothesis 9**

#### *Null-hypothesis*

H09: There is no significant relationship between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure.

## **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

An *ex post facto* research ( descriptive, small-scale survey research presenting data for a retrospective enquiry) is conducted, which does not involve any experimentation, but rather, uses existing information as data to investigate the research problem.

The research methods used in this study were a literature study and an empirical investigation, which was conducted in the following manner. In the following discussion attention is given to the research sample, the design and administration of the questionnaire, as well as the pilot study.

### **3.4.1 Sampling**

A research sample was drawn from sixteen KZNDEC schools in the larger Durban area, and as such, they follow a similar syllabus. The rationale behind this choice is that Foundation Phase educators at these schools teach through the medium of English and service a large number of L2 learners. The present Foundation Phase syllabus follows the OBE curriculum of Curriculum 2005

(C2005). The demographics of these schools are ideal for investigating the research problem.

Due to the change in education policy after the birth of a democratic South Africa, all education departments began admitting learners of all races into their schools. As a result a large number of Zulu-speaking learners sought admission at English medium schools. The former Houses of Assembly, Representatives and Delegates administered these schools. All the English-medium schools chosen are in areas that Zulu-speaking learners attend. The schools in Isipingo admit L2 learners from Umlazi, Umbumbulu, Isipingo and Folweni; Merebank schools admit learners from Lamontville and Umlazi, and the Overport/ Sydenham and Durban Central areas admit learners from the city centre, Overport, Sydenham, Clare Estate, Chesterville, KwaMashu, Inanda, Umlazi and Cato Manor, among others. These L2 learners come from various socio-economic backgrounds. The target group is 104 Foundation Phase educators at the above-mentioned schools. The randomised cluster sampling method was utilised.

### **3.4.2 Instrument**

The questionnaire was compiled as an instrument to collect data on the barriers Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners experience in English reading and spelling. Closed form items were used in the design of the questionnaire to ensure that it kept the respondents on the subject and that they found it easy to fill out. It also promotes easy tabulation and analysis (Best & Kahn 1989:183).

The questionnaire was divided into four sections and it contained sixty-six items. The first section of ten multiple-choice questions centred around biographical information of the educator and L2 learners, some of which were gleaned from educators' records of learners. The second set of ten multiple-

choice questions required the educator to describe their training and proficiency in the first language and the L2 by rating the aforementioned variables either "good", "average" or "weak". The third and fourth sections comprising forty-six statements concentrated on contextual, language, school and intrinsic variables, which were interspersed. Educators were asked to respond to these statements on two five-point Likert scales. Section three ranged from "none" to "I don't know". The statements measured the level of learners who experienced the different barriers. Section four ranged from "strongly agree" to strongly disagree". It consisted of statements that measured the opinion of educators in respect of the barriers their learners experienced. This type of questionnaire gathers information about the respondent and then asks for the opinion of the respondent regarding factors that hinder acquisition of basic English reading and spelling skills. These barriers were identified in the literature study.

The following variable numbers were allocated to each of the four broad barriers that hinder the acquisition of English reading and spelling.

**Table 3.1 Allocation of variable numbers to barriers**

<b>ASPECT</b>	<b>VARIABLE NUMBER</b>
Contextual	23 25 26 27 29 38 39 54 55
Language	28 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37
School	21 22 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 61
Intrinsic	24 56 57 58 59 60 62 63 64 65 66

❖ **Contextual factors**

Questions were based on areas that were representative of the types of contextual barriers that learners experienced such as socio-economic environment, parental involvement, family configuration, parent's educational

status and the language and culture of the community. They were either positively or negatively worded and were arranged in random order.

#### ❖ **Language factors**

These included statements on language structure, cultural vocabulary, proficiency, perceptions of illiteracy, reading and cognitive development. The statements based on these sections ascertained the number of L2 learners experiencing these barriers, their effects and possible reasons for these barriers.

#### ❖ **School factors**

Statements in this section were chosen to examine the role of monolingual educators, funding, qualifications, resources, training, educator-learner ratios and curriculum on the L2 learner's acquisition of English reading and spelling skills.

#### ❖ **Intrinsic factors**

Section 2.5.4 of the literature study highlighted the intrinsic barriers L2 learners experienced. Eleven statements were developed, either positively or negatively, to ascertain possible psychological barriers to the acquisition of English reading and spelling skills.

### **3.4.3 Administration**

Data was collected by means of a questionnaire and response sheet (Annexure A). Permission was sought from, and granted by, the Acting Manager: Education Support Services from the Durban South Region to conduct the research at their schools (Annexure B). Each Principal was

approached with a copy of the letter from the Department of Education and a letter outlining the focus of the research (Annexure C). A sufficient number of questionnaires were put into A4 envelopes, on which appeared information such as number of questionnaires handed in and number returned. A letter informing them of the nature of the research, and the anonymity and confidentiality of the questionnaire was attached to the questionnaire (Annexure D). Questionnaires were handed to the sample after having explained the questionnaire in order to avoid misinterpretation of the questions. On the questionnaire itself respondents were informed of the vital importance of completing and returning the questionnaire expeditiously.

#### **3.4.4 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted among eight Foundation Phase educators from one school after seeking permission from the Principal to administer the questionnaire. Only a few minor adjustments were made to the questionnaire due to unforeseen problems that emerged during the pilot study. Thereafter the questionnaire was finalised and administered to the educators in the sample. Each school Principal, who was given clear guidelines on how the questionnaires were to be completed, guided the completion of the questionnaires.

#### **3.4.5 Collection of Data**

A date for the collection of the questionnaires was given to each school. In most cases schools were given approximately two days in which to complete the questionnaires. These were handed to and collected from each school personally. Most schools responded on time, while a few had not. A return visit was made to these schools. The questionnaires were checked on site so that any errors were corrected before collection. Of the 104 questionnaires

sent out 100 were completed and returned, this means 96.1% of the questionnaires handed out were returned.

### **3.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA**

The data gleaned from the questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis to determine the barriers L2 learners experienced in their acquisition of English spelling and reading skills. The data was sent to and processed by a statistician from the Department of Statistics at the University of South Africa to check for its validity and reliability.

Using this information the testing of the hypotheses was made possible by the use of the following statistical techniques: the correlational method using the product moment correlation coefficient, the Pearson  $r$  correlation. To determine whether or not to reject the null-hypothesis, a test of significance, namely the two-tailed test, was used. The probability level or level of significance was either at the 1% or 5% level. To determine differences and dependencies, correlational analysis using t-tests were used.

### **3.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

When executing measurements of any kind, two aspects must be taken into consideration: the validity and reliability of the measuring instrument used (Leedy 1993:40).

#### **3.6.1 Validity**

Mulder (1996:215) refers to validity as the degree to which a test succeeds in measuring what it is supposed to measure. A test is valid for a particular purpose and for a particular group (Gay 1992:155). Validity is concerned with

the effectiveness of the measuring instrument. The research study used two measures of validity: face validity and content validity.

### **3.6.1.1 Face validity**

This type of validity relies on the subjective judgement of the researcher. It requires that the researcher answer two questions:

- ❖ Is the instrument measuring what it is supposed to measure?
- ❖ Is the sample being measured adequate to be representative of the behaviour being measured (Leedy 1993:41)?

Experts in the areas under investigation have given their judgement on whether the items in the research tool have determined the barriers to the acquisition of English reading and spelling skills, as well as how they hinder acquisition.

