SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES TO LEARN SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: AN INVESTIGATION OF BUSUU AND WESPEKE AS TOOLS FOR BLENDED LANGUAGE LEARNING

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Liverpool John

Moores University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2022

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institutes of learning.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my sister Charo, who taught me to use encyclopaedic dictionaries at home, when I was seven years old. She planted the seed of curiosity in me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dozens of people have supported me in finishing this thesis. First, I would like to thank Professor Michael Thomas, my Director of Studies throughout this journey. He has accompanied me on my lengthy academic voyage and has gone above and beyond the call of duty. I would not have been able to achieve success without his unfailing and unconditional help. My eternal gratitude goes to the supervisory team; Professor Michael Thomas, Dr Eduardo Tasis, Dr Nicola Halenko, and Dr Gillian Peiser. Thank you very much indeed to Juliet Wilberforce for proofreading, and Phil Hall for his help with the graphics. Thank you to all the participants in the research.

I also would like to express my appreciation to the Worldwise Centre at UCLan, which provided me with a tuition-fees only scholarship for the first three years of this thesis. Special thanks are due to Valery, Sofia, and Lisa.

Last but not least, I must thank my family in Peru, who—even if we are more than ten thousand kilometres apart geographically—have been by my side every single day. Likewise, my friends around the globe. Thank you to them for their patience, understanding, and emotional support.

I am immensely grateful to the many people who trusted and supported me throughout the period of my thesis. Thank you to all!

ABSTRACT

Research on Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS) and Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) has been limited to date. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has dominated LLSNS, and the existing research typically focuses on informal/autonomous language learning. This thesis is original in that it investigates Busuu and Wespeke, two LLSNS not previously researched in combination, and explores their use in a Spanish course in the higher education sector. The study fills several gaps in the literature related to the social dimension of LLSNS and uses Hinkelman's (2018) ecological framework to investigate how LLSNS can be used in a blended learning context. Two research questions guided the study: 1) What theories of SLA do LLSNS adhere to? And 2) How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills?

An exploratory research design was used involving two stages in a blended Spanish beginners' course developed by the teacher-researcher in a university in North-West England involving twelve students. A mixed-methods approach was designed to collect data via user experience questionnaires, feedback questionnaires, logon sheets and focus groups and analysed by thematic analysis and descriptive statistics.

While LLSNS are often promoted in line with social constructivist learning principles, findings suggested that not all LLSNS follow them, and many, like Busuu, tend to rely on behaviourist exercises involving repetitive practice. Conversely, Wespeke largely followed a social constructivist approach, encouraging language exchange and online social interaction. While LLSNS can help improve core language skills, learners in the study were surprisingly more interested in using their online features to improve writing rather than speaking.

This study's main limitation was that no linguistic performance was measured. However, it has implications for the effective design of blended language courses. Future research is required to measure learner performance in LLSNS and to investigate the attrition and/or disengagement experienced by some students.

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ALM	Audio Lingual Method
BLL	Blended Language Learning
CALICO	Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium
CALL	Computer-Assisted Language Learning
CBI	Content-Based Instruction
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
DM	Direct Method
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
FG	Focus Group
GTM	Grammar–Translation Method
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
LAD	Language Acquisition Device
LEP	Language Exchange Partners
LLSNS	Language Learning Social Networking Sites
MFL	Modern Foreign Language
PPP	Presentation, Production, and Practice
RQ	Research Question
SFL	Spanish as a Foreign Language
SFQ	Site Feedback Questionnaire
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SNS	Social Networking Site
TATE	Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration
TBLT	Task-Based Language Teaching
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TMTBLT	Technology-Mediated Task-Based Language Teaching
TSLT	Task-Supported Language Teaching
UNW	University of the North West
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the structure of this thesis. It starts with the background to the research and the statement of the problem. Then, the four axes of the thesis are introduced: Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL), Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS), Blended Language Learning (BLL), and Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT). It continues with the rationale for the study, its theoretical framework, originality and significance, the research questions, and concludes with an overview of the chapters in the thesis.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the latest Internet World Statistics (2022), from an estimated global population of 7.8 billion, there are 5.1 billion internet users (65.6%). Since 2000, there has been a growth of 1,332%. However, the COVID-19 pandemic evidenced the continued existence of digital divides, both within and between countries. As reported by UNICEF (2020), in low-income countries only 8% of young people between 15 and 24 years old had internet access at home, while in high-income countries that figure rose to 89%. Furthermore, these numbers reflect the gap already existent when the global educational system migrated from in-person to online lessons as a temporary solution to avoid learners missing their training. Explicitly referring to language education in that context, Godwin-Jones (2020) envisioned an opportunity to apply Blended Language Learning through the "porous classroom" (p. 1).

Keeping in mind that language education has been at the forefront of innovations in learning technologies (Thomas, 2015), Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has evolved from a structural (grammar–translation) into an ecological stage (Chun, 2016). In this stage, learners have become collaborative

language prosumers who use mobile and wearable devices for global communication through a teaching paradigm that emphasises the importance of digital literacies and multiliteracies. Furthermore, the use of language is seen as symbolic, and intercultural competence is viewed as essential to developing the identity of learners as global citizens (Chun, 2016).

The research in this thesis is related to Web 2.0, the current period of the internet (Patil & Surwade, 2018), as it encourages users to interact, share information, participate, and collaborate (Ngo & Eichelberger, 2020). These are the essential features of Social Networking Sites— online environments where people can meet to socialise— and they have turned into a ubiquitous element of our daily lives (Boholano, 2017). As in Language Learning Social Networking Sites, where the frontiers between learners and instructors are blurred, communities of prosumer learners synchronously get involved in peer support and language learning (Thomas, Reinders & Warschauer, 2014). Furthermore, social networks are used to interact, collaborate, entertain, and above all, for networking (Lin, Warschauer, & Blake, 2016). Nevertheless, the social dimension of Language Learning Social Networking Sites is an under-researched area (Zourou, 2016), and the investigation of the intersection of Language Learning Social Networking Sites, Computer-Assisted Language Learning, and Spanish as a Foreign Language is almost non-existent.

Therefore, this thesis intends to address these gaps by researching the use of Language Learning Social Networking Sites— specifically Busuu and Wespeke— to learn Spanish as a Foreign Language and explore how they can be tools for Blended Language Learning via Task-Supported Language Teaching.

1.1.1 Spanish as a Foreign Language

According to the Cervantes Institute (2021), Spanish is the mother tongue of approximately 493 million people worldwide. Additionally, there are 98 million non-native speakers and learners of Spanish, which makes 591 million Spanish speakers globally (7.5% of the world population). Spanish is the second mother tongue by the number of speakers globally after Mandarin Chinese, and the third by the number of speakers after English and Mandarin Chinese. Moreover, it is the official language of 21 countries and is present on five continents. Therefore, it is essential for business, culture, science, and politics.

Furthermore, Spanish is my mother tongue, and I have been teaching it for the last 23 consecutive years. Through my practice, I discovered the difficulty learners of Spanish encounter when they want to practise outside the classroom what they learn within it. Students have a much higher possibility of practising foreign languages when they learn them in a place where it is spoken, as they are immersed and surrounded by speakers of the language and their cultures. Nevertheless, most students cannot learn a foreign language abroad. Hence, the question remained in my mind: how could Spanish as a Foreign Language learners practise outside the classroom what they learn in their lessons?

The answer to that question appeared to be addressed by Livemocha (2007), the first Language Learning Social Networking Site (Brick, 2011, 2013). Ideally, using Language Learning Social Networking Sites, learners would be able to practise out of the classroom with language exchange partners what they learn in their lessons.

It is pivotal to underline that through their advertising, LLSNS promote such language exchange with native speakers as the optimal way of learning a foreign language. Nevertheless, the native vs non-native distinction has already been widely

discussed. Ahn et al. (2021) concluded that "Native speakerism is an ideological construction, an actively and purposefully propagated myth" (p. 12). Nowadays, such a comparison is inappropriate, particularly in the globalised society we currently live in, namely, that of a multicultural and multilingual world (Bárkányi & Fuertes, 2019). Furthermore, Thompson and Cuesta (2019) signposted that such a distinction "is inconsistent with the pedagogical goals that guide contemporary second language teaching practices" (p. 655). I have learnt English with some expert non-native EFL teachers, and I have also worked with some non-native SFL colleagues who are excellent teachers.

Finally, there are three reasons why Spanish as a Foreign Language was chosen as the language researched in this thesis. First, Spanish is a globally important language; second, it is my mother tongue as the researcher; and third, there is a lack of research on the intersection of Spanish as a Foreign Language and Language Learning Social Networking Sites. Hence, the data collection tools designed for this thesis (e.g., a user experience questionnaire, a site feedback questionnaire, logon sheets, and focus groups) produced data that were analysed to determine how the features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites can be used to develop Spanish as a Foreign Language learning skills.

1.1.2 Language Learning Social Networking Sites

Traditionally, Language Learning Social Networking Sites have been investigated in relation to autonomous language learning contexts (Abrahim et al., 2018; Loewen, Isbell, & Sporn, 2020; Guillén, 2020), although learners do not usually have the opportunity to interact with language exchange partners and learn from them during this kind of self-directed learning. Hence, this thesis proposes investigating Language Learning Social Networking Sites as complementary tools to the face-to-face lessons

utilising Blended Language Learning. Once learners have studied a new Modern Foreign Language in the traditional classroom, they can practise it online with speakers of the language through social interaction and language exchange.

With reference to Language Learning Social Networking Sites, although there are many different definitions of a Social Networking Site, the definitions provided by Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011) were used in this research. These definitions remain influential as they capture the intrinsic ethos of social networking in an educational context. For example, Social Networking Sites allow users to create a profile, add friends, search for new friends, build a circle of friends, communicate with others in the network via multiple means, receive feedback from friends, upload user-generated content, and enhance peripheral awareness of other users. Even though Social Networking Sites are permanently evolving, these features remain unalterable. That is why this definition is still currently relevant. Central to these aspects is the social dimension of Language Learning Social Networking Sites. However, little research has considered this in detail (Zourou, 2016). Hence, it was necessary to review the existing research on Language Learning Social Networking Sites (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Different theoretical frameworks support recent empirical studies on Language Learning Social Networking Sites. However, most of the research to date has been framed within socio-cultural and socio-cognitive dimensions, for instance, socio-cultural theory (Álvarez, 2015, 2016, 2018; Brick, 2011; Chwo et al., 2012; Gruba & Clark, 2013; Guillén, 2020; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Zourou & Lami, 2013), activity theory (Malerba, 2015), socio-constructivism (De Azevedo, 2013; Brick, 2013; Zourou & Lami, 2013), and social cognitive theory (Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Orsini-Jones et al., 2013), among others. According to Wang and Vásquez (2012), this was due to the transition of computer use in language learning, at least in this domain of Computer-

Assisted Language Learning, from a structural/cognitive practice to a more socio-cognitive approach (Warschauer, 2000), which perceived the computer as an instrument that mediates interactions between language learners and other humans. This finding is related to improving Web 2.0 technology by moving "from linking information to linking people" (Wesch, 2007, video, 03:52), fostering more prospects for a more significant interaction. Therefore, communication and interaction-based learning should be understood as the foundation of many socially oriented approaches to L2 learning, mainly through Language Learning Social Networking Sites.

Most of the interaction on Language Learning Social Networking Sites occurs via their networking aspect. Hence, it is fundamental to distinguish between *Social Network Sites* and *Social Networking Sites*. Most of the time, they are interchangeable in the literature; however, as Boyd and Ellison (2008) clarified, *networking* (as a verb) emphasises relationship initiation, often between strangers, and commonly, users are not necessarily networking or trying to meet new acquaintances on these Social Networking Sites. On the contrary, they are fundamentally communicating with people who are already a part of their wider social *network* (as a noun). Therefore, when alluding to Language Learning Social Networking Sites in this research study, I intended to use *Social Networking Sites for Learning Languages* as indicated by Harrison and Thomas (2009), Brick (2011b), and Zourou and Lamy (2013).

Nevertheless, such a denomination may be confounding, as placing the words *Social Networking Sites* first induces one to think about any of the multiplicity of such networks that could be used for language learning (Carhill-Poza & Kurata, 2021) while moving the phrase *language learning* to the fore defines the intention, from the very beginning, as to what this kind of Social Networking Site is centred on (Chik, 2015; Chik & Ho, 2017; Blake & Guillén, 2020). That is why the term *Language Learning*

Social Networking Site is preferred instead of *Social Networking Site for Learning Languages* in this thesis.

Referring to Language Learning Social Networking Sites, this thesis follows an ecological approach to language learning (Álvarez, 2015, 2016, 2018; Hinkelman, 2018). From Hinkelman's (2018) viewpoint, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (and the study of Language Learning Social Networking Sites as an area of research within Computer-Assisted Language Learning) is essentially tool-centric because the research and conceptual framework are on computers (electronic devices in general) and how they can assist language learning. Therefore, he proposed substituting the tool-centric focus that has characterised research on Computer-Assisted Language Learning over the past 20 years with an ecological view of Blended Language Learning.

Previously, in applied linguistics, van Lier (2010) defined ecology as "the study of the relationships among elements in an environment or ecosystem, in particular the interactions among such elements" (p. 4). An ecological analogy interconnects these psychological, social, and environmental features and centres attention on environmental affordances that enhance learning. These webs of relationships are called a "Language Learning Ecology" (Hinkelman, 2018). This thesis intends to integrate its four themes (Language Learning Social Networking Sites, Spanish as a Foreign Language, Blended Language Learning, and Task-Supported Language Teaching) into such a Language Learning Ecology.

Moreover, relating specifically to Web 2.0 language learning communities, van Dixhoorn et al. (2010) outlined a typology of three kinds: (1) structured Web 2.0 language learning communities (Language Learning Social Networking Sites), which constitute the locus of our research; (2) language exchange sites; and (3) marketplaces. In this sense, strictly centred on Language Learning Social Networking Sites, the

literature can be categorised into three broad types: descriptive studies, quantitative studies, and qualitative studies. All these concepts are developed in Chapter 3.

Specifically, Language Learning Social Networking Sites are worth investigating because Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) currently mediate every aspect of language learners' access to information via SNSs, e-books, Wikipedia and Google (among other search engines), and via multiple electronic devices such as mobile phones and tablets (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). In addition, digital technologies and social media play a similar role for teachers, who develop their work routines (e.g., access lesson plans, share digital resources, communicate with students and work colleagues, and use learning management systems) via online environments (Bates, 2017).

1.1.3 Blended Language Learning

The third axis in this thesis is Blended Language Learning, which Anderson (2021) defines as a combination of face-to-face and online learning instructional models. Focusing specifically on Blended Language Learning, Anderson (2021) signposted that "it refers primarily to combined classroom and online instruction" (p. 3). Furthermore, the added aspect of blended learning in this thesis addresses the problem of how learners are guided in their learning process (Jones, 2001; Reinders, 2010; Gruba & Clark, 2013; Orsini-Jones, Brick, & Pibworth, 2013). Finally, Blended Language Learning has become particularly relevant since 2020, when the whole educational system had to migrate from in-person to virtual platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic, using these ICTs in their teaching and (re)discovering the use of blended (language) learning (Godwin-Jones, 2020).

Given the combination, it has been argued that Blended Language Learning counterbalances the inconveniences of face-to-face and the online learning model (Pima

et al., 2018). Furthermore, given the progress in web technology (Acikgul & Firat, 2021), Blended Language Learning has become one of the most common models of instruction in Higher Education worldwide (Mizza & Rubio, 2020). Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of online and Blended Language Learning models at all educational levels (Godwin-Jones 2020).

Among the hybrid approaches in blended learning, Bates (2017) mentioned technology-enhanced learning, Learning Management Systems (LMS) for storing educational materials and online discussions, lecture capture for flipped classrooms, and some semesters on campus, while others online. He also added some hands-on experience related to the studied assignment (e.g., the 'year abroad' scheme required by some universities for their students studying foreign languages); and hybrid or flexible learning, when students have to attend lessons at the school for very distinct in-person teaching, such as labs or hands-on projects that are impossible to do online. As with the Language Learning Social Networking Sites, an ecological approach is followed in this thesis when referring to blended learning (Hinkelman, 2018).

Specifically, Hinkelman's (2018) study proposed a Blended Language Learning ecological approach, where teaching devices are not at the centre, nor are they simple support, but instead a part of intricate classroom/online ecologies that the instructor adapts in a local environment. Therefore, an ecological viewpoint interconnects all social, psychological, and environmental factors and centres on affordances in the environment, incentivising learning "emergence" (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 74).

1.1.4 Task-Supported Language Teaching

For more than 40 years, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) has been the source of comprehensive research (Long, 2015b). Long (2015b) differentiated between *real* tasks, the real-world duties people think of when organising, administering, or recalling their

day—an ordinary, non-technical meaning—and *counterfeit* tasks, which are not related to real-world chores outside the classroom and in which exercises and activities are renamed as tasks in commercially published pedagogic textbooks. Such differences led to the Task-Supported Language Teaching approach.

The fourth axis of this thesis, Task-Supported Language Teaching, is also an adopted hybrid approach. As Bygate (2016, p. 388) outlined,

> *Given the complexities of changing entire programmes in one go and also given that a task-supported approach can perfectly well use tasks to import a communication-based approach to the teaching and learning of language, a task-supported approach is likely to be the most practicable stepwise introduction of TBLT.*

During this investigation, I was teaching at a university in the Nort-West of England, which gave me access to beginner Spanish as a Foreign Language students. Hence, I designed a Spanish as a Foreign Language beginners' course, considering the research questions of this thesis and covering the elementary contents, so that participants could interact in Language Learning Social Networking Sites via purposely designed tasks. As Swan (2005) posed, beginner Modern Foreign Language learners need much more L2 input than intermediate or advanced students. Hence, Ellis (2012) proposed a hybrid approach of Presentation, Production, and Practice + Task-Based Language Teaching to develop the social skills needed for interaction in the real world and for the use of the language to achieve the tasks proposed. Therefore, I designed the beginners' course based on Swan's (2005) and Ellis' (2012) recommendations.

Specifically, this thesis followed Anderson's (2020a) Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration model for language teaching, which is "compatible with natural order theory and skill acquisition theory through its ability to integrate meaning-focused tasks within a task-supported approach to language teaching, allowing for both implicit and explicit learning processes to occur" (Anderson, 2020a, p. 1).

1.1.5 Statement of the Problem

The problem I identified through my professional experience teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language is that learners do not have enough opportunities to interact and practise recently learnt concepts in or out of the classroom to develop the coveted fluency in this foreign language. In search of a solution to this problem, I applied Anderson's Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration model to the blended language learning Spanish as a Foreign Language beginners' course I designed to investigate how the learners practised the concepts recently learnt in the classroom via Language Learning Social Networking Sites and how this could enhance, if at all, their communication skills. The design of the course was based on existing research on the use of Social Networking Sites for Learning Languages that suggests that social interaction on Social Networking Sites helps students to develop their pragmatic competence (Blattner & Fiori, 2009, 2011; Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; Chen, 2013; Vie, 2007). Furthermore, Lee (2006) argued that the frequency of use of these Social Networking Sites positively impacts their oral proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, and syntactic complexity.

By contrast, it is essential to underline that even if students do not receive enough grammar instruction from these Language Learning Social Networking Sites, according to Lin et al. (2016), "learners still feel they make significant improvements because, for most of them, this is the first experience of using L2 in meaningful conversation with others" (Lin et al., 2016, p. 138). Nevertheless, as Jones (2001) had previously pointed out, it may be difficult to engage users over an extended period without teachers or peers to drive the Computer-Assisted Language Learning process.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

There is little research on the intersection of Language Learning Social Networking Sites and Spanish as a Foreign Language, and even less if Blended Language Learning

and Task-Supported Language Teaching are added to the equation. Therefore, this thesis intends to fill these gaps by investigating the intersection of these four areas.

Consequently, the research started with the development of a taxonomy of the different Language Learning Social Networking Sites currently in existence, followed by the selection/development of data collection tools used in the research: a user experience questionnaire, a site feedback questionnaire (Liu et al., 2015), logon sheets (Brick, 2013), and focus groups. Hence, the results obtained from qualitative data collection and analysis were used to form variables to collect and analyse quantitative data with those QUAL→quan outcomes.

Finally, I designed and taught a Spanish as a Foreign Language beginners' course, considering the research questions of this thesis, covering the elementary contents such that learners could interact in Language Learning Social Networking Sites via purposely designed tasks and following Anderson's (2020a) Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration model for language teaching.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This thesis follows an ecological approach when referring to Language Learning Social Networking Sites (Álvarez, 2015, 2016, 2018) and blended learning (Hinkelman, 2018). Álvarez (2016) concluded that Language Learning Social Networking Sites include, in their contents design, the three overarching theories of learning: behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. However, he also highlighted how Computer-Assisted Language Learning is mainly influenced by socio-cultural approaches and ecological views of language and learning. Specifically, "the ecological approach looks at language and learning as a complex system, and adopting this purview permits the exploration of the interdisciplinary, multimodal, multiscalar semiotic practices among

computer-mediated artefacts, individual learners, and their situated cognition and agency" (Álvarez, 2016, p. 71).

The ecological Blended Language Learning proposed by Hinkelman (2018) and followed in this thesis is meant to avoid a tool-centric viewpoint in the course design and delivery; additionally, it allowed students to learn fundamental Spanish as a Foreign Language concepts. Hence, this ecological Blended Language Learning approach did not focus on the Language Learning Social Networking Sites' use but put the notion of community at the centre of the Blended Language Learning lessons to explore social interaction and collaboration in the classroom and via the Language Learning Social Networking Sites utilised. In this thesis, Hinkelman's ideas are synthesised as his Principles of a Language Learning Ecology (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 74):

1. The environment is not only the conditions surrounding the teaching situation.
2. Community is the defining principle that holds together all the environmental elements.
3. The syllabus design includes all the system's spaces, people, and activities.
4. Students select the learning contents.
5. The environment extends beyond the individual learner.

1.4 ORIGINALITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The originality of the thesis relates to not only addressing several gaps in the literature related to the social dimension of Language Learning Social Networking Sites, but also specifically to exploring the role of peers when supporting each other in their learning process through the use of Language Learning Social Networking Sites (Zourou, 2016). Furthermore, this originality is tangible as the thesis examines Wespeke, a Language Learning Social Networking Site that has not been investigated in the research previously. Moreover, there is an additional novelty in that it is the first research study conducted after Busuu reduced its social networking site features from eight to three to

make its platform compatible with mobile devices, which meant that it became a capped Language Learning Social Networking Site.

This study also aims to identify the Second Language Acquisition theories that Language Learning Social Networking Sites adhere to and the features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites that are most beneficial for developing speaking skills. Thus, both platforms' research findings identify guidelines that will be valuable for Language Learning Social Networking Site developers, teachers, and researchers to design and evaluate Blended Language Learning environments utilising Language Learning Social Networking Sites and Task-Supported Language Teaching.

Above all, the significance of this study is that the use of Language Learning Social Networking Sites via Blended Language Learning and Task-Supported Language Teaching can be proposed as a paradigm not only for the Spanish as a Foreign Language classroom but for other Modern Foreign Language courses, suggesting a change from the bottom up in teaching foreign languages.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the literature reviewed (Chapters 2 and 3), two research questions were identified:

(Research Question 1) What theories of SLA do Language Learning Social Networking Sites adhere to?

Wang and Vásquez (2012) affirmed that much research in Computer-Assisted Language Learning is not explicitly grounded in theoretical frameworks, and some studies suffer from common methodological weaknesses (Orsini-Jones et al., 2013; Lomicka & Lord, 2019). Moreover, there was no agreement about the theories Language Learning Social Networking Sites adhere to in the literature reviewed. Therefore, to answer Research Question 1, the first stage of the research was undertaken to clarify this matter. Thirty-nine different studies, from the last two decades, focused

on Language Learning Social Networking Sites, were analysed qualitatively to accomplish this, and seven tables with the results of this analysis are presented in Chapter 3. One of the most critical findings from Research Question 1 was to find out that the social dimension of Busuu decreased when it migrated to a mobile platform. Therefore, Busuu had suspended some features as they migrated their platforms to make them compatible with mobile devices. Hence, at this point, Busuu fulfilled only three (37.5%) out of eight of the basic features every Social Networking Site should have, according to the definitions used in this thesis by Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011).

(Research Question 2) How do the features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites develop Spanish as a Foreign Language learning skills?

Language Learning Social Networking Sites are typically identified more with autonomous language learning contexts than traditional classroom-based environments (Jee & Park, 2009; Reinders, 2010; Reinders & White, 2011; Brick, 2012; Harrison, 2013; Bajrami, 2015; Yagcioglu, 2015). Hence, this thesis examines the use of Language Learning Social Networking Sites via Blended Language Learning as complementary tools to face-to-face lessons, so learners can practise online with Spanish speakers what they have learnt in the traditional classroom.

This thesis was developed in two stages to answer Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. The first stage drew on two pilot studies related to Busuu and Wespeke. As Busuu changed several features while migrating to a mobile platforms layout during the course of the research, it was necessary to undertake a second pilot study on the SNLLS Wespeke. In both cases, two different groups from the database of the Language Centre of a post-1992 large university and two Spanish as a Foreign Language classes from the same university in the North-West of England were invited

via email to participate in the pilot studies. In Busuu's case, there were 14 participants from CEFR A1 to B2 Spanish and nine participants from B1 to C1 Spanish in Wespeke's case.

Participants used each platform for four weeks, and data were obtained via a user experience questionnaire, a site feedback questionnaire (Liu et al., 2015), one logon sheet (Brick, 2013), and four focus groups. They were used to determine the Second Language Acquisition theories that Language Learning Social Networking Sites adhere to (Research Question 1) and elucidate the features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites most beneficial for developing language skills (Research Question 2).

Additionally, the second stage was opened to the general public. It took place in the same university in the North-West of England and lasted for five weeks. It consisted of implementing Blended Language Learning sessions using Task-Supported Language Teaching. The research participants were A1 Spanish as a Foreign Language learners, as this was the level that the researcher had access to when teaching. Initially, when designing the pilot studies, the B1 level was the most recommended for participation, as learners with a B1 level would better interact with the language being learnt and practised via the Language Learning Social Networking Site. However, as it was complicated to find participants with that level, it was decided to downgrade this requirement to include more participants.

1.6 THESIS OVERVIEW

Including the Introduction (Chapter 1), this thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter 2 is the first of two literature review chapters and examines relevant research on theories of Second Language Acquisition and Computer-Assisted Language Learning. It also provides an overview of language teaching methods, starting with Spanish as a Foreign Language from the 16th to the 21st Century. Furthermore, as Teaching English as a

Foreign Language has significantly influenced Modern Foreign Languages teaching (Baralo, 2018; Sánchez, 2009), the chapter also explores relevant research in this field. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief history of Computer-Assisted Language Learning, focusing on some research on the intersection of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Spanish as a Foreign Language.

The literature review continues in Chapter 3, which is centred on Language Learning Social Networking Sites and Blended Language Learning. It starts by delving into the research of Web 2.0 and Language Learning Social Networking Sites. Next, it considers the research on Language Learning Social Networking Sites, first in general and later specifically in relation to Spanish as a Foreign Language. Finally, the chapter concludes by exploring research on Blended Language Learning, particularly at the intersection of Blended Language Learning and Spanish as a Foreign Language.

Chapter 4, Methodology, describes the research methods and the research strategy (exploratory practice research) used in the thesis. Then it examines the exploratory [QUAL→quan] research design adopted and the rationale for its use. Next, details are provided on the institutional context, the sampling procedures, and the procedures for data collection. Finally, the six different data collection tools (pre- and post-written tests, pre- and post-oral tests, user experience questionnaires, site feedback questionnaires, logon sheets, and focus groups) are explained. The ethical aspects of the study are also outlined. An introduction to the corresponding qualitative and quantitative data analyses is also delivered, and it concludes by explaining the applicability of concepts such as validity and reliability to this thesis.

The common features of the pilot studies and the main study are presented together to avoid unnecessary repetitions in the different stages of the data collection. Additionally, the particular elements of the main study are described, especially the

approach and kind of tasks used, the lesson scheme, Task-Supported Language Teaching blended lessons, and the teacher's and the students' roles. Finally, the chapter concludes with an explanation of how the qualitative and quantitative data were analysed.

Chapter 5 focuses on the findings for research question 1: What theories of Second Language Acquisition do Language Learning Social Networking Sites adhere to? It recaps the findings from the literature review and addresses the question for each of the two Language Learning Social Networking Sites analysed, Busuu and Wespeke, through the quantitative and qualitative data collection process.

Chapter 6 analyses the findings for research question 2: How do the features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites develop Spanish as a Foreign Language learning skills? The data obtained from the collection tools are analysed, starting with the user experience questionnaire. Most of this chapter is centred on comparing the initial and final site feedback questionnaire and concludes with the focus groups and logon sheets, according to the features found in Wespeke.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings from the previous two chapters related to the two research questions. The findings for research question 1 were obtained from the data collection tools used in the first stage of the research for both Busuu and Wespeke. The data were contrasted with the five fundamental principles of social constructivism synthesised by Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner (2006): learning is participatory; knowledge is social; learning leads to development; knowledge emerges through meaningful activity with others; and learners develop dispositions relative to the communities in which they practice. Finally, the findings for research question 2 were contrasted with Hinkelman's (2018) Blended Language Learning Ecology principles: the environment is not only the conditions surrounding the teaching situation; the

community is the defining principle that holds together all the environment's elements;
the syllabus design includes all the spaces, people, and activities; students select the
learning contents, and the environment extends beyond the individual learner.

The thesis ends with Chapter 8, Conclusion, which summarises the main
findings and the answers to the research questions, the limitations of the study, its
implications, and proposed future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND COMPUTER ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates the use of Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS) to learn Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) and their roles as tools for Blended Language Learning (BLL) via Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT). These four topics have been channelled through two research questions (RQs) in this thesis: (1) What theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) do LLSNS adhere to? (2) How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills?

Therefore, the literature review will highlight the gaps in research in relation to the themes above: SFL, LLSNS, TSLT, and BLL, and has been divided into two chapters to pave the way for a clearer understanding of the research. Chapter 2 focuses on SLA and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and Chapter 3 on LLSNS and BLL. Chapter 2 begins by providing some background research relating to theories of SLA and language teaching methods relevant to the development of SFL. Then, the chapter briefly introduces the evolution of CALL as a subfield of SLA and the intersection of CALL and SFL. Finally, this chapter concludes by summarising the main points raised.

2.2 SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORIES

The theoretical aspect of the literature review starts by exploring SLA theories because this will clarify which of these theories are adhered to by the LLSNS, the main research theme of this thesis.

SLA is an area of knowledge enriched by researchers from different backgrounds who have been trained in a variety of disciplines, including linguistics,

applied linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and education, leading to the

development of a vast number of hypotheses, models, theories, and theoretical

frameworks (Long, 2007). To clarify the evolution of SLA theories, this research study

will follow the chronological criteria established by Mitchell, Myles, and Marsden

(2019), which is the most authoritative in the literature and mainly centred on the post-

war period. Starting with the 1950s, they divide the history of SLA theories into three

main phases: the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s onwards. However, the

authors only considered these three SLA phases because the 1980s constituted a turning

point for SLA theorising and empirical research. Furthermore, many of the main strands

of research in SLA, which continue in the 21st Century, can trace their origins to that

period. A synthesis of the main theories, methods, and hypotheses in SLA to be

reviewed in the following paragraphs is shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Main Theories, Methods, and Hypotheses in SLA

Pre-20th Century	Early 1900s	1940s, 1950s	1960s, 1970s	1980s to Present	
Grammar–translation	Audio-Lingual, Direct Method	Behaviourist, S–R–R	Universal Grammar, LAD	Information Processing Models	Social Interactionism
Flick	Bloomfield, Fries	Skinner	Chomsky, Krashen	Andersen, McLaughlin	Vygotsky

Based on Malone (2012).

With reference to SFL, Baralo (2018) clarified that the theories explaining SLA

are closely intertwined with the theories of L1 acquisition. She also highlighted that

none of the SLA theories had provided a convincing explanation of language learning

factors. Some emphasise social elements, others the learner's personal factors, while

others focus on linguistic components. For example, regarding the order of acquisition

of morphemes, it has been found that there is a similar sequence of language

acquisition, whether native or foreign languages, independently of the learners' L1.

Therefore, the acquisition of a Modern Foreign Language (MFL) cannot be explained

solely by the influence or transference of the L1.

Baralo (2018) pointed out that SFL acquisition theories have been taken from English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) research frameworks as there are no systematic programmes for SFL study in the social and interactionist models. Moreover, according to Baralo, only Chomsky's universal grammar has been studied intensively in Spanish. Finally, she stated that there is no entirely satisfactory theory of MFL acquisition able to explain the phenomena and features of the process in terms of its global and specific aspects and the acquisition of phonology, syntax, lexicon or pragmatics of the target language. What is more, she contends that there is no theory that also considers the different factors that influence the classroom and any other teaching/learning situation such as, for example, the teacher, learner, context, and programming, among several others, and suggested conceiving the SLA as a process of creative construction, even in formal contexts, and not only as a process of changing linguistic habits.

In parallel, Pavón Vázquez (2018) posited that the principles to be applied to teaching a language to people with a different language are the same; whether the foreign language to be learnt is French, Spanish, German or English, for example. He added that the extensive scientific and pedagogic bibliography on the subject and the vast amount of material evidence relating to learning a foreign language have the same value, regardless of the language being learnt. He concluded by highlighting the fact that applying different pedagogic trends in teaching SFL has paralleled the generic evolution of theories, approaches, and methods, basically from Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), and has applied them extensively to teaching other MFLs.

Therefore, the following sections will explain the evolution of SLA theories in EFL, but it is necessary to be cognisant of the fact that the same principles can be applied to SFL or other MFLs.

2.2.1 The 1950s and 1960s

In the 1950s, the general learning theory prevailing in psychology was behaviourism, and SLA was no exception. Habit formation was seen as the foundation for any learning, including language learning. Skinner (1957) argued that numerous stimuli condition human beings' reactions. Their response to such stimuli will be reinforced if the desired outcome is achieved. Thus, learning any skill, including an L2, was seen as based on a stimulus–response–reinforcement (S–R–R) pattern.

Skinner published a book entitled *Verbal Behavior* in 1957, which explained his behaviourist viewpoint as applied to languages. Chomsky (1959) reviewed and contradicted Skinner's book and claimed that children have an innate skill to learn a language. He stated that children are programmed to discover the rules of any language through their own inherent knowledge of how the rules should look (in his book *Universal Grammar*). Such a stance was the trigger for the study of psycholinguistics and specifically for research on language acquisition.

2.2.2 The 1970s

Chomsky's *Universal Grammar* became a great stimulus for investigating young children's language acquisition (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019). From the mid-1960s, it was determined that children go through the same stages in their language learning behaviour, wherever they are in the world and regardless of their mother tongues. The findings of Klima and Bellugi (1966), Slobin (1970) and Brown (1973) supported Chomsky's theory. Although this thesis is not focused on children's but rather on adult's SLA, it is important to mention these principles because ulterior theories focused on adults, such as Morpheme Studies (Brown, 1973), Monitor Model (Krashen, 1981), and the Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983), were based on Chomsky's *Universal Grammar*.

Correspondingly, Lado's *Contrastive Analysis* (1957) proposed that all errors originated by interference from the learner's L1 should finally be considered unfounded, and this gave origin to the theory of *Error Analysis* (Corder, 1967); the systematic investigation of L2 learners' errors. This interest in understanding learners' internal errors and the L2 system was the origin of the term "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972) as the language created by learners and considered a system by itself, permanently unfolding and obeying its own regulations. So, interlanguage replaced error analysis "by focusing on the learner's system instead of its non-target-like features" (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019, p. 48).

By the same token, Brown (1973) discovered the appearance of 14 grammatical morphemes in English in a consistent order in his longitudinal study, which originated in *Morpheme Studies.* Finally, Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974) concluded that children and adult learners of ESL achieved precision in some grammatical morphemes in a specific order, independently of their learning context (naturalistic, classroom, or mixed). They also suggested that L2 learners followed internal principles unrelated to their mother tongues, confirming such a systemic order.

According to Van Patten, Keating, and Wulff (2020), the explanation of SLA before the 1990s fell into two periods: behaviourism and post-behaviourism. Of all the theories that emerged to contradict behaviourism, the one that remains influential is Krashen's Monitor Theory because it laid the foundation for new theories within SLA (Van Patten, Keating, & Wulff, 2020).

At the end of the 1970s, Krashen's *monitor model* evolved from articles published in a series of books (1981, 1982, 1985). The model is based on five hypotheses: (1) The Acquisition/Learning hypothesis: Language acquisition (a subliminal process built up through using language meaningfully) differs from language

learning (intentionally finding out or learning principles in a language), and language acquisition is the only alternative way for competence in a second language to occur. (2) The Natural Order hypothesis: Grammatical structures are learnt in a specific order; nothing good is achieved when trying to learn them in a different order. (3) The Input hypothesis (i+1): People acquire language best from input that somewhat exceeds their present competence. (4) The Monitor hypothesis: Intentional learning functions only as a monitor or editor that checks or fixes the output of the language acquired. (5) The Affective Filter hypothesis: The learner's affective state becomes a filter that can hinder necessary input for language acquisition.

2.2.3 The 1980s to the Present

Mitchell, Myles, and Marsden (2019) affirmed that the 1980s constituted a turning point for SLL, as many of the leading research strands in SLA, continuing into the 21st Century, can trace their origins back to that period. They mention the impact of Chomsky's *government and binding theory* (1981), which established global principles applied to all languages and a restricted set of parameters that explained the variations between languages. This *principles and parameters model* paved the way for an intrinsic language aptitude (*Universal Grammar*) and its prospective role in L2 acquisition, including the role played by the L1 when the parameters are set differently in the L2 being learnt.

