

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter focusses on the various instruments which are used in this study for the main purpose of obtaining answers to the research questions. The instruments used have helped the researcher to find out the sources of information used by the course participants, the application of information skills in the practicum reports and whether the course participants were able to write their practicum reports in a cohesive and a coherent manner.

Academic writing represents a difficult assignment for In-Service teachers in Malaysian teacher training colleges because this type of writing involves an integration of a number of writing skills. Apart from punctuation, vocabulary, spelling and basic grammar, academic reports require sourcing required information as well as systematic ordering of ideas which allows the reader to follow a logical chain of reasoning. This ordering first necessitates the selection of a topic, a statement of purpose, and a series of interrelated paragraphs which progress coherently to a final convincing closing paragraph.

### 3.1.1 Research Questions

This study serves to investigate possible answers to the following research questions.

- (a) Does the background of the participants (in terms of ELT experience, basic teacher training, type of school, writing proficiency and attitude towards work) affect their performance in the practicum reports?
- (b) What were the information sources used by the participants in their practicum reports? How were they used in the academic writing?
- (c) Does journal-keeping help course participants to seek, store and process information for their practicum reports? How?
- (d) Is the interview a valuable source of information for a practicum report?
- (e) What strategies of information use have the participants acquired, and how are these demonstrated?
- (f) Did the participants apply their knowledge of information sourcing and note-taking techniques such as direct quotation, paraphrase, summary and evaluation effectively in their practicum reports? To what extent?
- (g) Did the participants use their knowledge of information skills to write their reports cohesively and coherently?
- (h) Did the participants find the information skills component useful?

### 3.2 The Sample

The sample consisted of 19 participants of the In-Service English Language Immersion Course at Maktab Perguruan Temenggong Ibrahim, Johor Bahru. The 14 week In-Service English Language Immersion Course is the brainchild of the Teacher Training Division of the Education Ministry and its sole purpose was to improve the teacher's own proficiency. 'Immersion' can be defined as the process of learning English through English. This process is realised through an In-Service English Course where participants are 'immersed' in communicative settings which promote the use of English. The teachers selected for this course were all primary school teachers teaching English in their respective schools. Most of the teachers in this course had training in TESL Methodology. Only a few did not have a TESL background. They were either Bahasa, Chinese language, Tamil language or Pre-school teachers. The respondents too, came from various family backgrounds. They also differed in their years of teaching service. The details of the sample are as follows:

Components of Sample

<i>No.</i>	<i>Area of Specialisation</i>	<i>No. of Teachers</i>
1.	English Studies (TESL)	9
2.	Malay Studies	4
3.	Chinese Studies	2
4.	Tamil Studies	1
5.	Pre-School Education	3
	TOTAL	19

### 3.2.1 The Non-TESL Participants

Those who were not TESL optionists but who were made to teach English, were confident in their use of English language orally. Their only problem was writing, partly due to poor reading habits and lack of interest in anything that was in English. Basically they were more attuned to teaching in Bahasa Melayu.

### 3.2.2 The TESL Participants

Before the start of the course on information skills, the researcher perceived that the course participants were apprehensive about the content of the course as it was relatively new. Other than having a rudimentary knowledge of note-taking and summarising skills, the majority of the TESL participants did not possess the other salient pre-requisites for information skills. Information processing skills such as direct quotations and paraphrasing were beyond their comprehension and they realised that these skills were new challenges they had to contend with in the arena of academic writing.

The TESL optionists, although better-off than the Non-TESL optionists in terms of teaching strategies and methodology, were still not as proficient as one would expect them to be. They were particularly weak in writing for academic purposes. This could be attributed to their general lack of interest in reading for academic purposes and inadequate involvement in academic writing, in their teaching career. Neither was their teacher-training days helpful as much of the writing they did then was for general purposes. What they lacked was experience in writing academic papers. To most, writing the practicum



report was a new experience. Except for one or two teachers who could be classified as habitual writers in English, the others were, on the whole, non-writers.

