

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the data collecting process of this study on the factors affecting the learning of English among Form 1 Malay students of SMK Methodist (ACS) Melaka. It looks at the subjects of the study and moves on to the research instruments used in this study and its rationale. Next, the procedures used in collecting the data are presented and finally, the collected data are analysed. This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, and seeks to obtain answers to the research questions posed by the researcher in Section 1.3.

3.1 SUBJECTS OF STUDY

The subjects of this study are from SMK Methodist (ACS) Melaka, a school for boy students ranging from the ages of 13 – 17 years. This is a government-aided school and has a Board of Governors from the Wesley Methodist Church. The school building, which was built by the government, stands on a piece of land, which belongs to the Church. This is not the case with other non-Church owned-schools built by the government on government properties. Since this is a government-aided school, the yearly allocation of funds from the government for the upkeep of the school's infrastructure is usually insufficient so the school has to obtain additional funds. This is done through a yearly collection of a small amount of money from each student for the School-Building Fund or holding fund-raising activities like Canteen Day to overcome this problem.

This school is selected for this research as the researcher teaches here and has access to three out of the four Form 1 classes. Hence gaining access to the students does not pose a problem. The overall breakdown of students in this school according to the racial composition is 242 Malay students (44.2%), 265 Chinese students (48.4%), 38 Indian students (6.9%) and 3 students of Other Races (0.5%). The total enrolment of students as of 31st August 2001 according to racial composition in this school is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Racial Composition of students in SMK Methodist (ACS) Melaka (as of 31.8.2001)

Form	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others	Total
Remove	-	23	1	1	25
One	45	72	7	1	125
Two	51	45	9	-	105
Three	47	38	9	-	94
Four	43	47	6	1	97
Five	56	40	6	-	102
Total	242	265	38	3	548

The breakdown of students in Form 1 totalling 125 shows that 45 students or 36% are Malays, 72 students or 57.6% are Chinese while 7 students or 5.6% are Indians and 1 or 0.8% is in the Other Races category. The breakdown of the students according to classes in Form 1 is shown in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2 Racial Composition for Form 1 students of SMK Methodist (ACS) Melaka (as of 31.8.2001)

Form	Malays	Chinese	Indians	Others	Total
1M	7	27	2	1	37
1J	13	20	2	-	35
1K	13	19	1	-	33
1H	12	6	2	-	20
Total	45	72	7	1	125

The Malay students were selected as subjects for this study through purposive sampling. The reason for this choice was because 36% of the total population in Form 1 were Malay students compared to 57.6% Chinese, 5.6% Indians and 0.8% Others.

Since there were too many Chinese students but too few Indian students, they did not make good subjects for the study. Besides that, the Malay students were selected since Bahasa Melayu was not the first language or mother tongue of the Chinese and Indian students. As the focus of this study was on the influence of first language, that is, Bahasa Melayu in the learning of the English Language, the researcher had decided to select the Malay students whose first language or mother tongue is Bahasa Melayu as the subject, henceforth called respondents.

As pointed out earlier, the first reason for choosing this school was that the researcher taught here thus was aware of the linguistic and socio-economic environment of the majority of students in this school. All the respondents lived in communities where everyone was able to communicate in Bahasa Melayu or the colloquial Bahasa Melayu with their neighbours of different ethnic groups. Since Bahasa Melayu is the national language, almost everyone in Malaysia could speak the language so many people did not see the need to communicate in English since Bahasa Melayu was widely accepted. The researcher was also aware that the respondents did not have the opportunity to use the language outside the classroom and in their home environment due to social and environmental factors. The respondents knew that everyone could communicate in Bahasa Melayu so they were able to socialise using the national language and not have to go through the hassle of acquiring another language like the English Language. Sometimes the problem of using English was a lack of suitable and keen participants like friends or classmates or parents and siblings for the respondents to converse in English. When and if the respondents tried conversing in English, their friends would tell them off for speaking the "Orang Putih" (White Man's) language. In order to be a part of the group, most students even the 'more adventurous' ones would soon give up their attempts to use English so that they

would not be ostracised. These factors were gathered through the researcher's personal observation and feedback from the informal talks with the respondents and through information provided by the researcher's principal and colleagues.

