Chapter 4

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter looks at the Methodological Considerations of my Study and includes descriptions of the Instrument of data collection, the Sample and its Representativeness, Fieldwork, the Items of the Questionnaires, Data Analysis, the Selection of Respondents, Validity, Reliability and Ethical aspects.

4.2 Choice of the Instrument

In educational research, there are many methods of obtaining information from subjects available for investigating foreign language acquisition. Generally, all of them can be categorized into non-experimental (qualitative and descriptive researches) and experimental research (quantitative research), as per its common usage. Some research questions are best investigated through some form of experiment, while others might be investigated best through other methods. As Nunan (71) argues, it is but obvious that the research method or methods one employs should be determined by the research questions. For the aim of this study, which is to investigate teachers’ and students’ concepts and beliefs regarding language-and-culture teaching, I chose a combination of quantitative and qualitative research design.

Surveys have been widely used for data collection in most areas such as social inquiry, politics, education etc. about people’s attitudes, opinions, motivation etc. Surveys are usually conducted in the form of questionnaires or interviews, or a combination of both. Both questionnaires and interviews share many of the same characteristics, such as obtaining information by asking questions related to the subject, directly to the people. However, there are also some differences between the two instruments, which have been discussed by many researchers including Fin and Kosec off (1985), Seliger and Shohamy (1989) and Nunan (1992) among others. Thus, for example, according to Seliger and Shohamy (1989):

Interviews are personalised and therefore permit a level of in-depth information-gathering, free response, and flexibility that cannot be
obtained by other procedures. The interviewer can probe for information and obtain data that have not often been foreseen. Much of the information obtained during an open/unstructured interview is incidental and comes out as the interview proceeds. There are disadvantages, however. Interviews can be costly, time-consuming, and often difficult to administer. They depend on good interviewing skills that might require extensive training. They may introduce elements of subjectivity and personal bias, and rapport may cause the interviewee to respond in a certain way to please the interviewer. (166)

And at the same point of time, both Seliger and Shohamy (1989) believe questionnaires to be:

( ... ) self-administered and can be given to large groups of subjects at the same time. They are therefore less expensive to administer than other procedures such as interviews. b) When anonymity is assured, subjects tend to share information of a sensitive nature more easily. c) Since the same questionnaire is given to all subjects, the data are more uniform and standard. d) Since they are usually given to all subjects of the research at exactly the same time, the data are more accurate. However, one of the main problems with questionnaires is the relatively low response rate (especially with mailed questionnaires), which poses questions about the reasons why certain subjects respond and others do not. A low return rate may therefore influence the validity of the findings. Another problem with questionnaires is that they are not appropriate for subjects who cannot read and write. This is especially relevant to research in second language, as subjects very often have problems reading and providing answers in L2. Thus there is no assurance that the questions used in a questionnaire have been properly understood by the subjects and answered correctly. (172)

In the light of the present research questions, which directly ask the respondents for information in relation to their attitudes towards the issue in question, we decided to employ questionnaire to obtain the required data information. Thus, the questionnaire for the present survey is based on the existing questionnaire used for the study of European foreign language teachers’ intercultural competence (Sercu, 2005). The
questionnaire mostly contains closed questions and only some open questions to support the data. The main themes addressed in the questionnaire are as follows:

- Personal data;
- Current teaching job;
- Perceptions of the objectives of foreign language education;
- Students and foreign languages;
- Familiarity and contacts with the foreign culture(s) associated with the foreign language(s) you taught;
- Culture in foreign language teaching;
- Foreign language teaching materials;
- Exchanges;
- (Cross-curricular) intercultural activities and projects.

In addition to this, the questionnaire also contained a series of statements, which specifically inquired into the respondents’ willingness to integrate an intercultural dimension in their foreign language teaching as well as the factors conditioning that willingness. Further, details on the questionnaire items as well as on how data were collected with respect to the various aspects of the questions under investigation at relevant stages (see section on the Items of the questionnaires, their designs and the choices of data analysis), are also provided.

