CHAPTER III

PROBLEM, PLAN OF STUDY AND DELIMITATION

In order to be informed about the world with its ever-growing knowledge, various means are open to man. Despite the phenomenal growth of technology and electronic media of communication, the place occupied by books and other printed materials in the advancement of knowledge, is unparalleled. This stunningly great quantity of reading materials at man's disposal accounts for his undiminished reading tastes and habits.

The activity of reading has been variously defined by experts. In olden days reading was considered by many as the sounding out of printed words. But obviously reading is far more than decoding graphic symbols. Reading becomes meaningful if the reader can imbibe the author's thoughts and ideas, interpret them, appreciate, and evaluate them and apply them in his own life. Reading with quick comprehension of essentials is of paramount importance in this fast moving world.

In a multilingual country like India the place occupied by English is very important. Educationists and statesmen have emphasized the need for the teaching of English in our schools and colleges. Therefore, English is taught compulsorily in all schools from standard seven onwards. In some schools English is the medium of instruction. There will be some disparity in the standard of English of students of Government schools who learn English as a second language and the students of Public
schools who have English as the medium of instruction. The SES of parents, and the school atmosphere also affect the standard of English of students. Naturally the reading ability of students in English is affected by their standard in English.

A perusal of related studies has revealed that a lot of research work has been done in testing reading ability of children. Thorndike (1917) was one of the pioneers in this field who established the complexity of reading comprehension. It was in the late thirties and forties that procedures of factor analysis began to be applied to isolate the various factors of reading comprehension. Davis (1941, 1968 and 1971), Langsman (1941), Hall and Robinson (1945), Anderson (1949) and Mazurkiewicz (1957) could identify a few factors of reading ability. On the other hand Conant (1942), Thurstone (1946), Hans (1948) and McCullough (1957) established reading ability as a unitary trait. Studies by Coull (1956), Downing (1974), Manning (1977), Rao (1976), Vijaya Lakshmi (1976) and Gupta (1977) were about reading ability and sex difference. Reichard (1944), Garret (1946), Mukherjee (1962), Tewari (1985), Tyagi (1987) and Garg (1989) conducted research on differentiation of abilities. Rao (1978), Opal and Sen (1979), Singh (1981) and Veera Raghavan (1983) studied the relationship between reading ability and different school systems.

Thus, even though some work had been conducted on Reading Ability and a number of test instruments had been prepared and administered to identify the dimensions of reading ability of children in India and outside, there may still be some facets of reading ability yet to be uncovered. Hence, the investigator proposed to undertake
the present study which was entitled, "AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE STRUCTURE OF READING ABILITY OF INDIAN STUDENTS IN ENGLISH."

3.1 Hypotheses

On the basis of the review of related studies, the investigator formulated the following hypotheses for the present study.

(I) Reading ability is not a unitary trait; it has different facets.

(ii) Differentiation of abilities takes place as children grow older.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

(i) To secure or construct reading ability tests to form a Reading Ability Test battery.

(ii) To test the reading ability of children by administering this battery of Reading Ability Tests.

(iii) To identify different factors of reading ability through multivariate analysis of data secured from the tests.

(iv) To test the differentiation hypothesis of reading ability by administering the tests upon the students of the ninth and eleventh grades of Public schools of Delhi.
3.3 Definition and Delimitation

The focus of inquiry becomes clear by defining and delimiting a problem. It enables an investigator to avoid unnecessary deviations from the track of inquiry. Defining means spelling out the actual scope of inquiry. The whole process of research work becomes effective and useful only if the defining and delimiting of the problem are done meticulously. Delimiting is usually done by indicating the geographical boundary of the sample and by specifying the data gathering tools. Seeing the resources of the present investigator, the scope of the study was delimited as follows:

(i) The study was limited to only reading ability in English though there are three more significant abilities in language learning, i.e., listening, speaking and writing.

(ii) Due to the paucity of time at the disposal of the researcher, the present study was limited to the Public Schools of Delhi, the other types of schools, viz., Government and Central schools not being taken into consideration.

(iii) The study was limited only to the ninth and eleventh grades of Public schools as the tenth and twelfth grades could not be disturbed since they had to take Board examinations.

(iv) The study was limited to 400 students - 200 each from ninth and eleventh standards.
(v) The study was limited to the girls only as a previous study undertaken by Grover (1990) had already established that both boys and girls of Delhi acquire more or less the same level of reading ability by the time they reach the ninth grade. But still there are studies which indicate that there are gender differences in reading ability. Hence, to minimise error variance due to gender difference, if any, the present study was limited to girl students only.

(vi) Presuming that reading ability is primarily concerned with silent reading, the tools constructed were such as measured only silent reading, i.e., reading aloud was not measured.

(vii) Presuming that the two significant measures of reading ability are vocabulary and comprehension, the rate of reading was not measured.

3.4 Tools for the study

Construction of the appropriate tools for research work is a time-consuming process requiring utmost skill and perseverance. It is always advisable to study the available tools and if possible select the appropriate ones for one's study.

