Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

The first part of this chapter consists of a brief description of the private institution and the sample chosen for the study. The second part describes the four stages that were undertaken by the researcher:

i) Preliminary preparations

ii) Pilot test

iii) Using the module

iv) Feedback and analysis

The College

The private college was established in 1950 and is one of the most established private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. It offers professional courses as well as degree programmes. Some of the professional courses offered are accountancy studies, management studies, hospitality management, secretarial studies and others. This college also offers courses at the post-graduate level such as Masters in Education in collaboration with Deakin University, Australia. This college also offers courses specialised English courses, such as Intensive English, TOEFL, Communication skills and others. Its wide range of courses offers Malaysian students a vast selection of career opportunities to pursue.

The main campus of this college is situated in Petaling Jaya and it has its branches in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Malacca, Kuching and Kota Kinabalu. There are about 2,000 students who are currently pursuing their studies in this college and there are more than forty conscientious lecturers employed by this college to give the best to the students.

Secretarial Courses

Three kinds of secretarial courses are offered in this institution. The three are:-

i) Diploma in Private Secretaryship

ii) Diploma in Executive Secretaryship

iii) Secretarial skills – single subject courses.

The duration of the diploma courses is three to four semesters and the certificate level (secretarial skills) is two semesters. The minimum entry requirement for these courses is a pass in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM). There are about two hundred students who are pursuing their studies in this field in the institution. This course is offered on a full-time and part-time basis.

The Sample

The sample consists of twenty female secretarial students who are pursuing their studies full time at the diploma level. Most of the students are fresh from school and they are between eighteen to twenty years of age. All these students are in their first semester and they have slightly different academic profiles in their English proficiency. All the students are weak in their English proficiency especially in writing skills.

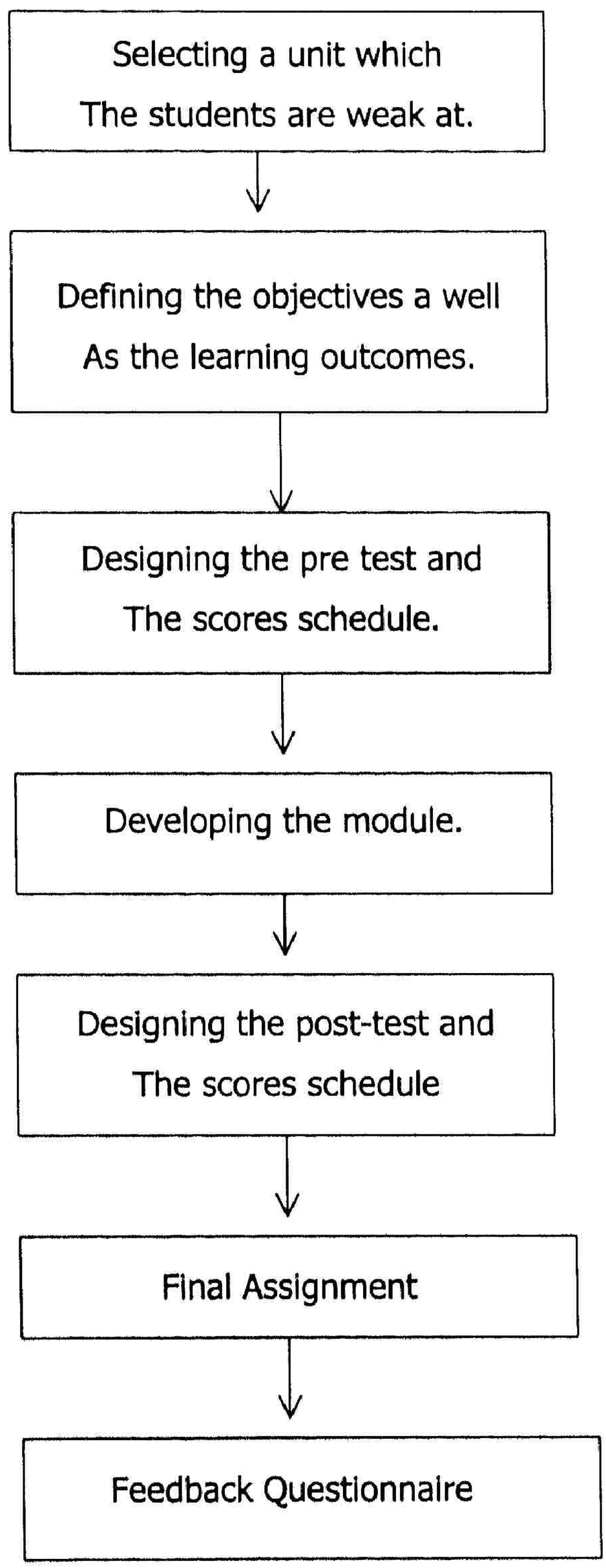
Preliminary Preparations

The researcher who is also the teacher of this sample has identified the problems of these students. Based on the homework and test given to them on writing letters, particularly letters of invitation, the researcher found that these students are weak in their writing skills. The students also complained that the teaching aids employed by the English lecturers have not helped them in their writing skills.

Finally, the researcher designed modules to see if this method would be helpful to the students to improve their writing skills. Modules as self-instructional materials have never been used before in their English lessons by the lecturers.

Designing the Module

In designing the module, the researcher has followed the steps below:



Selecting the Unit

As mentioned earlier the selection of the unit of learning was based on the students' performance in their writing skills, particularly writing letters of invitation. From the weekly test given to the students, the researcher found that the students have problems in :

i) Writing letters of invitation using the correct format.

ii) Writing letters of invitation using appropriate vocabulary and correct grammar.

