CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

In this chapter, the research methods applied in the present study are discussed. In the beginning, the framework of the study design is introduced. Then, the subjects are introduced by detailing the criteria and the background of the sampling. Next, the administration of the procedures and the instruments are presented. In the end, some variables of the study are mentioned before the final discussion of the data analysis.

3.1 Research Method

The purposes of the present study are to investigate the possibility of enhancing the low achievers' English learning attitude through culture learning and to explore their attitude and reflections toward cultural learning. Both quantitative and qualitative research designs were applied to verify the efficacy of culture learning in low achievers' English learning. The quantitative research design included the pre-test and post-test of Students' English Learning Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire (SELAM Questionnaire) (See Appendix A), meant to meet the purpose of examining the variance of low achievers' English learning attitude and motivation; the qualitative research designs included Cultural Learning Feedback Questionnaire (CLF Questionnaire) (See Appendix B) after each culture learning unit and the follow-up oral interview, utilized through both the quantitative and qualitative analyses to evaluate low achievers' culture learning feedback and figure out the optimal cultural learning mode for low achievers.

3.2 Subjects

The research focused on English low achievers of junior high school.

Therefore, the prerequisite for the research was to determine the sampling of "English low achievers."

3.2.1 Selection of the subjects

In this study, 30 English low achievers were selected from Grade 9 of a junior high school.   Their ages were 14 to15.   The students were identified as "English low achievers" on the basis of their poor academic performance in English and normal intelligence test scores.   By making use of the following criteria—intelligence quotient and school academic achievement test scores, the researcher decided on her choice of "English low achievers."

The 30 subjects from Hsinhu junior high school all have normal intelligence (30-75).   Their T-scores are around 30-75 in the Junior High School Intelligence Test III (國民中學智力測驗第三種) (Lu & Lu, 1990) , which was administered to them at the very beginning of their admission to junior high school.   The means of their English achievement test scores last semester were then examined through the computerizing statistics process, in which the students in the range of the lower 40 % academic achievement test scores (33 students) were taken into consideration as our participants.

And then through the examination of their average achievement scores in Chinese or math, the researcher selected out 30 low achievers whose English academic performance was lower than their other subjects' academic performance. This procedure was used in the study to strengthen the internal validity of the study. It is believed that the academic tests held by the school each semester could serve as an objective instrument to indicate a student's academic performance.   Consequently, the researcher also took into consideration the scores of the two other major subjects, math and Chinese.   Though these students' scores in Chinese or math were above

average, their English averages were below the average (below one deviation of the average).   This incongruity of their academic performance revealed that even though they were potentially able to learn, something retarded their learning in English (Shao, 1998).

The thirty subjects were further divided into two groups—the control group (CG) and the experimental group (EG) by matching their average English achievement test scores last semester.   The mean of matching their average English achievement test scores last semester made the subjects' English academic performances in the two groups roughly equal.   Table 3.1 indicates the result of the t-test of the subjects' English achievement test scores before the treatment—Culture Learning Project. The means of the English achievement test scores for the control and experimental group were not significantly different.   That is to say, before the treatment, the students in both groups were basically equal in terms of their English proficiency. Then the experimental group underwent Culture Learning Project, while the control group received no cultural learning treatment.

Table 3.1. *T-test of the Subjects' English Achievement Test Scores for the Control Group and Experimental Group*

	Control Group (N=15)		Experimental Group (N=15)		T value	P value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
EATS	49.57	15.44	52.77	14.00	-0.59	0.57 (>0.05)

Note. EATS= English Achievement Test Scores. $p < 0.05$*

3.2.2 Background of the subjects

These subjects were the third grade junior high school students. They were studying in a rural-setting school. With the treatment of Cultural Learning Project, the experimental group members underwent the regular English curriculum, supplemented by the seven-unit cultural learning project lasting for ten weeks (three units of the seven-unit culture learning project lasted for two weeks). The control group members received no additional treatment.

For the researcher, the selection of those third-grade junior high school subjects were on the ground of the familiarity between the subjects and the researcher who was also the cultural instructor in the study. The subjects were all in the researcher's practicing classes, and she has taught these students for two years. On one hand, the researcher had a clear understanding of her students' learning experience and proficiency levels, and on the other hand, the students also got accustomed to the instructor's teaching style. Thus, a better command of the classroom management and the experimental processing acquired by the researcher made the study progress smoothly.