### **3.6.1.2 Content validity**

It is concerned with how accurately the questions asked in the questionnaire elicit the information sought (Leedy 1993:41). According to Gay (1992:157) the areas covered by the test are validated by experts in those areas and by the literature study. In this research study the different barriers to the acquisition of basic skills in English reading and spelling by L2 learners have been validated by experts and by the literature study in Chapter Two to sample the concepts adequately.

### **3.6.2 Reliability**

Reliability refers to the level of consistency with which the questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure (Mulder 1996:209). A computer analysis will be used to check the reliability in this research study. This will be

executed by calculating the Cronbach alpha correlation coefficient of the scaled items, which is a split half method.

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

The explanation and detailed discussion of the research design of the empirical investigation was the focus of this chapter. The research problem statements were investigated from which the research hypotheses were stated. A brief description of the statistical techniques, which will be used to test the hypotheses in this investigation, was given.

The next chapter focuses on the findings and interpretation of the empirical investigation with regards to barriers that hinder Zulu-speaking learners in their acquisition of English reading and spelling skills in the Foundation Phase. This will be discussed in detail in order to determine whether the null hypotheses will be accepted or rejected.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter focused on a discussion of the empirical research design used to investigate the research questions. This chapter focuses on the findings and interpretation of the empirical investigation with regards to barriers that hinder Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners in their acquisition of English reading and spelling skills.

#### **4.2 RELIABILITY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The reliability of the questionnaire used in this study was checked by means of a computer analysis that used the Cronbach alpha correlation coefficient. This split-half method requires only one administration of the questionnaire. The questionnaire is then regarded as comprising two halves, with the even

numbers forming one half and the odd numbers the other half. A value of between 0.8 and 1 is a preferable reliability score. However, in this study the reliability was measured at 0.65, which is considered to be acceptable.

### 4.3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the hypotheses data was collected through the questionnaire. It was then processed, using the statistical techniques described in paragraph 3.5. The results emanating from these techniques will be discussed below.

#### 4.3.1 Results of the hypotheses

The correlation between the variables in each of the hypotheses is seen below in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 *Correlation between the variables in each of the hypotheses*

Hypotheses	Variables	Correlation	Significance
1	Parental involvement and learners' ability to converse in English	.301	p < 0.01
2	Socio-economic background and learners' ability to converse in English	.375	p < 0.01
3	Quantity of prescribed literature that includes L2 learner's culture, and learners' ability to converse in English	.123	p > 0.05
4	Learner's proficiency in English language structure and learner's ability to converse in English	.278	p < 0.01
5	Quality of educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching, and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure	.118	p > 0.05

6	Educator's proficiency in Zulu and the proficiency of the educator in the teaching of English language structure	-.202	p < 0.05
7	The availability of resources and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.	-.156	p > 0.05
8	L2 learner's fear to respond to tasks and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English	.300	p < 0.01
9	Knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure	.769	p < 0.01

Table 4.2 below demarcates which specific questions in the questionnaire collectively make up the different categories outlined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.2 *Questions from questionnaire which form the categories in the hypotheses*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Parental involvement	27 28
Learner's ability to converse in English	21 25 54 55 56
Socio-economic background	5 6 7 26
Quantity of prescribed literature having L2 learner's culture	34 35
Learner's proficiency in English language structure	30 36 37 38
Educator's training in OBE/bi-and multilingual teaching	12 13 14 15 40 49
Proficiency of educator in English language structure	18 41
Educator's proficiency in Zulu	16 17 42 53
Availability of resources	20 22 23 50 51 52
Learner's knowledge of phonetic skills	36 39 46 47 48
Learner's fears at attempting tasks	57 58 59 60 62

Below are separate detailed discussions of each research problem and hypothesis.

#### **4.3.2 Discussion of the results of the hypotheses**

#### 4.3.2.1 Hypothesis 1

H01: There is no significant correlation between parental involvement and the learner's ability to converse in English.

The correlation between parental involvement and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English is seen in Table 4.2.

Table 4.3 *Correlation between parental involvement and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
1	Parental involvement and learners' ability to converse in English	.301	p < 0.01

Table 4.3 indicates that:

- ❖ the correlation is significant at the 1%-level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis may be rejected at the 1%-level of significance. This means that there is a significant relationship between parental involvement and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.
- ❖ the correlation is low and positive - this means that as parental involvement increases, so too does the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

#### 4.3.2.2. Hypothesis 2

H02: There is no significant relationship between L2 learners who come from poor socio-economic backgrounds and their ability to converse in English.

The correlation between socio-economic background and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English is seen in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. *The relationship between socio-economic background and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
2	Socio-economic background and learners' ability to converse in English	.375	p < 0.01

Table 4.4 indicates that:

- ❖ the relationship is low and positive - which means that as the socio-economic background of the L2 learner decreases, so too does the L2 learner's ability to converse in the English language.
- ❖ the relationship is significant at the 1%-level of significance. Therefore, the null-hypothesis may be rejected at the 1%-level. This means that there is a significant relationship between the socio-economic status of L2 learners and their ability to converse in English.

#### 4.3.2.3 Hypothesis 3

H03: There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of the prescribed literature that includes the L2 learner's culture.

Table 4.5 below indicates the quantity of available prescribed literature that includes the L2 learner's culture.

Table 4.5 *Quantity of available prescribed literature, which includes the L2*

*learner's culture.*

Prescribed literature, which includes L2 learner's culture	Frequency	Percentage
None	25	25.0
A few	55	55.0
Most	15	15.0
Don't know	5	5.0
Total	100	100.0

80% of the sample indicated that a few to none of their prescribed literature included the L2 learner's culture. Only 15% of the sample indicated that most of their prescribed literature included the L2 learner's culture.

Table 4.6 below shows the frequency of the ability of L2 learners to converse in English. The frequency is the same as the percentage.

Table 4.6 *Frequency and percentages of the ability of L2 learners to converse in English*

	Good	Average	Weak
Ability to converse in English	11 (11%)	56 (56%)	33 (33%)

56% of the L2 learners showed average ability in conversing in English and 33% of the learners' ability at conversing in English was weak. In effect, 89% of L2 learners had average to weak ability as compared to only 11% who were good at conversing in the second language.

Tables 4.5 and 4.6 indicate that:

- ❖ the correlation is positive, which means that the less exposure L2 learners have of their culture in the L2 prescribed literature the less will be their ability to converse in English.

The correlation between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the exposure the L2 learner has of his/her culture in the L2 prescribed literature is seen in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 *The correlation between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of the prescribed literature that includes the L2 learner's culture*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
3	Prescribed literature which includes L2 learner's culture, and learners' ability to converse in English	.123	p > 0.05

Table 4.7 indicates that:

- ❖ the correlation is low
- ❖ the relationship is not significant on the 5%-level. Therefore, the null-hypothesis cannot be rejected on the 5%-level. This means that there is no significant correlation between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of prescribed literature, which includes the L2 learner's culture.

#### 4.3.2.4 Hypothesis 4

H04: There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's proficiency in English language structure and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

The frequency and percentages of L2 learners who are proficient in the different language structures in English is seen below in Table 4.8. Percentages and frequencies have the same quantity.

Table 4.8 *Percentages and frequencies of the extent of L2 learners who are proficient in English language structure*

Language structure	None	A few	Most	All	Don't know
Phonetics-decoding	6	70	23	0	1
-encoding	8	74	18	0	0
Morphology	6	83	10	0	1
Syntax	8	75	17	0	0
Semantics	8	76	14	1	1

Table 4.8 indicates that:

- ❖ Between 10% and 25% of the sample indicated that most of their L2 learners were proficient in the different language structures of English. However, between 70% to 83% of the sample indicated that only a few of their L2 learners were proficient in the different language structures of English.
- ❖ The above results will be examined in relation to the ability of L2 learners to converse in English, which is indicated in Table 4.5 above.

