

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

The research methods employed in this study were designed to investigate the feelings, perceptions and experiences of stakeholders in the dissemination of feedback from the marking board concerning its accessibility to, and utilisation by teachers in improving English language teaching and learning in the light of localised marking of the COSC English language examinations. The word ‘stakeholders’ includes teacher-markers, non-teacher-markers, Heads of English language Departments, Principals of selected schools and senior officers from ECOL and NCDC. All these categories of people are directly involved in teaching, assessment (examinations) and syllabus development.

3.2 Research Method

Qualitative research may use a case study design meaning that the data analysis concentrates on one phenomenon, which the researcher selects to understand in depth, regardless of the number of sites or participants for the study (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001). They also say that qualitative researchers study groups of individuals who have similar experiences, such as the teachers in this study. Sometimes different categories of people are selected, not for comparative purposes. They may not be mutually exclusive, for instance, teacher-markers and non-teacher-markers are not mutually exclusive. Mcmillan and Schumacher (2001) assert that qualitative research employing a case study design also contributes to policy formulation, implementation and modifications. It is hoped by the researcher that the policy-makers will be assisted through this report to anticipate alternatives for future educational reforms. Mcmillan and

Schumacher (2001) argue further that a case study promotes better understanding of a practice or issue and facilitates informed decision-making. Neuman (2000) argues that in qualitative research the interpretation of data is imperative. However, the meaning the researcher gives begins with the point of view of the people being studied. The researcher interprets data by finding out how subjects being studied see the world, how they define the situation, or what it means for them. In case study research, Yin (in Creswell, 1994) discusses dominant modes of data analysis such as search for ‘patterns’ by comparing results with patterns predicted from theory or literature.

3.3 Methods of Data Selection and Collection

Data collection in this study was done using both qualitative and quantitative methods. These included three main sources of data collection: interviews, questionnaires, and analysis of documents. This multi-method nature of data collection is referred to as ‘triangulation’, which may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspects of human behaviour (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Denzin, 1989b; Flick, 1998 in Denzin *et al* 2000). Since no single method of data collection is complete by itself, more than one method has been employed in order to fill the gap(s) that may be left by the use of one method (Jacobsen, 1999). Moreover, this multi-method approach allows researchers to use different methods in different combinations (Denzin, 2000). This approach is relevant because human beings are complex, and their lives are ever-changing; therefore, the more methods we use to study them, the better our understanding of how they construct their lives and the stories they tell us about them (Denzin, *ibid*).

3.3.1 Research Site

The research site was in Lesotho, particularly in the districts of Maseru, Leribe and Mafeteng. These three districts represent the three educational administrative areas – the Central, the North and the South, respectively. The rationale behind the choice is that the teachers are accessible to me because Leribe is my home town and I have worked with many teachers there before I joined the Ministry of Education. Similarly, Maseru is my workplace though I sometimes travel to other districts. As an inspector, I have contact with teachers of English in Maseru and Mafeteng. The selection of these districts is therefore mainly based on convenience.

3.3.2 Participants

Purposive sampling was used in this study. According to Cohen and Manion (1994):

In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs (1994:89).

I selected teaching professionals who are involved in the marking process. These included:

- experienced teacher-markers, who have insight into the marking of the COSC examinations,
- non-teacher-markers ,who need information from the marking board,
- team-leaders, who moderate the marking,
- principals of secondary schools and Heads of English Departments, who facilitate the flow of information from the marking board and supervise teachers,
- examinations’ administrators and curriculum developers.

More information about these categories of participants will be elaborated on in sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.4. Their roles, attitudes, views and perceptions about dissemination of examination information and its impact on teaching and learning are

of importance in this study. Examinations administrators are situated at ECOL, an organisation which is responsible for administering the COSC examinations. They should ensure that feedback from examinations reaches the teachers and all other stakeholders in time. Curriculum developers from NCDC play a crucial role in the COSC localization process. They are guardians of the syllabus and monitors of assessment information and its flow down to the teachers. These agents have a stake in the localization of examinations and the dissemination of information to the schools.

