

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

A review of the relevant literature as discussed in Chapter 2 relates many variables that can affect language learning. This exploratory study investigates whether rural cultural factors affect the target language proficiency of students and this chapter describes the instrumentation, methodology and procedures utilized in collecting and analyzing the data.

In this study, the English Language proficiency of the student as the first variable is measured by the English results in the PMR and a proficiency test (Cloze test & Error identification) adapted by the researcher. This can be shown as:

a) First variable- English Language Proficiency (PMR & CLOZE TEST)

As for the other variables in this study, they include factors like rural attitudes towards English, peer pressure, motivation, rural school culture, teaching methodology and the effect of religion (Islamic). These are all encompassed in the overall term "rural cultural factors" or the second variable and can be shown as:

b) Second variable- rural cultural factors

### 3.1 Subjects

#### Student respondents

Table 3.1 shows proficiency (based on PMR), ethnicity and gender of the student respondents.

**Table 3.1 Background of the student respondents interviewed**

Student	PMR score	Ethnic	Gender
1	B	M	F
2	C	M	F
3	B	M	F
4	A	M	F
5	B	M	F
6	C	M	M
7	C	M	M
8	C	M	M
9	A	C	F
10	C	M	M
11	C	M	M
12	C	M	M
13	A	I	F
14	B	C	F
15	C	I	M
16	C	M	F
17	B	M	M
18	B	M	M
19	C	M	M
20	C	M	F

Key: M-Malay, (16students) C-Chinese (2) I-Indian. (2) M-Male (10) F-Female (10)

The twenty student respondents studying in six rural schools in Terengganu are randomly selected as subjects in this study. They stay in a rural area called Kuala Berang, which is 68 kilometers away from town. They come from three ethnic backgrounds with different religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Since this is an exploratory study of rural cultural factors affecting the proficiency of English, other variables like gender, ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds are not considered. The main criterion is all the

students come from rural schools (see 1.4.8). These student respondents are currently taking English as a compulsory subject for the Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM). They were interviewed for an hour each. These respondents comprise 16 Malay students, 2 Chinese, and 2 Indians (see Table 3.2). Ten are male while the other ten are female students (see Table 3.3).

The general information about the student respondents' backgrounds was gathered first. These students have completed 10 years of formal learning of English as a second language, six years at primary level and four years at secondary level. At present they are in Form five. All these students state that they communicate in Malay in school and at home rarely speak English. They only speak English to their English teachers in class. For the non -Malay students, they speak their mother tongue like Tamil or Mandarin at home. In fact, English is learnt as the third language after Malay and their mother tongue.

**Table 3.2 Ethnicity of the student respondents**

<b>Ethnic</b>	<b>Malay</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Indians</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number</b>	16	2	2	20

**Table 3.3 Gender of the student respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number</b>	10	10	20

**Table 3.4 PMR scores of the student respondents**

<b>SCORE</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>
<b>Number</b>	3	6	11

As far as their PMR results are concerned, only 3 students scored A, 6 obtained B while 11 got Grade C (See Table 3.4).

**Table 3.5 Table showing the types of schools attended by the student respondents**

Types Of Schools	Number Of Students
Public Day Schools	11
Fully Residential Schools	9

Table 3.5 shows that 11 student respondents are from national day schools while 9 are from fully residential schools.

#### **Teacher respondents**

**Table 3.6 Background of the Teacher Respondents**

Teacher	Years of experience	Qualification	Ethnicity	Gender
1	7	B. Sc.	C	Female
2	5	B A	I	Male
3	10	B A	M	Male
4	10	B. Sc.	C	Female
5	10	B. Sc.	I	Male
6	3	B A	M	Female
7	9	B. Sc.	C	Male
8	6	B. Sc.	M	Female
9	7	B. Sc.	M	Female
10	6.5	B A	M	Female

Key: B.Sc.-Bachelor of Science, B.A- Bachelor of Arts, M-Malay C-Chinese I-Indian

Table 3.6 shows ten teachers of different ethnic backgrounds, gender, academic qualifications and years of teaching experience are randomly chosen to be involved in this study. The researcher stresses that the study focuses on the rural environment, hence the teacher respondents, like the students are from rural schools regardless of their different backgrounds. Six of these teacher respondents are Science graduates while four are Arts graduates.



