

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the methodology underpinning this research. Discourse completion task (DCT), and Scale Responses Questionnaire (SRQ) were administered to gather data from 98 participants of Saudi learners distributed across two groups known as (HAs) and (LAs). For this purpose, this chapter is designed as follows: Section 3.2 introduces research questions. Section 3.3 explains the rationale of the research design. Section 3.4 provides an explanation of research instruments including validity and reliability of research tools. Section 3.5 details out in-depth the data collection procedures exploited in this research. Section 3.6 discusses the data analysis procedures including highlights on the coding scheme. Section 3.7 summarizes this chapter. The following table (Table 3.1) shows the session for collecting main data from participants, tools, research questions, and data analysis.

Table 3.1: Data Collection Overview

Session	Instruments	RQ/objectives	Data analysis
Session 1	Placement Test	The three classes participants were asked to sit for the Touchstone which was conducted under test unit supervision including the whole procedures of the test (organizing time, distributing question papers as well as grading and classifying students into two groups) Placement Test (TPT) is a language proficiency paper, and a pencil test to classify students into HAs and LAs.	Scoring manually who get ≥ 44 was considered as HA and who get ≤ 43 was considered as LA (this test was administered by assistance of test unit) 120 Saudi learners sat for the exam but 98 student who met the requirement of the study to take part in data collections.
Session 2 (Ice breaking session)	Demographic Background	The essential objective of this session was to 1) brief the participants regarding the study as well as (2) obtain consent from the participants by completing the consent form as well as (3) elicit biodata of participants such as age, exposure to the English language.	Data was used to understand the background of the students.
Session 3	DCT	The purpose of this session was to identify request strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners at two different levels of English language proficiency use (linguistic variability).	Data was analyzed qualitatively from DCT using CCSARP to identify linguistic expressions, structure, and content used to perform requests and to find out the frequency and occurrence of the strategies between groups.
	SRQ	The second objective of the current study was to investigate relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic realization of making requests by Saudi EFL learners.	Data were analyzed quantitatively from SRQ and quantitatively using SPSS depending on CCSARP to assess the speaker's realization of pragmatic competence in using request act.

3.2 Research Questions

Investigation of this study attempts to address the following questions:

1. What strategies do Saudi EFL learners at different levels of English language proficiency employ in making request act? Linguistic variability pertaining to
 - a. Level of directness / indirectness between HAs and LAs
 - b. conventionally indirect, and non-conventionally indirect request strategies
 - c. external and internal modifications between HAs and LAs
2. What is the relationship between language proficiency and pragmatic realization of making requests by Saudi EFL learners? (Situational variability).
3. What are the similarities and differences in the production and realization of request act by HAs and LAs?

3.3 Rationale of Research Design

In interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) and contrastive pragmatics, Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is deemed as the most common tool in gathering data and in cross-cultural studies as well (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Golato, 2003). In general, DCT has a variety of social variables in a certain context (age, gender, and power), which assist scholars in studying the effect(s) of these variables on speech act in intercultural or cross-cultural studies (Cohen, 2004).

The current study which attempted to identify request strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners at two different levels of English language proficiency use (linguistic variability) uses mixed methods for collecting and analyzing the data. Firstly, using Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) tool by employing DCT is considered the most extensive empirical investigation of cross-

cultural pragmatics. Secondly, discourse completion task (DCT) that contains 12 situations is a qualitative instrument designed to serve the purpose of the study and to pinpoint the most employed request strategies among SEFL and their pragmatic realization in making requests (in this tool no grading for the students' responses). Thirdly, scaled response questionnaire (SRQ) is a quantitative tool that has a predetermined answer list with options that are incrementally related to each other with the purpose of measuring the intensity to which a respondent feels toward or about something.

The use of this instrument helps the tendency of the students towards using request strategies. As a result, it draws a distinction between high and low SEFL proficiency learners. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that the use of speech acts properly is affected by the speaker's perception and competence of the sociocultural norms of the target language. Hence, SRQ in this study may serve as a potential method to obtain the learner's socio-pragmatic knowledge in producing speech acts. Socio-pragmatic competence gathered from SRQ provides a relatively assessment of speakers' ability to understand and realize the influence of social variables in the target language and culture (Takimoto, 2012).

The adopted SRQ (Al-Momani, 2009) includes 5- scales attached with DCT aiming at collecting SEFL's realization of socio-pragmatic knowledge in using request act from both groups of different language proficiency. This tool has been conducted and adopted in many studies (Alsakaker, 2020, Al-Momani, 2009; Lin, 2014).

Although Kasper (2000) suggested nine methods of data collection in pragmatic competence, Nurani (2009) pointed out one of the potentially reliable instruments amongst these methods is DCT. Employing DCT in ILP has many advantages since it has some features, such as control over social variables and context. One of the most

distinctive features of DCT is that it supplies a sufficient amount of data in a short period with less effort. Moreover, its gathered data does not need transcription and there is no need to compare responses. This method fits scrutinizing speech acts such as apology, invitation, and request. DCT is one of the most prominent methods exploited by researchers and linguists in a variety of fields such as pragmatic, ILP, intercultural communication, and second language acquisition. This widespread use of this method is due to its simplicity and controlling over variables (Golato, 2017, Yuan, 2001). Thus, this research also conducts a qualitative paradigm since it concerns mainly the description of the speech act focusing on request strategies such as (in)directness and external and internal modifications.

3.3.1 Research Context

The English language has increased dramatically in the educational system in Saudi Arabia due to the importance of this language after Arabic language in the communication in cultural and social sense. The use of English language is utilized extensively, alongside Arabic as a formal language, in industry, ministries, companies, hospitals, airports, street signs, media, hotels, universities and institutions. Despite the importance of the English language in communication, SEFL learners still face difficulties in using English language effectively in academic and nonacademic communication. The reason behind this obstacle may refer to the insufficient pragmatic competence for SEFL learners (Elyas & AlGrigri, 2014). For instance, Rouissi, (2016) stated that SEFL learners present pragmatic failures in their communication in using English language, recommending more communicative approaches should be exploited to improve EFL instructions and increase pragmatic competence.

