

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

This research was designed as a case study considering it was focused to conduct an in-depth examination particularly on a learning process phenomenon for IELTS writing task 2 in its natural setting of the training bounded by space and time (Alwasilah, 2002; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In short, it was particularistic, descriptive and heuristic (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Such characteristics were also applicable because this study was oriented to two representatives of students only and it resulted in a comprehensive description of their writing development and the contributing factors on their learning, obtained from three diverse data collection procedures during a period of an IELTS preparation course (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 2003).

The procedures utilized in this case study were those commonly used in other qualitative research approaches (Gay et al., 2009) , i.e. students' writing scripts, questionnaire, and interview. Although this study was focused to elaborate the data qualitatively, some information was actually presented in numbers and codes. Such quantitative presentation was made possible in this qualitative study since the numerical data used were only intended to identify and correctly characterize the diversity of actions, perceptions, or beliefs in the setting or group studied (Anyan, 2013; Malik & Hamied, 2016; Maxwell, 2010). Later, however, information gained from all data collection instruments was integrated in the interpretation or data analysis phase either to note the convergence of the findings as a way to strengthen the knowledge claims of the study, or to explain any lack of convergence that may result.

### 3.2. Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted in a language center located in a university in Bandung city. The language center provides varied services in language training and testing, and the IELTS preparation course is a relatively new program offered. Since this research is considered as an important mutual effort to improve the IELTS preparation program, permission on access to site and participants becomes unconstrained (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, the researcher was also assigned to be one of the teaching staff members for the program, and therefore direct interaction with the participants during their learning process gave wider opportunity and flexibility in collecting the data.

This research involved only two participants through selective or purposeful sampling (Coyne, 1997; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015; Koerber & McMichael, 2008), not due to limited number of participants, but in order to be able to reveal important qualities, such as argumentation and coherence in writing, which cannot be accommodated by automated or computerized analysis (Barkaoui, 2016). Besides, the purposeful sampling method, which is significant to be addressed in a case study (Gentles et al., 2015), was made possible as the researcher made several observations at the site and was able to decide who to sample and who possesses certain traits or qualities according to the aims of the study. Two course participants engaged in this research were so-called with pseudonyms, Maria and Angel, since this method can be considered as a solution to the issues of confidentiality and privacy (Lahman et al., 2015). The pseudonyms were also carefully chosen to represent their gender and the possible ethnic expression of the given names.

Furthermore, Maria and Angel were chosen not to increase the variability of the research, in line with a claim about the limitation of one of previous studies about the effects of different contexts involved (Barkaoui, 2016). The selection was made by running on a background check. Although never taking IELTS preparation training before, both of them were selected due to their different experiences reflecting different contexts mentioned in the previous study. Maria

graduated from English major and became an IELTS test repeater, and Julia had non-English academic background and no-experience in taking the IELTS test.

### **3.3. Data Instruments**

The data were collected through a within-method procedure using students' writing scripts, survey questionnaire, and interview techniques. This procedure combining more than two methods in studying the same phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2003; Hussein, 2009; Wilson, 2014) was a strategy for accessing multiple sources of evidence termed methodological triangulation, which is regarded beneficial in confirming findings, collecting more comprehensive data, increasing validity, and enhancing understanding on phenomenon studied (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Fulcher, 2010). Further, the three techniques employed in this research were considered among the most common and efficient ones in collecting qualitative data (Elmusharaf, 2015; Sargeant, 2012).

#### **3.3.1. The Students' Writing Scripts**

One of valuable sources of qualitative information in this research is the students' writing scripts, and document review method was chosen to provide data for a systematic document analysis, for an insight on contextual history/information on study group, and for an efficient time control in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2003; Watkins, 2012). This method was considered relevant to collect sufficient data to answer the first research question which was dealing with the development of the students' writing ability as reflected in their writing products.

In this research, the students' writing scripts were collected after the students took four test simulations before and after the IELTS preparation course. Such timing is important because the atmosphere during the simulation tests are

similar to that in the official test, and therefore the data obtained could be as objective as possible for analysis. Documents from the first simulation test were obtained in April 2018, and this first simulation test was actually intended to identify the basic proficiency of the students. The rest of the documents were obtained from a sequence of simulation tests conducted in May, June, and July 2018. Different from the first one, those tests were in the formative framework which was used as a part of the course in order to improve students' learning (Fulcher, 2010; Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

### 3.3.2. Questionnaire

After the documents were collected, the students were given questionnaire which functions as a self-reporting or self-reflection medium (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), in this case, on factors and modes that may have influenced their learning process for IELTS writing task 2. Items included in the questionnaire were based on and adapted from the components in the washback model of students' learning (Shih, 2007). Since the model is an enriched model emphasizing on learners' point of view, the constituents were considered relevant to acquire information related to the third question and to give leads to elaborate the answer for the fourth research question.

