



Research Design: Investigating the Relationship Between Language Proficiency and Academic Performance in UK Pre-sessional Programmes (PSPs)



A Study on Key Terms: Effectiveness of Programmes, Students' and Teachers' Perceptions
Presented by: Tao PENG
Date: 3rd of June, 2025

Background & Rationale

Importance of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Evans & Morrison, 2011).

Aim to address language-entry gap (Hyland, 2006; Pearson, 2020).

PSPs are bridging courses for entry into degree programmes for Chinese international students(Heng,2018).

Concerns remain about actual academic benefits from previous case studies(Creswell and Clark, 2011).



Research Problem

How do language gains from PSPs lead to students' academic success?

- Gaps:

- Lack of longitudinal tracking

- Mismatch between perception and performance

- Limited mixed-methods and cross-cultural perspectives



Research Questions

- **Main Question:**

How effective is a UK university pre-sessional programme (PSP) in supporting Chinese international students' academic success?

- **Sub-Questions:**

1. How do students perceive the effectiveness of PSP activities (e.g., group discussions, presentations, academic writing, critical thinking tasks) in supporting their learning?

2. How do teachers perceive the impact of students' language development in PSP on their academic performance?



Literature Review (Full explanation available in the printed version)

Language proficiency: Modest (Green, 2007); limited in short courses; Variability among students (Pearson, 2020)

Academic performance: Mixed findings (Ushioda & Harsch, 2011; Thorpe et al., 2017)

Students' Perceptions: IELTS score $\neq$ actual performance outcome (Elyazidi, 2023); Teachers' Perceptions: Cultural differences in expectations (Heng, 2018)

Case Study: Design and methods (Yin, 2018); Research strategy (Stake, 1995)

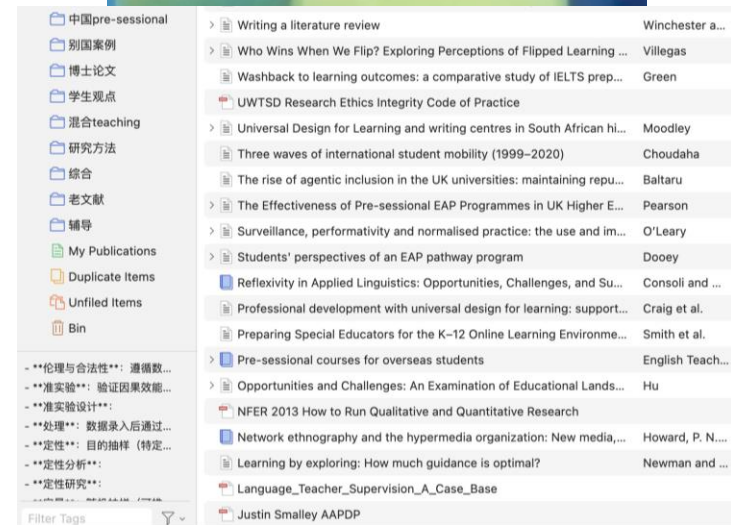


Figure 1: Journals and that I read
Source: ©Author's own

Aims & Objectives (Source: ©Author's own)

