Chapter 3-Research and Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the research design, instruments and process of data collection used in this study. To begin with, various methods used in research on language learning beliefs are reviewed. Next, the methods selected for this study are outlined along with the rationale for their selection. This is followed by a description of the setting, participants, instruments, interview and pilot studies related to the present study. A detailed explanation of the data collection procedures used in this study is also presented at the end of this chapter with a brief discussion of the study's ethical considerations.

As stated in the first chapter of this dissertation, this study aims to explore and identify international students' language learning beliefs and the perceptions they have with regard to their experience of learning English in Malaysia. This study focused on the following research questions: *What are the language learning beliefs of international students learning English at a local college in Kuala Lumpur?*, *What are their perceptions of learning English in Malaysia?*, *Is there a statistically significant relationship between their language learning beliefs and their perceptions about learning English in Malaysia?*, and *What are the other factors that influence the learners' perceptions of learning English in Malaysia?*

To begin the discussion of the research methods used in this study, a summary of commonly used methods used in research on learner beliefs and perceptions in second language acquisition will be presented in the next section.

3.2. Research Methods used in SLA Research on Beliefs and Perceptions

To address the focus of this study, as described in the previous section, a review of previous studies on learners' beliefs and perceptions was conducted. In terms of research on learners' beliefs, methods used to collect data are generally dictated by how beliefs are viewed by researchers. As discussed in Chapter Two, when beliefs are viewed as stable

mental constructs, as they are in the normative approach (Ellis 2008), they are generally studied through quantitative approaches, mainly closed-choice questionnaires of which the BALLI is one of the most widely used. On the other hand, when the researcher is working from the contextual or socio-cultural approach, more weight is given to the context in which the beliefs are formed; thus, qualitative methods, such as classroom observations, interviews and journal studies are preferred. Similarly, a variety of methods have been used to measure learners' perceptions about various aspects of their learning environment. When the focus of a study is on collecting data from a large sample, then researchers have preferred to use questionnaires such as the BALLI (Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006, 2007 and Bernat, 2006) and other questionnaires such as those developed by Sakui and Gaies (1999), Tanaka and Ellis (2003) Piquemal and Renaud (2006) and Mori (1999). However, when the research aims to collect multiple layers of data from a relatively small group of learners, more varied methods are chosen, including metaphor analysis (Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Farrell, 2006; Ellis, 2002; Nikitina & Furuoka, 2008), interviews (Christison & Krahnke, 1986; Alanen, 2003; Barkhuizen, 1998; Barcelos, 2000), observation (Barcelos, 2000, Barkhuizen, 1998) and journals (Tse, 2000). Although a variety of methods have been used to collect data on learner perceptions and beliefs, questionnaires and interviews are the most commonly used and will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

3.2.1. Questionnaires

Many studies on learner beliefs and perceptions, particularly large-scale studies, have used questionnaires. According to Creswell (2008), a questionnaire is a form which is completed by participants involved in a study, after which the form is returned to the researcher. In Chapter Two, the BALLI questionnaire, its development by Horwitz and subsequent use by other researchers have been discussed. In this section, other available questionnaires to measure learner beliefs and perceptions will be summarised briefly.

Sakui and Gaies (1999) developed their own 45-statement questionnaire from the analysis of existing beliefs questionnaires and the addition of statements that would improve the context-specificity of their questionnaire to be used on Japanese learners of English. Their questionnaire also went through a panel of English teachers at various levels of the Japanese education system. Their study is of particular relevance as one of its objectives was to test the consistency of responses to belief questionnaires in order to determine whether questionnaires were a reliable method of collecting data on learners' beliefs (Sakui & Gaies, 1999). The researchers found that although participants' responses may vary with the repeated administration of a questionnaire, these differences were usually related to an actual change in their beliefs or to their learning context. Another closed-choice questionnaire was the 27-item Learner Belief Questionnaire developed by Tanaka and Ellis (2003) to measure the change in beliefs about language learning held by Japanese learners of English before, and after, participating in a study abroad programme. This questionnaire was developed by examining and analysing other available instruments and selecting the relevant items. To examine the beliefs and attitudes of 1,305 French university students learning English and other languages, Piquemal and Renaud (2006) developed a questionnaire comprising 69 closed-choice items and 6 open-ended items. These items were compiled from existing questionnaires such as BALLI and SILL as well as from individual interviews and focus group discussions. On other hand, Rantala (2002) modified Victori & Lockhart's (1995) Assumptions about Language Learning instrument, which was based on Flavell's conception of metacognitive knowledge, to study the language learning beliefs of 148 learners of English in Finland.

Questionnaires have also been used widely in studies on learner perceptions of learning activities and classroom environment such as the ENLEAS Q, which was used along with other methods by Barkhuizen (1998) in his study of the perceptions held by South African high school learners of English with regard to language teaching and learning activities. O'

Fathaigh (1997) used the seven-dimension ACES questionnaire in his study of adult Irish learners' perceptions of their learning environment. In addition, studies on learners' perceptions of situational aspects of their learning environment have employed questionnaires such as the Inventory of Perceived Study Environment, used by Wierstra et al. (1998) to gather data on 851 European students' perceptions of their learning experiences in study abroad programmes. Similarly, Lizzio et al. (2002) administered the Course Experience Questionnaire to 5,000 university students in Canada to study the relationship between academic success and learners' perceptions of their learning environment.

The variety of instruments available to measure learners' beliefs and perceptions, whether about language learning or about various aspects of their learning experience, indicate that the survey method of data collection is widely-used and much relied upon by researchers working in this area. Questionnaires offer researchers the opportunity to efficiently collect large quantities of data on the variables being studied. In addition, opting for a questionnaire that has already been used to measure a particular construct helps researchers bypass the time-consuming process of developing a valid and reliable instrument. Furthermore, closed-choice questionnaires are an efficient way of collecting quantitative data that can then be analysed statistically to look for patterns and relationships among variables.

However, some researchers have pointed out the limitations of questionnaires in studying learners' beliefs and perceptions. Firstly, a closed-choice questionnaire limits the responses learners can give and only measures their responses towards those items that have been listed on the instrument (Barcelos, 2000; Benson & Lor, 1999). Moreover, learners may have different beliefs and perceptions for different situations (Benson & Lor, 1999), but questionnaires force a learner to choose one response for all situations. More significantly, Barcelos (2000) argues that questionnaires take beliefs out of context, which may lead to misinterpretation, and therefore, are not an ideal method of studying learners' beliefs. Because of the limitations of questionnaires, some researchers have opted for other methods

of data collection, while others have used multiple methods in addition to using questionnaires. Another common method of data collection in the study of learners' beliefs and perceptions is interviews, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2.2. Interviews

Many studies have used interviews to explore learners' beliefs and perceptions. While some researchers have relied completely on interviews, many have used interviews alongside questionnaires, observations and other methods of data collection. Using semi-structured interviews to study learners' beliefs about language learning has generally been associated with the metacognitive approach. In her study of the language learning beliefs and strategies of 25 adult ESL learners in a U.S. university, Wenden (1986) provided them with a list of topics to think about before the interview. When the findings of this study were compared with the items on the BALLI questionnaire, Wenden (1986) found that there were some items that were not included in the BALLI while other items were different to those on the BALLI. This led Wenden to conclude that providing participants with a limited list of items may lead to the missing out of certain beliefs that may be important to learners, but that have been overlooked by researchers (Wenden, 1986).

