

Challenges in Conducting Classroom-Based Research in EFL Settings

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This article reports on methodological issues faced in carrying out a classroom-based study in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting in an Indonesian university that may have relevance for other planning studies in similar settings. The study investigated the pedagogical value of communicative tasks in an EFL setting. Within the topic of how communicative tasks might be used to generate interactive discourse among adult English students in a foreign language classroom, it examined the oral discourse of such students and their teacher during selected communicative tasks. This article describes the study, including its background, research design, context and research procedures. It then focuses on the challenges faced during data collection and how they were dealt with, and concludes with some lessons learned about carrying out classroom-based research in EFL contexts.

Key words: Classroom-based research, EFL setting, communicative tasks

Conducting research, including classroom-based research, requires understanding the research process and its implementation using an appropriate approach, whether it is qualitative, quantitative, or both. Research may be viewed as a process in which the researcher engages in certain steps in order to investigate an issue (Creswell, 2002). Creswell further puts forward a working definition of research:

Research is a cyclical process of steps that typically begins with identifying a research problem or issue of study. It then involves reviewing the literature, specifying a purpose for the study, collecting and analyzing data, and forming an interpretation of the information. This process culminates in a report, disseminated to audiences, that is evaluated and used in the educational community. (Creswell, 2002, p. 8)

Along with these steps, there are challenges that the researcher has to anticipate and face. In this article, which deals with classroom-based research within the qualitative approach, the data collecting step and the challenges involved when the researcher is commencing a field work are of particular interest. During this step the researcher depends on other people as participants for the success of his/her project.

Qualitative research textbooks (e.g., Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) offer descriptions of research approaches and explanations of how they are realized, including ways of collecting data within a specific approach. However, they do not typically address instances of the data collecting process. These textbooks warn the researcher of having to face issues that will need to be resolved, and suggest that the researcher should reflect on potential issues in order to anticipate possible problems. For example, Patton (2002) cautions that things may not turn out as planned, due to methodological issues. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 60) point out that “being out in the field does not afford one the luxury of videotapes, soundproof rooms, and high-quality recording equipment,” and so, Creswell (2002) suggests that any equipment that is needed should be located and its use organized in advance. Another more complex methodological issue is the fact that the researcher may have participants from a different culture (Bresler & Ardichvili, 2002; Robinson-Pant, 2005); and even within the same culture, the participants may have their own agendas that have to be respected (McKay, 2006; Schostak, 2002). Resolving these issues is, in fact, key to the success of data collection, but they are not addressed in detail in any research textbook because they are usually context dependent. As Razak (2005, p. 87) asserts, regarding her qualitative study in Malaysia, “the crux of the matter is

that the product of an interview is not as meaningful and significant as the instances of the process, which were not addressed in any research books.” She further reflects that the success of her study relied on “the depth of [her] understanding of the cultural context and the locality [she] was in” (Razak, 2005, p. 87). It is the purpose of this article to report on the author’s reflections on methodological issues faced in carrying out a classroom-based study in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting in an Indonesian university that may have relevance for other planning studies in similar settings.

Since the study was conducted in an Indonesian context with particular characteristics at a specific time and place, it is a real life case study with real people facing real issues. Thus, it extends classroom-based research, which has mainly been carried out in ESL (English as a second language) settings, to EFL settings. Like other classroom studies using a qualitative approach, participants need to be recognized and approached as full human beings who have their own agendas and purposes (McKay, 2006; Schostak, 2002), which may be influenced by larger contextual factors, that may not necessarily be the same as the researcher’s. As a result, problems may arise during any stage of the data collection.

This article first describes the study under reflection in terms of its background, design, and context. It then focuses on the process of data collection in this context, including its procedures, the challenges that arose and how they were dealt with. Finally, it concludes with some lessons learned about doing classroom-based research in EFL contexts.

