Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the participants and how the case study was done. It also discusses the instruments of data collection, how the data was collected and how it was analyzed to determine if the research questions and objectives were met.

3.1 Participants

The ten students that were involved in this study are all adults; with an age range from early 20's to early 40's and for all of them English is not simply an L2 but rather an L3 or even in one case an L4. The students do not all have the same L1 background, as they all grew up speaking their own tribal languages, which included Lahu, Lisu, Rawang and Ahka. They also have some knowledge of either Thai or Burmese as an additional language, but not all of the students are fluent. If there were any misunderstandings, one student is fluent in both Lisu and Lahu, and was available to translate as needed.

While all of the students show a willingness to participate in the study, several of them also politely let it be known that they did not feel that writing in journals would make a difference in their writing skills. This belief was noted, and thus the student's change of attitude towards the study was added as a question to the final journal entry.

3.2 Instruments

For this study one treatment instrument and four research instruments were used. The triangulation method was used, in order to maximize the amount and type of useful information gathered. Using multiple instruments will ideally show both the student's feelings and reactions to the study as well as any improvement in their writing.

3.2.1 Treatment

For this study, the treatment instrument was the dialogue journals that the students wrote in during the entirety of the experiment. Their purpose was for the students to display their abilities in writing accuracy and writing fluency during and after the study took place. The students wrote on a pre-decided topic for each entry and the researcher responded to the entry, without correcting any errors. The researcher did, in a few cases, subtly recast errors in the response, but this was not a priority and was only done when it was felt that doing so could occur naturally in the response. The researcher responded with questions, sympathy, excitement and general feedback to the students' writings, depending on what exactly they wrote. The response language was grammatically correct, natural sounding and without slang. The researcher tried to respond using a slightly higher level of English than each

individual student had in their entries.   The students received their weekly topic on each Tuesday morning and had until that Friday morning to write their entry.   The researcher explained each topic thoroughly and tried to make sure the students understood what was expected.   The researcher collected the dialogue journals on Friday and read and responded to them over the weekend.   The journals were returned to the students, with all entries responded to, on Tuesday when they received their next journal topic.

A schedule of the dialogue journal topics for the program is as follows:

Week One: Introduction – the students introduce themselves to the researcher.   Suggested ideas for this included family members, hobbies, favorite foods, favorite colors, basic likes and dislikes and country or tribe of origin.

Week Two: Favorite Story – since the students are all studying theology, they were asked to share their favorite religious story and to explain why they like it.

Week Three: Tribes – since the students are all natives of various tribal groups in South East Asia, they were asked to share some facts about their tribe.   Suggested ideas included history, religion, festivals and celebrations, customs and traditions, crafts and housing.

Week Four: Travel – students were asked where in the world they would travel if they had both unlimited time and money.   Students were encouraged to use their imagination to the fullest.

Week Five: Story Trade – students traded a story with the researcher.   First, she told the class a story that fit into one of the four categories.   The students then responded in their journals with a true story of their own from one of the categories.   The four categories are sad, happy, scary or funny stories that really happened.

Week Six: Inventions – students stated what they believed to be the greatest or most useful human invention and then explained why they believed so. Suggested questions to consider - Has it made their lives easier or do they think humanity in general is better because of it?

Week Seven: Idol – students were asked to write about a person who they admire and to explain why this person is their idol.

Week Eight: Five year plan – students were asked to write a tentative plan for the next five years.   What do they hope to do, where do they plan to be, what might they have done etc.

Week Nine: Final thoughts – for the final journal entry, students were asked to write on their thoughts and feelings about the journals.   They were asked how they felt about the experience and if they felt that the journals helped them become better writers.   They were also asked if they felt that the journals should be continued at their learning center.

3.2.2. Data Collection Instruments
The data collection instruments for this study are first, the student dialogue journals and the rubric (Appendix B) and recording table (Appendix C) that was used to mark the scores for writing accuracy and record the results for writing fluency. Secondly, the reflection journal that the researcher kept and the recording table

(Appendix D) used with it, and last, the final dialogue journal entry that the students wrote, with the recording table (Appendix F) that goes with it.

3.2.2.1 Student Dialogue Journals

The primary data collection instruments are the dialogue journal rubric and recording table. The purpose of these instruments is to collect relevant data from the student dialogue journals concerning the students writing accuracy and writing fluency. The rubric for writing accuracy was adapted from Liao and Wong (2010) and Cael (2010) and then adjusted to fit the needs of this study. The table of recording was created by the researcher based on the needs of the study (measurement of writing fluency) which required a more subjective method of measurement.