The results of Tables 4.6 and 4.8 indicate the following:

- ❖ Between 70% to 83% of the sample indicated that only a few of their L2 learners were proficient in the different English language structures.
- ❖ 89% of L2 learners had average to weak ability in conversing in English.
- ❖ This means that the less proficient L2 learners were in the different English language structures the less able were they in conversing in English.
- ❖ The relationship is positive.

The correlation between the L2 learner's knowledge of English language structure and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English can be seen in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 *The correlation between the L2 learner's knowledge of English language structure and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
s			e

4	Learner's knowledge of English language structure and learner's ability to converse in English	.278	p < 0.01
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Table 4.9 indicates that:

- ❖ The correlation is low.
- ❖ The correlation is significant on the 1%-level of significance. Therefore, the null-hypothesis may be rejected on the 1%-level. This means there is a significant relationship between knowledge of English language structure and the learner's ability to converse in English.

#### 4.3.2.5 Hypothesis 5

H05: There is no significant relationship between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure.

Figure 4.1 indicates the frequency of the quality of educators' training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching.

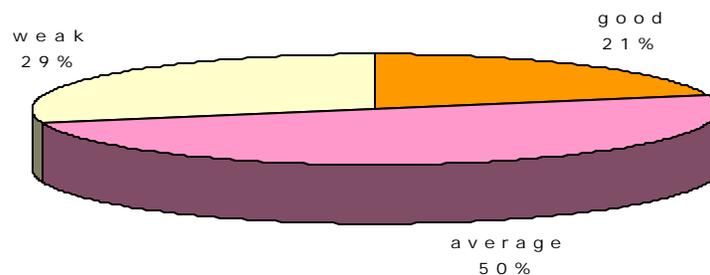


Figure 4.1 *Frequency of teacher training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching.*

Figure 4.1 indicates that 50% of educators has received training of an average quality in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching. 29% of educators believes that their training has been weak as compared to 21% who believe their training has been good. 71% received average to good training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching, while 79% of educators received average to weak training.

The proficiency of the educator in teaching the different English language structures is illustrated below in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 *The proficiency of the educator in teaching the different English language structures*

<b>Language structure</b>	<b>good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Weak</b>
Phonetics-decoding	91	7	2
-encoding	91	7	2
Morphology	89	10	1
Syntax	89	10	1
Semantics	88	11	1

Table 4.10 indicates that:

- ❖ more than 88% of educators was good at teaching the different English language structures and between 7% to 11% indicated an average proficiency and below 2% indicated that it was weak at teaching the different language structures.

Figure 4.1 and Table 4.10 indicate that:

- ❖ 79% of Foundation Phase educators, with average to weak training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching, produces over 88% of educators who are proficient in the teaching of the different English language structures.
- ❖ The relationship is negative.

The correlation between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure is seen in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11 *Correlation between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
5	Quality of educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching, and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure	.118	p > 0.05

Table 4.11 indicates that:

- ❖ the correlation is very low and negative. This means that the quality of training in OBE and bilingual and multilingual teaching does not share a significant relationship with the proficiency of the educator in teaching the different language structures.
- ❖ the correlation is not significant on the 5%-level of significance, thus the null-hypothesis may not be rejected on the 5%-level. This means that there is no significant relationship between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure.

#### 4.3.2.6 Hypothesis 6

H06: There is no significant relationship between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and the proficiency of the educator in the teaching of English language structures.

The percentage of educators who are proficient in Zulu can be seen in Figure 4.2.

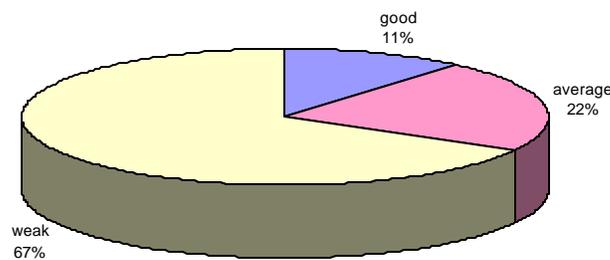


Figure 4.2 Percentage of the quality of educators' proficiency in Zulu

Figure 4.2 illustrates the percentage of the quality of educators' proficiency in Zulu as 67% being weak, 22% as being average and 11% as being good. When seen in relation to data in Table 4.9 below, indicating the proficiency of the educator in teaching the different English language structures, the following is noted:

- ❖ The proficiency in language structures in English is not adversely affected by the weak ability of the educator in Zulu.

Table 4.10 The proficiency of the educator in teaching the different English language structures

Language structure	good	Average	Weak
Phonetics-decoding	91	7	2

-encoding	91	7	2
Morphology	89	10	1
Syntax	89	10	1
Semantics	88	11	1

The correlation between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and in the teaching of English language structure in this sample is seen in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12 *Correlation between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and in the teaching of English language structure*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
6	Educator's proficiency in Zulu and the proficiency of the educator in the teaching of English language structure	-.202	p < 0.05

Table 4.12 indicates that:

- ❖ the correlation is low and negative. This means that although educators are less proficient in Zulu, their proficiency in teaching English language structures is not adversely affected.
- ❖ the correlation is significant at the 5%-level of significance. Thus the null-hypothesis may be rejected on the 5%-level. This means there is a significant relationship between educators' proficiency in Zulu and their proficiency in teaching different English language structures.

#### 4.3.2.7 Hypothesis 7

H07: There is no significant relationship between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

The following table shows the percentages and frequencies of the need for the availability of resources to ensure the success of lessons.

Table 4.13 *Percentages and frequencies of the need for resources to ensure the success of lessons*

<b>Resources</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>unsure</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
At school	34	58	8	0
At home	26	67	1	6
Surroundings	29	68	2	1

Table 4.13 illustrates the importance educators place on the different resources need to ensure successful lessons. 92% believes that resources at school are essential for successful teaching, 93% believes resources from the home are needed and 97% is of the opinion that resources from the environment are essential tools to ensure success in teaching L2 learners.

Resources form an integral part in the success of teaching English to second language learners.

Table 4.6 below (repeated here for easy access) shows the frequency of the ability of L2 learners to converse in English. The frequency is the same as the percentage.

Table 4.6 *Frequency and percentages of the ability of L2 learners to converse in English*

	<b>Good</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Weak</b>
Ability to converse in English	11 (11%)	56 (56%)	33 (33%)

The above two tables illustrate that resources alone cannot ensure successful teaching of L2 learners. The availability of resources, or lack thereof, produces 89% of average to weak conversation in English by L2 learners.

The following table shows the correlation between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learners' ability to converse in English.

Table 4.14 *Correlation between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
7	The availability of resources and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.	-.156	p > 0.05

Table 4.14 indicates that:

- ❖ the correlation is very low and negative. This means that although resources are essential for successful second language lessons, they result in producing only 11% above average conversation in English by L2 learners.
- ❖ the correlation is not significant at the 5%-level of significance. Therefore, the null-hypothesis may not be rejected at the 5%-level. There is no significant relationship between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

#### 4.3.2.8 Hypothesis 8

H08: There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's fear to respond to tasks and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

The table below highlights the percentages and frequencies of the fear of L2 learners to respond to tasks in English.