Sakui and Gaies (1999) found that interviews were a useful way of triangulating and explaining questionnaire data. Their study involved administering the same questionnaire twice to assess the consistency and reliability of questionnaires in measuring learner beliefs. In their interview sessions, they found that some inconsistencies in learner responses were actually due to beliefs changing since the first stage of data collection. In other cases, different responses to the same item could have been because the learner was thinking about a different situation at each time. Interviews can overcome the inability of closed-choice questionnaires to represent the reasons behind learners' beliefs and perceptions as well as to record the factors that contribute towards a learner's selection of a particular response.

This section has outlined the various data collection methods used in research on learners' beliefs about language learning and learners' perceptions of their learning environment. While many methods were mentioned, this section primarily discussed the two most common methods used by previous researchers: questionnaires and interviews. In the following section, the research design of the present study will be outlined.

3.2.3. BALLI Studies Featuring a Second Variable

As mentioned in the previous chapter, several studies have used the BALLI to study the relationship between beliefs and another variables such as gender (Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), stage of learning (Tanaka & Ellis, 2003) and personality (Bernat, Carter & Hall, 2009). There have also been several BALLI studies which aimed to identify the relationship between learner beliefs and their learning strategy choice (Hong, 2006; Truitt, 1995; and Park, 1995), using the BALLI and a second questionnaire SILL, or Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (Oxford, 1990 as cited in Park, 1995). According to Horwitz, "The BALLI was not designed to elicit a single, delineated construct in the way measures of anxiety or motivation are. Thus it is not possible to compute a correlation of the BALLI as a whole with other measures such as strategy use or learning style" (Horwitz, 2007:6). Horwitz goes on to describe the procedures used by Hong (2006), Truitt (1995) and Park (1995) to identify the relationship between beliefs and other variables. In all the studies mentioned, the results of both the BALLI and SILL were analysed using factor analysis, which reduces the individual items within each questionnaire to groups of beliefs or strategies. The resulting factors were then named according to the researchers' interpretation of the items within each factor. For example, Hong named the first BALLI factor in her study 'Motivation for and Nature of Learning English' because the items that loaded under the first factor contained items related to participants' motivation as well as items related to participants' beliefs about the nature of learning English. After the factors for both questionnaires were identified, the relationship between beliefs and strategies was

determined using Pearson *r* correlation analysis between the BALLI and SILL factors (Hong, 2006).
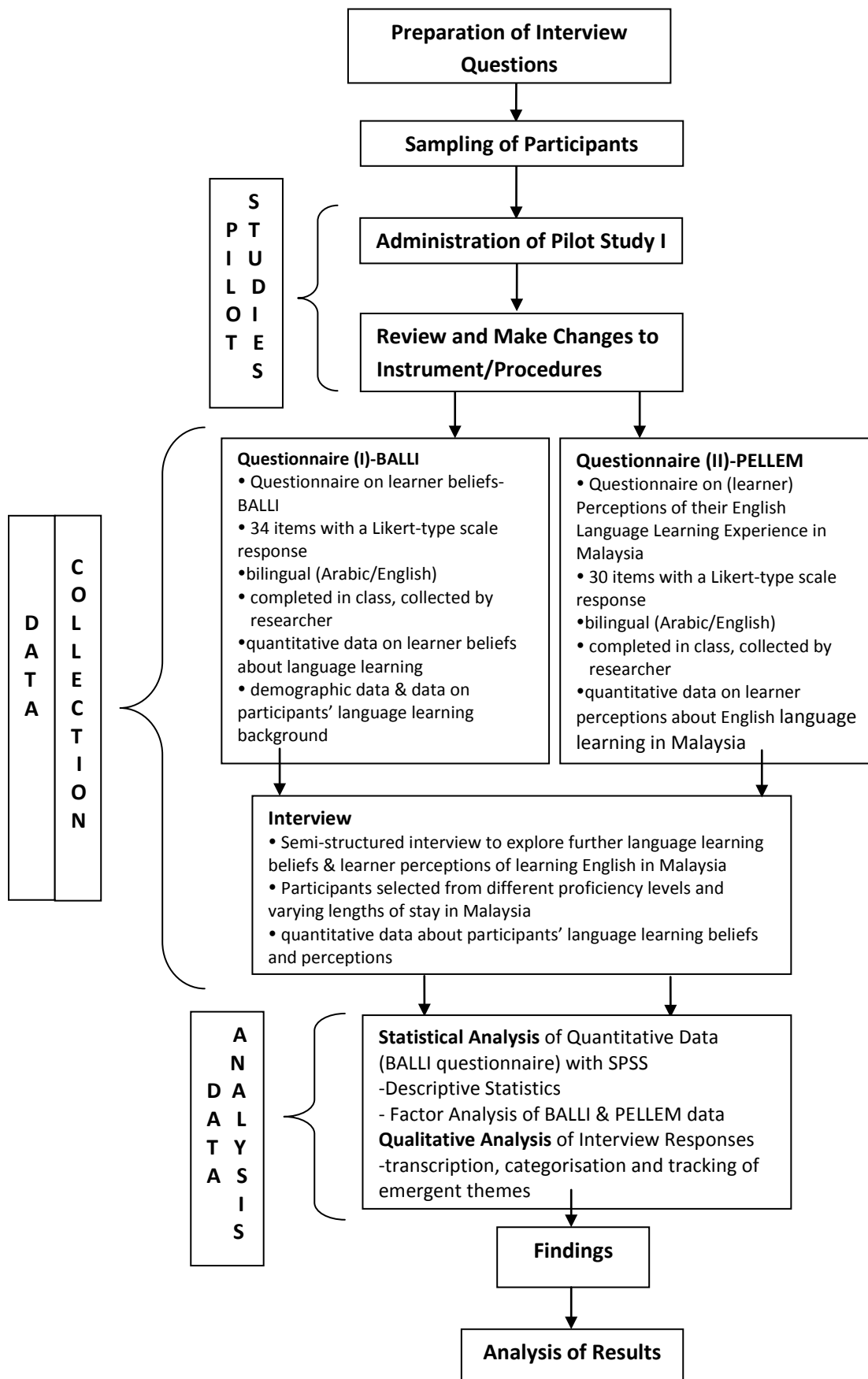
3.3. Overview of Research Design Used in Present Study

This section will present an overview of the research design of the present study, as summarised in Figure 3.1. on the next page. As can be seen in the figure, data collection was carried out in two stages. The first stage involved the administering of the BALLI and the PELLEM questionnaires to all participants. In addition, a section on personal information was added to the first questionnaire in order to collect demographic data as well as information about how long participants had been learning English and the length of their stay in Malaysia thus far.

