

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research design, procedures for data elicitation, the pilot study and the procedures used for data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

This study is a study of the perceptions of learners and a teacher of an English proficiency class. The method used to conduct this study is the diary study method which is a “first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns or salient events” (Bailey, 1990:215). This study is ethnographic, or more precisely micro-ethnographic in nature as it seeks to interpret the way the students understand the processes in a classroom through their written accounts in diary.

Ethnography, a term borrowed from anthropology, is the study of people's behaviour in naturally occurring, ongoing settings, with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behaviour (Hyes, 1982). Watson-Gegeo (1988) outlines three principles of ethnographic research. Firstly, the focus of ethnography is people's behavior in groups and on cultural patterns in that behaviour. Secondly, ethnography is holistic. It is holistic because any aspect of behaviour must be described and explained in relation to the whole system of which it is a part. The third principle is,

ethnographic data collection begins with a theoretical framework which is used to direct the researcher's attention to certain aspects of situations and certain kinds of research questions.

This study fits Watson-Gegeo's (1988) description of ethnographic research for the following reasons. Firstly, its focus is the behaviour of the students and their teacher in a particular setting, in this case an English Proficiency classroom. Secondly, the behaviour observed is described in relation to the class (the system of which the students and teacher are part of). The class is also the context of the study whereby the context carries connotation of space and time and thus can be used to find out the interactions and relationship patterns. Lastly, the data is collected using the diary study method, a research genre commonly used to document language learning experiences, student teachers' reactions to academic courses and language teaching experience (Bailey, 1990). The research questions of the study form a framework which acts as a guide for the researcher to establish the issues to focus on.

This study is data-driven and is descriptive in nature. Selinger and Shohamy (1989) describes descriptive research as one which involves a collection of techniques used to specify, delineate, or describe naturally occurring phenomena without experimental manipulation. Descriptive research is also used to establish the existence of phenomena by describing them explicitly. Although descriptive research can begin with a hypothesis or question, the phenomena it describes are not manipulated or elicited artificially. In descriptive research, data can be collected using tests, surveys, questions, self-reports, interviews etc.

The study is also naturalistic as it shares observations of a natural environment where people study and work. Naturalistic research is a descriptive term that implies that the researcher conducts observations in the “natural, ongoing environment where people live and work” (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973 p. 5). In the case of language learning, a naturalistic observation would need as its database the lesson with its participants in real time rather than, say a class constructed to try out a particular teaching method (McDonough and McDonough, 1997). Nunan (1992) named this ‘genuine’ language classroom. In naturalistic study we also seek to interpret rather than avoid the existence of multi perspectives.

The main aim of the study is to examine the similarities and differences found in accounts or perceptions of learners and the teacher regarding the same class events. The second aim is to find out what affective factors are evidenced in the classroom. Affective factors are described in the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics as variables which include attitudes, emotions, motivation, personality etc. Affective factors or affect is also commonly defined as the area covering feelings, emotions, mood and temperament (Chaplin, 1975). The terms affect, emotion and feelings are often used interchangeably.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How do the perceptions of students and teacher regarding the lesson coincide or differ?
2. What affective factors are evidenced in the diaries?

Perceptions refer to the way someone views something or an event which he or she experiences. The Longman Dictionary of Language, Teaching & Applied Linguistics(1992) defines perception as 'The recognition and understanding of events, objects and stimuli through the use of the senses (sight, hearing, touch, etc)'.

A lesson in this study refers to the classroom events or processes in which the students and teacher participate from the time the class starts until it ends. The class' duration is six hours and is scheduled once per week. A lesson encompasses the interactions among class participants, the tasks or activities they do, the materials they use and everything they are aware of within the period when the event of teaching and learning take place. It is, in a sense, defined by time and space within and in which participants make sense of the experience they undergo.

The perceptions of students and the teacher are obtained through their diary entries. In this way, first hand accounts of their perceptions of the classroom processes could be obtained. Diaries are used to obtain this data on perceptions as perceptions are basically very private and differ from person to person. Thus, it is important that the perceptions of the learners and teacher are obtained through a method which allows for free expression of thoughts. Furthermore the diary has become increasingly significant both as a reflective genre in itself, and as one of a battery of interpretive micro-ethnographic research techniques (McDonough & McDonough, 1997).