Table 4. 15 *Percentages and frequencies of the fear of L2 learners to respond to tasks in English.*

	Strongly agree	agree	unsure	disagree	Strongly disagree
L2 learners are afraid to respond to tasks	6	43	12	35	3

Table 4.15 indicates that:

- ❖ 49% of the sample is in agreement that L2 learners are afraid to respond to tasks in English, while 38% believes that L2 learners are not afraid to respond to tasks in English.
- ❖ the results of Table 4.6 above clearly illustrate that only 11% of L2 learners has a good conversation in English, while 89% of L2 learners is average to weak.

The correlation between the fear L2 learners have in responding to tasks in English and the ability of L2 learners to converse in English in the sample is seen in Table 4.16 below.

Tables 4.16 *Correlation between the fear L2 learners have in responding to tasks in English and the ability of L2 learners to converse in English*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
s			e

8	L2 learner's fear to respond to tasks and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English	.300	p < 0.01
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Table 4.16 indicates that:

- ❖ the correlation is low and positive. This means that the more difficulty L2 learners experience in conversing in English, the more afraid they are to respond to tasks in English.
- ❖ the correlation is significant at the 1%-level of significance. The null-hypothesis may be rejected at the 1%-level. There is a significant relationship between the fear L2 learners have in responding to tasks in English and the ability of L2 learners to converse in English.

#### 4.3.2.9 Hypothesis 9

H09: There is no significant relationship between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure.

The correlation between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure in the sample can be seen in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17 *Correlation between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure*

Hypothesis	Variables	Correlation	Significance
9	Knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure	.769	p < 0.01

Table 4.17 indicates that:

- ❖ the correlation is high and positive. This means that the more decoding and encoding phonetic skills L2 learners have, the better will be their knowledge of the English language structure.
- ❖ The correlation is significant at the 1%-level of significance. Therefore, the null-hypothesis is rejected at the 1%-level. There is a significant relationship between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure.

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

The findings and interpretation of this empirical investigation regarding barriers hindering Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners in their acquisition of English reading and spelling skills involved translating numerical data into meaningful information. A summary of the findings indicates that:

- ❖ The reliability of the questionnaire, using the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, measured 0.65. Although not a strong reliability, it is an acceptable level.
- ❖ Hypotheses were tested using the Pearson correlation. The 1% and 5% levels of significance were used to either reject or accept the null-hypotheses.
- ❖ The percentages and frequencies of the questions in the questionnaire were discussed.
- ❖ Although most of the correlations were low, they were positive and significant.
- ❖ The following conclusions were arrived at after testing the hypotheses:
  - ◆ There is a significant relationship between the role parents or guardians of second language learners play in their children's education and the L2 learners' ability to converse in English.

- ◆ There is a significant relationship between the socio-economic status of L2 learners and their ability to converse in English.
- ◆ There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of the L2 learner's culture that is included in the prescribed literature.
- ◆ There is a significant relationship between knowledge of English language structure and the learner's ability to converse in English.
- ◆ There is no significant relationship between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure.
- ◆ There is a significant relationship between an educator's proficiency in Zulu and his/her proficiency in teaching different English language structures, notwithstanding that the relationship is low and negative.
- ◆ There is no significant relationship between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.
- ◆ There is a significant relationship between the fear L2 learners experience in responding to tasks in English and the ability of L2 learners to converse in English.
- ◆ There is a significant relationship between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure.

This chapter sketched the results of the empirical investigation. The next chapter contains the conclusions that were drawn from the results of this study. Recommendations for future research are made and the limitations of the study highlighted.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The results of the empirical investigation were discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter explores the conclusions of the literature study and the empirical research with regards to factors that hinder Zulu-speaking L2 learners in their acquisition of English reading and spelling skills in the Foundation Phase. The limitations of the study are highlighted and recommendations that have educational implications are made for improving Foundation Phase L2 learners' acquisition of basic reading and spelling skills in English. The conclusions, recommendations and limitations are made on the basis of the findings in this investigation and are applicable to the schools involved in this research and, probably with minor adjustments, to any other context.

#### **5.2 CONCLUSIONS**

The following conclusions were reached from the literature study and from data collected and analysed in the empirical investigation. The question that initiated this study was "what are the barriers in acquiring basic English reading and spelling skills by Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase learners, and how do these factors hinder the acquisition of these skills"?

##### **5.2.1 Conclusions from the literature study**

The purpose of the exploration of the literature was to raise awareness of the current trends in research findings and thoughts regarding the teaching of English to Zulu-speaking learners in the Foundation Phase, proficiency in the mother tongue and factors that hinder their acquisition of English. This also gives rise to an exploration of how these barriers affect L2 learners in acquiring English reading and spelling skills.

#### *5.2.1.1 Proficiency in the mother tongue*

The first part of the literature study focused on the role that proficiency in Zulu plays in acquiring English reading and spelling skills. Mother tongue proficiency is a good indicator of second language development (see 2.4). The study examined the impact proficiency in the mother tongue has on the facilitation of the second language (Wang 1996:149). Knowledge of the basic concepts in the mother tongue reduces the fears and frustrations the L2 learner may experience when learning the second language. The processing of information in the mother tongue enhances the transfer of concepts to the second language. The higher the proficiency in English, the better the academic achievement (Wang 1996:8). Learners who have limited language proficiency in the second language perform poorly scholastically. However, Jordaan (1993:8) believes that the promotion of the second language is only partly dependent on the learner's competency in the first language. Moonsamy (1995:5) found that indigenous languages are not given enough attention at our schools to improve the mother tongue. This creates a void when learners require the appropriate vocabulary to transfer to the second language in subjects like Mathematics and science.

A well-debated aspect of language in our schools is whether L2 learners in the Foundation Phase should be taught only in their mother tongue or not. There is a general consensus that Foundation Phase learners are able to learn in a second language, except for a few necessary requirements. Finchilescue and

Nyawose (1998:58) are of the opinion that Zulu-speaking children should start their education first with a firm grounding in Zulu before learning in a second language. Jordaan (1993:8) agrees that English proficiency is partly dependent on the competency in the mother tongue. This facilitates conceptual learning and makes for easier transference from Zulu to English (South Africa Department of Education 2002:20). However, L2 learners may suffer academic failure if they lack proficiency in English (Wang 1996:8) and it is therefore necessary to develop their Zulu proficiency alongside that of English.

#### *5.2.1.2 Factors hindering L2 learners in their acquisition of English reading and spelling skills*

The second part of the literature study focused on the factors that hinder L2 learners in their acquisition of English reading and spelling skills. The factors were contextual, language, school and intrinsic learner barriers.

- **Contextual barriers** - The literature study investigated the socio-economic status of L2 learners and how it affects their linguistic and academic progress. Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995:307) found that it is a major impediment to their linguistic progress. Positive parental involvement and learner's academic performance are inextricably linked (Wang 1996:12), as is family configuration. Baloyi (2002b:6) found that abnormal family dynamics did not create a supportive learning environment for the L2 learner. The educational status of parents of L2 learners affects the performance of these learners in English. Low literacy levels in English, schooling in the traditional apartheid educational system, as well as minimal schooling among parents of L2 learners contribute to the poor performance in a second language (see 2.5.1.4). The incongruence between the language of learning (English) and the culture of the Zulu-speaking learner does not provide the L2 learner with the necessary tools towards proficiency in the L2 (see 2.5.1.5).