This study utilized mixed methods of data collection, by combining the quantitative data collection methods through the use of Likert-type questionnaires and qualitative data collection through the use of semi-structured interviews. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) state that synthesising or merging both qualitative and quantitative data enables a more integrated understanding of a particular phenomenon or research problem, compared to using a single approach. Therefore, it was felt that using both quantitative and qualitative research methods would give the researcher a better understanding of the beliefs and perceptions of this group of international students learning English in Malaysia.

As depicted in Figure 3.1., the first stage of the study applied the quantitative approach to data collection. At this stage, the BALLI questionnaire was used to measure participants' beliefs about language learning in general, while the PELLEM questionnaire was used to measure their perceptions about context-specific aspects of their experience of learning English in Malaysia. Both questionnaires provided quantitative data about the participants' beliefs and perceptions. According to Creswell (2008) quantitative research involves narrowing down the questions being asked in order to obtain measures or scores on a scale..

Figure 3.1. Research Design Flowchart

Preparation of Interview Questions

Sampling of Participants

PILOT STUDIES

Administration of Pilot Study I

Review and Make Changes to Instrument/Procedures

DATA COLLECTION

Questionnaire (I)-BALLI
• Questionnaire on learner beliefs-BALLI
• 34 items with a Likert-type scale response
• bilingual (Arabic/English)
• completed in class, collected by researcher
• quantitative data on learner beliefs about language learning
• demographic data & data on participants' language learning background

Questionnaire (II)-PELLEM
• Questionnaire on (learner) Perceptions of their English Language Learning Experience in Malaysia
• 30 items with a Likert-type scale response
• bilingual (Arabic/English)
• completed in class, collected by researcher
• quantitative data on learner perceptions about English language learning in Malaysia

Interview
• Semi-structured interview to explore further language learning beliefs & learner perceptions of learning English in Malaysia
• Participants selected from different proficiency levels and varying lengths of stay in Malaysia
• quantitative data about participants' language learning beliefs and perceptions

DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical Analysis of Quantitative Data (BALLI questionnaire) with SPSS
-Descriptive Statistics
- Factor Analysis of BALLI & PELLEM data
Qualitative Analysis of Interview Responses
-transcription, categorisation and tracking of emergent themes

Findings

Analysis of Results

Both questionnaires used in this study provided participants with answer choices on Likert-type scales to collect data which could be analyses quantitatively

In order to overcome the limitations of quantitative data collection methods, a second, qualitative, data collection stage was included in the research design. As mentioned earlier, mixed methods research is believed to provide a deeper understanding of the variables being studied and it also serves to triangulate data (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, a second stage of data collection, featuring semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to examine the factors that influenced these beliefs and perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the most suitable instrument for this stage of the study because working with a list of questions provided standardization from one interview to another (Bryman, 2008). However, participants would also have a certain amount of latitude in which to respond (Bryman, 2008). In addition, the researcher would also be able to ask further questions depending on the issues that arose in each interview.

The following sections of this chapter will present details about the participants, the language course they were enrolled in at the time of the study, the questionnaires and interviews. In addition, the rationale behind the selection of each of the three data collection methods will be discussed in sections 3.5.1., 3.6.1. and 3.7.1.

3.4. Participants

The study involved 102 participants, all of whom were international students enrolled in an intensive English programme at a local college in Kuala Lumpur. Other than two participants, who were learning English for personal reasons, all the participants were in Malaysia to pursue academic programmes in various fields at local educational institutions, with levels of intended study ranging from Diploma to PhD programmes. In this aspect, there were slightly more participants headed for post-graduate study than those headed for undergraduate study. Out of the 100 participants headed for university, 41 were planning to

enrol in Master's degree programmes, 13 were headed for PhD programmes and 46 were preparing for Bachelor's degree programmes. Participants were also at different levels of language learning and were enrolled at various proficiency levels from Beginner to Academic Skills for IELTS. The distribution of participants according to level was as follows: Beginner-17, Elementary-15, Pre-intermediate-36, Intermediate-27 and Academic Skills for IELTS-7. The participants ranged in age from 15 to 42, with the majority (n=67) falling within the ages of 20-29. There were 13 participants were in their mid-to-late teens, 19 were in their thirties and 4 were over 40 years old. The majority (n=74, 72.5%) of these participants were male.

Participants were of various nationalities, with Libyan students making up the largest group (n=45, 44.1%), followed by Somali students (n=30, 29.4%). Other nationalities represented were Sudanese (n=13), Iraqi (n=3) and Uzbek (n=2). There was one participant from each of the following countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Algeria, Morocco, Guinnea Bissou, Iran, Indonesia, Spain and Yemen. The majority of participants (n=65, 63.7%) spoke Arabic as a first language. Another common first language was Somali (n=27, 26.5%). Around one-third (n=38, 37%) spoke only one language (other than English); however, a few spoke two languages. Some participants had already learned another foreign language due to immigration to another country or studying a foreign language in their own country. For example, three participants spoke Russian and another three spoke Italian.

Participants were also asked about the length of time they had spent learning English, including their English language learning experience prior to enrolling in the present course. This ranged from 3 months to about 15 years with the majority (n=72) having spent less than 5 years learning English. This includes time spent learning English in Primary and Secondary school, which according to the interview participants, was taught as one of many subjects in school using their first language. At the time of the study, participants were

enrolled in various levels of the language course, from Beginner to Academic Skills for IELTS (Upper-Intermediate) level.