The second reason was the respondents in this study were homogenous in terms of ethnic group, religion and culture, that is, they were all from a similar group, that is, Malays with Islam as their religion. This was necessary so that the researcher would not be hampered by the task of understanding the influence of other languages by students of different ethnic groups. For example, if all the students were selected for this study, there would be the influence of other languages like the Chinese Language and its dialects among the Chinese students or the Tamil Language and its dialects among the Indian students when learning the second language.

The third reason was that 80 percent of the Malay respondents were from the middle and low-income families and the remaining 20 percent from high to middle income families. This was based on the respondents' answers in the questionnaire on their parents' educational background and job occupation. All the families lived in or near Malay communities and their language of communication with their family members and friends (including neighbours) was Bahasa Melayu.

In view of the three reasons above, the researcher chose the Malay respondents from Form 1 for this study since they had just joined the school and there was a transition from the primary school to the secondary school. They were from 13 different primary schools both the National Primary Schools and National-type Primary Schools so the amount of exposure to English would differ (See Table 3.5 in Section 3.1.2). In some of primary schools, the school placed more emphasis on the learning

of English by having extra English classes so respondents from these schools had more exposure to the language.

3.1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

In order to carry out a study, there was a need for suitable respondents. In this case the respondents were forty Form 1 Malay students from a school in Malacca. There were two reasons for the selection of the Form 1 respondents over those from other forms. The first was that they should have mastery of the basic 3Rs, that is, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic after six years in the primary school. During their primary school years, Year 1 students from the National Schools or Sekolah Kebangsaan started learning Bahasa Melayu from the first month in school. They began English Language lessons in Year 1 from the month of July onwards, that is, after six months of exposure to Bahasa Melayu. Each week the students were exposed to 8 lessons of English Language lasting 30 minutes per lesson for Phase 1 (the first three years of schooling). For each academic year, there was an average of 38 school weeks, hence in Year 1, they were exposed to English for about 19 weeks. This meant that in Year 1 there was a total of 4560 minutes or 76 hours, while in Year 2 there was a total of 9120 minutes or 152 hours and another 152 hours in Year 3. For the whole of Phase 1, the students were exposed to a total of 380 hours of English. For Phase 2 (from Year 4 to Year 6), the students were exposed to 7 lessons of English Language lasting 30 minutes each for each year. This amounted to 7980 minutes or 133 hours per year and a total of 23940 minutes or 399 hours for Phase 2. This meant that students from National Schools upon completion of their primary school education would have had six years of exposure to the English Language totalling 46740 minutes or 779 hours. (See Tables 3.3a and 3.3b)

On the other hand, Year 1 students from the Chinese or Tamil National-type Primary Schools or Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (Cina / Tamil) started learning the Chinese or Tamil Language from the first month in school. In Year 1, from the month of July, they started learning Bahasa Melayu. When they moved into Year 3, they started learning the English Language and were exposed to 2 lessons of English Language per week lasting 30 minutes per lesson which amounted to 2280 minutes or 38 hours. Likewise in Year 4, they were also exposed to 2280 minutes or 38 hours of English lessons. In Year 5, they were exposed to 3 lessons of English Language per week lasting 30 minutes per lesson, totalling 3420 minutes or 57 hours and another 57 hours in Year 6. Therefore, students from the Chinese or Tamil National-type Primary Schools upon completion of their primary school education would have had four years of exposure to the English Language lessons totalling 11400 minutes or 190 hours. This showed that contact hours for English Language for students in the National-type Primary Schools was very much less than that of other students in the National Primary Schools. (See Tables 3.3a and 3.3b)

Table 3.3a Commencement and allocation of time for English Language in National Schools and National-type Schools per week

School / Year	National Primary School	National-type Primary School
One	240 min.(begin in July)	-
Two	240 min.	-
Three	240 min.	60 min.
Four	210 min.	60 min.
Five	210 min.	90 min.
Six	210 min.	90 min.

