

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains an outline of the overall research methodology. It consists of eight main sections. The first section describes the research design. The second section describes the sample group for the purpose of this study. The third section describes the pilot test. The fourth section discusses briefly the lecturers who take part in the interview. The fifth section discusses the instrumentation which comprises the trainees' questionnaire, the lecturers' interview questions, the prognostic test and the final exam English paper. The next section of this chapter deals with the collection of data. Following this is the description of the examination of documents relevant to this study and the final section describes the analysis of data.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This quantitative study was essentially designed to gather information in the form of feedback from the English option trainee teachers and lecturers in MPBP. The instruments employed by the researcher were the questionnaire, the structured interview, a prognostic test and the final exam English paper for Semester one and two. This study involved the development and administration of the trainees' questionnaire, the development of the lecturers' interview

questions, the actual interviewing of the lecturers and the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire, the interview, the prognostic test and the final exam results.

Before administering the questionnaire, the sample group was asked to look through all the academic materials given to them during their first semester and the present semester. The purpose was for the respondents to refresh their memory regarding the content and the style in which the materials had been written. This would help them in filling in the questionnaire objectively.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

For this study, the sample chosen consists of 2 classes of English option trainee teachers from M.P.B.P. in Johor. This made up all the English option trainees in this semester. This group of trainees registered for their DPM course in June 1998 and at the time of this study they were in their second semester. They were selected for this course after getting through the qualifying examination known in Bahasa as Ujian Kelayakan Latihan Perguruan (UKELP) followed by an interview conducted by officials from BPG under the Education Ministry. This is a six-semester Diploma Course. Previously the course offered was the five-semester Certificate Course. The Diploma Course began in June 1996.

This sample group, 57 in number, is made up of 6 Indians and 51 Malays. From this group, 10 trainees were chosen for the purpose of the pilot study and,

therefore, were not included in the actual study. For this study there was no necessity to group them on the basis of race. These trainees major in English Studies and its components cover methodology and proficiency also referred to, in the DPM syllabus, as the academic component. A lot of reading needs to be done in both the components. The methodology component is made up of 'Principles and Practice of ELT', 'Language Assessment' and 'TESL Methodology'. The proficiency component comprises 'Listening', 'Speaking', 'Reading', 'Writing', 'Linguistics', 'Language Study' and 'Literature'.

During the first semester, the trainees have to read materials dealing with 'Principles and Practice in ELT' under the methodology component. During their second semester the materials read are concerning the areas of 'Sociolinguistics', 'Psycholinguistics', 'Phonology' and 'Principles and Practice in ELT' under the methodology component. This sample group had completed about four months of lectures during their first semester and about three months of lectures during the second semester at the time of this study. This would have made up approximately seven months of exposure to the academic materials.

This group of trainees also attend lectures conducted in the Malay language for their Minor, that is, Living Skills and Moral Studies.

These trainees went through their entire primary and secondary school education in the Malay medium. The researcher observed that they always reverted to conversing in the Malay language whenever possible.

These trainees performed badly in their prognostic test which was held upon their entrance into the college. More than 50% of them failed the reading section and no one scored an 'A' grade. The report on the analysis of this test is given in chapter four. Their poor performance in the prognostic test implies that the overall language proficiency of these English option trainee teachers is low.

3.4 PILOTING

A pilot test was conducted on ten trainees from the sample group. The purpose of the pilot test was to examine the respondents' understanding of the questions in the questionnaire and most of all to ensure that the questionnaire does indeed provide answers to the present research. The pilot test was also administered to estimate the time taken to complete the questionnaire. The researcher wanted to ensure that the respondents understood the questions and the pilot test confirmed that the respondents were able to respond to the simple questions written in English. This pilot test also confirmed that the questions in the questionnaire could be used to gather the information required to answer the research questions. In addition, two experienced lecturers were also asked to go through the questions to advise on the rubrics and style.

3.5 LECTURERS

All the lecturers from the English unit were selected for the purpose of the structured interview. There are six lecturers in the unit including the researcher.

Three of them have a degree in TESL and two of them possess a Masters qualification and they have a minimum of 7 years experience lecturing in teacher training colleges and a maximum of 32 years in the teaching profession. They also lecture the trainees in this study. They gave their views and opinions concerning the importance of reading for the trainee teachers and reading problems faced by them.

