

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The study aims to identify Thai and Vietnamese university students' English language learning strategies and determine the factors affecting their choices of language learning strategies. This chapter focuses on the methodology employed for data collection and analysis in the current study. The first section describes the population and participants. The subsequent section describes the instruments used in data collection. The last section of this chapter presents the results of the pilot study, the collection, and the analysis of the data of the main study.

#### 3.1 Population and Sampling

The target population of this study is composed of two groups of students: Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students. The following sections describe the selection criteria of academic institutes and participants.

##### 3.1.1 Selection of Academic Institutes

Students were selected from two universities to represent the population of university students in Thailand and Vietnam. It is worth noting that because of the scope and scale of the study, it is not possible that all Thai universities participate in the present study. Therefore, purposive sampling was considered the most suitable approach for this study. According to Merriam (2001: 6), "*purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned*". To insure that the results obtained from the study could be generalized to the target

population, the Faculty of Arts at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand and the Faculty of Linguistics, the Faculty of International Studies, and the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam<sup>1</sup> were selected as sampled institutes. The selection was based on their common characteristics. First, both of these universities are considered one of the top five universities of Thailand ([www.cu-qa.chula.ac.th/suggest/sug\\_answer.asp?](http://www.cu-qa.chula.ac.th/suggest/sug_answer.asp?)), and of Vietnam, respectively ([www.rosalux.de/cms/index.php?id=4848](http://www.rosalux.de/cms/index.php?id=4848)). Second, both are public universities which have long historical background in education. Third, before entering two universities, these students must pass a university entrance examination. Finally, both have the Faculty offering specialized courses on language and literature. Therefore, it can be seen that these two universities are comparable to a certain extent.

### 3.1.2 Participants

Two groups of university students were drawn from these two universities. They had to fulfill four main criteria to be qualified for the study. First, a participant was, at the time of study, either first or second-year students, studying fundamental English courses of the 2006 academic year. Second, their age ranged from 17 to 21 years. Next, all of them had no more than 4-month experience abroad<sup>2</sup>. Finally, all students had at least 6 years<sup>3</sup> of experience of English instruction.

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<sup>1</sup> The university system of Vietnam is different from that of Thailand. That is, *the University of Social Sciences and Humanities* is a constituent part of the Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam.

<sup>2</sup> It is arbitrarily assumed, in the present study, that the experience abroad of more than 4 months may affect the choices of language learning strategies.

<sup>3</sup> In Thailand, students learn English as a compulsory subject from Grade 1 onwards. However, in Vietnam, English is a compulsory subject from Grade 7 to Grade 12. Studying English for at least 6 years, therefore, was taken into account in the present study.

In order to recruit participants from these two universities, the researcher distributed 200 copies of questionnaires to first and second-year students of each university (see 3.3.2 for further details). The returned questionnaires which met the criteria as set forth were recognized the participants of the present study. To this end, the total number of the participants was 136 undergraduates. The Thai participants were 84 Thai EFL students—26 males (31.0%), and 58 females (69.0%). The Vietnamese participants were 52 undergraduate students—24 males (46.2%) and 28 females (53.8%).

The details of the participants in this study are summarized in the following table.

**Table 3.1: Summarized Details of the Participants**

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Faculty</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Level of Study</i>	<i>Gender</i>
Thai University Students	Chulalongkorn University	Arts	17-21 M=19.0	First and Second - year	Male = 26 (31.0 %) Female = 58 (69.0 %) N = 84
Vietnam University Students	The University of Social Science and Humanities	Linguistics, International Studies, and Oriental Studies	17-21 M=19.6	First and Second - year	Male = 24 (46.2 %) Female = 28 (53.8 %) N = 52

### 3.2 Instruments

Two instruments were used in the present study: 1) the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 5.1, and 2) semi-structured interviews.

### 3.2.1 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

There are many possible ways to assess learners' language learning strategies (e.g., written questionnaires, oral interviews, observation, diaries and dialogue journal, etc.); however, the use of the SILL, a questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990) (see 2.2.3 and Appendix A for details) consisting of two parts (background questionnaire and 80-item strategy questionnaire) is a very popular data collection instrument (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The second part containing 80 items of learning strategy statements are classified into 6 categories: Memory category (items 1-15), Compensation category (items 16-40), Cognitive category (items 41-48), Metacognitive category (items 49-64), Affective category (items 65-71), and Social category (items 72-80) (see descriptions of each category in detail on page 21-22). Babbie (1998) explains that questionnaire is a very popular data collection technique because it is self-administered and can be distributed to large groups of subjects at the same time. Moreover, it provides easier ways to collate and analyse data than interviews. Therefore, the SILL was adopted in the current study in order to identify the language learning strategy patterns used by Thai and Vietnamese students when learning English and to gain information about factors affecting the choices of language learning strategies used.