3.4.1. Selection of Participants

In the preliminary stages of this study, it was decided that the sample would include all the international students who were enrolled in the English language programme. The total population varied from month to month since this course was a short term programme, but since the total student number was less than 200, it was decided that the entire student population would be included in the study. During the time data was collected (September to October 2009), the total number of students was 137. Questionnaires were administered to all students enrolled in the English language programme who were attending class during the days that the questionnaires were administered and who also agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. The final total of this convenience sample was 111. Bryman (2008) defines convenience samples as those that are available or accessible to the researcher. While using a convenience sample, reduces the ability to generalize findings to the greater population, convenience samples are valuable as a source of information to answer research questions and hypotheses (Creswell, 2008). In addition, the total of 111 amounted to 80% of total enrolment. According to Creswell (2008), survey response rates of 50% or higher are considered acceptable; therefore the involvement of 80% of the student body in this study leads to the conclusion that the sample could be sufficient in order to draw conclusions about the beliefs and perceptions of this group of learners.

After the questionnaires were administered, participant demographics, as reported in the Personal Information section added to the BALLI questionnaire, were analysed and only those students who had been in Malaysia for more than 2 months were selected. This criterion had been predetermined in order to ensure that participants' perceptions of learning English in Malaysia had been formed over a reasonable length of time and also so that any initial adjustment issues would not cloud participants' overall perceptions of their learning

context. Nine participants were excluded from the final sample as they had been in the country for less than 2 months, leaving a total of 102 participants as the sample in the present study. Participants had been in Malaysia for varying durations, ranging from 2 months to 28 months. Participants were distributed widely over this range as follows: 2-6 months (51 participants) 7- 12 months (42 participants) and 13-28 months (9 participants). In the following section, the language programme in which the participants were enrolled is described briefly in order to provide a complete picture of the setting and context in which this research was conducted.

3.4.2. The English Language Programme at a Malaysian College

Chapter One of this dissertation included an overview of English language learning and use in Malaysia as well as a brief explanation of the learner group being studied: international students learning English in Malaysia. The learning experience of this group of learners is contextualised not only in the host country, Malaysia, at the macro level, but also within the language learning classroom, at the micro level. Because of this, it is necessary to outline the specifics of the language course they were enrolled in as classroom learning experience is related to how the participants view both the language learning process and how they perceive their language learning experience in Malaysia.

Participants were enrolled in an intensive English programme designed to improve learners' general English proficiency, in the early stages, with the long-term goal of equipping them with the necessary skills to cope in English medium academic programmes. Upon enrolment, learners undergo a written and oral placement test after which they are placed in the most suitable of 6 levels, ranging from Absolute Beginner to Academic Skills for IELTS/Upper Intermediate. The Common European Framework/ IELTS band approximations to these levels range from Pre A1/Band 1 at Absolute Beginner to C1-C2/Band 5-6 at Upper Intermediate. All levels run for 9 weeks excluding the Absolute Beginner level which lasts 5 weeks. Learners attend class for 20 hours a week, which is

made up of 15 hours of integrated skills and grammar lessons and 5 hours of reading and writing lessons. In class, learners participate in a variety of activities using the *New Cutting Edge* series of course books as their principal text. Teaching and learning activities aim to increase opportunities for interaction in the classroom, for example, through pair-work and group activities; however, grammar is also taught. Learners also have access to a Computer Aided Language Learning (CALL) lab for self-study. In the CALL lab, learners can choose either to use *Longman Interactive* software, which features four levels of language learning activities in all four skill components, or to access the internet for reading and listening practice with authentic materials. For the duration of a level, learners are taught by two teachers, one of whom teaches the class for 15 hours a week using the *New Cutting Edge* book while the other teaches reading and writing skills twice a week. The teaching faculty at the college is made up of both native-speakers from the United Kingdom, the U.S. and Australia as well as local English teachers and one teacher each from India, Pakistan and Iran. The teaching schedules are planned in such a way to enable students to experience both native and non-native language teachers. Learners are assessed at the end of each level with a final exam for each of the following components: Grammar, Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. An average of 70% is required to progress to the next level. In addition to providing language instruction to students, the college also plays the role of preparing learners for further study by educating them on the social expectations that they will face as students in local universities.

The previous sections have provided a description of the participants as well as their learning context. Next, the methods of data collection used in this study will be presented in detail, beginning with the instruments used and followed by the interview stage. As mentioned in earlier sections of this chapter, two questionnaires were used in this study: the BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) and the PELLEM, which was developed for this study to measure

learners' perceptions of their language learning experience in Malaysia. The discussion of the instruments will begin in the next section, with a discussion of the BALLI.

3.5. BALLI

In this study, the 34-item version of Horwitz's BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) was administered to participants. The BALLI has already been discussed at length in Chapter Two, so this chapter will present the rationale for using the BALLI to measure participants' language learning beliefs and the modifications made to this instrument.

3.5.1. Rationale for Using the BALLI

Limitations of the BALLI, namely its lack of statistically generated themes, have already been described in Chapter Two, in section 2.6.9. However, there are many strengths to the BALLI, which have led researchers to find it a useful tool for measuring learners' beliefs in different contexts. As stated by Creswell (2008) using a suitable existing instrument is far less complicated compared to developing an instrument. For this study, the BALLI was deemed to be suitable because of two main reasons. Firstly, using an existing questionnaire was preferable to the development of a new one for practical reasons and because an existing questionnaire, like the BALLI, would already have been tested in other contexts, thereby increasing its reliability. Secondly, the BALLI was selected over other existing instruments as many of the other instruments developed by researchers such as Sakui & Gaies (1999), Tanaka & Ellis (2003) and Kuntz (1996b) were designed by analysing various instruments and adding or removing items either based on the researchers' understanding of the research context or based on interviews and focus groups. Thus, these other questionnaires were developed for use in specific contexts such as that of Japanese learners of English (Sakui & Gaies, 1999), Japanese participants in English study abroad programmes (Tanaka & Ellis, 2003) and learners of less commonly taught languages in the United States (Kuntz, 1996a).

The BALLI, on the other hand, has been used in a variety of contexts, to measure the language learning beliefs of both learners and teachers in foreign language, ESL and EFL contexts. In addition, the BALLI has been successfully used to study the language learning beliefs of learners of English in the United States (Horwitz, 1987; Siebert, 2003), Australia (Bernat, 2004; 2006; Bernat & Lloyd, 2007), Lebanon (Diab, 2006), Turkey (Oz, 2007) and Korea (Hong, 2006; Park, 1995; Truitt, 1995), among other countries. The fact that the BALLI was designed to find commonality across different groups of language learners, as opposed to context-specific idiosyncratic beliefs, made it a suitable instrument for preliminary investigations into the beliefs of a group of learners which has not been studied much, such as in the present study.