3.6 INSTRUMENTATION

3.6.1 The Trainees' Questionnaire (Appendix A)

The questionnaire was used as the main instrument for the purpose of collecting data from the trainees. The reason why the questionnaire was chosen as the instrument in this study was because the researcher wanted to obtain all the data at once. In addition, it could be administered within a relatively short period. The questionnaire also ensured anonymity so that the trainees could be honest and objective.

Upon conducting the pilot test, adjustments were made to the questionnaire as it was discovered that the questionnaire was too long and certain parts were redundant. The items were refined so as to enable better understanding of the questions and to ensure easier collection of data.

The researcher consulted two lecturers from the English unit and two lecturers from the Education Department to assist in checking the intended meaning of the questions in the questionnaire, the rubrics and style and, most

importantly, to see whether the questions provided the information required for the purpose of this study. They have had experience in designing and administering questionnaires for the purpose of their respective studies. These lecturers gave constructive views and adjustments were made accordingly. Many of the open-ended questions were omitted in the final questionnaire to make analysis easier.

The questions in this questionnaire were adopted and adapted from questionnaires in previous researches done by Rajeswary (1984), Mariappan (1986), Lee King Siong (1994) and Xiaohong Wen (1997). The questions in the questionnaire which were taken from Xiaohong's questions were adopted from the published motivation scales of language learning, the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery by Gardner (1985) and from the questionnaire developed by Ely (1986). As these questions had been tested in previous studies they can be considered reliable. The questions were all in English.

This questionnaire consisted of 32 items. Of these, 20 questions (65 variables) were based on a five-point scale while the other questions require a "Yes / No" answer or filling in of responses. The questions were geared towards obtaining information on the trainees' socio-economic status, academic background, attitude towards the English language and the English course, their reading habits, reading strategies and reading problems.

The data gathered from question nine until eleven were to answer the third research question on the level of English use among the teacher trainees. Questions number nine, ten and eleven dealt with their use of English.

Questions number twenty-four to twenty-nine were placed in the questionnaire in order to answer the fourth research question on reading strategies. Questions number twenty-four to twenty-nine were directed towards gathering data regarding the reading habits and strategies adopted by the respondents, for example:-

Question 25. How often do you read an article or a reference book for the following purposes:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| a. Before lectures, to prepare for a new topic. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
|---|-------------------------------|

Questions thirty and thirty-one were designed to obtain information concerning their reading problems. The final question, number thirty-two, was placed to obtain the trainees' views concerning their confidence in being good, effective English teachers. This question was placed in the questionnaire in order to assist in answering the second research question on attitude of the trainees.

All the data gathered managed to shed light on the actual situation among the English option teacher trainees in semester two for the purpose of answering the research questions in this study.

3.6.2 The Lecturers' Interview Questions (Appendix B)

The interview questions were developed to investigate the views of all the lecturers in the English unit. These views were regarding the reading proficiency of the English option teacher trainees to answer research question number six, the perceived reading problems of the English option teacher trainees to answer research question number seven and ways to improve the present training programme for the English option trainees to answer research question number eight. Seven open-ended questions were constructed for the structured interview. The purpose for deciding on the structured interview was to keep the lecturers' responses limited to the area of focus in this study. The purpose of this interview was to obtain the lecturers' views regarding the importance of reading to English option trainee teachers (questions one and two), the reading abilities and problems faced by the trainees (questions three, four and five) and suggestions to overcome their problems (question six). Question seven was to obtain suggestions on ways to improve the present teaching programme for the English option. The questions included in the interview schedule were:

- i) Based on your experience and expertise, how important do you think is 'reading' to the English option trainee teachers?
- ii) Do you think that improved reading proficiency can help improve proficiency in the English language? Why?
- iii) What is your view regarding the reading proficiency of the English option trainee teachers in semester two?

- iv) Why do you think it is such?
- v) What do you think are the problems they face in reading comprehension?
- vi) How can the problems in reading comprehension be overcome?
- vii) Can you suggest ways to improve the present training programme for the English option trainees?

Five sets of the interview schedule were prepared for the five lecturers which made up all the lecturers in the English unit in MPBP at the time of this study excluding the researcher. Responses from each lecturer were noted on separate sets of the schedule.

