

THE STUDENT VOICE IN MODELS OF
LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION:
LISTENING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF FOREIGN
LANGUAGE LEARNING

CLARE FORDER

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is offered in partial fulfilment of my Doctorate in Education (EdD), one third of which has already been externally moderated and passed over the previous three years.

Post-14 foreign language learning in England has seen a decline in recent years. This follows changes to languages education policies which made the subject optional rather than part of the statutory National Curriculum. Such changes were predicated in part on the belief that optional study would increase students' motivation to continue with language learning. However, the number of students choosing to study for a General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) in another language decreased significantly once the changes were implemented in 2004.

As changes to policies bring forward the role of motivation in language learning but highlight the variance between policy and research, this study sets out to provide empirical evidence of students' experiences of foreign language learning. The specific research question underpinning this study is: *what are the qualitatively different ways in which year 9 students experience foreign language learning?* Thus it seeks to determine *what* motivates (or demotivates) students to learn another language rather than *how* to motivate language learners. In doing so it contends that foregrounding student voice challenges existing models of language learner motivation and argues for its inclusion in revised motivation constructs. The study identifies three concepts central to language learner motivation: a sense of belonging; learner autonomy; feelings of competence. It finds they are also at the core of student voice research, thereby underpinning further the argument for focusing on students' perspectives of their language learning experiences as an important, yet under-researched, aspect of learner motivation.

Phenomenography, grounded in exploring students' experiences of learning, provides the theoretical framework for the research. It allows for an in-depth examination of students' conceptions of foreign language learning. Twenty-four year 9 students (aged 13-14) from an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school on the south coast of England took part in the research, which was formed of initial focus groups and semi-structured follow-up interviews. The participants' teacher was also interviewed in order to triangulate the data gathered from the students and provide a different perspective on their comments.

Participants' experiential descriptions of foreign language learning were expressed in one of four qualitatively different ways. They described: 'a negative learning experience', 'an emotional one', 'a disengaged one or a 'self-assured one'. At the same time, further outcomes reveal that aspects which motivate or demotivate students in the foreign languages classroom are strongly linked to the concepts of belonging, learner autonomy and competence. Through examining participants' descriptions of their foreign language learning experiences the study contends that seating arrangements, copying activities and in-class relationships all have a cumulative effect on their levels of motivation. These effects are felt differently depending on the type of learning experience the participants describe. Moreover, the issues raised by students often conflict with the beliefs held by their teacher.

These findings contribute to new knowledge in the field by not only focusing on previously unconsidered motivational factors, but also by substantiating the claim that including student voice,

often little heard by teachers, in models of foreign language learning motivation is not only appropriate but necessary.

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

Dated

LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

BERA	British Education Research Association
CfBT	CfBT Education Trust
CILT	The National Centre for Languages
D&T	Design & Technology
DES	Department for Education and Science (1964-1992)
DfE	Department for Education (1992-1995 and 2010-present day)
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment (1995-2001)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001-2007)
EDM	Early Day Motion
FG1/2/3	Focus group participant
FI1/2/3	Follow up interview participant
FLL	Foreign Language Learning
GCSE	General Certificate in Secondary Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IT	Information Technology
KS2/3/4	Key Stage 2/3/4
L2	Second or foreign language
MFL	Modern Foreign Language(s)
NCMFL	National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SCRE	Scottish Council for Research in Education
SIG	Special Interest Group
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TL	Target Language
WO	Work Order

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis by first discussing the rationale behind it and highlighting the problem under investigation. It goes on to explore the context in which it is set, covering policy- and research-related issues and situating it against the backdrop of the declining number of students choosing to continue with post-14 language learning in England. The study's main aims and objectives are outlined and its guiding research questions are presented. Next, the intended contributions of the research to knowledge in the field are considered and finally, the thesis outline is described.

1.2 Rationale

As Coffey (1999: 161) notes, research is not just about those we set out to investigate. It also involves our own lives as well as our own aims, needs and emotions. The basis, therefore, of this study is grounded as much in my personal interests as it is in my professional ones. Personally, I am constantly intrigued as to why students would turn away from foreign language learning and its associated benefits. Having been introduced to French whilst still in primary school, this sparked in me an almost immediate passion for language learning. Early fascination at realising other people could use completely different words to the ones I was familiar with but still mean the same thing fuelled my desire to learn and find out how to do this myself. Throughout my school and university career I continued with French and German, picking up small amounts of other languages along the way. However, realising others did not always share this passion and then seeing first-hand through my professional role just how deeply entrenched negative attitudes towards language learning can be prompted a quizzical reaction. Why do others not enjoy language learning in the same way I had? What causes them to view foreign languages so negatively?

I wanted to explore these questions and try to understand language learning from perspectives other than my own.

Professionally, I was keen to explore some of the issues underpinning the project I work for at the University of Brighton; namely the reasons why many students give up foreign language study as soon as they are able and what can be done to encourage them to continue with rather than abandon the subject. More specifically, I wanted to examine year 9 students' (age 13-14) views of foreign language learning in particular as it is at this point in their school careers that many of them decide whether or not to take languages further.

The criticality of what could potentially be a life-changing decision made at a very young age and often based on limited or even biased information (the familiar message of "English is enough") to me called for further and more detailed investigation.

Current education policy suggests students are now more motivated to continue with language study but learner statistics indicate otherwise. Consequently I believed it necessary to determine from the students themselves what it is about foreign languages that did or did not motivate their study of them. I viewed gaining further insight into what prompts the decision to drop or continue language learning at this stage as beneficial not only professionally but also pedagogically. It would allow for practical languages-related interventions to be designed and implemented more appropriately and permit a deeper appreciation of how understanding students' foreign language learning experiences could offer new ideas and approaches for language teaching. Furthermore, and of key importance, the incorporation of student voice into motivation strategies would also be foregrounded.

Finally I also believed it important to investigate motivational strategies and the inclusion of student voice given the forthcoming introduction of compulsory foreign language learning

at Key Stage 2 (age 7-11) in state primary schools from September 2014 (DfE, 2012). As this new policy will extend the period of compulsory language learning for students from the current three years (Years 7-9) to seven years (Years 3-9), this creates some urgency in establishing what does and does not work to motivate young language learners.

1.3 Statement of the problem

My approach to this thesis is based on the belief that student voice is a vital element in the debate surrounding foreign language learning in English secondary schools. However, in terms of motivating students to continue with language study, the student voice aspect is often not included as a strategy or potential means of framing student engagement in the subject and there appears to be little in the literature which links these concepts together. Accordingly this thesis sets out to explore student voice in greater detail and how it might be located in the foreign language learning context in order to enhance existing models of motivation.

1.4 Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) research and policy in England

MFL teaching and learning enjoys a wide variety of extant research. Topics investigated range from foreign language classroom anxiety (e.g. Horwitz *et al*, 1986; von Wörde, 2003), learning and teaching styles (Felder and Henriques, 1995; Oxford, 2003) and the use of the mother tongue in foreign language learning (FLL) and teaching (Butzkamm, 2003) through to inquiries into perceived gender gaps in FLL (Davies, 2004) and parental support of MFL learners (Jones, 2009). A wealth of literature also covers FLL motivation and its associated fields of study and these will be looked at separately in the following chapter. However, as the parameters of this study are not wide enough to permit a detailed investigation into the

areas listed above, this section will focus only on the literature as it applies to FLL in English state secondary schools as well as on selected key policy decisions made by successive governments in recent years.

Examining the history of MFL over the last few decades reveals a number of underlying tensions and polarities. These include whether the study of languages is vocational or academic (Lawes, 2000); whether language teaching should be approached from a grammar and accuracy perspective or from a communicative one (Miller, 2002) and the problems affecting attitudes towards language learning posed by the notion of English as a global language (Crystal, 2003). Such differences have arisen not only from diverse pedagogies but also as a result of the constantly changing education policies imposed upon the subject during the same timeframe.

Exploring the current situation in MFL teaching and learning reveals a number of complexities. These can be approached from an historical position; for example, with the introduction of the GCSE syllabus in 1988 (Macaro, 2008) or more recent events can be examined, such as the removal of MFL from the statutory curriculum in 2004 following the then government's Green Paper on 14-19 learning (DfES, 2002a). Both approaches offer valuable insights and ideas as to why the subject is facing such concerns as declining examination entries (Tinsley and Board, 2013) and repeated claims of higher levels of difficulty compared to other subjects (Fisher, 2001; Gould and Riordan, 2010). Events at either end of the period (i.e. *Languages for All* or the removal of compulsory language lessons post-14) have been held responsible for these (Canning, 2008; Macaro, 2008; Coleman, 2009), thus highlighting the complexities of the issues surrounding foreign language teaching and learning. To navigate through these it is perhaps useful to look at

certain key areas in the history of MFL in English secondary schools. To do so this review will take the Nuffield Languages Inquiry's final report (Nuffield, 2000) as a starting point as it offers a platform from which a variety of FLL concerns can be assessed. It will also reflect upon government decisions made before and after the report was issued, thereby providing not only a critical evaluation of the literature, but also a reflection of the often disjointed attitude to languages education which, as evidenced by the teacher interview for this study, is still being felt today.

1.4.1 Before and after the Nuffield Languages Inquiry

The Nuffield Inquiry report (2000) was published at a time when a coherent national approach to MFL was lacking (Coyle, 2002: 158). The report signals a "lack of joined up thinking" (Nuffield, 2000: 5) and argues for a national strategy as "an investment the UK cannot afford to ignore" (*op cit*, 63). In addition, researchers had already begun to investigate students' attitudes towards FLL (Stables and Wikeley, 1999; Chambers, 1998) as well as emerging downward trends in examination entries (Saunders, 1998) and the comparatively little curriculum time afforded to FLL (Milton and Meara, 1998). By the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new decade, the picture of MFL in English secondary schools was not looking particularly bright. This landscape, some have argued, was the result of earlier policies, notably the new National Curriculum, being unsuccessfully imposed upon MFL (e.g. Mitchell, 2002).

Arguments put forward in this respect maintain that the *Languages for All* directive (DES/WO, 1991) may actually have "sown the seeds of decline" (Macaro, 2008: 101) well before more recent changes began to do the same. In fact, some of the problems MFL faces today surfaced as early as the introduction of the *Languages for All* policy. Whilst greeted

positively in terms of widening access to MFL, as Field (2000: 4) observes, the set of purposes for teaching MFL that emerged during this time were both appealing and contentious. Specific concerns were raised by teachers regarding assessment, learning a second foreign language, time constraints, difficulty of higher levels and the lack of defined content (Mellor and Trafford, 1994: 2). Teachers had to contend with ever-changing prescribed teaching methods. Initially instructed to teach solely in the target language where possible, later advice favoured an emphasis on grammar and accuracy. Pachler (2007: 4) explains how this “led to detrimental backwash effects such as a skills-based performance orientation rather than an emphasis on knowledge and understanding”.

Such inconsistency may have had a significant effect upon students’ motivation to study foreign languages, along with their enjoyment of doing so. Mitchell (2003: 16) also observes how the structure of the MFL curriculum itself may have exacerbated these problems. The usual attainment levels for other core subjects cover 12 years of education (beginning in KS1) but for MFL the same levels must be achieved in a much shorter period of only five years. As a result, Mitchell (*op cit*, 17) argues, the framework is both insufficiently challenging in some respects but prevents the achievement of expected levels in others. A final point highlighted by the same author is that the MFL national curriculum was initially based not on “any solid research inputs” (*ibid*) but instead on professional consultation. This has led to difficulties in practice and the understanding that the framework was “externally imposed on MFL without regard to its suitability for the special concerns of foreign language classroom learning” (*ibid*).

Further examples of disparity between policy and practice are highlighted in the Nuffield report (2000), which also draws attention to similar gaps between issues in FLL and what

should be done to remedy them. It warns of the consequences in which the country's lack of linguistic capabilities may result (*op cit*, 18) and offers potential solutions and means of avoiding them (*op cit*, 21-22). In short, it appeals to the government to better align policy with practice in order to re-establish the importance of foreign language study. The government seemingly welcomed the review but its official response (DfEE, 2001) reveals a "very limited conception of MFLs" (Allford and Pachler, 2001: 2). With a heavy emphasis on learning languages for commercial purposes, the response clearly associates MFL with business and vocational needs and not with the strategic concerns of improving the "lack of grammatical understanding and transferable language skills" already identified as problematic by employers (*op cit*, 3, quoting Nuffield, 2000: 20). As a result, despite the outward positivity of the response, it left many with "a nagging feeling that [the government] is still sticking to its own agenda" (Reynolds, 2001: 12) rather than embracing the realities put forward by the Nuffield group.

The tensions between governmental attitudes towards FLL and those of MFL researchers and practitioners are further evident in a practice known as disapplication (Education (National Curriculum) (Exceptions at Key Stage 4) Regulations, 1998). Until September 2004 when entitlement areas were implemented (DfES, 2006: 10) this allowed schools to "disapply" students from up to two subjects from a choice of Design and Technology (D&T), Sciences and MFL in order for them to tailor the curriculum to their needs. Even though disapplication was intended to permit small numbers of students to study fewer subjects or enable them to engage in work-related learning or the further study of particular subjects (Nelson *et al*, 2001), in reality the process allowed large numbers of learners to give up on foreign language study despite it still being a compulsory curriculum subject. The disparity

between disapplication for MFL compared to other subjects such as D&T or science is shown in the patterns for the academic year 1999-2000: D&T and science received disapplications from 16% and 2% of students respectively, whereas the figure for MFL was much higher at 42% (Nelson *et al*, 2001: 18). Furthermore Ofsted's (2002a; 2002b) MFL subject reports for the academic years 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 record that some schools had not implemented the procedure appropriately and were using it to tackle staffing problems and low motivation amongst students. Figures for the period show that one in ten schools was not providing the statutory KS4 curriculum (*ibid*). Ahead of decisions that were later to be made about MFL in secondary schools, its position and status were already weakened by government policy.

1.5 Students' attitudes towards MFL

Within this context researchers continued to explore why students' attitudes to FLL were so negative. Aside from the fact that existing policies appeared to undermine the positive aspects of foreign language study or attempted to confine them to commercially driven purposes, other possible reasons were also put forward. Hawkins (1996: 17) explains his view that MFL is inevitably afforded a lower status than other core subjects because:

...alone among the foundation subjects, it is not introduced until Key Stage Three. Furthermore, we choose to introduce it at the onset of adolescence, when empathy...gives way to self-consciousness and insecurity.

Sharpe and Driscoll (2000: 83) also point out that "insularity and prejudices tend to be more firmly established and consequently more difficult to challenge" in secondary school years and thus serve to diminish curiosity about and motivation to learn another language. Others reason that when presented with curricula that often prevent self-expression (Mitchell, 2003; Grenfell, 2000); typically emphasise national identity and do not encourage broader

outlooks (Byram, 2002); and seem to promote gender imbalance (Callaghan, 1998), it is perhaps not surprising that students believe FLL to be a disheartening endeavour.

The perception of English as a global language (Graddol, 2006) also plays an important role here. Bartram (2006), Hawkins (2005) and Mitchell (2002) amongst others all document the challenges experienced by MFL educators in the face of global English. The English students in Bartram's study (2006: 50) do not see the value of learning another language (see also Graham, 2002) and Mitchell (2002: 23) argues for a major overhaul of the MFL curriculum in order to boost instrumental motivation for FLL in England. In order to retain the relevance of learning another language, global English should be seen as "only one strand in a globalising world and in a knowledge economy" (*op cit*, 25). Hawkins (2005: 4) furthers the debate by advocating language awareness (i.e. "learning how to learn") and the move away from an instrumental approach to FLL. This would give students a better understanding of why it is important to learn another language and would also encourage more thoughtful decisions to be made about continued language study.

The Nuffield report (2000: 6) makes similar attempts to highlight these points and carries the message that English alone is not enough. It recommends not allowing students to drop languages and suggests revision of curriculum content and examination syllabi, primarily so that students are sufficiently grounded in grammar to cope with advanced level study and so that courses are made more appealing, particularly to boys (*op cit*, 48). It also suggests the introduction of a "national strategy for developing capability in languages in the UK" (*op cit*, 8). This was something that was later introduced under the title *Languages for All: Languages for Life – a strategy for England* (DfES, 2002b) but not before the government introduced its Green Paper on 14-19 learning (DfES, 2002a), in which proposals were made

to remove languages from the compulsory curriculum. Despite the national languages strategy's far-reaching sounding headline, the government did not appear to be answering the recommendations proposed by the Nuffield Languages Inquiry. On the one hand there was a promise to "strengthen still further the position of Modern Foreign Languages "(DfES, 2002b: 4), alongside the Nuffield report's cautions against monolingualism (2000: 14) but on the other hand, the government pushed ahead with plans to remove MFL from the compulsory curriculum from September 2004. Increasing numbers of disapplying students and a suggestion that the NCMFL sometimes prevented language learning for all (2002a: 21-2) provided some of the reasoning behind this decision. Moreover, a heavy focus on providing a language learning entitlement for primary school pupils (*op cit*, 4) appeared to further justify the proposal. Again their approach could be seen as being at odds with research and consultation. Pachler (2007: 3) warns that it "appears to be at best only partially informed by research evidence and one, therefore, needs to remain sceptical about the merits of this fundamental shift in policy". Deeply-rooted perceptions of and problems surrounding the teaching and learning of MFL such as those discussed thus far appear not to have been confronted. Such suggestions as developing a more attractive and interesting MFL curriculum seem to have been overlooked in favour of taking the easy way out and removing foreign language study from the compulsory curriculum (Hudson, 2002).

1.6 Removing MFL from the post-14 compulsory curriculum

A key factor in deciding to "downgrade" MFL to an optional subject lay in the fact that the government believed this would boost students' motivation to learn languages (DfES, 2002b: 6). What many languages experts saw instead was that this decision would in fact "pull the rug in the crucial teenage years" (Kelly, 2002) and would further weaken the status

of MFL in this country. Pachler (2003: 4) predicts that it would have “potentially far-reaching and very damaging consequences” and not for the first time it is noted that there are few references to evidence supporting policy decisions (Allford and Pachler, 2002). The contradictory nature of this approach is further demonstrated in the language strategy’s claim that “language competence and intercultural understanding are not optional extras” (DfES, 2002b: 5) within a document that outlines the very opposite. Motivation to continue studying languages, already waning for some students, was undermined. As Davies (2004: 54) points out, nearly 30% of schools planned to drop compulsory language teaching for all students from September 2002, two years ahead of when the proposals would come into effect. Evidence also revealed that the impact of the planned changes was not solely confined to KS4. Students in Key Stage 3 (KS3) were also beginning to question the point of working hard at MFL if they could just opt out in Key Stage 4 (KS4) (CILT, 2003). Such attitudes only hinted at what would later become a disquieting decline in the numbers of students studying languages at KS4 (e.g. CILT, 2004). Rather than fostering an environment in which MFL could thrive, it seemed a “climate of negativity” (Watts, 2004: 65) had been generated.

Curriculum modifications left MFL in a precarious position. In variance to European policy calling for the learning of at least two foreign languages, notably referred to as “basic skills” (European Council, 2002: 19), policy in England was promoting the opposite. Making languages optional damaged their perceived status (Coleman *et al*, 2007: 249) and the decrease in the number of students choosing to continue their language study was mirrored by the number of schools deciding to remove languages from the curriculum entirely (CILT, 2004). Those who retained languages often timetabled them against more attractive

subjects such as sociology or media studies (*ibid*), leaving MFL struggling to endure in the often extremely competitive options selection process. Just one year after the changes came into effect, research indicated that only a quarter of schools was still providing compulsory language study (CILT, 2005). As mentioned above, the new KS4 measures for MFL also continued to affect KS3. Reduced staffing, timetabling and time allocated for language lessons formed some of the problems faced at KS3 (Evans and Fisher, 2009). Other pressures surfaced in the shape of the extra work involved in trying to promote FLL to students at this level in order to boost numbers at KS4 or the reduction of the KS3 curriculum from three to two years (CILT, 2008). Dearing's *Languages Review* (Dearing and King, 2007) and prior interim report (Dearing and King, 2006) reflect the need to address these on-going issues but approach the situation relatively cautiously. Their final report (2007: 25) acknowledges that no "quick fix" can be applied and thus refrains from suggesting the reinstatement of compulsory language lessons. Whilst disappointing for some language teachers and expert stakeholders, recommendations including the introduction of FLL at KS2 and the development of a wider range of assessment options (2007: 13) were welcomed. However, issues such as progression between KS2 and KS3 and the availability of teachers sufficiently proficient in MFL to teach them in primary schools are not addressed (Evans, 2007: 302). This ties in well with Byram's (2007: 297) comment that the review focuses more on teaching languages than it does on learning them – a subtle but important difference. Others hint that the consultation report simply re-affirms the government's original decision to remove compulsory language study in favour of more students taking up vocational qualifications (Mitchell, 2011; Pachler, 2007: 10;).

Although reaction to the *Languages Review* was mixed, reports show that it also prompted a number of initiatives to help schools promote languages and motivate students (CILT, 2008). These were particularly well-received as motivation and the perceived status of MFL in the eyes of students (and the wider community) continued to prove problematic (Bartram, 2005; Coleman *et al*, 2007). Sanders and colleagues (2008) note the “lack of incentives for students to study modern languages at Key Stage 4 and beyond”, whilst Canning (2008: 13) concludes that the “2008 language landscape is as much a cause for concern as it was in 2003”. In a 2009 position paper, the British Academy (2009: 1) also warns that the lack of language skills at secondary level and beyond will affect the United Kingdom’s ability to compete effectively in a global market, which may damage the country’s social, cultural and economic well-being.

1.7 Further factors affecting students’ motivation to learn languages

The government’s assertion that making MFL study optional drives students to continue their studies of it notwithstanding, the literature reflects other aspects which may affect FLL motivation. Coleman (2009: 112) suggests “looking beyond the school gates” to themes including negative public opinion of language learning as well as media attitudes. Insular national mind-sets (Chambers, 1999; McPake *et al*, 1999), often unwavering belief that “English is enough” and the low status of foreign language proficiency in society (Pachler, 2007) all could be argued to contribute to a lack of motivation in terms of FLL. However, for Coleman (2009: 116) it is the hostile attitude towards language learning created and reflected by the media which has one of the biggest impacts. Within the English social climate “casual xenophobia” remains widely accepted and unchallenged, with the media acting as the “worst offenders and most influential in reinforcing prejudice, especially

against Europe” (*op cit*, 118). Marshall (1999: 2) also notes how the “climate of public opinion in which [students] live, as determined by attitudes to Europe in the media, among politicians and employers emerges as a negative force, particularly for the ‘non-linguists’”. It would not be surprising that these attitudes leak into the consciousness of the (disaffected) language learner and thus render efforts to boost motivation within FLL much more difficult.

Returning to the school context and the long-debated notion of motivation in FLL sees various different aspects acting as motivators and indeed de-motivators within the languages classroom. Aside from those already mentioned, factors such as uninspiring content (Fisher, 2001), the transactional nature of the curriculum (Pachler, 2007) and a heavy focus on assessment and performance (Mitchell, 2011) all contribute to negative perceptions of the subject and in some cases stifle creativity and achievement. Teachers are thought to play a key but difficult role here, too. Chambers (1998: 252) observes the importance of the role of the teacher to students and how many aspects of FLL can count for nothing if the teacher-student relationship is lacking (see also Williams *et al*, 2002). Whilst it is true that MFL teachers have recently come under criticism for uninspiring teaching and not bringing languages to life for students (Ofsted, 2011) it is important to recognise that doing so within a subject that has long operated in a state of methodological and curricula confusion (Grenfell, 2000) naturally brings its own difficulties. Pedagogic problems go beyond student motivation and lay also in the notions of performance and competition. League tables including MFL examination results are seen as largely detrimental to language study as schools do not want to see their results drop because of “difficult” subjects like languages (Gould and Riordan, 2010: 205).

Conclusions can be drawn about the position of MFL in English secondary schools and how it relates to students' motivation to study the subject. It is evident from policies that promote languages for all and from policies that make languages optional that neither seem to fully address the fundamental difficulties in encouraging English secondary school students to learn another language. Problems encountered today are not new; they have already been raised and confronted in earlier cycles of the modern languages teaching and learning debate. Many suggestions on how to remedy the FLL situation in England have been made and certain initiatives have seen some success in this area, such as the Routes into Languages project (HEFCE, 2006). However, to reach an understanding of how students themselves view foreign language study and what might potentially motivate (or demotivate) them in this area, it is important to examine the literature on FLL motivation and how it could be applied to the English secondary school context. It is also necessary to explore how students' voices may be heard within this debate so that ground-up rather than top-down approaches and solutions can be developed. The following chapter explores these areas in more detail. The next section examines the aims of this study.

1.8 Aims of the study

At a time in their schooling where motivation to study languages seems to wane for many students and the option to give them up is easily accessible, it is of critical importance for students to be able to discuss their views. This study aims to identify such opinions about language learning and provide a conduit for them.

As making the subject optional for Key Stage 4 (and further) has not appeared to increase students' motivation to study it as justified by changes to languages education policies, this study was based upon two further aims. The first one involved providing empirical research

regarding students' views and conceptions of foreign language learning. As discussed above, recent decisions regarding MFL policy have ostensibly been made with little reference to existing research in the general field of MFL teaching and learning. Moreover, within that research, there is a scarcity of evidence foregrounding the consultation of students and their thoughts about the MFL learning process. In the following chapters, I argue that adapting existing models of language learner motivation to include student voice is critical to developing new constructs which may provide more successful motivational strategies than those referred to in current practice.

Closely linked to the first aim, the second was concerned with finding out how students' experiences of foreign language learning affect their motivation in the subject. Within a group of students with diverse language learning statuses (some actively choosing to study a language GCSE, some dropping the subject as soon as they are able and others having to continue with language study because of their chosen qualification pathway) it was expected that there would be similar diversity in experience. The study was therefore designed to help uncover this variation so that it could eventually be used to understand students' levels of motivation and later develop and inform student-centred approaches to motivation in the languages classroom.

These objectives gave way to the following research question:

What are the qualitatively different ways in which selected Year 9 students in an English state secondary school experience foreign language learning?

Sub-questions helping to answer the main question included:

- *Is students' motivation to study a foreign language affected by their overall experience of foreign language learning?*
- *How do students describe ways in which their foreign language learning experience could be improved?*

1.9 Intended contributions to knowledge

The research presented in this thesis, as partial fulfilment of the Doctorate in Education (EdD), aims to contribute to new knowledge in the field by providing deeper insights into students' conceptions and experiences of the foreign language learning process. It identifies a gap in existing research on language learner motivation in that constructs or models of language learner motivation do not tend to include aspects of student voice as a means of motivating learners; that is students' own views and perspectives on foreign language learning. Rather, they concentrate more on teacher-led means of engaging and motivating students. Consequently, adding student perspectives derived from examining different types of learning experience to these models provides a variety of new ways of motivating students in the languages classroom.

A further contribution to new knowledge is intended in the form of adding to the limited available research on student voice in foreign language learning. The development and understanding of different types of foreign language learning experience is beneficial in and of itself by not only informing pedagogical approaches to MFL teaching and learning but also encouraging teachers and school leaders to seek and act upon their students' views.

Younger students in particular are often disenfranchised from the discussion of issues surrounding their education. Asking for their thoughts and opinions provides opportunities for reflection and better understanding of their learning processes, which in turn helps

teachers to understand from a student's perspective what motivates and demotivates them in the classroom. I elaborate in more detail on the above-mentioned contributions to new knowledge in Chapter 7.

1.10 Thesis organisation

This thesis includes a further six chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the literature on language learner motivation and student voice and finds that both fields share three central conceptions: belonging, learner autonomy and competence, which form the foundation of the study. Chapter 3 introduces phenomenography as the methodology underpinning the research and providing its theoretical framework. Chapter 4 examines the research design, supporting pilot study and the steps taken throughout the data analysis process. In Chapter 5 the research findings are presented and discussed. Different types of foreign language learning experiences are described and two diagrammatic representations of these are provided, known as outcome spaces. Chapter 6 examines the findings presented in the previous chapter and finally Chapter 7 considers how the research questions were answered, acknowledges the strengths and limitations of the study, provides a reflective account of the research process and considers how the findings contribute to new knowledge in the field.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Following the introductory chapter where the background and rationale for this study are discussed, this chapter turns to the relevant literature in the field. It looks first at the specific field of motivation in foreign language learning (FLL) and in doing so maintains that various government policy decisions have made students' motivation to study or continue studying foreign languages a central focus. Second, the notion of "student voice" is examined in light of FLL and motivation as I argue that a more in-depth understanding and wider appreciation of what students themselves have to say about their FLL experiences may lead to renewed and better-informed means of motivating MFL study.

2.2 Motivation and foreign language learning

In this section I address the literature on motivation in foreign language learning and its relevance to the present study. I survey the major studies in the field and examine how theories and ideas borrowed from other domains such as cognitive psychology have informed existing research. Early influential work such as that carried out by Gardner (1985) provides the basis for an exploration into newer models of motivation in the FLL arena. The differences between second language acquisition (SLA) versus foreign language learning contexts are explored, with a close inspection of the complexities of motivation in the foreign language classroom environment. I draw upon some of the main theories in this area and identify possible gaps in the various constructs and models of L2 (second/foreign language) motivation.

There is a long tradition of research looking at motivation and second or foreign language learning (the former referring to language learning contexts where the L2 community is near

or closely accessible, such as learning French in Canada, whilst the latter refers to situations where the learner is less likely to have immediate access to the L2 community, such as learning German in England). Yet with this long tradition comes a complex interweaving of influences and ideas from many different theoretical backgrounds, such as industrial, educational and cognitive developmental psychology (Oxford and Shearin, 1994: 13). Consequently the field is extremely broad and several (often competing) constructs and models of foreign language learning motivation have been proposed.

However, in order to focus attention on areas relevant to the English secondary school context, topics have been selected from the broad field for a more in-depth analysis. The themes drawn upon to underpin this study include:

- The difference between motivation in second language acquisition and motivation in foreign language learning
- The complexities surrounding foreign language learning and the classroom environment (including the social nature of FLL, issues of identity and group relationships)
- The focus on aspects of motivation specific to the L2 foreign language learner

These aspects are of particular importance because they reflect some of the issues raised in the FLL literature, including students' negative attitudes towards foreign language study and the difficulties encountered when trying to motivate learners in this subject. I propose that a deeper understanding of L2 motivation may offer a stronger framework for encouraging students to take up or continue language study.

2.3 Differences between motivation in SLA and FLL contexts

Whilst the field is generally labelled L2 motivation, closer inspection reveals subtle differences in the basis of the research conducted in this area. The seminal work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) and subsequently Gardner (1985) situated motivation in second language learning research in a social-psychological framework (Dörnyei, 1994a: 273). However, this proved a very different socio-cultural milieu than that of other contexts in which language learning occurs, the most obvious being the foreign language classroom. As Dörnyei (1990: 49-50) explains (see pages 32-33 also), the difference in second language acquisition versus FLL situations means that the early concepts of L2 motivation posited by Gardner and colleagues (see below) may take on very different values and relevance by students depending on the context in which their learning takes place.

The notions of motivation supplied by Gardner and Lambert and their colleagues follow an integrative-instrumental dichotomy. The “integrative” notion refers to “a high level of drive on the part of the individual to acquire the language of a valued second-language community in order to facilitate communication with that group” (Gardner *et al*, 1976: 199). The “instrumental” concept explains how students’ interests in learning the foreign language are associated with the pragmatic, utilitarian benefits of language proficiency, such as a better job or a higher salary (Dörnyei, 1990: 46). The division of FLL motivation into these two aspects became an accepted model, with several studies applying and confirming the approach.

However, other researchers began to argue that while valuable, the integrative-instrumental divide was also problematic (Ely, 1986; Dörnyei, 1990). The main contentions lay in the fact that distinguishing between integrative and instrumental motivation is often

not straightforward and furthermore, the two orientations may not provide the sole reasons as to why someone decides to learn another language (Ely, 1986: 28). In light of this, Clément and Kruidenier's (1983) research led them to define a further three orientations (or language learning reasons) alongside instrumentality: travel, knowledge and friendship, which they separated from the overall umbrella of integrative motivation. Others contended that the simple integrative-instrumental divide did not account for "complicated changes over time in a student's reasons for learning a language" (Oxford and Shearin, 1994: 14) or that it was, in fact, too influential (Dörnyei, 1994a: 273). As Crookes and Schmidt (1991: 501) point out, the model was "so dominant that alternative concepts [were not] seriously considered".

The need, therefore, to examine the role these concepts and others may play in an educational setting rather than a social-psychological one prompted renewed interest in L2 motivation led by Dörnyei and colleagues. This allowed them to extend and develop Gardner's (1985) original construct and shift the perspective from a socio-cultural one to an educational one, thus expanding the original theoretical framework to include new research (e.g. Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994a, b; Oxford and Shearin, 1994). The idea appeared not to move entirely away from Gardner and his associates' theories but to find others which would not only complement them (Dörnyei, 1994b: 516) but also incorporate the developments in mainstream psychological and educational psychological theories of motivation (*op cit*, 513) which had been made in recent years. Such thinking was often viewed critically by those firmly rooted in the Gardnerian tradition (Gardner and Tremblay, 1994; Tremblay and Gardner, 1995; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003) but it enabled the complexities of L2 motivation to be broken down and analysed in new lights. As Oxford

(1994: 514) explains, a need arose to “look at motivation in greater detail, with keener vision...and with more urgency”.

This approach and being able to look at motivation in greater detail than the original integrative-instrumental divide, fits well with the parameters of this study as it allows aspects more specific to the English secondary school context to be examined. It provides a more pragmatic framework grounded in recent developments in educational psychology (e.g. Dörnyei, 2001) within which to explore the themes of foreign language learning and the classroom environment. It also allows the dynamic aspect of motivation in relation to the L2 learner to be examined, that is, the idea that motivation is not static but subject to fluctuation over periods of time. This is an important consideration and will be addressed further in Section 2.8.

2.4 Complexities surrounding FLL and the classroom environment

Moving away from the socio-cultural elements of second language acquisition and into the realms of the classroom reveals a quite different context for foreign language learning. It is here that the limitations of the traditional integrative-instrumental dichotomy of L2 motivation can be most keenly felt and that the complexities of motivation in FLL are articulated. In developing a new framework to relate aspects of L2 motivation more specifically to classroom contexts, Dörnyei (1994a: 274) explains how L2 learning is at the same time:

a) a communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject, b) an integral part of the individual's identity involved in almost all mental activities, and also c) the most important channel of social organisation embedded in the culture of the community where it is used. Thus, L2 learning is more complex than simply mastering new information and knowledge; in addition to the environmental and cognitive factors normally associated with learning in current educational

psychology, it involves various personality traits and social components (emphasis in original).

That FLL is so complex and involves such a wide variety of behavioural, social and cognitive factors suggests that earlier models of L2 motivation are not sufficient to fully explain the wider aspects of motivation surrounding the process. Thus Dörnyei's (1994a: 280) tripartite model, which encompasses a language level, a learner level and a learning situation level provides a more nuanced approach by embracing different theories to help clarify the motivational areas apparent in FLL.

2.5 The social aspect of language learning

One of the main points highlighted by Dörnyei's (1994a) framework is the social aspect of language learning. Although this appears at what Dörnyei (1994a) labels the most basic levels of the construct – the language level – this social aspect holds great significance in the English secondary school context. As already noted, foreign language learning in English secondary schools very often coincides with the onset of adolescence (Hawkins, 1996) where students begin feeling more insecure and self-conscious. That language

belongs to a person's whole social being: it is part of one's identity, and it is used to convey this identity to other people. The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills...it involves an alteration of self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner (Williams, 1994: 177)

means that FLL cannot be described as a "socially neutral field" (Dörnyei, 1998: 122).

Consequently students must navigate issues of identity, self-image and confidence, and the discomfort of operating according to new and different social and cultural norms in the FLL classroom when they are most likely already having to do similar in their social and personal lives both within and outside school.

As Gardner (1985: 6) rationalises, “students’ attitudes towards the specific language group are bound to influence how successful they will be in incorporating aspects of that language”. This is also echoed in Bartram’s (2010) research, in which he argues that imposing elements of another culture into one’s own life-space (Dörnyei, 2001: 47) and the learner’s willingness to allow this to happen will clearly be determined to a large extent by his or her attitudes (Bartram, 2010: 5). If the social aspects of FLL are not accepted by students then motivating them to learn the language becomes an increasingly difficult task.

2.6 The classroom dimension of L2 motivation

Although Dörnyei and colleagues advocated a move away from the Gardnerian model of L2 motivation, understanding the social nature of FLL highlights how Gardner’s (1985) integrative concept can still be retained in newer constructs of L2 motivation. However, as these values and attitudes are largely determined by the social milieu in which FLL takes place (Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998: 205) it became increasingly apparent to scholars in the field that additional focus on the classroom dimension of L2 motivation was just as important, perhaps playing a far more significant role than had previously been assumed (*ibid*). Whilst Dörnyei’s (1994a) model addresses the classroom dimension at the learning situation level, this will be examined here in the light of the social nature (cf. language level) of FLL as there are some useful links between the two.

Dörnyei’s (1994a) learning situation level corresponds broadly to the L2 learning environment. It is here that his attempts to outline a comprehensive motivational construct relevant to L2 classroom motivation (1994a: 283) is most apparent. It also marks a move away from the socio-psychological processes dominant in Gardner’s (1985) work to a socio-environmental structure focusing on situated learning and highlighting the role of the social

context (Dörnyei, 2003: 12). This micro perspective, as opposed to Gardner and colleagues' macro perspective which addresses learning patterns of whole communities, allows for keener emphasis on instructed language learning which usually takes place in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2003: 11). This is supported by the work of Clément *et al* (1994), who also promote the salience of investigating classroom learning contexts.

Given that the picture of FLL in English state secondary schools currently reveals a lack of motivation in students to study another language, the importance of addressing motivation from a classroom perspective has been identified as a central theme underpinning this study. While factors such as curriculum content, teaching methodologies and types of learning task can all contribute towards effective foreign language learning, more recent arguments suggest that conditions surrounding the provision of a motivating classroom climate are of growing importance (Dörnyei, 2007: 719). This underlines the necessity of the paradigm shift in L2 motivation during the 1990s and, as explained above, the need to look at the micro context of the classroom environment itself as opposed to wider contexts in which languages can be learned. As Dörnyei (*ibid*) argues, long-term, sustained learning such as L2 acquisition cannot take place unless the educational context provides (alongside adequate teaching practices) sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in learners.

Three areas are identified by Dörnyei (2007: 720) as influencing the L2 classroom environment: classroom management, dynamics of the learner group and motivational teaching practices and strategies. These aspects have influenced the development of this study in that they allow a better framework of what may or may not affect the motivation of students from within the examined classroom environment. The three areas share some

overlap but also provide different angles from which the students' own accounts of language learning can be analysed. In turn, the themes emerging from these different areas have helped to sensitise the direction of the study. They cover such issues as leadership style, the importance of classroom issues including seating, group work and other learning tasks and autonomous learning, as well as group cohesion (Dörnyei, 2007). The idea of maintaining and protecting motivation is also raised (Dörnyei, 2007: 728) which provides potential avenues for further study.

The three areas mentioned above also link in well with other features of L2 motivation research developed by Dörnyei (1994a) at the learner level of his model and are furthered by other researchers such as Noels and colleagues (1999, 2001, 2003). They also continue the theme of the social nature of FLL and the importance of the classroom environment and are explored below in more detail.

2.7 The focus on aspects of motivation specific to the L2 learner

In investigating why motivation appears to be the crucial missing factor in why students at English state secondary schools do not continue with foreign language study once they reach the stage where it is no longer compulsory, this review has addressed the differences between SLA and FLL and has examined the complexities of the social nature of language learning along with the importance of the classroom environment. These aspects attend to the more external influences at play in this area but do not focus upon factors which relate to students individually. In order to reach a better understanding of how students themselves may or may not be motivated to learn another language and so that their own accounts of their language learning experiences can be addressed effectively, it is also

useful, according to researchers such as Dörnyei (1994) and Noels *et al* (2003), to look at the factors which may affect their personal levels of motivation.

According to the learner level of Dörnyei's (1994a) construct, two motivational components are central to the L2 learner: the need for achievement and self-confidence. The former builds on the idea of motivation existing on an intrinsic-extrinsic continuum, whilst the latter includes aspects relating to variables such as language anxiety, perceived L2 competence, attributions about past experiences and self-efficacy (Dörnyei, 1994a: 279). These facets each have ties with the social nature of language learning and are controlled and influenced to some extent by the type of environment in which FLL takes place. Moreover the two components and their associated characteristics can be examined in light of what can be argued to be missing from constructs and models of L2 motivation: the voice of the students themselves. Many of the theories supporting motivation at the learner level call upon teachers and other influencers such as parents to drive and reinforce students' motivation, yet there is little in the literature which addresses how students themselves might be able to talk about what motivates or demotivates them and what this might mean to them. Indeed, many of the studies carried out in this area are quantitative rather than qualitative and do not seem to draw directly on students' first hand experiences to gather information which may provide a different perspective on issues of motivation. This apparent gap in the literature forms another reason for this study and will be returned to in section 2.10 (page 50).

