

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion and description of the research design and methodology employed in the study. This includes the following: sampling, selection of survey method, design of the instrument, administration of the questionnaire and structured interview and examination of samples of students writings and data collection.

3.1 Sampling

3.1.1 Students

This study involved the participation of 50 students from four Form Four classes. Students from this level were chosen because it was felt that after completing 9 years of schooling, they would have acquired some writing and oral skills to be able to respond to the questions prepared by the researcher. Besides, they were chosen because they were not sitting for any major public examination and thus, able to spare some time to answer the questionnaire and be interviewed. The students selected were of both sexes to avoid gender bias. They were also selected on the recommendation of their teachers as those identified as having writing problems in class. Furthermore, these students were those who had obtained an average performance in their school exams since Form 1 and

therefore they should represent the average students in the school. By average, the researcher means that the students have obtained 50% of their school English Language examination. This is important in order to make generalization of the findings of the study.

3.1.2 Teachers

As for the teachers, 10 teachers teaching the Forms Four and Five levels were requested to participate in this study. They were chosen because they were teaching this level and therefore, would be familiar with the syllabus and scheme of work for the writing component. Most importantly, they were willing to participate in the research and thus, would be more co-operative in providing information. It was hoped that the task of data collection would be facilitated a great deal and the information gathered would be more revealing. The teachers were also selected in the study to determine the general attitude towards writing, their perception of the difficulties faced by them as teachers of English in the school generally and in teaching composition writing in particular.

3.2 Selection of Survey Method

In this study, the questionnaire survey method was employed as questionnaires are the most efficient and economical method of collecting information from a large number of students (Youngsman, 1982:156). In addition, questionnaire survey allows for description assertions to be made on a defined population. Besides, questionnaire survey enables quick collection of data. It is acknowledged that even though the questionnaire survey

method may lack the ability to penetrate deeply into any phenomenon, the fact that such a method has been used in recent studies by Rajentharan (1998) and Kamalnathan (1999) lends support to its present use.

To further support data collected via the questionnaire survey method, structured interviews with both teachers and students were carried out and samples of students compositions collected.

3.3 Design of Instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

Bearing in mind the general principles of questionnaire construction (Oppenheim 1966, Bailey 1978), two sets of questionnaire for both the students and teachers were carefully developed from a review of the related literature as well as from personal experience and intuition. Consisting of two parts, the questionnaires were designed with the following objectives:

- 1) To elicit from students and teachers what actually happens in their composition class with regard to the learning and teaching of composition writing, respectively, and
- 2) To identify students' and teachers' perceptions of the problems they have in writing and teaching composition, respectively.

(a) Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two parts (see Appendix A).

Part I consists of general questions which aimed at gathering information regarding their background knowledge, attitudes and perceptions towards learning English. In this part I of the questionnaire and among other things, the researcher also attempts to find out the language the students usually use to communicate, whether they read materials in English and how they perceive their composition lessons in class.

Part II of the students' questionnaire aims at eliciting information on their perception of the problems related to composition writing in particular. The questions are grouped under 3 sections :

Section A, comprises questions seeking answers related to content-based problems. Questions on the organization of their ideas, their preference for composition topics and difficulties they encountered in writing the different composition topics assigned to them by their teachers.

Section B, comprises questions seeking answers related to process-based problems that students experience at the different stages in their writing.

Section C, comprises questions seeking answers related to language-based problems which students have difficulties in.

(b) Teachers' Questionnaire

The questionnaire also consisted of two parts (see Appendix B).

Part I, among other things would bring forth teachers' perception on their students' English language skills proficiency, views on the importance given to English by their students, information pertaining to teachers' educational qualification, previous training and experience in teaching composition writing.

Part II, of the questionnaires for the teachers, aims at eliciting information on their perception of the students' problems related to composition writing in particular. The questions are also grouped under 3 sections.

Section A comprises questions seeking answers to the problems teachers encountered when teaching writing which relate to content such as inability of students to organize their ideas, poor topic continuance etc.

Section B comprises questions seeking answers to the problems related to process such as difficulties in carrying out process writing in class, problems in providing feedback to students etc.

Section C comprises questions seeking answers to the problems related to language such as the grammatical errors made by students, limited vocabulary, poor or inadequate use of cohesive devices, sentence structure, mechanics of writing etc.

3.3.2 Structured Interview

Apart from the use of questionnaire, a structured interview for both students and teachers was conducted. According to Cohen and Marion (1989) cited by Sta Maria (1999) a single approach to understanding the teaching and learning process yields only limited and sometimes misleading data. Thus, the interviews were conducted to further clarify data collected via the questionnaire and to get more detailed information on their problems in learning and teaching composition writing. Data obtained from the students' and teachers' interview would provide rich, in-depth information concerning their perceptions and what they actually encountered in practice.

The interviews were personalized and as suggested by Selinger and Shohamy (1989 :166) "permitted a level of in-depth information gathering... that cannot be obtained by other procedures. The interview method is one of the best way to find out what is in and on someone else's mind."

(a) Students

Among the 50 students who responded to the questionnaire, 5 students who volunteered and who have reasonably good command of spoken English were picked for the interview. This consideration for the selection of interviewees was important. Firstly, since the students had volunteered, they would be more co-operative in providing information. Secondly, if their command of English is reasonably good, their answers or

feedback will be more revealing and the task of data collection via interview for the researcher would be facilitated a great deal.