In addition, in response to Krashen's *input hypothesis*, Long (1983) developed the *interaction hypothesis*. Long agreed with Krashen on a language acquisition device (LAD), described as a purported instinctive mental capacity which enables a person to acquire and produce language, but focused on interactive aspects of second language discourse. Long's previous investigation (1980) revealed that native and non-native speaker interactions when exchanging everyday conversations or game-playing tasks

were fruitful in meaningful negotiations, such as double-checking requests and repetitions; making L2 speech more understandable increased its usefulness for L2 acquisition.

Another response to Krashen's input hypothesis was formulated by the *output hypothesis* (Swain, 1985). Swain argued that learners could frequently understand L2 texts while only processing them partly, focusing on semantic processing. Thus, from her perspective, it is only output (production) that forces L2 learners to fulfil grammatical processing, accompanied by syntax and morphology.

Moreover, by the end of the 1980s, cognitive psychology offered more elaborate models of the mind than mid-20th Century behaviourism, from which SLA theories had borrowed some models. (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019). For example, McLaughlin (1987), criticising Krashen's model, proposed viewing the mind as a limited-capacity processor, originating the *information processing* models of SLL. This viewpoint developed into the theory that learning involved migrating away from restricted processing to spontaneous language processing and transferring new know-how from short-term memory to long-term memory. Similarly, Andersen and Shirai (1994) developed some cognitive acquisition principles based on the *aspect hypothesis*, which supported the view that first and second language learners will primarily be influenced by the intrinsic semantic aspect of verbs or predicates in the acquisition of tense and aspect markers related or attached to those verbs. They argued that those acquisition principles result from how learners and native speakers arrange information and their own perspectives in continuous discourse.

Furthermore, although Vygotsky published research from 1925 to 1934, it was not until 1962 that his book *Thought and Language* was translated into English. Since then, his theories of child development have become widely influential, particularly

from the second half of the 1980s until the present, because they have become the foundation for new teaching methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Savignon, 1972) and learning theories such as connectivism (Siemens, 2004). Furthermore, his ideas were promoted among others by Lantolf (1995, 2000, 2011, 2020), who has demonstrated their relevance in the language learning process.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory was conceived in a pre-digital context. However, it has been helpfully demonstrated that the learning outcomes are the same independent of whether teaching uses digital technologies or regular classroom instruction (Means et al., 2013). All of this is crucial for LLSNS, as 41.6% of the empirical research about LLSNS analysed in this thesis took socio-cultural theory as its theoretical framework (see Table 3.6), and it is also the cornerstone of TSLT and BLL, the three main topics of this research.

The foundation of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is that learning is mediated in two stages. On the one hand, it is achieved partially via the learner's developing use and command of mental tools, where language is the primary learning tool and is also socially mediated. On the other hand, it depends on face-to-face interaction and distributed processes (Lantolf, 2000). Initially, unskilled individuals learn by performing activities and tasks guided by more knowledgeable others through a supportive process of shared comprehension of how to perform those tasks via collaborative dialogue (scaffolding) via other regulations until they take over new knowledge or skills into their consciousness, becoming capable of autonomous functioning and self-regulation. Vygotsky (1978) called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) the environment where learning can most effectively occur.

For all humans, including infants, learning is conceived as initially social and then later individual. First, conceptual progress and consciousness are seen as inter-

mental circumstances shared between individuals; then, people develop their own awareness, which becomes an intra-mental phenomenon. Language is the first symbolic mediation tool for the development of awareness. For example, part of that development is reflected in the personal speech that children are immersed in while solving a puzzle. This becomes inner speech to prove children's developing ability to rule their own behaviour and internal thought without external regulation (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2019).

According to Álvarez (2016), LLSNS typically apply a socio-cultural perspective in the design of their platforms. This thesis adopts the principle that "learning foreign languages is a long-term and complex developmental process that operates through participation in social practices" (Cutrim Schmid, 2017, p. 3). This concept intertwines with the intercultural language learning theory (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), differentiating between acquisition and participation metaphors:

> *The concept of "knowledge" (a noun) as an entity or state within the acquisition metaphor becomes "knowing" (a verb) within the participation metaphor to render the notion of process. Within the participation metaphor, learning involves a process of active construction and becoming a participant in communities of shared practice and shared discourse through enculturation (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 40).*

After reviewing the SLA theories, it is necessary to focus on the language teaching methods to understand their evolution and how we have arrived at the current ones in use.

2.3 LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS: AN OVERVIEW

This section is centred on the history of language teaching methods. As this thesis is centred on SFL, it will start with the history of this field. Later, because TEFL has greatly influenced the teaching of MFL globally (Baralo, 2018; Sánchez, 2009), it will proceed to focus on TEFL.

2.3.1 A Brief History of Teaching Methods in Spanish as a Foreign Language

Sánchez (2014) summarised in English a 430-page essay he had previously written in Spanish (1992) about the history of teaching SFL. He is the only author who has undertaken such a task in SFL. In both cases, he focused on the evolution of the different methodologies applied in that teaching. Both papers are underpinned by the teaching of European languages as a group, as Spanish initially developed in this continent; he added that methodological histories of different European languages are intertwined. Hence, it would be impossible to understand an individualised history of one language without exploring the history of the others in addition. Through both works, he told the history of the Spanish language from the 16th to the 20th Century. In 2009, he published a book continuing that history, focusing on the methods and approaches in teaching languages (in general, not specifically in Spanish) in the 20th and the beginning of the 21st Century.

Referring to the MFL teaching methods, Sánchez (1992) reduced them to two main trends, different/opposite, grammatical/conversational. He added that researchers should realise that these methods are not as revolutionary as they are portrayed; language pedagogy contains elements rooted in tradition and derived from it, in conjunction with other factors that are developments of or merely adaptations to the thoughts and feelings of each era's demands.

2.3.1.1 The 16th to 19th Centuries

For this thesis, the 20th and 21st Centuries are essential in the evolution of SFL teaching. However, to present a general idea of its evolution from the 16th to 19th Centuries, Sánchez's (1992) research will be synthesised. The 16th Century was the foundation of SFL teaching; the methodology was based on dialogue format lists of words and texts. The 17th Century saw the expansion of SFL teaching through Europe; however,

grammatical and conversational pedagogies were still widely used. Later, in the 18th Century, the natural approach as opposed to formal or artificial approaches became widely accepted in pedagogy. Finally, the 19th Century brought universal methods; the mixing of grammar and translation was forged and established in schools.

2.3.1.2 The 20th Century

The Direct Method (DM), created by Berlitz in 1878, became the most fashionable in the first half of the 20th Century in Europe and the USA. It even influenced MFL teaching in the official school system (Sánchez, 2014). Grammar and explicit teaching were prohibited. The most salient feature of the DM was its conversational approach.

In parallel, Gouin (n.d., end of the 19th Century) invented the Series Method consisting of presenting and learning an MFL as a sequence of related events in a particular situation, using gestures and actions so that learners can obtain meaning. It was popular in France, England, and the USA, but it lost against the DM.

According to Sánchez (2014), materials for teaching Spanish to foreign learners started to be printed in Spain by the mid-20th Century after the second world war. Once tourism started, travelling increased, and the idea of learning an MFL became popular with the middle classes in countries where those languages were spoken. The grammatical tradition influenced those first language learning books, and later the Audio Lingual Method (ALM), and by the end of the 20th Century, the SFL printed materials had reached their highest peak.

Furthermore, the Instituto Cervantes was founded in 1991 as the official governmental organisation responsible for fostering the teaching and learning of SFL and Hispanic-American cultures in non-Spanish speaking countries. Currently, the pedagogical and methodological guidelines specified by the Instituto Cervantes are followed by authors and publishers (Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes (PCIC)).

2.3.1.3 The 21st Century

Between 1991 and 2001, the Council of Europe conceived the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which promotes the action-oriented

approach, meaning an authentic and varied use of the target language that considers the

learner a social, autonomous, and intercultural agent. The goal is that learners will

perform by themselves with the new language what they are learning in real situations

in social contexts. From this perspective, language is seen as an effective socialisation

tool, not as an abstract construct. Above all, language learning pivots on competencies

(the knowledge, skills, capacity to learn and communicate; pragmatics, linguistics, and

socio-linguistics), which must be acquired and developed by the language learner using

tasks (Calero-Vaquera, 2018, pp. 51–52). Currently, all European governments, private

institutions, and publishers have accepted the CEFR's preeminent role in defining

language teaching methodology (Sánchez, 2014). Table 2.2 summarises the last five

centuries of teaching methods in SFL.

Table 2.2: A Brief History of Teaching Methods in Spanish as a Foreign Language

Century	Meaning in SFL Teaching	Methodology
16th	Foundation	Lists of words and texts in dialogue formats
17th	Expansion	Grammatical and conversational pedagogies are still widely used
18th	Consolidation, particularly in the UK	The natural approach in contraposition to formal or artificial became widely accepted in pedagogy
19th	Universal methods	The traditional method of mixing grammar and translation was forged and established in schools
20th	SFL materials printed in Spain	After WW2. Highest printing point of materials by the end of the 20th Century
21st	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)	Leading role in the definition of language teaching methodology and in private institutions and publishers of European languages

Based on Sánchez (1992, 2014)

Table 2.2. synthesises the meaning that each Century has had within SFL teaching; 16th,

foundation; 17th, expansion; 18th, consolidation, particularly in the UK; 19th, universal

methods; 20th, SFL materials printed in Spain and creation of the Instituto Cervantes; 21st, Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Hence, as proposed by Baralo (2018) and Pavón Vázquez (see 2.2. in this thesis), all the SLA theories can be applied to different languages. Likewise, when talking about teaching methods, it would be impossible to understand an individualised history of one language without explaining the history of the others. Consequently, the teaching methods of different European languages have all evolved together as a group (Sánchez, 2014).

Therefore, this thesis follows a chronological line to explain the teaching methods, despite Curtis' (2017) proposal of a non-linear, circular, cyclical nature in EFL teaching methods, and even when he coined *pendulumic* as a term to refer to "what goes around, comes around" applicable to such methods. The former is the criterion observed by most authors (Thornbury, 2017). For example, Howatt and Smith (2014) suggested a history of English language teaching, summarised in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Timeline of Language Teaching Methods

Stage	Modern Language Teaching in Europe		Language Teaching in and beyond Europe	
Years	1750–1880	1880–1920	1920–1970	1970–2000+
Period	Classical	Reform	Scientific	Communicative
Core focus	Imitating the teaching of Classical languages	Teaching the spoken language	Scientific basis for teaching	Aiming for "real-life communication"
Main method(s)	Grammar–Translation Method	Direct Method	Audio-Lingual Method	- Communicative Language Teaching - Task-Based Language Teaching

Based on Howatt and Smith (2014).

This thesis subdivides the language teaching methods timeline into six parts for the purpose of clarity: (1) the pre-20th Century methods, (2) the early 20th Century, (3) the 1950s, (4) the 1960s and 1970s, (5) the 1980s and 1990s, (6) the 2000s and 2010s.

2.3.2 Pre-20th Century English as a Foreign Language

Kelly (1969) went back in time 25 centuries to explain language teaching methods. Germain (1993), for his part, referred to 5,000 years of history to clarify the evolution of the teaching of languages. This section will start its overview of language teaching methods in the later stages of the 19th Century as it is based on more reliable sources.

2.3.2.1 Grammar–Translation Method

For many readers, the origins of language teaching and learning go back to the Grammar–Translation Method (GTM) (Curtis, 2017). According to Howatt (2004), the earliest grammar–translation course was written in 1793 by Fick, and the original motivation for the GTM was not to teach languages using translation and grammar. As a matter of fact, its label was coined by its opponents in the 20th Century (Howatt & Smith, 2014). The traditional scholastic approach to learning languages in the 18th Century had been to gain reading skills in foreign languages by studying their grammar and applying it to the understanding of texts using a dictionary. The GTM wanted to reform that traditional approach (Howatt, 2004). Therefore, in each of the early GTM lessons, only one or two grammar rules were introduced, along with a shortlist of vocabulary items and some practical examples that the students had to translate with the teacher's help (Curtis, 2017).

As Howatt and Smith (2014) stated, improved travel and communication made evident the need for speaking rather than being able to read the language, which resulted in criticism for GTM's vast lists of grammar rules, silly sentences for translation, lists of exceptions for memorisation, and teacher-centredness as another of its drawbacks. Nonetheless, as Curtis (2017) highlighted, there are still diverse parts of the world where the GTM is still being used or never left. With reference to TEFL, among other reasons for its perdurance, Richards and Rogers (2014) mentioned the following factors:

a limited command of spoken English of some language teachers; some instructors tending to use the same method by which they learnt; other instructors wanting to keep a sense of control and authority in the classroom, especially in large groups. They added finally that conventional approaches had remained longer in developing areas than in more economically developed ones because of limited learning resources and finances, insufficient language teacher training, cultural viewpoints, and the slower evolution of educational systems. At the same time, Thornbury (2017) concluded that the idea that the GTM "teaches itself" refers to the teacher not being wholly proficient in the foreign language being taught or to teachers being too overworked to undertake extensive preparation.

2.3.3 Early 20th Century English as a Foreign Language

As Thornbury (2017) asserted, L2 teaching approaches and methods naturally go through a course of cyclical evolution. They are first proposed, often as a counter-reaction to others, then accepted, put into practice, and finally criticised. The objections may involve either the revision, amendment, or the complete refusal of the approach or method, and even its replacement. That is what happened with GTM, and it is how the DM appeared.

2.3.3.1 Direct Method

As Table 2.3 shows, Howatt and Smith (2014) included the DM as part of the reform period of teaching. The core concern of this stage was teaching the spoken language, which was done following a fundamental rule: no translation is permitted, and the meaning must be transmitted directly in the target language using visual aids and explanations without recurring to the learners' native language (Thornbury, 2017).

Curtis (2017) mentioned volumes and discursive papers on the DM published in the early 1900s and cited Bovée's (1919) conviction of the greater effectiveness of

acquiring vocabulary more naturally, using words in whole sentences rather than memorising words lists. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) explained that instructors who use DM encourage students to directly relate meaning with the target language. Hence, when the teacher introduces new vocabulary in the target language, they demonstrate its meaning using pantomime, pictures, or realia. The "real situations" in which learners are involved should never be translated but exercised in the target language by the learners. Therefore, the course contents in the DM are based on situations (how to interact in a shop or at a train station) or specific topics (the weather, at the doctor's). Grammar principles are obtained from cases inductively; students obtain the rules from the given examples. Explicit grammar rules are never given, and learners are encouraged to communicate using whole sentences to practise new vocabulary.

The tendency to communicate with complete sentences is the origin of one of the cavils of the DM, as that kind of speech could be pointed out as "unnatural" or not according to how a native speaker would communicate. Such imitation and reliance on memorisation were also believed to deprive the learner of flexibility, according to Curtis (2017). However, Thornbury (2017) pointed out that Berlitz's and Rosetta Stone's methods follow the DM despite those hindrances. It could also be added that Conti's Extensive Processing Instruction approach (2016), which following Bovée's ideas (1919) and Sweller's cognitive load theory (1988), allows students to become familiar with the language patterns and structures and then work backwards from there. Sweller (1988) suggested that instructional methods should prevent overloading the learners' working memory with additional activities that do not directly provide learning, as this type of memory has a limited capacity.

2.3.4 English as a Foreign Language in the 1950s

The period between the two world wars led to a resurgence in foreign language teaching and the search for a more scientific foundation for its methods. Hence, Howatt and Smith (2014) named this era the scientific period. The most used approach at this time was the audio-lingual method (ALM).

2.3.4.1 Audio-Lingual Method

Like the DM, the ALM is also grounded on an oral approach. However, they are very different from each other. DM emphasises vocabulary acquisition through exposure to situations. ALM focuses on the use of grammatical sentence patterns. Another difference is that ALM has a robust academic base in psychology and linguistics, while DM does not (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Fries (1945) is the pioneer who applied structural linguistics principles to start the ALM. Later, principles of behaviourist psychology were added. Skinner (1957) proposed that reinforced behaviours continue, while punished acts eventually end. He coined the term "operant conditioning," referring to a voluntary reaction followed by a reinforcing provocation. Hence, the voluntary response (i.e., learning a foreign language) is prone to be performed. Compared to classical conditioning, the latter refers to a stimulus that automatically initiates an involuntary reaction (Bates, 2016).

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) synthesised the main principles of the ALM: dialogues are learnt through imitation and repetition and are used to present new structures and vocabulary. Those structural patterns present in the dialogues are practised and learnt via drills such as repetition, question-and-answers, transformation, substitution, backward build-up, and chain. Grammar is not provided; it is induced from the examples produced. Dialogues are contextualised through cultural information. Reading and writing skills are developed based on the oral work practised previously.

Nunan (1998) considered that audio-lingualism had a more significant influence on foreign language teaching than any other approach and described it as a highly consistent and highly elaborate lesson-based pedagogy with clear connections between theory and practice. The ALM method was synthesised through five main ideas: language is the oral expression, not writing; a language is a set of habits; the language itself should be taught, not rules about it; a language is how native speakers communicate, not what someone thinks they should utter; and languages are nonidentical (Moulton, 1963, pp. 24–26).

By the end of the 1950s, the theoretical foundations of audio-lingualism started to be criticised as fallacious regarding both language and learning theories. As a result, students could not put into practice what they had learned outside of the schoolroom, and some found it dull and disappointing (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In addition, teachers realised that the practical results of pattern practice, drilling and memorisation were lower than expected (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Admittedly, Curtis (2017) stated that the Internet has given the ALM a new lease of life, in the same way as the then-new technology of tape recorders was one of the primary drivers of a significant methodological shift towards the ALM. Currently, the Internet provides plenty of computerised digital models enabling students to listen and to repeat the target language.

2.3.5 English as a Foreign Language in the 1960s and 1970s

The 1960s and 1970s were very prolific in terms of the emergence of language teaching methods. Chronologically ordered, these two decades saw the appearance of the Silent Way, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning, and CLT. Only the latter is relevant for this thesis and will be explained next.

2.3.5.1 Communicative Language Teaching

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) highlighted how in the late 1970s, some language educators argued that communicating required more than knowledge of linguistic competence; for communicative competence, students need to be cognisant of who, when, and how to interact. These observations started the change from a linguistic-centred to a communicative approach in the shape of CLT. Specifically, several authors have clarified that, as it lacks a specific set of principles and procedures, CLT should best be viewed as an approach more than a method (Spiteri, 2010; Savignon, 2013; Shawer, 2013; Curtis, 2017). Moreover, this flexibility has allowed it to endure for more than 40 years (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Spiteri (2010) defined CLT as an approach that emphasises the use of oral communication, significant input, contextualised grammar, language games, songs, role-plays as interactive activities, and pair/group work. Shawer (2013) added negotiation of meaning, authentic schoolroom communication in the target language, using collaborative activities and authentic materials to this list. Finally, Savignon (2013) underlined that CLT focuses on the student and how their communicative needs require a framework for designing programme goals regarding operational competence, which implies qualitative, more holistic assessments of learner competence than a quantitative assessment of discrete linguistic features.

Curtis (2017) put aside all the positive aspects of CLT and pointed at some drawbacks of English Language Teaching. Furthermore, these can be extended to teaching any foreign language: there are contexts in which English is not being learnt for communication but only to pass an exam. Furthermore, CLT may have capitalised on the "native English-speaking teacher" privileges to the detriment of the non-native ones. Above all, there are certain areas in the world where promoting CLT may be

contextually inappropriate because there are still historical, cultural, and linguistic differences (China, Japan, and Arabic countries, for example). To balance the pros and cons of CLT, Curtis (2017) admits that millions of people worldwide have learnt and are currently learning foreign languages using CLT. He concluded by summarising the prerequisites for effective CLT lessons: smaller groups, higher level and highly motivated learners, students who enjoy working in pairs and groups, who may not need much knowledge about the structures of the language and how it works, who are more interested in developing their speaking and listening skills rather than their writing and reading abilities.

2.3.6 English as a Foreign Language in the 1980s and 1990s

Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about the social nature of learning started to gain favour in the 1980s. As a social process, learning achieves better results through cooperation between the student and the teacher and among students (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Furthermore, through the social exchange, more advanced thinking emerges in the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Howatt (1984) noted two versions of the *communicative approach* related to this social learning process: weak and strong. The weak variant is described as learning to use a foreign language; the strong one encourages the use of that foreign language in order to learn it. CLT, as developed in section 2.3.5.1, belongs to the weak version, while Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) belong to the robust version. Ellis (2017) showed that the weak form uses tasks in a structural approach to teaching (task-supported teaching, see section 2.3.6.4), while in the strong form, tasks serve as the basis for the teaching syllabus (task-based teaching). The two strong versions of CLT will be explained next.

2.3.6.1 Content-Based Instruction

According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), one of the main contributions of CBI was in combining the learning of languages with content, themes in which students are interested, or even academic subject matter (Schleppegrell, Achugar, & Oteiza, 2004). Curtis (2017) added that, like CLT, CBI could be considered an approach instead of a method. He also argued that while CBI largely originated in the USA, the same teaching approach was known in Europe as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

A CBI/CLIL lesson is described by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), who state that to start with, teachers must help learners understand authentic texts. Visuals, realia, several examples, and repetition, building on students' previous experiences, are used to make meaning clear. Both language and content are addressed through activities designed by teachers, emphasising how language is utilised in a specific discipline. For example, the same language is not used in geography and mathematics. Students are immersed in learning both in terms of content and language through interacting with their peers.

Lo (2014) identified economic and geographic reasons, rather than pedagogic, for the growth of CBI/CLIL. According to her, in the era of globalisation, CBI enhances EFL mastery by learners in countries where English is not the majority language but enjoys high socio-economic status. Curtis (2017) pointed to the increasing number of non-native English speaking students who are studying in English-medium universities worldwide as one of the reasons for the success of CBI/CLIL. So, their benefits are mainly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Curtis (2017) also highlighted the need for authentic cooperation between content teachers and language teachers to develop curricula.

2.3.6.2 Task-Based Language Teaching

As the TBLT approach is strictly linked to TSLT, one of the four pillars of this thesis, its discussion will be developed to a deeper level than the other teaching methods previously described above. TBLT was developed based on the communicative approach to teaching languages in the late 1980s (Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2013). Long (1985) and Prabhu (1987) are singled out as the pioneers of this method (Curtis, 2017). However, Thomas and Reinders (2012) traced its origins back to Dewey (1938), who argued for authentic learning to connect learners with their real-world experience. TBLT is an active form of learning in which learners become engaged participants, and research is motivated by increased opportunities for interaction instead of acquiring static knowledge. These authors also linked Dewey's experiential theory of learning with Bruner's (1961) idea of learning as discovery and Vygotsky's (1978) social-constructivist theories of knowledge and agency.

For more than 40 years, TBLT has been the source of broad-ranging research (Long, 2015b). It has even become the approach institutions and governments suggest when learning MFLs (Ellis, 2020). As Long (2015, p. 8) put it, "the basic tenets of TBLT are motivated by, and broadly consistent with, the past 40 years of SLA research findings." In Ellis' (2020, p. 188) words, "the case for TBLT is stronger than for structure-based instruction."

At the centre of TBLT is the concept of a task, and multiple definitions of the term have emerged over the years. Table 2.4 provides a useful overview of some of the most prominent definitions in the research.

Table 2.4: Some Definitions of Tasks

Long, 1985	A piece of work undertaken for oneself or others, freely, or for some reward ... Tasks are what people will tell you they do if you ask them (unless they are applied linguists who understand tasks in a different way).
Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985	An *activity* or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language. Tasks may or may not involve the production of language. A task usually requires the teacher to specify what successful completion will be. The use of a

	variety of different kinds of tasks in language teaching is said to make the teaching more communicative, since it provides a purpose for the classroom activity that goes beyond language practice for its own sake.
Crookes, 1986	A piece of work or *activity*, usually with a specified objective, undertaken as part of an educational course, at work, or used to elicit data for research.
Breen, 1987	A range of work plans which have the overall purpose of facilitating language learning – from the simple and brief exercise type to more complex and lengthy *activities* such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making.
Candlin, 1987	One of a set of differentiated, "sequenceable" problem-posing *activities* involving learners' cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu.
Krahnke, 1987	The defining characteristic of task-based content is that it uses *activities* that the learners have to do for non-instructional purposes outside of the classroom as opportunities for language learning. Tasks are distinct from other *activities* to the degree that they have non-instructional purposes.
Prabhu, 1987	An *activity* which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought and which allows teachers to control and regulate that process.
Wright, 1987	Instructional questions which ask, demand, or even invite learners (or teachers) to perform operations on input data.
Nunan, 1989	A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.
Willis, 1996	*Activities* where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.
Skehan, 1998	An *activity* in which meaning is primary; there is some communication problem to solve; there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; the task completion has some priority; the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome.
Lee, 2000	A classroom *activity* or exercise that has: (a) an objective obtainable only by the interaction among participants, (b) a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction, and (c) a focus on meaning exchange. A language learning endeavour that requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, and/or produce the target language as they perform any given set of workplans.
Bygate, Skehan, and Swain, 2001	An *activity* that requires learners to use language with meaning to attain an objective.
Ellis, 2003	Criterial features of a task: it is a workplan; involves a primary focus on meaning; involves real-world processes of language use; it can involve any of the four language skills; it engages cognitive process; it has a clearly defined communicative outcome.
Van den Branden et al., 2007	An activity in which people engage in order to attain an objective and which involves the meaningful use of language.
Ellis, 2009	Criteria to define a task: (1) The primary focus should be on "meaning" (which means that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances). (2) There should be some kind of "gap" (i.e., a need to convey information, to express an opinion or to infer meaning). (3) Learners should largely have to rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) to complete the activity. (4) There is a clearly defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e., the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).
Long, 2015b	"Task" in TBLT (in capital letters) has its normal, non-technical meaning. Some tasks are mundane, some complex. Some require language use, some do not; for others, it is optional. He distinguishes this [authentic] task concept from the TBLT (lower case letters) as "counterfeit/consciousness-raising/focused" tasks used to practise structures.
Anderson, 2020a	A meaningful language-use *activity* that allows learners to make free use of their "languaging" resources to achieve an envisaged outcome in written or spoken form.

Based on Ellis (2003).

Long (2015b) distinguished between "real" tasks, the real-world chores people think of when preparing, managing, or reviewing their day, a "normal," non-technical meaning, but in opposition to "counterfeit" tasks, which are unrelated to real-world activities outside the classroom and in which activities and exercises are relabelled as tasks in commercially published pedagogic textbooks. This distinction was the origin of the TSLT approach, outlined in section 2.3.6.4.

Consequently, as shown in Table 2.4, some researchers use "task" and "activity" as synonyms. However, it is crucial to distinguish between both terms, as Thomas and Reinders (2012) proposed. They defined "task" as the work plan given to the learners, while "activity" meant the resulting communication from the performance of the task. Hence, a task is what the learners are required to do, while the activity is the language the learners use/produce while doing the task. Ellis (2012) added that the tasks might emerge as different activities executed by different learners, or even by the same students in different contexts, and on separate occasions.

According to Thomas and Reinders (2012), the resources of the Web 2.0 classroom provide teachers with potentially their best opportunity up until now to better understand Dewey's vision of "bursting through the walls of the 'watertight' classroom" (p. 48). Furthermore, tasks have been related to socio-cultural theory (East, 2021; Feryok, 2017; Wu, 2018; Xue, 2020), which means they can mediate language learning through interaction. This is related to the SLA theories that LLSNS adhere to (RQ1), as explained in Chapter 5.

Overall, González-Lloret (2015) added that the purpose of TBLT is to foster language learning by accentuating not only fluency but also accuracy and complexity. Chapelle (2015) went a step further and added that, as learners are currently immersed in the use of technology, technological tasks should go beyond learning languages; they

should contribute to improving skills in using such technology, above and beyond the schoolroom, boost learners' interest in the L2 culture, and enhance pragmatic abilities.

Willis (1996) and Willis and Willis (2007) designed a TBLT model in three stages: (1) Pre-task phase; (2) Task cycle; (3) Language focus phase. In the pre-task phase, the instructor presents the topic and the task, gives instructions and emphasises the words and phrases useful for the task. This TBLT framework can be seen in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: The Task-Based Learning Framework (from Willis, 1996, and Willis & Willis, 2007).
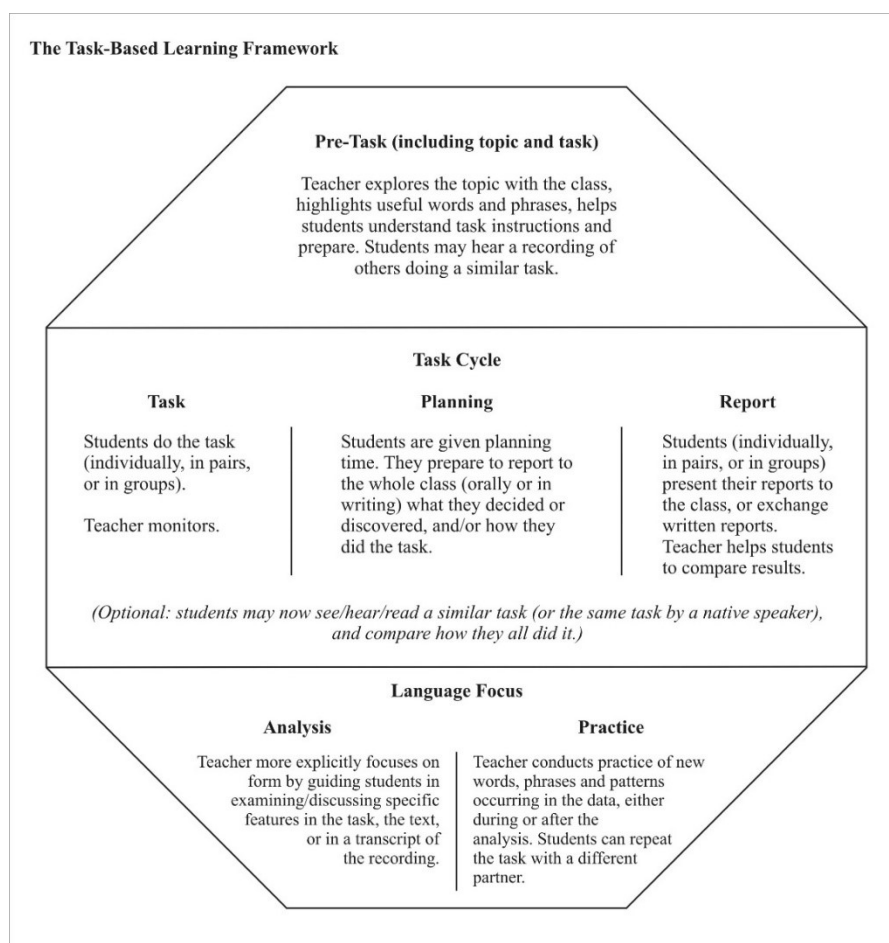
As shown in Figure 2.1, the task cycle is divided into three substages: a task phase, a planning phase, and a report phase. In the task phase, the teacher adopts a passive role (but making sure every student is on task, controlling the time, and encouraging

involvement), as it is to increase the learner's fluency. During the planning phase, learners get ready to provide information about the results of their work to the class, trying to be as accurate as possible in the use of the language. The third substage is the report phase, in which students present the results of their endeavours and compare results. Finally, the instructor summarises the results.

The language focus consists of integrating language analysis and practice by discussing text features or the written record of the previous task. The instructor recaps and focuses on the reviewed language patterns to practise such structures through oral and written activities.

Hence, according to Nunan (2004), task-based assessment should follow certain general principles: direct evaluation of student execution; criterion-referenced; focused on the fulfilment of specific objectives instead of trying to evaluate generic mastery; it should also be formative. This way, the actual language produced by the learners while doing a task is looked at holistically, as opposed to using discrete point tests (Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2013). As González-Lloret (2015) put it, the goal of TBLT is language acquisition, not just communicative efficiency. These concepts are developed and set within context in section 4.12.1, where the methodology applied in the task-supported lessons during the main study is explained.

Even after more than 40 years of researching TBLT, Long (2015b) was still wondering, "Does TBLT work, and work better than alternative approaches?" (2015b, p. 351). Kirschner et al. (2006) had maintained that, on the contrary, the testimonies from controlled studies "almost uniformly supports direct, strong instructional guidance rather than constructivist-based minimal guidance" (2006, p. 83). This seems to be the case for beginner/intermediate learners (Swan, 2005). That is the reason why, in conjunction with Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth's (2011) and Ellis'

(2018) proposals, it was decided to follow a TSLT instead of a TBLT approach in this thesis, which will be developed in section 2.3.6.4.

2.3.6.3 Task-Based Language Teaching and Spanish as a Foreign Language

Some recent research about the intersection of TBLT and SFL will be summarised next, while additional specific literature referring to LLSNS will be developed in section 3.3 of this thesis. The most prolific author to write about the intersection of TBLT and SFL is González-Lloret. However, none of the articles analysed next refer to the intersection of SFL, TBLT, and LLSNS, which is the subject of this thesis.

González-Lloret (2015) wrote a practical guide to integrate technology into TBLT, which developed the theoretical aspects of technology-mediated TBLT, and provided examples to practise these concepts. It was divided into four chapters. The first chapter defined technology-mediated TBLT, and the concept of task, and gave examples of technologies for technology-mediated tasks. The second chapter highlighted the importance of the needs analysis of tasks and technologies, defined it, gave an example, and showed how to run it. The third chapter focused on creating, organising, and sequencing tasks. It explained the philosophical and procedural principles of TBLT, the steps in creating a TBLT syllabus, and provided some samples of technology-mediated TBLT, most of them based on SFL experiences. The guide concluded with the fulfilment-based assessment of technology-mediated tasks, including the technologies and tools for fulfilment-based assessment, programme evaluation, and the evaluation of materials. Each chapter included reflective questions, activities, and recommended supplementary reading.

A year later, Baralt and Morcillo (2017) developed a guide for teachers using TBLT online and focused on SFL. They filled a gap because such a guide did not exist previously. Hence, they started with an abbreviated review of TBLT basics and adapted

the Willis (1996, 2012) task-based framework for synchronous, online video-based intercommunication. They described the framework and applied it while enhancing socialisation and community rapport. They also discussed teachers' challenges when applying TBLT online and proposed solutions to overcome them and maximise language learning. They concluded that socialisation and community building are imperative to online learning, principles applied in the blended language learning course developed in this thesis.

In the same year, González-Lloret (2017) summarised the research on tasks and technology (Task-based language learning and teaching), not focused on SFL only. She presented examples concerned with L2 exchange in technology-based tasks, focus on task planning in the study of technology-mediated L2 exchange, tasks developed through Web 2.0 technologies, areas of concern for technology-mediated TBLT, and the research itinerary in this area. She concluded by underlining the importance of incorporating technology as a target of instruction, meaning that students would learn the target language and "develop their digital, multimodal, and informal literacies, crucial life skills for the citizens of tomorrow" (p. 240). However, she also admitted that teachers need training in using technologies and developing tasks.

The third article published on the intersection of TBLT and SFL in 2017 was Zalbidea's (2017), which researched the functions of task complexity, modality, and working memory capacity in SFL performance. In her study, 32 intermediate SFL learners fulfilled more and less intricate variations of the same argumentative task in the writing and speaking modalities. Quantitative analyses revealed that task modality played a more significant role than task complexity in producing enhanced linguistic performance during task-based work: Speaking tasks resulted in more syntactically elaborated output while writing tasks favoured more lexically intricate and more

accurate language. According to Zalbidea (2017), from a pedagogical viewpoint, those findings can inform instructional decisions about task sequencing, as "speaking and writing tasks have the potential to direct learners' attention to the improvement of different dimensions of L2 output" (Zalbidea, 2017, pp. 348-349).

A year later, González-Lloret and Ortega (2018) explored the relationship between pragmatics, tasks, and technology. They saw such a relationship as a synergy where the objective is to enhance pragmatics in an L2. This study focused on MFL in general, though most of its examples were taken from SFL experiences. They viewed L2 pragmatic competence as culturally and circumstance-specific, and not detached from actual communication, which comprises both face-to-face and digital worlds. They believed that the optimal mixing of tasks and new technologies could provide a state-of-the-art framework for L2 instruction. They concluded that technology-mediated tasks overcome traditional classroom materials for learning pragmatics. "A focus on pragmatics as part of the language required to accomplish a task would help learners succeed in interaction and create and maintain the rapport necessary to continue future interactions and cultivate social relations". (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2018, p. 209).

Castañeda (2019) designed a study to explore improved conversational exchange by English speakers learning SFL when involved in task-based speaking activities in three stages. Fifty-three students from an American university who were registered on Intermediate Spanish 1 and Intermediate Spanish 2 courses participated in input tasks, recorded summaries and self-analysis on the input content with VoiceThread technology, and recounted their results in face-to-face and online group exchanges. The study results were heterogeneous, and students reported satisfactory experiences with input, presentational output, and interpersonal exchanges. Finally, the author concluded

that "task-based activities can help students improve the quality of their conversational interactions in the L2" (Castañeda, 2019, p. 23).

Smith and González-Lloret (2020) discussed critical ideas in technology-mediated task-based language teaching (TMTBLT) and provided a research roadmap for advancing this CALL subfield safely and in a data-driven manner. Initially, they defined TMTBLT and discussed the significance of considering technological advantages and specified learning contexts when matching explicit technologies with specific tasks. Finally, they called for TMTBLT research to capture and assess learner process data. They proposed a set of specific investigation tasks that gradually built on prior research into face-to-face and technology-mediated settings. This proposed research may help practitioners better understand how technologies and tasks converge to foster language learning. The authors concluded by highlighting the importance of data protection when conducting research. They advocated for an "ethical use of data that promotes digital literacy in equitable ways which are respectful of learners' educational and technological contexts" (Smith & González-Lloret, 2020, p. 15).