2.7.1 The need for achievement

The concept of self-determination (Deci and Ryan, 1985) or the theory of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation lies behind the notion of need for achievement at Dörnyei's (1994a)

learner level. Intrinsic motivation drives the need in students to engage in interesting behaviours, develop competencies and accommodate their social environment. In short, self-determination encourages learners to act out of choice (Deci and Ryan, 1985: 38). Conversely, extrinsic motivation, which is deemed to exist upon a continuum ranging from external regulation (activities carried out that are determined by sources external to the individual) through to identified regulation (where an individual carries out an activity because of its importance for achieving a valued goal) (Noels *et al*, 2003: 39) is a weaker form of motivation, leaving students less likely to want to achieve the goal at hand. In fact, some have argued that extrinsic motivators such as reward systems do more damage than good in terms of encouraging students to remain motivated and engaged in the task at hand (Dickinson, 1995; Urdan and Schoenfelder, 2006). Consequently research shows that intrinsically motivated students are more likely to continue with their language studies (e.g. Ramage, 1990).

However, self-determination theory assumes that students have acted or can act out of choice to carry out the activity in question, namely language learning. In many English secondary schools, FLL is not something students have chosen to study. Some may have to continue with the subject because of chosen qualification pathways or because of school regulations. Therefore self-determination may be less likely to occur and students may become more amotivated or extrinsically motivated than if they had been able to make the choice themselves. Similarly, self-determination theory does not help explain why a large number of students in English secondary schools choose to abandon language learning as soon as they are able. If self-determination or intrinsic motivation does not sustain language learning efforts then it is important to turn to other theories which may be able to offer

more ideas. In these instances self-determination brings new emphasis to the development of learner autonomy as a way of increasing motivation in FLL contexts (Dörnyei, 1998: 124).

2.7.2 Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy is not a new concept and a wealth of literature exists on the topic (see Benson, 2007 for a review). However, in terms of FLL, it has recently been explored in more depth with regards to being a useful tool for increasing students' intrinsic motivation (e.g. Noels *et al*, 1999; 2001). A common theme is that autonomous learners become more highly motivated and that autonomy leads to better and more effective work (Dickinson, 1995: 165). As Noels *et al*, (2001: 425) emphasise, "students need to develop the sense that they are in control of their own learning process – in a sense, masters of their own linguistic fate". This links clearly to self-determination theory in that perceptions of autonomy generate intrinsic motivation and consequently sustained effort at the learning task (*ibid*). Similar links with attribution theory (see below) are also evident in the notion of taking responsibility for one's own learning and being able to persist in the face of failure. Benson and Voller (1997) warn, however, that autonomy can be viewed in many different ways. They identify technical, psychological and political versions of the concept and advise that researchers should make clear which version they refer to in their work. In this instance, the theories of Noels and others tie in well with Benson and Voller's (1997: 19) psychological definition, which finds autonomy as "a capacity – a construct of attitudes and abilities – which allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning".

Taking responsibility for one's learning is another common theme in the literature, but in order for students to do this, an autonomy-supporting environment needs to be created. According to Noels (2009: 302), autonomy can be supported in a variety of ways, such as

providing appropriate choices, encouraging self-initiation and minimising the use of controls. She also advises (2009: 302-3) that senses of relatedness (belonging with other people in one's community) and competence (the feeling that one has the capacity to effectively carry out an action) should also be generated, as these are the key variables in learners' self-determination processes. Indeed, studies have shown (e.g. Noels *et al* 1999, 2001) that students who perceive their learning environments as non-controlling and helpful are more likely to develop and maintain intrinsic motivation in contrast to those who find their environment authoritarian and negative. Those whose perceptions fall into the latter category are more likely to feel controlled and demotivated. As Noels *et al* (1999: 31) assert, by interacting with students in ways that develop their autonomy and competence, teachers may be able to change the students' type of motivation and thereby contribute to better learning. This points to the teacher as having a central role in the development of learner autonomy but also indicates one of the few instances in the L2 motivation literature where seeking discussion with students is suggested.

2.7.3 Self-confidence

The second of the two motivational components at Dörnyei's learner level is self-confidence, referring to the belief that one has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals or perform tasks competently (Dörnyei, 1994: 277), similar to the notion of competence above. Clément *et al* (1994: 422) argue that self-confidence is the most important determinant of attitude and effort expended toward L2 learning. This is closely linked to self-efficacy theory, which involves an individual's judgement of their ability to perform a specific action (Dörnyei, 1994: 277). Those with a strong sense of self-efficacy, often developed as a result of reinforcement and positive evaluation from persons of

influence such as teachers or parents, are more likely to be able to deal with failure as well as success. Those whose sense of self-efficacy is undeveloped may struggle more than others, suggesting that teachers should seek to help them by providing meaningful, achievable and success-engendering language tasks (*ibid*). This ties in well with the notions of self-determination theory outlined above, as well as with those of attribution theory (Weiner, 1972) which advances the idea that learners approach new tasks based on their past failures and successes. Attributions can be ascribed to uncontrollable factors such as low ability or controllable factors such as effort. Failures ascribed to uncontrollable factors decrease the expectancy of future success more than failures ascribed to controllable factors (Weiner, 1979, cited in Dörnyei, 1998: 119). Williams *et al* (2004: 20) also note that as students' attributions for their successes and failures are most likely to be perceived explanations rather than "true" reasons, attribution theory is useful in helping them rethink these reasons, which can ultimately lead to thinking and acting in more positive ways about given educational tasks. This is supported by Dörnyei's (2003: 9) claim that because of the "generally high frequency of language learning failure worldwide, attributional processes are assumed to play an important role in language studies".

2.8 The dynamic aspect of motivation

The topics addressed earlier in this chapter explore aspects of motivation which are situated and context-driven. This final point concentrates instead on a different component; that of motivation's dynamic aspect. As outlined by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998: 64), motivation can be defined as:

...the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes

whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritised, operationalised, and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out.

Whilst classroom environment, need for achievement and learner autonomy are important considerations surrounding the complex concept of motivation, they are not seen as allowing for the fact that motivation is “not static but dynamically evolving and changing in time” (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998: 43). Therefore a need to identify an approach within the field of motivation research which could account for the “daily ‘ups and downs’ of motivation to learn” (Shoaib and Dörnyei, 2005: 23) was highlighted. In doing so, researchers sought to view motivation as a changeable attribute, subject to very diverse phases (*ibid*). Such reframing of the concept saw the development of what Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) named the “process model” of L2 motivation. Here, three stages of motivation are highlighted: the preactional stage, the actional stage and the postactional stage, accounting for the generation, maintenance and protection of motivation respectively as learners navigate the learning process (see also Dörnyei, 2001).

However, continued research in the field revealed limitations of this framework. Although based on the temporal nature of motivation, it continued to be characterised by cause-effect relations (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 70). This was identified as a shortcoming because it still did not fully take into account the dynamic complexity of the learning process or the multiple goals and agendas shaping learner behaviour (Ushioda and Dörnyei, 2012: 398). Consequently, a further shift to what became known as the socio-dynamic phase became apparent, with a focus on “the situated complexity of the L2 motivation process and its organic development in interaction with a multiplicity of internal, social, and contextual factors...”(*ibid*).

In relation to the present study, including an interpretation of L2 motivation from a socio-dynamic perspective is beneficial because it brings together several of its features (e.g. the temporal aspect, dynamic fluctuations, classroom environment, learner differences) and encourages the examination of learning histories and how these can shed new light on the L2 motivational complex (Shoaib and Dörnyei, 2005: 36). In doing so, combining environmental and temporal contexts can offer genuinely rich description (*ibid*) and allow for students' voices – i.e. the accounts of their language learning experiences – to be accessed, listened and used within new motivational frameworks.

At this stage it is perhaps useful to supply a working definition of L2 motivation upon which the remainder of the thesis will be based. This description draws together the central components of the L2 motivation complex and attempts to unite situated and dynamic factors in order to “take account of the broader complexities of language learning and use in the modern globalised world (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 70). My definition is as follows:

Foreign language learning motivation is an intricate balance of situated and dynamic factors existing on both an interactional continuum (e.g. between individual and context) and a temporal axis. It is neither static nor linear and must take into account fluctuations in students' interests, priorities, emotions and desire to learn.

Diagrammatically, it may look something like this:

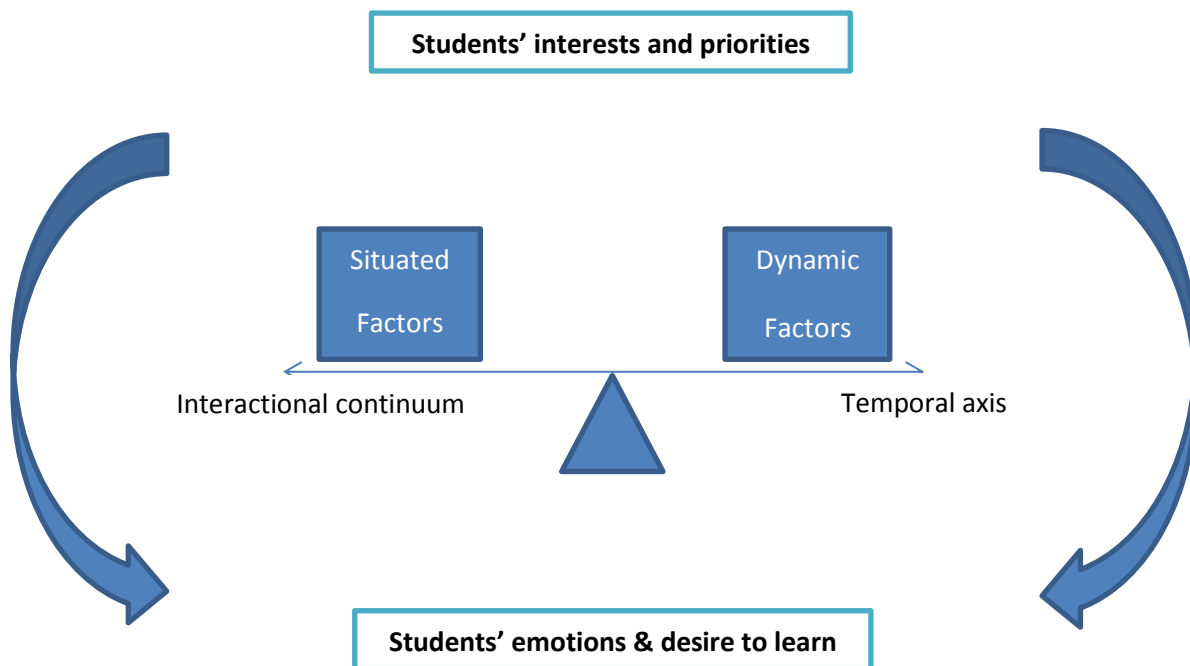


Figure one: motivation diagram

2.9 Summary of L2 motivation factors

In conclusion this review reveals the broad and complex nature of L2 motivation. The field draws upon a wide range of influences from diverse spheres, each conceptualising motivation in different ways. Uniting these into a comprehensive account of foreign language learning motivation reflects the multifaceted aspect of language learning itself and to support the present study, certain issues have been drawn out as particularly relevant to the FLL context in English state secondary schools. To recap, the main theories explored include Gardner's (1985) macro social-cultural framework, Dörnyei's (1994a) tripartite model focusing on the learner as well as the micro social-educational context (i.e. the classroom), Deci and Ryan's (1985) and later Noels and colleagues' (2003) work on self-determination theory, and Dörnyei's collaborations with other scholars investigating the dynamic and temporal aspects of motivation (e.g. Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998; Shoaib and

Dörnyei, 2005). Supporting theories include attribution theory (Weiner, 1972) and learner autonomy theories (Dickinson, 1995).

Given that much of the research carried out before the “education shift” in the 1990s was based upon the wider background of second language acquisition, the work of Dörnyei and others (e.g. Oxford and Shearin, 1994), which brings aspects of foreign language learning into sharper relief, is of particular importance because it allows a more specific focus on the context in which this study takes place. However, some of the ideas and theories proposed from this educational perspective do not fully address the FLL situation currently faced by many secondary schools in England. Students are often not found to demonstrate self-determination or are not intrinsically motivated to continue their language studies.

Consequently the work of Noels *et al* (2003) and a number of Dörnyei’s (1994a) suggestions surrounding learner autonomy and group cohesion are what inform the research presented in the following chapters.

The dynamic aspect of motivation (as opposed to it previously being considered a more static concept) provides a similar basis. However, although the shift to the socio-dynamic phase was viewed positively, adding further depth to the complexity of the overall motivation concept, its inconstant nature still rendered researching motivation a difficult task. As Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011: 198) point out, motivation is not stable and changes over time as a result of personal progress as well as multi-level interactions with environmental factors and other individual difference variables (such as those discussed earlier in this chapter). This, in conjunction with the fact that motivation is not directly observable (*ibid*), means that any attempts to research it must be carefully planned and the difficulties surrounding it understood. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011: 199) advise targeting

relevant motivational aspects, that is, the specific aspect of L2 motivation one is interested in (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 199) in order to maximise the usefulness of the research. These should then be further defined by considering motivational influences and priorities among these (*ibid*). Following such advice, the specific motivation aspect I have chosen to look at is year 9 students' experiences of foreign language learning. The related motivational influences take the form of the concepts of autonomy, belonging and competence as already discussed and the research priority is student voice, that is, what students themselves say and think about FLL.

I argue that incorporating an awareness of student voice perspectives into models of L2 motivation will strengthen such frameworks and provide the basis for a better understanding of how students approach language learning. Learner autonomy and associated concepts appear in both the L2 motivation literature and that of student voice as means of developing student motivation and as such will be examined in more detail below.

2.10 Student voice and possible links to theories of L2 motivation

The previous section argued that current constructs of L2 motivation may not be sufficient to stimulate interest in and continued study of foreign languages in the English secondary school context. Despite the application of concepts such as self-determination (intrinsic motivation) and self-confidence, along with focusing more specifically on the FLL rather than SLA context, the voice of the learners themselves is rarely called upon to help develop theories of L2 motivation. A selection of recent research shows which themes have been addressed by which methods:

AUTHOR (DATE)	THEME	METHOD
Clément <i>et al</i> (1994)	Attitude, anxiety, motivation	Quantitative: questionnaire, factor/correlational analysis
Dörnyei and Csizér (1998)	How to motivate students	Quantitative: questionnaire, statistical/reliability analysis
Schmidt and Watanabe (2001)	Motivation, language learning strategies, learner preferences	Quantitative: questionnaire, factor analysis
Noels et al (2003)	Motivational orientations and self-determination theory	Quantitative: questionnaire, factor/reliability analysis
Csizér and Dörnyei (2005)	Learner motivational profiles	Quantitative: questionnaire, cluster analysis
Bernaus and Gardner (2008)	Language teaching strategies and effect on motivation	Quantitative: questionnaire, path/linear modelling analysis
Hernandez (2008)	Integrative motivation as predictor of achievement	Mixed methods: questionnaire, oral proficiency interview, examinations, multiple/logistic regression analysis
Kormos and Csizér (2008)	Motivation and age	Quantitative: questionnaire, factor/reliability analysis
Kouritzin et al (2009)	Factors influencing successful language learning	Quantitative: questionnaire, principal components analysis
Kozaki and Ross (2011)	Contextual dynamics and motivation	Quantitative: questionnaire, multilevel modelling

Table one: examples of recent motivation research

Few studies appear to have taken a qualitative approach. A search via the University of Brighton's online library facility using the keywords "qualitative" and "L2 motivation" revealed only two qualitative studies (Williams and Burden, 1999; Kim, 2009) and two mixed methods studies (Williams et al, 2002; Ghenghesh, 2010) involving interviews as part of the data collection stage. It therefore seemed important and perhaps even necessary to redress the balance in favour of quantitative studies by proceeding with qualitative research for this study. Indeed, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011: xii) recognise the need for and significance of qualitative, situative, non-positivist research in the field and this approach also ties in well with the area of motivation I have chosen to explore (see page 51). Engaging in student voice research and examining students' experiences of foreign language learning demands, in my view, a qualitative approach where one is able to access learning histories (Shoaib and Dörnyei, 2005: 36) in order to widen the scope of our understanding and add data-driven (rather than speculative) depth to the analysis of a phenomenon (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 204).

As student voice research explores how to engage and motivate students in various aspects of learning, I contend here that aspects of this field may correspond well with L2 motivation research. I believe that unifying some of the central themes in each area will help create a new lens through which students' accounts of their FLL experiences can be more readily viewed and utilised to improve motivation.

2.11 What is *student voice*?

First it is perhaps helpful to define what I understand to be "student voice" and how I have interpreted it for the purposes of this study. Rudduck *et al* (1996: 1) outline the approach in explaining that:

...what pupils say about teaching, learning and schooling is not only worth listening to but provides an important – perhaps the most important – foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools.

Mitra (2004: 651) elaborates further by stating that:

...student voice activities can create meaningful experiences for youth that help to meet fundamental developmental needs – especially for students who otherwise do not find meaning in their school experiences.

What these perspectives suggest is that student voice can have multiple purposes. On the one hand it can be recognised as a valid and legitimate discourse within an education environment, providing a conduit for students to express their views but also simultaneously encouraging this “voice” to be heard by adults and educators. On the other hand it can be seen as a way of creating meaning for learners by lending more weight to their learning experiences through engaging with student voice-related activities. Applied to the present study, the notion of student voice therefore also works in two ways: not only does it provide part of the conceptual framework for the research (in conjunction with ideas found in the L2 motivation literature) by advocating the ideas of autonomy, belonging and competence as central to the development of motivation in the L2 classroom, but it also surfaces as a prominent finding in that the action it inspires (e.g. listening to learners, learners being asked to give their opinions) can serve to boost students’ motivation.

The assumptions central to student voice research are that students have something to say about teaching and learning, that their voices are worth listening to and that this can pave the way for school improvement. Applying these assumptions to the context of foreign language learning can provide new ways of understanding students’ attitudes to MFL as a subject. Combining them with elements of L2 motivation research can also further extend these ways of understanding and lead to wider inclusion of students’ accounts of their

experiences within strategies for motivating language learners. That the literature on FLL and student voice is scarce (see Payne, 2007, as an exception) is indicative of how under-explored this area is.

2.12 Exploring the broad field of student voice research

As with L2 motivation, the student voice field is also broad, encompassing many different research directions. An overview of the literature reveals such topics as school reform (e.g. Silva, 2001); school improvement (e.g. Rudduck *et al*, 1996), reciprocal learning between teachers and students (Mitra, 2001), developing strategies and assessing impact (MacBeath *et al*, 2001) and learning to hear students' voice and develop the act of listening (Bragg, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2006). This variety points to the breadth of areas viewed as benefitting from an understanding of the student voice perspective as well to the fact that student voice is gaining ground in becoming an important aspect of teaching and learning. Moreover, what most of these studies have in common is the shared assumption that students can, and should have, a sense of ownership of their learning and what happens to them during their school experience.

Whilst early student voice research concerned ideas of empowerment and the rights of young people (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000: 78) more recent research has shifted attention towards student consultation, signalling respect for their opinions and inviting greater involvement on their part (Rudduck, 2006: 137). This also suggests that student outcomes will be improved and more successful if students actively participate in shaping them (Mitra, 2004: 652). While focusing on what students have to say is not new (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004), it does offer an arena in which learners can be consulted about how they learn, how that learning is best achieved and what might impede it. In this study being able to discuss

learning with students is viewed as significant in that it helps access their own perspectives on FLL (thereby adhering to phenomenographical principles of working from a second-order perspective, see Chapter 3) and ultimately leads to their “voice” becoming a tool for improving motivation. Through this process it also becomes easier to see how learning experiences affect motivation and how students learn (Hadar and Hotam, 2012: 187).

2.13 Theoretical underpinnings of student voice

Although much of the research on student voice offers largely practical advice about how to carry out participation or consultation projects, there is evidence of growing debate regarding the field’s theoretical underpinnings. Student voice work encompasses a number of core values and assumptions which have given rise to this discussion. Aside from the danger of consulting students for reasons other than their own personal and social development as observed by Rudduck (2006), other concepts have been framed by various scholars as important considerations in terms of the development of a theoretical framework for student voice work. Robinson and Taylor (2007) identify four core values within student voice research: communication as dialogue; participation and inclusivity; power relations; change and transformation. Fielding (2004: 296) also highlights the transformative potential of student voice and supports its dialogic nature but counsels against certain presumptions which involve speaking about and for others as well as “getting heard”. Cook-Sather (2006: 366) offers insights into how student voice signals presence, involvement and commitment on the part of students and alters dominant power imbalances between adults and young people; whilst Mitra (2004), from a social interaction perspective, similarly examines how student voice allows for an increase in students’ senses of agency, belonging and competence. These varying perspectives underline the tensions

between institutional gains (the benefits of school improvement) and personal gains on the students' behalf, such as confidence and the shaping of personal identity (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006). They also challenge the often long-held assumptions that educators and educational researchers know more than young people about how they learn or what it is they need to learn (Cook-Sather, 2002: 3).

Further complexities regarding the theoretical basis of student voice research arise when the goal of bringing forth student voice is considered. As already noted research in this area can take many forms and have a range of different objectives. Some may be keen to construct "discourses of respect, empowerment and citizenship in school" (Busher, 2012: 113); others may be looking to "rupture the security of traditional power relationships between teachers and students" (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006: 225); others still may use it to examine ideas of trust within the classroom (Mitsoni, 2006), naming only a few of the ideas found in the literature. These extensive possibilities are informed by similarly broad theoretical concepts, making it difficult to pinpoint one particular approach above another. However, Cook-Sather's (2002) research offers a useful framework for looking at student voice within and beyond the classroom and the different perspectives associated with these positions. She identifies a range of pedagogies along with educational researchers' views as well as those of social critics which all come together in different ways to "authorise young people's perspectives" (2002: 5). These, she argues, are the angles from which people attempt to fill the missing voice in educational research – that of the student (*ibid*). This study follows a constructivist perspective in that it supports the notions that "students need to be authors of their own understanding and assessors of their own learning" and that their

understanding of these learning experiences can contribute to changing pedagogical practice in order to better facilitate learning (*ibid*).

2.14 Defining “student voice” and use of the approach in the study

Qualitative methods involving interviews are typically carried out in order to elicit students’ views. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. However, it is important here to address how the notion of “student voice” has been applied in the study. Beyond the idea of simply collecting student voice data via interviews, I assert that the study rests on the principles of student voice research in that its main aims are to:

- Seek out and discuss the issues surrounding foreign language learning as raised by the participants
- Purposely include a range of voices in order to minimise questions about who is “authorised” to speak (Cook-Sather, 2002 , cited in Bahou, 2011: 5)
- Provide new knowledge and understanding for teachers and other educators about participants FLL experiences
- Use any new knowledge and understanding gained to affect change
- Compare students’ view with those of adults’ or “accepted knowledge”
- Make students’ comments visible and accessible (in the form of transcripts) to teachers
- Explain to students the (intended) outcome of their participation

These points are echoed in the work of other student voice researchers such as Bahou (2011) and Fielding and Rudduck (2002) when they describe the objectives and challenges of student voice work. They are adhered to throughout the research process and are

supported by the use of phenomenography as methodology (see pages 72-73 for further discussion). As a result, student voice as applied here can be seen in three different ways: as something which empowers students to engage in the learning process; a means or tool to help enhance motivation (listening to students and seeking their opinion); a dialogue resulting from a conversation in which students' views are sought.

In the present context the three applications of student voice work in combination as follows: the central tenets of student voice (autonomy, belonging and competence) help anchor the debate surrounding the importance of voice research as a means of enhancing motivation (and therefore becoming an added component of L2 motivation models), whilst voice as an end result of conducting interviews with students is what is analysed (see Chapter 5) in order to develop student voice as an eventual tool in the L2 classroom. It is hoped that the data collected for this study will ultimately inform future practice in schools (see Section 7.8 Implications, p254) by offering new or alternative approaches to languages teaching and learning based on students' own views. The style of interviewing adopted during the data collection phase (see Chapter 4) allowed participants to foreground aspects they felt were the important in relation to their FLL experiences. Therefore it can be argued that the resulting comments centre on authentic issues pertinent to the students rather than merely responses to questions posed by adults in a position of authority.

The features of student voice most relevant in this instance are those which focus upon enhancing learner motivation and engagement. It is here that the similarities to certain aspects of L2 motivation research are most evident. Table two below displays possible links between the areas of student voice and L2 motivation:

Themes emerging from L2 motivation literature	Themes emerging from student voice literature	Possible links
Learner autonomy (e.g. Noels <i>et al</i> , 1999, 2001; Benson, 2007)	Growth of student agency (e.g. Mitra, 2004; McIntyre <i>et al</i> , 2005)	Main: notions of autonomy, belongingness/relatedness and competence
Social/group contexts of learning (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994a, 2003)	Sense of citizenship and being part of a community of learners (e.g. Rudduck & MacIntyre, 2007; Busher, 2012)	Related: Enhancing engagement, achievement and motivation Understanding group and social dynamics
Self-confidence (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994a; Clément <i>et al</i> , 1994)	Pupil confidence (e.g. Ruddock & Fielding, 2006)	Involving students in teaching and learning

Table two: links between themes in L2 motivation and student voice literature

Both fields appear to address three common themes: autonomy, belonging and competence, all of which can simultaneously drive students' motivation and help to develop their "voice" in terms of talking about their experiences of learning. Although student voice (by any definition) is not something that seems to have received explicit attention in the L2 motivation literature, as many of the motivational strategies presented are top-down approaches to be executed by teachers rather than students themselves (Dörnyei, 1994a, b), the ideas encapsulated in student voice research may have much to offer studies looking at issues relating to foreign language learning. As Chambers (2001: 15) points out, the perceptions of consumers (here, foreign language learners) in today's market-driven society

are of paramount importance. It would therefore seem appropriate, if not essential, to consider their views as central to any attempt to improve not only the status of FLL in schools, but also their enjoyment of and engagement in the subject.

2.15 Three main themes linking student voice and L2 motivation

The three main student voice themes (learner autonomy/agency, belonging and competence) which are particularly relevant to this study because they echo similar themes in the L2 motivation literature but also attend most directly to enhancing student engagement in learning and providing ways of hearing what students have to say about their learning experiences, are explored in more detail in this section. Rudduck *et al* (1996) observe that students often talk about what researchers have termed “conditions of learning” in school. These conditions refer to “how regimes and relationships shape [students’] sense of status as individual learners and as members of the community and, consequently, affect their sense of commitment to learning in school” (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000: 76). This definition draws attention to two key differences: learners as individuals and learners as members of a wider community. How student voice can affect learners as individuals will first be considered by looking at how student voice efforts can contribute to developing student agency and/or autonomy, which are also key concepts in the establishment of L2 motivation.

It is widely agreed in the student voice literature that some students are rarely afforded by schools the responsibility and autonomy they are used to outside of school and that their social maturity is often overlooked (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004: 1; Rudduck, 2006: 136). As a result, decisions about learning and overall school experiences are regularly made without any consultation of those who will be most affected by them. Advocates of student voice

call instead for students to be recognised as “expert witnesses” (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004) or “generous commentators and insightful critics” (MacBeath, 1999, cited in MacBeath *et al*, 2001) who may have much to offer when it comes to making improvements at whole school, curriculum and classroom levels. Recognising that students can offer valuable insights into “conditions of learning” and act as indispensable resources in this area has benefits for the students themselves as well as the school. However, such benefits should be carefully presented to any participating student and whatever they have to say should also be handled with care or otherwise the risk of damaging and limiting emerging student voices can be great and carry with it the negative assumption of tokenism (e.g. Fielding and Rudduck, 2002: 5). Nonetheless, if approached considerately and with appropriate preparation, listening to the perspectives of learners can result in student gains, not least increased autonomy and agency. Mitra (2004: 653) argues that this is one of the core assets central to youth development. The advantages she outlines are numerous and include: increased academic achievement, stronger engagement and developed sense of ownership, a stronger sense of one’s own abilities and improved understanding of how one learns. These are the same end-goals for foreign language learning as expressed in the L2 motivation literature (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994a; Noels *et al*, 1999, 2001) and thus suggest that using student voice channels for developing learner autonomy in an FLL context may yield positive results.

2.15.1 Learner autonomy

Within the field of L2 motivation an increased sense of agency is often viewed in terms of learner autonomy (Noels *et al*, 1999; 2001). However the overall aims of the two concepts are shared in that there is an explicit wish for students to take control of their own learning

processes. This taking of responsibility should then generate higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Yet what is not offered by the L2 motivation literature is how students might go about taking responsibility for their learning. Admittedly Dörnyei (1994a) offers some suggestions, but as mentioned previously, these are rather more teacher-led than student-initiated. What student voice efforts could therefore contribute are the means by which students can become involved in something which sparks their sense of agency and autonomy. Research has shown that students are very often ready and keen to strengthen their feelings of agency and ownership and increase their independence and autonomy not only within the classroom but also so they are prepared for life after school (McIntyre *et al*, 2005: 154). In a foreign language learning context, maximising instances whereby students can discuss and talk openly about their learning can foster a deeper feeling of autonomy and subsequently enhance language learning experiences. Listening to students' views about FLL becomes key because if we "fail to listen to student voices and dictate what we believe is best for them, we encourage their dependence rather than promote their autonomy" (Daniels and Arapostathis, 2005: 54).

2.15.2 A sense of belonging

Considering next the idea of learners as members of a wider community finds similarities with the concepts of belonging and group dynamics as advanced by L2 motivation researchers. Fielding and Rudduck (2002: 6) claim that an enhanced sense of membership of a learning community helps students feel more positively about school (see also Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). This notion of "belonging" as understood in the field of student voice refers to "developing relationships consisting of supportive, positive interaction with adults and peers and of opportunities to learn from one another" (Mitra, 2004: 669). Involving

students directly in school decision-making about issues of relevance to their own lives helps develop their sense of citizenship and provides a sense of ownership over school processes (Busher, 2012: 114). Appealing to students as participants in their own schooling rather than just recipients of it (Rowan, 1997, cited in Rudduck and Fielding, 2006: 221) allows them to be instigators of changes which may not only enhance their commitment to school and to learning but may also lead to increases in effort and attainment (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000: 82).

Feeling part of a learning community can also prompt students to appreciate collaboration and peer-peer interactions as well as student-teacher relationships, thereby creating a strong and co-operative learning group. McIntyre *et al* (2005: 154) observe that students value classroom contexts that permit collaboration amongst peers and help them to interactively negotiate meanings and understandings. Libbey (2004: 282) also notes that, regardless of what is being measured, young people who feel connected to school and that they belong, do better. Likewise, Mitra (2004: 669) finds that once students realise their perspectives are understood and respected (whether by fellow students, teachers or both) they begin to develop a sense of ownership and attachment, which is positively related to academic success and motivation. This echoes Dörnyei's (1994a, 1997) work on group dynamics and the group-specific level of his tripartite model of L2 motivation. He argues that group co-operation and a cohesive group climate is the basis for substantial peer interaction and, ultimately, motivation and satisfaction.

However, although the merits of belonging and group collaboration are evident, there are areas which need to be managed carefully. McIntyre *et al* (2005: 155) warn of potential frustrations students may experience if they are not grouped with peers or friends they

want to work with; whilst Silva (2001: 98) advises careful thought about “which students are representing the “student voice” of their school”, for it is all too easy to hear the more self-assured, confident and eloquent students above those who are silent – or silenced (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006: 228). In this way, for some students, groups may provide as much an obstacle to participation and “getting heard” as they pave the way for other students. If used as a tool to augment motivation in the languages classroom then teachers must take care to encourage and listen to views and opinions of all students, otherwise there is a danger of reinforcing traditional hierarchies and the promotion of some students above others. This may lead to students believing that no real change can be achieved and thus their motivation slips further away. As Mitra (2004: 672-3) observes, the aim of increasing a student’s sense of belonging lies in improved interactions with teachers and peers and the building of partnerships based on trust and respect. These connections are critical to overall academic success. Addressed on the more micro-level of the languages classroom it is clear that strategies for improving motivation can be found in certain aspects underpinning student voice work but these must be handled with care.

2.15.3 Feelings of competence

The final theme emerging from the L2 motivation literature and student voice research is that of competence. Returning again to Mitra (2004: 675) competence is defined as the “need to develop new skills and abilities, to actively solve problems and to be appreciated for one’s talents”. It is developed in part from the sense of belonging to a learning community and is also sharpened by one’s perceptions of autonomy and agency. In this way, the idea of competence can be viewed as particularly important. If students do not feel that they possess the skills necessary to meet the challenges they face, then they are less

likely to even attempt learning tasks presented to them (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, cited in Daniels and Arapostathis, 2005: 37). Consequently the concepts of agency/autonomy, belonging and competence form somewhat of an interdependent relationship where each aspect influences the others. As with agency and belonging, feelings of competence can be established and advanced by involvement in and taking ownership of learning processes. However, in order for this to occur, teachers and other education stakeholders must recognise that students have valid comments to make about their learning and that listening to and acting upon these can have far-reaching benefits. As Cook-Sather (2002: 3) acknowledges, when students are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered. This sense of empowerment contributes greatly to increased feelings of competence.

When viewed from an L2 motivation perspective, competence is framed as a key variable in learners' self-determination processes (i.e. the development of intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic motivation). In line with student voice calls for teachers to look towards creating environments in which students are actively consulted about various aspects of teaching and learning, the L2 motivation literature also demands that teachers help generate non-controlling and supportive settings in which students can develop their senses of autonomy and competence (e.g. Noels, 1999). Matching Mitra's (2004) findings that participation in student voice efforts results in a marked growth in agency, belonging and competence, Noels (2009) also finds that the more students feel that their needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied, the more they indicate intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic reasons for learning a language and the less they feel amotivated. This suggests that the constructs found in student voice research could contribute significantly to

cultivating deeper motivation within foreign language learning contexts. Allowing students' voices to not only be heard but properly listened to allows for their needs of agency/autonomy, belonging and competence to be fulfilled, which, when handled sensitively enough, could help to generate the motivation for learning which is often missing in the languages classroom.

2.16 Conclusion

This review has examined the main themes evident in student voice research relevant to this study (learner autonomy, belonging and competence) and has examined the field's theoretical underpinnings. Efforts in student voice research serve many different areas of teaching and learning and are reflected in the wide range of topics found in the literature, from school improvement through to learning how to listen. A similarly broad range of theories support student voice work and has given rise to healthy debate regarding the development of an appropriate theoretical framework. It is clear that student voice can be addressed on many levels, such as through policy and government initiatives or participating in school-based schemes or large-scale funded research projects. As a result, there are also many different forms of student participation, ranging from basic teacher-student consultation through to being active members of research projects.

I maintain that existing frameworks of L2 motivation are not sufficient to address problems of FLL motivation in English secondary schools because they do not take the voice or view of the learner into account. Exploring the field of student voice, however, reveals elements also common to the L2 motivation literature. These aspects of learner autonomy or agency, belonging and competence offer new ways of understanding L2 motivation and suggest that incorporating student voice into any attempt to raise students' intrinsic motivation in

foreign language learning could be beneficial. This is not only because it encourages listening to first-hand accounts of students' experiences but also because students themselves value being consulted on aspects of their learning.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapters set out the background and rationale for this study and have located it within the existing literature surrounding MFL policy and research in England, L2 motivation and student voice research. This chapter provides the methodological basis for the study, which is informed by a research approach known as phenomenography (Marton, 1981). I first discuss how and why I came to develop a phenomenographic study and then go on to examine the methodology's central themes as well as the main critiques levelled against it. Finally, I explore issues regarding reliability and validity.

The principle reason I chose to use phenomenography as the basis for this study is because it is grounded in the field of education research (Marton and Säljö, 1976). Quantitative methodologies, while popular in the field of L2 motivation (see page 52 for examples), would present very specific limitations in light of a phenomenographic study, the most obvious being the lack of qualitative data necessary to achieve the "thick description" (Geertz, 1993: 6) I believed crucial to enhanced understanding of students' experiences of FLL. Reducing participants' contributions to statistical elements would, in my view, create a further obstacle to accessing and hearing student voice. As one of the principle reasons for conducting the study was to foreground students' views on foreign language learning and create opportunities to probe and explore these opinions, asking participants to complete surveys or questionnaires would be at odds with this goal. I wanted to approach the study from an atypically qualitative perspective and ensure the data collected would showcase what students had to say and add depth to the research.

In conducting other small-scale research assignments I had previously encountered qualitative methodologies such as grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and

phenomenology (Husserl, 1960). However, whilst sharing human experience as a basis for research, I found that these perspectives would not fully enable me to conduct the research for this study in the way I wished, which was to capture and explore a range of student experiences of foreign language learning. Grounded theory's substantial focus on finding a core category upon which to "hang" the collected data conflicts with my belief that the different experiences voiced by participants would be seen as parts of a whole, i.e. that the various experiential descriptions arrived at would be viewed collectively. Phenomenology was also too restrictive for what I hoped to achieve with this study in that it seeks to understand the essence of the phenomenon under research in terms of richness of experience and the ways in which an *individual* experiences and describes that phenomenon (Marton, 1996, emphasis added). Quite often, this individual perspective is the researcher's own (Merleau-Ponty, 1996). However, I wanted to get as close as possible to my participants' experiences and realised that a phenomenological approach would not necessarily allow for this. As Larsson and Holmström (2007: 62) explain, in a phenomenological study the phenomenon *per se* is investigated but in a phenomenographic study the researcher investigates how (a group of) people view or understand the phenomenon, with variation in these ways of experiencing or conceptualising it a central objective.

I could also have followed a case study approach. Again, however, I felt this would not allow me to achieve the objectives of the study in the ways that phenomenography would. For example, case study methodology encourages a "spotlight on one instance" (Denscombe, 2003: 30) of the phenomenon under investigation rather than a range of examples. This contradicts the principles of a phenomenographic study in that seeking variation in

experience is the main aim. Whilst case study researchers may argue that illuminating the general by looking at the particular (*ibid*) allows for the discovery of insights that may not have been uncovered in a wider situation, for the purposes of this study, I felt examining collective experiences of foreign language learning would lead to deeper and richer experiential description. Furthermore, case study research generally requires the collection and analysis of a variety of different data sources, including documents, direct observation and participant observation alongside interviews (Yin, 2013: 102). As already discussed it is widely agreed that motivation is not an observable trait and has no objective measures (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 197), therefore making observation as a data source particularly difficult, if not impossible. In the same vein, it would be unlikely for learners or teachers to have created any specific documents relating to the concept of motivation, so collecting appropriate source documentation may also have been problematic.

By contrast, phenomenography intends to investigate the *range* of different ways in which participants view or experience a particular phenomenon and the focus rests on determining variation within these different ways of experiencing. As I would be investigating the foreign language learning experiences of different types of student, I felt that a methodology which not only concentrates on students' conceptions and experiences of learning (Prosser, 2000: 43) but also demands that these are accessed from a second-order perspective (i.e. one which aims to explore other people's experiences) (Marton, 1981) would provide a robust framework for this study. To ensure I had the best possible understanding of the approach before carrying out the present research, I attended a Special Interest Group (SIG) conference on phenomenography in Sweden, where both original and more recent proponents of the methodology spoke about the different ways in

which it can be applied. The emphasis placed on uncovering variation in students' experiences (of various phenomena) and how this variation can be used to understand the different experiences further assured me that a phenomenographic approach would strengthen my own study. Consequently I use phenomenography here as a means of seeking the variation in students' conceptions of FLL and any possible relations between them (Trigwell, 2000). I argue that exploring the variation in these conceptions will not only help to better understand students' ways of experiencing FLL, but will also indicate how such ways of experiencing can be used to effect positive changes in their learning environment.

Used to explore L2 motivation as one of the main features likely to emerge from students' experience of foreign language learning, in general terms phenomenography offers a suitable approach because it "meshes well with the assumption that through the investigation of the *relationship* between student and discipline, insights may be gained into the motives behind the choices students make and the behaviours they exhibit" (Breen, 1999: 3 emphasis in original). This in turn provides the theoretical framework based on empirical data that Breen (*ibid*) goes on to argue is essential for understanding dimensions of student motivation to learn. In line with this, Harris (2008: 60) also maintains phenomenography's suitability for this type of research by contending that other methodologies (particularly quantitative approaches) cannot be used to explain how people make sense of the concept of engagement. By following a phenomenographic approach, researchers can gain a more complete understanding of engagement through participants' own words (*ibid*). The situated, complex and dynamic nature of L2 motivation is well-suited to phenomenographic investigation again because of the emphasis placed on uncovering

variation. Motivation in the L2 classroom is unique to each of the participating students and will occur for different reasons at different times and in different ways depending on the factors discussed earlier in this chapter (see pages 41-46). As evidenced in Chapter 1, motivation to study other languages is often found to be severely lacking in English state secondary schools and teachers are working hard to change this. Consequently it is essential to work within a scaffold which allows for multiple variations to be underscored and drawn upon as vital to understanding experience of and motivation in FLL. Other methodologies, such as phenomenology as discussed previously, attempt to reduce such variation to a single essence, thereby eradicating the many different voices which come together to help shed light on a particular experience. As Booth (1997: 137) points out, by becoming aware of the possibility of a variation in ways of experiencing a phenomenon and by considering that variation, the way is opened to the possibility for change.

