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**INFORMAL LANGUAGE
LEARNING:
THE PERSPECTIVE OF
HIGHER EDUCATION
STUDENTS IN BRUSSELS.**

A case study

Anne Van Marsenille
MA Language Studies, MEd

Doctorate in Education (EdD)

Centre for Research in Education and
Educational Technology

The Open University

January 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank:

my husband, Hervé, for helping me during the whole doctorate, with his support, encouragements and practical advice;

my mother, for believing in me and encouraging me during the research;

my supervisors, Dr Inma Alvarez and Dr Linda Murphy, for reading my work and giving me useful feedback and comments;

June Ayres, for giving me the right advice when needed;

the Open University library staff, for helping me with books and bibliographic management;

the Director and the Head of the Language Department, for letting me research at the Higher Education institution;

my colleagues for helping me with the interviews and encouraging me;

the students who participated in the research;

Lidija, for redesigning the figures and giving me her support;

Rachel, for proofreading my work and for giving me useful comments;

the Open University staff, to my family and friends, to all the people I met, who inspired and encouraged me.

ABSTRACT

This research explores informal language learning by Higher Education (HE) students in Brussels. Informal language learning is defined in this thesis as learning that takes place outside formal HE institutions. Informal language learning has been studied less than its counterpart, formal learning, because it is more difficult to observe, to quantify and to evaluate. It depends more on the learner, which makes it more difficult to grasp. Informal learning is less structured because it does not occur within a formal learning context; the learning objectives are not defined by the teacher and can vary, according to the learner's situation.

The literature review examines the difference between learning and acquisition; this study draws on Krashen's (1976) monitor theory where learning comes from formal instruction and is a conscious process, while acquisition involves meaningful interaction in the target language and is a subconscious process. This study explores the different types of motivation to study informally and examines how reflection can be used to monitor and improve the language that has been acquired by the learner outside class.

This project is situated within an experiential approach in qualitative inquiry. The students' experience of learning outside class as it is lived by them has been studied. This is naturalistic rather than experimental research as normal learning situations are examined from the learners' point of view.

Mixed methods were used to collect the data: questionnaires, interviews and self-reports to analyse the informal learning process in more detail. The self-report was an adaptation of the 'European Language Portfolio' (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009), which is a tool that links informal to formal learning.

Recommendations based on the findings of this study suggest new methods and strategies for language learning to students and that teachers should be aware of what students do, what motivates them and how learners reflect upon the language learning process, in order to help them learn in class and beyond.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research topic, background and rationale

This study investigates students' informal language learning or learning outside a formal institution by Higher Education (HE) students. As Golding *et al.* (2008) state, informal language learning has been less examined than formal learning, because it involves many variables, it is not systematic, it is not organised by an institution and because it is determined by the student, it is harder to identify. Informal learning is not immediately evident in records and programmes, it is difficult to evaluate, as the learner, and not the teacher is in control of the learning.

This investigation studies in particular the views and behaviour of the students in the Higher Education (HE) institution where I am currently working. It is an HE institution for communication which offers undergraduate courses to approximately 2,000 students: a Bachelor's degree in Applied Communication, a Master's degree in Journalism, a Master's degree in Advertising, a Master's degree in Public Relations and a Master's degree in Socio-cultural and life-long learning activities. The HE institution is located in Brussels, which is a bilingual city with the French and Dutch languages. The HE institution is French-speaking. The learners study Dutch as a second language and English as a foreign language. Dutch is studied as a second language because it is not the students' mother tongue, but it is a national language of Belgium; English as a foreign language is studied

because it is essential in the international context and position of Brussels (Gunderson et al. 2013). This project focuses on the learning of English although the informal learning methods and strategies related to English can be applied to Dutch and to other languages. Through the work I have carried out at the HE institution for communication for fourteen years, I have realised that we, as teachers, have only evaluated the formal learning progress of the students. Being a language teacher and a language learner myself, I notice that much of the language learning is done outside class. This is the reason why I decided to investigate what is learnt informally, what and who motivates the learners, how they reflect upon the language learning process and how the students' informal learning can be taken into account in the formal language curriculum.

1.2. Research areas

This study deals with the difference between formal and informal learning, learning within an institutional structure and learning on an individual basis. This difference is important as, in this research, informal learning is studied within a formal learning context. Informal learning is studied within this framework in order to identify it better and to explore possible ways to integrate it into the formal learning assessment, if it is appropriate to do so.

Informal learning is studied within a psychological and a sociological framework. The former relates to the individual and the way the mind works, the latter is linked to social learning theories placing the learning

individual in a specific environment (Rogers 1996). This research can be related to Krashen's (1976) model, which deals with comprehensible input, through which the learner can understand the message delivered. Krashen's theory is used in this study to understand how students acquire language knowledge through comprehensible input, which they receive when they choose to engage in informal learning activities.

The study can be related to the work of Hamilton (2002) who considers the ecology of learning, where knowledge can be acquired in an everyday environment. Ellis (1994) also focuses on the natural setting to learn a language. Lave and Wenger (1991) bring the concept of 'communities of practice' where experience is acquired within a certain environment. These concepts point to a difference between learning in an academic institution and learning in a natural setting, in the student's everyday environment. Much of the learning occurs through the use of the Internet. The Web can offer the possibility of combining informal and formal learning. Indeed, from my practice, I have found that students are motivated in class when they participate in activities requiring the use of the Internet. In order to practice informal learning activities, students need to be motivated to do so. Students motivate themselves because they like learning the language or they are motivated by external factors, such as having a good job after their studies (Dörnyei 2001a). Learners are also motivated by other people, such as their teacher, in order to sustain their language learning. This study tries to find out the different influences related to students' motivation. Once

learners are motivated, autonomy and reflection can assist the language learning process. Holec (1981) states that autonomy is defined as students taking responsibility for their learning. Therefore, they are active in their learning and can control it. Reflection on the learning is part of learning autonomy. Reflection on experience can lead to better results as far as the acquisition of knowledge is concerned. We learn through the 'process of reflection on our experiences' (Doyle 2001: 11). This research will examine whether students notice what they have learnt and how this process leads to reflection upon the language.

The 'European Language Portfolio' (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009) is considered in this study as a means of promoting reflection and autonomy in the language learning process. The ELP can be used by the students to reflect upon their learning and also by the teacher to know what and how the student learns and to possibly evaluate the informal learning within the formal learning programme. The ELP was used as one of the tools to assist in achieving the aim of the research, that is, to identify what informal learning activities students engage in, how they are carried out and how they might be integrated within the formal learning curriculum.

1.3. Research aim

The aim of this investigation is to find out which informal learning activities students engage in, what and who motivates them to do so and how they reflect upon their language learning process. The purpose of this study is to

consider how students use informal learning activities to improve their knowledge of the foreign language.

1.4. Research evolution

When I started the doctorate programme, my first idea was to research informal learning in Higher Education and in the workplace; to compare both settings, to verify whether people in the workplace are encouraged to study on an informal basis, even if in some cases, they no longer receive formal education in languages. I felt there was a link between formal and informal learning. Students appeared more motivated to learn a language informally if they receive the necessary advice and encouragements in class. I reconsidered the limits of my study and thought it was better to restrict myself to one of the settings as the topic would be too broad. I decided to choose the Higher Education setting, as I am a HE teacher and it would be useful for my practice to consider which informal learning activities students practise and to try to bridge the gap between formal and informal learning.

At first, I did not know which HE institutions to choose, beside my own. I thought of examining informal learning in several HE institutions. In order to have a comprehensive view of the situation, I limited myself to a case study in the HE institution where I am working. I chose second and third year classes as I teach languages at these levels, but I chose to research other

teachers' classes, as I wished to compare what the students did and their views with their teacher's views.

I therefore developed the themes of interest, which I explained under the heading "Research areas". These themes focus on informal learning in an HE context by dealing with the contrast between formal, informal and non-formal learning, informal learning activities, motivation to study informally, reflection and autonomy in the language learning process. These themes developed into research questions, which will be presented in detail after the literature review.

This project lies within an experiential approach in qualitative inquiry. The students' experience of learning outside class as it is lived by them is examined. This is naturalistic rather than experimental research as normal learning situations are observed from the learners' point of view.

I carried out an initial study with a few students and a teacher to test whether the methods used could be applied in a further study. Some issues related to the research themes arose in the initial study: it appeared that students mostly used the Internet and watched films in English as informal learning outside class. The teacher did not emphasise the use of the Internet during informal learning activities. In this initial study, it appeared that motivation to learn informally generally came from the teacher. Students mostly consulted dictionaries in order to understand the meaning of the words they did not know, whereas the teacher also mentioned the use of a reference grammar, which was a tool learners did not often use. The initial

study showed that the European Language Portfolio, as a means to identify the students' formal and informal language learning, was not well known and not much used by the students and their teacher. These issues were further explored in the main study in order to draw conclusions regarding informal learning and related topics and in order to understand its possible relationships with formal learning.

Initially, this research focused on getting insights from the students.

Subsequently, I hoped that an outcome of the research might be to increase students' awareness and to provide learners with information about informal learning activities, so that they might make more effective use of such opportunities to enhance their formal learning. It turned out that findings are probably at least as relevant to teachers, who might be encouraged to consider what learners do outside class and to find out more about their students' informal learning, in order to encourage them to engage in informal learning, to give them good advice on how to study informally, and to explain how and why this may enhance their formal language learning.

1.5. Research questions

This research project will investigate the following research questions related to the areas discussed in the literature review.

1. What type of informal language learning activities do learners in a Higher Education institution in Brussels engage with?

2. In this HE context, are students motivated to learn a foreign language informally? Who and what motivates them? If students are not really motivated, why do they lack motivation to learn languages outside class?
3. Do learners reflect upon the informal language learning process? What are the consequences of reflection, or its absence?

The first question aims to find out whether learners actively seek and engage in informal language learning opportunities, whether they use the world around them (Coleman et al. 2005), whether they employ face-to-face or virtual means of communication in order to learn informally. It also asks about what students feel they learn informally, whether they take advantage of the cultural context (Kramersch 1996).

A second strand of this research focuses on who and what motivate learners to engage in informal learning activities. The integrative and instrumental motives (Dörnyei 2001a) will be taken into account. It examines whether students learn English to be part of the language community, whether it is for better work possibilities, whether they wish to use English as a vehicular language (Mitchell et al. 2013). This research investigates the extent to which some people recommend informal learning activities and whether teachers notice that students learn informally. From my practice, I realise that some aspects of language learning do not motivate students and they do not always take time to practise the foreign language outside class. The effects of motivation or the lack of it will be also analysed.

Finally, reflection during the informal learning process is considered. The extent to which students benefit from noticing (Schmidt 2001) and reflection upon the language learning process and whether teachers help students to reflect is examined, to understand whether learners become more autonomous in their language learning. Lack of noticing and reflection and why it occurs is also to be taken into account. A portfolio tool, that promotes reflection upon the formal and informal learning process and their evaluation, will be used. In my practice, I notice that language portfolios, and more particularly the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009), are known by my colleagues, but not used. The reasons why they are not applied and included in the curriculum, as instruments to combine formal and informal learning, are explored.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The nature of informal learning has been considered by a number of researchers. According to McGivney (1999: 1), informal learning can be defined in many ways: it usually takes place outside class in a variety of settings but it can also happen in class, it can occur intentionally or unconsciously, it does not require a framework but it could arise under the guidance of a teacher in an informal style, it can be planned or unplanned. The type of informal learning examined in this project dealing with students' views is the learning activity which occurs outside the formal institution.

In this literature review, different aspects of informal learning are examined. Firstly, I consider the difference between formal, informal and non-formal learning. Secondly, I look at informal learning within the psychology of learning that could be explained as learning as an individual and with intrapersonal interaction or learning through the interaction of the mind. Thirdly, I explore informal learning within the sociology of learning or learning in a particular environment with interpersonal interaction. Fourthly, I examine the informal learning activities students undertake (Figure 2.1). In this research, I am dealing with informal learning or learning outside the classroom, which is carried out in parallel with and in support of formal learning. I am not dealing with non-formal learning, or structured learning that "does not lead to certification" (European Commission 2001: 33). This research also focuses on motivation, which is necessary to practise informal

learning. Motivation can be integrative, depending on the students themselves or instrumental, depending on external factors (Dörnyei 2001a). This study considers autonomy and reflection that may be part of the informal learning process.

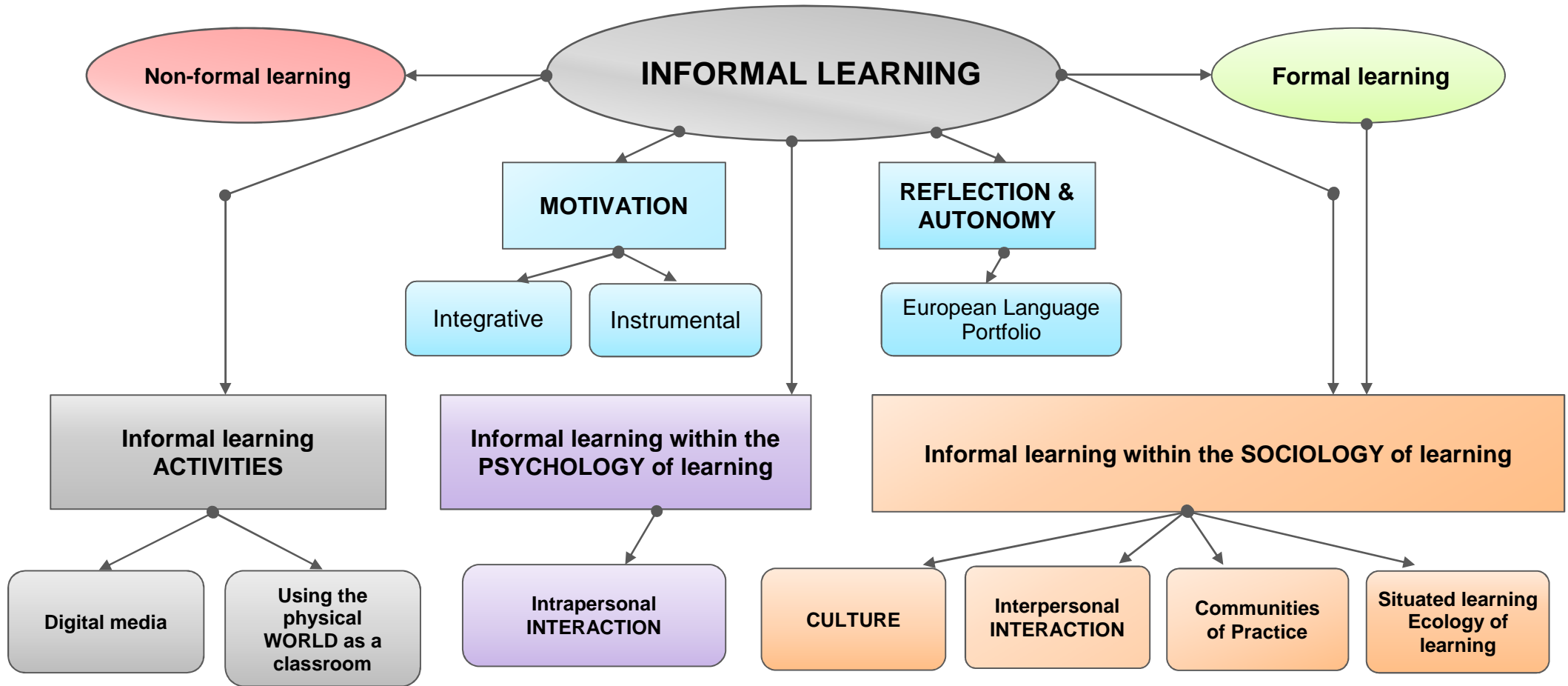


Figure 2.1: Literature review: Main concepts

2.1. Informal language learning

In order to understand informal learning, it is necessary to contrast it with formal and non-formal learning. I will also deal with informal learning within the psychology of learning on the one hand and within the sociology of learning on the other. In order to exemplify informal learning, different types of informal learning activities are considered and analysed, especially the activities making use of digital media.

2.1.1. Informal, formal and non-formal learning

In this part, I consider the views of several researchers to distinguish between informal, formal and non-formal learning. In this investigation, I use the definitions given by the European Commission (2001) to examine informal and formal learning. I explore the possible relationships between informal and formal learning. I look at the location of the informal learning activities. Finally, I explain features of informal learning by drawing a difference between incidental and intentional learning, implicit and explicit knowledge.

In this study, I will focus on the definitions of the European Commission to understand the differences between the various types of learning. The Communication from the European Commission (2001: 32-33) differentiates:

“formal learning that is typically provided by an education or training institution, structured (in terms of learning objectives,

learning time or learning support) and that is leading to certification.

Formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective.

Informal learning that results from daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support) and typically does not lead to certification. Informal learning may be intentional but in most cases it is non-intentional (or "incidental"/random).

Non-formal learning that is not provided by an education or training institution and typically does not lead to certification. It is, however, structured (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support). Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's perspective".

The focus of this study lies on informal and formal learning but not on non-formal learning, as it aims to analyse unstructured learning in support of structured learning at a Higher Education institution. In the 1970s, the term "non-formal learning" appeared, which is linked to informal learning as it does not lead to certification. It is also related to formal learning as it is structured, which is a characteristic of formal learning, that can also occur in informal learning in some cases. Benson (2011: 10) writes that formal teaching and learning occur in the classroom, but that the distinction between non-formal and informal learning is not always clear. Non-formal learning often refers to classroom learning, but where no certification is involved. This differs from the definition of the European Commission, where the characteristic of non-formal learning is that it does not depend on

an educational institution. It might be organised by clubs or communities, for instance.

Nearly four decades ago, Krashen (1976) argued that learners have to be exposed to comprehensible input in order to acquire a language. Learners need a monitor that controls and corrects what they have acquired. This is explained in this thesis in the part “Informal learning within the psychology of learning”. Krashen made a distinction between language acquisition and language learning. Acquisition occurs through an unconscious process developed when using language meaningfully – this is mostly related to informal learning, but it could occur in the class as well. Learning is a conscious process that helps discover language rules – this could be linked to formal learning. Krashen stated that acquisition and learning cannot be integrated. This difference is relevant as far as learning is concerned because later on, other researchers, such as Mocker and Spears (1982), Garnett (2010), Benson (2011) or Mitchell *et al.* (2013) analysed it and discovered other aspects related to it. From their research, it appears that formal learning does not always occur in class and informal acquisition outside class. Both types of learning can take place in the different learning situations. Krashen’s difference between acquisition and learning was also contradicted by researchers in the 1980s, such as Gregg (1984), who reported that both types of knowledge interact. Krashen’s concepts of acquisition and learning are a helpful framework for this study. In this research, I take the stance that they can be combined.

VanPatten and Williams (2007: 26) have also explained the difference between acquisition and learning, they emphasise that:

“*Acquisition* takes place naturally and outside of awareness. [...] *Learning*, on the other hand, involves gaining explicit knowledge about language such as its rules and patterns”.

An interesting distinction between formal and informal learning is given by Mocker and Spear (1982). They distinguish formal learning where the learner has little control over the objectives and means of learning from informal learning where the learner controls the means but not the objectives. This is not the case any longer. Nowadays, learners have more control of the organisation of their learning, as teachers are encouraged to give learners the opportunity to make choices and decisions about their learning.

In some forms of education, it is recognised that it is important to let students organise their learning, e.g. in what has been called flipped education (Fulton 2012), where the learners study the course contents online before going to class, so that teachers can give more individualised guidance to students. By doing so, students can choose what interests them in the course, they are in control of their learning, as in informal learning situations. In the same context, the students can be seen in a researcher approach, where they are asked to do additional research related to the course. The learners can select what they want to do research on, it is not organised by the teacher; so it is linked to informal learning. Learners may also have their own objectives when they engage in informal learning

activities, they may want to reach a better level in the target language and have a programme to reach that level.

Other terms used to refer to informal learning are ‘self-instructed’ or learning by oneself in informal contexts; ‘non-instructed’ or not learnt but acquired and ‘naturalistic’ learning, in natural settings. These concepts are opposed to ‘instructed’ language learning, which would describe formal learning, where instruction and explicit explanation are given (Benson 2011: 11), which mostly occurs in class.

McGivney (1999) argues that the concepts of formal and informal learning cross boundaries. This is also stated by Golding *et al.* (2008). The fact that both types of learning can mix is used in this study to understand the students’ informal learning activities. Informal learning is usually related to the learning outside class but it can also take place within a context of formal education, for instance when learners work in groups and share views and experiences. The researchers also state that on the other hand, formal learning occurs in an informal learning situation when the learning is more structured, when the learner is active, structures their own learning and understands how the language is used, its rules and applications. This can occur when students organise what and how they want to learn informally; they may plan their learning in order to reach their goals in the learning process.

Sundqvist (2011) mentions that there are few studies which combine data on out-of-school language activities with data on school language activities.

Analysing a situation in Sweden that combines both, she is convinced that English practised out-of-class has some effect on oral proficiency and vocabulary, but it is difficult to establish exactly what the influence is, because it is hard to measure the precise effect of informal learning on formal learning. It is not possible to be with the informal learners all the time. Sundqvist analyses how out-of-class learning supports in-class learning; this is related to what this study intends to do. Benson (2011: 7) writes there is not much research that proves the effectiveness of informal learning, although the good learner will know that classroom and out-of-class learning are both essential in order to learn a foreign language. This study does not verify the effectiveness of informal learning, but it contributes to exploring the way informal learning may support formal learning. Indeed, by knowing what students learn out of class, teachers can draw links between the students' informal learning activities and the class course. In the same way, Coffield (2000) observes that lifelong learning has long been seen as formal learning in educational institutions, although most people tend to learn on an informal basis. The author remarks:

“Informal learning should no longer be regarded as an inferior form of learning whose main purpose is to act as the precursor of formal learning: it needs to be seen as fundamental, necessary and valuable in its own right” (2000: 8).

People learn informally before attending formal classes. Garnett (2010) explains that individuals learn on an informal basis because they are interested in what they want to learn. He also says that our educational culture seems to be hostile to this “self-organisation” of learning. This can

be illustrated from my experience. In the institution where I am working, teachers do not seem to be giving choices to students: only the teachers and not the students decide which activities should be done in relation to the course, which books should be read to sustain the language learning.

As far as the location of the learning is concerned, Mahoney (2001) emphasises the fact that formal learning is associated with institutions and focuses on the product or result, whereas informal learning lays the emphasis on the learning process. The location does not seem to be important; informal learning can occur at many different places: at home, at the pub, at the cinema, for example. Learners can also learn thanks to work programmes, in associations and clubs, in cultural centres, through voluntary and social activities and in international exchanges and mobility programmes (Lafraya 2012: 11). Different names are given to locations related to informal learning, it can be named 'out-of-class', 'out-of-school', 'after-school', 'extracurricular' or 'extramural'; they imply that something additional is given to the classroom location (Benson 2011: 9). This view is corroborated by Schwier (2012: 139) who states that formal learning environments place learners in specific contexts whereas non-formal and informal learning environments do not exercise control over the learners.

Another characteristic of informal learning is that it can be incidental or intentional. According to Doyle (2001), much of our learning occurs unconsciously: it is called incidental learning. When people decide to take part in activities with the objective of learning, this is called intentional learning. My investigation will study the views of learners who engage

deliberately in informal learning activities, which can therefore be termed intentional learning. Intentional and incidental learning can also refer to the implicit and explicit knowledge, as stated by Gasparini (2004), the former refers to instances where the individual is not able to state what the knowledge is whereas in the latter case they can explain the knowledge that they have acquired. This research will address how implicit knowledge and experience - i.e. the acquisition of knowledge through informal learning activities, such as watching films - can become explicit through noticing and reflection - i.e. by paying attention to the vocabulary used in the films and considering the register used by characters. The fact of turning implicit into explicit knowledge, as it was exemplified above, is related to intentional and deliberate learning. By improving their knowledge and knowing what they have learnt by doing or by watching a film, students practise intentional and deliberate learning.

The implicit and explicit knowledge of informal learning is related to learning from experience (Blacker 2001). It is important to understand the process which occurs when learning informally and by experience. Experiential learning was described by Kolb (1984) who explains the process in four stages: firstly, the 'concrete experience' of learning, secondly, the 'reflective observation' when thinking about the experience, thirdly, the 'abstract conceptualisation' when building a theory and finally, the 'active experimentation' when testing the theory. Kolb has been criticized because he does not take into account the non-reflective aspect of learning; he overemphasises the role of the individual and "decontextualizes" the learning process (Keeton et al. 2002). It is true that

learning is not always reflective, but learners could be helped to make it reflective, so that they would understand how the language works. A lot of learning occurs automatically through the use of the language but it could be argued that students are more interested in learning when they are reflective. If learners notice some aspects of the language and reflect on how the whole language is organised, the structure of the foreign language is clearer and they are encouraged to learn more. In this project, the students' views of their learning outside class and by experience will be analysed according to Kolb's model taking its limitations into account, in order to identify the different phases of learning, from experience to reflection to experimentation. Informal learning or unstructured learning will be seen within the context of its use to support a well-organised HE formal structure.

2.1.2. Informal learning within the psychology of learning

Informal learning, and language learning in general, is underpinned by the psychology of learning. In the psychology of learning, or how the mind works in the language learning process, a distinction can be made between learning in a natural setting, which is related to informal learning and learning in class or formal learning. Language learning within the psychology of learning and the distinction between informal and formal learning as far as the cognitive process is concerned will be examined according to some of the theories in the field.

Within the psychology of learning, intrapersonal interaction or the interaction of the mind with a phenomenon in order to construct meaning

will be considered. The issue of interaction is controversial: some theories, such as the Universal Grammar theory which was proposed by Noam Chomsky (1969) and which argues for the principle of a grammar shared by all languages, reduce the importance of the role of interaction and emphasise the learner's mental mechanisms in language acquisition. Chomsky's Universal Grammar has been criticized, for the fact that it does not take psychological and social parameters into account and that it separates language knowledge and language use. Language knowledge is language competence or the knowledge of the rules of the language, as a resource for use; whereas language use is language performance or the language used by the native speakers of the language (Chomsky 1969). Nevertheless, it may be the most sophisticated tool available for analysing language today (Mitchell et al. 2013). In this study, understanding some principles of the Universal Grammar can help the learners analyse some aspects of the language learning process. This is related to this investigation as far as noticing and reflection are concerned; when students reflect upon the structure of English, they can make comparisons between the structure of the English and the French languages.

Chomsky (1975) also states, along with Krashen (1976) with his input hypothesis, that comprehensible input, through which the learner can understand the message delivered, is needed for language acquisition, therefore interaction has to be modified in order to reach mutual understanding. When learners take part in informal learning activities that match their level, they should receive comprehensible input in order to understand what is being said, so that they are motivated to participate in

further activities. According to Krashen (1982), the unconscious process in order to acquire a second language is of primary importance and the 'monitor', which controls and corrects the knowledge that has been acquired, is helpful when the learner has time, thinks about grammar and correctness and knows the rule. Native speakers or peers during informal learning activities and the teacher in class can help learners monitor the new language structures they have acquired. This research considers how reflection can be used to monitor and improve the language that has been acquired by the learner outside class. In stating that acquisition is more efficient than learning, Krashen (1976) is considered by some researchers to have simplified the cognitive process of learning. Anderson (1983, 1995) divides the learning process into three stages: the cognitive stage, where the learner receives knowledge, the associative stage, where errors are corrected and connections are made and the autonomous stage, where the skills are acquired. Learners move from one stage to the other in order to master the language. These stages can also be observed in informal learning. Learners go, for instance, to a conference, where they receive knowledge. They use some of the new vocabulary they have learnt in asking questions and they are corrected by native speakers. Subsequently, they use the new words in various conversations. Krashen (1976) does not separate the learning process into different stages, as Anderson does. In order to acquire the foreign language progressively, I think that learners receive comprehensible input during the cognitive stage, move on to the associative stage for error correction and become autonomous in their language practice in the last stage.

As counter to Krashen's input hypothesis, Swain (1993) presents the output hypothesis, which claims that the act of producing language (speaking or writing) constitutes, under certain circumstances, part of the process of second language learning. The output hypothesis favours noticing, which leads to reflection and acquisition of the new language. The output hypothesis takes place when learners notice a gap in their language knowledge. They reflect about it and can change or improve their language output (Swain 1993). This output hypothesis can be used when learners practise informal learning activities. During a discussion with speakers of the target language, for instance, learners notice they lack some vocabulary, they ask other speakers how to say the words they want to use and they can subsequently practise them.

Another cognitive approach related to Krashen's implicit acquisition concerns the implicit learning of form-meaning connections, occurring in natural language learning or informal learning. Williams (2009) states that implicit learning is incidental learning, or learning without intending to do so and without awareness. This is difficult to evaluate, but evaluation is appropriate if we want to know whether someone has learnt or not. In this investigation, the students' informal learning, their implicit or incidental learning is reported but not evaluated; this should be done at a later stage. Explicit knowledge, on the other hand, is being conscious of the learning and knowing of the language or parts of the language. Explicit learning would occur more within formal learning than informal learning; explicit learning can appear in informal learning, when the learner notices and reflects upon the structure of the language: for instance, in English, long

sentences are not used. Implicit learning could also happen in class: by listening to the teacher, students can automatically acquire some language forms. Relating to automaticity, or performing activities out of habit and with little reasoning, Ellis (2002) refers to implicit learning as automatised and explicit learning as non-automatised. Indeed, informal learning can occur through watching films and implicitly understanding the vocabulary used in the films, whereas the same vocabulary can be explicitly learnt in class.

In exploring different aspects of language acquisition from the psychology of learning and from Krashen's theory, a link can be made with the sociology of learning, emphasising the value of informal surroundings, on which Krashen's theory also lays the focus. In examining informal learning activities, this project draws on Krashen's distinction between learning and acquisition. However it does not intend to separate learning from acquisition as Krashen does. In this investigation, I make the point that acquisition in an informal environment should not be set apart from formal learning but should rather be combined with it; students can monitor learning during the informal learning; during formal classes, students can be helped by the teacher in order to check, acknowledge and improve the language that has been acquired. If the teacher notices their learners' language production, feedback can be given and possible mistakes can be corrected. If the teacher encourages learners to notice and identify their errors, the students can make progress in their language study. If learners take the teacher's comments into account and correct themselves, learning may take place. The teacher's role in the process was explored by Vygotsky (1978). The cognitive

psychologist believed that language learning is brought about by interpersonal interaction – complementing the intrapersonal interaction of the mind explained above. In his view, language learning is a socially mediated process. Therefore it relates to the sociology of learning; but it is also close to Krashen’s monitor hypothesis in the psychology of learning. The teacher can help the learners monitor the new language structures they have acquired. Learning occurs when somebody who has more knowledge can assist the learner. This is called ‘scaffolding’, as explained by Harmer (2007: 59):

“A key element of successful scaffolding is that the learners can only benefit from it if they are in the *Zone of Proximal Development* – in other words, if they are just getting to a stage (above their current level of knowledge) where they are ready to learn the new thing with the assistance of others. Interestingly, this is not dissimilar to Krashen’s idea”.

Other researchers, such as Oxford (2001) and Wells (2009) also recognise the importance of the teacher as a learning partner and the help of other speakers in the language learning process. Whereas Vygotsky refers to knowledge built with the assistance of others and as the internalisation of social activity, Piaget (1976) states that people understand the world by means of their mental structures, which are developed to respond to situations and applied when needed. For Piaget, a language situation can be understood, because it occurred before and the mind developed a response to it. As a result of a previous pattern of action, the mind can act in a further similar situation. For instance, as far as informal learning is concerned,

learners go to conversation tables, meet some English-speaking people and discuss British culture with them. They keep this pattern in mind and can use it the next time they go to conversation tables to meet English-speaking people. This relates to the psychology of learning, learning through the mind; whereas Vygotsky brings us from the psychology to the sociology of learning, learning with others.

