

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Harrison (1994), people who read carry their own library around in their minds. This internal library makes an indelible impact on all their thinking and discourse, spoken or written. Although one can argue that reading itself cannot guarantee power in intellect, breadth in knowledge, wisdom in judgment or freedom in political life, it does provide some essential conditions for these qualities to grow. Yet there are many who can read but have little interest in reading. Most children start school with an eagerness to read. But once they move up to secondary school, this natural enthusiasm begins to wane as other interests take over. Winning back their interest in reading is a task that should concern all language teachers. Success in the secondary school, according to the Bullock Report (Bullock:1975), depends considerably on the level of achievement in reading and language. Unless a student can read, write and talk competently, he cannot benefit from the range of learning which the secondary school provides. Marland (1977) views the non-reader who can talk really coherently a rarity in schools.

Against this background, the literature review will present some of the past and recent research that has been carried out in the field of reading interest and motivation. The review will also include the views and comments of some of the leading authorities on reading, in particular, reading in English among secondary school students. Although there are a multitude of factors that affect reading motivation, the main focus will be the studies done on the role of the topic and of content in motivating students to read.

## 2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF READING

The ability to make sense of the world in which we live is shaped by our ability to read texts of all kinds. It is through reading that we make contact with our cultural heritage. Marland (cited in Lunzer and Gardner:1979) believes that the ability to read at the highest possible level is essential to the individual's growth in the modern world, his ability to benefit from most of the learning opportunities at school, and his ability to take his place in society. The school must therefore take the teaching of reading and language very seriously. The acquisition of knowledge in most school situations depends on the students' ability to comprehend texts (Stone:1981). Reading, says Wallace (1986), gives us autonomy not just as learners in school but as everyday members in society. Bright and McGregor (cited in Brusch:1991) are convinced that where there is little reading there will be little language learning. The student who wants to learn English will have to read himself into a knowledge of it unless he can move into an English environment. In school, reading skills help students cope with all subject areas. Collins (ED:1996) proposes that the prime goal in school is to foster an interest in reading that will contribute to the students' ability to lead a full and productive life. Reading enriches the individual and society, intellectually, emotionally and materially. Not to be able to read in a democracy, says Pumfrey (1997), is to be impoverished and marginalised. Not to enjoy reading is to be culturally deprived. According to Chitravelu (1997), people read because they need the information in the text to fulfil some purpose in their life. Reading in this information age is indeed a life skill. Nuttall (1996) believes that the ability to read in a foreign language enables one to get better jobs and access to more literature and information. Kim and Krashen (1997) believe that reading is a powerful means of developing second language competence. Those who read more, they argue, have larger

vocabularies, do better on grammar tests, write better, and spell better. There is also suggestive evidence that extensive pleasure reading can contribute to oral/aural competence as well. (Cho and Krashen:1994)

## **2.2 READING RESISTANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Given all these benefits of reading, it is ironic that there are those, L2 learners included, who do not typically take advantage of the power of reading. While the majority of children in grade school are eager to learn, many adolescents appear indifferent and supercilious towards learning, observes Jenkinson (1964). This progressive deterioration in attitude toward learning (including reading) cannot be disregarded. Barmore (1979) believes that if such an attitude is allowed to continue, such students will become adults who feel reading is a chore rather than a source of pleasure or a vehicle for learning for the rest of their lives. Bintz (1997) in describing the reading nightmares of American high school teachers draws a picture of students who were not interested in or not very good in reading. Many flatly refused to read, or who read reluctantly more out of fear of examinations or reprisals from their parents rather than out of a burning desire to seek specific information or enjoyment. A similar picture can be drawn of students in Malaysian secondary schools.