### **3.3 Instrumentation and Data Collection**

In the course of this study, various instruments have been used to achieve greater triangulation and credibility of results. Information skills is a network of skills pertaining to acquiring, retrieving and processing of information. The relevancy and accuracy of information conveyed reflects the participant's skill in selecting, recording and organising information and presenting it in the best way possible for his/her audience. In order to gauge this skill, the researcher found it necessary to use various instruments to identify information acquired, retrieved and processed in the practicum reports. The instruments used in this study were as follows:

1. Questionnaire on the Biodata of Course Participants
2. Pre-Test
3. Journals
4. Practicum Reports
5. Interviews
6. Post-Test
7. Evaluation of the Information Skills Component through a Questionnaire for Course Participants.

### 3.3.1 Questionnaire on the Biodata of Course Participants

The research started with a questionnaire to gather information on the background of respondents. This was the first data that was collected. The following information was sought to ascertain whether there was any significant correlation between students' performance on writing assignments and the factors mentioned below. The questions asked were those pertaining to the course participants' teaching experience, their school environment and their frequency of writing in English. Although questions on race, sex, age and SPM English Language Grade were asked, they were not collated as they were not important for the purpose of this study.

Where experience in teaching was concerned, the respondents were required to state the years of teaching experience. They were also asked to specify the years of experience in English Language teaching. The main purpose of this question was to find out whether the respondents' years of experience in English Language teaching had any effect on their academic writing ability. They also had to stipulate their area of specialisation during their teacher-training days. This was essential to differentiate the performance of TESL and Non-TESL participants and to find out whether a TESL background had any impact on the writing skills of TESL participants.

In order to ascertain their school environment, a question pertaining to the type of school they were teaching in, whether rural, semi-urban or urban, was asked. This provided a scenario of their working environment and conditions. It gave an insight into

the teacher's exposure to knowledge and English language and the type of writing they indulged in. It also served as a basis for establishing whether urban-based teachers were better academic writers than rural-based teachers. It was also felt that this information might serve to overcome certain preconceived ideas people might have regarding rural and urban English language teachers.

To start with, the notions people have of the rural English language teacher are usually very negative. As rural teachers are isolated from urban life, more often than not they are regarded as a 'deprived lot' in terms of teaching facilities, teaching techniques and latest technology in teaching. Owing to these impoverished conditions, they would not be able to teach well, thus resulting in ineffective teaching and poor English results. As the performance of pupils in exams is crucial for the image of the school as well as the image of the English language teachers in that school, it is of paramount importance that the English language teachers are sent for In-Service training from time to time. This will help them to keep abreast of latest teaching methodologies in TESL.

Although the urban teachers are better off than their counterparts in rural schools where teaching facilities are concerned, they are not the 'epitome of perfection' where language teaching is concerned in town schools. With Internet being easily available to students at home as well as at cyber cafes, the urban teacher should always be ahead of students where knowledge and information technology are concerned. This could only be achieved with strong determination, positive attitudes towards teaching and good reading

habits. The urban teachers must always upgrade their teaching skills to be well ahead of the students in schools.

To round up the survey on the biodata of respondents, the researcher found it pertinent to find out how much of general writing in English, the respondents had done during their free time. This was to ascertain whether the habit of writing frequently had any effect on their overall writing proficiency. The respondents had to indicate whether it was 'Never', 'Sometimes' or 'Always'. Finally the respondents had to reflect on their writing experience and indicate the problems they faced while writing in English.

### **3.3.2 Pre-Test and Post-Test**

The pre-test (Refer to Appendix C) was administered as soon as the data on the teaching experience of the respondents were collected. This test was administered before the start of the course on information skills.