This investigation follows Vygotsky's theory and tries to find out how the teacher, a peer or a speaker of the language helps learners develop their language skills informally; this interpersonal interaction is part of the sociology of learning.

2.1.3. Informal learning within the sociology of learning

In this research, it is also necessary to understand informal learning from the perspective of the sociology of learning. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of mediation is a link between the psychology and the sociology of learning. Human mental activity is mediated by the means of tools, such as language, to relate to the social and cultural context. In this section, social learning theories concerning the interaction between the learner and the environment will be explored: in particular, situated learning (Rogers 1996), the ecology of learning or the influence of the learning environment (Hamilton 2002, Ellis 1994), the social constructivist views of the communities of practice (Lave et al. 1991) and the importance of culture in language learning (Kramsch 1996).

Rogers (1996) refers to environmental learning theories, where experience shapes behaviour and language acquisition. The author states that the learning process needs the “resources of the environment in which the learner is situated” (1996: 13). He uses the concept ‘social learning theories’ as “the study of the interaction of the individual and the social environment” (1996: 14). Situated learning (Rogers 1996) refers to the learner and the context, conditions and circumstances in which the learner is evolving. Situated learning explains how learners acquire knowledge from their context. Ecology of learning (Hamilton 2002) relates to the student’s lived experience. As far as students’ informal learning activities are concerned, situated learning could be attending a workshop on travel and tourism in English in Brussels. An example of the ecology of learning could be practising field hockey at the British school. Hamilton (2002) considers the environment as a learning place and states that informal learning is part of social and situated learning which refers to the ‘ecology’ or the learning environment. In this study, the environment linked to the students’ informal learning activities plays an important role. Learners can acquire the target language in various places, such as theatres, museums, cafés, conference rooms, because English is widely used in Brussels. Contrasting formal and informal learning, Hamilton refers to literacy as using written language in the course of life. New Literacy Studies draw upon the use of the resources related to technologies and digital media. Hamilton analyses how they are used in institutionalised environments. These practices call upon the distinction between ‘dominant’ or institutionalised and ‘vernacular’ or self-generated literacies. The former are usually associated with formal settings

while the latter arise for the 'purposes of everyday life'. Hamilton developed the theory as adult literacy has been a major issue in the UK, recognised in the 1970s, but it is also an international topic. Literacy referring to schooling has not always been compulsory. According to Hamilton, dominant and vernacular 'knowing' are equally important and should be integrated. It is not how institutions always view the so-called 'truths' about literacy, in which certain kinds of knowledge are favoured and named 'real knowledge', the institutionalised knowledge against 'vernacular knowledge'. In this study, ecology of learning or learning the language informally in a particular environment will be explored. Watching a play in English with the Brussels British Community Association exemplifies the ecology of learning.

Ellis (1994) considers the advantages of both formal and informal learning according to the learning and learner's situation. On the one hand, Ellis gives more attention to learning a second language in a formal setting, the classroom, where speaking can take place if opportunities for oral discussion are created. On the other hand, he emphasises the importance of the natural setting as well and promotes the integration of formal and informal learning. Ellis favours learning in the classroom based on several types of real life situations provided by the teacher as it provides richer and more diverse learning experiences. In class, he argues communication can be focused on the meaning and errors can be treated. Learners can reflect consciously upon linguistic forms. However, Ellis is also in favour of informal learning, as he concludes that children are more successful in natural settings; this conclusion is based on experiments with French

immersion programmes for children in kindergarten and primary school starting in Canada in 1972 and developing there and in other countries such as Hungary, Finland and Spain in 1997 (Ellis et al. 2007: 20). Ellis (1994) and Mitchell *et al.* (2013) state that adult learners and especially beginners often have to go through formal processes in order to learn quicker. This is verified in my experience, where students want to understand the structures of sentences in order to use them themselves.

Ellis (2001) distinguishes focus on form, focus on forms and focus on meaning in a classroom context or formal learning. “Focus on form” makes the learners aware of the grammar used to produce language – it can be related to “noticing” or the awareness of a form in the input, as a necessary constituent of language learning (Schmidt 2001). “Focus on forms” is the teaching of grammar to produce understanding, but only grammar is not sufficient to speak a language, attention has to be drawn on “focus on meaning” as well. To this could be added the theory of saliency (Carroll et al. 2007), which makes input available for processing. The saliency of a word allows students to classify words by importance. Therefore, learners can focus on the most important words and use them. Students receive input, organise it by importance and process the words they have been taught and they notice. During informal learning activities, when listening to a conversation in English for instance, the learner can acquire the salient words and subsequently use them in a discussion with friends.

This project gives importance to formal and informal learning, both influencing one another. Instead of making a distinction between children

who acquire a language more easily in a natural setting and adult learners who learn better in a classroom (Ellis 1994, 2007), this research investigates students' informal language learning activities in Higher Education and learners' views of how they may complement formal learning.

Hamilton (2002) and Ellis (1994) suggest that learning may occur in the classroom, but the natural setting related to informal learning is important for acquiring the language. Ellis focuses on form and forms and meaning; formal instruction as well as informal learning can help learners to understand the structure of the language and its vocabulary but in order to improve their knowledge, learners have to practise the language, by being exposed to the foreign language in a 'community of practice' (CoP), where salient words, phrases and structures can be noticed.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of 'communities of practice' relates to the sociology of learning, learning in the environment or situated learning or learning that occurs where it is applied. The sociolinguists Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) define the CoP as:

“An aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages”.

CoPs have existed for a long time in the professional world when people learn and share their experience by explaining it to one another, but it has developed in other fields, including language learning. Lave *et al.* (1991) explain that these CoPs share a common goal – this differentiates them from other communities. Apprentice learners are aware of the mature practice and have to learn in order to reach it. Learners recognise that they need to learn more from those more experienced. By learning and reaching the mature stage, they develop autonomy. The apprentice learners come from the periphery and move into the CoPs, thanks to the help of a master. The master-apprentice relationship could refer to the teacher-student relationship, in the case of formal learning, or native speaker-learner, as far as informal learning is concerned. As far as formal learning is concerned, the class could be considered as a CoP, because all the participants have a common purpose, they present mutual engagement and they have shared artefacts or a shared “knowledge within a community of practice and ways of perceiving and manipulating objects” (Lave *et al.* 1991: 117). A language class can form a CoP when the teacher and the students share the common purpose of acquiring the language; they present mutual engagement when the teacher has objectives so that students reach a certain level in the foreign language and the students share these goals. In informal learning, not all speakers of a language are masters; there must also be a common goal between the learners and their ‘master’, they must share a common activity that creates a closer relationship. As Murphey *et al.* (2012: 224) write, a classroom can be a CoP, but not all students want to be part of that community. Some of them are in class to have good grades and prefer to

work on an individual basis. They are not part of the CoP, which shares a common purpose and presents mutual engagement. Teachers have to pay attention to this if they want to create positive group dynamics.

Wenger (2000) states that competence and experience coming from the CoP let us open up to the world across the boundaries that limit the communities and connect them. Boundaries distinguish the communities; people do not share the same knowledge and experiences in the different communities. However, people can acquire knowledge at the boundaries of their CoP, this is good to test their actual knowledge and to go beyond it to understand it better. There should be communication across the boundaries, between the CoPs. Two CoPs could be, for instance, a student class in the HE institution for formal learning and the British Council, where the student practises informal learning. Indeed, if the learner goes to the British Council in Brussels - to have a folk dancing workshop - this group forms a CoP and the student is learning English on an informal basis. As we will now see, learning is enhanced and students' motivation increases when different CoPs are linked.

A way of learning, which is related to the community of practice or which is a combination of learning through the community of practice, informal learning and formal instruction, is service learning. Service learning is the balance between formal classes and learning through service in a community (Eyler et al. 1999). At the HE institution where I am teaching, third year students have to undergo a period of training; usually, they choose the place of work of their choice in their field of communication; some

students also choose a place of training in a community related to their field and in a foreign language, as in Brussels, work can easily be combined with a foreign language, mostly English and Dutch for French-speaking students. Service learning usually enhances the learning (Eyler et al. 1999) and the motivation for learning (Pope-Ruark et al. 2014), as students are really involved in their work and have some affective implication which sustains their motivation. Therefore, it will increase their motivation for the formal class, as they see the relation between work and formal instruction. When students work in an English-speaking organisation, they can practise their English on an informal basis. They are learning by working. At the same time, this work experience helps them understand their formal education in a different context.

As Murphey *et al.* (2012: 225) state, an advantage of being in a CoP is that when people are part of a group, they may have access to resources that they would not have otherwise. A group is more than a gathering of individuals, it is also individuals who share cognitions and emotions. This is an important factor in the process of foreign language learning; it will enhance the motivation for learning. If the members of the group share language learning tips and resources and give feedback to each other, they will be motivated to try out and to learn more. The concept of CoP frames this study, which explores the possible relations between formal and informal learning. A student class could be one CoP and the choir at the British Council could be another CoP. If HE students become singers in the choir, they engage with an informal learning activity. This enables the student to

practise the foreign language. This exemplifies the relation between formal and informal learning.

CoPs involve interaction between their members. The concept of interaction in second language acquisition appeared in the 1980s but it was formulated by Long (1996). The author states that there are two types of interaction: strong interaction, which develops language skills and weak interaction, where learners find ways of communicating, that they can use or not. The interaction hypothesis is related to Krashen's (1976) input hypothesis, as it recognizes the importance of comprehensible input, which is intensified when learners try to understand the meaning of utterances. Sundqvist (2011) also considers the importance of the interaction hypothesis in informal learning activities, as she states that learners nowadays receive English input when they listen to music, watch films, use sites on the Internet and they also have to produce output in English when they sing listening to music, when they write on blogs. This investigation also considers these occupations practised by the students. Interaction relates to the social constructivist views of language learning, it involves face-to-face communication, which enhances language proficiency.

However, nowadays, interaction is not only face-to-face. During informal learning activities, learners can have face-to-face interaction when they have a conversation in a pub, for instance. Yet at present, people use digital media a great deal. Many informal learning activities are media based: students use the Internet to watch films and series, to listen to their favourite songs or to chat on Facebook. According to Reis *et al.* (2010), in our current

learning environments, there is often talk of virtual communities of practice, using the new technological means in order to learn languages. My initial study showed that during their informal learning activities, students make much use of the Internet and the new media. By using social media, for instance, learners can find virtual communities of practice, communities of interest; learners have a passion for a certain topic and they find a group of international people on Facebook sharing the same interest. They can share their views on the topic using the English language. This is a very powerful means of informal learning.

Interaction plays an important role in second language acquisition from a socio-cultural point of view. “Interaction has also two different but related meanings: interpersonal and intrapersonal” (Ziglaris 2008: 446). The former is to be considered from a social and ‘environmental’ perspective whereas the latter relates to one person, the interaction of the mind with a phenomenon in order to construct meaning, reflection upon the process leading to self-evaluation. This was previously mentioned by Benson and Voller (1997), who favour learning where

“learners are encouraged to explore relationships between individual beliefs and actions about language and second language learning and the social contexts in which they occur” (1997: 14).

Interaction is important to acquire the foreign language. An informal learning activity can be acting in a play with the theatre group of the British Council. Students of English can be members of the theatre group. Through intrapersonal interaction, the members may be able to understand how the

English language works in a play. Through interpersonal interaction, members act with one another, have social relations and learn how to use the language.

As far as the sociology of learning and interaction are concerned, culture plays an important role as context or background for learning. There are different definitions of culture. In this research, the description given by Bates and Plog (1990: 7) will be used: culture is “the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning”. It is important to distinguish the cultural context from the cultural content or information that can be learnt along with a language. Claire Kramsch (1996: 36) defines context as referring

“to the intentions, assumptions, and presuppositions of speakers and hearers, which ensure that their discourse is perceived as coherent and therefore makes sense for the participants”.

The words we choose depend on the context in which the language is used. We can consider context in a classroom or outside class. In the former, culture or ‘linguaculture’ (Kramsch 1996: 31) exists through the conversations between individuals in the classroom. Teachers try to use the language in context, also when they deal with different types of exercises, such as grammatical ones. In that situation, it is not always very clear what is meant by context, as this does not reproduce the natural situation. In the latter, Kramsch *et al.* (2008) refer to context outside class, known as

‘Ecolinguistics’ or ‘Language ecology’, the interactions between the language and the environment. As previously mentioned, the role of the environment in language learning has also been described by Hamilton (2002). Hamilton emphasises that in considering lifelong learning, it is important to take the following aspects into account: the use of literacy in local communities, the process of vernacular learning in communities, the learning in institutions. Language ecology draws on a learner-centred approach, where “learning environments are not directly mediated by a teacher” (White 2008: 3). Some studies have concentrated on a naturalistic learning environment or an ‘immersion context’, where learners do not receive formal instruction, i.e. students working abroad on exchange programmes. Different strategies are employed to communicate in that context. The first step is to use ‘compensating strategies’, such as guessing the meaning of words in the target language; the following steps include cognitive strategies, such as making use of language materials, for example, dictionaries; these strategies can be used when the language is better known, as White (2008) mentions. This study tries to find out whether when learning informally and also on an autonomous basis, learners use dictionaries, grammars or other materials to sustain their learning, reflect upon it and understand the input they received. This research will focus on the impact of the cultural context for learning in and outside class.

According to Romero-Muñoz (2011: 7), our system of language education is often criticized and many advocate learning languages only in a native community of practice. It has been suggested that one of the solutions could be to reform formal education with the different means we have today, using

e-learning, giving the opportunity to be with the language community and having fewer formal classes (Romero-Muñoz 2011: 40). From my experience at the HE institution, students mostly learn informally through digital environments but some of the students also participate in immersion programmes during the academic year and during the holidays, they sometimes have a job where they have to use the target language.

Informal learning within the sociology of learning has been dealt with from the angle of environmental learning focusing on Hamilton (2002) and Ellis's (1994) viewpoints, this led to learning within communities of practice or communities of interest, broadly defined by Lave and Wenger (2000); the CoPs involve different types of interaction, which was clearly stated by Long (1996). Language learning in the environment will be considered more concretely through a range of informal learning activities.

2.1.4. Informal learning resources and activities

Informal learning resources refer to books, newspapers and magazines as well as their online counterpart and all the resources that can be found through the Internet and the digital online media, such as informative websites, blogs and social networks. Informal learning activities can be face-to-face, i.e. attending a conference, going to a theatre play; or virtual, for example watching series on the Internet, being interactive on the BBC website. This investigation will explore face-to-face and virtual activities and resources.

For acquisition to take place, students need to practise informally once they have learnt the language in the classroom (Gregg 1984). They have to be exposed to the input in the target language in order to produce output, for which they have too little time in the classroom. Interpersonal interaction can occur between the students and the teacher but it is also necessary beyond the language classroom as the amount of hours of language class is limited in the formal learning curriculum. Learners can choose to participate in a community of practice, be it face-to-face or virtual, in order to improve their English outside class.

Today, “English dominates the media landscape” (Sundqvist 2011: 106). As young people use digital media on a regular basis, it is assumed that they acquire much of their English outside class (Sundqvist 2011: 106).

Nowadays, language immersion programmes are also popular among young people (Lasagabaster et al. 2009). Students do not always have to go abroad to improve their language skills, there are many opportunities in Brussels; by going to English or Irish cafés, for example, students can take part in conversations touching various points of interest such as music, sports, among others, in the target language. Learners should seize as many opportunities as possible to practise the foreign language (Palfreyman 2014: 178).

Krashen (1976) stated that the learner needs comprehensible input in order to understand the message delivered. For the learner, implicit acquisition relates to the implicit learning of form-meaning. Informal learning can occur in particular contexts, it is more effective when the learner can receive

comprehensible input and can notice language forms and functions and this leads to a positive attitude towards the target language (Palfreyman 2011: 18). Therefore, the learner has to try and find the most appropriate learning supports.

Concerning learning resources, Coleman and Baumann (2005) suggest that the world should be used as a classroom. There are a lot of materials, such as articles, books, radio, TV programmes and resources on the Internet that can be used as learning materials. There may be cultural centres, cafés, cinemas, theatres and speakers of the language in one's own country, especially in Brussels, a multicultural city, with whom learners can communicate and share activities. There are also possibilities to be in contact with speakers of the language through online communities. Learners would be well-advised to take advantage of all the opportunities they encounter in order to develop their receptive, productive and interactive skills in the target language on a regular basis.

What is also important is to “keep up your motivation by choosing real-life materials and tasks which reflect your own interests and level of proficiency” (Coleman et al. 2005: 144). In order to be more efficient in the target language, beginners should probably mix with sympathetic speakers of the language; if they receive comprehensible input, they will subsequently improve their communicative skills, whereas advanced learners should probably mix with high-proficiency users in order to improve their knowledge of the language. Beginners can have discussions in English with people who are willing to speak to them and possibly correct

their mistakes; whereas advanced learners are able to understand a theatre play performed by the Brussels Shakespeare Society and subsequently discuss the play with the actors. If learners are willing to increase their language skills, with time and experience, they will probably seek the learning situations that suit their language level. In Brussels, there is an offer of theatre plays in English at a beginner's level, with simple words and sentences; these plays can be performed in English by college students. Native speakers, such as the actors of the Brussels Shakespeare Society, also perform in plays, where the language level is much higher.

In the 21st century, literacy in any language does not only consist of reading and writing in the traditional sense of the word but it also means a good use of digital media (Cazden et al. 1996). As noted by Murphy (2014: 119), nowadays, there is an increased demand for flexible learning, where the learner has the choice between different aspects of the learning experience (Collis et al. 2001: 9). Many combinations are possible in flexible learning. Students may choose a formal class and combine it with various informal learning activities or they can choose to use the new technologies in their formal as well as informal learning. This relates to the first research question, which explores the type of informal learning activities HE students engage with. Digital informal learning activities are possibilities students have to acquire the foreign language outside class.

As Godwin-Jones (2012: 4) says: "In Western countries today, instructed language learning in Higher Education normally includes the use of the Web: as a resource in face-to-face classes, as an equal partner in

instructional delivery in hybrid courses, or as the primary teaching and learning environment in distance learning”. For some teachers in HE institutions who have been used to teaching otherwise, it is not always easy to introduce new technologies in formal learning programmes. At the HE institution where I am working, it is necessary as it is a HE institution for communication. The emphasis lies on media and new technologies.

Learners are using them on a daily basis to find information on different topics and to communicate with native speakers in other countries. This is made much easier with new media (Palfreyman 2014: 179), which can provide “authentic language production and an opportunity for language practice” (Stickler et al. 2007: 18).

Before the use of new media, it was very expensive to communicate with a native speaker living in another country, as normal telephone conversations cost more money than conversations through the Internet; therefore, this type of conversation was limited. With new technologies and the Web, it is possible to discuss for longer periods with people abroad, it is easier to listen to international radio stations and to read online newspapers in foreign languages. There are a lot of opportunities to learn foreign languages online, which can be used in class –as part of formal learning- or recommended by the teacher –as part of informal learning. At the institution where I am teaching, we have a new e-learning programme, using the software Captivate. Students are therefore using digital media every day, at school and outside. However, they had started to work and to learn freely for school or for themselves with digital media on an informal basis before the new media appeared in formal education. Erstad (2012) is aware of the

students' media use and states that schooling and media use are what young people are engaged in most of the time. New media are part of informal and formal learning activities. Students and users of digital media are often quicker to apply the new media than the institutions (Szucs 2009: 3). This is backed up by Beetham *et al.* (2007) who write that there is a gap between youth culture with the technology and education which is much slower to adapt to changes.

Students are taking charge of their learning; e-learning promotes student engagement and interaction and allows them to integrate formal and informal learning in Higher Education (Dabbagh et al. 2011: 4).

Once the new media were integrated in formal learning, this was called "blended learning". "Blended learning" has been defined as

"courses that integrate online with traditional face-to-face class activities in a planned, pedagogically valuable manner and where a portion of face-to-face time is replaced by online activity" (Meyer 2007: 55).

This is the way we organise formal education at the HE institution. We dedicate increasingly more time to self-study, as part of self-instruction, with the help of digital media, thanks to a multimedia platform, which was developed to give new resources to students and to enable them to have more time for language study. It is a more learner-centred approach contrasting with the previous traditional teacher-centred and institution-centred approach in formal learning programmes (Garnett 2010). This refers to the first research question, in which we consider how HE students engage

in informal learning activities and how informal and formal learning can be related. Nowadays, students often engage with digital informal learning activities. In class, digital media can be used to enhance formal learning.

Regarding the learner-centred approach, it is to be noted that digital media are more individual and “transformative resources of learning” (Drotner 2008: 16). Students favour these methods as they have used them for a long time. Some new technologies allow students to organise their own learning and focus on their needs and interests. There has been a transformation from an education where the teacher is the expert who has the full knowledge of the subject to a more learner-centred and collaborative learning where students can bring their own ideas and perceptions to learning (Hampel et al. 2006: 7; Lebrun 2002: 22). The students’ use of digital media and their way of learning will be explored in this project. Activities related to digital media are diverse: they can practise the different skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) of the foreign language by using images and texts for instance. Listening consists of ‘extensive’ and ‘intensive listening’ (Field 1998): extensive listening relates to the understanding of the general context, whereas intensive listening refers to the understanding of some details. On an informal basis, listening comes first, as students favour watching films and series. The informal learning activity could complement the formal class: students could discuss in class the series and films they have watched on an informal basis. In a formal learning context, there is an emphasis on speaking. There are two types of speaking: spoken production or producing utterances and spoken interaction or speaking with other

people (Gavioli et al. 2001). Learners can choose what best suits them and can work at their own pace.

Nowadays, socio-technical communities have emerged in order to sustain formal and informal learning (Jahnke 2010). These online communities create social, educational and technical relationships. The socio-technical communities enable students to obtain relevant information about their studies without having to ask the administration. In other words, students can find the information themselves through the online communities, which individualise learning and help students find the right materials to learn; they are very useful in Higher Education and in particular to promote informal learning (Jahnke 2010: 36). These learning resources give opportunities to students to engage in informal learning activities, in practising the foreign language informally by facilitating virtual groups for different purposes, for example interacting with diverse groups of people on the Internet, conversing with native speakers through social media, writing on blogs and listening to music while reading the words.

As far as virtual learning communities are concerned, there has been an increase in the use of social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, during the last ten years. According to Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2011: 5), “while most learning experiences are a blend of both formal and informal learning, social media is also inherently enabling informal learning experiences in higher education”. Because HE students use social media on a daily basis, these media provide an opportunity to link formal and informal learning, as social media can also be used in a class activity. Hampel (2014) reports that

social media have become extremely popular among young people and that written communication has now more importance than spoken communication. As far as language learning is concerned, this is an aspect that has to be taken into account in order to know which language skill is more developed in contrast to the other competences. Besides, Toetenel (2014) writes that although social media are much used by students and could serve as tools for formal and informal language learning, there is not much study on the use of social media in language learning. This investigation highlights the students' use of social media during their informal learning activities. In order to be successful with social media, students have "to acquire and apply a set of personal knowledge management" and "self-regulated learning skills" (Vivian 2011: 264). Not all students master the technology at the same level, they do not always want to be available all the time, they also need privacy and this is difficult to manage with social media. Social networks like Facebook enable people to come into contact, to collaborate, to share knowledge. Unlike face-to-face communication, they are technically mediated. Technical and social elements mix (Jahnke 2009: 764). Most students nowadays enjoy using social media on an informal basis to share their views and points of interest, for instance, but at the same time, they do not always realise that what they publish will be viewed by all their friends on the network and the implications this could have for their privacy, if people misuse some of the information they have shared. Some students also prefer to keep their social media activity separate from formal learning, because they do not want the teacher to interfere with their social life (Buckingham et al. 2013). If

teachers want to relate the students' informal learning activities to the formal classes, they have to know that students are not always willing to use social networks in class.

According to Drotner *et al.* (2008b), the relations between digital media and informal learning are significant, because the knowledge society is transforming our way of learning:

“Online games, social networking websites such as the videosharing site YouTube and community-generated encyclopedias such as Wikipedia all offer new means of communication, collaboration and creation for their users” (2008b: 2).

The emphasis of online activities lies on “active learning, research-led learning and teaching, small-group teaching, and collaborative work” (Szucs 2009: 4). In many studies, the positive effects of online activities are presented. Szucs (2009) and other researchers such as Gee (2008), Hull *et al.* (2008), Kirkpatrick *et al.* (2008) report that students are also more independent, motivated, critical and creative when they learn online. Mesch (2009), Wan *et al.* (2006) warn against the dangers of online activities, cyberbullying or games addiction, for example. Learners have to be aware of the dangers and effects of the Internet use beforehand, so that they have less chance of being affected by them. The dangers occur when the students use the Internet on an informal and individual basis; they can be followed on the Net by a bully who can prevent them from doing their normal activities.

The knowledge or information society has also changed our print culture into a digital and image culture (Hampel et al. 2006: 5; Sefton-Green 2008: 238). The print media, radio and television can now be made digital (Drotner 2008: 16). In Belgium, in HE institutions for communication, for instance, actual classes are often presented by means of audio, video material and power-point presentations. Texts, as such, are not given to students. In my experience, students tend to read fewer books; teachers have to reduce the number of pages they ask the students to read. This change of society has an impact on the formal and informal learning process and activities. One of the consequences is that people watch films and series on the Internet and on TV. Through the evolution of the new media, we live in a digital and image culture, which is represented, for instance, by TV series. Young people watch many TV series, and this is observed in different countries in the world. By studying an online exchange project between German and Hong Kong Chinese learners, Chik *et al.* (2014: 113) noticed that “the Hong Kong students were surprised that the German students were watching the same American sitcom or TV series or movies as they did; the German students found that the Hong Kong students also used popular cultural material to create individual virtual spaces for language learning”. This investigation will find out whether Belgian students also watch English-speaking sitcoms or TV series or movies and whether they develop individual spaces for language learning.

E-learning through digital media serves informal but also formal education, as it is “widening access to educational opportunity, enhancing the quality of learning and reducing the cost of higher education” (Szucs 2009: 1). The

use of digital media implies some adjustment in the curriculum and it can take some time for Higher Education institutions to implement it. In the HE institution where I am working, everyone is encouraged to use digital media; all classes are equipped with computer installations and screens. When planning the year's programme, colleagues decide to do some activities in class requiring the use of digital media. Young people and students, in particular, mostly use digital media on a daily basis, to find information, to listen to music and to watch films and series. By doing so, they sometimes learn foreign languages, if they watch them in the original version. Students sometimes report about this in class, when they are asked about it.

I have covered some of the studies on learners' use of new technologies. Most investigations relate to this aspect of the new media. Some researchers have also analysed teachers' use and reluctance to digital media; Hardy (1999) writes, for instance, that just because classrooms are equipped with computers and technologies does not mean that teachers are using them successfully; some teachers prefer the traditional methods and are not willing to use the technologies or try them out. They are not convinced about them because they have problems with computer functions or the use of the Internet. They do not always feel at ease with their colleagues or students who are sometimes more familiar with the technology than they are (Gallardo et al. 2011: 223). Georgina *et al.* (2008) state that if teachers are required by the HE institution to use technologies, they should receive technical support.

As far as students are concerned, in order to use digital media effectively or to learn while using them, learners have to be autonomous to manage their informal learning as well as to contribute to the formal language learning (Ollivier 2007: 2). In their informal language learning, students have to know what they need to improve and to find the right information that can help them reach their goal. The teacher can help them do that.

If students become more independent, they gain more responsibility for their learning. They can also improve their linguistic skills through collaborating with other learners and competing with them (Stepp-Greany 2002: 166).

The advantage of formal learning is that collaborative learning can be set up easily. Students can take part in tasks in groups sharing a common task and mutual engagement; together, they can gather, deal and analyse information. Vygotsky (1978) among others is an advocate of that kind of learning.

Training in learning methods, that teachers at the HE institution where I am working receive, favours collaborative learning.

However, the use of digital media in class and outside class is controversial as it implies inclusion and exclusion, related to problems of access and differences between adults and children, for instance (Drotner et al. 2008b: 3). Digital media also necessitate money, free time and knowledge of codes or computer use in order to use them efficiently (Drotner 2008: 17). Hampel *et al.* (2006: 12) also note that not all learners know how to use digital media. The new media can “pose affective challenges”, which can be positive and motivate the student but they can also hinder the learning process. This has to be taken into account by the learner and the teacher in

class, so that the teacher can explain how to use the media more effectively to the students, who will in turn use them outside class. This shows the possible influence of formal learning on informal learning activities.

Besides, digital learning has to be adapted and does not just “replicate conventional face-to-face settings”, according to Hampel *et al.* (2006: 3). It is not only by placing a document or a video online that the teachers produce e-learning, they have to try and find the advantages of using the new media instead of face-to-face teaching; then, they will complement their teaching activities.

Digital media serve informal learning as well as formal learning. In both cases, learning has to be adapted to the new technologies. Romero-Muñoz (2011) favours an adaption to the new learning and teaching environment with digital media, by using flipped education, where the student does some research on the course content beforehand, for instance. The new media are not useful if the old pattern of learning and teaching is not changed.

Sometimes material is missing in schools and in HE institutions. Learners are taught to work with the new media but they cannot use them as they wish. The Internet and computer software do not replace formal learning occurring face-to-face with a teacher, who can still use the traditional media, such as printed books and newspapers, for example.

Digital media are tools to help the learner in and outside class. E-learning classes exist but the support of a teacher is needed. Students have to be able to see and to discuss with a teacher to make sure they understand what is

required from them and to learn effectively; digital media help to reach that purpose. The new e-learning platform created at the HE institution where I am working could not exist without the teachers' assistance and availability to reply to students' requests. If learners understand how digital media help them to learn the foreign language, by using an online dictionary, for example, they will probably use these methods and strategies during their informal learning activities and look up new words in the online dictionary, for instance.

Meyer (2007: 53) claims that even if students in HE institutions in Montreal are familiar with the technology, the majority still "show a preference for the face-to-face discussion". Recent research (Blitz 2013; Blake 2013) reports on students' preference for face-to-face discussions with teachers in order to help them in their learning and to remain motivated. Buckingham *et al.* (2013) write that students prefer to keep the new media for their informal learning activities and have face-to-face contact with teachers during the formal classes. Teachers have to take this into account if they want to relate their students' informal learning activities to their formal classes.

Besides, Aagard *et al.* (2010) report that technology simplifies and at the same time complexifies language learning and teaching. Simplification occurs because material for study can easily be found and archived; complexity is observed as the large variety of learning materials and methods makes it difficult to grasp how students learn and to help improve their strategies. In my study, I will explore some of the web resources students have at their disposal to practise informal learning activities and the

fact that they sometimes have difficulties in finding the appropriate film or report that matches their language level and that will help them acquire more vocabulary, for instance.

The digital media evolution is going further, moving towards mobile learning or “learning across multiple contexts, through social and content interactions, using personal electronic devices” (Crompton 2013: 4).

Students may adapt rapidly to the new technological changes and use their smartphone, for example, to listen to the radio, watch short films in the target language but HE institutions also have to understand that they need to change rapidly, adjusting to mobile learning, for instance. The institution where I am working, for example, is only now starting with a large-scale e-learning project whereas e-learning has existed for a time now, and other Higher Education institutions are moving towards new forms of learning, such as flexible, collaborative or mobile learning, to be combined in formal and informal learning. As we will now see, in order to perform face-to-face or virtual informal learning activities, learners have to be motivated either by themselves or by other factors or people.

