

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This study seeks to identify the level and types of reading comprehension difficulties faced by nine Year Four pupils in an urban school. The study also explores the reasons for these difficulties. In order to do so, specific information is required and to obtain this information, carefully selected data gathering tools and analysis have been identified. The tools and the procedures used to administer them will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

3.1 Research Design

In constructing the research design of this study, Rose Tunku Ismail's (1999) list of reading comprehension skills (See section 2.8) which is based on the primary school English Language syllabus (Ministry of Education, 2008) and her simplified method of questioning will be taken into consideration. This study uses both the quantitative and qualitative approaches for the purpose of analysis and identification of the types and levels of reading comprehension difficulties faced by the subjects. Rose Tunku Ismail (1999) describes the problem faced by learners of ESL in the reading comprehension

component in a local setting and she suggests using a simplified method of questioning by the learners so that the reading comprehension task may be fulfilled effectively by the learners of ESL in primary and secondary schools. Using some of the items prescribed in the Year Four English Language syllabus (Ministry of Education, 2008) and the simplified method of questioning (Rose Tunku Ismail ,1999) ,a series of six tests was then designed to assess the reading comprehension skills among the subjects who participated in this study. In addition to that, a questionnaire was also designed to gather information on the subjects' background, reading comprehension difficulties they faced as well as other aspects related to reading comprehension difficulties.

3.2 Subjects

The subjects of this study consist of nine Year Four pupils from a National-type urban school in the Klang Valley. The nine subjects were selected from a class of thirty-five Year Four pupils based on the scores they obtained in a reading comprehension test (Test 1) (See Appendix C) administered at the beginning of the data collection period. The test was designed in accordance with the Year Four English language syllabus, assessing word recognition skills, schemata decoding, identifying specific details and grammar. Pupils were required to answer ten open-ended questions based on a reading text. The maximum score possible for this test was ten marks. The highest score achieved in the test was eight and the lowest score was one. Of the thirty-five pupils who were assessed, nine pupils obtained less than four marks. According to the school-

based grading scheme, 40% is the passing mark. As the aim of this study is to identify reading comprehension difficulties, only pupils who performed below the passing mark of 40% will be selected for further investigation. As such, the nine pupils who scored within the range of three and zero marks were selected as subjects of this study.

The nine subjects identified through the reading comprehension test (Test 1) were given a short questionnaire seeking specific background information: gender, ethnicity, language-use and exposure to English. The information gathered is summarized in Table 3.1. The nine subjects comprise five boys and four girls. Of this number, four are Malays, two are Indians and three are Sabahan Malays. None of the subjects' first language is English. All of them learnt to read English when they started kindergarten or Year One. Two of them speak English at home. All the nine subjects attended the same primary school from Year One.

Table 3.1: Description of Subjects

Subjects	Gender	Ethnicity	First Language	Home Language(s)	When Subject Learnt English	Total Test Score
S1	Male	Malay	Malay	Malay	Kindergarten	29.78%
S2	Male	Malay	Malay	Malay	Kindergarten	50.00%
S3	Male	Indian	Tamil & English	Tamil & English	Home	31.91%
S4	Male	Indian	Tamil & English	Tamil & English	Home	48.93%
S5	Male	Sabahan Malay	Malay	Malay	Kindergarten	48.93%
S6	Female	Sabahan Malay	Malay	Malay	School	47.87%
S7	Female	Sabahan Malay	Malay	Malay	Kindergarten	44.68%
S8	Female	Malay	Malay	Malay	Kindergarten	35.10%
S9	Female	Malay	Malay	Malay	School	36.17%

3.3 Instruments

The instruments used to gather data on the nine subjects selected for this study are six reading comprehension tests and a questionnaire. The following sections describe in detail the instruments used. The rationale for using these instruments is to gather information in the form of tests scores that would be analysed to determine the level and types of reading comprehension difficulties faced by the subjects. For the purposes of

this study, written responses for the reading comprehension tests as opposed to oral responses were chosen because written responses are used in formal testing in schools as well as in the UPSR. The school based tests are marked based on the UPSR marking scheme.

3.3.1 Tests

A set of six tests (See Appendix C) were designed and administered to the nine subjects during school hours over a period of one week. The tests were spaced out over a period of six days (Monday to Saturday) with one test administered per day so that the subjects would not be anxious. The tests were carried out at the end of the year after the final examination, when the syllabus had been completed. The subjects were given 30 minutes to complete each test. All the tests are designed in accordance to Rose Tunku Ismail's (1999) simplified questioning and the Year Four English Language Syllabus, 2008. The questions were also based on the reading texts taken from the English Language text book prescribed by the Ministry of Education, 2008. (See Appendix A). Test One had ten items, Test Two had seven items, Test Three had eight items, Test Four had seven items, Test Five had seven items and Test Six had six items. The time limit of thirty minutes was standardized for the purpose of uniformity. The number of items tested vary in terms of difficulty and texts were of varying length and content. Having weighed the content of texts, the number of items tested and level of difficulty, the Researcher decided to standardize the time as thirty minutes for each test. The

subjects were informed prior to the administration of the test that the marks of this test were for research purposes only and will not be recorded in their report cards. This was done so that they would treat the tests as non-threatening and would be relaxed when they did the tests, bearing in mind that the subjects face reading comprehension difficulties.