Thus, taking into account the disadvantages of the interview, which becomes difficult for one to overcome, in terms of limited time of interviewers, among other things, and in the light of the nature of information required to be elicited from the respondents among others, we found a questionnaire to be sufficient enough and the only practical and best appropriate means whereby, in our case, to get the needed information.

4.3 The Sample and its Representativeness

In order to find genuine and consistent answers to the set research questions it had been decided to survey two groups of respondents: foreign language teachers and their students. Therefore, the dual focus on the teacher and the student formed the two phases of my study. In the first phase, the focus was on the teacher with an emphasis on the teacher’s conceptualisation of culture and culture teaching. In the second phase I
focused on their students’ attitudes to culture learning. The major source for data collections for both groups was through the means of a questionnaire.

4.4 The Field Work and its Ups and Downs

The present survey was carried out during the period of August 2009 to December 2009. Keeping in mind that the relatively low response rate and other factors could influence and affect the validity of the findings, I decided first to contact and briefly interview some relevant professors as well as some young teachers about the ongoing survey. I received support and help from most of the people I contacted and after a few meetings the idea that all the questionnaires would be given to teachers, only in the hard copy format, was dismissed. I was suggested by Prof. Maurya (DU) to distribute the teachers’ questionnaires electronically, because some of the teachers were more comfortable with this.

The respondent teachers and students are from three different Universities namely JNU, DU and JMI (see Universities’ profiles, Chapter 3.4). Although all of them are located in one city, New Delhi, they are considered to be unique in the sense of following a pattern of organization in the domain of Foreign Language Teaching. Since none of the current patterns of organization of FLT seemed to be able to provide the learners with optimum learning conditions for enhancing ICC, there was a need to undergo the present research and find out the foreign language teachers’ beliefs regarding culture and its place in their practice.

The students from different levels, pursuing various degrees, starting from B.A. as the lowest and Ph.D. as the highest, took part in the study. In spite of having various degrees of language proficiency, all of them have cultural component as either integrated or given as an additional part of their foreign language education.

A total of four hundred and ten students-questionnaires were distributed among the students out of which a total of three hundred and seventy-three were returned completed. As the above mentioned statistics show, the return rate was 90%.

A total of 65 teacher-questionnaires were given out, out of which a total of fifty-one were returned completed. The return rate in this case was 84%.

Unlike JNU and DU, where I knew quite a number of people who could actually use their ‘privilege’ in the classroom and easily help to organize the whole process of data collection, the student questionnaires distributed at JMI proved to be somewhat
difficult. In this university only five completed teacher questionnaires were collected. The total number of foreign language teachers in this University was seven. As it turned out, in the other two universities both the quality of the responses and the return rate proved to be higher. Conversely, the collection of the students’ questionnaires proved to be rather difficult for various reasons. However, it was decided not to give up this part of the survey as each questionnaire was very valuable for our research. Fortunately, since the study had not been meant to be comparative, it did not affect the final results.

Neither teachers nor students were constrained by any time limit for submitting their questionnaires. Only when they were ready to submit their filled in questionnaires, did I collect them. Teachers and students were reminded about the deadline several times and at times the process took more time than had been expected. I waited until the last questionnaire was collected on December 10, 2009. Another four completed electronic questionnaires were collected from some teachers of DU and JNU. Thus, a total of fifty-one teacher-questionnaires were collected from all the three Universities.

According to the original plan, the survey had to be carried within a period of two-three months. However, due to some delay, both from the side of the teachers as well as the students, the period of survey was extended by one more month.

The whole process of data collection can be divided into two phases. Initially, personal visits were required in order to present myself, my research area and topic. In this stage I found support and willingness from the teachers, some of whom wanted to participate in the study while the others helped me with valuable comments. It was at this stage that email addresses, office room numbers and office and personal telephone numbers of all teachers were collected and most of the teachers were addressed personally (with the exception of a few individuals who were travelling outside the country or were unavailable due to health related problems).