The teachers also vary in terms of teaching experience. The maximum number of years in the teaching profession is ten while the minimum is three years.

**Table 3.7 Ethnicity of the teacher respondents**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Malay</b>	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number</b>	5	3	2	10

Table 3.7 shows that the teacher respondents consist of 5 Malays, 3 Chinese and 2 Indians.

**Table 3.8 Breakdown of the gender of the teacher respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number</b>	6	4	10

Table 3.8 shows that 6 female and 4 male teachers are involved in this study.

The ten English Language teachers were asked to respond to the questions in the questionnaire (see Appendix B). From the answers to the questionnaire, it was seen that these teachers have varying years of teaching experience, and comprise of different ethnic groups and most importantly, have been teaching in the rural schools for various years.

### **3.2 Research tools**

The research tools used for the study were semi structured interviews sessions for the students while the teachers were given a questionnaire. The interview sessions were carried out in an informal manner, sitting under the tree in a school compound over four weekends from the end of May to the end of June 2000. The meetings were casual so as

to create a non- threatening atmosphere. Each student met the researcher for an hour except for two pairs of male students who preferred to be interviewed together. As for the ten teachers, they responded to a questionnaire.

### **3.2.1 Cloze test and Error identification**

Cloze tests have been taken to be a global test of English proficiency ( Darnell 1968, Oller 1872, Spolsky 1968, Stubbs and Tucker 1974 cited in Foto 1991). The cloze test chosen for this study consists of two passages with twenty blanks each (see Appendix C). The blanks were created using the 5<sup>th</sup> word deletion method adapted from the past SPM English examination paper.

The second part of the test was also adapted from past SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) examination questions where students have to identify and correct errors (see Appendix C). The student respondents are expected to detect the grammatical errors in the given sentences and correct them. The purpose of the test was to measure the structural proficiency of the 20 student respondents.

The researcher considered it necessary to carry out this test. This is because the students had completed the PMR examination about two years ago and so it was felt that the PMR results might not help to measure the latest level of language proficiency of the student respondents. Each student was asked to take this proficiency test so as to determine his or her proficiency. Table 3.9 shows the English language proficiency of the 20 students

based on the Reading Program Scale (see Table 3.9) adapted by the researcher in this study.

### **3.2.2 Interview sessions**

The interview of an hour each enabled the students to explain their feelings, emotions and opinions about the learning of English .The students spoke a mixture of Malay and English .The researcher had to rephrase the questions many times in order for the students to understand the questions. Hence questions (see Appendix A) were a guide only and the researcher had to reword the questions depending on the proficiency of the students interviewed (see Appendices 1-18).

The interviews were conducted within a period of four weeks from the end of May to the end of June 2000 by the researcher. Before the study, the student and teacher respondents were given a brief explanation of the purpose of the survey. They were told in Malay that the researcher was interested to find out their problems for the poor proficiency in English among rural students .It was emphasized that the responses would be strictly confidential.

### **3.2.3 Questionnaire**

The teacher respondents favored the use of the questionnaire, as they were busy and preferred to write down their opinions. Their response serves to cross validate the findings from the students' interviews (a similar methodology was used by Patton, 1996).

The questions are open-ended so as to elicit as much information as possible from the teachers.

### **3.3 Description and types of the questions asked in the interview and questionnaire**

#### **3.3.1 The interview**

Open-ended questions were used to elicit information from the students on both personal and language background. The questions were semi-structured for the convenience of processing the data, though the researcher had to rephrase and translate when the students did not know how to answer the questions (see Appendix A). All the questions were centered around the learning of English in the rural setting .For example, questions like “Why do you think English is important?” “ Do you think students should learn English?” “How do you go about learning English?” “What do you think are some problems in learning English?” “Compared to your peers elsewhere especially in the urban area what do you think the rural school lacks?” “Do you think students learn English because of examinations?” “Do ‘rural cultural factors’ affect the learning of English?” “Do you think the school culture helps you in learning English?” “How does the lack of exposure explain the reduced proficiency?” “Who should be blamed for the poor proficiency of English in the rural schools?” and “ What are the other issues that can be considered to influence the learning of English in your school or in the East Coast at large?” There are altogether thirteen questions including the questions on the students’ backgrounds. The students were free to respond in their own ways. The findings are discussed in Chapter 4.