This declining interest in reading experienced by students cuts across borders. In America, students have lost both the skill and the will to read as they move from elementary to secondary school. Questions about why maturing students lose interest in reading became the focus of a research project conducted by a group of university reading educators. (Bintz:1993) The research revealed, among others, that boredom and an

inability to see the relevance of what they read, contributed to a loss of interest in reading. The findings have drawn similar comparisons from reading teachers in Brazil, Austria, India and Hong Kong. In Brazil, students lose interest in reading as they progress through school. There is resistance to school reading because many students dislike the school reading programme. In Austria, high school students also show much resistance to reading from school-assigned books. In India, resistant readers also exist among the high school population. In Hong Kong, a recent survey revealed that avid readers are rare, and secondary school students read only because they are bored or are afraid of missing any information. Reading resistance seems to be a global phenomenon. In Malaysia, it prompted an investigation into why the reading habit has not caught on among school children. Among the contributory factors was the overtly and obviously moralistic tone of most of the reading materials which does little to make reading fun and enjoyable. (Fatimah Hashim and Lynne Norazit:1992) In another investigation by Auerbach and Paxton (1997), 20 foreign students studying L2 in America admitted that they hated reading in English, only did it for school or functional reasons, and said they could not relate to what they read.

## **2.3    MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO READ**

Wallace (1992) criticizes educational practices for neglecting the pleasure principle in reading. According to her, a vicious cycle develops when reading is viewed as tedious. It decreases motivation to read anything other than essential survival material – the minimum required to function in school or at the workplace. As a result, fluency never gets a chance to develop. As reading is an interactive process (Goodman:1988; Grabbe:1988; Smith:1994; Nuttall:1996), the context in which a learner experiences



successes or failures in reading has powerful affective concomitants. Pumfrey (1997) links high attainments in reading to positive attitudes towards reading and a willingness to engage in reading. Attitudes towards reading and motivation to engage with texts are complementary processes. In a study mentioned by Harris (1964), one of the findings is that the reading material is important; material written with an effort to be interesting tends to be more successful in motivating reading. Marland (1977) also stresses the need to create interest in pupils, to motivate by an end-product and to offer stimulus and encouragement. Lunzer and Gardner (1979) cites a study conducted by Shnayer on 500 junior high school students where the central finding was that there was no significant differences between ability groups in the comprehension of stories that were rated as 'high interest'. The discovery of a student's interests, according to Thomas and Loring (1979), is an essential first step in the motivation process. Using this knowledge the teacher can select appropriate reading materials which will stimulate a desire to read. However, as often happens, there is a discrepancy between student preferences and adult recommendations. Norvell (cited in Carter:1979) in his research with secondary students criticized the tendency of adults to impose their standards, their likes and dislikes on children and adolescents. Students should be given a greater say in what they want to read. Littlejohn (1985) concurs that learners could be allowed choice in their reading matter. Meaningful learning has the quality of personal involvement. While motivation from external sources are effective in learning, motivation which comes from within the learner can be more influential in terms of producing behaviour and attitude changes which are crucial to becoming a reader. (Thomas and Loring:1979)

Chambers (1979) argues that the ability to read becomes devalued when what one has learned to read adds nothing of importance to one's life. Quite often what teachers put

before their students is the most bland, pointless, ill-written prose they can find. No wonder they view classroom reading with such aversion! Because students at high school are becoming increasingly aware of the outside world, it is important to offer a variety of materials that reflect their wide range of interests. The materials must be interesting, pertinent and stimulating. (Barmore and Morse:1979)

According to Betts (1979) and Skehan (1989), motivation – the drive to learn or the forces that activate reading to learn – comes from within the learner and is both a cause and an effect. Spolsky (1989) believes that the more motivation a learner has, the more time he or she will spend on learning, and this includes reading as well. Gardner and Lambert (1972) describe two types of motivation that influence learning outcomes – integrative and instrumental. The integrative motivation reflects whether the student identifies with the target culture and people in some sense, or rejects them. The more that a student admires the target culture, the more successful the student will be in the L2 classroom. The instrumental motivation on the other hand reflects whether the student is learning the language for an ulterior motive unrelated to the target culture, for example, to pass an examination or to secure a job. Course books should reflect the writer's assessment of the students' motivation. (Cook:1991) The choice of teaching materials should correspond to the motivations of the students. When it does not, argues Beard (1980), students lose interest as the materials fail to enlist their natural curiosity and seem irrelevant or inappropriate to their needs. Skehan (1989) concurs with this view that materials with greater inherent interest can be used to influence motivation in students. The importance of motivation in reading, more particularly, the reader's level of interest in the content of what he is reading has come to be regarded more seriously by researchers.