The main purpose of the pre-test was to gather information regarding the respondents' skills in note-taking techniques prior to their exposure to a formal instruction on information skills. In fact, this was a study on the previous knowledge of the respondents as regards note-taking skills. A study of the course participants' prior knowledge of basic information skills, in particular note-taking techniques was necessary to ascertain at the end, whether the acquisition of information skills was significant when both the pre-test and the post-test results were compared and analysed. The pre-test also revealed the entry behaviour for academic writing.

Once the practicum reports had been evaluated, a post-test was administered to find out respondents' ability to use information skills, that is, to what extent they had imbibed the salient features of information skills and had used them accurately and appropriately in direct quotation, paraphrasing, summarising and evaluating the report. The criteria used for analysis of this post-test was similar to the criteria used in the pre-test. The purpose of this post-test was to ascertain the participants' mastery of information skills to assess the degree to which they had improved through the actual writing of the practicum report by comparing results in the pre-test and the post-test. The same instrument was used for the pre- and the post-test so that the test would be a valid one and its scores would be more reliable. Furthermore, it would be easier to collate both results if the instrument was the same. The weightage of marks for evaluating the pre-test and the post-test was as follows:

Direct Quotation	-	10 marks
Paraphrase	-	20 marks
Summary	-	10 marks
Evaluation	-	10 marks
		<hr/> 50 marks

In direct quotation, the course participants were required to quote verbatim from the reading text. Marks were given for accuracy of quotation, where the participant had used exactly the same words as were used originally. In paraphrasing, the course participants had to write a text in their own words, without deviating from the original meaning of the text. The third criterion 'Summarising' entailed a condensation of the

whole text in about 120 words. The final criterion, that is 'Evaluation' involved a process of obtaining information, interpreting the information, making value judgements and finally making decisions.

#### 3.3.2.1 Text Selection

The text selected for the tests was based on the theme of cross-cultural misunderstanding in the world today (Refer to Appendix C). The criteria for its selection were as follows:

1. The subject matter of the text was interesting.
2. It had several examples giving the participants a clearer picture of the cultural misunderstanding that exists in the world today.
3. In terms of language, it was easy to understand and not confusing.
4. It provided sufficient scope for note-taking techniques and recording of information such as direct quotation, paraphrasing, summarising and evaluation.

The text consisted of 4 paragraphs which stated how cross-cultural misunderstanding occurred when the meanings of words in two languages which were assumed to be the same reflected different cultural patterns. The author then went on to explain how this occurred through a series of anecdotes, which exemplified typical situations of this cross-cultural misunderstanding throughout the world. Some of these anecdotes were humorous. What the course participants were required to do was to read and comprehend the passage and then use the passage given to illustrate note-taking

techniques such as direct quotation, paraphrasing, summarising and evaluation. The participants were given one hour to complete the test. The purpose of giving this test was to test their ability in quoting directly from a given text, paraphrasing accurately without deviating from the actual meaning of the source, summarising the whole text to one third of its length and maintaining its meaning and finally evaluating the whole text.

One of the problems encountered by the course participants when attempting the question was time. Paraphrasing and summarising a text required more time than direct quotation and evaluation. In order to prevent the course participants from selecting the shortest paragraph for paraphrasing, they were instructed to paraphrase the first paragraph and not any one of the paragraphs as stated in the rubrics. The researcher had to make this amendment to the test paper because this test had been administered as a 'take-home' assignment to previous Immersion Course Participants for the component on Information Skills and they had all selected the shortest paragraph to paraphrase to lessen their burden.

#### 3.3.2.2 Assessment

The four basic skills of direct quotation (citation skills), paraphrasing, summarising and evaluation of text were focused for this test as they were regarded as salient features of any academic writing. For example, in citation skills, the participants were evaluated on accuracy and authority of source. Each participant was awarded 10 marks for a perfect quotation which was cited correctly. Marks were allocated for conventions of direct

quotation and punctuation. An omission of a comma or a fullstop would not warrant full marks.