Every journal entry was read and compared to the rubric to show accuracy, which was then marked for every instance of each listed attribute noted. The journals were scored both progressively, with each entry measured to the one before, and comparatively, with the first entry being compared to the last entry. The same method was used for the recording table, which noted the instances found in the dialogue journals for writing fluency. The writing accuracy rubric was used to answer Research Question # 1 and Objective # 1, while the writing fluency recording table was used to answer Research Question #1 and Objective # 2. Scoring of the journals for writing accuracy was done solely for research purposes; the students did not receive a score or a grade from the journals.

3.2.2.2 Researchers' Analysis Journal

One of the secondary instruments is the researchers' weekly analysis journal. The purpose of this instrument was to collect any additional relevant data about the students' response to the study. The researcher kept a personal journal reflecting on how she thought the students responded to the study, how their writing changed and any unexpected (positive and negative) events that happened. Any attributes noted by the researcher was written down in the related recording table. This instrument was used to answer Research Question # 2 and Objective # 4.

3.2.2.3 Final Dialogue Journal Entry

The other secondary instrument was the final journal entry. The purpose of this instrument was to collect the relevant data on what the students thought about the dialogue journals and the overall study. The students wrote their final journal entry discussing how they felt about the study, if they thought they might like to keep using journals, if their ideas on writing changed and if they felt they had improved at writers. They were also encouraged to add any additional thoughts, feelings or suggestions they may have had. The researcher gave them several guiding questions to assist in their reflections (Appendix E) and their responses were noted down on the related recording table (Appendix F) and placed into three thematic categories; how the students' views towards writing have changes after dialogue journals, if the students' felt that they had improved as writers and if the writing was easier after dialogue journals, and any extra thoughts, opinions, ideas and suggestions the students might have. This instrument was used to answer Research Question # 2 and Objectives # 3 and # 4.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Starting in the first week and continuing until the second to last week of the term, the students wrote an entry in their dialogue journals once per week. The first week the researcher explained what the study measured and what its' overall purpose was. The researcher modeled for the students what form the dialogue journals should take. The students then got their first topic, which was introducing themselves to the researcher. They had all week to finish this journal entry.

At the end of the week on Friday, the researcher collected the journals, responded to the entries the students had written, returned the journals to the students on Tuesday and then gave them a new topic to write on. The researcher explained the topic in detail and checked to make sure all of the students understood what they were going to write about. The students then wrote on the new topic for the next entry but were also encouraged to respond to the researchers' comments and questions from any previous entry. Once again they had all week to write, with the researcher collecting the journals on Friday and returning them on Tuesday, after responding to all of them. The students were repeatedly encouraged to talk to the researcher and to ask any questions they may have had at any time.

The researcher kept a personal journal based on her observations of student behavior and reactions, along with her own personal reactions to the student dialogue journals. The researcher also recorded any additional responses or reactions from the students that she thought might add to the study but were not initially expected to be seen.

The students received the topic for the final journal entry (#9) during the last week of the study after all of the journals had been completed and returned. Students were told the purpose of this final journal entry, which was to determine how the students felt about the study overall and how they felt about their writing skills after the study. They were encouraged to be as honest as possible, so that the researcher would know what they considered positive about the study and what they thought needed to be changed or adjusted. The students had at least one full week to work on their final journal entry. They also had the option of writing any additional thoughts about the journals that were not suggested by the researcher. They were encouraged to talk to the researcher if they had any questions about the final dialogue journal entry.

3.4 Data Analysis
3.4.1 Student Dialogue Journals

The researcher read and re-read the first eight dialogue journal entries written by each student. She scored each entry based on the criteria given in the writing accuracy rubric. Then the scores from the eight entries were compared to see if there was any change, both from the first entry to the eight, and also among any of the other entries. The results for each of the five categories were placed in a table to show the changes, if any, between the eight entries.

The journals were read again for writing fluency, and the recording table was used for this, using grounded theory to analyze these eight dialogue journal entries from each student. Each entry received a record for each of the five categories and their sub-categories based on the criteria from the recording table (discussed in Chapter 2). The first and last entries were compared in these sub-categories to see what change, if any, appeared. The other entries were also compared to each other, to see if any patterns of change could be found.

Each dialogue journal entry was marked once for writing accuracy and noted once for writing fluency, giving two separate set of records for each entry. The final, 9th entry was used for reflection purposes only, as seen in 3.3.3 Students' Final Journal Entry.