According to Jenkinson (1964), interest determines not only whether an individual will learn to read, but how well he will read, how much he will read, and in what areas he will read. Interest has a central position in any type of learning. Learning is most successful when the learner has a stake in the activity undertaken. He becomes involved cognitively or emotionally in what he is learning. Consciously or unconsciously, says Jenkinson, the learner chooses what he wants to experience from that activity, in this case, reading. His choice is largely determined by his interests. But interest and its by-product, concentration, will only be developed if the reading matter challenges him and satisfies those needs. Rivers (1983) considers that motivation of itself, is merely raw material. Students will not learn (or read) unless they see some relevance of the materials to their personal goals. Learners need experiences with texts that are relevant. (Collins:ED1996)

Meaning also appears to be closely linked with interests. If a book or a text has little meaning for a learner or does not gratify his curiosity or stimulate his thinking, he will tend to lose interest. On the other hand, if what he reads satisfies his desire to know, the knowledge will move him to further quench his cognitive drive. Thus, if reading has meaning, both interest and motivation will be generated. Because students at the secondary level are required to use textbooks, it is important for them to see what reading informational books has to offer. Teachers can help to construct situations where students can find personal reasons to make the effort to comprehend what they read. Teachers should have a knowledge of interests in general, as well as their students' specific interests and reading abilities in order to recommend or select appropriate materials. Even bookworms, says Jenkinson (1964) cannot be fed indigestible content.

In his landmark work on educational psychology, Ausubel (1968) refers to the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, for instance, between studying science for its own sake because of its intrinsic fascination, and studying it for such extrinsic reasons as passing examinations or widening employment opportunities. In the context of reading, most learners start off with extrinsic reasons for studying something. But rather than wait for intrinsic motivation to develop, Vincent (1983) feels that teachers can actively cultivate it by finding out what motivates students to read and use it as a means to an end, even if Pop Culture is what they are interested in reading. Students, she continues, will always work better at materials which involve them, so teachers need to find topics that will engage students emotionally and intellectually. She concludes that if teachers can find materials that in content and presentation interest students, then they are on the way to motivating students. It is thus the teacher's responsibility to provide interesting materials for teaching and learning.

## **2.4 LEARNER-CENTREDNESS IN THE SELECTION OF READING TEXTS**

Munby (1978), Lautamatti (1978), Breen (1984), Littlejohn (1985), Nunan (1988), Tarone and Yule (1991), Seedhouse (1995) and Tudor (1996), all advocate a more learner-centred approach to learning. Not only should learning be centred around learners' needs and interests, but also that learners themselves assume more responsibility in the choice of learning objectives, content and methods. Psychologist Arthur W. Combs points out that "Our major failures do not arise from lack of information....but from our inability to help students discover the personal meaning of the information we so extravagantly provide them....Our preoccupation with information has dehumanized our

schools, alienated our youth, and produced a system irrelevant for most students". (cited in Moskowitz:1978:9)

Lautamatti (1978) believes that reading materials should focus on the learner. She suggests that the teacher should consult his students about the kind of materials they would like to read. Furthermore, in her opinion, the syllabus of a reading course should be based on observed difficulties in reading, not on preconceived ideas of what the students should know about the language. Thompson (1979) blames reading failures on the lack of motivation. Many reading materials used in the classroom carry the adult stamp of approval. They are worthy but uninspired, as if things associated with school should eschew entertainment. It would appear that anything smacking of entertainment and fun could not possibly be educational and allowed in the classroom. Littlejohn (1985) also looks at the problem from the aspect of the syllabus. He feels that a tightly specified syllabus can turn out to be a strait-jacket for both the teacher and the learner. If learners are given no choice over what they learn, they may become passive learners or reluctant learners. Closer to home, Ratnawati Mohd Asraf (1996), Pillay and North (1997) also raise the problem of being tied to the topic in a syllabus that does not allow any learner choice. One way out of this, as suggested by McCracken (1996), is to creatively adapt the syllabus to match learners' needs and interests.