However, to gain information about factors affecting the choices of language learning strategies which the present study aimed to determine, the background questionnaire was adapted. In the process of adapting the background questionnaire, the researcher excluded all items related to the language learning enjoyment because they are not directly relevant to the present study. Since this study focuses on investigating the role of gender, motivation, and experience in studying English, the researcher added two items together with their sub-questions focusing on variables:

motivation (no.12: Why do you want to study English?), and experience in studying English (no.13: Your experience in studying English). In addition, to facilitate the understanding of the participants, the researcher changed the phrase in the SILL from “*learning a new language*” to “*learning English*” in every item. In this case, the adapted version (see Appendix B) was approved by the two scholars for their clarity and consistency.

### 3.2.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995), “*interviews, whether formal or not, provide personalized information on many types of strategies that would not be available through observation, but they take considerable time from the teacher and the students.*” Swetnam (2000) also explains that interviewing is a method of collecting data that can stand on its own or be a follow-up to another method. It may offer insights to help researchers interpret responses to questionnaires. Moreover, any ambiguities or misunderstandings of the questions can be clarified. Also, it is flexible in the sense that the interviewer may change the questions if necessary.

In the light of considerations discussed above, in the present study, therefore, the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C) were also conducted with the selected participants as a follow-up instrument to check for the truthfulness, to elicit the answers from the SILL about their language learning strategies when learning English, and to gain more information about the second and third variable—motivation and experience in studying English. The questions focused on how they learned English and why they used such a language learning strategy according to the categorization of the six sets of learning strategies covered in the test.

### 3.3 Research Procedures

#### 3.3.1 Pilot Study

Since no previous studies using the 80-item SILL report the time used for SILL administration, the pilot study was conducted in order to 1) estimate the amount of time needed for a participant to complete the SILL questionnaire and 2) to assess the participants' comprehension in the SILL questions in English. To this end, the results of the pilot study were analyzed so that relevant adaptations could be made to the instrumentation and procedures prior to the main study.

The pilot study was conducted with 15 students studying at the Faculty of Political Science and the Faculty of Law, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, in the second week of November, 2006. Despite certain differences between the participants in the pilot study and in the main study, they shared some common characteristics including their field of studies from high schools, and backgrounds of studying English at the university.

The procedures of the pilot study were as follows. The researcher asked for the permission from the instructor to distribute 15 copies of the SILL, and informed the instructor of the purposes of the study. However, given that the questionnaire is quite long, and the time spent on the test administration might disrupt the class, the researcher asked the students to complete the SILL at their convenience. They were asked to write the time they started and finished in order to determine the time to be allocated in the main study.

A total of 12 questionnaires were returned. The pilot study showed that the participants could complete the SILL without difficulties. Moreover, it was found that 40 minutes was appropriate for the test administration. Therefore, in the main study, the participants were given 40 minutes to complete the test.

### 3.3.2 Data Collection in the Main Study

Data were collected at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, in the first week of December, 2006, and at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam, in the third week of December, 2006. Steps in data collection are as follows:

1) The researcher explained the department heads and classroom teachers in Thailand and in Vietnam the purposes and procedures involved in order to ask for permission and cooperation for data collection.

2) Then, 400 copies of the SILL were distributed to Thai and Vietnamese undergraduates. The researcher explained the purpose and procedures of the study. The students were allowed to complete the questionnaire at their own convenience within 40 minutes. In addition, it was emphasized there were no right or wrong responses, and the findings would be kept confidential and used for this research only. The students were also informed that the answer would be useful and beneficial to both Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students in order to learn English more effectively; therefore, honest responses would be appreciated.

3) After the questionnaires were collected, the researcher selected the participants who would participate in the interview based on the data elicited from the questionnaires which met the criteria in 3.1.2.

4) The researcher conducted interviews with the selected participants to elicit information about language learning strategies from the SILL. In this process, the researcher laid out the criteria for recruiting 8 informants from each nationality group of the participants as follows.

In terms of motivation, to recruit both highly-motivated and lowly-motivated students<sup>4</sup> from the participants– Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students, their answer of each sub-question of the question no.12, “*Why do you study English:*” in the background questionnaire would be rated, namely, 2 points for “*strongly agree*”, 1 point for marking “*moderately agree*”, and no point for no response<sup>5</sup>.

Each semi-structured interview took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. To prevent possible misunderstanding that could be caused by language barrier, the interviews were conducted in Thai, the native language of both the researcher and the Thai participants. For Vietnamese students, the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, with the help of a researcher’s assistant who is fluent in Vietnamese. Once again, the informants were informed that the conversation would be kept confidential and used for research only. With the permission of the informants, the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively.

Figure 2 summarizes the procedures of data collection in the present study.