2.2. Motivation to learn informally

The concept motivation is regularly used in educational and research contexts. However, there is little agreement in relation to the meaning of the concept. Researchers tend to agree that motivation leads human behaviour by stimulating and directing it, but the way it happens is reported very differently in the literature (Dörnyei 2001a).

This study focuses on the difference between integrative and instrumental motivation as far as informal language learning is concerned, the difference between both motivations is relevant and marked in Brussels, where English is necessary on the job market (instrumental motivation) and where it is possible to find native speakers belonging to one of the language communities, with whom learners can associate with the language (integrative motivation).

Schumann (2001) compares language learning with foraging. Learners have a motive to gain some knowledge and search the environment for relevant information; once they find the information, they must decide whether to use it or not and whether to produce an effort and have the motivation to learn it. The classroom can be seen as a learning environment, but the different communities of native speakers of English in Brussels can also be part of this environment, if students get in contact with them.

Motivation is not only integrative or instrumental; it can also be intrinsic (internal) or extrinsic (external) (Noels 2001). In this investigation, the emphasis is also laid on these two types of motivation. People can learn a new language because they have self-motivation and feel some pleasure doing it and becoming bilingual; the focus lies on the learning process and not the achievement. This is related to intrinsic motivation and the pleasure of mastering a language. It also refers to integrative motivation and feeling a sense of belonging to the community who speaks that language – that community in the case of the English language could also be the

international community of English speakers, as English is used as a lingua franca (Mitchell et al. 2013). HE students in Brussels have many opportunities of meeting native speakers of English by attending events at the British Council or going to the Irish pub, for instance. Extrinsic motivation is related to instrumental motivation, as far as getting or not losing a job is concerned or having good grades and a degree. In Higher Education, students are very much concerned with their grades. They want to improve their English in order to pass the English class; therefore, some of them wish to acquire more of the language by practising informal learning activities, by learning new vocabulary watching films on the Internet, for example.

A very powerful and internal motivation, that I experienced myself as a language learner and that I notice in my practice when students report to me the experiences and the progress they have made in their language learning is intrinsic motivation, the pleasure coming from communicating in a foreign language. They find gratification in understanding how the structure of the language and the meaning of the words can be combined to understand comprehensible input and to produce a comprehensible output. Pleasure in learning was examined by a Japanese Professor of Applied Linguistics, Yashima (2014), exploring autonomy in young Japanese EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Yashima states that this strong internal motivation and pleasure of communicating coming from informal learning can lead to external motivation in succeeding tests and homework given in formal education. In my experience, some students have the joy of mastering the foreign language and communicating with people outside

class and are subsequently gratified in class by having good grades.

Informal learning has an influence on the students' performance in formal learning.

Referring to universities, Coleman (2004) states that language study differs from other subjects. Practice is needed in order to acquire some features of the language, while other disciplines can be learned through repetition. Subjects different from languages can be acquired by studying and repeating several times. Language rules can be learnt through study and repetition. However, in order to acquire how the language is used, practice or communicating in the target language, is needed. In order to have regular practice of the foreign language, motivation to become competent in the target language is necessary. Motivation is a crucial aspect in order to sustain formal as well as informal language learning. If students understand the positive effects of regular language practice, the fact that they will be able to communicate more easily in the target language will motivate them in the formal language class and to use in that context what they have learnt informally.

Gardner (2001a) refers to motivation as a driving force. It consists of three aspects: effort to learn the language, desire to learn and positive affect. The author deals with integrative motivation but highlights the fact that integrativeness is not always related to motivation, as someone can be integrated in a language community without mastering the language. In a similar vein, Dörnyei (2001c) states that motivation or the desire to learn is probably the main element which would determine success. The

examples coming from my experience and my practice confirm this idea of the importance of motivation. Motivation consists of an integrative motive or good disposition toward the language community (Dörnyei 2001a), this relates to what Gardner (2001a) explains: the learners first make an effort to learn the language, they wish to improve their knowledge and participate in events in the language community; therefore, they have a positive affect or good disposition toward the language community. Motivation also involves an instrumental motive related to the gains in learning the language, i.e. getting a job or being promoted (Dörnyei 2001a). Both types of motivation can inspire a language learner (Noels 2001). This project explores the learning of English in Brussels, whether it involves an instrumental motive. In Brussels, English is necessary to have a job in a multilingual and multicultural environment. An integrative motive can be present as well: by learning the language, students at the HE institution where I am teaching find pleasure in understanding and using the language. This project investigates whether some students have the desire to associate with the communities where the language is spoken, mostly the American or the British community, depending on the time they have spent in the different countries and the friends they have coming from these countries.

However, we can wonder whether we can speak of integrative motivation for learning English as the learning of English has become a basic skill and it is sometimes difficult to identify with one language community. In their research dealing with the learning of the English language, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) still use integrative motivation but as opposed to Gardner (2001a), they move to the notion of “self”. This implies that “the greater the

perceived likelihood of goal-attainment, the higher the degree of the individual's positive motivation. This desired self, the ideal self or one's ideal future representation (Ushioda 2012: 65) is also opposed to the feared self, which can hinder motivation (Dörnyei et al. 2009). There is a complex interplay of the selves. The ideal self can have integrative and instrumental motives at the same time (Ushioda 2012); a language learner can have the desire to learn the language to belong to a language community and also in order to have better job opportunities. The desired or imagined self does not always correspond to the actual self, and this discrepancy can result in a learner's motivation to make progress in order to reduce it. As opposed to the desired self, the feared self can prevent students from learning, as they are afraid of making mistakes or of ever being able to reach an acceptable level in the target language. Motivation is not linear; its different aspects have to be taken into account in order to have a full picture of the situation. This relates to the second research question, which refers to motivation to learn a foreign language informally.

Dörnyei (2001c: 143) also differentiates between demotivation and amotivation. Demotivation refers to "specific forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention or an ongoing action", whereas amotivation concerns the lack of motivation coming from realising that there is no point in learning the foreign language. Besides, a difference should be made between 'diminished motivation' and 'total loss of motivation', which are demotivation and amotivation respectively. Dörnyei (2001c: 143) states that demotivation does not mean that all the positive motivational influences from the beginning have dropped away. According

to the author, some positive motives may still exist in a learner's learning process. For example, someone who is partly demotivated in learning English because of the English teacher may still think that learning English is important because it is an international language. To sum up the difference between the two concepts, demotivation is linked to external and internal forces whereas amotivation concerns general outcome expectations that are unrealistic on some grounds. In this study, I will investigate what type of activities teachers suggest that can be done on an informal basis, whether these activities can motivate or demotivate the student.

There are various ways in which learners can sustain motivation. One way is receiving feedback and sometimes rewards, which can help with individual participation in cooperative learning and group work. Rewards are a kind of extrinsic motivation, which does not come from the learner itself; they may be seen as an obstacle to intrinsic motivation as learners will not be stimulated by themselves, but this did not prove to be true when rewards were not considered as a control on the situation but rather as an incentive to performance and progress (Sears et al. 2012: 247-249).

It is also important for the language learners to sustain their motivation and practise the foreign language on a regular and informal basis. If they want that experience to be productive and to keep on having motivation, students need to make use of learning strategies. Learners will develop their own strategies, as Naiman *et al.* (1996: ix) says about the motivated, 'good language learner':

“the successful or good language learner, with predetermined overall characteristics, does not exist. There are many individual ways of learning a language successfully”.

It is important to point out that “not all learners progress all the time” (Arthur 1992: 46) and that learners progress at different paces. Therefore learning strategies have to be adapted individually. The definitions of “learning strategies” vary (White 2008: 8). Strategy researchers have examined how the term strategy is used and they came to this point:

“Language learning strategies are commonly defined as the operations or processes which are consciously selected and employed by the learner to learn the target language or facilitate a language task. Strategies offer a set of options from which learners consciously select in real time, taking into account changes occurring in the environment, in order to optimise their chances of success in achieving their goals in learning and using the target language” (White 2008: 8-9).

Some learners may also use many learning strategies without making progress in the foreign language because they lack motivation (Cohen 2012: 142). The use of learning strategies varies from individual to individual and can even change or evolve during the whole learning process of the same person. The teacher can encourage learners to develop their preferred strategies or can propose new ones according to the learner’s situation and in order to become active and independent learners. McGivney (1999) states

that guidance should be available to students during the whole learning process, and not just at the beginning. Students' learning strategies and guidance learners receive as far as informal learning is concerned will be investigated in this research. Students' learning strategies can be finding salient words when they watch a film or listen to a song in English or asking native speakers of English to correct them when they discuss at the pub.

Guidance is mostly given by the teacher who supports students' motivation. Teachers are needed as facilitators and motivators of learning (Zukas et al. 2002), even if education is learner-centred and learners become more autonomous. Dörnyei (2001b) explains some of the roles of the teacher, motivator of learning, such as setting goals for learners and giving regular feedback. The teacher's enthusiasm for the target language will enhance the learner's motivation. I will explore whether the focus in the relationship between the teacher and the learner is on positive experience, progress, feedback and appraisal to generate further motivation and autonomy to learn in formal and informal environments. According to Voller (1997), the teacher should be seen as a facilitator or helper of learning but also as a counsellor who can give information and guidance to learners through personal interaction and as a resource or expert. In my study, I will investigate how students view the teacher. The teacher can be a motivator of learning, by explaining how the language works, by facilitating communication, by giving tips to students so that they study on an informal basis. Although teachers can feel and observe what is happening in class and students report they can be motivated by their teacher, "tutors know very little" (Arthur et al. 2000: 35) about what learners do outside class. In this

study, I will explore whether teachers still do not know much about their students' informal learning practice. Benson (2011: 7) states that teachers agree on the fact that students learn best when they receive formal and informal learning, but there are not many studies on the effectiveness of informal learning. Therefore, it is more difficult for teachers to know which informal learning activities students engage with. This project aims at establishing what and how students learn informally and whether and what teachers know about their students' informal learning. If teachers know about what learners do outside class, they may be able to motivate them and to recommend them informal learning activities which are suitable to their needs and expectations.

Not only motivation but also self-regulation or the aptitude to control yourself and your emotions is essential in order to be successful in language learning (Ning et al. 2012). This means that it is important to get over laziness for instance and to work in order to attain the desired language goals. Motivational self-regulation is related to autonomy of the learner, who reflects upon his learning process and is able to control it (Dörnyei 2001a).

This research will analyse the students' source of motivation and their motivation to learn on an informal basis, originating in an integrative motive, as the desire to be part of the English-speaking community and an instrumental motive, passing the English class and subsequently finding a good job thanks to the knowledge of the English language. In the motivation process, the teacher may play an important role in motivating students in

class and recommending informal learning activities. In this study, students will be asked whether they consider their teacher as a motivator of learning and teachers will reflect upon their function with respect to motivation to learn in and outside class.

2.3. Reflection, as part of autonomy in the language learning process

In order to keep up motivation and pleasure in learning a foreign language, noticing and reflecting upon the language can help the learner. Noticing has been researched by Schmidt (1993, 2001) who states that this is how language learning can happen. Noticing relates to the fact that learners cannot learn structures or meanings in a language if they do not notice them; it is a starting point for language acquisition. Noticing is important and should be encouraged by the teacher in the classroom, but it should also be practised outside classroom when learning on an informal basis, when listening to music or watching films and series, for instance. After noticing and being aware of the particularities of form and meaning in a language, learners can reflect upon the language and the language learning process, in order to adjust their learning strategies, by correcting their own mistakes, for instance. However, the noticing hypothesis has been criticized by Truscott (1998) because it is difficult to know precisely what attention represents when noticing a language form, because noticing would not help acquire the language but would help acquire metalinguistic – used to analyse language - knowledge of the language. Truscott recognises that the noticing hypothesis gathers much information and many ideas; they have to be better organised

and analysed. In this research, the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt 1993) is taken into account in order to analyse the findings, as it is a theory that is promoted at the HE institution by my colleagues and it appears to be seen positively by our students as far as language learning is concerned.

After students have noticed language structures and meanings, they can reflect upon the language learning process. Formal and informal language learning requires reflection and autonomy in order to be really effective. According to Tarvin and Al-Arishi (1991), reflection occurs when a problem or a particular situation has to be faced and through processes such as comparison, abstraction or analysis, the case can be better understood. By noticing and reflecting, students learn and understand more of the language, this encourages them to reach a higher level in the target language and to communicate better with the speakers of the language. This is a stimulating process, where students become more autonomous. As Murphy and Hurd (2011: 48) write, there is an important relation between autonomy and motivation, critical reflection being essential for autonomy.

To explain the relation between autonomy or the learner's responsibility for the study of the language (Benson et al. 1997) and motivation, teaching practice shows that if students are responsible for their own learning, they will be motivated and vice versa. Autonomous students are active in the learning process in order to improve their language knowledge. They can control the language learning on their own, without an institution (Lamb et al. 2008: 22). This study will seek to understand how HE students become

autonomous in their language learning through critical reflection. As Little (2008: 2) states:

“The development of autonomy in language learning is governed by three basic pedagogical principles:

-learner involvement – engaging learners to share responsibility for the learning process (the affective and metacognitive dimensions);

-learner reflection – helping learners to think critically when they plan, monitor and evaluate their learning (the metacognitive dimensions);

-appropriate target language use – using the target language as the principal medium of language learning (the communicative and the metacognitive dimensions)”.

With these principles, it is clear that autonomy and reflection are closely linked in the field of language learning. This study seeks to find out whether students reflect upon their language learning once they have noticed some aspects of the language, such as salient words or the use of vocabulary registers. By critically reflecting, they will be able to learn the language better on their own.

Stefanou *et al.* (2004) differentiate *procedural autonomy support* – in which students cope with their own experimental materials – and *cognitive autonomy support* – in which students find solutions to problems, and receive feedback. In the first case, we are dealing with students who gather their own material to learn and not the material given by the teacher; in the

latter, the teacher encourages students to find their own solutions and provides feedback to this; the teacher does not provide the solutions. This is a more learner-centred approach. If students learn to be autonomous in class, they may be able to apply the same principles outside class.

As claimed by Holec (1981) and Little (2008), learner autonomy means that students are taking charge of their learning; autonomy occurs “when we accept full responsibility for the learning process, acknowledging that success in learning depends crucially on ourselves rather than on other people” (Little 2008: 1). In this study, I will explore whether students are autonomous and have the ability to reflect, analyse, control and evaluate what has been learnt.

Although autonomy is often a “learner-centred idea” (Benson 2008: 16), the notion has evolved and today, we realise that teacher autonomy is necessary as well. This seems contradictory. If learners can exercise autonomy and be responsible for their learning, we can wonder how teachers can be autonomous in their teaching. It is actually through the combination of teacher and learner autonomy that the language will best be learnt. In order to express oneself properly in the foreign language, reflection, among other aspects, is needed to understand how the language learning process occurs. This reflection can be encouraged by the teacher who will motivate the student to learn. Consequently, the teacher has to foster autonomy, to get rid of old methods where the teacher was the only one to give instructions. Teachers have to listen to the students, to engage in and reflect on pedagogy in order to find the best individual methods to learn successfully (Smith

2003: 6; Dam 2007). Learner autonomy and teacher autonomy have to “develop in tandem” (Lamb 2008: 10), they have to be enhanced in the practice (Raya et al. 2008) and they have to be favoured in class, so that teachers can help students be autonomous outside class. This is related to the research question which explores who motivates students to learn informally. Learner autonomy is developed by the students themselves. Teachers are sometimes frustrated when they dedicate a lot of energy in their class and they obtain little results from the students. These learners rely too much on the teacher and are not autonomous. The teacher should lead them to more autonomy (Benson 2008: 24). This has to do with self-awareness and consciousness “raising about the nature of languages and what it is to learn a language” (Trebbi 2008: 45). This could be taught to students; that way, learners would be more autonomous and would control their learning process. It is important to remember that teachers are also learners, “able to learn from their learners” (Smith 2003; Lamb 2008), who then become teachers. Teacher autonomy implies reflection on developing learners’ autonomy and on the processes that allow students to acquire, keep and increase learners’ autonomy (Lamb 2008: 11). Teachers encourage students to acquire autonomy; this helps the learners to study outside class.

Related to autonomy, teachers’ and learners’ perspectives are also different. The teacher has to keep up with “institutional learning arrangements within established curricula” and learners are “concerned with learning, in a much broader sense, and its relationship to their lives beyond the classroom” (Benson 2008: 15). Although teachers’ and learners’ perspectives are different, they both share the same interest in language learning and

‘personal autonomy’. This is important in order to understand how formal learning is organised, how the teacher can help the learner to reflect upon the language learning process and to be more autonomous in the formal language learning process as well as in the informal one, as the teacher can be a facilitator of both learning processes.

As discussed above, reflection is something that students have to do by themselves (Anderson et al. 1996) or with the help of a ‘critical friend’ (Costa et al. 1993) or a trusted person who gives feedback to the learner.

Reflection can also be encouraged by the teacher. In this investigation, I examine whether language teachers are aware of their students’ reflection and how they stimulate reflection upon the informal learning process.

Students who are eager to learn in class and outside class have been found to engage in ‘noticing’ before reflecting upon the language learning process and become autonomous in their learning.

Autonomy has long been considered as an individual process (Holec 1981) conferring more independence to the learner and it is still considered as such, but autonomy is also based on social relations and interdependence, between learner and teacher as we have seen above, but also with other social contacts. Nowadays, learning is a social activity, being through face-to-face contacts or in the virtual exchanges on the Internet. Therefore, there is a need for respect for the autonomy of others, by helping and receiving help, being fair and collaborative (Lewis 2014: 57). Ryan and Deci (2000) developed the self-determination theory, which stresses the role of intrinsic motivation, the pleasure of learning the language. In the theory, relatedness

represents an innate need and is the desire to interact with others, to care for others and to be connected to people. Social interaction and autonomy are connected and help in sustaining motivation. Learners can become more autonomous in their learning process thanks to their contacts with other people, their positive attitude and the feedback they receive from others. This can help them develop more language skills and improve their knowledge of the foreign language.

As far as the learner's responsibility is concerned, the concept of self-directed learning goes further than autonomy. Indeed, autonomy refers to the responsibility of the learners taking charge of their own learning (Holec 1981: 3), whereas self-directed learning is "knowing how to realise that capacity" (Holec 1985: 188). Knowles (1984) explains the principle of self-directed learning where individuals take the complete initiative of their learning by considering their learning needs and goals, choosing the appropriate resources, using the proper learning strategies and assessing their learning outcomes. Concerning informal learning, learners can present autonomy by practising various activities and reflecting upon the language learning process. Besides, students practise self-directed learning when they have chosen the activity they need related to their language level; when they use the best learning strategies, such as working with a 'critical friend' (Costa et al. 1993) and when they can assess their learning outcomes, whether they have met the required criteria.

Boud and Walker (2002) study autonomy and reflection in classrooms in post-compulsory education. They believe that language learning practice

can be considered differently by the learner, by the teacher, or by the institution. The major aspect of learning from experience is reflection on the practice. They advocate 'critical reflection' and they warn of the dangers of simplified reflection consisting of 'technical formulae' or 'following a recipe' (Boud et al. 2002: 92-93). Each situation is a unique 'learning event'. Experience is wide and not limited to what the teacher represents. Boud and Walker (2002) mean that we have to evaluate each learning situation with our experience and we have to try and understand the meaning of experience. Then, it is possible to change a situation if needed.

It is through the 'process of reflection on our experiences' that we learn (Doyle 2001: 11). This project will study how the process of reflection is relevant for learners in their informal learning, but will also try to establish connections with the role teachers can play in encouraging students to think about their learning process and experience. Kolb (1984) was previously mentioned in dealing with learning by experience or 'experiential learning'. According to Tudor (2001: 84), meaningful experiential learning depends on the learner's mode of study and individual learning goals, among other aspects. Therefore, reflection upon experience in learning a foreign language is necessary and will lead to a better understanding of the informal language learning process.

Students can take charge of their learning process and reflect upon it in a resource centre, for example, having access to the online and digital media at their disposal in order to learn English. Learning with the media, students can acquire vocabulary and structures incidentally, without real intention to

do so. They learn in the course of other activities and by using the different language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) (Sockett et al. 2012). In my practice, students develop linguistic skills by using the Internet and social media and therefore acquiring new vocabulary and language structures. Through the social media, they have to understand the messages addressed to them in a foreign language and reply to them. Although this can occur incidentally, they can notice they have acquired new vocabulary subsequently and reflect upon the impact of using digital media in their language learning.

Riley (2001) states that formal structures are needed in informal education and a certain method and recording of progress, under the form of a portfolio, self-report or learning contract (Anderson et al. 1996) is useful in order to stimulate the students' reflection and motivation. In this investigation, the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009) is examined as a tool that encourages reflection and autonomy on the language learning process. By means of the ELP, students can also report on their noticing of the structures and meanings of the target language. They can reflect upon their own ELP and relate it to their classmates' ELP in a desire to interact with others and to have feedback from others.

2.3.1. The European Language Portfolio as a reflection tool

In order to promote autonomy and reflection in the language learning process and to keep track of the activities students engage in outside class as well as their views about the activities, the use of a portfolio or a diary that

is filled in by the learner on a regular basis might prove very useful. With these or similar tools, learners can report on the informal language activities they have engaged with, the way they consider they are making progress, their language learning strategies and intentions for future learning.

This investigation focuses on autonomy and reflection in language learning.

Tools that can encourage develop these skills are portfolios, diaries or blogs.

There can be various types of portfolios, diaries or blogs, which can be adapted to the learners' needs, but the aims of these tools should remain similar.

A language diary reports on the student's language learning activities on a regular period of time, with comments and thoughts going along with it (Suzuki 2004). A diary can help the researcher or teacher to know which informal learning activities students have engaged in, but also the amount of time they spent on them. When the language diary is online, it could be related to a language blog. Blogging can promote self-expression and reaction from other learners. The advantage of blogging is that it prompts to regular site updates (Hourigan et al. 2010). A language diary can be part of a student's language portfolio. The portfolio is a tool to develop student's autonomy and reflection on the learning process; portfolio assessment helps to bring the student's learning to their attention, to acquire cognitive and affective strategies in relation to others, not necessarily the teacher, but classmates (O'Leary 2014: 33). Portfolios are described as "tools that offer learners an opportunity to gather, evaluate, select, enquire and reflect on the work they have done and share it with others as proof of effort and achievement for assessment and employment purposes" (Alvarez 2012:

126). In a study carried out in Sweden by Sundqvist (2011), learners filled out a diary with the time spent on activities related to English outside class.

The systematic use of portfolios in language learning started ten years ago, its use has been advocated by several authors, i.e. Little (1991), Moon (1999), Murphy (2008) and O’Leary (2014) among others. They consider the use of portfolios in Higher Education and in professional contexts as tools which promote reflection and autonomy.

The portfolio I decided to use in this research is the ‘European Language Portfolio’ (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009). I chose the ELP because it is a structured tool, because it has been specifically designed for language learners, because it is known in education, because it has been used and revised in Europe for some time, because it is already known by some of my colleagues and by a few students, because it can be adapted to the needs of the HE institution and to the students’ needs. The ELP contains several sections which can help view what students do in order to improve their knowledge of the language and how they learn.

The ELP consists of a Language Passport, a Language Biography and a Language Dossier. The Language Passport is a means of recording language skills, qualifications and experiences. Language skills are determined ‘in terms of proficiency’.

“The Language Biography facilitates the learner's involvement in planning, reflecting upon and assessing his or her learning process and progress; it encourages learners to state what they can do in each

language and to include information on linguistic and cultural experiences gained in and outside formal educational contexts; it is organised to promote plurilingualism i.e. the development of competencies in a number of languages.

The Language Dossier offers the learner the opportunity to select materials to document and illustrate achievements or experiences recorded in the Language Biography or Passport” (Council of Europe 2009).

The ELP, as a portfolio, links informal to formal learning. It allows students to report on their informal learning activities and to write about their learning methods and strategies. Therefore, it helps them be aware of their language learning process and it helps teachers know what students do and how they learn in order to adapt their teaching and to consider students individually. I chose this portfolio because in the HE institution, my colleagues are willing to use it and I already use it with my students in class. I ask my students to fill in an adapted version of the portfolio at the beginning and at the end of the year in order to see how they expect to improve their English and what they have done to meet their goals at the end of the year.

The pedagogical action of the ELP goes further than language teaching and learning; therefore, it represents a shift in educational theory and practice. It is a turning point in pedagogy because the ELP is innovative and based on self-assessment, self-reflection and self-directed learning (Kühn et al. 2012:

1), instead of teacher-directed learning or assessment, comments and learning methods coming exclusively from the teacher.

Learner autonomy and reflection of the student result from the use of the ELP, which can prove useful to learners and teachers in Higher Education. It is learner-centred, it favours lifelong learning, it is designed for the learners, who have to acquire the foreign language and learning processes, who have to develop skills and strategies, who have to be proactive in their learning (Little 2009: 1). It allows to “develop an autonomy culture in contexts previously dominated by traditional pedagogy” (Little 2004: 2).

The Portfolio can be used independently or with the help of the teacher. Teachers can explain and justify its purpose; they should help students develop appropriate strategies to learn the foreign language through the ELP. They can help learners by giving simple tasks first and gradually more complicated ones, which can be reflected upon. This is important because some learners resist “taking responsibility in the ELP-oriented work, being satisfied with their (relatively) dependent role” and preferring the familiar teacher-directed work (Kohonen 2012: 32). In this study, the ELP will be used as a tool to identify informal learning and to reflect upon it.

2.4. Conclusion

This literature review focuses on informal language learning, which is not structured and usually practised outside class, as opposed to structured formal learning, based on evaluation and certification and structured non-

formal learning, not depending on evaluation (European Commission 2001: 32-33). Informal language learning has been less studied than its counterpart, formal learning, because it is not organised by an institution and it depends more on the learner, which makes it more difficult to understand. This is the reason why this investigation seeks to identify informal learning through students' observations and to relate it to formal education.

Informal learning is related to the psychology of learning, as mental and cognitive processes are involved. What Krashen (1976) defines as comprehensible input is needed to understand the message coming from the speakers of the target language but a comprehensible output (Swain 1993) has to be uttered in order to be understood. Both are necessary; they transform language learning into language acquisition (Krashen 1982). This transformation process can be observed in class through the language that informal learning students acquired outside class. In this investigation, I will examine how students acquire the English language through informal learning activities, how class learning becomes acquisition.

Informal learning can be viewed from a sociological perspective. We can wonder how students interact with their environment in order to be proficient in the foreign language. Hamilton (2002) and Ellis (1994) have examined the importance of the learning environment in acquiring a language. An important concept is Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice (CoPs). CoPs enable learners to find communities sharing their points of interest and using the target language. The CoPs can be face-to-

face or virtual, as much of the communication is occurring through the Internet nowadays. The purpose of this study is to identify more precisely how learners take advantage of the world around them and through digital media in order to improve their knowledge.

In a formal as well as an informal environment, motivation is a key element to successful language learning. This study will explore what and who motivates students to learn formally and informally on a regular basis. We will see whether students want to be part of the community who speaks the language. We will consider whether they learn the language in order to have better job opportunities.

In order to be more proficient in the foreign language according to Arthur (1992), Naiman *et al.* (1996) and White (2008), among others, reflection is needed to analyse one's progress and experience. Kolb (1984) is an advocate of learning from experience and using reflection in order to experiment fully the acquired experience. Kolb's critique relates to the non-reflective aspect of learning, the overemphasis on the role of the individual and the "decontextualization" of the learning process (Keeton et al. 2002). This study takes Kolb's model and its limitations into account, analysing students' learning experience and reflecting upon it. Students and teachers can take part in this process.

The use of portfolios, such as the European Language Portfolio (ELP), promoting autonomy (Benson 2001) and reflection in language learning, is one of the means that can help in the integration and evaluation process of

the formal and informal learning. This study examines the ELP, as one of the tools to promote autonomy and reflection in formal and informal learning. These areas of research, all related to informal language learning, were used to formulate the following research questions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH STUDY

3.1. Research methodology

In this study, what learners do from their perspective and in their own way is explored. The goal of this research is to describe and understand how learners report acquiring and developing their language skills and strategies outside the classroom.

This project is a single case study, which tries to clarify learners' views on the informal learning of English at a Higher Education institution in Brussels. It lies within an experiential approach in qualitative inquiry, as we are dealing with "human lived experience" (Schwandt 2007: 100); it is the students' experience as it is lived, felt and understood by them that is analysed in the investigation. Stake (2005) explains that the researcher knows about the students' learning because the researcher asks them. The students are the ones who are observed and have the experience of informal learning activities within the HE institution.

This is naturalistic research as the learning situations are examined "through the eyes of the participants" (Cohen et al. 2007: 167). The aim of the project is to "study human action in a setting that is not contrived, manipulated or artificially fashioned by the inquirer; hence the setting is said to be 'natural' or 'naturally occurring'" (Schwandt 2007: 207). This is further explained by Cohen *et al.* (2007: 20), who give some characteristics of naturalistic research, among others that

“situations are fluid and changing rather than fixed and static; events and behaviour evolve over time and are richly affected by context – they are ‘situated activities’ ”.

What students write and say they do and learn will be studied. I have to examine this carefully because there may be discrepancies between what they write and say.

This research is also situated within the exploratory and interpretative approach, as it is based on understanding experiences of language learning.

Faerch *et al.* (1987: 66) explain that

“the aim is the interpretative reconstruction of structures of sense, of the view of the world and of self, as well as of everyday knowledge”.

The study is based on learners’ understanding of the language learning process; how they view informal learning develops and their interpretations are “continually reformulated and mutually agreed upon” (Faerch *et al.* 1987: 57), which is part of the interpretative paradigm, as opposed to the normative paradigm, which

“proceeds from the assumption that actions and definitions of situations are to be considered as either explicitly or implicitly determined once and for all” (1987: 56-7).

There will be an open dialogue between the research participants, considered as informants, and the researcher, through respondent validation or the verification of the data.

In considering students' views and verifying whether they correspond to their teacher's opinion, several perspectives are presented and reflected upon in an attempt to reduce bias or "the tendency in inquirers that prevents unprejudiced consideration or judgement" (Schwandt 2007: 20). Language learning is approached according to students' views and their teachers' viewpoints in order to triangulate the information. Having two angles is important in order to verify the data.

3.1.1. Case study

The choice of a single case may be explained, as it stands for a typical case or a representative institution, according to Yin (2009: 48). This research is based the HE institution where I am currently working. It has been described in the research introduction.

The study of English as a foreign language is compulsory; on an average, students learnt English for six years before entering the school. In addition to English, students have to choose a second foreign language: Dutch or German. Although there are not many institutions of this type in Brussels, foreign language courses at this HE institution are representative of similar courses at other HE institutions or at university. This is why research on this theme is relevant as far as the choice of the single case is concerned.

Although the findings of this study could be applied to other Belgian HE institutions, the case study can be criticized as it is not easily generalizable, as we are dealing with one case in a particular setting. However, Gomm *et al.* (2000: 5) write:

“In some case study work, the aim is to draw, or to provide a basis for drawing conclusions about some general type of phenomenon or about members of a wider population of cases”.

The outcomes of this research can be applied to the situation of other HE institutions and universities in Belgium and probably in Europe.

The results do not come from statistical analysis, as some critics concerning generalization in case study research point out, but they rather feed a process of ‘naturalistic generalization’. In case studies, “what is crucial is the use others make of them or how they facilitate the ‘transfer’ of findings from one setting to another” (Gomm et al. 2000: 5). The significance of this project lies in the fact that the findings related to informal foreign language learning can be used by other Higher Education institutions and universities in Belgium and Europe, with a comparable student population and where foreign languages are also taught. In this case study, the focus of the investigation is the learning of English but some findings and conclusions can be applied to the learning of other foreign languages: the use of digital technologies as a tool to learn informally or reflecting in order to understand how the foreign language works, for instance.