## **2.5 READING INTERESTS**

It is a truism that success begets success, and failure begets failure. Nuttall (1996) talks about weak readers being trapped in a vicious cycle of reading frustration. She urges teachers to help them get out of this cycle and put them onto the virtuous cycle of growth

of the good reader. Rivers (1983) suggests that teachers can start by respecting students' reading interests so that students can develop an enhanced perception of themselves, which increases motivation to engage in classroom activity be it reading or otherwise. Motivation increases as students experience success in their learning. Parents too have a role to play. Khemlani-David (1992) worries that by insisting that children read only books that their parents approve of, it might kill their love of reading. Parents, she suggests, can aid and abet teachers in their joint effort of whetting the appetite of the child/student for reading and in nurturing a life-long reading habit. Collins (ED:1996) also expresses her concern about the need to motivate low performing adolescent readers. Readers, she says, who have negative experiences with reading generally view reading as a process of getting the word right rather than an act of making sense of the material.

If reading success encourages reading motivation which in turn promotes further interest in reading, the question that arises is, what type of reading materials would contribute towards reading interest and therefore, reading success? Gardner (1978) contends that a reader's comprehension of what is being read varies with the degree of involvement with the text. Williams (1984) feels that a starting point for motivating learners is to discover their wants, needs and interests, and then to select texts that satisfy these interests. Alternatively, learners can motivate themselves through a self-access scheme where they choose and work on their own texts. In relating learner's interests to reading, teachers should find out what their students' preferred reading interests are.

Studies of reading interests reveal that age, sex, intelligence, socio-economic status, culture, ethnicity and experience all help to determine what one likes to read. A survey by Chambers (1979) concludes that despite the fact that interests may fluctuate

over time and are influenced by the individual's environment and experiences, reading interests have remained very similar over almost 80 years of research. When Kirsch, Pehrsson and Robinson (cited in Carter:1979) looked at reading interests across ten countries, they found more similarities than differences in the 2,000 children from varying countries and cultures. For example, children in the first two years of school listed fairy tales and fantasies as their most preferred reading interests. However, as children grow up, reading preferences become more extensive and varied. Appleyard (cited in Nunn:1993) characterises the process in terms of psychological development: the player reader of the early years becomes the reader heroine/hero of childhood, who evolves into the reflective thinker of adolescence, the reader interpreter of young childhood and the pragmatic reader of middle-age.

### **2.5.1 GENDER DIFFERENCES**

By far the factor that has the greatest influence on reading preferences is gender. Boys, according to Thonis (1970) of any age are not especially enthusiastic about themes from home and family life. Unfortunately, many primary school reading texts are based on these themes. By the time boys move up to secondary school, it is not surprising that many have lost their enthusiasm for reading. The findings of a 1981 survey conducted by the Euromonitor Book Readership on 2694 readers showed an overwhelming percentage enjoyed reading fiction (Beard:1988). However, there was a very clear distinction between the sexes with 29% of the females (against 1% of the males) favouring romance and historical fiction while 10% of the males (against 2% of the females) preferred war and adventure fiction. Nunn (1993) also quotes a research study by Gorman that points to similar differences. Teenage girls typically choose books with romance, relationships and

human issues while boys frequently resort to non-fiction books to support hobbies and interests. Bügel and Buunk (1996) carried out a study on 2980 high school students to test the hypothesis that sex-based differences in reading interests had an effect on reading comprehension. Their study highlighted several areas of differences between the sexes: males are more interested in sports, computers and technical matters; females are interested in fashion, pop stars, human relations, romance and art. Females read more fiction and literature, whereas males prefer to read about automobiles, technology, economics, politics and sports. It is important to bear this in mind when selecting reading materials for classroom activity, and more importantly, when selecting reading texts for testing comprehension. The choice of reading materials should ideally reflect the gender composition of the class.