3.3 Instruments

Three types of instruments were utilized in the study: (a) the pre-test and post-test of Students' English Learning Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire (SELAM Questionnaire), (b) Cultural Learning Feedback Questionnaires (CLF Questionnaires), and (c) a follow-up interview. The pre-test and post-test of SELAM Questionnaire were meant to understand the learners' English learning attitude after culture learning in response to the first research question in the present study. Moreover, CLF Questionnaires and the follow-up oral interview were to elicit the learners' responses toward the culture learning treatment in addressing the second and

third research questions in the study—to get the picture of the optimal culture learning mode for low achievers.

3.3.1 Questionnaire on English Learning Attitude and Motivation (Appendix A)

To get a deeper understanding of the variance of the low achievers' English learning attitude and motivation before and after the treatment of culture learning, the subjects were asked to fill out the questionnaire.

3.3.1.1 Questionnaire construction

The questionnaire was developed through a series of stages. Starting from an extensive reading of literature on English learning attitude and low achievers which served as references, the researcher adopted the questions addressed in Wu's (1990) "Questionnaire of the English learning attitude of junior high school students" and Haque's (1989) "Attitude/motivation Questionnaire," which had passed the examination of reliability and validity. Based on Wu's "Questionnaire of the English learning attitude of junior high school students," the researcher selected 34 questions on learners' attitude toward English learning in class and after class, and attitude toward English courses and teachers. The researcher also added questions on learners' sociocultural attitude toward English to SELAM questionnaire. According to Haque's assertion, learners' sociocultural attitude toward foreign language was also a significant component on learners' learning attitude. Besides, on the consideration of the research purpose of examining the effect of culture learning experience on learners' English learning attitude, the addiction of six questions on learners' sociocultural attitude toward English to SELAM Questionnaire was thus significant and necessary.

The statements of the questions were modified to be adapted to the context of the

study and also simplified.   For example, the item "I often wish I could read newspaper and magazines in another languages" was altered into "I hope I could read newspapers and magazines in English."   The item "I will listen to auxiliary listening materials like tapes after school" was also replaced by the item "I will listen to auxiliary listening materials like CDs after school."   Then, these questions in the questionnaire were further translated into Chinese by the researcher.   These steps taken, a questionnaire was ready for the pilot study.

A pilot study which covered 40 questions on English learning attitude was conducted around the end of November, 2005.   The goal of it was to understand how English low achievers responded to the questions.   36 English low achievers in Grade 2 coming from my practicing class were asked to fill out the questionnaire, and they were also asked to write down their opinions on the content and lay out.   With their remarks in mind, I made some revisions and deleted 6 questions which made the subjects in the pilot study hard to make a judgment or questions leading to similar data.   For example, the researcher deleted the question "I usually make marks and underline the important point in my textbooks" after the pilot study because another question "In class, I usually take notes and write down the main points" seemed to quite similar to each other.   Finally after the consultation with her colleagues and the advisor, the researcher fine-tuned the questionnaire.   With modification time and again through such a procedure, the questionnaire was believed to have attained a certain degree of validity and be capable of providing this researcher with valuable data (See Appendix A).

3.3.1.2 Content and format of the questionnaire

The item format adopted Likert Five-point Scale (1932), requiring students to choose one of the five alternative responses: "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neutral,"

"Disagree," and "Strong Disagree" following the attitude statements.

The students' English Learning Questionnaire on Attitude/Motivation was composed of the following three parts:

1. General interest in English learning. This scale consisted of four positively worded items (Item 1, 14, 19 and 33) and four negatively worded items (Item 13, 18, 28, and 24). Students were asked to indicate their general feelings toward English learning. Each student's score was the sum of the points taken from each question ranging from 1 to 5. A high score (8 items; maximum＝40 points) indicates a positive attitude toward English.

2. Attitudes toward socio-cultural aspects of English. This scale was composed of six positively worded items (Item 2, 3, 9, 12, 17 and 25). These questions all emphasized that English can be a means of facilitating interaction with foreign people. A high score (6 items; maximum=30 points) indicates students' positive attitude toward the use of English as an avenue toward understanding foreign culture.

