Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The current study collected quantitative and qualitative data through interviews, questionnaires, a teacher's log, and course materials to evaluate an English for Tourism class taught at an international college in the north of Thailand. The course design reflected a communicative approach to language learning, which is widely accepted in the field as an appropriate teaching approach (Brown, 2007; Nunan, 1998). The course was organized in what Richards (2001:151), refers to as "whole to part", beginning with a background introduction of the tourism industry, followed by the processes of creating a successful tour that coincides with a marketing plan for the respective tour. In addition, a context/task based syllabus (Appendix A) was used to sequence the course, and to create communicative tasks for the learners which centered on content typically found in the tourism field. According to Oxford (2001), the integrated-skills approach introduces English language learners to true language forms and allows them opportunities to communicate naturally in the language. Other research in the tourism field has shown the value of a multi-skill approach to language teaching (Coskun, 2009; Luka, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate an English for Tourism program designed for EFL learners attending an international college in the north of Thailand. This chapter describes the methods of study, which includes the participants, data collection instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

3.2 Participants

The study focused on three types of participants: fifteen fourth-year students who enrolled in the class, two university officials from the international college, and the researcher who was also the instructor of the course.

3.2.1 Learners

There were fifteen fourth-year students enrolled in the course from August 2010 to December 2010. Of the fifteen students, fourteen were Thai Nationals, one was Chinese; there were eight males and seven females in the course. Eight of the students were pursuing a degree in English for International Business (EIB) and seven of the students were pursuing a degree in English for International Communication (EIC). The tourism program was required for the EIB students; however, the EIC students chose it as an elective. These learners were members of the first class to

enroll in the international college program at the university in 2007; most are on schedule to graduate in the spring of 2011.

The English level varied greatly amongst the students. The instructor rated 12 students between the level A2 and B1 (see Appendix B) according to Common European Framework (CEF) (Council of Europe, 2001). The other three students ranged from B2 to C1. The ages of the students ranged from 21-34 with the older students being the stronger English speakers, possibly due to more background experiences where English was commonly spoken.

The input of the learners is significant, as the designed course aimed to meet their needs, and was adjusted throughout the term to provide them with content and materials that they felt were most relevant to their current and future ambitions. However, the instructor managed the course direction to ensure the overall goals of the course were met. As this course was experimental, these learners were valuable in providing information regarding their experience in the course. The learners provided the researcher with data concerning their feelings towards the overall course, the impact of the teacher on their learning, course materials, topics, and activities completed in class. The learners were viewed as the most important stakeholders in this research, because of their ongoing participation throughout the term in the tourism program.

3.2.1 University Officials

The researcher identified two university officials as major stakeholders in the evaluation of the English for Tourism program. First, the Director of the International College oversees the entire International Program, and is instrumental in creating opportunities for students to have practical experience in the tourism sector locally as well as abroad. The director has been a member of the department since 2009 and sets the standard of education that he would like the students to achieve in the future; he is instrumental in providing advice and relaying his expectations to the instructors at the university.

Secondly, the Dean of Academic Affairs was viewed as a stakeholder in this evaluation. The dean oversees the curriculum for the entire international college and has been a member of the international college for two years. She was previously an instructor in a different faculty within the university before retiring. She chose to end her retirement to be a part of the development process in the international college. Her responsibilities include reviewing instructor syllabi, assessment measures, and exams. Her input is valued as it provides the researcher with a view outside of the learners or teachers as it relates to items that should be included in the course, and as it relates to the expectation level of the students.