3.2 Phenomenography – an overview

Phenomenography is a relatively new qualitative research approach. It emerged within the field of education in Sweden during the 1970s (Marton and Säljö, 1976; Marton and Svensson, 1979; Säljö, 1979) as a reaction against the then largely dominant positivist research traditions (Svensson, 1997: 171; Dall’Alba and Hasselgren, 1996). Since then it has formed the basis of many educational studies (Bowden *et al*, 1992; Prosser, 1993; Entwistle, 1997; Boulton-Lewis *et al*, 2001; Campbell *et al*, 2001), as well as those in other fields such as the healthcare professions (Barnard *et al*, 1999; Sjöström and Dahlgren, 2002), leisure (Watkins, 2000), information technology (Pham *et al*, 2005; Alsop and Tompsett, 2006) and behaviour in the workplace (Sandberg, 2000). What each of these studies has in common is the desire to uncover the different ways in which people experience a given situation or

aspect of the world. Phenomenography's aim is to do precisely that. It is a qualitative approach which seeks primarily the 'description, analysis and understanding of experiences; that is, research which is directed towards experiential description (Marton, 1981: 180). As Hasselgren and Beach (1997:192) note, the etymological roots of the word *phenomenography* stem from the Greek *phainomenon* (appearance) and *graphein* (description). In simple terms, phenomenography means a description of appearances.

Phenomenography seeks to reveal the various different ways in which people experience the world. In early phenomenographic studies this was achieved by analysing and mapping accounts of experiences as described by research participants, usually during an interview, in order to answer the question (or a variation thereof), 'why are some people better at learning than others' (Marton, 1994: 4424). Findings from these initial studies showed that participants typically demonstrated a limited number of qualitatively different ways in which an aspect of the world is experienced (Marton and Säljö, 1976; Marton, 1981). This has since been shown to apply to many other studies both within and beyond the domain of education research (Marton, 1994).

This empirical and pragmatic approach (Hasselgren and Beach, 1997: 192) did not initially concern itself with any particular philosophical stance, as Svensson (1997: 164) explains:

Phenomenography is not a system of philosophical assumptions and theses, and it is not derived or deduced from such a system. It is an empirical research tradition. This means that metaphysical beliefs and ideas about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge do not come first.

Nonetheless by looking at the assumptions upon which the approach is based, i.e. the rejection of an objective reality and the attempt to understand the world through a collection of people's experiences, a non-dualist, interpretive ontology can be identified:

There is not a real world 'out there' and a subjective world 'in here'. The world [as experienced] is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them. (Marton and Booth, 1997: 13)

Although Marton and Booth (1997: 111) explain "[people] cannot act other than in relation to the world as [they] experience it", critics of this approach, such as Uljens (1996: 116), claim its weakness rests in the fact that "we shall never reach a description of the world, only a description of what we have experienced". However, phenomenography is not concerned with the ultimate true nature of reality (Svensson, 1997: 165) but with a pragmatic generation of how specific phenomena are understood (experienced) at both individual and collective levels (Hasselgren and Beach, 1997: 195).

In phenomenographic terminology, people's ways of experiencing phenomena are known as 'conceptions' (Sandberg, 1997: 203). Such conceptions are central to research of this kind and mark a move away from an objective view of knowledge towards one that is more subjective and relative (Svensson, 1997: 163). This epistemological stance is what Marton (1981: 177) calls a 'second-order perspective', as the interest lies not in describing various aspects of the world but in describing people's experience of various aspects of the world.

Conceptions drawn from data collected in a phenomenographic study form 'pools of meaning' (Marton and Booth, 1997: 133) from which 'categories of description' (Marton, 1988) are abstracted. As is the case in other qualitative research methodologies such as grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), categories must emerge from the data and should not be forced or pre-defined. These categories of description are then linked (often hierarchically) in the form of an 'outcome space' (Marton and Booth, 1997: 125). The outcome space is a diagrammatic representation of the research findings (and thus the phenomenon under investigation) and should aim to reveal the structural relationships

between the categories of description. The belief that structural relationships between categories exist also highlights the non-dualistic epistemological assumption underlying the approach (Åkerlind, 2005: 322).

A critical appraisal of phenomenography's epistemological footing reveals similarities to constructivism (Ireland *et al*, 2008) in that both look at individuals' ways of experiencing or making sense of something, although constructivism can be said to adopt a dualist position by examining how individuals engage with objects in the world and make sense of them (Crotty, 1998: 79). This is acknowledged by Booth (2008: 451), one of the leading proponents of phenomenography, but limited in that "phenomenographic emphasis is on learning content, coming to see important knowledge in particular ways and how to contextualise them, and not at all on learning social structures that have formed around knowledge and how to manoeuvre in them." Similarities to constructionism, the "collective generation (and transmission) of meaning" (Crotty, 1998: 58), can also be found in phenomenography's attempts to investigate how phenomena are understood collectively. Indeed, Richardson (1999: 68) argues that "the dependence of phenomenography on discursive accounts demands a constructionist interpretation of [conceptions]." However, Marton and Booth (1997) reject these epistemological considerations in favour of examining the internal relationship between the knower and the known (Booth, 2008: 451).

Phenomenographic research is not concerned with how perceptions of reality are created, it focuses on "the world as experienced by the person" (Marton and Booth, 1997: 113).

As the approach began to establish itself as a viable platform for exploring people's experiences of the world, a need for it to be refined and clarified emerged. As a result, different versions of phenomenography were developed. Other "ways of doing"

phenomenography include 'new' phenomenography and 'developmental' phenomenography, where the former seeks to reveal variation and the dimensions thereof in ways of experiencing something (Marton and Pang, 1999; Pang, 2003) and the latter aims to use research outcomes to effect change in teaching and learning (Bowden, 2000a). This study draws less of a distinction between the two as it seeks to both reveal variation in students' ways of experiencing FLL and to use these research outcomes to initiate possible changes in the teaching and learning of foreign languages in English secondary schools.

This overview provides a basic explanation of phenomenography and introduces the main terms and concepts used by the approach, which will be explored in greater detail below. To recap, the table overleaf highlights are the key elements of phenomenography and serves to identify it as a methodology distinct from other approaches such as phenomenology or grounded theory. It also demonstrates how these elements are linked to the present study.

KEY ELEMENTS OF PHENOMENOGRAPHY	RELATION TO PRESENT STUDY
The description, analysis and understanding of people's experiences.	Focus on participants rather than researcher
The identification of a limited number of qualitatively different ways of experiencing something	Allowing multiple categories to be derived from the data rather than a central one
The assumption of an interpretive, non-dualist ontology	Further focus on how one phenomenon can be experienced in different ways
The adoption of a second-order perspective when looking at people's ways of experiencing something	Paying attention to how other people describe aspects of their world - prevents describing experience from researcher's perspective
The development of conceptions and categories of description to describe how people experience something	Abstracting from the data rather than applying pre-defined categories
The construction of an outcome space to represent structural relationships between categories	Assumption that structural relationships exist - one goal of study is to make them visible and determined how they can be used further

Table three: key elements of phenomenography and their links to this study

The following section expands on the concepts listed above. It looks at the object of study in phenomenographic research and how qualitatively different ways of experiencing something can be uncovered.

3.3 Engaging in a phenomenographic study

Engaging in a phenomenographic study requires awareness of how the approach's key concepts come together to allow the research participants' experiences to be appropriately accessed, developed and presented. The overall aim is to discover the different ways in

which something is experienced. This “something” is commonly referred to as a phenomenon and can range from a teaching or learning concept such as solubility in chemistry (Ebenezer and Erickson, 1996) through to wider lines of enquiry such as the professional development of university tutors (Åkerlind, 2003) or student engagement in lessons (Harris, 2008). Here, the phenomenon under investigation is foreign language learning as experienced by Year 9 students in an English state secondary school.

From this starting point some assumptions can be identified; namely that different ways of experiencing the same thing exist and that the possible variation in these ways of experiencing is of interest and use in itself. As Marton (1981: 178) explains:

...we consider that to find out the different ways in which people experience, interpret, understand, apprehend, perceive or conceptualize various aspects of reality is sufficiently interesting in itself...

These pragmatic assumptions are what drive a phenomenographic study. Applied to the present research, I assert that there will be a number of different ways in which students experience and conceptualise foreign language learning and that the variation in these experiences will offer valuable insights into issues surrounding why there appears to be little motivation to study the subject beyond the end of compulsory learning.

3.4 Conceptions – the unit of research

Marton and Booth (1997: 111) explain that the unit of research in studies informed by phenomenography is the participants’ way(s) of experiencing the phenomenon in question and the object of the research is to determine the variation in these. As such, the researcher does not focus on the phenomenon itself or on those who are experiencing it (Bowden *et al*, 1992: 263). Rather, they must try to describe an aspect of the world as it appears to the individual (Marton, 1986: 32). According to Marton (1997: 1), this is important because

“ways of experiencing” are critical aspects of learning and can help to understand the phenomenon being investigated.

Throughout the phenomenographic literature the term “way(s) of experiencing” is often used interchangeably with similar phrases such as “way(s) of understanding”, “conceptualising”, “perceiving” and so on. However, it is easy to streamline the terminology by using the word “conception”, first referred to by Marton (1981: 189) as he writes:

This focusing on **conceptions** of specific aspects of reality, i.e. on apprehended (perceived, conceptualized or ‘lived’) contents of thought or experience...is in fact the most distinctive feature of the domain labelled ‘phenomenography’ (emphasis added).

The identification of conceptions is seen as a central aspect of the approach. As the methodology developed it became clear, however, that conceptions do not only refer to ways of experiencing but also to an “internal relationship between the experiencer and the experienced (Marton and Booth, 1997: 113). Sandberg (2000: 12) further elaborates by explaining that conception signifies “the indissoluble relation between what is conceived (the conceived meaning of reality) and how it is conceived (the conceiving acts in which the conceived meaning appears). It can therefore be argued that a conception has two functions: it demonstrates how an individual experiences something and also shows us how that individual makes sense of his or her experience.

Consequently conceptions can be defined as having dialectically intertwined structural (how) and referential (what) aspects (Marton *et al*, 1993: 277; Marton and Pong, 2005: 336). These aspects refer to the way in which something is experienced, acting as two internally related components of the same experience (Trigwell, 2000). Understanding and being able to define these aspects is important as the delimitation of an individual’s experience is

perhaps one of the most important factors when it comes to identifying and analysing a conception. Ultimately this will reveal more about how a phenomenon has been understood and how this version varies from others' understandings. A conception's structural component enables us to see how the phenomenon (or parts of it) is understood, related, temporally organised in awareness or differentiated from its background context and from other phenomena (Watkins, 2000: 102). Its referential component allows us to identify the global meaning attributed to the phenomenon (Barnard *et al*, 1999: 216); that is, further meaning can be perceived by understanding how the structural component has been discerned.

3.5 Adopting a second-order perspective

As already determined the main focus of phenomenographic studies is participants' ways of experiencing the phenomenon under research. In this way, phenomenography is not concerned with making statements about the world, but about people's conceptions of it (Marton, 1986: 32). In doing so, a second-order perspective should be adopted (Marton, 1986; Marton and Booth, 1997). The researcher attempts to see and describe the world as it is seen and described by the individual. Consequently, as Marton and Svensson (1979: 472) explain:

[i]nstead of two independent descriptions (of the student on one hand and of his world on the other) and an assumed relationship between the two, we have one description which is of a relational character.

The distinction between a first- and second-order perspective is a pragmatic one. Marton (1981: 178) argues in favour of a second-order perspective for two reasons: one is that revealing different ways of experiencing something is interesting and the second is that descriptions arrived at from this perspective are autonomous and cannot be derived from

descriptions arrived at from the first-order perspective. Therefore a different level of description can be achieved; one that is experiential and relational (Marton, 1986), coming from the inside rather than the outside, as opposed to one that is observational and from the outside (Marton and Svensson, 1979: 472). As Trigwell notes:

Phenomenographers have the view that meaning is constituted in the relation between the person and the phenomenon. The meaning of all phenomena is the total of all human experience of that phenomena. It is expected that there will be qualitative variation in that experience. This is the relational or constitutionalist view which underpins phenomenography.

In terms of the present study, I do not aim to make first-order statements about foreign language learning but to answer the question “what are the different ways in which students experience foreign language learning?” and make visible the differences identified. I focus on experiential description and seek variation therein. Firmly orienting the study from a second-order perspective enables me to come as close as possible to people’s experiences of the world (Sandberg, 1995) and prevents me from describing them in my own pre-defined way, independently of the participants rather than through their eyes (Marton and Svensson, 1979: 473).

3.6 Identifying variation

Another of the key concepts underpinning phenomenography is that of identifying the variation in the ways people experience a particular phenomenon. As many phenomenographers have pointed out, “every phenomenon can be seen, experienced, understood, in a finite number of qualitatively different ways” (Marton, 1997: 1; see also Booth, 1997; Barnard *et al*, 1999; Brew, 2001). As determined above, exploring the structure of conceptions (i.e. structural and referential aspects) helps with the process of revealing

variation and consequently results in being able to highlight key features of the phenomenon under review (Åkerlind, 2008: 636).

In a teaching and learning context discerning variation is seen as a particularly important process because it can help both students and teachers to facilitate learning, effect change and understand (or even encounter for the first time) new ways of seeing or experiencing something (Bowden, 2000a; Linder and Marshall, 2003; Bruce, 2006). As Bruce *et al* (2006, cited in Bruce, 2006: 9) observe, the underlying principle is widening experience and thus revealing variation in order to bring about learning. Booth and Hultén (2003: 70) explain this well when they state that:

The task of the researcher is to delve into the ways the learners experience critical aspects of the learning situation and describe the variation in order to problematize the taken-for-grantedness.

The “taken-for-grantedness” they refer to is what happens when learners are unaware of the potential of variation in experiencing the phenomenon in question. They argue that instruction can be designed to challenge this and that students can be provided with situations “where some particularly critical feature of the materials they are learning can be brought out of a taken-for-granted background by meeting variation around that feature” (*ibid*). It also marks a shift in the primary emphasis of phenomenography from methodological to theoretical concerns as researchers move from questions about how to describe different ways of experiencing to those concerning the nature of the different ways of experiencing something (Pang, 2003: 146).

In the context of the present study I argue that seeking variation in the ways in which students experience foreign language learning will help researchers, teachers and other languages experts to develop new and enhanced means of encouraging language study.

Pedagogically, a clearer insight into the ways in which students experience FLL can afford changes to the MFL curriculum as well as the way in which the subject is implemented in the classroom.

3.7 Categories of description

As previously discussed, in phenomenographic research a conception refers to an internal relationship between the experiencer and the experienced, where structural and referential aspects are evident. An individual can offer different conceptions of the same phenomenon and looking at how a number of individuals experience the same phenomenon can present the researcher with a large number of conceptions. It is helpful to consider these different conceptions as fragments of the same whole (Marton and Booth, 1997: 114). Therefore, in order to characterise and define the phenomenon under research in as much detail as possible, the researcher must look to pulling these various fragments together to constitute its whole. To do so, categories of description (hereafter “categories”) are used. These categories, according to Marton (1988: 181), have four main characteristics:

[They are] relational, dealing with the intentional or subject-object relation comprising the conception; experiential, that is, based on the experience of participants in the study; content-oriented, focusing on the meaning of the phenomenon being studied; and qualitative or descriptive.

They should reflect the differences and similarities in the ways in which a phenomenon has been understood and are based on the most distinctive features differentiating one conception from another (Bowden, 2000a). In this way, the phenomenographic aim of making visible variation in conceptions of an aspect of reality is preserved.

Categories of description also move the understanding of different ways of experiencing from the individual to the collective level. Marton and Booth (1997: 128) explain that:

When we talk about “a way of experiencing something” we usually do so in terms of individual awareness...When we talk about “categories of description” we usually do so in terms of qualitatively different ways a phenomenon may appear to people of one kind or another. Thus categories of description refer to the collective level.

This is a fundamental difference between conceptions and categories. Whilst conceptions attend to individuals’ experiences of an aspect of the world, categories attempt to move away from this towards capturing the richness of the data as a whole and rendering it meaningful (Brew, 2001: 274). Marton (1981: 195) elaborates further by explaining that at the level of categories, “the perceived world, rather than the perceiving individual is the focus of attention”.

It is important to note here that as conceptions should emerge from the data without being forced, so too should categories of description. The researcher should not approach the task of abstracting the characteristics of a phenomenon by applying a pre-defined set of categories to the identified conceptions. Indeed, it is expected that the researcher will bracket any presumptions (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 296); that is, set them aside and not use them to guide the analysis. In part this is because to retain methodological validity the researcher should remain as close as possible to the original data but it is also because one of the main aims of the endeavour is to identify the logical and possibly hierarchical relations between categories (Marton and Booth, 1997). This cannot be done (or at least is severely restricted) if pre-determined categories are applied. Some (Webb, 1997; Richardson, 1999) have raised concerns about this process and these will be returned to in a more detailed discussion of this and other methodological criticisms below.

3.8 The outcome space

The end product of phenomenographic study should be a set or complex of categories of description; that is, a detailed exposition of the ways of experiencing the phenomenon being investigated. Labelled an “outcome space” (Marton and Booth, 1997: 125) it is most often a graphic representation illustrating the categories and the relationships between them. Marton and Booth (1997: 125) offer the following guidelines for developing an outcome space: categories should stand in clear relation to the phenomenon so that each one reveals a distinct about a way of experiencing it; categories should also stand in a logical (and frequently hierarchical) relationship with each other; the system should be parsimonious – as few categories as is feasible for capturing the critical variation in the data should be explicated. As Åkerlind *et al* (2005) point out, the hierarchical relationships between categories are not value judgements from “better” to “worse”. Rather, the hierarchy can be seen as one of inclusiveness. Consequently the structure of an outcome space may not necessarily be linear but could contain forks or branches (Mann *et al*, 2007: 8).

The sections above outline the phenomenographic approach and its main features.

However, consideration must also be given to the possible limitations of the approach. The following sections discuss issues relating to the nature of interview data and the process of defining conceptions and categories of description.

3.9 Experience or account?

Phenomenography is based on the study of people’s ways of experiencing an aspect of reality. However, for some critics of the approach, this raises an ontological question. As

Hasselgren and Beach (1997: 193) highlight, there is a danger of attributing a particular ontological status to the different ways in which something might be experienced. They argue that phenomenographers can simply accept their findings as genuinely denoting a map of existing person-world relationships with regard to a particular phenomenon without questioning whether the data really do represent internal relationships between individuals and the phenomenon in question (*ibid*). This is reflected in the phenomenographic discourse when researchers speak about “ways of experiencing”. What Hasselgren and Beach (1997) as well as Säljö (1997) and Richardson (1999) contend is that phenomenographers tend to equate participants’ experiences with *accounts* of their experiences. As an alternative, Säljö (1997) offers a modified definition of phenomenography as the method of looking at the different ways in which people take account of their experiences. As he emphasises (1997: 178), just as there can be said to be a limited number of ways of experiencing something, so it can be argued that there are a limited number of ways of talking about a phenomenon. These accounting practices are, in fact, what is accessible to study (Säljö, 1997: 182) rather than the experience itself.

However Säljö’s (1997) argument is largely based upon studies focusing upon students’ conceptions of complex learning phenomena (the concepts of force and motion in physics, for example), not conceptions which concern their overall experience of a learning situation as in the present study. Furthermore, as McCune (2004: 261) maintains, if student interview analyses can be “related in meaningful ways to the outcomes of students’ learning” then there is evidence that participants’ accounts do indeed relate to their experience. In this instance the outcomes of learning for the students in this study can be related to how they perceive their FLL experience given the link between positive and negative experiences and

the decision to carry on with foreign language study. It can therefore be argued that there are links between students' accounts of their experience and the experience itself and that these are made visible in the analysis of their ways of experiencing.

3.10 Issues surrounding the development of conceptions and categories

As previously discussed, conceptions are the unit of research in phenomenographic studies. Categories of description then move the description of the phenomenon in question from the individual level to a collective one in order to bring together fragments of the same whole. However, this process has attracted some criticism based upon the "ability of the researcher to have pristine perception, make neutral observations, build objective categories and give neutral interpretations" (Webb, 1997: 201). Richardson (1999: 67-68) furthers this debate by claiming that the categories of description phenomenographers put forward are their own constructions and that other researchers may come up with different categorisations. He goes on to argue that it is difficult to determine how far categories of description reflect participants' ways of experiencing as opposed to those pre-conceived by the researcher (1999: 70), echoing Webb's (1997: 201) suggestion that phenomenographic research simply tends to report the history of a particular discipline as it is understood by researchers. It is true that the field has seen discussion regarding the construction of categories or their emergence from the data (see Walsh, 2000 as an example). Both points of view have received critiques and some argue that the construction of categories allows researchers to apply pre-defined categories and ignore data which do not fit (Webb, 1997; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). This study follows Sandberg's view (1997: 208) that the process of defining categories is a relational one. He explains this position by saying:

as the researcher is a human being, he/she is always intentionally related to the research object. As the researcher cannot escape from being related to the research object, the categories of description are always the researcher's interpretation of the data obtained from individuals about their conceptions of reality. In other words, the categories of description are intentionally constituted through the researcher's interpretation.

Sandberg (1997) goes on to discuss the need to maintain interpretive awareness if the approach above is followed. By this he means the adoption of reflexive practices which encourage the researcher to check that analysis and interpretation are linked to participants' experiences and not their own. This entails constant recourse to the data and the holding in check or bracketing of prior experience, knowledge and pre-conceived ideas. It is an ambitious task because of the paramount requirement to be sensitive to the individuality of conceptions of the world, but a necessary one to avoid the generation of arbitrary categories of description (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 297). However, this process does go some way to addressing issues of validity and reliability in studies informed by the phenomenographic approach. These issues are discussed below.

3.11 Reliability and validity

Research in the social sciences is typically underpinned by concepts of generalisability, replicability and intersubjective agreement. However, in the context of phenomenographic research, these criteria give way to certain tensions. In the case of replicability, for example, as categories of description are formed via a relational process between the researcher and the data (Sandberg, 1997), it is conceded that other researchers may develop different categories from the same data (Säljö, 1988). Although Marton (1986: 35) claims that discoveries do not have to be replicable, he does suggest that intersubjective agreement is possible.

However, other researchers in the field (e.g. Sandberg, 1997) argue that intersubjective or inter-judge reliability is not appropriate within qualitative research because “the manner of achieving the evidence is different because of different assumptions which, in turn, inspire different criteria” (Giorgi, 1988: 175). Furthermore, as it is based upon positivist tenets that create theoretical and methodological inconsistencies (Sandberg, 1997: 207), other alternatives to inter-judge reliability have been proposed. Sandberg (1997: 209) posits interpretive awareness as a means of achieving reliability and validity. The researcher is called upon to “demonstrate how he/she has dealt with his/her intentional relation to the individuals’ conceptions being investigated” and to deal with researcher subjectivity rather than overlooking it. Following Idhe (1977) he outlines five stages that guide the process of interpretive awareness:

- Being oriented to the phenomenon as and how it appears throughout the research process
- Being oriented towards describing experiences rather than explaining them
- Horizontalisation – or the treating of all aspects of the lived experience under investigation as equally important
- Searching for structural features of the experience under investigation
- Using intentionality as a correlational rule to help explicate variation in conceptions (Sandberg, 1997: 209).

These strategies are intended to be applied throughout the research process in order to ensure that the participants’ lived experience is not detracted from (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 297) rather than only when dealing with the research outcomes.

In the present context I have applied these steps where appropriate to the various stages of the research process. For example, the research question which this study aims to answer is necessarily broad (what are the qualitatively different ways in which year 9 students from an English state secondary school experience foreign language learning?) and takes an “open view of the phenomenon to be studied” (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 300) so that as many different student experiences as possible could be accessed. I used semi-structured interviews as the research instrument, with *what* and *how* questions encouraging participants to offer detailed descriptions of their experiences, whilst being able to guide the interview themselves according to what they foregrounded in their answers. All variations of the students’ experience were considered equally important and none were ignored or left out, thereby minimising the risk of subjective or arbitrarily created categories of description during the data analysis stages. In this respect, only the transcripts from the initial focus groups and the follow-up interviews formed the data to be analysed. During analysis care I endeavoured to retain an open mind and avoid applying pre-conceived ideas of how conceptions and categories might be developed. This process was aided by engaging in description rather than explanation, looking for the structural and referential aspects of each category and by using devices such as analytical memos, which helped me to focus on what the participants were saying. I also used illustrative quotes from the interview transcripts to support each category and retain the descriptive element.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide the theoretical framework for the present study. It looks at how phenomenography can be applied as a research approach, explores some of its criticisms and discusses how a phenomenographic study can demonstrate reliability and

validity. The following diagram represents how each of these aspects fit together to form the methodological framework:

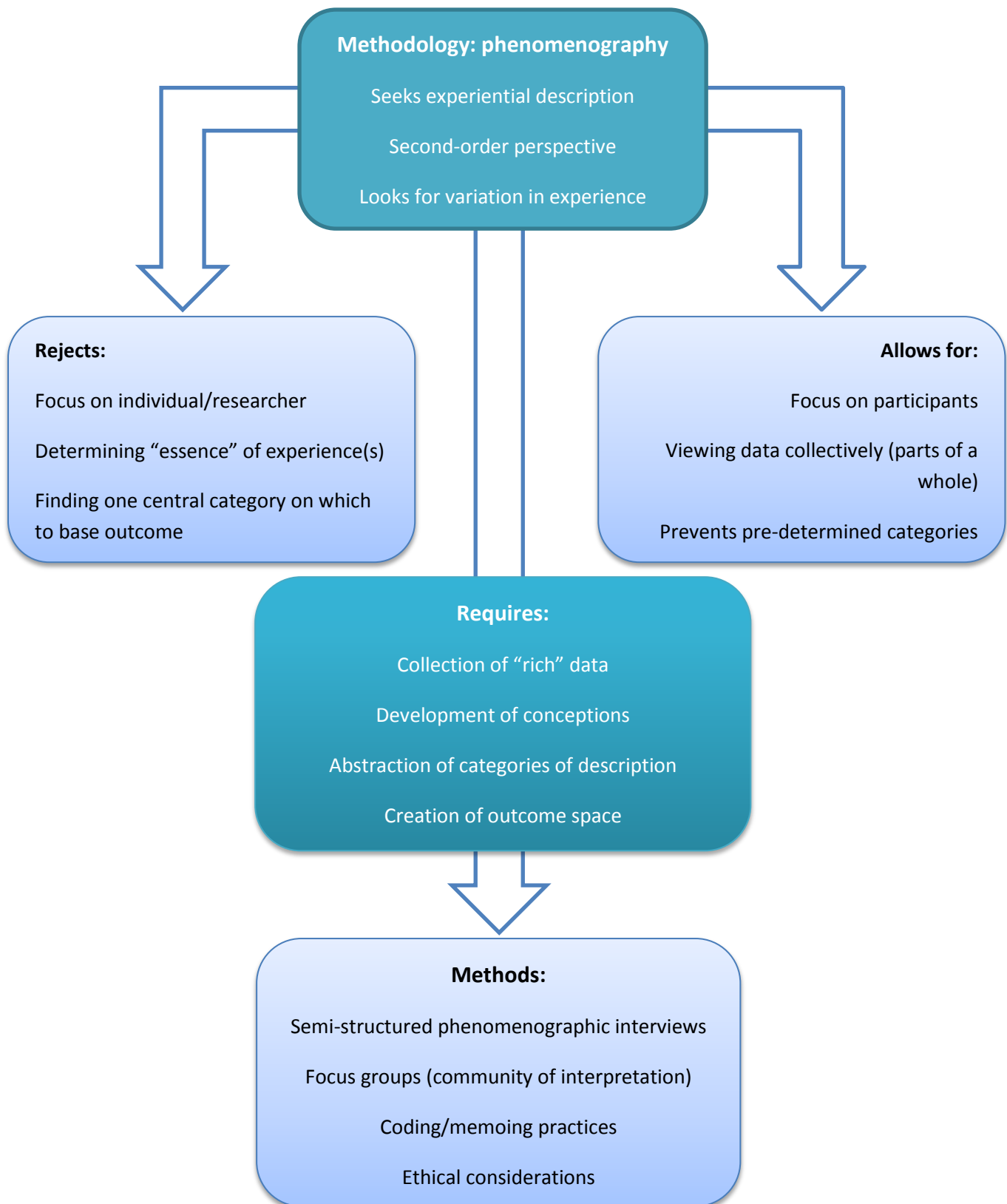


Figure two: diagram of methodological framework

In conclusion, three main points as to why I chose phenomenography to inform this study are recapped below.

3.12.1 Providing empirical research

As discussed in Chapter One, despite an available pool of research in the field, foreign language education policy decisions have tended to be based on professional consultation rather than on solid empirical evidence (Pachler, 2007). Mitchell (2003: 15) argues that this is also prompted by problems surrounding learner motivation and achievement, as well as UK society in general being sceptical about the need for languages as a compulsory part of the curriculum. Such approaches are unlikely to have considered the views of students, much less to have confronted the possible variations within their experiences.

Phenomenography offers a way of empirically investigating a range of experiences and can provide rich data and “thick description” (Geertz, 1993: 6) of these, thereby creating a more detailed picture of the phenomenon under research. As phenomenography also seeks to emphasise the critical differences in participants’ ways of experiencing an aspect of the world, this may reveal previously unconsidered factors and allow them to be viewed in new lights.

3.12.2 Giving voice to participants

As mentioned above, foreign languages education policy in England does not appear to always have been based on empirical findings. Similarly, it is also noted in Chapter Two that those affected most by changes to school curricula, lesson content and teaching methods are rarely consulted about such decisions (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). Using phenomenography to reveal students’ perspectives and opinions regarding FLL goes some

way towards countering this. In the present study, I actively seek the voices of the students and attempt to describe and report their experiences as faithfully as possible. By adopting a second-order perspective, I necessarily describe rather than explain participants' conceptions. In doing so, I put forward their words as the data and open dimensions of variation (Booth and Hultén, 2003: 65) that may result in challenging previous assumptions about foreign language learning held by policy makers, teachers and languages experts. Moreover, this can also lead to challenging the students' own perceptions of FLL. If successful, this could lead to different ways of addressing some of the problems surrounding the teaching and learning of foreign languages in English state secondary schools (see below). This study goes some way towards addressing the lack of literature combining phenomenography, foreign language learning and student voice.

3.12.3 Effecting change

One main concern of phenomenography is using research findings to "affect the world in which I live and work" (Bowden, 2000b: 3). This developmental viewpoint assumes that the eventual outcomes of phenomenographic research; that is, participants' conceptions of the investigated phenomenon and the ultimate categories of description arrived at, can be used as a basis for learning and development activities (Sandberg, 1994). It also assumes that providing a means of seeing something from a variety of angles may result in an equally broad range of possible ways of effecting change and bringing about improvements in the learning environment. Applying this pragmatic attitude to discovering how students experience FLL and looking for the critical differences therein provides a basis for generating new strategies to help students continue with foreign language study and raise their motivation to do so.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHOD & DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored phenomenography as the overarching methodological approach which underpins this thesis and provides its theoretical framework. This chapter turns to the methods used to carry out the study and how they are informed by the phenomenographic approach (see Figure two in Chapter 3, page 93). I discuss the research design, pilot study and the steps taken throughout the data analysis process and consider the use of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Finally, I also debate certain ethical considerations.

The research behind this thesis takes the form of a qualitative, exploratory study examining the experiences of foreign language learning as described by various groups of year 9 students (aged between 13 and 14) from a state secondary school in the South of England. Three stages of the study were implemented. These included an initial development phase whereby a review of the literature was completed, the methodological approach was considered, a pilot study conducted and the final interview protocol developed. The second stage encompassed the main data collection phase by means of three focus group sessions, three follow-up interviews and one teacher interview. The final stage involved analysing the collected data, reporting the findings and discussing the emerging themes. A timeline for these phases can be found overleaf.

ACTIVITY	DATE	DETAILS
Exploring/considering appropriate methodological framework	June-December 2011	Discovering phenomenography and in-depth reading on the methodology.
Arranging and conducting pilot study	June-July 2011	Small pilot study conducted with two groups of 5-6 students at a local high school.
Literature review - MFL	Jan-March 2012	Chronological review of MFL policy and research
Literature review – motivation	March-May 2012	Overview of historical and recent developments in L2 motivation literature.
Literature review – student voice	May-July 2012	Examination of student voice literature and linking of similar concepts found in L2 motivation literature.
SIG Earli Phenomenography conference, Sweden	August 2012	Attendance at phenomenography conference
Development of final interview protocol (following pilot study)	October-November 2012	Using reading on qualitative/phenomenographic interview practices and experience from pilot study to develop more robust interview protocol.
Focus groups and interviews for main study	November 2012	Conducted three focus groups and three follow up interviews (24 student research participants in total). Also conducted on teacher interview for data triangulation purposes.
Writing up of immediate field notes	November 2012	Field notes immediately recorded and written up to retain initial thoughts and ideas.
Focus group and interview transcription	November 2012-March 2013	Verbatim transcription of focus groups x 3 and interviews x 4
Writing up chapters 3 and 4	March-June 2013	Finalising chapters
Initial/open coding of focus group and interview transcripts	May-July 2013	Coding all transcripts and engaging in iterative constant comparison process. Also included analytical memoing.
Abstracting categories of description from data	June-August 2013	Finalising four categories of description/structural aspects.
Writing up findings chapter	August-October 2013	Finalising chapter
Writing up remaining chapters	November 2012-January 2014	Finalising chapters
Submission of final draft to supervisors	January 2014	Discussion with supervisors and making necessary amendments
Preparing thesis for submission	February-April 2014	Completing thesis

Table four: research timeline

4.2 Research design

In order to answer the research question, *what are the qualitatively different ways in which year 9 students experience foreign language learning*, I designed the study so that I could not only capture rich data but, according to the phenomenographic principles outlined in Chapter 3, also seek variation in participants' responses (Pang, 2003). I considered various means of data collection, including student questionnaires, written responses to open-ended statements and participant observation (Spradley, 1980) and although these methods would likely generate rich data, my concerns rested in applying a research method that would not only support the need for variation in participant response but one that would also allow me to describe the experiences through the eyes of the participants (Marton and Svensson, 1979). Consequently I felt that initial focus groups paired with follow-up interviews would enable the data to be collected according to typical phenomenographic processes. It would also provide me with opportunities to immediately probe and explore participant responses in order to draw out the most detailed responses possible, something which would not be feasible via written statements or questionnaires.

To determine whether or not focus groups and interviews were the most appropriate means of data collection, I conducted a pilot study prior to the main data collection phase. The next section describes this pilot and the resulting reflections and revisions made ahead of conducting the main study. A brief examination of the data collected during pilot fieldwork is also presented, although this is naturally limited given the small scale of this stage.

4.3 The pilot study

Pilot studies are an important part of any research as they allow the researcher to “put a toe or two in the research waters before diving in” (Sampson, 2004: 399). In practical terms this means that chosen aspects of the research study can be tested before advancing to the main project. As van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001: 1) observe, an advantage of conducting a pilot study “is that it might give advance warning about where the main research project could fail...or whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated”. In this instance I felt it necessary to conduct a pilot study so that I could practise the semi-structured style of interviewing common in phenomenographic research (Barnard *et al*, 1999) and confirm this was the most appropriate data-collection method for this study. I also felt it would enhance the validity of the research (see page 90) and highlight further the careful steps taken to finalise the main study and gather data.

I approached a local comprehensive school to do this on the basis of an existing good working relationship with the head of languages there, which afforded me ease of access to the students. In the same way, I also knew some of the participants. A plan and requirements for the interviews were discussed during a telephone conversation and were confirmed in a follow-up email (see Appendix 1). I then supplied information letters and consent forms (see Appendix 2) for parents to sign so these could be sent home with participating students. However, for unforeseen reasons students were not available for short interviews in groups of two or three. Furthermore the time allotted by the school was reduced on the day so I decided to conduct two focus groups instead.

Whilst an interview is the primary data collection method in a phenomenographic study, Marton (1994: 4427) allows for the gathering of data via other means. Focus groups still

provided an appropriate way of gaining access to the participants' perceptions and experiences of FLL. In fact I believe that students responded more openly to the questions asked because being with friends or classmates made them feel more comfortable or increased their confidence. This was not something I had previously considered but became an idea I would develop when designing my final data collection strategy (see below). Limitations of such a setting, however, included difficulties in probing individual students and drawing out longer or more detailed answers to the questions. Consequently I felt that in some instances I gathered only superficial responses, whereas a more personal setting may have allowed me to explore answers more extensively.

4.3.1 Interviewing technique

Kvale (1996: 5-6) defines the research interview as "an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena". This definition is useful as it echoes the phenomenographic approach to data collection and places emphasis on obtaining participants' descriptions of their experiences. As Bowden (2000a: 9) also explains, the focus of a phenomenographic interview is the way in which the interviewees understand the chosen concept. To arrive at these understandings, the interviewer should ask for clarifications and explanations of what the participants say (Bowden, 2000a: 10).

However, as Kvale (1996: 13) notes, there is no common procedure for interview research. As such, it is easy to head straight into the interview process before considering important preparations such as the development of specific questions (Warren, 2001: 86) or elicitation techniques (Johnson and Weller, 2001) designed to encourage participants to reveal as

much detail as possible. Reflecting on the pilot interviews highlighted the necessity of these prior considerations as can be seen below.

Reviewing the transcripts revealed repeated use of closed questions (i.e. those that prompt “yes”/“no” answers) rather than open-ended ones which may have encouraged more detailed responses. I later rephrased questions such as “is learning a foreign language important?” or “is there anything about your current lessons that could be changed?” in order to elicit more considered answers than “yes”, “dunno” or “not sure” and tried to ask questions that “let the subjects choose the dimensions of the question they want to answer” (Marton, 1986: 42). Similarly, I avoided “leading” questions which could be seen to steer participants’ responses. As Trigwell (2000: 68) notes, phenomenographic interviewers must go about “exploring at greater and greater depths of thinking without leading” in order to gain as detailed an insight as possible into the phenomenon under investigation.

4.3.2 Using an interview protocol

Johnson (2002: 111) states that when conducting in-depth interviews, beginning with an interview protocol containing introductory, transition and main questions is best. Boyce and Neale (2006: 5) also advocate the use of a protocol in that it can help maintain the reliability and consistency of the interviews. However, I initially felt that, aside from a standard opening statement which was read aloud at the beginning of each session (see Appendix 3), the focus groups themselves would not need to follow a strict procedure or list of questions. I assumed that the interviews would follow their own course, requiring only the interjection of basic prompts and follow-ups. However, this approach and its subsequent putting into practice revealed a certain naivety. The transcripts highlight how the absence of a well-developed protocol resulted in having to concentrate on what questions to ask (and in some

instances asking them badly) and how to direct the conversation rather than engaging in the “empathetic listening” (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 302) crucial to phenomenographic interviewing. Working without a question guide also ran the risk of not covering all the main areas necessary to answer the research question and consequently not gathering enough suitable data.

These areas of reflection informed the research design for the main data collection phase, allowed for the development of a new interview protocol and helped heighten my overall sensitivity to the interviewing process. Set out below are the areas in which changes were made and how these contribute to a more robust study.

4.3.3 A revised approach to data collection

To achieve rich data or arrive at a “thick description” (Geertz, 1993: 6) of students’ experiences of FLL, I felt it useful to revise my approach to data collection. After further exploring the phenomenographic literature I decided to follow the lead of Sandberg (2000: 13) who, echoing Apel (1972), asserts that establishing a “community of interpretation” is one way of capturing data in a rich and comprehensive manner. He explains that his “community of interpretation” was built through observation, interviews and seminars which helped develop an understanding between researcher and participants about what they are doing (*ibid*). In a similar fashion, although on a smaller scale, I considered this to be an appropriate way to minimise some of the potential awkwardness that may arise when interviewing young people for the first time. This was especially pertinent given that I would be conducting the main research interview in a different school because of changes in staffing at the school where I had held the pilot interviews. I decided to hold initial focus groups with the participants which would then be followed by individual interviews with

two or three students from each group. Participants for this stage of the research would be selected according to the purposive sampling methods common in phenomenography which encourage selection based upon the likelihood of achieving maximum variation in response (Bowden, 2000a). Holding initial focus groups would help to establish my own “community of interpretation”, allowing me to get to know the participants and them to find out more about why they had been asked to take part in my research. Purposively selecting students would ensure that as wide a variety of views and attitudes as possible would be offered.