- **Language factors** - The structure of English language is different to that of Zulu (see 2.5.2.1). Moonsamy (1995:5) explains that it takes longer to learn a language that is typologically very different from the mother tongue. Language itself is seen as a barrier to learning for L2 learners. There is a great disparity between learning English and learning other subjects in English (see 2.5.2.2). Very often Zulu-speaking L2 learners are described as illiterate or having learning disabilities by their English-speaking educators who do not realise that " ... there is a difference between being knowledgeable and speaking a language" (Dlamini 1998:19). There are very few support structures to assist L2 learners in their acquisition of reading and spelling skills in a second language. The prescribed literature in the Foundation Phase contains very little of the L2 learner's cultural language. Sears (1998:75) explains that L2 learners tune out matters that are of no interest to them and which contain too many language items that are unfamiliar. These learners do not gain any meaning from a language that is way above their functioning.
  
- **School factors** - A majority of South African educators are not trained to teach bilingual or multilingual classes (see 2.5.3.1). English-speaking educators, not proficient in Zulu, may lose the interest of their L2 learners (Ragaven 1998:2) due to their inability to supply bilingual language input (Lemmer 1996:330). They are unable to allow for learners' responses in Zulu, the use of code switching or the adequate and fair assessment of L2 learners. Large learner-educator ratios leave L2 learners bereft of proper individual attention in cases of learning difficulties (see 2.5.3.2). Inadequate educator training in bilingual or multilingual education contributes to serious problems in multicultural classes.

Hayes (1995:252) found that in-service training is essential for upgrading and improving teaching skills and methodology. According to a teacher-

training audit in 1997, South African schools lack effective teaching and learning activities by educators in bilingual classes (Henning 1998:14). Vakalisa (2000:19) put the unhappiness among Foundation Phase educators down to the curriculum paradigm shift to OBE and its intimidating technical jargon.

The literature study examined the availability of resources for L2 learners (see 2.5.3.5). Kreuger and Braun (1998:410) found that L2 learners could not meet the challenge of simultaneously learning a new language and learning to read in the absence of any external support. The short supply of resources at school, home and surrounding environment creates a void in bilingual education. Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, questioned how OBE was implemented without libraries at our schools (Daily News 2003:1).

- **Intrinsic learner factors** - The literature study examined how proficiency, age, affective factors, motivation, attitude, anxiety, cognition and learning styles (see 2.5.4) affect the acquisition of reading and spelling skills in the second language.

Lemmer (1996:333) found that L2 learners in the Foundation Phase who fail to reach adequate levels of language skills in their mother tongue before learning English suffer the negative effects of semilingualism. Inadequate proficiency in Zulu and English will render the L2 learner functionally illiterate in both languages later in life.

A study by Robertson (2000:206) concluded that cortical areas in the brain are not responsive to a language after seven years of age, and this is regarded as the sensitive period of language acquisition by Jordens (1996:27). Older L2 learners experience backlogs in proficiency as compared to L2 learners who begin from an earlier age (see 2.5.4.2).

The impact of affective barriers results in severe backlogs in the acquisition of a second language (see 2.5.4.3). The NAEYC (1996:5) found that L2 learners experience loneliness, fear, bewilderment and abandonment when placed in an environment that isolates them from their home community and language. Vakalisa (2000:24) examined the effect the absence of black role models has on L2 learners when they attend former whites-only schools. She found out that learners are bereft of affective support from educators who are helpless to provide this support due to a lack of understanding between learners and themselves. Lemmer (1996:336) found that L2 learners experienced frustration when they knew the answers to questions posed to them, but lacked adequate vocabulary to express themselves, resulting in slow academic progress and acquisition of English. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypotheses (Wang 1996:13) validates this in a study which found that learners in a less than optimal state experienced a mental block, thus preventing the full utilisation of linguistic input for language acquisition. Day and Bramford (1998:27) believe that failure to have a positive attitude and a low-level reading ability in the mother tongue lowers the L2 learner's motivation to read in the second language. While Gardner's research (1979) concluded that motivation determines second language acquisition, Wang (1996:14) supported a bi-directional causality between motivation and achievement.

Van der Walt and Dreyer (1997:220) found that L2 learners who regarded English as a threat to their cultural identity experienced barriers in L2 acquisition. They also found that heightened forms of anxiety among L2 learners are caused by repeated negative experiences in class, thus resulting in poor performance (1997:219).

### 5.2.2 Conclusions from the empirical study

The empirical research was guided by the general research problem from which nine hypotheses were developed. The conclusions from each of the hypotheses are discussed separately.

- ❖ *There is a significant relationship between the role parents or guardians of second language learners play in their children's education and the L2 learners' ability to converse in English.*

There is a significant positive relationship between parental involvement in the learner's education and the learner's ability to learn English, as well as to learn in English. As parental involvement increases, so too does the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

- ❖ *There is a significant relationship between the socio-economic status of L2 learners and their ability to converse in English.*

As the socio-economic background of the L2 learner decreases, so too does the L2 learner's ability to converse in the English language. The poorer the home environment, the more likely it is that the L2 learner has minimal chances of exposure to the English language environment. In effect, the learner's ability to speak in English is minimal.

- ❖ *There is no significant relationship between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of the L2 learner's culture that is included in the prescribed literature.*

Although the correlation is positive (the less exposure L2 learners have of their culture in the L2 prescribed literature the less will be their ability to converse in English), it is low. This means that there is no significant correlation between

the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of the L2 learner's culture included in the prescribed literature.

❖ *There is a significant relationship between knowledge of English language structure and the learner's ability to converse in English.*

Only a few L2 learners were proficient in the different English language structures. Most L2 learners had average to weak ability in conversing in English. It seems that the less proficient L2 learners were in the different English language structures, the less able were they at conversing in English.

❖ *There is no significant relationship between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure.*

Most of the sample had received average to weak training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching. Most educators of L2 learners are proficient in the teaching of the different English language structures. The quality of training in OBE and bilingual and multilingual teaching does not impact on the proficiency of the educator in teaching the different English language structures.

❖ *There is a significant relationship between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and their proficiency in teaching different English language structures.*

Although educators are less proficient in Zulu, their proficiency in teaching English language structures is not adversely affected. This means there is a low but significant negative relationship between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and his/her proficiency in teaching different English language structures.

- ❖ *There is no significant relationship between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and L2 learners' ability to converse in English.*

11% of the sample indicated that L2 learners have above average ability to converse in English. The availability of resources (at school, home and environment) does not have a significant impact on improving the L2 learner's ability to converse in English.

- ❖ *There is a significant relationship between the fear L2 learners experience in responding to tasks in English and the ability of L2 learners to converse in English.*

L2 learners who have trouble conversing in English are afraid and reluctant to respond to tasks set in English.

- ❖ *There is a significant relationship between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure.*

L2 learners with decoding and encoding phonetic skills in English have a better knowledge of the English language structure.

### **5.2.3 Conclusions from the literature and empirical studies**

- ❖ Contextual factors

Parental involvement in L2 learners' education improves their ability to learn English and learn in English. Correlational studies by Wang (1996:12) support the positive relationship between parental involvement and the L2 learner's school performance. Low socio-economic environments and literacy levels of their parents tend to provide L2 learners with minimal chances of exposure to

the English language, thus effectly reducing their ability to speak in English. Van der Walt and Dreyer (1995:307) agree that the low socio-economic status of L2 learners is an impediment to their progress. Lemmer (1996:334) concurs that the low literacy levels in L2 among parents in Black communities render them unable to function as effective primary educators to their children.

❖ Language factors

This study found that a lack of exposure L2 learners have of their culture in the L2 prescribed literature does not affect their ability to converse in English. However, Rosowsky (2000:51) found that an important relationship exists between reading comprehension performance and cultural bias. The meaning of words in different contexts confuses the L2 learner further. L2 learners whose cultural knowledge is different from English L1 learners, find comprehension of items in the L2 text difficult (see 2.5.2.4). It seems that the less proficient L2 learners were in the different English language structures, the less able were they at conversing in English. The findings are similar to those presented by Miller and Gillis (2000:220).