3.6.3 The Prognostic Test

The prognostic test is a test administered to the teacher trainees under study upon entry into the Teacher Training College. This test is to assess the proficiency levels of the trainees in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. The same paper is administered to the same group of trainees on completion of the DPM course to assess changes in their proficiency levels, if any. This test is a confidential document prepared by the Education Department of Malaysia for the DPM course as such the researcher was unable to attach the test in the appendices. For the purpose of this study, only the reading section was analysed. The reading section of this paper comprised four passages followed by

comprehension tasks. The tasks which followed the passages were made up of answering multiple-choice questions, completing a table for error correction, answering structured questions to identify grammar and vocabulary items, answering true or false questions and completing mind-maps. There were 18 pages altogether. All the four sections of the prognostic test carried 100 marks each. The reading section carried 100 marks and stretched over one and a half hours.

3.6.4 The Semester 1 and 2 Final Examination English Paper

The final exam papers for the DPM courses are all confidential documents. As such, the researcher was unable to attach these documents as appendices in this study.

Only the results of the reading comprehension section were analysed from the Semester 1 and Semester 2 final exam paper. The reading comprehension section comprises two passages followed by ten questions each. All the questions are multiple choice questions.

The purpose of analysing these results was to use this analysis of the actual reading comprehension performance of the trainees under study to compare against their perceived reading comprehension level.

3.7 COLLECTION OF DATA

3.7.1 Using the Trainees' Questionnaire

The sample group was informed ahead that they would have to fill a questionnaire and what its purpose was. This was done as the researcher felt the trainees would be better prepared and more objective responses would be obtained. This questionnaire was administered outside their normal lecture hours to ensure a more relaxed atmosphere. Arrangements were made for a free slot by the researcher to enable all the trainees to gather in the lecture hall. The researcher went through the questionnaire to ensure that the trainees understood every question. The questions were explained clearly. It was stressed a number of times that the respondents needed to give their frank opinions and views and that they need not worry about being penalized. They were allowed ample time to answer the questions. They were also encouraged to discuss among themselves and the researcher. This was to ensure that the trainees were able to give appropriate answers. The respondents took about one hour to complete the questionnaire. The researcher had to explain question number twenty-nine (b) in further detail, using examples, as the respondents had some problem answering it.

The question was;

Question 29.

- a. Do you have any particular method or strategy for tackling reading assignment?

YES() NO()

- b. If yes, please write down briefly the main steps in your method or strategy.

3.7.2 Using the Structured Interview

The structured interview was conducted after the administration of the questionnaire to the trainees. The lecturers in the English unit were prompted with probing questions to aid in obtaining more comprehensive views. They had given their views based on their experience with the sample group. The interviews were conducted on an individual basis when the lecturers were available. They were asked to give their honest opinions and their responses were recorded verbatim. The researcher jotted down what was said by the lecturers into the interview schedule where spaces were provided. There were no serious obstacles in the collection of data. All the lecturers were very cooperative.

3.8 EXAMINATION OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

The researcher studied the DPM 'English Major' (1998) syllabus content and the course outline. The purpose of examining these documents was to assess the types and amount of reading material necessary for the trainees in the present study based on their syllabus.

The researcher observed that the areas where intensive reading was necessary was that of Principles and Practice, Linguistics and TESL Methodology. It was necessary for the trainees to do a lot of reading of articles on methodology theories written by renowned linguists. The reading list (Appendix C) and the suggested references in the DPM 'English Major' syllabus (1998:105) were examined too. It was observed that the books and other reference

materials recommended in the list are written by renowned linguists, like, R. Ellis, D. Nunan, H.G. Widdowson, J. Yalden and many others.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

The tool used for analyzing the data obtained from the trainees' questionnaire was the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) for 'Windows'. A lecturer from the 'Information Technology' unit was consulted for the purpose of analyzing the data. The answers from the items in the questionnaire were keyed into the computer. They were processed and analyzed using the SPSS programme after keying in all the data. Frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations were obtained and the related items were gathered under common categories. They were then tabulated and analyzed. Conclusions were then arrived at based on the statistics obtained.

The data collected from the lecturers' interview were analysed by grouping the data under similar categories. This analysis based on the research questions number six, seven and eight, is shown in Chapter four.

The findings and conclusions from the analysis have been discussed and presented based on the research questions in this study.

Chapter four presents the analysed tabulated results of the findings, the discussions and the recommendations of this study.