The chosen case is not the whole HE institution but four classes in the second and the third year of study. These classes were selected because in the second and third year, students still learn the foreign language, whereas in the fourth and fifth year, they receive specialist classes in the foreign language. The first year was excluded as the number of students is not stable and it is difficult to make appointments with the students. The four

particular classes in the second and third year were chosen because the teacher was willing to have research carried out in class.

The selection of the institution where I am teaching was made for practical reasons as well; contacts with the research participants were facilitated and therefore data collection could be completed in the allocated time. However, as I am teaching there, I may not always have the necessary distance to analyse the whole language learning situation.

Furthermore, the case study approach “provides an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth” (Bell 2005: 10). In this study, the issue at stake is the observation and understanding of students’ views on their informal learning of English. Motivation and reflection in learning are part of this issue.

The informal learning of English was identified by means of several methods and over a certain period of time. This is emphasised by Denscombe (2007: 37):

“One of the strengths of the case study approach is that it allows the researcher to use a variety of sources, a variety of types of data and a variety of research methods as part of the investigation. It not only allows this, it actually invites and encourages the researcher to do so”.

As we will see, in researching this case study, two sources are used: students' views and teachers' views. Various methods are also used: questionnaires, interviews and self-reports.

Finally, Yin (2009) advocates a case study approach when the researcher does not really control the situation being studied. In qualitative research, not all parameters related to the participants and to the study are controlled. In this investigation, I did not know the students or their views; I could not always control the whole situation; I did not know what the students would reply and I had to renew some of my questions according to the students' responses. I could not exactly ask the questions I had written all the time.

3.1.2. Role of the researcher

As qualitative research is prone to subjectivity, it is important for the researcher to show reflexivity. Ball (1990: 36) explains: "The nature, limitations, and possibilities of data can be fully appreciated only when we begin to know how the actors' views of the researcher have influenced what they have or have not said and done". The research participants may have spoken freely to me but they may have been influenced by the fact that I was working at the institution where they were studying. Indeed, reflexivity is also needed in order to consider one's role as an insider or outsider researcher. While going to classes and administering questionnaires and subsequently interviewing students and teachers at the institution in French, the common mother tongue, I am working as an insider researcher or an "established participant" (Hammersley 1993: 219) researching in my own

organisation and having inside knowledge of its working. Hockey (1993: 199) mentions the advantages of the insider researcher, namely maintaining good rapport and communication with the participants as well as receiving more intimate details during the interviews. Indeed, the students of the HE institution where I am teaching spoke about the organisation of the school and the language courses; they gave their impressions about the institution and the classes. They would probably not have explained in the same way and given some of these details to people who do not know the HE institution; but they might also tell me what I want to hear, although I am not their teacher and will not be in the future. I can also be considered an outsider researcher as I am not dealing with my own students. I was not known to the students, but I introduced myself as a teacher working at the HE institution where they were studying. After the data is collected and discussed, I will not have further contact with the research participants, as I am teaching English to students in the second year and Dutch to students in the third year. I will not teach English to the students in the second year I interviewed, as I am teaching Dutch in the third year. I do not teach English to the students in the third year.

Actually, the position of insider and outsider researcher gives a more complete view of the research situation. As Hellowell (2006: 487) writes that “ideally the researcher should be both inside *and* outside the perceptions of the ‘researched’”. Hammersley (1993) confirms that both empathy related to the insider and alienation linked to the outsider are helpful to the researcher. For the work of a qualitative researcher to be valid and accepted, the position of the researcher - which can present two sides,

insider and outsider – and the limitations due to the researcher's involvement and interpretation of the participants' viewpoints, have to be taken into account.

As explained above, I am an insider and outsider researcher, I am currently working at the institution where the research was carried out; this is the reason why I can interpret some statements they made about the school and the language courses. I could understand easily what students are discussing when they mention the language curriculum at the HE institution. I had to remain alert not to deal with emotional aspects related to colleagues and their classes. I did not give further comments when students spoke more emotionally. I can interpret what students say but I have to be careful not to do this with preconceptions related to my position in the HE institution.

3.1.3. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in my research include the Director's consent and the Head of the Language Department's consent to carry out the research with students and teachers at the HE institution, the students' consent to participate in the research, with the anonymity of the research participants and the fact that they checked my data to verify whether I accurately represented what they had said.

The access to the participants was relatively rapid and easy as I am teaching English and Dutch at the institution. The Director of the institution read my questionnaires and interview questions, he subsequently agreed with the

practical aspects related to my research in language learning. The Head of the Language Department gave me his oral consent to interview the students. Four colleagues agreed that I could ask their students as participants in the research and that they would be interviewed themselves. The access to the students was relatively easy but it was quite difficult to have the sufficient number of students for the interviews and to arrange the practical details, such as the time of the interview. Indeed, students are busy with numerous activities and it is sometimes hard for them to stick to the interview schedule. Therefore, the interview schedule had to be reorganised several times.

The 'informed consent' and the 'agreements about the uses of the data' (Bell 2005: 46) were received. Students received a consent form they had to fill in and sign in class, along with the questionnaire (See Appendices 1,2). I did not receive formal approval from the OU ethics committee, as I started my research in 2009 and it did not fall within the research framework. At that time, it was acceptable to make my own judgement against the committee's criteria. The research participants are over 18. It was judged that my study would not harm participants, or affect their studies.

The names of the participants have been anonymised. A numbering system is used in the presentation of the data. Students and teachers agreed to the recording of the interviews, which was later sent to them, with the interview transcription and translation, to verify the information to make sure of the validity of the data, to check whether they really meant what they said and whether it was transcribed and translated correctly. The possible misinterpretations were discussed and corrected. This is called 'respondent

validation' or 'member check' (Schwandt 2007). This is also part of the interpretative approach, based on learners' and teachers' interpretation of the language learning process, which can be reformulated and agreed upon. The verification was also done in order to avoid bias, as interview transcriptions can also be subject to bias:

“The literature provides a growing consolidation of illustrations of transcription as theory, as selective and partial, as representative and as interpretive” (Davidson 2009: 47-48).

The translation of the parts of the interviews and the information coming from the self-reports from French into English could also be biased, knowing that

“the interpretation or translation of the research interview is revealed as a site of interface between different identity and knowledge claims” (Temple et al. 2002: 17).

The translator's perspective and identity have to be considered in reading the findings; the researcher and translator analysed the data in French but translated the findings into English. Therefore, in order to counter bias, the final translated results were submitted to an external reader for verification.

Another ethical concern was to ask the interviewees whether the whole interview could be used for the project. They had access to my data and could ask me not to use some parts of it. They all agreed with the fact that I could use the whole material. In the future, if the interviewees wish to read

my study, I will provide it upon request. My thesis will also be available online via the OU ORO repository.

3.2. Methods of data collection

The methods of data collection section includes the choice of a mixed methods approach as well as the details of the methods used in the research, the language used for data collection, which is different from the language used to write the thesis, the research participants and their selection.

3.2.1. Mixed methods approach

This investigation used a diversity of methods, i.e. student questionnaires, student and teacher interviews as well as student self-reports. I adapted the Language Biography of the ‘European Language Portfolio’ (Council of Europe 2009) in order to write the self-reports. They were handed out and explained to the interviewed students. The different methods helped me to understand all the aspects of the research questions; the questionnaires gave a broader view of the students’ learning situation, the interviews a closer look and the self-reports presented even more details.

“In an integrated methodologies approach, the start of the process, however, is the main research question” (Plowright 2011: 8). From the main research question related to what and how students practise informal learning, the other research questions were developed and consequently the research methods. These research methods are quantitative in using questionnaires to have a general view of the language learning situation and

qualitative in the students' interviews and self-reports in order to have more detail on the language learning process.

“Once you have formulated your research question, it will be clear that your research will involve one or more sources of information. These sources will provide you with the data for your research”
(Plowright 2011: 14).

To answer the main research question, general questions were asked to a substantial number of students; therefore questionnaires were used, as they are a practical way to collect data from a large number of people.

Subsequently, some details in the questions from the questionnaires were revised during the interviews with a smaller number of students. Finally, self-reports were given to some students to understand answers to some of the questions in more depth. The interviews were semi-structured, so that the interviewees could express their views more freely, and reflect with a self-report in some cases.

Different types of methods were used in order to have some validity, as this is an important aspect of a case study approach. This research uses a triangulation of methods: student questionnaires (See Appendices 3 to 5) compared to student and teacher interviews (See Appendices 6 to 15), followed by student self-reports (See Appendices 16, 17). Questionnaires were used in order to obtain some background information which was explored in more depth during the interviews. These methods are in line with many studies in foreign language, which

“include a background questionnaire for learners and researchers sometimes follow up on this source of information by using interviews to expand on particular topics or to clarify details” (Gass et al. 2007: 149).

As explained above, self-reports were also added to the data collection process of the study. The questionnaires and interviews were tested and revised. In a following stage, self-reports were administered.

3.2.2. Language used for data collection

The research participants as well as the researcher are French-speaking and they are learners and teachers of English as a foreign language. The choice of the language to administer the questionnaires and to give the interviews and self-reports was French, the speakers' mother tongue, as this study is not aiming at assessing the English fluency but rather at understanding how students view the informal language learning process. Participants are more confident in using their first language and are likely to reveal more of their emotional side, which is important in speaking about language learning, as Bond *et al.* (1986: 185) explain:

“The emotional distancing that is possible in a second language may also impart a lifeless, schizoid quality to the resulting speech behavior. This outcome would follow if paralinguistic components that are normally associated with arousing first language productions are missing when the second language is being used”.

This is the reason why French was chosen; participants could express better and in more detail their views and activities. The data were translated by the researcher into English and revised by an external English-speaking reader. The quotations are given in English in the thesis but the original quotations in French are in Appendix 10.

3.2.3. Initial study

In November 2009, I carried out an initial study at the HE institution where I am working. The study was carried out in a second-year class. The aim was to test the methods which would be used in the final study. The methods of data collection were student paper questionnaires as well as student and teacher face-to-face interviews. The sample of the initial study was five 20-year old male students and five 20-year old female students for the questionnaires and one female student, one male student and one male teacher for the interviews. The distribution and completion of self-reports was not done for the initial study because it would have required more time than was available for the students to reflect upon their language learning, write about it and explain it to the researcher.

In replying to the questionnaire, some students showed willingness to discuss their language learning process further in an interview. Two learners were chosen at random among them. Their teacher was subsequently interviewed to have his view of the situation and to cross-check the results with the responses from the students. As the sample in the initial study was

small, preliminary insights were revealed but conclusions could not be drawn.

The initial study disclosed that students learnt English outside class by watching films and surfing on the Internet. Interestingly, this was not exactly how their teacher viewed informal language learning. The teacher suggested speaking with people outside class was a very useful means of learning informally. While students reported on practising receptive skills, the teacher referred to interactive skills. Motivation to learn informally generally came from the teacher. Students mostly consulted dictionaries in order to understand the meaning of the words they do not know, whereas the teacher also mentioned the use of a reference grammar, which was a tool learners did not often use. The European Language Portfolio, as a means to consider the students' formal and informal language learning, was known by the teacher, but not used with the students.

The different aspects related to the research were further developed in the final study in order to draw conclusions regarding informal learning: a question was added to the questionnaire, the interviews were more focused, self-reports were added, the research sample was larger.

3.2.4. Research participants

In my main study, the number of students was chosen according to the organisation of the institution, i.e. the number of students per class, the permission I received from the Director and the time constraints.

In order to gather data about informal language learning, students and teachers agreed to give their opinion, although for the questionnaire, it was a captive audience - the students were in class and were asked to complete it; it was difficult for them not to reply to the questionnaire (Hox et al. 1995) although they were offered the opportunity to withdraw from completing it. My own students were not chosen in order to keep impartiality. This allows to use triangulation or “a means of checking the integrity of the inference” (Schwandt 2007: 298) in interviewing their teacher. Triangulation was used as I interviewed the students first, and subsequently their teacher to compare with the students’ replies.

Sampling relates to the selection of the research participants. When choosing the sample for data gathering, Ball speaks of the “reflexivity that requires the researcher to face up to the partiality of data coverage or to an over reliance on data from some people, places, or times” (Ball 1990: 40). When dealing with the data, reflexivity, considering that the interviewed participants were more willing to speak about their language learning process than the average student population, is needed in order to relate the conclusions to different types of language learners. The ‘opportunity sample’ (Bell 2005: 146) proved to be people who were willing to share their views. The data from the questionnaires, interviews and self-reports will be analysed taking this aspect into account.

Twenty students from four different classes were chosen to fill in a questionnaire. Four classes in the second and third year were chosen to have a more representative sample. The first year was excluded as the number of

students is not stable and it is difficult to make appointments with the students. Twenty students per class usually attend the course. From each group of twenty students, four students were willing to be interviewed. From each of the four interviewed students, one student in each class agreed to fill in a self-report. Table 3.1 represents the research instruments that were used in the initial and in the main study, as well as the number of research participants in the initial and in the main study.

Table 3.1: Research instruments and participants in initial and main study

Research instruments	Initial study	Main study
Questionnaire	10 students	80 students
Interview	2 students 1 teacher	16 students 4 teachers
Self-report	0 student	4 students

Table 3.2 presents the participants who completed the questionnaire, had an interview and filled in a self-report.

Table 3.2: Student and teacher participants in questionnaires, interviews and self-reports

Student questionnaire	Student interview	Teacher interview	Student self-report
S1 to S4 S17 to S32	S1 to S4	T1	S4
S5 to S8 S33 to 48	S5 to S8	T2	S7
S9 to S12 S49 to S64	S9 to S12	T3	S10
S13 to S16 S65 to S80	S13 to S16	T4	S13

The first column shows that a total of eighty students from four different classes completed the questionnaire. Each class group consisted of twenty students. For instance, S1 to S4, as well as S17 to S32 represent the twenty students of the first class who completed the student questionnaire.

The second column shows that a total of sixteen students from four different classes had a face-to-face interview. For instance, S1 to S4 represent the four students of the first class who had an interview.

The third column shows the teachers in each class who had an interview.

The fourth column gives the students in each class who completed the self-report.

3.2.5. Student questionnaires

A questionnaire was used in order to acquire background and information about the students' foreign language learning activities. The questionnaire was divided into several parts according to the research questions about formal and informal learning, motivation and reflection. The questionnaire in the main study did not differ very much from the initial study. A question was added about the cultural aspect of language learning, as it was considered as an important aspect of language learning arising from the interviews during the initial study and through additional reading (See Appendices 3 and 4: Part 2: Question 6). The question is related to the student's informal learning, which can occur by participating in cultural events.

The questionnaire was divided in three parts: educational path, English language learning and personal information. The part dedicated to English language learning included the main themes: formal learning, informal learning, motivation, reflection and the ELP, each with a set of closed questions to give the frequency of the activities performed related to each theme.

The computer programme SurveyMonkey was used to design the questions; through the programme, I realised that it was easier to create closed-questions, as they provided factual information about the language learning process and they are easy to deal with, some of them were open questions in order to capture aspects which cannot be predicted and for issues related to feelings and opinions. Paper questionnaires were administered to the students, as they represent

“a much more personal form of administration than mail surveys and therefore the chances for the questionnaires to be returned are significantly better” (Dörnyei 2003: 81).

Indeed, all the questionnaires were completed in class, by the students immediately. It took them about fifteen minutes to fill in the questionnaire. All students returned the questionnaire, probably because they wanted to do as their classmates did.

3.2.6. Student and teacher interviews

The interview questions were linked to the questionnaire, in order to provide more details about the different research questions. The students' teacher

was subsequently interviewed to have a view of the formal and informal learning activities of the students and to compare the results with the responses from the students. The teacher was asked similar questions to the ones which were given to the students; some of the questions were adapted to the teacher's role in relation to the students (See Appendices 8, 9). All the relevant interview extracts which are presented in the findings are given in the original language, i.e. French, in Appendix 10. The participants were interviewed in a classroom of the HE institution for approximately twenty minutes each and audio recorded with an mp3 device, as agreed with them.

The interviews were 'in-depth, semi-structured' and open to further discussion. Indeed, Gubrium *et al.* (2001: 11) advocate that type of interview where the interviewees are able to speak freely and thoroughly about topics of significance to them but a certain structure of the interview is kept in order to cover the different aspects related to the research questions. I prepared several questions, but I had the ideas related to the research questions in mind and I adapted some of the questions, as necessary, when the interviewee was speaking.

3.2.7. Student self-reports

Another research method I used in order to have a more complete view of the language learning situation is the self-report. Self-reports are a means of asking participants about their feelings, behaviour and impressions. According to Fielding (2006), in a self-report, people inform the researcher

about their own actions and attitudes linked to them. They may be carried out in interviews or using questionnaires.

Cohen (1987: 84) distinguishes “self-report” and “self-observation”. What I used in this research is the self-report or “observation of what learners do by learners”. The self-report mostly focuses on the beliefs students have about their language learning. It is not based on real-time observation, and it is different from “self-observation”. “Self-observation” refers to “the inspection of specific language behaviour” (Cohen 1987: 84).

I used part of the ‘European Language Portfolio’ (Council of Europe 2009) as a self-report. The ELP gathers student work and reflections on their progress in foreign language learning. As Kohonen (2002) puts forward, the ELP has been tested in many European countries and it has been positively rated for its quality, validity and transparency as a good and complete ‘pedagogic tool’. However, even though it is known that the ELP has been widely used, it is surprising that “there is a lack of research on the ways the ELP has been developed and used” (Alvarez 2012: 125). As a whole, the ELP has proved to be a positive instrument in order to be active in the learning process and to reflect upon it. However, it requires time to learn how to use it, teachers need to be supported by their institution in order to give assistance to their students to make optimal use of it.

The ELP can be adapted to the learners according to the guidelines of the ‘European Language Portfolio’ (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009), according to the learning situation, the age and the context. The ELP can be used as a

whole or partially. I adapted the self-reports from the ELP Language Biography, describing the learner's experiences in the foreign language and which is designed to guide the learner in planning and assessing progress (Council of Europe 2014). I shortened the ELP Biography to keep the more detailed information about the informal learning of the students and the learning methods (See Appendices 16, 17).

Students filled in the self-report a few days after the interview. Self-reports also mainly reflect language acquisition and use instead of language learning, although the latter is present as well. By completing self-reports (See Appendices 16, 17), students could reflect in more detail about their foreign language learning process. They explained how and why they learn the foreign language, how they are motivated to learn, how they consider the foreign language in its cultural context. They wrote further details related to the questionnaires and later the interviews; therefore, a picture of the learning situation is given according to the different research questions.

The data from the self-reports does not give a full picture of their language learning, because as Cohen (1987) notes, self-reports are limited to learning behaviour which the learner is aware of. In other words, the data from self-reports probably do not fully reflect the language learning, as “much of language learning takes place at an unconscious level and is, therefore, inaccessible to mental probes” (Cohen 1987: 88).

There are different types of self-reports. Some can be formal with fixed questions, others can be more flexible and open (Cohen 1987: 87). The self-

report I gave to the students was open. With a self-report, a full picture of all aspects of the language learning situation is not given but some elements are considered in more depth from the research participants' perspective.

3.3. Methods of data analysis

The data coming from the questionnaires, interviews and self-reports were analysed according to the research questions and were divided in themes and categories.

After gathering the questionnaires, I created a spreadsheet in Excel related for the different responses in accordance with the themes and categories in the order of the questionnaire items. I entered columns related to the frequency of the performance of the activities mentioned. The questionnaire responses to the closed questions were entered in Excel and displayed in a table (See Appendix 5), and were subsequently transformed into graphs. Unfortunately, there were no responses to the open questions.

I transcribed the interviews from the French recordings. In order to analyse the interview data, the NVivo software, which allows the categorisation and analysis of qualitative data, was considered but not used. However, I was inspired by the software in organising the data. Sections of the interviews were chosen and classified in numbered themes linked to the literature review and the research questions. The interview coding was theory-driven. The interviews were coded according to the following model.

Table 3.3: Sample of student interview coding

Coding explanation (cf. Literature Review):

Themes: 2.1.Informal Learning – 2.2.Motivation – 2.3.Reflection and autonomy

Categories: 2.1.1 Formal Learning - 2.1.2. Psychology of Learning – 2.1.3. Sociology of Learning – 2.1.4. Informal Learning Activities

2.2.1. Integrative motivation – 2.2.2. Instrumental motivation – 2.2.3. Self-Motivation – 2.2.4. Motivation coming from the teacher

2.3.1. Noticing – 2.3.2. ELP

The references to the literature are indicated in italics with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

The important ideas are marked in bold with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

2.1.1. S9: We deal with **2.1.1.articles** in general. For example, we spoke about **2.1.Facebook** *2.1.nowadays socio-technical communities in order to sustain formal and informal learning – Janhke 2005*, about iPhone applications, as well as about some wine in Chile, it doesn't matter and every time, there is a debate, where people who want to participate. This is what we do orally.

[...] 2.2.

R: I mean the British Council (talks/ theatre / European or British school).

What is the most stimulating?

S9: **2.2. The most stimulating:** speaking about everything, possibly face-to-face. Even with the Internet, now, we have the microphone and the webcam, it is better than writing.

R: Are you encouraged to speak outside class, by whom? Do you motivate yourself?

S9: **2.2.1. Many friends in the US, in the United Kingdom or in Australia.** I speak to them every day. This summer, I go and see them in Australia. I am **2.2.1. motivated, even if I don't realise I learn.**

R: Which piece of advice does your teacher give you about what you could do outside class?

S9: **2.2.4. He encourages us to read, to listen to the radio, to watch movies.** Simple things we do naturally but if we do them in English, it is better.

R: Does the teacher recommend books to read?

S9: The teacher **2.2.4. recommends us books he liked himself.**

[...] S9: *2.2. internal motivation. 2.2. Being able to discover more things*

because we speak English. On the Internet, the good piece of information is in English. *2.2. external motivation.* **2.2.2. Professionally, on a resume, they easily hire someone who speaks English fluently.**

The whole interview coding is presented in French in Appendix 13, in English in Appendix 14 and the above extract in its original version, in French in Appendix 15.

The self-reports (See Appendices 16, 17) were analysed and organised, in the same way as the interviews. Relevant parts of the responses in the self-reports were categorised in themes – informal leaning, motivation, reflection and autonomy – related to the literature review and to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings are given and discussed according to each research question. The data related to each research question is presented in different stages: firstly, from the students' questionnaires, secondly from the students' interviews, thirdly from the students' self-reports. The data from the three research methods - the students' questionnaires, interviews and self-reports- is corroborated or contradicted by examining the data from the teachers' interviews. I end each section with a discussion of the data coming from all these sources.

Data from questionnaires is presented in a graph which gives the percentages of students replying to the statements. The main findings are then presented, starting with the most striking aspects of students' informal language learning and continuing in the order of the graph. In order to facilitate the reading of the replies, a letter was added to the different research themes and a number to the different statements. The letter A corresponds to informal learning activities, the letter B corresponds to formal learning activities, the letter C corresponds to the motivation to learn English, the letter D corresponds to the motivation coming from the teacher and the letter E corresponds to reflection in the informal language learning process. Data from the students' and teachers' interviews is presented in interview extracts, which are then discussed. The interview extracts can be seen in the original language, i.e. French in Appendix 10. Data from the self-reports is presented as text extracts encompassing the main ideas.

In the questionnaires, none of the students replied to the open questions starting with “other”, as the interviewed students told me they did not take the time to think of any other possibility. The interviewed students were asked whether they had something else to say about each question in the questionnaire.

4.1. Informal learning activities practised by HE students

4.1.1. Informal learning activities

Informal learning or learning outside class is an important part of the language learning process. The first part and the following graph (Figure 4.1) present the findings coming from the questionnaire data and related to the first research question: What type of informal language learning activities do learners in a Higher Education institution in Brussels engage with? The graph gives the replies to Part 2 Point 6 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 4). This presented students with a range of informal learning activities identified in the literature review and in the initial study and asked them to select activities which they engaged in.

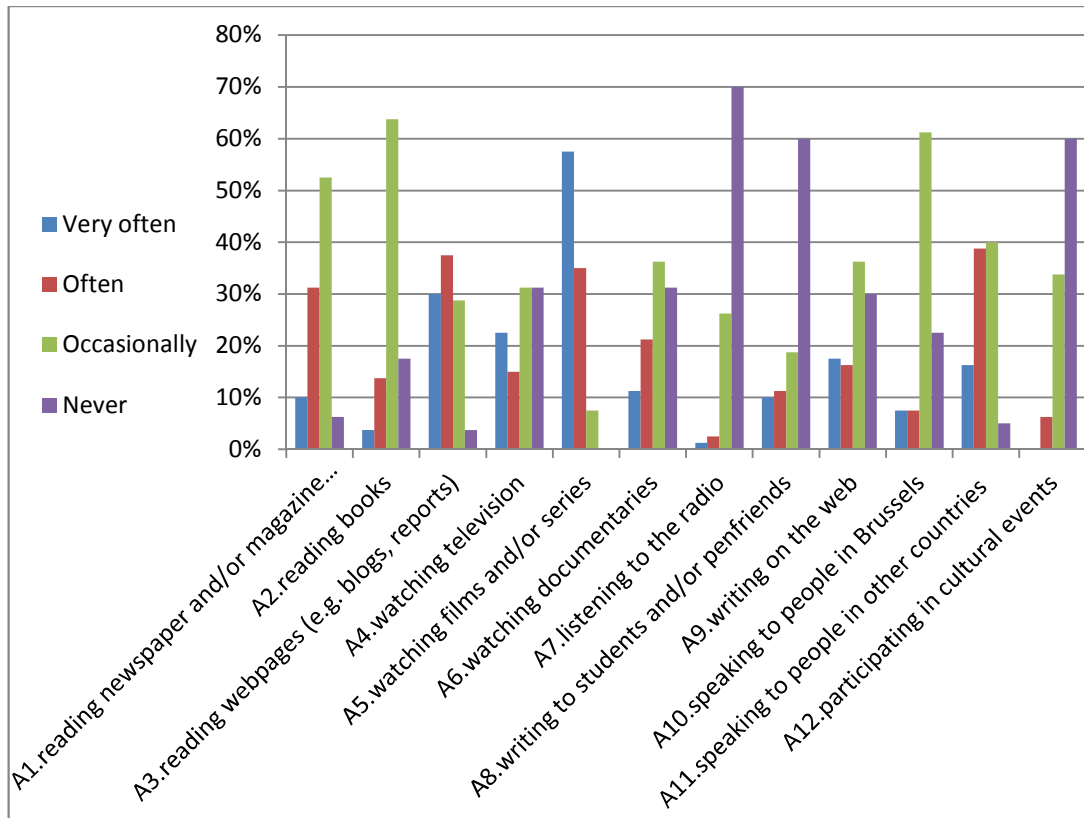


Figure 4.1: Student questionnaire data: Informal learning activities

From the questionnaire data in Figure 4.1, it emerges that 57% of the students watch films and series in English (A5) outside class very often and 35% watch them often, 52% occasionally read newspapers and magazines (A1) and 64% occasionally read books (A2), 70% never listen to the radio (A7), 60% never write to students and/or penfriends (A8), 61% occasionally speak to people in Brussels (A10), 60% never participate in cultural events (A12).

Watching films and series (A5) is the informal learning activity students practise the most. This exemplifies the statement made by Hampel *et al.* (2006) and Sefton-Green (2008) that our knowledge or information society has changed our print culture into a digital and image culture. We see that

students occasionally read printed and/or digital newspapers and magazines (A1) and occasionally read printed books (A2). Erstad (2012) states that young people are engaged with digital media most of the time. There is a large offer of films and series in English through the Internet; to a lesser extent, the students in this research also use other resources in English on the Internet, such as reading webpages and writing on the web. I think that the Internet has become a major resource. Students frequently use the Internet during their informal learning activities. If the people who encourage them to improve their foreign language learning are aware of the students' Internet use, this will help in advising good web resources.

Learners do not often take the opportunity to interact with English speakers; they rarely listen to the radio. Many students never participate in traditional cultural events, such as going to the theatre or to a museum. They do not use the physical world as a classroom (Coleman et al. 2005), but they use the virtual world as a classroom, as they very often use digital media. With the appearance of digital media, it has become common to practise activities through the new media. It often replaces face-to-face activities. Nowadays, students often use social media (Hampel 2014) on their mobiles or their laptops; there, they write to their friends, but they would not write them letters.

The questionnaire data related to watching films and series is confirmed by the student interviews. The interviewed students mention that they watch video resources in English, in particular TV series and films that they usually watch in the original version. Half of the interviewed students gave details concerning the films and series they watch. At first, they may watch

them with subtitles in French, then in English and as they improve their understanding of the language, they watch the material without reading the subtitles. The students comment on these issues:

“As most young people, I like watching films, series; I’ve always watched series in the original version” (S1/1).

“From the Internet, I watch series with subtitles, at the moment in French, but I thought of doing English-English. It will be more productive. [...] It is a pleasurable moment, so there isn’t this arduous side of learning English” (S4/1).

Some students watch films and series in English out of pleasure, can end up thinking in English.

“Watching series, on a regular basis, and listening to the words regularly, enables us to learn the vocabulary much quicker. [...] I like it, I pay attention to what they say [...] I repeat the words. [...] I think in English” (S7/1).

“[...] series and films, I really don’t like watching the dubbed version. It is useful for phrases we use a lot in the daily conversation. This is what I like the most. [...] During trips, [...] I use the vocabulary I learned in the series and films” (S2/1).

This student’s comment shows that watching series and films brings her new vocabulary that she can subsequently use. This illustrates the pleasure of learning a language and putting it into practice. Another student also reports on the vocabulary learnt by watching films:

“Films, it is an easy type of activity. [...] the advantage is that I can choose the type that interests me. The vocabulary is adapted to my knowledge. (S3/1).

The interviewed student chooses the type of films that is adapted to her knowledge of the language. This refers to Krashen's (1976) comprehensible input, through which learners understand the addressed message. Students can start by watching easy types of films. As they understand, they may choose films that contain more elaborate vocabulary and improve their knowledge of the foreign language. By watching films and series, students can acquire vocabulary, without really studying it, as VanPatten and Williams (2007) mention that acquisition is a natural phenomenon, of which we are not aware. The previous quotes illustrated the fact that students were aware of acquiring vocabulary; one student mentioned that she could use the new vocabulary in her daily life, for instance. From the quote below, we notice that students can acquire the language without being too aware of the phenomenon:

“On my own, I only watch films, and more in English. [...] I just watch the film, I like it: a film, it is a theme” (S5/1).

All interviewed students usually watch films and series through the Internet; they also use the Internet in other ways: they read blogs, magazines; they listen to music or use social networks, such as Facebook and Skype:

“What's really stimulating is music. We want to know the words. [...] I sometimes read newspapers in French, and then in English to compare” (S1/2).

This is related to the pleasure of learning outside class:

“With the Internet, we learn without formal structures” (S4/2).

Once students understand the message in the target language, they do not need to refer to their mother tongue:

“We often find pages in English, we have to read, I’m not looking for the page in French” (S6/1).

“I mostly read fashion blogs; there are girls from all over the world, they take pictures of clothes and it is often in English. I read it. [...] I visit websites related to fashion, photography, technology. I spend much time, I’m very much Internet¹” (S7/2).

Although much information is given in English on the Internet, learners do not always search specifically for pages in English:

“If I find a website in English, I’ll read it; but I’m not searching for English websites on purpose” (S14/1).

In the preceding quotes, informal learning activities were reported, using the Internet and without the conscious purpose of learning English in a structured way. The informal learning of the students can also be more formal and structured (McGivney 1999). Students are active and autonomous; one student has found a website to learn more English:

¹ Translation from the French “Je suis très internet”, which means I use the Internet very often.

