

# **CHAPTER FIVE**

## **RESEARCH METHODS: THE LITERATURE REVIEW, CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS AND THE COLLECTION OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the research methods chosen for this study and the reasons for choosing them. These research methods include the literature review, interviews and the collection of statistical information.

### **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

As explained in Section 6 of Chapter 1, the research methods that are followed 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
- The collection of statistical information relevant to the offering of multicultural library services and collections.

Each of the information gathering techniques are discussed in the following section.

## 2.1 The literature review

The publication, *The A-Z of Social Research* (Robinson & Reed, 1998: 58), defines a literature review as “a systematic search of published work to find out what is already known about the intended research topic.”

A literature review serves many important purposes, including establishing the need for the research; broadening the horizons of the researcher; and preventing the researcher from conducting research that already exists. Aitchson (1998: 58) supports the view that a literature review allows the researcher to find out what has been done in terms of the problem being investigated - to ensure that duplication does not occur.

Bless (2000:20) gives more specific reasons, which include the following:

- To sharpen and deepen the theoretical framework of the research.
- To familiarise the researcher with the latest developments in the area of research.
- To identify gaps in knowledge, as well as weaknesses in previous studies.
- To discover connections, contradictions or other relations between different research results by comparing various investigations.
- To identify variables that must be considered in the research.
- To study the definitions used in previous works as well as the characteristics of the populations investigated, with the aim of adopting them for the new research.
- To study the advantages and disadvantages of the research methods used by others, in order to adopt or improve on them in one's own research.

Leedy (1989:66) notes that the more knowledgeable you are, the better you will be able to understand your problem. The purpose of a literature review is not

only to identify and analyse all information written about a topic, but also to gain insight and understanding into the problem at hand.

The literature review for this project was carried out to provide information relating to the general background and context of the study. The international literature review focuses specifically on literature available in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, as public libraries in these countries are also involved with culturally diverse communities and they have developed a range of multicultural services to cater for these communities. These countries have also published extensively. Publications include policies and guidelines on the topic.

From the literature review, information was collected about

- the meaning of multiculturalism and multicultural librarianship.
- the development of multicultural library services abroad.
- existing guidelines for multicultural library services.

The South African literature review focuses on literature that has a direct or indirect bearing on multicultural library services. It highlights South Africa's unique path of library development, especially in terms of the separate and unequal development of library services for different cultural communities in South Africa.

The local literature provides information on

- the meaning of multiculturalism in South Africa.
- the multicultural nature of South Africa and the City of Johannesburg - based on statistical data.
- the historical development of South African public libraries which has a bearing on multicultural services.

- a policy framework which supports the development of multicultural library services in South Africa today.
- existing South African library and information literature that focuses on multicultural related issues.
- the development of the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services, as this study focuses on this region of South Africa.

As noted in Chapter One (see Section 2.1: Nexus search), literature on multicultural materials and services in South African public libraries was found to be minimal.

## **2.2 Conducting interviews**

According to Bless (2000:103), the main types of qualitative data collection methods include non-participant observation, participant observation, interviews and questionnaires.

The decision to use interviews as a data gathering method was influenced by Ely *et al* (1991: 4), who maintain that "qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions." According to Welman (2001: 158), the interview is a data-collecting method which usually involves personal visits to respondents at home or at work. In the interview the interviewer asks questions from an interview schedule and records the respondents' responses. Interviews are very useful because highly specific data can be obtained in a very short space of time. The interview is also useful in providing a general overview of people's thoughts.

A variety of interview methods exist. According to Berg (1998: 59), these include the standardised (structured), the unstandardised (informal) and the semi-standardised (semi-structured) interview. For the purposes of this study the

semi-structured interview method was the main method chosen. Stone (1984: 12) defines this method as

an interview method in which some questions are structured (closed) and some are open-ended. Unstructured questions allow respondents to reply freely without having to select one of several provided responses.

The disadvantage of unstructured questions - that are part of the semi-structured interview - is that the free responses solicited tend to produce results that are more difficult to analyse. As a point of caution concerning the above technique used in the collection of data, Busha and Harter (1980: 78) stress that the interviewer must be well-prepared before the beginning of the questioning process. The interviewer should not just know the questions to be asked, but also the sequence of the questions and the method of the recording the data.