3.2.3 Researcher

The researcher is a native English speaker pursuing a Master's degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) and has over five years of English teaching experience in various countries, contexts, and with differing age groups. This was the first university level program taught by her, and she was the first and only instructor of this course at the international college from August 2010 to December 2010. During the course a detailed log was written by the instructor, allowing for an inside look into the classroom. According to Richards (2001), the

instructor's log has the ability to provide detailed and open-ended information that other methods may not be able to document. Classroom based research or evaluation is possibly incomplete without input from the instructor of the course who possesses the knowledge on the happenings and outcomes of their own classroom.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

During this research, four instruments were used to collect data. The instruments included questionnaires, interviews, a teacher log, and documentary sources. The questionnaires, interviews, and documentary sources are components of the summative evaluation while the teacher log composes the formative aspect of the evaluation. The combination of both summative and formative instruments allows for a comprehensive view of the program while the variety of instruments allowed for triangulation in the collection and analysis process as suggested by Norris and Watanable (2007).

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire (Appendix C) was administered to the students after the completion of the course and was included as part of the summative evaluation. The researcher's advisor approved the questionnaire. In addition, it was pilot tested with another student, not involved in the study, to ensure clarity in the questions. The questionnaire was written in English and Thai in order to get more accurate data from the learners. The translation was completed by a bilingual speaker and then verified by an expert in the field. The ability to use their native language possibly reduced anxiety and enabled them to write freely.

The organization of the questionnaire consisted of both structured and unstructured items. The structured items aimed to determine the learners' responses to a variety of features in the program including activities, topics, and materials. The learners were asked to select the most useful and unhelpful features of the course including activities, topics, and materials. In addition, the unstructured items allowed the learners to comment on the overall value and difficulty of the course and the teaching style used throughout the course.

3.3.2 Interviews

Two university officials were interviewed using a semi-structured design as part of the summative evaluation. They allowed for detailed discussions on the issues and had the advantage of using follow-up questions to gain a greater understanding of the interviewees' responses.

The design of the interview questions (Appendix D) followed the suggestions of Norris and Watanbe (2007) relating to the evaluation of a foreign language program and was approved by an expert in the field. The interview used in this research collected information regarding the international program as a whole, and the administration's expectations of students and instructors in the tourism program. In addition to collecting information relative to the tourism program, the interview was vital in providing information on the growth, and potential growth, of the tourism industry in the north of Thailand.

In addition to interviews with stakeholders, informal interviews were conducted with some students regarding their survey responses. These interviews were used for clarification purposes concerning the questionnaire. The follow up interviews provided more background information about the students and a greater understanding of their point of view.

3.3.3 Teacher's Log

A journal documenting, describing, and reflecting on the different components of the course was kept by the instructor as part of the formative evaluation. The course aspects reflected on included activities and materials used during the three-hour class period each week. In the reflection process, the teacher detailed which features on the class allowed for positive or negative interaction amongst the learners, and detailed why these activities were helpful or unhelpful in creating meaningful interactions among the learners. In addition, the log detailed tasks, materials, and activities that caused difficulty for the learners and which ones were potentially unchallenging to the majority of the learners.

3.3.4 Documentary Sources

The documentary sources were evaluated using Cunningham's checklist (cited in Ya-ni, 2007) for communicative interaction with the exception of the course syllabus. The materials evaluated according to the checklist included: textbooks, worksheets for individuals', outside readings, case studies, and group activity worksheets. A Variety of textbooks were consulted throughout the course, and selected by the instructor according to relevance, difficulty, and the learners' needs. Samples of these materials and evaluations are included in Chapter 4. The textbooks included in the evaluation were:

- *How to Start a Tour Guiding Business* (Mitchell, 2005)
- *How to Travel the World for Free as an International Tour Director* (Mitchell, 2005)

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The course commenced in August 2010; before this time, the instructor developed a course syllabus. The syllabus included a course description, instructor expectations, grading scale, and weekly topics. It was designed for a fifteen-week program, but the evaluation only took place over thirteen weeks. There were two reasons for this: (1) classes were cancelled due to holidays, and (2) the final exam was rescheduled for one week earlier than originally planned, thereby eliminating make-up time for the classes. The cancellation of classes did not allow for all topics in the syllabus to be covered, most notably the development of marketing skills for a tour guiding business.