4.3.4 A revised interview protocol

Although approaching data collection with a predetermined plan is a point of some debate within the phenomenographic literature, the importance of ensuring the interviews remain focused enables the researcher to proceed with some degree of advanced planning (Booth, 1997; Walsh, 2000). Having realised the value of an interview protocol, I set about devising a guide that would help me draw out participants’ conceptions of FLL in as much detail as possible. In the first instance this required thinking how best to present the research situation to those involved. This would be key to ensuring that the focus groups and subsequent interviews ran smoothly and that the necessary “thick description” could be achieved. Reading about interviewing adolescents revealed that task-based activities are useful for stimulating discussion and generating easily comparable data (Punch, 2002: 53). In terms of this study, introducing a task at the beginning of the focus groups seemed expedient as it could serve as an ice-breaker or warm-up exercise and help familiarise the students with the focus group situation. From professional experience I determined that an activity involving matching a range of different jobs with a selection of skills and school

subjects would allow insight into what students conceived of being relevant to various different situations. Encouraging them to rank the skills and subjects in order of importance would also help me to understand what values they placed upon them. Languages would therefore figure as one of the skills or subjects the participants could choose from and discussion could then be fostered according to where (or even if) they had been ranked. In this way the relational aspect of phenomenography would also be upheld as it would encourage the students to share their views and opinions “in relation to real world phenomena” (Prosser, 2000: 36).

To further the initial task, a question guide was designed in accordance with typical phenomenographic principles of asking open-ended questions and encouraging students to focus on aspects of the questions they want to talk about. This was divided into two categories: main questions and supporting prompts. The prompts were included for back-up purposes in case the discussion flagged or dried up. A sample of the interview protocol can be found overleaf in Table five.

Introduction:

You are here today to talk about your experiences of learning a foreign language. We are going to start by carrying out a short activity where you will be asked to look at different types of jobs and decide which skills and/or school subjects are needed for them. You should put these in order of importance. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers!

After the task we will talk about your decisions and about what you think about learning a foreign language.

Main Questions	Support Prompts
<p>You have chosen the following skills (read selected ones aloud) for this job (first job). Can you tell me why you've chosen them?</p>	<p>Can you explain more about that? Why is that important?</p>
<p>Can you tell me why you've put the skills/subjects in this order?</p>	<p>Why do you think this one is the most important? Why is that one at the bottom?</p>
<p>(Depending where language skills are situated) can you tell me why you have put languages with this job/in this position?</p>	<p>Why do you think languages are necessary for this job? Why are languages not needed for this job? Can you think why languages might be needed here?</p>
<p>We've talked about languages and jobs, so let's talk about languages and you now. Can you tell me about your experiences of learning another language?</p>	<p>Can you explain further? Can you give me some examples of that? Why is that?</p>
<p>We have looked at how languages are relevant (or important) for some types of job. Can you describe how languages are relevant (important) to you?</p>	<p>Why do you think that? Can you explain why languages are/are not relevant to you? Can you think of a time when they might be relevant? How could they be made more relevant to you?</p>

Table five: sample interview protocol

The questions and prompts in the table above were intended as a guide only. I let conversations and discussions take their own course so that participants could answer the dimensions of the questions that were important to them rather than them being led or guided by me. This also helped me to maintain interpretive awareness by being conscious of encouraging participants' descriptions of their experiences.

4.4 Pilot study data analysis

Conducting the pilot study also offered the opportunity to engage in phenomenographic analysis of the data collected. This section looks at the steps involved in the data analysis process and how the pilot stage helped shape the main data collection and analysis phases.

Phenomenographic analysis of interview data requires the researcher to uncover the ways in which participants conceive of or experience the phenomenon under investigation (Marton, 1986). In this instance, I coded the pilot data with the aim of constructing categories of description (see Chapter 4) which show the different ways in which students experience FLL. This involved reading the transcripts a number of times and identifying the action contained within the data by way of applying open codes to describe conceptually what is indicated in the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008: 160). I looked for similarities and differences in attempts to make clear the logical and structural relationships between categories and with a view to constructing an outcome space. In more specific terms, the process involved examining the focus group transcripts under the guiding questions of:

- *What are the different ways in which participants experience foreign language learning?*

- *What are the differences between various ways of experiencing foreign language learning?*

There were too little data from the focus group held with the year 9 students who had chosen not to take a language GCSE to begin developing categories of description, which again reiterated the importance of developing a question guide and ensuring that questions were asked appropriately to draw out as much detail as possible. The second focus group with year 9 students who would be taking a language GCSE in the next academic year yielded a good range of conceptions of participants' foreign language learning (FLL) experiences but again the data were insufficient in terms of being able to conduct an in-depth analysis and explore possible dimensions of variation. However, the data did reveal a number of initial conceptions which I subsequently used to develop the interview protocol for the main phase of the study. The central themes emerging from this dataset included:

- Languages give you advantages
- Language lessons could be improved
- Language lessons are not enjoyable

The first theme, *languages give you advantages*, could be seen as a somewhat holistic view of the language learning process as experienced by the focus group participants. It demonstrated an instrumental motivation reflecting how languages can help you do things such as travel abroad and get a job. Linked to this is a further dimension regarding personal goals, where in this instance, languages were perceived as something that can not only help you to get a job, but to get a better job or to be paid more for your language skills. Having a

language could also help you achieve more immediate goals such as school examinations like the English Baccalaureate.

The second theme, *language lessons could be improved*, pointed to how the physical act of learning a foreign language is experienced by the students. Here participants expressed how they felt their lessons could be improved by the introduction of variety: “maybe some different ways to actually learn the language”; relevance: “just normal things that we’d actually talk about”; focus on the language itself (as opposed to topics): “more focus on actually learning German”. It was evident that they had some clear ideas as to how they would like to experience their language lessons but that perhaps these needs or desires were not being met. Their motivation to learn was also apparent (see further illustrative quotes in Appendix 4) but seems to have been tempered by the ways in which lessons were delivered.

The third theme, *language lessons are not enjoyable*, related closely to that of improving language lessons but displayed a set of more negative conceptions than those discussed above. Although these were students who had chosen to study a foreign language, there was still a palpably active dislike for the subject when they talked about the ways in which they experienced their lessons. Whether this is a result of the way in which they were taught, how fellow students’ attitudes may have affected their own, or simply how they felt on the day of the focus group (for example, did it follow a particularly boring lesson that week?) is hard to determine. What is clear, however, is that there was a definite “student voice” emanating from the group. Lessons were perceived as boring and slow; not engaging; not well-taught; not relevant in terms of topics; not useful in terms of language taught.

In taking the study forward I believed it necessary and important to make sure this “student voice” would be heard as clearly as possible, which ties in well with adopting a second-order perspective as advocated by phenomenographic research. These basic pilot study findings enabled a more sensitive approach to data collection and also highlighted the various steps that I would need to take during the main data analysis stage. These are returned to later in this chapter. Next, the main study is described.

4.5 The main study

The main study took place at a local mixed comprehensive school for students aged between 11 and 16 (years 7-11). It has specialist status as a technology college and there are approximately 700 students on roll. It is located in a small town and ferry port on the south coast of England. Twenty three per cent of children from one of the main areas serving the school are on free school meals, compared to 15 per cent for the county as a whole. The same area also has one of the highest rates of students with a statement of Special Educational Needs (52 per 1,000 students) compared to the rest of the county’s wards (East Sussex Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, 2012). The school’s most recent Ofsted report (September 2012) rates it as requiring improvement because it is below the government standard for students’ attainment and progress (Ofsted, 2012: 4). Although students typically start GCSE courses in year 10, the languages programme at this school is condensed into four years and thus study for GCSE begins in year 9.

I chose this school for two reasons: the first because it was a suitable alternative to the school where I had carried out the pilot study, which could not continue with the research because of staffing changes; the second because it provided access to a range of students with different language study statuses. Some students had actively chosen to continue with

their language study at GCSE; some had been forced to continue with languages because they were studying for the English Baccalaureate; some had dropped languages as soon as they were able. As evidenced by recent language trends surveys (e.g. CILT, 2008), that the school has students who choose to continue with language study as well as those who do not is typical of schools across the country. As phenomenographic studies apply methods of purposive sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bowden, 2000a), these different groupings allowed me (with the help of the languages teacher) to choose participants because of their appropriateness to the research. Once the three types of student had been identified I worked with their languages teacher to discuss which students from her classes would be most suitable. This discussion was necessary because of her knowledge of the students and their attitudes towards foreign language study compared to only my overall picture of their language study status. Although this meant that the teacher knew which students would be participating in the research, potential obstacles surrounding confidentiality were minimised because she would be leaving the school shortly after the interviews were conducted and would no longer have contact with the students once the data were made available.

In order to capture as much variation as possible across students' experiences of FLL I decided to hold three separate focus groups according to the different types of student, with seven to eight participants in each group. A total of 24 students participated in the focus groups, with the gender balance slightly in favour of male students at 54 per cent. This number of participants is in line with other phenomenographic studies (Bruce, 1997; Sandberg, 1997) and would also allow for variation in experience whilst keeping the volume of data manageable (Trigwell, 2000: 66). In addition, as this was a small-scale, exploratory study I decided to limit the participants to those from one school only. Following the lead of

Marshall (1996: 523) I believed this to be sufficient as it would provide a sample size that would adequately answer the research question. Each participant was provided with a parent information letter and consent form (see below for discussion on ethical considerations) and all forms had to be signed and returned to the languages teacher before the research could take place.

I then engaged in further purposive sampling following these sessions when three students from each group were selected for follow-up interviews. The criteria for selecting participants for the follow-up interviews were those who seemed intuitively likely to have different lifeworlds (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 302); i.e. those with distinctly different attitudes towards FLL (including levels of motivation and achievement), gender and a willingness to participate. A total of five girls and four boys took part in the follow-up interviews after having been asked if they were happy to continue with the research.

The focus groups and the follow-up interviews were conducted at the school in a quiet room specifically booked for the purpose. The majority of the interviews were carried out during the participants' language lesson time so as to minimise disruption to other lessons.

However, where this was not possible the languages teacher contacted the teachers of other subjects to gain their permission for students to leave their classes. All teachers complied with the research request. The focus groups were all held on the same day and the follow-up interviews took place two days later. This short timeframe was purposely created so that participants could remain as focused as possible on the research and not lose interest or forget what had previously been discussed.

4.6 Focus groups

As mentioned earlier, one of the main reasons behind conducting focus groups for this study was to create “communities of interpretation” (Sandberg, 2000) and thereby allow both researcher and participant to get to know each other as well as familiarise themselves with the research situation. As Krueger (1994: 6) notes:

...a focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment. It is conducted with approximately 7 to 10 people by a skilled interviewer. The discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion.

This definition of a focus group supports the notion of developing a community of interpretation. In creating a safe environment where everybody’s thoughts and opinions are encouraged, participants are able to share and describe their experiences. However, moderating the discussion is important so that dominant voices do not overpower the conversation and so that quieter or more reluctant participants can feel comfortable and not overshadowed. This requires a certain level of skill on the part of the moderator and also reflects possible limitations of the method. As the literature on focus groups as a research method reveals, there is debate as to whether this type of setting allows participants to share their “true” thoughts and beliefs (Hollander, 2004: 608); concern that the views expressed by more assertive group members could be seen as the whole group’s opinion (Smithson, 2000: 107); potential difficulty in “striking a balance between encouraging spontaneity and adhering to the research agenda” (Barbour and Schostak, 2005: 44). Furthermore, whilst Marton (1988) allows for a range of data gathering techniques within phenomenographic studies, others argue that group interviews tend to

move the interviewees “towards positions of agreement rather than diversity” (Bruce, 1994: 53).

However, Russell and Massey (1994: 334) argue that conducting focus groups within phenomenographic research generates a secure environment which in turn encourages participants to reveal more about their experiences. In doing so group interaction leads to richness of data and on a more practical level, reduces the time needed to collect a variety of responses (*ibid*). In the context of this study I found that participants responded well to the group setting. Initial shyness or reluctance to take part was offset by the introductory statement I read at the beginning of the session which confirmed that there were no right or wrong answers (see sample interview protocol on page 106) and the group task, which served to bond the group as well as elicit discussion involving differing points of view. Other limitations such as moving towards agreement and balancing spontaneity and the research agenda were effectively managed by conducting three separate focus groups and by allowing the students to lead the discussion without a large degree of input from the interviewer. Moreover, focus groups can provide opportunities to observe instances of agreement and discord (Morgan, 1996: 139) and the ways in which participants interact may “tell as *much*, if not *more*, about what people ‘know’” (Kitzinger, 1994: 109, emphasis in original).

For the purposes of this study, using focus groups as a research method provided three main advantages. First, secure “communities of interpretation” were established, helping participants to feel at ease and more aware of the research process. Second, group discussion enabled the sharing of different opinions and experiences, thereby providing elements of variation, description and richness of data. Third, participants were able to

engage in discussions and conversations led largely by themselves rather than me, which ensured they were focusing on aspects important to them as opposed to what I may have deemed important. Each of these aspects upholds the principles of phenomenographic research and consequently they are more likely to reflect the participants' "daily realities" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 239).

4.7 Phenomenographic interviews

This chapter has already explored the development and use of interview techniques and question guides. This section looks more closely at the aims of the phenomenographic interview and some aspects of the method which distinguish it from other types of interviewing. On face value, a phenomenographic interview might not look dissimilar to any other type of qualitative interview. Indeed, a number of the characteristics of qualitative interviews identified by Kvale (1983: 174) can be applied to phenomenographic interviews, such as: the seeking to understand the meaning of the phenomenon in the interviewee's lifeworld; being qualitative, descriptive, specific and presuppositionless; being open to ambiguities and change. Bruce (1994: 49) also notes that phenomenographic interviews are not attempts to metaphorically enter the minds of the participants but are instances in which the interviewer tries to see how the world appears to them.

Drawing again on Bruce (1994: 50-53), five distinctive characteristics of the phenomenographic interview can be identified: the aim of the interview; the focus of the interview; the role of the interviewer; the design of the interview; the implementation of the interview. A common element rendering these characteristics different from other types of interview is the pursuit of variation. In establishing the aim of the interview, designing and implementing it, remaining open to and aware of the need to seek variation in

participants' responses is important, both within individual interviews and across all interviews comprising the dataset (Bruce, 1994: 53). In order to do so, it is essential that the questions asked are posed in such a way which allows the participants to account for their actions within their own frame of reference, not one imposed by the researcher (Entwistle, 1997: 132). This is supported by Åkerlind's (2003: 379) assertion that the aim of the interview should be to provide at all times opportunities for interviewees to reveal their current understanding of the phenomenon as fully as possible, without the interviewer introducing any new aspects not previously mentioned by the interviewee. As such, the interviewer remains wary of the intrusion of their own thoughts, ideas and preconceptions and attempts to "bracket" these as far as possible (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 302).

A further point highlighted by Bruce (1994: 51) and echoed by Barnard *et al* (1999: 221-2) is that the researcher should attempt to see the phenomenon under investigation through the eyes of the participants. The focus is on the relation between person and phenomenon; that is, how the participant experiences it. Consequently, there is a need for sensitivity to the way in which each person delimits the object of study (Barnard *et al*, 1999: 222). Being prepared to follow unexpected lines of reasoning can lead to fruitful new reflections (Booth, 1997: 138) and warrant being followed until they are exhausted and the two parties have come to a state of mutual understanding (*ibid*). Therefore, phenomenographic interviews are usually semi-structured, using open questions that encourage the participants to reflect on their experiences. As Ashworth and Lucas (2000: 302) explain, the interview should be regarded as a conversational partnership in which the interviewer assists a process of reflection.

When conducting the main study I therefore found it important to ensure that the various interviews would endeavour to seek as much variation as possible, whilst maintaining the focus on the participants' own experiences. I achieved this through the use of open-ended questions, usually beginning with *what* or *how*, and the use of prompts (e.g. "can you tell me more about that?") to help students to describe their experiences in their own words. I also sought variation through interviewing a range of different types of students and in different settings. Although some of the questions were predetermined (see earlier discussion), none of the conversations followed a set pattern. I used participants' own words and descriptions when seeking clarification or maintaining the discussion so that key points could be fully explored. At the end of the interview I also asked the students whether they wanted to add anything further or clarify what had been discussed.

4.8 Data analysis

It is agreed in the literature that there is a lack of precise description of what is necessarily involved in phenomenography (Entwistle, 1997: 128; see also Richardson, 1999; Ashworth and Lucas, 2000). The sections above have gone some way to address this in the context of this study but the same criticism also applies to methods of data analysis. Yet some researchers in the field have argued that it is not necessary to proffer instructions for phenomenographic data analysis (Bruce, 1997; Prosser, 2000) given that this stage in any study involves "interplay between the researcher's understanding, the nature of the phenomenon being studied and the style of the available database" (Bruce, 1997: 104). This suggests that analytical measures are largely dependent on the researcher and are not governed by any particular set of rules or procedures, thereby leading to variation in methods used.

However, addressing this as a weakness of the approach, both Ashworth and Lucas (2000) and Åkerlind (2005) propose sets of guidelines which are useful at this stage of the research process. Advice is given to retain an open mind as far as possible to avoid too rapid or premature closure of categories of description, as well as the application of presuppositions, which should be bracketed; similarities and differences should be identified across the set of transcripts as a whole in order to focus on collective experience; the process should be iterative and comparative and involve the continual sorting and re-sorting of data; analysis should be clearly described to allow the reader to trace the process by which findings have emerged and whether or not the researcher has achieved bracketing and empathy (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 300; Åkerlind, 2005: 323-4).

Applied to the current study, the first step of the analysis process involved making immediate field notes directly after each interview in order to capture first impressions and anything which resonated as important, interesting, confusing, or in the case of the focus groups, necessitating further discussion during follow-up interviews. Once all interviews had been conducted I transcribed them *verbatim* (see Appendix 5 for extracts), which, given the interpretive nature of transcription, I viewed as the next step in the analysis process (Wellard and McKenna, 2001). In studies such as this one where the methodology underpinning the research demands closeness between the researcher and the data (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006: 40) I deemed *verbatim* transcriptions necessary and they therefore include written representations of every verbal exchange. Although Poland (1995) argues that there is room for error in *verbatim* transcriptions, I found that the value of using the transcription process to develop familiarity with the data and uncover previously unnoticed phenomena (Bailey, 2008: 130) was more important. I also included certain non-

verbal content such as laughter, emphasis and hesitation in the transcripts in order to retain the context of the interviews. However, as Bailey (2008: 131) points out, it is impossible to record the full complexity of human interaction in written form. Therefore I also read through each transcript multiple times, along with listening to repeat playbacks of the audio files to develop an initial sensitisation to the data (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000: 304) and to start creating an overall picture of them.

The next stage involved open coding (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) of all the transcripts (three focus groups, three follow-up interviews and one teacher interview). This was a relatively rapid process aimed at describing the action contained within the data. For some researchers it is common practice to enlist the aid of computer software at this point in the analysis process (Richards and Richards, 1994; Weitzman, 1999; Marshall, 2002). This is because such programs are seen as helpful in managing data (Welsh, 2002), reducing time spent on the coding process (McLafferty and Farley, 2006) and flexibility in applying codes to the data (Basit, 2003). However, for each of these positive attributes there are reasons why using a software package may also be viewed as a less attractive option. In terms of the present study, these were: the time needed to learn how to use such software appropriately and efficiently (MacMillan and Koenig, 2004); concern regarding the type of coding a package might require (i.e. coding “imposed by the analytic rationale of the software package” (Blismas and Dainty, 2003: 457; see also Morison and Muir, 1998); feeling distanced from the data (Séror, 2005) and not being able to engage in the “messy reality” (Marshall, 2002: 56) that qualitative data analysis often engenders. For me, it is within this “messy reality” that I feel most immersed in the data and most able and comfortable to make the necessary conceptual and creative leaps and links between and across my

collection of codes. One of the frequent criticisms of computer-assisted data analysis is that it can focus more heavily on volume and breadth of data than it does on depth and meaning (St John and Johnson, 2000: 393), thereby stifling researcher creativity (McLafferty and Farley, 2006: 34). I wanted to stay as close as possible to my data in order to fully understand it. This may be viewed now as outdated practice but it still retains value in aiding the researcher to develop an intimate knowledge of the data (Pope et al, 2000: 115). Finally, I felt that one of the main arguments put forward for the use of computers in qualitative data analysis was not as absolute as proponents of such packages may imply. Many believe that using software enhances the rigour of the overall analysis procedure (Weitzman, 1999; Dey, 2003; Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011), largely because they can manage large data sets and take analyses “much further” than traditional manual approaches (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011: 71). However, the danger here is that rigour “is treated not as the product of concise conceptual thought, ideas, and examination of research materials...but as something provided by a software tool able to produce replicable data sets” (MacMillan and Koenig, 2004: 184). In agreement with this statement, I believe that I provide evidence of analytical rigour throughout this study via the careful detailing of the steps I took during the analysis process. In conclusion, I opted to follow Saldaña’s (2012: 25) advice for gaining control and ownership of the data by “manipulating [it] on paper and writing codes in pencil”.

To do so, the majority of the codes began with gerunds, such as “identifying need for languages”, “feeling frustrated”, “helping each other”. This helped me to keep to what the participants were saying, rather than impressing my own assumptions upon the data. As such, I created many of the codes using the participants’ own words. A large number of

initial codes were generated in this fashion (over 1000 from the three follow-up interviews alone), which at first felt overwhelming and somewhat unmanageable. Examples of initial coding and the resulting codebook can be found in Appendix 8.

However, engaging in the iterative process of constantly comparing the data both within and across the transcripts (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Åkerlind, 2005) allowed emergent conceptions to form and I could then begin to synthesise initial codes. For example, the initial codes of “feeling ‘dumb’”, “not understanding”, “asking [for help] repeatedly” and “not ‘getting it’” began to shape what became the overall conception of *negatively framed self-awareness* (see Chapter 5 for further discussion of findings and Appendix 9 for example of comparative coding process which led to this conception). The similarities between these initial codes reside in some of the students’ apparent views of themselves as “dumb” or “not able to get it” and thus I grouped them under the same heading of *self-awareness*.

I then compared other codes with this group to see if they also shared these similarities or if they in fact displayed any differences. In doing so, another aspect of the overall conception was revealed, that of how some students compare themselves to others in the class (“needing explanation”, “comparing self to others”, “others understanding”). Whilst this is a difference; that is, students are comparing themselves to others rather than giving opinions of themselves, there is also a level of similarity across the codes because this comparison also contributes to negatively framed self-awareness, just from a different perspective. In this way, the codes and the resulting conceptions are interconnected upon various levels, thus leading to the ultimate development of the different categories of description.

I repeated the process outlined above numerous times, focusing on emerging themes, difference, similarities, questions about the data and so on. This cyclical pattern of looking

at the data revealed a total of 19 different conceptions from all of the student interviews. I then compared and examined these conceptions in an iterative process in order to finalise a stable set of categories of description. Aiding this step greatly was the process of analytical memo writing (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), which involved writing constant notes or memos whilst coding and comparing the data. This helped me to record both fleeting and more concrete ideas about how links and relationships were forming in the data. As Corbin and Strauss (2008: 118) note, this step is important because it “forces the analyst to think about the data. And it is in thinking that analysis occurs”. I recorded nearly forty memos, which also provided a useful basis for reporting the overall findings (examples of these can be found in Appendix 10). In a similar fashion, I kept a research diary during the study in which any thoughts, field notes, critical reflections and similar were noted. Extracts from the research diary can be found in Appendix 6.

Bringing the different conceptions of the students’ foreign language learning experiences together to form categories of description moved the analysis process from the more individual level of initial codes to attempting to see what FLL means to the participants on a more collective level. This entailed grouping the conceptions in various different patterns and looking again for similarities and differences between and across them. Reading the whole transcripts again also proved beneficial at this stage to ensure that the abstracted conceptions were accurately reflecting the data. It was at this stage that the most distinctive features of the conceptions became apparent, with groupings forming under the headings of *negative*, *emotional*, *disengaged* and *self-assured* experiences. The groupings became the four different categories of description of the different ways of experiencing FLL and the conceptions within became that group’s structural aspects, clearly delimiting one category

from another, yet providing links and relationships across the categories. Another benefit of having re-read the transcripts was that I could select a direct, *in vivo* code from the data to form a descriptive label for each category and thereby illustrate its main theme. Appendix 11 shows a flow chart detailing the full data analysis process.

Finally, I created an outcome space (see page 182) to diagrammatically represent the categories of description and their structural aspects as well as to demonstrate their logical and hierarchical relationships. Reviewing the phenomenographic literature revealed that there was no standard way of depicting the research outcomes and consequently outcome spaces could be presented in many forms (see Boon *et al*, 2007; Govender and Grayson, 2008; Adams *et al*, 2010 for different examples). In order to present the categories of description and their structural aspects as clearly as possible, I chose to display them in the form of a colour-coordinated table which would highlight the relationships between each. The final outcome space can be found in the next chapter, following the presentation of research findings.

4.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations played an important part in research design and implementation. As a researcher working with young adults I believed it important to be aware of the need to protect the research participants, assure trust and satisfy organisational demands (Israel and Hay, 2006). In the first instance, the study received ethical clearance from the University of Brighton (see Appendix 12 for a copy). I then took further steps to adhere to ethical practice and distributed parent/carer information letters explaining the research and why their child had been chosen to participate as well as what this would involve. I also provided consent forms with the information letters which had to be signed by each participant's

parent or carer before the research began. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason. Copies of information sheets and consent forms can also be found in Appendix 2.

Before being able to collect the data, I also had to comply with the school's own ethical procedures. This involved providing evidence of my Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. This is a document required by law in England for those working with children. I had already been issued with the CRB form for my job role but had to present it to the school in the form of an email which was then followed up by a telephone check with the university's Human Resources department.

In terms of data collection, I reminded the participants that they would remain anonymous throughout the study. I protected their anonymity as far as possible by assigning each focus group and follow-up interview participant with a number rather than using their name or initials. I also made participants aware that the focus groups and interviews would be recorded. Following transcription, I deleted the audio recordings from the recording device and stored them on a password-protected computer that only I could access. However, I could only ensure anonymity from this practical point of view as obviously the participants themselves knew who had taken part in the research and could therefore share that knowledge with others if they wished.

Following data collection, I sent the teacher a copy of her own interview transcript and a carefully reported summary of the data from the focus groups and follow-up interviews (see Appendix 13), ensuring that each student was untraceable. I asked the teacher to provide feedback or further comments if she wished but did not hear from her with regard to any of the transcripts.

Aside from the practical considerations detailed above, I also took into account other ethical issues before I began the data collection process. Primarily this involved reflecting upon interviewing adolescents and the associated concerns therein which I would need to address. Morrow and Richards (1996: 94) debate the difference between asking parents of young people for their informed consent to interview their child versus asking the child themselves. As the participants were aged between 14 and 15 years old, they fell into the bracket applied in the United Kingdom of a “minor” (anyone under the age of 18) but at the same time they were young adults who could be expected to make their own decisions. However, after discussion with the teacher at the school I decided that parental consent would be necessary so that parents were aware of what their children were being asked to do. This would also give them an opportunity to voice concerns or prevent their child from participating if they were not happy for them to do so. Tymchuk (1992: 129, quoted in Morrow and Richards, 1996) asserts that this is necessary because parents have a right in saying what happens to their children.

Another issue relating to interviewing adolescents relates to power dynamics (Eder and Fingerson, 2001). The interviewer must be aware of the imbalance of power between themselves and their participants and should take care not to exploit this. As Eder and Fingerson (2001: 182) point out, interviewing young people in a group setting may make the interview context more natural and reduce the researcher’s power, particularly because they would then outnumber the researcher. This supports my methodological idea of establishing a “community of interpretation” as previously discussed and became an important consideration as I conducted the study.

Power imbalances can also be mediated by ensuring that the participants are represented in their own terms during data analysis and presentation (Eder and Fingerson, 2001: 1996). This can be done by using numerous direct quotes from the interviews and serves to keep the participants' voices "alive" in the data. This is particularly important in the context of this study given the "student voice" angle from which I have approached the research. It also serves to enhance the study's validity (see page 90). Being aware of the issues power dynamics can bring to an interview from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint enabled me to keep ethical concerns such as this at the forefront of the study and thereby draw upon them rather than viewing them as an obstacle.

4.10 Trustworthiness

Aside from the aspects of reliability and validity discussed in Chapter 3, further elements were incorporated into the study to enhance its trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985: 328) highlight that trustworthiness is a matter of concern to the consumer of inquirer reports and as such, certain steps can be taken to demonstrate to the reader the levels of trustworthiness inherent in the research. As Ashworth and Lucas (2000: 300) attest, the description of the research process should be transparent to enable the reader to evaluate the study and determine for themselves whether or not the interpretations and conclusions reached are viable and well-clarified. This chapter addresses these concerns by offering a clear outline of what the study entailed.

From a different perspective, Collier-Reed *et al* (2009) view trustworthiness in phenomenographic studies in the light of credibility. They offer three ways in which trustworthiness can be assessed by using notions of content-related credibility, credibility of method and communicative credibility (Collier-Reed *et al*, 2009: 7-9). Content-related

credibility demands that the researcher is familiar with the field and has a comprehensive grasp of the phenomenon under investigation; credibility of method necessitates a match between the aims of the study and its execution; communicative credibility rests in the ability to present the results of the study in an open way to allow the whole of the study to be scrutinised (*ibid*). This study, and specifically this chapter, outline in fine detail how these aspects of credibility are met and thereby contribute to the trustworthiness of the research as a whole.

Finally, other measures such as keeping a research diary (see Appendix 6), discussing early findings with a “critical friend” (Bassegy, 1995), triangulating data by interviewing the participants’ teacher to find another perspective on the issues raised, attending a conference on phenomenography to further my knowledge of the methodology (see Appendix 14 for conference programme) and presenting my understanding of the phenomenographic approach at doctoral conferences and during study seminars all contribute to the validity and trustworthiness of the study. Collectively these measures demonstrate a thorough and transparent approach to conducting the research and highlight how each stage of the study has been carefully considered and explored to the fullest extent.

4.11 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter seeks to provide a clear and traceable outline of how the present study was designed and implemented and how the collected data were analysed. By doing so, the trustworthiness of the research process and subsequent findings are enhanced and made visible to the reader. I took a number of steps to ensure that the research design and data collection methods were suitable and that ethical considerations were addressed and

handled appropriately. Conducting a pilot study not only enabled me to test the research methods and study design but also provided me with opportunities to reflect upon and revise the process before moving on to the main study. The changes I made to my interviewing techniques and interview protocol strengthened the final data collection phase, whilst my idea of developing a “community of interpretation” helped me to sensitise myself and the participants to the interview setting as well as address some ethical considerations. The next chapter presents the findings and research outcomes.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The research question guiding this study is:

- ***What are the qualitatively different ways in which Year 9 students in an English state secondary school experience foreign language learning?***

I employed a phenomenographic approach to help answer this question and in doing so attempted to uncover the different ways in which particular phenomena are understood and experienced by a particular group of people (Marton, 1981). In this study the phenomena in question are experiences of foreign language learning. The group of people in question are Year 9 students from a state secondary school in the South of England.

This chapter presents the findings of the above-mentioned study. It describes how foreign language learning (FLL) is experienced by the students who took part in the research. As is characteristic of phenomenographic studies, the findings are organised into categories of description and are subsequently displayed in the form of outcome spaces (Marton and Booth, 1997). The categories of description point to the qualitatively different ways in which people can experience and conceive of the same phenomenon. The aim of the outcome spaces is to present diagrammatically the relationships between each of the categories and to make clear the structural and referential aspects of each of them.

I also interviewed the students' teacher in order to triangulate the data gathered from the focus groups and follow-up interviews. The findings from this interview are presented at the end of this chapter. They have not been incorporated into the outcome space as this is intended to map only the relationships between the categories and structural aspects found in the student data.

It is perhaps important at this stage to reiterate that the findings explored below have been derived directly from the students' own experiences (i.e. from a second-order perspective). They have not been applied to pre-defined categories and neither do they reflect any attempt on my part to explain rather than describe the phenomenon in question. Consequently, the "voice" of the participants emerges quite stridently in some parts. I have not attempted to modify this voice in any way as the goal here is to remain as close to the participants' own words as possible. However, as Gunter and Thomson (2007: 184) point out, one of the risks involved in giving students as say is what they may say and how they say it may not be liked or welcomed. The inherent subjectivity of the students' descriptions of their experiences is a necessary part of student voice research but should not be confused with the researcher's presentation of the data.

5.2 Categories of description: how students experience foreign language learning

Chapter 4 explained the process of phenomenographic data analysis and the various steps involved before finalising the data into categories of description. This section presents the categories of description I arrived at and how they characterise the various ways in which Year 9 students experience foreign language learning (FLL). The categories of description reflect the students' opinions, experiences and conceptions; that is, they are derived from a second-order perspective (Marton, 1981: 177), something which is also particularly important in the context of student voice. Furthermore, they do not represent individual experiences of FLL but rather those of the 'collective mind' of the participants (Marton, 1981: 196).

The categories have each been given a descriptive label (Marton and Booth, 1997), in part drawn from a direct, *in vivo* code from the data, which serves to encapsulate the essence of

that category. There then follows a short narrative describing the category and the particular way of experiencing FLL it denotes. To extend the narrative description each category is also framed by a number of key structural aspects of the experience which help to clearly define and delimit one category from another.

5.3 Category one:

Every time I walked into French I just thought, hurry up and get it over and done

with: the negative foreign language learning experience

This category describes how some students frame their foreign language learning experience negatively. Students expressing this conception tend to view FLL as 'boring', 'confusing', 'a challenge' or something they 'don't get'. To them, learning a foreign language (in this case, French), is more of a chore than it is something to be enjoyed. In some instances they find it difficult to articulate reasons as to why this might be, using phrases such as: 'it's just a language'; 'find it a challenge'; 'too hard, can't do it'; suggesting that their level of engagement in the subject is low enough to preclude any kind of further self-investigation into possible reasons for this and how it might be tackled or changed. In fact, when I probed for a deeper insight into why they might find the subject hard or confusing or whether or not they have any strategies for coping with this, a common answer was simply 'dunno'. However, those that did offer slightly more in-depth responses cited: not doing 'any fun things in lessons'; 'getting mixed up with all the accents'; 'really hard activities like long sentences'; having to 'write everything down'; 'copying off the board' as some of the main reasons for their dislike of the subject. To quote Dörnyei (1994a) these can be seen as reasons located at the course-specific point of the learning situation level.

Further comments, such as: 'there's words thrown at you'; 'she doesn't have the accent', suggest that the lessons themselves might not be solely behind students' negative experience of foreign language learning but that the perceived behaviour and teaching style of the languages teacher may also be responsible. When asked what they do like doing during a language lesson, responses were similarly limited, including: 'fun stuff' and 'activities' without any further elaboration.

Pervading participants' accounts of this experience of foreign language learning is a sense of them not feeling equipped or able to cope in the target language. This feeling of unease, which comes at a time when students may already be feeling socially awkward or sensitive (Hawkins, 1996), perhaps does little to encourage learners to muster the courage and confidence needed to speak in the target language (TL). It is well-documented that boys in particular are often more susceptible to such pressures (Barton, 2006) and thus the social discomfort they may experience in the FLL arena can be enough to impair their enjoyment of the subject.

Finally, a negative FLL experience can also be linked to a limited outlook regarding the perceived pragmatic value of competence in the target language. Some students steadfastly believe that learning another language is unnecessary. They do not see how such skills may open up wider social and financial opportunities and prefer to stick to the belief that others 'should speak English' or that others do 'speak English anyway, so there's no point [in learning another language]'

5.3.1 Structural aspects of Category one (negative experience)

The above narrative provides an overview of the way in which foreign language learning is a negative experience for some students. A more in-depth analysis of the category as a whole can be achieved by examining its structural aspects; that is, those key elements which help elucidate how the experience is conceived of by the students, as well as how this particular experience differs from others. Five structural aspects can be defined:

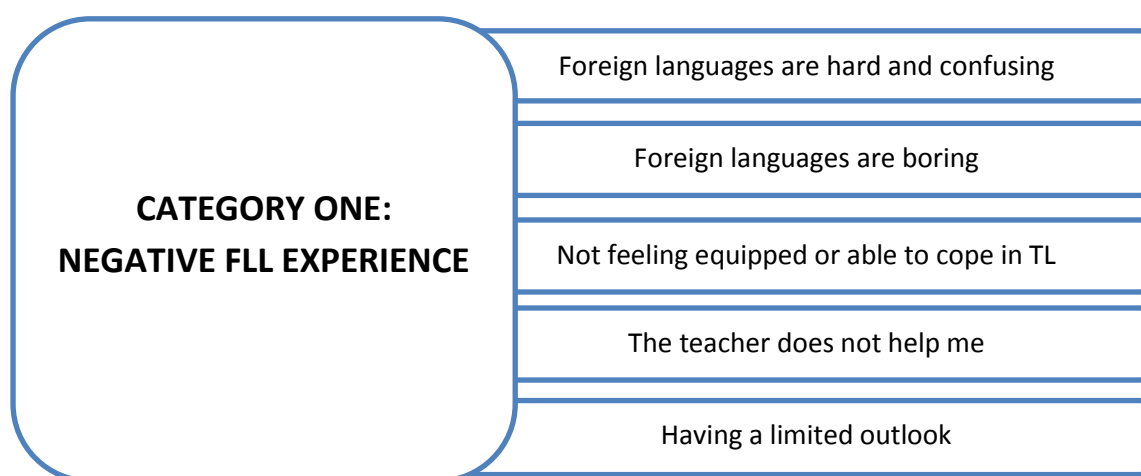


Figure three: Category one structural aspects

Analysing each of these structural aspects in turn allows the development of further knowledge about how foreign language learning is understood and experienced by some students.

5.3.2 Foreign languages are hard and confusing

This aspect reveals how students with a negative FLL experience tend to view language learning as hard or difficult and confusing. Although not a new or particularly unique perspective and certainly one that has been addressed by other studies (Davies, 2004), it

does, however, help to delimit this experience of FLL from the other ways of experiencing it that will be dealt with below. It is illustrated by the following quotes:

Well, I don't like languages cos it's too confusing and I don't understand it (FG9);

I dislike languages because it's very confusing. Getting mixed up with all the accents and all the different writing styles and all of that in all the languages. I just find it confusing (FG10);

Because, like, some of the words we don't even know what they mean (FG10);

I'd do it a bit better if, like, they made the work more simpler [sic]. Made it more easier [sic]...then once I understood that then she can make it a bit harder (F15).

These statements reflect how the participants' enjoyment of learning French is limited by a combination of being confused, finding the work hard and not understanding the target language. As mentioned above, there is little mention of the development, acquisition or use of any strategies that may help to minimise confusion or clarify learning points. For example, when I asked if they had any ways in which they tried not to be confused, a student replied, 'No. It just confuses me'. Similarly a number of students stated that French would be less confusing if 'it was easier work'. Whether this is because the level of the lesson is too high or whether 'easier work' is simply a quick fix is unclear. However, it appears as though students remain confused throughout their lessons, which causes them to view the subject negatively.

5.3.3 Foreign languages are boring

One of the most repeated reasons given for disliking French lessons is that they are not exciting: being in the languages classroom makes you feel 'bored'; the work and activities are 'boring'. Students say the following:

...we don't do any fun stuff (FG9);

I just find it boring...cos we have to write everything down...cos you're still working out language (FG11);

It's boring because it's hard... (FG12);

We do sports and going to the cinema – that's boring (FG14);

I think [the topics] are all boring (FI7);

I always looked at the clock. That's all I kept looking at (FI6).

Reasons for this seemingly high level of boredom appear to relate to three main areas: students' opinions of the language itself, including the perceived difficulty of the subject; curriculum content; teaching methods. Writing in particular is seen as an especially laborious task:

We just have to sit there and write a load of stuff (FG9);

Writing loads of French stuff down even though you don't even know how to spell it and that [is difficult]... (FG12);

...it was all writing down and copying off the board and it was just horrible (FG13);

I don't like writing and where they have the apostrophe things (FG14);

It's like we write and write and write and write and write and never speak or get to say what we think about everything (FG18).

Students appear frustrated with what they feel is a dull and repetitive classroom endeavour, which for many seems to be without meaning or purpose. Their repeated recounting of their dislike of writing-based activities seems to suggest that these have a significant effect on their view of the FLL experience as a whole and in their view do not allow many opportunities to encounter other methods of language learning.

5.3.4 Not feeling equipped or able to cope in the target language

Another structural aspect of the negative foreign language learning category relates to students' confidence in the target language. A sense of not being able to cope within the target

language community or be able to successfully use the target language outside of the classroom is evident through comments such as:

I'd love to, like, go to other countries and talk like they do...but I just don't get any of it...I don't even know how to pronounce it (FG14);

You're gonna want to know how to say, slow down, and they don't teach you that. They teach you...just individual words (F16);

But when we actually learn French, we don't learn the basics. We don't learn how to meet people and stuff (FG22);

We don't learn the common things (FG16);

We don't learn sentences, we learn bits. We don't learn the connectors... (FG15);

And if we do go over to France we wouldn't know what to say cos we haven't learnt it (FG22);

We need to know common things like, is there a phone around here or, do you know where I am? Stuff like that (FG19);

If they say something and you don't know then you're gonna be a bit stuffed really, aren't you? (F18).