❖ School factors

The quality of training in OBE and bilingual and multilingual teaching does not impact on the proficiency of the educator in teaching the different English language structures. It is noted that Lemmer (1996:334) did not find this. What was discovered was that educators who were not equipped to teach in bi- or multilingual classes placed at risk their L2 learners' emotional, cognitive and social development. Educators are unable to correctly teach the different English language structures because of a lack of understanding of the L2 learner's mother tongue, which could have been used to code-switch. The empirical study found that although educators are less proficient in Zulu, their proficiency in teaching English language structures is not adversely affected,

even though Vakalisa (2000:24) argues that an educator's lack of knowledge of Zulu creates a void when teaching English language structures to the L2 learner. Educators have difficulty in guiding the learner from mistakes committed. In addition, they are unable to assist L2 learners who are unable to learn English and other subjects in English. The survey showed that the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) does not have a significant impact at improving the L2 learners' ability to converse in English. However, only 11% of the sample indicated that their L2 learners have above average ability to converse in English. The literature study (see 2.5.3.5) indicates views that are contrary to the findings in the empirical study. A lack of relevant resources causes L2 learners to fall behind in their academic work and be hindered in their acquisition of English. A key finding in a report based on tests written by over 52000 Grade Three learners in South Africa was that the availability of resources at home was approximately 31%, with 57% of households having access to a television set, 23% to newspapers and magazines and 53% having less than ten books in their home (Daily News 2003:1).

❖ Intrinsic barriers

L2 learners who have trouble conversing in English are afraid and reluctant to respond to tasks set in English (see 2.5.4.3). They fear the reprisals meted out by their educator and/or peers for their perceived incorrectness. Their fear of embarrassment causes them to withdraw rather than provide the required work.

### **5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

During the course of this study several limitations were identified. Only the most significant limitations will be discussed below.

- ❖ This study provides the opinions of educators only. It would have been academically more sound for the study to have gained first hand the

opinions of Foundation Phase L2 learners about the difficulties and barriers they experience. Given the age of the learners and their limitations in reading and comprehending instructions in English, a questionnaire to be filled by Foundation Phase L2 learners would not have been feasible. In addition, the parameters within which this dissertation is written, that of a limited scope, does not allow for an indepth approach. A qualitative approach would have been ideal.

- ❖ The complexities of whether OBE prepares educators and learners for bilingual teaching and learning needs to be unravelled.
- ❖ Underreporting by educators may have occurred as a result of the personal nature of the items questioning their abilities to teach OBE and bilingual classes. This might have prevented them from answering truthfully and faithfully.
- ❖ The structured nature of the questionnaire limited the possibilities of exploring a wider field of areas to investigate, as unstructured and open-ended questions could do.

## **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Certain recommendations can be made in the light of the findings in this study.

### **5.4.1 Recommendations for schools**

- ❖ Schools need to employ the services of at least one Zulu-speaking educator. Zulu-speaking L2 learners must have Zulu lessons of at least an hour a week. These lessons would entail learning the Zulu equivalent of work they have been taught in English.
- ❖ Basic English phonetics must be taught and revised daily and educators must pronounce the phonetics slowly, clearly and correctly. Difficult words in prescribed readers must be taught in such a manner that L2 learners learn the word (sight vocabulary), its meaning and usage in a sentence before

being exposed to the reader. A thorough discussion of the reader must be embarked upon before actual reading begins. The sight vocabulary words should be used in as many written tasks as possible.

- ❖ L2 learners need to be exposed to a variety of reading material and other types of resources, for example, the school library, the natural environment and the surrounding physical environment.
- ❖ Schools and Governing bodies need to revisit their schools' language policies regarding the additional language taught at school. The second language should, of necessity, be the mother tongue of the Zulu-speaking learners.
- ❖ Psychological support/remedial teaching for L2 learners with learning disabilities.
- ❖ Support teams for educators.
- ❖ ABET classes in English for parents of L2 learners.
- ❖ Activities to reduce the gap of exposure to the various cultures at the school.

#### 5.4.2 Recommendations to parents of L2 learners

- ❖ Being vigilant with homework by checking and marking work before sending the learner to school.
- ❖ Expose the learner to as many environments as possible to gain a wider experience of the world. Use both languages (Zulu and English).
- ❖ Enrol the learner at the local library (if it is available).
- ❖ Talk about, and discuss, children's television programmes and books.

#### 5.4.3 Recommendations to educational authorities

- ❖ In-service training for bilingual teaching and OBE on a regular basis.
- ❖ Setting up proper and clearly delineated language policies regarding mother tongue education.

- ❖ Admission policies regarding second language learners. There should be a satisfactory level of knowledge and usage of the language of instruction by the L2 learner on admission to the school.
- ❖ Suitably qualified and experienced personnel to offer correct advice and support to educators.
- ❖ Proper resource materials to add strength to lessons.

#### 5.4.4 Recommendations for further research

- ❖ Research the impact of socio-economic environments and parental involvement on the L2 learner.
- ❖ Research the similarities and differences in the phonetic composition of the first language and the second language of the learner.
- ❖ Research the reasons parents have for enrolling their children (who have not had any exposure to the L2) in a school whose language of instruction is not the child's mother tongue.
- ❖ Research the lack of properly qualified and experienced personnel to provide support and advice to educators of L2 learners and its impact on the school system.
- ❖ Investigate the procedures and criteria used by the educational authorities in procuring written resources for Foundation Phase learners and the impact the quality of readers have on the L2 learner.
- ❖ Investigate the inclusion of culture sensitive stories and phonetically based readers in the Foundation Phase English curriculum.

## 5.5 SUMMARY

Our young democracy has introduced bi- and multilingualism to our schools. Both educators and parents were ill prepared for this new educational system. However, enthusiastic Black parents tested the waters by enrolling their children at English medium schools for their own reasons. Many did not, and

still do not, realise the repercussions of such a move if the child has not developed emotionally, cognitively, socially and physically to cope with such a change of cultural environment.

The researcher was interested in the difficulties Foundation Phase L2 learners experienced in reading and spelling in English and the factors responsible for these difficulties. A literature study was initiated to explore these curiosities. The barriers hindering the L2 learner were investigated and discussed. Hypotheses were developed for an empirical investigation that was researched at several Foundation Phase classes in the larger Durban area in Kwa Zulu Natal. The difficulties L2 learners experienced and the reasons for these problems were investigated. Several barriers to acquiring basic English reading and spelling skills were highlighted and examined.

The investigation led to the discovery of various significant relationships between variables. The research has shown that low socio-economic environments, lack of parental involvement, low educational status of parents, cognitive factors and various language, school and intrinsic factors, contribute to the problems L2 learners have when attempting to acquire basic English reading and spelling skills. Emanating from the conclusions at which the researcher arrived, recommendations were made and the limitations of the study were highlighted.

It is hoped that the education departments will be cognisant of the findings and recommendations. The only reason for this wish is to offer our future leaders a bright and fair beginning to a life that will provide them with all the necessary knowledge and skills to make their mark in this world, both nationally and internationally. We need to educate them to become a nation, one child at a time! We need to make them proud of themselves. We owe them this much!

