CHAPTER 3

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Background

The selected school is a Chinese type national school in the district of Hilir Perak. It is a co-ed, vernacular school. The student population is about 1900 and teacher population is 90. The students are mostly from new villages and town area. 99.9% of the students are Chinese while Indian and Malay students make up the rest of the population. The school is semi-government aided.

There is a library in the school but it is not well equipped. The books are rather old and there is limited number of English fiction books. The ones that are available are rather old and tattered and not at all welcoming. The Malay fictions share the same fate. The newer additions are under the Chinese fiction section, which is not surprising considering the school is a vernacular one. These books are very popular among students judging by the rate they move off the shelves. The revision section is also popular among students. It would be good if more money could be channelled into the library fund, so that more books, especially English books could be bought. There is no resource room in the school, which is indeed a sad thing for a school with such huge population.

The data collected from my observations, and informal discussions revealed that majority of the students use the Chinese language to converse most of the time and speak very little English. They even talk in Chinese, during English lessons, and when they are having group discussions or discussing with friends. Moreover, most of the students come from middle socio-economic status family background where

English is rarely spoken at home as their parents cannot speak the language, therefore, it is perceived as a foreign language.

The school has had its fair share of achievements both in academic and co-curricular activities, though the bulk of the achievements come from co-curricular activities. This year, the school won the first prize for public speaking and debate in the Chinese Language and secured second placing in the Chinese drama competition at the district level. The school also secured second placing in the poem, scrabble, and singing competition in English at the district level. Though such achievement is really encouraging, in reality the scenario is very much different. The really excellent students in the English Language are only a handful, about 2 or 3 from each form. Take for example the girl who was the runner-up in the singing competition, her spoken and written English is below average but she can memorise the lyrics and the pronunciation, and she is able to perform well. This shows that winning a competition in a particular language does not mean that you are good at it. Moreover, as discussed in the first chapter and from my interviews with the students I found that Chinese students generally resort to rote-memorisation. From my observation in class, I found this to be true too, as for the Oral English Assessment (O.E.S) the students memorise the whole text that they are going to present even if it is a dialogue or group discussion.

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative research methodology is used for this research as it is considered appropriate to obtain a complete view of phenomenon in its natural state or context

(Seliger and Shohamy 1989).

This study will follow a qualitative case study design, the purpose of which is to find out how and if, an extensive reading programme motivates reading habits among students. It further seeks to uncover the kind of reading materials that the students are interested in, as this will give teachers ideas on what kind of materials interest their students. This information will be beneficial because teachers then can supply these materials to students or get them to get their hands on these materials. The information for this study is collected through informal discussions, classroom observations, questionnaires, reading logs, and interviews. The informal discussions and classroom observation would supply data of why these students shy away from reading. It would also give an insight as to the kind of reading materials that would attract the students.

I came up with the constructs in the questionnaire (Appendix A) to find out students' attitude with regards to reading in English. The Reading Logs (Appendix B) would serve the purpose of supplying data of students' personal responses to the reading materials. I decided to use structured interview (Appendix C) to collect data that would throw more light on students reading habits, the reading materials they preferred and whether they liked the extensive reading programme. The interview session would provide information on whether the extensive reading programme managed to motivate the students to read. It would also provide information on whether the students would look for more interesting reading materials in the Internet in the future.

3.3 Subjects

The subjects of this study are all Form Four students of average English proficiency level from a Chinese type national school in the district of Hilir Perak. Their proficiency level is determined by their PMR and Form Four English examination results as well as classroom observations by the teacher. These students obtained either a 'B' or 'C' in their PMR. In their monthly examinations, these students usually score 'C'.

The informal discussions and observations revealed that the subjects are students who do not read materials in English other than the assigned ones. Even then, some of them do not read the literary texts that they are supposed to read for the literature component and always score low marks for the literature section in the examination. They do not take English very seriously and hardly make effort to improve their English like by reading materials such as storybooks or magazines in English.

The interview conducted with the students revealed that they are not interested in the reading materials in the library as, the reading materials there are very old and not interesting and the ones, which are available, are difficult to comprehend (in terms of language). I brought the students to the library (for privacy) and interviewed the subjects on the kinds of stories that might interest them. From the interview I realised that these students are willing to learn and read stories in English if the stories are similar to their mother tongue (Chinese) or if the language is simple and easy to understand. In other words their demands were in line with the notion of reading for meaning making as highlighted by Schema Theory. Schema Theory suggests that the

knowledge that we carry around in our head is organized in inter-related pattern. These are constructed from our previous experience of the experiential world and guide us as we make sense of new experience. Another important factor is learning will take place if the input is at comprehensible level.

3.4 Materials

A set of fables (15 fables) was downloaded from the Internet (http://classics.mit.edu/Aesop/fab.1.1.html) and further simplified to the needs of the subjects. Please refer to the original version and simplified version (Appendix D). All the selected stories were in agreement with the students' level and Schema theory. All the downloaded stories were then adapted or simplified to suit the needs of the subjects. I chose to download the stories from the Internet, as the samples are mostly Internet savvy. It is my hope that these students would put their knowledge of (IT) to good use by reading stories online.