“I found a website Gymglish, a learning programme which sends a story every day, with questions about the story and grammar questions” (S3/2).

The Internet facilitates contacts between people. All interviewed students use social networks, such as Facebook, to keep in contact with friends:

“There are many things on the social networks which are in English. We have friends, who don’t speak French, we write our status in English. I’m surrounded by English, whereas when I was 10-12 years old, I was not in contact with the English language, because television was in French, newspapers were in French, I wasn’t going on the Internet; I didn’t have that contact, whereas nowadays, it is more and more pervasive, it goes beyond the school walls” (S4/3).

This refers to the rapid evolution of society. Nowadays, with the new technologies, people have language learning opportunities, that were not so in use a decade ago. Other students comment on their regular use of the social network, Facebook:

“I have a few friends who live in the United States, we never call each other. We sometimes write on Facebook; there, I write in English” (S7/3).

“I like Wikipedia in English, but I don’t have enough time to contribute to it. Writing, it is through Facebook and e-mail” (S16/1).

Students have probably more contacts through the Internet than face-to-face contacts. Here is what they say about the contacts, the people they can speak

to in Belgium or abroad, the world around them, which is a good resource for informal learning activities (Coleman et al. 2005):

“What was really challenging for me, was travelling or going to camps, meeting people with whom I could only speak English. In Brussels, I’ve met people from the European Commission who spoke only English and their own language; I could speak English outside class; after that, we wrote to each other” (S4/4).

“Speaking also with people whose mother tongue is not English; it helps, we keep in touch with the language” (S6/2).

People use English with different speakers of the language, not only with native speakers. This exemplifies that English has become a lingua franca, a language used to communicate between people of different nationalities.

Two interviewed students are in contact with native speakers of English in Brussels, one student reports:

“I’m doing some babysitting in an English family; that way, I practise English on a regular basis” (S10/1).

Nine of the sixteen interviewed students (S3, S5, S6, S7, S8, S10, S14, S15, S16) do not often take part in face-to-face cultural activities, but the others say they engage in activities, such as going to talks, to film festivals or to the pub:

“I go to talks in English in Brussels: we speak and we have to ask questions in English” (S2/2).

“I thought of film festivals where the film directors only speak English, the debate or meeting is in English” (S4/5).

One student mentioned activities she would like to do, learning informally while doing something out of pleasure and interest in a community of practice (Lave et al. 1991):

“It’s difficult to find the activities in English, the best would be a cooking or yoga class in English; I would like it” (S5/2).

From the self-reports, it emerges that the four students watch films and television, usually with subtitles, they read articles in English, but that they also have experience in English abroad. White (2008) refers to this as an ‘immersion context’. People can learn the language better if they are in the country in which it is spoken. In order to improve their knowledge of the English language, two students spent some short periods abroad mostly in English-speaking countries, such as Ireland or the United States. By contrast, the interviewed teachers do not emphasise online activities. They mention digital media and some of the possibilities they can offer, but the teachers focus on informal learning activities, such as stays abroad, theatre plays, speaking with people, although films and series on the Internet really seem to be the most popular activity among students. The questionnaire and interview data confirms this, even if a certain number of students practise informal face-to-face learning activities:

“Stays abroad, of course, films, music, some students are really addicted to music and they use it as well as far as words are concerned” (T1/1).

“Going to the pub and speaking with people! [...] We are lucky to live in Brussels, a multicultural city” (T3/1).

One teacher (T3) comments on the series in English that students watch, he does not think it is the best means of learning informally:

“They think the best is watching series with subtitles in English. It is only a half skill. They remain passive” (T3/2).

4.1.2. Discussion on the students’ informal learning activities

It emerges that the most common activity that students practise outside class is watching films and series in English, usually found on the Internet.

Learners have pleasure in watching films and series. However, teachers do not always consider it as the ideal activity, but rather as a passive one because it seems to them that when watching films, students only listen and do not interact. However, it can also be considered an active experience, as students can try and understand the meaning of new words and expressions, analyse the context of the films and series. The different views between the students and the teachers can be due to the generational difference; teachers were not used to surfing on the Internet when they were younger. Therefore, they do not consider that type of activity as an efficient informal learning activity. Students do; for instance, one student (S7) says that in the series on the Internet, she pays attention to what the actors say, she repeats the words, she thinks in English.

Students experience watching films and series as an activity where they practise the foreign language they are learning and as a pleasurable activity,

this reflects what Garnett (2010) says about informal learning: individuals learn because they have pleasure and they are interested in what they want to learn. They choose their types of films and series and are happy to watch them. Students want to understand films and series in order to be able to follow the next episode. They sometimes search for the meaning of the words. They also report learning vocabulary, as it is repeated many times and they end up using that vocabulary in their everyday life when they have the opportunity to speak English or when they travel abroad. Coleman *et al.* (2005) emphasise the fact that it is important to choose real-life materials which match our interests and level of proficiency. Students realise they can understand the films and series and their understanding is improving with time, which makes the activity even more gratifying. However, watching films and series on the Internet is easier than trying to find English-speaking activities and participating in events in English in Brussels (and not on the Internet). One teacher referred to it as a “half skill”. He mentions this as he thinks that students are only receptive in watching films and series, especially when they read subtitles in French. If students want to understand the words and use them in their daily life, this skill is not only receptive. It can be difficult to listen very carefully and intensively (Field 1998) in order to find out the details of a speech. A certain degree of activity can also be added to the listening aspect, when students focus on the vocabulary and really try to understand.

As far as face-to-face activities are concerned, it is more time-consuming to meet English-speaking people and/or find cultural activities in Brussels.

Films and series are offered in your own room on the Internet, whereas it

requires more energy and time to be out and to meet people, to communicate with them and to create opportunities for interaction.

However, the Internet is used by students for a lot of activities. They read blogs and magazines related to their interests, listen to music, etc. Drotner (2008a) explains that the relations between digital media and informal learning are significant; because of the knowledge society, we learn differently. We use the Internet quite a lot as a means of learning, whereas books and papers were more used in the past. Students are very much influenced by digital media because they use them on a daily basis. As a lot of material at their disposal is English on the Internet, they often practise their English, sometimes unintentionally.

The Internet favours a learner-centric and more collaborative approach (Hampel et al. 2006). Some interviewed students (S4, S7, S16) report using social networks, such as Facebook. This is a means of communicating much used by students, also to stay in contact with friends abroad and to write to them in English. This is a current phenomenon. Nowadays, socio-technical communities have emerged in order to sustain formal and informal learning; these online communities create social, educational and technical relationships (Jahnke 2010). Not only students, but many people use social networks to communicate; new language learning opportunities can be found with the social networks, as it is easier to communicate with people from different countries.

Some people will argue that those virtual contacts do not replace face-to-face ones. Although I find virtual contacts useful, I agree that face-to-face contacts are different and important, as we are human beings and we need emotions that come from that kind of contacts. Some students stated during the interviews that they would like to meet English-speaking people and take part in activities in English but they do not always know how to find them. Teachers could help but some teachers do not consider mentioning informal learning activities to their language students.

The interviewed teachers are aware of the students' intensive use of digital technology but they do not always value this; there is a gap between youth culture with the technology and education which is much slower to adapt (Beetham et al. 2007). The teachers consider going out, meeting English-speaking people as informal learning activities. They could exploit the fact that students watch films and series on the Internet; they could use the Internet as a means to promote other forms of informal learning activities, such as finding English-speaking people they could meet face-to-face, going to the theatre or talks. These could fulfill the students' interest points.

The preceding part focuses on informal learning activities, mainly through the Internet, but also in Brussels and in other countries. Students have pleasure in using the Internet and watching their favourite films and series; they are learning without being aware of it. However, sometimes they are aware that they are learning or they deliberately use the Internet and find webpages in order to learn or improve their English language.

A student (S4) considered language immersion as challenging; activities such as going to camps, meeting English-speaking people, also in Brussels are stimulating. The interviewed students practise different types of informal learning activities, mostly virtual ones but also face-to-face ones, such as babysitting in an English family (S10). The following figure (Figure 4.2) visually summarises the informal learning activities students mostly practise.

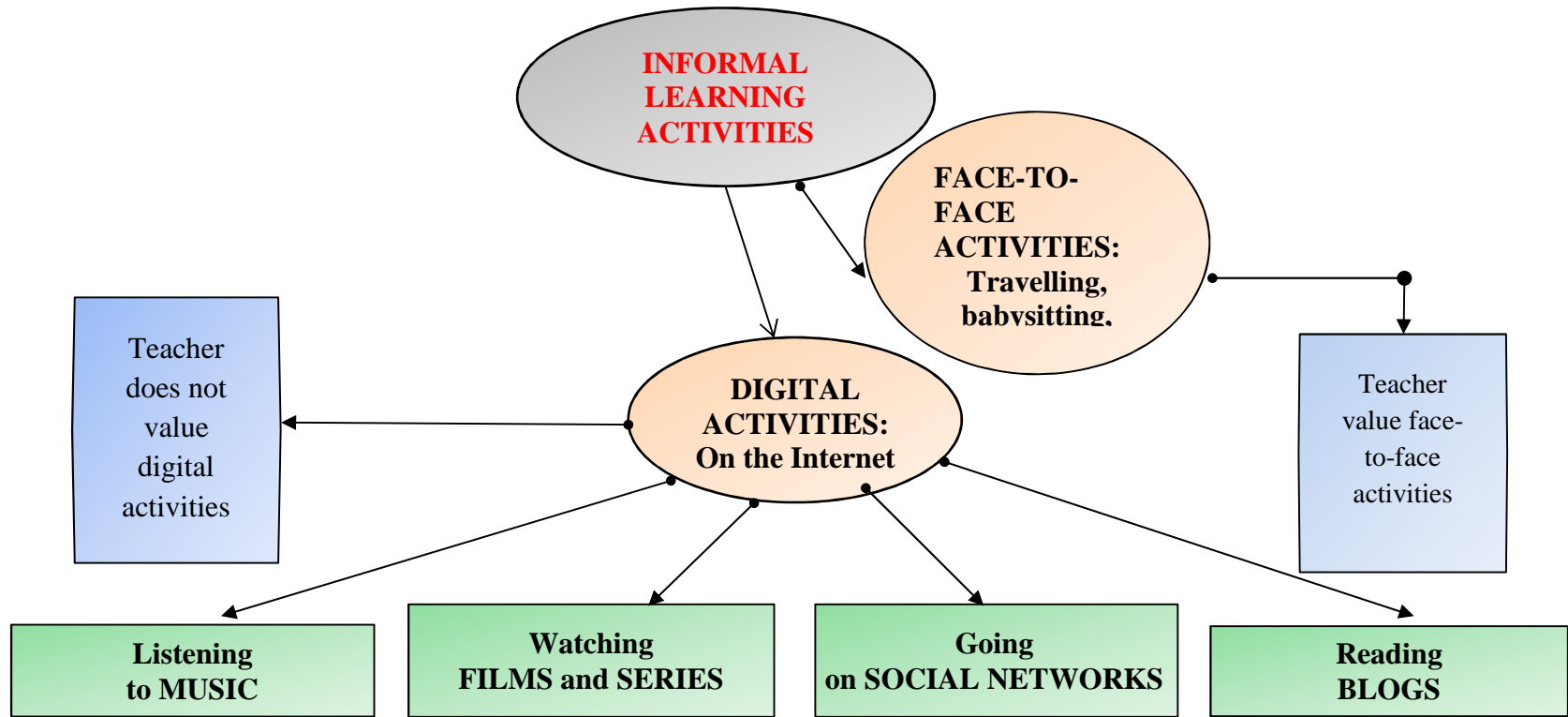


Figure 4.2: Main informal learning activities

4.1.3. Formal learning activities

The students in the research study communication in a Higher Education institution in Brussels. They receive foreign language classes within a formal learning structure. The formal learning context influences the informal learning activities of the students. Indeed, students are taught by a teacher how to learn foreign languages; learners decide what best suits their needs and whether they wish to use similar or complementary activities and methods in their informal learning activities, in order to acquire the language skills. Their informal learning activities are influenced by the formal learning activities they receive in class.

The graph below (Figure 4.3) presents findings from the questionnaire data. This is related to the first research question about the type of informal learning activities learners engage with in the context of their formal learning. Formal learning activities that may influence informal learning activities are examined. The graph gives the replies to Part 2 Point 5 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 4). This presented students with a range of formal learning activities identified in the literature review and in the initial study and asked them to select activities which they engaged in.

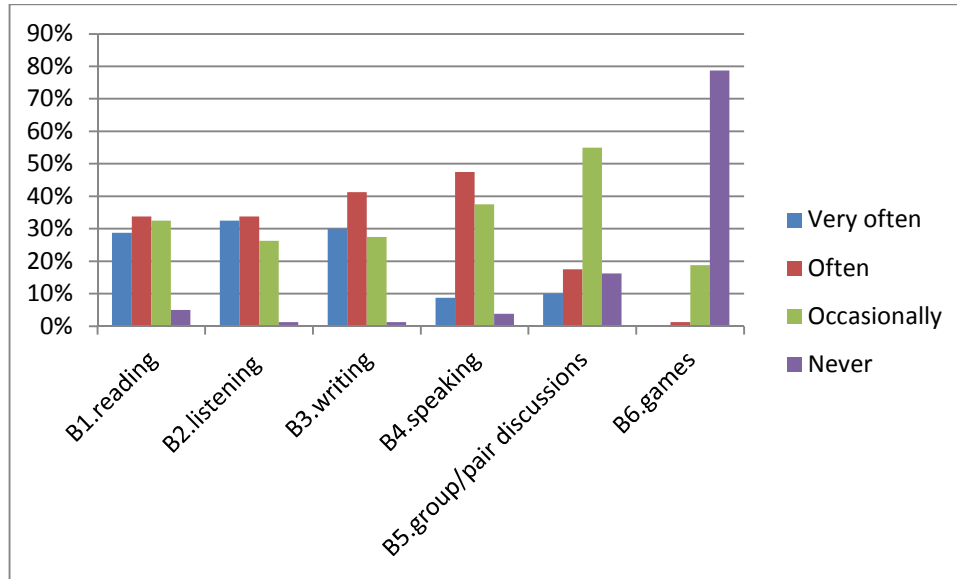


Figure 4.3: Student questionnaire data: Formal learning activities

From the questionnaire data in Figure 4.3, it appears that 55% of the students occasionally take part in group and pair discussions (B5). 47% often speak (B4) in class to the teacher, to other students or in a spoken interaction or the cooperation between two or more partners in a communicative situation (Stenström 1994), 34% often read (B1), 34% often listen (B2), 41% often write (B3), 79% never play games (B6).

Students often practise reading, writing, listening and speaking activities in class. These are the four language skills, which teachers develop with their students on a regular basis. Speaking and writing include spoken and written production, as well as spoken and written interaction. Spoken production corresponds to producing utterances, delivering a speech or giving a presentation, whereas spoken interaction is speaking with other people (Gavioli et al. 2001). Referring to writing, written production is writing an essay, for instance, whereas written interaction is chatting in a social network group, for example. Students practise spoken interaction, when

they take part in group or pair discussions occasionally. Spoken production and interaction are mainly practised in class, as opposed to written production and interaction. This active occupation is complementary to the less active informal learning activity - watching films and series – which rather develops the listening skill. Students also practise spoken interaction on an informal basis, when they participate in debates and conversations in pubs, for instance. Most of the students report not playing language games in class. Looking at the interviews in more detail, the following extracts emphasise that four students (S1 to S4) from the same class have to read outside class and comment on their reading in class.

“We have to find books, read them and then, we speak in front of the class and there I learn a lot.[...] The topics we discuss in class are so interesting that I really want to give my opinion” (S2/3).

Students do not read much during their informal learning activities. If they read, they mostly read webpages.

The most popular informal learning activity for the students in this research is watching films and series, a listening activity. Students also practise listening activities in class:

“During each class, we have a video that is used as listening comprehension. (S3/3).

Four students (S5 to S8) from another class mentioned that they really enjoy speaking in class, it could be in a one-to-one communication exchange or in a spoken interaction (Stenström 1994), a cooperation between two or more

partners in a communicative situation. They do not have many opportunities of speaking outside class, maybe due to the fact that it takes time to find speaking partners. In class, they favour speaking in small groups as there are many students in the class. If they gather in smaller groups they have more opportunities to speak:

“In class, the teacher often asks us to speak amongst ourselves; so, we can speak English; otherwise, we wouldn’t really do it. He asks us a question and we have to speak with our neighbour. He comes to each group to see what we are talking about” (S7/4).

The self-reports do not focus much on the learning of English in class, but they are used to acquire a picture of what learners do outside class. One student (S4) who filled in the self-report admits not having much English practice in class, whereas the others are satisfied with their formal practice of English. This means that English practice varies from class to class. If some students do not have much practice in class, the best way to acquire the language would be to have more practice outside class. Two students (S4, S13) spent three months in formal educational settings on Erasmus student exchange programmes, not necessarily in English-speaking countries, but in universities where courses were given in English. These are cases of language immersion (White 2008) in a formal learning context. Students in this research also have immersion during informal learning activities when they take part in talks, for instance, in an English context and with speakers of English. One teacher (T1) corroborates what the students said and gives more details:

“Every week, students are confronted with videos and readings. [...] In the first term, I work a lot with videos I bring and in the second term, I ask them to find an issue themselves, that they will partly explain, with a video they present to the other students” (T1/2).

This is related to informal learning where students tend to watch films and series a lot and improve their listening comprehension. Although teachers do not use films and series in class, some of them can show video material and develop the students' listening skills. The same teacher (T1) wants the student to speak English as naturally as possible:

“I'm trying to get to the point where students forget they speak English” (T1/3).

If students speak in English as they would speak in their mother tongue, this is an example of language acquisition, speaking the language without being aware of learning. During the informal learning activities, students can watch series and films without being aware that they learn the language.

Formal learning activities have an effect on the choice of the students' informal learning activities. The exercises students do in class in order to learn the foreign language can inspire them to practise some activities outside class. Students develop listening comprehension in class by watching the videos brought by the teacher. This can inspire them to do a similar type of informal learning activity, watching films and series. A student (S3) reports that they watch a video that is used as listening comprehension in class. They may listen to a programme to have a general idea, that is extensive listening or to understand the details, that is intensive

listening (Field 1998). In order to prepare their class course, students have to read books and articles. This is an activity that they do not often practise informally. Therefore, they exercise different language skills. They read books and articles for the class course (writing); they watch videos in class, series and films outside class (listening).

In class, students tend to speak in pair or in group regularly. This helps them develop their speaking interactive skills that they can practise on an informal basis. If they feel more familiar with the foreign language, they should not fear using it informally. One teacher emphasises the fact that she wants to bring them to the point where English comes as naturally to them as their mother tongue (T1/3). This is related to the informal learning of the students, who reported watching series and films in English. It is a pleasurable moment and they are not aware they are learning.

4.1.4. Discussion on the students' formal learning activities

From the questionnaires, it emerges that students mostly practise spoken interaction in class, by speaking with their peers and occasionally discussing in groups or in pairs. They do not practise spoken interaction regularly on an informal basis. In an informal context, students tend to listen extensively and also intensively to programmes, such as series on the Internet.

Analysing the interviews, it appears that the speaking skill is developed in class, and to a lesser extent the listening skill as well. Learners develop more the listening skill on an informal basis, as they watch a lot of films and series in English. Four students (S1 to S4) practise spoken interaction and

are prompted to raise relevant issues according to the themes addressed in class. It is recognised by the students and important to the teacher (T1) that the learners want to participate and enjoy the discussions, so that they forget that they are speaking a foreign language. This refers to the class, which can provide rich and diverse learning experiences, based on face-to-face situations provided by the teacher (Ellis 1994). Some students (S5 to S8) practise spoken interaction in discussing with each other and debating. The teacher listens to each group so that students are encouraged to follow their conversations and arguments in English. This illustrates the fact that formal and informal learning sometimes cross boundaries, as stated by McGivney (1999) and Golding *et al.* (2008). The focus of the study is on informal learning within a formal learning environment. Therefore, the relation between informal and formal learning is relevant in the investigation. The example in class above is a case of informal learning occurring within a formal learning context. This activity is student-directed as students feel free to discuss and lead the debate. It is also teacher-directed, as the teacher gives the main issues and listens to each group. The fact that spoken interaction as informal learning can also take place in a context of formal education, when learners work in groups and share views, illustrates McGivney (1999) and Golding *et al.*'s (2008) point of view: informal learning can be part of formal learning and formal learning can be found in informal learning situations, when student try to understand everything they have learnt in that context.

Formal classes of English are varied but they can help students to study more on an informal basis. Students are accustomed to reading books and

articles for class and they can read on outside class. They practise their speaking skills regularly in class, which could help communicate outside class. Learners also have some listening activities in class: they have listening comprehension exercises and they listen to their teacher. On an informal basis, students tend to listen to programmes on the Internet and listen to music. Both extensive and intensive listening are developed in class and practised outside class.

4.2. Motivation to learn a foreign language informally

The following graph (Figure 4.4) presents findings from questionnaire data related to the second research question: In this HE context, are students motivated to learn a foreign language informally? Who and what motivates them? If students are not really motivated, why do they lack motivation to learn languages outside class? The graph gives the replies to Part 2 Point 9 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 4). This presented students with different types of motivations identified in the literature review and in the initial study and asked them to select their motivations.

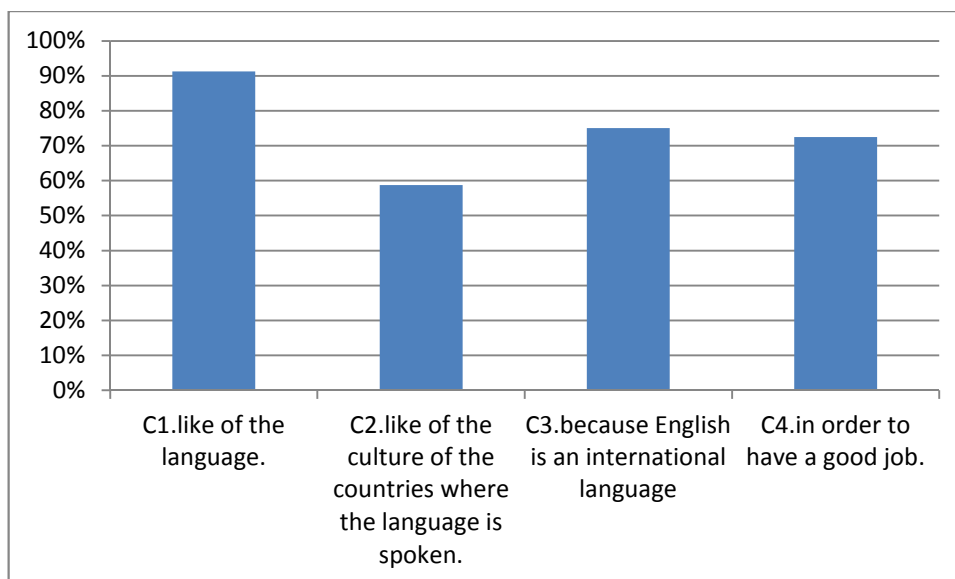


Figure 4.4: Student questionnaire data: Motivation to learn English

From the questionnaire data in Figure 4.4, it emerges that 91% are motivated because they like the English language (C1), 75% find their motivation in the fact that English is an international language (C3), 72% are stimulated by having a good job (C4) thanks to the knowledge of English, 59% have an incentive to learn the language because they like the culture of the countries where the language is spoken (C2).

Motivation to learn English informally and formally is very high among the students. An intrinsic motive, mostly a favourable disposition towards the English language is more important to many than an extrinsic motive, to have a good job.

Seven interviewed students (S1, S2, S4, S6, S7, S9, S12) mentioned the fact that they have to know the English language in order to communicate internationally at home or abroad. This can be seen as an external pressure to learn the language, but it is internal as well, as the students decide to learn

the language. It can also be argued that learning English has become a basic skill and that it is used around the world.

Two students (S5, S6) present an intrinsic and integrative motivation because they like the language as such or the culture and the community where the language is spoken:

“I like the British culture, maybe because I went there” (S5/3).

“In general, I don’t really like languages; it is one of the only languages that I am really motivated to learn” (S7/5).

Three students (S3, S4, S9) show an extrinsic and instrumental motivation (Dörnyei 2001a); they have to know English in order to find a job; in Brussels, it is often a major requirement.

Students found a motivation to learn English because they enjoy the language and its culture. They like it because they went to an English-speaking country and developed interest in the language. They realise informal learning and practising the language outside class is important in order to maintain their level and frequent contact with the language and its culture.

In all of the self-reports, those reasons for learning English are confirmed: because they like the language, in order to communicate on a daily basis with people from all over the world, to be proficient at work, to work abroad. In one of the self-reports, other internal reasons are given: to

understand better what is said, to acquire good English pronunciation, to understand films without reading subtitles, especially American films, to read articles in English.

One student (S13) reports that she really likes the English language, that she spent one year in the USA , that she does not want to forget all that she learnt there, that it gives her even more motivation to learn further and to keep in touch with her American friends, this is learning outside class. This is a good illustration of internal motivation (Noels 2001).

4.2.1. External motivation to learn a foreign language informally

Motivation which comes from other people, from the teacher for example, will also be considered. From my critical analysis of the literature, the teacher is considered as a motivator of learning and a way of motivating language learners. Gardner (2001b: 8) writes that “teachers can help the language learning process by motivating their students”. Teachers have to favour learners’ experiences outside class (Chambers 1999); therefore, they recommend to the students to practise informal learning activities. The following graph (Figure 4.5) presents the findings coming from the questionnaire data and related to the second research question: In this HE context, are students motivated to learn a foreign language informally? Who and what motivates them? If students are not really motivated, why do they lack motivation to learn languages outside class? The graph gives the replies to Part 2 Point 7 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 4). This presented students with a range of informal learning activities recommended by their

teacher and identified in the literature review and in the initial study. The students were asked to select the activities recommended by their teacher.

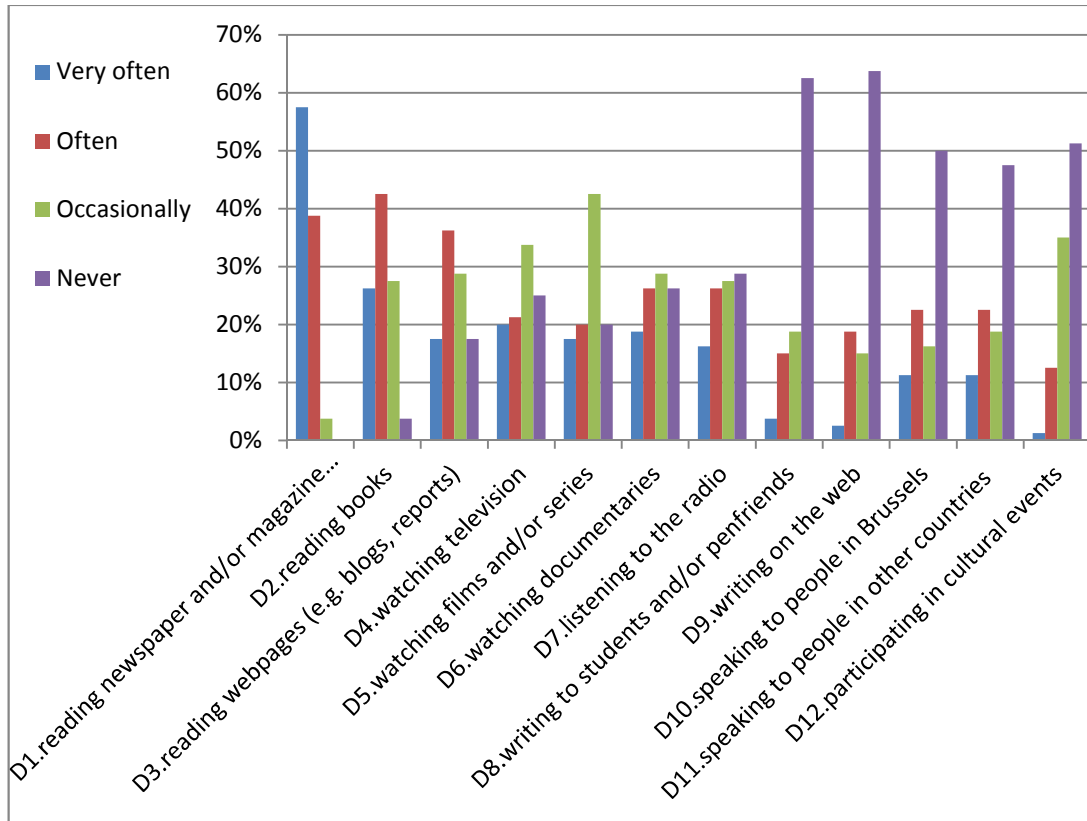


Figure 4.5: Student questionnaire data: Motivation from the teacher

From the questionnaire data in Figure 4.5, it can be seen that 57% of the students are very often motivated by their teacher to read newspaper and/or magazine articles (D1), 42% are often motivated to read books (D2), 36% are often motivated to read webpages (D3), 42% are occasionally encouraged to watch films and series (D5), 62% are never motivated to write to students and/or penfriends (D8), 64% are never motivated to write on the web (D9), 50% are never motivated to speak to people in Brussels (D10), 47% are never motivated to speak to people in other countries (D11), 51% are never motivated to participate in cultural events (D12).

Most students report being encouraged by their teacher to read newspapers, magazines, books and to a lesser extent webpages. Teachers promote reading articles and books, although this is not an activity that is practised often by the students informally. Teachers motivate them to watch films and series outside class but not as much as students actually do. In reality, students watch more films and series than they read other material. Writing, speaking and participating in cultural events are not favoured. In my experience, teachers tell me they do not recommend cultural events to students because they fear students will not go; on the contrary, from the findings on the informal learning activities, it appears that students do not go because they are not aware of the activities but they would like their teacher to tell them about the cultural events. Looking at the interviews in more details, four students (S1 to S4) from the same class declare that the teacher (T1) helps them to keep interested in the target language and to find new materials all the time. Doyle (2001) writes that the teacher's enthusiasm for the target language will lead to the learner's motivation; this is what two students say about this:

“She tries to open our mind; she gives us a list of films and websites in English. She encourages us to search information at different places” (S3/4)

“She suggests websites, with documentaries or the news. She made a list of books and films to watch” (S4/6).

The teacher motivates by suggesting that students look for information; she is active in telling the learners about different resources and activities; being

proactive and recommending material is a way of motivating the students to perform these activities. The self-report filled in by the student of that class (S4) proves that the teacher encourages students to visit interesting websites about the news, documentaries, articles on very interesting topics, books, films and that she encourages the students to search for information in English. The teacher stimulates the student to be in constant contact with the English language. Motivating students to use different materials and resources in English will help them practise their English further during informal learning activities. Four other students (S5 to S8) report that the teacher (T2) advises them to read books, but that he does not recommend other activities. The self-report of the student of that class (S7) maintains that the teacher suggests very interesting books for them to read; that way, they want to understand the vocabulary used in the books and they learn it. In another class, one student (S9) reports that the teacher (T3) encourages them to read a lot, to listen to the radio, to watch films; the students of that class usually do these activities but if they do them in the target language, in English rather than in their mother tongue, the teacher says that it is even better. Another student (S12) confirms the latter as well.

Two students (S10, S11) emphasise the fact that the teacher (T3) recommends talks in English, but that they do not particularly like attending those talks. That teacher will have the contrary effect in the long run; if he keeps on suggesting talks students are not interested in, it will demotivate the students. This is an example of demotivation referring to “specific forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioural intention” (Dörnyei 2001a: 143).

