

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

This study is a qualitative study on successful language learners from Myanmar and the factors that affect their learning. This chapter will discuss the details of the methodology employed in this study. The procedure of carrying out this study is divided into five steps; research instrument, data collecting procedure, participants, data analysis and pilot test.

#### **3.1 Research instrument**

This study used qualitative research methods to investigate the research questions. In qualitative research, the researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior, and to explore the reasons that direct that behavior. Thus, this method inspects the why and how of decision making, not just what, where and when. Quantitative and qualitative research methods are used to do the research in order to investigate the research problem. According to Mack, et al. (2005), qualitative research has more advantages than quantitative does in the sense that it allows greater spontaneity and adaptation of the interaction between the researcher and the study participant. For instance, open-ended questions are used in qualitative research and the participants are free to answer in their own words and these responses tend to be more complex than simply answers of yes and no. Hence, with qualitative methods, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is often less formal than in quantitative research. Participants have the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail than is typically the case with quantitative methods. As a result, researchers have the opportunity to respond immediately to what participants say by tailoring subsequent questions to information the participant has provided.

Merriam (1998) also explains that the basic qualitative study in education “typically draws from concepts, models, and theories in educational psychology, developmental psychology”. Thus, qualitative research method is employed as this study is trying to discover the motivation, attitudes, personalities, beliefs and reasons behind the participants’ behavior.

In qualitative research, interviews are the most common form of data collection. Therefore, for this study, semi-structured interviews were used as they allow the interviewer to inquire for additional information and follow leads that emerge during interviews while using the interview guide (Merriam, 1998). Another intention of using this semi-structured interview is it is an efficient and practical way of getting data about things that cannot be easily observed such as feelings and emotions. By using the semi-structured interview, we are able to talk about something in detail and depth. So the indepth information can be revealed as the interviewee is able to speak

for themselves with little direction from the interviewer. Besides, the complex questions and issues can be discussed and clarified and it is easy to read the interview with the video or audio.

As the aim is to capture, as much as possible, the subject's thinking about a particular topic and to obtain detailed information, the interviewer follows an in depth process of thinking, posing new questions after the first answers are given by the subjects. In this study the interview questions included topics like factual information of when they started learning English, formal and informal language learning experiences, how they learnt English, their beliefs concerning language learning, their attitudes on language learning, their language goals, education policy in their times, restrictions and difficult circumstances, available resources, their environment, learning opportunities, teaching methods in those days and their learning styles, their perspective on their teachers according to their learning experiences, their learning experiences affect their teaching, and the best way they think to learn English.

### **3.2 Data collecting procedure**

The qualitative data collection method employed in this study is the indepth interview using the semi-structured interview. It is used because the interview method can investigate the behavior and reason of a specific thing in the research more precisely than that of quantitative method which uses a set of questionnaires. The semi-structured interview is flexible, allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored.

The purpose of conducting this interview is to probe the ideas of interviewee on a specific matter that an interviewer is investigating. The Merriam (1998) suggested "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feeling, or how people interpret the world around them" (p.72). Therefore, a one-on-one interview data-collecting process was used to ask questions and recorded answers from only one participant in the study at a time. Five qualified participants were chosen to be interviewed. Therefore, the quality of data received will be reliable and highly representative.

The data collection was done during the month of May to June 2010. In order to collect the data, the researcher visited Myanmar and made appointments with the participants. Then, the interview was done at the participants' work places or homes, as Creswell (2003) explains that the characteristics of qualitative research are that qualitative research takes place in the natural setting, it uses multiple methods, it is emergent and it is fundamentally interpretive. In qualitative research, the researcher goes to the participant's home or office, which is not disturbed any more than is necessary, and conducts the research there. Thus, this enables the researcher to develop a detailed description of people's behavior and the context in which they act. Audio recording and note taking was used in collecting data during the interviews. The interview took two to three hours for each participant. The Myanmar and English languages were used for the interview. The interview questions were based on the five objectives of the study. For instance, when did you start learning English and where?, what makes you learn English?, why are you interested in English?, how did your environment and community help you learn English? , how did you improve your

language skills?, how often do you use English?, what learning opportunity / resources did you have?, what difficulties did you have and how did you overcome them? etc.

### **3.3 Participants**

In this study purposeful sampling was used as they are people who can best help us understand the answer to the research questions. For this study, five participants from Myanmar were chosen. They are from the generation who had to begin learning English only when they were in their fifth grade with limited teaching recourses and little opportunities. Therefore, they are chosen to represent the successful learners for this study. Although English is taught as a second language in Myanmar, it is the third language for the ethnic groups in Myanmar. Thus, the participants speak at least three languages: Karen as their mother language, Myanmar as their second language and English as their third language. The age of the participants ranged from 39 to 52. All of them are instructors teaching English at universities and four of the participants have received their MA TESOL degrees in Thailand and one of them got a master's degree from a university in the United Kingdom. The participants all taught the researcher when she was doing her undergraduate studies. The information about each participant will be described as follows.

