

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the findings in this study. A general overview of the problems related to the reading comprehension of the respondents, their attitudes, reading strategies and their SES, is given in relation to the findings of other studies. Summaries of the views of the English Unit lecturers of MPBP have been included too. Next, the implications of this study are discussed briefly and, finally, some suggestions are presented for future studies.

5.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to :

- highlight the socioeconomic and academic status of the trainee teachers,
- determine the attitude of the trainee teacher towards the English language,
- determine the level of English use among the trainee teachers
- investigate the reading strategies employed by the trainee teachers,
- ascertain the problems faced by the trainee teacher in reading in English.
- view the English lecturers' perceptions regarding the importance of reading in general and the reading proficiency levels of the respondents specifically.

- elicit suggestions from the English unit lecturers on ways to improve the English teacher training programme.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section discusses the findings of this study based on the purpose of the study.

5.3.1 The SES and the academic background of the trainee teachers

Data collected suggest that the general SES of the trainees was between the range of average to low. Only 12.7% of them came from homes where their fathers belonged to the high SES group. Studies on SES indicate that readers from low SES are placed at a general disadvantage. Eggen and Kauchak (1994) highlighted a review of studies in which students from high and low SES were compared and it was revealed that high SES students were more confident and eager to participate responsively to challenge. Low SES respondents, on the other hand, remained passive, had no confidence and needed more encouragement. Based on the researcher's observation, these characteristics stand out very significantly among a number of the respondents in the present study. Eggen and Kauchak (1994) recommended that low SES students who are passive and lack confidence, need more support to help them to succeed. They also need assistance in linking their efforts to the process of learning. This assistance can come from the home environment and the educational environment.

The researcher recommends that the respondents in this study be given more confidence and encouragement from the lecturers in college and their parents at home. However, the researcher feels that this is not going to solve the reading related problems faced by the teacher trainees within the two and a half year period in college. This is the duration of the DPM course.

With regard to proficiency in English based on their academic background, the researcher had observed that the respondents in this study had very low proficiency in reading and in English generally. In spite of that, the findings indicated that most of them managed to obtain average grades for the SPM English paper and a small percentage managed to get distinctions. It was noted that educators such as Chitravelu (1985) have voiced their doubts about the reliability of the SPM English paper as indicators of proficiency. Thus, from this study it can be seen by the researcher that the SPM grade for English alone is not a good basis for selection of the candidates to become English teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that in addition to English grades in SPM, other means of selection be included such as, oral examination, pre-test, reading comprehension test and so on.

5.3.2 English use and the attitude of the trainee teachers towards the

English language and the English course

The trainees generally had a positive attitude towards the English language and the English course. They did realise the importance of English in the present world. A similar finding was made in a study on 'Malay students reading

academic text in English', carried out by Lee (1994). Lee found that, although the students had low English proficiency levels, they did have a positive attitude towards the English language. In another study by Cooper (1992:136), reasons other than attitude were mentioned as the cause of poor reading abilities. He attributed the poor reading abilities of his Malay medium students to an inadequate knowledge of English and also lack of motivation to spend further time to improve their English. This, he added, was due to the fact that there was very little immediate need for English as they generally communicated in Malay. This is also the case in the present study. Thus, factors such as negative attitude, inadequate knowledge, lack of instrumental motivation and having no need to communicate in English, have contributed to their poor reading abilities and their reading problems. Due to their poor reading abilities, they are unsuccessful readers and this undermines their confidence in reading and adds to their reading problems.

The trainees in this study admitted to speaking some English at home and to listening to English programmes on the radio and television. Based on the researcher's experience with the trainees, almost all of them had problems with spoken English. In fact, many of them are almost incapable of effective communication. As such, they always reverted to Malay or discontinued speaking in English. This being the situation, it is highly unlikely that their English spoken at home would have helped to improve their proficiency and reading. Lee (1994) discovered that when the Malay medium students claimed that they spoke English, what they actually meant was more insertions of

English phrases and expressions in their normal Malay speech. This was not considered as communicating in English. The researcher, like Lee, feels that in order to improve the proficiency of a second language, it would be advisable to use it often and effectively. According to Richek, List and Lerner (1989), exposure to a second language is important. They discovered that if students used it frequently it would be easier to learn it. Therefore, it is recommended by the researcher that the respondents in this study be exposed to and use the English Language within and outside the learning environment at all times. Such exposure can be in the form of making the trainees read books and review them, debate, hold an English month, keep journals and so on. There should be at least two whole semesters just to improve proficiency and this should start with reading.