In the second stage, a written request was sent to almost all the teachers in the form of a hard copy. For the purpose of convenience and in accordance with recommendations of Prof. Maurya at Delhi University some teachers’ questionnaires were sent electronically as well. The electronic addresses were found on the list of teachers published either on the University Internet web site or on personal details list at each centre. In the letter, I presented myself, my supervisor, my topic and purpose of study (see Appendix I). I made it explicit that the study did not intend to critically evaluate the teachers’ beliefs. The sole intention was to explore their thinking on the cultural aspects of their foreign language teaching. Although I was mentally prepared
that some teachers and students would ignore my request, what disappointed me most was the fact that this number was higher than expected in both cases especially among students.

Also, while I felt that my topic was considered relevant or interesting enough, some trivial factors such as great workload and hurry might have been a reason for lower or delayed response.

### 4.5 The Items of the Questionnaires, their Designs and the Choices of Data Analysis

Building a good questionnaire is a difficult and time-consuming task. The questionnaire used in our study was designed on the basis of the existing questionnaire whose psychometric properties have already been established (“Foreign Language Teachers and Intercultural Competence”, Sercu Appendix 1). The final versions of the teacher and student questionnaires for our study were further piloted and tested for their cultural relevance to respondents. Though the order of the questionnaires was maintained, some of the items from the original questionnaire were omitted (see Appendix A and B). The student-questionnaire was identically designed for the purpose of the present study. Thus, questions on the questionnaires for the two groups of respondents are mostly identical, most of them containing closed questions along with some open questions, about teachers’ and students’ present self-concepts and their present culture and language teaching practice.

By primarily discovering the nature of teacher discourse, I tried to cover the following aspects (Sercu 86):

- How do teachers perceive the objectives of foreign language education?
- How familiar do teachers consider themselves with the foreign cultures of the foreign language that they teach?
- How do teachers perceive their students “knowledge and attitudes regarding the foreign cultures associated with the foreign language” they teach?
- How do teachers describe their culture teaching practices?
- How do teachers perceive the cultural dimension of teaching materials?
- How do teachers perceive the effect of intercultural activities and projects?
• What attitude do teachers have vis-à-vis different aspects of intercultural competence teaching in foreign language education?

• To what extent are teachers willing to take up intercultural foreign language education and what factors appear to affect that willingness?

The second direction of the research was encompassed by the evaluation of learning outcomes, specifically the students’ acquisition of intercultural sensitivity, defined in literature as a person’s sensitivity to the importance of cultural differences and to the viewpoints of culturally different others.

For this purpose, the students were asked to answer a similar questionnaire covering the following aspects:

• How do students perceive the objectives of foreign language education?

• How familiar do students consider themselves with the foreign cultures of which they learn the foreign language?

• How do students perceive their “knowledge and attitudes regarding the foreign cultures associated with the foreign language” they learn?

• How do students describe their culture learning practices?

• How do students perceive their cultural dimension of study materials?

• How do students perceive the effect of intercultural activities and projects?

• What attitude do students have vis-à-vis different aspects of intercultural competence learning in foreign language education?

• To what extent are students willing to include the intercultural dimension to their foreign language education and what factors appear to affect that willingness?

Both questionnaires mostly contained closed questions along with some open-ended questions. Since the original questionnaire was in English, I did not face any problems related to translation of the items and maintained the maximum originality of the questions.

The piloted questionnaires were distributed among the foreign language teachers and learners in three Indian Universities (JNU, DU, JMI). Both the groups filled in these almost identical questionnaires consisting of questions divided into the following sections:
Table 4.1: Organization of questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher questionnaire:</th>
<th>Student questionnaire:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 1: Personal data</td>
<td>Section 1: Personal data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2: You as a teacher</td>
<td>Section 2: You as a learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3: Your students</td>
<td>Section 3: Your familiarity with the foreign culture(s) associated with the foreign language you learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4: Your familiarity and contacts with the foreign culture(s) associated with the foreign language(s) you teach/learn</td>
<td>Section 4: Culture in foreign language learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 5: Culture in foreign language teaching/learning</td>
<td>Section 5: Foreign language learning materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section 6: Foreign language teaching/learning materials;</td>
<td>Section 6: Exchanges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 7: Exchanges</td>
<td>Section 7: (Cross-curricular) intercultural activities and projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 8: (Cross-curricular) Intercultural activities and projects</td>
<td>Section 8: Intercultural foreign language learning:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 9: Intercultural foreign language teaching</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: *As per present research.* Tabulation based on the questions set for data collection from both the Teacher-Questionnaire as well as the Student-Questionnaire.