The research procedure for the diary entries is adopted from the procedures of diary studies developed by Progoff (McDonough & McDonough, 1997) which includes the following.

a. Background Details

The background details of the subjects of the research namely, the students and the teacher are obtained. The students' details include their occupations, their achievement in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) English paper, their reasons for joining the course and their expectations of the course. The teacher/researcher's details include her experience in English language teaching and her beliefs about English language learning and teaching. It is important to describe the teacher's beliefs about English language learning and teaching as the teacher is someone "who leads the expedition or at least , carries the map " for the voyage of discovery in the classroom (Breen, 1998). Thus the teacher's belief about learning and teaching could have some effects on the classroom processes.

b. Diary Record

The diarists keep a systematic, retrospective account detailing the learning/teaching experience after each lesson. Entries are made in a notebook and handed in to the teacher/researcher at the end of each class. These records are expected to be entered honestly and openly. (An elaboration of how participants are to keep the diaries is seen in section 3.3.1 & 3.3.2).

c. Primary Editing

Pseudonyms are used to ensure confidentiality and to safeguard against any embarrassment to the subjects involved in the research should the research be published.

d. Preliminary Analysis

At the end of each class, the researcher reads the diaries and tries to find important points or issues to look into more deeply.

e. Selection of Issues to Focus On

The researcher reads through all the diaries and tries to identify patterns that emerge to derive research questions.

f. Final Analysis

The researcher looks at the data and finds examples or entries which address the research questions.

g. Preparation of the Final Report.

The issues that are identified as significant are discussed with reference to the data which are used to illustrate the points addressed. Quotes from the diary are cited. The final report focuses on issues which are insightful and those which answer the research questions.

3.3 Procedure for Data Elicitation

Two categories of data are elicited. One is the diary entries of the students. The other is the diary entries of the teacher cum researcher.

3.3.1 The Diary Entries of Students

The diary entries of students are obtained in the following manner. At the beginning of the course, students are informed that they need to make diary entries at the end of each lesson. They are asked to write their impression of the class for the day. They are free to write any other comments. To guide them, the teacher who is also the researcher, mentions that they may wish to include the following points:

- a. Detailed accounts of what happened during the lesson.
- b. Their feelings about what they learned, their classmates, the teacher and the class as a whole
- c. Any problems which they encounter.
- d. Proposals for what to do during the next class.
- e. Comments on the activities, teaching techniques and the materials.

The students are given ten to twenty minutes to write in their diaries. The students are allowed to use both their native language and the target language. The students are allowed to use their native language as they may not be proficient enough to express their perceptions in the target language and thus would not be able to write about their perceptions as thoroughly as they would like to.

3.3.2 The Diary Entries of the Teacher/Researcher

The teacher records her observation at the same time the students record theirs. She notes her impression of how the class went for the day making remarks about what she feels is important and insightful. Her remarks for the day are then compared to those made by the students. She makes notes of the entries made by the students and notes points she needs to clarify with the students in the next class. Salient issues which emerged from the data are also noted.

A pilot study using this method of elicitation of data is carried out before the actual study. The pilot study is briefly described in the next section.

3.4 The Pilot Study

A diary study of the perceptions of the teacher and students of an English for Specific Purposes course i.e. Computer English conducted at Akademi Infotech MARA was carried out in July 1998. This study was conducted over a period of a month and a half.

Data was obtained through the diary entries of the lecturer and 24 students who made entries whenever they attended the class. The study aimed to find out the perceptions of the teacher and students regarding the classroom processes.

The subjects of this study were a male lecturer who had about three years of teaching experience and students enrolled in the Pre-Diploma in Information Technology program. In this program students were required to study Preparatory Mathematics and Intensive English Language Program which included Computer

English, Business English and English Enrichment. Their English language proficiency, on average, was still elementary. The course in which this study was carried out was an English for Specific Purposes course named Computer English. The main aim of the course was to improve the students' reading skills. Two research questions were postulated. They were:

1. How do the perceptions of the teacher and learners coincide or differ?
2. What affective factors are revealed in the diaries?

Diary entries made by the lecturer and the students were examined. Guidelines on how to write the diaries were given. The students and lecturer were asked to write about the classroom processes; what they did, how they felt, problems they encountered, proposals on what to do in the next class, and general comments on the activities, teaching techniques and the materials.