5.3.3 The reading strategies employed by the teacher trainees

More than half the number of respondents admitted to not employing any particular strategy when reading. Of those who did use strategies, the common strategies employed were, underlining or highlighting important points, noting down important points, looking up difficult words in the bilingual dictionary, guessing meanings of words and main ideas in paragraphs, keeping in mind the purpose for reading and reading their texts straight away. A number of studies have revealed that it may not be so effective to try and understand the text word-by-word and look-up every difficult word in the dictionary. Hosenfeld (1977), Chitravelu (1985), Rubin (1993), Lee (1994), Carrell (1988) and many others

have given their views to support this. It is also believed that reading a text straightway may be ineffective too. It is recommended by Sherer (1975) that readers be taught the skills of skimming and scanning. This is to allow students to preview information in the text. Richardson and Morgan (1994) noted that previewing helps to clarify thinking and set a purpose for reading. It is recommended by the researcher that the respondents in this study learn the use of study skills, such as, underlining, taking down main points, skimming, scanning, previewing a text and chunking in order to overcome some of their reading problems. In other words, a study skill class should be included in their syllabus in the first semester so as to provide a foundation or to enhance their reading skills.

5.3.4 The problems faced by the trainees in reading

Most of the trainees indicated that they faced difficulty when handling a reading text like professional journals, reference books, lecture notes, magazines and newspapers. They were unfamiliar with the subject matter when reading academic texts. Furthermore, many of them also perceived the concepts in the texts as too abstract with complicated sentences and too many difficult words. These problems are text related problems and a numerous amount of research has been carried out in each specific area. All these problems indeed are common reading problems of second language or foreign language readers basing it on the wide and in-depth researches done. Anderson and Urquhart (1992) and MacNamara (1970) are amongst those who had done research on text difficulty.

Included in the sea of researchers are Cooper (1992) and Vacca and Vacca (1996) and Kintch and Van Dijk (1978) who had done studies on familiarity of texts and background knowledge. Of those who had carried out research in the areas of vocabulary difficulties are Alderson and Richards (1977), Chastain (1981) and many others.

5.3.5 Perceptions of the English Unit lecturers regarding the importance of reading and the reading proficiency levels of the trainees

The lecturers considered reading as of utmost importance in relation to other language skills. Some of them felt that reading laid the very basic foundation for learning the English language. According to Daneman (1991:526), 'good readers tend to be good listeners and conversely, poor readers tend to be poor listeners' and this is especially true at the more advanced levels of reading. Huges (1973) cited by Kamalanathan (1999), referred to reading as a 'tool skill' because a child's progress in other areas will depend greatly on the reading ability of the child. It was also stressed that if a reader is unable to read effectively, it could lead to educational failure and this enhances the fact that reading plays a major role in education. Henderson and Green (1969) also supported the view that reading is considered the major tool to guide the reader to achieve success in other areas of the curriculum. In the present study, reading ability is vital as the respondents will be teachers in the future and literacy would be a necessity.

The lecturers also felt that the trainees' reading proficiency levels needed serious attention as it was very low. They confirmed that the contributing factors

were unfamiliarity with academic texts, difficulties with vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, motivation and confidence and weaknesses in reading skills like predicting and inferring. They added that the trainees were lazy and had a negative attitude towards reading and lacked a healthy reading habit. The lecturers also stressed that the trainees were not employing effective reading strategies and lacked usage of English outside lecture hours.

5.3.6 Suggestions for a better training programme

The findings brought about four main suggestions to improve the present training programme for English option trainees. These were,

1. To increase their exposure to the proficiency component. The suggestion is that it be increased to two semesters at the least;
2. To restrict the intake of potential course participants to those who have the required level of proficiency in all the four skills in order to be effective English language teachers. Intake is not to be based solely on the result of the SPM English paper;
3. To concentrate only on the 'Major' studies and have no 'Minor' studies. Every other subject should be taught as electives and, that too, taught in the English language only; and finally,
4. To reduce the size of the classes from more than thirty trainees to twenty or fewer to enable individual attention.

5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Observing that most of the trainees have come from low SES backgrounds, it would be necessary for the trainees to be given more support, encouragement and confidence to, at least, attempt to improve their English proficiency. The lack of confidence has led to the trainees sitting tight-lipped with very little response to questions and unwillingness to participate in language activities. This does not help improve the situation. Although the home environment is outside the control of the lecturers, they can, to some extent, influence the learning environment in MPBP. According to Eggen and Kauchak (1994), low SES students need more help in linking their efforts to the process of learning to achieve success.

Regarding the passes in the SPM English paper, the issue is the nature of the SPM examination. The SPM examination is a standardized examination. Standardized tests, according to Moore (1983), only help to satisfy public demand that assessment be objective, exact and convenient. However, a standardized test may not provide information to portray the situation as it actually is. Vacca and Vacca (1996) emphasised that a single test cannot possibly provide a whole picture of a student's ability. The factor of individual differences among learners is also not highlighted through standardized exams. An alternative suggestion recommended by Vacca and Vacca (1996) is the naturalistic approach where the major tool is the teacher who observes and provides feedback. The teacher would need to systematically collect information regarding the students' capabilities. It was discovered that this suggestion had led to the emergence of 'assessment

through portfolios' and had immediately appealed to many. Portfolios, it was noted, are vehicles for ongoing assessment. According to Tierney et al. (1991), portfolios are purposeful collections that examine achievement, effort, improvement and most importantly, processes. They stressed that portfolio assessment be used at various levels of education like colleges and universities. This manner of assessment could be recommended to assist the teacher trainees in the present study in solving their reading problems. No doubt this will not be a definite solution as the duration of two and a half years is insufficient to make the teacher trainees learn what they had not learnt in eleven years of schooling but, at least, the assessment could help the trainees in identifying their weaknesses in the language. They could be made aware of their weaknesses and efforts to overcome these weaknesses could be undertaken from there.