3.5.2. Amendments made to the BALLI

In terms of content, minimal changes were made to the original version of the 34-item BALLI as used by Horwitz (1987). Only one change of wording was made, to statement number 32. This statement originally read '*I would like to have American friends*' and was initially changed to '*I would like to have Malaysian friends*'. After the first pilot study, this statement was changed again to '*I would like to have English-speaking friends*'. The change in wording was made to keep with Horwitz's (1987) purpose of including this item as a measure of a learner's integrative motivation. Through the interviews conducted during the first pilot study, it was discovered that the participants did not necessarily view Malaysians as being speakers of English. Because of this, the phrase '*Malaysian friends*' was replaced with '*English-speaking friends*'. In addition, the change of wording maintained the separate focus of the two questionnaires, according to the research design. In other words, the BALLI was included with the intention of measuring the participants' beliefs about learners about language learning in general, while the PELLEM was included to measure participants' context-specific perceptions about learning English in Malaysia. The final version of the BALLI questionnaire used in this study is presented in Appendix A.

As the BALLI only measures learners' beliefs about the language learning process in general, another questionnaire was needed to examine the learners' views about context-specific variables related to their present experience of learning English in Malaysia. This questionnaire will be discussed in the next section.

3.6. PELLEM

While an using an existing questionnaire is a more straightforward option than developing an instrument to be used in a study (Creswell, 2008), the lack of a suitable instrument for measuring the perceptions of international students learning English meant that one would have to be developed. The Perceptions of English Language Learning Experience in Malaysia (PELLEM) questionnaire was developed by the researcher for this study with the purpose of collecting learners' views on their English language learning experience in Malaysia. As the influx of international students into Malaysia is a relatively new phenomenon, more data is needed about how the local education industry is perceived by this new group of learners. One area of particular importance is the teaching of English to international students in preparation for entrance into academic programmes at local institutes of higher learning. As a language teacher and administrator at the English department of a local college which provides intensive English courses for international students, the researcher is familiar with the views of international students, both positive and negative, about different aspects of learning English in Malaysia. Among the many comments made by these students include that they have trouble finding the opportunity to practice English outside class and that they feel their present language proficiency is good enough to succeed in a local academic programme, even though they may only have minimal levels of English proficiency. To study the language learning beliefs of participants within the context of their experience of being international students learning English in Malaysia, a second questionnaire was required.

3.6.1. Rationale for Using the PELLEM

It was hoped that the PELLEM would be a starting point in the collection of scientific data on the perceptions held by international students with regard to learning English in Malaysia. In addition, the PELLEM was created as a complement to the BALLI in terms of providing a contextual background to the language learning beliefs held by the participants. As current research in learner beliefs is moving towards a more holistic, contextual approach, the combination of these two questionnaires and the interviews used in the second stage of data collection were expected to provide multiple layers of data to answer the research questions of this study.

3.6.2. Development of the PELLEM

The PELLEM was developed from a list of themes identified by the researcher based on discussions with students and amended after two pilot studies were conducted to verify the reliability and validity of the instrument. Initially, the PELLEM covered four themes: 1) *General Opinion of Learning English in Malaysia*, 2) *Out-of-Class Experience* 3) *English in Malaysian Academic Programmes* and 4) *Learning English as an International Student* and included 17 statements. After the results of the first pilot study, which is described at the end of this section, the final version of the PELLEM was prepared. The PELLEM was finalised with four themes, which included a combination of two of the earlier themes and an additional theme. These are: 1) *General Opinion of Learning English in Malaysia*, 2) *Out-of-Class Experience* 3) *Perceptions of English in Malaysian Universities* and 4) *Learning English in a Malaysian Educational Institute*. The final theme was added because participants' perceptions of the language course they were enrolled in were expected to influence how they perceive their learning experience in Malaysia. The final version of the PELLEM comprised 30 statements to which learners were required to record responses on a 5 point Likert-type scale (1=*Strongly Agree* to 5=*Strongly Disagree*). The themes, sub-themes and corresponding statements are detailed in Table 3.1. below.

Table 3.1. The PELLEM Questionnaire

Theme 1-General Opinion of Learning English in Malaysia	Total-9
Subtheme a-general	Total-5
I would recommend learning English in Malaysia to my family and friends.	Item 1
My English has improved since I came to Malaysia.	Item 2
Malaysia is a good place to learn English.	Item 9
The English language instructors in Malaysia are qualified and experienced.	Item 8
My lack of proficiency in English causes me many problems in Malaysia.	Item 12
Subtheme b-compared to home country	Total-2
Learning English in Malaysia is better than learning English in my own country.	Item 4
People who want to come to Malaysia to study should learn English in their own countries first.	Item 11
Subtheme c-compared to other countries	Total 2
I would be happier if I could learn English in another country (not Malaysia).	Item 10
You can only learn English well in a country where it is a native language (e.g. the U.S., the U.K, Australia, Canada, New Zealand & Ireland).	Item 7

Theme 2- Out-of-Class Experience	Total-6
Subtheme a-interaction/practice opportunities	Total-2
I have lots of opportunities to practice speaking English in Malaysia.	Item 3
The only time I speak English now is when I am in class.	Item 14
Subtheme b-perceived value of practising with locals	Total-2
Speaking English to Malaysians does not help me improve my English.	Item 13
I face problems understanding English when talking to Malaysians.	Item 6
Subtheme c-value of English proficiency in facilitating life in Malaysia	Total 2
I find it hard to use English when I go shopping or when dealing with daily events(for example paying bills, at the doctor's).	Item 15
Living in Malaysia is easier if your English is good.	Item 18

Theme 3- Perceptions of English in Malaysian Universities	Total-8
Subtheme a-perceived necessity to master English to succeed in local university	Total-5
I don't need to be very good in English to do well in a Malaysian university.	Item 5
If I can communicate well in English, my results at a Malaysian university will be good.	Item 16
I am worried about facing language problems when I start university.	Item 20
Students who are going to do courses need to be better in English than those who are going to do research studies.	Item 21
Subtheme b-perceived value of language for social/practical reasons in local university	Total-3
If I can communicate well in English, I will make more friends at a Malaysian university.	Item 17
All the information international students need at Malaysian universities is available in English.	Item 22
I don't expect to have any problems interacting with my lecturers or supervisor.	Item 23

Table 3.1. continued

Theme 4- Learning English in a Malaysian Educational Institute	Total-7
Subtheme a-effectiveness of language course	Total-2
The language course I am taking has helped improve my English language skills.	Item 24
The skills I am learning in this English course will help me when I start at a local university.	Item 25
Subtheme b-materials & course book	Total-1
The course book and materials we use in the English language class are useful and interesting.	Item 26
Subtheme c-classroom activities	Total-2
The activities we use in the English language class give me the chance to practice my language skills.	Item 27
I learn something new in my English class every day.	Item 28
Subtheme d-teaching	Total-2
The teachers in my class can show me how to improve my language skills.	Item 29
The way English is taught in my language course is easy to understand.	Item 30

For the actual version of the PELLEM used in the study, please refer to Appendix B. In the following section, the pilot studies and resulting changes to the PELLEM and data collection procedures are summarised.