González-Lloret (2020) pointed out that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online language teaching became a fact of life for numerous foreign language programmes that were compelled to teach at a distance. She added that, beyond viewing CALL as an emergency teaching fix, it was essential to adhere to the same rigour and to ground the MFL curriculum on pedagogic and methodological choices anchored within SLA and pedagogical research when developing an online language teaching syllabus. It was also necessary to recognise that exchange is fundamental to achieving second language skills. The research endorsed that, via cooperative technology-mediated tasks, spoken and written productive language output can be promoted, and also the kind of exchange that promotes language learning and stimulates students to enhance their conversational

skills. Such a conclusion reinforced the proposal of this thesis, which is the use of LLSNS via task-supported language teaching to achieve better speaking skills in Spanish as a foreign language.

Having made reference earlier to the intersection of TBLT and SFL, it is important to clarify the key concepts behind TSLT.

2.3.6.4 Task-Supported Language Teaching

Even if TSLT and TBLT differ and are often seen as opposite approaches, Ellis (2018, 2019) demonstrated that they could be compatible in a modular curriculum consisting of separate structured-based and task-based components. The rationale for such a curriculum model is the importance of first developing fluency and secondly, via the structural module, providing learners with explicit accuracy-oriented reinforcement.

As noted in section 2.3.5.1, prior to the CLT approach, traditionally, languages were taught via a structural syllabus (synthetic) using an inventory of grammatical items. Instead, CLT proposed a functional syllabus (analytic) based on semantic and functional categories through the use of the language.

With reference to syllabi, White (1988) had proposed a distinction between Type A (focused on what is to be learnt) and Type B (centred on how language is to be learnt). The former is interventionist and other-directed; the latter is non-interventionist and involves no pre-determination of the contents to be learnt, which means that a Type B syllabus surmises that students have their own intrinsic syllabus and should be left to abide by it without attempting to enforce any external learning layout (White, 1988). Therefore, according to Ellis (2018), structural and functional syllabi should be considered Type A, while TBLT should be considered Type B.

Before White, Brumfit (1984) had already distinguished between a product-based syllabus (Type A), made up of explicitly declared linguistic content and focused

on language-as-use and accuracy, and a process-based syllabus (Type B) integrated with problem-solving activities and centred on the use of language for meaning-making and fluency. Even if Brumfit (1984) saw both approaches as different, he concluded that both are necessary for an MFL programme. Therefore, he suggested the use of an integrated syllabus, emphasising accuracy or fluency depending on the learners' developmental stage. Such a proposal is the one that Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2011) and Ellis (2018) updated and presented as TSLT.

Furthermore, Littlewood (2014) stated that TBLT does not adjust to the assessment methods utilised in the global examination trend where assessing affects teaching practices. He also referred to several problems implementing the TBLT approach in China, such as group sizes, learners' heavy use of L1 while working on the tasks, and traditional teachers' belief that learning involves the transmission of knowledge. Hence, he downplayed the strong version and opted for a weaker variant of TBLT, which Ellis (2003) named TSLT, as he considered it a more appropriate teaching approach in Asian settings.

From Bygate's (2016) viewpoint, through TSLT, tasks are brought into an existing structure-based syllabi to present an opportunity for wider communicative language use, enhancing the existing language-focused curricula. This means that classes using tasks are expected to involve a task-based exploration of language, as in task-based syllabi. Moreover, Bygate (2016) concluded by saying that:

> *Given the complexities of changing entire programmes in one go and also given that a task-supported approach can perfectly well use tasks to import a communication-based approach to the teaching and learning of language, a task-supported approach is likely to be the most practicable stepwise introduction of TBLT.* (Bygate, 2016, p. 388).

Aubrey et al. (2020) acknowledged that both language teaching approaches were based on different learning theories: TBLT follows "usage-based theories of

implicit/incidental learning" (Ellis, 2019, p. 458), while TSLT is based on skill learning theory (Aubrey et al., 2020). Moreover, in TSLT, tasks are fundamental parts of practising specific language structures (Ellis, 2019). In the end, Aubrey et al. (2020) decided to take on TSLT as the approach for their research as it was a more promising framework to engage students in Japan positively.

Li et al. (2016) proposed a stronger version of TSLT via a performance of the tasks, including both pre-task specific instruction and corrective feedback via recasts within the task, finding that a strengthened TSLT version had better results in comparison with (a) task only and focus on meaning; (b) performance of the tasks with corrective feedback addressing the target structure, pure TBLT and focus on form; or (c) performance of the tasks following pre-task specific instruction of the target structure (TSLT). This stronger TSLT version produced the most substantial effect on explicit and automated language. In addition, the corrective feedback received by the learners helped them reinforce the explicit cognisance of the target structure given through the specific instruction.

In response to Ellis' (2018, 2019) modular curriculum, Anderson (2020a) suggested the use of a Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration (TATE) model for language teaching. The latter argued that the model is congruent with both natural order theory and skill acquisition theory via its capacity to unite meaning-focused tasks within a task-supported approach to language teaching that permits both implicit and explicit learning occurrences. He introduced it as a unified abilities model following current investigations on vocabulary and grammar learning, recognising the relevance of spoken and written language practice during tasks (Anderson, 2020a). Arising from this discussion, to better understand the differences between TBLT and TSLT, Table 2.5 synthesises the differences between them.

Table 2.5: Comparison of Task-Supported and Task-Based Language Teaching

	Task-supported language teaching	Task-based language teaching
Syllabus	Structural (i.e., a graded list of linguistic features to be taught)	Task-based (i.e., a graded list of tasks or task-types to be performed)
Attention to form	Directs attention to form	Attracts attention to form
Activity type	Exercises + tasks	Tasks only
Primary focus	Accurate use of target forms	Communicative use of language
Type of learning	Intentional	Incidental
Theory of language learning	Skill-learning theory	Interaction approach; usage-based learning
Educational philosophy	Transmission: learning-to-do	Experiential: learning-by-doing

From Ellis (2017b, p. 110)

Table 2.5 not only synthesises the main differences between TSLT and TBLT but also

the methodology used via the TSLT approach of this thesis (see section 4.12.1).

With an overview completed of the essential language teaching methods for the

1980s and 1990s, the next section will analyse the most recent approaches to MFL

teaching.

2.3.7 English as a Foreign Language in the 2000s and 2010s

As Curtis (2017) put it, the 2000s confirmed the pendulum movement of the methods

and methodologies for language teaching. Among the 30 language methods explained

by Thornbury (2017), four for the 2000s and 2010s were included: (1) Teaching

Unplugged, (2) Programmed Instruction, (3) Uber Method, and (4) Principled

Eclecticism. For space limitations, this thesis will focus on the latter only as it reflects

the current status quo for global language teaching methods.

2.3.7.1 Principled Eclecticism

Even if Kumaravidelu (2003) had suggested a beyond-methods era, Thornbury (2017)

proposed seeing methods as a kind of smorgasbord from which teachers can pick and

choose, tailoring their methodology to their particular context. Mishan (2021) also reminded his readers that methods are usually developed hand-in-hand with specific technologies, sometimes designed for purely commercial reasons. Finally, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) suggested the use of Principled Eclecticism, meaning that teachers should create their personal methodology by mixing aspects of other methods, choosing techniques coherent with a consonant language learning theory.

Richards and Rodgers (2014) had already posited that teachers should not focus on pursuing the optimal method, but rather on the conditions and circumstances where more effective learning and teaching are achieved, suggesting a "process-oriented methodology" based on the teacher's own exploratory practice.

Thornbury (2017) concluded by saying that methods are eclectic as they obtain from, construct on top of, and repurpose aspects from one another. The teachers' comprehension of how and why that happens, and how these similar appropriation and reconfiguration procedures impact their own teaching, is part of a teacher's continuous professional development.

A summary of the different language teaching methods explained in the last two sections can be seen in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: Timeline of Methods and Methodologies of Language Teaching

Year	Creator/Pioneer	Method and Methodology
1793	Fick	Grammar–Translation Method
1919	Bovée	Direct Method
1945	Fries	Audio-Lingual Method
1965	Gategno	The Silent Way
1973	Cuisenaire	
1966	Asher	Total Physical Response
1971	Lozanov	Suggestopedia
1971	La Forge	Community Language Learning
1972	Curran	
1972	Savignon	Communicative Language Teaching
1981	Cummins	Content-Based Instruction
1989	Brinton, Snow, Wesche	Content and Language Integrated Learning
1985	Long	Task-Based Language Teaching
1987	Prabhu	
2000	Thornbury, Meddings	Teaching Unplugged
2009	Von Anh and Hacker	Programmed Instruction
2010	Lewis et al. (polyglots)	Uber Method
2011	Larsen-Freeman and Anderson	Principled Eclecticism

After reviewing essential SLA theories and the language teaching methods, it is necessary to clarify the evolution of CALL, a subfield of SLA. According to González-Lloret (2015), new technologies can become nothing but entertainment unless principles for pedagogy and language development guide their planning, utilisation, and evaluation.

2.4 A Brief History of Computer-Assisted Language Learning

Before referring to LLSNS (see section 3.3), it is a prerequisite to visualise their development through the lens of CALL. To investigate the history of CALL, it is essential to understand how it has been moulded not only by trends in language education and SLA theories but also by the development of computer technology (Davies et al., 2014). There have been many attempts to narrate a history of CALL research from its beginnings in the 1960s until the mid-1990s (Sanders, 1995) and from its starting point in the 1950s until the beginning of the new millennium (Delcloque, 2000). Others have preferred to choose a bibliometric approach, focusing on the contents and nature of publications (Jung, 2005), while others have decided to highlight the tools used in different stages, such as courseware in the 1960s, multimedia in the 1990s, Web 2.0 in the 2000s (Butler-Pascoe, 2011; Otto, 2017). Another group of researchers have taken a historical approach, identifying how language learning technologies have been interpreted and their relationships with other disciplines that have evolved up to the 2010s (Davies et al., 2014). In this respect, Warschauer's *The Three Stages of CALL* (2000), in which he identified synergies between methodology and technology, has proved to be influential (see Table 2.7).

Table 2.7: Four Stages of CALL

Stage	1970 – 1980 Structural CALL	1980 – 1990 Communicative CALL	2000s Integrative CALL	2015 Social CALL
Technology	Mainframe	Personal computers	Multimedia and Internet	Social media [mobile devices]
English-teaching paradigm	Grammar–translation and Audio-Lingual	Communicative Language Teaching	Content-based ESP/EAP	Collaborative learning [on social networks]
View of language	Structural (a formal structural system)	Cognitive (a mentally constructed system)	Socio-cognitive (developed in social interaction)	Participative (learners as target language *prosumers*)
Principal use of computers	Drill and practice	Communicative exercises	Authentic discourse	Authentic tasks in real/virtual world environments
Principal objective	Accuracy	And fluency	And agency	And communication

Adapted from Warschauer (2000, p. 64).

In relation to Table 2.7, it is essential to emphasise that different practices from various stages can co-exist with another (Warschauer, 2000, p. 65). Indeed, Bax (2003) criticised the unclear criteria evident in Warschauer's table, particularly the term "integrative" for the third stage. He proposed an additional stage where CALL would be "fully integrated, normalised transparent within language pedagogy" (Bax, 2003, p. 23). In 2011, Bax revisited his concept of normalisation, which led Dudeney and Hockly (2012) to say that "CALL would be normalised when computers are treated as always secondary to learning itself when the needs of learners would be carefully analysed first of all. Then the computer is used to serve those needs" (Dudeney & Hockly, 2012, p. 538). However, according to Kessler and Hubbard (2017), normalisation is improbable in most teaching circumstances in the near future unless adequate teacher preparation is provided to obtain the CALL cognisance and background needed to achieve normalisation.

Consequently, based on Thomas, Reinders, and Warschauer (2014), a fourth stage was added to Table 2.7, which describes the current state of CALL since 2015. In this phase, the combination of wireless technology and mobile computing has emerged as an aid to learners in their use of portable devices as learning tools (Andújar, 2019;

Azeez & Al-Bajalani, 2020; Morgana & Kukulska-Hulme, 2021; Rosell-Aguilar, 2017; 2018; Stockwell, 2021), which brings this in line with the concept of mobile learning as "the use of portable and wireless devices and technologies to access any type of educational material from anywhere at any time" (Arvanitis & Krystalli, 2020, p. 84). However, Chun (2016) called her fourth stage "ecological" CALL. In this stage, language is seen as symbolic and involves the development of intercultural competence; learners use mobile and use wearable devices to communicate globally via a teaching paradigm focused on digital literacies and multiliteracies. Furthermore, learning a language in this context aims to develop as global citizens (Chun, 2016, p. 106).

It is essential to highlight that some authors have suggested broadening CALL's name to Technology-Mediated Language Teaching as an evolution of the former. This proposal is made because computers no longer restrain technology's inclusion in learning. The ubiquitous use of mobile devices is currently integrated withing teaching (González-Lloret, 2016; Vinagre & González-Lloret, 2018).

As this thesis focuses on teaching SFL using some aspects of CALL, it is necessary to explain the intersection of both areas.

2.5 COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING AND SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

According to Marsden and Kasprowicz (2017), MFL educators in the UK have limited exposure to research. Furthermore, the research on SFL in higher education produced in the UK is scarce and insufficient at the intersection of SFL and CALL. While EFL represents 61.3% of CALL research, SFL counts for only 7.7% (Gillespie, 2020). Consequently, the studies found as examples of recent research in this area are not restricted to the UK. However, in their corresponding sections, other specific examples

of the intersection of CALL and SFL referring to TBLT (section 2.3.6.3) and blended

language learning (section 3.6) are developed in this thesis.

Cabot's (2000) early survey of Spanish CALL practitioners in higher education

in the UK was the only example of research in this area. She gathered data from 25

higher education centres on topics such as; the motivation of instructors in the use of

CALL; the span of incorporation; the kinds of programmes utilised; their perception

concerning the functions of the computer and themselves as instructors, the observed

convenience of CALL programmes for enhancing learners' skills, and the elements that

would better help promote the use of CALL materials. Finally, she explored and

contrasted the findings with the specialised literature, searched for clarifications for the

differences, and made suggestions for the future utilisation of CALL for teaching SFL.

More recently, Zhang and Zou (2020) proposed different types of state-of-the-art

technologies for learning MFL. These technologies were for:

1. Mobile learning
2. Multimedia learning
3. Socialised learning
4. Speech-to-text recognition and text-to-speech recognition
5. Digital-game-based learning

There is some research on the intersection of those technologies and SFL. However,

these studies will not be summarised here because they exceed the locus of this thesis.

Hence, a gap was discovered through the literature review of the intersection of CALL

and SFL; there is no recent research referring to LLSNS and SFL.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a review of research focused on SLA, CALL and SFL. A

clear research gap in the intersection of the three areas was found, particularly when

referring to CALL/SFL and TBLT/SFL.

Regarding SLA, it was found that Spanish researchers typically rely on previous EFL studies (Baralo, 2018; Pavón Vázquez, 2018). Something similar happens in relation to CALL/TBLT and SFL. Unfortunately, there is scarce research on the convergence of those areas (sections 2.3.6.3 and 2.5 in this chapter), and research is almost non-existent concerning LLSNS, a sub-area of CALL. To explore these gaps further, the next chapter focuses on a review of the literature with reference to LLSNS and blended learning

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW: LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND BLENDED LANGUAGE LEARNING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Following examination of the literature regarding Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in Chapter 2, this chapter focuses firstly on the research into Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS), the phenomenon under investigation. Secondly, the chapter explains the Blended Language Learning (BLL) approach, which constitutes the fourth and final central theme of this thesis. From the research undertaken, it has emerged that this is an area in which little research relating to Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL), CALL, and LLSNS has been conducted.

3.2 WEB 2.0 AND LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

As seen in Table 2.7, CALL has been situated in its "social stage" since approximately 2015. This social stage means:

1. The technology is mainly used through social media and mobile devices.

2. The language teaching paradigm is collaborative and uses social networks.

3. Language is seen as participative, and learners are target language prosumers.

4. Devices are used for authentic tasks in real/virtual environments.

5. The principal objective of learning a language is not only accuracy, fluency, and agency, but communication.

Web 2.0 learning environments brought with them implications for pedagogies, identities, literacies, and genres (Warschauer, 2003). Furthermore, according to Wang and Vásquez (2012), since the beginning of the 21st Century, SLA research has experienced "a paradigm shift: it moved from a cognitive orientation to social

orientation, from classroom contexts to naturalistic settings, from an acquisition metaphor to a participation metaphor, and from L2 learning to L2 use" (Wang & Vásquez, 2012, p. 413). Numerous other researchers have ratified this viewpoint (Zourou, Potolia & Zourou, 2017; Patil & Surwade, 2018; Choudhuri & Pattnaik 2020; Ngo & Eichelberger, 2020).

Wang and Vásquez (2012) added that this paradigm shift in SLA research seems to align with many of the fundamental attributes of Web 2.0 technology (such as interaction, collaboration, easy participation, and information sharing). Furthermore, research also suggests that the application of Web 2.0 technology in many L2 learning contexts has transformed language learning, particularly in relation to curriculum design and pedagogy (Kessler & Hubbard, 2017; Otto, 2017; Kannan & Munday, 2018; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Reinhard, 2019; Arvanitis & Kristalli, 2020). Moreover, existing studies established that Web 2.0 technologies provide language learners with the potential for a community-based and collaboration-oriented learning environment (Zourou, Potolia & Zourou, 2017; Ngo & Eichelberger, 2020). Wang and Vásquez (2012) concluded that some research had discussed other potential benefits of Web 2.0 technologies in language learning, while other researchers have offered anecdotal accounts of pedagogical implementations of Web 2.0 tools (Ortega, 2017; Rosell-Aguilar, 2017, 2018; Zourou, Potolia & Zourou, 2017; Dooly, 2018; Vinagre & González-Lloret, 2018; Blake & Guillén, 2020). According to Dudeney and Hockly (2012), Web 2.0 tools ensure that online users with no programming or design skills could produce resources, which led to more creative approaches from teachers using technology and more creative practice in the classroom.

The research in this thesis is related to Web 2.0, an era that is still relevant (Patil & Surwade, 2018), as it encourages users to participate, collaborate, and share

information (Ngo & Eichelberger, 2020). These are the main features of Social Networking Sites (SNSs), as they are virtual places where learners can gather to interact. In LLSNS, where the boundaries between learners and instructors are being deconstructed, communities of prosumer learners simultaneously engage in instruction, peer mentoring, and language learning (Thomas, Reinders & Warschauer, 2014, p. 5).

Hence, Boyd and Ellison (2008), in their history of SNSs, explained how, between 1997, when SixDegrees.com appeared as the first SNS and 2006, at least 45 SNSs had been created on the Internet. With reference to LLSNS, while there were already some precursory SNSs for practising foreign languages, Livemocha was founded in 2007 as the first LLSNS (Brick, 2011, 2013), Babbel in 2007, Busuu in 2008, and Wespeke in 2010.

Tables 3.1–3.3, however, provide a better understanding of the current LLSNS. Table 3.1 shows several popular social media platforms that users typically consider to be LLSNS but do not meet the minimum requirements. Unfortunately, this is currently the case with most current language learning applications. Table 3.2 shows different communities alphabetically ordered, while Table 3.3 shows existent communities following the criteria suggested by Loiseau, Potola, and Zourou (2011), classified as structured Web 2.0 language learning communities, language exchange sites, or marketplaces.

Table 3.1: Some Social Media That Are not LLSNS

	Site	Year of Foundation	Skills	Levels	Model	Languages	Features
1	Conversation Exchange	2005	Reading/Writing/Listening, Speaking (R/W/L/S)	No Data (ND)	Free	ND	- In-person, "real" exchanges - Chats: text, voice, and video, primarily outside the platform - Conversation topics - Foreign characters keyboard
2	Duolingo	2009	R/W/L/S	A1–B1	Free	38	- Written lessons, dictation, speaking, English tests, tinycards - Gamified skill tree - Experience points - Timed practice - Rewards: "lingots." - Class platform - Not LLSNS

3	Edufire[†]	2008–2010	R/W/L/S + others	ND	Premium	35	Intermediary platform between teachers and students. Not only languages but IT training, marketing and tests
4	Lernu	2002	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	29	A multilingual site to learn Esperanto. Great forum (text chat) but not an LLSNS
5	Lingueo	2007	R/W/L/S	ND	Premium	ND	- Foreign language classes: kids, business, travel and leisure, specific subjects, tests - More a language school's platform than an LLSNS
6	Memrise	2010	R/W/L	ND	Freemium	200+	- Learn languages, other academic subjects, even Trivia and Pop culture - Based on flashcards - Learners can be followed, but no direct interaction with them
7	TalkaLang[†]	2015–2018	R/W	ND	Free	3	- Discussion forums in EN/FR/ES/DE - Feedback from other participants - No chat or possibility of friending
8	uTalk	1992	R/W/L/S	A1-B2 (CEFR)	Freemium	130+	- Vocabulary for 90+ topics - Measure achievements - Speaking games (record your voice) - Native voices as patterns - Educational platform: Junior (4-11), Classroom (11-18), Campus (18+) - No chat or possibility of friending

Note: The symbol [†] refers to platforms that do not exist anymore.

All the social media featured in Table 3.1, particularly Duolingo and Memrise, are considered LLSNS by some users; however, beyond their listed characteristics, none offer the types of functionality (defined by Boyd & Ellison, 2008, and Duffy, 2011) related to social interaction to be considered as such.

Table 3.2 shows language communities alphabetically ordered from 1998 to 2022.

Table 3.2: Language Communities Alphabetically Ordered: Basic Data and Features

	Community	Year of Foundation	Skills	Levels	Model	Languages	Features	Users
1	Babbel	2007	R/W/L/S	A1–B2	Freemium	14	- Courses on and offline - Chat: text, no voice, no video - Message boards - Review manager (vocab bank), spaced repetition - Certificates	20M
2	bili	2016	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	ND	- Language exchange site for schools - Parents' login and teachers' profile	ND
3	Busuu	2008	R/W/L/S	A1–B2	Freemium	13	- Level tests (premium users) - Lessons - Give/receive feedback on exercises. No direct interaction with other users - Vocab flashcards - Travel/business courses - Free/Premium/Pro versions	100M
4	English Café[†]	2008 – 04/2012	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	1	- Video and audio lessons (library) - Open forums to comment on lessons or upload your own materials	ND

							- Create groups to interact with other learners/teachers	
5	English, baby!	2008	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	1	- Chat text only. No audio nor video. - Free lessons, TV, blog - Forums, quizzes, audio download - Users' comments on lessons	2M
6	HelloLingo By the founders of SharedTalk	2015	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	ND	- Chat: text, audio, no video - Mobile app - Language games	ND
7	HelloTalk	2012	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	100+	- Voice to text - Text to voice - Transliteration - Camera share - Doodle share - Translation - Counter - Free calls among users - Moments (with all native speakers of a language) - Save chat to refer to later	8M
8	HiNative	2014	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	ND	- Language and culture Q&A Platform - Pre-established forms - A Lang-8 subsidiary	ND
9	Interpals	1998	R/W	ND	Free	150+	- Chat: text only. No audio, nor video. - Forums - Travel "buddies"	3.8M
10	iTalki	2007	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	100+	- Teachers site + LLSNS - Discussion boards - Community blog - Notebook for being corrected - No in-site chat - Mobile app	3M
11	Lang-8	2007	Writing	ND	Freemium	90	- Writing exchange and correction	750K
12	Langademy	2016	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	ND	- Exchange "trade" of foreign languages: time banking rooms, wallet rooms (paying for conversations)	ND
13	Language for exchange	2009	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	115	- Directory of language schools - Travel abroad (exchanging countries and language) - Open forum - Chat: text, voice, and video	100K
14	LetsPal	2016	R/W	ND	Freemium?	ND	- Chat text only. No audio nor video. - Blogs, members, photos, quizzes	ND
15	LingQ	2007	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium?	14	Free version is too limited - Language library - Words tracking system	600K
16	Livemocha†	2007–2016 (Closed by Rosetta Stone)	R/W/L/S	A1–C1	Freemium	38	- Synchronous chat: text, no voice, no video - Lessons - Virtual keyboard for foreign characters - Reward system: mochapoints and badges - Weekly progress reports	18M
17	Mixxer (Dickinson University)	2005	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	9	- Contact via Skype - Group exchanges - Lessons - Blog - Writing correction	ND
18	MyLanguage Exchange	2000 Oct	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	115+	- Chat: text, voice, no video - Translation - Homestay - Teacher-monitored pen-pals - Notepad - Library - Bulletin board - Multi-language dictionary - Lesson plan - Timer	3M
19	Palabea†	2007–2013	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	ND	Video/voice chat Marketplace for speaking and learning languages via video chat. Share documents, files, media Forums, classrooms Contact "real" language schools	ND
20	Pen4Pals	ND	R/W	ND	Free	ND	- Group chats: writing - Open invitations to chat - Writing correction - Forums - Open participants gallery	25.6K
21	Penpaland	2015	R/W	ND	Free	ND	- SNS for language exchange	ND

#								
							- Online chat: text, blogs - Sharing media - Connect with people when travelling, pen-pals, and cultural events	
22	PlaySay†	2008–2013 (closed by Babbel)	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	ND	- iPhone game to talk and write - Chat: text, voice, no video - Pronunciation feedback - Also, practice via Facebook	ND
23	Polyglotclub	2003	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	ND	- Direct search of exchange pals - Face2face 'real" events	745K
24	SharedTalk†	2005–08/2015	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	ND	- Chat: text, audio, no video - Mailbox - Public chat rooms - Language games	1.6M
25	Speaky	2015	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	110+	- Chat: text, audio, & video - Timer to equalise the time during the exchange - Calendar to set dates	1M
26	Tandem	2015	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	8	- Chat: txt, audio, & video - Mobile app - Tutors	3M
27	Tongueout	2012	R/W/L/S	ND	Free	21	- Chat: text, audio, video - Public chatroom - Blogs, Photos, Videos, Events, Polls - Android App	ND
28	TripLingo	2011	R/W/L	ND	Premium	14	- Written/Audio Phrases - Voice-life Translator - Dictionary, Flashcards - Cultural Guide - Calculator	ND
29	Verbling	2011	R/W/L/S	ND	Freemium	38	- Video chat with language teachers - Chat rooms (practice groups with learners) by levels	800K
30	Wespeke† (Carnegie Mellon University)	2010	R/W/L/S	American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages	Freemium	1	- Lessons (only in English) - Chat: text, audio, video - Say it again/slower - Record your voice message and upload it - Upload pics when chatting - Translator - Notepad	5K institutions

Note: The symbol † refers to platforms that do not exist anymore.

As Table 3.2 shows, there were already at least five different language exchange sites before Livemocha (2007), the first LLSNS created on Web 2.0, fulfilling all the criteria to be considered as such. These previous LLSNS were based on key-palling (e.g., email pen-friending) because, at the time of their origin, the idea of social interaction through the Internet—corresponding to the Web 2.0 concept—did not exist. The most critical LLSNS at the time, SharedTalk, does not exist anymore. Moreover, the other four (Interpals, Mixxer, My Language Exchange, Polyglot Club) have not progressed to becoming full-functioning LLSNS.

Table 3.2 also shows that 2007 was a very productive year in that at least six communities were launched. Subsequently, however, a decrease occurred: four ceased to operate in 2008, one in 2009, another one in 2010, two in 2011, and another two in

2012; then, there was a resurgence in 2015 with four new LLSNS. Finally, two new LLSNS appeared in 2016, totalling 30 communities at the time of writing this thesis. It is essential to mention the activity among these enterprises, as some of them have been acquired by other educational technology vendors to become more international, to expand their market, or in some cases to avoid eclipsing the achievements of a more prominent company.

These Web 2.0 communities specifically designed for language learning were ordered into three categories, according to a classification outlined by van Dixhoorn et al. (2010) and further detailed by Loiseau et al. (2011): structured Web 2.0 language learning communities (with lessons contents) which are within the scope of this thesis; language exchange sites (without lessons contents); and marketplaces.

On the next page, Table 3.3 is displayed, whereby it can be seen that out of the 22 communities existing when this table was initially designed, only 4 (18.2%), Babbel, Bili, Busuu, and Wespeke, should be considered Web 2.0 language learning communities. A total of 59% are merely language exchange sites, while 22.5% work primarily as marketplaces. With the exception of English, baby!, which specialises in EFL, all the other communities offered the possibility of learning/practising SFL at the time of writing this thesis.

Table 3.3: LLSNS Fulfilling Criteria

	Communities	**Create a profile**	**Add friends**	**Search for friends**	**Create a circle of friends**	**Communicate with friends**	**Exchange feedback**	**Upload content**	**Peripheral awareness**	**Fulfilment %**
1	Babbel	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	25
2	Bili	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	75
3	Busuu	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	37.5
4	English, baby!	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	50
5	HelloLingo†	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	90
6	HelloTalk	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	80
7	Interpals	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	70
8	iTalki	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	100
9	Lang-8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	100
10	Language for exchange	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	70
11	LingQ	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	70
12	LetsPal	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	80
13	Mixxer	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	60
14	MyLanguage Exchange	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	70
15	Penpaland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	90
16	Pen4Pals	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	80
17	Polyglotclub	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	90
18	Speaky†	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	100
19	Tandem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	90
20	Tongueout†	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	80
21	Verbling†	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	90
22	Wespeke†	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	80

Note: Based on Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011). / The symbol † refers to platforms that do not exist anymore.

LLSNS Categories (according to Loiseau, Potola, & Zourou, 2011)

	Structured Web 2.0 language learning communities
	Language exchange sites
	Marketplaces

Admittedly, Solis (2013) confirmed that there are hundreds of social media and SNS currently available; however, neither the Encyclopaedia of Social Networks (2011) nor the Encyclopaedia of Social Network Analysis and Mining (2014) includes any LLSNS or even mentions this category. Moreover, market researchers do not acknowledge LLSNS in their results (Smith, 2015). Therefore, it can be considered an under-researched area (Zourou, 2016), and one in need of further review.

3.3 RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

This section focuses on the primary phenomenon under investigation, LLSNS. From the 39 empirical research studies involving LLSNS specifically collected for this research study between 2009 and 2022, only 10 (25.6%) included Spanish as one of the languages investigated. However, only one was explicitly centred on SFL (Table 3.8).

Different theoretical frameworks support recent empirical studies on LLSNS. Most of the research is framed within socio-cultural and socio-cognitive dimensions such as socio-cultural theory (Álvarez, 2015, 2016; Brick, 2011; Chwo et al., 2012; Gruba & Clark, 2013; Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Zourou & Lami, 2013); activity theory (Malerba, 2015; Inaba, 2021); socio-constructivism (De Azevedo, 2013; Brick, 2013; Zourou & Lami, 2013; Chik & Ho, 2017; Zourou, Potolia & Zourou, 2017; Reinhardt, 2019; Ngo & Eichelberger, 2020; Carhill-Poza & Kurata, 2021); and social cognitive theory (Harrison & Thomas, 2009; Orsini-Jones et al., 2013), among others. As stated by Wang and Vásquez (2012) and Otto (2017), such a framework is due to the shift of computer use in language learning, at least in the particular domain of CALL, from a structural/cognitive approach to a more socio-cognitive approach (Warschauer, 2000), which regards the computer as a tool that conveys interactions between language learners and other humans. Wang and Vásquez (2012) asserted that this finding, to a greater extent, corresponds to the development of Web technology shifting from

"linking information to linking people" (Wesch, 2007, video, 03:52), which fosters wider opportunities for broad interaction. Communication and interaction-based learning should be understood as the backbone of many socially oriented approaches to Modern Foreign Language (MFL) learning, particularly through LLSNS.

Most of the interaction on LLSNS takes place through their network aspect. Hence, it is core to differentiate between Social *Network* Sites and Social *Networking* Sites, as most of the time, the terms are interchangeable in the literature; however, as Boyd and Ellison (2008) clarified, "networking" emphasises relationship initiation, often between strangers, and, commonly, participants are not fundamentally "networking" or becoming acquainted with new people on these SNSs; instead, they are interacting with people who are already a part of their extensive social network. Therefore, when alluding to LLSNS in this research, this will mean Social *Networking* Sites for Learning Languages, as referred to by Harrison and Thomas (2009), Brick (2011b), and Zourou and Lamy (2013), among others.

Given the constant evolution of LLSNS, Reinhardt (2019) suggested the term "Social Network-Enhanced Commercial CALL sites and services (SNECs)." However, this term encompasses too many concepts. The designation "Social Networking Sites for Learning Languages" (SNSLL) may be equally confusing, as placing the words "Social Networking Sites" first prompts one to think about any of the hundreds of SNSs that could be used for language learning (Carhill-Poza & Kurata, 2021) while moving the phrase "language learning" to the forefront clarifies what kind of SNS they are (Chik, 2015; Chik & Ho, 2017; Blake & Guillén, 2020). That is why the term "Language Learning Social Networking Sites" (LLSNS) is preferred instead of SNSLL in this thesis.

To add greater clarity to this area, given the multiplicity of SNS in existence,
van Dixhoorn et al. (2010) outlined a typology of three kinds: (1) structured Web 2.0
language learning communities (LLSNS), which constitutes the locus of this thesis; (2)
language exchange sites; and (3) marketplaces (see Table 3.3).

In this sense, strictly focusing on LLSNS, the literature can be divided into three
broad categories: descriptive studies; quantitative studies; and qualitative studies, which
frequently combine mixed methods but are mainly qualitative. Furthermore, as LLSNS
are in constant evolution, their publication date is a caveat to be considered for all these
studies. Thus, some of the conclusions of these pieces of research may not be valid
currently as the LLSNS studied has changed or may no longer exist. See Table 3.2 for
clarification. Explicitly referring to the intersection of LLSNS and SFL, the
corresponding research will be examined in section 3.4.

Specific language learning-related topics will be mentioned in the 39 studies
analysed, which accurately refer to LLSNS, and they are summarised in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: Language Learning-Related Topics in Empirical Research on LLSNS

Research Focus	Study	Number of Studies	% of the Total of Studies
Autonomy	Andriani (2013); Brick (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liaw (2011); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017); Rosell-Aguilar (2018)	14	35.8%
Collaboration	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011b); Harrison (2013); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010); Pélissier & Qotb (2012)	9	23%
Interaction and discourse	Álvarez (2015); Chik (2015), Gruba & Clark (2013); Jee & Park (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	8	20.5%
Motivation	Brick (2011a); Brick (2013); Jee & Park (2009); Kétyi (2015); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	8	20.5%
Cultural exchange	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Harrison & Thomas (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Guikema (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	7	17.9%
Feedback	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); De Azevedo (2013); Gruba & Clark (2013); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	7	17.9%

Informal learning	Brick (2012); Chwo et al. (2012); Kétyi (2015); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	6	15.3%
Community learning	Brick (2013); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Jee & Park (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Guikema (2013)	5	12.8%
Formal learning	Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Malerba (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	5	12.8%
Identity	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012)	5	12.8%
Language Exchange	Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Guikema (2013)	5	12.8%
Peers' assistance/scaffolding	Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Liu et al. (2015)	5	12.8%
Social-constructivist learning	Clark & Gruba (2010); De Azevedo (2013); Harrison (2013); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2011)	5	12.8%
Authentic materials	Brick (2011a); Brick (2011b); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Gruba & Clark (2013)	4	10.2%
Ecology of languages	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Clark & Gruba (2010); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020)	4	10.2%
Effective learning	Brick (2011a); De Azevedo (2013); Kétyi (2015); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016)	4	10.2%
Engagement	Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Malerba (2012); Liu et al. (2015); Guikema (2013)	4	10.2%
Negotiation of meaning	Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Malerba (2011); Guikema (2013)	4	10.2%
Personal Learning Environment (PLE)	Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Malerba (2011)	4	10.2%
Real-life contexts	Clark & Gruba (2010); Liaw (2011); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	4	10.2%
Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	Brick (2011b); De Azevedo (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	4	10.2%
Active learning	Harrison (2013); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	3	7.6%
Basic skills	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	3	7.6%
Communicative experience	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Liaw (2011)	3	7.6%
Grammar exercises	Brick (2011a); Jee & Park (2009); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	3	7.6%
Impression management	Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Liaw (2011)	3	7.6%
Learner generated content	Malerba (2011); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	3	7.6%
Tandem learning	Brick (2011b); De Azevedo (2013); Lloyd (2012)	3	7.6%
TOTAL STUDIES		**39**	**100%**

Note: For space reasons, themes developed by less than three studies are not included in this table. An extended version can be found in Appendix XVI, covering the period from 2009 to 2022.

Table 3.4 shows a comprehensive list of topics related to research on LLSNS, with the first four on autonomy, collaboration, interaction and discourse, and motivation being the most investigated. Other relevant themes are feedback, interaction and discourse, cultural exchange, informal learning, identity, peers' assistance, and scaffolding, all of which relate to socio-cultural theory as indicated in Table 3.9. As previously stated, some of these issues concerning SFL will be discussed in section 3.4. The first category of LLSNS research refers to descriptive studies.