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<sup>4</sup> Since the literature revealed that the degree of motivation might differently affect the choice of language learning strategies, the researcher separated the questionnaires of the participants into two groups; one was highly-motivated and another was lowly-motivated group, in order to prove whether or not they employ differently language learning strategies.

<sup>5</sup> The students who got more than 15 points (60%) were considered highly-motivated students, while those of less than 15 points were grouped in lowly-motivated group. The cut-off point may seem a bit high. The rather high cut-off score would be beneficial in enhancing the distinction between the two groups of students by motivation. However, this criterion is arbitrarily established.



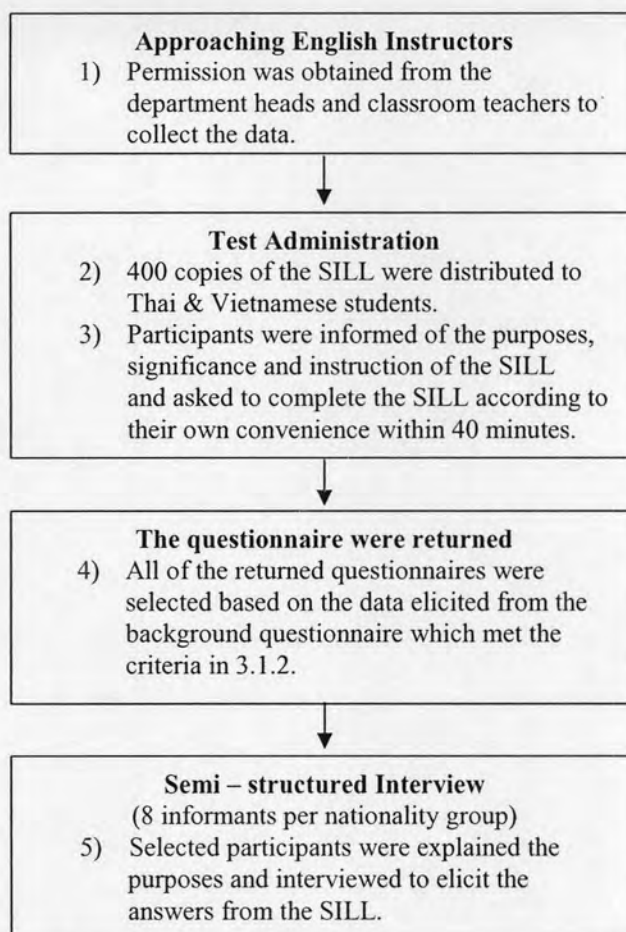


Figure 2. Procedures of Data Collection in the Present Study

### 3.3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out as follows:

1) In order to identify language learning strategies of Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students, the data from the returned questionnaires of each student group which met selection criteria were analyzed based on the six of learning strategy types classified by Oxford (1990), by using descriptive statistics: means, frequency of score, and standard deviation. The statistical analyses were performed using SPSS program.

2) To compare Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students' language learning strategies, the data from no.1 were compared in terms of similarities and

differences in using language learning strategies.

3) To get more in-depth information about language learning strategies, the interview responses were analysed qualitatively.

4) The data from the background questionnaire were analysed to determine factors affecting the choices of language learning strategies. Once again, it should be noted that, in this study, the researcher intended to examine the roles of three variables that might affect the choices of language learning strategies. They are: 1) gender, 2) motivation, and 3) experience in studying English.

To do so, first of all, in terms of gender, after the researcher got all questionnaires from both groups of Thai and Vietnamese undergraduate students, the questionnaires in each group were divided into two groups according to gender—male and female. In addition, in order to analyze the data of each gender group, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations and frequencies was calculated using SPSS. After that, the data were compared within each group, and across groups, using T-test for significant differences.

In terms of motivation, all questionnaires from both groups were analysed again according to the answers to the question “*Why do you want to learn English?*” (no.12). First, to separate highly-motivated and lowly-motivated students, the data from each group were analysed according to the scores of each sub-question (see 5 in 3.3.2), using SPSS program to calculate descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations and frequencies. Then, the data were analysed using T-test for significant differences to compare the data within each group and across groups.

To focus on experience in studying English of each student group, the researcher analysed the answers to the question “*Your experiences in studying English*” (no.13) in the background questionnaire. In this regard, the questionnaires

were separated into two groups: group 1- those from the respondents with experience from language center and those from going abroad in an English speaking country but no more than 4 months, group 2- those who had no experience from these two sources. The data was then analyzed by using descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations and frequencies, using SPSS program. The data were also compared within each group and across groups, using T-test for significant differences.

5) After having obtained the data from no.1 to 4, the researcher described the results of how three variables affected the choices of language learning strategies by combining the data from the interviews to elicit and gain more detail about each of the six categories of learning strategies.

