CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Population of the Study

Nepal is divided into 14 zones and 75 districts. This was done in order to carry out development works in a decentralized manner. Similarly, it is also divided into five development regions for accelerating a balanced development in all parts of the country. The spirit has yet to be materialized because of the insurmountable geographical barriers such as the high mountains and large rivers that stand obstacles in the development works. There are no transportation facilities for a majority of people in the hills and high mountains because road building is a slow and expensive process. Similarly, in the field of education, some districts do not have any campus for their high school graduates to continue their studies even today. As a matter of fact, these students are bound to go to some adjacent districts if a college is available there, or go to town areas to avail opportunities of higher studies. As a result of this, all the colleges in towns are flooded with students. The crowded class-rooms affect the teaching and learning activities. Mostly the PCL classes are the ones that face this chaotic environment. Normally, Biratnagar in the east, Kathmandu in the centre and Pokhara in the west are supposed to have the maximum intake of the high school graduates.

Five campuses selected for the study are located in the Kathmandu Valley, and four, outside it are in Pokhara and Bhairahawa. The population of the study, however, belongs to the various parts of the Kingdom, from the hills and plains, representing altogether 58 out of 75 districts of Nepal with an average distribution of 4.65 students per district.

3.1.1. Social Domain Chosen

The present study represents the population from a middle class stratum to a class of local peasants. But it is not affect-
ed by such a diversity. The majority of the people (73.3%) under study are from villages while the rest (26.6%), from the urban areas. Most of the male parents of the subjects are farmers, and female parents housewives. The majority of them are illiterate also (cf. Appendix 1, Table No.1).

3.1.2. Levels of Education

As discussed in the previous chapter regarding the linguistic competence of the intake, a debate has been going on between the school and campus level communities. Campuses blame the secondary schools for the low quality of education they impart to the secondary school students. Secondary schools blame the lower secondary schools and so on. No one is ready to take the responsibility of this misery. Actually the totality of teaching and learning process and the environment is responsible for creating this situation.

Bearing this scenario in mind, the present study is undertaken to look at the errors of the first year university students who have just passed the SLC examination. It, thus, tends to shed light on the ELT background that the tertiary intake has come up with. The study, therefore, includes all the PCL students from all the five Faculties and four Institutes under Tribhuvan University of Nepal (see Appendix 1, Table No.1).

The average marks that the students under study had obtained in English in the SLC Examination were 52.4%. The highest and the lowest average marks obtained by the students of Science and Technology and Law were 46.5% and 60.3%, respectively.

3.1.3. Age Groups

Nepali students should be of 16 years, while appearing in the SLC examination. Since the population of the present study includes the students who have already entered the university, they must have completed 16 years. The average age of the students under study is 17.7 years. It is because in the villages children either join school later than the specified age, i.e. 6
years or repeat the same class. Again some secondary schools, in some villages, are inaccessible for the children and they have to leave their villages and get temporarily settled in the vicinity of the secondary schools. Parents also feel insecure to send their children to the far off villages for their secondary school education. That is why, they are delayed for a year or so and as a result, the average age of the students goes up by more than a year. Another factor responsible for it is the delayed admissions to the university classes. Though students normally take the SLC examination between January and February and their results are published between June and July, admissions to the PCL are completed as late as September or October.

The present study was also conducted in February and March 1994 when the PCL first year classes had just started. Therefore, it is obvious that the average age of the students has to be a little more than it is expected. The average age of students from the Faculty/Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, Management and Forestry was 17 years. The average age of the students from the Faculty/Institute of Law, Medicine, Science and Technology, Engineering and Agriculture and Animal Sciences was 18 years while the average age of the students from the Faculty of Education was 19 years (see Appendix 1, Table No.1).

3.1.4. Sex

The 1992 statistics of Ministry of Education and Culture show that of the total, secondary school going girls' population is 30.4% only as compared to the figure of close to 70% for the boys (Statistical Pocket Book- Nepal 1994). This indicates that the number of girls entering the tertiary level will also be less than that of the boys. While selecting the population of the Present study, this factor was not taken into consideration and it so happened that the girls' population came out to be 38.5% in this case.
3.1.5. Mother Tongues

Nepal is a multilingual and multicultural country. Though the 1991 census records 32 languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal, there are several unrecorded languages spoken by a considerable population of the country. As Taba (1992: 23-24) records, Nepali is one of 69 languages spoken in Nepal besides Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu which have been kept in the category of other languages. These languages belong to Austro-Asiatic, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Sino-Tibetan language families. The present study covers subjects speaking 13 languages. However, there is a single speaker each of Khaling, Sherpa and Thakali languages. The majority of the students of the study, that is 65.5%, are the speakers of Nepali followed by Newari, Gurung, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magar, and Limbu speakers which consist of 11.8%, 5.1%, 4.8%, 2.9%, 2.2% and 1.1%, respectively. There are two speakers each from Rai, Tamang and Tharu languages.