THE STUDY UNDER REFLECTION

Background of the Study

One of the problems in foreign language instruction, in this case English as a foreign language (EFL), has been how to provide quality linguistic input for

learners. In non-English-speaking contexts, learners primarily get exposure to the second language (L2) in the language classroom. One possible way of providing input and interaction opportunities to students is through communicative task-based instruction. As students carry out tasks, they are engaging in purposeful activities which focus on meaning and require both comprehension and production of the language. These are activities which have been shown to promote language learning (Foster, 1999). Most of the research on interaction during communicative tasks has taken place in ESL classrooms among students representing diverse first languages (L1) where English is necessarily the language of communication, and much of it has been carried out in well-controlled experimental settings, focusing on learners, and particularly on the language they produce (see Mackey, 2007). However, there is surprisingly little research to date that focuses on the use of communicative tasks and student discourse in real, working classrooms in EFL settings (Hasan, 2006). The current study aims to help fill some of the gaps since it examines student discourse while completing communicative tasks in a natural, existing EFL classroom.

The research topic was how communicative tasks might be used to generate interactive discourse in such a setting. The context was a course in academic oral English for undergraduate medical students with intermediate English proficiency level at a university in Manado, Indonesia. The study looked at the oral discourse that EFL students and their teacher generate when carrying out selected tasks. The main purpose was to explore the nature and content of the L2 discourse of the teacher and students that arose from doing such tasks, as this might relate to language development and related attitudes. Its focus was on how communicative tasks could promote oral peer interaction in the EFL classroom, which in turn might promote more effective L2 learning.

Overview of the Research Design

The research described here was a descriptive case study. Creswell (1998)

defines a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). What characterizes a case study is not the topic of inquiry, but the unit of analysis, which is a single entity (Merriam, 2002), such as an individual student or teacher, a classroom, a school or school district, a program, or an event. As a bounded system, a case study allows for varied qualitative strategies to be incorporated into the case. For purposeful sampling, I studied an ordinary and accessible case and selected the sample from which I expected to learn the most. My case was a specific university EFL classroom over a period of one academic term. As part of the research design, the teacher implemented four selected communicative tasks over the term in alternation with the existing curriculum in which, although it included communicative activities, whole group, teacher-fronted activities were still dominant.

The study examined this academic EFL classroom with respect to whether and how the communicative tasks generated interactive oral discourse among the students and their non-native EFL teacher and investigated the characteristics of this discourse. Students’ task related oral (and supplementary written) language use during peer interaction in the L2 and that of the teacher during task performance were described. Content analysis of this discourse and other data provided information about students’ and teacher’s attitudes toward the communicative tasks and about students’ self-perceived lexical development.

The study involved one course section with a teacher and 27 students, covering both the sessions when they worked on selected communicative tasks and the regular whole-group sessions. Thus, it was bounded by time and place to a certain schedule and classroom, fitting Merriam’s (1988) point that case study research is concerned with description and interpretation within a bounded context. A pilot study was conducted at the beginning of the course for logistical and instrument refinement. It presented challenges that led to several methodological decisions, including the substitution of manual tape recorders in small group discussions for the planned voice activated digital

recorders (which recorded too much background noise). Furthermore, whole-class video recording was undertaken during subsequent task implementation (to aid in later identification of the participants and interpretation of recordings). It also became clear that specific teacher training/orientation would be needed before each task implementation. Student guidelines on the use of tape recorders were also prepared and finally, it was decided that small groups of four students with mixed gender (two females and two males) were ideal for task implementation. Clearly, the on-site pilot study in which procedures and instruments were tried out with key participants in the study context was a vital part of the research process.

While observing the chosen EFL classroom for four months, I was present during all class sessions, approximately two hours per week, to establish rapport and to minimize the distance between myself and the participants. It also allowed me to familiarize myself fully with the context and participants. I did not intervene in classroom activities unless asked by the participants, particularly during task implementation sessions.

After each of the four communicative task sessions, I analyzed the audio-recordings of teacher discourse and interaction among participant subgroups for eight selected students, representative of the class in ability range and gender. This allowed me to examine their oral language use, vocabulary learning, and attitudes toward the tasks over time and to make any needed adaptations to ensure the quality of the data collected. I attempted to understand and describe the students' perspectives from observation of their language use during specific instructional activities and from both individual/small group debriefing session after task performance with them and end of course interviews.

The study of these eight students was developed, "not to represent the world, but to represent the case", to understand its particularity and complexity (Stake, 1994, p. 245). The issues of what and how much might be learned from the case were examined in a comprehensive description in Tulung (2008). With respect to the issue of generalizability, given the focus on a single unit, the author follows Merriam's (2002) assertion that the reader

must determine whether the case is transferable to other situations.