The next note-taking technique that was assessed was paraphrasing of text. The course participants were assessed based on accuracy and grammar. 20 marks were allocated for a good paraphrase.

Where summarising skills were concerned, the participants had to identify key items in the passage. The participants had to reduce or compress these items in a way that was at least sufficient to allow the researcher to retrieve their original meaning. The allocation of marks for this skill was 10. The participants had to summarise the whole passage in about 120 words. The criteria for evaluation were content and language.

The fourth area of assessment was the evaluation of the whole passage by the participants. Here they were assessed by their ability to judge the value of the text for a given purpose. They were also judged on organisation of the output and relevance to the purpose. They were allocated 10 marks for this task.

In conclusion, the total allocation of marks for the whole Pre-Test and Post-Test was 50. The breakdown of marks was as follows:

Direct Quotation	-	10 marks
Paraphrase	-	20 marks
Summary	-	10 marks
Evaluation	-	10 marks



The pre-test was used as the post-test at the end of the course. The purpose of the pre-test was to gauge the entry behaviour of the course participants prior to starting the course on "Information Skills". The purpose of the post-test was to gauge how much of "Information Skills" have been absorbed, understood and applied effectively in their note-taking techniques. It also served to show whether a knowledge of information skills helped them to write better for academic purposes.

There were no 'ready-made' answers for this test and the researcher had to work out a marking scheme for the test to facilitate marking. She allocated 10 marks for a direct quotation, a summary and an evaluation of the text. Her rationale for allocating ten marks for a direct quotation was that the information selected for quotation should be very important and pertinent for the topic of study. Although the specific information is quoted verbatim from the text, it had to be well-phrased with strict adherence to the norms of direct quotations. Similarly, ten marks were also allocated for a summary of the whole text as it was text-based and gave the gist of the text. It showed the participant's ability to condense and group the writer's ideas. The course participant was also allocated ten marks for a good evaluation of the whole text. Here, he or she had to be judgemental and evaluate fact or opinion, reality or fantasy and appropriate or inappropriate information. Conversely, a paraphrase requires the course participant to restate the writer's idea in his or her own words. This requires greater thought, a good comprehension and accurate interpretation of the text. As this task entails 'more work' than the other note-taking techniques, more marks have been awarded, that is, twenty marks.

### 3.3.3 Journals

A journal for the purpose of this study is an account of what a student writes of his/her daily activities. In this case, it was a written account of participants' involvement in their classroom-based activity and progress in their practicum reports. Each course participant was required to submit four journals. The topics for the journals were chosen based on the different stages of report writing. The journals were as follows:

- (a) Journal 1 - Topic, objectives and scope of project
- (b) Journal 2 - Introductory chapter and materials for portfolio
- (c) Journal 3 - Practicum - Activities carried out in school and revising activities
- (d) Journal 4 - Participants' reflections on the whole course and their writing experiences during the preparation of the practicum

A briefing on the Practicum Report was given to all course participants after registration. It was at this stage that the course coordinator briefed them on how to keep journals and told them what to include in their journals. These journals gave the researcher an insight into how much had been done as regards participants' research on classroom-based activity.

The journals were beneficial to the course participants. They helped the participants to keep track of their day to day involvement in their special project, which was actually the writing of the practicum report and the preparation of materials and

activities for the classroom-based activity. Each participant was assigned a supervisor and they were to report to their supervisors fortnightly. The journals were later submitted to the researcher for analysis.

(a) Journal 1

Two weeks after the briefing, the supervisees met their supervisors for their first round of pre-practicum discussions and they had their journals with them when they met their supervisors. The focus of this first journal was the topic of their project, as well as the objectives and scope of project. On the day of the meeting, further discussion and clarification of their project ensued between participants and supervisors. It also included outcomes of discussion and responses to supervisor's comment.