3.3.1 Descriptive Studies

Descriptive research primarily tends to evaluate the main pedagogical features of the

LLSNS studied and the role of the learners within the community. Therefore, the

investigations analysed in this thesis are summarised in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: LLSNS Investigated in Empirical Research

LLSNS	Research	Number of Research Studies	% of the Total of Studies
Livemocha	Álvarez & Fernández, (2019); Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Brick (2011b); Chwo et al. (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); De Azevedo (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2015); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	13	46%
Busuu	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Brick (2012); Brick (2013); Chik (2015); Kétyi (2015); Peckenpaugh (2018); Rosell-Aguilar (2018); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017)	10	30.7%
Livemocha and others	Gruba & Clark (2013); Liu et al. (2013); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	7	26.9%
Busuu and others	Gruba & Clark (2013); Liu et al. (2013); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	6	23%
Generic	Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Malerba (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	3	11.5%
Babbel and others	Gruba & Clark (2013); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	3	11.5%
Italki and others	Liu et al. (2015); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020)	2	7.6%
Palabea and others	Stevenson & Liu (2010); Pélissier & Qotb (2012)	2	7.6%
English café and others	Liu et al. (2013)	1	3.8%
Lang-8	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	3.8%
Lang-8 and others	Liu et al. (2015)	1	3.8%
LingQ and others	Liu et al. (2015)	1	3.8%
Polyglotclub and others	Liu et al. (2015)	1	3.8%
Wespeke	Guikema (2013)	1	3.8%
Not specified	Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	1	3.8%
TOTAL NUMBER OF LLSNS		**26**	**100%**

As indicated in Table 3.5, Livemocha (2007) was the very first LLSNS created in Web

2.0. Most research has been done on Livemocha (46%), Busuu (30.7%), and Lang-8 and

Wespeke in third place, with scarcely 3.8% of research on each one. Hence, to achieve a

broader overview of LLSNS, it is necessary to review both the quantitative and

qualitative studies.

3.3.2 Quantitative Studies and Qualitative Studies

Another perspective from which research about LLSNS has also been carried out

focuses on qualitative elements. Qualitative studies frequently combine mixed methods.

However, they can be considered mainly qualitative as they focus on students'

perceptions of online communities for L2 learning, the role played by learner autonomy,

the thematic analysis of learners' interactive discourse, and affordances and constraints

of the platform concerning pedagogical issues, among others. By contrast, quantitative

studies mainly focus on strengthening these communities' pedagogical design based on

the learners' needs. See Table 3.10 for a breakdown of the quantitative studies separate

from the qualitative investigations in this research.

Until now, this review of the research literature has summarised the different

publications related to research on LLSNS to understand how they adhere to theories of

SLA (RQ1). The 39 articles previously analysed, which constitute the core of this

research, are categorised in Tables 3.6–3.10.

Table 3.6: Distribution of Empirical Research about LLSNS in Books

Book Title	Number of Articles	Empirical study Author/s (year)
Lamy, M-N. & Zourou, K. (Eds.) (2013). *Social Networking for Language Education.* Palgrave MacMillan.	6	Gruba, & Clark (2013); Harrison (2013); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liu et al. (2013); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013).
Zou, B., Xing, M., Wang, Y., Sun, M., & Xiang, C.H. (Eds.) (2013). *Computer-Assisted Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Technological Advances.* IGI Global.	1	Orsini-Jones, M., Brick, B. and Pibworth, L. (2013).
Jones, R.H., Chik, A., & Hafner, C.A. (Eds.) (2015). Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age. Routledge.	1	Chik, A. (2015)
Cappellini, M., Lewis, T., & Mompean, A.R. (Eds.). (2017). *Learner Autonomy and Web 2.0.* Equinox Publishing.	1	Zourou, K., Potolia, A., & Zourou, F. (2017).
TOTAL	9	

Table 3.6 displays the distribution of empirical research into LLSNS in books. In the

first row, in the book edited by Lamy and Zourou (2013), six out of ten chapters were

strictly devoted to LLSNS. The other four are related to SNS, such as Facebook,

SecondLife, online reading groups, and blogs.

In the second row, in the book edited by Zou et al. (2013), only one chapter was

dedicated to research on LLSNS. In the third row, in the book edited by Jones, Chik,

and Hafner (2015), one chapter was devoted to Duolingo and Busuu. Finally, in the

book edited by Cappellini, Lewis, and Mompean (2017), one further chapter was

dedicated to research on LLSNS, totalling nine chapters in three books. By contrast,

Table 3.7 provides an overview of the distribution of empirical research in journals.

Table 3.7: Distribution of Empirical Research about LLSNS in Journals

No.	Journal Title	Number of Articles	Empirical Study Authors (Year)
1	Conference proceedings	7	Chwo et al. (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); Kétyi (2015); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015)
2	*Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium* (*CALICO*)	4	Jee & Park (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Guikema (2013); Stevenson & Liu (2010); Winans (2020)
3	Internet repositories	3	Andriani (2013); Brick (2013); De Azevedo (2013)
4	*Apprentissage des langues est systèmes d'information et de Communication* (*ALSIC*)	2	Lloyd (2012); Pélissier & Qotb (2012)
5	*Computer Assisted Language Learning*	2	Álvarez (2015); Rosell-Aguilar (2018)
6	*Compass: The Journal of Learning and Teaching at the University of Greenwich*	1	Brick (2011a)
7	*Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German. A Journal of the American Association of Teachers of German*	1	Peckenpaugh (2018)
8	*International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (*IJCALLT*)	1	Brick (2012)
9	*International Journal of Emerging Technologies & Society*	1	Harrison & Thomas (2009)
10	*International Journal of Social Media and Interactive Learning Environments*	1	Ngo & Eichelberger (2020)
11	*International Journal of Virtual and Personal Learning Environments* (*IJVPLE*)	1	Brick, B. (2011b)
12	*Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*	1	Álvarez & Fernández (2019)
13	*Language Learning & Technology*	1	Liaw (2011)
14	*Signo y Pensamiento*	1	Álvarez (2016)
15	*Studies in Self-Access Learning Journal*	1	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)
	TOTAL	**27**	

Updated from Saona-Vallejos and Thomas (2020).

Table 3.7 shows that 25.9% of the empirical research in journals originated in

conferences; 14.8% was published via *Computer-Assisted Language Instruction*

Consortium (*CALICO*), a journal devoted to research and development of technology in

SLA; and at least 11% was found in internet repositories, while the others were found

via other means of publication.

Table 3.8, furthermore, shows the target languages used in the empirical

research.

Table 3.8: Target Language(s) Investigated in Empirical Research about LLSNS

Target Language	Study	Number of Studies	% of the Total of Studies
Not specified	Brick (2011a); Brick (2011b); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Pélissier & Qotb (2012); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liaw (2011); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Guikema (2013); Stevenson & Liu (2010); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017);	17	43.5%
EFL/ESL	Álvarez & Fernández (2019); Andriani (2013); Chwo et al. (2012); Jee & Park (2009); Kétyi (2015); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2012); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020); Winans (2020)	10	25.6%
Spanish/SFL	Chik (2015), Gruba & Clark (2013); Kétyi (2015); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Lloyd (2012); Peckenpaugh (2018); Rosell-Aguilar (2018); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016); Winans (2020)	10	25.6%
Multiple Languages	Gruba & Clark (2013); Kétyi (2015); Malerba (2012); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Lloyd (2012)	5	12.8%
German	Brick (2012); Brick (2013); Kétyi (2015)	3	7.7%
French	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Lloyd (2012)	3	7.7%
Italian	Chik (2015), Malerba (2012); Kétyi (2015)	3	7.7%
Portuguese	De Azevedo (2013); Lloyd (2012)	2	5.1%
Korean	Clark & Gruba (2010); Gruba & Clark (2013)	2	5.1%
Japanese	Gruba & Clark (2013)	1	2.6%
Dutch	Lloyd (2012)	1	2.6%
Russian	Lloyd (2012)	1	2.6%
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDIES		**39**	**100%**

Table 3.8 shows how, out of 39 studies, English (25.6%) is still the language primarily

studied when researching LLSNS; which is followed by Spanish with the same

percentage (25.6%), while other studies focused on multiple languages represent 12.8%;

French, German, and Italian share 7.7% of research each; Portuguese and Korean share

5.1% each; and Japanese, Dutch, and Russian, 2.6% each. Finally, it is necessary to

clarify that from the ten articles focused on SFL, nine were combined with other MFLs,

and only Vesselinov and Grego's (2016) paper focused strictly on SFL. Table 3.8 also

shows that 43.5% of the researchers allowed the participants of their studies to select the

language they wanted to improve through the LLSNS without indicating the language

they finally chose.

By contrast, Table 3.9 shows the theoretical frameworks of socio-cultural theory,

socio-constructivism, and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, all indispensable

for every LLSNS and the most cited when researching LLSNS. At the same time,

almost 18% of these studies do not mention any theoretical framework.

Table 3.9: Theoretical Frameworks of the Empirical Research about LLSNS

Theoretical Framework	Study	Number of Studies	% of the Total of Studies
Socio-cultural theory	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Brick (2011b); Chwo et al. (2012); Gruba & Clark (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liu et al. (2013); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	15	38.4%
Social constructivism	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Brick (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); De Azevedo (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2011); Rosell-Aguilar (2018); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017)	13	33.3%
Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development	Gruba & Clark (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2015);	7	17.9%
No identifiable theoretical framework	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Kétyi (2015); Liaw (2011); Guikema (2013); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016)	7	17.9%
Community of practice	Álvarez (2015); Brick (2013); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Pélissier & Qotb (2012)	4	10.2%
Ecologies of learning and teaching	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Clark & Gruba (2010); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020)	4	10.2%
Social interactionism	De Azevedo (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009);	3	7.6%
More Knowledgeable Other	Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009);	2	5.1%
Social Cognitive Theory	Harrison & Thomas (2009); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013);	2	5.1%
Behaviourism	Álvarez (2016); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011)	2	5.1%
Usability Testing	Liu et al. (2015); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	2	5.1%
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDIES		**39**	**100%**

Note: For space reasons, themes only developed by one study are not included in this table. An extended
version of this table can be found in Appendix XVII.

Table 3.10: Methodological Approaches Used in Empirical Research Regarding LLSNS

Methodological Issues	Categories		Studies	Number of Studies	% of the Total of Studies
Research Approach	Qualitative	Case study	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Brick (2011b); Brick (2013); Clark & Gruba (2010); De Azevedo (2013); Gruba & Clark (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	14	35.8%
		Non-case study	Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liaw (2011); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	7	17.9%
	Quantitative	Descriptive	Brick (2012); Liu et al. (2013); Rosell-Aguilar (2018);	3	7.6%
		Experimental	Kétyi (2015); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016)	2	5.1%
	Mixed methods		Andriani (2013); Brick (2012); Chwo et al. (2012); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017)	9	23%
Participants	No participants		Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liaw (2011); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	8	20.5%
	Not specified		Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
	Auto-ethnographic		Álvarez (2015); Chik (2015), Clark & Gruba (2010); Gruba & Clark (2013)	4	8.3%
	General public		De Azevedo (2013); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020); Rosell-Aguilar (2018); Stevenson & Liu (2010); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017)	8	20.5%
	University students		Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Andriani (2013); Brick (2011b); Brick (2012); Brick (2013); Chwo et al. (2012); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Kétyi (2015); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Lloyd (2012); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	13	33.3%
	Teachers		Álvarez (2015); Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); Gruba & Clark (2013); Liu et al. (2015)	6	15.3%
Sampling	Inexistent. Theoretical Studies		Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liaw (2011); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	8	20.5%
	Not specified		Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
	Convenience sampling		Álvarez (2015); Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Andriani (2013); Brick (2011b); Brick (2012); Brick (2013); Chwo et al. (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); Gruba & Clark (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Kétyi (2015); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Lloyd (2012); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Stevenson & Liu (2010) ; Vesselinov & Grego, (2016);	18	46.1%
	Purposeful sampling		Malerba (2012); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017)	3	7.6%
	Random sampling		De Azevedo (2013); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Rosell-Aguilar (2018); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	5	12.8%
Duration	Not specified		Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); De Azevedo (2013); Gruba & Clark (2013); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liaw (2011); Liu et al. (2015); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017)	15	38.4%
	≤ 1 month		Andriani (2013); Rosell-Aguilar (2018); Stevenson & Liu (2010);	3	7.6%
	> 1 month < 3 months		Álvarez (2015); Brick (2013); Kétyi (2015); Lloyd (2012); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016);	5	12.8%
	≥ 3 months		Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Brick (2011b); Brick (2012); Chwo et al. (2012); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Liu et al. (2013); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	8	20.5%
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDIES				**39**	**100%**

Table 3.10 focuses on the methodological approaches used in empirical research regarding LLSNS; it shows that almost 36% of the research available is qualitative and based on case studies. At the same time, half of them are non-case studies. Only 12.7% are quantitative studies, of which 7.6% are descriptive, and 5.1% are experimental. 23% followed a mixed-methods approach.

By contrast, when referring to participants in those studies, 33.3% were university students, and this percentage increases to 46% when studies using convenience sampling are included. Furthermore, 15.3% are focused on teachers' opinions more than learners', and 20.5% have included members of the general public. Finally, 20.5% of the studies were done without participants because they were descriptive or theoretical.

Concerning the duration of these studies, 38.4% did not define the time the investigation lasted, while 20.5% specified a minimum period of study of three months. Another 12.8% lasted between one and three months, and only 7.6% lasted for less than a month.

3.4 LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

While Table 3.8 showed that 10 out of 39 studies referred to SFL, only one of those studies was strictly focused on SFL. Furthermore, as LLSNS are in a state of constant change, the findings of these investigations were valid at the moment they took place, but a great deal has occurred since they were published in terms of the technologies available and used. Therefore, to understand the context better, it is essential to systematically explore the studies on SFL.

Lloyd (2012) investigated the willingness of language learners to communicate through Livemocha. This case study suggested that LLSNS such as Livemocha could

have helped enable some continuity between formal and informal learning contexts. Gruba and Clark (2013) focused on formative assessment within LLSNS. As SFL learners, the researchers found that their beginner language skills were insufficient to interact with native speakers, concluding that their lack of motivation originated from their false expectations of having more favourable interactions in the LLSNS.

Orsini-Jones, Brick, and Pibworth (2013) reflected on practising language interaction via LLSNS from the perspective of expert students (future EFL teachers) on personalised language learning. They found that interaction was almost non-existent in the LLSNS' practical activities, which followed the stimulus–response–reinforcement CALL tradition, and were drill-based multiple-choice questions and matching activities. Thus, there was an evident contradiction within those social–collaborative settings, "as their 'hard-sell' is social-collaboration" (Orsini-Jones, Brick, & Pibworth, 2013, p. 49). They had included ultramodern collaborative tools and provisions into their sites, but their materials reverted "to the most traditional and least pedagogically founded language teaching and learning practice approaches" (ibid.).

Chik (2015) dedicated a chapter to recreational language learning and digital practices, focusing on positioning and repositioning. She preferred to use the notion of "positions" instead of "roles" to understand discourse. From her viewpoint, when learners joined a Busuu lesson, they were positioned as part of the company's business operations first, before being considered members of a learning community as advertised on the Busuu homepage. The site's architecture was designed to position Busuu users as consumers of either Busuu or third-party products or services through advertising. Furthermore, members were constantly reminded to upgrade to become premium members.

Kétyi (2015) focused on a practical evaluation of Busuu in higher education. His exploration showed that Busuu and other language learning apps were unknown and still new to the students at the period the research was carried out. In the end, the findings showed that at least 29% of participants were not satisfied with the experience, while 15% were satisfied, and the vast majority (57%) considered Busuu mildly helpful.

Malerba's PhD thesis (2015) focused on social networking in MFL, specifically on informal online interactions in Livemocha and Busuu between English, Italian, and Spanish students. Her findings empirically confirmed a decline in learners' participation within the platforms over time due to inherent incongruities in the design of the LLSNS.

Vesselinov and Grego's paper (2016) is the only study strictly focusing on SFL. It explores 144 autonomous learners who used Busuu for two months, with pre- and post-tests used as assessments. After the research period, "84% of participants had improved their written proficiency, and 75% had improved their oral proficiency" (Vesselinov & Grego, 2016, p. 27). The researchers concluded that, on average, Busuu users would need 22.5 hours of study to cover the requirements for one college semester of Spanish (ibid.).

Peckenpaugh (2018) wrote a software review article centred on Busuu about the evaluation made by the students at an American university: 81.6% of students considered that Busuu helped them with class participation, 89.2% agreed they better understood grammar concepts, and 63.2% claimed that Busuu helped them improve oral proficiency.

Rosell-Aguilar (2018) set up a survey to evaluate the Busuu app by autonomous users learning different MFLs. The participants' highest expectation when they downloaded it was to boost their speaking skills (this was chosen by 15.6% of respondents), followed by listening skills (13.6%), reading (11.5%), and writing

(11.1%). The fifth general expectation (10.8%) was to achieve fluency in the language, coinciding with improving vocabulary (10.8%), grammar (9.8%), and translation skills (8.6%). Curiously for an LLSNS, the last expectation was to meet people to practise the language (6.3%). Finally, when asked to select the area where participants considered they had improved the most, 27.7% chose vocabulary; followed by speaking (16.2%), listening (12.9%), grammar (11.1%), reading (8.6%), writing (7.6%), pronunciation (6.8%) and translation (3.9%). A further 5.1% of respondents selected "none." It is necessary to highlight the 11.5% difference between vocabulary (first improvement) and speaking (second improvement), as the latter is usually the skill mostly sought-after by LLSNS users.

To date, the latest learning technology review on Busuu is by Winans (2020). It was a generic review, although it mentioned some valuable insights referring to SFL. For example, the reviewer underlined that language and cultures are seen as inseparable from socio-cultural perspectives, so blanket assertions and the privileging of standard dialects misses opportunities to develop intercultural competence. Winans also mentioned the McGraw-Hill Education Certificates that Busuu currently provides its users for every level finished. However, he also added that the tests are short and not comprehensive, and they do not demand any speaking, so it is difficult to match a user's achievement to a CEFR level reliably. That said, the tests are available for premium subscribers only.

None of the ten studies previously summarised has focused on the intersection of LLSNS, SFL, TSLT, and BLL and still less on the development of SFL language skills, which is the gap this thesis aims to fill. After reviewing TBLT in section 2.3.6.2 and LLSNS in section 3.4, blended language learning will be explained in section 3.5.

3.5 BLENDED LANGUAGE LEARNING

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 showed how the research on LLSNS has been developed. However, little research has been conducted on the intersection of LLSNS and BLL (Malerba, 2015; Peckenpaugh, 2018).

Blended learning is defined as "a combination of face-to-face and online learning instructional models" (Anderson, 2021, p. 3). Focusing specifically on BLL, Anderson (2021) noted that "it refers primarily to combined classroom and online instruction" (ibid.).

Given the combination, Pima et al. (2018) argued that blended learning counterbalances the hindrances of face-to-face and online learning models. Furthermore, given the progression in web technology (Acikgul & Firat, 2021), BLL has become one of the most common models of instruction in higher education worldwide (Mizza & Rubio, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has simply accelerated the process of adopting the online and blended learning models across all educational levels (Godwin-Jones 2020).

3.5.1 Definition

Most researchers define blended learning as the mixing of traditional, offline, face-to-face learning, and online, self-paced learning (Bowyer & Chambers, 2017; Hinkelman, 2018; Hockly, 2018; Geng et al., 2019). Alternatively, for this research, as it is the most comprehensive, Casebourne's (2017) definition is going to be followed, which considers blended learning as a mix of approaches to learning supported by technology, aimed at mastering a technique (in this case, speaking a foreign language) as thoroughly and efficiently as possible.

Among these approaches included in blended learning, Bates (2017) mentioned technology-enhanced learning; the use of a Learning Managing System for storing

educational materials and online discussions; lectures captured for flipped classrooms; some semesters on campus, with others online; some hands-on experience related to the studied assignment (the "year abroad" scheme required by some universities to their students studying foreign languages); and hybrid or flexible learning, when students have to attend lessons at the school for specific face-to-face teaching, such as laboratories or hands-on projects that cannot be performed suitably online.

3.5.2 Background

Casebourne (2017) identified the roots of blended learning in the first distance or correspondence courses of the 19th Century. Yalçinkaya (2015) pointed out that instructional design has a long history of blending classroom work with homework, reading assignments, audiovisual media, laboratories, and field trips; adding that the novelty of current blended learning is the practical modalities of online synchronous and asynchronous activities available, together with "technology-based instructional methods which can now be added to the mix" (Yalçinkaya, 2015, p. 1064).

3.5.3 Main Benefits of Blended Language Learning

Yalçinkaya (2015) mentioned these benefits for blended learning in MFL: it provides learners with independence from place and time; it promotes autonomous and flexible learning; it allows students to be in contact with their peers; different knowledge at the beginning of a course can be equalised individually without restraining other students; the activities can be worked on in a more balanced way, for instance, intensive exercises such as writing or grammar can be organised as home tasks, allowing learners to proceed according to their own pace; teachers can supervise and assess the students' improvement during the face-to-face sessions.

According to Klimova (2015), the main reasons why blended learning should be used in teaching are as follows: it promotes collaborative learning; students or educators

can work together on some projects 24/7 from anywhere; hence, it contributes to pedagogy because it fosters more interactive strategies, not only face-to-face teaching; it intensifies intercultural awareness since it gathers researchers, educators, and students around the world; it decreases the costs of teaching and learning as students do not have to travel to attend lessons, and it might match different students' learning styles. Anderson (2021) synthesised these ideas, pointing out blended learning's flexibility to adapt contents to learners' needs, referring to time, place, and pace, including socialisation, interaction, and active learning opportunities.

More accurately, Casebourne (2017) listed the following benefits of blended learning. First, it constitutes multi-mode and media learning, meaning specifically that a well-executed, narrated, and animated process is intuitively much easier to understand and follow than a PowerPoint, and it can be rewound at any point of confusion. Second, it is vital to allow learners to practice what they learn in a safe environment before performing in real situations. Third, blended learning courses can be designed to fit very busy people's lives with tailored modular activities; consequently, learners' time is provided more effectively. In addition, learning should not be a one-time event; instead, it should be approached as an integral part of the lifelong learning journey. Fourth, blended learning allows scaffolding in learners' journeys, increasing reach and take-up. Moreover, blended learning helps combat the forgetting curve by spacing and practising over time to learn more efficiently and remember better. In conclusion, blended learning implies an improved transfer of learning, as learners can practise what has been learnt in real environments.

Hence, the contents of the lessons available in LLSNS follow a mixture of some of the features previously mentioned: they propose some guidelines to follow a modular content in a suggested order to be consumed in short periods, over time. For example,

Busuu proposes 10-minute slots: little content, in a short period, but several times. They also encourage learners to revisit activities to refresh their memory. Therefore, students learn quickly and remember better. However, such LLSNS will work best as complementary tools in a blended learning context and under a teacher's guidance.

Anderson (2021) considers the benefit of BLL as the ability to include any combination of face-to-face, online asynchronous, and online synchronous components to support pedagogical objectives and satisfy learner needs, searching also for the improvement of pedagogy, an increase of students' access to courses, and reduction of costs. The final goal of blended learning is to complement, rather than fully replace, the lessons that the instructor or course designer chooses to keep in the face-to-face mode.

3.5.4 Disadvantages of Blended Language Learning

Naturally, a blended learning environment has also some disadvantages. Regarding drawbacks, Chen and Lu (2013) started by mentioning the confusion some scholars still have about the concept of blended learning. Consequently, there is an additional workload for teachers and students; it may be challenging for teachers to choose the most suitable teaching mode and control the proportion of face-to-face and online learning, while for the students, there is an increment in the cognitive load. Furthermore, blended learning may not be suitable for some students' learning styles, and there is a cost implication of additional electronic resources. A third disadvantage mentioned is the quality of e-resources; quality and interaction with the resources should prevail more than quantity. Finally, adding to all these hindrances, it might also be considered a far-reaching, over-diversified assessment of the students' work involving classroom performance, examinations, online discussions and quizzes, and this could incentivise plagiarism.

Anderson (2021) best synthesised the challenges of blended language learning: the need to motivate learners to work independently, the additional time required for instructors to provide feedback on online work, and the new mindset needed to create valuable activities that make the best use of both face-to-face and online modalities. However, she also added the most critical hurdle to implementing blended learning, namely, course designers, instructors, and students must be supported during this process. The same financial challenges that may cause institutions to turn to digital solutions may inhibit their ability to provide training, grants, graders, tutors, and course release time (Anderson, 2021).

In relation to the challenges and disadvantages of BL, it is essential to mention how to create effective BLL courses, such as the one implemented for SFL beginners in this thesis. Mizza and Rubio (2020) recommend starting with a rationale for implementing blended learning in a language course, continuing with a road map for its design and redesign, and considering the role of the stakeholders in the decision-making process for BLL adoption. Furthermore, as the foundation of BLL, it is necessary to differentiate between the blend, the blending process, and the blended path, taking into account the theories of learning, the factors central to BL, and SLA principles.

Furthermore, during the design phase, it is fundamental to start with a needs analysis before programming the course goals, teaching objectives, and learning outcomes. Then, in the build phase, it is recommended to review the organisational structure of the BLL course before creating its activities and tasks, focusing on the teaching phase that will have to determine the set of practices with the highest impact on students' learning. Finally, the process will conclude with the revising phase, assessing and evaluating the corresponding blended language course's effectiveness through the tasks' authenticity (Mizza & Rubio, 2020).

Anderson (2021) summarises the process of obtaining a successful BLL course, suggesting combining social activities and critical thinking with the affordances of technology. She highlighted the substantial challenge in low-level courses concerning acquiring all basic skills.

No matter what the level of the learners, in every case, it is necessary to provide the students with training in the use of technologies for their blended learning courses, as a study carried out by Lai, Shum, and Tian (2016) corroborated. This training program on using technology for language learning effectively induced a higher frequency of self-directed use of technology. In addition, it promoted a greater willingness alongside a more substantial knowledge and skill base in support of such learning behaviours.

In the same sense, Pulker and Vialleton (2015) pointed out the vast measure of self-discipline needed from the learners as an additional requirement for the success of BL. Furthermore, the most crucial individual achievement criterion is the student's drive to learn. Therefore, educational institutions should divert their energy from reaching out to students and maintaining their initial motivation instead of focusing predominantly on teaching.

3.6 BLENDED LANGUAGE LEARNING AND SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Except for Comas-Quinn's article (2011) focused on training teachers to teach Spanish blended courses, research on BLL in Spain and the UK is almost non-existent. There has, however, been a significant amount of investigation into the intersection of blended learning and SFL in the United States, which is valuable for the UK context.

According to Campbell and Sarac (2017), between 1999 and 2010, the US National Center for Academic Transformation funded a series of projects in a variety of disciplines, one being Spanish, aimed at converting face-to-face (F2F) curricula to a

blended form of delivery. Feedback on the blended curricula was positive, as evidenced by findings from studies such as those at Carnegie Mellon (Campbell & Sarac, 2017).

Thoms (2020) stated that little effort had been made to measure the increasing number of online language learning courses in the USA until the publication of his research. One exception was the study by Murphy-Judy and Johnshoy (2017), which gathered data on online MFL instruction in post-secondary institutions in the USA. They found that the main language was Spanish, and the predominant tuition was the four-year public institution. Most importantly, they established that online language learning expanded particularly as a result of Web 2.0 technologies. Thoms (2020) concluded that the trend of online course supply across US educational institutions continues to expand, leading to an increased number of L2 hybrid and online courses to be produced over time.

The research found in the intersection of BLL and SFL can be classified into four categories: language skills, learner perceptions, learner autonomy, and instructor-related aspects; all can be related to language learning social networking sites.

3.6.1 Language Skills

Regarding linguistic development (language skills), comparative research on learning results in presence-based and online or hybrid courses have been mixed. For example, Young (2008) did not find relevant differences between two groups enrolled in hybrid and F2F Spanish courses of university-level students for a semester. Her study measured the learning outcomes in the four basic skills (e.g., speaking, writing, listening, and reading). She discovered slight differences concerning their linguistic improvements.

Likewise, Blake et al. (2008) examined the case of Spanish Without Walls, a freshers language course provided at a US university in distance-learning and hybrid

formats. The SWW syllabus comprised materials provided via CD-ROM/DVD programs, online content-based web pages, and synchronous bimodal chat encompassing text and sound. The benefits of each of those components were assessed. To measure the participants' oral skills, the authors compared the data from distance-learning and classroom students who took the 20 minute Versant for SFL test, which was delivered by phone and automatically graded (Blake et al., 2008). The data obtained showed that during their first year of study, distance, hybrid, and classroom MFL learners reached similar levels of oral proficiency.

Similarly, Thoms (2012) measured learners' speaking and writing improvements in two university-level on-site and hybrid Spanish language courses. Concerning students' speaking skills, the researcher concluded that participants enrolled in the hybrid section experienced similar results to those registered in the traditional section of the same course. However, the ones in the hybrid scheme developed more significant improvements in their writing skills through the semester than the students registered in the in-person course.

Gleason (2013) found that some timid students may feel more confident speaking up in online lessons instead of the traditional classroom. In addition, the anonymity of the online groups may imply support for more reserved personality types to enhance their engagement in online class forums. Finally, these results showed that the online lessons might also influence their in-class lessons, boosting students' confidence to speak up in person.

Similar to Blake et al. (2008), Burke Moneypenny and Aldrich (2016) also utilised the Versant Spanish assessment tool to compare undergraduate students' oral proficiency in online and in-person Spanish courses at the end of a two-semester introductory Spanish unit. It assessed participants' vocabulary, sentence formation,

pronunciation, and fluency as oral proficiency elements. As in previous studies, the results showed no statistically significant differences between the two groups of students. Furthermore, they concluded that students in online MFL lessons can achieve equal proficiency skills compared to students who attend exclusively face-to-face lessons.

Likewise, Rubio (2012) analysed differences in oral proficiency progress between students in a presence-based SFL course and learners enrolled in a hybrid version of the same lessons. He did not find any relevant discrepancies between the two cohorts of learners on a holistic level. However, he found profound differences between both groups when conducting deeper analyses of proficiency figures, such as the degrees of accuracy, lexical diversity, and syntactic complexity. As most of the research in BLL compares the effects of different learning environments for one academic year maximum, Rubio (2012) concluded by suggesting to study the effects of longer-term exposure to BLL contexts.

Researchers have predominantly focused on various challenges with MFL hybrid and online course environments (Thoms, 2020). However, in their research, Romeo et al. (2017) found that teachers and students emphasised the significance of F2F interaction in MFL lessons and viewed in-person communication more positively than interaction via technology. When asked about the most efficient components of their SFL lessons, whether technology-related or not, most students referred to F2F interaction. Learners automatically asserted that "actual face-to-face communication is irreplaceable" and "the most helpful thing is speaking to people because I would not do it outside." (Romeo et al., 2017, p. 688). Participants added, "trying to express more complicated ideas with other people who are also learning but also willing to correct me or ask if they don't understand what I'm saying has been super helpful." (ibid.).

Aldrich and Burke Moneypenny (2019) assessed Spanish students' oral proficiency once they fulfilled one year of exclusively online MFL lessons. When finished year one, 65 learners took the Versant exam, which reflected their oral proficiency level, and four sub-sections: vocabulary production, sentence formation, pronunciation, and fluency. Researchers found that 40% of online Spanish learners met the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' benchmark of Intermediate–Low (equivalent to A2 CEFR), while 49% achieved Novice–High (A1 CEFR), one level beneath the benchmark. According to the researchers, most participants also met the benchmark for fluency and pronunciation, but not for vocabulary production or sentence formation. Furthermore, these results established the possibility of reaching benchmarks by learners enrolled only in online SFL lessons. Hence, they concluded that online language students could and should be accountable to the same oral proficiency principles as their peers in physical lessons.

Moreno and Malovrh (2020) measured the effects of a flipped and blended course structure for beginner-level SFL on the four skills (writing, speaking, listening, and reading) which was contrasted with a control group that followed a traditional present–practice–produce (P–P–P) teaching approach. Hence, compared with the control group, results of a pre/post-test design showed that two experimental cohorts that met four days per week only in the classroom and which followed flipped-blended course work and met three days per week in the classroom achieved the same pace in receptive skills and more so in productive skills.

The second category of research found in the intersection of blended language learning and Spanish as a foreign language refers to the learners' perceptions; research that can also be correlated to language learning social networking sites.

3.6.2 Learners' Perceptions

Students' surveys are the most frequently utilised data collection tool concerning learner satisfaction. According to Grgurovic (2017), different researchers have concluded that students were pleased with their blended courses. For instance, Jochum (2011) found that 91% of students reported satisfaction, while Scida and Saury (2006) measured 94% with SFL blended instruction. Likewise, Sagarra and Zapata (2008) reported that 75% of learners wanted to take another blended SFL course. Finally, in Murday et al. (2008), the last students' satisfaction survey showed that participants in blended lessons revealed their levels of satisfaction to be higher compared to offline learners over time.

The main reason cited by students for choosing blended courses was flexibility (Grgurovic, 2017). As an illustration, Goertler et al. (2012) found that 70% of students liked the decrease in face-to-face contact hours from every working day to three days a week. Similarly, the reduced class timetable was the central explanation for students enrolled in that course (Murday et al. 2008). Likewise, Scida and Saury (2006) concluded that blended lessons were preferred to five-day non-blended and online courses.

According to Rubio et al. (2018), since introducing blended courses in the elementary SFL curriculum at an American university, the department offered both options to students simultaneously. For years, an end-of-semester students' satisfaction survey had consistently revealed a predisposition to the blended format, which was the reason for the courses chosen for their research. In addition, students who registered for the blended sections of that subject in the Spring 2016 semester appraised their learning experience and their general impressions of the course and the teacher more positively.

Grgurovic (2017) highlighted that positive or negative precedent technology experiences might bias learners to enrol in a blended class regarding readiness to take

blended classes. She added that students justified their fear that online instruction would restrain them from face-to-face communication, impacting the development of their oral skills. However, as previously seen in section 3.6.1, on the contrary, Gleason (2013) showed that online speaking practice encouraged timid students to increase engagement in the face-to-face section of the lessons.

The third category of research found in the intersection of blended language learning and Spanish as a foreign language in the USA refers to learner autonomy, a topic widely correlated to language learning social networking sites (see Table 3.4).

3.6.3 Learner Autonomy

Thoms (2020) pointed out that a recent area of research interest is how MFL hybrid and online course settings affect learner autonomy. For instance, Lee (2016) focused on how and whether task-based instruction in online SFL courses, delivered utilising digital tools and teacher scaffolding, enhanced students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning. She discovered that a combination of guided teacher questions/scaffolded "boost learner autonomy in a meaningful and productive way" (Lee, 2016, p. 94). Lai (2019) added that technological settings redefine the nature of learner's autonomy, mainly via social technologies (e.g., social media, SNS, LLSNS). Through social technologies, learner autonomy can help to enhance the agency of one's own learning and contribute to others' learning. As she put it,

> *Autonomy in online collaborative spaces is indispensable of social mediation: sharing user-generated contents and personal experiences; acknowledging each other's presence, contributions, and efforts; motivating each other and supporting each other emotionally, and enjoying the online collaboration.* (Lai, 2019, p. 54).

As Thoms (2020) concluded, research in this field surmises that MFL hybrid and online course settings foster learner autonomy. The fourth and last category of research found in the intersection of blended language learning and Spanish as a foreign language in the

USA refers to the instructor-related aspects; research that can also be correlated to language learning social networking sites

3.6.4 Instructor-Related Aspects

Thoms (2020) also supported the view that a teacher's presence (or absence) in online MFL lessons can play an essential role for learners and their online-based language learning experiences. For example, he pinpointed that, even in virtual environments, "students still need recognition and guidance, especially for corrective feedback" (Thoms, 2020, p. 90), confirming previous research which stated that teachers are needed to drive the CALL process (Jones, 2001), and independent learners using CALL do require support (Reinders, 2010). Furthermore, Rubio et al. (2018), when investigating the features of teaching presence and classroom instruction in presence-based and hybrid elementary SFL lessons, discovered that in the hybrid environment, the approach was less teacher-centred. They also added that it involved less time dedicated to course organisation issues as learners took a more active role in their learning. However, from my personal experience as an SFL tutor in an English university, I would say that in online settings, the teachers need to dedicate even more time than in traditional settings reminding the students about assessment deadlines, for example.

To summarise, Thoms (2020) underlined that some researchers in this area are centred on the multiple benefits and hindrances of learning and teaching in MFL hybrid and online courses without comparing experiences in presence-based courses. More importantly, he highlighted that many of the studies mentioned above are based on socio-cultural or ecological viewpoints on L2 learning (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; van Lier, 2004). Hence, the current stage of CALL has evolved into an ecological phase by implying that "this more encompassing view of language acquisition goes beyond

classroom walls, as do technologies that can be accessed anytime and anywhere" (Chun, 2016, p. 106). As Bax (2003, 2011) suggested, CALL and teaching beyond a bricks-and-mortar classroom are becoming more normalised (Goertler, 2011) as Web 2.0 tools and applications have proliferated, and the interest in social and collaborative viewpoints on L2 acquisition have increased (Thoms, 2020).

Finally, according to Campbell and Sarac (2017), some language learning companies in the USA offer blended courses for the K–16 levels (e.g., Heinle Cengage, Middlebury Interactive, and Vista Higher Learning). iLrn Heinle Learning Center is "an all-in-one course management system developed to engage students and elevate thinking through listening, speaking, reading, and contextualised writing activities" (iLrn, 2015, n.p.). Middlebury Interactive Language curricula include activities grounded in real-life scenarios that incorporate "immersive gaming, social networking and multimedia interactive learning" (Middlebury Interactive website, n.d.). Vista Higher Learning produces pedagogically sound blended courses, such as the Intermediate Spanish program, Enlaces, organised around US national standards by exploiting authentic materials.

After summarising the research available on the intersection of blended language learning and Spanish as a foreign language, this thesis will explain how blended language learning is used in this thesis.

3.7 BLENDED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THIS THESIS

Concerning the blended aspect of the course design used in this thesis (section 4.11.3), Hinkelman's (2018) proposal was used. This is an ecological approach in which teaching devices are not at the centre, nor are they mere aids, but rather a part of complex classroom/online ecologies that the teacher configures in a local situation. Hence, an ecological metaphor interconnects all psychological, social, and

environmental factors and focuses on affordances in the environment, fostering learning "emergence" (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 74).

