

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The aim of this quantitative and qualitative study is to gain insights on the attitude of the Semai students towards learning English. The study also aims to reveal the factors that affect students' attitudes towards the learning of English.

This chapter describes the sample size, methodology and procedures used in collecting and analyzing data for this study.

3.1 Subjects

Forty Form 3 students were chosen as respondents for this study. They are students from SMK Sri Tapah, Jalan Pahang, Tapah. The school was chosen since it has a substantial number of Orang Asli students in the school (61%). Twenty female and twenty male Semai students participated in this study. They were randomly picked from 165 Form 3 Semai students in the school and therefore do not have the same level of proficiency (see Table 4.5). They sat for English as a compulsory subject in

Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) in year 2007. A questionnaire of forty items was administered to all forty students (see Appendix 1).

Apart from the questionnaire, interviews were conducted with five female and five male students. They were chosen from the forty student respondents. These subjects volunteered to be subjects for the interview. The interviews were conducted as to obtain more personal opinions and to understand better the subjects' attitudes in learning English (see Appendix 5).

In addition, all the five teachers who were teaching English in the school where the study was conducted were chosen as teacher respondents. They were required to complete another set of questionnaires (see Appendix 3). To gain more personal views from the teachers, a series of interviews was conducted with 5 teachers. Two English Language teachers from SMK Tapah (another school with a majority of Semai students) were interviewed as only three out of the five English language teachers in the school where the study took place were willing to be interviewed (see Appendix 6). All questions as in Appendix 3 were asked again as the teacher respondents were not all from the school where the study was conducted. The interview was relevant as the researcher wanted to know in depth the views of the teachers regarding the attitude of the Semai students towards education and also the perception of the teachers vis-à-vis problems encountered when teaching these students. The teachers varied in terms of length of teaching experience, ethnicity and gender (database provided in Table 3.2).

3.2 Research Tool

In this study, four research tools were used as a means of collecting data from the respondents:

1. Questionnaires for the student respondents
2. Interview sessions conducted with the student respondents
3. Questionnaires for the teacher respondents
4. Interview sessions conducted with the teacher respondents

Details of these instruments are now provided.

3.2.1 Questionnaires for the Students Respondents

A six-page questionnaire for the students consisting of forty items (four sections, see Appendix 1) was administered. Students were told not to reveal their identity or name so as to encourage them to be more truthful. The questionnaires elicited mostly data on the respondents' academic and family background, attitudes towards English, the students' responses towards strategies employed by teachers and the students' strategies for learning English. Section 1 attempts to elicit information on students' academic and family background and the demographic information of the subjects is acquired. A number of nine items of five close-ended questions (items

1,2,6,7 and 8), three items of open-ended questions (items 4, 5 and 9) and one item on order of frequency (item 3) are used in this section.

Section B with 14 items focuses on the students' attitudes towards English. It consists of two parts; I and II. Part I comprises of three items - two close-ended questions (item 10 and 11) and one open-ended question (item 12), while Part II comprises of 11 items of attitude scaling (items 13 to 23). The Likert scale questionnaire is used for the attitudinal questionnaires. It is a checklist asking the respondents to indicate simple agreement or disagreement with a statement and respondents are required to rate a pool of attitude statements according to their own beliefs and evaluations.

Section C which comprises of seven items examines the reactions or perceptions towards English activities (items 24 to 30). Item 24 is a close-ended question, whereas six items are on attitude scaling (items 25 to 30). Section D which investigates the students' strategy in learning English consists of ten items (items 31 to 40).

The questionnaires are all adapted with exceptions to items 1, 2 and 3 from questionnaires in studies conducted by both Chow (2003) who focused on the attitude of Malay and Chinese undergraduates towards English in the University of Malaya and Lim (2003) who studied the attitude of urban secondary school students in Malacca. Items 1,2 and 3 were added as the researcher needed to obtain data on what

the students expected to get for English language paper in PMR 2007, their score for English language in PMR trial and the frequency of languages (Bahasa Melayu, Bahasa Semai and English) used at home. Short and simple items are designed so as to not confuse the student respondents. Bahasa Melayu is fully used since the students are more comfortable using Bahasa Melayu than English. The student respondents would understand the questions better and there would be no misinterpretation of the questions or statements.

3.2.2 Interview Sessions Conducted with the Student Respondents

One-on-one interview sessions were conducted with ten student respondents. This was to help students relate their feelings about studying English and to help the researcher understand their feelings about learning the language. The students were interviewed individually. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed (see Appendix 5). The findings are discussed in Chapter 4.2, 4.3.2).