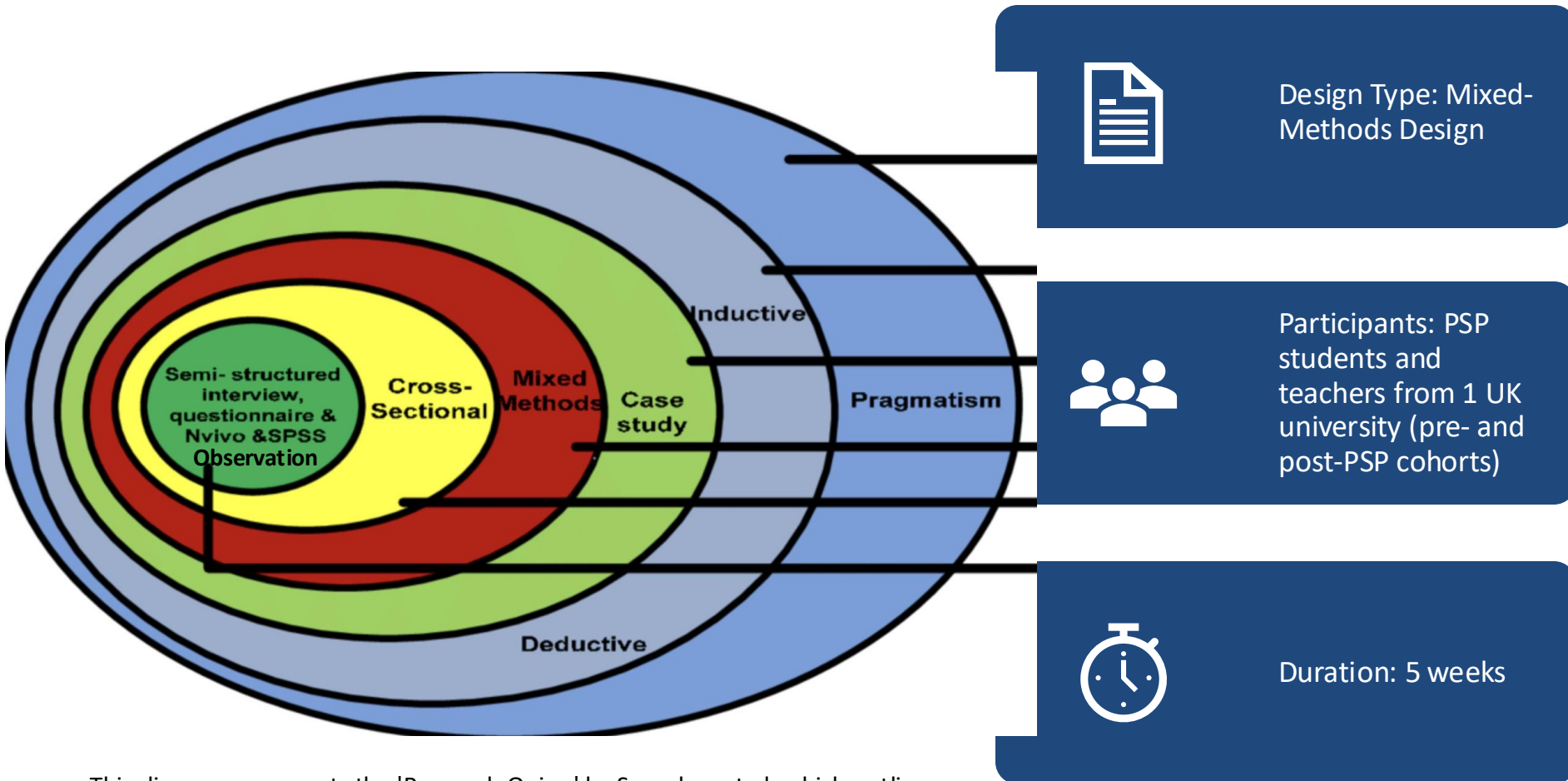
Dimension	Aims	Objectives
Multidimensional Effectiveness	To assess short-term and long-term outcomes of PSPs	To quantify language proficiency gains (e.g., IELTS/CEFR alignment) (Seviour, 2015). To analyse correlations between PSP completion and academic performance (e.g., degree classifications) (Thorpe et al., 2017).
Learning Environment	To explore the PSP learning environment's impact on linguistic and academic outcomes	To evaluate resource accessibility (e.g., academic mentoring, feedback mechanisms).
Course Design & Stakeholder Balance	To examine how PSP design balances competing priorities	To map stakeholder expectations (e.g., students, teachers, etc.) (Hyatt, 2013). To align quantifiable skill metrics with disciplinary demands (Hyland, 2016).
Potential gaps	To identify other factors influencing my research of PSP	To analyse programme duration and entry thresholds. To evaluate AI-integrated tools in PSP.

Overview of My Research Design



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Centre for Education
Addysg | Cymru | Education for Wales



This diagram represents the 'Research Onion' by Saunders et al. which outlines my stages of developing a research methodology.