3.6.3. Pilot Studies

Creswell (2008) states that pilot studies help researchers test whether the questions on a interview or questionnaire can be comprehended and completed by the intended participants. In order to test the PELLEM as well as the administrative procedures of both the questionnaires and the interviews, two pilot studies were conducted. The first pilot study (I) was conducted in April, 2009, while the second pilot study (II) was conducted in June 2009. The participants of the first pilot study were not included in the main study. However, the participants in the second pilot study were included in the final data since the PELLEM questionnaire administered was the final version, and no further changes were made to it. For both pilot studies, participants were selected using convenience sampling, by requesting permission from the college administration. In addition, the questionnaires were administered only in classes whose teachers agreed to participate. For example, some classes were approaching their mid-terms and their teachers declined participation. According to Creswell, (2008), convenience sampling involves the selection of participants

who are available and willing to participate in a study. Although a convenience sample cannot be said to be representative of the population, Creswell (2008) states that a convenience sample can provide useful information for answering questions and hypotheses. In the case of the pilot studies conducted in this research, the purpose was to perform statistical testing on the PELLEM questionnaire as well as test administrative procedures and the accuracy of the translation of both the PELLEM and the BALLI and the convenience sample fulfilled these objectives.

Pilot Study I

The main objectives of Pilot Study I were: a) to test the PELLEM questionnaire in terms of item reliability and language and b) to test the tentative list of questions for the semi-structured interview. The first pilot study involved 36 participants from the Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Academic Skills for IELTS levels. There were 22 male and 16 female participants, with the youngest aged 17 and the oldest aged 42. Questionnaires were administered in three different classes by the researcher, either at the beginning or at the end of the class. Completed questionnaires were collected and three participants were selected for the interview stage about one week later.

Results of Pilot Study I

The original version of the PELLEM, which was used in the first pilot study along with the BALLI, had 17 items under four themes: *General Opinion of Learning English in Malaysia*, *Out-of-Class Experience*, *English in Malaysian Academic Programmes* and *Learning English as a Foreign Student*. An item-reliability test was conducted to ascertain whether the construct of each theme was statistically sound. Several changes were made to the PELLEM. These changes generally involved the rewording of several items which seemed to have been misinterpreted by participants of the pilot study and the addition of several

items to the theme on English use in Malaysian universities. The details of these changes are presented in the following section.

Changes to Items based on Item Reliability

Statistical analysis of the results of Pilot Study I was performed, including inter-item correlations as well as computation of the Cronbach's Alpha for each theme. Table 3.2 summarises the changes made.

Table 3.2. Changes Made to the PELLEM based on the Item-Reliability Test

Findings	Changes Made
Weak correlation of Item 7-*There aren't enough good English teachers in Malaysia* with other items in Theme 1.	Wording of this item was changed from negative to positive to avoid misinterpretation by participants: *The English teachers in Malaysia are qualified & experienced.*
Weak correlation of Item 6-*I can't understand the English that is spoken by Malaysians* with other items in Theme 2.	This item was reworded as a positively oriented item: *I face problems understanding English when talking to Malaysians.*
The Cronbach's Alpha for Theme 3 was 0.320, which was considered very low	It was found that Theme 3 comprised only 3 items related to different aspects of English use in Malaysian Academic programmes. Five new statements were added to this theme.
The Cronbach's Alpha for Theme 4 was 0.240, which was considered very low.	Theme 4 comprised only two items related to Learning English as a Foreign Student: item 11-*People should learn English in their own country before going abroad to study* and item 12- *I face many problems as a foreign student in Malaysia and this affects how I perform in my language course*. It was decided that this theme overlapped with the first theme-General opinion of learning English in Malaysia. Item 11 was retained and placed under Theme 1, with some changes to the wording while Item 12 was deleted.

Addition of New Theme & Items

A new theme, *Learning English in a Malaysian Educational Institute,* was added to the final version of the PELLEM. This was done as it became clear from the interviews conducted in Pilot Study I that participants' opinions about language learning in Malaysia could not be studied in isolation from how they viewed aspects of their current language course. A new item was also added to Theme 2: item 18- *Living in Malaysia is easier if your English is good*.

<u>Changes to Data Collection Procedure</u>

Many of the statements which had proved problematic in the item-reliability test were those which were negatively worded. It had been observed that participants were rushing through the questionnaire, particularly when it was administered at the end of a class. It was suggested that participants be allowed to take their questionnaires home during the second pilot study.

Pilot Study II

A second pilot study was conducted involving 32 students who were enrolled in the English programme at the college. All except for three participants in Pilot Study II were enrolled in the Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Academic Skills for IELTS levels. The remaining three comprised two Beginners and one Elementary level student. There were 23 male and 9 female participants, with the youngest aged 15 and the oldest aged 42.The main objectives of Pilot Study II were a) to test the item reliability of the amendments to the PELLEM as well as b) to refine the questionnaire administration procedure in order to ensure that the maximum number of completed questionnaires would be collected. Thus, the participants in the second pilot study were allowed to take their forms home to be completed at their leisure. The change of procedure had been made in an attempt to remove the time pressure on students, as it was found in the first pilot study that some participants had rushed through the questionnaire. However, in the second pilot study, a new problem arose in that many questionnaires were not returned. As a result, the initial data collection method of administering questionnaires in class was deemed the more effective method and used in the actual data collection of the study.

Table 3.3. Results of Inter-Item Reliability of Pilot Study II

Theme	Cronbach's Alpha
Theme 1:General Opinion of Learning English in Malaysia (9 items)	.761
Theme 2:Out of Class Experience (6 items)	.672
Theme 3: Perceptions of English in Malaysian Universities (8 items)	.552
Theme 4: Learning English in a Malaysian Educational Institute(7 items)	.875

In terms of item reliability tests performed on the results of Pilot Study II, it was found that there was sufficient reliability among items in each theme of the revised PELLEM. The Cronbach's Alpha for each of the PELLEM themes are listed in Table 3.3 below. Although the value for Theme 3 appears a little low, upon further analysis of the items within this theme, it was decided that this was due to the nature of the theme. According to Landau & Everitt (2004) the acceptable Alpha level is 0.60 or above, while other statisticians advocate a Cronbach's Alpha level of 0.80 to be considered statistically significant (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994 as cited in Bailey, 2005). However, like the BALLI, the themes of the PELLEM include items which cover a broad range of issues; thus, a lower Alpha level is not unexpected.

