

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore the teaching and learning of the Literature component of the English Language curriculum in two Form 1 classrooms. I have drawn from the naturalistic inquiry (Gay, 1981) to investigate literature use in these ESL classrooms. As such, the study encompasses the processes of teaching and learning including teaching approaches as well as student responses to literary texts and tasks. In addition, I have attempted to capture the emic perspective (Neuman, 1991) on literature use in ESL teaching and learning and have therefore examined teacher and students' perceptions of these literature-based activities.

This chapter will firstly present the location of the study as well as the participants involved. I will also describe the methods used in collecting and analysing the data.

3.1 The Research Site

The study was located in two Form 1 classes, Form 1 Ceria ⁽¹⁾ and Form 1 Ramah, in S.M.K. Jaya, Petaling Jaya, in the district of Petaling in Selangor Darul Ehsan.

3.1.1 The School

The selected school was a co-ed government school located in Petaling Jaya, in the district of Petaling in the state of Selangor Darul Ehsan. The school began operating

1. all names of places and people in the study are pseudonyms.

in the late 80's, and in 1991, Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Jaya was awarded the title "Sekolah Harapan Negara" for its excellence in academic and non-academic fields.

The school was surrounded by the residential and commercial areas of Damansara Jaya and Damansara Utama, the squatter area of Kampung Sungai Kayu Ara, the Jalan Damansara highway which was undergoing the process of building a flyover close to the school at the time of the study (refer to Appendix C for sketch map of the school's location and of layout). On the first day of the study, upon arriving at the school gate, I was greeted by a security guard standing near the guardhouse. The guard was "courtesy of" the school's Parent Teacher Association. As I entered the school compound, the smell of food immediately told me that the single storey building with the asbestos roof on my right was the school canteen and to my left with its side facing me was a three-storey building with the letter "F" on it. In front of this "laboratory block" were two asbestos-roofed rather isolated single storey wooden buildings with glass shutters on the sides along the corridor. Old fashion wire-mesh was used in place of shutters on the opposite sides, "exposing" the inside of the classrooms. Blocks D and E were where the weakest of the Forms 1 and 2 students were located. Next to the canteen was another three-storey building, Block A, which housed the library. Directly opposite the gate was Block B, the administrative building. Behind it was Block C. I later discovered that the better of the Forms 1 and 2 classes were located here.

Students in S.M.K. Jaya came from middle to upper class residential areas as well as from the squatter settlement nearby. These suburban students came from Damansara Jaya, Damansara Utama, Bandar Utama and SS 2 in Petaling Jaya and from as far as Taman Tun Dr. Ismail, Kuala Lumpur while students from the lower income group came

from the neighboring Kampung Sungai Kayu Ara. Although the school's multi-ethnic population consists of all the main races in the country, the Malays, Chinese, Indians and Punjabis, it also comprised of Indonesians from the community of migrant workers.

3.1.2 The Selected Classes

The year 2000 marks the beginning of the implementation of the new Literature component of the English Language curriculum in the Forms 1 and 4 classes. As such, this study was located in Form 1 and it focussed on the teaching and learning of Literature in two Form 1 classrooms. Form 1 Ceria and Form 1 Ramah, two classes of thirteen year olds with contrasting academic abilities and English Language proficiency, were purposefully selected (Patton, 1986) as they would provide a more diverse and richer data for comparability in the study on the teaching and learning of Literature.

Form 1 Ceria was the top Form 1 class in terms of academic ability. It was located in the last classroom on the second floor of Block B. The students in this class come from English-speaking middle to high income homes and although its population was multi-ethnic, a majority of the students were Chinese. There were an equal number of boys and girls in the class, and although they were very friendly and open to one another, none of the boys and girls formally sat together. The students could be quite talkative even during lessons but pin-drop silence would be observed during Maths and Science periods. During their free time in class, the students could be seen busy completing and discussing some written work, usually Maths. Apart from this, the boys in the class could also be seen engrossed in talks about action-packed movies, computer games and the Internet, while the girls exchanged notes on the Internet chatrooms,

romantic Hollywood movies, songs and “boygroups” like Backstreet Boys and N’Sync.

I could see the students from Form 1 Ramah hanging out at the corridor and hear their screams and shouts from four classes away each time I made my way to the classroom. Form 1 Ramah, the third last class in terms of academic ability, was situated in Block E and was almost isolated from the rest of the school. A large majority of the students came from Kampung Sungai Kayu Ara and the class population was made up of three Indian and eight Chinese students while the rest were all Malays and Indonesian-Malays. Only a third of the population were girls. The boys and girls hardly talked to each other unless it was extremely necessary or unavoidable. A few boys were made to sit next to their girl classmates by their class teacher as a way to prevent the boys from misbehaving but in between lessons, these boys would leave their places to join the other boys. Although the students were academically weak, there were considerably very few disciplinary cases and usually it would concern talking during lessons, not sitting at their allocated places or going out of class without permission. Their most favourite topic of conversation would be the goings-on in their lives or in the lives of people they know of, though there were also chats on the local Malay and Hong Kong singers and actors among the Malay, Indonesian-Malays and Chinese students respectively.