3.4 Data collection tools and strategies

3.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Discovering the views of participants is vital to assessing the impact of an innovation (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976). Localising the marking of the COSC English Language examination is an innovation and it is important to find out what the subjects have to say about their work, what they think of it, how it compares with previous experiences (before localisation of marking) and also to comment on the use and value of the innovation (localised marking of the COSC examinations). These methods are intended to elicit whether the stakeholders think localisation of marking has brought about beneficial or harmful results. The interview method was employed because it is specific, targeted and focused on the area of research (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Semi-structured interviews were used because they provide an opportunity to question thoroughly certain areas of enquiry such as opinions, and it permits greater depth of responses. It permits one to investigate values, attitudes and social perceptions (Strager and Wenberg, 1971)

which are pertinent in pedagogical research. In addition, recent debates in interviewing portray the interview as a ‘negotiated accomplishment’. This is more so in a situation where semi-structured interviews are used. Schwandt (1997 in Denzin *et al* 2000), has this to say,

It has become increasingly common in qualitative studies to view the interview as a form of discourse between two or more speakers or as a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent (p.79).

However, the interview method can be unreliable and biased in the sense that the researcher can probe the respondent to give answers s/he wants to hear (Neuman, 2000). In this study I adhered to the interview schedule unless the response was not clear enough or when I needed further explanation of an interesting point.

3.4.2 Interviewees

Teachers involved in marking were chosen from the two districts, Maseru and Leribe (3.3). Although markers are recruited from all over the country, time and space permitted me to work with those teachers who are most accessible. Semi-structured interviews were used with the four categories of interviewees.

A presentation of interviewees in tabular form follows:

Question Paper	Participants	Number
Paper 1	Teacher-markers (TMs)	4
Composition Writing*	Senior-team-leader (STL)	1
Paper 2	Teacher-markers (TMs)	4
Comprehension and summary writing*	Senior-team-leader (STL)	1
School		
A (low-performing)	Non-teacher-markers (NTMs)	2
B (high-performing)	Non-teacher-markers (NTMs)	2
C (average performing)	Non-teacher-markers (NTMs)	2
School		
A	HOD	1
B	HOD	1
C	HOD	1
School		
A	Principal	1
B	Principal	1
C	Principal	1
NCDC	English subject officer (SO)	1
ECOL	English subject officer (SO)	1
	Registrar (R)	1
Total	Interviewees	25

Table 1: Information about the interviewees

*The COSC English language examination is composed of two parts: Paper 1 is Composition Writing, and Paper 2 is Comprehension and Summary writing.

The interview schedules for the different categories of interviewees are attached to this report as Appendix B.

3.4.3 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to elicit the views of teachers in relation to the major research question and sub-questions. The questionnaire is used to find out whether, according to the teachers, feedback from localized marking of COSC examinations has positive or negative effects (washback) on L2 teaching and learning. Teachers views, opinions and perceptions are sought in relation to what information (e.g. examiners' reports) reaches

them from the marking board and how they utilise it, and whether they find that information useful or not. The questionnaire was divided into three (3) categories viz:

- a) Questions (1-8) teachers' profiles;
- b) Questions (9-21) teachers' views on the influence of localised marking on teaching and learning of English language;
- c) Questions (22-39) teachers' responses to recommendations in examiners' reports (Appendix C).

There are a number of advantages to be derived from the use of questionnaires as a method of data collection. For instance, they allow for economical and factual collection of information (Verma and Mallick, 1999). Questionnaires can also be administered on a large scale because they can be distributed to a large number of participants without demanding too much time from the researcher. Since I needed to find out as many of the teachers' views and attitudes about dissemination of information of COSC marking as possible, this method complemented the interviews, which could not be carried out on a large scale. Key recommendations in examiners' reports that emerged over a five-year period -1998-2002 were used as a basis for questionnaires that were issued to teachers. Questionnaires, unlike interviews are likely to reveal new and unanticipated information which cannot be derived through other methods. So they are indeed necessary in this research. However, questionnaires may be problematic if they are not clear or if they are ambiguous. An attempt was made to design clear and unambiguous questionnaires. The first draft of the questionnaire was piloted among my colleagues at the University of the

Witwatersrand and then they were redesigned on the basis of their comments and responses.

3.4.4 Documentary Sources

Documents are important sources of qualitative research because they give a historical review of concepts (MacMillan and Schumacher, 2001). Documentation “corroborates evidence gathered from other sources” (Yin, 1994: 23). Documentation also provides stable data in that a repeated review can always be done in case a researcher needs to revisit the data and because it exists prior to the study. The following documents were analysed in this study:

- The schools’ COSC results from 1998 to 2002 (3 non-teacher-markers schools) (Appendix E)
- Examiners’ reports from 1998 to 2002 (Appendix A)
- Passlists/Results booklets (Appendix D)

Initially Passlists were not included in the research design, however, after interviews with some stakeholders, it became imperative that they should be analysed looking at the interrelatedness of these documents with the examiners’ reports. The information in the two documents is complementary. It is useful to the teachers in their teaching practice. This is in line with the importance of the concept of ‘intertextuality’ as espoused by Fairclough (1992) (refer to section 2.9).

