

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the sampling, instruments and procedures involved in collecting data for the purpose of finding out information concerning:

- students' reading problems,
- factors that contribute towards differences in reading interests,
- factors that affect students' motivation (or lack of it) to read in English and
- their views regarding the reading texts in the KBSM textbooks.

The end objective of the data collection and analysis is to draw up an inventory of text topics that would motivate students to read, and that would provide a guide in the selection or design of materials to teach reading.

3.1 SAMPLING

Students from two secondary schools were selected for the research study. To ensure a representative cross-section of the student population, the two schools that were selected differed in setting, medium of instruction and racial composition. This would enable a comparative study to be made of the reading motivation level as well as the reading interests of the students from the two schools.

3.1.1 SCHOOLS

The two schools selected were:

- a. Sekolah Menengah Datuk Mansor in Bahau, Negeri Sembilan.

This is a government secondary school in a rural setting. The medium of instruction is Malay. The school prepares students for the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) and the Sijil Peperiksaan Malaysia (SPM). The student population is made up of Malays, Indians and Chinese, with the Malay students forming the majority.

- b. Sekolah Menengah Tsun Jin in Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan.

This is an independent Chinese high school in an urban setting. The main medium of instruction is Mandarin with Malay as a secondary medium. The school prepares students for these examinations – the PMR and SPM which are conducted in Malay, and the Junior Unified Examination (JUE) and the Senior Unified Examination (SUE) which are conducted in Mandarin. The student population is largely Chinese.

3.1.2. STUDENTS

Only Form 4 students of the two schools were selected as it was felt that after ten years in a formal school setting, they should be able to identify their reading problems and their reading interests. Furthermore, Form 4 students were chosen over Form 3 and Form 5 students as the latter two were busy with preparations for their respective PMR and SPM.

Six classes were selected for the study, three from each school. Of the three classes, one was a Science class, and two were Arts/Commerce classes. The three classes

of each school were also selected to reflect different levels of language proficiency, that is, a good class, an average class and a weak class. The total number of respondents was 236. Of this number, 95, consisting of 45 boys and 50 girls, were from SM Datuk Mansor and 145, consisting of 85 boys and 56 girls, were from SM Tsun Jin. The students' age ranged from 15 to 17.

Based on their PMR grades for English, the students of each school were divided into three groups, namely, Good (those with Grade A), Average (those with Grades B or C) and Weak (those with Grades D, E or did not sit for the PMR). The student sampling was selected to allow a comparison to be made with the objective of finding out whether there were any differences in reading motivation and reading interests between

- students in a rural school and those in an urban school,
- boys and girls
- students from the science classes and those from the arts/commerce classes,
- students of different levels of language proficiency – good (high), average and low (weak).

3.1.3. TEACHERS

The English language teacher of each of the six classes also participated in the study. It was felt that their views and comments regarding their students' attitude towards reading and their reading interests would make a significant contribution to the data collection and findings. Besides these six teachers, questionnaires were also distributed to other English language teachers in the two schools as well as to English teachers from

other schools. This was done to provide additional data from an ‘outside’ source. In total, 30 teachers participated in the study.

3.2 INSTRUMENTS

Two questionnaires were specially designed to collect the necessary data – one for the students and the other for the teachers. Seven Form Four KBSM English textbooks were selected for the purpose of investigating how far the topics in the reading section matched the reading interests of the students.

3.2.1. STUDENT’S QUESTIONNAIRE

There were altogether 16 questions divided into two sections (Appendix A):

Section A

This consisted of 6 items designed to find out from the students their language background:

- which language they use most at home, at school and in public places (Items 1 and 2);
- their assessment of the importance of each of the four language skills in relation to their language needs (Item 3);
- their assessment of their level of proficiency in each of the four language skills and the relative importance of the reading skill vis-a-vis the other skills (Item 4);
- their response to whether they would take or not take English as an SPM subject if given a choice – this would give an inkling of their motivation (or lack of it) in learning English for academic purposes (Item 5);

- their reasons for learning English – to find out whether they are learning English for integrative or instrumental purposes (Item 6).

Section B

This section consisted of 10 items designed to elicit information from the students regarding their views and attitude towards reading, namely

- their interest in reading in their first language and in English – to find out if their lack of interest (if any) in reading in English could be due to a language problem (Items 1 and 2);
- their reading environment – to determine if they come from an environment that is supportive of the reading culture, that is, to what extent do their parents, teachers and peers encourage them to read (Item 3);
- their reading problems – to identify what these problems are, and which ones are more prevalent (Item 4);
- their views about the reading passages in their textbook – to find out whether they enjoy reading from their textbook, and if they do not, to identify the reasons (Item 5);
- their views about the benefits of reading – to find out if they agree with each of the benefits that are associated with reading (Item 6);
- their response to reading if they could choose their own reading materials – to find out whether the freedom to select their own materials would motivate them to read more than if their teachers select the reading materials for them. (Item 7);
- their favourite sources of reading materials –to give teachers and textbook writers an indication of where to source for materials for their reading classes and textbooks respectively (Item 8);

- their favourite choice of subjects for reading –to provide an inventory of their reading interests (Item 9);
- their selection of topics from a list of 24 topics that they would be interested to read about – to indicate the kind of reading passages that could be used as texts for reading comprehension.