Organization wise the teachers-questionnaire does not vary much from the students’ one except for slight changes whereby just a single section (“Your students”) had been omitted in the student questionnaire. Although all the sections are presented in the same order in both the questionnaires, the content of the questionnaires varies slightly according to the nature of the required information.
4.5.1 Teacher Questionnaire

The first section covers personal data of the respondents such as age, sex, native language, nationality, taught/learnt language(s) and the duration of language teaching/learning.

The second section is concerned with the respondents’ perceptions of what they try to achieve in the classroom. Six questions in this section are aimed at giving insight into the respondents’ understanding of ‘culture teaching’ in the context of foreign language teaching, time distribution between culture versus language teaching and most importantly, the teacher’s perceptions of the objectives of foreign language teaching. By asking these questions, my main aim was to assess the situation from the respondents’ perspective and also to find out whether and to what extent the cultural teaching in their ongoing practice is taking place.

The five questions in the third section, address various aspects of the students’ learning of foreign languages: motivation, obstacles in learning, culture knowledge, positive attitude towards a target culture as well as students’ contacts with the foreign country.

Section four consists of four questions which inquire into the teachers’ familiarity with the culture associated with the foreign language(s) they teach and whether they have any contacts with it.

Section five discusses culture teaching/learning practices in the classroom. Three of the questions in this section are devoted to culture teaching activities and particular cultural aspects dealt within the classroom.

Section six gives an insight into the foreign language teaching material used in classrooms, mainly textbooks and other additional material such as audio and video aids. Twelve questions of the section give insight into the criteria for choosing the textbooks including all cultural contents.

Section seven is concerned with the exchange programmes existing in the schools and teachers’ attitude to them. Ten questions of the section are devoted to the reasons, possibilities, roles and effects of such exchange programmes.

Section eight consists of four questions and discusses some other cross-curricular and intercultural activities and projects offered by the schools and the teachers’ attitude to them.
Finally, the last section consists of twelve statements on Intercultural foreign language teaching and learning to gain insight into the teachers'/learners’ attitude towards it.

In addition to this, a series of statements were included into the questionnaire, which had to be scored on a five-point scale. This section inquired into the respondents’ willingness to integrate an intercultural dimension in their foreign language teaching/learning. It also probed into the factors conditioning that willingness.

4.5.2 Student Questionnaire

Just like the teacher’s-questionnaire, the first section of the questionnaire meant for the students, covers personal data of the respondents such as age, sex, native language, nationality, taught/learnt language(s), duration of language teaching/learning.

Similar to the teacher’s-questionnaire, the second section of this one is concerned with the students’ perceptions of what they try to achieve in the classroom. However, unlike the second section in the teacher’s questionnaire, section two in the students-questionnaire contained not six but eleven questions which intended to give insight into the respondents’ understanding of ‘culture learning’ in a foreign language teaching context and time distribution between culture versus language teaching. Question on objective was focused on students’ perceptions on the objectives of foreign language learning, instead of teaching as it is the case in the teachers-questionnaire. By asking these questions, I wanted to find out the exact situation from the respondents’ perspective and whether and to what extent the cultural learning in their ongoing practice is taking place. I also wanted to inquire into the students’ motivation, obstacles in learning, culture knowledge and positive attitude towards a target culture as well as the students’ contacts with the foreign country.

Section three deals with a student’s familiarity with the foreign culture(s) associated with the foreign language he/she learns and aims to find out whether they have any contacts with it or not.

Section four is concerned with a student’s culture learning practice. Here we intended to give an insight into the culture learning activities that a student may practice in his/her classroom as well as the frequency of dealing with particular cultural aspects.