Basically, six questions were asked during the interviews (see Appendix 2). The questions attempt to elicit information on: whether they like to study English, their problems encountered in learning the language, the advantages of learning English, their opinions of their English teachers, the subject (English or Bahasa Melayu) they find more difficult and the strategies the students use to learn English.

The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Melayu as the students are more comfortable and proficient in Bahasa Melayu. Initially, during the interview the researcher used English. However, the respondents were not able to respond (in some cases the respondents were not able to understand the questions and therefore could not respond).

An interview with a student lasted for about 12 minutes. Being interviewed individually and not being familiar with the researcher were among factors that hindered students from expressing their thoughts openly.

3.2.3 Questionnaires for the Teacher Respondents

Another questionnaire was administered to the five English language teachers in SMK Sri Tapah. Eight items, all open-ended questions were asked (see Appendix 3). The questions were constructed in English. The questions aim to elicit information on whether the teachers think English is important for the Semai students, why the Semai students should learn English, what are the problems they encounter in teaching English to the Semai students, what are the ways to make the students interested in English, the purpose of teaching English, who should be blamed if the students fail to be proficient and what other issues influence the learning and teaching of English among the Semai students. The questionnaire is adapted from a questionnaire in a

study conducted by Ee (2001) on cultural factors affecting English proficiency in rural areas.

The objective of administering the questionnaire is to obtain the teachers' opinions on the Semai students' attitude towards learning English in the school and the problems students face in learning English (as perceived by the teachers). Data were then analysed and discussed in Chapter 4 (see 4.3.3, 4.3.5).

3.2.4 Interview Sessions Conducted with the Teacher Respondents

One-on-one interview sessions were conducted with another five teacher respondents. Five English language teachers teaching in two different schools with a majority of Orang Asli students in Batang Padang district were chosen as respondents for the interview. The teachers vary in terms of teaching experience. Two teachers have been teaching the Semai students for more than 10 years and 5 years respectively while one teacher has been teaching the Semai students for less than 5 years. Sixteen questions were asked during the interview (see Appendix 4 for details). The interviews were recorded and conducted in English. An interview with one teacher respondent took approximately 30 minutes. There was a sharp contrast as compared to 12 minutes interview duration with each student as the teachers were more familiar with the researcher and therefore could express their thoughts freely. The objective of interviewing the teachers was to gain different insights on the Semai students' attitude

towards English and education in general from the teachers teaching and interacting with the Semai students. The interview, helped to discover important issues which are relevant in teaching English to Semai students. The interviews were later transcribed (see Appendix 6) and data analysed (see Chapter 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.3.5)

3.3 Administration of Research Tool

As discussed in 3.2, four research tools were used in this study; a set of questionnaires for forty student respondents, recorded interview sessions with ten student respondents, a set of questionnaires for ten teacher respondents and recorded interview sessions with five teacher respondents.

Clear language was used to ensure the questions (see Appendix 1) were understood. The researcher also made sure the answer options did not overlap. The questionnaire was pilot-tested on 1st November 2007. Ten students from the researcher's school (SMK Buyong Adil, Tapah) were chosen as participants in this pilot study. They were all Form 3 students who had just sat for PMR. They were chosen as they were of the same age as the Semai student respondents. The pilot study was conducted so as to find out whether there was any difficulty in understanding the items. Some changes were made as a result of the pilot study. Previously, the questionnaire only consisted of 30 items (Section A, B and C). As a result of the pilot

study, another section consisting of another 10 items (Section D-items 31 to 40) was added as the researcher would like to obtain information on the strategies employed by the students in learning English. As a result of the pilot test too, there were changes made to questions 25 to 30. During the pilot study, for questions 25 to 30, students had to give their own responses and opinions on what the English teachers should do during lesson. However, only half of the students responded to this question while the other half skipped the question. However, after the changes, students just had to circle the appropriate rating scale as the possible answers were already provided.

On 7th November 2007, the questionnaires were administered to the 40 Semai students in SMK Sri Tapah, Tapah. Prior to this, the researcher sought permission from the school authority to have the 40 Semai students as respondents. 7th November 2007 was chosen because the students had just finished their Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) examination. After their PMR, the students did not have any more lessons but were engaged in activities like motivational talks and games conducted by the Counseling Unit of the school. The year-end school holidays were going to begin in just another three days. Therefore, it was an opportune time for the administration of questionnaires. Students were brought into a classroom and the questionnaire was administered. Statements based on point scale were rated and questionnaires were completed by the respondents and returned to the researcher. The administration of questionnaires took about 30 minutes. The questionnaires were later analysed (see Chapter 4.3.1, 4.3.2).