3. Desire and attitude toward learning English. This measure contained twelve positively worded items (Item 5, 6, 8, 10, 17, 20, 21, 29, 30, 31, 32, and 34) and eight negatively worded items (Item 4, 7, 15, 16, 22, 23, 26, and 27). They are all questions about students' learning attitudes in class and after class. A high score (20 items; maximum=100 points) reveals students' positive attitude toward English learning.

3.3.2 Questionnaire on Culture Learning Feedbacks (Appendix B)

The goal of the interval feedback questionnaires was to understand the learners' reflections on each culture learning unit. In this study, the periodical questionnaires were rendered at the end of the cultural instruction of each culture study unit. Since

there were 7 cultural units, 7 questionnaires were given to the subjects.   Through the questionnaires, the researcher is able to understand the learners' participation and attitude toward the culture learning in the classroom and also the subjects' reflections on their culture learning experience.

The questionnaires, based on the contents of each culture study unit, were designed by the researcher and her colleague and further modified by her advisor scrupulously.   Certain questions about culture learning contents, processes, and suggestions were asked in the questionnaires and the subjects in the experimental group were required to fill in the blanks immediately after the culture learning of each culture study unit.

3.3.3 The follow-up interview

Finally, an oral interview was adopted after the administration of the culture learning project to acquire the subjects' feedbacks for the project.   Fifteen subjects in the experimental group were interviewed on two kinds of questions: (a) questions about their viewpoints on the efficacy of culture learning on changing their English learning attitude, and (b) questions about their feedbacks toward the content and process of their culture learning.

This interview is a researcher-to-student conversation on their language learning in this semester after the treatment of cultural learning.   The questions asked in the interview are as follows:

1. What's your English learning attitude now?   Is it the same or different after the cultural learning project?

2. What's your feedback about the cultural teaching in this semester? Do you like it or not?   Why or why not? (Any difficulties?)

3. Which topic of culture learning do you like best regarding the seven-unit cultural
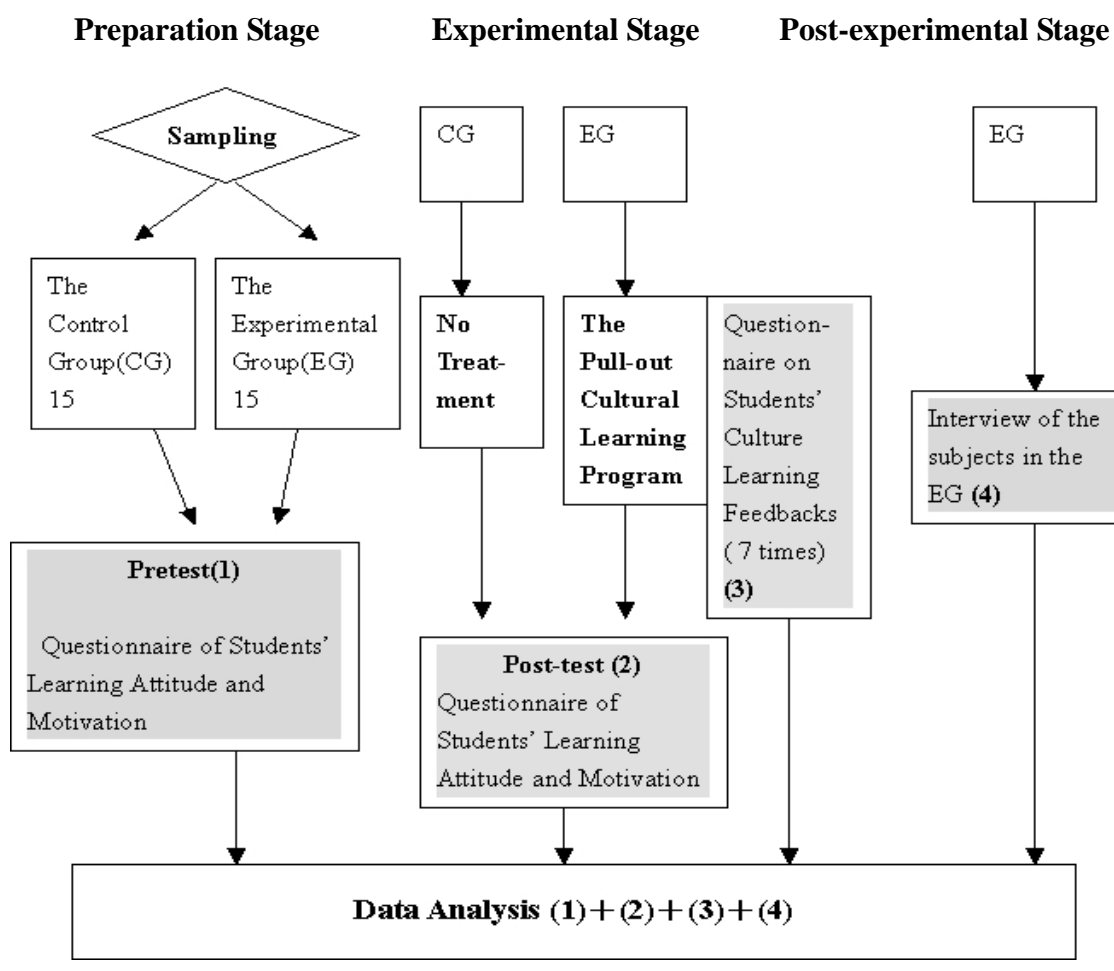
sessions?　Do you have any culture topics that you are highly interested and quite