Most of the research on CALL and language skills focuses on the influence of devices/software and how they may improve the language learning results, comparing BLL environments with control groups and measuring results. As previously synthesised (in section 3.6), for example, see the studies by Gleason (2013), Moreno and Malovrh (2020), and Romeo et al. (2017). Furthermore, LLSNS are not explicitly mentioned in Godwin-Jones' (2020) research. However, the author emphasised the importance of language exchanges in a blended learning environment with target language speakers beyond the classroom. They provide a real-world, non-academic, communicative context, offering opportunities for pragmatic language use and insights into different cultural orientations.

The ideas of blended learning and a porous classroom also relate to learner autonomy, a concept closely associated with self-access or autonomy. However, teachers are needed to drive the CALL process (Jones, 2001). Therefore, independent learners using CALL require support (Reinders, 2010); specifically, "students still need recognition and guidance, especially corrective feedback" (Thoms, 2020, p. 90). Those previous conclusions are tightly connected to what Gruba and Clark (2013) determined, as autonomous learners without a teacher guiding their learning process; their "beginner" language skills were insufficient to meet the interactional demands of native speakers, concluding that their absolute lack of motivation lay in their false expectations of having more favourable interactions in the LLSNS.

3.8 SUMMARY

This chapter has reviewed research literature on LLSNS and BLL, particularly in relation to Spanish as a foreign language. A clear research gap in the intersection of the three areas was found, particularly when referring to LLSNS/SFL and BLL/SFL.

As regards LLSNS, it was found that none of the published research has explicitly focused on using them as tools to develop SFL speaking skills via BLL. Hence, this thesis fills the gap through the intersection of LLSNS using TSLT and BLL. Now that the three main areas of the research have been explored in the literature, Chapter 4 turns to explain the methodology underpinning the study at the heart of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methodology underpinning the research study designed for this thesis. First, it starts by outlining the exploratory [QUAL→quan] research design adopted and the rationale for its use. Second, the study's mainly abductive research strategy is explored in relation to the pilot studies and main study. Third, it sets out the institutional context and provides information about the participants, sampling, ethics procedures, the data collection instruments, the analysis of the data obtained, and their reliability. Following this methodology chapter, Chapters 5 and 6 outline the study's findings and Chapter 7 presents an analysis of the main research questions (RQs).

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

There are two RQs in this thesis:

1. What theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) do Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS) adhere to?
2. How do the features of LLSNS develop Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) learning skills?

Blaikie and Priest (2019) suggested that once a set of research questions has been established, the next step is to design appropriate research strategies. Blaikie and Priest proposed four main approaches: inductive, deductive, retroductive, and abductive, and highlighted that each of these strategies has connections with specific philosophical and theoretical traditions, and that they can be used alone or in combination with each other.

The inductive strategy elaborates concepts from observations of identified events; it begins with an individual or specific statement and finishes with general or universal hypotheses. According to Blaikie and Priest (2019), this strategy follows four main phases: first, all facts are observed and accounted for without identifying their

potential importance. Second, these facts are assessed, compared, and categorised without using propositions. Third, from this examination, generalisations are experimentally drawn as to connections between the facts, and finally, these hypotheses are subjected to broader testing.

The deductive strategy commences explicitly with a provisional hypothesis or group of hypotheses that sets out a theory that could answer or explain a specific issue, and then continues to observe the testing of the hypotheses. Blaikie and Priest (2019) explained that the task of this strategy is to test each theory by obtaining hypotheses from it and then collecting relevant data. When these data match the theory, reinforcement is obtained for its continuing utilisation, mainly if further tests produce similar results. However, when the data do not match the theory, it must be adjusted or discarded. Hence, more comprehensive testing of new theories will be attempted. Thus, as this research strategy claims, knowledge within social sciences goes forward via a trial-and-error course of action.

Retroductive strategies involve constructing hypothetical schemes to understand empirical phenomena. Since it is not usually feasible for these structures and instruments to be observed, it is necessary to build a model of them first, generally based on recognised sources. Then, if the model represents these structures and mechanisms correctly, the phenomena would then be explained causally. Finally, the model is tested as a possible explanation of existing entities and their relations.

Finally, an abductive strategy recognises that human behaviour depends on how people interpret the circumstances in which they are involved and acknowledges the importance of explaining the social world on its own terms. Blaikie and Priest (2019) highlighted that the origin of this strategy is the social world of the participants being investigated: their building of reality, how they conceptualise and explain their social

world, and their implicit knowledge (e.g., the pragmatist worldview, in this thesis).

Moreover, the researcher should enter the participants' world to discover the reasons for

their social activities. Afterwards, the researcher must recount those motives, actions,

and circumstances in the environment in which they happened. Thus, the abductive

strategy implies building theory based on daily activities and/or the language and

meaning of social actors. The logic of these four research strategies is summarised in

Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Four Research Strategies

		Inductive	Deductive	Retroductive	Abductive
Aim		To establish universal generalisations to be used as pattern explanations	To test theories to eliminate false ones and corroborate the survivor	To discover underlying mechanisms to explain observed regularities	To describe and understand social life in terms of social actors' motives and accounts
From		Accumulate observations or data	Borrow or construct a theory and express it as an argument	Document and model a regularity	Discover everyday lay concepts, meanings, and motives
		Produce generalisations	Deduce hypotheses	Construct a hypothetical model of a mechanism	Produce a technical account of lay accounts
To		Use these 'laws' as patterns to explain further observations	Test the hypotheses by matching them with data	Find the actual mechanism by observation and/or experiment	Develop a theory and test it iteratively

From Blaikie and Priest (2019).

Referring to Table 4.1, Blaikie and Priest (2019) explained the abductive strategy by

stating that its first stage is to discover how social actors view and understand the

researcher's topic of interest. Hence, the researcher has to discover the everyday

concepts that social actors use to typify features of their world and discover the

meanings they give to them. The second stage is for the researcher to generate technical

concepts from the lay concepts. Then, the third and last stage is to take the

understanding obtained in the second stage and combine it with either deductive or

retroductive logic from the researcher's viewpoint. Such a combination of varied logics

of inquiry could provide rich answers to research questions. (Blaikie & Priest, 2019, pp. 100–101).

Additionally, according to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004):

> *mixed research uses philosophy's pragmatic method and system. Its logic of inquiry includes the use of induction (discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one's results)* (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16).

Consequently, to answer the two research questions in this research, an abductive strategy was mainly used, although some inductive and deductive strategies were also used. An abductive strategy was fundamentally used to describe and understand the second language acquisition theories LLSNS adhere to (RQ1). However, a deductive strategy was also applied to answer RQ1 and test Álvarez's argument (2016), which proposed that Busuu fulfilled all the requirements that a social network should have. Furthermore, Vesselinov and Grego's (2016) research, which asserted that 22.5 hours of Busuu would be equivalent to a whole university semester and necessary to progress to the next level when learning SFL, was also tested. Further, an inductive strategy was used to establish generalisations to explain how the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills (RQ2).

4.3 MIXED-METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN

Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined research design as the inquiry procedures that a researcher follows to investigate a problem. Traditionally, three research approaches are considered: (1) qualitative, (2) quantitative, and (3) mixed methods.

Frequently, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is perceived as utilising words (qualitative) instead of figures (quantitative), or as posing closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) in preference to open-ended questions (qualitative interviews). Mixed-methods research is located in the centre of this

continuum because it includes components of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mackey & Gass, 2016).

Qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning researchers ascribe to a social or human problem (Dudovskiy, 2016). As Creswell and Creswell put it, "The research process involves questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' setting, data analysis inductively building from specific to general themes, and the researcher's interpretations of the meaning of the data" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). The same authors added that qualitative researchers support an inductive style, a focus on personal meaning, and the significance of interpreting the intricacy of a situation.

Quantitative research is an approach for testing theories by assessing the relationship among variables (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Correspondingly, such variables can be measured, typically with instruments, so that quantified data can be analysed utilising statistical measures. Creswell and Creswell (2018) added that quantitative researchers have hypotheses about assessing theories inferentially, avoiding bias, controlling for complementary explanations, and generalising and replicating the findings.

Mixed-methods research is an approach to investigation that collects and combines both quantitative and qualitative data and uses varied designs that may include philosophical viewpoints and theoretical foundations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The rationale for this form of research is that the mixing of both approaches leads to a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem which would not be the case if only a single approach was used (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Several researchers have proposed different mixed-methods design types (Cameron, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, 2017; Guetterman, 2017; Johnson &

Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, this thesis follows Creswell and Plano Clark's research

(2011, 2017), as it is clear and has been supported by other researchers (Cameron, 2015;

Guetterman, 2017; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Timans et al., 2019), as shown in

Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: The Major Mixed-Methods Design Types

Design Type	Variants	Timing	Weighting	Mixing	Notation
Triangulation	- Convergence - Data transformation - Validating quantitative data - Multilevel	Concurrent: quantitative and qualitative at the same time	Usually equal	Merge the data during the interpretation or analysis	QUAN + QUAL
Embedded	- Embedded experimental - Embedded correlational	Concurrent or sequential	Unequal	Embed one type of data within a larger design using the other kind of data	QUAN(qual) or QUAL(quan)
Explanatory	- Follow-up explanations - Participant selection	Sequential: quantitative followed by qualitative	Usually quantitative	Connect the data between the two phases	QUAN→qual
Exploratory	- Instrument development - Taxonomy development	Sequential: qualitative followed by quantitative	Usually qualitative	Connect the data between the two phases	QUAL→quan

From: Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p.85).

In the third edition of Creswell and Plano Clark's handbook (2017), the mixed-method

research typology has been reduced to three: explanatory sequential design, exploratory

sequential design, and convergent design. However, the previous version was more

explicit, which is why it is used in this thesis. Table 4.2 is helpful in clarifying that an

exploratory [QUAL→quan] research approach has been adopted in this thesis, in that it

started with the development of a taxonomy of the different LLSNS currently in

existence (see Table 2.7 in Chapter 2), followed by the selection/development of data

collection tools (see section 4.6) used in the research: questionnaires, and focus groups

(Liu et al., 2015), as well as logon sheets (Brick, 2013). Consequently, the results

obtained from qualitative data collection and analysis were used to form variables to

collect and analyse quantitative data with those QUAL→quan outcomes. Figure 4.1

synthesises these ideas.

Figure 4.1: Exploratory Sequential Design
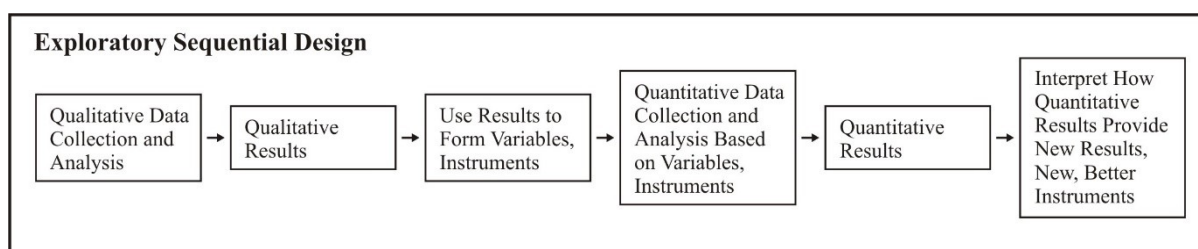
From Creswell, 2013.

Furthermore, I discarded action research and reflective practice and instead adopted an exploratory practice approach (Nakamura, 2014), which led to the thesis commencing by looking for a "puzzle" to understand why learners could not practise outside the classroom the concepts recently learnt in it. Even if the study were to take a long time to complete, the advantages of exploratory practice were: (1) it is teacher-friendly, (2) data are gathered through classroom practice, (3) it is specific for foreign/second language teachers and learners, and (4) teachers and learners are the leading agents in it.

However, as Ellis (2012) concluded, whether it is action research or exploratory practice, "the significance of such research lies not in whether it can or cannot contribute to our theoretical understanding of L2 classroom but to its relevance to language pedagogy" (p. 33). Table 4.3 synthesises the different practitioner research approaches.

Table 4.3: Different Practitioner Research Approaches

	PRACTIONER RESEARCH		
	Reflective Practice	**Action Research**	**Exploratory Practice**
Terminology	Reflection on experience	Starts with a 'problem'	Looks for a "puzzle"
Approach	Self-regulated	More formal research	Teacher-friendly
Data Collection	Own professional experiences	As in research	In classroom practice
Length of Study	Depends on the specific study	Clearly defined stages Completion of a cycle	Long-term commitment. Less predictable/clearly defined stages or outcomes
Focus	Reflection	Solutions	Understanding
Field	Any science field	More teaching-intended?	Foreign/second language teachers and learners

Starting Point	Action is taken once the circumstance has been observed and analysed.	Change is needed	Understanding a situation. Once the understanding is clear, it may be decided whether a change is needed or not.
Inquiry Purpose	To alter knowledge and actions.	To solve a problem	To solve a "puzzle" among colleagues
Geography	USA	Australia	Brazil
History	Democratisation of teaching (Dewey)	To provide the influx of immigrants with English education	A timeless, universal relationship between teaching and learning
Agents	Teacher	Researcher	Teachers, learners, and administrators

Based on Nakamura (2014).

Another reason why I followed the exploratory practice approach is that teachers and learners are seen as practitioners of learning (Miller, Cunha, & Allwright, 2021), and as Allwright and Hanks (2009, p. 7) proposed, exploratory practice conforms to five propositions about learners: (1) they are unique individuals who learn, (2) they develop best in a mutually supportive environment, (3) learners are capable of taking learning seriously, (4) they are capable of independent decision-making, and (5) they are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.

Furthermore, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) pointed out, the research approach intertwines philosophy, research designs, and specific methods, which is reflected in the philosophical worldview that researchers bring to the investigation and the specific procedures or methods of research that operationalise the approach in practice. All the ideas applied to this thesis are summarised in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Worldview, Approach, Methodology, and Methods Applied in This Thesis.
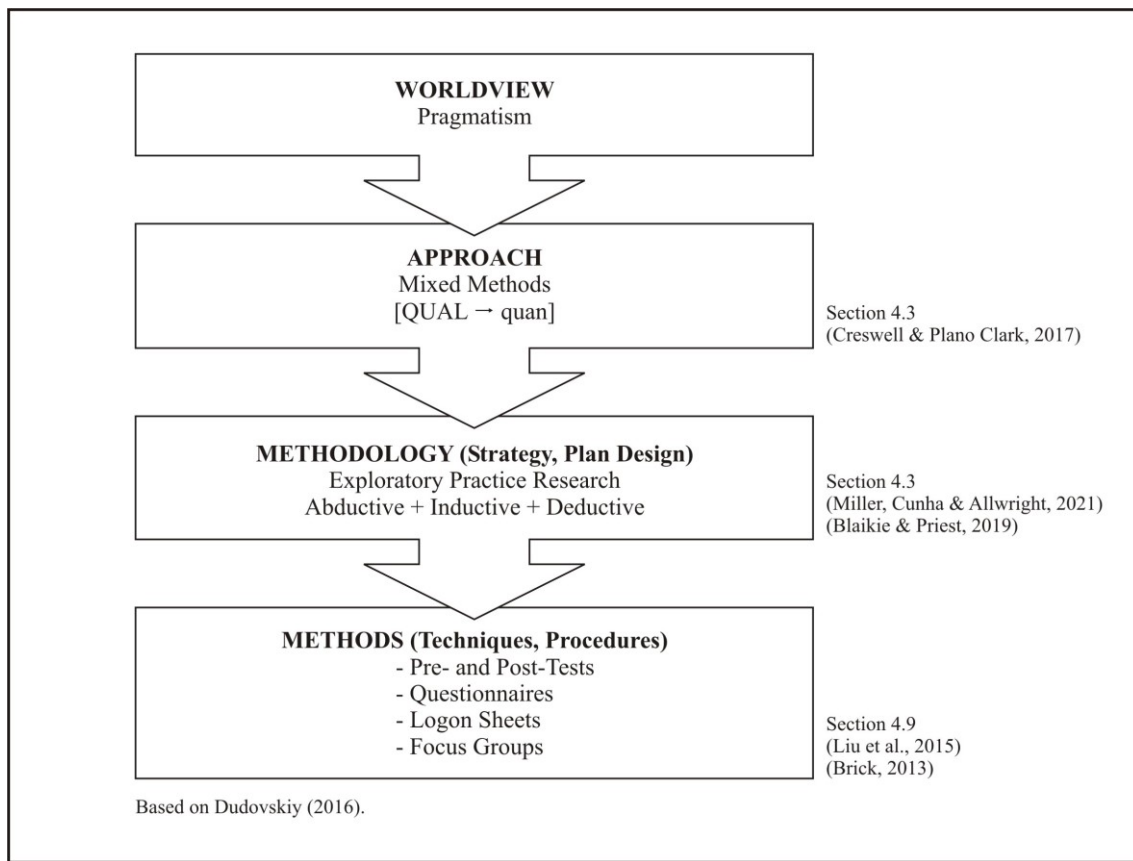
Hence, having explained the research strategy and the research design, its stages are defined in the next section.

4.4 RESEARCH STAGES

This thesis had two stages:

1. Pilot Study 1 (focused on Busuu) and Pilot Study 2 (focused on Wespeke) to answer RQ1: What theories of SLA do LLSNS adhere to?
2. Main study (Wespeke) to answer RQ2: How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills?

The findings for each stage are examined in Chapters 5 (RQ1) and 6 (RQ2). Therefore, it is necessary to introduce the pilot studies briefly in the next section prior to elaborating on them in more detail in section 4.7.

4.4.1 Pilot Studies

Two pilot studies took place prior to the main study, and the lessons learnt from both of them were incorporated into the main study.

The first pilot study took place from October to November 2016, and lasted for four weeks. Its objective was to determine Busuu's theoretical foundations (RQ1). Busuu was chosen as it seemed to be the ideal LLSNS to be studied, as plenty of research had already focused on it. Furthermore, Busuu offered Spanish as one of the 12 languages to learn on their platform, providing the necessary lessons and materials. However, in the first session of the pilot study, I discovered that Busuu had changed its layout to make its platform compatible with mobile devices, which meant that the social features available had been diminished. As a result, I completed the study and found that Wespeke was a more appropriate LLSNS to be studied.

Hence, a second pilot study took place between May and June 2017 and lasted for four weeks. Its objective was to determine Wespeke's theoretical foundations (RQ1). Wespeke used to offer lessons and materials in eight foreign languages, but from early 2017 they decided to focus on English only. Therefore, while it did not offer SFL, the platform was still used as a virtual language exchange meeting point. Moreover, Wespeke fulfilled all the criteria Social Networking Sites should meet according to Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011) and should be considered as such. However, this pilot study served to show the difficulty of obtaining a consistent sample of B1 level SFL learners as participants. Consequently, having learnt a great deal about the shifting landscape of Language Learning Social Networking Sites through my pilot studies of Busuu and Wespeke, the most effective way to mitigate the challenges posed by student recruitment was to design an intensive course for beginner level Spanish students that I had access to as a teacher-researcher. Hence, I followed Hinkelman

(2012) when designing such a course, as the pilot studies showed the convenience of following a blended language learning approach, as it would allow me to combine classroom lessons with the tasks the participants would complete when interacting with Spanish speakers in an LLSNS.

4.4.2 The Main Study

As previously stated, the main study focused on beginner-level learners of SFL as this was an under-researched group of participants identified in the literature review. In addition, it was also necessary to apply blended learning Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT), specifically Anderson's (2020) Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration (TATE, see section 2.3.6.4) model for language teaching, as it allows both implicit and explicit learning occurrences and recognises the relevance of spoken and written language practice during tasks. So, new course contents were developed, and the data collection tools were adapted from the pilot study process. The main study was open to the general public and lasted five consecutive weeks, from June to July 2018. Its goal was to determine which features of the LLSNS participants thought helped them develop learning skills (RQ2) while using Wespeke.

4.5 AN OVERVIEW OF THE LLSNS STUDIED

4.5.1. Busuu

Busuu was founded in 2008. In 2016, when the first pilot study took place, it had 60 million users worldwide. They offered 12 modern foreign languages (MFLs) to learn from A1 to B2 levels (CEFR) through a freemium model. Customers could obtain some basic features for free, but they had to buy the most useful ones. In 2015, they introduced themselves in this way:

> *Busuu is the largest social network for language learning, where you can practise [the four core language skills] engagingly and affordably through*

> *award-winning courses designed by qualified language experts. It is a*
> *worldwide community of language learners just like you, and you can connect,*
> *interact, practise and receive instant feedback as well as berries [points] and*
> *badges to keep you motivated. Wherever and whenever. Register for free!*
> (Busuu advertising video, July 2015)

Furthermore, Busuu had been the focus of various research studies but without involving blended language learning (Álvarez, 2014, 2015, 2016; Brick, 2012, 2013; Chik, 2015; Keyti, 2013, 2014, 2015; Liu et al., 2015; Pino James, 2011; Rezaei et al., 2014; Vesselinov & Grego, 2016; Yilmaz, 2015).

4.5.2 Wespeke

Wespeke was founded in 2010 and promoted by the Languages Technologies Institute at Carnegie Mellon University in the United States. It was intended to be used with institutional language exchanges involving classrooms groups. In 2016, a total of 5,000 institutions were affiliated with the platform. Initially, Wespeke offered eight MFLs to learn and followed the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages equivalence from A1 to B2 levels (CEFR) through a freemium model. As with Busuu, users could access some basic features for free, but they had to buy the lessons' contents. In 2017, they decided to focus on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) only. Wespeke introduced itself thus, in 2016:

> *[Wespeke is] … an easy-to-use international social network with a purpose:*
> *faster language acquisition, increased proficiency, and improved cultural*
> *understanding to build relationships via a 24/7 real-time video connection.*
> *Global exchange through the social network for social networks for free!*
> (Wespeke advertising video, May 2016)

At this point, Wespeke was the LLSNS that best fulfilled the social aspect every LLSNS should have, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011). Nevertheless, in terms of research, Wespeke has not attracted much attention. At the time of writing this thesis, only one software review (Guikema, 2013) and a few articles mention it indirectly (Munday, 2019; Henshaw, 2021; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021).

4.6. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The University of the North West (UNW, anonymised for research purposes) is a public university located in the North-West of England. Founded in the early part of the nineteenth century, it achieved university status in 1992. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2018/19), UNW is the 35th largest Higher Education institution in the UK with approximately 35,000 students.

In 2018, the School of Languages at UNW offered 11 classroom-based language courses from across Europe and Asia, while the UNW Foreign Languages Centre offered up to 28 self-study MFLs through Rosetta Stone®, available at different levels. In addition, all full-time students are entitled to study at least one MFL for free while attending the university. Furthermore, the School of Languages partners with other universities worldwide to enhance study abroad opportunities for all students studying a language.

4.7 ETHICS

According to the UNW's Code of Conduct for Research (2015), all its researchers, students, and staff involved in research or peer review of research procedures must be cognizant of and accept the Code. In addition, UNW is committed to observing the seven principles determined by the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life (1995): selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. UNW demands that these standards are always respected within, or on, the university's behalf. Furthermore, these principles were adapted to be in step with the ethical guidelines for educational research outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) and the recommendations of good practice in applied linguistics of the British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL) (2021). Given the focus on learning technologies, this thesis also observed the framework for researching

learning technologies from the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) (2021), synthesised with values such as awareness, professionalism, care, and community in mind.

An information sheet (Appendix II) with the recommendations of UNW's Ethics Committee was provided to all participants during the presentation of the main study. After agreeing to participate, they received a written consent form (Appendix III). Finally, all participants were given a privacy notice document (Appendix IV). All those documents had been previously reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee.

4.7.1 Participants' Information Sheet

The participants' information sheet (Appendix II), previously approved by the Ethics Committee at UNW, explained the research process to clarify what participants should expect and what was expected of them if they decided to participate in the research. Furthermore, it disclosed information about: the purpose of the study; the requirement to participate; the opportunity to withdraw at any time and without explanation; all the research procedures in which the participants would be involved; the possible benefits and risks of taking part in the research; the confidentiality of the obtained data; what to do if participants decided to take part; the possible use of the results; the organiser and funding for such research; the ethical approval; how to make a complaint; and contact details of the researcher and the Director of Studies for further information.

4.7.2 Informed Consent

The consent form (Appendix III), previously approved by the Ethics Committee at UNW, focused on seven key points: understanding of the Information Sheet previously provided to all participants, as well as the opportunity to consider this information, ask questions and receive satisfactory answers on it; free will to take part and withdraw at any time without providing a reason; the specific agreement on participating in the

study; the authorisation to store the anonymised data obtained; the impossibility of withdrawing such data once it was finally analysed; the audio-recording of the oral tests, user experience, focus groups; and finally, the authorisation for the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

4.7.3 Confidentiality

A privacy notice document (Appendix IV), previously approved by the Ethics Committee at UNW, was also provided to all participants in the research. This document clarified topics such as identifying the leading researcher, the information to be recorded, how these data would be used, the recipients of such reports, the researcher's contact details, and the Director of Studies' contact details for further study information.

4.7.4 Consequences

Because the UNW's Ethics Committee approved all the preliminary documents provided to the participants, this guaranteed that nobody would run any risk when taking part in the research. Participants received sufficient information through all of the documents, and the invitations to participate involved neither deterrents of harm nor offers of inadequate compensations (Mackey & Gass, 2016), nor did the researcher exercise undue influence on the participants. It was clearly stated, at all times, that participation was purely voluntary and that participants had a right to withdraw whenever they wanted to and without explanation. Furthermore, participation or non-participation in the pilot studies did not affect their participation in their lessons.

4.8 PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

The results of this research originated from two pilot studies and one main study. Hence, three different groups participated.

4.8.1 Pilot Study 1 (Busuu)

For the first stage, using convenience sampling, as it was helpful for hypothesis
generation and collecting data quickly (Dudovskiy, 2016), 268 students from the
database of the Foreign Language Centre and two Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL)
intermediate level groups from the UNW were invited via email to take part in this
stage. Then, using purposive sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), as there were only a
limited number of participants who could contribute to the study, 14 people were
selected: seven (50%) of them had a CEFR A1 level, three (21.42%) A2, two (14.28%)
B1, and two (14.28%) B2. Table 4.4 shows the participants' demographic data:

Table 4.4: Participants' Demographic Data (Busuu)

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality	Undergraduate / Postgraduate (UG / PG)	Spanish Level
Shirley	F	49	English	PG	B2
Chloe	F	20	English	UG	A2
Christine	F	54	English	PG	A1
Fiona	F	51	English	PG	A2
Farrah	F	23	English	UG	A2
Mike	M	24	English	UG	A1
Martin	M	47	English	PG	B1
Nathan	M	23	English	UG	A2
Vladimir	M	33	Belarusian	PG	A1
Leah	F	18	English	UG	A2
Samiya	F	23	English	UG	A2
Letizia	F	33	Italian	PG	B2
Phillip	M	44	English	PG	B1
Maria	F	21	Greek	UG	A2

Table 4.4 shows a diverse group in terms of age (average: 33.07); gender: nine
(64.28%) women, five (35.71%) men; nationalities; and mother tongues: eleven
(78.57%) English, three (21.42%) other languages; and academic background: seven
(50%) undergraduates, seven (50%) graduates. The only variable they had in common

was that all of them had studied SFL and had achieved a minimum of the CEFR A1 level.

4.8.2 Pilot Study 2 (Wespeke)

For Pilot Study 2, it was a prerequisite that the participants had at least a B1 level so that the interactions in Spanish could be more fluid and enriching for both language exchange partners in the LLSNS. Therefore, as with the first stage, using purposive sampling, 12 students from the database of the Foreign Language Centre and 2 SFL intermediate level classes from the UNW were invited via email or in their classrooms to participate in this stage. Then, using purposive sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), as there were only a limited number of participants who could contribute to the study, nine users were selected: two (22.2%) had a CEFR B1 level, five (55.5%) B2, and two (22.2%) C1. Table 4.5 shows the participants' demographic data:

Table 4.5: Participants' Demographic Data (Wespeke)

	Gender	Age	Nationality	UG/PG	ICTs Level	Spanish Level
Letizia	F	34	Italian	PG	3	C1
Lisa	F	21	German	UG	5	B2
Martin	M	48	English	PG	4	B2
Veronica	F	21	Italian	UG	3	B2
Janine	F	22	German	UG	4	B1
Joana	F	22	Portuguese	PG	4	B2
Josefine	F	26	Italian	UG	3	C1
Bethany	F	22	English	UG	3	B2
Belinda	F	24	German	UG	4	B1

This process of selection led to a diverse group in terms of age (average age: 26.6 years); gender: eight (88.9%) female, one (11.1%) male; nationalities; and mother tongues: three (33.3%) German, three (33.3%) Italian, two (22.2%) English, one (11.1%) Portuguese. There was also a variation in the academic background: six (66.6%) undergraduates and three (33.3%) graduates. The only variable they had in

common was that all of them had studied SFL and had achieved a minimum of the

CEFR B1.

4.8.3 Main Study (Wespeke)

As the pilot studies showed the difficulty of obtaining participants for the research, I

decided to widen the participants' spectrum. Hence, after an open invitation via

Facebook and Eventbrite, 52 potential participants initially expressed interest in

participating in the main study. However, the number was reduced to 30 on a first-

come, first-served basis as it was the maximum number of participants the classroom

could accommodate. By the time the lessons started, the group had been reduced to 20

due to student cancellations. Table 4.6 shows the demographics of the 20 participants:

Table 4.6 Participants' Demographic Data (Main Study)

Participant	Age	Gender	Nationality	First Language	UG/PG	Spanish Level
Gary	60	M	British	English	PG	A1+
Paul	28	M	British	English	GCSE	A1+
Shahzad	27	M	British	English	PG	A1
Susan	47	F	British	English	GCSE	A1
Helen	39	F	English	English	PG	A1
Gemma	26	F	British	English	UG	A1
Crescentia	19	F	Portuguese	English	UG	A1
Liz	66	F	British	English	GCSE	A1+
Ben	19	M	English	English	GCSE	A1+
George	27	M	Indian	Tamil	UG	A1
Saima	25	F	Pakistani	Urdu	PG	A1
Dariya	28	F	Latvian	Russian	PG	A1+
Chris	23	M	English	English	UG	A1
Paulina	27	F	Polish	Polish	UG	A1
Emma	33	F	British	English	UG	A1
Rahil	20	M	British	English	GCSE	A1+
Jingqi	28	F	Chinese	Chinese	PG	A1
Helen	52	F	British	English	GCSE	A1
Chen	29	F	Chinese	Mandarin	PG	A1
Sanna	24	F	British	English	UG	A1

As shown in Table 4.6, the age range among the participants was wide. There were 47 years of difference between the youngest and the eldest participant. The youngest was 19 and the eldest, 66. The age average was 32, and the most frequent range among participants was between 26 and 30 years old. Regarding gender, 13 participants (65%) were female, and the remaining 7 (35%) were male. Likewise, 65% were British and 35% foreigners. In addition, 14 participants (70%) had English as their first language, two participants (10%), Chinese, and there was also one participant in each of these languages: Polish, Russian, Tamil, and Urdu (5% each).

With reference to the level of their studies, seven participants (35%) were undergraduates, seven (35%) were postgraduates, and six participants (30%) had received the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). Finally, despite this course being designed for 'absolute' beginners of Spanish, there were six false-beginner participants (30%), as they had already received some Spanish foundation courses. Furthermore, according to the language e-learning platform Rosetta Stone®'s initial level test, six learners had an A2 level (CEFR), while 14 students (70%) had an A1 level. In the end, this variety of levels was beneficial because the learners with a higher level could support their peers at a lower level.

4.9 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Different data collection tools were utilised to answer both RQs, namely, pre- and post-written and oral tests (only for stage 1). For stages 1 and 2, four other data collection tools were used: a user experience questionnaire, site feedback questionnaires, logon sheets, and focus groups (see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Data Collection Tools
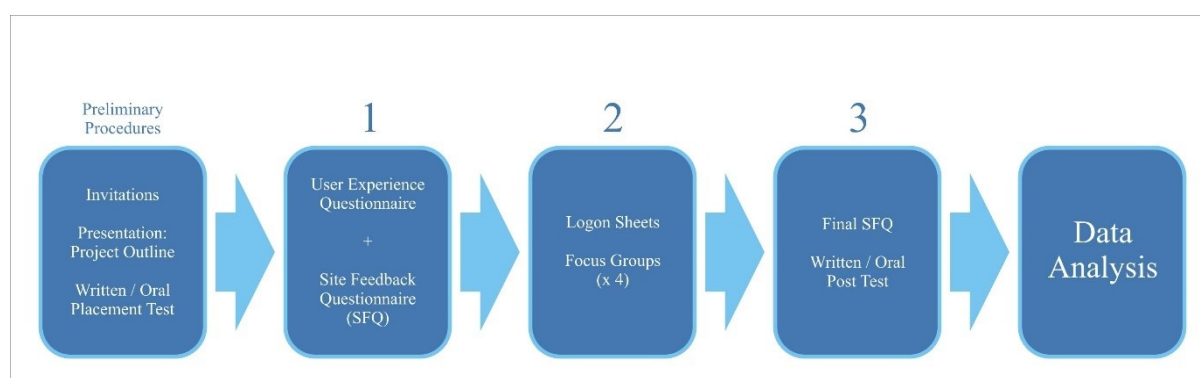
The reason why written and oral tests were implemented for Busuu only is because it offered SFL lesson content, and at that point, it was considered essential to assess the effects of those materials on the participants' learning process. On the contrary, Wespeke only offered EFL content, and as such, it was not possible to measure if there was a difference before and after using the platform's materials.

Hence, the two stages of this study used similar data collection tools, such as those utilised by Liu et al. (2015) and Brick (2013). It also followed the essential principle of mixed methods research that researchers must gather varied data utilising different approaches and methods so that the resulting combination may aid robustness (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, the triangulation principle was followed, which involved using multiple research techniques and data sources to examine the RQs from different perspectives. Using this triangulation technique contributed to credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research results (Mackey & Gass, 2016). The implementation of these collection tools can be seen in the methodology summary synthesised in Table 4.7 (Pilot Study on Busuu, RQ1), Table 4.8 (Pilot Study on Wespeke, RQ1), and Table 4.9 (Main Study on Wespeke, RQ2).

Table 4.7: Pilot Study on Busuu - RQ1

Phase: **MPhil: PILOT STUDY (1ˢᵗ stage: October–November 2016 - four weeks)**
Objective: To determine Busuu's theoretical foundations.
RQ1: What theories of SLA do LLSNS adhere to?

Quantitative and/or Qualitative	Data Collection Method	Details on Data Process	How to Analyse the Data?
Quantitative	Pre-written/oral level test	Written: Rosetta Stone®'s Tellmemore Campus Oral (Appendix XIII).	Descriptive statistics (mean, Standard Deviation - SD)
Qualitative	User experience	(Appendix VI). Close observation + self-reported data	Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	14 students (on-campus)	Three different tasks: exploratory, specific, and open-ended.	
Quantitative and Qualitative	Site feedback questionnaire 1	(Appendix VII) In situ, immediately after user experience.	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	14 students (on-campus)	Likert-type scales.	
		Feedback on-site design: 10 items.	
		Skills: 7 items.	
		Features: 8 items.	
		Future use and perception: 5 questions.	
Qualitative	Logon sheets	Ethnography of Busuu Website and App. Structured logon sheets that students filled in when connected (Appendix VIII).	Thematic and content analysis NVivo
	14 students (on-campus)		
Qualitative	Focus group weekly meetings	Group discussion for one hour each time. Semi-structured. Voice recorded.	Thematic and content analysis NVivo
	6 students (on-campus)		
Quan + Qual	Site feedback questionnaire 2	(Appendix VII) From home, after four weeks of using the platform.	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	6 students (from home)		
Quantitative	Post-written/oral level test	Written: Rosetta Stone®'s Tellmemore Campus Oral (Appendix XIII).	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD)
			Methodological triangulation to crosscheck the collected data.

The first stage of this research had the objective of determining Busuu's theoretical foundations, and it answered RQ1: What theories of SLA do LLSNS adhere to? However, as Busuu was a dynamic commercial platform and it changed in fundamental ways during the first study, it did not fulfil the requirements an LLSNS should, and it was necessary to perform an additional pilot study on another LLSNS, Wespeke. Table 4.8 synthesises its methodology.

Table 4.8: Pilot Study on Wespeke - RQ1

Phase: **MPhil to PhD: PILOT STUDY (1st stage: May–June 2017 - four weeks)**
Objective: To determine Wespeke's theoretical foundations.
RQ1: What theories of SLA do LLSNS adhere to?

Quantitative and/or Qualitative	Data Collection Method	Details on Data Process	How to Analyse the Data?
Quantitative	Pre-written/oral level test	Written: Rosetta Stone®'s Tellmemore Campus Oral (Appendix XIII)	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD)
Qualitative	User experience	(Appendix VI). Close observation + self-reported data	Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	10 students (on-campus)	Three different tasks: exploratory, specific, and open-ended.	
Quantitative and Qualitative	Site feedback questionnaire 1	(Appendix VII) In situ, immediately after user experience.	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	10 students (on-campus)	Likert-type scales.	
		Feedback on-site design: 10 items.	
		Skills: 7 items.	
		Features: 8 items.	
		Future use and perception: 5 questions.	
Qualitative	Logon sheets	Ethnography of Wespeke Website and App. Structured logon sheets that students filled in when connected (Appendix VIII).	Thematic and content analysis NVivo
	10 students (on-campus)		
Qualitative	Focus group weekly meetings	Group discussion for one hour each time. Semi-structured. Voice recorded.	Thematic and content analysis NVivo
	6 students (on-campus)		
Quan + Qual	Site feedback questionnaire 2	(Appendix VII) From home, after four weeks of using the platform.	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	6 students (from home)		
			Methodological triangulation to crosscheck the collected data.