(b) Journal 2

The second round of pre-practicum discussions between participants and supervisors took place two weeks after the first meeting. The focus of the discussion was the draft of the introductory part of the report and the submission of all materials which formed part of the portfolios or kit. At this stage, they submitted their schedule of work to the supervisors. The supervisors collected their second journals and noted the contents. The journals were later submitted to the researcher for further analysis.

(c) Journal 3

A week later after the second meeting with their supervisors, the course participants

were emplaced in their respective schools for about two weeks. This was the practicum period where they put into practice all they had planned for their practicum reports in their own schools. They kept journals of the activities they carried out in school. They were to write on what worked and what went wrong with their special project while they were carrying it out in their schools. These journals were later evaluated by the researcher.

After their brief stint in schools, they reported back for lectures and feedback. The post-practicum discussion between participants and supervisors ensued immediately after their return. They were to give feedback on their practicum experience and to submit drafts of the report. Participants were advised to check for gross grammatical errors in their reports before submitting. They also submitted their journals for evaluation.

A week later, course participants submitted the final drafts of their practicum reports to their supervisors. The supervisors vetted these reports and submitted them to the course coordinator. The course coordinator collected these reports and distributed them to all the lecturers who had taught them, for evaluation. These lecturers were also supervising them during the practicum but the course coordinator made sure that the reports were not marked by their own supervisors. The participants' practicum reports were marked by supervisors other than their own. This was to avert possibility of any favouritism or prejudice on the part of the examiners and to ascertain that the participants were awarded the marks they deserved.

(d) Journal 4

The last journal that they submitted pertained to the participants' feelings and reflections on the whole course and their experience in writing out the practicum report. The evaluation of the journals was highly subjective and impressionistic. The grammatical errors encountered in the journals were not corrected. The supervisors merely made comments on the content of the journal. Most of the criticisms made by the supervisors were usually constructive and they also gave some suggestions after reading the journals. The suggestions served to improve what they had planned. To the researcher, the last journal was crucial for her study, as it reflected the participants' feelings regarding the whole practicum experience. It also provided an insight into how much they had benefitted from it and portrayed the joys and woes experienced while writing out the report.

### 3.3.4 Practicum Reports

The product of the school-based study done by the course participants, was a written report known as the practicum report. The focus of this report was on course participant's language use and it sought to bridge the gap between experience and classroom teaching. It allowed for holistic language use through a series of classroom-based activities which centred on a theme of the participant's choice. The activities devised were practical and relevant for a classroom situation. Most of the participants chose topics and activities which they were familiar with. Sample recordings of oral interaction while conducting the study formed part of the report.

The practicum report provided a microscopic view of the practical applications of information skills taught in the 14-week English Language Immersion Course. The participants were given some guidelines on how to write their practicum reports (Refer to Appendix D).

The practicum reports were evaluated based on 'A Guide To Assessing The Written Practicum Report' (Refer to Appendix E). This guide was formulated by the Teacher Training Division of the Ministry of Education, Kuala Lumpur. The researcher herself was directly involved in the marking of the practicum reports. The areas of assessment were:

1. Content
2. Language
3. Organisation and Presentation of Text
4. Growth and Development

Under content, the following aspects were evaluated:

1. Treatment of Topic
2. Appropriacy
3. Integration of Ideas
4. Focus of Ideas

As regards assessment of language, the following criteria were adhered to,

1. Accuracy of grammar, vocabulary and spelling
2. Use of cohesive devices

The organisation and presentation of text was assessed based on the following,

1. Research

- Formulating questions/problems/hypotheses;
- Collecting data or evidence relevant to these questions/problems/hypotheses; and
- Analysing or interpreting these data.

2. Organisation of information and ideas

3. Presentation of text
- layout
  - illustrations
  - visual impact

The final assessment was the growth and development of participants in the course of writing out the practicum reports. Under this guideline, two aspects were analysed, namely attitude and general approach. The attitude of the course participant was assessed in terms of receptiveness to advice and comments, motivation and flexibility. As regards general approach, the examiner tried to find out whether the course participant was consultative, meticulous and resourceful in his/her report.