### **2.5.2 TEEN PREFERENCES**

As mentioned on page 31, fairy tales and fantasies appeal to children, but as they move into the teen years, their reading interests change. Rönqvist and Sell (1994) advocate the use of teenage novels over reading materials in the traditional textbook. Themes range from boys' adventure stories through detective stories, animal stories, science fiction, to socially-realistic novels. Quite often these teen novels are specially written for young people, or by young people themselves. The common denominator in these materials is that they should be directly relevant to the life experiences, thoughts, emotions and dreams of young people. For this reason, Rönqvist and Sell feel that the classics are unsuitable, since they are beyond the concentration span, range of interests, and language ability of most young students. If introduced to literary works or even extracts of classics, students especially those with low language proficiency, may lose



interest in reading altogether. Like Rivers (1983), Rönqvist and Sell share the view that it is important to accept what pupils themselves read, to let them motivate their own choice of reading materials, and to show respect for their choice. This view is supported by Fatimah Hashim and Lynne Norazit (1992) who see nothing wrong in students showing an interest in reading comics or entertainment magazines. They cite an example where recent issues of *Gila-Gila* have addressed such serious matters as AIDS and the protection of the environment, albeit in comic form but in a way which might have a more lasting impact than a literary approach. Rather than criticize their reading tastes, they suggest that perhaps teachers can harness this reading for fun to wean students onto more substantial fare.

### **2.5.3 PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

Going back to Nuttall's (1996) cycle of growth in the virtuous cycle of the good reader, success in reading or comprehension, generates positive attitudes towards reading which further improves reading skills. Reading is not a skill which can be taken for granted. Students in secondary schools may have difficulty understanding what they read. Teachers can help students to overcome this problem in the initial reading-to-learn stage by selecting materials with contents that are familiar to the students. Such materials can then be the spring-board for the successful teaching of reading skills and the enhancement of motivation towards reading. Gardner (1978), Langer (1981), Widdowson (1983), Nunan (1985), Safiah Osman (1986), Perin (1988), Anderson and Pearson (1988), Nuttall (1996), Carrell and Wise (1998) and Urquhart and Weir (1998) have written and researched on the role of prior knowledge in text comprehension. According to Langer (1981), every learner, simply because of life's experiences, has some prior knowledge

relevant to a new topic of study. Nuttall (1996) refers to the schema theory first introduced by Bartlett in 1932. Our schema, she explains, is made up of assumptions. The kinds of assumptions we make about the world depend on what we have experienced and how our minds have organized the knowledge we have got from our experiences. Thus the way we interpret a text depends on the schemata activated by the text; and whether we interpret successfully depends on whether our schemata are sufficiently similar to the writer's. Nunan's (1985) research on the role of prior knowledge in the text comprehension of 100 L2 students re-affirms the schema theory that reading involves more than the development of linguistic and decoding skills, that interest, motivation and background knowledge will determine, at least in part, the success that a reader will have with a given text. He suggests that increasing content familiarity may assist L2 learners compensate for gaps in linguistic knowledge when processing written texts. Safiah Osman (1986) believes that if the reader has an adequate amount of relevant prior knowledge and utilizes that knowledge to comprehend text, his comprehension will be enhanced. Perin (1988) also supports the view that motivation is enhanced when the learner has some familiarity with and interest in the content of the instructional materials. According to Moorman and Blanton (1990), research has consistently demonstrated that what readers know before they read about a topic is the single most important factor in determining what they will understand and remember after they have read. Shih (1992) believes that to meet the demands of reading assignments in secondary and post-secondary classes, the more relevant the background knowledge, the more prepared the students will be for reading. Bügel and Buunk (1996) contend that familiarity with the text topic facilitates the reconstruction of the main idea of the text. Prior knowledge that is in conflict with new information can hinder the understanding of new information. Poor readers often lack the required background knowledge about the topic of the text, and are

therefore incapable of filling in the missing gaps. Bügel and Buunk also view interest and prior knowledge as related concepts: People often know more about topics that interest them.