### **3.3.2 The Questionnaire**

As for the questions in the questionnaire directed at the ten teachers, they are open-ended. There are twelve questions. All the questions (see Appendix B) are geared toward identification of problems in teaching and learning English in the rural areas. The questions include "Why do you think English is important?" "Do you think students should learn English?" "What are the problems you encounter in teaching English in the rural setting?" "How do you go about teaching English in the rural setting?" "What are the ways you can make a student interested in English?" "Compared with their urban peers, what is lacking in the teaching of English in the rural areas?" "Do you think that rural cultural factors hinder the acquisition of better proficiency?" "Do you think you teach English for exam purposes? Is learning of English related to examinations or for other reasons? 'Who should be blamed if students do not excel in English?' "Do you think the school culture helps you in the teaching of English in the rural area?" "Who should be blamed if the students fail to be proficient?" and "What other issues can influence the learning of English?"

### **3.4 Proficiency level in English**

The proficiency level of the students who participated in this study was based on their performance in the test designed by the researcher and the PMR (Penilaian Menengah Rendah) Grade. As mentioned, in 3.2.1 the test administered by the researcher is based on two cloze passages of 40 questions and 10 questions on identification of errors. These were adapted from past SPM exam questions (see Appendix C). The researcher used the

scale of the **Class Reader Program** to determine the proficiency levels (see the scale in Table 3.9).

**Table 3.9 The scale in the Class Reader Program**

Proficiency	Marks	Number
Elementary	0-40	12
Intermediate	41-60	4
Advance	61-100	4

From Table 3.9, it is clear that twelve students are in the elementary level while four students are in the intermediate level and only four are in the advanced level. Table 4.1 shows the highest score is 74% whereas the lowest score is only 10%. Eighty percent of the students' scores are below the 60 % level .The average score in this proficiency test of the student respondents on the whole is only 39%. Only two students or 10% obtain 70 marks and above. It is interesting to note that the PMR results show the students have different levels of proficiency in English. Table 3.4 shows 11 students obtaining C, 6 students obtaining B and 3 students scoring A. We can conclude from the above that most of the rural student respondents in this study are not very proficient in English.

### **3.5 Method of data analysis**

The method of data analysis utilized for this study comprises the following steps:

- 1) Analysis of data from the student respondents (Interviews)
- 2) Analysis of data from the teacher respondents (Questionnaires)
- 3) Making connection between the rural cultural variables (see 1.4.10) with problems in the learning and teaching of English and determining if these rural cultural variables affect the proficiency level of the students as in Chapter 4.

### **3.5.1 Analysis of data from the student respondents (Interviews)**

As described in 3.2, the twenty students were asked to sit for a test before the interviews so as to determine their proficiency in English. Sixteen students were interviewed individually for hours each while four students were interviewed in pairs. These four students lacked confidence in understanding English and requested the researcher to allow them to be interviewed in pairs. The 18 interviews were recorded. The researcher spent many hours translating from Kelantanese dialect into standard Malay and then into English. The transcription was carried out after listening at least five times to the recordings of the sixteen interviews. The data collected formed the database for analysis (see Appendix D).

### **3.5.2 Analysis of data from the teacher respondents (Questionnaires)**

The teachers completed the needed responses to the twelve questions on time i.e. within a week. As the data was written down, not much time was spent on translating or transcribing. The teachers were direct in their answers and interested in helping the researcher. Data collected was easily understood and comprehensible. The questionnaires were distributed seven days before they were collected, hence the teachers were given time to think about the questions before answering. As the 10 teachers come from different schools there was no fear that they would contact each other. The findings will be discussed in Chapter 4.