Source: ©Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill (2011)



Choosing the Right Methods

(Source: ©Author's own)

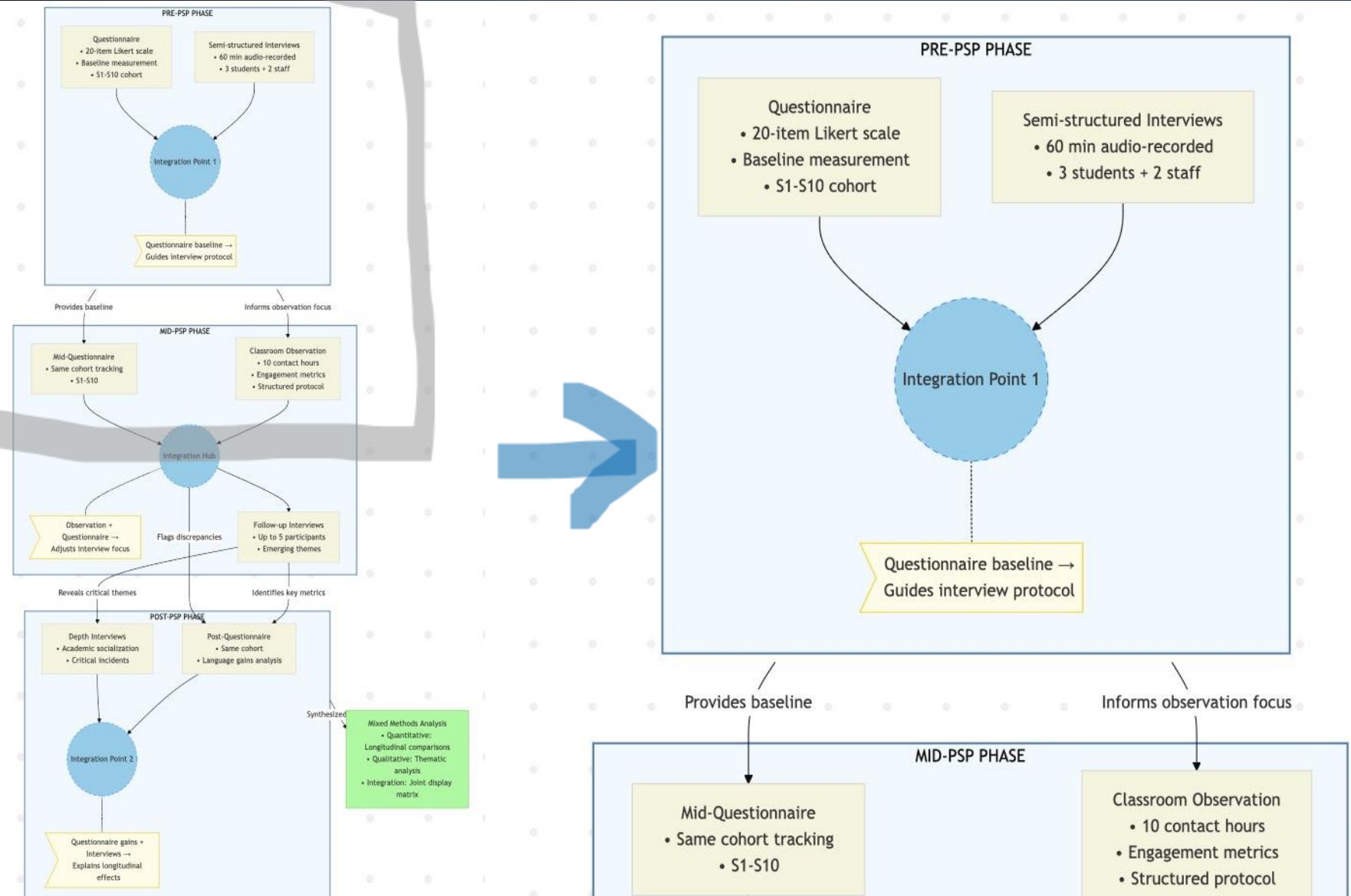
Method	Strengths	Limitations	Enlightenment
Questionnaires	Standardisation: Efficient collection of quantifiable data (Cohen et al., 2018). Anonymity: Reduces bias for sensitive topics. (Dörnyei, 2007)	Superficial responses: Socially acceptable answers may dominate. (Bryman, 2016) Limited depth: Misses different insights. (Bryman, 2016)	Use mixed open/closed questions to balance breadth and depth. Pilot-test questions to identify ambiguous phrasing.
Semi-structured Interviews	Rich insights: Captures reflective experiences. Flexibility: Probes contradictions. (Silverman, 2017).	Researcher bias: Framing may steer responses. (Flick, 2018). Time-intensive: Requires significant analysis. (Flick, 2018).	Train interviewers to use neutral prompts (e.g., "Tell me more"). Triangulate with observational data to validate claims.
Classroom Observation	Authentic data: Directly documents practices. (Cohen et al., 2018). Contextual understanding: Reveals implicit challenges.	Observer effect: Participants may alter behaviour. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) Subjectivity: Interpretation depends on the researcher's judgment. (Cohen et al., 2018).	Conduct covert observations where ethical. Use predefined coding frameworks to reduce bias.

