

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

*A qualitative case study was designed in order to investigate the development in students' responses towards literary texts through the use of journal writing. This chapter contains a description of the procedure used in data collection. Here, the context in which the study was implemented is described. Aspects such as the description of the research site in which the study was conducted, a profile of the students who participated in this study, the duration of the study, the data collection as well as the data analysis procedures are included.*

#### The Case Study Approach

In this qualitative study, the case study approach has been adopted. Merriam (1988) defines this approach as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit", and the analysis of the data in this approach is done through inductive reasoning. This view is supported by Fraenkel & Wallen (1996), who classify a case study as a type of non-participant observation where a detailed study on a regular basis is conducted in order to obtain valuable insights.

As a teacher-researcher, I am of the opinion that the case study approach is the most compatible approach for this study. This belief is further strengthened by Cohen and Manion (1994), who strongly advocate case studies as being eminently suitable in order to obtain answers to problems faced by subjects who are people essentially meaningful to the researcher.

As such, teacher-researchers will find this approach suitable when trying to seek knowledge of the teaching-learning process in the classroom. Thus, I have decided to adopt the case study approach in order to observe how my students would be able to *develop their responses towards literary texts through the use of journal writing as an activity.*

It is hoped that by studying a particular group of students' responses to literary texts through journal writing, both with and without guided questions, an understanding of the teaching-learning process can be discerned.

### The Research Site

This research was carried out in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Taman Tun Dr Ishak, (all names of places and persons in this study are pseudonyms). Officially opened in 1980, this urban secondary school is situated in an elite residential area *and is situated between Wilayah Persekutuan and Petaling Jaya, Selangor.*

At first glance, one would be very impressed with the infrastructure of this school as it houses six multi-storeyed buildings, a mosque and a playing field. As this is one of the pioneer SMART schools, the school boasts of five computer laboratories for the students' use. There are many other facilities such as *air-conditioned staffrooms equipped with computers, a language room, a resource center* which houses a hyper-media laboratory and special individual rooms for subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Music, Art and Home Economics.

This co-educational school consists of approximately 1450 students from Forms 1 to 5. The student population is made up of 86% Malays, 8% Chinese and *6% of Indians and other races including children of migrant workers.* Out of this number, around seventy percent of the students come from the surrounding

residential area which consists of middle to high income families. These students mostly come from English-speaking homes and are quite fluent in speaking the English Language. In fact, for some of them, English is their first language.

*The remaining thirty percent are from low-income families living in the Kampung Sungai Penchala squatter settlement. These students are extremely poor in English, do not use the language at all other than in the classroom and are unable to even construct one correct sentence in the language. As such, there is a wide difference in the English proficiency level among the students. This is the context in which this study is conducted.*

### The Participants

The class selected for this study is a science-stream class comprising forty students with twenty-eight Malays, eleven Chinese, and one Indian. The class is considered to be one of the two top classes among their form, based on their academic performance in the PMR examinations. The majority of these students come from English speaking homes and is very proficient in the language, with a small number who seem uncomfortable in the language.

Generally, the students are very friendly and active participants in class during their English lessons, and class discussions can get quite boisterous and noisy. However, a small number of them prefer to remain passive and take a back seat when class discussions are carried out during English lessons. When encouraged to participate in classroom discussions, they are often hesitant and inarticulate. In short, this class has a group of learners with different proficiency levels in the English Language and who also differ in terms of behaviour and personality.

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A total of six students were selected from this class as the key informants for this study. This selection was based on purposive sampling as the researcher used her personal knowledge and prior information about them in order to select them for this study. Other than their English proficiency level and their performance in the literature component questions in the examination, the researcher also selected them based on their willingness to participate in the study.

These key informants were divided into two sets. The first set consists of three students who are of high proficiency in the English Language. They comprise of three female students - two Chinese and an Indian. The second set of three students is of lower English proficiency. These students comprise of a Chinese and a Malay boy and one Malay girl.

#### The Key Participants

All three informants from the high proficiency set always perform extremely well in all their English examinations. They always obtain a Grade 1A and this is evident in their mid-year examination where they managed to score 85 percent and above for English. In the literature component question in the examination paper where they are required to analyse and respond to the literary text, they have managed to score more than ten marks out of fifteen marks.