The text factor had also been looked into. Many researches have indicated that text comprehension is highly dependent upon background knowledge or schema. In the present study deductions made based on the low SES of a large number of the respondents and the problems concerning unfamiliarity with texts imply that the trainees may lack the required background knowledge. Richard, List and Lerner (1989) support the view that reading itself helps build the needed background information. If the trainees in this study do not build enough background knowledge, they will always be facing problems in reading comprehension. The trainees should be made aware and encouraged or 'forced', if necessary, to read and take the necessary steps to understand the text which is read.

In order to handle the problem of lack of use although, in general, the trainees have positive attitudes towards English and the English course, the educators need to play an important role. Differences in language use can affect reading instruction and teachers need to understand them. Chitravelu et al. (1995) stressed that it is always easier to teach a highly motivated group and recommends maximization of motivation among students. Richek, List and Lerner (1989) observed that students tend to learn a second language more quickly when only a few of their classmates speak their native language. As such, if the trainees strictly speak only English during and outside lecture hours, this exposure would lead to easier learning. It was also observed that students would benefit most if exposed to people who communicate effectively in English. The respondents in this study should communicate frequently with the English lecturers. Merit points could be given to those who discussed assignments with their lecturers and this may lead to more frequent use.

The fact that more than 50% of the respondents do not employ any reading strategies implies that they are not aware of the importance of reading strategies. The implications are that the trainees are ignorant of the fact that the reading process can be enhanced by using adequate reading strategies. Rose (1989) called attention to the social nature of the development of academic skills. She stressed that readers need to be made aware that reading is a transaction between the reader and the author. The reader needs to understand what it means to become partners with the authors of the reading texts, with other trainees and with the lecturers. These are all tied to the academic assignments. Rose also added that

educators should be concerned over the acquisition of specific linguistic and reasoning skills for the purpose of comprehending texts in order to complete academic work. The trainees need to be made frequently aware of the purpose of reading a certain text in order to keep them focussed and to produce the desired product. It would be important to provide the trainees with the correct learning objectives to inform trainees of what they are to learn and, at the same time, direct them to the content regarded as important. This view is strongly supported by Royer et al. (1992). This may also help the trainees with the difficult words. The cognitive process may be made easier as they would not be swimming in a sea of words without any direction. It may also be helpful to ask the trainees to discuss among themselves and try the reading strategies used by their friends to arrive at a suitable strategy for themselves. They should be encouraged to guess meanings from texts. It is clear that if these trainees go on employing ineffective strategies, it will definitely impede understanding. Hosenfeld (1992) had made some recommendations concerning effective reading strategies. She suggested at first to assign the initial paragraph of a text for silent reading, then, ask several volunteers to identify new words and describe the strategies used in order to understand these words and finally to discuss the identified strategies with the entire class. However, she added, the problem was that certain readers are highly resistant to having their 'habits' changed.

Finally, the views given by the lecturers imply that there needs to be a change in the intake requirements presently used by BPG or the Teacher Education Section. It is of utmost importance that, during the interview at the

selection stage, it be determined that only those candidates who are adequately equipped and suitable to be English language teachers be chosen to undergo the course. If this is not done, the implications are that the future of English among the generations to come will be drastically affected mainly due to inefficient, ineffective and English 'illiterate' teachers. The researcher finally recommends very strongly that BPG makes absolutely sure that candidates offered the English option DPM course are indeed proficient in the English Language.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.

Further research can be done in the issues related to reading which have been focussed upon in this study but they can be studied separately as individual issues. This would enable thorough, detailed and more useful findings.

Research can also be carried out based on the present study by relating it to the first language reading abilities of the respondents. The acquisition of English can be studied in relation to the first language practices of the respondents to shed light in that area. The age factor and gender can also be studied in relation to issues on reading.

Correlation studies may also be helpful. As there were too many issues in the present study, a correlation study was not done. However, studies could be carried out to look into the correlation between vocabulary and comprehension, English usage and reading abilities, attitude and English usage or comprehension and a variety of other aspects related to reading.

Similar studies to the present study can also be done using English option trainees in the other semesters, non-English option trainees or trainees in other colleges.

Other studies can also be done basing the classification of the socio-economic status of the respondents on the income grouping as stated in the Seventh Malaysian Plan. According to the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996 - 2000), income earners of up to RM1,000.00 belonged to the low income category, those earning between RM1,001.00 and RM 3,000.00 belonged to the average income category and those earning above RM3,001.00 belonged to the high income category.

In addition, other methodologies can be used for a study of this nature. A variety of instruments such as, observation, interviews and diaries can be used.

Another area where further studies can be done is that of reading problems in relation to the availability of library facilities and the size of the resource centres in teacher training colleges.