This study was carried out in Prince Sattam bin Abd aziz University (PSAU) in Kharj, Saudi Arabia. PSAU was established in 2009 including twenty-two faculties in several majors such as Business Administrations, Medicine, Laws, Engineering and Science, Arts etc. It also holds more than 29,000 students. The medium of instruction in science, medicine, and engineering colleges is English. Owing to the importance of English, higher education in Saudi Arabia compels English as a medium of instruction in the public universities. Accordingly, each university sets up a new deanship, which is called the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) - science based courses are only offered at this college-centering on EFL. The current study was conducted in the specific context of the Saudi public university; Prince Sattam bin Abdalaziz University, located in Kharj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Being admitted to the medical or engineering field, students are required to enroll in one academic year foundation program. The context was focused on students from this program, which includes two streams of health and engineering departments with roughly 1000 students each academic year. About 100 lecturers, and professors jointly run at the university, approximately 30% of them are native speakers of English. The educational system offers two health and engineering tracks with 12 hours of English language per week comprising 6 hours of reading skills and 6 hours of writing skills in the first semester. 15 hours of English language in the second semester were distributed 9 hours of English for Special Purposes (ESP), and English for Medical Purposes (EMP) classes and 6 hours of listening and speaking classes. These courses are structured around sixteen weeks of teaching with nine contact hours per week for each course.

Briefly, the content of the English language module for ESP focuses on providing students with English from a wide variety of technological terminology and situations, improving their communication skills, and refining students with background in

primary technological notions. In comparison, EMP focuses on establishing students who would pursue Medicine or medical -related programs. It introduces students to English courses that comprise range of medical jargons and possible situations. It promotes their writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills, and boosts them with background in essential medical concepts. The following section will address the groups that participated in this study.

In the first semester, students should enroll in reading and writing courses 12 hours per week during 15 weeks of actual teaching in one semester for both health and engineering tracks. On the one hand, the promotion policy for Preparatory Year Program (PYP) entails that if the student fails in reading or writing courses, he cannot be promoted to the next semester until he/she passes the current level. In the second semester, students should study EMP and Listening course for health tracks with 15 hours per week. On the other hand, students of engineering tracks should study listening and ESP in the second semester with 15 hours per week. TPT is considered as an example of proficiency test that provides information about how learners are distributed into beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels. Administrators generally rely on a placement test that is designed by Cambridge University which involves three skills, namely: reading, listening and language use. The assessments of teaching English at PSAU are carried out in a way that affects the content and context of language structure and function and speech act of making requests to a limited extent. With respect to learners' background, they are government-sponsored at bachelor's degree levels. And they are self-sponsored, particularly when they pursue higher degrees. The following pages are the elaboration of the method used to collect data. A research assistant was employed to distribute pilot tests and the procedures following the pilot test.

3.3.2 Sampling

Three classes participants were asked to sit for the Touchstone which was conducted under test unit supervision including the whole procedures of the test (organizing time, distributing question papers as well as grading and classifying students into two groups). Placement Test (TPT) is a language proficiency paper, and a pencil test which is utilized to classify students into HAs and LAs. After the test unit finished their task, I was informed of the timetable of the participants. Three classes in wing A (labs A 110, A11 and A 15) accepted to take part in the study orally before distributing consent form.

The sample includes 98 undergraduate SEFL level-two from PYP College, who studied English writing and reading courses in the first semester of 2020/2021. The students are EFL learners who none of them study or live in a country where English is the first language in order to investigate only the influence of language proficiency from the same educational background. The researcher teaches English reading courses in the first semester and English for Medical Purposes (EMP) in the second semester.

3.3.3 Participants of the Study

The EFL participants of the current study are Saudi learners of English studying at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. They have no study abroad experience and they have not resided in an English-speaking country. The participants of this group involve 98 Saudi first-foundation year students from PYP College. They were chosen from both medical and engineering tracks at PSAU based on their results from TPT. At the end of second semester, students were admitted to their college either in medicine or engineering college according to their Grade Point Average (GPA). Their ages were from 18-20 years old, and all the students were native speakers of Arabic. The students

have 14 hours per week. All the members of this sample shared the same cultural background and academic background since they have studied the English language from age eleven at Saudi public school, and all of them are schooled in Saudi and followed the Saudi education system.

The participants involved were selected based on their scores on the Touchstone Placement Test (TPT). (For more details, see Appendix, 5), which is adopted by the testing and assessment unit at PYP as a required exam before students' admission at PYP. The research assistant took approval from test unit coordinator and head of English department to collect data. Moreover, students were asked to contribute to take part in this research. High achievers are 50 students who achieved ≥ 44 out of 70 on the placement test. The second group sample were 48 students with a low proficiency in English according to their results; ≤ 43 out of 70 in Touchstone Placement Test (TPT) (see Appendix 6 provides the official scoring guidelines).

Table 3.2: Distribution of Participants

Level of proficiency	Number of students	Age
Advanced proficiency learners	48	18-20
Low proficiency learners	50	18-20
Total	98	

3.4 Research Instruments

To reveal the pragmatic competence of second language learners in producing request act and realizing pragmatic competence, the researcher conducted combined methods of collecting data that were then quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed.

Data are elicited using the following research instruments:

1. Demographic Questionnaire (DQ) is used to understand the background of the students. So probably it is not the main tool for analyzing the gathered data (Appendix 3).

2. Discourse Completion Test (DCT) to elicit pragma-linguistic knowledge (linguistic variability) (Appendix 5).
3. Scale – Response Questionnaire (SRQ) to elicit the social influence on pragmatic realization (situational variability) (Appendix 7).

3.4.1 Demographic Questionnaire

The essential objective DQ was to brief the participants regarding the study as well as to obtain consent from the participants by completing the consent form as well as to elicit demographic data of participants such as gender, age, education, exposure to the English language. For more information, please see Appendix 3.

3.4.2 Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

As the prime goal of the current study is to identify request strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners at two different levels of English language proficiency use (linguistic variability). More specifically, it aims to investigate the level of directness, internal and external modifications among learners from different language proficiency, there is a need to gather an adequate quantity of data. According to Ogiermann (2009), one of the best instruments which supplies a sufficient quantity of data is Discourse Completion Task (DCT).

Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire written in the English language via DCT (no grading for the students' responses). This DCT (appendix, 3) consists of 12 situations that show the variance of power and degree of distance between interlocutors as illustrated in Table 3.2.

