

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

We, the people of South Africa,... believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity...

Preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a multicultural nation with a diversity of linguistic, religious and cultural communities. For public libraries to be truly representative they need to offer collections and services which meet the needs of these diverse communities equitably (IFLA, 1998:1). Within this context, this study examines how the multicultural nature of South Africa is reflected in the collections and services offered by public libraries and makes recommendations on how these can be improved to meet the needs of culturally diverse communities. Although this study focuses on the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services (CJLIS), the recommendations made - based on the findings - may be applied to many other regions in Johannesburg and to the rest of South Africa which also serve culturally diverse communities.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

As a multicultural society, South Africa is often referred to as the Rainbow Nation. This is because South Africa - as a nation - consists of a diversity of cultural, religious and linguistic communities (Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Act 19, 2002:2).

Sections 6, 9, 29, 30, 31, 35, 185 and 186 of the Constitution (South Africa, 1996) and Act 19 of 2002 (2002:2) stipulate the following:

- All communities should be treated equally in South Africa.
- The cultures, religions and languages of each community should be promoted and protected so as to promote peace, friendship, humanity and tolerance among all groups (Rautenbach, 1998: 58).
- The protection and promotion of these rights should assist in nation building and national unity.
- The rights of communities should be promoted and protected through the equal distribution of resources (Beukman, 200:144) and an equitable rendering of concrete services to all communities (Mbeki: 1998).

In order to achieve the above, public services - such as public libraries - need to respond positively to the above stipulations.

The need for public libraries to comply with the Constitution and Commission is made clear in various library and information legislation and policies, both nationally and internationally. The policies of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA Policy, 2005) point out that libraries "shall acquire, preserve and make available the widest range of materials, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society." This policy supports the view of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA, 1998:1), which states that "library services should be provided to all ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups at the same level, and according to the same standards."

Providing equitable materials and services for a culturally diverse population is also supported by actual CJLIS policies. This includes the Minimum Standards for the CJLIS (2003-2006) which state that the library should reflect the variety of cultures represented in the community; support cultural traditions; and provide for

the languages spoken and read in the local community (2003:3). The Policy for the Selection of Materials for CJLIS (2002) also states that the library's materials should reflect the cultural diversity of the City, especially materials in the languages of the indigenous communities.

2.1 Existing literature

Library and information research - focusing on the needs of multicultural societies - has received substantial attention in the literature abroad. This includes literature that examines the services and collections offered by public libraries abroad to culturally diverse communities, and guidelines for the development of multicultural library services. The international literature is reviewed and examined in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

A Nexus database search, conducted on 31 October 2005, revealed that although the topic of multiculturalism and diversity has received attention in other fields, especially multicultural education, little has been published on multicultural library services in South Africa.

South African research projects found include those of Taole (1996), Mhlari (1997), and Fredericks and Mvunelo (2003). These projects, however, only have limited reference to multicultural public library services. For example, Taole (1996) examines the role libraries should play in providing multilingual access to information in online public access catalogues. The research notes the importance of this within a multicultural society, such as South Africa. The research of Mhlari (1997), on the other hand, concentrates on how library managers should communicate with employees in a multicultural environment. The research explains that understanding and appreciating cultural differences is vital for South African libraries.

The research of Fredericks and Mvunelo (2003) is more relevant to the current study, although it only focuses on one aspect of multiculturalism - that of multilingualism, specifically in relation to library materials in indigenous languages. Fredericks and Mvunelo (2003:133) investigate the impact of the adoption of the eleven official languages on the production of books in indigenous languages, as well as the role of public libraries in promoting the use of books written in these languages. The study shows that

despite the provisions of the New Constitution regarding language, it seems that the publishing houses have not made much effort to reduce the predominant status traditionally enjoyed by Afrikaans and English in the South African publishing industry.

The findings also show that most libraries have collections published mainly in English and Afrikaans.