The four guidelines - content, language, organisation and presentation as well as growth and development, were ultimately awarded Grades A to F. Grade A was a distinction, Grade B, a credit, Grade C and Grade D were passes and Grade E and Grade F were failures. The weightage of marks allocated for each guideline was not the same. For example, 10 marks were allocated for content and the range was as follows:

Range	Grade	Award
8 - 10 marks	A	Distinction
7 - 7.9 marks	B	Credit
6 - 6.9 marks	C	Pass
5 - 5.9 marks	D	Pass
3 - 4.9 marks	E	Fail
0 - 2.9 marks	F	Fail

Similarly, the assessment of language also included grades but the range of marks varied. Only 5 marks were allocated for language and the range was as follows:

Range	Grade	Award
4 - 5 marks	A	Distinction
3.5 - 3.9 marks	B	Credit
3.0 - 3.4 marks	C	Pass
2.5 - 2.9 marks	D	Pass
1.5 - 2.4 marks	E	Fail
0 - 1.4 marks	F	Fail

Organisation and presentation of text was allocated 20 marks on the whole. The range of marks awarded was again totally different from the range awarded for content and language. For organisation and presentation, the following marking range was adhered to:



Range	Grade	Award
16 - 20 marks	A	Distinction
14 - 15.9 marks	B	Credit
12 - 13.9 marks	C	Pass
10 - 11.9 marks	D	Pass
6 - 9.9 marks	E	Fail
0 - 5.9 marks	F	Fail

Finally, the growth and development of course participants was assessed based on a five-point scale, which was similar to the assessment of language. The range was as follows:

Range	Grade	Award
4 - 5 marks	A	Distinction
3.5 - 3.9 marks	B	Credit
3.0 - 3.4 marks	C	Pass
2.5 - 2.9 marks	D	Pass
1.5 - 2.4 marks	E	Fail
0 - 1.4 marks	F	Fail

The total allocation of marks for the whole practicum report was 40%. The allocation of marks and the marking scheme were given by the Teacher Training Division.

Each practicum report was assessed by a particular supervisor (first examiner). After that, it was assessed by a second examiner. Once each report had been examined by both the examiners, it was submitted to the researcher for her analysis. The researcher herself was a supervisor for two of the course participants. She was also the first and second examiner of two other practicum reports. Data presented were based on both the researcher's analysis as well as the moderation of marks made by both the examiners

The lecturers involved in the teaching of the English Language Immersion Course Participants had been adequately exposed to the teaching and evaluation of Information Skills in the In-Service Training Programme held for lecturers at INTAN and the Asian Pacific Development Centre in Kuala Lumpur. Even though these lecturers or supervisors cum examiners were not directly involved in the teaching of Information Skills, they were perfectly aware of the requirements of this course component and its evaluation.

### **3.3.5 Interviews**

Interviews were conducted by the participants with the Head of School and the senior English language teacher. The interviews were structured and touched on areas such as,

1. Years of teaching experience
2. Personal experience in English Language Teaching
3. Positive aspects of English Language Teaching
4. Developing pupils' skills in English Language
5. Problems of English Language Teaching

6. Problem solving
7. Coping with weak pupils
8. Availability of facilities in school

Heads of schools were asked questions pertaining to school administration which involved funding English Language projects and improving facilities for English Language Teaching.

The purpose of these interviews was to get as much information as possible about the school. This information provided the background of the school for Chapter 1 of the practicum report. It enabled the participants to glean further information for the background of their project and provided information in addition to references from books. In other words, interviews were a source of information for course participants regarding the historical background of the school, the existing state of affairs where English Language Teaching was concerned and the general proficiency level of pupils. The course participants took off from there and planned activities that were geared to the needs of the school.