The current DCT is adopted from Al Momani's study (2009). The formation of the current questionnaire depends basically on two social factors, distance (D) and

power (P) according to Brown and Levinson (1978)'s theory, which are considered as the one of the most important variables in realizing the speech act (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989). Social power (P) means the power of the speaker over the hearer that includes three possible cases such as (+P) speaker has more power, (-P) the speaker has less power, and (=P) speaker and hearer have the same degree of power. Moreover, social distance (D) refers to what extent interlocutors know each other; in this variable, it would be either they are familiar with each other (+D) or not familiar (-D). The integration of these two variables will equal six possible formulations in the current DCT as follow: situation 6 and 1 (-D, +P), situations 3 and 4 (+D, +P), situations 2 and 5 (=P, +D), situations 12 and 7 (-P, -D), situations 10 and 8 (+D, -P), and situations 11 and 9 (=P, -D). To ensure the reliability and validity of this gathered data, the integration involves two different situations in the DCT, so it has resulted in 12 situations (see appendix 2). The following table illustrates the situations according to social variables distance, and power: for more clarification, see Table 3.3.

For a number of reasons, the researcher adopted Al-Momani's (2009) questionnaire for this study though. First, it was adopted by many research in Arab countries (Alsakaker, 2020) as both participants somehow were from same cultural norms, which made the situations suitable for this study. Second, as Beebe and Takahashi (1987) mentioned, "the word 'refusal' was not used in order to avoid biasing the respondent's choice of response" (p.138). Thus, the word "request" was not mentioned in the DCT situation descriptions. Time and the potential for fatigue were the final factors to take into account. Kasper and Dahl (1991) suggested that if the task took longer than 30 minutes, participants might get tired and give up. Therefore, it was decided that the questionnaire should not last longer than ten minutes for this study.

The DCT was created by Al-Momani (2009) utilizing a back-translation technique, in which the English version was translated into Arabic and the Arabic version was then translated back into English by a professional translator. Following that, two bilingual PhD students with majors of composition and TESOL confirmed the two versions (Al-Momani, 2009).

Table 3.3: Social Variables Distributed in DCT Situations

Situation	Status	Familiarity
1. Canceling a class	-P (S<H)	+D
2. Sharing ideas	=P (S=H)	+D
3. Fetching the charger	+P (S>H)	+D
4. Broadcasting news	+P (S>H)	+D
5. Copying lecture notes	=P (S=H)	+D
6. Postpone submission of class	-P (S<H)	+D
7. Asking a recommendation	-P (S<H)	-D
8. Turning down the volume	+P (S>H)	-D
9. Borrowing old course book	=P (S=H)	-D
10. Changing the time	+P (S>H)	-D
11. Taking calculators	=P (S=H)	-D
12. Borrowing short story	-P (S<H)	-D

Source: Al-Momani (2009)

The following explanation shows the situations that were adopted and used in the current DCT including social variables exploited in the current study (Appendix 3). Situations 3 and 4 (+P, +D) represent that the speaker has power over the hearer who receives the request act and there is a social distance between interlocutors. In both situations the speaker does not know the hearer.

Situations 1 and 6 (-P, +D) represent that the addressee has low power compared to a speaker where the distance is high. In both situations the speaker does not know the hearer. Situations 9 and 11 (=P, -D) represent that there is equal power between speaker and hearer and no social distance exists between them. In both situations the speaker knows the hearer well. Situations 7 and 12 (-P, -D) represent that there is neither power nor distance between speakers. Situations 2 and 5 (=P, +D) represent that there is equal

power between speaker and hearer, but distance is high. Situations 8 and 10 (+P, -D) represent that the speaker has power over the hearer where there is no social distance between them. In both situations the speaker knows the hearer well.

3.4.3 Scale –Response Questionnaire (SRQ)

As the second question of the current study set out to investigate the pragmatic realization of making requests across high and low SEFL proficiency learners (situational variability), Scale–Response Questionnaire (SRQ) (Al-Momani, 2009) is considered as one of the potential tools to obtain socio-pragmatic competence for learners. It consists of a predefined answer list with options that are connected with each other that aims at investigating the intensity concerning a respondent's feelings toward or about request act. This tool includes an elaborated image of the scenario with related information given to learners like imposition and power the same situations from employed DCT.

After adopting the scenarios based on the situations outlined in the DCT (Table, 3.2), the supposed response to those situations is also given along with a certain scale which normally split down from 1 to 5 scales (see appendix) which is adopted by Al-Momani (2009), and the respondents were asked to assess the situations by choosing one relevant scale. For more clarification, consider the following situation (Appendix 5) the following situation is used to reveal the speaker's ability to use linguistic competence in a certain situation (linguistic variability) among speakers from different language proficiency.

Situation 2 (Appendix 5)

You are students in ESP or EMP, your instructors divide the sections into groups to do the course's presentation, but you face troubles in discussing with the members in the group. And you know by chance there are excellent

students in a group. You do not have any rapport with them, and even you have never spoken with them. You decide to speak with one of them asking to **share your idea about** the presentation, and you say

The best method to elicit the type of assessment is SRQ. For this study, the SRQ consists of 12 situations used in DCT and items are indicated by using a 5-points Likert scale such as the degree of social power, familiarity, the right, and the obstacle of performing the request and the imposition to implement the request. Consider the following example from the current SRQ (please refer to Appendix 7 for more information) (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: SRQ Example

Situation 2					
You are a student in an ESP or EMP course, and your instructor divided the section into groups to do the course's presentation, but you face troubles in discussing with the members in your group. You know by chance there are excellent students in the X group. You do not have any rapport with them, and even you have never spoken with them. You decide to speak with one of them to <i>share your idea about</i> the presentation.					
1	To what extent does the familiarity exist among the hearer and speaker in the above situation?	Low Familiarity		High Familiarity	
		1	2	3	4 5
2	To what extent does the speaker have power over the addressee in the above situation?	Low Power		High Power	
		1	2	3	4 5
3	To what extent does the difficulty exist in performing request act in the above situation?	No Difficult		Very Difficult	
		1	2	3	4 5
4	To what extent does the speaker have the right to perform a request in the above situation?	Not Right		Strong Right	
		1	2	3	4 5
5	What is the addressee's obligation in implementing the request act in the above situation?	Not Obligation		Strong Obligation	
		1	2	3	4 5