Based on the results of the Nexus database search, one can conclude that research projects on services to multicultural or culturally diverse communities in South African public libraries are minimal. Although these identified research projects do provide some initial thoughts and opinions of other South African authors on the topic of multicultural library services, they have only been small, restricted studies for the publication of articles in journals. The need for a research project on a larger scale - such as the present study - is, therefore, confirmed by the Nexus database search.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

3.1 Background to the significance of the problem

In order to understand the significance of the problem, it is important - at this point - to emphasise the past, segregated context within which public libraries developed in South Africa. Kalley (2000: 1) summarises the cultural separation

in South Africa by stating that it was reinforced by the Group Areas Act (41 of 1950) which controlled the racial zoning of land; the Separate Amenities Act (49 of 1953) by which the provision of separate buildings and services for people of different racial groups was legalised; and the Bantu Education Act (47 of 1953) which increased the difference in literacy levels between population groups.

Taylor (1967:64) and Mostert (1999:1) explain that it is against this background that library services in South Africa were established, focusing mainly on European (white) communities. Although, after the visit of the Carnegie Commission (1928), some public library services were developed for non-white communities, this was done in an environment of segregation and inequality. These services were inadequate and were further slowed down by the "pervasive legislation of Apartheid" (Von Beck, 1997:180).

The situation of segregated, unequal library services continued well into the 1970s and 1980s and it was not until the end of Apartheid in 1994 that equal access to all public libraries for all communities in South Africa was guaranteed by the Constitution (South Africa, 1996).

3.2 Significance of the problem

Irrespective of this liberation that came about after democratisation, Stilwell (1997:27) remarks that

South African public libraries have been democratised in the sense that they are open to all races and this, in itself, gives communities the opportunity to make their needs known. Very little evidence is available, however, on systematic and continuous needs assessment by the public sector.

This remark is also relevant to multicultural services. While multicultural library services emphasise equal access to all population groups, a multicultural approach in public libraries is not about equal access only.

A multicultural approach requires that the needs of each cultural community of a library be examined, and that the collections and services offered by the library be representative and relevant to the needs of these diverse communities. This requires positive action, where concrete services are rendered to meet the specific needs of each group. This may include that library services should be provided in the language of the members of a group and that collections should be available in the languages of the communities. Tinker (1990) supports the idea that multicultural library services are about more than equal access and opening one's doors to different communities, when stating that a multicultural library ensures that the services and materials provided also reflect the multicultural nature of these communities, and that it is a library "in which the multiplicity of cultures is recognised and represented throughout the library service" (1990:40).

Walker (1994:125) - when referring to the challenges of providing information to all in the 'new' South Africa - also argues that as libraries have opened their services to black users, many librarians have been challenged by unfamiliar problems. These problems include the selection and acquisition of appropriate material for a multilingual, multicultural society, and cultural and language barriers in communication between users and librarians.

3.3 Problem formulation

Given the above background, the main research question of this study comprises the following:

How do the collections and services of public libraries in South Africa, specifically the CJLIS, Region Eight, reflect the multicultural nature of the diverse communities they serve?

4. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 Aim of the research

Given the above research question, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the multicultural nature of South African communities is reflected in the collections and services of public libraries, specifically those of the CJLIS, Region Eight, and to make recommendations - based on the findings – on how public libraries in this region and in other regions in South Africa can be representative of the diverse communities they serve.

4.2 Research objectives

To achieve the aim of the study, the objectives are:

- To analyse the literature in investigating the concept of multiculturalism and to describe it in the context of public libraries.
- To establish practices of public libraries abroad regarding collections and services to multicultural communities.
- To identify international guidelines for the provision of these services.

- To perform a local literature review to obtain the views of South African authors on issues related to multiculturalism in South African public libraries.
- To conduct a survey of the CJLIS, Region Eight, to determine
 - whether these libraries have conducted a needs assessment and whether they have a user profile that reflects the cultural diversity of the community they serve.
 - how these libraries have responded to the multicultural nature of the communities they serve - in the *collections* they offer.
 - how these libraries have responded to the multicultural nature of the communities they serve - in the *services* they offer.
- To obtain *suggestions* from the libraries of the CJILS, Region Eight, on how services and materials can be improved in order to better meet the needs of the culturally diverse communities they serve.
- To make recommendations based on the findings of this study that may be applied not only to the CJLIS, but to other public libraries in South Africa which also serve culturally diverse communities.

