CHAPTER FOUR DATA-COLLECTION

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Chapter 4
Data-Collection

4.0 Introduction

This chapter reports on the administration of the questionnaire and the implementation of the interview format in varied settings. It delineates how the sample selected for the study was representative of the universe. It concludes with the problems encountered and observations made by the investigator.

4.1 Administration of the Questionnaire

As discussed in the previous chapter the questionnaire contained a total number of 34 questions on four broad categories of language learning strategies – cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies - that the Good Second Language Learners employ. The questionnaire was administered to a selected sample of 125 subjects that displayed variations with regard to geographical settings, proven competence in English Language, language of instruction, institution or faculty, sex and age.

4.1.1 Geographical Variations

For the purpose of the present study the investigator approached the students in colleges affiliated to two important universities in the state of Gujarat - the Gujarat University and the Sardar Patel University. The
Gujarat University has its headquarters in Ahmedabad but colleges affiliated to it spread over Central Gujarat, North Gujarat and the Kutch regions. All the subjects selected as a sample from the Gujarat University studied in different colleges in Ahmedabad. Most of them were either born here or had been staying long in the city. They represent the urban population of the selected sample. The Sardar Patel University is a residential university. It has affiliated colleges in the townships of Anand and Vallabhb Vidyanagar, the administrative office being located at the latter place. Students come from different parts of Gujarat to study at Vallabhb Vidyanagar. Barring a few exceptions, the majority of the subjects chosen as a sample from the Sardar Patel University come from rural area. These subjects either commuted to Anand and Vallabhb Vidyanagar from nearby villages and towns or came from rural areas of Saurashtra region to take education at the University. Some of these subjects were also from rural areas of South Gujarat, for example Valsad district.

4.1.2 Competence Variations

The study aimed at identifying the learning strategies and styles of Good Learners of English at the undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat. The investigator approached the students who had secured at least 60% or more marks in English language paper in the previous exam. All the subjects approached by the investigator were Good Learners of English as they exhibited their competence by achieving good marks in English in the last exam. The sample was then divided into two broad groups for their proven competence in English on the basis of mean derived from the total range of values. The students who had secured more than 65% of marks in
English were characterized as the Better Language Learners for the purpose of this study.

4.1.3 Language of Instruction Variations

The Good Second Language Learners come from a variety of educational and socio-economic backgrounds. For the purpose of the present study the investigator took into account "the language of instruction" variation. This refers to the subjects' language of instruction at school level. Subjects who had taken their school education through English mostly belonged to upper economic strata. Many of them were non-Gujaratis but had been staying in the state long enough to have absorbed Gujarati culture or lifestyle. Students who had had their education in Gujarati medium schools were born Gujaratis. Both English and Gujarati medium background students had a proven proficiency in English language. The investigator was interested to know if language of instruction had any bearing on the strategies and styles employed by the Good Learners of English at the undergraduate level.

4.1.4 Faculty or Institution Variations

The study intends to identify learning strategies and styles of Good Learners of English at the undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat. For this purpose the investigator administered a questionnaire to a selected sample of 125 subjects. All these subjects studied in the Arts and the Commerce faculties in two important universities in the state of Gujarat -
the Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar and the Gujarat University, Ahmedabad.

4.1.5 Sex Variations

Sex was one of the important attributes for the present study. The investigator was interested in examining whether sex had any relation to the learning strategies and styles used by the Good Learners of English at the undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat.

4.1.6 Age Group Variations

Age is an important factor in second language learning. The investigator decided to focus on this attribute and to relate it to the choice of language learning strategies and styles by the Good Learners of English at the undergraduate level. In terms of age, the respondents to the questionnaire were divided into two groups - those below 20 years and those between 20-25 years of age.

4.2 Interview

The investigator designed an interview schedule with a view to supplementing data gathered through the strategy questionnaire. Enough care was taken to ensure that all relevant and important questions were covered in this schedule. The investigator approached ten subjects from the selected sample to whom the strategy questionnaire was administered. The purpose of the interview schedule was to elicit data on the use of learning
strategies in more detail, in personal and informal setting that was naturally absent in the administration of the questionnaire.

4.2.1 Interview Format

The interview format was prepared on the basis of the strategy questionnaire. All the four important categories language learning strategies are represented in the interview format. The final version of the interview format consisted of two sections: Personal details and Strategy Use by the Good Language Learners.