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## **ANNEXURE A**

### **BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS BY ZULU- SPEAKING FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

(To be completed by the class teacher)

**Kindly read the following general instructions before you begin completing the questionnaire.**

**L2 refers to English that is being learnt as a Second Language by Zulu-speaking Grade 1 learners.**

- Please **DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME OR THE SCHOOL'S NAME** on the **questionnaire** or the **response page** provided !
- This is a **confidential questionnaire**. You can be assured that **no individual educator's name or school's name will be published**.
- Your assistance in completing this questionnaire and returning it as soon as possible will be appreciated, as this is vitally important to the study.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sandhya Mahabeer

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

- **Questions 1- 11** require each educator to provide **quantitative data**, ie., each educator has to count the number of L2 learners (either from your records or the learners themselves) according to the requirement of each statement .  
*The information asked for should be as accurate as possible.*
- For each item on the questionnaire **indicate your answer on the response page**, by **writing the selected number** in the **square** provided.
- Please make sure that the number on the questionnaire is the same number on the answer sheet.

1 Indicate the number of learners in your class.

Less than 30 = [1]

30 - 39 learners = [2]

40 - 49 learners = [3]

50 - 59 learners = [4]

60 or more = [5]

2 Indicate how many of your learners are **L2 learners**.

0 - 9 learners = [1]

10 - 19 learners = [2]

20 - 29 learners = [3]

30 or more learners = [4]

3. Indicate the average age of the **L2 learners** in your class.

Younger than 5 years [1]

5 years [2]

6 years [3]

7 years [4]

8 years or older [5]

4. The **home language** of most of the **L2 learners** is:

Zulu [1]

SeSotho [2]

Xhosa [3]

Setswana [4]

Ndebele [5]

Afrikaans [6]

Venda [7]

Seswati [8]

Other [9]

5. **Occupation** or similar occupation of **most parents** of **L2 learners**

<b>Unemployed</b>	[1]
<b>Housekeeper /gardener /labourer /cleaner</b>	[2]
<b>Vendor/informal trader/self-employed</b>	[3]
<b>Secretary /clerk /receptionist /typist /sales</b>	[4]
<b>Security officer /police / traffic officer</b>	[5]
<b>Teacher /nurse /social worker</b>	[6]
<b>Doctor /engineer /accountant /computer progr.</b>	[7]
<b>Businessman/ woman</b>	[8]
<b>Other</b>	[9]

6. Type of **residential environment** in which most L2 learners reside.

<b>Streets</b>	[1]
<b>Squatter camps/informal settlements</b>	[2]
<b>Shelters</b>	[3]
<b>Places of safety/children's homes</b>	[4]
<b>Suburbs</b>	[5]
<b>Townships</b>	[6]
<b>Cities</b>	[7]
<b>Rural areas</b>	[8]
<b>Other</b>	[9]

7. **Highest level of education** of **most parents** of **L2 learners**.

None	[1]
Grade 1-7	[2]
Grade 8-10	[3]
Grade11/12	[4]
Tertiary	[5]

8. What is your age?

18 - 25 years	= [1]
26 - 35 years	= [2]

- 36 - 45 years = [3]
- 46 - 55 years = [4]
- older than 55 years = [5]

9. What is your teaching experience?

- Less than 5 years = [1]
- 6 - 10 years = [2]
- 11 - 20 years = [3]
- 21 - 30 years = [4]
- over 30 years = [5]

10. Indicate your qualification:

- University Postgraduate Degree = [1]
- University undergraduate Degree & 4 years Education
- Diploma = [2]
- University undergraduate Degree = [3]
- 4 years Education Diploma = [4]
- 3 years Education Diploma = [5]
- Lesser qualification = [6]

11. Indicate your **home language** :

- English = [1]
- Zulu = [2]
- Xhosa = [3]
- Setswana = [4]
- Tsonga = [5]
- Venda = [6]
- Ndebele = [7]
- Seswati = [8]
- Other = [9]

12. Describe your **qualifications** regarding **Foundation Phase Education**.

Unqualified ( no educational qualification) = [1]

Under -qualified (Educational qualification but not in Foundation Phase) = [2]

Qualified = [3]

13. Describe your training in the teaching of English as a second language?

Excellent = [1]

Adequate = [2]

Inadequate = [3]

No training = [4]

14. Describe your OBE training with regards to bilingual/multilingual teaching.

Excellent = [1]

Adequate = [2]

Inadequate = [3]

No training = [4]

15. How do you rate the need for in-service training in the teaching of English as a second language?

Absolutely necessary = [1]

Necessary = [2]

A little necessary = [3]

Unnecessary = [4]

16. In general, are your lessons

monolingual - English ? = [1]

- Zulu ? = [2]

- bilingual - English/Zulu ? = [3]  
multilingual - English/Zulu/other languages ? = [4]

17. To what extent are you proficient in pure Zulu?

- Totally = [1]  
Largely = [2]  
Slightly = [3]  
Not at all = [4]

18. Use one of the following codes:

- Very good = [1]                      Above average = [2]                      Below average = [3]  
Very weak = [4]                      No knowledge = [5]

to best describe your **proficiency** in the teaching of each of the following areas of **English language structure**?

- a) **Phonetics** -decoding
- b) **Phonetics** -encoding
- c) **Morphology** (meaning of words)
- d) **Syntax** (word order)
- e) **Semantics** (meaning of the sentence)

19. When L2 learners experience problems in English , do you consider them to be:

- illiterate = [1]  
learning disabled = [2]  
Dyslexic = [3]  
Lagging in linguistic ability = [4]

20. Which statement aptly describes the state of your school library?

- well-stocked = [1]  
Under-stocked = [2]

does not exist = [3]

21. How would you describe most of your L2 learners' ability to converse in English?

Not at all fluent = [1]

A little fluent = [2]

Fluent = [3]

\*\*\*\*\*

- For the following **questions** there are no right or wrong answers, only your own opinion is wanted.
- For each item on the questionnaire indicate your **answer on the response page**, by writing the **selected number** in the square provided.

- For the following statements the responses are as follows:

**None =1**

**A few =2**

**Most =3**

**All =4**

**none = [1]**

**a few = [2]**

**most = [3]**

**all = [4]**

22. Indicate the proportion of your L2 learners who have access to each of the **resources** indicated below:

a) **TV**

b) **Books, magazines, newspaper**

c) **Radio**

d) **Library**

23. What proportion of L2 learners live in close proximity to a library?
24. What proportion of L2 learners always do their homework?
25. What proportion of L2 learners are usually actively involved in lessons?
26. What proportion of L2 learners come from indigent backgrounds?
27. How many parents/guardians of L2 learners play an active role in their children's education?
28. What proportion of L2 learners, whose parents/guardians are actively involved in their education, show a positive change in their performance in English?
29. What proportion of the parents/guardians of your L2 learners are proficient in English?
30. What proportion of L2 learners understand English?
31. What proportion of L2 learners **attended** an **English-medium pre-school**?
32. What proportion of L2 learners **failed Grade 1** at an **English-medium school**?
33. What proportion of L2 learners **failed Grade 1** at a **mother-tongue medium school**?
34. What proportion of the prescribed L2 **literature includes** the L2 learners' **culture**?
35. What proportion of the prescribed L2 **Euro-centric** cultural **vocabulary** is **understood** by L2 learners?

