Chapter 1

Introduction

Today, education plays an important role in our society. Almost everybody is striving hard to gain entry to institutions of higher learning such as universities, private colleges, vocational schools, polytechnics and so on. Malaysia is moving fast towards industrialization and globalization. More professionals as well as skilled workers are needed to achieve the aspirations of the country (Dewan Siswa, May 1985, pp. 17-18).

The expansion in our education system has spurred the growth of private institutions lately (Kamal Salih, 1993). These institutions serve the purpose of giving the best education to the students in line with the policies of the Ministry of Education.

According to Kamal Salih (1993), out of hundred students who applied to enter universities, only fifty-six students were successful to gain entry because of insufficient places. He added that about 150,000 students apply yearly to gain entry into universities. Private collages play an important role to accommodate students who do not obtain a place in local universities.

Most private institutions continue to grow with time to meet the increasing demands of students. These private institutions use English Language as the medium of instruction in most of the courses offered.

At present the English Language plays an essential role in meeting the needs of the society. People who can speak English well will have a lot of

opportunities in their career and social advancement. The importance of English Language has been highlighted by Isahak Haron in his paper presented in the Second National Convention which was held in November 1980, where he stated:

> I don't think higher institutions can develop by utilizing only one language. Languages which can enrich our knowledge should be taught and used in this era of 1980's. English Language is a very practical language which should be learned by all students.....
>
> (translated from: "Pendidikan tinggi di Malaysia: Cabaran-cabaran Dalam Tahun 1980-an. Konvensyen Nasional Ke-2 Persatuan Pendidikan Malaysia Kuala Lumpur, 7-9 November 1980)

Hence, students as well as the public should pay more attention and emphasize the use of English Language in their daily lives. Teachers, particularly English Language teachers in schools or in higher institutions of learning should cultivate the habit of using English to communicate among students.

Methods and approaches which suit the students should be devised and employed in order to benefit them. One of the methods is using self-instructional materials which leads to individualized learning among students in a language lesson.

Statement of Problem

This research will be carried out among secretarial students in a local private institution. The aim of this study is to determine the efficacy of the use of a programmed instructional module to teach writing letters of invitation to slow-learners.

Modules had never been used as a supplementary aid in the English Language classes in this private institution. From the daily homework and the monthly test results, the researcher found that the students have problems in their writing skills. All the lecturers claimed that they prefer to use their own worksheets and white board as their teaching aids.

As it is, most of the students face great difficulty in writing and they complained that the methods employed by the lecturers have not helped them to improve their writing skills. Some of the lecturers give very vague verbal instructions to the students in their English lessons which causes difficulty to comprehend the language.

The students, especially the slow-learners who come from non-English speaking families need to be guided and given full attention in their writing skills. They need to be given step by step instructions on what to do in a writing task.

This being the case, the researcher who is also incidentally the teacher decided to use another method to help the students improve their writing skills. A programmed instructional method was to be used instead of the normal

classroom instruction. Self-instructional materials will give students a change to learn at their own pace, which enables individualized learning.

Objectives of study

There are three objectives for this study. These include:

1) to determine if the secretarial students are able to write letters of invitation at the end of the module;
2) to identify the problems faced by the secretarial students in using the module;
3) to obtain feedback and suggestions from the students on how to improve the module.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives, this research will attempt to address the following questions.

1) Whether the secretarial students will be able to write appropriate letters of invitation at the end of the module?
2) What problems did the secretarial students encounter while using the module?
3) What suggestions were made by the secretarial students to improve the module?

Significance of the study

Self-instructional methods such as using modules in an English lesson provides the opportunity for students especially slow-learners to learn according to their own ability and at their own pace. The module gives step by step precise instructions which makes the learning process easier for students. There is one to one relationship between the student and the module and students get immediate feedback for their answers in each exercise in the module.

The teacher or facilitator can use modules as a supplementary aid in his or her teaching process and this adds to the variety of teaching aids employed in the classroom. Self-instructional materials such as modules give ample practice to the students in learning either in the class or at home.

Modules have never been used before in English lessons in this private college. It is hoped that students will benefit from this method of instruction. This method can also be adopted by other language teachers in their classrooms. Moreover, these modules will add to the resources for teaching in the college.

Limitations of Study

This study has its limitations. The researcher has only focused on a small number of students in the college. The sample for this study consists of twenty students who are at the elementary stage in their English proficiency.

The subjects of this study are only from one particular college in Kuala Lumpur. Not all private institutions are involved in this study. The researcher could not expand the study throughout Malaysia due to insufficient time, money and manpower assistance. The module which has been designed by the researcher teaches only one aspect of writing which is letter-writing.

Although the results of this study cannot be generalised to other students in the same college or in other colleges in Malaysia, the findings of this study may help to provide an insight into employing modules as teaching aids in teaching English by language instructors.