3.4.4 Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

To assure the reliability and validity of the current DCT and SRQ, the researcher asked two professors from the English department at Prince Sattam bin Abdalaziz University (PSAU) to provide feedback and any suggestions. As Al-Momani (2009)'s tools for collecting data were used for Arab context and to investigate request act, so these tools might be suitable the field of the current study. Furthermore, two situations are conducted for each social variable to increase the reliability of the gathered data. Hence, no recommendations from either hired professor were issued about the ability of these instruments to answer research questions. Moreover, the instruments for the administered situations were piloted to assure the reliability and validity of the DCT and SRQ by testing the instruments on a small sample of respondents to help the researcher if there were any ambiguous situation for the students. Although these instruments were piloted and used by Al-Momani (2009) and used by many researchers (Alsakaker, 2020), the current researcher piloted these situations to ensure the allocated time and readability of scenarios for the Saudi EFL participants. Accordingly, slight changes that were made, for example in Situation 9, were added to the utterances EMP and ESP which are familiar for the students in PYP instead of the word politics (a course name) in Al-Momani questionnaire. The following table summarizes research questions and aims with the associated tools adopted in this study.

Table 3.5: Instruments of Data Collection and their Associated RQ.

Research Question	Participants	Research Aim	Research Tool and Description	Analysis Tool
What strategies do Saudi EFL learners at different levels of English language proficiency employ in making request act? pertaining to Level of directness / indirectness, conventionally, and non-conventionally indirect, external, and internal modifications between HAs and LAs.	98	To identify request strategies employed by Saudi EFL learners at two different levels of English language proficiency use. It aims to investigate the level of directness, internal and external modifications among learners from different language proficiency.	DCT which contains 12 situations adopted from Al-Momani, 2009	Data was analyzed qualitatively using CCSARP to identify linguistic expressions; structure, content used to perform requests.

3.4.5 Piloting the Instruments

Despite the adopted DCT and SRQ were piloted by Al-Momani (2009), the pilot study was conducted to assess the situations' authenticity and familiarity to the participants from different language proficiency, to make sure that the participants understood the instructions in both languages clearly and had no misunderstandings regarding the manner of performing the tasks. The pilot session was conducted in a regular classroom environment. This session was held in the second week of the academic year with agreed time with the participants after discussing the purpose of the study. The DCT was administered to participants who have similar academic backgrounds compared to the actual participants. And this sample of students did not take part in the actual investigation. The essential goals of this step, as other scholars

suggested in previous studies such as (Al-Momani, 2009; and Taguchi, 2015) are as follows: to ascertain all the situations are familiar, comprehensible, and clear enough to all respondents. To ensure that the scenarios' layout and wording were clear and unambiguous, especially for the low Achievers group. Also, to verify if the situations are designed successfully to produce a speech act of request. Moreover, to give the researcher an impression about the required time that should be assigned to do such a task. Finally, to avoid any inconveniences, confusion, or misunderstanding that may appear in the process of data collection. These participants were roughly 10 Saudi students from different language proficiency (5 HAs and 5 LAs).

The researcher spent half of the class distributing DCT, and SRQ; the students were required to fill them out and to write any comments or suggestions. In the same session, students were asked to reply to situations. After reading the responses and comments, the vague expressions and length situations (if any) might be modified to make them suitable in Saudi culture and make them shorter and more apparent (see Section 3.5.4). The result from this pilot session showed that all the situations were familiar, comprehensible, and clear enough to all respondents and the allocated time was suitable to reply to DCT and SRQ. The scenarios' layout and wording were clear and unambiguous for both groups group.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

The following section describes the data collection procedures. The discussion also includes a brief description of the sessions regarding the main data collection (Section 3.5.2) in the attempt to select the participants for this study and to detail the procedures and sessions taken for the main data collection.

3.5.1 Session 1 – Placement Test

This study took place in a governmental university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The population (98 students) were enrolled students at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University. Data was gathered during the second academic year 2020\2021 as planned. As mentioned earlier, two groups of learners took part in this study: in doing so, 98 Saudi EFL. All these groups were informed previously about the nature of research, and they were given a written consensual confirmation (see Appendix 1). The process of data collection lasted two weeks since it took place during COVID-19 and students attended only practical courses such as Physics and Chemistry laboratories. DCT and SRQ are dual languages as English in Saudi Arabia is considered as a foreign language (Appendices 3,4,7 and 8). Table 3.6 illustrates the procedure for the Proficiency test held at PYP. Table 3.7 illustrates the scores and the category of achievers according to the students' scores on their placement test held by researchers according to the scoring rubric attached in Appendix 10.

Table 3.6: Procedure of Data Collection for Session 1

Item	Description
Time	The researcher conducted this session during the third week of the second semester of 2020/2021. The researcher chose the third week intentionally to ensure the students settled down after the registration process
Participants	The participating students of this session were from those who enrolled in the Preparatory Year Program at PSAU (students stay one academic year in this college)
Throughout the meeting	During the first meeting, all the participated students were required to sign a consent form to take part in this study. The researcher also explained the nature of the study, and any inquiries regarding the aims and procedures of the research were addressed for the volunteers)
Procedure	To this end, three classes were selected randomly from 20 classes available (permission was taken from the head of the department and test unit). The participants were asked to sit for the Touchstone Placement Test (TPT), a language proficiency paper, and a pencil test that was conducted for the allocated time given. As each group had different timetables for their academic classes, the session for each group took into consideration of their break time or the researcher resorted to the English department to choose classes from the department schedule such as reading skills or writing skills. The TPT that took about 1 hour, and half was conducted to determine the level of English language proficiency of participants which was administered by test unit
Analysis	Following the analysis of the Touchstone Placement Test (TPT) results performed by the researcher, the participants were categorized into two groups – low and high achievers. The identification of the different groups was determined by the scores obtained in the TPT (see the scoring rubric, appendix 10)

The interpretations of the scores are derived from Touchstone Placement Test (TPT) –as mentioned in appendix 10. This test is used by the Assessment and Test unit in PYP before admitting the students to the college. If the student gets ≥ 44 and above, it means the examinee is considered as High Achievers (HA) in using English. And if the examinee gets less than ≤ 43 , it indicates the speaker has limited knowledge in the English language as Low Achievers (LA). Touchstone Placement Test (TPT) is an international test designed by Cambridge University Press, 2009. TPT is designed to

measure English language proficiency for those who use English in communication and education purposes. This test takes one hour and half with multiple choice questions, including three sections: listening (20 items), reading (20 items) and language use (30 items). The total score of this test is 70 points. In order to classify students into two groups, TPT was administered for three classes in case some students may refuse to participate in this research that may plenty number of students standby (For more information, refer to Appendix 9). And for grading guide please refer to Appendix 10.