Different studies have used different tools. Since the present study was aimed at measuring the reading ability of students, the only tools required were reading ability tests.
In an effort to identify a few reading ability tests in English suitable for the present study, the investigator studied the available tests. Earlier Grover (1990) used six reading ability tests for her study and she was able to identify two factors of reading ability. For each factor, a minimum of two to three tests is required. Therefore, there was need for more tests to cover all the areas of Word Knowledge and Comprehension. Hence the investigator planned to use not only Grover's tests but also to construct new tests to cover all the aspects of reading ability.

3.5 Construction of the Reading Ability Test Battery

It was planned to use a battery of fifteen Reading Ability tests for the purpose of the present study. It was also decided to take five tests - three comprehension tests and two vocabulary tests - from Grover. The remaining ten tests were planned to be constructed by the investigator herself. The test material was planned to be divided into two parts - Part A comprising of eight vocabulary tests and Part B of seven comprehension tests in the pattern mentioned below:

Part A (Vocabulary Tests)

(i) A test to recognise word meaning.
(ii) A synonymity test.
(iii) An antonymity test.
(iv) A test to identify a word to replace a phrase or idea.
(v) A test to identify the appropriate word in context.
(vi) A test to recognize the key-word for a proverb.
(vii) A test to identify a word to replace a phrasal verb.
(viii) A test to recognize the dicton and usage.

Part B (Comprehension Tests)

(i) A test to recognize paraphrases.
(ii) A test to recognize the meaning of idiomatic expressions.
(iii) A test to identify the meaning of a sentence.
(iv) A test to recognize the meaning of proverbs.
(v) Reading for inference.
(vi) Reading for general significance.
(vii) Reading to note details.

3.6 The Pre Try-out

The purpose of the pre try-out is to obtain information about the adequacy of test instructions and to discover gross deficiencies in the test format. It was, therefore, planned to give the prepared tests to a few English teachers for their valuable suggestions. It was also decided that the tests should be administered to ten ninth standard and ten eleventh standard students of a Public School. According to the identification of deficiencies or irregularities, necessary alterations were planned to be made in the test format.
3.7 The Try-out

The try-out gives data for qualitative and quantitative analysis. Qualitative analysis consists in finalising the test administration procedure, identifying faulty or ambiguous instructions and discovering the defects in items. Quantitative analysis consists in the determination of the difficulty and discrimination value of each item in order to select the most suitable items for inclusion in the final form of the test. This procedure is known as Item Analysis.

In the present study, item analysis was proposed to be done using the dichotomous criterion with top and bottom 27 per cent cases. For the purpose of the try-out, it was decided to administer the test to a sample of 200 girl students of the tenth standard of the Public schools of Delhi. This decision was taken because of the following reasons.

Firstly, administration of the reading ability test battery was expected to be a time-consuming process. The school authorities were unwilling to spare the students of both the ninth and eleventh classes for both the try-out and the final administration of the tests. They were willing to spare the tenth standard students for the try-out and the ninth and eleventh for the final tests.

Secondly, the try-out was proposed to be conducted in August or September, 1991, when the tenth class students would be neither far advanced nor far behind with their reading ability. The item analysis criteria applied for item selection after the try-out would account for the difficulty level and discrimination level of each
item. Therefore, an item which was suitable for the tenth class students could be presumed to be suitable for both the ninth and eleventh class students.

Thirdly, if the try-out was to be given to the ninth and eleventh class students separately, there would be the practical difficulty of co-ordinating the performance of the students of these two classes with regard to the difficulty and discrimination levels of items and reaching a conclusion on the selection of items suitable for both the classes. The performance of the tenth standard students was expected to provide a sort of median measurement of reading ability enabling the investigator to construct a test-battery suitable for both the ninth and eleventh standard students.

3.8 Final Administration of the Test

It was proposed that the finalised tests should be administered to 200 girl students each of the ninth and eleventh standards of three Public schools in Delhi. It was proposed to give the tests in two sittings, as otherwise it would be quite tedious for them to write all the fifteen tests at a stretch. It was also decided that the tests should be conducted soon after the second terminal examinations which would be convenient both for the teachers and the students.

3.9 Scoring of data

After test administration, the next step was scoring of the test booklets and tabulating the data. It was decided that the scoring and tabulation would be done
by the investigator herself taking meticulous care in order to avoid any sort of error. Before beginning the scoring, the keys for all the tests were to be prepared by the investigator.

It was also decided that the raw scores were to be transformed into T-scores, with a view to normalise the scores which would preclude the possibility of error entering into further computations.

3.10 Analysis of the Data

Analysis of the secured data and its interpretation are the most important steps in research work. This is to be done with respect to the hypotheses formulated for the study.

In order to test the hypotheses formulated for the present study it was decided to compute intercorrelation among different variables in the case of the two grades ninth and eleventh, and then to subject it to factor analysis.

It was also decided to give suggestions for further research on the basis of the findings of the present study.