It is significant to mention here that the 10 reading interests and the 24 topics listed in Section B Items 9 and 10 of the questionnaire were designed to cover all the areas specified in the reading component of the KBSM syllabus for Form 4 (Appendix C). For some of the areas, two topics were given – one with the teacher in mind, the other with the students in mind. A case in point is the area covering descriptions of processes and procedures. The two topics suggested were “A Visit to a Biscuit Factory” (teacher-centred), and “The Making of ‘Tarzan – the Movie’” (student-centred). In addition, some topics were designed for boys and some for girls. An example is the topic “Motor Sports” (for boys), as opposed to “Beauty Contests” (for girls). Topics on moral values, for example, “Caring for the Elderly” were included to get feedback on how students viewed such topics. Other reading interests covering Local Culture, Foreign Culture, Science & Technology / Computer & I.T were represented by the respective topics “Islamic Art and Architecture”, “A Traditional Japanese Wedding” and “The Use and Abuse of the Internet”. Finally, various genres specified in the reading component of the KBSM syllabus were also covered such as a newspaper report (“Malaysians Conquer Mt Everest”), a narrative (“The Ghost of Pulau Senja”), and letters to the newspapers (“Complaints about School Facilities”).

The responses to the questions in Section A would show whether there was any correlation between the students' language proficiency and language environment, and their motivation to learn English. These findings would be compared with those in Section B which examine the students' reading problems to see if their language proficiency (or lack of it) and language environment directly affected their motivation to read in English. And if this were the case, what reading materials would motivate them to read. The findings, based on the students' ranking of reading interests and text topics, would form the main focus of the questionnaire and research study.

To ensure clarity and ease of understanding, all the items in the questionnaire were worded in simple English. Furthermore, to facilitate ease of answering and tabulation, there were no open-ended items. 13 of the 16 items required the students to mark their answers with a tick in the appropriate boxes or columns, 2 required them to number their choices according to their order of preference and only 1 item required them to write a one-word response.

3.2.2. TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

There were a total of 14 items in the teacher's questionnaire (Appendix B). Of these, 12 were similar to those in the student's questionnaire. The reason for this is to provide feedback on whether the teachers' views about their students' reading problems and reading interests matched the students' views about their own reading problems and reading interests. A close match would indicate that the teachers were sensitive to their students' reading problems and were also aware of what their students were interested in

reading about. A poor match, on the other hand, would reflect a need for the teachers to identify their students' reading problems and be familiar with their reading interests.

The remaining two items referred to the number of years of teaching experience they had, and how often they made use of the materials in the textbook to teach reading comprehension. The purpose of including the former item is to find out if young teachers, being closer to the students' age group, are more attuned to the reading interests of the students than older teachers with a much wider age gap. The response to the latter item would give an indication of how significant or insignificant is the role of the textbook as the teachers' main source of reading materials.

3.2.3 THE KBSM ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR FORM 4

Apart from the student's and teacher's questionnaires, seven KBSM English textbooks were selected and the topics of the passages in the reading component were examined. This was done to see to whether the topics in the textbooks reflected the reading interests of the students. Six of the textbooks were approved by the Ministry of Education and currently in use in various schools in the country. The seventh textbook – *Learning English 4* – was privately commissioned, and published by the United Chinese School Committee's Association of Malaysia (UCSAM). It is also currently the course-book used in many of the independent Chinese schools in Malaysia. This particular textbook was included in the study as one of the schools in the sampling was an independent Chinese high school. The reading passages in all the seven textbooks followed the guidelines set out in the reading component of the KBSM curriculum specifications for English Language for Form 4.

3.3 THE PILOT STUDY

61 students consisting of 29 boys and 32 girls from the Form 4 Science class of Sekolah Menengah Chong Hwa in Kuala Lumpur made up the respondents in the pilot study. Two questionnaires were prepared, one for the students and the other for the teachers. Both questionnaires were similar in construct and content, and divided into three sections:

- Section A: 6 items pertaining to the students' language background
- Section B: 7 items pertaining to the students' reading background
- Section C: 10 items pertaining to the students' views about the reading passage taken from their English textbook.

Depending on their language proficiency, the students took between 30 and 50 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Some of them were unsure about what they were required to answer. There was also insufficient time for them to read the passage in their textbook in order to answer the questions relating to the passage in Section C.

As a result of the above problems faced by the students in answering the questionnaire, and subsequent to the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire, some of the questions were modified for clarity and brevity. Questions that were found to be irrelevant were deleted. The entire Section C was removed for the following reasons :

- it was felt that including a reading passage would present problems as different schools used different textbooks;

- due to time constraints, many of the students were unable to complete the questionnaire as well as read the passage and give their assessment of it;
- the students also said that it was mentally demanding for them to answer a questionnaire, read a lengthy passage and answer questions based on the passage.

