

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction.

"...since we know that each individual may have their own idiosyncratic pathway to developing language competence ,case studies are also able to show how the development of individual language acquirers may be different from that described groups" .

(Seliger and Shohamy 1989:125)

This study adopted the case study approach as the researcher chose a small population to study in great depth the effectiveness of an ESP classroom task, i.e. the 'negotiation task' through learners' performance and perception of the task. The learners' performance and perception were compared to that of the specialist informants' perception of effective 'negotiations' in the real working environment.

3.1 Research design

This study collects its data using qualitative methods and focuses on one case during a limited time period. The researcher focuses on one particular situation that is the 'negotiation' task performed by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia , Business English students at the end of their course. The simulation is part of the course evaluation. Neuman (1997), claims that :

"a case study is more distinct. It usually involves qualitative methods and focuses on one or a few cases during a limited time period ".

(1997 : 28)

The data were mainly collected by interviewing the subjects after the completion of their 'negotiation' task and analysing their performance through a video recording. Data was also collected through the use of a triangulation process whereby data obtained from the students were triangulated with written comments from teachers and verification from the two specialist informants from two telecommunications firms.

Social sciences researchers often choose interviews as their tool to collect data. One common kind of interview is the face to face interview. Many believe that this kind of interview has the highest response rate as compared to mail questionnaires, for example. In this study the researcher requires unrestricted

responses from the respondents, thus an interview was most appropriate. As Chin mentions (1987) in her study that :

"with a qualitative method , it is more appropriate to solicit candid and unrestricted responses from students through the process of an interview".
(1987 : 20)

Besides, the researcher believes that through an interview process a more accurate information could be obtained from individual learners who had performed the group task. This accurate information actually refers to the learners' views of the task that they had performed, i.e. the negotiation task. Furthermore, it is time consuming and places a greater demand on the learners writing ability if the subjects were required to give written responses. Besides students may not express themselves well.

An interview also enables the interviewer to probe questions extensively to record clearer and specific views. However, one of the disadvantages is interview bias where an interviewer's tone of voice or question wording may affect the subjects' responses.

Nevertheless, a face to face interview most importantly, allows the researcher to observe learners' behaviour and non-verbal communication like facial expressions. At the same time it is crucial that rapport is created between the interviewer and the subjects before the actual interview starts and the researcher had met her subjects to create a rapport before collecting her data. Therefore, it easily breaks the barrier that may exist between two strangers where one's "explicit purpose" (Neuman 1997: 254) is to get specific information from the other.

Since the responses were expected to be 'candid and unrestricted', the researcher has used a questionnaire to be the base of the interview. This was done in order to obtain standardised responses. This was also done in Chin's (1987) study who believes that :

" the use of questionnaire as the basis of an interview helped to provide some uniformity to the interviews... the uniformity achieved in the interviews was expected to facilitate a comparison of the responses made by the students and some generalisations based on them".

(1987 : 20)

In order to analyse learners' performance, the researcher has decided to use a video recorder to record the negotiation. The recordings were then observed by both , the course teachers and the specialist informants to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the learners' performance through written comments. At this point, the teachers' comments were triangulated with the informants' comments for verification.

The triangulation process is one technique used by researchers to secure perspectives of different parties involved as Neuman (1997 : 151) states that " they look at something from different angles or viewpoints to get its true position" . In this study , the learners' , teachers' and the informants' viewpoints were gathered to seek their perception on factors that contributed to an effective business negotiation.

3.2 Subjects

The subjects were students taking Business English course II, VG 2023 at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia , Bangi , Selangor. The total number of subjects was 18 and they were second year students except for one who was in his final year. As this is a case study, it is more appropriate to take only a small

proportion of students from the entire population. These students were mainly from the Business and Economics faculty except for the final year student who was from the Science and Physics faculty. Nevertheless, he had taken the Business English course as an elective.

The total number of subjects here comprises of students from three different classes or groups with six students per group. This was because the nature of the negotiation task assigned to the students included three roles for each group. (refer appendix B). Two groups were from the Business faculty and one was from the Economics faculty.