The questionnaire consists of thirty items and is divided into two parts. Considering the number of components to be responded by the students, the questionnaire was designed in a semi-structured formation, meaning that most of the items in Part B were close-ended, but a few in Part A were open-ended because the response on the latter totally relied on the students' ideas (Gay et al., 2009; Nunan, 1991). Three open-ended items in the first part were included in the questionnaire worksheet and they were conveyed to identify students' background information from their brief responses to the questions about their decision to take IELTS. Meanwhile, the other close-ended items in Part B were formulated to inspect any factor from the washback model that influenced students' learning

process. As seen in Table 3.1, there are twenty seven statements divided into three sections based on the major categories of the contributive factors.

To provide a valid questionnaire, all statements included into the categories in Table 3.1 were focused on a single brief idea and set side-by-side with the response column (Gay et al., 2009). Students were asked to give response by putting a mark on a corresponding score column from a five-point Likert scale attached to descriptors with a range of 5 (*always or almost always true*), 4 (*usually true*), 3 (*somewhat true*), 2 (*usually not true*), 1 (*never or almost never true*).

Table 3.1. The division of statements reflecting contributive factors based on the washback model of students' learning (adapted from Shih, 2007).

No.	Category	Section
1.	Extrinsic factors	Statements A.1. to statements A.13.
2.	Intrinsic factors	Statements B.1. to statements B.3.
3.	Test factors	Statements C.1. to statements C.12.

Students were also informed that there were no true or false answers in the questionnaire. Before distributed to students, the questionnaire was translated into bahasa Indonesia to avoid misunderstanding, and it was then pilot-tested by asking a number of thoughtful and critical individuals to examine and verify the completeness of the questionnaire (Gay et al., 2009; Nunan, 1991). With a number of modifications based on comments and suggestions from pilot test group, the questionnaire was finally distributed to students to be filled in under researchers' attendance to allow any questions or uncertainties to be addressed immediately with the questionnaire designer (Cohen et al., 2007).

### 3.3.3. Interview

To counteract the inadequacy of examining social relationship or intricate patterns of interaction and to assure the indication from the questionnaire (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), data were further collected through a semi-structured interview which gave the researcher certain power or control over the course of the interview, but flexibility did still exist (Gay et al., 2009; Nunan, 1991). Therefore, questions given to the students were based on leads from the questionnaire and relevant points from the document review, and were oriented to discover influences of the test on students' learning and psychology (Shih, 2007). Elaboration on those aspects was efficient to provide pertinent information to answer the fourth research question of how some factors might have influenced students' learning and their writing development.

During the interview, the order of the questions given was based on the order of the topics appearing in the questionnaire items, and three up to five open-ended questions, either pre-arranged or unprompted, followed up each topic. The interview was also conducted in bahasa Indonesia under one-on-one scheme in a semi-formal situation to consider the large number of questions given and the possibility of expanded discussion and to keep the students relaxed and compliant to share information. In the same time, students' responses were tape-recorded since this instrument was considered effective to provide objective and naturalistic response from the interviewees, to record interviewer's contribution, and to facilitate documentation and further analysis after the event (Nunan, 1991).

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed to obtain relevant points leading to the identification of changes in students' writing before and after the IELTS preparation course. Since the data were collected by means of three different instruments (writing script, questionnaire, and interview), the data obtained from each technique were analyzed through different techniques.

Following rudimentary steps of analyzing qualitative types of data, the analysis process for qualitative data generally took at least three iterative phases; reading/ memoing to become familiar with the data and to identify potential themes, examining the data thoroughly to provide detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, and activity, and classifying, coding and grouping pieces of data into themes (Gay et al., 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Watkins, 2012). Meanwhile, data transformation technique was particularly implemented by qualifying the numerical data, and successively consolidating both types of data to instigate an integrated data interpretation process (Creswell, 2003; Gay et al., 2009).