Description of the Research Context

Research site. The research was conducted in university EFL classes for undergraduate medical students in Manado, Indonesia. There are two dominant languages in Manado: Melayu Manado, a language that people speak in their daily life, and Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia that people use on formal occasions and for publications. Unlike Bahasa Indonesia, whose main function is for written communication, Melayu Manado is used primarily for oral communication in informal interaction, such as between family and friends, between employers and employees, and in other everyday exchanges. It is occasionally mixed with Bahasa Indonesia in formal settings, such as classrooms or offices.

English is taught and learned at school as a foreign language. In the larger society, it is used only in places or occasions where people work with or talk to foreigners. While some exposure to English is available through TV programs, films, internet, and reading materials (textbooks and newspapers), access to these sources is not equal for all students. The medical students participating in the present study were young adults, who had had English instruction at primary and secondary schools for about eight years, and had an intermediate level of English proficiency. These students had already used and would continue to use English receptively in written form, as they needed to read popular and academic English texts during their undergraduate studies. They would also need productive oral/written English later during their internship and professional lives.

EFL course for pre-medical students. The research was carried out at the university's Language Center, which offers English programs/courses. The Communication Skills course in which the teaching innovation and research took place was taught weekly in 2-hour sessions for 14 weeks (one semester). The course was based on a textbook of nine units, compiled by the teaching staff at the Center, which had been updated from the previous course to

enhance the emphasis on interactive language use. Communicative objectives were specified for the course: at the end students should be better able to express personal information and complaints related to pain, discuss the diagnosis and treatments of illnesses in English, and understand language functions. It should also enhance their vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation, and their ability to express ideas in accurate sentences.

The Communication Skills course was a non-credit, extra-curricular course, but undergraduate medical students were nonetheless required to complete it successfully. It was offered in the second semester for first year students and above. An English test was administered by the Center before the course started to place them according to their proficiency levels. This test took the form of a role play between a patient and a doctor dealing with common illnesses. Based on the test, the students were grouped by proficiency levels into five classes with 20 to 28 students, taught by different teachers. The data collected for the research were taken from an intermediate proficiency level class. The participant teacher was a non-native speaker of English who shared the same L1 as the students and had herself learned English as foreign language.

In addition to a required attendance of 75% of the classes, the students needed to complete various assignments and two role-play exams to determine their success/failure in the course. The existing syllabus was organized according to different language functions (e.g., describing complaints, giving instruction and advice) with topics related to English for medical purposes. Thus, it could be considered as an ESP (English for Specific Purpose) course. Activities were varied, ranging from matching sentences with pictures, listening to and completing written dialogues, completing and orally practicing dialogues, unscrambling dialogues, to role-playing and creating new dialogues. These were usually done individually or in pairs, and there was occasional language focus (i.e., grammar) for teachers to explain. A typical class usually began with the whole-group approach, with teacher explanation and individual vocabulary or listening exercises; continued with oral dialogue modeling/completing/practicing or role-playing,

either in the whole group or in pairs; and ended with students creating or performing their own dialogues in pairs.

Communicative tasks used. The study treatment involved four sessions during which communicative tasks replaced the regular curriculum. Two types of communicative tasks were selected for the study: *jigsaw* and *decision making* (two of each). They were selected because it has been shown in the literature that these two task types are effective in promoting language learning (see Ellis, 2003; Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993). Jigsaw tasks have a single outcome and provide each student with part of information in a text that s/he needs to share to complete the task. Decision making tasks provide each student with the same information needed to complete the task, and have a number of possible outcomes. Thus, while working in small groups, the students were encouraged to talk about topics in the texts, and needed to get their meaning across through interaction and to work together to solve problems. These task types had not been used with the students for this course prior to the study.

In preparing the tasks, I reviewed the regular Communicative Skills course materials and methods, and adapted them to create the four reading-based communicative tasks. While the modifications made to the materials in the current textbook in creating the two jigsaw tasks were considerable, only minor modifications were needed for the two decision making tasks, since this type of task was already employed in the newly updated textbook. In order to create the jigsaw tasks, the written dialogues or written information on patients in the textbook, which were intended to be read or listened to and completed, were first turned into patients' cases with basic information (e.g., name, age, gender, complaints, diagnosis, and treatment). This information was then reorganized into written notes for each student in a group providing complementary partial information about each patient. A patients' information table was also created to be filled in by the group. Each student would have a note with different information to share in order to complete the patients' information table. As for the decision making tasks, the adaptation was only in the instruction part to accommodate the design of small group and task

procedures, because the activities employed were already oriented toward decision making.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Procedure