The primary criteria in choosing the subjects were as follows:

1. The respondents were selected on the basis that they have all completed their Business English I.
2. The students have completed the English proficiency course / courses taken upon entering the University before pursuing ESP courses.
3. The students should have started their proficiency course at either the intermediate level or the upper intermediate level. This is to ensure that the subjects were proficient enough to speak the target language.

It is crucial in this study that the subjects were able to perform the task without having major language difficulties. Furthermore, it was hoped that the subjects would also be able to give feedback or responses in English.

The secondary criteria were:

1. All students in each class were given a proficiency test to identify their present proficiency level. The Language Faculty's English Placement Test (EPT) was used to gauge the students' current proficiency level. The paper was adapted from the Cambridge University paper and has been vetted by the Language department. It comprises only multiple choice questions. Students who scored C3s and above (i.e. A1s and A2s) were selected.
2. From the selected individuals, the course teachers' recommendation on the most appropriate student was then taken into consideration.
3. The course teacher's personal recommendation was based on students' positive attitude in the classroom and this included their interest level, their enthusiasm and their constant willingness to participate verbally in any class discussion.

These criteria were of importance to the researcher's interest. However, there were a few students whose results of the proficiency test were below C3 and yet they were selected because of the teachers' recommendation.

The students' profile have been summarised as below.

Table 2: Profile of subjects (Group B1)

Instructor: Teacher 1 (T 1)

GROUP B 1 (Business)	SUBJECTS	FACULTY	YEAR	SPM Eng. Grade	Proficiency Test
	B1S 1	FPP	2	C3	A2
	B1S 2	FPP	2	C3	C3
	B1S 3	FPP	2	C3	C3
	B1S 4	FPP	2	C5	C3
	B1S 5	FPP	2	C3	A2
	B1S 6	FSFG	3	C4	A1

Table 3 : Profile of subjects (Group B2)

Instructor : Teacher 2 (T 2)

GROUP B 2 (Business)	SUBJECTS	FACULTY	YEAR	SPM Eng. grade	Proficiency Test
	B2S 7	FPP	2	C3	C3
	B2S 8	FPP	2	C4	A2
	B2S 9	FPP	2	A1	C3
	B2S 10	FPP	2	C4	C5
	B2S 11	FPP	2	C3	A2
	B2S 12	FPP	2	A1	A1

Table 4 : Profile of subjects (Group E1)

Instructor : Teacher 1 (T1)

GROUP E 1 (Economics)	SUBJECTS	FACULTY	YEAR	SPM ENG Grade	Proficiency Test
	E1S 13	FE	2	C3	C5
	E1S 14	FE	2	C4	C5
	E1S 15	FE	2	A1	A1
	E1S 16	FE	2	C4	C5
	E1S 17	FE	2	C3	A2
	E1S 18	FE	2	A1	A1

E1S 13, E1S 14 and E1S16 whose proficiency test results were not in the targeted criteria were specifically recommended by their course teachers on the basis of their active participation in the classrooms.

3.3 Materials

The materials used in this study consisted of one negotiation task prepared by the course co-ordinator for the evaluation. The topic centres around a negotiation on the merging of two financial institutions. Several issues or problems were laid down for discussion in the negotiation task (appendix B). The nature of the task requires two groups with three participants in each. Each participant will role-play his or her role as instructed.

3.4 Instruments

3.4.1 Interview.

Interviews were conducted after the subjects had completed their task. The researcher deliberately interviewed the subjects a day or two after the negotiation task was done. The researcher did not believe that the subjects should be interviewed right after the completion of the task as they may not have been able to provide authentic responses because of the anxiety over their evaluation scores.

It was not difficult for the researcher to set an interview schedule as the negotiation task for each group took place at different times. A questionnaire was used as the basis of the interview so as to provide uniformity of questions and responses, which would facilitate the oncoming analysis. Basically, the interview seeks to investigate the following:

1. Learners' perception of their understanding of the task.
2. Learners' perception of factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the task.

