

Abstract

This study has aimed to investigate what reading materials commercial publishers and education NGOs currently offer to Foundation Phase learners in the nine official African languages and also the extent to which these materials are marketed and made available to the general public by the publishers. It has been guided by two research questions. The first is as follows: What is available for early readers (learners) to read in their home languages? This question seeks to address the issue of what kind of reading material is available for Foundation Phase learners to use in early literacy, in the nine indigenous South African languages, ranging from readers, to fictional and non-fiction information books which are likely to develop their interest in reading and their literacy skills. In addition to what is available for learners, the second main question is: How do people find out about materials that are being published? How are the materials being marketed by the publishers? Who knows about them and how do they know about them? How would people get access to the materials if they wished to purchase them?

The study is in two parts. The first part involved a survey of published reading materials and the second part was a personal investigation of accessibility, in terms of ease or difficulty of finding and/or purchasing these reading materials.

One of the main findings is that outside the mainstream educational publishers there is reluctance on the part of many publishers to publish texts in African languages for young readers. At present, much of the reading material published by the mainstream educational publishers for Foundation Phase readers conforms to the requirements of the CAPS curriculum. The limited variety may discourage children from reading in their home languages. The limited availability to the general public of existing texts in African languages is another of the key findings of this study and the lack of information about freely available texts is third. One encouraging development is that education NGOs are finding creative ways to make interesting texts available to young readers in a range of languages.

Keywords: Foundation Phase reading materials; African languages; commercial publishers; NGO publishers; availability of texts