To sum up, a great diversity in different aspects is recorded in the population of the present study. It is very difficult to find an absolutely homogeneous group in terms of socio-economic background, status of parents and their education, etc. in a multilingual and multicultural country like Nepal. Segregating any section of population is of no use where the students follow the same national syllabus, study the same textbooks and sit in the same national examinations. The method of teaching English is the same all over the country. In most cases, English is taught with explanation in Nepali and students from all language backgrounds sit in the same class where Nepali serves as a filter language for the non-native Nepali learners of English. Transfer from Nepali as a first language or a second into English may be equally evident for both the groups, i.e. Nepali native speakers and non-native Nepali speakers if it is at all. Therefore, the present population can be categorized into a group which can be called the Nepali learners of English.

Mother tongue interference is now being considered as one of the several other sources of errors and as a result of which a change has occurred in the researchers to view errors not as sins
but as inevitable characteristics of language learning. Therefore, as mentioned above, the population that follows the same syllabus, studies the same textbooks and sits in the same examination can be taken as an ideal group in a country where English is more or less confined into the classrooms and medium of instruction is mostly Nepali. Very rarely are the other subjects except for English taught in English both at school and campus levels. Exposure to English outside the classroom is limited except in some programmes on Nepal Television and Radio Nepal both of which are also accessible to a limited section of the population. In this way the present population is considered to be an ideal representative for the study.

3.2. Construction of Test Items

The researcher used a questionnaire and five types of test in order to obtain data for the study. This section presents a description of all these.

3.2.1. A General Questionnaire for Students

A general questionnaire for students was prepared to obtain information from them regarding their personal as well as academic records. The items included were: name, age, sex, mother tongue, previous schooling, medium of instruction at schools, marks obtained in English in the SLC examinations, name of the Faculty/Institute and campus, parents' qualifications and occupations. Apart from these, the questionnaire includes 14 other questions regarding the use of Nepali and English outside the classroom environment in a five-point scale (see Appendix 1).

The purpose of this questionnaire was not to take the said variables for the explanation of the learners' errors but to see the representation of different ethnic groups, their socio-economic backgrounds, geographical regions they represent and their Previous as well as present exposure to English.
3.2.2. Test Items

Test items were based primarily on the Secondary School English Curriculum approved by the Curriculum Development Centre of His Majesty's Government of Nepal. An attempt was made to include majority of the items in order to make the tests representative. A review of the Courses of Study for Proficiency Certificate Level First Fear was done with a view to seeing the linkage between the two, that is the SLC and PC levels. Also the Lower Secondary English Curriculum was borne in mind while devising the tests (see Appendix 5A-E).

The test is divided into five sections: listening test (which includes sound discrimination and comprehension tests), grammar test (which includes multiple choice test, error identification test and translation test), reading comprehension (cloze) test, word-formation and word meaning tests, and writing test. The forms and contents of these tests are explained here.

3.2.21. Listening Test

This test is further divided into two parts, namely sound discrimination test and listening comprehension test.

3.2.21.1. Sound Discrimination Test

This test is designed to assess the learners' ability to perceive and discriminate English sounds which is further classified into two sub-sections, namely vowels and consonants. All the vowel sounds (both monophthongs and diphthongs) are included in the test. As far as possible, minimal pairs are used to contrast individual sounds. The contrasted sounds appear in four Pairs each so that each sound in contrast can come twice. In the case of the sound /θ/, the same words are used with their strong and weak forms except for the pair and/ant to contrast it with /sθ/.
Each vowel occurs twice in contrast with another vowel except for /\, /u/, /\, /\, /\, /\, /\, /\, /\, and /\, each of which is contrasted with a single vowel. Vowels like /\, /a/, /\ and /\ are contrasted with three vowels while /\ is contrasted with four vowels, i.e. /\, /a/, /of and /\. The test consists of 19 items in all.