The procedures of data analysis are summarized in Figure 3.

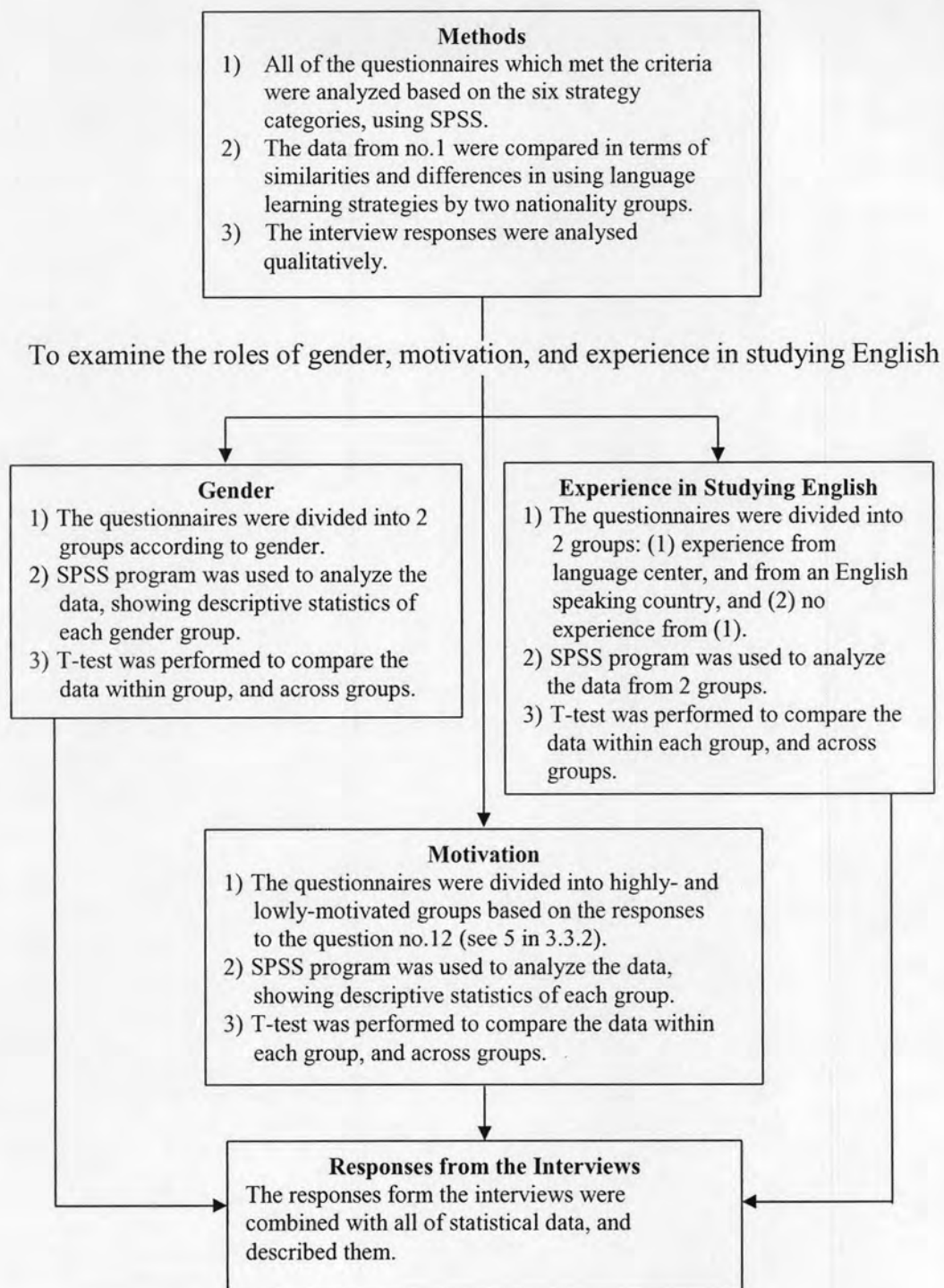


Figure 3. Procedures of Data Analysis in the Present Study

## **Conclusion**

The present study was conducted with 84 Thai and 52 Vietnamese university students. The Thai participants were studying at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand, while Vietnamese participants at the Faculty of Linguistics, Foreign Languages, and Oriental Studies, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam. Two instruments were used in this study. The first instrument was the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning Version 5.1, containing 80 items developed by Oxford (1990), together with the adapted background questionnaire. The second one was interview questions developed by the researcher. Data collected from the SILL and the semi-structured interviews were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, since the present study aims to investigate whether three factors: gender, motivation, and experience in studying English affect the choices of language learning strategies of these students, T-test was performed to highlight the significant differences of the data within each group and across groups.