As Merriam (1988) indicates, in qualitative case study research, “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 52). Consequently, as the researcher I was the one who collected all the data. In order to have a holistic analysis, I used multiple sources, including student and teacher questionnaires, classroom observations, audio-taped classroom communicative task sessions, reflective written comments, student debriefings and a teacher interview. During the data collection and analysis, my insights and perspective were informed by my own experiences teaching English in this and other contexts, my interactions with the teacher participant as a colleague, and the fact that I share both Melayu Manado and Bahasa Indonesia with the teacher and student participants. Thus I know the nuances of meaning and use of these languages. Prior to 2005, when the study was conducted, I had taught EFL at the Center for four years and had been involved with the teacher in the preparation of an earlier version of the course. It was therefore possible for me to function as an ‘insider’ to the present research. Together with the teacher and other teaching staff at the Center, I was also involved in compiling the current textbook and in administering the placement test to the students prior to the course. During the data collection phase, I attended regular class sessions as a non-participant observer, to observe the use of the regular method. I also attended class sessions during task implementation, when I had a more active role in group formation and task management (occasionally advising the teacher). In addition, interactions with the students occurred as I moved around in the class to make sure the tape recorders used by each small group were functioning properly.

Task implementation and data collection in the Communication Skills course took place over four months from February to May 2005. The course itself ended in June 2005 with two regular class sessions and one test session that were not included in data collection. The chronological procedures of data collection are presented in the table below, based on the class schedule of 15 Fridays from February 18 to May 27, plus two extra data-gathering meetings (indicated with an asterisk).

TABLE 1
Chronological Data Collection Procedures

Date	Classroom and Research Activities
Feb. 18	Session 1: Unit 1 – 23 students Administering Consent Forms and Questionnaires
Feb. 25	Session 2: Unit 1 (Continued) – 26 students Conducting Pilot Study
March 4	Session 3: Unit 2 – 15 students Observation of Regular Method
March 11	No Class (Holiday for the Hindus)
March 18	Session 4: Unit 2 (Continued) – 10 students Observation of Regular Method
March 25	No Class (Holiday for the Christians)
April 1	Session 5: Unit 3 – 12 students Task 1 Implementation (Jigsaw)
April 8	Session 6: Unit 4 – 3 students Observation of Regular Method
April 15	Session 7: Midterm Test – 27 students Debriefings on Task 1 with the student participants outside the classroom
April 21*	Debriefings on Task 1 with the student participants outside the classroom
April 22	No Class (Holiday for the Muslims)
April 29	Session 8: Unit 4 (Continued) – 8 students Observation of Regular Method Debriefings on Task 1 with the student participants outside the classroom
May 6	Session 9: Unit 4 Special Project – 22 students Task 2 Implementation (Decision Making)
May 13	Session 10: Unit 6 – 20 students

	Task 3 Implementation (Jigsaw) Debriefings on Task 2 with the student participants outside the classroom
May 20	Class cancelled due to a mandatory event at the Faculty
May 27	Session 11: Unit 9 – 19 students Task 4 Implementation (Decision Making) Debriefings on Task 2 with the student participants outside the classroom
May 30*	Interview with the Teacher

Challenges

From Table 1, one may anticipate some of the challenges that occurred during the data collection. In fact, there were three main challenges that made it difficult to proceed as planned: scheduling issues, the non-credit status of the course, and technical issues in data gathering. First, the scheduling of the course by the Faculty of Medicine was for Fridays from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This meant that classes were cancelled on three official holidays plus a mandatory occasion at the Faculty. Consequently, of the supposed 16 regular class sessions over a semester, only 14 were held (11 during data collection and three after). In addition, due to course scheduling on Friday at midday, four Muslim students in the class had to leave each session at about 12:00 to go to the mosque for prayers. As a result, they could not participate completely in class activities and also had to be excluded from data collection.