3.4.2 Observations

The observation from the video recording is to examine in detail, learners' contributions to the effectiveness of the task. The two teachers were required to view the tape to give written comments on a holistic impression on the effectiveness of the task performed and to identify factors that contributed to it. Most importantly, the tape was necessary as the two specialist informants were required to view the tape and to provide feedback on factors that have contributed to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the group's performance.

3.4.3 Written comments

Written comments were obtained from the teachers who had taught and evaluated the students' performance. Written comments were also gathered from the specialist informants. Only two teachers were involved, one who had taught group B1 and E1 and the other had taught group B2.

They were required to review the video tape and to give comments on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the subjects' performance and factors that were perceived to have contributed to it. These written comments were then analysed by the researcher to identify the factors provided and to compare these responses with that of the learners'.

3.4.4 Specialist informants.

The specialist informants were selected based on the nature of their jobs that require them to mostly negotiate. Two informants were chosen from the marketing department of two different telecommunication companies (refer appendix G). They are male informants who hold managerial posts and have had more than five years experience in negotiations. These informants were required to validate or verify learners' responses of their general understanding of a negotiation task and factors that were perceived to have contributed to the effectiveness of a business negotiation task.

They were also required to analyse the effectiveness of learners' performance through the video-recorded tape. The feedback was given in a written comment, which were later analysed by the researcher. This is to see if the learners' performance were effective. More importantly, the written comments were gathered to identify factors that make negotiations effective in the opinion of both the specialist informants and the students.

3.4.5 Verification list.

This verification list is similar to a checklist. However, the researcher believes that the term 'verification' is more appropriate. According to Oxford student's dictionary of current English (1978), the term 'verification' refers to the testing of the " truth and accuracy " which justifies the purpose of this study which is to seek the truth of effective business negotiations in the real world. Thus, in the case of this study, the verification list was derived from learners' responses during the interview sessions.

3.5 Procedure.

3.5.1 Initial preparation

The Course Co-ordinator was first informed of the researcher's intention to select the learners of the Business English course as her subjects. Since it is a fourteen week course the researcher began her search for the most appropriate group at the beginning of the semester. The groups were selected on the basis of students who had entered the University with good English grades for their SPM exam such as A1(distinction) , A2 (distinction) or C3 (credit). This means that they started with either the intermediate level or the upper intermediate level proficiency course and had completed these courses. As there were classes that had a mixture of second and third year students the researcher had narrowed her scope to seek groups that consist of learners in the same year of study except for one final year student.

Once the groups had been identified, the instructors involved were then told of the researcher's intention. A proficiency test was then conducted during week 5 and 6 of the semester.

Based on the proficiency test result, the selected students were identified and an informal discussion was held with the respective teachers to finalise the selection of subjects. This was when the teachers' recommendations were taken into consideration. The researcher had to wait for the evaluation week which was week fourteen, the last week of the semester to conduct the interview. In the meantime the researcher managed to conduct a pilot study on a group of students from the Business faculty. A similar procedure was followed where the researcher managed to test the reliability of this test .

3.5.2 The Pilot study

The researcher managed to pilot the interview questions on another group of learners who were not involved in the actual study and this was conducted during the mock negotiation task. This mock negotiation took place a week before the task performance. This gave the researcher some time to revise the questions. The researcher also piloted the verification list on two other informants so as to seek its feasibility.

3.5.3 Preparatory meeting

The researcher met the subjects personally before they performed the task. This was to explain to the subjects the general idea of the study and what they were expected to do in order to lessen their anxiety and nervousness.

Furthermore, the researcher used this opportunity to create rapport with the subjects involved. The researcher found this essential in order to break any barrier that may have existed. This was to ensure that the students were as natural as they could be in the negotiation task. It is crucial that the subjects are comfortable with the researcher when giving responses.

3.5.4 The study

The students' performance of the task was then recorded and during the task the researcher was present in the classroom to check on the process of the video recording in the classroom if any problem arises. After the completion of each task, an appointment schedule was given to the students for the interview.