Among them is Savitha, a pleasant looking Indian girl whose hobby is reading. With a sheepish smile, she admitted that her favourite reading materials are romance novels and the only literary texts that she has been exposed to, are in the literature class. A responsible and hard working school prefect, she was keen to participate in the journal writing activity, as according to her, it would be a form of revision for the examination.

Ann is a petite Chinese girl who has been labelled by her classmates as "the perfect student", as she is a favourite among her friends and teachers. This gentle and soft-spoken girl is very caring and sensitive. Her polite and courteous nature is evident during class discussions as she usually waits for her turn to speak and when she does, her ideas are thought provoking and refreshing.

Angeline, on the other hand, is very articulate and expressive and has lots of interesting ideas and views. She is always active in class discussions and very vocal in expressing her views and opinion. Never one to run away from a challenge, she always represents her group during presentations. She is very proficient in English and loves writing creative and expressive essays, which are always a good read.

In comparison, the three informants from the low proficiency set are inarticulate and often have problems expressing themselves in English. Their English marks are usually between 40 to 55 marks as apparent in their mid-year examination results. These students also perform badly in the literature questions in the examination where they are required to respond to literary texts. Most often, they end up writing the summary of the text.

Mira does not use English at all other than during her English lessons. A good-natured girl, she is hard-working and even though she faces difficulty, she always makes a great attempt to write her essays with interesting expressions and words. However, most often, she uses them in the wrong context. Also, she often code-switches to the Malay language during group discussions as she finds it difficult to express herself fully in English. Her hobby is reading Malay romance novels and she does not read any English materials other than those that her English teacher provides in class.

This is the same with Zaiful who is usually very quiet and passive during the English lessons. He prefers to sit quietly in class and one can hardly hear him utter a word. When questioned, he would give monosyllable answers so softly that it is inaudible. *Cooking is his hobby and according to him reading is only for examination purposes.* His writing pieces are usually short and lack interesting expressions. Literature is something new to him and he admits that if this component had not been introduced into the syllabus, he may not have read these texts at all.

The final informant is Alex, a Chinese boy who loves basketball so much that *he spends all his free time playing this game, much to the worry of his parents.* As his mother does not speak English, his main language at home is Cantonese. The English materials that he does read are mostly magazines on computer and cars. In terms of writing, he has problems in sentence construction and often makes grammatical errors. Also, his essays lack interesting ideas and expressions and are an *uninteresting read.*

#### Literary Texts Used

The literary texts used in this study were selected from the Ministry of Education's prescribed list for the Form Four literature component syllabus, as the researcher felt that it will be easier for the students since they are familiar with these texts. Also, the examination questions are based on these texts and it would be an additional motivation factor for the students when attempting the task set for them. Most importantly, the participants themselves were more receptive to the use of these texts as they felt that it would be a form of revision for their exams. Thus, the researcher selected a short story and a poem from this list.

The poem chosen is "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost which talks about choices that one has to make and its effect on our life. This poem also places emphasis on the importance of choosing wisely, and that one has to accept the consequences of that choice. The short story chosen is "The Sound Machine" by Roald Dahl. This story deals with the issue of conformity, and how people react to those who do not seem to follow established norms of behaviour. It shows the importance of respecting other people, and not ridiculing those who have different views. Both these texts were selected for their interesting themes and issues that the researcher felt the participants would be able to relate to, and reflect on when writing in their journal.

#### Duration Of The Study

This study was carried out over a period of six weeks, during the English period. The researcher who is also the class English teacher has already taught the texts mentioned. Thus, class discussions on the plot, character, theme and moral values have already been carried out. The data collecting procedure was only carried out once the participants were familiar with the texts.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Fraenkel & Wallen (1996) describe "instrument", as a device used by the researcher to collect data. For this qualitative case study which examines the students' response to literary texts using journal writing, data was collected by the means of a questionnaire, student-journal, teacher-researcher's journal and semi-structured interviews. The different data collection procedures will be discussed below.