The students were interviewed individually and informally, following a schedule of open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The individual instead of group interview was favoured to ensure that each student's view was genuine and truly his/her own.

(c) Teachers

Among the 10 teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 2 teachers were selected to participate in the interview. One of them, is TESL trained with only 2 years of teaching experience. The other teacher has more than 15 years of teaching experience in other subjects and in English. She is not an English optionist. The interviews were conducted to further clarify data collected via the questionnaire and to further validate responses obtained through the questionnaires and to penetrate a little deeper into the phenomena being researched. The teachers were interviewed individually and informally, following a schedule of open-ended questions (see Appendix D) and were told that the purpose of the interview was to find out how composition writing was taught in their classes and what they experienced and perceived were the problems they encountered in their writing class.

3.3.3 Document - students' composition scripts

To further substantiate and supplement data collected via questionnaire and interview, samples of students' marked compositions were collected and analysed. The marked

compositions from the 4 modes of discourse namely narrative, descriptive, argumentative, and expository mode were collected from the respective teachers' respondents. The compositions were then picked at random by the researcher from the two teacher interviewees' classes. The samples of compositions among other things would reveal teachers' feedback or response to their students' compositions and to further verify the difficulties and problems faced by students in the composition writing. The students' composition scripts would among other things, reveal how teachers marked their students' composition with regard to locating errors, giving comments and providing the correct form. (refer Appendix E)

3.4 Administration of instruments

3.4.1 Questionnaire

Before administering the questionnaire, permission from the school principal was obtained to conduct the study and to use the school auditorium. The 10 teachers and 50 students were briefed by the researcher on the objective of the study and on how to complete the questionnaire, for an example, on expressing endorsement on a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by SA = strongly agree, A = agree, U = no opinion or undecided, D = disagree and SD = strongly disagree. They were also told to check with a tick () in the appropriate column after considering each statement carefully and to be frank and honest in their opinion as there were no right or wrong answers. Teacher and student respondents were also told not to write their names anywhere in the questionnaire to reassure them of their anonymity.

The questionnaire for the students was administered to the students on a Friday afternoon after school so as not to interrupt their class lesson. The questionnaire was administered in the school auditorium by the researcher with the help of a teacher. The researcher had also in advance requested the Form 4 English teachers to select and send students respondents to the auditorium. The researcher also requested a teacher volunteer to help distribute the questionnaire and to be present in the auditorium to help give necessary guidance and clarification in answering the questions in the questionnaire. This was deemed necessary by the researcher because a pilot test on the questionnaire was not done owing to time constraint.

The researcher also explained the questions but not the objective of the questionnaire to the students. The students were given half an hour to complete the questionnaire. While filling in the questionnaire, students were allowed to ask questions to clarify any further doubts that they might have regarding the possible ambiguity of questions in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire for the teachers was distributed to the teachers on the same day but given 2 days to return the questionnaire. The researcher personally collected the questionnaire on the given date.

3.4.2 Structured Interview

In order to obtain objective information, the structured interview for the students was conducted the following day i.e on a Saturday during recess time and after school. A

point to note, Saturday is a school day for this Chinese Independent High school students. 5 students were asked to volunteer for the interview after having responded to the questionnaire in the auditorium. This practical consideration for the selection of the interviewees as noted in 3.3.2 was that they should also be willing to spare time to be interviewed during their recess time or on Saturday so as not to disrupt their lessons in school. The students were interviewed individually instead of group interview to ensure that each student's view was genuine and truly his/her own. The interview was conducted in the researcher's office. The interview was taped recorded.

Interviews with the 2 teachers were conducted during their free periods and on the very day when the researcher collected the questionnaire from them. Likewise, the interview was recorded on tape.

To reiterate, the reassurance of confidentiality was made to all parties concerned orally and in writing.

3.4.3 Documents

Sample marked students' essays were collected from the respective teachers and examined in an attempt to see the link between students and teachers' perception on the problems they have in writing and teaching composition, respectively.

3.5 Data Collection

The data collected from the questionnaire, interviews and compositions was analyzed through triangulation in order that the findings would provide information on what the students' and the teachers' problems are in writing and teaching composition, respectively and the possible reasons for their problems which may have implication in the learning and teaching of composition writing. To reiterate, as cited by Kamalanathan (1999 : 48) "Data collected by means of questionnaire or any other methods mean very little until the data is analyzed and assessed (Gelding in Bell et al 1984 :230).

And in order to attain qualitative cross validation, data was analyzed through triangulation. Triangulation is used because teachers' and students perception of their problems and how composition writing should be taught may not reflect how they actually teach or learn in class. It could be that both the teachers and students may be influenced by the idea of how they should teach and be taught from the questions posed in the interview and questionnaire. What teachers and students perceive as important may not be what they actually do in their class lesson. To reiterate, Denzim (cited by Lim 1997 : 98) "Triangulation is the use of multiple methods in the study of the same object. Triangulation of data collection method is a major strength of case study as it enables the researcher to achieve the best of each method while overcoming their deficiencies."

This chapter has reviewed the methodological procedure in data collection. It has also identified procedure for data analysis. In the following chapter, findings from the research questions will be reported accompanied by a discussion.