Over the thirteen-week period, documentation of each class was included in the teacher's log. Each week the lesson plan, materials, and learner responses to the class were recorded in the log as viewed by the instructor. In addition, class materials were collected to analyze at a future time. The class finished in December 2010; data

collected during this period included the teacher log, syllabus, and course materials.

At the completion of the course a questionnaire was created, approved, and translated. A second party, who is considered an expert in the field, verified the translation. The researcher issued the questionnaires to the students through an online survey in January 2011, after the completion of the course and official submission of final grades. The use of an online survey allowed the learners adequate time and anonymity in their responses. In conjunction with the questionnaire, the instructor informed the learners of the purpose of the questionnaire and the nature of the research. The researcher received all questionnaires before February 2011. After receiving the questionnaires, informal interviews were conducted with the some of the students to gain a greater understanding of the data collected in the questionnaire.

Coinciding with the delivery of the questionnaires, the interviews took place in the respective participants' offices, on the campus of the international college in January 2011. The researcher conducted each interview once, but followed up the interviews when clarification or more information was needed to create a more in depth analysis of the tourism program.

Before conducting the interview the researcher asked for permission to audio record the session; the interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes each. Subsequently the researcher told the officials the nature of the research and purpose of their involvement in the evaluation process.

The final step in the data collection was collecting samples of course materials and evaluating them according to Cunningham's (1995, cited in Ya-ni, 2007) checklist for communicative interactions. The data collection was completed in February 2011 in preparation for the complete analysis of the data accumulated.

3.5 Data Analysis

The following section details the data analysis process. The quantitative analysis includes the close-ended questions on the questionnaire. The qualitative analysis includes the open-ended questionnaire items, interviews, and the teacher's log. The documentary materials were analyzed using Cunningham's checklist for communicative interactions. The researcher analyzed data retrieved from each instrument separately, then combined the data to identify similarities and differences among the learners', stakeholders', and instructor's views. The results of the analysis are reported in Chapter 4.

3.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The close-ended questions included in the questionnaire were quantifiable and entered were into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to determine the frequency of responses by the students. The researcher graphed and charted the results to analyze and discover patterns among what the students viewed as strengths and weaknesses in the program. The results of the close-ended items were then compared with the teacher log in order to determine similarities and differences between the teacher's and students' viewpoints.

3.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

The analysis for the open-ended questionnaire items was completed for each individual question. The responses were categorized according to positive and negative responses by the learners. The positive answers were viewed as strengths of the program, and the negatives as weaknesses of the program. The categories were then analyzed to determine patterns between the strengths and weaknesses of the program as viewed by the students. The results were then compared with the teacher's log to determine similarities and differences.

The data received from the interviews was initially categorized according to positive and negative features of the program, the stakeholders' view of the programs, and the context of the program. After further review, the researcher categorized the interviews according to students' educational background, strengths of the tourism program, and administrative goals of the program. The researcher analyzed the data to determine patterns and similarities in responses by the stakeholders.

3.5.3 Documentary Source Analysis

The sources evaluated were the syllabus, textbooks, readings, worksheets, case studies, and group activity worksheets. Initially, the researcher gathered samples from each source, except the syllabus, and completed Cunningham's checklist for each individual sample. In addition, questionnaire responses from items 9 and 10, which documented the most helpful and least helpful items, were displayed in a frequency chart. The responses combined with the activities surrounding them were compared with the teacher's log to determine the effectiveness of creating communicative and engaging opportunities for the learners.

The syllabus was reviewed by the instructor at the conclusion of the course to help in determining its effectiveness according to its sequence and to the time allotted for each topic. In addition, the syllabus was reviewed by the instructor to determine if topics were skipped due to time constraints or unforeseen circumstances. Comments from the teacher were used to determine which topics were not covered or were too time consuming.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the organization and collection of data for this study. The instruments used to collect data included questionnaires, interviews, a teacher log, and documentary sources. The data collected from each instrument was combined to discover similar patterns among the different participants view points. After the data collection and evaluation the results were compiled and they are detailed in the following chapter.