Table 3.7: Classification of the Groups According to their Scores

Score	Group
≥ 44	High Achievers
≤ 43	Low Achievers

After the researcher collected results from test unit, he chose high 50 students from those who get ≥ 44 to be in group HAs and 48 students were chosen from those who got less than ≤ 43 . Specifically, the tests were graded solely based on grammatical structures and grammatical correctness. The tests will be given score if it is correct based on sentence construction soundness and accuracy only. Then, the researcher called these students to be participants in this study. After oral approval from students, the researcher asked them to sign in the consent form adopted by supervisor from USIM.

After the permission was granted to researcher from head of English department and head of test unit at PYP, PSAU, the researcher contacted with three of lab instructors who teaching practical courses during Covid- 19 to depict of what members would be expected to do and the long of participation would last. The researchers called the volunteer then sat with them individually in their office at agreed-upon times according to their timetables. During the meeting with them, they were given consents forms and full explanation of the nature of the research without inserting request word

in explanation as this word might effect on students' responses on their answering DCT. The flow chart represented in Figure 3.1 shows the sampling technique's procedures used in the current study:

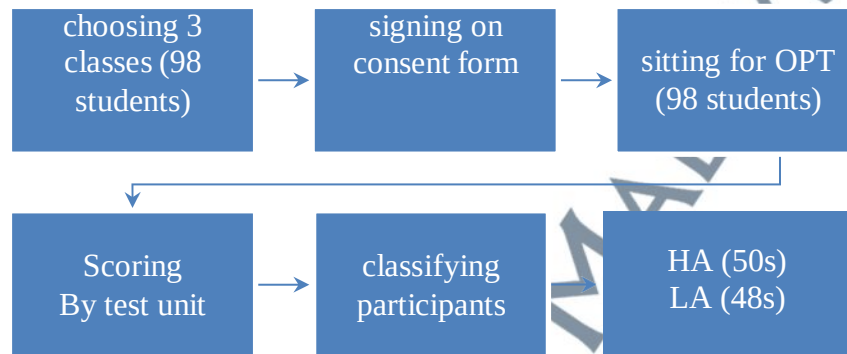


Figure 3.1: Purposive Sampling Technique

3.5.2 Session 2: Briefing Session /Ice Breaking Session

The essential objective of this session was (as explained early) to 1) brief the participants regarding the study as well as (2) obtain consent from the participants by completing the consent form as well as (3) elicit demographic data of participants such age, level of language proficiency and exposure to the English language. This session took place in the week after conducting the placement test that is the fourth week of the academic year, and it was conducted according to the agreed time with the participants. In the beginning of the session, the participants were briefed regarding the tasks to be completed by the participants in the following sessions such as the DCT and SRQ.

Additionally, participants consent to participate in this study was also obtained. (See appendix 1 – Consent Form). Finally, distribution of the DQ was conducted. Collecting data was during pandemic of COVID-19, so it was struggled to contact with students, and they were not available during the whole week. The researcher resorted to practical courses such as physics (laboratory) and chemistry (laboratory) to collect data

with assistance of instructors of these courses to distribute questionnaire and guide students during responding to questionnaires.

3.5.2.1 Session 2a - Distribution of DCT

The DQ was conducted immediately following the ice-breaking session. It was conducted with the assistance of volunteers in small groups of participants to ensure a convenient time for students and to guide them on how to answer the situation and clarify the reason behind this study. The session was conducted in a normal classroom environment, and the participants were not allowed to communicate with each other during the test. Before distributing DQ, participants were encouraged to ask for clarification regarding the tasks to be completed in the test, and questions regarding the tests were answered by the researcher.

The DQ session minimally lasted for 30 minutes to 40 minutes when there were cases where the researcher would spend more time discussing with students before the start of answering. At the end of this session, the researcher gathered the students' responses to analyze them later and informed the arrangements of the third session to the participants and no grading was assigned for the respondents.

3.5.3 Session 3 – Main Data Collection: Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and Scale Response Questionnaire (SRQ)

Session 3 was conducted in the third week, which was the fifth week. Similar to session 1, with the assistance of volunteers, the participants were asked to sit for the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and Scale Response Questionnaire (SRQ) tests according to the groups assigned earlier. The session began with the participants being invited to ask any questions that they were uncertain about before the beginning of the

tests. The participants were informed about the two different tests to be taken. They were also briefed that a 15- minute break was given between the tests to ensure the students feel comfortable and to avoid any confusion that may affect the student's performance.

3.5.3.1 Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

The purpose of the DCT test is to investigate the linguistic variability of SEFL learners in making the act of request. Hence, the questionnaire would require participants to answer each situation in DCT individually. They were to provide answers about using request strategies in a certain situation. The time allocated for the questionnaire was roughly half an hour. At the end of the session, the volunteers gathered the students' responses once the time was over.

3.5.3.2 Scale Response Questionnaire (SRQ)

Following the break for 15 minutes, the participants were required to answer the SRQ test. They were to provide their views regarding the student's socio-pragmatic knowledge in using the request act. The purpose of SRQ is to investigate the intensity to which a respondent feels toward the questions that examine SEFL's ability to realize the effect of situational variability in making requests speech act. The time allocated for the questionnaire was roughly half an hour. At the end of the session, the researcher gathers the students' responses once the time is over.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the procedure taken for the main data collection from SEFL learners that took place in the second semester, 2019\2020 in the third week of the second semester.