In keeping with the changes in the student's questionnaire, similar changes were also made to the teacher's questionnaire.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

A letter was sent to the Principal of each of the two schools explaining the purpose of the research study, and requesting permission to conduct a survey in the school. Once permission was granted, the details were worked out so that there would be minimal inconvenience and interruption of lesson time for the students and teachers participating in the survey. However, there was a difference in data collection between the two schools

In the case of SM Datuk Mansor, the researcher was at the school to distribute the questionnaires to the students. The English language teacher who taught two of the three classes (a good class and a weak class) explained the items in the questionnaire to the students while the researcher remained in the background as an observer. For the weak class, the teacher had to explain the items in Malay to ensure that they understood the items. As for the third class (the average class), the researcher herself guided the class through the questionnaire.

In all these three classes, the purpose of the survey was explained to the students. They were also told that their views as expressed in the questionnaire would be kept confidential. By doing this, it was hoped that they would give honest and accurate answers. Finally, the students were encouraged to ask for clarification if they encountered any difficulty when answering the questionnaire. The questionnaires were completed during the lesson time allocated, and were collected the same day. Copies of the teacher's questionnaire were distributed to the English language teachers of the three classes as well as three other English language teachers of the school. These were also completed and returned on the same day, except for one, which was later posted to the researcher.

This contrasted with the data collection in SM Tsun Jin. Here the Principal was directly involved in the data collection. The researcher was not present in any of the three classes when the questionnaires were distributed to the students. When the questionnaires for the students and for the teachers were completed, the researcher was informed and told to collect them at the school.

The data obtained from the student's questionnaires and the teacher's questionnaires was analyzed using straightforward simple frequency counts. The corresponding percentages were tabulated and recorded, and a comparison made between the data obtained from SM Datuk Mansor and that from SM Tsun Jin.

3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Motivation is not something that is easy to quantify or measure. When the focus is on reading preferences and the type of text topics that motivate students to read, there is

always the problem of reliability. It is much easier to focus on what they *do not* like to read. The findings are based on the students' and teachers' responses to all the items in the questionnaire. Even though all the items were worded in simple English, and orally explained and translated into Malay by the teachers, there could have been instances of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the items, leading to inaccuracies in the responses. Perhaps the student's questionnaire could have been worded in Malay. But this would have given rise to another problem – that of translating the 24 text topics into Malay. Nevertheless, despite this limitation, clear-cut conclusions can be drawn from the percentages and figures obtained from the data analysis.

The sampling of 236 respondents provides a fairly representative cross-section of the target population of Form 4 students in terms of setting (urban and rural), gender (boys and girls), stream (science and arts/commerce), language proficiency (high, average and low). However, the role of ethnicity in influencing choice of reading interests was not considered in the study. The findings suggest that ethnicity could have a significant bearing on the responses to some items in the questionnaire, for example, why the topic "Siti Nurhaliza – Malaysia's Pop Princess" was given a ranking of 22 out of 24. It would be interesting to find out how the students would respond to the topic if it were about Shah Rukh Khan, currently the most popular Indian singer and actor, or about his Hong Kong counterpart, Leon Lai.

From the researcher's point of view, the rationale for selecting an urban independent Chinese school over an urban government school was to obtain data on the reading interests of students from Chinese schools for the purpose of providing some useful feedback to the teachers of these schools. This would help them in selecting suitable

texts to teach reading. The researcher had intended that the findings be useful not only to teachers from the government secondary schools but also to those from independent Chinese high schools. But by choosing a Chinese school for the sampling, the reliability of the findings might have been compromised. This is a limitation that should be rectified in future replications of this study.

The two researcher-generated lists of 20 reading interests and 24 text topics are by no means exhaustive. Even though the major areas are covered, there could be a few not listed that might interest some of the respondents, for example, reading interests such as fashion, career guidance and further education. Likewise, there is an infinite number of topics that could have been included in the list of text topics. Nevertheless, there has to be a cut-off point somewhere due to time constraints and the problem of having too many choices that can end up bewildering and confusing the respondents. The final lists are based on the reading component of the KBSM syllabus for Form 4.

This study focuses mainly on the motivational aspect of reading. While the findings do indicate the reading interests and the text topics that would motivate students to read, there is no follow-up reading assignment to test out the validity of the findings. That is to say, the respondents were not given any passages to read to determine whether they found the passages interesting and motivating. This was done in the pilot study with a sampling of 61 respondents. They were given a follow-up passage to read on “Sumo Wrestling” and asked to answer some questions pertaining to their views of the passage. However, this took up more time than was allocated for by the school. For this reason, the comprehension section was deleted from the questionnaire. As the study is exploratory in design and no hypotheses were tested, whether or not the topics chosen by the respondents

would actually motivate them to read the passages based on these topics remains to be studied in future research.

As with any research that is limited in scope, the findings cannot be viewed as representative of the entire student population in the country. Firstly, the respondents are all Form 4 students, so generalizations cannot be made for other Forms, especially since the textbook for each Form follows different themes and syllabus specifications. Secondly, only seven KBSM textbooks were examined and only the reading sections of the textbooks were studied. The findings, therefore, cannot be used to make an overall value judgment of the entire textbook.