Data Collection (Pre-PSP)

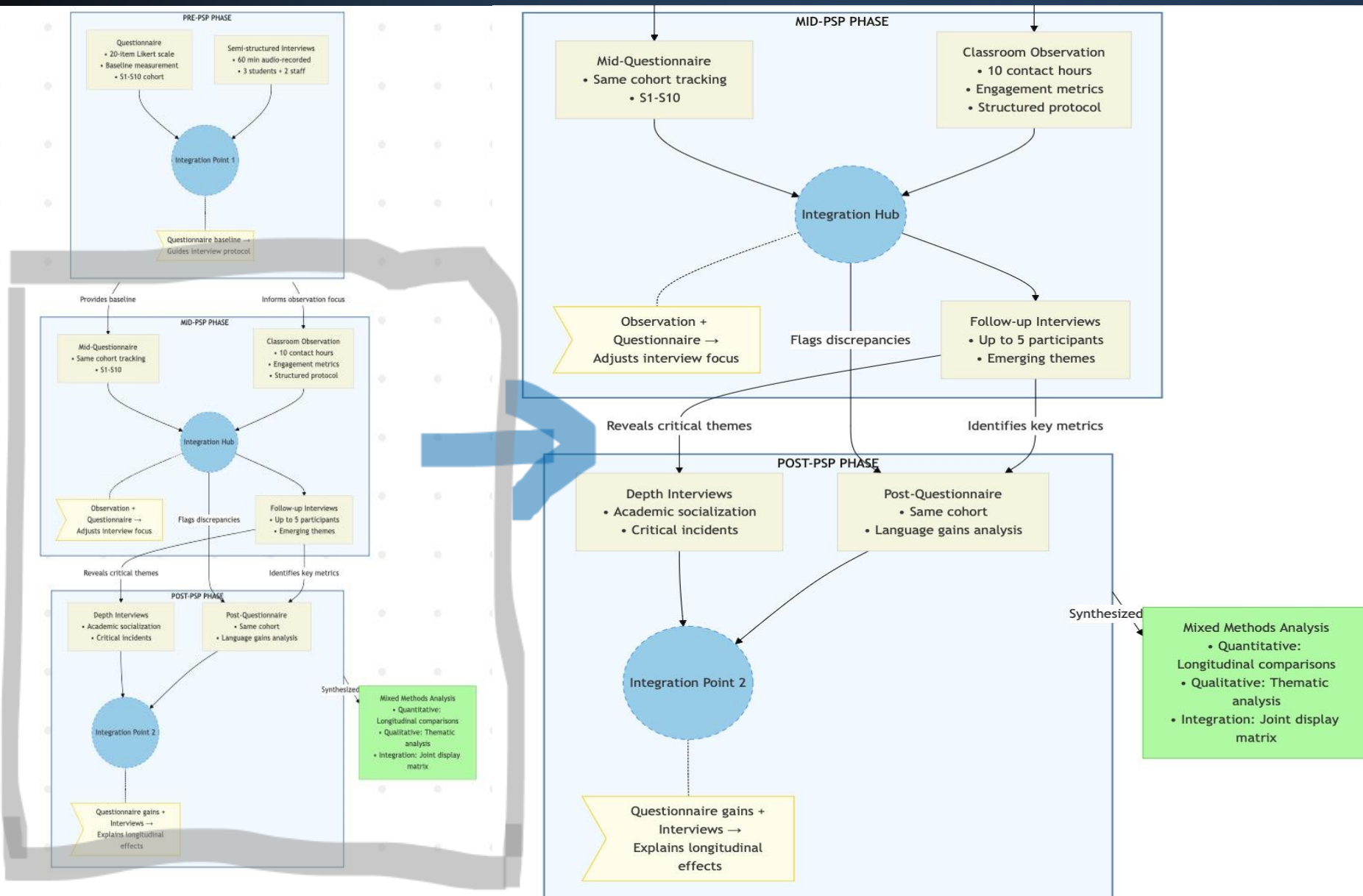


Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Centre for Education
Addysg i Gymru | Education for Wales



Data Collection (Mid-PSP & Post-PSP)





Draft Outline for Questionnaires (Student)

Section	Purpose	Question Type	Example Questions
A: Background	Demographic & linguistic background	Short-answer	1. Pseudonym: _____ 2. IELTS/TOEFL score: _____ 3. PSP duration: _____