3.4.1 Analysis of how the Perceptions of the Learners and Teacher Coincide or Differ

The analysis of how the perceptions of the learners and teacher coincide or differ is as follows.

3.4.1.1 Learners' and Teacher's Perceptions which Coincide

The learners' and teacher's perceptions of the lesson coincide with regard to group work, discipline and the class as a whole (see table 3.1). Both view group work positively. The teacher thinks the students enjoy group work and the students express their liking for group work. As for discipline, the teacher dislikes students who are not punctual and who do not apologise when they are late. Students also do not like their peers to be rude.

Table 3.1 Perceptions which Coincide

Categories	Students' Perceptions	Teacher's Perceptions
Group work	<p>"The class is fine. All in joyful mood. We did some group work".</p> <p>"Actually, today I'm so happy because in my discussion with my group I know a little bit about the computer specification. Thanks for my friend".</p> <p>"Today the class is very cheerful. Everybody enjoy their studying. I think my classmate and I will more like study group than just read the black and white book (CE book)."</p>	<p>"They enjoyed every minute of it" No surprise because it is discussion time" and "... moving from one group to the other. Most of them were clearly enthusiastic to come up with something good!".</p> <p>"It was fun during the Q&A session because all the groups tried to give the best possible answer."</p>
Discipline	<p>"During Mr. Yan explained about task, one of our class member so sleepy. I hate him because he didn't respect Mr. Yan."</p>	<p>"There were some latecomers! To be frank, I really feel irritated with those latecomers because sometimes they do disturb the flow of the lesson and sometimes some of them don't even have the courtesy to apologise to me."</p>
Class as a whole	<p>"Everyone in the class also look very bored but maybe a little tired because of Language Enrichment quiz."</p> <p>"It was boring. Mr. Yan talked too much but don't know how to attract us. We are all sleepy and nearly fallen asleep."</p> <p>"But after work everybody was looks like sleepy and boring."</p> <p>"The other student look like boring. I look some of the student sleepy also do I."</p>	<p>"Today it was the final day for the presentation. Again I saw disappointed faces, whispering pairs and lethargic bodies in the audience when the presenters were trying hard to give a brilliant performance in front of the class."</p> <p>"Today the class was quite a 'disaster'...as I entered the class, I saw exhausted faces and bored faces."</p>

3.4.1.2 Learners' and Teacher's Perceptions which Differ

The perceptions of learners and teacher differ with regard to set induction, riddle, the textbook, the topics covered and the ergonomics of the class (see table 3.2). Set induction refers to the introductory phase or the beginning of each lesson where teachers use various strategies to arouse the students' interest. The teacher seems very excited about giving a riddle in class. The students however did not understand the riddle. The students dislike using the textbook because the text print is not very clear and also because they find the book boring. The teacher does not make any mention about the textbook. The students seem to enjoy the topics covered in class but the teacher makes no comments on the topics covered. Students write about how the ergonomics of the class affect them. A noisy class seems to have a positive effect on them. A student claims that it sparks a creative idea. A few students say that the class is cold and this makes them sleepy.

Table 3.2 Perceptions which Differ

Categories	Students' Perceptions	Teacher's Perceptions
Set induction	No response	<p>"I brought a replica of the car from the hit movie "Back to the future".</p> <p>"To start the class I decided to bring some 'fresh air' of politics into my lesson. I asked the class about YAB Dato' Sri Dr. Mahathir's speech the night before..."</p>
Riddle	<p>"Today Mr. Yan gave us a riddle. I don't know what it means"</p> <p>"Mr. Yan started his lecture with readel (teka teki). Maybe he tried to attract us."</p> <p>"Mr. Yan begin our class with his riddle. Nobody can answer it".</p>	<p>"... I tried to do something to brighten up the mood a little bit. I gave them a riddle."</p>
Textbook	<p>"Today lesson I think ok than yesterday. This is because today we don't have to read the CE book (the black and White book) that make me sleepy".</p> <p>"All students look tired and sleepy. Mr. Yan teach used the CE book. All students quiet and more listening what Mr. Yan teach us."</p> <p>"We discussion about introduction to computer hardware once again. It was bored topic. I don't know why. I like computer. Maybe because of text print was so bad. It was not clear and the word was small. It make we want to sleep."</p>	No response.
Topics	<p>"Today we learn more details about computer hardware."</p> <p>"I feel I got many knowledge about computer."</p> <p>"Today excited when Mr. Yan told about the anatomy of memory."</p> <p>"I have a computer presentation assignment. I love this because it can improve my knowledge in computer".</p>	No response.
Class environment	<p>"The class is so noisy. All students talk. A lot of creative ideas come form my mind."</p> <p>"Class is noisy but okay."</p> <p>"Today class quite boring. We get into group. Students look sleepy. Mr. Yan also slow when teaching. No spirit. Boring and class so cold."</p> <p>"Other students are quite sleepy. The class as whole are too cold and quite boring."</p>	No response