#### **3.3.1 Participant A**

The first participant is Participant A who is 39 year old and was born in Yangon, Myanmar. He is from a middle class family and both of his parents are educated. His father was a doctor and his mother was the staff at an embassy. He belongs to the Karen ethnic group which is one of the largest minority groups in Myanmar. Although they are Karen, they mainly used Myanmar at home. Thus, according to participant A, his mother tongue is Myanmar but the family still used some Karen in their conversation. He started learning English formally at school when he was in fourth grade. They started learning the English alphabet and some vocabulary. Then, as they came to the higher grade, they learned some grammar and short stories. Yet, he said he was not among the outstanding students and he learned English as it was the compulsory subject for them. He finished his high school in 1988. At that time, due to the conflict situation in the country, all the schools and universities were closed. Thus, he could not continue his study when he finished his high school. Then, he started to learn English by himself and from that time on he focused on learning it by himself. He never went to the language school but only took one private English speaking class near his neighborhood just for a while. Then, as the universities were reopened, he got into the physics major and there he also had to learn English as the minor subject. He had never had a chance to meet with the native speakers or in the environment where people speak the language. However, when he started working for a private company he got chances to meet with foreigners and there he got experiences talking to foreigners. However, as the business did not go very well, he tried to teach English to the young people in his community to earn some money for himself. Then, he also started to teach at one of the private libraries near his neighborhood. He also joined the evening BRE (Bachelor in Religion Education) program in the evening at MIT and also helped teach English at MIT. After that he was selected to do his MA Studies in Assumption University in Thailand. Then after

he studied there, he came back to Myanmar and taught English at MIT. I have known him for a long time as we are from the same church and the same neighborhood. Besides, I had attended his English classes before I joined the university. Thus, I have always admired him as a teacher. The reason I chose him was he was really a successful English language learner who independently made his own way to achieve his goals and his qualification and his performance proves that he is a successful learner.

### **3.3.2 Participant B**

The second participant is Participant B who is 51 years old and was born in Mate Hti Lar District, Mandalay, now the third biggest city in Myanmar, but brought up in Yangon. She is also from an educated family and her father was a pilot and her mother a nurse. They are also from the middle class. Unlike the other participants, she is half Burmese and half Karen as her father was a Burmese and her mother is a Karen. She has eight brothers and sisters and her parents sent her and her sisters to their aunt to go to school. Thus, it was while they were raised by their aunts and grandmother that they started getting some exposure in English from them. At school, she started learning English when she was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She said they had to learn grammar, vocabulary, phrases and some short stories. She passed her high school with two distinctions which are English and chemistry. Then she went to the university and majored in English. It took her four years to finish the degree and afterward she was eligible to join the honor class for one year. Then, she served as the English teacher at a regional state college and also worked for one of the NGOs from Yangon and is currently teaching at MIT. There she was offered an opportunity to study at Assumption University by the head mistress of MIT. After she had done her master's degree, she came back to Myanmar and has continued her teaching career at MIT as well as in another private language center.

### **3.3.3 Participant C**

The next participant was Participant C who is 44 years old. She is also a Karen and she was born and raised in Yangon. She is also from a middle class family and her parents are also educated. Her mother tongue is Karen and she could speak Myanmar fluently as her surrounding neighbors are Burmese. Since she was young, she got exposure in English from her parents' conversations with each other. Sometimes, her parents also took her to the movie theater to see Waltz Disney cartoon movies. Thus, she got some chances to hear some English. She started learning English formally at school when she got into her fifth grade. According to her, English was not a difficult subject and the marks she earned in her English subjects were high. Even after her matriculation exam, she got distinction in English and it was the only distinction she got in her high school. Then, she joined the English Major in Yangon University. After she did her second year, she was qualified to do the honors class while the other students continued their 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Then she started her first year in her honors class and it took 3 years to get the BA honors degree. However, unfortunately, in her third year due to the demonstrations in 1988, the schools and universities were closed so she could not finish it. Thus, she started to work. Then the schools and universities were reopened in 1991 but her work did not allow her to attend the classes. So she had to take the exam without attending the classes. She claimed that she passed the exam

but she could not continue with a master's degree due to her grade result and she herself preferred to work. Thus she got her BA honors in 1991 and then later on she taught at the KBTS and she was offered an opportunity to do her Master's degree in TEFL at Assumption University in Bangkok. After she earned her degree, she continued serving as an English teacher at KBTS and has been teaching there to this day.

This participant also used to be my teacher at KBTS before she left for her further studies. I have always admired her for her accent and her writing technique. She is also recognized as a well qualified English lecturer by her colleagues and the university. Thus, she was chosen for this study.