The self-report of the student of that class (S10) confirms that the teacher (T3) encourages the students to read, mostly newspaper articles and to speak about them. Four other students (S13 to S16) say that they are not so encouraged by the teacher (T4) to practise activities outside class. They say that the teacher does not mention these activities during the class course.

The self-report of the student of that class (S13) mentions that the teacher (T4) encourages them to read books and newspaper articles outside class and they can possibly comment on their readings in class. This is different from what the students said during the interview, i.e. the fact that the teacher does not recommend the students to practise activities in the foreign language outside class. The student (S13) who filled in the self-report did not mention the same during the interview. It is possible that when she filled in the self-report, she had more time to think and she remembered that the teacher had mentioned some reading activities to do outside class. This might mean that the teacher does not encourage the students to practise these activities very often.

The first teacher (T1) confirms that she recommends websites, related to the news, that she makes them enjoy what they do. She convinces them that everybody can learn, sometimes with more work. She tries to encourage them to watch films in the original version by arguing:

“The fact that you are regularly confronted to the English language is important. Sometimes, they come back to me and say that they only watch films in English, this is quite rewarding” (T1/4).

Another teacher (T2) confirms that he recommends books to read, that he put online at the students' disposal, but he also refers to a website he created with different ideas related to the learning of English, such as conversation groups. The teacher (T2) considers himself as a motivator of learning because he encourages each student individually; he tries to use a large variety of methods to teach and to recommend to the students, he gives personal feedback in order to make progress. This reflects the views of Smith (2003) and Dam (2007), who write that teachers have to adapt their pedagogy in order to find the best individual methods to learn successfully.

Another teacher (T3) is aware of the fact that he suggests talks in English but that the students do not attend them. He explains that students remain on the surface and are not particularly interested in going to talks to acquire more knowledge and to improve their language skills.

The last teacher (T4) confirms that he does not often encourage students to practise activities outside class. He mentions the fact that students watch films but that they do not take part in activities, such as cultural activities, that could help them improve their English even more. The teacher (T4) gives resources in English to the students but he is not convinced that they use them.

Students are motivated by the teachers to learn more English; nine students (S2, S5, S6, S9, S10, S12, S13, S15, S16) are also encouraged to improve their English by other people, mostly members of their family, with whom

they discuss the activities they undertake. Friends abroad stimulate them to learn English as well.

4.2.2. Discussion on the motivation to learn a language informally

These findings relate to the research question: In this HE context, are students motivated to learn a foreign language informally? Who and what motivates them? If students are not really motivated, why do they lack motivation to learn languages outside class?

The findings emphasise that motivation is complex: intrinsic and extrinsic, integrative and instrumental. The students in this study are extrinsically motivated, by the fact that they like the English language, that English is very useful, as an international language, and by other people, such as their teacher, among others. For informal learning, the teacher mostly focuses on recommending reading print articles and books, whereas students usually read on the Internet: they read Facebook pages or other webpages.

The main source of motivation is intrinsic motivation, coming from oneself, as well as integrative motivation – liking the language and its community, for instance. Most of the students in this study are motivated because they like the English language. Many students want to learn English for work purposes.

Motivation is related to autonomy; motivated students become more autonomous, reflect and control the language learning process (Dörnyei 2001c). In this research, the students who are really motivated by the

pleasure of learning English, an international language, make progress and reflect in order to improve their foreign language skills, as we will see.

4.3. Reflection in the informal language learning process

In order to be a proficient language learner and to sustain motivation, reflection and autonomy in the language learning process are needed.

Autonomous learners are able to reflect, “plan, monitor and evaluate their learning” (Little 2008:2). Reflection enables learners to understand how they learn and what they should improve as far as their language skills are concerned.

The following graph (Figure 4.6) presents findings from questionnaire data related to the third research question: Do learners reflect upon the informal language learning process? What are the consequences of reflection, or its absence? The graph gives the replies to Part 2 Point 8 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 4). This presented students with different ways of noticing the language and its form and reflecting upon it. This was identified in the literature review and in the initial study. The students were asked to select how they notice the language and its form and which strategies they use to improve their knowledge of the language, in order to reflect upon their language learning process.

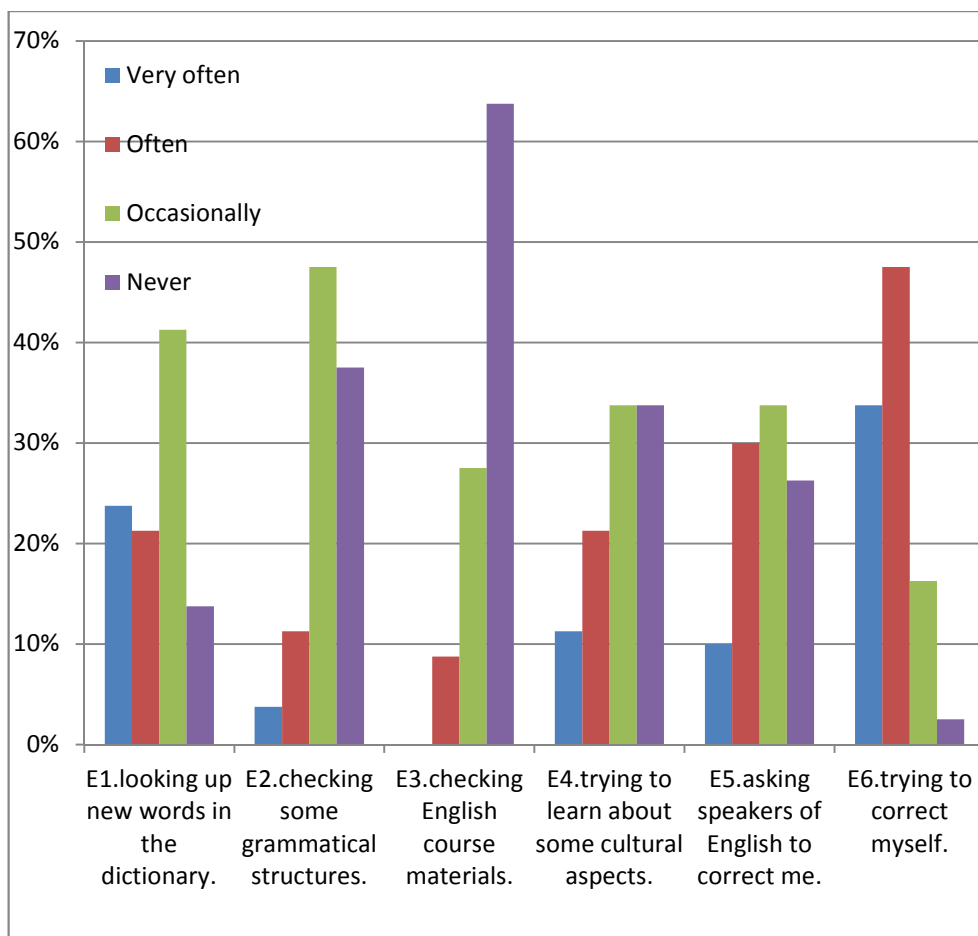


Figure 4.6: Student questionnaire data: Noticing and reflection in informal learning

From the questionnaire data in Figure 4.6, it appears that 41% of the students occasionally look up new words in the dictionary (E1), 47% occasionally check some grammatical structures (E2); these two aspects refer to noticing the language and its form; indeed, students cannot learn structures or meanings in a language if they do not notice them (Schmidt 2001); after noticing and being aware of the particularities of form and meaning in a language, learners can reflect upon the language and the language learning process, in order to adjust their learning strategies; 64% never check their English course materials (E3), this could help them plan their language learning; 34% occasionally try to learn about some cultural

aspects related to the foreign language (E4) and 34% as well never try to learn about some cultural aspects related to the foreign language (E4), 34% ask speakers of English to correct them (E5), this would be linked to noticing after they have been corrected; 48% try to correct themselves (E6), this is also an example of noticing the form of the language.

Students are noticing some aspects of the foreign language, such as vocabulary, grammar, correcting their mistakes; this can lead to reflection about their learning process, more particularly to 'critical reflection', advocated by Boud and Walker (2002), as they focus on each situation being a unique 'learning event', to be reflected upon individually. Boud and Walker report that we have to evaluate each learning situation with our experience and we have to try and understand the meaning of experience. Then, it is possible to change a situation if needed. In this study, when students have noticed a new form in the foreign language, they can evaluate it with their experience of the foreign language and compare it to similar forms, for instance. By doing so, they can increase their understanding of the meaning of the new form, and possibly change their speech by using that form. Many students also look up words in the dictionary in order to activate and learn vocabulary. Noticing unknown words and looking them up in the dictionary in order to understand their meaning lead to reflection upon the informal language learning process. Students occasionally check grammatical structures but they very rarely look at their course materials when they learn informally.

Looking at the interviews in more detail, it appears that eleven students from all groups (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S10, S12, S13, S14, S16) want to understand what interests them and make the necessary efforts, they know how they learn, they are autonomous in their learning process:

“When I like a song, I always want to know what the words mean. When I don’t understand a word, I immediately ask what it means, even if it’s clear for everybody. If nobody can help me, often I understand from the context” (S1/3).

“Comparing languages interests me...I don’t like not to understand what a word means; I constantly look up words in the dictionary on my mobile phone” (S2/4).

This shows that the student is eager to learn and understand, notices the words she does not understand and look them up in the dictionary.

“When there are words I don’t understand, I found a good translating website and I translate what I don’t understand... and those words, I remember them, contrary to the vocabulary I have to learn because it’s compulsory” (S3/5).

This exemplifies the fact that this student is more willing to learn on an informal than on a formal basis.

“I often look up words, but if I come across them only once, I don’t learn. These words have to come back. I don’t often make links between words, but it helps, it takes time, I don’t think about it, I learn by ear” (S5/4).

This shows that the student learns by noticing and also through repetition.

The student can remember the words if she has seen them and looked them up in the dictionary several times.

The interviewed students sometimes try to understand the language as a whole and see how it differs from the formal structures they have learnt; one student reports:

“In films, I try to see the familiar language they use, rather than the academic language learnt at school” (S10/3).

Six students (S3, S7, S8, S9, S12, S15) reflect and tend to correct themselves when they speak, or ask people to correct them. However, four students (S4, S6, S7, S11) do not always want to learn or to be reflective; some say:

“It is supposed to be pleasurable moments, I don’t want to study all the time” (S4/7).

“I prefer to be passive [...] I don’t like looking up words in the dictionary”. [...] I don’t like details” (S7/6).

“I don’t want to reflect. I think I’m good at English. [...] I understand with the context and repetition” (S11/1).

Sometimes, being reflective and analysing does not help, as one student says:

“I’m a perfectionist and it disturbs me instead of helping me. I look up too many words and I don’t understand the context any longer”

(S14/2).

In the self-reports, three students (S4, S7, S10) say they prefer not to pay attention to grammar so much, but to communicate in English. However, they recognise that grammar is necessary in order to express themselves better. Three students (S4, S7, S10) report that they pay particular attention to the pronunciation in English, because oral English is very different from its written counterpart. By contrast, one student (S13) writes that when she reads, she looks up practically every word in the dictionary. One of the teachers (T1) explains that she encourages students to revise grammar on their own as they have different levels, she recommends materials to them. She likes them to study vocabulary outside class and to practise in class. For another teacher (T2), it is important to give tools to the students so that they are autonomous and choose the resources they need in order to improve their knowledge of the foreign language. A third teacher (T3) does not know how students learn outside class, whether students notice and reflect upon the language learning process. The last teacher (T4) makes the students think more about the word formation so that they do not have to memorise so many words. Students do not always understand this method of acquiring more vocabulary.

Paying attention to vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar are ways of noticing the foreign language and its form. Once students have noticed these aspects of the language, they can reflect upon their informal language

learning or “think critically when they plan, monitor and evaluate their learning” (Little 2008: 2). Learner reflection, along with learner involvement and appropriate target language use are the three characteristics, that will help learners become autonomous in their informal language learning process (Little 2008). A detailed summary on the findings related to the third research question on reflection upon the language learning process is given after the findings on the European Language Portfolio (ELP), a reflection tool.

4.3.1. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) as a reflection tool

The third research question is: Do learners reflect upon the informal language learning process? What are the consequences of reflection, or its absence?

The ‘European Language Portfolio’ (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009) is a tool that favours reflection and autonomy in the language learning process; it enables students and teachers to keep track of the activities students engage in outside class as well as their reflection and views about the activities. The ELP consists of a Language Passport, a Language Biography and a Language Dossier, which are described in the literature review.

I adapted the ELP Language Biography to produce a self-report (See Appendices 16, 17) for the students who participated in this research. A self-report was given to four students during the final stage of data collection.

The questionnaire was given to eighty students during the first stage of data collection. From the questionnaire data, it emerges that 95% of the students have not used the ELP (See Appendix 5). They may have heard about it; this is subsequently verified in the interviews but they have not actually used it. Half of the interviewed students (S1, S2, S3, S5, S6, S9, S11, S14) did not know about the ELP, and half of the students (S4, S7, S8, S10, S12, S13, S15, S16) remembered what it is. This group of students know specifically about the ELP Language Passport and the different language levels, which is only a part of the ELP.

Subsequently, four students filled in the self-reports; these students got to know about some aspects of the ELP Biography: the general characteristics related to foreign language learning, the reasons, the learning process, the description and plans concerning the language learning process and a part dedicated to intercultural experience which is not part of the classic version of the ELP. All of the students who completed the self-report found the ELP Biography a useful reflection tool. The purpose of the administration of the self-reports was to find out more aspects related to the students' language learning process and their reflection upon it. The ELP and its different parts were explained to the students before they filled in the self-report and the results were discussed with the students after they had completed the self-report.

All of the interviewed teachers have heard of the ELP and more specifically the Language Passport. The interviewed teachers gave more comments than the students on the ELP, the teachers consider it as a pedagogical tool. The

first teacher (T1) did not know it well, but she thinks that a university degree is not sufficient as far as foreign languages are concerned. If it is proven thanks to the ELP, for instance, that the students master the language, it is better, more particularly for a future profession. The second teacher (T2) mentions that the ELP is one of the possible reflection tools we can use. It should be a real portfolio, that the students could use all their life, and not just one element among the others. If the ELP is only one extra part of the course, the second teacher does not think it is very useful. It takes time to use it. The ELP should be discussed with the other teachers and the success of the project will depend on the willingness and understanding of the participating teachers (Little 2012a). The third teacher (T3) used the ELP at secondary school but it was not a success because of lack of time. The ELP was handed out but there was no follow-up. Some teachers do not want to use it any longer because they do not see the link between the ELP and the curriculum (Little 2012b). The last teacher (T4) recognises that the ELP can be a good reflection tool, so that formal and informal learning can be linked; however, it is time-consuming.

In conclusion, the students who used the ELP, the students who filled in the self-report and got to know about an adaptation of the ELP Biography in more detail reflect upon the language learning process and find it a useful reflection tool. All the teachers confirm it enables students to reflect and they consider it as a worthy pedagogical instrument providing it makes part of the curriculum.

4.3.2. Discussion on reflection in the informal language learning process

It emerges that most students notice some aspects of the foreign language, such as vocabulary in most cases, grammar, correcting their mistakes. This process can lead to reflection upon language learning and reflection upon the language learning process is part of the development of autonomy in language learning (Little 2008). When the students in this research notice vocabulary and grammatical structures, when they want to know and understand the words they encounter, they become conscious of their language learning, reflective and autonomous in the language learning process.

Informal learning often occurs unconsciously, it is incidental learning (Doyle 2001). In this study, it is evident that students notice and reflect upon their language learning. Reflection enables the unconscious process of language learning to be more conscious. By reflecting, students become aware of how the language is structured; consequently, they can improve their language knowledge and reach a higher level in the language reception and production. Gasparini (2004) differentiates implicit and explicit knowledge, which is related to incidental and intentional learning. Implicit knowledge refers to instances where the individual is not able to state what the knowledge is whereas explicit knowledge is known by the learner. Informal learning is mostly implicit, whereas formal learning is mostly explicit. In this study, I observed that reflection is the bridge between informal and formal learning, as it helps students' implicit knowledge of the language to become explicit.

The students who participated in this research notice the vocabulary which is used in the films and series they watch, during their informal learning activity. By noticing this, most of the students become conscious of the language use and they organise their informal learning into formal learning. This is related to what McGivney (1999) writes about the relation between formal and informal learning. McGivney reports that formal learning occurs in an informal learning situation when the learning is more structured, when the learner is active, structures one's learning and understands how the language is used, its rules and applications. Nonetheless, some students do not always want the unconscious process of learning to become conscious, they do not want to notice their language learning and to reflect upon it; one student (S14) reports that being reflective and analysing does not help; by doing this, she cannot understand the context of the speech any longer. Some students learn informally out of pleasure, without thinking about the language. According to Krashen (1982), the unconscious process of learning is of primary importance, and the 'monitor', which controls what has been acquired is useful when learners have time and wants to be reflective about their learning process. The teacher can lead the students to more reflection and autonomy (Benson 2008: 24); the teacher can help the students to be self-aware and conscious about the language learning process (Trebbi 2008).

Most of the students are exposed to difficulties in understanding the vocabulary and they find ways to acquire it by listening to the words in a large variety of situations, by looking up the words in the dictionary, by making links between the words, when they can. Tarvin and Al-Arishi

(1991) explain that people reflect when a problem occurs and they have to solve it. The way students learn and the amount of words they remember is individual and relates to autonomy or the learner's responsibility for the study of the language (Benson et al. 1997). Still, some of the interviewed students (S4, S6, S7, S11) do not reflect upon their language learning process, they prefer to enjoy the pleasure of just acquiring the foreign language.

The students in this research who reflect upon their learning use the Internet and social media, they mostly use the Internet as far as vocabulary acquisition is concerned, they sometimes learn while doing another activity, they learn new words by watching their favourite film (Sockett et al. 2012). Acquiring new vocabulary, understanding grammatical structures and improving one's pronunciation are done differently by every student. Each one has their own methods of learning vocabulary, grammar and of improving their pronunciation. There are no 'technical formulae', 'critical reflection' is needed, as every situation is a unique 'learning event' (Boud et al. 2002).

Teachers can help students notice different aspects of the foreign language and to be reflective. The students in this research focus on learning vocabulary and understanding the contexts in which the vocabulary is used, while the interviewed teachers prompt students to notice other aspects of the language, such as grammar. One of the interviewed teachers (T1) recommends materials, to study grammar and to revise vocabulary outside class. Another teacher (T2) goes further in saying that he wants to give

personalised tools to the learners, so that they become more autonomous.

One more teacher (T4) enables students to think about word building but he is not sure that the learners really do it, especially outside class.

One of the tools that promotes reflection and autonomy could be the 'European Language Portfolio' (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009). At first, most of the students reported in the questionnaire that they have not used the ELP. When they were asked questions about the ELP at the interview, it was found that half of the interviewed students had heard of it or that they had an idea of what the Language Passport is. The students in this research know relatively little about the ELP; the interviewed teachers are aware of it, but they do not always have a clear idea of how it can be used; two teachers (T2, T4) find it time-consuming. Progress can be made and time could be dedicated to the explanation of the use of portfolios and the ELP to the teachers and the students.

Foster Vosicki (2012) states that stakeholders and teachers have to develop a new awareness of language teaching and learning, where the learner is more autonomous. If this new culture does not appear, the ELP can hardly be implemented. Learners will know more and use the ELP with the help of the teacher; the teacher is important as a resource person for self-directed reflective learning (Kohonen 2001). Nonetheless, it is not always easy to change the previous pedagogy; the use of the ELP leads to "an autonomy culture in contexts dominated by traditional pedagogy" (Little 2004: 2). It takes time for teachers to change and to understand the advantages of using the ELP. It is better to see it in a global institutional context, so that the new

method can easier be implied, as one of the interviewed teachers mentioned. The interviewed teachers are not ready to use the ELP as such; they need to discuss with their colleagues and the board to implement it. Teachers find the ELP time-consuming; by reflecting with their colleagues about it, they may find ways of integrating it in the curriculum, so that it does not require too much time.

The findings of this study present evidence that students notice aspects of the language and reflect upon the language learning process. Not all of them want to reflect, because by reflecting, they find language learning, and more specifically informal language learning, less pleasurable. The teacher can help students see the advantages of reflection, which can make students more autonomous in their learning. Students could be prompted to reflect more if they would use reflection tools, such as the 'European Language Portfolio' (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

This research has highlighted some knowledge gaps related to informal learning that were not thoroughly studied as this type of learning is more difficult to observe, to quantify and to evaluate than formal learning. Indeed, this study reveals actual types of informal learning activities, how these activities are influenced by the formal learning process and how they could be taken into account in class. This investigation focuses on what and who motivates students to learn informally and whether they reflect during the informal learning process.

The conclusions of this study on informal learning within a formal learning context are presented for each of the three research questions based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter. Following the conclusions, the limitations of the research are indicated. Contributions made by the study, implications for practice, recommendations and further research in the field are considered.

5.1. Responses to the research questions

5.1.1. Informal language learning activities by HE students in Brussels

This study has shown that students spend quite a lot of time watching films and series in English, as they consider this as pleasurable activity. Watching films and series on the Internet is a popular activity for young people nowadays, as Chik *et al.*'s (2014) study concerning the online exchange project between German and Hong Kong Chinese learners shows. Both

groups of learners were watching the same American sit-com or TV series or movies. Belgian students are watching the same programmes and sharing their views about them on the Internet. These widespread series and movies offer material to learn English and to discuss in English with people around the world. From this investigation, it appears that students enjoy doing that, are sometimes conscious of their learning of the foreign language, as they realise they acquire new and specialised vocabulary. Some of them are not aware of the learning process. As Doyle (2001) mentions, much of our learning occurs unconsciously. This is an informal learning activity which is not always backed up by the teachers in this research. They do not always think that this is a common student activity or they do not consider it as an optimal informal learning activity, as students might remain passive while watching the programmes. However, students are sometimes active when they try to understand what is said and remember the new vocabulary. If teachers recognise that series and films can be part of language learning, they may be able to relate to them in the formal learning practice. If teachers do so, they may include the informal aspect in the formal learning practice, as both types of learning could be combined to reach the best way of learning (Benson 2011: 7).

Learners also use the Internet for other purposes: they listen to music, they read blogs, they go on social network sites, such as Facebook or Twitter. There is a link between digital media and informal learning. Students make great use of the Internet outside class. The interviewed students often chat in English with friends abroad; that way, they can maintain contacts with people they cannot see regularly. Teachers are aware of the use of social

media by the students but they do not consider using them in class to enhance the formal learning practice. My study confirmed what the research literature on digital technology had stated, that there is a gap between students with the technology and teachers who appear much slower to adapt. However, two teachers in the study make use of the Internet in order to suggest interesting websites or additional exercises in English. They make use of “blended learning” (Meyer 2007) and combine digital media with a class course.

Students in Brussels have more contacts with English-speaking friends via the Internet than face-to-face contacts. It is more difficult for them to find face-to-face contacts because they do not know where they can meet English-speaking people and how to participate in cultural events in English. They would like to have advice from their teacher in order to have more information.

Informal learning can support formal learning practice and vice versa. The students who participated in this study practise the four language skills in class, i.e. reading, writing, extensive and intensive listening (Field 1998), as well as speaking, i.e. spoken production and spoken interaction. On an informal basis, both types of listening come first, as students favour watching films and series and understanding the general context as well as the details. The informal learning activity could complement the formal class: students could discuss in class the series and films they have watched on an informal basis. In a formal learning context, there is an emphasis on spoken production and spoken interaction. For other students, listening

occurs as well, but mostly listening to the teacher during lesson time. This is quite different from watching films and series, although the teacher is not always aware of this informal activity that is practised by their students. Particular films could be recommended, as well as other types of more active informal activities.

The findings related to this research question may help us bridge the gap between informal and formal learning. This investigation should help us raise awareness of some of the informal learning activities practised by HE language students, so that teachers can take them into account in their formal learning practice.

5.1.2. Motivation to learn a language informally

From this study, it can be seen that HE students are motivated to learn English in class and on an informal basis. Their main motivation to learn informally is an internal motive, because they like the language and also an integrative motive as identified by Dörnyei (2001c) because they want to be part of the English-speaking community and they like its culture, be it the English-speaking communities and their cultures.

Students also find pleasure in communicating in English with foreign people, they use English as a lingua franca; this is a strong internal motivation, as Yashima (2014) also discovered in her study. The pleasure they encounter in speaking the English language gives the students motivation to practise it regularly on an informal basis, as this sustains their language learning process, as it is stated by Coleman (2004).

Different types of external motivations emerge from this study: some people motivate the learners to improve their English outside class –family members and friends, for instance. English is an international language and students need it to communicate abroad or in a professional situation. This makes the situation of the learning of English a little different from the learning of other languages. The fact that the language is international relates to different types of motivations, an external motive due to the international importance of the English language and an instrumental motive as well, as in Brussels, knowing English is often a major requirement to find a job.

From this investigation, it appears that another source of external motivation for HE language students in Brussels is the teacher. Teachers mostly recommend reading a lot of press articles, books, etc. They do not suggest communicating with English-speaking people in Brussels or abroad so much. In the case of languages, a lot of oral practice is needed to acquire some features of the language, as emphasised by Coleman (2004). Students practise English with other speakers of the language on their own initiative but they would like to receive more advice from their teacher about the different places they can go to in Brussels, in order to meet English-speaking people.

Teachers do not often advise their students to watch certain types of films or even series outside class. They do not do it because they do not enquire about the students' informal learning activities or they do not consider it important. This investigation points out the different informal learning

activities students practise and some of the tools that are available to teachers to discover the activities in order to motivate the students in their foreign language learning process.

Teachers are the major source of motivation for the students; they can also motivate students by showing enthusiasm for the target language. By sharing the teacher's enthusiasm, learners will learn the new language because they feel some pleasure themselves by speaking the language and becoming bilingual; this is the case in intrinsic motivation, motivation coming from the self as identified by Noels (2001). Teachers are not always facilitators of learning. In some cases, they can also demotivate the students. One of the interviewed teachers suggests talks to his students but he feels that they do not attend them. His students confirm they do not go to the talks and that they are not motivated to attend talks in English in Brussels.

The fact that another teacher gives resources in English to his students but is not convinced that they use them illustrates that teachers know little about what their students do outside the classroom, as stated by Arthur and Beaton (2000) and Benson (2011). This investigation aims to give more information on informal learning; it may prompt teachers to think about informal learning and to find out what their students do in order to relate their class course to their students' informal learning activities. McGivney (1999) suggests that guidance should be available to students during the whole learning process. Teachers could enquire more about what the learners do outside class by asking them or by letting them fill in portfolios, where the students report what they do in and/or outside class. With this information,

they could motivate their students to perform the activities which are suitable to them.

Another source of external motivation to learn English for the students are family members and friends. Findings from the study showed that students are encouraged to improve their English by members of their family, with whom they discuss the activities they undertake. Friends abroad stimulate them to learn English. The learners have to write in English to them. This gives the students a sense of goal-attainment, which sustains motivation, as argued by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009). Students are happy to see the results of their learning; it is stimulation to performance and progress, as argued by Sears and Pai (2012).

To summarise the main points on motivation to learn informally, HE students have different types of motivation: they motivate themselves because they like the English language and its culture and they want to integrate with the English-speaking communities. They find pleasure in speaking the language that they would like to practise even more.

They are motivated by the fact that English is an international language; it is important to know the language to have a job in Brussels, to travel or to communicate with foreign people. They are also motivated by people, mainly their teachers, who help them learn by giving them different types of advice and who could give better guidance if they knew more about the students' informal learning activities.

5.1.3. Reflection upon the language learning process

From this study, it emerges that students apply different methods, so that they become aware of the language and its use; they notice some aspects of the language and subsequently they reflect upon the language and upon the best methods to use to improve their formal and informal learning of the language. They often try to correct themselves when they make mistakes or ask native speakers to correct them. They notice the new vocabulary and they look up new words in the dictionary, they also pay attention to grammatical structures.

Noticing the language and its variations in forms and meanings can lead to more attention to the foreign language; it can transform the unconscious acquisition into conscious learning and favour the language learning process. It can lead to reflection on how students learn and therefore, learners can become more autonomous in their learning. This investigation confirms what Schmidt (2001) says: that we learn through noticing and attention. In this study, the learners notice some particularities of the English language: what some words mean and how they are used, for instance. This method may be more effective on an informal learning basis as it relates to material that the learners have chosen. The students become conscious of some aspects of the foreign language, they can monitor and control their language acquisition as it is identified by Krashen (1982). Subsequently, they can ponder over their language learning process and experience, learner reflection being part of the development of autonomy in language learning, according to Little (2008).

However, the students in this research do not always want to pay attention to the language and its different forms, they do not always want to be reflective upon the language learning process. Some learners report that if they constantly consider the language, its form and meaning, they lose the pleasure they experience by simply watching films and series in English or listening to English songs. The teacher can show the purpose of noticing and subsequently reflection, so that the learners can apply the processes on their own.

A tool that promotes reflection and autonomy in the language learning process and that enables to keep track of the different language activities is a language portfolio, as suggested by several researchers, such as Little (1991) and Sundqvist (2011). In this study, the language portfolio, which was chosen, was the 'European Language Portfolio' (ELP) developed by the Council of Europe (2009), because it has been used in many European countries and it has proven to be an efficient tool, according to Little (2009). In this investigation, most of the students did not know about the ELP. They sometimes remembered parts of it, i.e. they mostly knew about the Language Passport. However, it is the Language Biography that allows to keep track of the language learning activities and to be reflective upon them. Learners could be informed by their teacher or by the HE institution about the existence of language portfolios and the ELP in particular, so that it could help them reflect upon their formal and informal language learning process. In this study, an adapted version of the ELP Language Biography was used as a self-report. By completing it, they knew more about the ELP Language Biography. The students were satisfied to reflect upon their

language learning process through the ELP Language Biography. Teachers do not always know much about language portfolios and the ELP. The teachers in this study have heard of it, two of them have used it but it was not successful due to lack of time and two teachers have not used and do not consider it as a link between their formal class and the students' informal learning activities. There is a lack of information and awareness in Higher Education and at the HE education institution which was the location for this investigation. Teachers do not receive information and advice about useful pedagogical tools that help learners reflect upon their language learning process and that help teachers get to know and understand the way their students learn the foreign language. The ELP can also assist teachers in evaluating formatively, – and summatively, if they wish to include the students' informal learning in the final grades. This assessment is desirable because formal and informal learning can complement one another and give a complete picture of the student's language learning. In this study, we notice that the ELP was only used by a very small number of students, that teachers know about it and find it useful but that they do not use it, as it is time-consuming and it is not part of the HE institution curriculum. This investigation states that the use and the promotion of the ELP to the teachers would be more effective if it were recommended by the stakeholders of the HE institution, as noted by Foster Vosicki (2012).

If teachers were well informed and willing to use the language portfolio, they could explain to their students how to use it and why it is a valuable instrument that can promote reflection upon the language learning process and that can take the student's formal and informal learning into account.

5.2. Limitations of the research

The conclusions have to be considered with the limitations pertaining to the research. One of the limitations of this research is that it was carried out at one Higher Education institution in Brussels with a sample of eighty students and four teachers. It would have been helpful to work with other groups either in the HE institution where I am teaching or in other HE institutions. This investigation is limited in terms of a few groups within the institution, because a smaller sample was better suited for qualitative analysis.

All the research materials (questionnaire, interview questions, self-report) come from the researcher and reflect the researcher's thoughts and ideas about the issues of the study. They could have been developed differently; further questions could have been asked. As an example, some of the findings related to reflection and autonomy in language learning are based on noticing which leads to reflection. The questionnaire and interview questions could have been more focused on the process of reflection in language learning and how learners control their learning. The self-reports could have been developed to match the research questions more closely.