3.2 The Key Participants

The key participants were the English subject teacher and 2 students from each class respectively, making a total of 2 teachers and 4 students. An equal number of boy and girl participants were purposely selected among the students to gain equal insights from both genders with regards to the issues at hand.

3.2.1 The Teacher Participants

Both teacher participants for the study had been teaching long enough to have some exposure to Literature in English through the Class Reader Programme. This was perceived crucial as the experience may help them to give deeper and greater insights regarding the new Literature in English Component. The teachers were also my close acquaintances : the time allocated for the study was perceived to be too short for me to establish the desired rapport for “Hawthorn effect-free” data to be reliably gathered when the teachers were observed or interviewed. Our familiarity was not on professional basis and thus, the issue being studied would still be examined from fresh perspectives.

Jane Gomez had been teaching English since 1998. The petit teacher was often seen in her teaching attire of long, flair skirts and short sleeved blouses and was still single. The soft spoken 33 year old was as enthusiastic about the project as I was when I first informed her. Her big, light brown eyes shone with excitement, which made her look even more like Sally Fields, the actress. Jane graduated from a local teachers training college and after teaching for a few years, she pursued her studies. Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Arts with honors, she was posted to S.M.K. Jaya. I got to know her through a relative of mine but we got closer with the amount of time we had to spend together during the study. She was always co-operative, and took time to talk to me during a teacher’s most busy period of before and after a class, or even during the odd-hour phone calls that I made when I found things that needed clarifying as I marked her students’ books. She was always there for me, a stranger in a strange land !

Anis Sufia, 29, came to S.M.K. Jaya one year earlier and she was a close relative of mine. She was fully TESL trained and she graduated with honors from a local

university in 1997. She was slightly taller than Jane and was always dressed in either baju kurungs or long skirts and long sleeved blouses, with matching headgear. If it was not for the mole in the middle of her left cheek, many would have mistook her for Nurul Izzah, the daughter of our former Deputy Prime Minister! Initially the mother of a 1½ year old girl was worried about the amount of time she was expected to spend on the study, her round black eyes stared at me in disbelief. However, she was later reassured that the naturalistic inquiry would not be too taxing on her and she became just as enthusiastic as Jane and I. Anis had “full time table” on the days I was in her school, so we talked only during the periods before her classes and on weekends when I visited her.

3.2.2 The Student Participants

The student participants from Form 1 Ceria were English speaking Karl Lim and Sia Vern. Karl was the more studious and serious of the two. The 5' 4" boy wore dark brown, oval shaped plastic-rimmed glasses that hid his pair of Japanese eyes. Karl was far too fair even for a Chinese but he admitted he was not “mixed”. Coming from a high income family, Karl traveled and read extensively. Among the “books” he had read was “Macbeth” by William Shakespeare. His classmate, Sia Vern, was equally well read, as reading and writing were her passion. Her dark, brown eyes would sparkle each time something, usually an idea, interests or excites her. Sia Vern was the class’s “walking calendar of events” with regards to entertainment, movies or music. This petit and soft spoken girl was determined, ambitious and had definitely high potential. She was also the treasurer for her class’s editorial board which published their own English newsletter.

From Form 1 Ramah came Kevin Ng and Sumitha. At Sia Vern’s height, Kevin was

rather small for a boy his age but his sharp features and well-gelled hair hinted that this Chindian looking boy was older than what people may think from his size. Kevin spoke mainly Chinese, although he can speak Bahasa Melayu and better English than his peers. He was, however, weaker at writing in English than a number of them, according to Anis, his English teacher. Kevin sat next to a Malay girl, and behind his best friend who also sat next to a Malay girl, in the second line in the first row from the front door. The confident class monitor was however mainly approached by the Chinese boys in his class. Sumitha or Sue, in contrast, attracted the girls in the class like sugar to ants. Standing at 5' 3", the stout but seemingly shy girl was an aggressive school athlete in the track events. Sue's oval face would blush the first few times I approached her, hiding her eyes behind the China-doll fringe. Sue spoke Tamil, a little Bahasa Melayu and even lesser English. After getting to know her, her pleasant personality revealed the attraction felt by her peers : Sue would go out of her way to help a friend in need.

3.3 Duration of the Study

The entire fieldwork took eight weeks, from 14th of August, 2000 to 10th of October 2000. This does not include the week I went to see the school's afternoon supervisor or one of the school's main "gatekeeper" (Gay, 1981) to seek permission to conduct the study in the school and to formally hand her a letter to the Headmistress prior to that. The duration also did not include the one week's school break in September.