4.3 Scope, limitations and exclusions

According to the official web site of the City of Johannesburg, Region Eight is one of the eleven regions that make up the city. This region has a population of 257 169 (Statistics South Africa, 2001).

Region Eight was selected for this study as it constitutes the central part of the City of Johannesburg - or inner city – which is densely populated and is made up of diverse cultural communities. According to Census 2001 (Statistics South Africa), these communities are made up of people speaking the following languages: 8485 (3%) Afrikaans, 47717 (18,5%) English, 7497 (3%) isiNdebele, 20636 (8%) isiXhosa, 94885 (37%) isiZulu, 20033 (8%) Sepedi, 11484 (4,5%) Sesotho, 14918 (6%) Setswana, 3370 (1%) siSwati, 7225 (3%) Tshivenda and

8342 (3%) Xitsonga. They also include 12578 (5%) people who speak other languages. Census 2001 also reveals a diversity of religious groups, including Christian, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and African traditional beliefs, as well as various nationalities that live in the area from the rest of Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas and Australia (see Appendices 2 & 3).

Another important factor in the selection of the CJLIS, Region Eight, is that besides six branch libraries, the region includes the Central Library Building which is the biggest library in Johannesburg and houses a cross-section of different types of public library services that lend themselves to this study. According to the web site of the CJLIS, it includes a Central Lending Library, Reference Library, Children's Library, Young Adult Library, the Michaelis Art Library, Music Library, African Studies Library and a Multimedia Library. Interviews for this study were conducted with the librarians from the branch libraries in Region Eight and heads of each of these sections at the Central Library to determine their responses to the multicultural nature of the region in terms of the materials and services they offer.

The Manager of the CJLIS, Region Eight, was also interviewed to determine management's perspective on how the library recognises the multicultural nature of the users it serves.

It should be noted that although the survey focuses on Region Eight, it is believed that the results obtained from the respondents - and the recommendations based on the findings - may be applied to many other regions in Johannesburg and in the rest of South Africa that also serve culturally diverse communities.

4.4 Significance of the study

For South African public libraries to continue playing a relevant role in their communities, it is essential that the services and collections they offer are relevant and representative of the communities they serve. An appropriate means to achieve this is to offer multicultural library services.

As mentioned in Section 1 of this chapter, a search on multicultural and related materials and services in South African public libraries found that research in this field is minimal (Nexus database search: 31 October 2005). Because of the lack of similar studies, the findings and recommendations of this study will enable the CJLIS - and other public libraries in South Africa that also operate within a multicultural environment – to move towards improving their collections and the services they offer to their culturally diverse communities.

The study will, hopefully, also open the debate on diversity and multicultural librarianship in South Africa.

5. KEY THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

The main definitions of the key theoretical concepts - used in this study - are briefly explained in this section. These definitions are based on the detailed discussion of these concepts in Chapter 2. Further discussion of these concepts is deemed necessary in order to understand the development of multiculturalism and its relevance to libraries.

5.1 Multiculturalism and the multicultural society

For the purposes of this research project multiculturalism and a multicultural society is defined as

a society in which a diversity of cultures exist. In a multicultural society these diverse cultures are recognised, accepted, respected and celebrated. These cultures may be a result of linguistic, religious, and/or any other cultural diversity. In the global village of the 21st century, the definition of multiculturalism includes not only cultural groups within a nation but also cultural groups within a global society (Chapter 2, Section 2).

5.2 Public libraries

According to the Unesco Public Library Manifesto (1994), the term, 'public library', can be defined as

the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.

The above definition is used during the course of the study to refer to the term, 'public library'.