Another problem related to the scheduling of the course was its venue. It was held at the Language Center located on the main campus of the University, but far away from the Faculty of Medicine campus. Most students who did not use private cars had to take the minibus (local transportation), with one change on route, to travel to the Center from the campus where they had their earlier classes. Consequently, not all students arrived on time for the course and although the teacher allowed some time before the class began, a few would come much later. This particularly affected the formation of small groups when a task was implemented. As far as the research was concerned, it affected one group during Communicative Task 2 implementation. This

group had five members because one of the student participants came late after the teacher and I had appointed another student to be in the group.

The second challenge was the nature of the course, which affected the priority students gave to it. Because it was a non-credit, extra curricular – although required – course students preferred to give their priority to other courses in their program. In their busy schedules as pre-medical students, they tended to disregard the importance of the requirement to attend at least 75% of the course in order to pass. As can be seen in the table, attendance at instructional sessions varied from 3 to 26 students, and only once did all 27 students attend, when the midterm test was administered. This attendance problem also affected the task implementation schedule. Due to low class attendance, Communicative Task 1 was postponed once and Communicative Task 2 was postponed twice (during which time the observation of the regular method took place). Consequently, instead of implementing the four tasks two to three sessions apart as planned, Communicative Task 1 was implemented in Session 5 when the number of students was large enough to form three small groups of four (and these students then became the basis of the student participants), and Communicative Tasks 2, 3, and 4 were implemented subsequently in Sessions 9, 10, and 11. The variable attendance also affected the selection of the sub-group for more intensive study since that was based on participation in all four tasks; as such, some potential participants were eliminated. After Communicative Task 1, one student did not attend when Communicative Tasks 2, 3, and 4 were implemented. As a result of these attendance issues, from the 11 students selected as the initial student participants, only eight students were left as the final student participants. I had foreseen this attrition and so had initially selected a larger number of participants.

The low class attendance also affected the scheduling of debriefings with the sub-group. Of the planned debriefings after each of the four tasks, only those for Communicative Tasks 1 and 2 could be conducted. In addition, these debriefings had to be done according to students' availability, rather than, ideally, right after the task was implemented. Consequently, the

debriefings for Communicative Task 1 were done on three different days, from two to four weeks apart, and the debriefings for Communicative Task 2 were done on two different days from one to three weeks apart. Fortunately, the debriefings for these two tasks together covered both task types employed in the study, and included two types of debriefings for each task, one based on each student's reflective comments and the other based on several excerpts involving that student in the small group discussion during task implementation.

The third challenge experienced during data collection was the variable quality of the audio recording of the small group discussions when the tasks were implemented, due to both human and technical causes. Based on the pilot study, manual tape recorders were substituted for the voice activated digital ones used in the pilot study, which picked up too much background noise. Each small group had its own manual recorder placed centrally on a chair. However, some of their L1 utterances were not recorded. Participants were supposed to turn on the tape whenever they started working on a task, giving a brief introduction of the members of the group, then recording the whole task discussion, whether it was done in the L2 or L1. In spite of this instruction, each group turned off the tape once in a while, especially when they were using the L1 (as they later admitted). This was done more often during Communicative Tasks 1 and 2 than during Communicative Tasks 3 and 4, since after I became aware of the problem, I emphasized that they should not turn off the tape during a task. I also moved around more to monitor their activities while the task was being completed. However, I could not subsequently determine the exact amount of time that each group had turned off their recorder.

Another problem related to the audio recording of the small group discussion was the intelligibility of the recordings. Two aspects of this problem were sound audibility (what the word/phrase/sentence was) and voice recognition (who said what). In terms of sound audibility, there were times during small group discussions when a word/phrase/sentence was inaudible due to the way it was said, for instance when it was whispered or

said outside the recorder range. Such inaudible parts were necessarily excluded from analysis. In terms of voice recognition, there were times when it was difficult to recognize whose voice it was, particularly when it was weakly recorded or when two voices had similar tones. One specific example was with a group of three females and one male completing Communicative Task 2 (a formation due to class attendance). Consequently, considerable effort was sometimes required during the data transcription, particularly for the introductory part of every recording, to ensure voices of the students were identified. While this problem had a solution, it complicated the data transcription process, requiring repeated listening.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was affected by a number of institutional and cultural factors of the specific EFL setting. For example, the scheduling of the course that included several religious holidays and was during the prayer time of the Muslim students, delayed the implementation of several tasks and eliminated a sub-group of students as possible participants. Class attendance also affected task implementation and debriefing scheduling. For these reasons, as Patton (2002) has cautioned: “The researcher’s plans and intentions ... may not be the way things actually turn out” (p. 267), and in this case the study could not be conducted exactly as planned. Changes were made during the semester and their consequences for the research were handled as appropriately as possible.