impressed?

4. Do you have any suggestions on the culture learning content or process?

3.4 Procedures

　　The present study was divided into three stages: the preparation stage including

the pretest, the experimental stage including the cultural learning treatment, the

posttest and the periodical questionnaires, and the post-experimental stage including

the follow-up interviews.　The procedures of the experiment were illustrated in a

flowchart in order to give the reader a complete framework of the study (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. A Flow Chart of the Experimental Procedure.

Preparation Stage　　　　**Experimental Stage**　　　　**Post-experimental Stage**

Sampling

The Control Group(CG) 15

The Experimental Group(EG) 15

CG

EG

EG

No Treatment

The Pull-out Cultural Learning Program

Question-naire on Students' Culture Learning Feedbacks (7 times) **(3)**

Interview of the subjects in the EG **(4)**

Pretest(1)

Questionnaire of Students' Learning Attitude and Motivation

Post-test (2)

Questionnaire of Students' Learning Attitude and Motivation

Data Analysis (1)＋(2)＋(3)＋(4)

Note. CG= the Control Group; EG= the Experimental Group

The procedures were subdivided into three stages—the preparation stage, the experimental stage and the post-experimental stage.   The results of the experiment in each stage were further analyzed to examine the research questions.

3.4.1 Pretest

In the beginning, the subjects in both the control and experimental group took a pre-test: filling out Questionnaire of English Learning Attitude and Motivation before joining the cultural learning project.   This questionnaire was meant to help the researcher get the idea of their original English learning condition before the cultural learning project treatment.

3.4.2 Culture learning treatment

The experimental group joined the Cultural Learning Project at the time outside their four formal English lessons for forty-five minutes in length every week.   The researcher administered a self-designed culture learning session (See Appendix D for detail) in the sixth period every Wednesday, lasting for ten weeks.   The experimental group received the cultural learning treatment, while the control group received no culture learning treatment.   Through the careful design of a culture learning curriculum, the researcher gathered more information on the relevance between low achievers' English learning attitude and culture learning.

3.4.3 Post-test

After joining the culture-learning project for ten weeks, subjects were given a post-test—Questionnaire on Students' English learning Attitude and Motivation again.   By scoring and analyzing the pretest and posttest of the questionnaire with Likert's five-point scale, the researcher got aware of the efficacy of culture learning on low

achievers' English learning attitude after culture learning treatment.

3.4.4 The periodical questionnaires on low achievers' feedback toward culture

learning

In order to investigate and understand the English low achievers' attitudes, perceptions and reflections toward the cultural learning project, another kind of questionnaire was made up to gather the outcomes of their cultural learning.   It was administered to the subjects in the experimental group after each culture study unit. And the questionnaires of culture learning feedback for seven culture study units were utilized mainly to analyze the subjects' reflections and preferences toward culture learning.