B: Language Proficiency	English skill development	Likert scale (1-5)	1. Rate confidence in academic writing (1=low, 5=high). 2. Rate difficulties in language barriers faced in lectures. (1=low, 5=high).
C: Academic Adaptation	Preparedness for degree studies	Likert scale (1-5)	1. Rate relevance of PSP workshops to your discipline? (1=low, 5=high)

Draft Outline for Staff Interview and Bilingual Interview of Midway-PSP Students



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

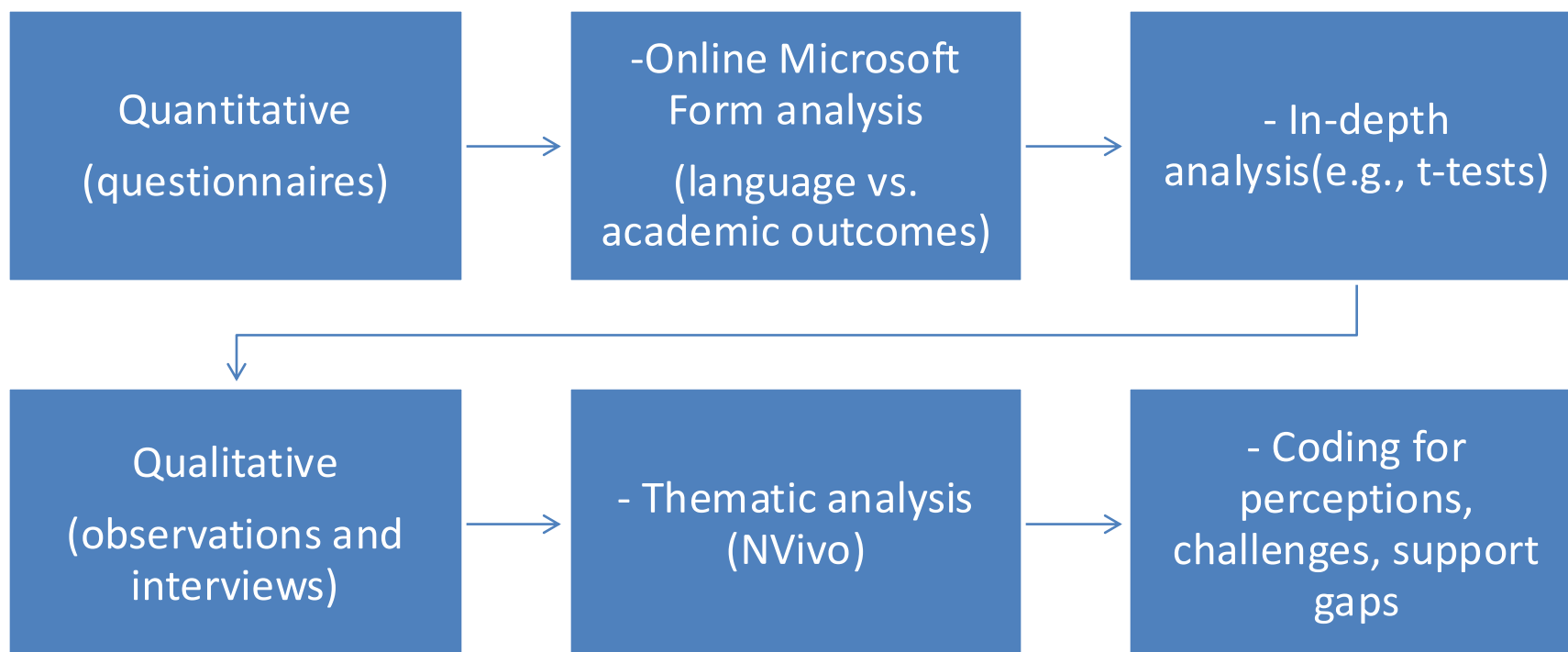
Yr Athrofa
Centre for Education
Addysg i Gymru | Education for Wales