### **3.3.4 Participant D**

The third participant chosen was Participant D who is now 52 years old and was born and raised in the former capital city of Yangon. She also belongs to the Karen ethnic group, but she also has some Shan and Pa-O ancestors. However, Karen is her first language and she could also speak Myanmar fluently since her childhood as the Myanmar language is the language of communication in Myanmar. Her father is an engineer and her mother used to be a university lecturer as well as an English teacher at St. Paul and the Chinese Methodist School. As her mother was also teaching private tuition at home, this provided a natural learning environment for her. As her parents and grandparents are highly educated people, they had a lot of books in their house which provided an environment for participant D to explore and increase her knowledge through reading. She started going to the English Methodist School at the age of four and began the lower kindergarten level where she started to learn English. Then in the following year, as all the schools were nationalized by the government, they had to stop learning English and wait until grade five to resume studying. However, she kept learning English informally at home and through music. Thus, since her third grade she could read some news in English which were higher than her level. Then she started to learn English again in her fifth grade and the school lessons offered were not a big challenge for her at all since they were taught only in a grammatical-based learning style. Afterward, she passed her matriculation exam with distinction, including in her English subject, and got into medical school which was considered the most prestigious major in Myanmar. However, she chose English major and studied English at Yangon University for four years. Then, she was eligible to continue to do her honors class. She has experience teaching at universities, British council in Yangon, and at her own language school. She holds a Diploma in Mass communication, a BA English and BA honors in Linguistics and Literature, an MA and TEFL in Applied Linguistics, and CEELT 1 which is from Cambridge University. She also got a Master's degree in English Language Teaching and Linguistics from Lancaster University.

I chose this participant because she used to be my teacher when I did my Bachelor's degree and I also worked as an English teacher for her language center for nearly 3 years. She is well recognized as successful and qualified in academics as well as in business. Thus, she was chosen for this study.

### **3.3.5 Participant E**

Participant E is 46 years old and was born and raised in Yangon. He also belongs to the Karen ethnic group and Karen is mainly spoken at home but Myanmar language was used as well. His father was a doctor and his mother was a nurse and his father supported him in learning English by teaching him songs and music and by reading him some English books. Additionally, he got some exposure through the church choir and gospel songs. Only when he was in fifth grade did he begin learning English formally at school. He also did well in English and got distinction in English at his 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and in the matriculation exam. Then, he got into the English major at university and received distinction in English so that in his third year he could join the honors class with no difficulty. Then, he was also qualified to join a master's degree program but, unfortunately, the university was closed in 1988 due to the demonstration. Thus, he worked as a case worker at one of the NGOs but later quit to continue his master's when the university reopened in 1990. While studying, he also worked as a tutor at the university to support his school fees as well as to support the family. Still he said classes were on and off. As he was working, he could not finish his master's degree there and he did not want to do his master degree in Myanmar. Then he decided to apply for a master's degree program in Thailand and eventually he got a chance to study in Assumption University in Bangkok. Then he came back to Myanmar and he is now working as a part time English teaching instructor and works for one of the NGOs in Myanmar.

Participant E used to teach me when I was doing my Bachelor's Degree at KBTS. Unlike some other teachers, he used various kinds of classroom activity in his teaching. He also liked to teach us the song he composed in English so he was liked by many students. He is also recognized as a qualified and successful learner and teacher by his colleague and students. Thus he was chosen here to be one of the participants for this study.

Since the interviewees are from the teaching field and have encountered various obstacles from the lack of academic freedom due to the government's control of the schools, the participants are invaluable to this study. The quality of data can be considered as high and representative because they are taken from representatives of perseverant and successful learners. There will be no language barrier and misunderstanding concerning with the interview questions. The interview process is spontaneous. However, as the participants are the researcher's instructors, it can be seen that teacher- student's relationship could form a bias in getting the information and the interviewee could be uncomfortable when asking some indepth questions.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

For this study, the process of data analysis applied is the category construction level in which categories or themes are constructed to capture some recurring patterns that cut across the data (Merriam, 1998). Firstly, data from the audio recorder was transcribed after every interview. Then, the data was accessed and examined to check if the answers were on target with the research questions and objectives. Next, the quality data was coded into distinguish patterns or themes such as background information, Language learning experiences, learning strategies, effort, attitude and

other sources that characterize a categorized interpreted data. After sorted out the data into themes, it helped me understand the general situation much better and thoroughly. Then, I made note to help me see the reflection I had on the interview and also used it while I analyzed the data. The coded data was sorted out and interpreted thematically to help understand the general situation much better and thoroughly. The categorized interpreted data were observed and analyzed for similarities and differences according to likeness and differences. Finally, the key findings were identified and summarized and then compared to the literature.

PAYYAP UNIVERSITY