36. What proportion of **L2 learners** are proficient in the following areas of **English language structure?**

- a) **Phonetics** -decoding
- b) **Phonetics** -encoding
- c) **Morphology** (meaning of words)]
- d) **Syntax** (word order)
- e) **Semantics** (meaning of the sentence)

37. What proportion of L2 learners copy the set task as is, without completing it as per instruction?

➤ *For the following statements the responses are as follows:*

- 1 = strongly agree
- 2 = agree
- 3 = unsure
- 4 = do not agree
- 5 = strongly disagree

**Choose ONE option.**

**1 = strongly agree   2 = agree   3 = unsure   4 = do not agree   5= strongly disagree**

38. Knowing the meaning of the vocabulary in their readers contributes to L2 learners comprehending what they have read.

39. Unfamiliar topics used in lessons contribute to L2 learners becoming overwhelmed by unknown words.

40. My training has thoroughly prepared me to provide a sound education in English as a second language to L2 learners.
41. I experience difficulty in guiding L2 learners with regards to mistakes made in the L2 by the L2 learner.
42. The extent of my knowledge of Zulu contributes to my experiencing difficulty in guiding L2 learners with regards to mistakes made in the L2 by the L2 learner.
43. A large class negatively affects the provision of extra individual lessons to learners experiencing difficulties in the L2.
44. Due to the large learner: educator ratio I experience frustration.
45. Due to the large learner: educator ratio I experience low morale.
46. OBE provides adequately for the attainment of basic English reading skills by the L2 Grade 1 learner.
47. OBE provides adequately for the attainment of basic English spelling skills by the L2 Grade 1 learner.

**1 = strongly agree   2 = agree   3 = unsure   4 = do not agree   5= strongly disagree**

48. OBE provides adequately for the attainment of basic English reading comprehension skills by the L2 Grade 1 learner.
49. OBE jargon has frustrated me in my preparation of daily lessons.
50. The success of my teaching lessons to L2 learners using OBE depends,

inter alia, on resources available:

- a) at school,
- b) from the home and
- c) from the surrounding environment.

- 51. The lack of accessibility to English reading material outside the school hinders L2 learners' acquisition of English.
- 52. The lack of accessibility to English human resources outside the school hinders L2 learners' acquisition of English.
- 53. The use of **translators** in my communication with L2 learners during lessons is essential.
- 54. A vast majority of L2 learners lack proficiency in the basics of English in Grade 1 because they don't speak the language outside the classroom.
- 55. L2 learners should be proficient first in their mother-tongue before learning a second language.
- 56. The earlier the age of exposure to the L2, the earlier the age of proficiency in the L2.

**1 = strongly agree   2 = agree   3 = unsure   4 = do not agree   5= strongly disagree**

- 57. Learners' individual attributes (such a motivation, attitude, emotions, confidence, aptitude, anxiety and personality) play a major role in second language acquisition.
- 58. L2 learners feel alienated from learners whose cultural values are different from theirs.

59. L2 learners feel alienated from learners whose cultural beliefs are different from theirs.
60. L2 learners experience frustrations when they know the answers to questions posed, but lack the adequate vocabulary to express it?
61. I tend to correct every slip the L2 learner makes.
62. L2 learners are afraid to respond to tasks because I correct every slip that they make.
63. L2 learners experience success at tasks in the L2 due to their individual learning style.
64. L2 learners have control over extrinsic barriers in their acquisition of reading skills.
65. L2 learners have control over extrinsic barriers in their acquisition of spelling skills.
66. L2 learners have control over extrinsic barriers in their acquisition of comprehension skills.

## RESPONSE PAGE

		v 1
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Question Number	My response	Office use
1		v 2
2		v 3
3		v 4
4		v 5
5		v 6
6		v 7

Question number	My response	Office use
34		v 42
35		v 43
36a		v 44
36b		v 45
36c		v 46
36d		v 47

7		v 8
8		v 9
9		v 10
10		v 11
11		v 12
12		v 13
13		v 14
14		v 15
15		v 16
16		v 17
17		v 18
18a		v 19
18b		v 20
18c		v 21
18d		v 22
18e		v 23
19		v 24
20		v 25
21		v 26
22a		v 27
22b		v 28
22c		v 29
22d		v 30
23		v 31
24		v 32
25		v 33
26		v 34
27		v 35
28		v 36
29		v 37
30		v 38
31		v 39
32		v 40
33		v 41

36e		v 48
37		v 49
38		v 50
39		v 60
40		v 61
41		v 62
42		v 63
43		v 64
44		v 65
45		v 66
46		v 67
47		v 68
48		v 69
49		v 70
50a		v 71
50b		v 72
50c		v 73
51		v 74
52		v 75
53		v 76
54		v 77
55		v 78
56		v 79
57		v 80
58		v 81
59		v 82
60		v 83
61		v 84
62		v 85
63		v 86
64		v 87
65		v 88
66		v 89

**ANNEXURE B**

**ANNEXURE C**

Telephone: 9025373

PO Box 23006  
Isipingo  
4110  
18 November 2002

The Principal

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Dear Sir/Madam

Re: **PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH**

I am a Masters of Education (Guidance and counselling) student at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I am also the Foundation Phase Head of Department at Gokul

Primary School in Isipingo. I am undertaking a study titled: " Barriers in acquiring basic English reading, comprehension and spelling skills by Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase learners".

The study will examine:

- Factors which hinder the Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learner's acquisition of basic English reading, comprehension and spelling skills.
- Views of Foundation Phase educators regarding their difficulties experienced in teaching reading, comprehension and spelling in English to Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners.

It aims to make recommendations for basic educational and community-based strategies, which can be implemented at a local, provincial or national level.

The Department of Education has granted permission for the research and the letter to this effect is attached.

Your school has been purposefully selected as part of the sample schools to be polled. It would be greatly appreciated if the Foundation Phase educators participate in the research. The research will involve survey questionnaires for the Foundation Phase educators.

I undertake to ensure strict confidentiality with the information collected and all respondents will remain anonymous. A copy of the report would be made available to the department of Education or made available to individual schools on request.

I trust that this will be given your kind consideration and time.

Kind regards.

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Sandhya Mahabeer

#### **ANNEXURE D**

Telephone: 9025373

PO Box 23006

Isipingo

4110

18 November 2002

Dear Colleague

**Re: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH**

I am a Masters of Education (Guidance and counselling) student at the University of South Africa (UNISA). I am also the Foundation Phase Head of Department at Gokul Primary School in Isipingo. I am under taking a study titled: " Barriers in acquiring basic

English reading, comprehension and spelling skills by Zulu-speaking Foundation Phase learners".

The study will examine:

- Factors which hinder the Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learner's acquisition of basic English reading, comprehension and spelling skills.
- Views of Foundation Phase educators regarding their difficulties experienced in teaching reading, comprehension and spelling in English to Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking learners.

It aims to make recommendations for basic educational and community-based strategies, which can be implemented at a local, provincial or national level.

The Department of Education has granted permission for the research and the letter to this effect is attached.

Your participation in the research is voluntary. You will remain anonymous and the research will be treated with strict confidentiality. The findings of the research will be shared with all interested roleplayers.

The information you provide by completing the survey questionnaire will assist in identifying the factors that hinder Foundation Phase Zulu-speaking English Second Language learners' acquisition of basic reading, spelling and comprehension skills, and to make recommendations that will assist schools to implement the teaching of basic English reading, spelling and comprehension skills to English Second Language learners.

I trust that this appeal will be given your kind consideration and time.

I thank you in anticipation of your kind co-operation.

Kind regards.

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Sandhya Mahabeer

## **ANNEXURE E**

### **SUMMARY OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE INDICATING EACH VARIABLE**

<b>SCORING DIRECTION</b>	<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>VARIABLE NUMBER</b>
+ ve	Contextual	25 26 54 55
-ve		23 27 29 38 39

+ ve	Language	37
-ve		28 30 31 32 33 34 35 36
+ ve	School	41 42 43 44 45 49 50 51 52 53 61
-ve		21 22 40 46 47 48
+ ve	Intrinsic	56 57 58 59 60 62 63
-ve		24 64 65 66

Positive statements:23

Negative statements: 23