The tests were graded in accordance to the UPSR marking scheme as this is the standard marking scheme adopted by the schools that prepare students to sit for UPSR. Full marks awarded for the tests range from six to ten. With the exception of Test 3, each testing item/question in all the other tests is allocated 1 mark per item. In Test 3, 10 marks are allocated to the 8 items /questions. The time allocated for the tests and the number of questions and marks per tests are done purposefully as the time allocated for each test is more than the usual time needed for the average student who does not face reading comprehension difficulties.

Table 3.2 shows the reading comprehension skills tested in Tests 1-6. Test 1 was used to determine and identify the subjects of this study. The score of four or forty percent is the passing mark in the school based examination as well as UPSR. In this case, three marks is equivalent to thirty percent, which connotes a Fail mark. Therefore, pupils who scored thirty percent and below are identified as having difficulties in performing the reading comprehension tasks and were selected as subjects of this study.

Table 3.2: Reading Comprehension Skills (Based on Year Four Syllabus)

TEST 1										
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Skills	3.8.6	3.8.6	3.9.2	3.8.5	3.8.5	3.9.6	3.8.3	3.8.5	3.8.6	3.9.8
TEST 2										
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
Skills	3.8.5	3.8.5	3.8.4	3.8.3	3.9.8	3.9.8	3.8.3			
TEST 3										
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Skills	3.8.2	3.8.3	3.8.2	3.8.2	3.8.2	3.8.2	3.8.2	3.8.3		
TEST 4										
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
Skills	3.8.3	3.8.3	3.8.3	3.8.3	3.8.3	3.8.4	3.9.6			
TEST 5										
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7			
Skills	3.8.2	3.8.3	3.8.2	3.8.2	3.8.2	3.9.7	3.9.7			
TEST 6										
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6				
Skills	3.8.2	3.8.3	3.8.2	3.8.2	3.9.7	3.8.3				

Table 3.3 lists the skills tested in accordance to the specifications set by the Ministry of Education. The numbers listed in the first column correspond with the numbers listed on the syllabus (See Appendix B).

Table 3.3: Description of Skills Tested

Item	Skill
3.3.2	Read and understand simple sentences.
3.3.3	Read and understand simple paragraphs.
3.8.2	Scan for specific information in texts.
3.8.3	Read and obtain meaning by making references to words within the texts.
3.8.4	Read and understand simple texts by answering comprehension questions in relation to main ideas and details.
3.8.5	Scan for specific information in text.
3.8.6	Read and obtain meaning by making references to words within the text.
3.9.2	Read and give details about people and animals in the story.
3.9.5	Read simple poems and stories
3.9.6	Read and give details about people in the story.
3.9.7	Read and talk about actions of people in a story heard or read.
3.9.8	Tell why a person in the story is good or bad.

3.3.2 Questionnaire

The subjects were asked to complete a questionnaire to obtain details that could provide insights to the reading comprehension difficulties they faced. Aspects such as their communication with neighbours and peers as well as choice of television programs were included to find out more on the subjects' language-use patterns and the influence these patterns may have on their levels of reading comprehension and their types of reading difficulties. The questionnaire was administered to the subjects in the classroom during school hours after they had completed the last of the six tests. The researcher read out the questions and explained them item by item to ensure pupils provided appropriate responses. The questionnaire consists of twenty-two questions. (See Appendix D). All the subjects completed the questionnaire in sixty minutes without any difficulty.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

This section describes the steps and approaches carried out in order to analyze the data collected. Based on the English syllabus provided by the Ministry of Education and Rose Tunku Ismail's (1999) list of reading comprehension skills, a series of six tests were given to the subjects to identify their level of reading comprehension difficulties. After the tests were done, a questionnaire was given to gather more data about the subjects' reading habits, socio-economic status, linguistic abilities and their preferences related to reading comprehension and the English language. The data collected were

entered into a spreadsheet and the responses were analysed to determine the reading comprehension level of the subjects. The information obtained as well as findings from the existing literature are used as a basis for explaining the possible reasons for the subjects' poor reading comprehension.

3.4.1 Tests

The tests were marked according to the UPSR marking scheme. Each test was awarded six to ten marks. Reading comprehension was tested through a poem, a dialogue and some fictional and non-fiction texts. All the texts were taken from the Year Four text book prescribed by the Ministry of Education. They were marked for reading comprehension in accordance to the UPSR requirements as it is the standard system adopted by Malaysian schools. Each test was marked by the researcher and the scores were not revealed to the subjects. The subjects were told that the tests were not for report card purposes but for the purpose of research only. The tests done by the subjects were also kept confidential.

The test scores and skills tested, were analysed to determine the level of the reading comprehension of the subjects, the types of reading difficulties faced by them and possible reasons as to what might be the cause of the subjects' inability to perform the reading comprehension tasks.

3.4.2 Questionnaire

Data gathered from the questionnaire would aid in finding out contributing causes to reading comprehension difficulties of the subjects. Hence, the information gathered, including the subjects' socio-economic status, reading habits, language-use preferences will be used to see if they have any relationship with the subjects' reading comprehension difficulties. The data was presented in a spreadsheet and comparisons and links were made to see if reading comprehension difficulties, schemata and poor language skills are related.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the sampling, methodology and procedures in data collection and analysis. Having done these, the findings and possible reasons for the reading comprehension difficulties will be discussed in the next chapter.