Students appear to express a desire to engage with the TL community but this is overridden by fear of not knowing what or how to say something. It is perhaps the above-mentioned focus on writing that leads to students feeling as though their competence in other areas, such as using and producing the target language, is diminished. Discerning levels of fear and reluctance is perhaps not surprising if one considers that out of the 24 participants only three mentioned that they had been to France. Consequently the majority of the group have not been presented with any real-life instances where they can find out whether or not their acquired level of French would actually 'stand up' to the situation they found themselves in. As a result, they can only rely on perceived levels of ability and confidence. Few of the students interviewed referred to what they *can* say in the TL and none made any suggestions as to how they might manage any communicative difficulties, apart from the

idea of 'getting a translator' (F16). This perhaps points to a learning environment where increased encouragement and positive feedback could obviate students' negative views. Such an approach would tie in with points 5-8 of Dörnyei's (1994a: 281) motivational framework.

5.3.5 The teacher does not help me

At first glance, the label given to this structural aspect may suggest that the teacher refuses to help the students. This, however, is not the case; rather, what is meant by this is that some of the measures employed by the teacher to help them in the classroom are not perceived as helpful. Take the following exchange as an example:

I: And how is the teacher when she gets round to you?

F15: She's normally annoying.

I: Annoying?

F15: Yeah, she is, yeah. She's just moaning at you cos you haven't done nothing [sic].

F14: Or she'll just say, try and figure it out for yourself but they don't.

F15: Or she'll give you a dictionary, a French dictionary...

F16: Which is annoying if you don't know how to spell.

F14: I'm not very good at spelling.

The above excerpt highlights two methods used by the teacher to help her students. The first is encouraging them to find answers for themselves and the second is providing a target language resource. Both are strategies commonly used in language teaching and learning but it appears that these do not resonate well with the students. Possible reasons for this are also hinted at above; the students' lack of confidence in their spelling and TL ability here seems to render the teacher's instructions both frustrating and daunting. What the teacher

assumes to be a helping hand is felt by the students to be the opposite and to them they remain unaided and further disenchanting. It is difficult to determine from the interview transcripts how far (if at all) the teacher realises that this approach is perceived by some students as negative and therefore this may merit further investigation.

5.3.6 Having a limited outlook

A final key structural aspect of this category is 'having a limited outlook'. Put simply, this means that students expressing a negative view of the FLL experience tend to struggle to see beyond their own culture and language community. It appears hard for them to see the value and importance of learning another language and they seem to be less instrumentally motivated (Dörnyei, 1994a: 274) to do so. The exchange below supports these suggestions:

I: Ok. So what are languages to you?

F15: Nothing.

I: Nothing? Do you know why that might be?

F15: Cos when I'm older I don't wanna...I wanna be an architect and that's got nothing to do with a different language.

The following quotes also support these suggestions:

I wouldn't really want to go to France anyway (F16).

I'd just speak to them in English, not French (F15).

...you're in England and you speak English. It's not your job to speak another language, it's other people's job who don't come from England to learn the language of the country that they're in (F19).

A last exchange continues in the same vein:

I: So what if you started off in a job that didn't need a language but then they said, oh we're thinking of expanding and we want to set up an office somewhere in the world...

F17: Yeah but then you can't open the office.

Again, this aspect does not reveal much in the way of 'new' information as student attitudes like these have prevailed for a number of years (Stables and Wikeley, 1999). However, it is still important to flag and address them where possible in order to try to establish why this might be the case when much research shows that the opposite is true (Tinsley, 2013). That students seem willing to miss out on opportunities to broaden their horizons, visit other countries or improve their job prospects (particularly in today's employment climate) suggests that either they truly have little to no interest in doing so or they have not been provided with valid and relevant reasons and explanations as to why learning a language might be valuable to them. However, students expressing a self-assured view of FLL (see Category four, page 163) seem fully cognisant of the benefits and pleasures FLL can bring, which raises the question of why the students expressing this conception do not. Perhaps it is simply an accumulation of factors such as those listed above which combine to create such a negative experience that the students cannot see beyond it.

5.4 Category two:

I actually got to the point where I was crying cos I was so confused: the emotional foreign language learning experience

This category demonstrates how some students view their language learning experience as an emotional one. A certain level of self-awareness is evident but this is communicated in negative terms as they explain how they feel 'pretty dumb', 'embarrassed' and 'frustrated'. These feelings are often exacerbated as the students tend to compare themselves to others in their group who they view as 'all kind of quite smart' and able to 'get' French.

Consequently they have a tendency to turn inwards; keeping their thoughts and feelings to

themselves and not letting others (friends, teachers and parents) see 'that I was upset about it'.

In terms of being in the languages classroom these students express a sense of feeling lost or ignored. To them, their presence in the classroom is often mitigated by the disruptive behaviour of other students. They try to get on with their work but regard the support and guidance they need from their teacher as absent because attention is repeatedly diverted to those who misbehave. On a slightly different level students also feel ignored through the perceived dismissive actions of their teacher, who often does not stop to answer their questions and 'just moves on'.

Another issue to which a great deal of importance appears to be attached is that of trust. Here this refers to the participants' perceptions of how far they are trusted by their languages teacher and the resulting effects this has not only on the language lessons themselves but also wider social situations. This reveals another occasion which causes the students to become introspective and to question not only that which occurs during lessons but also situations beyond the classroom, such as how they are viewed by their friends, being the person 'who doesn't really fit in' and reciprocal trust in their teacher.

As in Category one, the teacher's perceived attitude towards students also features in this category. However, whereas in Category one students acknowledge the teacher as sometimes being unhelpful in instruction, here students identify and react to someone who appears to engage with them on a much more subjective level. Participants note how they have been called 'incompetent', see themselves as the 'crap' people (a perception arrived at in part due to setting practices that students believe is based on behaviour rather than ability), feel 'patronised' and are aware of the teacher being 'disappointed in you'. Some

students in this category also feel as though they cannot approach or interact with the teacher and that an almost reversed level of favouritism operates in the class when 'she tells one person not to do something but if another person does it she doesn't consequence them'. These examples indicate a distinct sensitivity on the part of the students within this category.

A final point regards the impact of other students' behaviour upon these students. Already hinted at in terms of not receiving teacher attention, this aspect can also be extended to include the direct effect others in the class can sometimes have upon these students. In this instance the students in this category report how the 'badmans' of the class 'pick on us during lessons', 'think it's funny if they hit someone' and 'throw stuff at you on purpose'. How students deal with these situations is sometimes influenced by the level of trust they have in their teacher as mentioned above. Reacting to such situations does not always help as this often results in being sanctioned – something that more sensitive students care about more than those who have no interest in French and just 'think it's cool to be stupid and silly'. When asked, a number of participants revealed that the removal of such students from their French class would have caused them to change their mind about dropping French after the end of Year 8.

5.4.1 Structural aspects of Category 2 (emotional experience)

As in Category one, there are five key structural aspects within Category two which can be further examined to help understand how the students have constituted their FLL experience. These are:

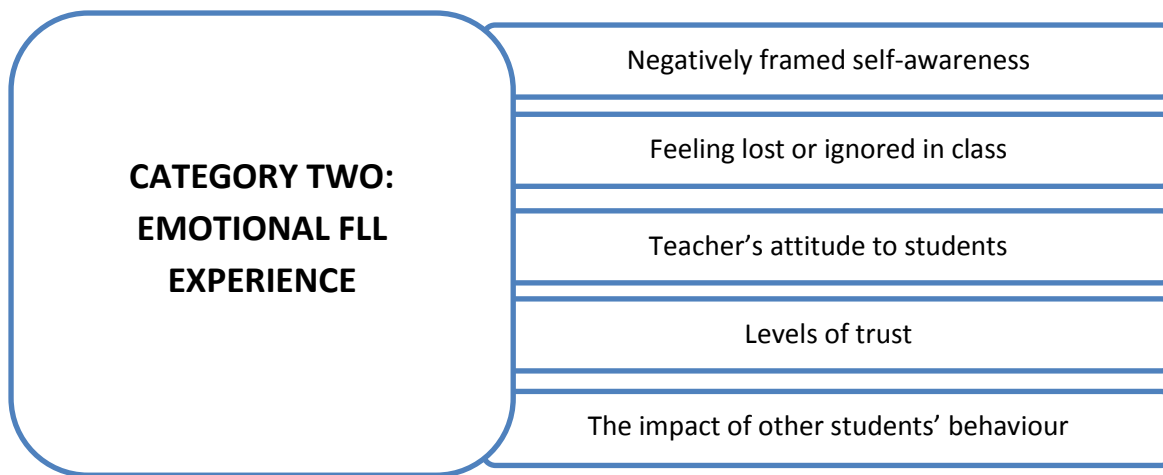


Figure four: Category two structural aspects

5.4.2 Negatively framed self-awareness

This key structural aspect involves how students see themselves in terms of language learning. Like students in Category one, they also find French 'confusing' or 'difficult'. The difference, however, between the students in these two categories is that whilst those in the first appear to accept being confused as a *fait accompli*, an inevitable part of the language lesson, those in the second use their state of confusion to compare themselves to others:

Everyone in my class kind of gets French...I am the only person sitting there, like, 'whaaat?' (FG13).

Everyone else understood it...everyone was just like heads down doing the work and I was just like, can you just explain this bit to me again...(FI6).

This direct comparison seems to intensify the students' emotional FLL experience and cause them to look inwards, suggesting that perhaps 'favourable self-perceptions of competence in L2' (Dörnyei, 1994a: 281) are lacking. There are no instances where students in this category confidently assert their ability in the target language. Instead they regularly point out their shortcomings:

I had to be reminded ten times before I could actually remember (FG13);

I get it in my head but then I just forget everything and I asked her [teacher] to repeat it and she said no (FG14);

[I have to ask] what really simple words mean (F16);

We should...be in with the people who don't get the work and who are not doing very well (F14).

Levels of frustration are accordingly high, with one student reporting that on one occasion she was 'crying because [she] was so confused'. Other students also describe feeling exasperated and like they 'want to get up and walk out' of the lesson or that they are 'frustrated with themselves because they don't get it and other people do'. Such instances tend not to be discussed with classmates, teachers or parents. As above, students turn inwardly and 'normally shut out from all [their] friends'. They hide their emotional reaction from others and do not feel comfortable in addressing the matter with their teacher. In putting themselves down about their language learning abilities and internalising their concerns there is a danger that students in this category could become isolated from their friends and teachers. This is a theme which can be identified in some of the other structural aspects below.

5.4.3 Feeling lost or ignored in class

Another way in which students in this category delimit their experience is by focusing on how they feel in class, this time in terms of interaction with the teacher. Again, a level of comparison with others is evident and it is this comparison which appears to contribute to the students' emotional experience of foreign language learning. The following quotes are representative of this:

...she takes forever with other people and then she goes to another person and another person and you're just waiting for ages so what's the point (F14)?

She...she just ignored me. Didn't realise I was there (F16);

She'll forget all about us. She'll forget that she was talking to us (F16).

In some instances this is because the teacher has been forced to deal with someone who has caused 'quite a big disturbance'. In others it is because so many people are requesting help that there is not enough time for only one person to assist everyone. Yet regardless of what prompts these situations, the end result is often the same: students are left feeling forgotten or ignored. For those who are already sensitive towards their language learning experience as noted above, considering themselves in this way may intensify their emotions and perhaps cause them to withdraw even further. A further feature of this aspect can also be identified by students' accounts of the teacher dismissing their requests for help:

Yeah, that annoys me so much. Like today, someone said...how do you do this and she was like, it's not relevant to the topic...It's like, well yeah, it might not be relevant to the topic but we're learning French and it is French (F17);

...I tried to ask...how [a verb works] is and she was like, oh that's not relevant and just kind of moved on (F19).

Here students are attempting to engage in the lesson and enquire about various aspects of learning French but feel their efforts are rebuffed. This generates feelings of annoyance and frustration in the students and is closely linked to another of the key structural aspects of this category, which is explored below.

5.4.4 Teacher's perceived attitude to students

As noted above, students in this category convey emotions such as frustration and irritation when they talk about their foreign language learning experience. As opposed to students in Category one, who are largely disinterested in the foreign language and express frustration in terms of not being provided with appropriate learning strategies, students in this

category identify the teacher as the source of much of their frustration. In this situation the students seem both sensitive to and angered by either some of the comments made by the teacher or her general attitude:

...I can have a laugh with [English teacher] and it's more fun but miss, if you, like, even try and talk to her without putting your hand up you get a penalty (FG20);

It makes me feel annoyed because, like, we get Cs for it but we can't help being incompetent as she puts it. Like, she's called me incompetent so many times and I'm not. I'm not incompetent at all (F17);

[The way the teacher talks to you] it's patronising (F19).

In this instance it is not known how the students have behaved in order to provoke such reactions, or indeed whether or not these reports are an accurate portrayal of the teacher. However in listening to accounts from a student voice perspective it is not appropriate to place a value judgement on the levels of truth and accuracy in such statements. What is important is discerning the students' own views of their FLL experience and what constitutes these. In this instance the students are foregrounding their emotional reactions, which in this thesis merit attention and exploration. Highlighted here is how the students perceive their teacher and their subsequent reactions to this, which may affect enjoyment of or engagement in the lessons. An example of this is reflected in the following statement:

...As I went into the French room brand new in Year 9 after having the six week thing off, she tells me to, like, sit at the front and I was like, well hang on a minute, why do I have to sit at the front and she was like, well I know you're bad. I was like, I could have changed, why are you sitting me at the front cos I was bad last year when I could've changed my attitude over the six weeks' holiday...and was, like, better behaved. It was just annoying because I feel like if she gives me the chance to prove myself then I will because I've been given the chance, but if she's gonna stereotype me as being bad, then I will...that's what makes me not wanna learn French (F17).

A wealth of reactions and emotions can be identified here: puzzlement (at having to sit at the front straightaway); indignation at being called 'bad'; annoyance; defiance; all of which

contribute to the student not wanting to learn French (although in this case this is a student who has to do languages as they are on the English Baccalaureate pathway). Perceiving the teacher as limiting them in such a fashion has a noticeably detrimental effect upon the student's attitude towards learning French.

Participants' perceptions of their teacher's attitudes do form a strong core of this category and consequently contribute significantly here to students' levels of motivation.

Nonetheless, whilst it is important from a student voice perspective to recognise and listen to such observations, it is also crucial to not assume or take for granted that this is how the teacher behaves or how she is perceived by all students. Instances such as this point to the value of the phenomenographic approach as it allows for collective rather than individual perspectives to be addressed and therefore a more balanced experiential description can be achieved.

5.4.5 Levels of trust

In this category students' mention and discussion of the issue of trust in the languages classroom reveals this to be a significant aspect of their experience of foreign language learning. It is explicated here in terms of being allowed to take home folders containing worksheets completed in class in order to revise. The following exchange explains:

F14: If we do revision miss said we could take our books home but we have a folder and we had all the bits of paper what we do in the folder and we couldn't take that home.

I: Why were you not allowed to take it home?

F14: She didn't trust us. She thought we wouldn't bring it back.

FI6: She trusted certain people in my class but it was the people who decided to complain that they weren't allowed to take their folders home, so everyone wasn't allowed to.

A number of issues can be identified from this extract which in fact encapsulates some of the aspects already examined in this category. First, students are not allowed to take home materials that may help them revise; second, the question of being trusted by the teacher is raised; third, there is again a comparison made by the students between them and others in the class; fourth, complaining about the situation changed the teacher's mind for some (i.e. those who were confident enough to engage with the teacher or perhaps even challenge her instructions were successful in being allowed to take home their folders whereas those who were maybe not as confident in doing so lost out). This of course has its own implications in terms of being motivated to study or revise, particularly outside of the classroom, and to work towards good grades, with students reporting that they simply did not revise and consequently achieved a 'really bad score' in their test. However the most important element here is that of trust. The participants voice their belief that their teacher does not trust them. This is further highlighted in one student's response to being asked whether or not they revised:

No. I wanted to take my folder home with me but she doesn't trust any of us or not in our class anyway. Cos we're all, like, loud and noisy (FI4).

The student has added what they believe to be the reason for the teacher's lack of trust in them, suggesting again that a certain level of sensitivity prevails when talking about their FLL experience. Nonetheless it is striking that the students seem to have been left to assume that their teacher does not trust them and that a definitive reason for not being allowed to take their folders out of school has not been provided. Yet this is not the only impact that

conceiving a lack of trust on the part of the teacher has; it does in fact have a bearing on wider social issues:

FI4: It does make me think, do my other friends think the same of me? Like they can't trust me as well, like, if my teacher can't trust me to take a book home, will my friends trust me to do anything with their stuff or something?

I: So that has a knock-on effect?

FI6: Yeah, cos they're not only saying that they can't trust us, it makes us think that what...does everyone else look at me like that...And then I start looking out at the things like how I am different from my friends, like everyone has the latest phone and are listening to music and I'm just thinking, am I the person who just tags along, who doesn't really fit in?

Here it is possible to note that what might seem like a small or even inconsequential issue to the teacher brings much bigger and wider-reaching consequences for the students.

Concerns about how they may be viewed by friends and how they fit into their friendship groups are focused upon, moving away from the languages classroom and into the realms of social anxiety. Consequently their conception of FLL magnifies other issues in their lives which may make them feel insecure or uncomfortable. If these feelings are then associated with language learning it is perhaps unsurprising that trust emerges as an important issue. A last mention of trust by one of the students leads us succinctly on to the next structural aspect:

...because...the teachers don't trust us to take a folder home, how are we meant to trust them not to say anything if we go up to them and try and tell them what's going on (FI6)?

Students feel unable to communicate with their teachers but more specifically there is a lack of reciprocal trust in them in the way they might handle any problems raised. An indicator of what these problems could include is examined next.

5.4.6 The impact of other students' behaviour

This final structural aspect demonstrates how other students' behaviour in the languages classroom is a key area of importance for those with an emotional experience of foreign language learning. Participants report that:

People pick on us during lessons. People throw stuff at me. I even got thrown a pen at me once. It was horrible (F16);

Because every single year you have, like, the popular group, the bad people...they're hard...They, like, throw stuff, they swear and everything and think it's funny if they hit someone. Even if they're doing an assessment they just start talking (F14).

As already noted, students exhibit feelings of being ignored by the teacher in class when her attention is diverted by bad behaviour. Here we see a more direct effect these 'bad' or 'hard' students have on those in this category. There is an element of bullying and physical violence as well as frustration that they do not keep to the rules (i.e. talking during tests).

One student goes on to explain:

Everyone...pretends that they like them to their face and they don't get thrown stuff at but if you stand up to them and say, you don't have the right to say that to me, or start yelling at them, they'll throw stuff at you on purpose. They'll try and get you in the head with a pen. When the teacher's back's turned they'll throw pencils. When they're outside of the classroom they'll try and trip you up in the corridors. It's horrible (F16).

Such accounts suggest that French lessons (and beyond) are fraught with trying to avoid becoming the targets of the 'badmans' in the class. As mentioned above participants do not feel able to confide in their teacher and thus they are left to defend themselves as well as try to get on with their work. Further aggravating this situation is the fact that the participants seem to get into trouble if they react to the disruptive students:

If I'm in French and trying to do an assessment [student]'ll tap me on the shoulder and I get in trouble for it, for saying, just leave me alone. I get in trouble for it and she doesn't notice him (FI4);

And if we try to, like, say I didn't do anything, and if we try and say why we turned around, they'll give us an automatic C1 or C2 for not doing anything, for trying to tell them to leave us alone so we can get on with our work (FI6).

A sense of injustice is discernible in the words of these participants as well as of frustration at being punished and for not being able to get on with their work. When asked, all of the participants in one of the follow up interviews explained that they would have changed their minds about French had certain other students not been in their class, clarifying that they would be able to 'get on more' and forget less because the teacher would not have to stop explaining something to them in order to manage others' behaviour.

5.5 Category three:

It doesn't feel like you're learning a language; it just feels like you're there for the ride: the disengaged language learning experience

Category three looks at how foreign language learning is viewed by students from a disengaged perspective. Participants describing this type of experience are typically those who have had no choice as to whether or not they study a language. They struggle to see the relevance of learning French as the endeavour is 'pointless', 'tedious' and some are 'never gonna want to go to France'. The course content is also seen as irrelevant, with topics such as the cinema, health, weather and similar being rejected as 'rubbish' and 'boring'. A desire to learn things such as how to approach and interact with people 'like in cafés and stuff' is expressed but this then tends to be overridden by an obvious lack of motivation in wanting to use the target language or find out about the target language community.

Opinions of France and French are extremely negative in some cases; the country is 'ugly'

and 'trampy' and the language is 'despised' and 'crap'. A number of participants also fail to see the point in learning the language because they cannot identify any instances in which they might be able to practise their language skills. This is also tempered by the fact that there is a distinct attitude that 'everyone speaks English'. In direct contrast to those in the next category (see page 163) there appears to be little to no self- and social motivation to learn or engage with the target language. Reasons for doing so seem to be linked to travel or the likelihood of actually visiting anywhere where the TL is spoken and when this prospect is limited, so is the desire to learn the language. Perceptions of the teacher and her attitudes towards the students also play a strong part here, perhaps even more so than in the first and second categories. The student-teacher relationship as well as the teaching style employed in class are cited as reasons for disliking French. The teacher is 'grumpy', 'too strict' and 'makes it difficult'. On a similar level, the teacher's management of the classroom environment is also a contributing factor to student opinion in this area.

Another element students in this category appear to feel strongly about is the speed of the lessons and how quickly they are moved from topic to topic. They report how they would like to spend more time on certain areas or go into more depth instead of 'just moving on really quickly' as they feel this impacts upon what they are able to learn and subsequently reproduce in assessments.

This perception of being rushed links to another aspect of this category which is that of making lessons memorable, another dimension of the 'languages are boring' aspect discussed in Category one. Here, students' assessment of boredom is structured slightly differently. Instead of simply finding the lessons dull or boring as expressed above, the participants note how if their lessons were memorable, they'd be more likely to be

interested and capable in French. In their view ‘languages are boring cos they don’t teach us properly’ and a lack of memorable lessons contributes to not being able to ‘remember any of it’. In turn this triggers further disengagement from the lessons as students believe they are ‘not taught French to go and speak to someone in France. [They] are taught French to pass a GCSE’.

5.5.1 Structural aspects of Category three (disengaged experience)

As above, a number of key structural aspects also help to characterise this category of the disengaged language learning experience. They are:

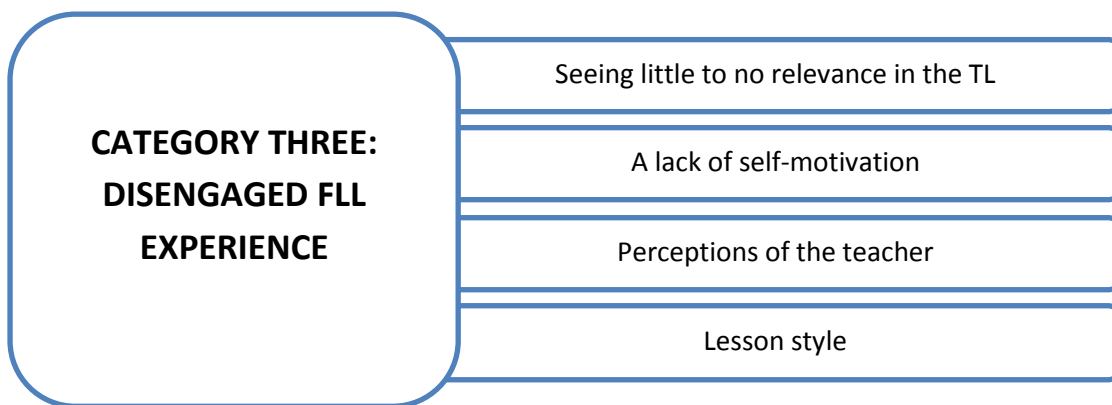


Figure five: Category three structural aspects

5.5.2 Seeing little to no relevance in the TL

This key structural aspect can be divided into two parts. The first points to how students see little to no relevance in learning French in general. The second examines how the French curriculum, i.e. the lesson content, appears to offer little in the way of relevance to the participants. Participants in this category appear quite adamant that learning French is not

relevant because 'we're English and that's French'. This theme is continued through statements such as:

They speak English anyway, so there's no point (FG22);

Yeah, but we don't need French (FG21);

So why can't all the other countries learn English? (FG19).

Occasionally an agreement that a foreign language might be useful is reached; usually in terms of getting a job and the fact that 'a French qualification is more impressive than an art one' and if you have one a prospective employer is 'more likely to pick you than someone else'. However this is then often quickly negated by the fact that a number of the participants have already decided they are never going to 'get a job that goes to France' or 'speak to any random French people'. Similarly, the course topics are also identified as irrelevant as the following exchange highlights:

FG22: Yeah, I mean, we just say we can do exercise but...

FG23: ...why would they care if we did that!

[Laughter]

[...]

FG19: We do learn quite pointless stuff in French. The other day I learnt how to say 'are you constipated?'

[Laughter]

FG19: I would never use that in France!

I: Ok! What else wouldn't you use?

FG22: Stuff about the cinema.

FG19: I wouldn't go over to France and be, like, 'bonjour, I do no exercise' and 'bonjour, I want to go to the cinema'.

It appears as though the students in this category experience some difficulty in linking what is learnt in class to what they might actually want or need to use should they ever go to France. They are somewhat scornful of the subjects covered and further explain that they 'don't relate to what we do'. They do not attach an instrumental value to them and cannot see themselves using them in real life:

And there's sport where we have to kind of say, I'm lazy and that kind of thing but it's like, if you're having a conversation you wouldn't go into detail about what kind of activities you do outside of school (F19).

Topics that they would like to engage in are mentioned and include: 'day-to-day stuff'; 'how to get someone to be our friend'; 'actually speaking French' but these do not appear to be incorporated into lessons. Such is the pivotal role of relevance here that the participants end up 'absolutely despising the language of French' and 'probably not even turn[ing] up for the exam'.

5.5.3 A lack of self-motivation

A close cousin of the structural aspect of relevance, self-motivation (or lack thereof) is another element of this particular foreign language learning experience. Again there is a wealth of existing literature on this topic, (see discussion in Chapter 2) so only key points will be discussed. In the same way that the participants cannot see the relevance of learning another language, they seem to identify little that would motivate them to do so. A couple of instances are discussed, such as the idea of a trip to France that would be 'like a massive science practical but you go to a different country and you have to have a passport and stuff' or getting French pen-pals. These are met with an initial enthusiasm and an eagerness to 'get a French friend' and put skills into practice with 'real French people' but this is soon curbed by the perceived lack of relevance in speaking French. Some students claim that

being and speaking English and living in England rules out any 'immediate need to speak French'. Speaking French would only be necessary if you lived in France. Furthermore because you live in England you 'can't practise [French] anywhere so you can't get better' or you have no opportunity to speak with people for whom 'French is their natural language'. Another reason that may be behind the lack of motivation to learn and engage with the TL is the fact that many of the participants declare themselves unlikely to ever go to France (or anywhere else where French is spoken). Perhaps a result of their negative perceptions of the country, potentially gained through the media (Coleman, 2009) or inherited from others such as parents (Jones, 2009), a number of students state their intentions never to go to France:

I'm never gonna want to go to France (FG19);

[I'd only go to the parts of Canada] that speak English (FG23);

I don't know anyone in this school who wants to work in France, live in France or have anything to do with France when they're older (FG20).

These vehemently expressed attitudes reflect these students' lack of motivation and they are vastly different to those expressed by students in Category four below. Why there would be such a difference in opinion between students from the same school, year group and even class may be evidenced through some of the following structural aspects of this category.

5.5.4 Perceptions of the teacher

In any school subject the student-teacher relationship and perceptions of the teacher are arguably two of the core factors behind student engagement in and enjoyment of the lessons (Noels *et al*, 1999). A good rapport with their teacher allows students to develop an

interest in the subject and may also lead to higher achievement levels, which in turn reinforces the enjoyment aspect (e.g. Burstall, 1980). However, in this category these positive elements appear to be absent. The teacher is not highly regarded and indeed some of her behaviours serve to 'annoy' the participants or lead them to feel 'patronised'. These behaviours can be characterised in two different ways: those that are related to teaching and those that are related to classroom management. In the first respect, this aspect may appear similar to one examined within the context of the previous category (teacher's perceived attitude towards students) but the main difference is the effect this has on the students. In the previous category it contributed to the participants' emotional reaction to FLL (i.e. generated frustration and so on) but here it seems to further students' disengagement from language learning. This is summed up in the following exchange following a discussion about how some participants believe the teacher does not stop to answer queries or explain things:

I: How does that make you feel?

FI9: [Laughs] that I don't like French. Maybe if she doesn't have any patience then I won't be listening in her lesson.

This clearly demonstrates an active step away from engaging in the lesson on the part of the student. Comparable attitudes can be identified in the following quotes:

Yeah but that's what I'm talking about: [teacher] and she teaches the language and that's what makes me not wanna learn French. It's just annoying (FI7);

...the teacher's tedious and boring. Makes it difficult...because they're the teachers and they know all of it and we know none of it and they think that we're gonna pick it up really quickly but we don't and it's just difficult (FG23).

Comments such as these perhaps point to a teaching style that is not well-received by the students in this category (a theme which will be explored in more detail below). This is

further elaborated when the same students speak of the teacher stating that ‘verbs should be drilled into your souls’ or that ‘[teachers] try and drill it into your head’. Negative reactions to the teaching style employed by the teacher become negative reactions to the teacher and eventually to the subject itself. It is at this point that students in this category appear to ‘switch off’ from the subject. They lose interest and their attitude shifts. This is highlighted in the words of one participant giving her overall view of French:

...it's like they're trying to get us to pass the GCSE and nothing else. They don't care about if we've learnt it, just, like, if we have the ability to write this much [indicates with hands] about this and then you have a GCSE...It's not learning a language, it's passing a GCSE (F19).

The other side of this key structural aspect reveals students’ perceptions of their teacher in relation to classroom management (i.e. keeping the classroom tidy, preparing materials, marking work and so on). This is not something that immediately springs to mind when investigating the reasons behind student disengagement from a particular subject but here it stands out as an important contributing factor; again, something which some participants seem to foreground (and thus give a certain level of primacy to) in their accounts of their FLL experience. Students report issues such as: spending money on unnecessary resources; using too much paper; always printing in colour as just some of the reasons they adopt negative views of the teacher. To the participants her behaviour appears at odds with what they know about, for example, environmental problems: ‘Amazon rainforest – is she not aware of the current situation?’; ‘...it’s just bad for the environment all of this printing...’ This seems to create disdain amongst some of the students which then appears indelibly linked with the subject itself. Other areas in which a similar pattern occurs include: the use of old-fashioned equipment; having an untidy classroom; being disorganised; not marking certain pieces of work. The teacher is ultimately responsible for these areas but the related

perceptions go beyond her and become part of attitudes towards the subject which are then hard to challenge.

5.5.5 Lesson style

The way in which lessons are taught resonates strongly with participants expressing a disengaged view of foreign language learning. The main factors focused upon here are the speed in which the language is taught or topics are covered and the opinion that lessons should be made more memorable. Some participants view the teaching style as quite different to how they think it is intended by the teacher, resulting in some obvious discord. This in turn leads to disinterest on the part of the students along with a certain criticism of the teacher's approach. The following excerpt reveals how the students in this category perceive their lessons:

F17: ...They just do it so they put it in you...they drill it into you so quickly you forget it. Because it's done so quickly.

F19: It's just like next thing, next thing, next thing.

F17: Yeah, like, literally we had a sheet and it was filled up, like, full to the brim of work and she was like, right it's that, that, that, that, that and that...

F19: We had two today.

F17: ...put it in your folders, get another sheet out...It's two fast pages.

F19: Yeah two.

F17: And then she moans when you don't keep up...we can't keep up but she just expects us to...once she says a word, for us to be like, right, that means this, ok brain, store it.

Through this exchange the students' perceptions of a rushed, teacher-centric lesson with potentially minimal student input but maximum student confusion are revealed. The way in which the first student uses phrases such as 'put it in you' suggests passive reception on the

part of the students while the teacher apparently tries to 'drill' the work into the group. The speed or pace of the lesson is evidently something these students struggle with, as is the use of worksheets, particularly ones 'full to the brim of work' which are then put back into folders and forgotten as the next topic is encountered. A certain level of pressure from the teacher is also hinted at in terms of being able to keep up with and memorise the work.

Other students also note:

I write something down and then forget it. We only write stuff for the sake of it (FG23);

You just write it all – you don't know what it means (FG21);

Literally all you do is...miss will write something on the board...and then she's like, copy this down and then she'll tell us what it means and then we'd move on (FG19).

The level of active student engagement or participation in the FLL process seems to be fairly low for these participants. Learning activities appear limited to writing or copying (see below for a more detailed look at how students perceive 'copying down') and for them there is a clear disconnect between that process and the actual 'learning' or 'remembering' of what is being taught. The students realise that the teacher equates 'writing down' with 'learning' but for them this is not the case. As one student suggests:

What I think what [teacher] thinks is that if it's in your book you know it (F17).

Conversely they are very aware that this is often not the outcome and instead they feel they are left with little knowledge of the TL:

...when it comes to assessments and stuff and she wants you to write it down, then you fail it because you don't learn much (FG23);

She puts you on the spot and asks you what whatever means and you don't know it cos it's just written down in your book (FG15);

The speed of lessons also features regularly in students' descriptions of their language classes and appears to account for disengagement from the target language as much as having to 'write down' does. Students' comments to this effect include:

Spend more time on certain subjects instead of just moving on really quickly (FG23);

I think she does it too quickly (F17);

I think the last topic I remember is family...and then it's just, like, all blurry since then (F19);

We can't learn all of this this quickly; it's physically impossible (F17).

A desire to learn more about some topics is indicated by some students, suggesting that they perhaps might show more of an interest in the subject if they felt they had time to do so. Unfortunately this interest seems to be extinguished by the pace at which they are taught and some participants feel daunted or overwhelmed. They appear to feel a pressure to 'get everything' in only a short space of time and often do not feel confident of their ability to do so (see earlier references to 'being incompetent'). Consequently their attempts at trying to engage in the subject are often impeded because they feel put off, as one participant explains:

...I'd rather think, ah yeah, French, fair enough, it's alright, than, arrrgh, French – I can't be bothered to go to this...I'd rather it be something I'm positive about (F17).

Closely linked to the problems that the pace of the lessons brings is for students in this category is also the delivery of the lessons. Apart from believing that they do not remember 'any French at all' because of the speed in which it is taught, lessons are also found to be boring and repetitive:

It's monotone and it's the same thing, the same thing, the same thing. It's nothing to kind of make you remember it (F19);

...it's so boring in French...the other day, I almost started crying; it was that boring (FG20).

Finding French boring is also a key structural aspect of Category one (negative experience) but the difference here is that whilst participants expressing a negative view of FLL simply found lessons 'boring' without much further explanation, the participants in this category appear more able to go beyond simply expressing their boredom and are able to make suggestions to remedy this. They assess boredom in terms of memory and being able to recall what they are taught and thus the idea of making lessons more memorable and exciting is for them a way of combatting the tedium and monotony they experience:

It's [shouts] BORING! There's no excitement. If there's more excitement then you're more likely to remember it (F19);

But stuff like, yeah, Mr Bean's Holiday, that's relevant cos it's in French, it's in France, they speak it but it's still funny and you still get enjoyment out of it rather than just sitting in a room with like...it's proper dark and just the teacher writing stuff on the board and copying this down and then five seconds later move on to the next part (F17).

The tasks or activities students in this category see as alleviating boredom include: watching films or videos; having a reward system; doing something 'completely different' from what is usually done. Students are aware that they do not necessarily have to do 'fun things all of the time' but they do express a wish for 'something that's gonna make you remember it'. It seems as though there is some level of interest in learning French but it is eclipsed by boredom which in turn results in disengagement.

5.6 Category four:

Everyone wants to be there or everyone is good at French: the self-assured foreign language learning experience

Category four examines how students come to have a self-assured view of the foreign language learning experience. Participants in this category tend to frame their conceptions of learning the target language in a confident and positive manner. Languages are seen as 'useful', 'fun', 'interesting' and 'enjoyable' and reasons as to why this might be are well-articulated. Students are easily able to perceive relevance on many different levels. They can also appreciate that there might be occasions where it is difficult to determine the relevance of what is being taught but that it might 'actually be in the GCSE that you have to do so to learn it is good...'.

One aspect clearly delimiting this category from the others is that of self- and social motivation to learn another language. This is evident through discussion of interest in other cultures, having or wanting to have friends from other countries and eagerness to travel. It is also expressed through examples of how others such as teachers and family members support the students' language learning both in and out of the classroom.

Quite differently from students in Category two, students in this category demonstrate a positive self-awareness in terms of how they see themselves as language learners. They do not appear to compare themselves to others as much as the students in Category two (and in Category three to an extent) and seem quite comfortable with recognising both their strong points and their limitations. Once these have been ascertained they are also confident in expressing their need to 'do a bit more' and be 'pushed' to greater

achievement or they feel able to approach their teacher to ask for extra help and support, something which is not manifested in the previous categories.

Linked to this aspect is a sense that these students know what is expected of them and what they should be doing in class and at home. This contrasts particularly with those in Category two who convey how they feel 'lost' or 'confused' in class. Here participants seem to be equipped with resources to support their learning such as a list of topics or a scale of grades so that they can focus their attention and 'decide where you're gonna start working'.

In drawing further comparisons between this category and the others, the students who possess a self-assured view of FLL exhibit a much greater cultural sensitivity than those who view FLL from other perspectives. They are aware of the issues surrounding attitudes such as 'everyone speaks English' and explain that you cannot expect others to 'know your language all the time'. They express anger and frustration at those who make no effort in another language and who 'constantly speak English' and seem to want to distance themselves from this type of person.

A final difference can also be identified in how these students react to similar situations experienced by students in other categories. A good example of this is how they deal with the element of boredom during lessons. As discussed above, boredom causes students in Category one to view the FLL process negatively and triggers disengagement from lessons for students in Category three. However, students in this category seem to associate being bored with not learning as much as they could or should. They deal with this aspect in a much more positive way than students in previous categories do and as a result they are able to remain engaged and interested in their language classes.

5.6.1 Structural aspects of Category four (self-assured experience)

The key structural aspects defining this category further are:

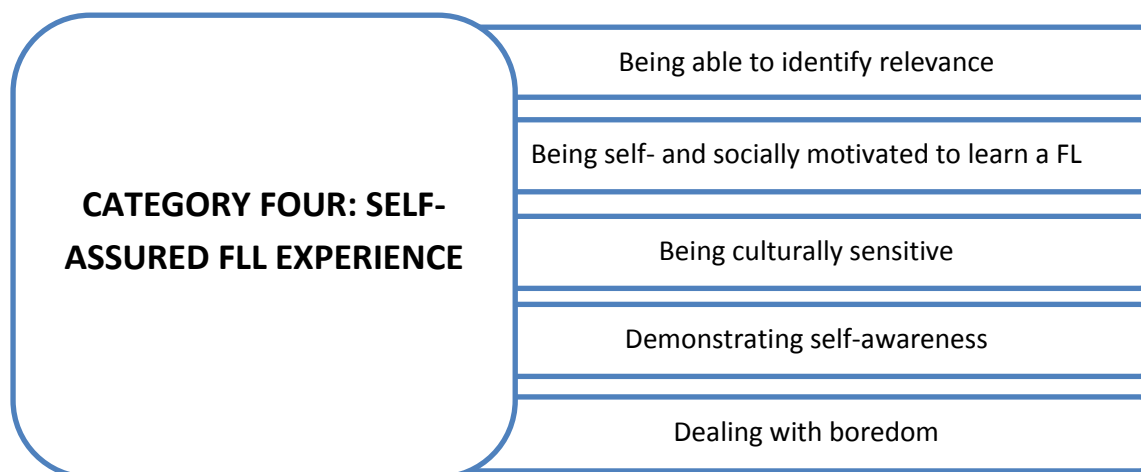


Figure six: Category four structural aspects

5.6.2 Being able to identify relevance

Students in this category are well-attuned to the relevance of learning another language and this key structural aspect serves to highlight this as a difference between the other categories. Participants in the three previous categories have struggled to see the relevance of FLL but here a number of reasons can be identified:

I think it's relevant because you need it for jobs and stuff and it looks good on your C.V. if you can speak a language...It's good for when you go to different countries as well...(F12);

If you know a language it sort of opens up loads of opportunities to do things and do jobs...(F13);

I'd say it's relevant to me because I've always want to work in a different country other than just England and, like, knowing their language is easier than just knowing your own language and expecting them to speak to you in your language instead (F11).

Work and jobs, travel and enhancing your C.V. are just some of the areas in which students pinpoint their ideas of relevance. Other explanations such as participating in an exchange scheme, needing to ask where public toilets are, being able to cope in an emergency situation abroad or just 'looking good' (in the sense of speaking a foreign language being a personal attribute) are also cited. A similar understanding of relevance is also applied to the topics covered in lessons. Whereas in some of the other categories students fail to see the point of talking about topics such as the cinema or sports, for example, students in this category can see how knowledge of these areas may prove useful, particularly if they 'do go over to France'. They are also able to see how teachers attempt to link topics to current affairs and events, in this case, the 2012 Olympic Games, in order to bring the subject to life. When they do find it more difficult to assess the significance of a particular topic, it is not just rejected as happens in some of the previous categories. Instead they attempt to find a reason as to why it might be useful as the following quotes highlight:

I think sometimes [the topics] are not that relevant...the other week we were learning about rude words like farting and burping...and I am never gonna use that, ever, but I guess it's ok to learn it in case I want to live over there and I'm having a conversation with a friend or something (F12);

...some of the stuff that may seem irrelevant to us is actually in the GCSE that you have to do so to learn it is good because then you can pass your GCSE easier (F11);

You gotta learn everything; you can't just learn something and if there's something else and you need to learn about it then you need to learn that as well. You can't just, like, skip that and then go on to something else (F18).