Another limitation may be that I did not work with levels of autonomy and levels of performance of the learners in English and whether both different levels were affected by the students' informal learning activities.

Even if the investigation presents some limitations, it can give a view of informal language learning within a formal learning system and help students and people working in the Higher Education sector recognise it and combine it with the formal learning programme.

5.3. Contribution to the understanding of the informal learning of English within a Higher Education institution in Brussels

This research emphasises that informal learning is an important part of the whole process of foreign language learning. Informal learning has often been underestimated for reasons explained earlier. In various aspects, this study brings some new light to the understanding of informal learning.

Firstly, it is situated in a context previously unstudied, Brussels. Secondly, it was carried out with HE students. Thirdly, motivation and reflection are linked to informal learning. Finally, this investigation can give a view of the students' informal learning to the teachers, so that they can use it in the formal learning activities.

If there are very few studies about informal learning, there is no research on the subject which is related to the learning of the English language in Brussels. Brussels has a particular position, as it is considered the capital of Europe or of the European Union (EU). As a result, people from all over the EU work and live there, it also attracts people who work for businesses related to the EU and many other foreign people, who enjoy the international character of the city of a reasonable size. For these reasons, the

English language is much used in Brussels in order to facilitate the contacts between the different communities of people; therefore, learning the English language is essential to communicate with people and to have a good job. This is an instrumental motivation, which was highlighted in this research. Therefore, Brussels offers excellent opportunities to practise English in the city, but students mainly engage with English informally in virtual spaces, as there was a rapid evolution of the new technologies. Young people use them the most; older people do not use them as much. That creates a generation gap.

This research enables practitioners to know what informal learning is from the perspective of students in HE education in Brussels. This specific age group has not been commonly studied as far as informal language learning is concerned. Sundqvist (2011) carried out research in Sweden on extramural English or English outside school with a group of pupils in ninth grade (aged 15-16). The students in this research are in their twenties. This investigation should help HE students and teachers to understand how students engage in informal learning.

The organisation of the study and of the research questions is specific to this kind of investigation. The articulation of the topics, motivation and reflection around the main theme, informal learning is unique to this study. This can probably help other researchers think about the connection between the areas in the context of informal learning. As far as the topic of reflection is concerned, the benefits of the use of portfolios and in particular the European Language Portfolio (ELP) are presented. Portfolios are not

popular in Higher Education in Brussels. Students are not always aware of them because teachers find them time-consuming and tend not to use them. This study is interested in the fact that portfolios can reveal how HE students learn, that these tools give importance to informal as well as to formal learning. However, the students and the teacher on their own may not be inspired to use it. It is advisable to suggest its use to the HE management, so that the portfolio can become part of the school curriculum. This idea has to be revived in HE institutions in Brussels, because they used the portfolio before but they did not continue.

The results of the research may reflect the situation in other institutions with some provisos. It may help by giving some advice to the HE institution. In other HE institutions, different subjects are taught, they do not specialise in communication, as it is the case for the HE institution where the research was carried out.

This study dealt with the learning of English. The strategies and methods related to the English language are applicable to other foreign languages, beside English. English as a foreign language has a particular status. It is an international and vehicular language. Many non-native speakers of English want to learn it, which is not the case for other foreign languages. The motivations for learning the language might be different in the case of other foreign languages. As an example, French-speaking students want to learn Dutch in Belgium because it is a second language, it is a language which is spoken and used in Belgium, but it does not have the international scope that the English language enjoys. Knowing Dutch is important to have a job

in Belgium but it will not be used as much as English in international contacts. For those students, the motivation to learn English may be different from the motivation to learn Dutch.

Teachers know little about their students' learning; this reflects work by Arthur and Beaton (2000) and by Benson (2011) who mentions that there are few studies on the effectiveness of informal learning; therefore, teachers are not eager to know more about it.

5.4. Recommendations for Higher Education

The findings of this research lead to different recommendations for HE students, teachers and management teams.

5.4.1. Recommendations to students

This investigation reveals the importance of informal learning activities to students. Through the findings from this research, students may become aware that informal learning forms integral part of the whole language learning process and that they should invest as much time as possible to practise informal language learning activities outside class in order to improve their foreign language skills.

Students should explain as explicitly as possible to the teachers how they learn informally, by giving details about their informal learning activities and by filling a language portfolio, for example. By doing so, they can be better helped in their learning process and they can receive suitable advice,

as far as the activities they already practise and the possible activities they do not know of.

Students can also share their materials and advice on informal learning activities with the teacher and the other students, so that the whole class and HE institution can benefit and they can receive good advice from the others as well.

5.4.2. Recommendations to teachers

Throughout this investigation, it became clear that teachers can benefit from the findings related to informal learning. From the research question related to the students' informal learning activities, it was apparent that teachers could take time to enquire about their students' informal language learning activities and consider individually what students do informally in order to encourage them and to suggest ways to use appropriate materials and learning strategies. Therefore, teachers could also revise the way they teach in the formal class to adjust it to the informal learning of the students and to integrate informal learning to the formal learning class by working in small groups (McGivney 1999) or to promote formal learning or reflection as part of informal learning.

They could also use more digital technology within formal learning and promote informal learning by applying 'blended learning' (Meyer 2007).

This study brought to light that the Internet is much used by the students during informal learning activities. Teachers could take advantage of this: they could use the Internet in class on a more regular basis and they could

suggest informal learning activities that students could practise on the Internet. Besides, they could also suggest cultural activities in English in Brussels, as students would like to take part in English-speaking events but they do not always know where they take place.

As far as motivation to learn informally is concerned, if teachers are aware of their students' informal learning activities, they can boost their motivation by suggesting complementary activities that interest the learners and by discussing them in class.

Teachers can also promote students' reflection and autonomy by using tools such as portfolios or the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe 2009). It will take them time to get used to the portfolios or to adapt them to their students' learning situation; but this time is valuable for the students' language learning, as it will help teachers see how students reflect, so that they can suggest different tips to the students, such as listening to specific programmes every day, even five minutes if students lack time and paying attention to particular words and expressions that they can report in class.

The portfolios will also enable teachers to assess informal learning formatively and possibly summatively, if they include a percentage of the marks dedicated to informal learning in the year evaluation. To include informal learning in the assessment gives it more value and shows that it is an important part of the whole foreign language learning assessment process.

5.4.3. Recommendations to management teams

With the help of this study, HE institution management teams could invest time in considering informal learning as part of foreign language learning; more value could be placed on informal learning by revising the foreign language learning curriculum, by trialling tools that promote informal learning such as the language portfolios, and the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe 2009) in particular, and by implementing the use of such pedagogical instruments in the foreign language learning programme. Experts in education could be invited to present the portfolios to the teachers, to encourage use in class and to acknowledge and evaluate informal learning formatively and possibly summatively.

The existing language portfolios could also be adapted by the teachers themselves, so that the teachers are involved in the process and they can choose the portfolio that suits student and curriculum needs. In this study, a teacher explained that he would use such tools, if it was considered within a broader and general HE curriculum. It could be that teachers are willing to use portfolios but they need instructions and guidance from HE management teams.

5.5. Further research

5.5.1. Research in education

This research showed a range of possible informal learning activities (See Figures 2.1, 4.1, 4.2), that mostly relate to languages but that could be

applied, with certain adjustments, to other fields, such as journalism or psychology, for instance. This could lead to a deeper study in considering and analysing all the possible activities which can be undertaken by the learners and to see the ones which are best suited to the different subjects and levels of learning. Students practise a lot of activities on the Internet; the websites relevant to their field of study could be examined in more detail, so that better advice could be given.

An important aspect is to integrate informal learning within the formal learning programme. Informal learning occurs in formal learning by working in small groups, formal learning is part of informal learning through reflection upon the language learning process. This field could be studied further; the different situations where informal and formal learning mix, in order to value and recognise both types of learning.

In this study, I focused on the use of the European Language Portfolio (ELP) (Council of Europe 2009), as it concerns languages; the ELP has been used in different countries and has proven to be a good pedagogical instrument that gives a complete picture of the students' formal and informal learning situation. Other portfolios and other means that favour reflection and autonomy in learning could be researched, also in other fields than languages, so that these instruments can be promoted and so that informal learning can be assessed within the formal learning curriculum. The best way of assessing informal learning within the formal learning programme could also be studied.

In addition, the learning situation at the workplace can also be analysed and see how it differs from HE education as far as informal learning is concerned.

Finally, students' informal learning in other HE institutions can be studied and compared to the HE institution in this case study. Larger numbers of learners could be compared. The learning process of the students in different HE institutions could be contrasted. The learning process of the people at the workplace could be compared to the learning process of students in HE.

5.5.2. Research in foreign language learning

The points mentioned above in research in education can also apply to research in foreign language learning. The following aspects are more specific to foreign language learning.

This research focuses on the learning of English as a foreign language although the findings concerning the learning of the English language could be applied to the learning of other foreign languages. Actually, the position of the English language in Brussels, and in other countries, may be different from other foreign languages, as English is an international language. If the motivation for learning Dutch, the second language in Brussels, was studied, it would probably be different, as Dutch does not have the international scope English has. Therefore, it would be interesting to enquire about the informal learning of Dutch as a second language in Belgium within HE education and at the workplace. The informal learning of other foreign

languages could also be studied in Belgium and in other countries. The findings related to activities, motivation or reflection could be compared to the findings of this study. This would give more value to informal language learning within the formal learning curriculum.

5.6. Concluding statement

The aim of this investigation was to find out which informal learning activities students engage in, what and who motivates them to do so and how they reflect upon their language learning process.

By carrying out the research and in replying to the research questions related to the informal learning activities, motivation and reflection, I have identified a gap between informal and formal learning. If students and teachers know more about the different informal learning activities, they could make better use of them; the activities could be taken into account in the formal learning programme. Being aware of what and who motivates the students to learn informally could help students in the language learning process and could encourage teachers to give more advice on possible informal learning activities.

Reflection on the language and the learning process gives more autonomy to the student who will engage in more informal learning activities which enhance language learning.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FORM IN FRENCH

date

Sur base volontaire, j'accepte de participer à la recherche sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais, entreprise par Anne Van Marsenille, doctorante à l'Open University au Royaume-Uni. Cette recherche est la base de sa thèse de doctorat.

Je comprends que les méthodes d'évaluation dans lesquelles je suis impliqué(e) sont :

1. remplir un questionnaire et/ou
2. participer à une interview de 20-30 minutes.

Je donne mon autorisation pour que l'interview soit enregistrée et transcrite, et qu'elle ne soit utilisée que par Anne Van Marsenille pour l'analyse des données. J'autorise le fait que les données d'évaluation venant des méthodes reprises ci-dessus soient publiées dans un rapport d'évaluation et dans une thèse de doctorat à l'Open University.

Je comprends que toute information restera anonyme dans le rapport d'évaluation et dans la thèse ou dans toute autre publication future.

Participant à la recherche (Nom et signature)

Date

APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM IN ENGLISH

date

I voluntarily agree to participate in the research on the learning of English, conducted by Anne Van Marsenille, a research student at the Open University in the United Kingdom. This research is the basis of her doctoral dissertation.

I understand that the evaluation methods which may involve me are:

1. my completion of a questionnaire and/or
2. my participation in a 20-30 minute interview.

I grant permission for the interview to be recorded and transcribed, and to be used only by Anne Van Marsenille for analysis of data. I grant permission for the evaluation data generated from the above methods to be published in an evaluation report and in a Doctorate thesis at the Open University.

I understand that any identifiable information in regard to my name will not be listed in the above-mentioned evaluation report and in the dissertation or any future publication(s).

Research Participant (Name and signature)

Date

APPENDIX 3: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE IN FRENCH

Questionnaire Nr:

date,

Projet sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais

Cher étudiant en anglais,

J'enseigne l'anglais et le néerlandais dans une école supérieure à Bruxelles et je fais un doctorat en pédagogie sur l'apprentissage informel des langues dans l'enseignement supérieur. C'est pourquoi j'aimerais faire remplir un questionnaire aux étudiants en anglais dans une école supérieure à Bruxelles.

Le but de ce questionnaire est de :

- réfléchir à l'apprentissage en classe et en dehors.
- penser aux actions entreprises pour améliorer l'apprentissage.

Ce questionnaire est divisé en trois parties.

Les réponses seront confidentielles.

Cela prendra quinze minutes pour remplir ce questionnaire.

Anne Van Marsenille

Doctorante en pédagogie à l'Open University

QUESTIONNAIRE

Prière de compléter toutes les parties ci-dessous.

Partie 1 : Parcours pédagogique

1. Année d'études à l'école supérieure IHECS – *Prière de cocher une seule case-*:

1ère année	2ème année	3ème année	4ème année	5ème année

2. J'étudie l'anglais depuis – *Prière de cocher une seule case-*:

1-2 ans	3-4 ans	5-6 ans	7-8 ans	9-10 ans	11-12 ans	13-14 ans	15-16 ans

3. J'ai étudié l'anglais ... – *Prière de cocher la(les) case(s) qui convien(nen)t-* :

à l'école primaire.	
à l'école secondaire.	
dans l'enseignement supérieur ou à l'université.	
à un cours du soir.	
en allant dans le pays.	

en habitant dans le pays.	
en auto-apprentissage.	
autre.	

Si la réponse est “autre”, prière de préciser:

.....

4. J'ai aussi appris ... –*Prière de cocher la(les) case qui convien(nen)t-*:

le néerlandais.	
l'allemand.	
l'espagnol.	
l'italien.	
autre.	

Si la réponse est “autre”, prière de préciser:

.....

Partie 2: Apprentissage de l'anglais

5. Je fais ces activités en classe –*Prière de cocher un choix pour chaque activité-* :

	Très souvent	Souvent	Occasionnellement	Jamais
lire.				

écouter.				
écrire.				
parler.				
discussions à deux/en groupe.				
jeux.				
autre.				

Si la réponse est “autre”, prière de préciser:

.....

6. Je pratique l’anglais en dehors de la classe par les activités suivantes –

Prière de cocher un choix pour chaque activité- :

	Très souvent	Souvent	Occasionnellement	Jamais
lire des articles de journaux et/ou revues.				
lire des livres.				
lire des pages web (par exemple des blogs, des rapports).				
regarder la				

television.				
regarder des films et/ou des séries.				
regarder des documentaires.				
écouter la radio.				
écrire à des étudiants et/ou des correspondants.				
écrire sur internet.				
parler à des gens à Bruxelles.				
parler à des gens dans d'autres pays.				
participer à des événements culturels.				
autre.				

Si la réponse est "autre", prière de préciser:

.....

7. Mon professeur me conseille de pratiquer ces activités en dehors de la
classe –*Prière de cocher un choix pour chaque activité*- :

	Très souvent	Souvent	Occasionnellement	Jamais
lire des articles de journaux et/ou revues.				
lire des livres.				
lire des pages web (par exemple des blogs, des rapports).				
regarder la télévision.				
regarder des films et des séries.				
regarder des documentaires.				
écouter la radio.				
écrire à des étudiants et/ou des correspondants.				
écrire sur internet.				
parler à des gens à Bruxelles.				
parler à des gens dans d'autres pays.				
participer à des				

événements culturels.				
autre.				

Si la réponse est “autre”, prière de préciser:

.....

8. Quand je pratique l’anglais en dehors de la classe, ... –*Prière de cocher un choix pour chaque activité-* :

	Très souvent	Souvent	Occasionnellement	Jamais
je cherche les nouveaux mots dans le dictionnaire.				
je vérifie les structures grammaticales.				
je vais voir les notes du cours d’anglais.				
j’essaie d’apprendre des points liés à la				

culture.				
je demande à des locuteurs anglophones de me corriger.				
j'essaie de m'auto-corriger.				
autre.				

Si la réponse est “autre”, prière de préciser:

.....

9. Je suis motivée pour apprendre l'anglais ... –*Prière de cocher la(les)*

case(s) qui convien(nen)t- :

parce que j'aime la langue.	
parce que j'aime la culture des pays où la langue est parlée.	
parce que l'anglais est une langue internationale.	
pour avoir un bon emploi.	
autre.	

Si la réponse est “autre”, prière de préciser:

.....

10. J'ai déjà utilisé le « Portfolio européen pour les langues » pour faire le bilan et planifier mon apprentissage de l'anglais – *Prière de cocher une seule case-*:

Oui	Non

Partie 3: Informations personnelles

Prière de fournir quelques détails personnels de sorte que les réponses puissent être placées dans un contexte plus large.

Age (nombre d'années):

--	--

Sexe:

Femme	Homme

Ma langue maternelle (*prière d'écrire également d'autres langues parlées depuis l'enfance, si c'est d'application*):

Merci d'avoir complété ce questionnaire.

Des interviews sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais durant 20 à 30 minutes
seront réalisées fin novembre. S'il est possible de vous interviewer, prière
de compléter vos coordonnées ci-dessous.

Nom:

.....

Adresse e-mail:

.....

Numéro de téléphone:

APPENDIX 4: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE IN ENGLISH

Questionnaire Nr:

date,

Learning of English Project

Dear Student of English,

I am teaching English and Dutch in a Higher Education institution in Brussels and I am doing a Doctorate in Education on informal language learning in Higher Education. Therefore, I would like to administer a questionnaire to students of English in a Higher Education institution in Brussels.

The aim of this questionnaire is to:

- think about your learning of English in and outside class
- consider the actions you undertake to improve your learning.

This questionnaire is divided in three parts.

Your responses will be kept confidential.

It will take you fifteen minutes to fill in.

Anne Van Marsenille

Research student in Education with the Open University

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete all the statements below.

Part 1: Educational path

1. Current year of study at the HE institution IHECS - *Please tick one box only-:*

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5

2. I have been learning English for ... - *Please tick one box only-:*

1-2 years	3-4 years	5-6 years	7-8 years	9-10 years	11-12 years	13-14 years	15-16 years

3. I have learned English ... - *Please tick any box which applies-:*

at primary school.	
at secondary school.	
at college or university.	
at an evening class.	
visiting the country.	
living in the country.	
by independent study.	
other.	

If “other”, please specify:

.....

4. I have also learnt *-Please tick any box which applies-:*

Dutch.	
German.	
Spanish.	
Italian.	
other.	

If “other”, please specify:

.....

Part 2: English language learning

5. I practise these activities in my English class *-Please tick any box which applies-:*

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
reading.				
listening.				
writing.				
speaking.				
group/pair				

discussions.				
games.				
other.				

If “other”, please specify:

.....

6. I practise English outside class by ... *-Please tick any box which applies:-*

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
reading newspaper and/or magazine articles.				
reading books.				
reading webpages (e.g. blogs, reports).				
watching television.				
watching films and series.				
watching documentaries.				
listening to the radio.				
writing to students and/or penfriends.				

writing on the web.				
speaking to people in Brussels.				
speaking to people in other countries.				
participating in cultural events.				
other.				

If “other”, please specify:

.....

7. My teacher recommends me to practise these activities outside class -

Please tick one option for each activity:

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
reading newspaper and/or magazine articles.				
reading books.				
reading webpages (e.g. blogs, reports).				
watching television.				
watching films and				

series.				
watching documentaries.				
listening to the radio.				
writing to students and/or penfriends.				
writing on the web.				
speaking to people in Brussels.				
speaking to people in other countries.				
participating in cultural events.				
other.				

If “other”, please specify:

.....

8. When I practise English outside class, ... *-Please tick one option for each activity:*

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
I look up new words in the dictionary.				
I check some				

grammatical structures.				
I check my English course materials.				
I try to learn about some cultural aspects.				
I ask speakers of English to correct me.				
I try to correct myself.				
other.				

If “other”, please specify:

.....

9. I am motivated to learn English ... *-Please tick any box which applies:-*

because I like the language.	
because I like the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.	
because English is an international English.	
in order to have a good job.	
other.	

If “other”, please specify:

.....

10. I have used the “European Language Portfolio” to record and plan my English learning –*Please tick one box only.*

Yes	No

Part 3: Personal information

Finally, please provide a couple of details about yourself so that your responses can be put in a greater context.

My age in years:

--	--

My sex:

Female	Male

My mother tongue (*please write other native languages, if it applies*):

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Interviews on the learning of English will be carried out at the end of November. If you are available, please fill in your contact details below.

Name:

.....

E-mail address:

.....

Telephone number:

APPENDIX 5: QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS, QUANTITATIVE**DATA**

The numbers refer to the number of students responding under each category.

Formal learning

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
B1.reading.	23	27	26	4
B2.listening.	26	27	21	1
B3.writing.	24	33	22	1
B4.speaking.	7	38	30	3
B5.group/pair discussions.	8	14	44	13
B6.games.	0	1	15	63

Informal learning

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
A1.reading newspaper and/or magazine articles.	8	25	42	5
A2.reading books.	3	11	51	14
A3.reading webpages (e.g. blogs, reports).	24	30	23	3

A4.watching television.	18	12	25	25
A5.watching films and/or series.	46	28	6	0
A6.watching documentaries.	9	17	29	25
A7.listening to the radio.	1	2	21	56
A8.writing to students and/or penfriends.	8	9	15	48
A9.writing on the web.	14	13	29	24
A10.speaking to people in Brussels.	6	6	49	18
A11.speaking to people in other countries.	13	31	32	4
A12.participating in cultural events.	0	5	27	48

Activities suggested by my teacher in order to learn informally

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
D1.reading newspaper and/or magazine articles.	46	31	3	0
D2.reading books.	21	34	22	3
D3.reading webpages (e.g. blogs, reports).	14	29	23	14
D4.watching television.	16	17	27	20
D5.watching films and/or series.	14	16	34	16
D6.watching documentaries.	15	21	23	21
D7.listening to the radio.	13	21	22	23
D8.writing to students and/or penfriends.	3	12	15	50
D9.writing on the web.	2	15	12	51
D10.spaking to people in	9	18	13	40

Brussels.				
D11. speaking to people in other countries.	9	18	15	38
D12. participating in cultural events.	1	10	28	41

Reflection in learning

	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never
E1. looking up new words in the dictionary.	19	17	33	11
E2. checking some grammatical structures.	3	9	38	30
E3. checking English course materials.	0	7	22	51
E4. trying to learn about some cultural aspects.	9	17	27	27
E5. asking speakers of English to correct me.	8	24	27	21

E6.trying to correct myself.	27	38	13	2
------------------------------	----	----	----	---

Motivations

C1.like of the language.	73
C2.like of the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.	47
C3.because English is an international language.	60
C4.in order to have a good job.	58

Use of the European Language Portfolio

Yes	No
4	76

APPENDIX 6: STUDENT INTERVIEW IN FRENCH

Interview : étudiant

Apprentissage de l'anglais en classe

1. De quoi est principalement constitué l'apprentissage de l'anglais en classe, pensez-vous?

Apprentissage de l'anglais en dehors de la classe

2. De quoi est principalement constitué l'apprentissage de l'anglais en dehors de la classe, pensez-vous?
3. Pratiquez-vous ces activités en dehors de la classe?
 - a) Quelles activités trouvez-vous stimulantes?
 - b) Qu'appréciez-vous le plus?
 - c) Qu'est-ce que vous ne pratiquez jamais?
 - d) Pensez-vous avoir assez de temps et/ ou d'occasions pour pratiquer ces activités?
4. Êtes-vous encouragé(e) à apprendre en dehors de la classe?
 - a) Comment?
 - b) Par qui?
 - c) Quand?
 - d) Quels conseils vous sont donnés par votre professeur?

Réflexion sur l'apprentissage

5. Quand et pourquoi entreprenez-vous des actions qui vous aident à apprendre (chercher des mots dans le dictionnaire, entre autres)?
6. Qu'est-ce qui vous semble facile dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais?
Et difficile?

Motivations pour apprendre l'anglais

7. Pourquoi voulez-vous apprendre l'anglais?

Le "Portfolio européen pour les langues"

8. Si vous connaissez le « Portfolio européen pour les langues », de quelle manière celui-ci peut être un bon moyen de faire le bilan et réfléchir sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais?

APPENDIX 7: STUDENT INTERVIEW IN ENGLISH

Student Interview

English learning in class

1. What do you think English learning in class mostly involves?

English learning outside class

2. What do you think English learning outside class mostly involves?
3. Do you carry out these activities outside class?
 - a) Which of these activities do you find challenging?
 - b) What do you enjoy most?
 - c) What do you never practise?
 - d) Do you feel you have enough time and/or opportunities to practise these activities?
4. Are you stimulated to learn outside class?
 - a) How?
 - b) By whom?
 - c) When?
 - d) What tips are recommended to you by your teacher?

Reflection upon learning

5. When and why do you take actions to help you learn (looking up words in the dictionary, among others)?
6. What seems easy to you in the learning of English? And what seems difficult?

Motivations to learn English

7. Why do you want to learn English?

The “European Language Portfolio”

8. If you know the “European Language Portfolio”, in which way do you think it may be a good means to record and reflect on your learning of English?

APPENDIX 8: TEACHER INTERVIEW IN FRENCH

Interview : professeur

Apprentissage de l'anglais en classe

1. De quoi est constitué l'apprentissage de l'anglais en classe, pensez-vous?
2. Essayez-vous différentes activités, stratégies et méthodes d'apprentissage des langues qui conviennent à chaque étudiant/la plupart des étudiants?

Apprentissage de l'anglais en dehors de la classe

3. De quoi est constitué l'apprentissage de l'anglais en dehors de la classe, pensez-vous?
4. Encouragez-vous explicitement vos étudiants à pratiquer l'anglais en dehors de la classe?
5. Quelles activités conseillez-vous à vos étudiants?
 - a) Quand?
 - b) Comment?
6. Savez-vous s'ils suivent vos conseils? Leur demandez-vous?

Réflexion sur l'apprentissage

7. Conseillez-vous à vos étudiants d'être actifs et réflexifs en pratiquant l'anglais en classe? en dehors de la classe?

Rôle du professeur

8. Comment percevez-vous votre rôle en tant que professeur?

9. Avez-vous le temps suivre vos étudiants individuellement? A leur propre rythme? Leur donnez-vous du feedback après certaines activités, telles que les présentations orales?

Motivations des étudiants

10. Quelles sont les motivations de vos étudiants pour apprendre l'anglais, pensez-vous?

Le "Portfolio européen pour les langues"

11. Connaissez-vous le "Portfolio européen pour les langues"?
- a) Que savez-vous à ce sujet?
 - b) Pensez-vous que c'est un bon moyen de faire le bilan et de réfléchir quant à l'apprentissage de l'anglais?
 - c) L'avez-vous utilisé en classe ?

Combinaison de l'apprentissage formel et informel

12. Certaines activités en dehors de la classe peuvent-elles être intégrées en classe ? Comment?

APPENDIX 9: TEACHER INTERVIEW IN ENGLISH

Teacher Interview

English learning in class

1. What do you think English learning in class involves?
2. Do you try different language learning activities, strategies and methods suitable to each/most of the students?

English learning outside class

3. What do you think English learning outside class involves?
4. Do you explicitly encourage your students to practise English outside class?
5. Which activities do you recommend to your students?
 - a) When?
 - b) How?
6. Do you know whether they follow your recommendations?
Do you ask them?

Reflection upon learning

7. Do you recommend your students to be active and reflective while practising English in class? outside class?

Role of the teacher

8. How do you view your role as a teacher?

9. Do you have time to follow your students individually? At their own pace? Do you give them feedback after some activities, such as oral presentations?

Students' motivations

10. What do you think are your students' motivations to learn English? Have they told you?

The "European Language Portfolio"

11. Do you know the "European Language Portfolio"?
 - a) What do you know about it?
 - b) Do you think it is a good means to record and reflect on the learning of English?
 - c) Have you used it in class?

Combination of formal and informal learning

12. Can some outside class activities be integrated in class?
How?

APPENDIX 10: INTERVIEW EXTRACTS IN FRENCH

S1/1 : « Comme tous les jeunes, j'aime regarder les films, les séries; j'ai toujours regardé les séries en version originale. »

S1/2 : « Ce qui est vraiment stimulant, c'est surtout la chanson. On veut connaître les paroles. [...] Parfois, j'achète des journaux en français, puis en anglais pour comparer. »

S1/3 : « Quand j'aime une chanson, j'ai toujours envie de savoir ce que veulent dire les paroles.

Quand je ne comprends pas un mot, je demande directement ce qu'il veut dire, même si pour tout le monde, c'est évident. Si personne ne peut m'aider, c'est souvent le contexte qui m'aide à comprendre. »

S2/1 : « [...] Les séries et les films, je n'aime pas regarder la version doublée. Ça sert pour des phrases qu'on utilise beaucoup dans la conversation quotidienne.

C'est ce qui me plaît le plus.[...]

Durant les voyages, [...] J'utilise le vocabulaire appris dans les séries et les films. »

S2/2 : « Je vais à des conférences en anglais à Bruxelles; on parle et il faut poser des questions en anglais. »

S2/3 : « Il faut aller chercher des bouquins, les lire et puis, on parle devant la classe et là, j'apprends beaucoup. [...] Les sujets dont on parle en classe sont à ce point intéressants que j'ai vraiment envie de donner mon avis. »

S2/4 : « Ça m'intéresse de faire des comparaisons entre les langues.... Je n'aime pas rester avec un mot en ne sachant pas ce qu'il veut dire. Je n'arrête pas d'utiliser le dictionnaire sur mon GSM. »

S3/1 : « Les films sont une activité facile à réaliser. [...] l'avantage, c'est que je peux choisir la catégorie qui m'intéresse. Le vocabulaire est adapté à ma connaissance. »

S3/2 : « J'ai trouvé un site Gymglish, un programme d'apprentissage, qui envoie chaque jour une histoire, avec des questions sur l'histoire et avec des questions sur la grammaire. »

S3/3: « A chaque cours, on a une vidéo qui sert de compréhension à l'audition. »

S3/4 : « Elle essaie de nous ouvrir l'esprit; elle nous donne beaucoup de films et de sites en anglais. Elle nous stimule à aller chercher de l'information à différents endroits. »

S3/5 : « Quand il y a des mots que je ne comprends pas, j'ai trouvé un bon site de traduction sur internet et je traduis ce que je ne comprends pas...et ces mots-là, ils restent ancrés, contrairement à du vocabulaire que je dois étudier, parce que c'est obligé. »

S4/1: «D'internet, je regarde des séries avec les sous-titres pour l'instant en français mais je me suis dit que j'allais faire anglais-anglais, ce serait plus productif.