As Table 4.8 shows, the objective of the repetition of the first stage of this research was to determine Wespeke's theoretical foundations, and it answered RQ1: What theories of SLA do LLSNS adhere to? The difference between these two research scenarios as described was not only that two dissimilar LLSNS were studied, but also that, in the second case, the study focused on the social aspect of Wespeke, which was almost non-existent in the first case with reference to Busuu. The results of both preliminary studies are given in Chapter 5 to establish the foundations of RQ2: How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills? Finally, the procedures required to answer it are synthesised in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Main Study on Wespeke

Phase: **PhD MAIN STUDY (2nd stage: June–July 2018 - five weeks)**
Objective: To determine the LLSNS features learners thought helped them develop learning skills.
RQ2: How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills?

Quantitative and/or Qualitative	Data Collection Method	Details on Data Process	How to Analyse the Data?
Qualitative	User experience	(Appendix VI). Close observation + self-reported data.	Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	12 students (on-campus)	Three different tasks: exploratory, specific, and open-ended.	
Quantitative and Qualitative	Site feedback questionnaire 1	(Appendix VII) In situ, immediately after user experience.	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	12 students (on-campus)	Likert-type scales. Feedback on-site design: 10 items. Skills: 8 items. Features: 5 items. Future use and perception: 5 questions.	
Qualitative	Group lessons: 20 students	10 Task-supported teaching/learning sessions against the pre- and post-tests.	Descriptive statistics SPSS NVivo
Qualitative	Logon sheets	Ethnography of Wespeke Website and App. Structured logon sheets that students filled in when connected (Appendix VIII).	Thematic and content analysis NVivo
	6 students (from home)		
Qualitative	Focus group weekly meetings	Group discussion for one hour each time. Semi-structured. Voice recorded.	Thematic and content analysis NVivo
	6 students (on-campus)		
Quan + Qual	Site feedback questionnaire 2	(Appendix VII) From home, after five weeks of using the platform.	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) Content analysis SPSS NVivo
	6 students (from home)		
			Methodological triangulation to crosscheck the collected data.

For the main stage of this research, the pilot studies were replicated with the difference that this time the blended learning aspect of learning via an LLSNS was added, for which ten TBLT group lessons were implemented, as can be seen in Table 4.9. I implemented such a change in the methodology because I learnt its necessity from the pilot studies. Furthermore, it filled the gap of the lack of research in this area, as evident in the literature review on how LLSNS are used. The results of this second stage are shown in Chapter 6. Nevertheless, before referring to both stages' results, it is

essential to explain in detail the data collection tools used throughout both stages of the research, as introduced in Figure 4.3.

4.9.1 Online Pre- and Post-Written Tests

In the two stages of this thesis, all participants were invited to take an online written proficiency level test to determine their language level before using the corresponding LLSNS. As previously indicated, Busuu was the platform that offered SFL lessons; hence, for Busuu, it was necessary to obtain the proficiency level results because they were compared to a post-test administered five weeks later, at the end of the main study, to measure students' learning development related to the social aspect of the platform (Saona-Vallejos, 2019). For this purpose, the Rosetta Stone® examination, available at the TellMeMore campus (https://www.tellmemorecampus.com/), was used. As this test was online, and to facilitate students' participation, they took the written examination by themselves at home, and then the results were checked via the Rosetta Stone® platform.

4.9.2 Pre- and Post-Oral Tests

For the pre- and post-oral level tests, a forty-item examination (Appendix XIII) was prepared following the Curricular Plan of the Instituto Cervantes. An assessment criterion (Appendix XIV) based on the CEFR and Cambridge Assessment Methods, used by the Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) Language Centre, was utilised to moderate all the participants' oral exams by one member of the Spanish Department at UNW. The differences in the participants' levels were discussed with the moderator. All the marks were agreed to confirm the reliability of the results.

4.9.3 User Experience Questionnaire

Based on Liu et al. (2015), to investigate how the participants coped with the social and learning dimensions in the LLSNS, all participants were invited to complete a user experience questionnaire (Appendix VI) in both of the two stages. This questionnaire consisted of three types of tasks: exploratory, specific, and open-ended (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: User Experience Questionnaire
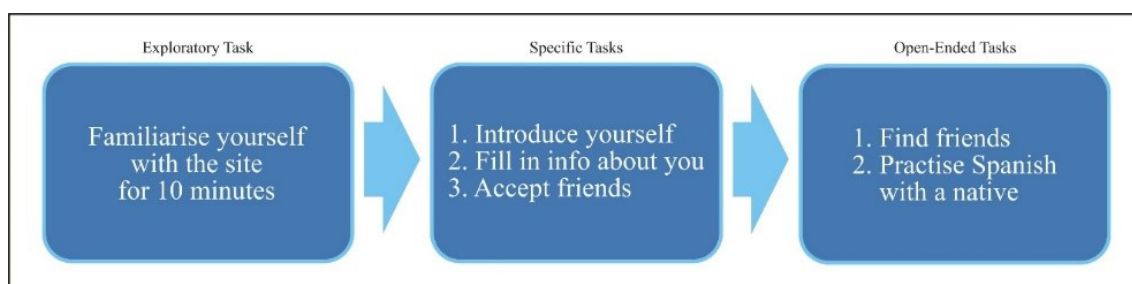
The purpose of completing the six tasks was to elucidate the theories of SLA LLSNS adhere to (RQ1). The results of this questionnaire are explained in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.9.4 Site Feedback Questionnaire

The participants answered the site feedback questionnaire (based on Liu et al., 2015, Appendix VII) twice. The first time was immediately after the user experience questionnaire. The second time was at the end of the study to compare if there was a change in the participants' perceptions of the LLSNS. The questionnaire offered a Likert-type scale, anchored in 1 (negative) and 5 (positive), and participants were also allowed to reply with open answers in some cases. The questionnaire was focused on skills, features, and future use and perceptions.

The questionnaire's objective was to answer RQ2: How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills? The first site feedback questionnaire (SFQ1) had the advantage that participants had used the platform recently and that they could record

their perceptions using the Google Forms platform, as this enabled users to share their viewpoints with the researcher and save them automatically.

4.8.4.1 Skills

The participants were asked about the different language skills that could be improved by using the LLSNS to learn SFL to identify the potential use they could focus on, depending on their personal needs. Their answers and the corresponding data analysis are available in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.8.4.2 Features

Besides the language skills that might be improved while using the LLSNS, participants were asked if the features of the platform could help them learn SFL. The objective of this part of the questionnaire was to measure the participants' perception of how these features could enhance their SFL learning (RQ2).

4.8.4.3 General Perception of the Site

In the two stages, two questions were asked regarding the future use of the site and the perception the participants had of it. The first one was: How likely are you to return to this site on your own? The second one was: Would you recommend this site to your friends who are learning Spanish? A Likert-type scale was provided to answer in both cases, with 1 being the least probable and 5 the most probable. The participants were also required to explain their answers. Accordingly, three additional qualitative questions were asked.

4.8.4.4 Qualitative Questions

To obtain a better assessment of the corresponding LLSNS from the participants' point of view, three open questions were asked of participants:

1. What do you like best about this site?

2. What do you like least about this site?
3. Do you have any recommendations or comments to improve this site?

Adhering to the questionnaire's objective, the data analysis was focused on the user experience and site feedback questionnaires (1 and 2), as they conformed to the more reliable information provided. In addition, the logon sheets and focus groups applied in the research process were also analysed, and they will be described next.

4.9.5 Logon Sheets

Based on Brick (2011), participants were requested to fill in a logon sheet (Appendix VIII) online every time they were connected to the LLSNS and immediately after they had finished their practice session. In addition, an auto-ethnographic methodology was applied to these documents, as participants were asked to describe and interpret their communicative-learning behaviour while connected (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

For each session, participants were invited to write about the specific theme practised; what they considered they learnt in that face-to-face interaction; the means used (e.g. message, text chat, voice chat, video chat, any other); a description of what they did and how they did it; mistakes made; what the participants enjoyed during the session, or did not; difficulties during the session; something specific they would have liked to learn in that session; their learning and practising plans for the future; and any specific problems with the platform.

The objective of the logon sheets was to obtain qualitative data about the participants' language learning experiences through semi-guided open questions and without the constraints imposed by closed ones. The intention was also to provide the volunteers with more comprehensive flexibility to complete their entries according to their schedules and use them as data sources for triangulation with the focus groups, which were constrained by the other participants' availability.

4.9.6 Focus Groups

A similar pattern was followed for the focus groups in both stages of the research. Focus groups took place from the second to the last week of the research. In the case of the main study, because the designed course lasted for five weeks, there were four focus groups in total, from week two to week five. Lessons took place on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 18:00 to 20:00; therefore, the focus groups were held on Tuesdays at 17:00, before the lesson, in a classroom opposite the one in which the lessons were developed, in order to avoid any interruptions when the other participants arrived.

As the number of participants was small, five or six learners took part in each weekly focus group. All the participants were invited to attend, and others were explicitly invited based on their responses to the data collection tools, but not all of them could attend due to personal commitments. The focus groups' objective was to discuss specific topics obtained from the logon sheets and the user experience and feedback questionnaires. I usually began with a generic question and let the learners participate freely, reconducting the group when necessary. The main advantage of the focus groups was that participants could practice the social aspect of learning a language with peer participants and share their experiences and tips for solving problems they experienced. Some of them even made a few metalinguistic reflections on their learning process (See Appendix IX, Focus Group 1, as a sample). Chapters 5 and 6 describe the findings from these instruments.

4.10 DATA ANALYSIS

As an exploratory [QUAL→quan] research approach was adopted in the two stages of this study, qualitative and quantitative data were analysed separately in the main study.

4.10.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

A cyclical process of data analysis is usually performed in mixed-methods research (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Following Watson-Gegeo (1988), three data-analysis stages were followed in this thesis. First, a comprehensive phase was developed via reviewing the literature specialising in LLSNS. Second, a topic-oriented period took place involving data collection with Busuu and Wespeke in the pilot studies. To conclude, there was a hypothesis-oriented level in which the idea of utilising LLSNS as complementary tools for learning SFL via blended language learning was implemented.

Specifically, the qualitative data collected via the previously explained tools (section 4.9) were analysed through content analysis, compressing the participants' open answers into ten content categories based on explicit coding rules (Stemler, 2001) using NVivo 12. In addition, triangulation was applied using multiple data collection instruments to explore the research topic from varied feasible perspectives.

4.10.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data obtained was analysed using IBM-SPSS-Statistics-27.0. However, as the thesis sample was small and there were a limited number of response options, the data obtained were skewed. Hence, it was necessary to apply a nonparametric measure of rank correlation (Pallant, 2016), namely, *Spearman's rho*, which measured the strength of association between two variables.

The 28 original quantitative variables measured via the pre-site feedback questionnaire doubled to 56 when adding the same number of variables corresponding to the post-site feedback questionnaire. Finally, the ten most relevant features were correlated and bi-variated, always taking the pre- and post-written examination variation as the reference point for all the correlations. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter 6.

4.11 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

As the thesis follows an exploratory [QUAL→quan] research approach through both stages, and as most of the data were obtained from qualitative instruments, it was necessary to consider the data in relation to their credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Mackey & Gass, 2016).

Data were collected from as many sources as possible, ensuring that the results were as complete as they could be to demonstrate that the findings of this thesis are credible to the research population. In addition, the data were described from multiple perspectives to provide a 'thick description' (Mackey & Gass, 2016). Finally, the data on which the results are based have been made available so that the results can be confirmed, modified, rejected, or replicated by other researchers.

All the previously described concepts are connected to triangulation. Methodological triangulation (using various measures or research methods to examine LLSNS) was applied in search of a convergent validation of the results to improve the accuracy of the collected data analysis. Furthermore, both the quantitative and qualitative data were cross-validated and found to be congruent and reliable (Jick, 1979).

In the next section, the main study will be explained after the common methodological features have been outlined.

4.12 THE DESIGN OF THE SFL COURSE USED IN THE MAIN STUDY

The findings from the pilot studies indicated that a beginners' SFL course using a Task-Supported Language Teaching and Blended Language Learning approach was required for the main study involving Wespeke. This section will explain the design of the tasks used and the teacher's and the learners' roles in that process.

4.12.1 Approach and Kind of Tasks Used

Even though researchers such as Anderson (2017) still propose the use of the

Presentation, Production, and Practice (PPP) paradigm in MFL teaching, my teaching

experience and the findings from the pilot studies suggested the need for another model

so that learners could be exposed to more authentic language use. While TBLT

appeared to achieve this goal, Swan (2005) suggested that TBLT may not suit beginner

level students, as beginner level learners require much more L2 input than intermediate

or advanced students. In response to this criticism, Ellis (2012) suggested using a hybrid

approach involving PPP + TBLT to develop the social skills needed for communication

in the real world. Based on this PPP + TBLT hybrid approach, I designed an SFL

beginners' course covering the elementary content to enable participants to interact via

specifically designed tasks.

The concept of task has already been clarified in Chapter 2 (see Table 2.4).

However, before explaining the content of the course and the tasks, it is important to

reiterate the definition of task identified by Ellis (2009, p. 223):

> *(1) The primary focus should be on 'meaning' (by which it is meant that learners should be mainly concerned with processing the semantic and pragmatic meaning of utterances).*
>
> *(2) There should be some 'gap' (i.e., a need to convey information, express an opinion, or infer meaning).*
>
> *(3) Learners should mainly rely on their own resources (linguistic and non-linguistic) to complete the activity.*
>
> *(4) There is a defined outcome other than the use of language (i.e., the language serves as the means for achieving the outcome, not as an end in its own right).*

According to Bygate (2016), the rationale for the TBLT approach is that tasks can be

devised and used in lessons to engage students in utilising language socially (both

speaking and in writing) to enable them to understand how features of the language

function, and to include the learnt language into their social interaction. Such

socialisation means learners link language to purposes and significance, receive feedback from others, and check if their meanings or expressions are appropriate. Hence, learners would gradually enhance their understanding of a new language, with the task creating a permanent context for recently learnt language to be activated, utilised, and finally grasped. Bygate (2016) stated that the three principal approaches to adopting TBLT in language learning are task-supported, task-referenced, and task-based. The task-supported approach utilises tasks to complement or support conventional or existing programmes. In this case, tasks are incorporated into existing structure-based programmes to create broader communicative language use opportunities, enhancing the actual language-focused syllabus. However, a task-referenced perspective uses tasks to determine the target skills students intend to learn by the end of each unit. Alternatively, a task-based programme is founded on a sequence of tasks in which all the units' teaching and learning contents are focused on the tasks themselves.

For this thesis, a task-supported approach was adopted as the most practical step-wise introduction to TBLT. In addition, a hybrid approach as recommended by Swan (2005), Ellis (2012), and Bygate (2016), namely, Anderson's Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration (TATE) model for language teaching, was also adopted. As clarified in Section 2.3.6.4, such an approach is "compatible with natural order theory and skill acquisition theory through its ability to integrate meaning-focused tasks within a task-supported approach to language teaching, allowing for both implicit and explicit learning processes" (Anderson, 2020a, p. 1).

Referring to the taxonomy proposed by Robinson (2011), Table 4.10 shows the features of the tasks developed for this research.

Table 4.10 Features of the Tasks Developed

YES	NO
Real-world: the target was daily, ordinary communication	Pedagogic: 'artificial' communication
Two-way: all participants were able to exchange information	One-way: only one participant manages the information
Open: no predetermined outcome Convergent: agreed outcome Divergent: no need to agree	Closed: there is a correct answer
Focused: induce the use of language constructs	Unfocused: not language focus
Output-based: participants are expected to produce language	Input-based: learners are mostly passive users of the language

Adapted from Robinson (2011, p.6)

To summarise, the tasks developed to learn SFL via blended learning with Wespeke and making use of Anderson's TATE were: real-world tasks, two-way informed, open outcome, sometimes convergent, otherwise divergent, focused, and—above all—output-based, as participants were expected to produce language and utilise it as a tool to complete the proposed tasks.

4.12.2 Task Supported Language Teaching Blended Lessons

I designed the lesson scheme based on the curriculum of the Instituto Cervantes, and this was the backbone of the SFL beginners course taught. It consisted of ten two-hour lessons (see Appendix XI). Its goal was to provide the participants with the essential tools to communicate in a basic way in their daily lives. Its design and contents were supervised and approved by a senior lecturer in Spanish at the UNW, and it was used throughout the five weeks of the course duration. As a result, it received very positive feedback from the students at the end of the course (see Appendix XV).

The blended lessons designed for the study resulted in a hybridised approach; their theoretical framework was the "blending technologies" procedure proposed by Hinkelman (2018), while pedagogically, they followed Anderson's TATE model for language teaching. The TATE model integrates both lexis and grammar, recognising the importance of written and spoken language practice during tasks (Anderson, 2020). For

example, in lesson number five of the course, the objective was to say what furniture was in the students' houses and rooms, and the communicative goal was to describe the furniture and rooms in a house. The grammar topics covered were: (1) Determined/non-determined articles; (2) Difference between "hay" (there is/there are) and "está" (to be located); (3) Differences between "es" + adjective (to be, description), "está" + preposition + place (to be, location), "tiene" + noun (to have) to mention accessories.

Hence, the same scheme of work was followed during the ten sessions of the intensive SFL beginners' course: two hours in the classroom, using the TATE model (60% of the total input), and one hour in the computer laboratory to practise new concepts learnt in the classroom, plus some free time when participants could be connected to Wespeke practising SFL virtually (via language exchange) on the platform (40%). They had been asked to complete logon sheets (Appendix VIII) to register what they did while connected. Unfortunately, there was some resistance from the participants to do so.

Applying the TATE model, the lesson started with a short text (T) distributed among the students and read aloud by the teacher, then twice more by two students (in order to practise pronunciation and intonation). The analysis (A) came immediately after the reading; students worked in pairs to find the new structures in the printed document (*hay, está, tiene*). The teacher elicited students' answers, recapped them, and distributed a summary of these structures. The task (T) involved the students drawing their favourite room in their house and describing it orally to their classmates so that they could draw a picture based on what they had listened to. The exploration (E) consisted of exchanging drawings, comparing differences, and correcting each other. Finally, students swapped roles.

Referring to the "blending technologies" procedure proposed by Hinkelman (2018), he defined it as "the continuous process of co-creating, configuring, and facilitating a community environment for second language learning with a strategic, local ecology of face-to-face and online technologies" (2018, p. 90). According to Hinkelman (2018), by substituting the tool-centric viewpoints that have typified research on Computer-Assisted Language Learning over the past 20 years with an ecological view of blended language learning, "teachers would focus more on the flexible design of teaching and activities that suits student needs, rather than feeling compelled to master the latest, ever-changing electronic devices" (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 79).

Therefore, the Task Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) blended lessons designed for the beginners' course in the study aimed to help students learn practical SFL concepts as part of their lifelong learning, using an LLSNS and not making it the centre of their learning process but as part of the community. Putting the community at the core of the blended lessons, the socio-cultural theory on which LLSNS are based is reinforced, as this contributes to each participant's learning through their interactions in the group. Hinkelman's ideas can be synthesised in his Principles of a Language Learning Ecology (2018, p. 74)

1. Environment is not only the conditions surrounding the teaching situation.
2. Community is the defining principle that holds together all the environment elements.
3. The syllabus design includes all the spaces, people and activities in a system.
4. Students select the learning contents.
5. The environment extends beyond the individual learner.

These five principles will be used in the discussion chapter (Chapter 7) to clarify whether Wespeke was suitable for delivering such a course following a blended learning approach.

4.12.3 The Teacher's Role

Besides facilitating a community-based MFL learning environment (Hinkelman, 2018), it is essential to clarify the role of the MFL teacher. Richards and Rodgers (2014) suggested that the teacher should take some responsibility when referring to TBLT. However, because TSLT is the 'weak' form of TBLT, I performed the following four primary roles: First, I selected and sequenced the tasks; second, I prepared the participants for the tasks; third, I raised their consciousness of the tasks; and fourth, I monitored their completion. Concerning the first role, I was active in selecting, modifying, and devising tasks and then adapting them to the learner's needs, interests, hopes, and language skill level. However, I was constrained due to the participants' beginner level. In the end, the tasks were limited to practising new structures and vocabulary learnt via Wespeke orally.

In relation to the second role of the teacher, I provided the participants with some training for pre-tasks. Following Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011), these training activities included a topic introduction, specifying task instructions, supporting students in learning or recalling helpful vocabulary and phrases to achieve the task efficiently, and partially displaying the task process. Third, to raise participants' consciousness of the tasks, I enhanced learners' interest by ensuring they realised the usefulness of topics to be practised orally on Wespeke and in daily life in the future. Finally, in relation to the fourth teacher's role in monitoring, I observed learners' tasks completion constantly and decided whether an intervention was required during or after a task.

Specifically referring to TSLT, besides motivating the learners (Mohammadzadeh & Alavinia, 2021) and promoting learners' oral fluency (Castillo et al., 2018), I focused on participants' empowerment (Misdi et al., 2018) as they became

aware of the meaning, value, and practicality of what they were learning, and above all, I encouraged them to feel competent, qualified, and capable in communicating when performing their tasks. Furthermore, as Anderson's (2020) TATE model guided the study, Shintani's (2014) metaphor—which describes the teacher as a navigator—was also followed; throughout the course, I was monitoring and guiding all the time, but the control of the interaction was handed over constantly to the learners while interacting via tasks.

4.12.4 The Learners' Role

The learners' role in TSLT lessons is not to be passive receptacles of understood input; learners must lead their own learning (Aubrey et al., 2020). This course's TSLT lessons were student-centred (Ellis, 2020; Long, 2015a; Van den Branden, 2016), meaning participants were always fundamental to the learning process. In this TSLT course, participants needed to make the most of their interaction to develop language while performing their online tasks. Richards and Rodgers (2014) proposed that teachers and learners are responsible for developing classroom interaction.

Hence, based on social constructivism, in this course, learners became instructors of their peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Participants were permanently engaged by using Anderson's (2020) TATE model. First, they dealt with the initial text (T) that the lessons started with, and they had to read/listen to it; they also had to analyse (A) the text in pairs in order to discover the new structures to be learnt in each lesson; immediately after that, the participants had to complete the task (T), and finally, the exploration (E) consisted of exchanging viewpoints and roles with their peers, and supporting and correcting each other.

4.13 SUMMARY

This chapter has described the technical details of the research in the thesis. It started by establishing the research questions and research strategy and, following an abductive strategy, continued with the approaches to research design. It examined the exploratory [QUAL→quan] approach adopted and the rationale for its use. Furthermore, it explained the research stages (pilot studies and main study), the LLSNS studied, the institutional context, participants and sampling. It described the ethical principles underpinning the study, and the use of pre- and post-written tests, pre- and post-oral tests, user experience questionnaire, site feedback questionnaire, logon sheets, and focus groups. An introduction to the corresponding qualitative and quantitative data analysis was also provided to summarise the applicability of concepts such as validity and reliability to this thesis. Finally, the rationale for the design of the TSLT course in the main study was also elucidated, relating to the approach and kind of tasks used, the TSLT blended lessons, and, to conclude, the teacher's and learner's roles. The results of the analysis of the obtained data are the subject of Chapters 5 and 6.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS: WHAT THEORIES OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DO LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ADHERE TO?

5.1 INTRODUCTION

According to the most recent thematic review on Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) research (Chen et al., 2021, p. 158), current CALL research mainly focuses on mobile-assisted language learning, followed by project-based learning, blended learning, computer-mediated communication and synchronous computer-mediated communication, and digital multimodal composing. However, this has meant that several strategic topics have been under-researched. For example, out of 1,295 articles analysed by Chen et al. (2021), published in the three leading international CALL journals (*Language Learning & Technology*, *CALL*, and *ReCALL*) from 1995 to 2019, only 119 (9.18%) referred to blended learning. Furthermore, the thematic review does not mention Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS). This thesis has sought to address this lack of research on LLSNS, extending and deepening existing research in this area (Zourou, 2016). Chapter 5 examines the findings from the study related to the pedagogy behind the LLSNS (Research Question (RQ)1). Then, Chapter 6 centres its attention on exploring the findings vis-à-vis the LLSNS features that students thought were most beneficial in helping them develop language skills (RQ2).

As Ellison and Boyd (2013) highlighted, as the broader field of learning technologies, LLSNS are a rapidly changing phenomenon. As they put it: "two studies of a particular site that produce different findings may not be 'contradictory'—they may actually have examined what is, in essence, two different socio-technical contexts" (Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 167). They concluded by suggesting that scholars should pursue research that aims to achieve greater understanding and conceives of theories

beyond the studied site and is helpful even after the site design changes. This thesis has followed such advice.

Nevertheless, the findings described in this chapter show that changes to LLSNS are not merely motivated by educational purposes but also economic and commercial ones. Changes in LLSNS reflect neoliberal trends that promote digital applications for teaching and learning (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012) within an increasingly for-profit sector in which language learners are viewed as customers purchasing a product (Teräs et al., 2020). The rapidly changing functionality, rise and demise of LLSNS throughout this thesis show that they are difficult to research. Although purporting to challenge learners through adherence to contemporary learning theories, they offer short-burst forms of "fast-food" learning using traditional behaviourist designs (Ritzer, 2019).

To answer RQ1 (What theories of SLA do Language Learning Social Networking Sites adhere to?), an abductive strategy was mainly used to describe and understand the second language acquisition theories LLSNS adhere to (RQ1). First, 39 different articles that investigated LLSNS were analysed. Then, following Blaikie and Priest's (2019) abductive logic, once those concepts were understood and to obtain rich answers to the research question, a deductive strategy was also applied to answer RQ1, to test Álvarez's (2016) proposal that Busuu fulfilled all the requirements that a social network should feature. Additionally, Vesselinov and Grego's (2016) claim was also tested, that 22.5 hours of Busuu would be equivalent to a whole university semester and necessary to progress to the next level when learning SFL.

Therefore, the literature review in Chapter 2 showed how CALL has evolved into a social stage in which learners have been positioned as collaborative language prosumers via their use of mobile devices and Web 2.0 technologies (Thomas, Reinders,

& Warschauer, 2014) in real and/or virtual world environments. As most of the interaction in LLSNS should take place through their networking aspect, they "adhere" to the principles of social constructivism (RQ1). Therefore, it was necessary to contrast the literature review results with the most used LLSNS worldwide, Busuu and Wespeke. Both LLSNS fulfilled the requirements to be considered according to the definition proposed by Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011), forming two case studies that illustrate the field's tendencies in general.

Specifically, this chapter presents the findings relating to RQ1. It first recaps the main findings from 39 different articles that investigated LLSNS (Table 3.4) before presenting the empirical findings arising from the course designed specifically for this thesis in the shape of four data collection instruments (user experience questionnaire, site feedback questionnaire (SFQ), focus groups, and logon sheets).

5.2 RECAP OF THE FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW: WHAT THEORIES OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DO LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ADHERE TO?

As seen in section 3.3, to obtain the research articles that are core to the thesis, it was necessary to conduct a thorough search. Besides the three leading international CALL journals (*CALL*, *Language Learning & Technology*, and *ReCALL*), this research also included CALICO Journal, and the two most commonly used academic search engines were utilised (Scopus and Google Scholar). The keywords (and their intersections) used were "Language Learning Social Networking Sites" (or its variant "Social Networking Sites for Language Learning"), "Busuu," "Wespeke," and "Spanish as a Foreign Language." Studies that referred to Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, among others, were excluded as they were not the focus of this research. As this thesis started in 2015, the studies collected started six years earlier, from 2009, and continued until the investigation was completed in 2022.

Thirty-nine empirical research studies about LLSNS were obtained and analysed (see section 3.3, Literature Review). Different theoretical frameworks supported those empirical studies on LLSNS. Most of the research was framed along socio-cultural and socio-cognitive dimensions such as socio-cultural theory (Álvarez, 2015, 2016); activity theory (Malerba, 2015); social constructivism (Brick, 2013); and social cognitive theory (Orsini-Jones et al., 2013). According to Wang and Vásquez (2012), this picture reflects the shift in computer use in language learning, at least in the CALL domain, from a structural/cognitive approach to a more socio-cognitive approach (Warschauer, 2000). Such an approach sees the computer as a tool that mediates interactions between language learners and other humans. This finding further corresponds to the development of Web 2.0 technology which initiated a shift from "linking information to linking people" (Wesch, 2007) and created more opportunities for learner interaction. Therefore, communication and interaction-based learning should be understood as the backbone of many socially focused approaches to L2 learning, mainly through LLSNS.

As a consequence, with specific regard to Web 2.0 language learning communities, van Dixhoorn, Loiseau, Mangenot, Potolia, and Zourou (2010) designed a typology of three kinds: (1) structured Web 2.0 language learning communities (LLSNS), which constitutes the locus of this research; (2) language exchange sites; and (3) marketplaces. In Chapter 3, Table 3.3 visualises this typology with existing language learning communities during the first stage of this research.

Such LLSNS were obtained by searching for them as "Language Exchange sites/apps" between 2015 and 2016. However, an update of Table 3.3 showed that 6 of these 22 LLSNS (27.27%) were no longer operating as of December 2021: Speaky, HelloLingo, Language for Exchange, TongueOut, Verbling, and Wespeke. This is an increase of 9.9% from those not operating only one year earlier in December 2020,

confirming the constantly shifting nature of this area of study. As LLSNS are in

constant development (Ellison & Boyd, 2013), a caveat to be considered for the entire

Literature Review on LLSNS is the date of publication. Therefore, some of the

conclusions of these studies may not be valid currently as the LLSNS studied have

changed in terms of their core functionality, or they may no longer exist.

With reference to the 39 empirical research studies about LLSNS at the core of

this research, Table 3.9 shows the theoretical frameworks of socio-cultural theory,

social constructivism, and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development to be the most

cited when researching LLSNS. In contrast, almost 18% of these studies do not mention

any theoretical framework. Therefore, based on existing research, the first stage of the

thesis explored how LLSNS adhere to or diverge from social constructivism approaches

to SLA (Liu et al., 2015). Hence, it was fundamental to analyse learners' interactions to

determine whether language learning opportunities were encouraged or hindered by

their intrinsic social dimension (Malerba, 2012). Furthermore, it was necessary to focus

on one specific LLSNS as an example, and as Busuu was the one used mainly by the

public worldwide, it was chosen for this purpose.

Related to RQ1, different researchers have highlighted social constructivism as

the theory on which Busuu was based. For example, Gruba and Clark (2013) referred to

socio-cultural theory in the context of purposeful interaction, contextualised

understanding and enhanced learning via immediate feedback provided by Busuu. Liu et

al. (2013) spoke of socio-cultural SLA, evidencing peers' feedback as a crucial

affordance that LLSNS can provide and as an instrument that mediates language

development (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). Orsini-Jones, Brick, and Pibworth (2013)

recognised social collaboration and socio-cognitive growth, identifying peer feedback,

text conferencing, and group formation as the affordances found in Busuu. However, of

all of these studies, only Álvarez's (2016) research focused explicitly on Busuu. Based on his synthesis of previous research, he concluded that LLSNS comprise pedagogical features and tenets from diverse theories of language learning that are interwoven in a confrontational but simultaneously complementary way in an ecological system of nested semiotic spaces. For example, language is introduced to users following behaviourist principles and the cognitive view of learning; however, users in LLSNS are also requested to interact and think of learning as emerging from interaction and co-construction.

Most of these researchers may also have been influenced by the marketing strategies LLSNS used to promote themselves. For example, advertisements frequently mention the basic principles of socio-cultural SLA in their promotional rhetoric and campaigns to attract new users. One example from a marketing video in 2015 about Busuu expresses this well:

> *Busuu is the largest social network for language learning, where you can practise [the four basic language skills] engagingly and affordably through award-winning courses designed by qualified language experts. It is a worldwide community of language learners just like you, and you can connect, interact, and practise and receive instant feedback as well as berries [points] and badges to keep you motivated. Wherever and whenever. Register for free!*
> (Busuu advertising video, July 2015.)

The advertisement did not say that if users decided not to pay, they would only have access to a minimal number of lessons (only to the first lesson of the four levels they offered). They would also not have access to "instant" feedback from other users, quizzes, or grammar lessons. Even if Busuu advertised itself as an education technology company under a social constructivist SLA approach, studies undoubtedly suggest that its primary interest is short-term commercial profit rather than long-term education development (Chik, 2015). Busuu applies neoliberal corporate policies where

quantification is more important than lifelong learning (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012).

Wespeke, an LLSNS founded in 2010 and promoted by the Languages Technologies Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, also advertised itself indirectly following similar socio-cultural SLA principles as

> *An easy-to-use international social network with a purpose: faster language acquisition, increased proficiency, and improved cultural understanding to build relationships via a 24/7 real-time video connection. Global exchange through the social network for social networks for free!* (Wespeke advertising video, May 2016.)

Wespeke tried to give its users all that it had offered. However, as they offered too much for free, their platform was too slow, which deterred their users from effectively utilising it, as the participants in this thesis complained. In the end, it became a victim of the McDonaldisation (Ritzer, 2019) of higher education (HE), as initially it was intended for HE only. However, due to falling numbers of HE users, its target market was extended to the general public to make it profitable, and it followed the four basic principles of McDonaldisation: (1) efficiency, using the best method for moving from one point to another; (2) calculability, emphasising the quantifiable features of products/services offered rather than their quality; (3) predictability, the guarantee that products/services will be the same wherever/whenever, 24/7; (4) control, via limited "menus" and few options, forcing their users to do everything quickly and leave.

After reiterating the essential aspects of the findings from the literature review, the following section considers the empirical data, first on Busuu and then on Wespeke.

5.3 BUSUU

Using the data collection tools mentioned (section 4.5.1.4) to answer RQ1, following an abductive strategy, and referring to Busuu as a case study, the most important finding of this phase was that the networking aspect of Busuu was no longer as prevalent as

indicated by Álvarez (2015). Instead, it advertised itself as based on an SLA social

constructivist approach, but it comprised pedagogical features from different language

learning theories within an ecological system of nested semiotic spaces (Álvarez, 2016).

Furthermore, some participants expressed disappointment due to the absence of the

networking feature, which though prominent in the advertisements, was not evident in

reality. Hence, it was necessary to determine if Busuu followed the five fundamental

principles of social constructivism synthesised by Bronack, Riedl and Tashner (2006),

as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Principles of Social Constructivism

1. Learning is participatory
2. Knowledge is social
3. Learning leads development through predictable stages via shared activity
4. A useful knowledge base emerges through meaningful activity with others
5. Learners develop dispositions relative to the communities in which they practise.

Taken from Bronack, Riedl & Tashner (2006).

Drawing on these principles, the following sections present findings by data collection

instrument to explore how Busuu adheres to the principles of socio-constructivism,

beginning with the quantitative findings.

5.3.1 Quantitative Findings

Two data collection instruments were used to obtain quantitative data: a user experience

questionnaire (Appendix VI) and SFQ (Appendix VII).

5.3.1.1 User Experience Questionnaire

The results attained through the data collection tools showed that learning is not

participatory in Busuu. Conversely, individual learning was fostered by the layout, and

this conflicted sharply with the notion of an LLSNS environment as a community of

practice in which learners share objectives and engage in continuous cooperative and

meaningful language learning activities.

The 14 participants were invited to answer a user experience questionnaire, focusing on their interactive learning in a group context. The first specific task (see Figure 4.4) was to write a short self-introduction in Spanish. A total of 42.8% of participants knew where to complete this task. However, 50% complained verbally about the lack of satisfactory instructions about navigating the platform. Therefore, participants were verbally instructed to include general information about themselves in their profile for the second specific task (fill in information about yourself), and all of them could achieve this.

None of the participants could complete the third specific task, namely, to accept "friends" (peer language learning supporters), as Busuu had suspended the friending feature as they were migrating their platforms to make them compatible with mobile devices. Hence, at this point, Busuu had stopped being an LLSNS as it fulfilled only three (37.5%) out of eight of the basic features every SNS should have according to the definitions used in this thesis from Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011). Busuu only allowed users to create a profile, upload user-generated content, and receive feedback.

The final specific task, saving other users' helpful corrections, also became challenging due to the friending feature's cancellation. As a result, only 7.14% of the participants could complete it successfully.

The first two open-ended tasks, which involved finding peer language learner supporters and practising Spanish with a native for five minutes, were not possible due to the migration process in execution while this stage took place. However, in the third open-ended task, which required students to work on any lesson by themselves, all participants (100%) engaged, and 35.7% verbally expressed satisfaction.

To summarise, due to the refurbishment of the platform, only four out of eight (50%) tasks could be attempted and completed, all of which had to be performed without social interaction, and this confirmed that in terms of being an LLSNS Busuu no longer followed a social constructivism SLA approach.

5.3.1.2 Site Feedback Questionnaire

The questionnaire's objective was to discover if Busuu adhered to a theory of SLA. The same feedback questionnaire (Appendix VII) was used twice. The first time, immediately after the first contact the participants had with the platform, and the second time, to compare if their viewpoint after using Busuu for four weeks had changed. Each of its five different sections is analysed next.