Section	Purpose	Question Type	Indicative Questions
Part A: Background Information	To collect demographic and teaching background	Open-ended	1.Name / Pseudonym 2.Years of teaching English 3.Teaching contexts 4. Education
Part B: Reflections on Teaching and Student Performance	To evaluate teaching strategies and academic progress	Semi-structured	1.Effective approaches for academic English 2.Student progress observed 3.Common student challenges 4.Assessing readiness

Section	Purpose	Question Type	Indicative Questions(English/Mandarin)
Part A: Background Information	To understand student's language learning background	Open-ended	Name / Pseudonym What is your experience learning English, and what are any test results (e.g. IELTS)?
Part B: Teaching & Its Impact on Language and Academic Skills including Part B1: language proficiency Part B2: academic performance Part B3: Teaching and Learning Support Part B4: Self-Reflection	To explore how teaching supports students' language and academic (e.g. critical thinking) development	Semi-structured	1.在语言课中，哪些教学方法帮助你提升英语能力？ Which teaching methods were most effective for improving your English? 2. 老师是否帮助你理解并使用学术语言？请举例。 Did the teacher help you understand and use academic language? Can you give example(s)? 3.你是否学会了如何进行批判性思考？是谁引导你理解这个技能的？ Have you learned how to apply critical thinking? Who or what supported your understanding? 4.哪些学习活动（如小组讨论、写作反馈）最有助于你准备正式专业学习？ What learning activities (e.g., group work, writing feedback) helped you prepare for academic study?



