

Methodology chapter sample

Procedure

My research adopted a case study approach. The 12 voluntary participants were divided into three groups (Group 1, 2, 3). Four of them were paired with a partner they were not familiar with before the study.

At the beginning of week 4, all the participants were required to do the first task with their assigned partner through instant exchanging in an online text-based CMC environment. Then, they saved their MSN 'written' exchanges by copying and pasting them to a word processing program and sent me the file at the end of the week 4. I corrected and marked their written exchanges and sent them back individually by email. I also provided the learners with explicit feedback with explanations of the errors they made in written records in a later face-to-face session.

After receiving feedback, students in Group 1 and 2 carried out the first task orally with their partner in voice-based CMC environments (Group 1 with the use of microphones and webcams; Group 2 with the use of microphones only); students in Group 3 carried out the same oral activities in a face-to-face environment in week 6.

All the participants had to record their spoken performances. Participants in the two synchronous groups recorded their online spoken practice using Audacity software, which was free for downloading and was provided on the class website. They were required to familiarize themselves before the study with the software by following the user instructions given on the website. Participants in Group 3 were asked to record their face-to-face spoken practice by using an MP3 player. All the participants needed to submit their sound files to me by email. And then they were invited to repeat their spoken activities publicly in the subsequent face-to-face sessions.

After listening to the files of each pair, each pair was given their marks and feedback by email, pointing out each learner's pronunciation and grammar errors. I also asked the learners to practise those common pronunciation errors that appeared in their sound files in the following face-to-face sessions after pointing out the errors most of them made and providing them with correct sounds for those errors.

All the participants had to receive instruction in regular face-to-face sessions and then

practised given tasks at an appointed time after the classes. Dörnyei (2001a) claims that “making the teaching materials relevant for the learners” (p.29) is one strategy classroom teachers can use to generate students’ initial motivation. He suggested that teachers can discover the topics students want to learn and build them into the curriculum as far as possible (Dörnyei, 2001b). Following his suggestion, I provided a number of topics to the participants and had them select their favourite topics at the first session of the course. Then I created course materials which were based on the learners’ topic selection.

Some French learning websites were also chosen to be teaching content of the course and presented to learners in the classroom. The use of these authentic materials was intended to make French ‘real’ to the participants and therefore enhance their language-related values and attitudes (Dörnyei, 2001b).

The semester constituted cycles of three-week practice on three tasks. The task practice procedures and task content were posted on the class website in order that learners could follow the design of the study and complete the tasks appropriately. Additionally, they were invited to post questions or share information on the classroom bulletin board, where I provided course-related information for those students who were absent from the classes or who learned slowly during the classes to catch up with the course outside the classroom.