CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Designing a syllabus is part of curriculum development. Richards (2001) claims that one of the basic assumptions of curriculum development is that a sound educational program should be based on an analysis of learners' needs. Needs analysis to him is procedures used to collect information about learners' needs. A triangulating approach (collecting information from two or more sources) is advisable since any one source is likely to be incomplete or partial. In this study, a needs analysis is done in order to find out needs and preferences regarding language and skills, as well as difficulties and problems. Regarding language and skills needs, analysis and evaluation is applied and regarding the preferences, difficulties and problems in language learning, an empirical study was done and questionnaires and email interview were implemented.

3.1. Analysis and Evaluation of Resource Materials

Today many language programmes and Institutions make use of commercial coursebooks. They are carefully designed in light of the theories and principles of language learning. There are many kinds of coursebooks on general communicative approach, English language skills and also for specific purposes. In some situations, they even serve as syllabus. Therefore, common and specific language content, the

practical use of the skills and strategies, kinds of learning activities and tasks applied in some commercial coursebooks and text books were surveyed.

The two old textbooks and the four coursebooks under analysis in this research were: (1) *Trial Edition*; (2) *Composition Book Two*; (3) *Straightforward* (Pre-intermediate); (4) *Exploring Theological English: Reading, Vocabulary and Grammar Skills for ESL/ EFL*; (5) *Looking Ahead: Mastering Academic Book 4*; and (6) *Concepts for Today Book 4*.

3.2   Respondents

The respondents for the needs survey included both teachers and students. The first group of teachers was interviewed through email. They were (10) in number and are from various departments: (2) from the Old Testament, (2) from the New Testament, (1) from Church History, (1) from Music Department, (2) from Pastoral Theology, (1) from Christian Religious Education Department, and (1) from Feminist Theology. They were of different age group ranging from 30 to 58. Most of them had shown concern about the proficiency of English of the theological students.

The second group of teachers was the English teachers. There were 14 English teachers who helped answer the survey. Three were the full- time teachers from the Department of English, three were the Volunteer teachers, and the others were the part-time teachers who were helping with the Evening Liberal Arts Programme. Their age differed from 30 to 65. The majority was female teachers. Their teaching experience also ranged from 2 to 35 years.

Similarly, the first group of students were from the B.Th First year, (17) male and (21) female students, and 38 in total. Their ages ranged between (18) and (30). There are 17 different Associations under the Karen Baptist Convention, and these students represented (9) associations: Yangon(14), Pyi- Tharyarwaddy (5), Pathein Myaung Mya (5), Taungoo (2), Nyaung Lay Bin (1), Hpa-an (2), Hinthada (5), Myeik (1), and Ka Yah(3). The first year students were chosen as they were of the year the research was focused on.

The second group of students was the B.Th. Senior students, (20) in total, (7) males and (13) females, and their ages ranged from (22) to (40). They also were from different associations under the Karen Baptist Convention: Hsaw Hti (1); Hinthada(1); Kayah Moe Bwa (1); Myaung Mya (2); Yangon(6); Pyi- Tharyarwaddy (1); Pathine Myaung Mya (5); Hpa –an (1); Nyaung Lay Bin (1); and Dawei-Myeik (1). The final year students were also surveyed, with the assumption that they had attended three years at the Seminary, and therefore, might better realize and express more of their needs, problems, preferences and experiences.

3.3. Instruments

The preferences, difficulties and problems students usually encounter were assessed through two kinds of instruments: questionnaires and interview through email correspondence.

Cohen, Mansion, and Morrison (2000) define that there are several kinds of questions and response modes in questionnaires, including, for example, dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. Closed

questions prescribe the range of responses from which the respondent may choose. In general, closed questions are quick to complete and straightforward to code and do not discriminate unduly on the basis of how articulate the respondents are. Open questions, on the other hand, enable respondents to write free response in their own terms, to explain and qualify their responses and avoid limitations of pre-set categories of response. Open-ended questions invite an honest personal comment from the respondents in addition to ticking numbers and boxes, and thus, in some ways, they can catch the authenticity, richness, and depth of response.