The interviews conducted by the course participants, manifested their ability to :

1. decide on interview information areas - the kind of information that needed to be elicited from the interview for their practicum reports.
2. make up interview questions that might elicit interesting answers that were related to their choice. The interview therefore contained open-ended questions (WH-

questions) in addition to Yes/No questions. Given below are samples of questions framed by a course participant for the topic "Developing Note Expansion Skills Through Grammar In a Year Five Class".

Questions for the Head of School

- (a) As the head of this school, what are the problems that you usually encounter when dealing with the English Language of this school?
- (b) What about the facilities and the financial upkeep of this school?

Questions for the Senior Assistant

- (a) How many years have you been teaching English?
- (b) As an experienced English language teacher, do you think teaching grammar is an easy task? Why?
- (c) Do you think note expansion skills is difficult to teach? Why

Questions for the Senior English Language Teacher

- (a) How do you normally teach grammar in a Year Five class?
- (b) How do you develop the Year Five pupils' note expansion skills?
- (c) Do you have any problems in teaching weaker groups?

Questions for feedback from pupils pertaining to activities

- (a) Do you speak English with your friends?
- (b) Do you like the grammar and writing activities? Why?
- (c) Can you write good sentences now?

3. select people to interview, in particular, people who had some direct experience related to the topic and some important information or knowledge related to the topic.

4. conduct the interview at a time that is convenient for the interviewee, making them feel at ease and relaxed.

The researcher was able to extract the following points from the interviews:

1. participants' ability to explain who they interviewed and why they interviewed the person concerned.
2. data collection techniques through tape recording and note-taking and finally restructuring the interview at a later date for the practicum report.

The course participants wrote most of the interview in third person and in narrative form. They paraphrased most of the interview and this enabled the researcher to make a study of the participants' paraphrasing skills from audio-based materials. From the sample questions framed above for interviews by a course participant, the researcher was able to glean information pertaining to English language problems and the facilities and financial upkeep of a school; the problems of teaching grammar and note-expansion skills in school; ways of developing grammar and note-expansion skills and handling weaker pupils; and pupils' perceptions of activities carried out in class as well as their progress at the end of the activities. The information obtained were carefully paraphrased and included in Chapter I pertaining to "Introduction: Background to the Study" and in Chapter II pertaining to the "Description of the Project".

### **3.3 6 Questionnaire on the Evaluation of Information Skills Component**

This questionnaire consisted of five main questions. The purpose of this

questionnaire was to glean information regarding participants' perceptions of the course component on Information Skills.

The first question evaluated the usefulness of Information Skills. The participants had to tick 'Yes' or 'No' in the space provided. The second question was on course content. This was based on a four-point scale. The scale was as follows:

- 1 I have understood most of what has been taught
- 2 I have understood some of it
- 3 I have understood very little
- 4 I have not understood anything at all

The third question was devised to gauge the application of information skills in their practicum reports. Five aspects of the course content were listed down in the form of a table and the participants were required to tick the aspects that had been used in their reports.

As writing and reading skills complement each other, the researcher deemed it necessary to devise one question, at least, to glean information regarding participants' reading ability (Refer to Appendix F). The sub-skills for reading were taken from Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading Skills (Refer to Appendix G). Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading Skills followed a hierarchy which was quite different from Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Barrett had listed five hierarchy of reading skills. They were,

1. Literal recognition or recall
2. Reorganisation

3. Inference
4. Evaluation
5. Appreciation

To be a good reader, it is essential to have mastery of all five skills above. Once a participant had selected a book which was relevant to his area of study, he then went on to locate specific information which was pertinent to his topic. Skills like skimming and scanning, sequencing, inferring and evaluating were essential for effective note-taking skills. As reading provided content for writing, it could be assumed that a good reader would make a good writer in the long run (Stotsky, 1983).

In Information Skills, the teaching of reading skills was not included. This area was handled, by the Reading Skills lecturer. Failure to select appropriate information for their practicum reports would indicate a poor mastery of reading skills. A course participant who was unable to select the relevant facts and figures from books or who did not know how to extract the relevant information, would only make futile attempts at writing and his work would become a mere patchwork of plagiarised ideas (Dahl, 1984).