The second section of the test consists of the discrimination of English consonant sounds. The test contains 27 items in all. All voiceless consonants and their voiced counterparts are contrasted first. Three nasal sounds are also contrasted among themselves. Similarly, other confusing sound pairs are also included in the test. The sound /\ is contrasted with /t/ and /s/. Similarly, /\ is contrasted with /d/ and /z/. The sound /\ and /\ are contrasted with /\ and /b/, respectively. Sounds /\ and /\ are also contrasted among themselves. The sound /h/ comes in contrast with vowels like /a/, /\ and /\.

The test does not include stress and intonation, though they are taught in schools. The inclusion of all items is not possible in a single study of this nature and it is a limitation of the present study, two.

3.2.212. Listening Comprehension Test

This test is included to assess the students' ability to comprehend a passage by listening to it which is taken from Rye (1982). It is simplified to suit the level of the students. The choice of the passage is made on the basis of the topic, i.e. Launching Your Kite – a common theme throughout the world. The multiple choice questions given in the passage have also been revised since there were only three distractors in each question. Five multiple choice questions with four distracters each are finalized for the present study.
3.2.22. Grammar Test

Though it is not possible to test the total knowledge of English grammar of the students, an attempt has been made to cover the majority of the items given in the Secondary School English Curriculum— which the students have gone through in the recent past. Many of such grammatical items are repeated in the PCL first year English textbooks as well. Since the students are the beginners of the tertiary level education, their immediate past background must be kept in mind. This test is divided into three parts: multiple choice test, error identification test, and translation test.

3.2.221. Multiple Choice Test

This test includes 114 multiple choice items containing two to four choices each designed with an objective of testing 14 grammatical items. A description of the grammatical items tested and the number of test items they include are as follows:

Table Mo. 7
Grammatical items included in multiple choice test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical items</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pronouns</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Subject-verb agreement</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Articles</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Modals and auxiliaries</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conjunctions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Adjectives</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Conditionals</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Gerund/to-infinitive</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Question tags</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tenses</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Prepositions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Passive voice</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Reported speech</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Relative clauses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The differences in the number of items under each category show the attempt made to include as many items as possible in order to bring better results.

3.2.222. Error Identification Test

This test consists of 28 sentences of which 16 are erroneous which are classified into 11 grammatical categories. Nine of them are similar to the ones given in the multiple choice test and the rest of them are new. This test helps to check the regularity of the errors. It requires the students to locate the errors and correct them. The grammatical categories and the number of items included in this test are as follows:

Table No. 8
Grammatical items included in error identification test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical items</th>
<th>Number of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Concord</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clauses</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gerund/to-infinitive</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Adverbs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Articles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Nouns</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Tenses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Pronouns</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Modals</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Indirect questions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Adjectives</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.223. Translation Test

Avoidance of certain structures is a regular feature in the writings of the learners. Schachter (1974) finds that Chinese and Japanese students avoid the use of relative clauses. It is true that some items are very frequent in speech and writing while others are not. It is therefore that the test items are specially designed to assess whether the testees avoid such items.
Several studies in EA have made use of translation work because it is considered an appropriate test for finding out the influence of the mother tongue in the learners' performance in the TL. The present test consists of 10 Nepali sentences to be translated into English. The grammatical items intended to test here are: reported speech 2, direct speech 6 and relative clauses 2.

3.2.23. **Word-Formation and Word Meaning Tests**

This test is divided into two parts. The first part deals with word-formation in which the learners are asked to match the given seven prefixes and six suffixes with the root or base forms. The second part of the test contains six multiple choice items with four distractors each set with an objective of testing meanings of the six words selected from the Secondary Level English textbooks. Here the students are required to infer their meaning from the given contexts.

3.2.24. **Reading Comprehension (Cloze) Test**

The cloze test created for the present purpose consists of 226 words divided into three paragraphs each with a different theme. The objective of the test is to check the learners' reading comprehension. The vocabulary items and sentence structures both are chosen in such a way that they suit to the level of the subjects under study. Every fifth word is deleted so that the students are required to fill in altogether 44 slots. The categories tested and the number of items each category includes are given below:
### Table No- 9
**Grammatical items Included In reading comprehension (cloze) test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Structure Words</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Content words</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Auxiliary Verbs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Verbs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Nouns</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Conjunctions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Adjectives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Prepositions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.25. **Writing Test**

The test is intended to analyse the errors obtained from the free compositions of the students so that several language items can be tested at a time. Keeping the linguistic proficiency of the students in view, they are asked to write an essay in about 150 words on any one of the following topics:

a) An unforgettable event in your life  
b) Your village or town  
c) Your aim in life  
d) How did you spend your winter vacation?