3.4.4.1 Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) Results 1998 to 2002

An analysis of the COSC results per school of the non-teacher-markers can have revealing results on the effects of this innovation. They bring in the quantitative, statistical component of the triangular data collection and study. The results ensure concentration on “observable and valid data than the quest for thought, sensation and emotion” (Rosenberg, 1988:4). It is measurable and patterns can be established which can enable focused and guided analysis (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). This data was used to cross-check teachers’ claims about the positive effects of localised marking of the examinations, that is, the allusion that the performance of students has been improving as indicated by the results.

3.4.4.2 Examiners’ Reports (ERs)

Examiners’ reports provide necessary and useful assessment information and requirements that are so vital for teaching and learning. They were analysed in relation to their content, their availability and accessibility to teachers at schools. They can be used to help teachers make informed decisions about their pedagogical practices. Whether this information is used by teachers to align teaching to assessment requirements is to be revealed through teachers’ responses to both the interview questions and to the questionnaire.

3.4.4.3 Passlists/Results booklets

Passlists were analysed to determine the complementarities between the two instruments of feedback from COSC marking board (that is, ERs and Passlists). The Passlists contain

information about students' scores and a comparative analysis is made across the country with important comments being made about the results. This is elaborated on in section 4.4 of Chapter Four.

All the data were used to look for any changes and/or improvements in the teaching methods and/or strategies. The improvement or decline in results within a five year period will shed light on the viability of localization of COSC examinations marking. It is hoped that the accessibility and utilisation of feedback in relation to the current marking of COSC examinations in Lesotho will be illuminated by the findings of this study. The discourse analysis of these documents was necessary hence the next section is on a presentation of a model of data analysis used in analysing the above- mentioned documents.

3.5 A Model of Discourse Analysis (Examiners' Reports and Passlists)

Fairclough's (1989, 1995) model (see Figure 1) was used in this study. This model is useful in that it emphasises that meaning should be derived from the context within which the text is produced or received. All social practices are tied to specific historical contexts and are the means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served. The question of whose interests are served relates discourse to relations of power. The question of how the text is positioned or how it is positioning and whose interests are negated are crucial in critical discourse analysis (Janks, 1997:239). What makes Fairclough's (1989) model distinct from other models of critical reading is that he foregrounds social processes by differentiating between 'text' and 'discourse'. The text is a 'product' of the processes of text production while 'discourse'

refers to the ‘whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part. According to Fairclough (ibid) CDA is composed of three interrelated processes of analysis which are related to three interrelated dimensions of discourse:

- I. text analysis is tied to description
- II. processing analysis is tied to interpretation
- III. social analysis is tied to explanation.

The three dimensions do not represent sequential stages to be followed in any particular order. This model provides multiple points of analytic entry. The three different types of practices are embedded in one another so that the analysis of text and interaction is always conditioned by the social context within which the text is produced and received (Granville, 1998). The three dimensions of the critical discourse analysis model are presented in Figure 1 below.