3.4.2 Affective Factors Evidenced in the Diaries

The affective factors revealed in the diaries vary from lesson to lesson. Generally the feelings can be categorized as positive or negative. Some positive feelings revealed by the students include feelings of happiness, interest in the lesson, and a general sense of accomplishment. These feelings are directed towards the activities, the topics, their peers, the class atmosphere, and the teacher (see table 3.3). Some negative feelings are boredom, sleepiness and dislike. The data which supports this analysis can be referred to in Appendix 1.

Table 3.3 Affective Factors evidenced in the Students' Diaries

Categories	Affective factors Evidenced
Activities	Fun Nervousness Happiness Excitement Enjoyment Boredom.
Topics	Interest Enjoyment Boredom Sleepiness Excitement
Peers	Affection Anger Dislike
Teacher	Affection Admiration

3.4.3 General Conclusions

In this study, it is found that the students' and teacher's perceptions both coincide and differ. Secondly, we can conclude that affective factors evidenced are both positive and negative affects. The feelings are directed towards the activities, the topics, peers and the teacher. Some affective factors evidenced in the classroom are enjoyment, happiness, anger, fear and boredom.

The following are some general observations made about this study:

1. Students enjoy group work, discussions and assignments which require creativity.
2. Students have different views about presentation. Those who presented feel either nervous or good about themselves. Generally the presenters feel relief that the task is over and feel they did a good job. Anxiety over having to present is evident.
3. The students generally like each other and are able to work well together. They are cooperative and helpful towards each other. Personal problems can affect a student's feelings about the class.
4. Students have gradually begun to feel affectionate towards and admiration for the teacher. They are affected by the teacher's personality and manner of dressing. They commend the teacher for being helpful, for making jokes which lighten up the mood of the class, for being open-minded, for being sporting, for giving clear explanation, for being kind and reasonable and also for his looks.
5. The teacher's deportment affects the students' perceptions of him.
6. The noise level and temperature of the classroom affect students.

The pilot study has shown us that the students and teacher have different perceptions of classroom processes. It also shows us that different aspects of classroom processes evoke different feelings among the students and teacher. The awareness of the existence of these differences is important as this awareness can motivate teachers to acknowledge learner differences and help teachers devise means on how to cater to their differing needs.

The actual study replicates the pilot study by using the same research method and research questions on a group of learners in an English Proficiency class.

3.5 The Subjects of the Study

The subjects of this study are the teacher and students of the PEN 5015 (English) course for the Diploma in Technology –Telecommunication Engineering program, jointly organised by Telekom Malaysia and Universiti Telekom Malaysia. The course is conducted for students who have registered for the program on a part-time basis. The classes are held once a week over eight Saturdays. Classes began on 26 December 1998 and ended on 27 February 1999. The teacher and the students who participated in this study are described below.

3.5.1 The Teacher

The teacher is also the researcher. Thus, she can also be considered the participant observer, a term used in ethnography and anthropology to describe the role duality. She has ten years experience in teaching English. From 1989 until 1999, the teacher has taught various English courses to pupils ranging from the age of eleven to 64. The courses taught include basic proficiency courses and ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses such as English for Banking, English for Meetings, Public Speaking, Business Writing and Report Writing. The classes she taught were mainly a mixed group of students. Thus, she found that she often had to use different strategies to handle the mixed group of students. She resorted to using journals and diaries to help her get a clearer picture of what was happening in the classroom. She felt there was a real need to listen to the inner voices of her students. She knew this could help her be a better teacher and the students, better learners. This need led to a deep interest in classroom based research.