In a recent study by Carrell and Wise (1998) involving 123 L2 students of various nationalities, participants scored higher on passages (10 in all) about which they had high prior knowledge. The study concluded that comprehension might suffer most when students have both low prior knowledge and low interest in a given topic. Teachers need to be sensitive to both factors in their students' reading. Further, teachers need to be aware that gender differences may function differently with respect to the interactive effects of prior knowledge and topic interest, given the fact that gender plays an important role in determining topics of interest as mentioned on pages 31 and 32.

#### **2.5.4 CULTURAL BACKGROUND**

Closely related to prior knowledge is the cultural content of the text. If the cultural background of the text is familiar to the reader, or if the reader shares the same cultural background as the writer, his comprehension of the text is facilitated. Debyasuvarn (1970) cites the example of Thai students experiencing difficulty in understanding the poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' by Robert Frost. The students had never experienced winter nor seen a quiet wood. These were alien concepts to the students. Thus, if the subject matter is culturally too remote from their experience, they cannot understand what they read. Without understanding, there can be no real enjoyment in reading.

This viewpoint is shared by Steffenson and Joag-Dev (1984). In their cross-cultural study, 20 Indians and 20 Americans were asked to read and recall two texts describing an Indian and an American wedding. The findings showed that the respondents were able to read and recall the passage on their own culture more rapidly than the passage based on the foreign culture. Steffenson and Joag-Dev concluded that reading comprehension is a function of cultural background knowledge. If readers possess the schemata assumed by the writer, they will understand what is stated and effortlessly make the inferences intended. If they do not, they will distort meaning as they attempt to accommodate even explicitly stated propositions to their own pre-existing knowledge structures.

A similar study was carried out by Nelson (1987) on 27 Egyptian students. They were asked to read four pairs of matched texts. The findings were consistent with those of Steffenson and Joag-Dev. Students recall significantly more when reading passages relating to their own culture. The research also indicates the need for reading materials related to the culture of the students learning the language. Most ESL textbooks contain reading selections that students know little about, especially students from non-western countries. A survey of ESL textbooks reveal a propensity for passages from British and American sources. Obah (cited in Nelson:1987) refers to this as the Third World dilemma. Third World students have additional reading difficulties because their background experiences reflect a world very different from that portrayed in the material they read.

Nunan (1985) believes that readers process texts within the framework of their own personal knowledge of the world. Those who have the same cultural background as

the writer have more schematic prerequisites for comprehending a given text than readers from another culture. This issue was also taken up by Prodromou (1988) who argues that when the material used is culturally alienating then, inevitably, the students switch off, retreat into their inner world, to defend their own integrity. One solution, he suggests, is to process textbook material whether locally or internationally produced in such a way that the content relate more closely to the culture and experience of the learners. Wallace (1986:33) attributes reading problems to a lack of cultural competence which she defines as 'a very complex package of beliefs, knowledge, feelings, attitudes and behaviour'. Tickoo (1988) calls attention to the search for cultural appropriateness in EF(S)L teaching materials. Similarly, Alptekin (1993) feels that familiar schematic knowledge allows the learners to make efficient use of their top-down processing in helping their bottom-up processing in reading comprehension. Familiarity in this context refers to schemas based chiefly on the learner's own culture. He concludes that textbook writers should try to build conceptual bridges between the culturally familiar and the unfamiliar in order not to give rise to conflicts in the learner's 'fit'. Such bridges can be built, among other ways, through the use of comparisons as techniques of cross-cultural comprehension or the exploitation of universal concepts of human experience or reference points for the interpretation of unfamiliar data. Some examples of such reference points include pop culture, travel and sports.