Data Analysis

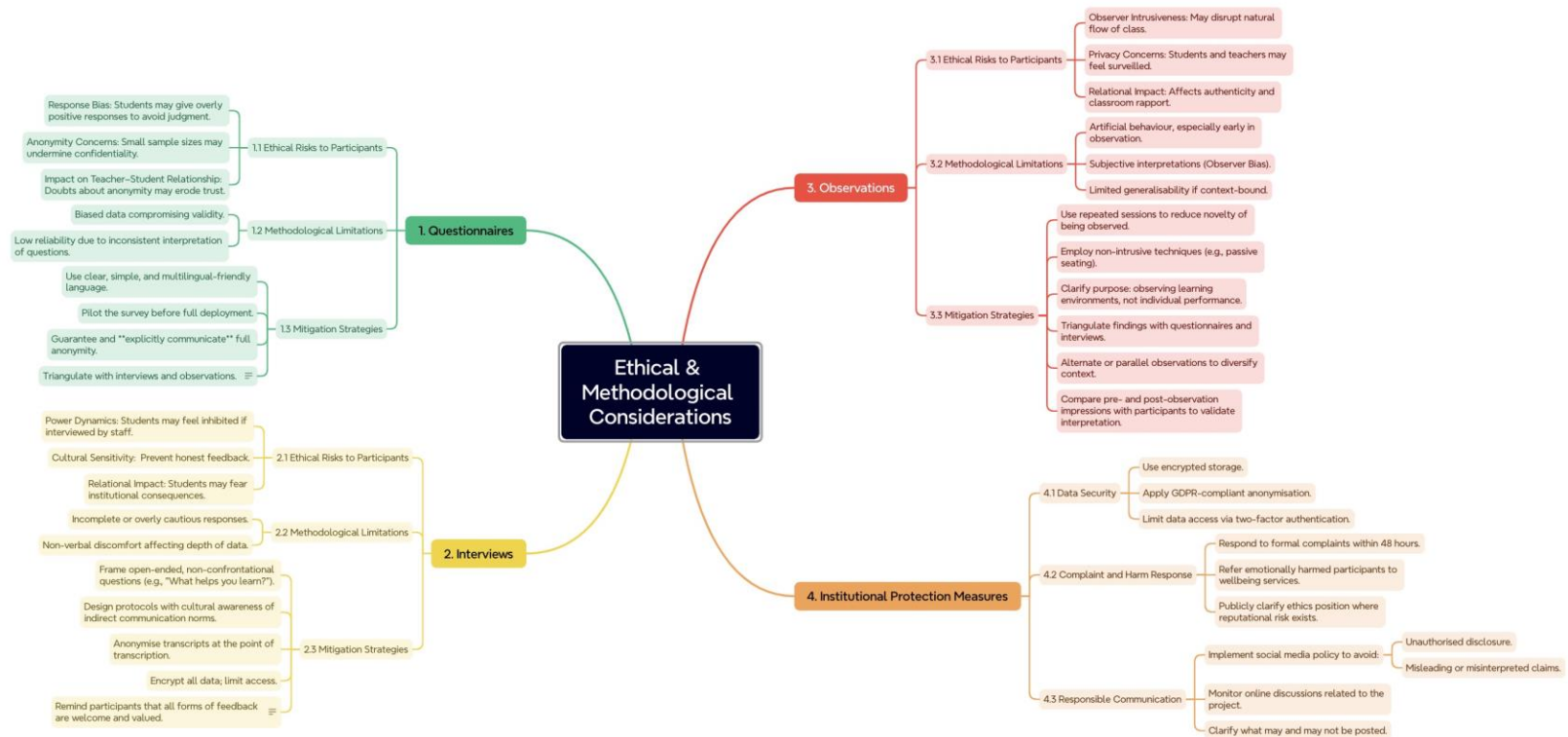




Ethical & Methodological Considerations

(Source: ©Author's own)

(Full explanation available in the printed version)



DATA ACCESS AND
CONSENT (THORPE
ET AL., 2017)



(UWTSO, 2023;
BERA, 2021)



CULTURAL
SENSITIVITY (HENG,
2018)



Research Gaps & Further In-Depth Study



Gap1:

Need for more longitudinal studies and diverse methodological approaches.



Gap2:

Lack of research into different PSPs



Refined RQ:

Why do many students/experts perceive them as 'irrelevant'—does this not reveal a disconnect between institutional goals and students' lived academic experiences?



CLARIFY LINK BETWEEN
PSPS AND ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE



HIGHLIGHT STUDENT
PERCEPTION GAPS



PROVIDE ACTIONABLE
INSIGHTS FOR
CURRICULUM AND
ASSESSMENT ALIGNMENT

Upcoming Tasks: Consent Form, etc.

(Source: ©Author's own)

CONSENT FORM (Non-target students)

Title: Language Proficiency and Academic Performance:
A Case Study on the Effectiveness of Pre - sessional Programmes at a University in the UK

Researcher name: Tao PENG

Please initial the box(es) if you agree with the statement(s):

I have read and understood the participation information sheet (non-target students) and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this classroom observation where the researcher is following some students (but not focusing on me).	
I understand that the researcher may take some notes if I interact with the participants (observed students).	
I understand that if I withdraw from the study that it may not be possible to remove the data once my personal information is no longer linked to the data.	
I understand that my anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the study, but that any information collected by the researchers will be kept confidential.	
I understand that taking part in the study involves researcher' s observation and written field notes for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet.	

Name of participant (print name).....
Signature of participant.....
Date.....
Name of researcher: 2411134@student.uswtd.ac.uk
Signature of researcher Date.....

Invitation Letter

Project Title: Language Proficiency and Academic Performance:
A Case Study on the Effectiveness of Pre-Sessional Programmes at a University in the UK

Dear Student,

My name is Tao PENG. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the effectiveness on Pre-sessional programme (PSP). This study focuses on language proficiency and academic performance in PSP, and I would be grateful if you would help me to know more about your learning experiences during the PSP.