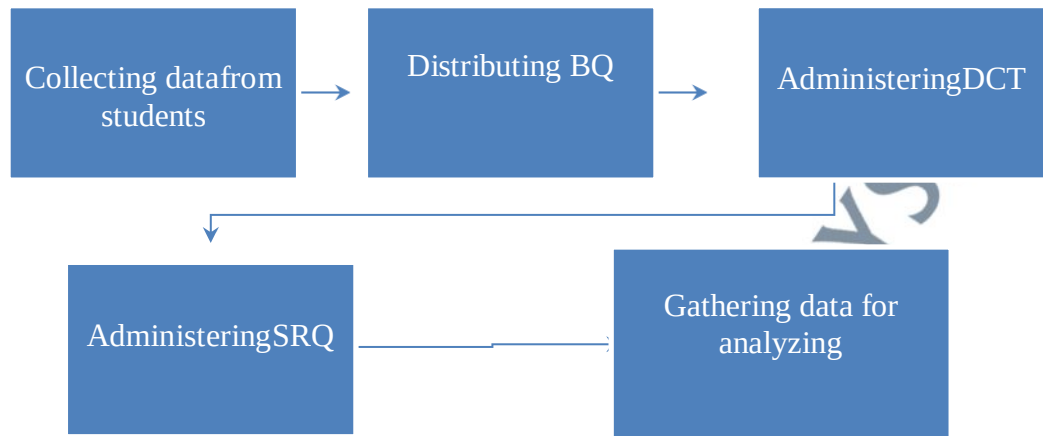


Figure 3.2: Overview of Main Data Collection from Learners

3.5.3.3 Demographic Questionnaire

The main objective of the qualitative study is to analyze the collected data of the participants by using an open-ended Demographic Questionnaire that aims at collecting biodata pertaining to participants such as gender, age and residents in the target community and the exposure to English language to elicit general information regarding the participants' personal and educational background. Hence it is not a tool that is used for data analysis purposes.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures (DCT and SRQ)

This section presents the procedures used in this study for analyzing the data elicited from the two groups of learners. The analysis is determined according to the research questions and objectives of the current research. The gathered data from SRQ are analyzed by using T-test to find out the differences and similarities between SEFL learners of different language proficiency in realizing the socio-pragmatics in Saudi Arabia's context.

3.6.1 Qualitative Analysis

The main objective of the current study is to scrutinize the request act production by SEFL learners of different language proficiency and to investigate the influence of language proficiency in performing request act. To achieve this aim, the DCT is designed with 12 situations vary in social distance and power. The gathered data from high achievers and low achievers were analyzed qualitatively by identifying the level of directness used by both groups. The obtained data were investigated to show the difference and similarities for both groups in producing range of request strategies, the quality of lexical, content, and grammatical discourse knowledge in using speech act. The analysis showed the variation of pragmatic realization of both groups in using request act based on social power and distance.

Also, the objective of the study is investigating the influence of language proficiency in making request act in terms of social politeness and pragma-linguistic aspects. To achieve this aim, the gathered data would show presence or absence of using mitigating devices and conventional indirectness between HAs and LAs; they might differ in the level of formality. As I have explained before, the interpretation of the DCT only takes expressions that are grammatically sound; this means, the items are interpreted if they have proper and grammatically-sound sentence construction. For instance, “*can I have two more days to finish my assignment?*” or “*can you please give me two more days?*” or “*could you please give me two more days?*” (S1, HA #9, see appendix 12).

Respondents showed the extent of using supportive moves as a tool to mitigate the sharpness of request act. In short, the analysis shows if language proficiency has positive or negative influence in pragmatic performance mediating the social variables.

The obtained request strategies gathered from both high and low achievers were

analyzed in the light of CCSARP used by Blum-Kulka, as a request classification pattern (refer to coding schemes in Section 3.8).

3.6.2 Quantitative Analysis

The second part of the main objective of the current study is to investigate the influence of language proficiency of Saudi learners in performing request act based on the socio-pragmatic assessment because students' responses to Scale Response Questionnaire determine their language proficiency level which serves the purpose of the study. To do so, respondents were analyzed according to the 5 scale in SRQ including five contextual variables which are 1) difficulty to perform request 2) right to make request 3) obligation to reply to request 4) familiarity and 5) power. To clarify, the difficulty or simplicity confronted by the students in performing requests indicate their language proficiency level. Same is true with the rest of the 4 scale because their responses determine their responses and to what extent they are familiar with using the language.

The model of CCSARP is a universal pattern used by several scholars in different languages to analyze speech act strategies, which gives frequency and percentage for each strategy in each group. Additionally, chi-square was used for further analysis by building a table for giving frequency and percentage for each strategy used by each group which is considered as the suitable test to show the frequencies among two groups on DCT to answer first RQ. One important thing is that no grading for students' responses on DCT.

In the current study, a T-test was employed to analyze the respondents from both groups (high and low achievers) depending on their socio-pragmatic assessment. This technique is frequently preferred because it is the most suitable tool for giving statistical

differences between groups and to investigate the speaker's perception of using speech acts, including meta-pragmatic assessments (socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic). The gathered data was analyzed based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory including negative and positive face, politeness strategies, and social variables power and distance through the analysis of the data.

To analyze the social context variables, situations were divided into six categories based on social distance and power classification as follows: 1) +P, +D, 2) -P, +D 3) =P, -D 4) -P, -D 5) =P, +D 6) +P, -D. The analysis depends on these categories, which means the researcher focused on each request strategy performed by each request category, and then counted them to find out the percentage and frequency for each group. To determine whether language proficiency influenced the producing and realizing speech act of request, participants were divided into two groups, low achievers and high achievers based on the results obtained from the TPT (see section 3.5.3). After that, the researcher compared frequency percentages for each strategy used by each group. A specialist in statistics coded the strategies into tables to find out the percentages and frequencies by each respondent.

To sum up, in order to reveal the difference between low achievers and high achievers in using request act. The gathered data were analyzed by utilizing Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to investigate the influence of social power (Brown & Levinson, 1987) includes ($S > H$), ($S = H$), and ($S < H$) and the social distance includes (Close or Distant) on using request act amongst SEFL. And this tool is used to show the frequency and occurrence for each strategy by both groups to find out the differences and similarities between HAs and LAs.

The request strategies used by each group of speakers were counted based on the percentages and frequencies of each strategy in each group. That is, the number of the

request strategies or semantic formulas was calculated by counting the total number of occurrences of each request strategies by participants in all 12 situations (see DCT on Appendix, 5 and Section 3. Analytical data). In order to find out the frequency and percentage of a specific request strategy, the number of a specific request strategy was divided by the total number of all request strategies in a specific group then multiplied by 100. For example, the mood derivable of directness was used 234 times by LAs group, this number was divided by the total number of this strategy employed by LAs group and then the number multiplied by 100, for example, $(234 \div 547 = 0.427 \times 100\% = 42.7\%)$ consequently the percentage of this strategy employed by LAs was achieved.