Table 3.3b Commencement and allocation of time for English Language in National Schools and National-type Schools per year

School / Year	National Primary School	National-type Primary School
One	4560 min./ 76 hours	-
Two	9120 min./ 152 hours	-
Three	9120 min./ 152 hours	2280 min./38 hours
Four	7980 min./133 hours	2280 min./38 hours
Five	7980 min./133 hours	3420 min./57 hours
Six	7980 min./133 hours	3420 min./57 hours
Total	46740 min./779 hours	11400 min./190 hours

In terms of assessment, in Year 6, the students from the National Schools and National-type Primary Schools sat for different English papers in the Primary School Assessment Examination or Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) although the format was similar. According to the education policy, all the students from the National-type Primary Schools would gain automatic entry to Form 1 regardless of their UPSR results. If these students had not mastered the 3Rs, that is, Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, they would be left behind in their studies, resulting in their inabilities to cope with the higher requirement of education in the secondary school. These students usually dropped out sometime during their secondary school years or become problematic students. This was due to the fact that the secondary school syllabus or KBSM English Language was an extension of the primary school syllabus or KBSR. The KBSM English Language syllabus was a structured syllabus with structural items grouped into units where syllabus items were cumulative and taught in context. For weak students who did not have a good grasp or foundation of the language, this difficulty in coping with the lessons would pose a perennial problem and might result in loss of interest in the language.

This policy only applied to certain groups of students from the National-type Primary Schools, that is, those who obtained at least a minimum of Grade C in Bahasa Melayu would be automatically promoted to Form 1. For students who obtained a Grade D or E in Bahasa Melayu, they were required to study for a year in the Remove Class. This extra one-year was to help students catch up with two languages, Bahasa Melayu and English Language. For English Language, while in the Remove Class, the students would be taught the syllabus content of Year 5 and Year 6 from the primary school. (See Table 3.4)

Table 3.4 Syllabus Content of English Language in the Remove Class

Syllabus Content	National Primary School	National-type Primary School
Year 1	Year 1	Year 3
Year 2	Year 2	Year 4
Year 3	Year 3	Year 5
Year 4	Year 4	Year 6
Year 5	Year 5	Remove Class (Jan - Jun)
Year 6	Year 6	Remove Class (July - Nov)

Since the respondents were from different types of primary schools with different total number of contact hours in English at the end of their primary education, the researcher through this study wished to find out if this would affect their acquisition of English. Another reason was that these respondents would not be sitting for any public examination, so there was no fear of this study interfering and affecting their examination performance.

3.1.2 SAMPLE POPULATION

The sample consisted of Malay students from the category of high, average and low achievers based on their UPSR results. The respondents are aged between 13 to 14 years. The total enrolment of Form 1 students was 125 boys, of which 45 were Malays. (See Table 3.2) However, only 40 of the 45 Malay boys were chosen to represent the whole population of Malays in Form 1. Five were not included in this study for the following reasons. Two of them were illiterate; one had difficulty in spelling or writing some letters of the alphabet and the other unable to recognise all the letters of the alphabet. Another student had a mental problem and was under psychiatric care while the other two were frequently absent from school.

Of these 40 Malay respondents, 2 studied in two rural National-type Chinese Schools here in Malacca. From the remaining 38, 33 studied in six rural National Primary

Schools in Malacca, two each in Selangor and Perak and one in Johore. Table 3.5 showed the distribution of these respondents.

Table 3.5 Types of Schools where Respondents receive their Primary Education

Form	National Primary School				National-type Primary School in Malacca
	Malacca	Selangor	Perak	Johore	
1M	7	-	-	-	-
1J	11	1	1	-	-
1K	8	1	1	1	2
1H	7	-	-	-	-
Total	33	2	2	1	2

3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

In this study, multiple data collection procedure had been used, so that it would yield a fuller understanding of the study’s phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The research instruments used were:

- 3.1 a questionnaire (Section A and Section B Part I)
- 3.2 a structured interview (Section B Part II and Sections C and D) and
- 3.3 observation (of the attitude of the respondents, strategies they used during their English lessons and the ways they responded to the questions).

The researcher also engaged in conversation with the administrators and other teachers of this school to obtain a general overview of the background of the Malay students enrolled here yearly and especially those chosen for this study.

The questionnaire elicited mostly data on the respondent’s academic and family background. In the structured interview and observation, psychological factor of attitude was included to obtain a general idea of the respondents’ attitudes in learning English Language besides the respondents’ abilities to understand the teaching and learning tasks in English and the strategies used to overcome this problem. The

researcher carried out the piloting of the research instrument for each class at different times within the time frame of two months during relief periods. The researcher did not use the English Language periods so as not to deprive both the Malay and the non-Malay students of their English lessons.