The day after the administration of the questionnaire, interview sessions with ten student respondents from the 40 student respondents who had participated in the earlier questionnaire took place. The students volunteered to be interviewed. The interview sessions were conducted in a laboratory in the respondents' school and there were five female and five male student respondents. The interviews were conducted between the researcher and each respondent. Six open-ended questions were asked by the researcher during the interview. The researcher directed questions from an interview guide and listened to the answers. The researcher used English and Bahasa Melayu alternately during the interview. Responses were recorded. The recordings were later transcribed (Appendix E) to enable the researcher to analyze the responses (see Chapter 4.2, 4.3.2). As each interview took about 12 minutes, the ten interview sessions took about one hour and twenty minutes.

Eight open-ended questions (see Appendix 3) were given to five teacher respondents. The respondents were free to answer questions or provide comments. Space was provided in the questionnaire for the teachers to write their responses. The questionnaires were given to the teacher respondents and were collected after one week. Table 3.1 below shows the demographic information of the teachers.

Table 3.1 Demographic Information of the Teacher Respondents for the Questionnaire

| Teacher | Gender | Age | Working experience |
|----------------|---------------|------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Male | Above 40 | More than 20 years |
| 2 | Female | Below 30 | Less than 5 years |
| 3 | Female | Above 40 | More than 10 years |
| 4 | Female | Below 40 | More than 10 years |
| 5 | Female | Below 40 | More than 5 years |

In addition, interview sessions were conducted with five teachers (in the district of Batang Padang) who are teaching in schools with a majority of Semai students (see Table 3.2). Three English language teachers from SMK Tapah and two English language teachers in the school where the study was conducted agreed to be interviewed. The teachers were chosen as they represented two schools with a majority of Semai in Tapah. Only one male teacher was interviewed because most of the English teachers teaching in schools with a majority of Semai are predominantly female. The interviews were conducted in an informal way so as to make the teachers comfortable in sharing information during the interview. Sixteen open-ended questions were asked during the interview (see Appendix 4) and each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Questions asked in the interviews were similar with questions in the questionnaires as some of the teachers stated very brief answers or responses to the questions in the teacher's questionnaire. By having the interviews, more details answers could be obtained from the teachers. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Data was later analysed (see 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.3.5).

Table 3.2 Demographic Information of the Teacher Respondents for the Interview

| Teacher | Gender | Age (years old) | Working Experience | School |
|---------|--------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Female | Below 30 | Less than 5 years | SMK Sri Tapah, Tapah |
| 2 | Female | Below 40 | More than 10 years | SMK Sri Tapah, Tapah |
| 3 | Female | Above 40 | More than 10 years | SMK SriTapah, Tapah |
| 4 | Female | Above 40 | More than 10 years | SMK Tapah, Tapah |
| 5 | Male | Above 40 | More than 10 years | SMK Tapah, Tapah |

3.4 Research Methodology

The following data was analysed:

1. Student respondents' questionnaires responses
2. Student respondents' interview transcripts
3. Teacher respondents' questionnaires responses
4. Teacher respondents' interview transcripts

3.4.1 Student Respondents' Questionnaires Responses

There were forty student respondents. Items were mostly close-ended (36 items). In most cases, students were required to circle a suitable answer from the attitudinal rating scale to indicate a simple agreement or disagreement on the issue addressed. There are also four open-ended questions. Some basic and personal or demographic information of the students were also asked.

3.4.2 Student Respondents' Interview Transcripts

Recordings of one-on-one interviews with all the ten respondents were transcribed. The recordings lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes. On an average each interview session took about 12 minutes. Basically, six questions were asked during the interview. All the respondents answered all questions.

3.4.3 Teacher Respondents' Questionnaires Responses and Interview Transcripts

The researcher did not have any difficulty in understanding data collected from the questionnaires and in transcribing the interviews since the recordings were clear.

Answers provided in the questionnaire and during the interviews were analysed for triangulation (see Chapter 4.2, 4.3, 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.4, 4.3.5).

3.5 Conclusion

In this study, the research tools utilized were two sets of questionnaires for both student and teacher respondents and interview sessions with both student and teacher respondents. Forty students and five teacher respondents participated in answering the questionnaires while ten student respondents and another five teacher respondents were involved in the one-on-one interview sessions. Close-ended and open-ended questions and attitudinal rating scale were employed in the questionnaires for student respondents. Close-ended questions were employed as such questions are efficient means of gathering information while attitudinal rating scale helped to identify trends in attitudes.

The interview session helped to gather opinions of the students about learning English by giving the respondents the freedom to respond with their own ideas in their own words. The open-ended questions used in the interview sessions and in a set of questionnaires administered to the teacher respondents helped to get richer and more detailed insights into the teachers' perception regarding the teaching and learning of English by their Semai students.