3.6.3 Coding Schemes

The gathered data from the current DCT are qualitatively analyzed in the light of Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) coined by Blum-Kulka (1989) which has been used by many researchers in analyzing and coding request acts. As mentioned earlier, the request act performed will focus on how learners of different proficiency levels perform different patterns of their request acts, i.e., level of directness, external and internal modification that induces the listener to achieve the speaker's request of the target language in realizing pragmatic competence. To achieve the research question (What is the relationship between SEFL's English proficiency levels and strategies of making requests?) (Linguistic variability). A controlled elicitation procedure instrument used is a discourse completion test, which was originally developed for comparing the speech act realization patterns of SEFL HAs and LAs. The following subsection will address these strategies used in CCSARP in order to investigate the variation in utilizing these strategies among SEFLs as high achievers and low achievers.

3.6.3.1 Directness

The preferable method in analyzing data regarding speech act is the Blum-Kulka (1989)'s classification, that is Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern (CCSARP) which utilized by large numbers of scholars Al-Khaza'leh, (2018), Al-Momani, 2009, Qari, (2019). For the purpose of investigating the students' responses concerning the use of request strategies, the best data set to be used is determined by the analysis of the data yielded by the responses to the discourse completion task which depends on an independent evaluation of each response. To put this in a nutshell, the following examples indicates the forms of research questions that might be used in this study, such as mood derivable the nature of the verb has an influence on the hearer e.g.: *"turn down the volume"* (S7, LA#7), explicit performatives in which the speaker tends to use an utterance that has an implicit impact on the hearer e.g.: *"I am asking you to turn down the volume"* (S7, LA#9), (, hedged performatives have an embed naming of the illocutionary force, here the speaker tends to be politer. For instance, *"I'd like to ask you to turn down the volume"* (S7, HA#7). Obligation statement, the speaker tends to oblige the listener such as *"you will have to turn down the volume"* (S7, LA#23). Finally, want statements, these utterances express the intentions, desires, and feelings of the speaker. For instance, *"I really wish you'd turn the volume"* (S7, HA#9).

Despite the criticisms of the weakness of CCSARP (Woodfield, 2012) the head acts notion in CCSARP show the effectiveness of this method. Al-Momani (2019) mentioned that head acts are portions of sequences that are used to recognize the act separating from other parts. According to (Ibid), there are three classifications of directness such as 1) Non-Conventionally Indirect (NCI) 2) Conventionally Indirect (CI) 3) Direct (D) as shown in the table below presents the crucial strategies employed in assessing the directness degree to analysis the elicited data in the current study

(Blum-Kulka 1989). Economidou-Koetsidis (2013) stated that several researchers have used this pattern widely and tested it successfully and empirically. In the present study, levels of directness are analyzed depending on the classification conducted by Al-Momani (2009), as shown in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8: Strategies of the Speech Act of Request (Level of Directness)

Type	Sub-type	Definition	Examples
(D)	Mood derivable	The illocutionary force of the utterance in the grammatical mood marks as request.	<i>Borrow me lecturer notes.</i>
	Explicit performative	The speaker uses the illocutionary force explicitly by employing pertinent illocutionary utterances.	<i>I ask you to give me your book</i>
	Hedged performative	Utterances involve verbs or modal verbs expressing intentions.	<i>I would like to ask you to write me a recommendation letter</i>
	Obligation statement	The speaker's intention is explicitly taken from the semantic meaning of the utterance.	<i>You have to turn down the volumeit is noise</i>
	Want statement	The utterance shows the speaker's feelings, desires, and intentions.	<i>I want your calculator</i>
(CI)	Suggestory formula	The speech includes a suggestion to the hearer	<i>How about changing the submission</i>
(NCI)	Query preparatory	The speaker uses a reference to a preparatory condition, for instance, possibility, ability, or willingness.	<i>Can you collect the charger from my office</i>
	Strong hint	Speakers use part of reference which is required for implementation of the act	<i>Are you using your calculator</i>
	Mild hint	Utterance does not contain elements or references to the appropriated request act, thus the demand for context to be interpreted. It is also attributed to indirect pragmatic.	<i>I am busy this week doctor</i>

3.6.3.2 Conventionally Indirect (CI)

Because of the importance of CI among participants, it is described as a social aspect and cultural dimension of language (Al-Ageel, 2016; Al-Momani, 2010; Blum-Kulka, 1989). The analysis depends on the two categories: a convention of means and

a request perspective. Request perspective, according to Blum-Kulka (1989), could be classified into four categories as follows:

1. Impersonal request (e.g., how about cancelling the class)
2. Inclusive requests (e.g., can we prepare for the exam together)
3. Speaker-oriented requests (e.g., may I get this the book)
4. Hearer oriented requests (e.g., could you help me)

On the other hands, referring to CCSARP, the utilizing of conventions of means as well can be classified as follows:

1. Suggestion (e.g., what about cancelling the class today)
2. Willingness (e.g., would you mind giving me this article)
3. Possibility (e.g., is it possible to postpone the date of submission)
4. Permission (e.g., may I borrow your calculator)
5. Ability (e.g., could you carry this with me)

3.6.3.3 Supportive Moves (External Modification)

One of the prime objectives of the present study is to investigate how SELF employs external modifications in their request acts. External modification in request act is used before or after head acts to perform several goals. In most cases, it is employed to mitigate the sharpness of the request act. There are many strategies such as disarmer, preparatory, getting pre-commitment, imposition minimizer, small talk, grounder appreciation, apology, and promise of reward. The following table shows these strategies with their definition (Blum–Kulka, 1989). For the purpose of eliciting responses from the participants, discourse completion task DCT will be used.