3.4.5 The follow-up interview

Finally, the researcher interviewed all the 15 subjects in the experimental group through direct face-to-face conversation with them at the end of the research.   The researcher intended to further verify the subjects' feeling about culture learning and English learning.   The subjects were asked to share their reflections on preferences and attitudes toward culture learning and English learning with the interviewer.   All experimental group members were interviewed to make the data collection more reliable.

3.5 Material—Cultural Learning Project

Even though certain kinds of commercial materials for culture learning do exist, they might not be suitable for the need of low achievers whose language proficiencies are not good enough for them to handle culture learning and English learning well at the same time.   Now that there were no standard cultural learning materials for the

low achievers, the teaching materials of Culture Learning Project were edited by the researcher, the teacher.   The ultimate goal for the culture learning in this project was basically based on the assumption that low achievers might undergo enjoyable language and culture learning experiences and thus increase their intercultural understanding and positive attitude toward English learning.   To achieve the goal, it is necessary to design a culture learning project with the backup of theories.

3.5.1 The rationale of material design

Byram et al. (1994) emphasized that the selection of the content of culture learning should be preceded by the anchoring of the social group whose culture an instructor will be focused on.   Here, the problem arose with the definition of "English culture."   English is viewed as an international language; it is a world language.   Thus, the culture learning in this project adopted a multicultural model (Byram, et al., 1994; Moran, 2001).   In other words, the selection of the content was not confined to American, English or Australian culture; other foreign cultures were also included.

Culture learning materials related to the textbook in use might be conducive to the English learning in the classroom in terms of learning motivation and learning transition.   Arries (1994) postulated that a true culture-learning curriculum would integrate students' interest in target culture and native culture with the textbook contents.   The cultural topics and content in the project were chosen by making reference to the subjects' textbook in use, Nan-yi edition of Junior High School textbooks—to bridge culture learning and English learning for the low achievers. The related categories the culture learning project covered were: (a) belief and behavior within a social group like customs and habits, and (b) socialization and the life-cycle like institution and socialization—systems, schools, national history,

national geography and stereotypes.

Moran (2001) underscored that "the culture learning process runs back and forth between the learner's culture and the culture under study" (p.126). In the process of learning new culture, learners are sure to confront lots of differences and similarities in cultural products, practices, perspectives, and so on; it is hoped that students can consider and discuss similarities and differences between their own culture and the cultures of the countries and communities where the target language is spoken (DES, 1991: 26). Thus, comparison and contrast between the foreign cultures and the mother culture were applied widely in this experimental project. The insertion of students' native culture was believed to provide them with more familiar schema knowledge, which may help low achievers learn language and culture with more confidence (Byram et al., 1994). The researcher exploited this teaching technique to help students to step into other culture through language learning without shaking off their own culture (Byram et al., 1994). Based on a three-level model of cultural comparison and analysis (Lado, 1997; Moran, 2001)—the comparison of "knowing what" (artifacts), "knowing how" (practices) and "know why" (perspectives), the researcher constructed a structural, systematic comparison of two cultures in each culture learning session. It was believed that a culture learner might avoid cultural misinformation and prejudice through the objective observation and analysis of the three levels.

Since the low achievers in this project had only limited English proficiency, culturally related topics had to be presented in English legible and understood by them. Flewelling (1994) reminded that learners' inability to figure out the cultural information in the target language might discourage them from pursuing cultural topics which may be of interest to them. Seelye (1984) postulated that cross-cultural communication and understanding are too important to be treated superficially and

that language teachers should feel free to teach culture in the first language.   Thus, in this culture-learning project, it is a must for the researcher to weigh out the low achievers' English ability and tries to present the most suitable cultural materials for English learning.