5.3 The multicultural public library

For the purposes of this study, a multicultural public library is defined as

a public library which strives to provide all its linguistic, religious and cultural communities with relevant services in their preferred languages and reflecting their own cultures - on an equitable basis. The multicultural public library recognises and represents the multicultural nature of the communities it serves in its collections and services (Chapter 2, Section 5).

6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:63), research design and methodology is the specification of the most adequate operations to be performed in order to achieve the goals set out in the research objectives. There are various research designs. When choosing a design, it is important to remember that each design is suited to a particular type of research and should, therefore, be chosen accordingly. According to Bailey (1982:33), research design and methods range from qualitative (report of observations in natural language with numbers used less) to quantitative (assigning numbers to observations).

The research design chosen to find the answer to the research question for this study is qualitative. Ely *et al.* (1991: 4) state that "qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions." Therefore, in order to investigate the response of a specific group of public libraries to the multicultural nature of South Africa and to seek suggestions from them on how these might be improved, it was necessary to obtain the perspectives and opinions of librarians who work in public libraries and serve culturally diverse communities.

It is also important to note the remarks made by Berg (1998:10) concerning why some researchers should rather use qualitative methods. Berg explains that in some settings in which research is conducted, the research may not meet some of the quantitative requirements for representativeness and sufficiency of sample size to allow for statistically meaningful results. In these situations, it is recommended that the research should also rely on the experiences and perspectives of the population being researched. Berg (1998:11) emphasises the fact that both qualitative and quantitative methods are considered scientific "provided that science is defined as a specific and systematic way of discovering and understanding how social realities arise, operate, and impact on individuals and organisations of individuals."

As this study is mainly concerned with obtaining the opinions and perspectives of a small group of respondents and because certain statistics are not collected by the organisation being researched – depending, therefore, on the experiences of the respondents, quantitative research methods, such as the accumulation and analysis of statistics, are used to a lesser extent in this investigation. Nevertheless, they are used where possible and where necessary. The remark made by Dabbs (in Berg, 1998:2) that “qualitative and quantitative are not distinct” is also relevant here. That author explains that often a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods is used in a study.

The research methods that have been used to gather information pertaining to the current state of multiculturalism in public libraries include the following:

- A local and international literature review
- Interviews with librarians from the CJLIS, Region Eight
- Collection of statistical information relevant to the offering of multicultural library services and collections.

These research methods are discussed in Chapter Five.

7. ORGANISATION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 is an overview of the study, comprising the main research question and the purpose and the objectives of the study. The significance of the study is also pointed out and the key concepts used in the study are described.

Chapter 2 expands on the concepts of multiculturalism. It examines the scope of multiculturalism abroad and in South Africa. This chapter is also a review of

related literature on multicultural librarianship and the development of multiculturalism in public libraries abroad.

Chapter 3 examines existing policies and guidelines on multiculturalism in public libraries.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of multiculturalism and public libraries in South Africa - based on a local literature review. It includes a description of the development of public libraries in South Africa - specifically that of the City of Johannesburg - focusing on the segregated cultural environment in which these developed.

Chapter 5 discusses the research methods chosen for the study. This includes the literature review, the interviews and statistical data collection methods.

Chapter 6 presents the results of the interviews and statistical information collected. The results - pertaining to the semi-structured interview guide used to interview librarians at the branch libraries and the heads of sections of the Central Library - are presented. The results of the interview held with the Manager of the CJLIS, Region Eight, are also given.

In Chapter 7, the results of the study - based on the set objectives outlined in Chapter One - are interpreted.

Chapter 8 presents a summary of the study, recommendations, and conclusions reached that are related to the study. Further research possibilities are also suggested.

8. CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the dissertation. It describes the main research question, the aim and the objectives of the study. The significance of the study is also mooted, and the key concepts used in the study are briefly defined.

In Chapter 2 a background to the study is given. This includes a detailed discussion of the concepts of multiculturalism, the multicultural library and other related concepts. The international views on multicultural public library services are also examined.