Table 5.2: Feedback on Site Design

Measurable Aspect	1		2		3		4		5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Ease of finding information	7%	0	29%	10%	36%	40%	21%	40%	7%	10%
2. Quality of learning activities	0	0	14%	10%	43%	30%	29%	40%	14%	20%
3. Ease of reading texts	0	0	0	10%	36%	20%	29%	30%	36%	40%
4. Appearance	0	0	0	10%	29%	20%	36%	30%	36%	40%
5. Displaying speed	14%	0	7%	10%	14%	10%	36%	10%	29%	70%
6. Entertainment value	0	0	14%	10%	43%	30%	36%	40%	7%	20%
7. Overall learning experience	7%	0	7%	0	43%	40%	43%	50%	0	10%
8. Instructions for activities	14%	0	50%	20%	21%	30%	7%	30%	7%	20%
9. Ease of moving around	21%	10%	43%	20%	21%	20%	7%	30%	7%	20%
10. Ease of finding contacts	71%	40%	14%	30%	14%	20%	0	10%	0	0

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *very dissatisfied* and 5= *very satisfied*.

Table 5.2 shows participants' dissatisfaction with using a platform that did not follow the social constructivist SLA features as advertised. The users did not find opportunities for social interaction to learn and practise Spanish as a Foreign Language. Moreover, while they expected to engage and practise the four basic skills and speak and receive instant feedback through an LLSNS, they could only create a profile, upload user-generated content, and receive asynchronous feedback. Therefore, in the first SFQ, 71%

of participants were *very dissatisfied* with the ease of finding contacts, and this would

rise to 85% if the 14% who said they were *dissatisfied* were added.

a) Features

As seen in the previous paragraph, from the three features that users still could find in

Busuu (create a profile, upload user-generated content, and receive asynchronous

feedback), the latter two features relate to learning development via shared activity.

However, as shown in Table 5.3, these three characteristics comprise only 37.5% of the

basic features every SNS should satisfy, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008) and

Duffy (2011). Table 5.3 shows participants' responses to the features found in Busuu

based on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 5.3: Features that Can be Found in Busuu

Measurable aspect	1		2		3		4		5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Creating a profile	21%	20%	43%	70%	36%	10%	0	0	0	0
2. Friending	50%	60%	7%	0	36%	30%	7%	0	0	10%
3. Vocabulary	43%	0	14%	0	29%	30%	14%	50%	0	20%
4. Posting	14%	20%	14%	0	21%	20%	50%	50%	0	10%
5. Receiving feedback	29%	0	14%	10%	21%	30%	21%	40%	14%	20%
6. Giving feedback	43%	40%	14%	20%	36%	30%	7%	10%	0	0
7. Images	29%	20%	21%	0	29%	30%	21%	40%	0	10%
8. Corrections and comments	29%	20%	21%	20%	21%	20%	21%	30%	7%	10%

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *very dissatisfied* and 5= *very satisfied*.

As shown in Table 5.3, the most significant division of opinion was related to the

usefulness of the features found in Busuu. Most participants agreed when measuring the

friending feature: 50% of participants said it was not helpful in the pre-test, which

increased to 60% in the post-test. By contrast, the features most valued by the

participants in the post-test were being able to learn vocabulary (20%, increasing to

70% if the satisfied users were counted) and receiving feedback (20%, rising to 60%

likewise).

b) Skills

As Busuu was not following the social constructivist SLA approach, participants did not have the opportunity to acquire useful knowledge by interacting in meaningful activities with other students. Table 5.4 shows the participants' opinions about the skills that could have been improved using Busuu.

Table 5.4: Skills that Could Be Improved Using Busuu

Skills Measured	1		2		3		4		5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Speaking	21%	30%	29%	40%	36%	20%	7%	10%	7%	0
2. Listening	21%	0	21%	10%	29%	30%	21%	60%	7%	0
3. Reading	7%	0	21%	0	21%	30%	36%	60%	14%	10%
4. Writing	7%	10%	29%	20%	29%	30%	14%	30%	21%	10%
5. Grammar	21%	10%	29%	10%	14%	40%	21%	20%	14%	20%
6. Pronunciation	29%	20%	43%	50%	21%	20%	0	10%	7%	0
7. Vocabulary	7%	0	21%	20%	36%	10%	29%	50%	7%	20%
8. Culture	21%	10%	57%	20%	7%	50%	7%	20%	7%	0

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *completely disagree*, and 5= *completely agree*.

Table 5.4 shows different opinions about the skills that could be improved using Busuu. The highest number, 57%, of participants showed scepticism about a potential improvement in cultural knowledge when using Busuu, which increases by an additional 21%, including participants who disagreed strongly with this possibility in the pre-test. These figures vary for the post-test, as 50% chose a middle point in the scale regarding culture. The higher figure in the post-test of 60% can be found when showing agreement that their listening and reading skills could improve after using Busuu, and accordingly, none of the participants expressed disagreement.

5.3.1.3 General Perception of the Site

As Busuu decided not to follow the social constructivist SLA approach, learners did not have the chance to create a community of learning, thus confirming the difficulty of engaging users to drive their own learning process in SNS (Jones, 2001). Table 5.5 synthesises the participants' general perception of the site regarding whether they would

return as learners in the future or recommend the learning platform to other language

learners.

Table 5.5: General Perception of the Site

Possibilities	1		2		3		4		5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Return to the site	0	0	14%	0	14%	30%	50%	60%	21%	10%
2. Recommend the site	14%	10%	21%	10%	43%	60%	14%	20%	7%	0

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *completely disagree*, and 5= *completely agree*.

In the pre-test, 71% of participants declared they would return to the platform, while

14% had some doubts, and 14% were neutral. It is important to highlight that none of

the participants said they would not return; however, some explained that this was due

to their commitment to participate in the research. These figures decreased to 70% of

participants who said they would return in the post-test, while 30% expressed doubts.

Accordingly, when asked if they would recommend Busuu to other language

users for learning Spanish (Table 5.5), 43% expressed neutrality in their opinion in the

pre-test. Interestingly, 35% said they would not recommend this site, while 21% said

they would. However, figures varied in the post-test: 60% still declared neutrality, 20%

said they would not recommend it, and 20% agreed they would recommend the site.

5.3.2 Qualitative Findings

To determine the SLA theories that underpinned Busuu, when asked why participants

would return to the site or why they would recommend it or not, their viewpoints

generally varied between two extremes. One could be synthesised by Leah, who said:

> It is a great app. Although I can only see it as an additional feature. You still
> need to speak to people and use books.

By contrast, Christine outlined a more positive perspective:

> This was supposed to be a social network site to help improve my Spanish. I
> never found anyone ever that I could connect with.

Both answers implied the lack of a social constructivist approach, which, although evident in Busuu's promotional material, could not be found in the platform's actual functionality.

In addition, when asked about what they disliked in the platform, 86% mentioned the difficulty of navigating the site, and 50% specifically pointed to the impossibility of contacting other users. Finally, in the post-test questionnaire, 67% of participants spontaneously mentioned not being able to find peer language learning supporters, and 34% mentioned the inadequacy of grammar contents, as exercises were not sufficient, too repetitive, not clear enough, or difficult to return to when further practice was required. Moreover, 57% of participants recommended that Busuu needed to improve opportunities for learner collaboration. For example, Letizia's comments clearly captured this point: "the social aspect of the network should be implemented."

Finally, Figure 5.6 shows the list of the 15 words most frequently used by the participants when replying to the SFQ.

Table 5.6: The 15 Most Frequently Used Keywords by Participants in the Site Feedback Questionnaire

	Word	Frequency of Mention
(1)	Learning	280
(2)	Language	255
(3)	Lesson	192
(4)	Site	158
(5)	Social	142
(6)	Vocabulary	141
(7)	Users	140
(8)	Spanish	123
(9)	User	118
(10)	Grammar	113
(11)	LLSNS	103
(12)	Feedback	101
(13)	None	97
(14)	Different	95
(15)	Friends	91

Table 5.6 highlights the importance the participants gave to the social constructivist approach they expected to find in Busuu, as evident for example, in the use of keywords such as "social" (position 5), "users/user" (7, 9), "LLSNS" (11), "feedback" (12), and "friends" (peer language learning supporters) (15).

After discovering that Busuu did not follow a social constructivist approach anymore, the next section will show the findings for Wespeke.

5.4 WESPEKE

Using different data collection tools to answer RQ1, one crucial finding of this stage of the research study was that as Wespeke did not offer specific learning contents for SFL, participants did not focus on learning or reviewing specific themes but on practising the language itself. As a result, just 11.1% of the participants directly asked their online language exchange partners to practise themes they considered they needed to improve. As in the section on Busuu, following an abductive strategy, this section presents the findings on Wespeke by exploring the data collection tools (section 4.5.2.4) and following the principles of social constructivism shown in Table 5.1.

5.4.1 Quantitative Findings

As with Busuu, two data collection instruments were used to obtain quantitative data for Wespeke: a user experience questionnaire (Appendix VI) and an SFQ (Appendix VII).

5.4.1 1 User Experience Questionnaire

Participants' answers in the user experience questionnaire suggested that learning was participatory in Wespeke. This platform encouraged learners to engage in meaningful interaction within a community of practice (Bronack et al., 2006, p. 223), and as a result, both more and less experienced participants found themselves immersed in

Wespeke's social network and were able to exchange languages and practise what they knew with their peers.

As explained in section 4.5.2.4, to identify what theories of SLA Wespeke adhered to, the participants were invited to answer a user experience questionnaire. The first specific task was to write a short self-introduction in Spanish, and all the participants (100%) were able to complete it without experiencing any significant challenges. Similarly, all of the participants completed the second specific task, which consisted of completing information about themselves, and the third task involved accepting "friends" (peer language learning supporters). However, 11.1% of the participants complained about not receiving enough peers' suggestions and input into their language learning activities from the system. That was because they had provided little information about themselves, so it was difficult for the software to identify or suggest relevant matches related to their profile. However, the system provided them with a broader list of suggested peers once the participants had been guided through adding more information about their language learning biographies.

Most participants achieved the two open-ended tasks: finding peers within the social network and practising Spanish with them for ten minutes each day. Nevertheless, as explained in the previous paragraph, a few of them experienced challenges. For example, one participant decided not to regularly meet with his peer friend as suggested by the online system as he preferred to chat only with learners he had previously met in person, which improved his motivation level. However, overall, all of the participants completed the set tasks in the user experience questionnaire, and the findings show that there was a high degree of participatory learning available in Wespeke.

5.4.1.2 Site Feedback Questionnaire

As with Busuu, the questionnaire's objective was to confirm if Wespeke adhered to a theory of SLA. The same feedback questionnaire was used twice. The first time, it was used immediately after the first contact the participants had with the platform, and the second time, it was used to compare whether their viewpoint after using Wespeke for four weeks had changed. Each of its four different sections is analysed next.

Table 5.7 shows the feedback on site design.

Table 5.7: Feedback on Site Design

Measurable Aspect	1		2		3		4		5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Ease of finding information	0	0	0	14%	44%	29%	44%	43%	11%	14%
2. Quality of information	0	0	0	14%	11%	43%	67%	43%	22%	0
3. Ease of reading texts	0	0	0	14%	0	14%	22%	57%	78%	14%
4. Appearance	0	0	0	14%	22%	0	44%	71%	33%	14%
5. Displaying speed	0	14%	0	29%	0	43%	56%	14%	44%	0
6. Entertainment value	0	0	0	43%	33%	29%	44%	29%	22%	0
7. Overall learning experience	0	0	11%	29%	22%	43%	56%	14%	11%	14%
8. Instructions for activities	0	0	0	14%	33%	43%	44%	43%	22%	0
9. Ease of moving around	0	0	0	14%	22%	43%	56%	14%	22%	29%
10. Ease of finding contacts	0	0	0	0	44%	0	11%	57%	44%	43%

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *very dissatisfied* and 5= *very satisfied*.

Table 5.7 shows that after four weeks of using Wespeke, 57% of participants expressed satisfaction with the ease of finding information and contacts to exchange languages and practise/learn Spanish with them. That percentage rises to 100% if the remaining 43% of very satisfied participants are included in this figure, confirming that knowledge was considered social by the participants using Wespeke in the study. However, the highest mark achieved by the platform referred to its appearance, as 71% of participants confirmed their satisfaction with its aspect. Furthermore, as the feedback on site design

(Table 5.7) indicates, the highest number of *very satisfied* users, immediately after completing the user experience questionnaire, referred to the ease of reading texts, which registered 78% of participants as satisfied. This figure increases to 100% if the participants who indicated *satisfied* were also included. The second-highest ranking was 67% of participants who identified their satisfaction with the quality of information provided in Wespeke. In comparison, 56% shared their satisfaction regarding Wespeke's display speed, overall learning experience, and ease of navigating the online language learning platform.

Accordingly, it is important to highlight that none of the participants showed a high rate of dissatisfaction with any of the measured aspects of Wespeke's site design. For example, only 11% indicated dissatisfaction with the overall learning experience. Alternatively, 44% were neutral when referring to the ease of finding information and finding contacts. Notably, the highest rate of dissatisfaction referred to the entertainment value of the Wespeke platform, with 43% of participants expressing dissatisfaction. Moreover, 14% expressed being *very dissatisfied* with the platform's speed.

a) Features

Unlike Busuu, Wespeke covered 100% of the basic features every SNS should satisfy, according to Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011). Table 5.8 shows the participants' opinions on five of the most important of Wespeke's features based on a five-point Likert Scale.

Table 5.8: Features that Could be Found in Wespeke

Measurable Aspect	1 Not Useful at all		2 Not Useful		3 Neutral		4 Useful		5 Very Useful	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Creating a profile	0	14%	22%	14%	11%	43%	56%	29%	11%	0
2. Friending	0	14%	11%	0	0	14%	67%	29%	22%	43%
3. Exchanging languages	0	0	11%	29%	0	14%	56%	43%	33%	14%

4. Receiving feedback	0	0	11%	0	33%	29%	44%	57%	11%	14%
5. Giving feedback	0	0	22%	43%	33%	14%	33%	43%	11%	0

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *Not useful at all* and 5= *Very useful*.

When measuring the interaction features found in Wespeke, immediately after completing the user experience questionnaire, 67% of participants considered the friending feature useful for practising SFL. At the same time, 56% thought that creating a profile and exchanging languages would also be helpful. These figures increased to 89% and 67%, respectively, if those who considered the friending and exchanging languages features *very useful* were also included. However, even in the first SFQ, 22% believed the features of creating a profile and giving feedback to other users were not helpful. In contrast, 33% were neutral about giving and receiving feedback.

Conversely, after four weeks of using the platform, 43% considered the friending feature *very useful* for exchanging languages; this percentage increased to 72% if those who believed it useful were included. Likewise, while 57% thought receiving feedback was useful, it increased to 71% if the ones who considered it *very useful* were added. Finally, 43% of participants agreed that giving feedback and exchanging languages was beneficial. In the latter case, the percentage increased to 57% if the participants who considered it *very useful* were also added.

At first sight, these results may seem contradictory in terms of the skills that could be improved using Wespeke. However, the fact that 71% of participants agreed that reading was the skill that could be improved most using the online platform, while 57% thought that writing would be improved (see Table 5.9), confirms the learners' view that speaking and listening were catered for less among Wespeke's functions. Furthermore, after four weeks of using Wespeke, the previous results confirmed that the participants thought interacting on this platform led to developing their SFL learning.

Still referring to the results after four weeks of using Wespeke, creating a profile was the feature that achieved the lowest rating, as 29% of the participants considered it useful, while 43% expressed neutrality on this question. Furthermore, 14% evaluated it as *not useful*, and 14% as *not useful at all*. Likewise, 14% agreed that the friending feature was *not useful at all*.

The other two features with divided opinions were exchanging languages, which 28.5% considered *not useful* as opposed to 57.1% who believed it *useful*, and giving feedback, which 42.8% of participants considered *not useful*. The same percentage marked it as useful, while 14.2% expressed neutrality.

b) Skills

As Wespeke followed the social constructivist approach, participants could acquire useful knowledge by interacting in meaningful activities with other students. Table 5.9 shows the participants' opinions about the skills that could have been improved using Wespeke.

Table 5.9: Skills That Could be Improved Using Wespeke

Skills Measured	1		2		3		4		5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Speaking	0	0	11%	29%	22%	57%	56%	14%	11%	0
2. Listening	0	0	22%	57%	33%	43%	33%	0	11%	0
3. Reading	0	0	22%	0	0	29%	33%	71%	44%	0
4. Writing	0	0	11%	14%	0	0	22%	57%	67%	29%
5. Grammar	0	0	11%	29%	33%	43%	33%	29%	22%	0
6. Pronunciation	0	0	11%	29%	44%	71%	33%	0	11%	0
7. Vocabulary	0	0	11%	14%	22%	43%	11%	29%	56%	14%
8. Culture	0	0	11%	14%	22%	29%	44%	29%	22%	29%

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *completely disagree*, and 5= *completely agree*.

Table 5.9 shows the participants' opinions, immediately after utilising the platform for four weeks and after completing the user experience questionnaire, about the skills that could be improved using Wespeke. This was the most important part of the SFQ as it focused on the theories of SLA that Wespeke adhered to (RQ1) and as it was tightly

correlated to the features of LLSNS that could be most beneficial for the students to develop language skills (RQ2).

The highest response rate corresponded to writing skills, as 67% of participants agreed that their writing would be improved using Wespeke. Another 56% of participants thought their vocabulary would improve, while another 56% agreed that their speaking skills would improve. None of the participants completely disagreed that their skills would improve in the first SFQ or after using the platform for four weeks. For example, 22% of participants disagreed that their reading or listening skills could be improved, while another 44% responded by neither agreeing nor disagreeing when referring to improving their pronunciation.

After four weeks of using the platform, 71% agreed that reading was the skill that could be improved using Wespeke, while 57% thought that writing would be improved. However, this figure rose to 86% if the other participants who responded by completely agreeing were also included, still referring to writing. Correspondingly, another 29% considered that their grammar, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge would improve using Wespeke. That figure increased to 58% when agreeing participants were added in the case of culture and 43% in the case of vocabulary. Such results confirmed that the participants thought they could acquire useful knowledge due to meaningful interaction with others while using Wespeke.

However, only 14% of the participants thought their speaking would improve while using Wespeke, which was a disappointing result as these types of social networking platforms for language learning are mainly intended to enhance the speaking skills of the users. However, the participants did not perceive it that way. On the contrary, 57% gave a neutral answer, and 29% believed they would not improve their speaking skills. Furthermore, 57% were sceptical as they thought their listening

skills would not improve. However, 43% provided a neutral answer when referring to this aspect. Similarly, another 29% said that their grammar and pronunciation would not improve either, while the other 43% provided a neutral answer when referring to grammar.

The highest percentage of neutral responses was 71%, which referred to pronunciation, followed by 43% of participants who responded with a neutral answer about listening, grammar, and vocabulary. Finally, 29% also provided a neutral answer regarding their reading and cultural skills. Overall, 14% of participants thought their writing, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge would not improve while using Wespeke.

5.4.1.3 General Perception of the Site

As Wespeke followed the social constructivist SLA approach, learners could create a community of learning, exchange languages, and even drive their own learning process in SNSs (Jones, 2001). Table 5.10 synthesises the participants' general perception of Wespeke's site regarding whether they would return as learners in the future or recommend the learning platform to other language learners.

Table 5.10: General Perception of the Site

Possibilities	1		2		3		4		5	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Return to the site	0	29%	0	29%	22%	14%	44%	29%	33%	0
2. Recommend the site	0	0	0	0	33%	14%	22%	57%	44%	29%

Note: A 5-point Likert Scale is used in which 1= *completely disagree*, and 5= *completely agree*.

In the research study, the participants developed several dispositions about Wespeke over time. When asked about the likelihood of returning to the site independently (see Table 5.10), in the pre-test, 33% declared they definitely would, while 44% said they would, and the remaining 22% were neutral. It is important to highlight that none of the participants said that they would not return to the site; however, in the post-test, at least

29% said that they would not return to the site by themselves, while another 29% said they would not; 14% had some doubts, and another 29% agreed on returning to the site. Accordingly, when asked if they would recommend Wespeke to other users for learning Spanish (see Table 5.10), in the pre-test, 44% ultimately agreed, 22% said they would, and 33% were neutral.

Remarkably, none of the participants disagreed about recommending the site in the pre- and post-use of Wespeke. On the contrary, 14% expressed some doubts, while another 29% completely agreed, and 57% said they would, which means that at least 86% of the participants would recommend the site to other Spanish language learners.

5.4.2 Qualitative Findings

When the participants were asked for the reasons why they would return to the site, "people" was the word most mentioned by 56% in the final feedback questionnaire (see Appendix VII). In comparison, "native speakers" was ranked second by 22%. Furthermore, the platform generally had a very positive review immediately after the user experience test; some of the adjectives used to describe it included: "useful," "rapid," "easy," "exciting," and fun." For example, Joana said:

> *I am likely to return to this site because it is very helpful and rapid in interacting with native speakers.*

At the same time, Janine added:

> *It seems quite useful and fun to learn languages this way, and you can get to know people from all over the world :-).*

In general, there were positive answers about recommending Wespeke. However, only 22% of participants were cautious and indicated that they needed more time to assess it, while the rest expressed identified particular points:

> *They [LLSNS] can improve some skills (listening, speaking) that might be difficult to improve in class. (Joana)*

> *Easy access and easy to find native speakers. (Letizia)*

> *The most natural way of learning. (Janine)*

When asked about what they liked best, the participants mentioned several areas of

note:

> *Very clear page layout and many options for matches for people to speak to.*
> (Joana)

> *... finding interesting contacts from around the world, like-minded people who*
> *also enjoy communicating in other languages.* (Belinda)

Conversely, 44% of the participants declared they needed more time to answer when

asked what they liked the least. Other notable answers included:

> *I do not feel comfortable speaking to strangers in general, so this feels quite*
> *unnatural. (Lisa)*

> *As I am more interested in talking to people, writing/chatting would be the last*
> *thing I would like. (Josefine)*

> *I fear that it might be too much of a chat room where people might not feel*
> *comfortable correcting each other's spelling, grammar, pronunciation etc.,*
> *even though that should be the case in order for users to improve. (Belinda)*

Finally, in the pre-test, when asked for suggestions to improve the platform, 44% of the

participants declared they needed more time to answer, while others added:

> *Probably, taking a short quiz when you sign up could help to determine you[r]*
> *language level and make sure you get connected to the right people. (Letizia)*

> *... encourage feedback through special features, buttons etc., in chat to make it*
> *easier and not be taken personally but actually help. (Belinda)*

After four weeks of using the platform, when asked if they would return to the platform,

29% said that they were:

> *not maintaining active contact with anyone. (Lisa)*

> *I prefer having real face-to-face exchanges or with people I have already met*
> *in person. (Martin)*

Others specified:

> *By now, I have a few contacts with whom I can communicate in Spanish via*
> *other social media. This is more comfortable and efficient for me than using*
> *Wespeke directly. (Belinda)*

> *good for finding native speakers as contacts, not so nice for staying on the site to keep talking (technical flaws, speed, too many people texting at once, hard to focus on one). (Janine)*

Accordingly, the answers were positive, even when asked about recommending the site.

For example, Lisa said the site provided:

> *a good way to find native speakers to talk to and probably overcome anxiety when speaking a foreign language as you have social media and no direct communication. (Lisa)*

> *really easy access to native speakers. If you find the right person/match could be useful to improve language and overcome the barrier of speaking a language maybe studied in books. (Letizia)*

Once again, Belinda was the most specific:

> *I already have recommended it to some friends; one joined just yesterday. I said it's great for finding contacts, and then, once a bit of "trust" is established, it's better to practice with them on WhatsApp. (Belinda)*

Several ideas emerged when asked about what they liked the most on the platform. This was because of "the ease to get in contact with people interested in language and willing to learn and share language knowledge" (Letizia), or as indicated by another participant who worked in an international environment, having direct access to "real" people was preferable to virtual contacts.

A visual representation of the 50 keywords most frequently used by the participants when replying to the SFQ is shown in Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: The 50 keywords most frequently used by participants on the site feedback questionnaire.

Figure 5.1 confirms the importance users gave to the social constructivist features of Wespeke. "People" was the most cited word. Besides "language," other outstanding words were "contacts," "exchange," "speaking," "practice," and "video chat." These words confirm the importance that the language learners placed on their ability to interact in the group environment provided by the Wespeke LLSNS.

5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented quantitative and qualitative data from Busuu and Wespeke in response to RQ1. Following an abductive strategy, the most significant finding is that the social aspect of LLSNS plays a crucial role in the MFL learning process. Concerning Busuu, findings from the study showed that it did not entirely adhere to the principles of social constructivism. Instead, during the study, it moved regressively from a social to a cognitive orientation, from participation to an acquisition scheme, and from using to learning an MFL. In contrast, the results from the data collection relating

to Wespeke confirmed that it followed social constructivist principles of learning as it encouraged language learning via language exchange and online social interaction.

CHAPTER 6. FINDINGS: HOW DO THE FEATURES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES DEVELOP SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING SKILLS?

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the data collected to answer Research Question (RQ) 2: How do the features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS) develop Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) learning skills? The literature review and the participants' answers to RQ1 determined that little research on task-supported Spanish language teaching using Blended Language Learning (BLL) has been undertaken to date. Hence, an intensive course in Spanish was designed using this approach (see Appendix XI). This chapter presents the findings of the blended language learning course and the use of Wespeke by the participants.

Similarly, as with RQ1, to answer RQ2, as for RQ1, an abductive strategy was predominantly utilised to describe and understand the features of Wespeke that helped participants develop SFL learning skills. Then, once again, following Blaikie and Priest's (2019) abductive logic (see Table 4.1), an inductive strategy was used to establish generalisations to answer RQ2.

6.2 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

This chapter discusses the findings arising from the following data collection tools:

1. A user experience questionnaire to evaluate Wespeke's social dimension.

2. A feedback questionnaire to explore the participants' general perception of the platform.

3. Four focus groups to deepen the participants' viewpoints on Wespeke.

4. Twenty-six logon sheets to determine in detail how the participants interacted on the platform and reflected on how they used it.

6.2.1 User Experience Questionnaire

To investigate how the participants coped with the social dimension in the Wespeke platform, and following an abductive strategy, participants completed a user experience questionnaire (Liu et al., 2015), which comprised three different types of tasks: exploratory, specific, and open-ended. The purpose of the six tasks was to allow the participants to familiarise themselves with the platform and assess their perceptions of Wespeke for the first time. Figure 6.1 shows the tasks to be completed as part of the user experience questionnaire.

Figure 6.1: The User Experience Questionnaire
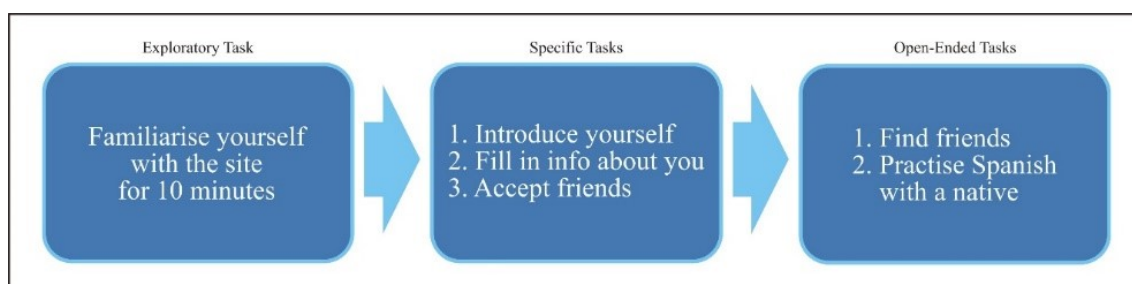
One of the most prominent critiques Wespeke received from the participants was that while there were "so many [language exchange] partners available" (Chris), the platform "did not recommend any straight away" (Gary). An explanation for this might be that the algorithm used for matching and suggesting potential language exchange partners (LEPs) was based on the "likes" each platform user had provided when registering. Therefore, the more "liked" activities, the more affinities might be matched with those LEPs. Saima, for example, complained that some of those "likes" were ambiguous and added that she had connected to one LEP but did not receive any replies. However, Robert said he could exchange some sentences with an LEP abroad. He also

added that he had not been able "to make more contacts because of the short time of this session," but he would try to continue by himself at home.

Referring to qualitative aspects, the participants provided positive feedback about the platform after their first user experience. Figure 6.2 shows the quantitative results of the user experience:

Figure 6.2: User Experience Quantitative Results Showing How Many Participants Completed Which Tasks
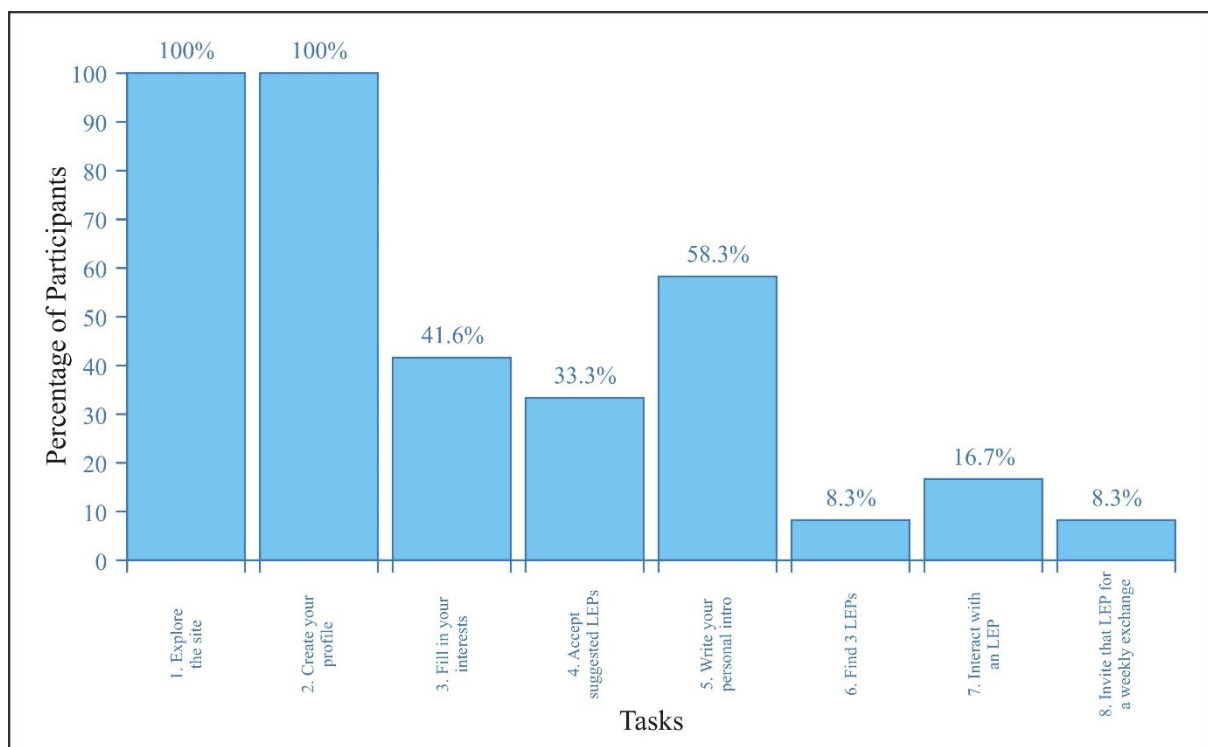

Figure 6.2 shows two axes: the *x*-axis shows the tasks attempted by the participants, while the *y*-axis shows the percentage of participants who completed the tasks. Tasks 1 (explore the platform freely) and 2 (create your profile) were completed by all the participants (100%). Task 5 (self-introduction of the participants) was completed by 58.3%. Task 3 (providing personal information to receive suggestions on LEPs) was the second-best and was completed by 41.6% of participants. Task 4 (accepting at least three of those LEP suggested) was completed by 33.3%. In contrast, task 7 (interact with one of those LEPs for at least five minutes) was completed by 16.7%, and tasks 6

(ask three of those users to become your LEP) and 8 (invite that person you were connected with on task 7 to be connected on Tuesdays and Thursdays so that both of you can exchange languages) achieved the lower completion rate of 8.3% of participants.

These results confirmed the critique expressed by the participants, as the social opportunities offered by the platform were not as effective as suggested: only 33.3% of participants were able to accept the proposed LEPs, 16.7% were able to interact with Spanish native speakers, 8.3% were able to find three LEPs, and another 8.3% were able to convince their new LEP to be connected on Tuesdays and Thursdays to exchange languages for the next five weeks; all of which disappointed the users.

Immediately after the user experience questionnaire, the participants answered the site feedback questionnaire (SFQ), which aimed to collect data about the participants' general perception of the platform.

6.2.2. Comparison of Results Between the Initial and Final Site Feedback Questionnaire

The same feedback questionnaire (Appendix VII) was used twice. The first time, immediately after the first contact the participants had with Wespeke's platform, and the second time, to compare whether their viewpoint after using it for five consecutive weeks had changed. It was based on a Likert Scale, where 1 indicated the lowest level of satisfaction of the users, and 5 the highest.

Therefore, to answer RQ2, following an abductive strategy, this section compares the initial SFQ (SFQ1) and the final SFQ (SFQ2). The first line (light blue) in each figure correspond to SFQ1 and the second line (dark blue) to SFQ2. In the case of RQ2, the participants' feedback on core skills (section 6.2.2.2) and features of Wespeke that could develop SFL learning skills (section 6.2.2.4) were particularly relevant.

Both research questions in this thesis are qualitative. Hence, answers should adhere to the same approach. In the specific case of Research Question 2 (How do the features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites develop Spanish as a Foreign Language learning skills?), it is essential to highlight that the results shown are based on self-reported participants' perceptions, not on quantitative data that could have been reported via pre- and post-tests to measure their actual language development. As this thesis followed an ecological approach (Hinkelman, 2018), I focused on the diverse aspects of the teaching situation—people, content, procedures, conditions—and not only on the technology used as does most of the existent research when showing pre- and post-test results only. I also followed Stepp-Greany's (2002) suggestion when asserting that "research studies should be conducted to compare second language learning in a holistic, constructivist TELL environment as opposed to more structured TELL environments." (Stepp-Greany, 2002, p. 176).

Furthermore, as some of the participants could not continue cooperating with the research due to work commitments, the number of participants who completed the SFQ decreased from twelve (SFQ1) to six (SFQ2). Hence, to compare the results of both documents, instead of the numbers of participants, they were transformed into percentages so that the contrast could be more balanced. I contrasted the results of these six participants (SFQ2) by referring to them as the same participants as in SFQ1, in order to avoid comparing two different groups.

At first sight, while there was some initial disappointment among the participants related to what they expected from Wespeke, the data collected does not indicate that. The five parts of the SFQ referred to feedback on site design, core skills, other skills, features, and future use. All of these will be compared in the following sub-sections.

6.2.2.1 How Satisfied Were You with Wespeke?

As Figure 6.3 shows, the initial level of satisfaction of the participants with the ease of

finding information on the platform was initially higher, as 33.3% were *very satisfied,*

and this percentage increased to 58.3% if the participants who expressed satisfaction

with four points (25%) were also included. By contrast, in SFQ2, there were no *highly*

satisfied participants.

Figure 6.3: How Satisfied Were You with the Ease of Finding Information?
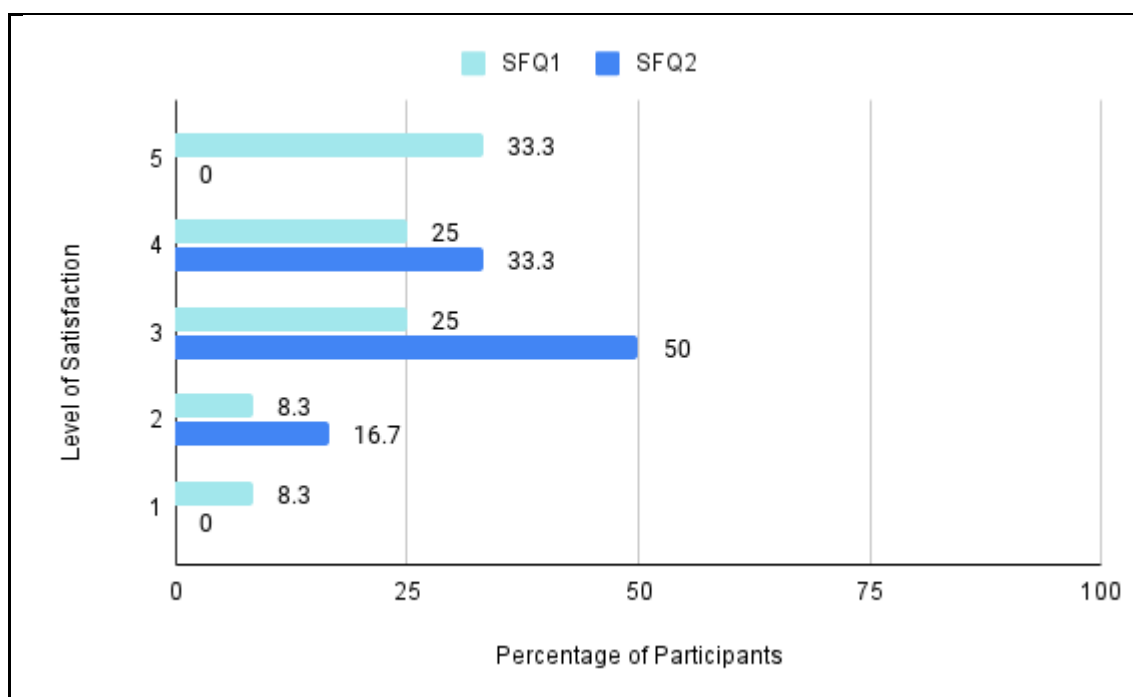
However, 33.3% were *satisfied*, and the percentage of neutral participants doubled from

25% to 50%. There were no *very dissatisfied* participants in the SFQ2, but 16.7% were

dissatisfied, a similar percentage to SFQ1 if *very dissatisfied* and *dissatisfied* were

combined.