Section five looks at foreign language learning materials used in the classroom. Like in the teacher’s questionnaire, this section concerns textbooks and other additional
material such as audio and video aids. Unlike the teachers-questionnaire, the questions on the criteria for choosing the textbooks were omitted, as one is aware of the fact that textbooks are not a matter of a student’s choice. However, we included questions on cultural contents as well as the student’s expectations from a textbook.

Section six, similar to the teachers-questionnaire (Section seven) concerns exchange programmes existing in the schools and the students’ attitude towards them. Ten questions of this section are devoted to the reasons, possibilities, roles and effects of exchange programmes.

Similar to the teachers-questionnaire (section eight), section seven consists of four questions and discusses some other cross-curricular and intercultural activities and projects offered by the school and the learners’ attitude towards them.

Finally, the last section of the questionnaire for students, again similar to the one distributed among the teachers, consists of twelve statements on Intercultural foreign language teaching and learning to gain insight into the teachers’/learners’ attitude towards it.

In addition to this, the same set of twelve statements as used in the questionnaire for the teachers were included and had to be scored on a five-point scale. This section inquired into the respondents’ willingness to integrate an intercultural dimension in their foreign language teaching/learning and the factors conditioning that willingness.

4.6 Pilot Study

To ensure that all the questions were properly understood, I conducted a pilot study, which was administered in early September 2009 among two groups of teachers and students (consisting of two teachers and two learners who later did not participate in the actual questionnaire survey of the research).

The respondents were given detailed instructions as to the questionnaire filling procedure. They were, in addition, also asked to comment on any problematic issue regarding:

(a) Clarity and relevance of the questions,
(b) The layout and organization of the questionnaire,
(c) Suggestions for more appropriate wording of the questions,
(d) Anything else they thought would help to improve the questionnaire.
The teachers and students were requested to note down the time that they took to complete the questionnaire and any problems that occurred during the administration. It took not more than thirty to thirty-five minutes to complete the entire questionnaire. Since the questionnaires for the present study were a slightly adopted and modified version of the questionnaire used by Sercu et al. (2005), there were only few minor points that required attention and correction. Most of the problems pointed out were that of misprints and were immediately corrected. The final number of questionnaires were then printed and made ready for use. The final versions can be found in Appendix A and B.

4.7 Personal Meetings

Although some participants were generally willing to engage in the present study, certain parts of the questionnaires caused them some doubts regarding their role in the study. Although every teacher participant was generally able and willing to reply to all the open-ended questions that were asked and also commented on some of the statements, some of the teachers felt more convinced about participating in the study after personally meeting me.

It can be said that I professionally benefited from such personal meetings in terms of gaining insight into the teachers’ thought processes. In other words, not only did these personal meetings help to clarify the research questions and to convince the teachers in taking part in the study, but they also constituted a part of the research treatment. Teachers’ ideas, comments and general attitudes expressed orally during the personal meetings before, during or after the filling in of the questionnaires, added a lot of supplementary and supportive information to the entire bulk of the officially collected data (two teachers filled it in my presence although I preferred to be rather in a passive than active role).

As for the students, due to their large number I could not meet each and every one of them personally and they were requested by either me and/or a teacher, to fill in their questionnaires during or after the classes. It guaranteed their anonymity which gave them the feeling of trust and openness.
4.8 Analysis of the Material

Since the questionnaire contained both closed-ended (i.e., quantitative) and open-ended (i.e., qualitative) questions, quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures were used. Quantitative data were processed by means of descriptive and correlational statistical techniques (including the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, i.e. the SPSS programme). The qualitative data were analysed by hand.

4.8.1 Getting an Overall Picture of the Material

The first step involved carefully reading through all the questionnaires to obtain an overall impression. Those key words used in the answers to the open-ended questions that reflected the teachers’ cognitions about the intercultural dimension were marked. Information that was considered to be superfluous to the present study was discarded. The information that was discarded was deductively conducted on the basis of my theoretical frame of reference and pre-understanding.

4.8.2 Organizing the Material according to Themes

In-depth organization of the material according to thematic questions was the second step. All statements that could be attributed to a specific theme were highlighted with a marker in special colours.