That students are able to identify various instances where foreign languages are relevant suggests they are also more motivated than participants in other categories. This is explored further below.

5.6.3 Being self- and socially motivated to learn a foreign language

Another structural aspect of this category is revealed in the self- and social motivation to learn a foreign language demonstrated by the participants. Again, this highlights a significant difference between this overall category and the previous ones where similar levels of motivation are not present. Students here are positive about their language learning and take steps of their own to improve learning methods and outcomes. This is evidenced in such quotes as:

I've had to talk to my French teachers about [verbs] and I think it helps that my tutors are both language teachers so they can help me in tutor – even though it's just for 25 minutes, anything can help (FG3);

I feel like I need to sit around people that kind of know what to do, so then I feel I have to push myself to do what they're doing as well and I'd focus a bit more;

...I told [teacher] that I want to do anything that can help me as much as possible (F11);

You can't have an hour's lesson a day and learn so much. You need to do revision (F12).

The last comment in particular contrasts highly with the attitudes displayed in the previous category. There, students seemed overwhelmed by the amount of work, explaining that it was 'physically impossible' to learn it all. Here, students perceive a need to supplement their lessons with their own work and revision outside of the class. They report feeling comfortable in seeking advice and support from their teacher (again in contrast to those in Category two who felt they could not approach their teacher) and want to achieve as much as they can in the TL. Their self-motivation is also highlighted through the involvement of their parents in their language learning. A number of participants recall how their parents have helped them:

...sometimes I talk to my mum in French even though she can't understand a word I'm saying [laughs]. It just makes me feel confident that I can say things (F12);

Me and mum have started labelling things around the house in French so I can remember what they are (F11);

I don't really do speaking at home in French but we bought revision books and stuff that I look through...I look at them to help me if I don't understand what we're actually doing (F13).

Family input appears to be a strong theme here, with students also talking about how their parents wanted them to take a language because they had regretted not doing so themselves or encouraging them to keep up their language skills because of the likelihood of family trips to France or other countries. It is interesting to note that a family element is not discussed nearly as much in categories one, two and three. Where families are mentioned in those groups, one instance explains how a participant has relatives in France whom he has never met but who all 'probably speak English anyway' and other instances are mentioned in terms of how parents would complain if their child was forced into taking a language. There is no mention of positive family role models as described by participants in Category four.

There is also an element of social motivation to learn a foreign language amongst these participants. One student speaks of having an Italian friend who can 'speak perfect English' but because she cannot speak Italian she explains how they would not be able to meet up because she could not speak to him in his own language. Another student describes her passionate interest in South Korean music and culture and how she listens to 'different language music' with her older sister. She explains how she would 'absolutely love to learn [Korean]' so she could travel and live in South Korea. Both participants can therefore see beyond learning a language simply to pass a GCSE or for it to look good on a C.V. They see it

as a tool to be able to engage with other people and cultures. This links well with the following structural aspect of 'being culturally sensitive'.

5.6.4 Being culturally sensitive

Whilst helping to define the way in which students in this category experience language learning, this key structural aspect also allows us to see the difference between this category and some of the others. Imagining the various structural aspects existing on some kind of continuum helps to identify the various dimensions of the same thing; i.e. the qualitatively different ways in which the same phenomenon is experienced. Whilst participants in Category one (negative experience) exhibit a limited outlook with regards to cultural sensitivity and understanding why foreign language skills might be useful, participants in this category can be viewed as extremely culturally sensitive. Not only can they interpret relevance and demonstrate high levels of self- and social motivation to learn another language but they can also appreciate the importance of being able to communicate in another language. This goes beyond being able to cope with whatever situation they might find themselves in and extends to trying to see things from other people's perspective. This much more outward-looking approach can be seen in the following quotes:

You're in their country so you should speak their language (F11);

[Languages are] very important, yes, because if you go to a different country on holiday then you really need to know their language because you can't expect them to know your language all the time – lots don't (F13);

...I always find that British people are quite lazy with the way they talk when they go on holiday. They're constantly speaking in English and students like us are trying to speak a different language but then you've got other British people who aren't doing the same... (F12);

It makes me feel really angry [when others don't try to speak another language]. Do you really want to live your life just in England...? (F11);

If somebody hadn't bothered to learn the language, then it could be quite offensive to the people because they might see it as the person doesn't think their language is important enough to learn. Just because they might also speak English...it doesn't mean you shouldn't speak their language to them (F13).

Here it is clear to see that these participants feel it is important to learn another language and that they are angered by those who do not have a similar attitude. They are sensitive to how they come across and do not want to subscribe to the 'everyone speaks English' mind-set. To this end it could be argued that these participants demonstrate a much greater respect of other countries and languages than can perhaps be found in the other categories.

5.6.5 Demonstrating self-awareness

Being culturally sensitive as discussed above is one feature of being self-aware. This key structural aspect further examines the notion of self-awareness and how it contributes to the category of a self-assured FLL experience. Providing a further contrast between this category and previous ones (Category two (emotional experience) in particular) it is possible to see how participants' high levels of self-awareness lead to a positive view of language learning. Students in this category appear able to distinguish their language learning strengths and build upon them as well as recognise their limitations and what they might be able to do to improve these. In talking about their strengths and limitations participants tend to focus on something they find difficult but then reassert their competence by describing something they are good at, or vice versa:

...Sometimes [lessons] are really, really easy but other times I find them quite difficult cos I find things hard to pick up quite quickly so sometimes I just need a little bit of extra help or I talk a bit too much in the lessons so then I sort of lose track of what I'm doing (FG3);

...I think I'm just really creative with the writing that I do...that is what I'm good at. I'm not good at speaking so I'd rather be good at speaking than writing (F11);

I think that my French has helped my English as well because I've never been very good at spelling...Doing French, some of the words are spelt the same or look similar; it helps me with my English (F12);

...French can be quite hard and I just think anything at all can help me; like, I have a verb book now cos my teacher told me to get one and she said she's gonna bookmark pages for me and things like that (F12).

This is quite different from participants in Category two, for example, who tend to see themselves in a much more negative light and focus largely on what they cannot do. It is also unlike those with a disengaged view of FLL who appear inclined to perceive difficulties as the fault of the teacher and are not motivated to find any methods to help them develop their TL skills. In contrast we can see that participants' perceptions of their L2 competence (Dörnyei, 1994a) are well-formed. Another difference this aspect highlights is that students in this category are aware of how they learn and what they need to do to be successful in their attempts. Some level of frustration is also encountered when these attempts are hindered:

...sometimes it's quite annoying cos if it's something I like then I wanna learn it but I can't cos people keep interrupting. And then I get a lower level on my assessment cos I didn't get to learn it (FG5);

...in that group I wasn't really learning anything...I probably learnt more in the first two lessons of French up in top set than I did in whole term in that [lower] set... (F13).

Comments such as these demonstrate how keen these participants are to learn. Whereas students in other categories perhaps see lesson disruption as a threat to their own presence in class, here students are frustrated by the effect it has on their learning. It can be argued that it is the level of confidence in and awareness of one's own TL ability that leads to these differing attitudes towards the same issue.

5.6.6 Dealing with boredom

Boredom can strike in any class at any time. It is not reserved for those struggling with the lesson in hand and it does not solely affect those who are disengaged from what is being taught. The difference rests in how it is dealt with by the students themselves. In the final key structural aspect of this category we examine how students who perceive FLL as a self-assured experience manage boredom in their language classes. For these students boredom tends to set in when other classmates are 'interrupting' or 'mucking about all the time', rather than because the lesson content itself is dreary. With the teacher having to intervene when this happens, quite often students are 'just sat there not doing very much':

I get quite bored because people keep interrupting the lesson (FG1);

...in lower set there'd be more interruptions and I wouldn't get to learn (FG6);

[The interruptions were] really frustrating because I knew that I was actually meant to be up in top set but I just was back down there and it was so boring (FI3).

As mentioned above, this can lead to frustrations but instead of demanding more memorable lessons as evidenced in Category three (disengaged experience), participants here mention the need to be 'stretched' or 'pushed' in order to learn well, stating that they 'need to be expected to do something so then [they] can actually do it'. In the same vein, these students do not identify fast-paced lessons or find that they are moved through topics too quickly. On the contrary, they regularly mention that:

...we're kind of like doing the same thing over again (FG6);

Sometimes we do the same thing a lot of the time and it's like we wanna learn something new (FG5);

Well, we spend three of our lessons on one subject and yeah...it's quite boring cos I've already picked it up (FG4).

However, finding lessons boring or repetitive does not cause them to disengage from the subject or view it negatively. Instead it often acts as a catalyst to prompt them into further developing their TL skills. In this respect these students appear to have much more agency over how they learn. They adopt more responsibility for their language learning than students in other categories and as a result appear to engage in a more rounded and positive view of the FLL experience.

5.7 Two further aspects

Described above are the key structural aspects which help to delimit and define each of the individual categories. Within each of these categories are quite different elaborations of the foreign language learning experience. However the data also reveal two further aspects which appear in each of the categories. These are students' reactions to classroom seating arrangements and their opinions of one of their main classroom activities: copying from the board. Participants in each of the categories refer to both of these aspects, with shared or similar attitudes as opposed to the often distinctly different outlooks outlined above. These aspects also prompt the most enthusiastic suggestions for change, which perhaps hints at the overall significance and impact they have upon the students' language learning experiences.

5.7.1 Seating

Taking first the reactions to classroom seating arrangements, students report that:

...the seating arrangement in our classroom is actually a joke (F17),

...the whole layout is appalling (F19),

It's a row of twos...and that covers the whole classroom so if you're at the back sitting in that corner, you're literally like right, right in the corner and there's no room

for you to get up and walk around to stretch your legs –even though you’re not supposed to do that in the class anyway but there’s no kind of room and you feel a bit like, oh I’m a bit cramped in (F11),

The lights are hardly ever on in our classroom either, so it’s just like...you know when things are brighter it makes it better and more alert (F19).

The bearing a poor classroom layout has on these students can be identified through the following comments:

...I sit at the back in the corner and I don’t like it. I feel really ‘urrrrrrr’ and I can’t concentrate cos I am claustrophobic anyway, so being in a corner is a bit like, nooooo! (F11),

...you’re constantly worried that you’re gonna knock the person next to you so you’re trying to keep your books in one little space and try not to get in their way but some other people don’t have the same consideration for you...and it’s not nice (F12),

...you can’t look to the side of you, you can’t look behind, you have to look at the board at what miss is doing... (F19),

Last year there was a table RIGHT in front of the board and I had to sit there and...if you turn round you get moaned at...and other people used to moan at me, oh your head’s in the way. So then you turn round to say [mimes arms in the air, what can I do gesture] like that and then you get told off (F18).

Students make reference to feeling claustrophobic, having little space to work and being moaned at by the teacher and other students, all of which contribute to how they view their language lessons. A certain level of frustration and physical discomfort is evident, along with the fact that the seating arrangements also seem to cause some disruption to the class, with other students ‘shouting out, like, why is your head in the way’ or if the student in question does not react, ‘why are you ignoring me?’ Some participants also resent being ‘ordered around the classroom’ and not being allowed to sit where they want or with their friends. It seems that seating may be an unconsidered aspect of the foreign languages classroom. However, students themselves appear to have some very forthright and well-thought out

ideas on how to improve the physical aspect of their classroom. This can be evidenced through such statements as:

[The classroom should be arranged as] a circle table – so everyone can see each other (F16),

I'd have a circular table and I'd have EVERYONE around it... (F11),

I'd definitely have it either in a circle or in fours of tables... (F12),

I think it should be horseshoe-shaped... (F19).

Despite the fact that these participants experience FLL in very different ways they all put forward a similar means of arranging the classroom. To them changing the classroom layout from rows of tables to a circle or horseshoe arrangement would afford co-operation and collaboration between students:

...so you could see each other and have everyone doing the same work together in a group with the teacher at one end... (F11),

...you could have all people on a table and it's more brains, I guess...people who find it difficult can sit with people who find it either easy or are quite good at it... (F12),

Then we can all co-operate with each other (F15),

If we were to get put in a circle table we could see each other, co-operate (F16),

[Sitting in a horseshoe we can] yeah, like co-operate (F17),

Instead of talking to people, like, because it's boring, maybe like, discuss things openly, like if it's in a horseshoe... (F18).

Not only do students believe a change in seating arrangement would bring more co-operation but simply the act of being able to see each other appears to have a high level of importance. This is perhaps related to the fact that some students view a circular seating arrangement as being more comfortable – perhaps more so emotionally than physically.

This is encapsulated by the following statement:

So you feel more comfortable and so you can see everyone and you don't feel like you're at the back or you're at the front and feel self-conscious cos the teacher's right there [puts hand in front of face]. I'd feel more comfortable with everyone sitting in a circle so then you could all see each other and feel more comfortable because you're all in the same kind of space (F11).

Additionally students would welcome a different seating pattern as they believe it would allow the teacher to better identify behaviour problems and other students to get on with their work:

...cos some people think that just cos they sit at the back they can't be seen, so they muck about...so if they were in a circle then they'd behave more cos they'd know that if they did anything then they'd get seen straightaway. They wouldn't muck around then and would have more time to actually learn something, so it would benefit everyone better (F13),

And the teacher could tell who's being mean cos she could see everyone and just concentrate on one person (F16).

Lastly, and perhaps not surprisingly for a subject focusing upon communication, some students believe a circular seating arrangement would enable everyone to hear each other:

If you're trying to listen to somebody or someone's speaking to the class then everyone can see that one person (F13).

You can hear a bit better as well cos it's projected round the circle instead of having someone speak at the front and you're at the back and you're like, what? [mimes hand to ear]. Especially those quiet people you get that don't really like to talk much. If you're in a circle you can hear them better (F11).

5.7.2 Copying activities

The second aspect of classroom FLL mentioned by students in each of the focus groups and follow up interviews is that of copying from the board or from books. This appears to be a universally disliked activity, as evidenced by the following comments:

When we have to copy loads of stuff down because then we're just, like, copying it – we're not speaking it or learning it. Cos she doesn't give us a lot of time to copy it

down either so...and cos we've only got a small class so sometimes miss is always stopping to tell people to move or to stop talking and stuff (FG5).

I struggle a bit when my teacher says, oh copy this out of the book, cos I don't know what she means and I don't know where and I don't know how to put sentences together really without her explaining how to (FG3).

Well, I learnt Spanish in primary school and we learnt that by listening to a song that was really catchy so it stuck in our heads but when we came here it was all writing down and copying off the board and it was just horrible (FG13).

[I don't like copying] cos it's boring. Once you start and you look up, you've forgot where you are and then you've got to read from the beginning of it and you don't know what it's saying (FG14).

I don't know any French but in my book it would appear I know loads of French but it's just copying. You don't even have to say it or anything, it's just copying (FG16).

The reason they're disruptive in French is cos all they're doing is copying and they don't like it. It doesn't stick in their head (F16).

It would appear that the task of copying from the board is “boring” and “horrible”. It does not engage the students in their work and a number of them feel like they do not learn anything as a result. It is also seen as a difficult activity, with the teacher moving too fast or students not being able to follow what is on the board because they do not understand what it means. Aside from not feeling as though they are learning, students also cite having to copy as a reason for disruptive behaviour in class.

Interestingly, a number of students were able to offer alternative activities that they would prefer to do instead of copying tasks. This contrasts with answers to other questions about FLL where responses were often “dunno” (particularly in Category one (negative experience)). Examples of often well thought out suggestions for lesson activities include:

...have someone that actually speaks proper French. And then when they're here, we can teach them English and they could teach us French (FG13).

Well, it would be better if we done it [residential trip] the school because then [teacher] could come and then she could just tell us what to say and teach us stuff in French in France and then we could go and put it into practice with real French people. Like doing a massive science practical but you go to a different country and you have to have a passport and stuff (FG20).

In lessons they should have a whole lesson where you talk to each other and where you have to make your own sentences up and say, like, do you wanna go to the cinema or go to the café or get something to eat. I reckon we should do that instead of sitting down and writing everything...(FG19).

If we was doing food for, like, French or something...Like, if we was able to get the ingredients we would be able to make something, like French or something food (F15).

This suggests that despite finding copying and writing-based tasks boring and difficult, some students could perhaps re-engage with or enjoy FLL more if a wider range of activities were on offer. The ideas mentioned above are very practical and also reflect a surprising desire for more opportunities to speak in the TL. It would seem that interest in FLL is mediated through the types of classroom tasks students are expected to carry out. The data collected here point to the fact that students perhaps care more about their lessons than they appear to. Finding out whether or not their attitudes towards language learning would change if they could engage in tasks they found personally interesting and exciting could form an interesting avenue of further research.

5.8 Findings from the teacher interview

Interviewing the students' teacher allowed insight into their descriptions of their learning experiences from a different perspective and also highlighted the concerns and difficulties she faced. Analysis of the interview reveals two points of view: factors external to the classroom and factors relating to teaching. The former are explained in terms of coping with pressure from senior management and being compared to other subjects whilst the latter

include dealing with curriculum changes and viewing languages as difficult to teach. The parameters of this study preclude an in-depth examination of these points but an overview of each is presented below to provide context.

5.8.1 External factors

A major concern voiced by the teacher is that of coping with pressure from senior management. This refers to how senior members of staff at the school view languages and how they try to position MFL alongside other subjects. According to the teacher, MFL is not understood in her school by the senior staff and as such, not only do misconceptions of the subject abound but teachers are under pressure to conform to standards set for other subjects. These are often based on “made up levels from primary teaching” given to MFL teachers to create similar ones for their subject. As a result, the teacher has “a bottom set based on KS2 data but they can’t write a sentence in English, let alone do past tense and future tense in their second year of French”. This leads to frustration on the part of the teacher and a reiteration of the “who cares about languages” attitude.

Comparing MFL to other subjects is another attitude the teacher has to contend with. She notes how senior management “try to fit language lessons into the same kind of remit as all of the other lessons within the school” and do not seem to realise that language lessons can be very different to those in other subjects. Being “constantly compared to English” is another frustration, especially with “all the support and stuff that English gets” whereas MFL does not receive the funding that the teacher believes is necessary. She describes how she has been teaching for almost thirteen years but yet the problem as she sees it is “just getting worse...nothing’s being done”. Again, exasperation and even disappointment are evident here, suggesting that there is little support for foreign languages within the school

and that the teacher must deal as much with these external factors as she does with those operating within the classroom.

5.8.2 Teaching-related factors

Teaching-related factors encompass difficulties associated with a changing curriculum and how this dealt with by the school's senior staff, as well as the view that MFL is a difficult subject to teach. Evidence of the effects of a changing curriculum and its subsequent management can be found in the following statement:

When I first started the onus was getting all four skills in. Now it's moved away from that. We keep going round in circles. You've got target language, you've got grammar. Are we supposed to be teaching grammar or is it discrete like, here's 10 past tense phrases, learn them? It's all about changing. Senior management can't keep up with the changes. They ask us if we're teaching in the target language then say don't teach grammar. We can't keep up.

Changes to the curriculum and the way languages are taught do not only come from outside agencies but also from within school. The decision to condense the GCSE programme from five to four years had a particular impact, not only on students but on the teachers who are then expected to adapt their teaching to embrace the new timetable. That they also have to include teaching elements such as revision and time management alongside an already full schedule means that the pressure to cover everything is high and both students and teachers feel the effects. As the teacher states, "to get them through in four years is frankly ridiculous with the exam criteria that we've got".

Aside from the issues discussed above, the teacher also mentions the general difficulties associated with being a languages teacher, particularly in comparison to other subjects. She perceives her role to be harder than that of other teachers because "it's almost like you're teaching four lessons in one with the different skills". As such, MFL teachers in her view

need to be armed with many more resources and materials than those in other subjects and “there’s so much more to organise”. Lessons “*have* to be kept varied” but at the same time, this is viewed as a downfall because “pupils aren’t used to chopping and changing”. For example, other subjects such as history or geography offer pupils a starter, main activity and plenary but language lessons need to provide “4, 5, 6, 7 activities...there’s a lot of stuff to get in there”. Consequently she deems languages as “the hardest lesson to teach”.

In sum, the participants’ teacher paints a picture of the many different, and often difficult, factors associated with being a languages teacher. Whilst some are certainly context-dependent, others may be recognised by other MFL instructors. Although there is little convergence with some of the perceptions relayed by the students, it is possible to infer from the data that demands made outside of the classroom have a serious impact on what happens within it. Moreover, it may not seem too unreasonable to suggest that the teacher’s attention and efforts are often caught up with trying to cope with these demands as well as tackle the misconceptions and comparisons outlined above, leaving less time to concentrate on what happens in class.

5.9 Outcome spaces

To conclude this chapter the outcome space depicting the four categories of description outlined above and their structural relationships is presented overleaf in Table six. Where relationships between categories exist, the structural aspects constituting these relationships have been colour-coded for ease of reference. The outcome space also presents the strongest relationships between structural aspects and categories at the top of the table, moving down towards the bottom of the table where some aspects are not linked with any others.

CATEGORIES	CATEGORY ONE: The negative foreign language learning experience	CATEGORY TWO: The emotional foreign language learning experience	CATEGORY THREE: The disengaged foreign language learning experience	CATEGORY FOUR: The self-assured foreign language learning experience
STRUCTURAL ASPECTS (CONCEPTIONS)	Classroom environment (seating)			
	Copying activities			
	The teacher does not help me	Teacher's attitude to students	Perceptions of the teacher	
	Feeling lost or ignored in class		Lesson style	
			Seeing little to no relevance in the target language	Being able to identify relevance of FLL
			A lack of self-motivation	Being self- and socially motivated to learn a foreign language
	Having a limited outlook			Being culturally sensitive
			Negatively framed self-awareness	Demonstrating self-awareness
	Foreign languages are boring			Dealing with boredom
	Foreign languages hard & confusing	Levels of trust		
Not feeling equipped or able to cope in TL	The impact of other students' behaviour			

Table six: initial outcome space

As the outcome space depicts, there are a number of relationships between the majority of the structural aspects comprising the four main categories (highlighted in colour). In many cases, these relationships could be said to exist upon a kind of continuum where a structural aspect links all categories (e.g. classroom environment), most of the categories (e.g. participants' view of the teacher) or only two categories. Where the structural aspects link two categories, this tends to highlight the positive and negative ends of a continuum, such as *seeing little to no relevance in the target language* contrasting with *being able to identify the relevance of learning a foreign language*. There are also aspects which link indirectly to others. *Feeling lost or ignored in class* and *lesson style*, for example, can be associated with the aspects relating to students' perceptions of the teacher but this is not their central focus so they only provide supporting links. This is shown in the outcome space by a colour-coded outline.

A relationship also exists between the categories as wholes. Whilst the structural aspects of each category help to define the links between conceptions, the ordering of the categories reflects a logical relationship between them (Marton and Booth, 1997). The outcome space shows how all the structural aspects in category four have links with each of the other categories. Consequently it can be argued that this category presents the most holistic view of foreign language learning, encompassing a number of different aspects, each reflecting the most positive ends of the continua they can be placed upon. Category four could therefore stand in hierarchical relation to the other categories, as in effect, the conceptions attributed to it show the most complex description of foreign language learning and understanding of the process as experienced by the participants. A further continuum can also be identified here as students' perceptions move from attributing dislike of FLL to

outside influences such as the teacher or the activities involved, through an introspective view of the experience, followed by an almost total rejection of FLL until a broad outlook is achieved. Students offering this perspective tend to have recognised and attempted to tolerate some of the aspects found in other categories and transform them into more positive aspects. This does not suggest that one particular way of viewing or experiencing FLL is preferable to another but it does offer a way of providing some form of hierarchy within the results where the categories can be seen to build upon each other.

However, it should be made clear at this point that the categories derived from the data can only represent a brief snapshot in time (i.e. the period during which the interviews were conducted) – a glimpse at the “intricate balance of situated and dynamic factors” (my definition, page 48) which underpins L2 motivation in this context. This means that although they are stable (Sandberg, 1997) they should not be viewed as permanent. Consequently the categories can be seen as more or less temporary social presentations in a dialogue making sense of foreign language learning (Abrahamsson *et al* 2005: 370).

It is also worth remembering that while these categories have emerged from collective experiences, the underlying individual level draws upon accounts and experiences that may change over time and within different contexts (*ibid*). This means that not all participants can be “fixed” into one category or another and as students’ interests, emotions and priorities wax and wane, a certain degree of movement between categories could be expected. For example, a participant displaying many of the structural aspects of category 2 (emotional foreign language learning experience) may also exhibit some of the traits defined in category 3 but at the time of interview, the “emotional” factors were foregrounded and best defined their FLL experience. This is perhaps one of the limitations of the

phenomenographic approach and as Brew (2001: 283) highlights, it is important to identify how likely these variations are to change over time or in different circumstances.

Nonetheless, what the final categorisation does provide is a potentially lasting taxonomy of types of foreign language learning experience students could likely encounter in different languages classrooms. This is beneficial to teachers and others because it highlights the different ways in which students approach and make sense of FLL and how they might be motivated within this.

The outcome space depicted on page 182 can also be reconfigured to reveal emerging themes that will be used to structure the following chapter which presents a discussion of the findings above (see Table six, page 186). These themes can be grouped as physical, learning or relationship factors (highlighted in the outcome space below in red, blue and green respectively) and each can be related to the concepts of learner autonomy, belonging and competence found in the L2 motivation literature and that of student voice as presented in Chapter 2. They will be discussed in light of the categories of description detailed above as well as in relation to the findings gathered from the teacher interview.

CATEGORIES	CATEGORY ONE: The negative foreign language learning experience	CATEGORY TWO: The emotional foreign language learning experience	CATEGORY THREE: The disengaged foreign language learning experience	CATEGORY FOUR: The self-assured foreign language learning experience
STRUCTURAL ASPECTS (CONCEPTIONS)	<p>Classroom environment (seating) Feeling lost or ignored in class The impact of other students' behaviour</p> <p>Copying activities Foreign languages are boring Foreign languages are hard/confusing Not feeling equipped or able to cope in the target language</p> <p>The teacher does not help me</p> <p>Teacher's attitude to students</p> <p>Negatively framed self-awareness Levels of trust</p> <p>Perceptions of the teacher</p> <p>Lesson style</p> <p>Seeing little to no relevance in the target language</p> <p>A lack of self-motivation</p> <p>Having a limited outlook</p> <p>Dealing with boredom</p> <p>Demonstrating self-awareness</p> <p>Being able to identify relevance of FLL language</p> <p>Being self- and socially motivated to learn languages</p> <p>Being culturally sensitive</p>			

Table seven: reconfigured outcome space

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter presents the research findings and how they have been abstracted into categories of description with supporting key structural aspects. A top-level finding is that the participants in the study experience foreign language learning in one of four qualitatively different ways: the negative experience, the emotional experience, the disengaged experience or the self-assured experience. Related to this is the idea that while the categories themselves are stable, it is possible that some of the participants cannot be identified as experiencing FLL in one of the defined ways alone. It is likely, given the inconsistent nature of learning and motivation that a student may move between at least two different categories and changes over time may equate to changes in type of experience.

Within these categories the structural aspects denote and delimit each experience from another and relationships can be established between and across them. The main findings assert that physical, teaching and relationship factors come together to affect these experiences and subsequent effects are felt differently by participants depending on the type of experience they describe. Central to these factors are problems relating to seating arrangements, copying activities and student-teacher as well as student-student relationships. These can be linked to the principal themes of belonging, learner autonomy and competence respectively, as described in the L2 motivation and student voice literature.

Additionally, data gathered from the teacher interview reveals that there are some discrepancies between the students' and teacher's attitudes and beliefs, which may also magnify the issues raised by the students. In some instances it is clear that what the teacher finds trivial or unimportant is in fact of great importance to learners and impacts directly on

their ability and willingness to work. Equally the data show how students can sometimes be unaware of the pressures, difficulties or management issues faced by their languages teacher. This reinforces the value of student voice work as not only is it beneficial for teachers to listen to their students but in a two-way communication process there may also be merit in explaining decision-making processes and other factors which affect the teacher and his/her teaching to learners to ensure a more transparent and shared learning community. The following chapter discusses these aspects in relation to existing research.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the main research findings presented in Chapter 5. I consider these in view of the shared conceptions of belonging, learner autonomy and competence found in the L2 motivation literature and that of student voice as outlined in Chapter 2. Certain elements of foreign language learning reported by participants in this study; namely seating arrangements, learning strategies involving copying, and in-class relationships affect these conceptions and may therefore present potential barriers to L2 motivation and engagement for some students. I use the structural aspects of the categories of description elaborated in the previous chapter to characterise the discussion. I also draw upon existing research to illustrate and support it as well as to suggest renewed approaches to motivating students in the foreign languages classroom.

In the following sections I recap the categories of description presented in Chapter 5 and compare these to existing taxonomies of foreign language learners as described in the literature. I frame the discussion of the research findings in terms of physical factors (classroom environment), learning factors (teaching and learning strategies) and relationship factors (how students perceive their teacher and peers) as presented in the second outcome space in the previous chapter (see page 186). Finally, I also consider the teacher's view in light of the participants' descriptions of their foreign language learning (FLL) experience.

6.2 Categories of description

As presented in Chapter 5, I abstracted four categories of description from the data on year 9 students' experiences of foreign language learning. These are summarised as follows:

6.2.1 Category one – the negative foreign language learning experience

Category one conveys a negative view of foreign language learning. The FLL experience is limited and students are unenthusiastic about it. This is confirmed by the five key structural aspects identified by the participants (see page 134). There appears to be little interest in combatting the confusion and boredom encountered in the languages classroom and there is a distinct lack of desire or motivation to fully comprehend the pragmatic value of language skills. These students firmly believe that everyone speaks or should speak English and according to them competence in another language is unnecessary.

6.2.2 Category two – the emotional foreign language learning experience

This category encompasses notions of annoyance, frustration, withdrawal, trust and injustice, so it is perhaps not surprising that foreign language learning is perceived as an emotional experience by these participants. The source of these feelings is often the teacher or other students (or a combination of both), with less focus on actual language learning processes in comparison to other categories. There is a suggestion that what occurs in the languages classroom has broader implications for the students than simply learning French and that this causes them to look inwards and shut themselves off from others. A certain desire to engage in learning the target language can be identified but this is often quashed by other issues or problems.

6.2.3 Category three – the disengaged foreign language learning experience

This category describes a disengaged experience of foreign language learning. Examples of students clearly stepping back from the FLL process and how this then affects their attitudes towards it are revealed. Compared to the previous category where there appears to be less

focus on language learning and teaching, here these are foregrounded as some of the reasons for not enjoying the subject. Factors such as the relevance of topics covered, the speed in which they are taught and the element of boredom seem to overshadow any fraction of interest this group of students might display. Specifically, the teacher appears to occupy a central role in the way in which students perceive their language learning experience. More emphasis is placed on how her behaviour affects the students' FLL experience than in Categories one and two and a number of participants are very aware of the disconnect between her attitude and theirs.

6.2.4 Category four – the self-assured foreign language learning experience

This category encompasses various features that come together to form a self-assured view of foreign language learning from the students' perspective. Many contrasts can be drawn between this category and the previous three, demonstrating links between them all and how various aspects can be seen as part of the same continuum. Students who describe this largely positive experience of learning another language appear confident, self-aware and culturally sensitive. They see the need to keep their language skills alive beyond the classroom and can identify numerous instances in which such skills may come in useful. An overriding theme discerned in a number of this category's key structural aspects is that of agency. Participants here seem much more willing to take responsibility for how and what they learn and do not tend to look beyond themselves for reasons as to why they may encounter any difficulties.

These categories present a collective view of the qualitatively different ways in which participants in this study experience foreign language learning. Derived from a second-order perspective (Marton, 1981), they encompass as widely as possible the totality of the

participants' FLL experience. While some students may fluctuate between categories just as their L2 motivation will tend to fluctuate, the categories as a whole do also serve to challenge what Marton (1981: 185) calls "pre-existing authorised conceptions" of types of foreign language learners. In doing so, this opens up potentially new ways of viewing how students approach and engage in foreign language learning, rather than the typical motivated-demotivated or positive-negative dichotomies of students' attitudes as perceived by the teacher of the participants in this study and others within the wider context (e.g. DfES, 2002a). Looking at students' FLL experiences as a whole invites a broader understanding of the various aspects that constitute these experiences. It also allows insight into how these aspects are experienced in different ways and thereby encourages listening to the "voice" of the students.

In order to assess how they might relate to existing research or how they might afford important differences in understanding types of language student, I examine below the categories of description in comparison to previously documented conceptions of foreign language learners.

6.3 Existing conceptions of foreign language learners

Much of the research on types of foreign language learners tends to focus on learning styles and strategies (Krashen, 1981; Skehan, 1991; Oxford, 2003). Willing (1987, cited in Castro and Peck, 2005: 403) identified four types of language learners: communicative learners, concrete learners, conformists and convergers. This classification was further developed by Kolb (1981) and became an accepted scoring inventory to help determine different types of foreign language learners. Other taxonomies, for example, the dimensions of learning offered by Oxford (2003), are based on different aspects such as sensory preferences,

personality types, desired degree of generality and biological differences. However, whilst each of these categorisations presents valid means of understanding the differences in how students prefer to learn, they generally reflect distinctions made upon the basis of how students approach various language learning tasks. What does not seem to be taken into account is how students consider their foreign language learning experience as a whole; that is, the teacher, the classroom, other students, the L2 in question *as well as* the learning tasks.

Certainly, elements of other taxonomies can be found in the four categories of description outlined above. For example, the location aspect of Oxford's (2003: 7) dimension of biological differences in FLL (covering environmental factors such as temperature, lighting, sound, comfort), corresponds in part with the structural aspect of classroom environment present in all the categories of description defined in this study. However, an important difference rests in the fact that the classifications of types of learners in other studies have often been defined from a first-order perspective and the result of fitting learners into pre-defined categories (Felder and Henriques, 1995; Castro and Peck, 2005). This illustrates one of the strengths of the categories of description here as they have been derived from the data, thereby encouraging the researcher to leave nothing "unspoken" (Marton and Booth, 1997: 125). Consequently the present study offers a foreign language learner grouping which conveys the sum of the participants' FLL experience. Another strength of this classification is that it is based upon all participants' experiences, whereas other studies acknowledge that some proposed categories of learning styles are not comprehensive (Felder and Henriques, 1995: 27).

In the following sections I look at some of the features of the different FLL experiences listed above and how they relate to concepts of L2 motivation and student voice discussed in Chapter 2. I examine the physical, learning and relationship factors present in the languages classroom and how they affect the different types of foreign language learning experiences as described by the participants. Moreover, I explore aspects of the foreign languages classroom that appear to have received little attention in the existing literature in the field.

6.4 Physical factors: classroom environment

Here I address the data associated with how participants view the physical aspects of their FLL experience. I examine how factors such as seating arrangements impact on learning, behaviour, interactions with the teacher and collaboration with peers. This was an unforeseen research outcome arising from the data and deserves particular attention as it affects all participants regardless of the type of language learning experience they describe. I discuss the data in terms of how the classroom environment may affect students' sense of belonging and thereby provide an explicit link between the research findings and one of the main characteristics of L2 motivation and student voice research. The teacher's views on the same aspects also provide insights into how opposing views are often at play in the classroom.

6.4.1 Students' views on seating arrangements

Common to all four categories of description in this study, the data indicated that the foreign language classroom environment formed a significant part of the participants' overall FLL experience. Seating arrangements in particular appeared to have the greatest effect on their well-being and learning during lessons. Factors such as physical comfort (or

discomfort), behaviour, communication and collaboration seemed to be affected by the way the classroom is set out (rows of tables) and the seats assigned to the students.

Interestingly, however, comparatively little reference was made to how seating patterns influenced their actual learning tasks and activities. Comments focusing upon how the seating arrangements made them feel were much more predominant. A number of sensitivities were mentioned regarding how the students are affected personally, either by the seating itself or how other students react to the layout:

...I sit at the back in the corner and I don't like it...I can't concentrate cos I am claustrophobic... (F11);

...you're constantly worried that you're gonna knock the person next to you...but some people don't have the same consideration for you...it's not nice (F12);

...they [other students'] shout out as well, like, why is your head in the way...and then you get the C1 [punishment]...and it kind of winds you up, really (F18);

And then all your friends are like, why are you ignoring me, and it's cos, you like, got me to a C2 [punishment] and I don't wanna get to a C3 [stricter punishment] and I can control myself (F17).

It appears that seating not only caused frustration in the students but also distracted their attention from the learning situation. Seemingly more time was spent worrying about classroom arrangements and less on the lesson itself. For some students, specifically those in Category two (emotional experience), the seating arrangement also impacted their relationship with the teacher and sensitised them further to the behaviour of other students, leading to the category's structural aspect *feeling lost or ignored in class*. With disruptive students (those sitting at the back of the class) often garnering more attention from the teacher, participants reported that they felt as though the teacher "didn't notice I was there" (F16). They advocated a circular seating arrangement because then the teacher

could “see who’s being mean” (F16) but also so that they could “actually learn something” and this would “benefit everyone better” (F13).

When comments were made about how the layout of the classroom affected learning, participants noted how feelings of physical discomfort and reduced ability to communicate with peers overrode any sense of concentration or cooperation within the group. There was ample evidence that all of the students in this study believed that their lessons could be improved by altering the seating arrangements. The large majority suggested that a circular or semi-circular seating plan would be preferable, indicating that their current layout of rows of tables was not conducive to how they would like to learn during their foreign language lessons:

I’d have a circular table and I’d have everyone around it so you could see each other... I’d feel more comfortable with everyone sitting in a circle...because you’re all in the same kind of space (F11);

If [students who misbehave] were in a circle then they’d behave more cos they’d know that if they did anything then they’d get seen straightaway (F12);

I think it’s a really good idea...cos you can see everybody in the circle. If you’re trying to listen to somebody or someone’s speaking to the class then everybody can see that one person (F13);

...if we were to get put in circle tables you could see each other, co-operate... (F15);

I think it should be horseshoe-shaped so everybody can see everyone and we can all...maybe like, discuss things openly... (F19).

The participants also seemed aware of the fact that changes to seating arrangements were necessary for certain tasks. Listening activities in particular were identified as instances where circular seating would be beneficial, making it easier to hear what is said. Other students noted how changing seating arrangements would make them feel more confident

during certain tasks because they could either sit with their friends or “people who find it difficult can sit with people who find it either easy or are quite good at it” (F12).

6.4.2 Teacher’s views on seating arrangements

Conversely, the teacher’s opinion of the seating layout in her classroom appeared notably different to that of the participants. In her view, traditional two-by-two rows of tables allowed for mixed ability pairings, learning partners or boy-girl seating patterns. These arrangements, although dependent on school policy, were the “best medium” she had tried. It is interesting to note that none of the students in this study seemed to have noticed these seating strategies and that to them, they either had to sit where they were told or with people they did not want to sit next to. Consequently the pedagogical reasoning behind the seating arrangements may not have filtered through to the students. Furthermore, the teacher also communicated that if the students felt supported and able to learn, then such seating arrangements would have a “huge effect” upon them but that this required a necessary building up of trust in the teacher. Although conceding that the seating plan did not support the group work or group seating “that now seems to be being pushed”, the teacher believed it was easy for her to put students into groups based on the paired seating already established. There was no mention of possible alternative arrangements such as those described by the students.

6.4.3 Discussion of seating arrangements in existing literature

That the participants’ views of the classroom environment and the way it makes them feel contrasts significantly with much of the existing research on classroom arrangements is worthy of consideration. The literature tends to explore how seating affects variables such

as the level of question asking during lessons (Marx *et al*, 2000), pupil attention (Blatchford *et al*, 2003) or class performance and achievement (Gossard *et al*, 2006). However, given that creating a sense of belonging is deemed one of the most important aspects of L2 motivation (Noels, 2009) it would seem wise to pay attention to the characteristics of the foreign language classroom that could help facilitate this. The following sections explore how seating is discussed in the literature and how the findings above may be further illuminated.

A general consensus found in the literature on classroom arrangement is that the physical characteristics of a classroom can influence the behaviour of its users (Marx *et al*, 2000: 249; see also Sommer, 1977; Burgess and Kaya, 2007). As such, it is widely agreed that aspects of the physical milieu is necessary as they can have the potential to help prevent problem behaviours that decrease student attention and diminish available teaching time (Wannarka and Ruhl, 2008: 89). Bocard *et al* (2012: 407) further this argument by stating that student seating is one of the easiest, most cost-effective classroom management tactics available to teachers and that changes to such arrangements may help to minimise or eliminate problem behaviour without the need for consequence interventions. Many suggestions are made as to how seating can be best employed in the classroom, including the layout of tables and chairs (rows, clusters or semi-circles) as well as the distance and orientation of seats in relation to target areas such as the teacher or the board (Rosenfeld *et al*, 1985; Marx *et al*, 2000; Mathiesen and Saether, 2010).