[...] C'est un moment agréable, donc il n'y a pas le côté laborieux de l'anglais. »

S4/2 : « Sur internet, on apprend sans vraiment qu'il y ait un cadre scolaire. »

S4/3 : « Il y a beaucoup de choses qui circulent sur les réseaux sociaux, qui sont en anglais. On a des amis, qui ne parlent pas français, on écrit son statut en anglais. Je baigne dans l'anglais, alors que quand j'avais 10-12 ans, je n'avais aucun contact avec l'anglais parce que la télévision, c'était en français, les journaux, c'était en français, je n'allais pas sur internet ; je n'avais pas ce contact, alors que maintenant, il est de plus en plus permanent, il dépasse les murs de l'école. »

S4/4 : « Pour moi, un grand déclic, ça a été en voyage ou à des camps, de rencontrer des gens avec qui je pouvais seulement m'exprimer en anglais. A Bruxelles, j'ai rencontré des gens de la Commission européenne qui parlaient seulement anglais et leur langue ; ça me faisait parler anglais en dehors des cours ; après, nous nous sommes écrit. »

S4/5 : « J'avais pensé à un festival de films, où les réalisateurs ne parlent qu'en anglais, le débat ou la rencontre est en anglais. »

S4/6 : « Elle propose de sites internet, qui proposent des documentaires ou des sites internet sur l'actualité. Elle a fait une liste de livres et de films à voir. »

S4/7 : « Ce sont des moments qui sont censés être du loisir, donc, je n'ai pas envie d'étudier tout le temps. »

S5/1 : « De par moi-même, c'est uniquement tout ce qui est films, plus en anglais aussi. [...] Je regarde simplement le film, j'aime cela : un film, c'est un thème. »

S5/2 : « C'est à dur à trouver les activités en anglais, le mieux serait un cours de cuisine ou un cours de yoga en anglais, ça j'aimerais bien. »

S5/3 : « J'aime la culture britannique, peut-être parce que je suis partie là-bas. »

S5/4 : « Je cherche souvent des mots ; mais les chercher une fois dans le dictionnaire, ce n'est pas comme ça que j'apprends. Il faut que ces mots reviennent. Je ne fais pas souvent de liens entre les mots et pourtant, ça aide, ça prend du temps, j'ai pas le réflexe, j'apprends d'oreille. »

S6/1 : « Ça arrive souvent de tomber sur des sites en anglais, il faut lire, je ne cherche pas la page en français. »

S6/2 : « Parler, c'est aussi avec des personnes qui ne parlent pas l'anglais au départ ; ça aide, comme ça, on reste en contact avec la langue. »

S7/1 : « Regarder des séries régulièrement, côtoyer les mots régulièrement, permet d'apprendre plus vite le vocabulaire. [...] J'aime cela, je fais attention à ce qu'ils disent [...] Je répète les mots. [...] Je pense en anglais. »

S7/2 : « Je lis des blogs de mode principalement; ce sont des filles qui viennent du monde entier, elles prennent des photos de vêtements et c'est souvent en anglais. Je lis. [...] Je vais souvent sur les sites de mode, sur la photo, sur la technologie. Je passe pas mal de temps, je suis très internet. »

S7/3 : « J'ai quelques amis qui habitent aux Etats-Unis, on ne se téléphone jamais. On s'écrit parfois sur Facebook, là, j'écris en anglais. »

S7/4 : « En cours, le professeur nous demande souvent de parler entre nous, cela nous fait converser en anglais, ce qu'on ne ferait pas spécialement, sans cela. Elle nous pose une question et on doit en parler avec notre voisin. Elle passe dans chaque groupe pour voir ce qu'on se raconte. »

S7/5 : « Je ne suis pas une adepte des langues, en général ; c'est une des seules langues pour laquelle je suis motivée pour l'apprendre. »

S7/6 : « Je préfère être passive, [...] ça m'embête de regarder des mots dans le dictionnaire. [...] Je n'aime pas les détails. »

S10/1 : « Je fais du babysitting dans une famille anglaise ; ainsi, je pratique régulièrement l'anglais.»

S10/3 : « Dans les films, j'essaie de voir la manière familière de parler, plutôt que l'anglais académique appris à l'école. »

S11/1 : « Je ne veux pas réfléchir. J'estime mon niveau d'anglais suffisamment bon. [...] Je comprends par le contexte et la répétition. »

S14/1 : « Si je tombe sur un site en anglais, je vais le lire. Mais je ne vais pas spécifiquement chercher un site en anglais. »

S14/2 : « Je suis perfectionniste et ça me dérange plutôt que ça ne m'aide. Je cherche trop de mots et je ne comprends plus le contexte. »

S16/1 : « Je suis une fan de Wikipédia en anglais, mais je n'ai pas assez de temps pour y contribuer. Ecrire, c'est par Facebook et par mail. »

T1/1 : « Les séjours évidemment, les films, la musique, il y en a qui sont vraiment accros à la musique et ils en profitent aussi au niveau des mots. »

T1/2 : « Je confronte toutes les semaines les étudiants à des vidéos et des lectures. [...] Au premier semestre, je travaille beaucoup avec des vidéos que j'apporte et au second semestre, je leur demande de trouver eux-mêmes une problématique, qu'ils vont expliciter en partie, par une vidéo qu'ils présentent aux autres étudiants. »

T1/3 : « J'essaie d'arriver au point où les étudiants oublient qu'ils sont en train de parler anglais. »

T1/4 : « Le fait de se confronter le plus régulièrement possible à la langue anglaise est important. Parfois, ils reviennent vers moi et disent, je ne regarde plus que des films en anglais, ça, c'est assez gratifiant. »

T3/1 : « Aller au pub et parler avec des gens ! [...] On a de la chance de vivre à Bruxelles, une ville multiculturelle. »

T3/2 : « Ils croient que la panacée est de regarder les séries avec sous-titres en anglais. Ce n'est qu'une demi-compétence. Ils restent passifs.»

APPENDIX 11: TRANSCRIPTION OF AN INTERVIEW IN FRENCH

R : Alors première question,– puisqu'on parle d'intégration de ce que vous faites hors classe en classe- c'est d'avoir un peu plus de détails sur ce que vous faites en classe au cours d'anglais...

S9 : En fait, on travaille sur l'Union européenne, tout ce qui est politique autour de l'UE. La collusion entre pays. Il nous passe des diapositives, il nous explique toujours en anglais. Il y a des articles, il veut aussi qu'on prépare des articles chaque semaine. Il y en a un ou deux qui préparent des articles et ensuite on fait des débats.

R: Toujours sur l'Union européenne?

S9 : Non, les articles c'est en général. Par exemple, on a parlé de Facebook, des applications iPhone, comme du vin au Chili... peu importe et donc à chaque fois, il y a un débat, où les gens qui veulent participer, participent. Niveau oral, c'est ça qu'on fait.

On a des préparations à préparer sur l'Union européenne qui sont des grosses préparations en groupe et d'ailleurs ça commence dans les semaines à venir. Et là, c'est pareil, c'est le groupe qui passe des diapositives et les gens peuvent réagir. Donc, c'est vraiment ça qu'on fait ; donc, c'est étudier l'Union européenne, c'est lui qui nous explique comment ça se passe. Ensuite c'est à nous. Il y a des présentations d'articles et d'exposés au final.

R : Donc lire des articles et aussi écrire?

S9 :C'est plus pour les examens, les écrits à part pour la prise de notes pendant le cours. Sinon, il y a la préparation des exposés qui se fait par écrit. C'est plutôt personnel.

R: Détail des activités en dehors de la classe?

S9 : Parce qu'en fait, j'ai fait un Erasmus l'année passée en Angleterre de janvier à juin. J'étais déjà très « anglais » avant. Je lisais des magazines, je regardais des films, le tout en anglais. Depuis que je suis parti, je regarde les films sans sous-titres. Je lis des magazines indifféremment en français ou en anglais. Je converse aussi avec les amis sur internet soit à l'écrit soit directement à l'oral. Donc côté anglais, je pratique tous les jours. Et sur internet, partout, ça finit par être en anglais. Si on n'est pas gêné par ça, c'est beaucoup plus intéressant. On a vite fait le tour des pages en français.

R : Rappelle-moi ce que tu fais plus précisément sur internet par rapport à l'anglais?

S9 : Parler à des amis. Consulter des pages web, je suis fan de musique (en français il ne se passe pas grand-chose). Regarder des séries, écouter des podcasts radio.

R : Au niveau culturel, est-ce que tu participes à des activités en anglais à Bruxelles?

S9 : Non, sauf les concerts de groupes anglophones. Je vis en colocation avec des Erasmus. Soirées Erasmus où tout le monde finit par parler en anglais. Ou voir des films en VO mais pas vraiment avec un groupe

d'Anglophones. Mais j'aime beaucoup la culture anglaise, mais je n'ai pas trop la démarche.

R: Je parle du British Council (conférences/théâtre/école européenne ou britannique). Qu'est-ce qui est le plus stimulant?

S9 : Le plus stimulant : Parler de tout en face à face éventuellement. Même avec internet, maintenant, on a le micro et la webcam, c'est mieux que l'écrit.

R: Es-tu encouragé à parler en dehors de la classe, par qui? Tu te motives personnellement?

S9 : Beaucoup d'amis aux US, au Royaume-Uni ou en Australie. Je leur parle tous les jours. Je vais cet été les voir en Australie. Je suis motivé, même si je ne me rends pas compte que j'apprends.

R: Quels conseils te donne ton professeur en dehors du cadre du cours?

S9 : Il encourage à lire, à écouter la radio, à regarder des films. Des choses simples qu'on fait naturellement mais si on les fait en anglais, c'est mieux.

R: Le professeur renseigne des livres à lire?

S9 : Il nous conseille des livres que lui-même a aimés.

R: Vas-tu chercher des mots dans le dictionnaire?

S9 : En Angleterre, le colocataire australien expliquait les mots sur lesquels je bloquais avec ses mots en anglais. Bien sûr pas des grandes phrases, mais le mot qui fait le sens de la phrase.

R: Cette année tu fais pareil?

S9 : Oui, pareil avec mes amis. Idem dans les articles : Mot qui fait le sens de la phrase

R: Et prendre une grammaire?

S9 : Je pense que je l'ai acquise.

R : Qu'est-ce qui est facile ou difficile dans ton parcours?

S9 : Facile : les phrases du quotidien, les trucs basiques sont faciles, on les entend tout le temps. Difficile : le passé, la différence entre le « present perfect » et autres et ceci plutôt en écrivant.

R : La motivation, ce sont les gens et la culture.

S9 : Pouvoir découvrir plus de choses parce qu'on parle anglais. Sur internet, avoir la bonne information, c'est en anglais. Professionnellement sur un CV, ils prennent plus facilement quelqu'un qui parle facilement l'anglais.

R: Connais-tu le Portfolio Européen des Langues?

S9 : Non.

APPENDIX 12: TRANSLATION OF THE INTERVIEW IN ENGLISH

R: First question, - because we speak about integration of what you do in class outside class - I would like to have more details about what you do during the English class.

S9: In fact, we work on the European Union, politics around the EU. The collusion between the countries. He shows us slides and explains everything in English. There are articles, he wants us to prepare articles every week. There is one or two who prepare articles and then we have debates.

R: Always about the European Union?

S9: No, articles in general. For example, we spoke about Facebook, about iPhone applications, as well as about some wine in Chile, it doesn't matter and every time, there is a debate, where people who want to participate. This is what we do orally.

We have preparations on the European Union, which are big group preparations and moreover, it begins in the next few weeks. And there, it is similar, the group shows slides and people can react. Thus, it is really what we do; to study the European Union, he explains to us how it works. Then, it is our turn. There are presentations of articles in the end.

R: So, reading articles and also writing?

S9 : This is more for the examinations, the papers except for taking notes during the class course. Otherwise, there is a preparation of the presentations which is written. It is rather personal.

R: Detail of the activities outside class?

S9: In fact, I went on an Erasmus programme last year, in England from January till June. I was already very “English” before. I read magazines; I watched movies, everything in English. Since I went to England, I watch movies without subtitles. I read magazines indifferently in French or in English. I also speak with friends on the Internet, I write to them or I speak to them. So, I practise English every day. And on the Internet, everywhere, it is in English in the end. If it doesn’t bother us, it is much more interesting. With the pages in French, we’re quickly through them.

R: Remind me what you do exactly on the Internet related to English?

S9: I speak to friends. I consult webpages, I am a music fan (not so much happens in French). I watch series, I listen to radio podcasts.

R: At the cultural level, do you take part in activities in English in Brussels?

S9: No, except the concerts of English-speaking groups. My flatmates are Erasmus students. We spend the evenings with the Erasmus students; everybody eventually speaks English. Or watching movies in the original version, but not really with a group of English speakers. I like very much the English culture, but I don’t like the approach so much.

R: I mean the British Council (talks / theatre / European or British school).

What is the most stimulating?

S9: The most stimulating: speaking about everything, possibly face-to-face.

Even with Internet, now, we have the microphone and the webcam, it is better than writing.

R: Are you encouraged to speak outside class, by whom? Do you motivate yourself?

S9: Many friends in the US, in the United Kingdom or in Australia. I speak to them every day. This summer, I go and see them in Australia. I am motivated, even if I don't realise I learn.

R: Which piece of advice does your teacher give you about what you could do outside class?

S9: He encourages us to read, to listen to the radio, to watch movies. Simple things we do naturally but if we do them in English, it is better.

R: Does the teacher recommend books to read?

S9: He recommends us books he liked him.

R: Do you look up words in the dictionary?

S9: In England, the Australian flatmate explained words to me, the words I couldn't understand. He explained the words in English. Of course not big sentences, but the word which makes you understand the sentence.

R: Are you doing the same this year?

S9: Yes, the same with my friends. The same for the articles: the word which makes me understand the sentence.

R: Do you use a grammar book?

S9: I think I know the grammar.

R: What is easy or difficult in your learning process?

S9: Easy: everyday life sentences, the basic things are easy; we hear them all the time. Difficult: the past tense, the difference between the “present perfect” and the other tenses, and this rather, by writing.

R: Motivation, it is the people and the culture.

S9: Being able to discover more things because we speak English. On the Internet, the good piece of information is in English. Professionally, on a resume, they easily hire someone who speaks English fluently.

R: Do you know the European Language Portfolio?

S9: No, I don't.

APPENDIX 13: STUDENT INTERVIEW CODING – INTERVIEW IN FRENCH

Coding explanation (cf. Literature Review):

Themes: 2.1.Informal Learning – 2.2.Motivation – 2.3.Reflection and autonomy

Categories: 2.1.1 Formal Learning - 2.1.2. Psychology of Learning – 2.1.3. Sociology of Learning – 2.1.4. Informal Learning Activities

2.2.1. Integrative motivation – 2.2.2. Instrumental motivation – 2.2.3. Self-Motivation – 2.2.4. Motivation coming from the teacher

2.3.1. Noticing – 2.3.2. ELP

The literature is indicated in italics with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

The important ideas are marked in bold with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

2.1.1.

R : Alors première question,– puisqu'on parle d'intégration de ce que vous faites en classe hors classe- c'est d'avoir un peu plus de détails sur ce que vous faites en classe au cours d'anglais...

S9 : En fait, on travaille sur l'Union européenne, tout ce qui est politique autour de l'UE. La collusion entre pays. Il nous passe des diapositives, il nous explique toujours en anglais. Il y a des **2.1.1.articles**, il veut aussi

qu'on prépare des articles chaque semaine. Il y en a un ou deux qui préparent des **2.1.1.articles et ensuite on fait des débats.**

R: toujours sur l'Union européenne?

S9 : Non, les **2.1.1.articles** c'est en général. Par exemple, on a parlé de **2.1.Facebook 2.1.nowadays socio-technical communities in order to sustain formal and informal learning – Janhke 2005**, des applications iPhone, comme du vin au Chili... peu importe et donc à chaque fois il y a un débat, où les gens qui veulent participer, participent. Niveau oral, c'est ça qu'on fait.

On a des **2.1.1. préparations sur l'Union européenne** qui sont des grosses préparations en groupe et d'ailleurs ça commence dans les semaines à venir. Et là, c'est pareil, c'est le groupe qui passe des diapositives et les gens peuvent réagir. Donc, c'est vraiment ça qu'on fait ; donc c'est étudier l'Union européenne, c'est lui qui nous explique comment ça se passe. Ensuite c'est à nous. il y a **2.1.1.des présentations d'articles et d'exposés au final.**

R : Donc lire des articles et aussi écrire?

S9 :C'est plus pour **2.1.1.les examens**, les écrits à part pour la **2.1.1.prise de notes** pendant le cours. Sinon pour il y a la **2.1.1.préparation des exposés qui se fait par écrit.** C'est plutôt personnel.

2.1.

R: Détail des activités en dehors de la classe?

S9 : Parce qu'en fait j'ai fait un Erasmus l'année passée en Angleterre de janvier à juin. J'étais déjà très « anglais » avant. Je lisais **2.1. des magazines**, je regardais **2.1.des films**, le tout en anglais. Depuis que je suis parti, je regarde les **2.1.films sans sous-titres**. Je lis des magazines indifféremment en français ou en anglais. Je **2.1.converse aussi avec les amis sur internet** soit à l'écrit soit directement à l'oral. Donc côté anglais, **2.1.je pratique tous les jours**. Et **2.1.sur internet, partout ça finit par être en anglais**. Si on n'est pas gêné par ça c'est beaucoup plus intéressant. On a vite fait le tour des pages en français.

R : Rappelle-moi ce que tu fais plus précisément sur internet par rapport à l'anglais?

S9 : **2.1.Parler à des amis. 2.1.Consulter des pages web**, je suis **2.1.fan de musique** (en français il ne se passe pas grand-chose). Regarder **2.1.des séries**, écouter des **2.1.podcasts radio**.

R : Au niveau culturel, est-ce que tu participes à des activités en anglais à Bruxelles?

S9 : Non, sauf les **2.1.concerts de groupes anglophones**. Je vis en colocation avec des Erasmus. **2.1.Soirées Erasmus** où tout le monde finit par parler en anglais. Ou voir **2.1.des films en VO** mais pas vraiment avec un groupe d'Anglophones. Mais **2.2,j'aime beaucoup la culture anglaise** **2.2.internal motivation**, mais je n'ai **2.2.pas trop la démarche. 2.2.teacher could help**.

2.2.

R: Je parle du British Council (conférences/théâtre/école européenne ou britannique). Qu'est-ce qui est le plus stimulant?

S9 : **2.2.Le plus stimulant** : Parler de tout en face à face éventuellement.

Même avec internet, maintenant on a le micro et la webcam, c'est mieux que l'écrit.

R: Es-tu encouragé à parler en dehors de la classe, par qui? Tu te motives personnellement?

S9 : **2.2.1.Beaucoup d'amis aux US, au Royaume-Uni ou en Australie.** Je leur parle tous les jours. Je vais cet été les voir en Australie. Je suis

2.2.1.motivé, même si je ne me rends pas compte que j'apprends.

R: Quels conseils te donne ton professeur en dehors du cadre du cours?

S9 : **2.2.4.Il encourage à lire pas mal, à écouter la radio, à regarder des films.** Des choses simples qu'on fait naturellement mais si on les fait en anglais, c'est mieux.

R: Le professeur renseigne des livres à lire?

S9 : Le professeur **2.2.4.nous conseille des livres que lui-même a aimés.**

2.3.

R: Vas-tu chercher des mots dans le dictionnaire?

S9 : En Angleterre, le **2.3.1.colocataire australien expliquait les mots sur lesquels je bloquais avec ses mots en anglais.** Bien sûr pas des grandes phrases, mais le mot qui fait le sens de la phrase.

R: Cette année tu fais pareil?

S9 : Oui pareil avec mes amis. Idem dans les articles : Mot qui fait le sens de la phrase

R: Et prendre une grammaire?

S9 : Je pense que je l'ai acquise.

R : Qu'est-ce qui est facile ou difficile dans ton parcours?

S9 : **2.3.Facile : Les phrases du quotidien, les trucs basiques sont faciles, on les entend tout le temps. Difficile : le passé, la différence entre le « present perfect » et autres et ceci plutôt en écrivant.**

R : La motivation, ce sont les gens et la culture.

S9 : *2.2.internal motivation* **2.2.Pouvoir découvrir plus de choses parce qu'on parle anglais.** Sur internet, avoir la bonne information, c'est en anglais. *2.2.external motivation* **2.2.2. Professionnellement sur un CV, ils prennent plus facilement quelqu'un qui parle facilement l'anglais.**

R: Connais-tu le Portfolio Européen des Langues?

S9 : Non.

APPENDIX 14: STUDENT INTERVIEW CODING – INTERVIEW IN ENGLISH

Coding explanation (cf. Literature Review):

Themes: 2.1. Informal Learning – 2.2. Motivation – 2.3. Reflection and autonomy

Categories: 2.1.1 Formal Learning - 2.1.2. Psychology of Learning – 2.1.3.

Sociology of Learning – 2.1.4. Informal Learning Activities

2.2.1. Integrative motivation – 2.2.2. Instrumental motivation – 2.2.3. Self-Motivation – 2.2.4. Motivation coming from the teacher

2.3.1. Noticing – 2.3.2. ELP

The references to the literature are indicated in italics with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

The important ideas are marked in bold with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

2.1.1.

R: First question, - because we speak about integration of what you do in class outside class - I would like to have more details about what you do during the English class.

S9: In fact, we work on the European Union, politics around the EU. The collusion between the countries. He shows us slides and explains everything

in English. There are **2.1.1.articles**, he wants us to prepare articles every week. There is one or two who prepare **2.1.1.articles and then we have debates.**

R: Always about the European Union?

S9: No, we deal with **2.1.1.articles** in general. For example, we spoke about **2.1.Facebook 2.1.nowadays socio-technical communities in order to sustain formal and informal learning – Janhke 2005**, about iPhone applications, as well as about some wine in Chile, it doesn't matter and every time, there is a debate, where people who want to participate. This is what we do orally.

We have **2.1.1.preparations on the European Union**, which are big group preparations and moreover, it begins in the next few weeks. And there, it is similar, the group shows slides and people can react. Thus, it is really what we do; to study the European Union, he explains to us how it works. Then, it is our turn. There are **2.1.1.presentations of articles in the end.**

R: So, reading articles and also writing?

S9 : This is more for **2.1.1.the examinations**, the papers except for **2.1.1.taking notes** during the class course. Otherwise, there is a **2.1.1.preparation of the presentations which is written.** It is rather personal.

2.1.

R: Can you detail of the activities you practise outside class?

S9: In fact, I went on an Erasmus programme last year, in England from January till June. I was already very “English” before. I read **2.1.magazines**; I watched **2.1.movies**, everything in English. Since I went to England, I watch **2.1.movies without subtitles**. I read magazines indifferently in French or in English. I also **2.1.speak with friends on the Internet**, I write to them or I speak to them. So, **2.1.I practise English every day**. And **2.1.on the Internet, everywhere, it is in English** in the end. If it doesn't bother us, it is much more interesting. With the pages in French, we're quickly through them.

R: Remind me what you do exactly on the Internet related to English?

S9: **2.1.I speak to friends**. I **2.1.consult webpages**, I am a **2.1.music fan** (not so much happens in French). I watch **2.1.series**, I listen to **2.1.radio podcasts**.

R: At the cultural level, do you take part in activities in English in Brussels?

S9: No, except the **2.1.concerts of English-speaking groups**. My flatmates are Erasmus students. We spend the **2.1.evenings with the Erasmus students**; everybody eventually speaks English. Or watching **2.1.movies in the original version**, but not really with a group of English speakers. I

2.2.like very much the English culture *2.2.internal motivation*, but I

2.2.don't like the approach so much. *2.2.teacher could encourage and help.*

2.2.

R: I mean the British Council (talks/ theatre / European or British school).

What is the most stimulating?

S9: **2.2. The most stimulating:** speaking about everything, possibly face-to-face. Even with the Internet, now, we have the microphone and the webcam, it is better than writing.

R: Are you encouraged to speak outside class, by whom? Do you motivate yourself?

S9: **2.2.1. Many friends in the US, in the United Kingdom or in Australia.** I speak to them every day. This summer, I go and see them in Australia. I am **2.2.1. motivated, even if I don't realise I learn.**

R: Which piece of advice does your teacher give you about what you could do outside class?

S9: **2.2.4. He encourages us to read, to listen to the radio, to watch**

movies. Simple things we do naturally but if we do them in English, it is better.

R: Does the teacher recommend books to read?

S9: The teacher **2.2.4. recommends us books he liked himself.**

2.3.

R: Do you look up words in the dictionary?

S9: In England, the **2.3.1. Australian flatmate explained words to me, the words I couldn't understand. He explained the words in English.** Of course not big sentences, but the word which makes you understand the sentence.

R: Are you doing the same this year?

S9: Yes, the same with my friends. The same for the articles: the word which makes me understand the sentence.

R: Do you use a grammar book?

S9: I think I know the grammar.

R: What is easy or difficult in your learning process?

S9: **2.3.Easy: everyday life sentences, the basic things are easy; we hear them all the time. Difficult: the past tense, the difference between the “present perfect” and the other tenses, and this rather, by writing.**

R: Motivation, it is the people and the culture.

S9: *2.2. internal motivation.* **2.2. Being able to discover more things because we speak English.** On the Internet, the good piece of information is in English. *2.2. external motivation.* **2.2.2. Professionally, on a resume, they easily hire someone who speaks English fluently.**

R: Do you know the European Language Portfolio?

S9: No, I don't.

APPENDIX 15: STUDENT INTERVIEW CODING – EXTRACTS OF THE INTERVIEW IN FRENCH

Coding explanation (cf. Literature Review):

Themes: 2.1.Informal Learning – 2.2.Motivation – 2.3.Reflection and autonomy

Categories: 2.1.1 Formal Learning - 2.1.2. Psychology of Learning – 2.1.3. Sociology of Learning – 2.1.4. Informal Learning Activities

2.2.1. Integrative motivation – 2.2.2. Instrumental motivation – 2.2.3. Self-Motivation – 2.2.4. Motivation coming from the teacher

2.3.1. Noticing – 2.3.2. ELP

The references to the literature are indicated in italics with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

The important ideas are marked in bold with the number and the colour of the theme or category.

2.1.1. S9 : On traite d'**2.1.1.articles** en général. Par exemple, on a parlé de **2.1.Facebook** *2.1.nowadays socio-technical communities in order to sustain formal and informal learning – Janhke 2005*, des applications iPhone, comme du vin au Chili... peu importe et donc à chaque fois il y a un débat, où les gens qui veulent participer, participent. Niveau oral, c'est ça qu'on fait.

[...] 2.2 :

R: Je parle du British Council (conférences/théâtre/école européenne ou britannique). Qu'est-ce qui est le plus stimulant?

S9 : **2.2.Le plus stimulant** : parler de tout en face à face éventuellement.

Même avec internet, maintenant on a le micro et la webcam, c'est mieux que l'écrit.

R: Es-tu encouragé à parler en dehors de la classe, par qui? Tu te motives personnellement?

S9 : **2.2.1. Beaucoup d'amis aux US, au Royaume-Uni ou en Australie.**

Je leur parle tous les jours. Je vais cet été les voir en Australie. Je suis **2.2.1. motivé, même si je ne me rends pas compte que j'apprends.**

R: Quels conseils te donne ton professeur en dehors du cadre du cours?

S9 : Il **2.2.4. encourage à lire, à écouter la radio, à regarder des films.**

Des choses simples qu'on fait naturellement mais si on les fait en anglais, c'est mieux.

R: Le professeur renseigne des livres à lire?

S9 : Le professeur **2.2.4. nous conseille des livres que lui-même a aimés.**

[...] S9 : *2.2.internal motivation.* **2.2.Pouvoir découvrir plus de choses parce qu'on parle anglais.** Sur internet, avoir la bonne information, c'est en anglais. *2.2. external motivation.* **2.2.2. Professionnellement sur un CV, ils prennent plus facilement quelqu'un qui parle facilement l'anglais.**

APPENDIX 16: SELF-REPORT IN FRENCH

date,

Projet sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais

Cher étudiant en anglais,

Je vous donne mon adaptation de la Biographie Langagière, qui fait partie du Portfolio européen pour les langues (Conseil de l'Europe, 2006).

Le but de cette Biographie est de :

- réfléchir à l'apprentissage en classe et en dehors.
- penser aux actions entreprises pour améliorer l'apprentissage.

Les réponses seront confidentielles.

Cela prendra trente minutes pour remplir cette Biographie.

Anne Van Marsenille

Doctorante en pédagogie à l'Open University

anne.van.marsenille@galilee.be

Nom:Biographie LangagièreApprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère1. Contexte d'apprentissage de la langue

Je peux pratiquer l'anglais dans les situations suivantes:

Prière de cocher la(les) bonne(s) réponse(s).

	oui	Non
en classe.		
en voyage.		
avec des amis.		
à l'école/ au travail.		
en lisant.		
en regardant des films, les nouvelles, etc.		
autre.		

*Mentionner les autres situations au cours desquelles vous pouvez pratiquer
l'anglais:*

.....

.....

.....

.....

Mes raisons d'apprendre l'anglais sont:

Comment mon professeur me motive-t-il à apprendre l'anglais?

Aspects du processus d'apprentissage que j'apprécie plus particulièrement:

Aspects du processus d'apprentissage que je n'aime pas particulièrement:

Parties d'apprentissage qui me paraissent faciles:

Parties d'apprentissage qui me paraissent difficiles:

2. Mes plans

Pourquoi je veux apprendre la langue anglaise:

Ce que je veux atteindre dans la langue:

--

3. Mon style d'apprentissage

J'aime lire et je préfère voir les mots quand j'apprends. *Cocher la bonne réponse.*

Oui	Non

Ajouter des commentaires à la réponse précédente.

--

Je préfère apprendre en écoutant. J'aime les conversations et j'aime avoir des possibilités d'interagir avec les autres. *Cocher la bonne réponse.*

Oui	Non

Ajouter des commentaires à la réponse précédente.

Je préfère me concentrer sur des détails de la langue, comme les règles et les structures. *Cocher la bonne réponse.*

Oui	Non

Ajouter des commentaires à la réponse précédente.

Je préfère apprendre une langue pour donner une idée, plutôt que de m'inquiéter d'avoir utilisé les règles et structures langagières correctement.

Cocher la bonne réponse.

Oui	Non

Ajouter des commentaires à la réponse précédente.

4. Expérience interculturelle

Donner des informations concernant votre expérience de voyage pour les vacances, études et/ou travail, qui ont impliqué de parler l'anglais.

Donner des informations sur des séjours de longue durée dans d'autres pays, qui ont impliqué de parler l'anglais.

Donner des informations sur tout type d'expérience que vous avez et qui vous fait passer du temps dans une communauté multiculturelle où l'anglais est parlé.

Donner des informations sur des contacts sociaux et amis anglophones à l'étranger.

Donner des informations sur des contacts sociaux et amis anglophones dans votre pays.

Donner d'autres facteurs qui vous permettent d'apprendre l'anglais par une expérience interculturelle.

APPENDIX 17: SELF-REPORT IN ENGLISH

date,

Learning of English Project

Dear Student of English,

I am giving you my adaptation of a Language Biography, which is part of the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2006).

The aim of this Biography is to :

- think about your learning of English in and outside class
- consider the actions you undertake to improve your learning.

Your responses will be kept confidential.

It will take you thirty minutes to fill in.

Anne Van Marsenille

Research student in Education with the Open University

anne.van.marsenille@galilee.be

Name:Language BiographyLearning of English as a foreign language1. Language background

I can use English in the following situations:

Please tick the right answer(s).

	Yes	No
in class.		
when travelling.		
with friends.		
at school/ at work.		
while reading.		
while watching films, the news, etc.		
other.		

List the other situations where you can practise English:

.....

My reasons for learning English are:

In what ways does my teacher motivate me to learn English?

Aspects of the learning process which I particularly enjoy:

Aspects of the learning process which I particularly dislike:

Aspects of learning the language which I find easy:

Aspects of learning the language which I find difficult:

2. My plans

Why I want to learn the English language:

What I want to achieve in the language:

--

3. My learning style

I enjoy reading and prefer to see the words when I am learning. *Tick the right answer.*

Yes	No

Add comments to the previous reply:

--

I prefer to learn by listening. I enjoy conversations and the chance for interactions with others. *Tick the right answer.*

Yes	No

Add comments to the previous reply:

I prefer to concentrate on the details of language, such as language rules and structures. *Tick the right answer.*

Yes	No

Add comments to the previous reply:

I prefer learning a language to convey an idea, rather than worry about whether I have used language rules and structures correctly. *Tick the right answer.*

Yes	No

Add comments to the previous reply:

4. Intercultural experience

Give information about your experience of travel for holidays, studies and/or work that involved speaking English.

Give information about long term stays in other countries that involved speaking English .

Give information about any experience you have of spending time in a multicultural community in your home country where English is spoken.

Give information about your English-speaking social contacts or friends abroad.

Give information about your English-speaking social contacts or friends in your home country.

Give other factors that help you to learn English through intercultural experience.