Two thirty five-minute Literature classes were observed per week, during the second period on Mondays from 1.45 p.m. until 2.20 p.m. for Form 1 Ceria and during the first period on Tuesdays from 1.10 p.m. until 1.40 p.m. for Form 1 Ramah. Apart from these,

time was also spent before and after the Literature classes and sometimes even after school hours for informal data collections.

3.4 Data Collection

In this naturalistic inquiry (Neuman, 1991), data were collected through various ways, as a single approach to understanding the teaching and learning process may result in inadequate or sometimes, even worse, deceiving data (Cohen & Manion, 1989). As such, data were collected through means of participant observation, interviews, teacher and student journals, as well as an examination of all relevant documents, including circulars from the Ministry of Education, the literary texts, the teaching materials used and students' work.

3.4.1 Participant Observation

Eight observations of literature-based lessons in the two Form 1 classes were conducted over a period of two months. Data were mainly collected in the form of fieldnotes especially during lesson observation sessions. Observation notes with observer comments were made. Immediately after the classes, these comments were expanded as I reflected upon the day's events.

The lessons observed were also audiotaped, using a Sony Walkman model WM-GX322, beginning with the second week after the initial ice-breaking sessions. The main reason for audiotaping was to capture the class talk as it was, in case there was anything that might have been overlooked during observations. These audiotaped lessons were later transcribed immediately afterwards.

3.4.2 Journal Entries

The study also sought to capture the insider or emic perspectives of its participants. Data were also collected through the journals that the participants were asked to keep throughout the duration of the study. They were also given a list of semi-structured questions as a guide (see Appendix D for teachers' and students' guidelines for journal entries). The semi-structured questions were given only as a guide for the participants and were not meant to restrict them. This was explained to the participants at the very beginning of the study. The participants were free to elaborate or discuss on any other issues they felt significant that were not included in the questions. With the semi-structured questions, the data collected were more organised and thus facilitating the data analysis process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

3.4.3 Interview

Teacher and student participant were also interviewed throughout the duration of the study. The teacher participants were informally interviewed individually to gain insights into teacher perspectives with regards to the issue being studied. The key participants and the identified peripheral participants from the two classes were interviewed in three different groups each (see Appendix E for teachers' and students' interview questions). Considering the participants' outgoing personalities, this was perceived to be a more effective method in gaining rich data from them because a "mini discussion" could be generated where they could add to or comment on their peers' points of view. Kevin, one of the key participants from Form 1 Ramah, was individually interviewed as he wished to be interviewed in English while the others were interviewed in Bahasa Melayu. The

interviews were semi-structured to allow comparisons across participants while at the same time giving the participants the freedom to explore any other issues they found or felt significant. These interviews were also audiotaped and later transcribed in order to capture participants' responses in their own words. Apart from authenticity reasons, this facilitated the data analysis process as with the journal entries.

3.4.4 Data Analysis

Throughout the duration of the study, the data collected were analysed continuously. The ongoing analysis captured emerging themes in observer comments and analytical memos. However, a more formal overall analysis was carried out after the fieldwork was over and all the data collected.

Various coding categories were developed and the collected data were assigned different codes and categorised into "manageable chunks" (Gay, 1981). This greatly facilitated the data handling and analysis processes. Subcodes were also developed and assigned to data that could be broken down further for analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Lesson transcripts and fieldnotes were reviewed side by side to get a more holistic picture of the lessons observed. This helped to reveal specific patterns or peculiar yet significant events that might have been overlooked or dismissed earlier.

The journals were reviewed together with the observation notes and the lesson transcripts to gain deeper insights into the perceptions of the participants regarding their experiences with Literature based lessons. Journal entries were examined in conjunction with fieldnotes for connections, causes or reactions to events which occurred in class on the particular days the entries were made.

After listening to the audiotaped interview once to get a holistic picture of what had transpired during the interview sessions, it was later transcribed. The transcriptions were later reviewed side by side with my own "short notes", which noted the participants' accompanying body language and actions. They were also compared and contrasted for any emerging patterns, similarities and connections between them. This was reviewed together with the data collected during the lesson observations and in the journals.

Finally, once all the data had been analysed, it was compared, contrasted and triangulated to determine similarities or dissimilarities or cause and effect relationships between them. By the end of this data analysis process, I had gained a more comprehensive understanding of the teaching and learning of Literature that took place in the two Form 1 Classes.

3.5 Conclusion

This naturalistic inquiry focussed on two Form 1 classes in S.M.K. Jaya. In examining the processes of teaching and learning of Literature in the two classes, various techniques were employed. Literature lessons were observed to enable me as the researcher to get a first hand experience in my attempt to investigate the teaching and learning that went on during a Literature lesson. The participants were asked to write entries in journals and they were also interviewed to allow me as a researcher to get data from the emic perspectives. The data collected from these sources were then analysed and triangulated.