

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the sampling, instruments, data analysis and procedures involved in evaluating the reading component of the English Courses offered to Year One and Year Two CIMA students in TAR College. The study attempts to obtain information from both the lecturers and students concerning the suitability of the reading component for the CIMA students in TAR College in aspects such as the reading skills taught, the quality of the materials used as well as the design of the reading component. Ultimately, it aims to find out if the objectives of the reading component have been achieved. The collection of data is accomplished by the use of questionnaires for students and lecturers as well as interviews with fifteen of the students and all lecturers who participated in the study.

3.1 SELECTION OF SUBJECTS

The subjects comprised all CIMA year two students and six lecturers who taught them the Business English Courses offered by TAR College. The students who were the subjects had undergone the Year One and Year Two English Courses for CIMA students and had completed 40 hours of reading instruction. There were 118 Year Two CIMA students in TAR College in 1999, 104 students were present during the survey, however, only 100 student questionnaires were used for the

study because four questionnaires were incomplete. Six questionnaires were distributed to the lecturers concerned, however, only five were returned.

All the five lecturers who were involved in this study graduated from local universities. Four of them hold the Bachelor of Arts Degree majoring in English and one of them has post-graduate education. This lecturer graduated with Masters in Arts (Literature) from University of Malaya in 1995. Among them, one lecturer is currently pursuing Masters in English As A Second Language in the same university.

The minimum number of years they spent teaching English to business students in TAR College is one year and the maximum is six years. The average in terms of teaching experience is 3.8 years, so they can all be considered as rather experienced lecturers and are in a position to give salient comments about the courses.

3.2 INSTRUMENTS

The main source of data for this study was obtained from a self-constructed questionnaire for both students and lecturers (Appendix A and B). The questionnaires were designed based on guidelines for evaluations found in Weir and Roberts (1994). In addition to answers gathered from the questionnaire, data was also obtained by conducting interviews with the five lecturers and fifteen of the students (Appendix C and D).

3.3 QUESTIONNAIRES FOR STUDENTS

There were 3 sections and 21 questions in the questionnaire for students (Appendix A). Both questions in Section I were designed to obtain information about the students' choice of reading materials and their reasons for reading. There were 9 questions in Section II. The objectives of the questions was to elicit information about the reading problems, reading ability of the students and the views of the students regarding the materials used in the reading component. The reading materials were assessed in terms of usefulness, level of interest and level of difficulty. The 8 questions in Section III (questions 12 to questions 19) required the students to evaluate the reading skills taught in terms of range, applicability, emphasis and benefits of learning the skills. Responses to Question 20 showed the views of the students regarding the reading component and the last question encouraged them to give suggestions to improve the reading component. All the questions in the questionnaire were carefully designed in order to obtain valuable feedback about the reading component.

The language used in the questionnaire is simple and straightforward to reduce confusion and wrong interpretation by students with low language proficiency.

Most of the questions were structured to elicit specific responses. The students indicated their responses by putting a tick in the appropriate boxes below each question. Question 2 and 4 required the students to write short responses if necessary. Question 21 required the students to give suggestions to improve the

reading component. As most of the questions in the questionnaire were close-ended questions, students did not have much difficulty in completing the questionnaire.

3.4 QUESTIONNAIRES FOR LECTURERS

There were 20 questions in the questionnaire for the lecturers (Appendix B). 9 of the 20 questions were similar to those in the students' questionnaire. Findings from these similar questions will reveal whether the lecturers share the same view as the students.

The first four questions gave background information about the lecturers' academic qualification and teaching experience. These were followed by three questions that reflected the lecturers' perception of their students' reading problems and reading ability. The other questions required the lecturers to give their views regarding the suitability of materials and the appropriateness of the reading skills taught in the reading component. The five open-ended questions that followed encouraged the lecturers to give their views about the strength and weakness of the reading component.

3.5 INTERVIEWS WITH THE LECTURERS AND STUDENTS

The researcher conducted interviews with the lecturers and 15 of the students shortly after the questionnaires were returned (Appendix C and D). The purpose of the interviews was to supplement the questionnaires by seeking clarification

from the lecturers and students regarding their responses to certain questions in the questionnaires. The interviews probed the lecturers and students to elaborate on their responses and reasons for choosing certain responses in their questionnaires. The interviews provided useful information that facilitated the analysis and interpretation of data obtained from the questionnaires.

3.6 ADMINISTRATION OF INSTRUMENTS

A total of 104 questionnaires were distributed to the students. They were administered in a lecture hall by the researcher. The students spent approximately one hour in completing the questionnaires. The completed questionnaires were submitted to the researcher and this eliminated the problem of students not returning their questionnaires on the scheduled date. As anticipated, some questionnaires were incomplete. This was resolved by compiling information from 100 completed questionnaires.

The questionnaires for lecturers were individually distributed and the lecturers were given a week to complete them. Only one questionnaire was not returned.

Prior to the interviews with the lecturers and students, they were informed about the purpose as well as the time and venue for the interviews. The interviews were held in an empty classroom and the duration of each interview was approximately an hour. As this was an insider-evaluation, both the students and lecturers were very willing to participate in the evaluation.

3.7 ANALYSIS OF DATA

There were two types of analysis involved: quantitative and qualitative. The data from the students' questionnaires was mainly quantitative and it was analyzed using frequency counts and percentage distributions. The total for questions 1, 4, 7, 16, 18 and 20 in the students' questionnaires does not add up to 100% because the students were allowed to give more than one response. The data from the lecturers' questionnaires was mostly quantitative whereas data from the interviews was mostly qualitative. The qualitative data was presented in words. Quantitative data was analyzed using frequency counts and percentage distributions.

Data obtained from four sources i.e. the students' questionnaires, the lecturers' questionnaires and interviews with the lecturers and students, was used when commenting on the value of the course and when making recommendations for improvements. The data obtained from this study reveals some of the factors that hindered students' comprehension of business texts, the effectiveness of teaching reading skills, the weaknesses and strengths of the reading materials as well as whether the objectives of the reading component have been achieved.

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are a number of limitations to this study. This study used questionnaires as its main source of information. The tasks of designing, improving, revising and finalizing the questionnaires took up a lot of time. The questionnaires were not

piloted before being administered because any further delay would make it difficult to conduct the study as students would not be attending classes during the study leave. Although the students were encouraged to clarify any doubts should they have difficulties understanding the questions, the students asked very few questions.

The main source of information from the students was obtained through a set of questionnaire. The interview sessions with 15 students enabled the students to elaborate on their responses in the questionnaires and provided useful information for improving the reading component. However, time constraint had limited the number of students that were interviewed.

This study discloses that both the lecturers and students believed there is improvement in the students' reading ability but no data was gathered regarding the extent of improvement. The study did not verify the extent of improvement. The absence of pre-tests prior to teaching of the reading skills and post-tests, after the reading skills have been taught is one of the limitations of the study.

The findings only reflect the perceptions of students and lecturers towards the reading component so it can not be used to make an overall judgment of the entire Business English Course. However the perceptions of both the students and the lecturers are important because they indicate which aspects of the reading component should be maintained and which aspects need to be improved.

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