3.4.1 Rationale for Adaptation

The stories were adapted to suit the needs of the students. The vocabulary was simplified, as the subjects involved in this Extensive Reading programme are all students of average English proficiency level, who lack motivation in reading English storybooks. The fables were also shortened as most samples confessed in the informal discussions that they get bored reading lengthy materials. As Davis (1995: p. 329) stated, "the watchword are quantity and variety." I wrote down the moral values found in the stories at the bottom of each story to help the students understand the

story better. The stories were simplified according to the students' proficiency level because extensive reading will only manage to develop positive attitude towards reading in students if the materials used are within the students' linguistic ability.

3.5 Instruments

The collection of data is extremely important in any kind of research, for the conclusion of the study is solely based on the data. I used five different kinds of instruments to measure the data in this research, namely, informal discussions, observations, reading log, questionnaires, and interviews. These instruments are used to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection and research.

3.5.1 Informal Discussions

Informal discussions were used to obtain data from students, as students tend to open up to teachers when teachers act as their friend and not as someone in authority. Informal discussions were held prior to the study to collect data on students reading habits and the reasons behind their reluctance to read materials in English. Through these discussions too, I was able to find out the kind of reading materials that attracted the students. Thus, I was able to come up with reading materials that catered to their needs and taste. The reason I used informal discussions before carrying out the study was because generally students tend to open up and talk freely or air their views during such discussions. Students would not feel intimidated, as their 'talk' is not recorded as in the interview session.

3.5.2 Observations

This tool was used to gather information on students' participation and commitment towards extensive reading programme. This tool was also employed to gather information on students' performance in the English Language before and after the programme. This data was collected by looking at their exercise books, and monthly examinations results.

3.5.3 Reading Logs

This log was given to all the students to record their readings. Students were asked to record the titles of the story that they have read. This log (Appendix B) was extremely important as it was used to identify the frequency of students' reading and to check the kinds of stories that attracted the students and the reasons for their attractions. The students were also asked to write why they like a particular story.

3.5.4 Questionnaires

'Questionnaires are sets of written questions focusing on a particular topic or area, seeking responses to closed or ranked questions /options and/or open-ended personal opinions, judgements or beliefs, used in a non face to face situation.' (Freeman, 1996). Questionnaires are more efficient, fast and easy to administer. They are time and cost saving too as they can be used on a large sample. The questionnaire (Appendix A) was used to find out if the extensive reading programme managed to motivate the students to read. The questionnaire was asked in line with the research questions. Respondents were asked to tick in the 'Yes', 'No' column.

Structured questionnaire 'Yes'/ 'No' was given to facilitate responses and data analysis. Scoring is very objective and efficient too using this tool.

3.5.5 Interviews

This tool was employed to investigate and explore the reasons behind the students' lack of interest in reading (Appendix C). Due to time constraint only 18 samples were interviewed face to face and all the respondents answered without fear and favour as confidentiality was assured. The structured interview was conducted in the library. Each student was interviewed individually. The interview would provide data of whether the students enjoyed reading the stories provided under the extensive reading programme. It would also provide data of whether they are motivated to surf the net for more such stories.

3.6 Procedure

First, the importance of reading and benefits of extensive reading for the learning of a second language were explained to the subjects, in order to make them understand the reading programme. I gave all the subjects involved in the research a set of photocopied fables that contained all the 15 stories. They were asked to choose 10 stories to be read over a period of two weeks. The subjects were allowed to read any stories of their choice but asked to read at least 8 out of the 10 stories.

The subjects were asked to refer to the moral values given and allowed to discuss among their peers and refer to the teacher in charge, when they had problems in understanding the stories. The students were not pressured to complete the readings

but were encouraged to read all the fables. The subjects were given all the freedom to enjoy and understand their readings

3.7 Data Collection

Firstly, I spent a lot of time engaging the subjects in informal discussions to find out the reasons behind the lack of interest in their reading habit. The discussions also provided data of the kinds of materials that they like to read.

All the samples in this programme were given a Reading Log to jot down their view of the story and the reason for them to like the stories in the Extensive Reading programme. I constantly checked the reading log to make sure that the programme ran smoothly. The students kept the Reading Log for two weeks, filling in the information as they read the stories. They were given the freedom to read the stories wherever they like, be it in the school or at home. The information of the number of fables or stories read by each student is tabulated and presented in a table form. The data from the questionnaire is tabulated and presented in a table form too. Data from all the seventeen students interviewed were transcribed and analysed and described in data analysis and findings.

3.8 Data Analysis

After administrating the instruments, the responses were collected and triangulated before coming to a conclusion. The informal discussions were analysed to find out the reasons behind their lack of interest in reading and led the researcher into choosing the right genre of stories that are feasible and viable to the subjects.

The responses from the questionnaire revealed the students attitude towards reading and the type of reading materials they like. The entries in the Reading Logs were analysed using the frequency count and percentage and presented in a table form. The observation method was carried out by perusing into students exercise books, and examination papers, paying close attention to their written work in the form of essays and literature responses.