3.7. Translation of the BALLI and PELLEM Questionnaires

One of the challenges in collecting data from English language learners is the possibility that participants miscomprehend the questions or statements used in questionnaires. As the participants were at different levels of English language proficiency ranging from Beginner to Upper Intermediate levels, it was decided that a bilingual questionnaire would increase participants' comprehension of the items, thereby increasing the reliability of the data being collected. Because more than 60% of the students in the college spoke Arabic as a first language, it was decided that the questionnaires used in this study would be bilingual, in Arabic and English.

The BALLI and PELLEM were initially translated into Arabic by a native speaker of Arabic, who is also an English language instructor. This individual was selected to do the translation because of his high proficiency in both languages as well as his experience in translating for an international news agency. After the questionnaires had been translated into Arabic, back-translation was conducted. A second Arabic speaker was given only the Arabic version of the questionnaires and asked to state in English what he understood from each statement. The researcher then checked that this corresponded with the original statement in English. In addition, a few typing errors were found during the process of the pilot studies and were amended. The previous sections have presented information about the two questionnaires used in the first stage of data collection. In the following section, the interview stage of data collection will be discussed.

3.8. Interview

Upon completion of the questionnaires, the results were analysed in order to select participants for the interview stage. Sixteen participants were chosen to represent various levels of English proficiency, age, gender and education level.

3.8.1. Rationale for Using Interviews

As stated earlier in this chapter, using qualitative research methods in addition to quantitative methods is believed to enhance the understanding a researcher can gain on a particular phenomenon or research question (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The purpose of the interview stage was to gain further insight into the beliefs about language learning and perceptions held by the participants in terms of their learning experience. In addition, interview data enabled the triangulation of data collected from the questionnaire stage while at the same time addressing some of the limitations of questionnaires used in the first stage of data collection. Although the BALLI and PELLEM questionnaires were considered the most appropriate instruments to measure the two variables being studied, there remained the

problem of the limitations in the use of closed-choice questionnaires, as discussed earlier in this chapter. A semi-structured interview enabled further investigation of participants' beliefs and perceptions and allowed participants to express responses beyond agreement or disagreement. According to Bryman (2008), semi-structured interviews help to encourage standardization in the kinds of questions that are asked as well as in the way answers are recorded by the researchers. This helps minimize the possibility of errors on the part of the researcher. However, in using open-ended questions and by allowing the interview to progress naturally according to the topics that might be brought up, interviewees also have a certain amount of freedom in their responses (Bryman, 2008). Creswell (2008) also states that open-ended questions allow participants to relay their opinions or talk about their experiences without any limitations imposed by the researcher's views or the findings of past studies, as might occur in the use of questionnaires.

In the interviews conducted for this study, participants were asked about the factors that had led them to respond in a particular way to certain items of interest on the questionnaires. In addition, the reasons behind what seemed to be contradictory or unexpected responses were examined in the interview sessions. Participants were also given the opportunity to talk about other beliefs or perceptions they may have had that were not on either of the questionnaires. Thus, the interview stage was an essential part of the study as it provided additional, qualitative data in the participants' own words, which allowed much deeper examination of their beliefs and perceptions.

3.8.2. Selection of Interview Participants

After the questionnaire data had been collected and tabulated, 16 participants were selected to participate in a semi-structured interview. Initially, participants were selected using maximum-variation sampling in order to have as diverse a group as possible in terms of proficiency levels, gender, nationality and education. Interview participants were first selected to represent the different levels of proficiency: Beginner, Elementary, Pre-

intermediate, Intermediate and Academic Skills for IELTS/Upper Intermediate. Proficiency level was deemed a significant factor as those students with limited English skills were bound to have a very different experience of learning English compared with those who were more proficient. In addition, those at the higher levels were closer to achieving the language requirement for university admission than the others, which would likely affect their emotions and attitudes. Another difference related to proficiency levels was that the ability to interact with English speakers outside class would probably be greater for participants at the higher levels, which would lead to varying experiences outside the classroom.

As has been described in section 3.6.2. of this chapter, the intensive English course at the college where the participants were studying was divided into classes according to the following levels: Beginner, Elementary, Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Academic Skills for IELTS/Upper Intermediate. Initially, four participants were targeted for each proficiency level. However, in the end, this was only feasible for the Beginner and Pre-intermediate levels. One interview with an Elementary level participant had to be excluded due to a corrupt sound file, while for the Intermediate and Academic Skills for IELTS levels, only two and three participants, respectively, were available and willing to be interviewed. This was because many of the participants at the higher levels had already left the college for university by the time the interview stage commenced. Within each level, an effort was made to represent the three major nationalities present in the sample: Libyan, Somali and Sudanese as well as the other less-represented nationalities. In addition, interview participants were also chosen to represent the different levels of intended academic study. The purpose of setting these parameters was to ensure that different student groups were represented in order to gain insight into the perceptions held by different types of international students in Malaysia. Of all the students invited, 16 students agreed to participate in the interviews. Their demographics are listed in Table 3.4 below.

Table 3.4. Demographics of Interview Participants

NO	GENDER	Age	NAT	LEVEL AT QUESTIONNAIRE STAGE	HIGHEST EDUCATION
01	Male	25	Libyan	Beginner	Bachelor Degree
02	Male	23	Sudanese	Beginner	Bachelor Degree
03	Male	21	Somali	Beginner	Bachelor Degree
04	Male	23	Iraqi	Beginner	Bachelor Degree
05	Male	33	Libyan	Elementary	Bachelor Degree
06	Male	26	Sudanese	Elementary	High School
07	Male	17	Sudanese	Elementary	High School
08	Female	25	Kyrgyz	Pre-intermediate	Bachelor Degree
09	Male	22	Somali	Pre-intermediate	High School
10	Male	23	Somali	Pre-intermediate	High School
11	Female	27	Moroccan	Pre-intermediate	High School
12	Female	27	Libyan	Intermediate	Bachelor Degree
13	Male	21	Somali	Intermediate	High School
14	Male	20	Somali	Academic Skills for IELTS	High School
15	Male	27	Somali	Academic Skills for IELTS	Bachelor Degree
16	Male	27	Sudanese	Academic Skills for IELTS	Higher Diploma