3.3. **Sampling Procedure**

There are four Faculties and five Institutes under Tribhuvan University in Nepal. They are Faculties of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law and Management, and the Institutes of Agriculture and Animal Sciences, Engineering, Forestry, Medicine and Science and Technology.

The population of the present study consists of all the first year students of the PCL studying in the above Faculties and Institutes. As it was not possible to incorporate the whole
population for a research of this kind, the stratified random sampling, i.e. "... a sample in which the population is grouped into different strata, and a selection drawn from each level" (Richards et al. 1985:249) technique was adopted in the selection of the population.

3.3.1. Selection of the Campuses

One campus under each of the Faculties/Institutes was selected in order to have a representative sample for the study. The Kathmandu Valley was supposed to be an appropriate place for the present study, as students from different parts of the country come to avail the opportunities of higher education in various disciplines provided here. But it was not possible to carry out the whole study in the Valley alone as some of the Institutes have their campuses outside it. Therefore, either Hetauda or the Pokhara Valley was given a second thought. Again to have an access to the agriculture campus, an option had to be made between Lamjung and Rupendehi which are the only places where the PCL courses in agriculture are conducted. These three combined possibilities gave a wide coverage of samples for the present study. What follows here is the report of the procedure applied to the selection of the campuses.

Since Nursing campus at Pokhara was the only campus found to be running the PCL classes in Medicine during the time of field study, it was selected without any question. However, a lottery procedure was used between Pokhara and Hetauda campuses of Forestry, and between Lamjung and Paklihawa campuses of Agriculture and Animal Sciences. Pokhara campus for Forestry and Paklihawa campus for Agriculture and Animal Sciences were selected.

The same procedure was applied for selecting an Engineering campus from among the three choices: two in the Kathmandu Valley and one in the Pokhara Valley. Pulchowk campus of Engineering located in the Kathmandu Valley was selected through a lottery technique.
Similarly, a list of campuses for each Faculty/Institute in the valley of Kathmandu and Pokhara was prepared to use the lottery technique again. As a result, Padma Kanya Campus for Humanities and Social Sciences, Shankerdev Campus for Management, Sanothini Campus for Education, Mahendra Ratna Campus for Science and Technology all in the Kathmandu Valley and Prithwi Narayan Multiple campus of Pokhara for the Faculty of Law were selected for the study.

3.3.2. Selection of the Students

The selection of the campuses was followed by the selection of the students. Thirty students from each Faculty/Institute were to be selected. However, a uniform procedure could not be adopted because of the varying student-strength in different campuses which required the researcher's visit to all of them personally to make a selection of the students. The campuses in the Kathmandu Valley were visited several times, as they were readily accessible. But the campuses outside this Valley were visited once only during the time the students were given tests.

As there were 30 students each in the Nursing Campus Pokhara (Medicine) and Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal (Science and Technology) and Prithwi Narayan Multiple Campus, Pokhara (Law), all of them were taken. In Paklihawa Campus of Agriculture and Animal Sciences, there were 60 students in all. Thus, every second student, according to the attendance register, was selected. There were 120 students in the Forestry campus at Pokhara 60 in each group. In order to take a sample from both the groups, every fourth student from the attendance register was taken. There was a large crowd of students at Shankerdev Campus in Kathmandu where the selection of the students from the Faculty of Management was to be done. There were four sections in the PCL First Year which housed 450 students. In order to maintain a representation from all the groups, every fifteenth student according to the attendance register was selected. The second big crowd of 302 students was encountered at Padma Kanya Campus in Kathmandu while selecting the students representing the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. According to the campus
attendance register every tenth student was selected. Of the 61 students studying in the PCL First Year in Education at Sanothimi campus, Bhaktapur, every second student, according to the attendance register was taken. In the Engineering Campus at Pulchowk, out of 120 students in the different engineering sections, every third student was selected for the study.

3.4. Administration of the Tests

This section deals with the planning and administration of the tests.

3.4.1. Plan of Administration

As the tests were based primarily on the Secondary School English Curriculum, a pilot study was not considered essential. The whole test-package was given to the research supervisors for their expert opinion. After some modifications they were finalized and given to a press in Kathmandu for final printing. The product came out in 18x22 cm sized booklets each containing 12 pages.