3.2.1 RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Since this was a qualitative cum quantitative study, the researcher tried to have a rich collection of data from multiple sources through multiple methods. The researcher conducted formal interviews, engaged in conversations and informal interviews with administrators, teachers and respondents, made observations of the respondents during interviews and lessons. The researcher tried to note every bit of information about the surroundings and events related to the study. The researcher was careful during the formal interviews and conversations as some of the respondents were from broken homes or had lost one of their parents and were quite guarded regarding this. The researcher also invited feedback from their subject teachers on the respondents' background, attitude during lessons and their suitability for the study right from the beginning to the end. This was to clear any of the researcher's doubts and to prevent researcher's biases and assumptions during the study.

3.2.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

The researcher piloted the questionnaire prepared in Bahasa Melayu among the Malay students in each class when the researcher entered these classes during the relief periods. The questionnaire was presented in Bahasa Melayu, the respondents' mother tongue to ensure that all the respondents understood the questions posed to them.

This would ensure that the respondents' responses reflected the true situation and there would be no misinterpretation of the requirement of the questions or statements if the questionnaire had been in the English Language. In Section A of the questionnaire there were 12 questions to elicit information on the respondent's academic and family socio-economic background. Part I of Section B saw respondents answering 5 questions on their attitude towards the language. (See Appendix A - Questionnaire and Structured Interview)

3.2.3 STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Part II of Section B, a structured interview was also on the respondents' attitude towards the language whereas Section C was on the respondents' abilities to understand the teaching and learning activities in English and Section D was on the strategies the respondents used to overcome this problem. The high proficiency achievers from Form 1M (based on their overall UPSR results) completed the structured interview questions on their own during the relief periods. The average proficiency achievers from Form 1J and 1K answered the structured interview after the researcher had given them some explanation. The low proficiency achievers from Form 1H were interviewed individually by the researcher after they had completed Part I. Here, the researcher read each question and the responses to them and the respondents ticked in the appropriate boxes their responses for each question. For Sections C, the researcher went through with the respondents from Forms 1K and 1H (those below average and low proficiency levels) all the questions to ensure that they understood them. In Section D, the researcher read all the 16 responses to these same groups of respondents to ensure that they understood them. Then, each question was read and the respondents wrote the suitable letters of the alphabet for each response of

the strategies they used. This process was repeated for the other three questions. The same applied for the last question in this section. The results of the finding were tabulated in Chapter 4 Section 4.3.2.

3.2.4 OBSERVATION

The researcher also carried out the observation process of the selected 15 respondents from the three proficiency levels while the respondents were answering the questionnaire and the structured interview. This was basically to ensure that all the respondents understood all the questions in the questionnaire so that the answers obtained would reflect the actual information. The selected respondents comprised 5 respondents from each proficiency levels; that is, 5 high proficiency achievers, 5 average proficiency achievers and 5 low proficiency achievers based on their mid-year examination results. While interviewing the respondents on the strategies they usually employed in order to understand and carry out activities given during their English lessons, (from Section D of the questionnaire and structured interview), the researcher made some observations. The researcher observed each respondent's reactions (facial expressions like frowning, hesitations and gestures) to the questions asked, movements and behavioural characteristics and noted them immediately. This was to observe the respondents' reaction when answering Sections B, C and D of the questionnaire and structured interview. If the researcher noticed the respondents (especially among the respondents from the low proficiency group) hesitating or encountering any problems when answering the questionnaire or structured interview, the researcher would explain the requirement of the questions, simplify or give examples to assist them. This was to ensure that the answers obtained for the aspects on strategies were the ones that they really employed.

3.3 PROCEDURES USED IN ANALYSING THE DATA

The data analysis for this study was carried out hand in hand with data collection and was an ongoing process. All the data collected were categorised, compared and interpreted and the findings were noted. This was in line with Creswell (1994) and Bogdan and Biklen's (1998) suggestions that in qualitative research, the researcher(s) conduct several activities simultaneously such as collecting information, sorting the information into categories, data interpretation and writing the text. All the responses from the research instruments used were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentage were used to analyse all the responses obtained. Inferential statistics using mean, standard deviation and t-test were used to determine whether there were any significant differences between the scores obtained for Bahasa Melayu and English Language and between their Final Year English results with their projected Form 3 or PMR results from Question 4 of the Questionnaire. This was done to identify the influence of the first language among the Malay respondents in the learning of the English Language. The findings of this study are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

3.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher discussed how the respondents were selected for this study, the research instrument used, how the information was collected, sorted into categories and interpreted together with writing the text simultaneously. The findings obtained from the research instrument used will provide answers to the researcher's research questions and create awareness in other teachers about the problems students face in learning English.