My ability to adapt to scheduling and procedure changes was greatly facilitated due to my status as an insider and the cooperation of the EFL teacher and the students. As a member (on leave) of the teaching staff in the Center where the research site was situated, I had a good relationship with the administrator who provided me with helpful support and facilities. I also had a good relationship with the teacher and the student participants, who were willing to participate and cooperate throughout the study. Therefore, I was

able to communicate and solve problems with them, maneuvering through difficult situations.

Although the study was conducted in a specific EFL classroom, there are several methodological implications resulting from this study that may benefit other potential classroom-based studies. The first one concerns research equipment. It was found that advanced technology was not always helpful. The pilot study using voice activated digital recordings proved to be inappropriate since they picked up background noises too effectively. In this case, manual audio recordings worked better to record peer interaction in small group discussion. As for the other equipment, the use of video recordings that captured the whole class, as indicated by the pilot study, proved important later for me to be able to fully understand and transcribe classroom language use. As Lazaraton (2002) states, “this is especially useful if there is more than one speaker of the same gender, and particularly if they are of the same L1” (p. 52), which was the case for the current study.

The second research implication deals with sensitivity to cultural issues. Research procedures have to adapt to the cultural and institutional factors operative in the specific context. As Toelken, in Sims (2005), asserts, “[W]e play by their rules, not ours” (p. 224). The classroom under study was itself situated in a complex larger context, and was affected by the cultures of the society. In Indonesia, several different religions are officially practiced, so religious holidays from each are observed nation-wide. As a consequence, there were three holidays during the semester that resulted in extra intervals between course sessions. In addition, as the course was on Fridays, during the Muslims’ praying time, several Muslim students left in the middle of each class session to go to the mosque for prayers – as is entitled to them by the institution, and again observed nation-wide. As a result, they could not be chosen as research participants. Furthermore, a class session was cancelled due to a Faculty event.

The third research implication, related to cultural sensitivity, concerns the researcher as an insider. Gaining access to and building rapport with participants seem to be less difficult when the researcher is an insider (Sims,

2005). It would appear to be very important for a study conducted in a specific context to have a researcher (or close co-researcher) who can have full access to the participants through the filter of local, cultural, linguistic, and institutional factors. As an insider, I was able to conduct the study effectively because I could understand what the participants were saying. We shared the same L1 and were from the same country and institution, so I could comprehend not only their utterances but also most of their subtleties, secrecy, and body language as they participated in the study. I had good relations with the administrator, teacher, and students, and so was able to verify my views with them and to carry out member checks with all participants. This advantageous condition may only be possible for an insider researcher. Possible disadvantages of insider status have been discussed elsewhere, such as the researcher having sympathies or feeling pressure for positive outcomes, or, as Patton (2002) and Sims (2005) caution, being oblivious to behaviors and language that seem to be ordinary. Fortunately, my position as the researcher could be seen as that of an outsider by the participants, and having been away from Indonesia for some time, I could relate to the notion of the researcher as an outsider. As Patton (2002) asserts, “[t]he challenge is to combine participation and observation so as to become capable of understanding the setting as an insider while describing it to and for outsiders” (p. 268). For research in international education, suggestions have also been made to have insider co-researcher or cross-cultural teams of researchers (Ardichvili, 2002; Bresler, 2002). McKay (2006) offers a related practical suggestion for L2 classroom researchers – be they insiders or outsiders, “[t]he more rapport you can establish with administrators and teachers before you begin collecting data, the fewer problems you will have later” (p. 27).

In conclusion, the research context of the study was characterized by several unique features that were specific to the participants, the learning context, and the researcher as an insider. Given this specific context, the challenges in conducting the study cannot be generalized to other L2 teaching and learning contexts. However, to some extent the methodological

implications are relevant to any qualitative research in general. Researchers and study participants in any qualitative inquiry are human beings with their own varied agendas, purposes, and backgrounds. Beyond this, classroom-based research in EFL settings has special challenges, which vary depending upon and influenced by factors in the specific context, further complicating the research process. Understanding the context of the research site, having access to the participants and creating rapport with them are vital to the success of any classroom-based research.

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