Table 3.9: Classification of External Modification

Type	Sub-type	Definition	Example
External Modification	Availability	Declaring a request by inquiring about availability	<i>Are you busy doctor? Can you write a recommendation for me? I really need it..</i>
	Grounder	Utterance contains justifications, explanations or reasons for the request act	<i>I would like an extension for my assignment because I could not deal have time.</i>
	Getting pre-commitment	Utterance contains a commitment to the hearer before making the request.	<i>"Could you do me a favor ?"</i>
	Disarmer	The speaker tries to use a certain utterance in order to prevent any possible objections.	<i>'I know to what extent this assignment is important but could you ...?'</i>
	Promise of reward	The speaker promises a reward to raise the probability of the addressee's subjugation with the act of request.	<i>'Could you give me your calculator? I promise it will be ready by tomorrow.'</i>
	Imposition minimizer	The speaker reduces the force of obligation put on the hearer by the speaker's request	<i>'I would like to borrow your book. Just for a couple of days.'</i>
	Sweetener	Utterance includes exaggerated appreciation to raise the probability to respond to the request	<i>You are the one of the most wonderful teachers, my dad was very sick. I did not make the assignment.....</i>
	Small talk	Making an amiable request by firming the social rapports	<i>How is your teacher? I hope you are feeling well? Can I take a little bit from your time ?</i>
	Appreciation	The speaker uses appreciation utterances to comply with the request.	<i>I really appreciate your effort.....?</i>
	Self -introduction	The speakers preface the speech by introducing themselves to the addressee prior to making a request	<i>I am one of your studious student in your class.....can you...</i>
	Affective appeal	The speaker entreats the addressee's feeling to accept the request.	<i>My mum was sick Can you postpone the meeting please?</i>
	Apology	The speaker expresses apology to the addressee prior to performing the request.	<i>'I'm extremely sorry but I need ask to turn down the volume.'</i>

3.6.3.4 Internal Modifications

Internal modification is the most significant part of the request act which is used to reduce level of directness (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Depending on CCSARP, internal modifications include two strategies that are upgraders and syntactic or lexical downgraders. The speech act of request does not have upgrades, unlike apologies and compliments. Because this study focuses on mitigation and politeness used in request act, it entails downgraders. This strategy is used to answer the research question entitled to what extent do SEFL students of different language proficiency levels vary in their speech acts in making requests in the academic context in terms of their social politeness? In the present study, expressions of internal modification were analyzed depending on Blum–Kulka (1989) and Al-Momani (2010), as shown in Table 3.10.

Table 3.10: Classifications of Internal Modification

Strategy	Definition	Examples from current DCT
Politeness device	This part is an optional device that may be added to a request act to enhance cooperative behavior	<i><u>Please</u> can you postpone the submission</i>
Play-down (past tense)	Speakers usually use the past tense but contain a present time reference to decrease the perlocutionary effect.	<i>I <u>asked</u> if you can borrow me your ...you are my best doctor...</i>
Conditional clause (hedge)	Speakers use conditional clauses to keep a distance from reality.	<i><u>If you</u> do not need this bookcan I borrow</i>
Subjectivize	Speaker performs request explicitly by using subjective opinions.	<i>I <u>wonder</u> if you change the appointment</i>
Embedding	The requester introduces the request act by embedding request in a clause (conditional clause) using expressions such as thanks, hope, and delight.	<i>I <u>would appreciate</u> if I can share my idea about the presentation</i>
Understate	Speakers usually preface the request by using an adverbial modifier.	<i>Can I take your calculator <u>for a while</u></i>
Appealer	A discourse device, for instance, a tag, used to call for addressee's grasping.	<i>Can you turn the volume down, <u>okay</u>...</i>
Hedge	An adverbial device that underrepresents the state of affairs	<i>Can you <u>possibly</u> allow me to be absent tomorrow.</i>
Downtoner		
Consultative device	The speaker tries to include the hearer and bid for speaker cooperation.	<i><u>Would you mind</u> if you I can borrow your book</i>

As for the analyzing the data in the light of Brown and Levinson (1987) theory, the coding of the data is classified into four strategies (from lowest polite to highest polite).

1. Use the FTA on bald record, without redressive action (e.g., “Give me your calculator”)
 2. Use the FTA by positive *politeness strategies* with redressive action (e.g. “Doctor, you are the best doctor, can you please write a recommendation letter?”)
 3. Use the FTA by *negative politeness strategies* with redressive action, (e.g.,
 4. *Sorry to bother you, can I share my ideas with you?*) Use the FTA off record by using some hints as asking for something indirectly (e.g. *I forget mine*”).
- Before moving to the next chapters to analyze the collected data from DC and SRQ, the Table 3.10 shows the samples from students at different language proficiency. (The examples are attached in Appendix 11.)

Table 3.11: Sample of Both Groups Using Request Strategies from DCT

Sample	Level of directness D, CI, NCI	Int. modification	Ext. modification
S7, HA#9, (-P\ -D) <i>Salam Alaikum professor, would you mind to write a recommendation letter, I appreciate your help please</i>	CI (Query preparatory)	Politeness marker "Please"	Appreciation "I appreciate"
S7, LA # 49, (-P\ -D) <i>I need recommendation letter doctor. I need your help.</i>	D (want statement strategy)	No internal modification	Preparatory "I need a help"
S8, HA # 15, (+P\ +D) <i>Excuse me, could you please turn the volume down a little a bit; I need to focus on my study.</i>	CI (Query preparatory)	Understate "little a bit"	Grounder "I need to focus"
S8, LA# 13, (+P\ -D) <i>Turn down the volume, please</i>	D (Mood derivable)	Politeness Marker "Please"	No External Modification
S4, HA#32, (+P\ +D) <i>I hope if you can inform your colleagues that the doctor may not be able to attend the class. I'm busy. Thanks</i>	D (want statement)	Conditional clause "if you can inform"	Grounder "I'm busy".
S4, LA#29, (+P\ +D) <i>I ask you to tell your friend no class tomorrow, please.</i>	D (Explicit performative)	Politeness marker "PLEASE"	NO External Modification

Note: D (direct), CI (conventionally indirect) and NCI (non- conventionally indirect)

3.7 Conclusion

To sum up, Nurani, (2009) contended that each method of data collection has its weakness and strength; hence the most appropriate method is determined by its effectiveness in answering research questions and achieving the purpose of the adopted study. To achieve the goal of this study, DCT and SRQ were employed for data collection. The participants who took part in the current study were divided into two groups: 50 SEFLs as high achievers, 48 SEFLs as low achievers. This study took place at PYP, PSAU, in academic year 2020\2021. The questionnaires were employed

together the linguistic variability and social variability of request act amongst two groups of learners. In the remainder, this chapter explains the data collection as well as the procedures for data analysis. In essence, this chapter has sought to provide a detailed description of the rationale for the research design, the context in which the study took place, and the procedures for data collection and analysis that were employed. The next chapter presents and discusses the results of the investigation.