## Questionnaire

The first instrument was a questionnaire (Appendix A), constructed to obtain background information about the participants, their perception on the use of literary texts and *their knowledge or awareness of journal writing as an activity in the literature classroom*. Information obtained from the questionnaire helped the researcher in narrowing down the choices of the key participants.

## Student Journal

*The participants of this study were required to write down their responses to the literary texts in their journals once the researcher had completed the lessons in class for both the texts, with discussions on aspects such as the plot, character and theme. Before the participants started writing in their individual journals, a brief explanation on journal-writing was given.*

*The journal-writing activity was divided into two sections. In the first section, the participants were required to write their responses to both the texts without any guidelines except for one open-ended question (Appendix B). Also, they were not encouraged to discuss or interact during the task. Participants were given a week to complete their journal-writing activity for each text. This was to ensure that they did not feel pressurised.*

In the second section, the participants were again given one week to write down their responses to the same texts. However, in this round, they were given a journal-response guide (Appendix C), which contained questions that they could use as a guideline when writing down their responses to the text, in their journals. *The open-ended questions in the journal-guide were adapted from Berger's (1996) study.*



Questions were divided into four sections in order to elicit affective, connective and reflective responses to the literary texts. The section on "How do you feel?", is to elicit affective and emotional responses to the literary texts. The section on "What do you relate to?", *is to encourage the students' to connect the literary texts to life*. Finally, the sections enquiring "What do you notice?", and "What do you question?", are to elicit reflective responses on the text.

In order to make the task demands reasonable, the researcher applied a more flexible approach. The participants were required to choose at least one question *from each section but they had to attempt all four sections when writing their journal entries*. They were also encouraged to write any thoughts or opinions other than those connected to the questions asked. Also, there was no limit set to the length of their journal entry.

#### Teacher-Researcher's Journal

In order to keep a written account of observations, experiences and reflections throughout the data collection procedure, the teacher-researcher kept a journal in which all these were recorded. Here, a record of the participants' interests, behaviour and comments that were felt to be of importance in order to gauge their perception regarding the use of journal-writing in helping them develop in-depth responses towards literary texts, were kept.

#### Interviews

The interview is the second most important method used by qualitative researchers and it allows the researcher to find out what is in the minds of the participants, - what they think or feel about something. According to Cohen and

Manion (1994) the interview allows the researcher to make a true assessment of what the responder really believes. In order to obtain first hand information from the participants on their perception regarding the use of journal writing in helping them develop in-depth responses towards literary texts, the researcher interviewed all six participants after they had completed their journal writing activities.

This semi-structured interview was carried out individually and in an informal setting. A set of open-ended questions (Appendix D) was prepared for the interview as these questions allow the researcher to probe, in order to obtain more in-depth data. Also, it allows the researcher to be more flexible and spontaneous. These interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. The data were used to check, clarify and supplement other data sources.

### Data Analysis

As this is a qualitative research study, a descriptive analysis of the data obtained was done. The primary sources of data for this study were obtained from the participants' journal entries and the interviews that were carried out. A significant part of data analysis involved examining the written discourses of the participants, that is the journal entries.

As this study's main objective is to analyse the responses of the participants' towards literary texts, grammar errors is not the focus. Instead, the researcher analysed the responses based on meaning and content. The pre-guided journal entries and post-guided journal entries were compared and analysed in order to note the similarities and differences in their responses. Also, the participants' responses to the literary texts were analysed and coded into key categories such as affective, connective and reflective.

In order to trace the development of the students' responses, the researcher referred to Thomson's (1987) developmental model of a reader-response approach to literature (Appendix E). The students' responses were assessed according to the levels stated in this model.

Finally, the interviews with the participants were transcribed and examined in order to gain insights on the participants' perception regarding the use of journal writing in helping them develop their responses towards literary texts.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, a description of the research approach, the research site, the participants involved together with the key informants and the literary texts used have been given. Also, the methods used for data collection and the data analysis procedure have been presented. From these, the researcher hopes to obtain valuable insights that would be beneficial to the teaching and learning of literary texts. The next chapter is a discussion of the findings of this research study in relation to the research questions.