The difference between the entries, if any, was used to show development in writing accuracy and writing fluency, additionally, it also answered Research Question #1 and Objectives #1 and #2. This was all done using deductive reasoning, based a grounded theory to data analysis.

For the writing accuracy rubric, the terms used are defined for the purpose of the study as; the students' ability to express themselves through writing while adhering to the conventions of:

Content: Possessing all of the necessary parts. The topic of the writing, the information included, and the purpose of the writing and how well all of this is developed. (From Foroutan, Noordin & Hamzah, 2013; Liao & Wong, 2010)

Vocabulary: The words that the students use. The use of varied words, an attempt to use different, new or more advanced words in writing and the ability to use those words correctly. (From Foroutan, Noordin & Hamzah, 2013; Liao & Wong, 2010)

Organization: The proper way of being arranged. The arrangement of the writing, the logical flow and unity of the writing that shows the thought and planning in how it was developed. (From Song, 1998; Foroutan, Noordin & Hamzah, 2013; Liao & Wong, 2010)

Grammatical Structures: The proper use of grammar and of grammatical structure. (From El-Koumy & Mirjan, 2008)

Mechanics: Proper use of punctuation, spelling and capitalization. (From El-Koumy & Mirjan, 2008; Foroutan, Noordin & Hamzah, 2013)

The rubric used to score the writing accuracy of the dialogue journals for this study was taken from a rubric used by Liao and Wong, (2010) (Appendix A), and with assistance from Cael (2010), it was adapted to fit the uses of this dialogue journal study (Appendix B).

For the writing fluency recording table, the terms used are defined for the purpose of the study as; the students' ability to express themselves through writing while adhering to the conventions of:

Coherence: All the parts fit together well. The topic is well-developed. The organization is good. The student clearly understands the topic and can elaborate on it. The entry shows a sense of unity. (From Peyton et all, 1988)

Creativity: The ability to produce something unique. The student is experimenting with language, they have tried new vocabulary, even if it might not be used perfectly. There is good detail when the topic needs it and the content has a distinctive voice, it has clearly been written by the student and not copied. (From Ulanoff, 1993; Buhrke et all, 2002)

Communication: The ability to send a clear message. The students can make an effort at true communication, regardless of language ability; they go beyond simply writing and try to make a connection with another person. (From Chanthalangsy and Moskalis, 2002; Buhrke et all, 2002)

Development: The ability to make something better or clearer. The student can go into detail about their beliefs and opinions. They can give more than surface and simplistic thoughts about what they think. The student can explain why they have the opinion that they have given, and also give a reasonable, if simple, explanation. (From Ulanoff, 1993; Buhrke et all, 2002)
Length: The student not only writes more sentences per journal entry, but the sentences become longer and more complex as well. (From McIntyre, 1993; Isserlis, 1991)

The table of recording used to note instances of writing fluency for this dialogue journal study was created by the researcher, in order to fit the needs of the study (Appendix C).

3.4.2 Collection of Researchers' Analysis
The researcher's journal was reviewed for information concerning the students' writing, reactions and views towards the study and towards the journals. The researcher compared each entry of her journal to the related recording table and concluded whether or not if the reactions and writings of the students showed a change in their view of dialogue journal writing. Each weekly entry received its own separate table so that any change in the data could be seen. This helped to answer Research Question #2 and Objectives #3 and #4. This was all done using inductive reasoning, based on a grounded approach to data analysis; by which data is collected and then put into the analytical categories that emerge from that data (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

3.4.3 Student's Final Journal Entry
The final dialogue journal entry (#9) that the students wrote was part reflection and part answering guiding questions. The researcher gave the students the guiding questions (Appendix E) and asked them to both answer the questions and to reflect on the dialogue journal writing program as a whole. The entries were recorded using the related classifications (Appendix F) according to grounded theory, allowing any themes to emerge on their own.

Each student had their own table, which the researcher wrote in every time she found a corresponding comment in the journal entry. These comments were sorted into three themes, based on the idea given in Nunan and Bailey (2009), by which the material is read multiple times, until a pattern is seen in the data. The data is then focused into themes that are followed closely by the researcher. The three themes seen in the data were the students' changing views towards writing in English, if the students felt that they had improved as writers and the writing was easier now, and any additional thoughts, ideas and suggestions the students may have and wanted to share.

These themes in the final journal entry showed how the students felt about the journal writing as both a means to become better writers and to enjoy writing in English. It also showed how the students felt about their own progress as writers during the program. This was used to answer Research Question #2 and Objectives #3 and #4.