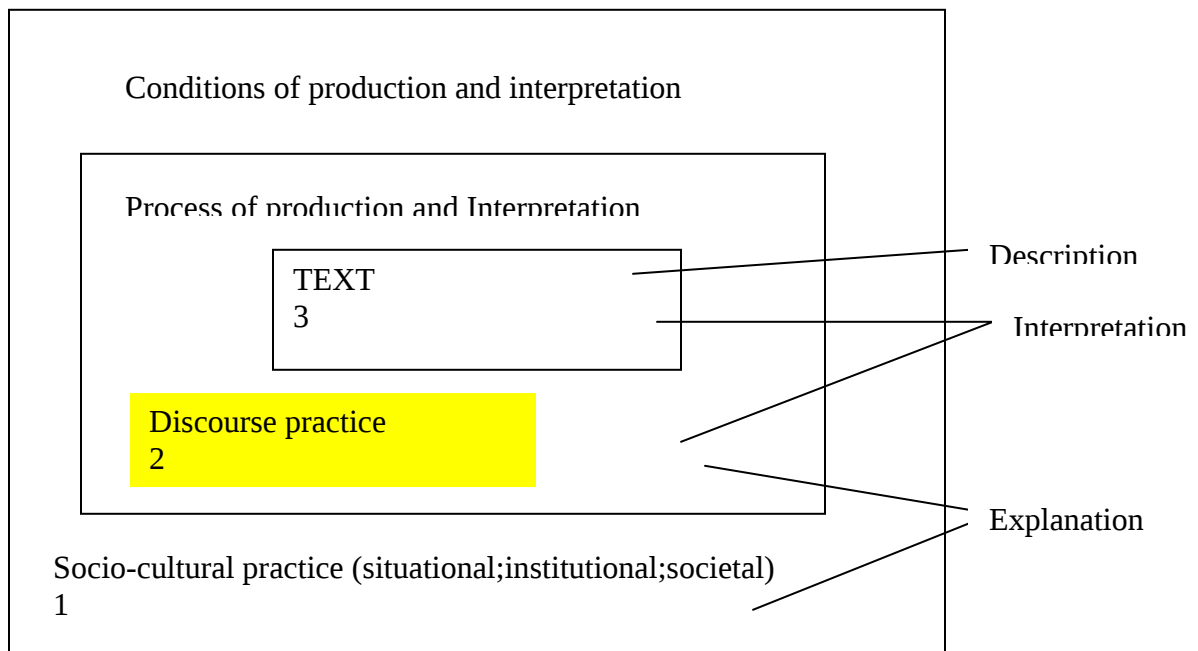


Figure 1 Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis in Janks (1997)

The first dimension represented in the inner box involves 'description' and it is concerned with the analysis of the formal properties of the text, the semiotic analysis or a study of signs (Brown and Dowling, 1997; Dowling, 1998). Producers of texts construct them from a range of possible lexical and syntactic options. This principle is tied to Halliday's (1978) functional theory of language which places emphasis on meaning as choice. When writing for example, the linguistic choices we make imply that we have rejected other choices. According to Scholes (1995), 'textual power' which refers to the power of print, directs our attention to what is present and away from what is no longer there (Kress and Hodge, 1979). The second dimension is called 'interpretation'. It is concerned with two types of interaction – first the analyst must take into consideration what is entailed in the processes of production and the processes of reception of texts. Interpretation encompasses understanding the interaction between these processes and the formal properties of the text itself. All these processes are social and require reference to the particular economic, political and institutional settings within which discourse is generated (van Dijk, 1988). Fairclough (ibid) calls the third dimension 'explanation'. It requires the analyst to take into account the wider historical, political, social and economic contexts within which texts are embedded. This dimension enables the reader not to view a text in isolation but to understand the ideological forces that underpin the construction of texts.

This model is relevant in this study because it is going to assist me in understanding the content of the examiners' reports, and passlists and whether they are meaningful,

sufficiently detailed, specific and diagnostic to help teachers improve their teaching practices. Understanding of the language choices used, how they position the readers, that is, teachers; how they position ECOL, the producers of the ERs were derived through this model. It enabled me to understand the historical, political and economic conditions of production that prevailed prior to 1995 and during the post 1995 era to present. More light was shed on whether teachers' perceptions have changed or not after reading local ERs. Are the locally produced reports readily available, and readily translatable to classroom instruction? It is hoped that these questions will be answered at the end through the application of CDA.

In conclusion to this section, it must be noted that a multi-methods approach (triangulation) was used in collecting data for this study. It is hoped that these different sources of data collection will provide information which addresses the major research question – *Does feedback from COSC English language marking board foster positive or negative 'washback' effects on English language teaching and learning in Lesotho secondary schools?* I believe the findings may reveal new trends and strategies to be adopted both at macro-level (national) and at the micro-level (classroom). These might lead to a realization of a fully-fledged localization of COSC for the benefit of Basotho children and the improved teaching of English language in Lesotho secondary schools.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

When a researcher is working with human subjects ethical considerations have to be taken into account. Since I was going to interview people and issue them with

questionnaires to fill in, I had to make sure that they were protected from harm – For example, using their names in my report – which might jeopardise their jobs. I ensured that I carefully and truthfully informed my subjects about the research before they could sign the consent forms of participation. Moreover, an *Information Statement* (Appendices B) explaining the purpose of the study was availed to all participants - the interviewees and teachers who filled in the questionnaire. Having explained the purpose of my research to the interviewees, they also signed the consent forms to be audio-taped. I had also guaranteed them confidentiality by ensuring that they could respond anonymously. In the next chapter I will present and discuss the data collected through the above-mentioned methods.