However these suggestions often stem from studies on lessons such as economics (Gossard *et al*, 2006) or science (Mathiesen and Saether, 2010) which present very different needs and contexts compared to the foreign languages classroom. Very little research was found

during this study that spoke of how classroom arrangements affect students learning a foreign language. Although from the perspective of teaching English as a foreign language, only Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) and Crichton (2011) seem to offer more than a superficial discussion of the implications of the classroom environment upon FLL. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003: 75) argue that “while the physical characteristics of the [classroom] environment do not completely determine how effective teaching is, they can be major inhibiting or contributing factors”, whilst Crichton (2011: 117) notes how languages teachers may organise their learners in rows so that they can clearly see the visual clues they provide to aid understanding. Nonetheless, underpinning these ideas is the notion that there is some level of control over the seating arrangements by the teacher, denoting that they are in charge of the learning environment (*ibid*). Sommer (1977: 174-175) points out that this contributes to a “tremendous imbalance of power” in the classroom and notes how “there is no way that the relationship between student and teacher could not be affected by straight rows of chairs and desks...or conversely by groups of movable chairs around desks”. As a result, the way students are located in the classroom has an important effect on learning (Cinar, 2010: 201). Consequently, if learning is affected by seating, it is useful in terms of the present study to explore how paying attention to seating can aid students’ sense of belonging in the classroom and therefore increase motivation in foreign language learning.

6.4.4 Using seating to emphasise a sense of belonging in the foreign languages

classroom

Cornell (2002: 41) states the physical environment within the classroom should be flexible in a way that encourages interaction, mutual learning and a “sense of community” among

students. However, in terms of the present study, the layout of the participants' classroom (rows and columns) appeared to be an inhibiting factor to not only learning but also the generation of a sense of belonging. Marx *et al* (2000) discuss the concept of "action zones" within traditional row-and-column seating arrangements. Those sitting in the front and centre of these layouts generally interact more with the teacher and each other and this positively affects their motivation (Marx *et al*, 2000: 251) yet those students sitting at the back and to the side of the class may feel left out or not included, thereby serving to diminish their sense of belonging and consequently their motivation. Although this layout is considered less desirable than other alternatives it persists because students' views on seating are "virtually ignored" (McCroskey and McVetta, 1978: 103) or they are given no role in environmental decision-making (Sommer, 1977: 175). Furthermore, this type of classroom layout is often closely linked to overall classroom behaviour management strategies (Crichton, 2011: 116).

As determined by the teacher's and students' comments described above, there is no indication that alternative seating arrangements have been tried. Kutnick *et al* (2006: 59) suggest that this is more often the result of teachers using classroom layouts to justify behaviour management than it is in terms of learning outcomes. In this instance, although no direct reference was made by the teacher linking seating and behaviour, the opposite of Kutnick *et al*'s (2006) suggestion appeared to be true; the seating arrangement triggered rather than managed problems with behaviour and disengagement and thus students were left feeling that their classroom arrangement was "actually a joke" (F17).

This is a good example of how student voice could be employed to make changes in the classroom. Listening to students' feedback and suggestions for improvements regarding

their environment could go some way towards managing behaviour and enhancing motivation. Kutnick *et al* (2006: 74) even suggest that ensuring pupils can feed back on classroom arrangements might assist in greater levels of learning. The research findings here suggested that there was a willingness to cooperate, discuss and collaborate with peers if the environment were to allow it. Although the literature states that there is no ideal way to set out a classroom (Wannarka and Ruhl, 2008: 90; Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003: 77), the almost universal suggestion of circular or semi-circular seating plans indicated that the participants had thought about how they would prefer their classroom to be set up.

Whilst there is some evidence that circular or semi-circular arrangements lead to potential spatial inequalities, with those facing each other more likely to communicate with each other than with their neighbours (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003: 82), the positive effect of these layouts is that the social interaction between students is enhanced (Mathiesen and Saether, 2010: 92-3; see also Burgess and Kaya, 2007; Cinar, 2010) and could lead to equal opportunities for everyone in the class (Marx *et al*, 2000: 261). In the present study seating is viewed as an obstacle rather than a conduit to group interaction although it is from this group interaction that collaborative learning extends (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003: 76).

Another point of interest regarding seating arrangements is linked to the idea of creating a “safe space” for students (Holley and Steiner, 2005: 56). This does not necessarily mean an environment where students are specifically protected from physical harm (although of course this should be the case within school), rather it refers to creating a space where students feel they can “freely express their ideas and feelings” (Holley and Steiner, 2005: 49). Of the many aspects coming together to construct a safe space, the participants in Holley and Steiner’s (2005) study relate how seating arrangements that allow class members

to see everyone (i.e. a circle or square) contributed overwhelmingly to considering the classroom “safe”. Furthermore, they also determined that row-style seating made the classroom feel unsafe (Holley and Steiner, 2005: 57). This is echoed by the findings in Burgess and Kaya’s (2007) study where students reported that they felt less at ease when seated in rows but claimed a greater sense of control over the classroom when it was arranged in a U-shaped layout.

These findings are particularly relevant to this study in light of responses given by students who described an emotional FLL experience. Creating a safer space for all students but particularly those who are more sensitive to teacher interaction and the behaviour of their peers may enhance their sense of belonging to their learning community. In addition, the “communicative network” (Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003: 81) established by circular layouts has reported students as finding each other “more friendly” (Ehrman and Dörnyei, 1998, cited in Dörnyei and Murphey, 2003: 81) than in other arrangements. Constructing a “safe space” by changing the seating arrangements may therefore contribute to alleviating some of the social anxieties students face when taking part in foreign language learning (Hawkins, 1996). If the environment where learning takes place can be made as comfortable as possible, then other concerns such as performing in the target language may be made less daunting and more positive.

Lastly, the students’ awareness of requiring different seating plans for different activities appears borne out by the literature (Sommer, 1977; Lotfy, 2012). Blatchford *et al* (2003: 164) comment that seating arrangements need to be consistent with learning aims. In their view, flexible seating is important because it can encourage pupil interactions in different working situations (*ibid*). Conducting all types of learning task according to the same

classroom layout may therefore have a detrimental effect on achievement and performance. However, Kutnick *et al* (2006: 56) note from the case study schools in their research that there appears to be a “pervasive inertia against implementing classroom level changes necessary to re-orient teaching and learning processes towards pedagogic concerns”. This is supported by Wannarka and Ruhl’s (2008: 89) suggestion that teachers should have the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions about how best to meet the instructional needs of their students. Although the participants’ teacher hinted at possibilities for moving students around for group work and suchlike, she did not refer to matching tasks with appropriate seating. Moreover, it appeared as though school policy rather than learning aims dictated the classroom layout.

6.5 Learning factors: teaching strategies

Here I discuss the data in terms of how the participants perceive the teaching strategies they are presented with during French lessons. The students’ descriptions of other learning factors, such as engagement, boredom and feeling equipped and able to cope in the target language are also drawn upon to help understand these perceptions. I frame the findings in view of learner autonomy and how this relates to students’ levels of motivation as well as student voice. In short, a relationship exists (i.e. students react against activities which limit their sense of agency) between learner autonomy and student voice within the foreign languages classroom which, if foregrounded, listened to and acted upon, could significantly enhance student motivation in the subject. Again, the teacher’s opinions in this respect are also included to provide a counter-view of the reasoning behind the use of particular FL learning strategies.

6.5.1 Students' views on teaching strategies

Of the different types of foreign language learning activities mentioned during the focus groups and follow-up interviews (e.g. playing games, speaking in the TL, listening tasks) copying from the board, worksheets or other resources appeared to be the task least favoured by all participants. Gender differences did not seem to influence perceptions of this activity as dislike was expressed in equal measure by both boys and girls. Throughout the transcripts copying was referred to very negatively, revealing two important points. First, students did not equate copying with learning and second, they described how they often did not comprehend what or why they were copying.

Not equating copying with learning suggests that two different perspectives operated in the languages classroom. Students viewed copying as something which prevented their learning because they did not engage in situations where they could actively use the target language. As one student pointed out, "you don't even have to say it or anything, it's just copying" (FG15). Yet according to their teacher there is a place for it in the languages classroom, even if it is "frowned upon, particularly by Ofsted". Despite the students' view of it impeding their learning somewhat, the teacher maintained that "there is nothing wrong with having a model and adapting it". Such discrepancies in attitude were also identified in the data where students reported other learning strategies employed by the teacher as not being helpful. For instance, some explained that being told to use a French dictionary was unhelpful because they did not know how to spell the words they were trying to understand. Consequently feelings of not being equipped or able to cope in the target language were also expressed, particularly by students who described a negative foreign language learning experience.

6.5.2 Teacher's views on teaching strategies

There were indications that copying activities were sometimes the only option available to the teacher when she explained that “when the school says no to photocopying, the only option left is to get [the students] to copy”. This revealed how issues outside of the classroom sometimes affected what happened inside it. Being restricted because of the lack of available funds needed to provide materials (also referred to by the teacher in noting how the “school can’t afford CDs” for listening activities) meant that the teacher had to rely on copying because there was no alternative. Again, however, the data did not indicate whether or not this had been explained to students.

6.5.3 Opposing views on copying activities

In terms of L2 motivation the data signified that copying activities may have contributed to limiting participants’ learner autonomy because they did not allow for independent use of the target language. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, autonomy is an important factor in motivating students to learn a foreign language. If students’ autonomy is minimised by having to repeatedly engage in copying tasks, then the impact on their motivation is likely to be negative. Giving students more control of their lessons was discussed with the teacher during her interview. Whilst she welcomed the idea in principle and had in fact attempted it with some of her students, factors such as available time and student behaviour (“they’d walk all over me...some of them”) were considered obstacles to allowing more autonomous lessons. Her eventual conclusion, that she was “not sure it would do them too much good”, indicated a possible reluctance to adopt different learning and teaching strategies. In turn, this could explain reliance on copying as a means of covering the syllabus in the allotted time as well as managing behaviour.

6.5.4 Copying activities, disengagement and their effect on learner autonomy

A further finding hinted at copying activities being responsible for disengagement from language lessons. Having a book “where it looks like I know loads of French but it’s just copying” (F19) implies that some students distinguished between “knowing” French and “copying” French. Consequently the copying tasks had the opposite effect of that intended by the teacher. Feelings of disengagement were apparent, presumably because the students were not challenged to begin manipulating the target language independently. Although the teacher commented that “eventually when [the students] see there is a point to it, they accept it”, similar views were not articulated by the students. Instead they saw copying as “horrible” (FG13) or a “struggle” (FG3), often because they did not understand what they were copying.

Disengagement from FLL may also follow as a result of the diminished senses of autonomy and competence copying tasks may engender. Although now disappplied until a new statutory programme of study for MFL is introduced in September 2014 (DfE, 2013), at the time of writing the KS3 National Curriculum for MFL lists copying at only Levels 1 and 2 (out of ten) of the attainment targets for writing (QCA, 2007: 176). This reflects the low status of the task and the potential lack of cognitive stimulation it offers. Dobson (1998: 6), in an inspection of MFL in secondary schools, notes that “in writing pupils move too slowly from the copying of words or phrases to independent writing”. For some students, such as those in Category four, this slow move may not have too much of a negative effect on their attitudes towards MFL as they are able to see beyond the boredom or difficulty of the task and maintain their interest in TL writing. However, too much copying and not enough independent work may cause in other students (such as those in Category three) disinterest

and disengagement. As Barton (2006: 114) attests, it is all too easy to fall in the “*copiez les mots*” (“copy the words”, my translation) trap.

6.5.5 Copying activities and boredom

Boredom was another key element described by students in Categories one and three. For those in Category one, language learning was conceived of as boring because of the topics covered and the learning activities they were required to participate in. Copying tasks and other writing activities seemed to be at the root of these participants’ boredom. According to them, they had to learn words they did not understand, by means of tasks they disliked and as a result, did not learn other things related to the target language that they would have liked to find out, such as about people and culture (for example “what they do, how they eat, what they cook” (F16) and so on). Consequently, it is possible that they viewed language learning through the lens of copying activities alone and this is what limited their enjoyment of the subject.

Students in Category three also commented on levels of boredom but in a slightly different respect. They described how the lesson delivery was boring and how it could have been made more memorable. This will be discussed below in relation to the teacher’s communicative style (Noels *et al*, 1999). In a different manner, students in Category four asserted that they experienced boredom as a result of other students’ misbehaviour in class, a factor not typically discussed in other studies of boredom or student behaviour (Larson and Richards, 1991; Lewis, 2001). However, it is possible to indirectly relate this to copying activities. If, as discussed in this section, students are not stimulated by copying tasks, then their attention and engagement is likely to wane and this is when disruptive behaviour usually sets in (Kanevsky and Keighley, 2003; Larson and Richards, 1991). That this then has

a knock-on effect upon other students, who become bored by this type of behaviour, implies that copying still has an effect upon them, apart from the fact that they also regard copying activities as those which prevent speaking in and learning the target language.

6.5.6 Students' suggestions for alternative teaching and learning strategies

This thesis argues for inclusion of student voice perspectives to enhance motivation in FLL, based upon the notion that students “*are* observant and have a rich but often untapped understanding of processes and events” (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000: 82, emphasis in original). Therefore, examining students’ views on what kind of tasks they would like to engage in during language lessons revealed a number of suggestions that could be considered as alternatives to copying activities. Ideas included playing board games, engaging with native speakers, making up their own sentences and speaking to each other, linking French with another subject such as food technology and going on trips abroad. Whilst some of these may not be physically or financially viable, giving students the opportunity to experiment with different forms of learning as opposed to persisting with activities which they reported as negatively affecting their progress may increase interest in MFL. In turn, this could improve their confidence in using the TL more independently. More independent TL use combined with seeing that their ideas and suggestions are acted upon may also contribute to increased learner autonomy and subsequently motivation. As Urquhart (2001: 83) explains, responding effectively to some of the difficulties learners face is helped by understanding the importance of listening to what students have to say about their experiences and what will make a difference to them.

6.5.7 Discussion of copying activities in existing literature

Existing research on copying in foreign language learning is not copious but does reveal some interesting points in relation to the findings discussed above. First, it is often suggested that boys in particular do not respond well to copying as a learning strategy (Barton, 2006: 29). However the data here showed that dislike of copying is referred to equally by boys and girls. That there is an evenly distributed disregard for this particular learning strategy suggests factors other than gender play a role here.

As noted above, for example, copying is viewed by some students as a barrier to independent use of the target language. Although such activities are often provided by teachers because they believe that the process of writing down new words progresses students' learning and helps to familiarise them with the written form of the words they hear and speak (Barton, 2006: 114), evidence, both here and in the literature, shows that copying does not always help students to learn. As McColl (2013: 34) attests, "the physical task [of copying] is so demanding that no attention can be given to recognition of letter patterns or spelling. In any case the end product is likely to be unusable". Cameron (2003: 108) also maintains that it may take some learners a long time to physically make the shapes of letters and as such "in the arduous process of making shapes on paper there is no mental space left to think about meaning or use". In discussing copying lists of words, Pichette *et al* (2012: 66) note that "reading or writing isolated words out of context is not a normal learning task", whilst Boaler (2002: 252-3) argues that because it does not present them with a problem to solve, the closed nature of copying means it is often not seen as "work" by students.

In addition, Macaro (2007: 33) explains how copying may also “perpetuate [the students’] concept of writing as reproducing the “language of others”, leading to feelings of dependence”. I maintain that “feelings of dependence” reduce students’ senses of autonomy and competence, so what is intended to help them develop their target language knowledge actually ends up impeding this process. Although other studies (e.g. Thomas and Dieter, 1987) have found copying to contribute to more effective L2 vocabulary retention than other tasks such as active translation activities (Hummel, 2010), no students in this study mentioned that they found copying a useful foreign language learning strategy.

That students often did not understand what they are copying may also negate the value of copying tasks. As such, the potential for mistakes and inaccuracies is significant, meaning that the “accurate written record” of new words (Barton, 2006: 115) that copying is intended to supply may in fact be inaccurate and could result in the creation of an ineffective learning resource. Porte (1995: 140) also explains that there are often significant differences between what the eye sees when copying and what the pen writes.

Consequently copying may instigate in some students “unwanted and unprovoked inaccuracies” (*ibid*). Whilst Macaro (2007: 29) found that the students in his study did not always make mistakes in their copying, he does identify instances in the copying processes where errors could occur. One of them is during a phase he calls “sub-vocalising” (Macaro, 2007: 28). This is where students read whatever it is they are copying, repeat it to themselves and then write it down. This may be a successful strategy for some, but if there is no comprehension of what the word or sentence being copied means or how it is pronounced then the likelihood of misspelling during copying is increased. As some of the participants here noted, they often did not speak in the target language, which could have

an effect on the accuracy of their copying skills. Furthermore, as Erler (2006: 8) attests, because students are rarely taught grapheme-phoneme correspondence, this can impair their ability to match words and sounds, thereby leaving them “bound to feel handicapped at this basic level” (*op cit*, 9). Another problem with the process of copying something that is not understood is that if concentration and therefore the place in the sentence or word being copied are lost, it is then difficult for some students to identify where they were and return to the correct place. This then risks imprecise copying because the lack of understanding the target language precludes being able to follow it, realise mistakes or make any necessary corrections.

Whilst some researchers point out the benefits of copying, such as learning to understand differences in L1 and L2 writing systems (Macaro, 2007) or enhanced vocabulary retention (Hummel, 2010), Barcroft (2006, 2007) argues that it may in fact decrease new word learning. He maintains that copying can detract from word learning by exhausting processing resources needed to encode novel lexical forms (2006: 487). Similarly, Lin and Hsu (2013) found that during copying vocabulary exercises learners did not engage in mental operations at complex levels. Consequently they contend that copying encourages learners to simply duplicate words without deeper and more detailed thinking (*op cit*, 115). This corresponds with Kember and Gow’s (1994: 71) argument that copying reduces to teaching to a one-way process where the students’ minds are “waiting to receive wisdom” and also supports Lewis and Wray’s (1999) concerns that copying notes from the board reduces the literacy demands made on the students. They argue that teachers need to “develop strategies that enable students to cope with the texts they encounter rather than minimise students’ encounters with texts” (*op cit*, 278).

Copying is identified as a dual task; encompassing the act of looking at what is to be copied and physically writing it out on one hand and the attempt to learn the new information received on the other (Barcroft, 2007: 714). Such dual tasks may not improve students' ability to learn new words but rather decrease it because they get in the way of allowing learners to attend to new L2 word forms and map meanings between them and their referents (Barcroft, 2007: 724). This argument is furthered by the fact that copying often does not require access to meaning (Barcroft, 2006: 488). In his study, the effects on productive L2 vocabulary learning by means of copying were negative compared to L2 vocabulary learning by no-writing activities such as matching words and pictures (Barcroft, 2006), supporting his hypothesis that copying can detract from learning new L2 words. Whilst Pichette *et al* (2012: 69) reason that the greater cognitive demands of writing should lead to better acquisition of new words through writing than through reading text, Lin and Hsu (2013: 111) also found that more extensive activities, that is, those that require the learner to notice, discern, construct, contextualise and generate target words (*op cit*, 115) were more effective in promoting long-term word retention in comparison to copying (*op cit*, 116).

6.6 Relationship factors: students' perceptions of teacher and peers

This section demonstrates how the third link between L2 motivation and student voice is borne out in the research findings. Here relationship factors encompass the different interactions within the foreign languages classroom (student-teacher and student-student) and how these affect participants' learning and behaviour during lessons. They have a significant bearing on students' feelings of competence, which can be developed or hindered by relationships with the teacher and/or other classmates. In this instance,

students need to develop a sense of competence in order to cultivate and maintain their motivation but this can be affected by how they view and interact with others in the classroom. In terms of student voice, the participants articulate well how the teacher's communicative style affects their learning as well as their overall language learning experience. However, deeper issues such as levels of trust between student and teacher are also foregrounded. Participants went on to explain how comparisons with peers affected aspects such as self-evaluation and motivation. The following looks at the student-teacher relationship as described in the data and then goes on to examine peer relationships.

6.6.1 Student-teacher relationships

Emerging as a theme in the outcome space (see Chapter 5), students' perceptions of their foreign languages teacher link Categories one, two and three on a scale of how these perceptions are rationalised. Participants in Category one appeared frustrated by their teacher's suggested learning strategies when they asked for help because to them these instructions did not provide the help they were seeking. They also believed the teacher displayed a negative attitude towards them, voiced in terms of feeling as though they were being criticised by her.

6.6.2 Emotional reactions to the teacher (Category 2)

Those in Category two, perhaps unsurprisingly, reacted somewhat differently to the same teacher and projected an emotional reaction to her and her attitude towards them. They focused upon how she made them feel and were sensitive to her comments about them. In contrast to students in Category one, they made little reference to the teacher in terms of her teaching style. Another structural aspect of Category two links closely with participants'

perceptions of the teacher although it is labelled differently; that of *feeling lost or ignored in class*. While the label does not directly refer to the teacher, it is the teacher who the students in this category viewed as being responsible for how they felt during their lessons. In this respect, they relayed their feelings about the teacher in terms of the level of interaction they had with her. The overall impression generated by their comments is that they were left feeling forgotten or ignored, usually because the teacher was distracted by disruptive students or spent a lot of time helping others. They also felt that the teacher did not always respond to their requests for help, leading them to react emotionally towards their FLL experience.

6.6.3 Disengaging from MFL as a result of the student-teacher relationship (Category 3)

Participants in Category three viewed the teacher with a relatively comparable emotional response to those in Category two; that is, some feelings of annoyance were generated or they reported feeling patronised. However, the difference between the two categories is that whereas in Category two, students were sensitive to the teacher's words and actions, students in Category three were more likely to react outwardly by becoming disengaged from their lessons. They appeared ready to match their perceptions of their teacher's attitude with negative behaviours of their own, such as not listening or not wanting to learn. Some participants also commented on the way the lessons were taught. They believed that the teacher was more concerned about passing examinations than ensuring students were actually learning the language. This is supported by another of the structural aspects of Category three: *lesson style*. Issues relating to teaching style, speed of lessons, boredom and pressure were all discussed by participants in this category and their comments revealed a disconnect between the outcomes intended by the teacher and the actual result. Rather

than feeling as though they had learnt something, students communicated that the teacher's instruction style left them with little knowledge of the target language. This, alongside the pressure to absorb large amounts of information in a short space of time which they felt were often delivered in a style they did not appreciate, appeared to cause these students to become more and more disengaged from the subject.

A further view of the teacher expressed by participants in Category three relates to her classroom management. This was not referenced in terms of student behaviour but with regard to the practicalities of everyday classroom life, such as keeping the classroom tidy or marking work. A main focus for students in this category was resources. Equipment was either old-fashioned or believed to have been purchased unnecessarily and the teacher was also reproached for appearing unconcerned about environmental factors by printing out too many worksheets or always printing in colour. This might seem an unusual cause for disengagement from lessons but it highlights another way in which not being attuned to students' attitudes may result in potential difficulties relating to motivation. It also illustrates why looking at students' whole experiences of FLL is important because previously unconsidered aspects regarding motivation and engagement can be revealed and then acted upon.

6.6.4 Minimal mention of student-teacher relationship (Category 4)

Participants in Category four did not refer to their teacher in any of the ways described by students in the other categories. Passing mention was made about her during the focus groups and follow-up interviews but she was not held up as a factor affecting how they learn or their overall FLL experience. This may suggest that their levels of motivation are such that they are more engaged in the subject and therefore do not see their teacher in the

same way as other participants. This is supported by Phelan *et al*'s (1992: 700) view that this type of student may have “so thoroughly internalised goals for the future that they overlook, ignore, or rationalise classroom circumstances that are not optimal”.

6.6.5 Lack of affiliative drive

In terms of motivating L2 learners, Dörnyei (1994a: 278) includes within the learning situation level of his motivational construct a strand labelled “teacher-specific motivational components”. He notes that one of the most important components under this heading is “affiliative drive”, referring to students’ need to do well in order to please a teacher whom they like and appreciate, which in turn generates both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (*ibid*). However, this appears to be based upon the assumption that students have the desire to please their teacher. Whilst some recommendations are made regarding teaching style and behaviours (Dörnyei, 1994a: 282), no suggestions are made as to how “affiliative drive” might be generated if attitudes towards the teacher suggest the desire to please is absent. A more likely scenario is that students could end up resisting the languages classroom because of their feelings towards the teacher, regardless of whether or not they display a positive attitude towards the target language (Gardner, 1985: 56).

It is possible that participants in Categories one, two and three likely do not possess the affiliative drive to please their teacher because of their attitudes towards her. Therefore, as teacher behaviour and beliefs are deemed to have a direct influence on students (Bernaus and Gardner, 2008: 388) it is necessary to examine by what other means the student-teacher relationship can be framed to help generate motivation in the L2 classroom. Drawing from the outline of students’ reactions to their teacher provided above, factors surrounding the positioning of the teacher in the classroom (corresponding to students

feeling lost or ignored in class) and the teacher's communicative style (corresponding to students feeling that the teacher does not help them or that their lesson style is not conducive to learning) are explored below.

6.6.6 The importance of teacher immediacy

An interesting aspect raised by participants in Category two of this study relates to how the physical location of the teacher in the L2 classroom affected their overall FLL experience. Their perceived ability to interact with her or for her to recognise when they need help or support seemed to have a considerable effect on their attitudes towards the teacher and subsequently how they felt about their foreign language lessons. In this sense, their impression of being "ignored" or "forgotten" negatively impacted their motivation. This sensitivity towards how the teacher acts and is positioned in the classroom is something which appears under-researched in the L2 learning and L2 motivation contexts owing to little available literature on both topics but can be evaluated in terms of teacher immediacy.

Immediacy is conceptualised as communication behaviours that enhance physical and psychological closeness with another (Mehrabian, 1971, cited in Frymier, 1993: 454). These behaviours can be nonverbal, such as eye contact, smiling, positive use of gestures and a relaxed body position (Frymier, 1993: 454-5) as well as physical proximity (Kelley and Gorham, 1988) and teacher movement (Gorham, 1988). Immediacy behaviours can also be verbal and include use of humour, praise, positive messages and self-disclosure (Gorham, 1988). All of these behaviours can contribute to affective and cognitive learning (Sanders and Wiseman, 1990; Gorham, 1988). Andersen (1979) also found that teacher immediacy formed a variable affecting whether or not students were likely to continue their studies on a similar course. Each of these factors has particular implications for the findings of the

present study but importantly, immediacy has also been shown to be positively related to student motivation (Frymier, 1993; Christophel, 1990).

Christophel and Gorham (1995: 293) posit that there is a sequential process that links teacher immediacy and student motivation. They argue that immediacy behaviours arouse interest in students, direct their attention and enhance their motivation, increasing their learning as a result (*ibid*). This is supported by Frymier's (1993: 461) assertion that teacher communication behaviours impact students' motivation to study and that their motivation is increased when the teacher demonstrates moderate to high immediacy. In the present context, it therefore does not seem surprising that students who reported that they are negatively affected by an apparently non-immediate teacher are those who decided not to continue their language study beyond the compulsory stage. This suggests that L2 motivational constructs might warrant the inclusion of teacher communication behaviours as a further aspect for consideration. Teacher immediacy may also be better facilitated by bearing in mind the suggested seating arrangements discussed above.

Teacher immediacy also affects students' behaviour (Kearney *et al*, 1988; Wall, 1993). This links to another aspect raised by participants in Category two: the impact of other students' behaviour. Wall (1993: 229) argues that the teacher's location in class can lead to students feeling more included in the lesson, resulting in greater concentration and decreased inclination towards disruptive behaviour. However, he also notes (*ibid*) that the teacher's position in class can give students an excuse not to pay attention. In terms of the student behaviour reported by participants in Category two, teacher immediacy is therefore given double significance as not only can it affect how students feel individually but it can determine how students feel about their classmates. In this instance where participants

have indicated that other students' behaviour in class has contributed to their decision not to continue with language study, teacher immediacy gains a more important role in the motivation framework and must be considered a valuable tool in the languages classroom.

6.6.7 The importance of the teacher's communicative style

Returning again to Dörnyei's (1994a: 282) motivational model and associated recommendations reveals that "adopting the role of facilitator rather than...drill sergeant" as well as being empathetic, congruent and understanding are all important means of motivating students. Significantly, adopting a teaching style which embraces these recommendations aids students' perceptions of their own level of competence, a prerequisite, along with a sense of belonging and autonomy (Noels *et al*, 2001) for developing longer-term motivation. However, this largely depends on the teacher being aware of these concerns and adapting their communicative behaviours to reflect them. As Noels *et al* (1999: 26) point out, the teacher is a key person who affects students' perceptions of competence and autonomy and therefore the manner in which teachers interact with students may be associated with the students' motivational orientation. Henning (2010: 64-65) echoes this in stating that a teacher's communicative style is critical to students' learning potential, whilst Velez and Cano (2008: 77) maintain that teacher immediacy combining both verbal and non-verbal constructs appears to decrease student apprehension and increase overall student liking for the course and subject matter. Bernaus and Gardner (2008: 387) also argue that the teacher is often overlooked in the learning process and that focusing on variables that would help the teacher to understand motivation and encourage its development and maintenance is of importance.

In this instance participants (principally those in Categories one and three) described how they reacted to their teacher's communicative style. A number of dimensions of this were revealed by the students' comments, including how variables such as speed of lessons, delivery, boredom and pressure exerted by the teacher upon students left them feeling as though they had little knowledge of the target language (Category three). Noels *et al* (1999: 23) argue that students' perceptions of their teacher's communicative style relates to their levels of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation as well as their language learning outcomes. Here, perceptions of the teacher, her attitude and her teaching style appeared to have affected the participants' levels of motivation. This is evidenced by comments describing how students did not want to engage in lessons because they believed the teacher spoke negatively to or about them or how they felt that did not receive the support they needed to understand the target language.

Similar to physical teacher immediacy, verbal teacher immediacy refers to the verbal expressions used by teachers (Velez and Cano, 2008: 77). These stylistic expressions ultimately determine how far a student likes or dislikes their teacher (*ibid*) and therefore the subject. As Teven and Gorham (1998) point out, a vital prerequisite to effective teaching is establishing a climate of warmth, understanding and caring within the classroom. If this is lacking and students identify negative verbal immediacy behaviours on the part of the teacher, such as covering topics too quickly and "drill[ing] them into your head" then it is much harder to engage and motivate those students. Importantly, students' trust of their teacher in this respect is not likely to be a function of a single interaction but based on a continuing pattern of interactions (Wooten and McCroskey, 1996:95). A teacher's communicative style can therefore enhance or frustrate students' efforts to learn a foreign

language (Noels *et al*, 1999: 23) and immediacy behaviours can be seen as key components of effective communication in the instructional environment (Thomas *et al*, 1994: 112).

A further point made by Noels and colleagues (1999: 26) is that students who find their teacher controlling or authoritarian and who believe that they are not given useful feedback about their progress may lose their sense of self-determination and competence in the learning process (see also Dörnyei, 1994a). This, alongside the other factors discussed above, may result in students applying only minimal effort to their learning (Noels *et al*, 1999). This appeared to be the case with participants in Category three. In response to lessons that are described as rushed and teacher-centric with very little active input on the part of the students, participants described how they easily forgot things but felt pressure from their teacher to remember a lot in a short space of time. They spoke of wanting to enjoy the lessons but felt the style of them impeded this. Termed “teacher misbehaviours” (Wanzer and McCroskey, 1998: 44), the behaviours demonstrated by teachers which irritate or distract students in their lessons (*ibid*) can have a detrimental effect on students’ motivation. In this sense, as Gorham and Christophel (1992) argue, student demotivation is “teacher owned” whereas student motivation is “student owned”. The subtle but importance difference rests in the fact that a teacher’s communicative style will affect whatever message is being communicated (Thweatt and McCroskey, 1998). If teacher behaviours lead to decreased student expectancy of success, it is likely that the group will become disenchanted with the course and cognitively disengage (Velez and Cano, 2008: 78). This was also indicated in Henning’s (2010: 64) study, where students reported that their ability to engage in the subject matter was mostly based upon the teacher’s ability to be flexible with the course content and teaching methods. As a result, the likelihood of

students taking additional courses in the same content area is diminished if the teacher “misbehaves” (Thweatt and McCroskey, 1998: 35).

Contributing to this scenario is the fact that participants in Category 3 also viewed their lessons as dull and boring. For these students, the lack of excitement equated to non-memorable sessions which also exacerbated the pressure to remember what they were taught. They understood that they cannot necessarily “do fun stuff all the time” but would have liked to see lessons injected with something that rendered them more memorable. Interestingly, comments made by the participants’ teacher suggested how she expects them to be motivated by success but realises that they only want to do “fun stuff”. She attempted to include elements of this in her lessons but there appeared to be some mismatch between her intentions and the students’ perceptions of her behaviour. As Williams and Burden (1997: 98) note, learners’ perceptions and interpretations have often been found to have the greatest influence on achievement, and as Brown (2009: 46) attests, mismatches between students’ and teachers’ expectations can negatively affect L2 students’ satisfaction of the language class, potentially leading to the discontinuation of L2 study.

6.6.8 Establishing trust between student and teacher

Finally, participants in Category two also discussed the notion of trust between themselves and the teacher and how this affected not only their language lessons but their thoughts and behaviours outside the classroom. Brookfield (2009: 55) maintains that students believe an important component of successful learning is being able to perceive the teacher as both an ally and an authority and that they need to be able to trust and rely on them. Wooten and McCroskey (1996: 94-95) explain that trust is a necessary component of a student-

teacher relationship and that it is likely to be affected by the way the student views how the teacher communicates with him or her. Participants in Category two believed that the teacher did not trust them enough to take their folders of work home because they were “loud and noisy” (F14), although other students were allowed to do so because they had “decided to complain” (F16). Whilst seemingly innocuous, this perceived imbalance of attitude on the part of the teacher had certain repercussions. The first is that without their folders students could not revise, so they ended up with “a really bad score in my test” (F16); perhaps contributing further to loss of feelings of competence and autonomy. Second, and potentially more important, the participants’ worried that if their teacher did not trust them, then maybe their friends did not either: “it does make me think, do my other friends think the same of me? Like they can’t trust me as well...if my teacher can’t trust me to take a book home, will my friends trust me to do anything with their stuff or something?” (F14). Students appeared very sensitive and aware of possible consequences that the lack of trust displayed by the teacher may have beyond the classroom and into their social lives. One student, in discussing how issues with trust made her feel, was anxious that she was “the person who just tags along, who doesn’t really fit in” (F16). Conversely, however, the teacher referenced that students trusted her and could understand why she did certain things. Again, a mismatch between student and teacher beliefs was evident, with potentially damaging consequences (Gabillon, 2012).

In sum it can be argued that students’ perceptions of their language teacher may form a more significant aspect of foreign language learning motivation than previously considered. Moving away from thinking about how teachers can motivate students (Dörnyei, 1994a, b; Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998) towards how students’ own beliefs can mediate their motivation

might offer some useful avenues for developing notions of competence in and enjoyment of FLL.

6.7 Student-student relationships and their effect on feelings of competence

Students' feelings of competence can be defined as much through their relationships and interactions with their peers as they can be through their relationship with their teacher. As noted above, developing and maintaining feelings of competence in foreign language learning is a key component in generating motivation for the subject. In line with the argument already proposed in this chapter, listening to student voice regarding feelings of competence may help to better develop this important aspect of motivation. The following section explores how the participants in this study discuss feelings of competence in terms of relationships with other students.

6.7.1 Feelings of competence and peer comparison

In this study, participants in Category two in particular demonstrated considerable awareness of what they believed to be their own levels of competence in FLL by comparing themselves, often negatively, with other students in their class. Their description of their FLL experience contained frequent reference to their own abilities in languages as being below those of others and how this consequently made them feel "dumb" (FI6) or that they wanted to "get up and walk out" (FI4). This differed from students in Category four, who made regular positive statements about their foreign language skills, such as "[writing] is what I'm good at" (FI1) or "I find that my French has helped my English" (FI2).

This type of student-student relationship based on peer comparison is an important motivational factor. Early adolescent cognitive development produces greater sensitivity to

peer feedback and greater skill at using social comparisons to assess one's own competence level (Dweck, 2002, cited in Molloy *et al*, 2010: 15). The perceived abilities of classmates can affect students' levels of motivation, meaning that motivation, as well as residing in the individual and in the context, can also emerge from the interaction between individuals within the social context of the classroom and school (Urdu and Schoenfelder, 2006: 333). As a result, those who make negative comparisons between themselves and their peers are likely to become less motivated. Although the previous section determined that reduced reliance on teacher-led motivational strategies in favour of student-led ones might be beneficial, it is here that teachers may lend a supportive hand by helping students improve their perceptions of competence. Dörnyei (1994a: 282) argues that teachers should help students by removing uncertainties about their competence and self-efficacy by giving relevant positive examples of accomplishment. It is not possible to determine from the transcripts whether this occurred in the participants' classroom because examples were not given. However, tentative suggestions to the contrary could be made given that students did report issues such as lack of trust and the teacher's negative attitude towards them (see previous sections). Consequently it appeared that some students were left in doubt as to the levels of their foreign language learning competence, potentially resulting in a detrimental effect on their motivation.

6.8 The teacher's overall view of MFL teaching and learning

Interviewing the participants' teacher was considered important because it provided an alternative view of some of the points raised by her students as already discussed with regard to seating arrangements and learning tasks. It also enabled a deeper understanding of the factors surrounding being a foreign languages teacher in this particular context,

which, to some extent provided possible reasons behind discrepancies between the teacher's and participants' attitudes.

6.8.1 Changes to teaching result in impact on student motivation

In terms of student motivation, the teacher expressed how the in-school changes made by senior managers, such as consolidating the GCSE course into a shorter timeframe had a significant impact on the way she was able to teach. The previously discussed interest in "fun stuff" enjoyed by students and teacher alike had to be necessarily minimised in order to sufficiently cover the syllabus, therefore leaving little time for activities that may have enhanced students' interest and engagement in the lessons. As the teacher explained, "there's just no scope for fun at all". This also supports the students' noted experience of rushed lessons and feeling as though words are "drilled into your head". The teacher was seemingly aware of this in her belief that "reducing timetables is just not successful for languages at all" and understood that some students "are not equipped" to learn in this format because they have "not matured enough to organise themselves, organise their folder, write up a revision timetable" and so on. This becomes problematic, she explained, when she then had to take time out of the curriculum to teach these necessary skills. She was very aware that this pushed students even more and conveyed exasperation that this was something she had to contend with on top of an already intense workload. In her view, this contributed significantly to the demotivation of some students as it "seems to turn them off even more rather than helping them". Unfortunately, however, she is governed by decisions made by others in the school.

6.8.2 Decisions made by non-languages staff

Decision-making about language lessons by those who are not language teachers seemed to have a considerable impact on the teacher. She explained how “management do *not* get what language teaching is like” and how factors such as perceptions of lessons (“we are not seen as a practical subject”), being compared to other subjects (“we are constantly compared to English”) and lack of funding (“we don’t get the funding that we need”) are all distractions from what actually goes on in the classroom. Furthermore, senior management was viewed as not being able to keep up with the constant changes made to the languages curriculum. Consequently they were reported to often make demands on languages teachers that meant “they keep going round in circles”. It would appear that teacher had as much to contend with outside of the classroom as she did within it. As concluded by the teacher herself, “languages are the hardest lesson to teach”.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the outcomes of this study; that is, year 9 participants’ descriptions of their foreign language learning experiences, provide valuable insights into practical and pedagogical aspects of foreign language teaching and learning in the context of an English state secondary school. Framed in relation to three main factors of L2 motivation and student voice discussed in the existing literature, it finds that seating arrangements (physical factor) affect students’ sense of belonging as well as interaction with their teacher and peers and determines that copying activities (learning factor) negatively impact learner autonomy for some students whilst intensifying disengagement in others because independent use of the target language is limited. It also illustrates how student-teacher and peer relationships (relationship factor) influence feelings of competence and how there

are often mismatches between student attitudes and their teacher's communicative style. Each of these elements can be located on the "interactional continuum" as defined on page 49 and form part of the array of factors which must be carefully balanced in order to augment L2 motivation.

The strong thread of "student voice" apparent in the participants' descriptions of their experiences suggests that students do give thought to their MFL lessons and that discussing their opinions may lead to alternative approaches and ideas that could help generate and maintain their motivation. The equally clear theme of how some of the participants perceive the teacher unifies Categories one, two and three in particular, although it is evident that she stands in different relation to each of them. The students' perceptions of her and her teaching or communicative style at times appear unremittingly negative but it is important to remember two points about this. The first is that one of the objectives of this study is to look at students' experiences of foreign language learning from a second-order perspective – i.e. one which allows focus on participants' experiential descriptions. Therefore to dismiss or negate students' reported perceptions would be to ignore vital data contributing to their overall learning experience. The second point, however, is to appreciate that in foregrounding what they dislike about their language learning experience, the participants necessarily do not see the "bigger picture". They focus on aspects which make them feel uncomfortable or which have the most significant effect on their experience. Consequently in some instances the teacher becomes their sole focus and other factors are not considered. That students in Category four made little reference to the teacher suggests that they foregrounded other aspects that were either not experienced or not focused upon by the other participants. The teacher's perspective therefore lends another dimension to

the discussion and allows a clearer understanding of the external factors governing her teaching and subsequently her capacity for adopting strategies that may enhance learner motivation.