Once you give consent to take part in the study, I will invite you to an interview (on Microsoft Teams) of 30 to 60 minutes, where we will talk about your perceptions, experiences, and your expectations of PSP. If you are a pre-sessional student at the University of Southampton and you are willing to participate in this research, please contact the researcher via email (provided below). Any data collected will be completely confidential and your identity will be anonymised. More information will be provided, but please feel free to contact the researcher with any questions you have. Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you would like to participate or have any questions about the study, please contact me at 2411134@student.uswtd.ac.uk . Thank you very much.

Yours Sincerely,
Tao PENG
2411134@student.uswtd.ac.uk

Research Timeline

(Source: ©Author's own)



Task	May (W3-W4)	Jun (W1-W4)	Jul (W1-W4)	Aug (W1-W4)	Sep (W1-W2)
Finalize Research Questions & Objectives	■				
Literature Review	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■	■
Theoretical Framework Development	■ ■	■			
Case Study Data Collection		■ ■	■		
Data Interpretation & Analysis			■ ■	■ ■	
Draft Writing (Chapters/Sections)			■	■ ■	■
Revisions & Feedback				■ ■	■
Final Editing & Referencing					■
Submission Preparation					■



References



- Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: a Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.
- Angrosino, M. (2007) *Naturalistic observation*. London: Routledge.
- BERA (2024) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024>
- Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*, 4th edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Choudaha, R. (2017) 'Three waves of international student mobility (1999–2020)', *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(5),. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1293872>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2018) *Research methods in education*, 8th edn. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Creswell, J.W. & Plano Clark, V.L. (2018) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*, 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Dooley, P. (2010) 'Students' perspectives of an EAP pathway program', *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2010.02.013>





References

- Ellis, R. 2015, *Understanding second language acquisition*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press.
- Evans, S. & Morrison, B. (2011) 'The first term at university: implications for EAP', *ELT Journal*, 65(4).
<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq072>
- GOV.UK (2018) *Data Protection Act 2018, Legislation.gov.uk*.
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents/enacted>
- Hyatt, D. (2013) 'Stakeholders' perceptions of IELTS as an entry requirement for higher education in the UK', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, vol. 37, no. 6.
- Heng, T.T. (2018) 'Different is not deficient: contradicting stereotypes of Chinese international students in US higher education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1152466>
- Hyland, K. (2006) *English for Academic Purposes: An advanced resource book*. London: Routledge.
- Hyland, K. (2016) *Teaching and researching writing*. 3rd edn. New York: Routledge.
- Mauthner, M.L. (2010) *Ethics in Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publ.
- May, T. and Perry, B. (2011) *Social Research & Reflexivity: content, Consequences and Context*. Los Angeles Calif.; London: Sage.
- Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2020) *Regulations on academic research in higher education institutions*. <http://www.moe.gov.cn>

References



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Centre for Education
Addysg | Cymru | Education for Wales

- O'Leary, M. (2013) 'Surveillance, Performativity and Normalised practice: the Use and Impact of Graded Lesson Observations in Further Education Colleges', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 37(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877x.2012.684036>
- Pearson, W.S. (2020) 'The Effectiveness of Pre-sessional EAP Programmes in UK Higher Education: a Review of the Evidence', *Review of Education*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3191>
- Seviour, M. (2015) 'Assessing academic writing on a pre-sessional EAP course', *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2015.03.004>
- Spada, N., and Fröhlich (1995) *Colt observation scheme: communicative orientation of language teaching coding conventions & Applications*. NCELTR Publications.
- Stake, R.E.(1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- UK Data Service (2023) *Managing and sharing data: Best practices for researchers*.
- UWTSD (2022) *Research Ethics | University of Wales Trinity Saint David*, www.uwtsd.ac.uk. <https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics>
- Yin, R.K.(2018) *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. 6th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Q&A



THANKS FOR YOUR PATIENCE.



FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME FOR
FURTHER DISCUSSION.



2411134@STUDENT.UWTSD.AC.UK



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Yr Athrofa
Centre for Education
Addysg i Gymru | Education for Wales