The recording of the listening tests was done at the Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad. Dr. Mohan G. Ramanan, Reader, in the Department of English, whose English was found near-native like, was requested to lend his voice for recording. When the recorded material was checked in Kathmandu, the acoustic quality of the recording was not found to be satisfactory. Therefore, a second recording was done at the British Council in Kathmandu. Ms. Sheilagh Neilson, a senior English Language teacher at the British Council, who had an experience of teaching English to the Nepali adults for about two years, did the recording in the Council’s recording room. While re-recording the listening test, care was taken to provide adequate pause so that the students could mark the proper word or phrase. The passage was also read at a normal speed so that the students could comprehend it. The recorder and the researcher both checked the quality of recording before it was marked to the expected quality.
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For the calculation of time segments to be given to each test, the researcher gave the questionnaire and the tests to his own niece, an average PCL first year student who passed high school from a remote village of the Far Western Development Region in the second division. She completed the whole test package in four and a half hours. She took two and a half hours to finish the questionnaire, listening tests and the first part of the grammar test, i.e. multiple choice items. The rest of the tests took her two hours. On the basis of the time she took, all the students taking the tests were given the same period of time, which proved to be an ideal plan.

3.4.2. Conducting the Tests

The first phase of the field study was done in the campuses of Pokhara and Paklihawa. The researcher first visited Pokhara. As there were three campuses under study, he had to make a plan for the administration of the tests. Three days for each campus were required.

The first day, the researcher went to the Forestry Campus, and with the help of the campus administration and the concerned English language teachers, the selection of the students and the room to administer the tests was completed. The next day, without prior information, the students were called on into the room designated to administer the test. The researcher explained to them what they were supposed to do. They were allowed to ask any question they had. When everyone was sure of what he had to do, the test package was distributed. The students were asked to complete the general questionnaire first. Then they were asked to do the listening tests. The cassette for this purpose was played on a National Panasonic cassette player with four speakers. The voice of the recorder was introduced first. After making sure that everyone could clearly hear the voice, the real test was played. When the students completed the sound discrimination test, they were asked to move on to the next. The recorder was played again for the listening comprehension test and the students ticked the answers. Then the students were asked to move
on to the grammar test, i.e. multiple choice items. They finished the first part of the test in two and a half hours. The tests were collected, but the students were not informed of the second part to be completed the next day in order not to make them conscious of it.

The next day, the same group of the students was asked to come to the same hall and complete the rest of the tests. Two hours' time was specified for the remaining part of the test-package. When the tests were returned, the researcher thanked all the participants and promised them to give the feedback. Though it was not possible to tabulate and analyse the answers given by the participants in a day or two, the researcher marked the first part of the tests and gave his general comments to the concerned English teachers who promised to pass them on to them. Thus, both parts of the tests were administered without prior information to the testees in order to see their off-hand performance in the English language which was an essential mechanism to draw conclusions on their competence in English.

The same procedure was used while administering the tests in other campuses also.

3.5. Identification of Errors and Tabulation of Data

After the administration of the tests, the test packages were collected and corrected by the researcher himself. Answer keys were prepared for the multiple choice items and the tests requiring single answer and possible other answers. Test scripts were marked on the basis of these answer keys. However, written compositions were marked on the basis of the errors found in each script. Erroneous sentences were verified on the basis of Leech et al. (1979), Swan (1982), Celce-Murcia (1983), Wood (1984) Quirk et al. (1985), Thomson and Martinet (1986), and Sinclair (1987, 1991, 1992). While verifying the erroneous items, two features, namely grammaticality and current usages, were taken into consideration. Erroneous items were tabulated on the basis of their frequency counts. Separate tabulations for errors were
made for Nepali native speakers, non-native Nepali speakers, and Boarding school products. Simple statistical tool of percentage was used to quantify the data.

Classification of error categories was based on the teaching items of English as prescribed in the lower secondary, secondary and the PCL first year English Curriculums (see Appendix 5, A-E). Therefore, the items were spread widely. Such classification was done with an aim of helping the teachers and material designers to devise learning or remedial materials for pedagogical purposes accordingly.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter presents a picture of the population of the study which covers wide geographical regions, a number of social domains, both sexes, different linguistic as well as educational backgrounds presenting an example of unity in diversity. The unity is shown by the textbooks the students have to master, the syllabuses they have to follow, and the examinations they have to get through. Similarly, a variety of test items included in the study tries to assess the proficiency of the students in different language skills. These are followed by discussions on the procedures adopted for the selection of the campuses and the subjects for the study followed by the administration of the test package and tabulation of the results.