To begin with, thematic groups made up on the key words were set up. Thereafter, all statements related to a particular question were coded onto the programme and excel sheets. As a result, our findings were put into categories which could be used to give us an accurate data analysis.

The computer software programmes such as excel and SPSS proved to be very useful tools for the organization of data according to the questions asked.

4.8.3 Identifying Patterns of Meaning and Structuring into Categories

The third step, which constituted the analysis, involved interpreting the answers to the open-ended questions, with an aim of developing meanings. This turned out to be the most critical phase in the analysis. I carefully studied all the answers to the open-
ended questions trying to understand their essence and making contrasts and comparisons in order to harness my thinking. As I probed deeper, I started noting patterns, which in turn led to the identification of their internal relationship. At this stage, SPSS and Excel programmes were used to set up categories in which all the material that hung together was coded. These categories were revised several times and became more and more elaborate. My understanding deepened and more subtle meanings emerged every time I dug into the material. The more familiar I became with it, the more urgent became the need for me to step ‘beyond the words’ and read between the lines. I also became more and more aware of the importance of taking the whole context into consideration; not just the linguistic context of the open-ended questions, but also the whole questionnaire of the respondent. It should be noted that although computer programmes are useful for the processing of extensive qualitative data, they cannot think nor feel for us. It was me, who as a researcher still had to make all the choices.

When labeling these categories, I shifted from the everyday informal language used by my respondents, to a more scientific language characterized by a higher degree of abstraction. My ambition was to set up categories that would clearly illustrate the patterns found, cover as many qualities in the different themes as possible and thus provide plausible and credible answers to my research questions.

Most of the categories also entailed a number of subcategories. In general, all the open-ended questions have been considered as so-called supplementary material, which not only provided with valuable background information for the three research questions but also constituted interesting findings in themselves, which will also be accounted for in the next Chapter.

4.9 Validity and Reliability Aspects

The validity (i.e. the degree to which the research results are founded in the data) and reliability (i.e. the degree of consistency) aspects of a qualitative research have been the subject of active debates (L. Richards, “Handling qualitative data”).

According to Kvale (241), validity is determined by how crafty the researcher is. The validity of the present study can be scrutinized from the five points of view by Larsson (204-210), mainly the discourse criterion, heuristic value, empirical anchorage,
consistency and the pragmatic criterion. These are criteria which in quantitative research are related to external validity.

Taking into account the discourse criterion that indicates that the results of the analysis should maintain a high standard and the researcher’s statements, arguments and interpretations should be tested against alternative statements, arguments and interpretations, our aim was to make sure that the results of the study are carefully and continuously considered and reflected. Therefore, what may have appeared obvious at first glance has been questioned over and over again, largely contributed through discussions with my colleagues and my supervisors.

While reporting my findings, I have made efforts to provide reasons for all my choices, regardless whether these are related with terminology used, interpretation, category labels, questionnaire excerpts or conclusions drawn.

Since the interpretations should naturally be empirically grounded, the empirical criterion of validity is thus about the “agreement between reality and the interpretation of reality” (Johnson 30-49). Our interpretations should be seen as pointing to their credibility and plausibility. Other researchers might make other interpretations and hence end up with a category system different from mine.

Since the consistency criterion is linked to the hermeneutical demand for consistency between the separate parts and the whole, our study can be considered valid due to the lesser number of contradictions between the individual data (the parts) from its interpretation (the whole). I have tried to balance between the demand for consistency and empirical anchorage by presenting my findings in a way that makes internal sense. For example, while choosing excerpts I have always looked at the context, as well as checked that the excerpts are appropriate in that particular context.

Finally, the pragmatic criterion is about the practical implications of the study. The question of practical application and pragmatic validation can be viewed either from the point of a practical-hermeneutical or an emancipatory hermeneutical knowledge-interest. The former can be related to communication and inter-personal understanding. The aspect of validity concerns the extent to which the study can inspire debate and lead to increased understanding of the research area. I truly hope that my findings will lead to an increased understanding of ICC and the teaching of culture and how it can be developed in India.