The interviews for this study were taped so that any extra information that was not noted down at the time of the interview could be recalled at the time of data presentation and analysis. Questions were prepared beforehand, but as the interviews progressed and more issues arose, relevant questions were inserted naturally into the flow of the interview. The use of the pre-prepared questions guaranteed that all relevant topics were covered.

The main purpose of the one-on-one, semi-structured interviews was that of finding answers to the main research question of this study: How are South African public libraries - specifically the CJLIS, Region Eight - responding to the multicultural nature of the communities they serve? The interviews focused on

- assessing the needs and compiling a profile of their communities in terms of cultural diversity.
- the nature of their collections.
- the services they offer.

- looking for suggestions on how these could be improved.

### **2.2.1 Respondents in the interviews**

According to Busha and Harter (1980: 56), the concept of the population to be surveyed is fundamental to research and refers to the group of persons or objects from which the research plans to draw inferences. In this study the population to be interviewed is referred to as the respondents and is defined as branch librarians working at the branch libraries of Region Eight of the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Services (CJLIS) as well as the heads of the sections - identified at the Central Library of the CJLIS. The manager of the CJLIS, Region Eight, was also interviewed (see Section 3.2.3).

The CJLIS, Region Eight, was selected for the study as it is located in the central part of the City of Johannesburg - or the inner city – which is densely populated by diverse communities (see census statistics provided in Appendix 2 and Chapter One, Section 3.3, on scope and limitations). The Central Library of Region Eight also makes the investigation of a range of different types of library services possible as it includes children library services, reference services, lending services, a multimedia library, an art library, a music library and an African Studies library.

Altogether, fourteen librarians were interviewed using the semi-structured interview guide. The librarians interviewed were the persons in charge of the following libraries:

- Hillbrow Branch Library
- Mayfair Branch Library
- Murray Park Branch Library
- Rhodes Park Branch Library
- Southdale Branch Library

- Yeoville Branch Library
- Central Lending Library
- Young Adult Library
- Children's Library
- Reference Department
- African Studies Library
- Music Library
- Art Library
- Multimedia Library

Permission to conduct the interviews with these libraries was obtained from the manager of the CJLIS, Region Eight.

### **2.2.2 Interview guide**

For semi-structured interviews, the term, 'interview guide' instead of 'interview schedule' is preferred. Welman (2001: 161) describes an interview guide as

a list of topics and aspects of these topics that have a bearing on the given theme and that the interviewer should raise during the course of the interview.

Although all respondents are asked the same questions, the interviewer may adapt the formulation of the questions (Welman, 2001:161).

The interview questions comprised both closed and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were important for librarians to express their views and experiences as freely as possible on the issues of multicultural library services and collections. Probing questions (Berg, 1998: 67) were also introduced to draw more information from the respondents, especially when it was felt that further elaboration was necessary. The interview questions were pre-tested on one

branch library that is part of the CJLIS, but not of Region Eight. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1993: 352), a pre-test of a schedule can reveal ambiguous, poorly worded questions and unclear choices. Minor changes were made to the questions - in collaboration with the supervisors of the study - using the suggestions made by the librarian involved in the pre-test. (See Appendix 1 for full version of the Interview Guide.)

The librarians were asked questions about four broad categories:

### **1. General**

Under General the librarians were asked for their understanding of multicultural library services and whether they find these services important. They were also asked if they are aware of any multicultural diversity policies, especially those of the CJLIS, and if they follow the recommendations made by these.

### **2. Needs assessment and user profile**

In this section of the interview librarians were asked about the communities they serve, and whether they have conducted any needs assessments in terms of the cultural diversity of these communities. Librarians were also asked whether they have a statistical profile of their communities based on any cultural diversity facet, such as the languages spoken by the communities.

### **3. Collections**

In this section librarians were asked questions about the materials they have available and whether these are representative of the cultural communities they serve. They were also asked about the materials they select and whether these are selected to represent the needs of the various communities.



#### **4. Services**

In the Services section librarians were asked about the types of services offered that are representative of different communities - for example, story time in indigenous languages and reference services in community languages.

The questions asked were based on a checklist that was developed from the guidelines reviewed in Chapter Three, Section 4, and on the results of the international and local literature reviews.