It was possible to have the interview sessions for each group at different times as the simulation was conducted on separate days.

The learners' responses were audio taped and the responses were analysed by firstly identifying the relevant responses and coding them into certain sections in relation to the research questions necessary to the study.

The findings of the analysis of the learner responses were then transferred onto a verification list. This verification list aimed to primarily seek information on learners' general understanding of the task and also learners' responses on factors that they felt contributed to an effective negotiation. The specialist informants were first asked to verify the responses obtained from the learners before analysing the learners' performance on video.

It is important to note that the informants were unaware that the verification list had actually been derived from the learners' interview responses. This cautious step was taken to avoid the informants' perception of the task performance during their video observation .

The performance of the students, which was recorded earlier, was then analysed by reviewing the recorded tape. In order to triangulate the findings, the tape was viewed by the teachers involved and the specialist informants to give feedback on the effectiveness of learners' performance.

A written comment was required from both parties above to identify factors that were believed to contribute to an effective negotiation task.

Learners' responses of their perception of the task and teachers' written comments became the basis to investigate the validity of the effectiveness of the task by getting the specialists' verification.

3.6 Methods of analysis.

3.6.1 The interview .

This research tool was used to gather responses which were audio taped during the interview sessions. The researcher had decided not to transcribe each interview. First, each interview took about 30 minutes and it was time consuming to transcribe each interview session, as there were 18 subjects that required 18 transcriptions.

More importantly, questions formulated were standardised for all interviews conducted with the students. This allowed uniformity that made it possible to identify the relevant responses when listening to recordings.

Before the responses were analysed, the interview questions were classified under the respective categories according to the respective research analysis. The first category was to elicit learners' general understanding of a negotiation task.

The interview questions (refer appendix C) related were as follows:

1. How would you define a 'negotiation' ?
2. Do you find negotiations interesting and why ?
3. Are negotiations easy or difficult? Explain.
4. What are the problems one may encounter in negotiations?
5. How do you find the language used in negotiations?

The second category was to elicit factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the negotiation task as perceived by the learners. This information was elicited by asking the subjects to list the important skills that were required in a negotiation and to identify the criteria that should contribute to an effective negotiation. In order to obtain this information the following questions were asked during the interview.

- 6 What do you think are the skills required in a negotiation?
- 7 Did you have to do a lot of thinking in a negotiation? If so why?
- 8 Based on what criteria would you say that the negotiation is effective ?
- 9 How would you suggest one should prepare for a negotiation?

The responses from all the subjects were listed in a table form and tabulated according to its number of responses or frequency and percentage form. The analysis began with analysing the responses for each relevant interview question in the respective categories.

3.6.2 Observations and written comments.

These two research instruments overlap with one another as the written comments were obtained from the observation of the video recording by both the teachers and the specialist informants. They were required to observe the learners' performance as a group in completing the task. They were asked to comment on the effectiveness of the groups' performance focusing on specific criteria .

Their comments were read and summarised by the researcher and the factors mentioned were chosen and listed. One of the objectives was to identify correlation between the factors derived from the teachers and the specialist informants. Nevertheless, the study also seek findings to research question 3 which was to evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the learners' performance of the negotiation task.

3.6.3 Specialist informants and the verification list.

The verification list was used to triangulate learners' responses during the interview with those of the specialist informants' primarily. The content of this list were numbered and arranged according to the subdivided categories as mentioned earlier. Its main aim was to verify learners' general understanding of a negotiation task and factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the negotiation with the demands of the negotiation task in the real world. The informants were required to verify the most appropriate responses provided by the learners. As there was more than one informant, the most favourable responses by the informants were identified as the most valid findings. The 'remark' column in the verification list was included to assist in the analysis of responses from the informants.

On the whole, the researcher believes that the specialist informants' comments and clarification should verify learners' and teachers' perception of an effective business negotiation. It is hoped that the findings would reveal factors that should contribute to an effective real world business negotiation as perceived by the specialist informants.