The following chapter examines the strengths and limitations of the study, discusses how it contributes to new knowledge in the field and offers suggestions for further research. It also presents reflections on the research process.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

I conclude this thesis by revisiting the original research questions and answering them by synthesising the data and extending existing ideas found in the literature. I examine the strengths and limitations of the study and discuss the implications of its findings and how they contribute to new knowledge in the field. I also offer some reflections on the research process.

I embarked on the research presented in the previous chapters in order to gain a deeper understanding of year 9 students' experiences of foreign language learning in an English state secondary school. This was set against the backdrop of declining numbers of students choosing to study languages beyond the age of 14 (CILT, 2004) despite reasoning behind government policy that optional study would in fact motivate students to continue learning languages in Key Stage 4 and beyond (DfES, 2002b). As making the subject optional at KS4 did not appear to inspire students to choose a language GCSE, I drew upon the literature on L2 motivation (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 1994a, b; Noels *et al*, 1999) to find out what could potentially motivate learners to maintain their language studies and presented my own definition of L2 motivation which I have referred to throughout the study:

Foreign language learning motivation is an intricate balance of situated and dynamic factors existing on both an interactional continuum (e.g. between individual and context) and a temporal axis. It is neither static nor linear and must take into account fluctuations in students' interests, priorities, emotions and desire to learn.

I identified three main factors influencing L2 motivation: a sense of belonging, learner autonomy and feelings of competence. These have foundations in the work of Deci and Ryan (1985) on self-determination and are furthered in the field of L2 learning and

motivation by Noels and colleagues (1999, 2001). As I sought to bring forward the “voice” of the participants as a fourth motivational factor, research on student voice also formed a basis for the thesis. I found that similar conceptions of belonging, autonomy and competence underpinned student voice studies (Mitra, 2004) and could therefore help strengthen the argument for including student voice in new models of L2 motivation, something that did not seem to have been given explicit attention in previous L2 motivation constructs (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994a). That many of the recommendations for motivating learners of foreign languages are teacher-led (Dörnyei, 1994a, b; Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998) suggested that there was a gap in the research that could be filled by considering how student-led strategies may enhance their motivation.

Consequently, I adopted a second-order perspective to ensure a move away from observational, first-order statements (made “from the outside”, see Marton and Svensson, 1979) about students and motivation in language learning as typically outlined in government policy statements (DfES, 2002b). This second-order perspective allowed access to participants’ experiential descriptions of their language learning experiences and was achieved through conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews with a total of 24 year 9 students. I gathered rich data that provided insight into the “collective mind” (Marton, 1981: 196) of the participants and I analysed these to discover the qualitatively different ways in which language learning was experienced by this selected group of students.

In conducting the analysis process I abstracted four different types of foreign language learning experience: negative, emotional, disengaged and self-assured. These formed the overall categories of description typical of phenomenographic studies and were supported

by various structural aspects. The structural aspects also highlighted links and relationships between each of the categories in the form of an outcome space (Marton and Booth, 1997). I then reconfigured this outcome space to illustrate broader relationships between categories and structural aspects within the scaffold of physical, learning and relationship factors. I discussed the key findings regarding seating arrangements, copying activities and student-teacher and student-student relationships within this framework and revealed important connections with the central features of L2 motivation and student voice. Seating arrangements relate closely to generating a sense of belonging; copying activities can limit learner autonomy and in-class relationships can affect students' feelings of competence. To continue this concluding chapter, the research questions formulated at the beginning of this study are revisited below.

7.2 Research questions

The main research question upon which this thesis rests is:

What are the qualitatively different ways in which selected Year 9 students in an English state secondary school experience foreign language learning?

Sub-questions helping to answer the main question were:

- ***Is students' motivation to study a foreign language affected by their overall experience of foreign language learning?***
- ***How do students describe the ways in which their foreign language learning experience could be improved?***

In answer to the main research question the previous chapters described the four different ways in which the participants in this study were found to have experienced foreign language learning:

- Category one – a negative foreign language learning experience
- Category two – an emotional foreign language learning experience
- Category three – a disengaged foreign language learning experience
- Category four – a self-assured foreign language learning experience

These qualitatively different experiences reveal the variation in how students from the same class with the same teacher perceive language learning. Uncovering such distinctions in experience is valuable because it suggests that means of motivating students to take up or continue language study may need to be equally varied in order to resonate with learners. Furthermore, this classification of different types of language learning experience is important because in variance to other taxonomies of a similar nature (Felder and Henriques, 1995), it encompasses the totality of the students' experience and does not focus on one single area such as response to learning tasks or strategies. Consequently this affords insights into students' views of language learning that may not have been considered previously. While the categories do only reflect selected students' experiential description at a particular point in time (which may or may not be subject to change), it can be argued that they are useful in illuminating the different ways in which FLL can be experienced.

Such insights brought to light three main student concerns. Certain physical, learning and relationship factors all contributed to how language learning was experienced by the participants. Specifically these related to seating arrangements, copying activities and in-

class relationships respectively. Although common to all four categories of description, the effect these factors had on students as well as their levels of motivation was noticeably different depending on their type of experience. Those describing a negative experience tended to blame the teacher for their lack of enjoyment and understanding of lessons; participants expressing an emotional experience were likely to internalise any problems rather than discuss them; disengaged students actively stepped away from the learning process and noted how their attitudes were often very different to their teacher's; self-assured students were largely able to see beyond most difficulties and often relied upon themselves for motivation and the development of learning strategies.

In response to the first sub-question it would appear that different foreign language learning (FLL) experiences can affect students' motivation in different ways. For example, participants describing an emotional FLL experience (Category two) tended to experience a lack of motivation through negative self-comparisons with peers, whereas students reporting a disengaged FLL experience (Category three) believed that lesson style was partly responsible for their lack of motivation in the subject. I have established that the three main concerns expressed by students (dislike of seating arrangements, dislike of copying activities, in-class relationships) are linked to the three main facets of L2 motivation found in the literature. I also found that the participants' reactions to and perceptions of these concerns are relative to their type of learning experience. For example, whilst peer relationships are foregrounded by participants in Category two because of the effect they have on self-evaluation and perceptions of competence, those in Category four were less likely to compare themselves to others and were more confident in their own abilities. Similarly, students in Category four described how disruptive students sometimes hindered

their learning but for those in Category two other students' behaviour drew the teacher's attention away from them, leaving them feeling forgotten or ignored.

The impact of experience upon motivation has received some consideration in the L2 motivation literature. However, this is often in the context of students' experiences of past successes or failures (Weiner, 1992, cited in Dörnyei, 1994a) as opposed to their total experience of the language learning process. Conversely, I argue that examining the participants' overall experiences of language learning, rather than just one area, not only leads to a deeper understanding of the different ways in which the FLL process can be experienced but also a realisation that these experiences are often more complex than typical motivated-unmotivated dichotomies suggest. Accordingly, the employment of strategies that go beyond standard methods of motivating students in the foreign languages classroom and attend to the issues raised in students' descriptions of their experiences is necessary. As evidenced in the present study, this could involve something as relatively simple as changing classroom seating arrangements or it could move beyond addressing physical factors towards the open discussion between students and teachers of issues such as reciprocal trust or self-awareness. Incorporating student voice practices as part of a wider motivational strategy (i.e. as a tool – see page 55 for earlier discussion) may also be beneficial as these are known to help enhance students' feelings of belonging, autonomy and competence (Mitra, 2004).

Student voice (as a dialogue) is something that emerged very clearly from the focus groups and follow-up interviews and helps to answer the second sub-question framing this study. The participants demonstrated that they had indeed given thought to how their language learning experience could be improved. Following the pilot study I had expected participants

in the main study to offer their opinions regarding language lessons but found that their thoughts, perceptions and ideas ranged far beyond the basic mechanics of teaching and learning. Responses to questions asked in this vein were well-considered and in some instances implied participants' motivation and desire to continue with language study could be enhanced if some of their suggestions were incorporated into lessons. Ideas ranged from playing board games in the target language as an alternative vocabulary learning task to copying activities, through to linking French with other subjects such as food technology. A number of participants expressed a desire to learn more about French people and culture, explaining that this was often overshadowed by a heavy focus on writing. Another point of note is that many of the participants also wanted to be able to use the target language more independently. They discussed how they wanted to do more speaking activities and described how this would boost their confidence and enhance their motivation. The wish to "know" French rather than "copy" it was evident. Finally, some participants, principally those in Category two, also revealed that they would welcome the opportunity to talk about learning languages and how it makes them feel. They explained that they had not realised the importance of languages before taking part in the research and suggested that if they could have had a similar discussion with their teacher about "how we wanted to change things" (F14), they would likely have chosen to continue their language study and take the GCSE. This signals the positive and even transformative effect (Fielding, 2004) focusing on students' own perspectives of learning can have.

In sum, I have found that participants experienced foreign language learning in one of four qualitatively different ways. Motivation in the languages classroom was moderated by the type of experience described, although certain factors affecting motivation were common

to all experiences, such as seating arrangements (physical factor) and copying activities (teaching factor) . Moreover, participants offered insightful comments about how their foreign language learning experience could be improved, suggesting that not only do they perhaps give more thought to the subject than they are credited for, but also that listening to students' comments about the issues they perceive as affecting their learning could be beneficial to students and teachers alike.

7.3 Limitations of the study

This study is offered in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate in Education (EdD). It provides a comprehensive examination of how foreign language learning is experienced by a selected group of students. This group of students aimed to be as representative of year 9 languages students as possible by including those who had actively chosen to study languages, those who had given up the subject as soon as they were able and those who had no choice in continuing with MFL because of their chosen qualification pathway. Another aspect of this study is that it has approached this examination from a second-order perspective (Marton, 1981) and thereby describes participants' experiences in their own words, leaving nothing "unspoken" (Marton and Booth, 1997: 125). Additionally the thesis has sought to identify and explain the variation (Pang, 2003) in ways of experiencing foreign language learning by first establishing four different categories of description and then by illuminating the relationships between and within them. This has afforded fresh, in-depth insights into how students experience foreign language learning and what may affect their motivation in this area. Further strengths of this study rest in its contributions to new knowledge in the field which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter (see page 244).

However, as with all studies, there are some possible limitations. First, interpretative research of any kind is always subject to claims regarding researcher subjectivity along with reliability of the data and the approach. I outline in Chapter 4 the efforts I made to bracket any researcher preconceptions and other steps taken to ensure the study was as transparent and trustworthy as possible. Nonetheless, it is possible that my own beliefs, whether personal or professional, have in some way influenced how the data were gathered and analysed. Consequently I adopted strategies such as keeping a research diary and triangulating data to minimise research bias throughout the process.

Second, the sample (24 participants), although typical of phenomenographic studies (Trigwell, 2000), was relatively small. Whilst this number of participants allowed for suitably in-depth focus groups and follow-up interviews, providing manageable data and plenty of scope for uncovering variation in experience, it also means that only tentative, non-generalisable conclusions can be drawn from the research. Although supplying generalisable statements is not an aim of this study and is therefore not reflected in the research design, it does render the data gathered here as representative only of those who took part in the research.

Linked to the sample size is the question of type and amount of data collected. Although potentially valuable in terms of adding to the discussion on student voice and L2 motivation, I decided not to conduct further individual interviews beyond the follow-up stage and neither did I perform any related action research based on the outcomes of the focus groups and other interviews. In retrospect, and following a traditional student voice research approach (e.g. Mitra, 2001; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004), it may well have been beneficial to have carried out a small-scale action research project to further demonstrate

to the participating students that there had been a purpose to their taking part in the research and that new approaches can be tried on the basis of what they have to say. It would also have been interesting to assess whether or not such an intervention had any effect on levels of motivation. However, I am not a languages teacher and neither am I employed in a school – factors which I felt would impede my ability to execute a practical research project successfully. This would therefore have necessitated support and assistance from the students' own languages teacher, which could potentially have resulted in difficulties engaging the students. I did not want my lack of teaching experience to negatively impact what could have a very positive effect on students' motivation if handled correctly and sensitively. Further investigation is obviously a logical extension of this research and one on which to build.

I did, however, follow student voice research principles as far as possible by explaining to participants that what they said would be fed back (anonymously) to their teachers, who would be able to read their comments. I also explained they would receive a copy of their interview transcript(s). In addition, I provided the participants' teacher with a copy of her own interview transcript plus an outline of the students' comments, asking her if she would like to discuss these further and requesting that the comments be circulated to the participating students. I did not, however, hear from her with regard to any of the shared documents, making it difficult to assess whether or not any measures were put in place as a result.

As Ushioda (2008: 29) attests, "the most promising line of inquiry lies in enabling language learners' own voice and stories to take centre stage". This reinforced my belief that the interviews I had planned would allow for these voices to emerge. Positively, however, the

implications of the study (see page 254) do suggest further avenues for teachers who may wish to take steps towards making changes based on what students as “expert witnesses” (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004) have said about their foreign language learning experiences. A wealth of suggestions arose from the collected data and these could be seen as springboards for taking MFL learning and teaching in new directions. This is the typical end-goal of student voice research and the number of possible suggestions for change, such as adopting different seating arrangements, providing alternatives to copying tasks and engaging in open student-teacher discussion, afford opportunities both large and small for words to be turned into action.

A study based on seven interviews may appear restrictive at first glance, yet as Becker (2012: 15) explains, providing you are “sure that when you do stop [conducting interviews], the interviews and observations you have and what you want to say coincide, your data supporting your conclusions and your conclusions not going beyond what your data can support”, it is not always necessary to collect large amounts of data. In addition, having already completed a third of my doctorate by submitting and passing three previous assignments, in terms of data collection, I would suggest that my study is commensurate with previous research such as that conducted by James, 2000; Mathison, 2003; Watson, 2010 and Wiles, 2011. Moreover I believe that the rich, in-depth data collected during this study provide detailed insights into different types of foreign language learning experiences and associated levels of motivation. The depth and complexity of the interview data, followed by equally exhaustive and meticulous analysis have allowed me to answer my research questions (see pages 29-30) comprehensively and have provided positive implications (see page 254) for advancing or implementing the research outcomes.

In the context of the present study, it could be argued that a further stage of interviewing and analysis at an individual level (after the follow-up interviews) may have yielded more detail about L2 motivation given that it is recognised as a personal trait which evolves over time. However, on a practical level, I could not be sure to reach the same participants to engage further in the research process. Given the word limitations of a professional doctorate, I felt that I had reached saturation point with the already collected data and I was not convinced that further interviews would have revealed any new contributions to the “pool of meaning” (Marton, 1986) I was beginning to establish.

Finally, the research presented here pertains to selected year 9 students from an English state secondary school who are studying French. It is first important to bear in mind the positive aspects of selecting the particular participants involved in the study. As discussed elsewhere, phenomenographic principles dictate that a range of experiences should be sought, therefore a range of learners was purposely included. This fits well with tenets of student voice work in that the research attempted to include as many “voices” as possible. However, there are some aspects which may have affected the context of the interviews. As mentioned earlier in the study (see Chapter 4), the school is geographically close to France and the town in which it is located is a ferry port. Consequently, and perhaps more so than in other schools, the emphasis on French as the first foreign language taught is quite high. In turn, this concentrated focus on the language may have (perhaps unwittingly) helped instil a negative attitude towards it amongst the students. This may be particularly frustrating for those students who came from primary schools where Spanish was the foreign language taught but then had to take up French from year 7. As a result in some instances French is already looked upon unfavourably before students have even started their secondary school

lessons. In terms of the present research, it should therefore be made clear that a number of the participants came to the study already exhibiting a dislike of French for potentially numerous reasons other than simply not enjoying or being motivated by the process of language learning. Although impossible to determine, this context may have influenced the research findings to some extent by departing from a negative rather than more neutral baseline. A group of students who had freely chosen the language they wanted (or had) to study may have provided a wider range of attitudes towards language learning and therefore different types of learning experience.

As such, the study may have offered other different outcomes had it been conducted in another setting. Research, for example, carried out with participants from a school where MFL is a specialism and therefore granted particular focus and status may have yielded additional ideas and attitudes about foreign language learning experiences. Conversely, however, it would have been harder to access such variation in type of student as in the present study as students in these schools must typically study at least one, if not two foreign languages, so the option to drop them post-14 is not available to them. Similarly, interviewing students who were learning a language other than French may also have generated alternative responses as suggested by Williams *et al* (2002) who found students displayed higher motivation to study German than French. Bartram (2005) also noted differences in the way English students perceived French and German as well as how the same languages, along with English, were viewed by Dutch and German students.

7.4 Contribution to knowledge

I have identified and attempted to fill a small gap in the L2 motivation and learning literature by comparing and combining its central concepts of belonging, learner autonomy

and competence with similar concepts found in student voice research (McIntyre *et al*, 2005; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Busher, 2012). By accessing students' perceptions of how they experience foreign language learning I counter that constructs or models of how to motivate learners of another language need to incorporate aspects of student voice in order for them to resonate more successfully with students. Existing research (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994a; Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998) is largely concerned with recommending how teachers can motivate language learners. However, motivation from the students' perspective is often not considered. Even less attention is paid to the idea of motivation being moderated by types of learning experience. The research I have conducted here highlights that drawing upon students' perceptions of language learning offers new insights into this process and also provides more explicit links between L2 motivation and student voice; an area which is currently under-developed within the context of enhancing the motivation of young English students to learn a foreign language.

7.4.1 Empirical originality

As outlined in Chapter 1 (see page 28) one of the aims of the present study was to provide empirical research based on participants' views of foreign language learning. This was for two reasons. The first addresses how the paucity of such research has allowed some MFL policy decisions in England to be made without full consideration of the perspectives of those directly affected by the policies, i.e. the students. The second is related to my belief that student voice must form a concrete strand of any L2 motivational model or practice as this appears to be a missing dimension in such constructs currently available. The data I gathered for this study reveal that there can be no "one size fits all" approach and that different types of language learner will require different forms of motivation based on their

various learning experiences. In contrast to other studies on L2 motivation which have focused on more traditional aspects such as reasons for learning another language (Clément and Krudener, 1983; Oxford and Shearin, 1994), my research further extends the idea of closely examining the foreign language classroom environment as proposed by Dörnyei (1994a) and finds a number of aspects perceived by students as important components of their language learning experiences. I have grouped these into three areas: physical factors; teaching factors; relationship factors, with each broadly corresponding to the shared L2 motivation and student voice conceptions of belonging, autonomy/agency and competence.

7.4.1.1 Empirical originality: physical factors – seating and immediacy – sense of belonging

Although investigated in other areas and in relation to other subjects (e.g. Frymier, 1993; Gossard *et al*, 2006; Mathiesen and Saether, 2010), physical aspects of the classroom environment such as seating arrangements and teacher immediacy do not seem to have been widely debated in the FLL context (see Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) for brief discussion of classroom layout). However, this study has found that such factors are viewed as important by students, with current classroom organisation contributing negatively to their overall learning experience in a majority of cases.

Findings from the present study relating to this aspect indicate that students are dissatisfied with their seating arrangements and are keen to try alternative models in the belief these will offer more positive results such as better communication and behaviour in class.

Interestingly there does appear to be some conflict between the students' and the teacher's opinions in this respect. The teacher displays a certain level of reluctance to make changes, which is also exacerbated by decisions made by senior management in the school.

It is accepted in the literature on L2 motivation and student voice that creating a sense of belonging is a key component (Noels *et al*, 1999; Mitra, 2004), allowing students to feel part of their learning community and consequently enhancing their motivation to study. A straightforward method of achieving this is by giving renewed consideration to seating plans as well as teachers' verbal and non-verbal immediacy. Although room layout may seem trivial or unimportant to adults, it is of great importance to students and their perceptions of its impact on their learning. Consequently factors relating to seating and teacher immediacy are also worthy of inclusion in revised models of L2 motivation.

7.4.1.2 Empirical originality: teaching factors – dislike of copying tasks – learner autonomy

Teaching strategies in foreign language learning have been the subject of much previous research (Oxford and Crookall, 1989; Lawson and Hogben, 1996; Graham, 2002). Copying activities have been addressed but largely in terms of their value as vocabulary learning and retention tools (Hummel, 2010) or how they support students in learning to write in the target language (TL) (Macaro, 2007). The outcomes of this study add to this discussion and further its originality by exploring how copying tasks can in fact have an opposite or negative effect. Copying is “probably one of the most widely used learning strategies” (Porte, 1995: 145) in the foreign language classroom, yet in the present study it is clear that it often serves to limit learner autonomy for some students because it impedes their capacity to use the TL independently as well as feel competent in their foreign language abilities. In turn this contributes to students' negative perceptions of the TL itself as well as the language learning process. In addition, the data highlighted how teachers may rely on copying activities in order to manage behaviour or respond to demands or restrictions imposed by senior managers within the school.

Lastly, examining students' views of copying revealed an underlying desire to engage in learning more about the TL culture but determined that this is often prevented by the prevalence of writing tasks. Consequently it can be argued that students are perhaps not as disinterested in or disengaged from MFL as some research suggests (e.g. Stables and Wikeley, 1999); rather it is the type of task they are required to carry out which thwarts their interest and motivation. Moreover, this again points to the value of including student voice perspectives in L2 motivation strategies as they can help teachers, other educators and policy makers understand what works to stimulate students' interests.

7.4.1.3 Empirical originality: relationship factors – levels of trust– feelings of competence

In-class relationships have also been the subject of widespread research outside of the field of foreign language learning and teaching (Gorham, 1988; Phelan *et al*, 1992). Although studies relating to FLL do exist, certain themes raised in the present research appear to have received less attention than others. For example, whilst the examination of discrepancies between student and teacher beliefs or perceptions is frequent (Noels *et al*, 1999; Noels, 2001; Brown, 2009), looking at issues of students' trust in their foreign languages teacher and their perceptions of how they are trusted in return is less commonplace. Featuring as a central aspect of some students' FLL experiences, levels of trust not only affected how participants viewed themselves as language learners but also how they then saw themselves in wider contexts such as friendship groups or the sharing of personal items. Trust issues were also linked to some students' feelings of competence, revealing that the lack of trust displayed by the teacher often affected their means of revision or studying and ultimately self-assessment of their abilities in the TL.

Given the lack of other research examining themes similar to those raised here, I contend that exploring issues of trust within the foreign language classroom contributes a unique angle to the ongoing L2 motivation debate. The notion of trust, or more specifically, the lack of it, can negatively affect learner motivation as it obstructs the development of feelings of competence, which, as posited by the student voice literature is an essential aspect of motivation. A further facet of this argument rests in the fact that the teacher believed she had gained her students' trust. This reflects another discrepancy between student-teacher perceptions which could be tempered by drawing together the concepts of belonging, autonomy and competence through the development of a learning community in which students feel respect, acceptance, inclusion and support (Watkins, 2005: 32).

7.5 Theoretical originality

There are very few studies exploring foreign language learning through the methodological approach of phenomenography. Following a search using the University of Brighton's OneSearch facility as well as through Google Scholar on the basis of the search terms "foreign languages", "foreign language learning", "phenomenography" and "phenomenographic", only four studies appeared to loosely connect the field and the methodology and none specifically addressed the issues of English secondary school students learning another language. Therefore the research I have presented here contributes to new knowledge in the field not only empirically but also by following a theoretical approach that does not seem to have been previously employed in this context. As a result I have been able to gather and scrutinise data in ways that may not have been open to me had I used a different theoretical framework. I believe this has allowed me to offer a particularly in-depth and innovative analysis of some of the current issues involved in

teaching and learning a foreign language in the particular context of the school involved in this study.

7.6 Contribution to professional knowledge and development

This study not only offers new knowledge in the field of MFL pedagogy but also points to ways in which my professional practice can be enhanced. Part of my role as Project Manager for the Routes into Languages programme in the South of England involves creating and organising one-day and longer-term sustained interventions for secondary school students to encourage them to continue studying foreign languages at school and beyond. The suggestions put forward by the participants in this study will help me design future events that are not only attractive to students but which correspond to their needs and interests. For example, the data suggest that engaging more regularly in speaking activities with native speakers and topics such as cooking or traditional food are areas of interest to students. Consequently an event including these aspects may result in motivating students more than one focusing on activities such as writing, which were found to be less attractive. In addition, the more practical knowledge uncovered about physical factors would help me to present the activity in a way that made the participants feel welcome, included and able to communicate with each other; considerations that I would not necessarily have thought important when, for example, booking lecture theatre-style rooms for these events and having the presenter stand at the front or behind a lectern for the majority of the session.

As the Routes into Languages network extends throughout more than 70 universities in England and Wales, the research outcomes presented here could also be beneficial for other partners within the wider project and subsequently affect a far greater number of students. Overall, however, the more significant value this study holds for me professionally is the

ability to not only listen to students' thoughts about learning another language but to act upon what they have said. This makes the research process more pragmatic and indicates that the sharing of opinions and ideas can lead to positive changes going forward.

7.7 A revised model of L2 motivation

Using Dörnyei's (1994a: 280) original tripartite model of L2 motivation as a basis, a revised construct including the key aspects drawn from the findings of this study is outlined below. Factors belonging to Dörnyei's (1994a) model are in black and new additions derived from the discussion within this study based on the links between student voice and L2 motivation are in purple.

LANGUAGE LEVEL	Integrative motivational subsystem Instrumental motivational subsystem
LEARNER LEVEL	Need for achievement Self-confidence (anxiety/perceived L2 competence/causal attributions/self-efficacy) Learner autonomy (developing learning strategies) In-class relationships (developing competence/establishing trust/discrepancies between teacher and student attitudes)
LEARNING SITUATION LEVEL <i>Course-specific motivational components</i> <i>Teacher-specific motivational components</i> <i>Group-specific motivational components</i> <i>Classroom-specific motivational components</i>	Interest/relevance/expectancy/satisfaction Affiliative drive/authority type/direct socialisation of motivation/effect of teacher's communicative style Goal orientedness/norm and reward/group cohesion/classroom goal structure Sense of belonging (seating arrangements/teacher immediacy)

Table eight: revised L2 motivation model (based on Dörnyei's (1994a: 280) original model)

The elements from my findings which I have added to the existing model all point to the value and importance of consulting students about learning processes and their overall experience. As has been evidenced, focusing only upon the teacher's beliefs (both her own

and what she feels the students think) not only provides a one-sided view of what happens in the classroom but also excludes access to what the students themselves think about their foreign language lessons. Although indicative only of those who took part in this study, listening closely to participants' accounts of their language learning experiences has revealed some key aspects regarding the language learning process and the FLL classroom environment not referenced in discussion with their teacher. That these factors can all be linked to the three core concepts of learner autonomy, sense of belonging and feelings of competence already shown to be central to L2 motivation and student voice research demonstrates that there are significant benefits to seeking students' opinions about foreign language learning and including them in a new framework of how to motivate language learners. In doing so the focus of responsibility with regard to motivation can be shifted from teacher-led strategies to those where teachers prompt the students for their input then use this as a foundation for building a learning community where motivation is a shared endeavour between teacher and student. In this way, a cyclical process can be visualised whereby teachers allow the core aspects of belonging, autonomy and competence to develop by revising their own approaches to elements such as seating, copying activities and in-class relationships as well as calling upon the views of their students, which in turn increases students' feelings of belonging, autonomy and competence, resulting in motivation becoming a more student-owned than teacher-led phenomenon.

7.8 Implications of the study

Pedagogical implications of this study rest in the suggestion that a wider focus on student voice perspectives may significantly enhance motivation in foreign language learning. The shared underpinning concepts of belonging, learner autonomy and competence have been found to act as important foundations for L2 motivation and student voice and ideas for incorporating or augmenting them in the foreign languages classroom have been discussed throughout this thesis. Whilst the results presented cannot be generalisable (see page 240), they do provide an insight into what might usefully form the basis of teacher and learner discussions on new ways of motivating and promoting language learning. The sections below take each concept individually to assess their pedagogical implications.

7.8.1 Physical factors: the classroom environment and generating a sense of belonging

Addressing the classroom environment by looking at seating arrangements may seem an easy place to start in terms of generating an increased sense of belonging amongst languages students. However, as evidenced by the teacher interview in this study, sometimes school policy dictates how classrooms are to be arranged. It may therefore be necessary for the languages teacher to discuss with the school's senior management the need for seating layouts that are conducive to language learning. Raising the idea of generating a better sense of belonging amongst students, known to positively affect motivation (Mitra, 2004; Watkins, 2005), may also appeal to teachers of other subjects.

7.8.2 Learning factors: copying activities and boosting learner autonomy

Although copying does seem to offer some benefits, such as appreciation of differences in writing systems (Macaro, 2007) or enhanced vocabulary retention (Hummel, 2010), there

are some negative associations with this type of task. As discussed, one is the insufficient cognitive stimulation it provides for some students; another is the fact that copying activities risk inaccuracy and often do not help students to understand the target language they are using. Furthermore, despite common belief that copying consolidates new word learning, there is some evidence that indicates the opposite is true. Consequently, it may be necessary to “radically rethink” (Macaro, 2007) the place of copying in teaching writing and vocabulary learning in MFL and break away from traditional assumptions that to remember a word means to copy it. Moreover, as this study demonstrates, listening to students to hear what means of writing and vocabulary learning they might like to engage in may provide worthwhile and more productive alternatives to copying.

7.8.3 Relationship factors: feelings of competence and improved in-class relationships

Life as a languages teacher in this particular school was described as “a fair amount of gymnastic tumbles”. Perhaps this sheds some light on why some of the participants in the study felt forgotten or ignored in class or that they could not raise concerns with their teacher. It may also explain why other participants’ attitudes were different from their teacher’s. In such a context it is possible that focusing on the pragmatic and pedagogical benefits of the notions of belonging, autonomy and competence may not register highly on the teacher’s landscape. Dealing with other concerns, largely those arising from outside the classroom, may take precedence instead. Nonetheless, based upon the principles governing student voice projects (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck, 2006), an argument could be made for facilitating more open relationships between student and teacher which could help to ameliorate classroom tensions and discrepancies in student-teacher beliefs and behaviours. An open dialogue between the teacher and her class where students feel comfortable in

raising personal and learning-related issues may result in increased motivation and improved learning outcomes. In turn, this may also develop students' feelings of competence and autonomy as they begin to feel more in control of their own learning process (Noels *et al*, 2001). However, student voice work is often difficult to negotiate and conduct successfully and must therefore be planned and explained carefully to those involved (Cook-Sather, 2002). This may prove problematic in a school where listening to students' perspectives is not a typical part of the pedagogical culture but plenty of guidance exists on this topic (Fielding and Rudduck, 2002) and could be adopted and adapted to suit the foreign language learning context.

Similarly, building strong peer relationships in the foreign languages classroom may also improve students' feelings of competence. As this study has shown, some students tend to compare themselves with others who they believe are "better" than them at languages, which leads to negatively framed self-awareness. In order to alleviate some of the negativity this type of peer comparison can generate, teachers may need to implement measures that help students frame their own abilities in more positive lights. Some participants suggested sitting with those who they perceive as being good at French, which they believe would help them to understand more and feel more comfortable. Although the teacher referred in her interview to seating students in mixed ability pairings, it is possible that this was not explained clearly enough to the class or did not happen regularly enough for students to understand why such arrangements had been made. Giving clear explanation regarding seating, pairing or grouping of students may also bring wider benefits to the group, such as improved group cohesion and the sharing of L2 skills and knowledge.

7.9 Suggestions for further research

The parameters of this study precluded extensive research based upon its findings. The suggestions below therefore offer ideas for further research.

7.9.1 Seating arrangements

Based upon this study's findings, further research in this area could include studies looking at whether or not circular or semi-circular seating arrangements do in fact increase students' senses of belonging and if they do, whether the same students report increased levels of enjoyment of MFL lessons as a result. This could also include looking at teachers' opinions of seating arrangements and what they feel works best and comparing this to students' ideas, as well as investigating the impact on teacher location in class upon students' feelings of belonging.

7.9.2 Copying activities

Further research may include test-based scenarios such as those used by Barcroft (2007) where students' recall of new vocabulary is assessed and compared after two types of task: one involving copying new words and one involving no writing activities such as word and picture matching. Other possible research could be based upon the suggestions made by students in this study and involve the investigation of learning new vocabulary through the playing of authentic target language games or by engaging in more speaking-based activities that allow students to feel as though they are actively using the TL.

7.9.3 In-class relationships

Suggestions for further research regarding in-class relationships in the foreign language learning context could include establishing a student voice project to encourage open dialogue about language lessons between students and teachers. This would be a longitudinal project, ideally over one academic year, and would involve tracking both students' and teachers' opinions before, during and after the intervention had taken place. This would determine whether or not the opportunity to freely discuss issues arising from the languages classroom has any impact on attitudes towards language study, motivation, achievement and desire to continue learning languages beyond compulsory stages. A parallel scheme involving actively pairing or grouping mixed ability students with the intention of increasing participants' feelings of competence could also be conducted for similar reasons.

7.9.4 Categories of description

Finally, further research using the categories of description elaborated in this study could be carried out in a wider context in order to determine whether or not these types of experiences are described by students of other languages in other schools. Doing so may confirm the validity of the categories of description and other types of experience could also be added to the hierarchy. Finding out whether or not these qualitatively different experiences can apply to larger numbers of students may help in developing more resonant methods of motivating L2 learners.

7.10 Reflections on the research process

In conducting the research for this thesis I became aware that my personal reflections were as much an aid to the development of my ideas and arguments as was reading as widely as possible around the literature on foreign language learning, motivation, student voice and phenomenography. I realised this endeavour would not be a straightforward process. As a novice researcher I found myself treading an uncertain path into the world of ontology, epistemology, knowledge claims and philosophical debate. Terms and concepts I had never encountered suddenly became the meta-language in which I had to read, write and discuss; a different kind of language learning. Thus, the process of researching also became a process of learning.

I became sensitive to the importance of finding the most appropriate means of conducting an enquiry that would enable me to delve into the experiences of other foreign language learners. This was by no means a straightforward task, however. I found that rather than this being a linear process, it was much more like the cyclical approach described by Creswell (1998: 142) when he explains that the “researcher engages in a process of moving in analytical circles”. Moving in such analytical circles, although at times confusing and frustrating, allowed me to spend time focusing upon my own beliefs about what it meant, both pragmatically and philosophically, to engage in research about other people’s experiences. Faced with myriad methodological choices, I had to spend time investigating each to find out which would resonate most with my beliefs. Then, as Denscombe (2005: 3) advises, I had to “make strategic decisions about which to choose”. At first, I felt “vulnerable to these methodological prescriptions” (McIntyre, 1998: 3), often not feeling confident that

I was making the most suitable strategic decisions. I was not used to such uncertainty and felt that my understanding of different methodologies was as elusive as it was concrete.

Much time was spent considering and making sense of the various qualitative approaches available and this was as beneficial for realising the methodologies I did not align myself with as much as it was for identifying an approach which would firmly underpin my study. I knew that I wanted to gain access to students' views about foreign language learning but some schools of thought, such as phenomenology, guide enquiry based on the researcher's experience and the idea of reducing the object of research to its essence (Merleau-Ponty, 1996). This seemed at odds with wanting to discover more about the different ways in which something is experienced and so was rejected as a basis for this study. Wider reading led to the discovery of phenomenography and even a basic scan of founding papers and articles convinced me this would become the theoretical framework for my research.

Grounded in the field of education and focusing specifically on students' conceptions and experiences of learning (Prosser, 2000: 43), it provided answers to the questions I had about how I would go about conducting my study and this became one of the points in the whole process where I felt I could stop "moving in analytical circles" and press forward with scaffolding my research.

Of course, breaking out from analytical circles did not last very long and I once again found myself back in a cyclical process as I tried to determine from the literature on phenomenography the ideas most salient to my own enquiry. Through extensive reading and attending a conference on the methodology, I began to feel comfortable that I was applying the approach to achieve two main aims: discovering the variation in the ways

students experience foreign language learning and using the outcomes of this variation to potentially effect change in the way the subject is perceived, taught and learnt.

Engaging in the data analysis process was for me the most interesting, challenging and exciting part of the study. I was eager to immerse myself in the world of the student and to listen as closely as possible to what they had to say. From my growing understanding of the student voice perspective I was certain that paying attention to the “expert witnesses” (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004) of this context would offer valuable insights and possibly new viewpoints from which to address the problems of motivating students to continue with their language study. At the same time, I knew I had to temper my enthusiasm with caution. Paying heed to the advice about bracketing preconceptions (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000) and remaining close to the participants’ words (Marton and Booth, 1997) became the strict rules I would adhere to as I made my way through the various levels of analysis.

The emerging data began to shed very thought-provoking light upon what I was beginning to build up as a picture of what foreign language learning meant to the participants in this study. I was particularly struck by how forthright, considered and impassioned some of the students’ responses were which again confirmed my belief that bringing their voice to the fore was appropriate and necessary. I had been concerned about collecting data sufficient enough to yield “thick description” (Geertz, 1993) and the variation in experience at the core of phenomenographic research (Marton, 1981) but found that the participants had much to say and in some cases openly appreciated being given the chance to share their views.

Although the data were analysed and abstracted to form the four categories of description previously discussed in this thesis, three common themes were also apparent. Participants

in all categories commented on seating arrangements, copying activities and in-class relationships, framed as physical, learning and relationship factors. This was worthy of note for two reasons: first because they were unexpected topics of discussion (again showing the significance of bracketing preconceptions) and second because they substantiated the importance of the conceptions of belonging, learner autonomy and feelings of competence found in the literature (Noels *et al*, 1999; Mitra, 2004). I realised I had been, perhaps inevitably and perhaps subconsciously despite overt efforts not to, applying some of my own preconceptions as I worked through the analysis. I had been expecting students to simply say languages were boring, hard, pointless, and so on. Whilst to some extent this was the case, the well-articulated and often heartfelt responses detailing much more complex issues revealed that students did have things to say and things they wanted to be heard. It became apparent that this study could act as some kind of mouthpiece for them to convey their views and perceptions.

Interviewing the participants' teacher was also of particular value in that she not only offered insights which at times conflicted with the students' views but she also explained the difficulties she faced as a languages teacher in that particular school. It is not possible to determine from this whether these were issues common to all or even most languages teachers but it provided a backdrop against which it became clear to see how the wider demands made upon teachers affect what happens in the classroom. That MFL in this context was often misunderstood and misconceptions of it abounded shows how teachers often have two battles to fight: one with the students in the classroom, convincing them that languages are necessary and worthwhile and one in the staffroom with senior

managers who appear not to understand how languages need to be supported, funded and taught.

In conducting this study I have learnt that to be a researcher is to step off a linear pathway and embrace the moving in analytical circles as described above. It does not always feel as though moving in circles leads to achievement but through reflecting on the process I have realised that cycling through data, philosophical stances or methodological approaches has enriched my understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Becoming familiar with the methodology and background literature at first and then the data allowed me to proceed with ever more confident steps towards the end product of the research and my final thesis. This process has also confirmed that my future research interests lay in student voice projects as well as reaching out to teachers for more detailed perspectives on pedagogical contexts.

This reflective account concludes with my assertion that making visible or heard the voices of foreign language students is key to understanding what might motivate them to continue with foreign language study. The present study has demonstrated three areas in which consideration of student voice perspectives have been linked with central themes of L2 motivation, suggesting that there is value in reconsidering typical models of L2 motivation to include student voice as a motivational factor. Understanding student voice is important but even more so is the students' understanding that their voices are being listened to and acted upon.

7.11 End word

At the time of writing (October 2013), the state of foreign language learning in England and the United Kingdom has once again come under scrutiny. A recent Eurobarometer report

(European Commission, 2012a) ranks the United Kingdom in 24th place out of 27 countries where respondents were asked if they were able to hold a conversation in at least one additional language. Only 14% of UK citizens reported this ability (*op cit*, 14). This figure rests in stark contrast with countries at the top of the table reporting numbers as high as 84% of respondents able to do the same. A further survey (European Commission, 2012b) addressing foreign language competence in students aged 14-15 across Europe notes that whilst countries such as Malta and Sweden present high proportions of learners competent in their first foreign language (82% each) the percentage of students in England displaying similar levels of competence is just nine per cent (European Commission, 2013: 2). Despite a potentially promising increase in the number of those taking a foreign language GCSE this year (*op cit*, 1), wider figures, especially those on a comparative European level, demonstrate that foreign language learning remains problematic in this country even more than a decade after the Nuffield Language Inquiry's final report (2000) was published. That such data can be drawn from today's language learning landscape suggests that existing issues in teaching and learning modern foreign languages need to be approached from new angles. The concepts raised in the present study therefore offer vital, innovative and robust means of understanding what it is to engage and motivate students to continue with their foreign language study and for them makes the rhetoric of autonomy a reality.

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