3.5.2 The Students

Sixteen students participated in this study. Most of the participants (87.5%) are Malays, with Malay as their mother tongue. Only two are Indians. The majority are in their twenties. The most common reason for joining the program (Diploma in Technology –Telecommunication Engineering) is to upgrade their job status in the telecommunication industry especially for those who are already working in the Telecommunication Industry. Others joined the program to qualify for employment in the telecommunication industry. The range of their achievement in English in the SPM or MCE is between distinction to F9 (fail). Their profiles are shown in the table on the next page . To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used.

Table 3.4 Particulars of Students

No.	Name	Age	Sex	Race	SPM Result (English)	Occupation	Mother Tongue	Reason For Joining the Course
1.	Sai	24	Male	Malay	C3	Engineer	Malay	To upgrade skills
2.	Ron	20	Female	Malay	C6	Clerk	Malay	To gain employment
3.	Nor	21	Female	Malay	F9	Clerk	Malay	To upgrade job status
4.	Hai	27	Male	Malay	C4	Technician	Malay	To upgrade job status
5.	Az	27	Male	Malay	C5	Executive	Malay	To gain technical skills
6.	Azis	27	Male	Malay	C6	Technician	Malay	To upgrade job status
7.	Zal	20	Male	Malay	C3	Unemployed	Malay	To gain employment
8.	Ren	22	Male	Indian	C5	Technician	Tamil	To upgrade job status
9.	Nini	21	Female	Malay	P8	Clerk (Police Force)	Malay	To gain exposure in the telecommunication field
10.	Denny	38	Male	Indian	Distinction (MCE)	Technician	Tamil/English	To upgrade job status
11.	Zan	28	Male	Malay	C5	Technician	Malay	To upgrade job status
12.	Moni	34	Male	Malay	C4	Manager	Malay	Personal Interest
13.	Am	25	Male	Malay	C5	Self-employed (Electrician)	Malay	To gain employment
14.	Eda	19	Female	Malay	P7	Clerk	Malay	To upgrade job status
15.	Arb	26	Male	Malay	C6	Technician	Malay	To upgrade job status
16.	Mus	20	Female	Malay	C3	Sales Personnel	Malay	To gain employment

3.6 Description of the Course

The course is named PEN 5015- English Proficiency. It is compulsory for those who have enrolled in the Diploma in Technology (Telecommunication Engineering) program. The students are part-time students and have to take three courses for that semester. The other two courses are Circuit Analysis and Business Management.

The English course is conducted over a period of eight weeks (26 December 1998 until 27 February 1999) Classes are held from 3:00 p.m. until 9:30 p.m.. The objectives of the course are to enhance the participants' proficiency in the English Language by integrating the four skills and to help participants acquire competence in the use of the English language at the pre-intermediate level.

The course contents include:

1. Listening/Speaking – Impromptu Speeches, Role-plays and simulation.
2. Reading – Reading for Main ideas and Specific Information.
3. Writing – Paragraph Writing
4. Grammar and vocabulary – Word class, tenses and punctuation.

The textbook used in this course is Reward (Pre-intermediate/Intermediate) written by Simon Greenall and published by Heinemann Publications in 1995. The teacher supplemented the basic text with other articles which relate to the tasks planned for the particular class.

3.7 Procedures for Data Analysis

The procedures for data analysis are :

1. The researcher reads through the diary entries and tries to get an impressionistic feel of the issues raised. Points which relate to the research questions are noted. Any evidence which supports or answers any of the research questions is noted and categorized.
2. The data obtained consists of all diary entries made by the students and the teacher. The data was compiled according to the name of the student who wrote it. A table to indicate the dates on which a student made an entry was constructed to show the frequency of entries and to match the diary entries to the descriptions of the events which the students and the teacher commented on.
3. The first type of evidence is one which relates to the question of how the perceptions of the students and the teacher differ or are similar. The second type of evidence would be that which reflects elements of affective factors.
4. The affective factors evidenced in the diaries are grouped according to the items on which the comment were made e.g. comments on the teacher, materials, peers, classroom activities, etc. The findings are compared to those made by the inter-rater.
5. A conclusion of the findings is discussed.

As the diaries are written records which differ in depth and detail, there may be a need to get further clarification during the analysis. To obtain clarification or elaboration a 'diary-interview' (Burgess, 1985) is carried out whenever ambiguity arose. These diary interviews are conducted at random. For the purpose of

triangulation, an inter-rater examines the diaries and lists out the affective factors she feels are revealed in the diaries. Her findings are then compared to the researcher's findings.