Safiah Osman (1992:10) points out to research that has shown the significance of schema availability in the comprehension process. Since part of the existing schema of the reader is cultural, it is important that the reading materials used in the classroom help to develop or activate the student's cultural schema. She proposes a reading programme that is flexible enough to not only meet the ever-changing needs and purposes of the

students but also incorporate the new emphases such as those dealing with cross-cultural issues and forging stronger cultural links.

To cite a case in point, in an effort to introduce more culturally relevant materials for the students in order to motivate language learning, the six English teachers of a rural school in Sarawak embarked on a project to write their own materials for teaching reading. They had found that many of the Form Five students could not understand the reading passages in the English textbooks recommended by the Ministry of Education. This was understandable as most of the materials featured themes and topics which were outside of their experience. Based on a list of themes and topics that would interest 12 to 17-year-olds, the teachers produced materials that incorporated local customs and traditions, local events, places and people. Over a period of two years about 250 passages were written. The teachers reported that the students enjoyed reading the passages. (Toh and Raja:1997)

However, in a study on the relationship between target-language culture and language learning, Ho's (1998) findings conclude that learning about the target-language culture actually motivated students in Taiwan's junior high schools to learn the language. In this case, motivation is linked to the students' instrumental or integrative orientation to learn English. Most students are curious to know more about foreign peoples and their way of life. Cultural materials provide many topics of personal interest to a student, thereby increasing motivation. An earlier study by Ho (1990) reveals that despite cultural differences, Singapore teenagers enjoy reading American young fiction because they are fascinated with Western adolescents, their behaviour and their culture which are so different from their own. The studies by Toh and Raja (1997), Ho (1998) and Ho (1990)

lend support to the view that there are individual differences in reading preferences. What motivates a group of readers may not necessarily motivate another group of readers be they from the same culture or a different culture. It is thus the task of the teacher to find out as much as she can about her students so that she select the most appropriate reading materials for them.

## **2.6 READING MATERIALS IN TEXTBOOKS**

Although Breen and Waters (1979) consider content materials as playing the role as a carrier or means for the teaching-learning process, this does not imply that the teacher's general choice of materials for teaching reading, for example, will be quite random. Content materials should be chosen so that they are appropriate to the ongoing needs, interests, and motivations of the learners. Allwright (1981) calls for a switch of emphasis from 'teaching' materials to 'learning' materials. O'Neill (1982) agrees that it is possible for textbook materials to be designed after a close analysis of the learners' needs. In his opinion, no textbook can expect to appeal to all teachers and learners at a particular level. There is a basic need for choice and variety. He suggests ways of designing textbooks so that they can be used by a variety of learners with a variety of ultimate goals. These views are echoed by Cunningsworth (1984) and Breen and Candlin (1987). According to them, teaching materials should offer variety. A course-book that is going to interest a learner should contain something that he wants to learn about or involve himself in, quite apart from the language itself. The extent to which materials engage the learners' feelings, attitudes and experiences is extremely important, as is the capacity of teaching materials to excite the learners' interest through other things of importance to them. No subject matter or topic is ever affectively neutral; what is at issue, is the extent to which

teachers can use the subject matter to develop that affective involvement so that learning is facilitated.

While there is much to be said about commercially produced textbooks, Richards (1993) draws attention to their possible negative impact which include lack of focus on student needs, lack of local content and reification of textbooks especially among ESL teachers who are non-native speakers of English. He sees textbooks as source books rather than course books, and their role as facilitating teaching rather than restricting it. Teachers should learn to creatively adapt the materials in the textbook to suit the needs and interests of their learners as advocated by Block (1991) and Goh (1998).