#### **3.4.1. Data from the Students' Writing Scripts**

A flexible and widely-used technique to analyze textual data from participants' writing scripts is content analysis, which is regarded useful for examining trends and patterns in document review (Bowen, 2009; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Stemler, 2001). There were eight documents obtained from IELTS simulations tests participated by the students. As suggested, the analysis of the qualitative data from the document involved skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation to determine its relevance to the research problem and purpose (Bowen, 2009). More specifically, content analysis techniques in this study involved coding, categorizing, comparing, and concluding processes (Cohen et al., 2007). In coding phase, all documents were firstly read to identify apparent structure of students' writing scripts. Then, they were examined and categorized mainly based on the four criteria; task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and grammatical range and accuracy, which were drawn from the public version of IELTS writing task 2 band descriptor.

To ensure the reliability, the accuracy, and the fairness of the scoring of the students' writing scripts, the scoring was conducted by two raters (Fulcher, 2010; IELTS, 2018; Uysal, 2009). The first rater was the researcher himself and the second was Arif, a pseudonym, who was also assigned to teach writing

materials in the students' IELTS preparation class together with the researcher. Due to limited resources to involve certified IELTS examiners in this study, the researcher and Arif were considered as credible alternatives since they could meet the Minimum Professional Requirements of an IELTS examiner, specifically in the areas of qualifications, teaching experience, and professional attributes and interpersonal skills (Council, 2014). In brief, both of them have a degree in education from a reputable institution, have more than three years' full-time TEFL teaching experience related to adult students, including in IELTS preparation program, and always act professionally during their work.

With his role as a teacher and a rater in the training program, the researcher was regarded as an insider-researcher who chose to study a group to which he belonged (Greene, 2014; Unluer, 2012). This condition may unfortunately bring subjective or narrowed perception, or result in the researcher's bias due to potential influences from the researcher's personal beliefs, experiences, and values during the research process. However, being an insider-researcher was also beneficial as it can lead to a greater understanding of the culture being studied, a natural flow of social interaction, and an established intimacy which promotes both the telling and the judging of truth. Besides, to cope with the weaknesses, the triangulation technique was implemented in this research to act as a measure in building trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln and Guba, in Greene, 2014). To the researcher personally, the result of the study can be shared to the students as a feedback about their learning process.

Further, the result of this examination was then compiled to present a comparison of the average band scores of all students' writing scripts and more specific scores for each aspect of IELTS writing task 2 band descriptor. From the comparison, an analysis was conducted to seek an answer for the first research question about the extent of students' writing development from time to time.



### 3.4.2. Data from Questionnaire

Further investigation was done by extracting data from the questionnaire. Since the questionnaire was constructed in a semi-structured formation, data obtained from the open-ended questions in part A were qualitative and those from the closed-ended questions in part B were numerical. The questionnaires were firstly verified to identify and eliminate errors made by respondents in terms of their completeness, accuracy, and uniformity. Then, they were resumed with data reduction process implemented by coding the responses manually, not computerized, since the survey in this study was designed for a small scale (Cohen et al., 2007).

The coding process was only applied to items in part B, but actually the coding frame was developed before the questionnaire was distributed, or in other words, it was precoded. This strategy was considered effective since the frame could be printed as Likert scale on the questionnaire together with the items (Gay et al., 2009). As a result, during the analysis stage, the numerically precoded answers from students could be reduced or qualified more easily based on the descriptors of the scale. Afterward, data from both parts of the questionnaire were combined and analyzed further to identify the range of factors that influenced students' learning process.

### 3.4.3. Data from Interview

Analysis on the interview record was crucial to validate and provide support for the result of analysis on the questionnaire, specifically to discover how the influences were actualized. By following generic steps to analyze qualitative data (Creswell, 2003), the first step to analyze data from the interview was transcribing the recordings. The transcript was typed in a table to provide a space for coding or examining and organizing materials into categories derived from the concepts underlying the study. The coding was conducted by labeling relevant lines from the interview with the components from the washback model of students' learning

(Shih, 2007). Afterward, further elaboration on the coded script was implemented and it was intended to identify whether the influences had impact on the students' learning process, especially in terms of content of learning, time of learning, learning strategies, learning motivation, and test anxiety. The elaboration could also recognize factors contributing to the impacts or whether those factors influenced one another. Discussion on those substantial points was combined with relevant points of information from the analysis of the documents and the questionnaire.