3.5.2 Cultural learning sessions

Worksheets of different cultural units (Appendix C) designed by the researcher were the teaching materials in the culture-learning sessions.   The researcher designed culture learning materials according to the topics in the student textbook and gather information from web sites and other commercial textbooks on culture learning.   In the process of planning the culture learning sessions, the researcher's advisor, Pro. Yeh, and coworkers were also consulted for the appropriateness of the contents for culture learning.   The worksheets were distributed to the subjects in the beginning of each session.   The general contents of the seven-unit culture learning project lasting for ten weeks are shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. *The Schedule and General Introduction of Culture Learning Project*

Week/ Date	Cultural Topics (Cultural Units)	General Cultural Contents	Relevant Topics in the Textbook
Week 1 10/17	**New York City vs. Taipei City**	1. Compare and contrast representative landmarks in the two cities 2. Discuss the cultural characteristics of the two cities	Have you ever been to New York?
Week 2 10/24	**New York City vs. Taipei City**	1. Compare and contrast the traffic practices in the two cities 2. Get a deeper discussion about the similarities and differences between the two cities	Have you ever been to New York?

(table continues)

Table 3.2 *(Continued)*

The Schedule and General Introduction of the Culture Learning Project

Week 3 10/31	**Moon Festival vs. Thanksgiving Day**	Compare and contrast the two festivals in terms of the cultural facts, practices and perspectives	Do You Like Fruit?
Week 4 11/7	**Eating and Drinking Around the World**	1. Introduce the representative food in several countries. 2. Compare and contrast the eating habits in Taiwan and Germany.	Do You Like Fruit?
Week 5 11/14	**Ancestor (Attitude toward Old Men)**	Compare and contrast Chinese, American and Mexicans' attitudes toward old men and the dead	Grandpa's Story (Life in the past.)
Week 6 11/21	**Literature— Harry Potter vs. Journey to the West**	Give a deeper introduction to the two novels—writers, contents, meaning, and etc..	Harry Potter
Week 7 11/28	**Literature— Harry Potter vs. Journey to the West**	Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the two novels.	Grandpa's Story (Life in the past and now)
Week 8 12/5	**Chinese Medicine vs. Western Medicine**	Compare and contrast Chinese and Western Medicine in terms of the cultural artifacts, practices and perspectives.	A Close Call
Week 9 12/19	**Men vs. Women**	Compare and contrast attitudes toward women and men in Middle East and Taiwan.	Girls Think Differently
Week 10 12/26	**Men vs. Woman**	Introduce gender bias in the English and Chinese language.	Girls Think Differently

As for the process of the culture learning, the researcher made use a series of steps to conduct the culture instruction:

1. Visual input: A variety of pictures, photos, realia were used to show cultural facts—to concrete and activate the low achievers' background knowledge and incite their interest in culture learning.

2. Cultural comparison: Through the demonstration of the PowerPoint related to each

unit of the culture learning, the researcher gave lectures of cultural comparison and contrast in terms of cultural practices and perspectives.

3. Pair discussion/ expressing oneself: The activities of "pair discussion" and "expressing oneself" were meant to lead them to understand, appreciate and identify with foreign culture and their own culture.

4. Cultural worksheets (Appendix C): Worksheets were handed back at the end of each session and later put in their cultural learning portfolios which were used for evaluation.

3.6 Variables

The implementation of the cultural instruction underwent some adjustments on the arrangement of time and the content of cultural learning.   Generally speaking, the research followed the schedule of Culture Learning Project.   However, the cultural learning project was conducted accompanying the regular English curriculum, some of the dates of the implementation of the project were adjusted because of certain special events, like students' extracurricular basketball games and academic achievement tests.

3.7 Data Analysis

This research completed with both the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data:

1. Quantitative Analysis

The researcher collected the statistics of both the experimental group's and the control group's pre-test scores and post-test scores on Students' English Learning Attitude and Motivation Questionnaire (SELAM Questionnaire), and then used the statistics software "SAS" to calculate the mean comparison to determine whether

there was a significant difference between English learning attitude of the experimental group and that of the control group after the culture learning treatment. Besides, part of the results of Cultural Learning Feedback Questionnaire was also sorted and quantified to present systematic and clear results for the researcher to get more ideas about the low achievers' culture learning mode.

2. Qualitative Analysis

With the analysis of the subjects' responses to CLF Questionnaires and the follow-up interview and the use of graphs, the subjects' culture learning feedbacks and preferences were induced and presented (See section 4.2 & 4.3).

This study based mainly on the quantitative analysis and supplemented by qualitative statistics to gain the results of the effect of cultural learning on the low achievers' English learning in junior high school.   The results of both analyses are presented in the next chapter.