The findings of the interviews held with the librarians are presented in the next chapter, Chapter Six.

#### **2.2.3 Unstructured interview with the Manager of the CJLIS, Region Eight**

Berg (1998: 61) explains that unstructured interviews do not utilise schedules of questions. Unstructured interviews are often used during the course of research to gain additional information on the issues at hand.

In this case an unstructured interview was held with the CJLIS manager of Region Eight to obtain additional views regarding multiculturalism, specifically management's perspectives and opinions on multicultural library issues. The questions from the semi-structured questionnaire were not used as these covered the specific materials and services, such as displays and story time, that were being offered to communities at service points and which were not relevant to the Manager's functions. The manager was asked to

- explain his understanding of multicultural library services.

- give his opinion on the current position of the CJLIS, Region Eight, in terms of collections and services to its culturally diverse communities.
- to make any suggestions on how these collections and services might be improved.

The interview with the manager was recorded and the findings are presented in Chapter Six.

### **2.3 Data collection of statistical information**

To highlight the multicultural nature of South Africa - and more specifically Johannesburg, statistical information regarding different cultural diversity facets were collected from Census 2001 (Statistics: South Africa), especially for Region Eight - where available. These included the languages, religions and nationalities of communities (see Appendices 2, 3 and 4).

Statistical information on the collections (Appendix 5) and circulation of collections according to language (Appendix 6) were also collected from Bibliographic and Distribution Services of the CJLIS. This was, then, compared to the population statistics obtained from the census to determine whether the collections and services offered by the CJLIS are representative of the communities they serve. The importance of this balance is reported by IFLA (1998: 8) which maintains that the provision of library materials for cultural communities should be equitable and related to the size of these groups.

Unfortunately, the CJLIS does not collect statistical information for all its libraries on cultural diversity facets. Therefore, whether the collections and services of these libraries are representative of culturally diverse communities had to be based on qualitative methods of observation - that is, the opinions and perspectives of the librarians interviewed. The findings from these observations are presented in Chapter Six.

Statistical data was compiled from the interviews by determining the frequency of opinions by respondents to the same questions, and the frequency of each multicultural service being offered. These are expressed in the form of tables and percentages in Chapter Six.

### **3. SUMMARISING AND DATA ANALYSIS**

According to Bouma (1995:180), to summarise and present your data involves three steps:

1. Categories must be selected in which raw data can be summarised.
2. Once the categories are selected, the data is coded – that is, sorted into the categories to be more readily analysed.
3. The data is presented in a form which facilitates the drawing of conclusions which may be in the form of tables, graphs and averages.

According to Marshall (1997:65), once the data has been collected and summarised, the researcher needs to make sense of the data by beginning the process of analysing the data. This includes sorting through data to identify patterns and establishing relationships in the research. Essentially, during data analysis and interpretation the researcher draws conclusions about the research objectives based on the evidence collected. At this stage suggestions and recommendations need to be made. Suggestions may, for example, be made for further research and the possible application of the results to other fields. Recommendations can also be made for the development or alteration of relevant programmes and policies.

In this study, content analysis - described as a method of analysing qualitative data (Saunders and Pinhey, 1983: 185) - was used in analysing responses to open-ended questions related to the perspectives and opinions of the librarians

interviewed. This involved simple content analysis only. The quantitative data was coded and analysed manually. Categories were selected and the data was sorted into each category to facilitate analysis. Where appropriate, data was presented in the form of tables and the frequency of responses was presented as percentages.

Based on the findings presented and analysed, conclusions were reached about the services and collections being offered by the CJLIS, Region Eight, to their culturally diverse communities. Finally, based on the conclusions reached and the literature reviewed, recommendations were made that may be applied not only to the CJLIS, but also to other public libraries in South Africa that cater for multicultural populations (see Chapter Eight).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has described the research methods used in this study which includes the information gathering techniques, namely, a literature review, interviews and the collection of statistical data. It has also described how the data collected was summarised, presented and analysed.

The next chapter summarises and presents the results of interviews, obtained from the questions formulated in the semi-structured interview guide, used to interview the branch librarians and the heads of sections at the Central Library. The results pertaining to the unstructured interview held with the CJLIS manager of Region Eight are also given.