The assessment of reading comprehension skills was based on a three-point scale, namely,

- 1 I have understood most of what I have read
- 2 I have understood some of what I have read
- 3 I have not understood anything at all

The participants ticked the relevant columns to show their mastery of reading skills.

The last question was on writing skills. The purpose of this question was to gauge participants' skill in writing. This was assessed on a four-point scale, namely,

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| 4 | Very Good    |
| 3 | Good         |
| 2 | Satisfactory |
| 1 | Weak         |

They were purely assessed on mechanics and organisation of text, in particular, spelling, grammar and organisation within and between paragraphs. The participants indicated their proficiency by ticking the appropriate columns.

A class discussion was had after the course participants had answered this questionnaire. This was purely to get clarification and elaboration of answers given in the questionnaire. The researcher was keen to know why they had 'ticked' the way they did and the reasons behind their answers. This helped her to gauge the extent of their understanding of the component on information skills and its use in the practicum reports.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

To facilitate analysis of findings, the raw data collected throughout this research were converted to percentages so as to ensure that the results were judged on a common footing, that is 100 per cent. As regards the first instrument, that is the Questionnaire on



the Biodata of Course Participants, the data collected on the background of respondents were tabulated and its raw data were changed into percentages. In each table, there was an explanation of the respondents' background in raw data which was later converted into percentages.

The findings of the second instrument, the Pre- and the Post-test, were juxtaposed with the actual practicum results to find out how the good, average and weak participants performed in the tests. The marks obtained for all four components were converted to percentages. The result obtained for each component was compared and contrasted with the overall practicum result.

In the analysis of the participants' journals, a holistic approach was adopted. It was assessed globally based on the requirements for each journal. The requirements were as follows:

- Journal 1        -        Topic, objectives and scope of project
- Journal 2        -        Chapter I of practicum report
- Journal 3        -        Activities carried out during practicum in school
- Journal 4        -        Participants' reflections of information skills course and experiences in writing

The next instrument, the practicum reports, were analysed with reference to an assessment guide known as "A Guide To Assessing The Written Practicum Report" (Refer to Appendix E). Marks were allocated for content, language, organisation and presentation

of text, growth and development. Total marks for practicum reports were forty. The analysis was based on frequency of scores for the criteria mentioned above.

The fifth instrument used was interviews. The participants were assessed based on their ability to extract information from the interviews for the introductory chapter of the practicum report. Interviews were regarded as a source of information (outside the library) for practicum reports in terms of the historical background of the school, the status of English in primary schools and the overall English proficiency of pupils.

The last instrument used in this research was a questionnaire on the evaluation of information skills component. It consisted of five questions. Question 1 was on the usefulness of information skills and the respondents marked 'Yes' or 'No'. Here the researcher merely counted the number of 'Yes' and 'No' answers. The second question which was on course content, was assessed based on a four-point scale, namely

Understood most of it

Understood some

Understood very little

Understood nothing

Assessment of course content was based on frequency counts for each scale. The third question was on application of information skills in practicum reports. This too was analysed based on frequency counts for each aspect of the course. The fourth and fifth questions were based on participants' perceptions of reading and writing ability respectively. As for Questions 2 and 3, here too the researcher analysed both questions,

that is Questions 4 and 5, based on frequency counts. Throughout the research, all raw data collected, were converted to percentages to facilitate analysis of results

### 3.5 Conclusion

On the whole, this chapter attempts to focus on the research methodology used in the collection of data, namely a questionnaire on the background of the respondent, pre-test and post-test, journals, practicum reports, interviews and finally a questionnaire to gauge the effectiveness of a course. The main purpose of using several research instruments was to triangulate the results, thus giving greater reliability and credibility to the findings of this research exercise.