Reliability is concerned with how exact the measurements are. For example, Helenius (247) discusses reliability in terms of logical thinking and a sensible
presentation of the research process and the results. And Kvale (235) attributes reliability to the consistency of the research findings. According to him, there is a wide range of situations where the quality of the results is determined by the trustworthiness of the researcher: choice of methods, the selection of respondents, manner of questioning, the coding of the interviews, the use of independent co-assessors etc.

One of these critical choices involved insuring that the respondents’ answers were not influenced in any way by my approach to them. In personal meetings I was particularly careful about not asking leading questions which could have inadvertently influenced my respondents’ answers. Furthermore, it was important to formulate the thematic questions precisely in the same way for everyone in order to minimise the risk of different interpretations.

4.10 Ethical Aspects

The prominent current tendency in applied linguistics, to pay careful consideration to research methodologies being employed, is giving way to a more holistic approach which, in turn “involves a significant shift in the researchers’ roles, relationships and ethical responsibilities” (Kubanyova 178).

Ethical aspects, just like validity and reliability can arise throughout the entire research process, thus serving scientific and human interests. According to Kvale (112-117), three ethical guidelines for human research are: informed consent, confidentiality and consequences. The first principle of informed consent covers informing the respondents about the overall purpose of the study. It also entails any possible risks and benefits from participation in the project. As a matter of fact, it also involves the respondents’ voluntary participation with their rights to stop and withdraw at any time during the process. Obviously informed consent is not entirely smooth as it may raise questions of who should give the consent and for what. In our study, the consent was given by the participating teachers who helped me in distributing questionnaires to the volunteering students. Though several teachers did not respond to my initial electronic letter of request, we sent them a reminder in the form of a hard copy. Finally, they agreed to participate with genuine willingness. However, I am convinced that none of the teacher or student respondents decided to participate merely as a result of my persuasion. They all appeared to be interested in the topic and it was satisfying to note
that they were stimulated by the fact that they had an opportunity to voice their views about the topic in question.

While providing information about the study in the letter, as well as at the personal meetings, I tried to strike a balance between giving too much information so as to not influence the replies and trying to answer all their doubts. I aimed at formulating using general terms in order to obtain the teachers’ natural views on the topic and avoid leading them to specific answers.

For instance, I deliberately did not state that one of my major interests lies in their core beliefs regarding the place of culture in FLT. This could have influenced some teachers’ and students’ choices or answers and direction of thoughts. This, again, would have shaken the issue of validity of my results.

Confidentiality, the second guideline refers to the respondents’ right to privacy. In our study, teachers and their students have been offered to voluntarily choose if they wanted to omit their names and private data identifying them. However, hundred per cent anonymity with teachers was difficult to achieve due to the questions relating to personal information which was asked in the first section of the questionnaire (age, degree, experience etc.) and also due to the personal meetings. Only those readers who were personally acquainted with the teachers and students might have been able to guess the persona hiding behind the descriptions in the first section if they really set their minds to it. In general, we find their descriptions absolutely unproblematic from an ethical point of view.

For the data entry and purpose of analysis, all questionnaires filled in by teachers and students were numbered and marked as JMI, DU or JNU, depending on the Institution.

The students-respondents were naturally more difficult to identify since their number is much greater and there was hardly any possibility for me or my guide to recognize them by their personal data (age, degree, language learnt etc.). In my view even if teachers read the students questionnaires they would not be able to recognize their students among others and thus, the risk of harming the students-respondents is very minimal.

Talking about the expected possible benefits and consequences of a study, one should consider the larger group that the respondents represent and not only the persons taking part in the study (Kvale 116). Therefore, one should keep in mind the reciprocity between what is given and what is gained. In the present study, I ideally distinguish
between *short-term* and *long-term* benefits and consequences. I believe that the short-term benefits lie in the very attention and interest in their matter under investigation, mainly *ICC*, which I feel that the participants experienced as something new and encouraging. As the long-term benefits for teachers and their present and future students it will hopefully be in a form of an increased focus on culture in FLT with regard to teaching materials, language teacher education, professional development, consideration and application of new methodologies and hopefully in-service training. It is now time for teachers to act.