Section - One elicited data on the following: respondent’s name, age, year of study, medium of instruction at school, languages known to the respondent, number of family members who could speak and write English and the reason for learning English.

Section - Two of the interview format was more important. It consisted of ten questions on the use of language learning strategies employed by the respondents. There were 5 questions on cognitive strategies, 3 on metacognitive strategies, and one for each social and affective strategies.

4.2.2 Learner Variations

Ten subjects were approached for the interview format, which was designed to probe the use of language learning strategies in detail. Out of the total number there were 5 male and 5 female respondents. Among the
subjects interviewed by the investigator, four respondents were below 20 years of age and six in the age group between 20-25 years of age. In terms of the faculty, six respondents were from the Arts faculty and four from the Commerce faculty. In terms of language of instruction at school level, six respondents were from Gujarati medium background whereas four respondents from English medium background. But, all these respondents had scored significantly higher in English language paper and therefore, they were all Good Learners of English.

4.3 Problems Encountered

The investigator carried out a survey on the use of language learning strategies by the Good Learners of English at the undergraduate level with a view to arriving at conclusions about the learning styles of the universe. For this purpose the investigator decided to use the Questionnaire and the Interview Format as tools to gather data. Several problems were encountered by the investigator while he was engaged on his work on the learning styles of the Good Learners of English at the Undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat.

The investigator decided to personally contact the students and administer the questionnaire. For this he sought permission of the Heads of the concerned institutes and consulted the teachers of those students. The teachers of these colleges helped the investigator. However, it was not easy to explain the purpose of the study to the students and to convince them how their responses would enable the investigator to arrive at useful and valid conclusions about the learning strategies and styles of the Good

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Language Learner at the Undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat. The idea of learning strategies and styles of the Good Language Learner was not familiar to them. Even their teachers did not seem to be much aware of the learners' preferences for particular learning strategies and styles. This was, perhaps, because in our exam-oriented system of education rote-learning and memorization are important techniques to perform better in exams. And, moreover, the teachers of these students do not usually encourage them to work independently or allow them to work according to their own styles of learning. When the respondents understood the idea of the Good Language Learner and their strategies and styles they were willing to provide relevant and reliable data.

Since the investigator was doing a full-time job at a college he found it a bit difficult and inconvenient to administer the questionnaire. Some colleges had the same timings as his own college had. No special leaves were to be granted to him for the purpose of the study. As a result, the investigator had to contact Heads of the concerned institutes and the teachers and the respondents at different times. The investigator had taken enough care to explain clearly to the students that they should avoid choosing the desirable responses. He also requested them not to leave the questionnaire incomplete or not to select two contradictory responses at the same time as such a questionnaire would not be acceptable for the analysis of the data. Despite these requests and explanations, many questionnaires were either left incomplete or in many places two contradictory responses were selected. Naturally, these questionnaires had to be rejected.
The investigator encountered some problems in implementing the interview format. In the first place, the respondents had to be assured of complete secrecy and convinced that their responses would be used for research purpose only. It was only then that they felt confident and free enough to talk about their use of strategies in different language learning situations. The interviews were to be tape-recorded. One of the problems concerned the difficulty in finding a place with sufficient and regular electric supply. This facility was not available at all the places all the time. Therefore, the investigator had to record the interviews with the help of a battery-operated micro tape-recorder, which in fact, proved to be more suitable for this purpose.

4.4 General Observations

The investigation was aimed at identifying learning strategies and styles of Good Learners of English at the Undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat. The investigator administered a strategy questionnaire to a selected sample of 125 respondents displaying variations in terms of sex, age, faculty, medium of instruction, and proven competence in English. The investigator also carried out an in-depth interview with 10 respondents from the same group of the respondents. A few observations can be made on the basis of the experience of the investigator.

It was observed that subjects from Gujarati medium background were hesitant to speak in English. More often their speech in English was full of unnatural pauses and halts. For this reason the investigator decided to interview these subjects in their mother tongue, i.e., that is Gujarati. It is
to be noted here that in our state graduate students usually find it more difficult to speak English than to write it. Perhaps, the ability to speak English has not received enough consideration and importance in our English Language Teaching curriculums in Gujarat. However, the students from English medium background were more relaxed than the students from Gujarati medium background, and were vocal and forthcoming in their responses.