Overall, the demographics of the interview participants were representative of the sample. In addition, all the main nationality groups were represented: Libyan, Somali and Sudanese, although in the overall sample, the largest nationality group was Libyan. Participants were also chosen from the less common nationalities, with one participant each from Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, and Morocco. The percentage of female participants was 19%, whilst in the sample it was somewhat higher, at 28%. Of the interview participants, 14 were still enrolled in the English programme, while two (Participants 12 and 16) had already started academic programmes at Malaysian universities. Participant 12 had already been accepted to university, where she planned to do a Master's degree in Mathematics. However, at the time of the interview, she was enrolled in the university's English programme for students who had received conditional acceptance without the IELTS band required for direct entry into academic programmes. Participant 16 had just started a degree programme at a local university and had been able to enter the academic programme directly based on his results

on the university English placement test. Participants 7, 9, 13, 14 and 15 had also been accepted into various university programmes but were still enrolled in the college's language course while waiting for the programmes to start. Upon registration, these students would be expected to produce an IELTS test result of the band required by the university (ranging from 4.5 to 6.5) or would have to take an English placement test. Based on the results of the test, these students would either begin their academic programmes, like participant 16, or be required to complete their respective universities' English course which could last from three months to a year. Because the tertiary education system in Malaysia does not have a centralized application system for international students, unlike the Universities and Colleges Admissions Services (UCAS) used in the U.K. system, each Malaysian university or college applies its own methods for processing and evaluating applications from international students. While university websites usually list an IELTS or TOEFL requirement, most universities also practise conditional acceptance and administer their own English placement tests to assess new students' language skills. Based on the researcher's experience, many students feel intimidated by the IELTS test and prefer to attempt the university's own placement test, which is perceived as being easier.

3.8.3. Interview Questions

With the aim of guiding the semi-structured interview process, a list of questions was prepared according to the five BALLI and four PELLEM themes. Many of the prepared questions asked for reasons behind responses to questionnaire items, for example, "What makes you believe that some people have a special ability to learn languages?" and "In the questionnaire you stated that you would/would not recommend learning English in Malaysia to your family & friends. Why/not?" Others presented questionnaire items in different ways in order to verify earlier responses, for example "One of your friends is planning on coming to Malaysia to learn English, what would you tell him or her?" or, "If you had started this course ten years ago, do you think it would be easier?". However, not all questions were

asked to every participant and the topics covered in the interviews were administered to progress naturally based on the participants' responses to earlier questions. The complete list of prepared interview questions is available in Appendix C at the end of this dissertation.

3.9. Data Collection Procedures

The two stages of the data collection for the present study were conducted over a six week period from September to October 2009. In the following sections, the administrative procedures for the questionnaire and interview stages will be discussed.

3.9.1. Questionnaire Administration

The questionnaires were administered in the last half hour of class in all the twelve classes running at the college at the time of the study over the course of three weeks. The researcher and class teacher were present in the room while the questionnaires were being filled. Before administering the questionnaire, the researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study while going through the consent form with the participants. Students who declined to participate were then allowed to leave. As the participants completed the questionnaires, the researcher was at hand to answer any questions and to make sure that questionnaires returned were as completely-filled as possible. In the case of students who had been in Malaysia for fewer than two months, their completed forms were collected, but not included in the data analysis or findings. During the pilot studies, it was found that participants often rushed through the questionnaires, particularly if they were administered at the end of the day. Therefore, for the main data collection stage, questionnaires were administered at the beginning of class. The administrative procedures of the interview stage are discussed in the next section.

3.9.2. Interview Administration

After the results had been tabulated, 16 individuals were selected to be part of the interview stage. This group comprised individuals who represented different types of students in terms

of level of English but was also restricted by availability as some participants had left the college to enter academic programmes in Malaysia. Most of the one-to-one interviews were conducted in the college by the researcher, and two interviews were conducted over the telephone. All the interviews were recorded as digital audio files using an MP3 recorder. They lasted between seven and twenty-five minutes. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed into text documents. After each interview was transcribed, participants were given a copy of the transcript along with a compact disc containing the recording. Participants were then asked to verify the content of the transcript, after which the transcript was analysed as described in section 3.10.2.

3.10. Summary of Data Analysis

Since the research design for this study used a mixed-method approach, two types of data were collected. The first stage of data collection utilised the BALLI and PELLEM questionnaires, which produced quantitative data in the form of participants' responses on a Likert-type scale. The second stage of data collection was the interview stage. During this stage, qualitative data was collected in the form of participants' responses to the questions asked by the researcher during the semi-structured interviews. The data analysis of the quantitative data and the qualitative data is summarized in the following sections.

3.10.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software version 17.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means and standard deviations were computed for participants' responses to the items on the BALLI and PELLEM, to answer Research Question One, on the participants' language learning beliefs and Research Question Two, on participants' perceptions of learning English in Malaysia. Next, factor analysis was performed on the data, using principle component analysis. An initial solution was determined for both the BALLI and PELLEM factors. Using the scree plot test, the

number of factors was then determined and the factor analysis was performed once again for a final factor solution. As both questionnaires are built up of themes which cannot be summed up into a total composite score, the factor scores for the factors identified by the factor analysis of the BALLI and the PELLEM were used as a basis for the Pearson r correlation coefficient tests to determine whether there was a relationship between the participants' language learning beliefs and their perceptions of learning English in Malaysia (Research Question Three).

3.10.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

The analysis of interview data was conducted according to the steps of qualitative data analysis outlined by Creswell (2008). According to these steps, data collection is followed by the transcription of data, after which the data is coded by the researcher (Creswell, 2008). After the participants had attested to the accuracy of the interview transcripts, the researcher read through all the interviews several times to get an idea of the possible themes within the interview data. Following this, each transcript was coded individually and these codes were then placed under four main themes: 1) *Perceptions of Malaysia as an English Language Learning Destination*; 2) *Communication and Interaction Outside Class*; 3) *Perceptions of English in Malaysian Universities;* and   4) *Language Learning*. The results of the interview stage are presented in detail in Chapter Five, in order to answer Research Question Four.

3.11. Ethical Considerations

The main ethical consideration involved in the study was the confidentiality of participant data. Prior to participation in the study, participants were given a consent form which explained the details of the study in both English and Arabic. A copy of the consent form is in Appendix D of this dissertation. After signing the form to indicate voluntary participation, participants then filled in both the questionnaires. Participants' names were

only known to the researcher, who assigned a number to each participant in the discussing of the results. As the researcher was holding an administrative position in the department, participants were repeatedly assured that their honest responses to both the questionnaires and interviews would have no implications on their performance on the language course or any other aspects of their stay as students at the college.

3.12. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research methodology used in this study along with other information relevant to selection of the methods used. Beginning with a short summary of the various methods used in previous research on language learning beliefs and learner perceptions, the chapter then included a summary of the research design used in the present study. This was followed by detailed descriptions of the participants, their learning context, and data collection methods used in this study, with particular attention given to the development of the PELLEM questionnaire over the course of two pilot studies. The research design and data collection procedures used in this study were also discussed. Finally, this chapter includes a section on the ethical considerations related to the study. The next two chapters will present the results of both the questionnaires and the interview sessions as well as the analysis of these results.