Defining the objectives of the module

After diagnosing the problems of the students, the researcher proceeded by defining the objectives of the module. The researcher also stated the intended learning outcomes that were expected from the students. The objectives of the module as well as the learning outcomes were devised based on the students' capability in their English proficiency.

Designing the pre-test

Next, the researcher designed a pre-test which includes questions on writing a letter of invitation. The function of this pre-test is to determine the students' prior knowledge in writing letters. According to Bloom (1976), students who have prior knowledge in a certain topic will learn faster compared to those who do not have any prior knowledge of a topic.

The contents of the module

The module was designed from the very basic concept to the more difficult ones. Students were given sufficient information and clear instructions on how to proceed from one part to the next part of the module. Short exercises were given after each part in the module. These exercises helped students to evaluate their own performance on a certain part before proceeding to the next part of the module.

Designing the post-test

The researcher designed a post-test at the end of the module. The function of the post-test is to assess the ability of the students in writing letters of invitation. This post-test has similar questions to the pre-test. The researcher determined the effectiveness of the module by analyzing the results of the pre-test and the post-test.

Final Assignment

This assignment was devised for the students to assess their understanding of writing letters of invitation. The results of this assignment helped the researcher to determine the effectiveness of the module. The students assignment was evaluated based on the criteria below:

Content	-	50%
Vocabulary	-	5%
Grammar	-	10%
Format	-	30%
Tidiness	-	5%

Feedback Questionnaire

The purpose of administering the questionnaire was to obtain feedback and suggestions from the students on using the module. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the students at the end of the module.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part contains information on the background of the sample. Information about the sample like course, year of course age and grade obtained in the English paper at the SPM level were collected.

The second part of the questionnaire consists of 16 items. Students have to tick the right answer from the options given and answer the open-ended questions. This part helped the researcher to obtain information of the students response to using the module and their suggestions as well as feedback on improving the module for future use.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted among five secretarial students who are also slow-learners from a different class. This study was carried out to ensure that the contents of the module were clear and comprehensible. The five students were told to complete the module according to their own pace and ability.

At the end of the module, the students were interviewed by the researcher on a one to one basis to obtain their feedback and suggestions were conducted within a week. Results from the pilot study led to the restructuring of a few items in the module as well as the questionnaire for improvement.

The following are some of the examples of frames revised:

Example 1:

Exercise 2 (page 22)

Instructions Before Revision

Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the passage on page 20.

Some of the students complained that this activity is too difficult and confusing for them. In order to make this activity simpler, the researcher had revised this instruction by providing the words that should be used in the exercise. Hence students have to choose the correct word from the words given to them.

Instructions After Revision

Fill in the blanks with the correct words given below:

The researcher had also focused on the improvement of some illustrations and the quality and standard size of the paper as well as rearranging of the content of the module.

One item that was improved by the researcher in the questionnaire was questions number 11.

Question 11

Instruction before revision

What you think of the number of examples in this module?

Students complained that the question above was vague and difficult to answer.

In order to improve the clarity of meaning of the question and to make the question simpler, the researcher had revised the question to:

Instruction after revision

Was the number of examples in this module

too few ☐

too many ☐

about right ☐

The Module

The module which was designed by the researcher consists of:

1) Programme rationale.
2) Aims and objectives of the module.
3) Learning outcomes.
4) Notes for the learner and the facilitation.
5) Pre-test and scores schedule.
6) The contents of the module.
7) Post-test and scores schedule.
8) Assignment.
9) Feedback questionnaire.

The module designed has its own programme rationale, objectives and learning outcomes. The module was designed to suit the level of proficiency of the sample. The text was arranged in the form of a booklet.

Prior to using the module, the students had to complete the pre-test. After that, they had to check their answers on the next page of the module. Students were able to evaluate their performance on writing a letter of invitation.

Several exercises were given to the students throughout the module. Sufficient examples were also inserted in the text in order to stimulate the learning process of the students. Answers for each exercise were given and students completed the module, part by part. Students who did not do well in

an exercise were advised to go back to the previous pages for quick revision. Here, students learn at their own pace and ability.

A post-test is given at the end of the module. This post-test consists of two parts which test students' comprehension on writing letters of invitation and students ability to complete a letter of invitation correctly. The researcher has included comments and feedback after each exercise in the module. The feedback and comments helped students to gauge their own performance throughout the module.

In the final assignment, students were required to write a letter of invitation. They were given 30-40 minutes to complete the task in class. Their answer scripts were marked by the researcher cum teacher.

Implementation Aid Data Gathering

In this study the researcher distributed the modules among the students in an English lesson. Students went through the module at their own pace and capability in understanding the contents of the module.

Students were required to complete the tests, text of module, the assignment as well as the questionnaire in the classroom. The questionnaire was distributed to the students after they had completed the entire module. The purpose of administering the questionnaire was to obtain feedback and suggestions from the students on using the module. The feedback and

suggestions were important for the researcher to revise and review the module for future use.

Analysis of Data

The effectiveness of the module was determined by comparing the students achievement in the pre-test and the post-test as well as the final assignment. The researcher had also used descriptive statistics such as percentages to elaborate on the students suggestions and feedback on using the module. Their feedback was analyzed to determine the major problems faced by the students in using the module on writing letters of invitation.