The research interview has been defined as a two- person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research- relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation (Cannell and Kahn, 1968 as cited by Cohen, Mansion, and Morrison, 2000). According to them, the interview administered in this research was a kind of standardized open-ended interviews, as the exact wording and sequence of questions were determined in advance, and all the interviewees were asked the same basis questions in the same order.

3.3.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires for the students were designed to elicit the needs, difficulties, problems and preferences of the students. The response mode in these questionnaires was mostly rating scales. Ticking numbers in the box was also included. Multiple answers were provided as examples to better express themselves. The 4 Point Scale was used to measure students' reaction to the items. It ranges from 0 or 1 (Not at all/never) to

2 or 3 (Very much/ very often). The 4 Point Scale instead of 5 Point Scale was chosen so as to see more clearly or obviously where they represented. With the 5 Point Scale, it seems that the middle number is likely to be neutral, indicating neither for nor against of their opinion, or beliefs. The items set in the questionnaires were: English language skills in order of importance; learning objectives; learning activities in preference; difficulty with English language skills as well as the reading sub skills, and topics in preference. The sample topics were adapted from the check list of topics by Feez (1998) which is stated to be the most commonly used topics related to the three learning focus areas in ESL: community access, further study and vocational English (See Appendix B, No. 4).

Questionnaire for teachers of English basically composed of the same types of questions with those of the students; however, it also included the objectives of the course and the weaknesses and difficulties both in students' English background and during the B.Th course. Comments and suggestions towards curriculum development were also requested.

3.3.2 Email Interview

Interview through email correspondence was designed for teachers of other studies. They were teachers of theological and biblical studies, and they were asked about the students' English background as well as difficulties with English which they encountered when teaching other subjects. Questions on the kinds of speaking, reading and writing assignments they usually gave to theological students were posted so that what the students actually had to do in those classes would be made known. Moreover,

their suggestions and recommendations were also requested towards the development of the curriculum.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires for the students, and the English teachers were sent through email to teacher A in the Seminary who printed them out and delivered them to teacher B and other English teachers, and then collected and sent them back to the researcher. Teacher B, an English teacher who had finished her MA TESOL degree, together with another English teacher, took the responsibility of administering the questionnaires to the target classes on behalf of the researcher. Time allowed was one hour which was one class period. The questionnaire was sent on November 21, 2008 and conducted on November 26, and December 1 respectively and were then sent back to the researcher. The questionnaires were written in English; however, those teachers gave an explanation of the questionnaires in Karen first, so as to ensure the students understood the terms in the questionnaire. The researcher was informed that students were encouraged to answer the questionnaires individually in class and only two students needed more clarification about the questions during that class period. All participants filled most of the questionnaires and their writing was also legible. However, regarding the learning activities and the topics of preference, some items were left unrated by some students from both groups. The number of students who left the items unrated as well as the number of the items left unrated varied; for example, seventeen first year students left some items from learning activities unrated, but the number of items varied from 1 to 3

43

(see Table D8, Appendix D; whereas five senior students left some items from learning activities unrated, with the number varied from 1 to 10 (see Table D15, Appendix D).

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The two old text books that had been used by the Seminary and the 4 commercial coursebooks on different language skills were analyzed in order to find out the language content included and the skills, strategies, activities and tasks applied. They were also evaluated according to the four criteria of Cunningsworth (1995): whether they correspond to learners' needs; reflect the present or future uses of the language; take account of students' needs as learners and facilitate learning processes; and have a clear role as a support for learning, and mediating between the target language and the learner.

Data from the empirical study through questionnaires were analyzed and identified as the most highly rated, moderately rated, and the least rated according to their mean scores and standard deviation. The data from the email interview were identified and interpreted through summarizing the findings and making comparison to the literature.

3.6 Summary of the Chapter

The empirical research was done in order to find out the needs, problems and preferences of the students as well as beliefs and experiences of the teachers. This

situational analysis done on English language teaching was the first of its kind in the

Seminary. There were some potential weaknesses in this research design: no pilot test

was administered, the researcher could not administer the questionnaires herself, and

detailed questions were set only on the reading skills, and some questionnaire items were

a bit overlapping. However, it was still worth doing, exposing both the teachers and

students with evaluation of the teaching and learning experiences and thus promoting

awareness.