Figure 6.4: How Satisfied Were You with the Quality of the Information Found?
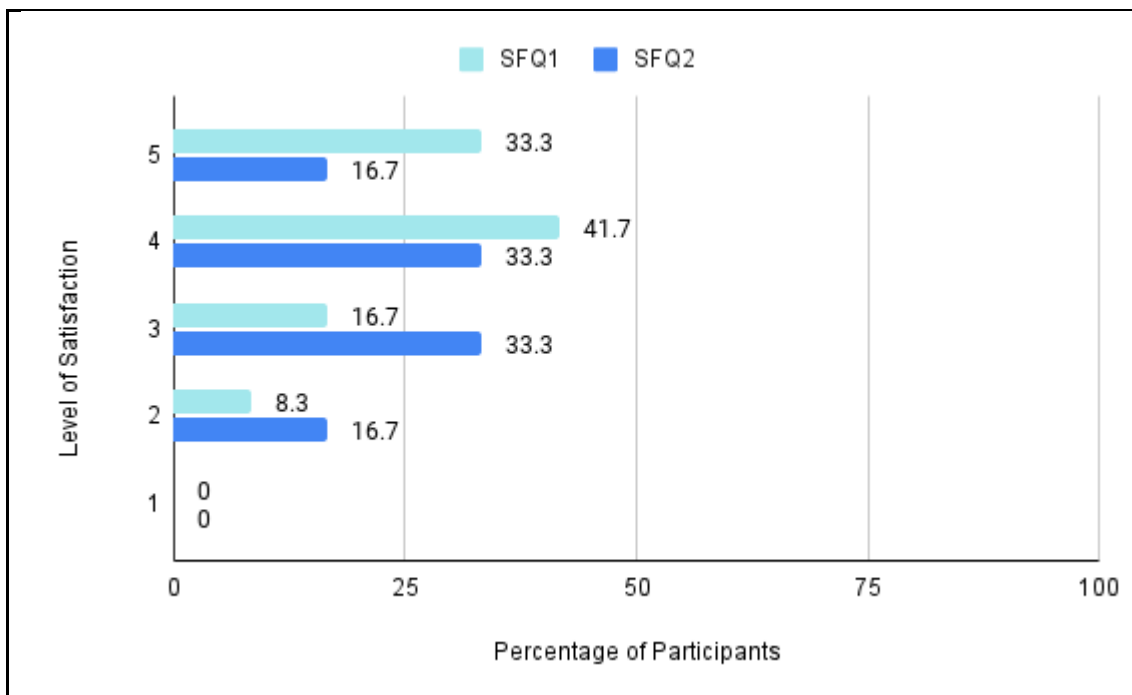
The quality of the information on how the platform worked is shown in Figure 6.4. A third of the participants were *very satisfied*, according to the SFQ1. That percentage increased to 75% if *satisfied* and *very satisfied* were combined. Such a level of satisfaction halved in the SFQ2; there were only 16.7% of *very satisfied* users. However, that percentage increased to 50% if the *satisfied* users (33.3%) were included. The percentage of neutral participants doubled from 16.7% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2. There were no *very dissatisfied* users in either SFQ, but the percentage of *dissatisfied* participants doubled from 8.3% to 16.7%.

Figure 6.5: How Satisfied Were You with the Ease of Reading the Texts?
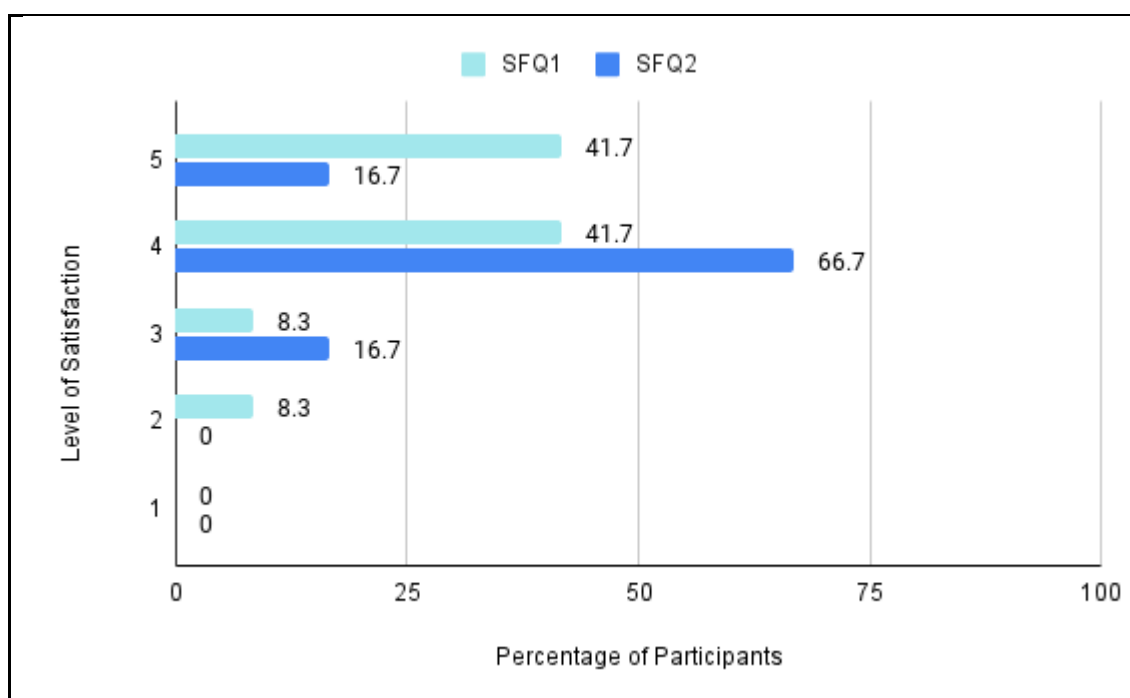
Figure 6.5 shows the level of satisfaction in relation to the ease of reading the texts written by their peers during the language exchange. It was the highest percentage obtained in both SFQs. In SFQ1, 41.7% of *very satisfied* users doubled to 83.4% if *satisfied* users (41.7%) were added. The percentage of *very satisfied* participants decreased to 16.7%, but the number of *satisfied* participants rose to 66.7%, meaning that if both groups were put together, they would represent the equivalent 83.4% of *satisfied* students in SFQ2.

The percentage of neutral participants doubled from 8.3% in the SFQ1 to 16.7% in the SFQ2. It is possible that the *dissatisfied* participants (8.3%) changed their minds and became neutral. It is important to highlight that, in both cases, there were no *very dissatisfied* participants for this question.

Figure 6.6: How Satisfied Were You With the Site's Appearance, Including Colours and Graphics?
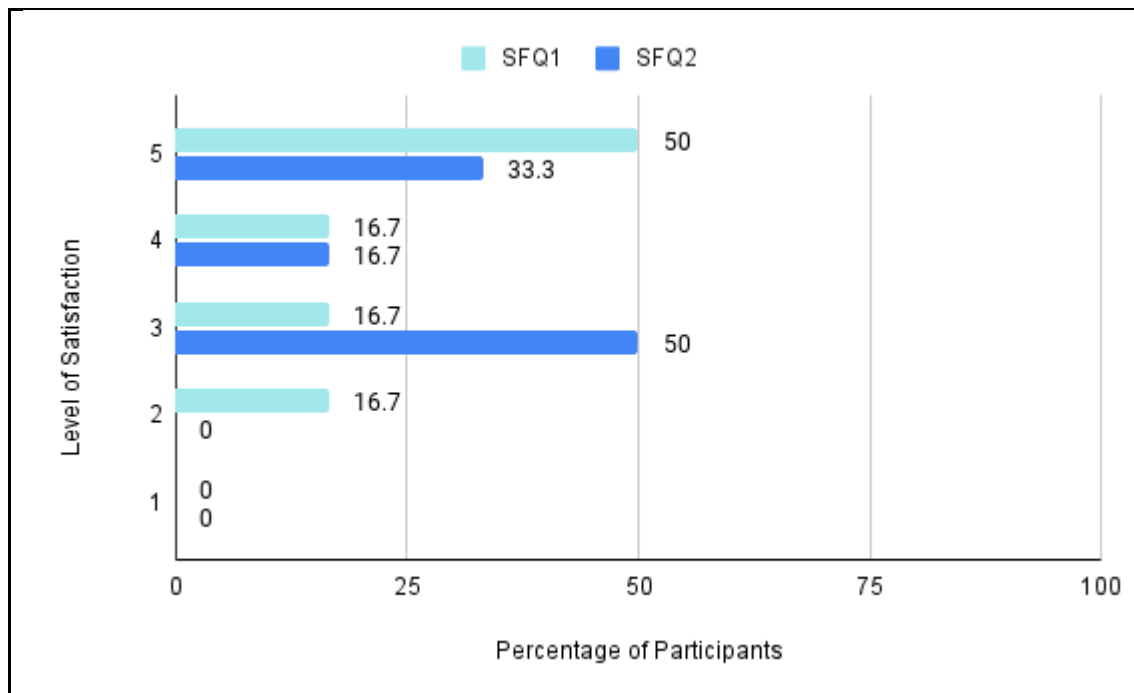
As Figure 6.6 shows, 50% of the participants in SFQ1 were *very satisfied* with the

appearance of Wespeke's site, which increased to 66.7% if the *satisfied* users (16.7%)

were added. The *very satisfied* percentage decreased to 33.3% in SFQ2, though it would

have increased to 50% if the *satisfied* users were included. However, the neutral

percentage trebled from 16.7% in SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2. Similarly, as in question 3,

there were no *very dissatisfied* users, while in SFQ1, there were 16.7% *dissatisfied*

students, a percentage that disappeared in SFQ2.

Figure 6.7: How Satisfied Were You with the Displaying Speed of the Pages?
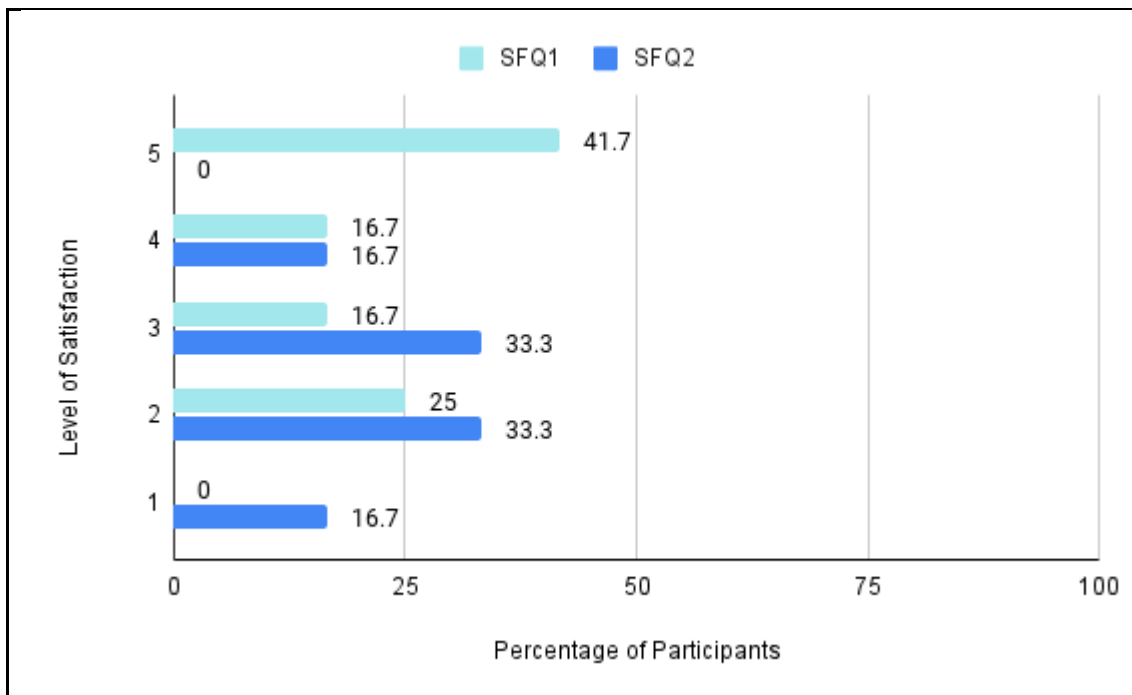
Figure 6.7 portrays the level of satisfaction related to the page displaying speed.

Unfortunately, this was one of the highest levels of dissatisfaction in SFQ2. In SFQ1,

41.7% of users were *very satisfied* with this feature. Furthermore, this percentage

increased to 58.4% if the *satisfied* users (16.7%) were also included. In SFQ2, there

were no *very satisfied* users, and only 16.7% of participants were *satisfied* (the same

percentage as in SFQ1). The percentage of neutral participants doubled from 16.7% in

SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2. There were 25% *dissatisfied* users in SFQ1, a percentage that

escalated to 33.3% in SFQ2. 16.7% of users were *very dissatisfied* with the displaying

speed of the pages in SFQ2. To summarise, at least 50% of the users were *dissatisfied* in

SFQ2. Because Wespeke offered sound, video, and text chat concurrently, this

demanded ample broadband speed. Participants felt frustrated as they had to wait during

significant pauses to chat and could not interact synchronously.

Figure 6.8: How Satisfied Were You With the Ease of Moving Around the Site Without Getting Lost?
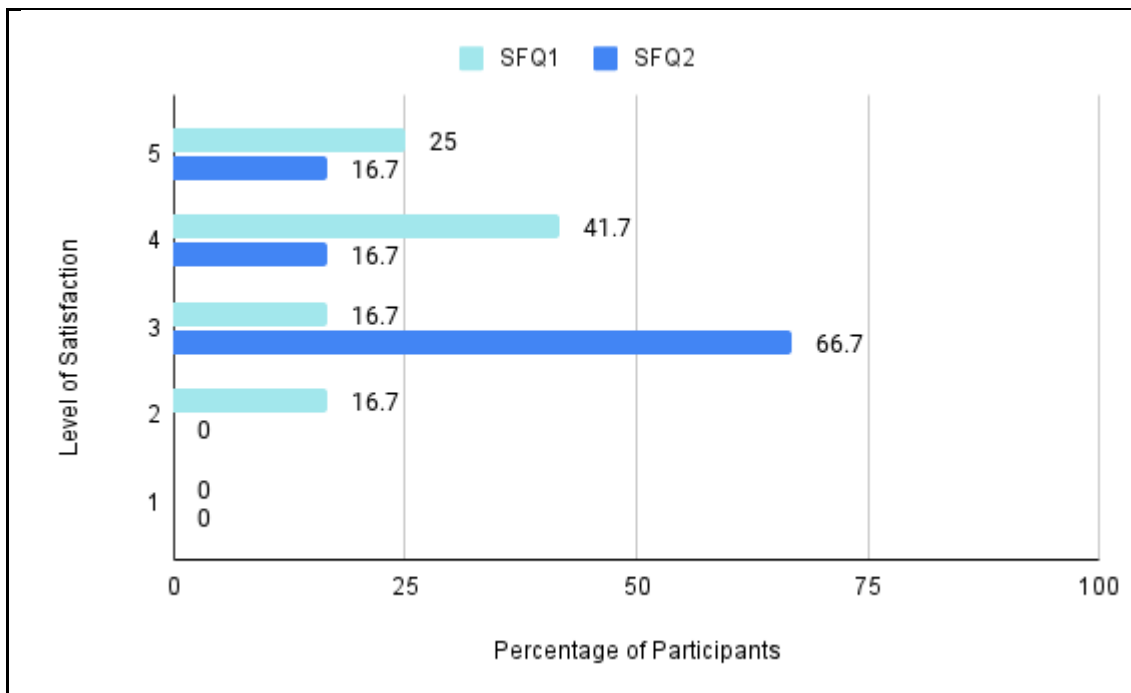
As Figure 6.8 shows, 25% of users were *very satisfied* with the ease of moving around

Wespeke's site in SFQ1. This percentage increased to 66.7% if the *satisfied* users

(41.7%) were included. These figures dropped to 16.7% of *very satisfied* participants in

SFQ2, doubling to 33.3% if the *satisfied* ones (16.7%) were included. The 16.7% of

neutral users in the SFQ1 increased fourfold to 66.7% in the SFQ2, while 16.7% of

dissatisfied users in the SFQ1 disappeared in SFQ2. Interestingly, there were no *very*

dissatisfied participants in either case.

Figure 6.9: How Satisfied Were You With the Ease of Finding Contacts to Practise the Language With?
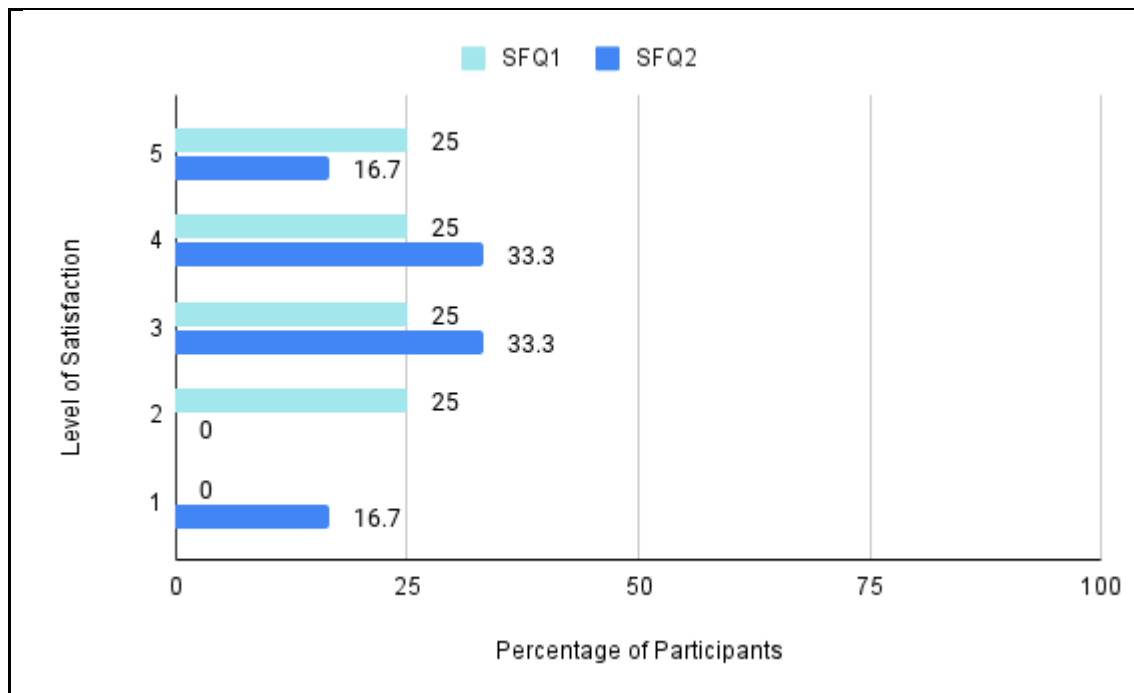
Figure 6.9 shows the most equalised distribution of satisfaction in SFQ1. It refers to the

ease of finding LEPs. A total of 25% of participants were either *very satisfied*, *satisfied*,

neutral, or *dissatisfied*, and there were no *very dissatisfied* users. These figures varied in

SFQ2, where 16.7% of participants were *very satisfied*, and 33.3% were *satisfied*.

Combined, this would total 50% of participants who could be classed as *satisfied*.

Additionally, neutral users increased from 25% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2.

Interestingly, there were no *dissatisfied* users in SFQ2, but there were 16.7% who were

very dissatisfied, in contrast to the non-existent figure in SFQ1.

Figure 6.10: How Satisfied Were You with the Overall Learning Experience?
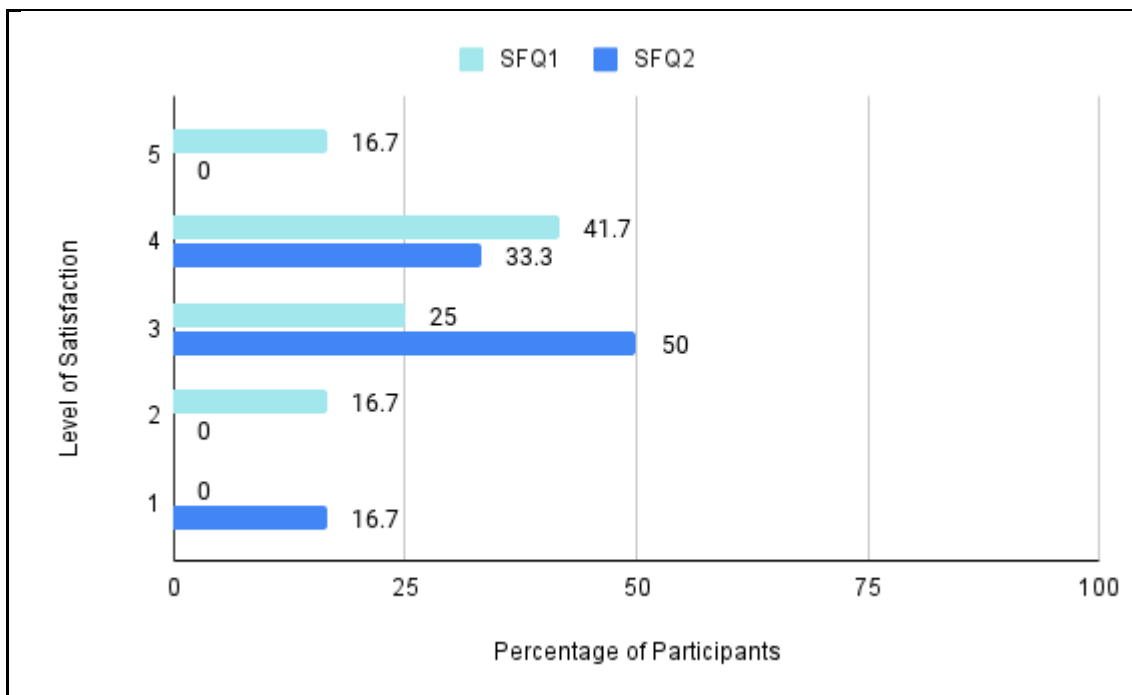
The participants' level of satisfaction with the overall learning experience is shown in Figure 6.10. In SFQ1, 16.7% of participants were *very satisfied*, which increased to 58.4% if the *satisfied* users (41.7%) were added. This percentage of *very satisfied* users completely disappeared in SFQ2. However, 33.3% of participants were *satisfied*, and the percentage of neutral users doubled from 25% in SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2. As in question 7, interestingly, there were no *dissatisfied* users in SFQ2, but there were 16.7% who were *very dissatisfied*, varying the non-existent figure in SFQ1.

6.2.2.2 Did Wespeke Help You With your SFL Core Skills?

Figure 6.11: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Spanish Speaking Skills?
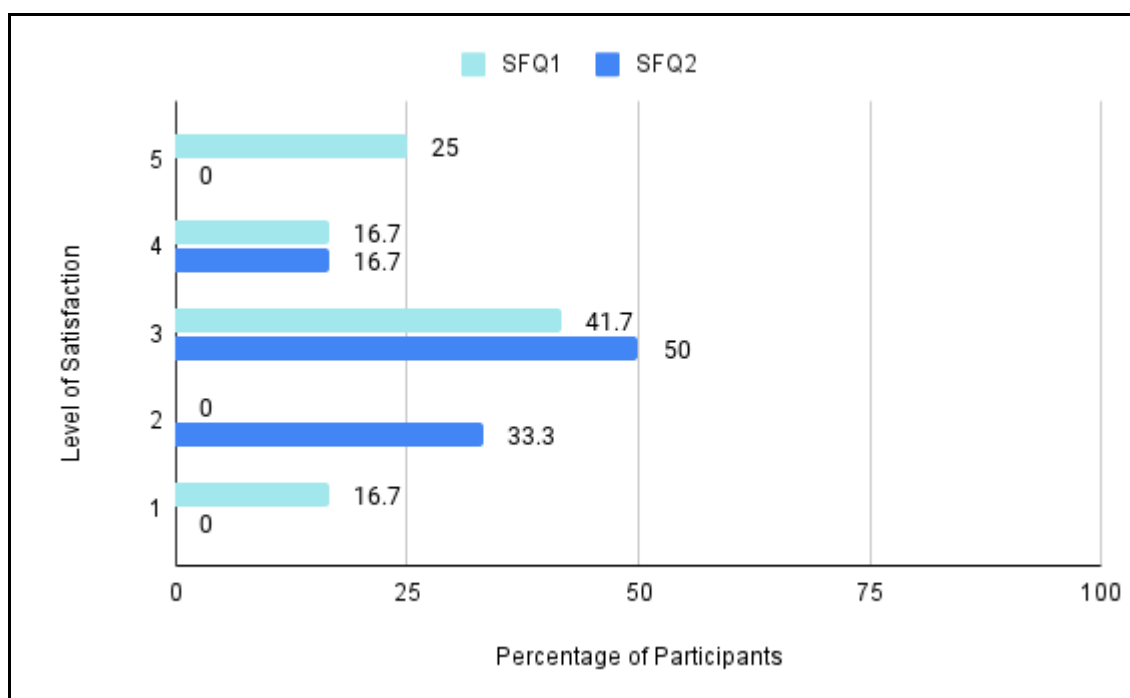
As Figure 6.11 shows, in the SFQ1, 25% of participants were *very satisfied* with the opportunity of using Wespeke's site to improve their speaking skills and put into practice what they had learnt while exchanging languages with their peers on the platform or the mobile application.

This percentage increased to 41.7% if the *satisfied* users (16.7%) were included. However, the *very satisfied* participants disappeared in SFQ2, and only 16.7% of *satisfied* users remained. Furthermore, the neutral participants' percentage increased from 41.7% in SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2, while *dissatisfied* students increased from 0% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2. However, while in SF1 there were 16.7% *very dissatisfied* users, none were registered in SFQ2.

Figure 6.12: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Spanish Listening Skills?
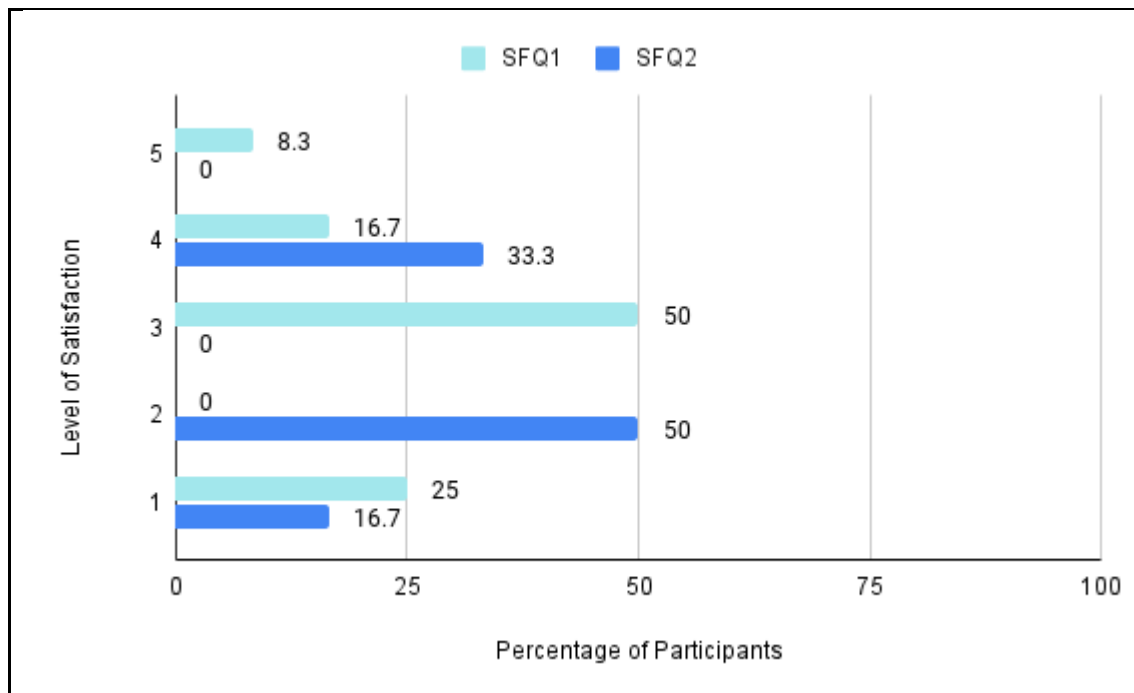
Figure 6.12 shows users' perceptions when asked if Wespeke would help them improve their Spanish listening skills through language exchange. In SFQ1, only 8.3% of users were *very satisfied*, which increased to 25% if the *satisfied* students (16.7%) were included. In SFQ2, there were no *very satisfied* participants, but 33.3% were *satisfied*. The 50% of neutral participants in SFQ1 may have changed their minds; they became *dissatisfied* in SFQ2, while the 25% who were *very dissatisfied* in SFQ1 decreased to 16.7% in SFQ2.

Figure 6.13: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Spanish Reading Skills?
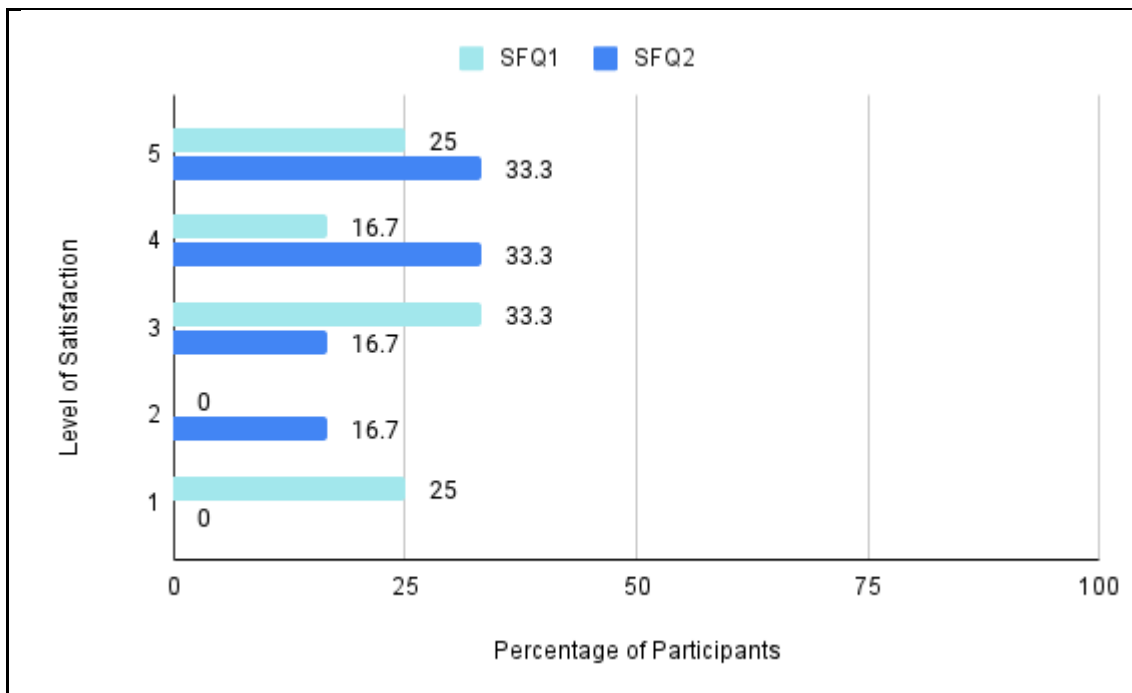
The level of satisfaction related to Wespeke's ability to improve the Spanish reading skills of participants through language exchange is depicted in Figure 6.13. In SFQ1, 25% were *very satisfied* users, a percentage that increased to 41.7% if the *satisfied* participants (16.7%) were included. These percentages increased to 33.3% for both *very satisfied* and *satisfied* users in SFQ2, making 66.6% of participants if combined. The neutral answers halved from 33.3% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, while *dissatisfied* users increased from 0% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2. However, the 25% of *very dissatisfied* users in SFQ1 were not recorded in SFQ2.

Figure 6.14: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Spanish Writing Skills?
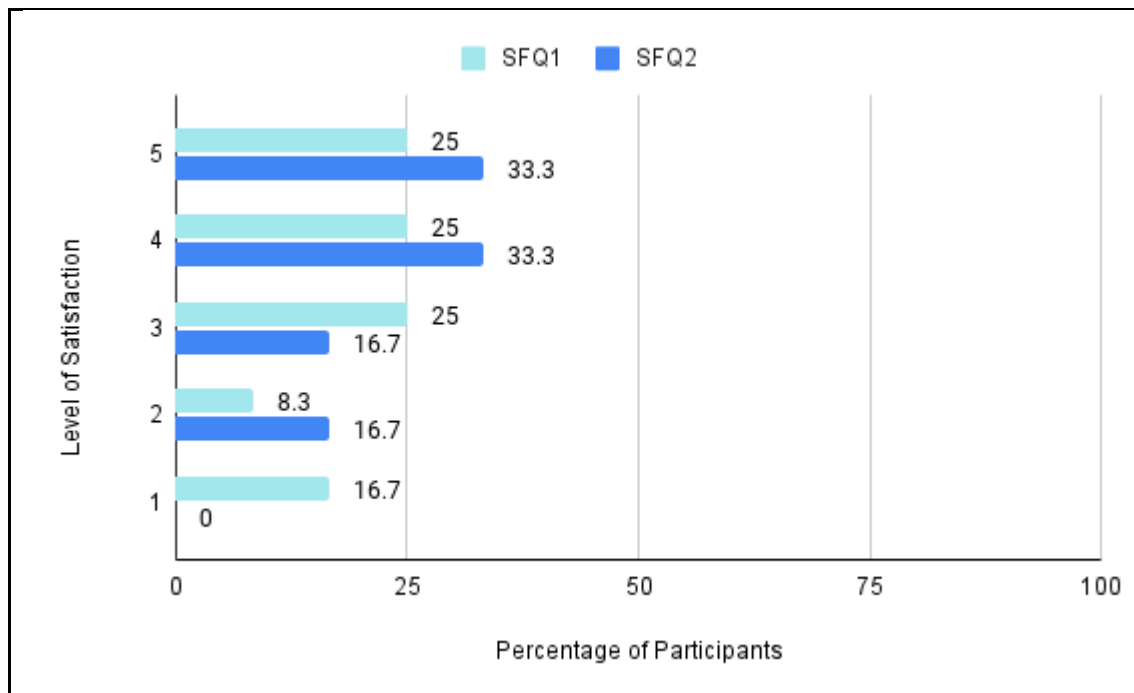
Figure 6.14 shows the participants' level of satisfaction when asked if they thought that Wespeke would help them improve their Spanish writing skills through language exchange. In SFQ1, 25% were either *very satisfied*, *satisfied*, or neutral. This increased in SFQ2 to 33.3% when referring to *very satisfied* or *satisfied* users and decreased to 16.7% when relating to neutral participants. The *dissatisfied* users doubled from 8.3% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, while the *very dissatisfied* responses decreased from 16.7% in SFQ1 to 0% in SFQ2.

6.2.2.3 Did Wespeke Help You With Other SFL Skills?

Figure 6.15: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Spanish Grammar Skills?
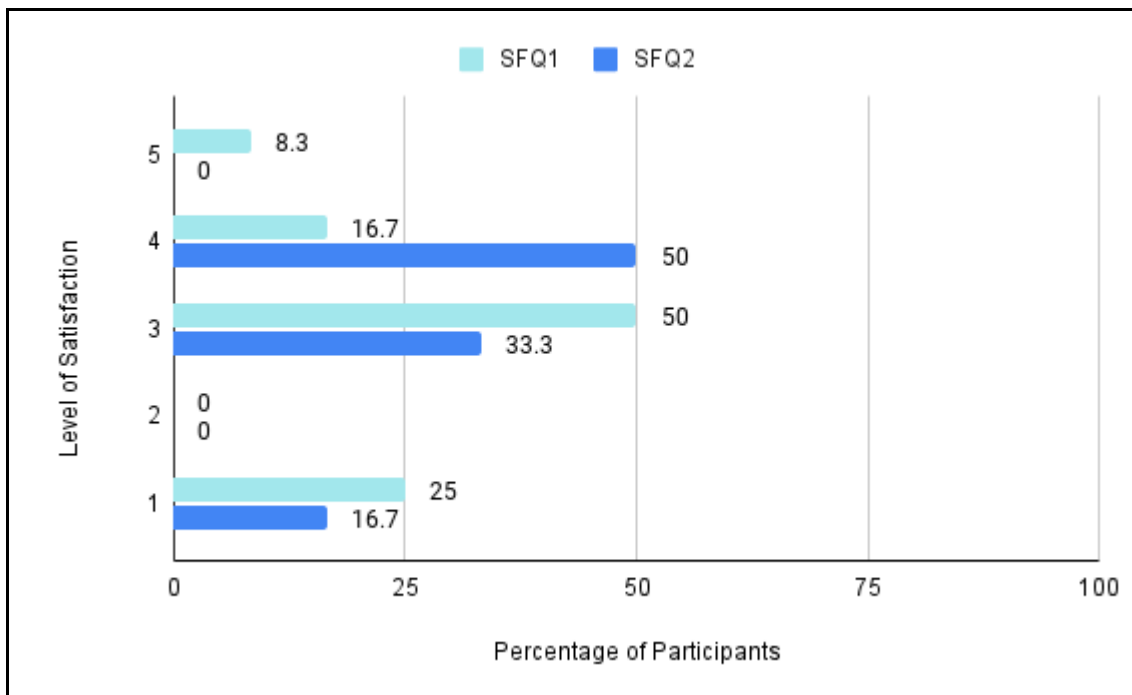
Figure 6.15 shows the first of four additional skills that Wespeke could help its users to improve, namely, grammar. When asked about this in SFQ1, only 8.3% of participants were *very satisfied*; this was 0% in SFQ2. However, *satisfied* users increased from 16.7% in SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2. Neutral participants decreased from 50% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2; there were no *dissatisfied* users. However, *very dissatisfied* users fell from 25% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2.

Figure 6.16: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Spanish Pronunciation Skills?
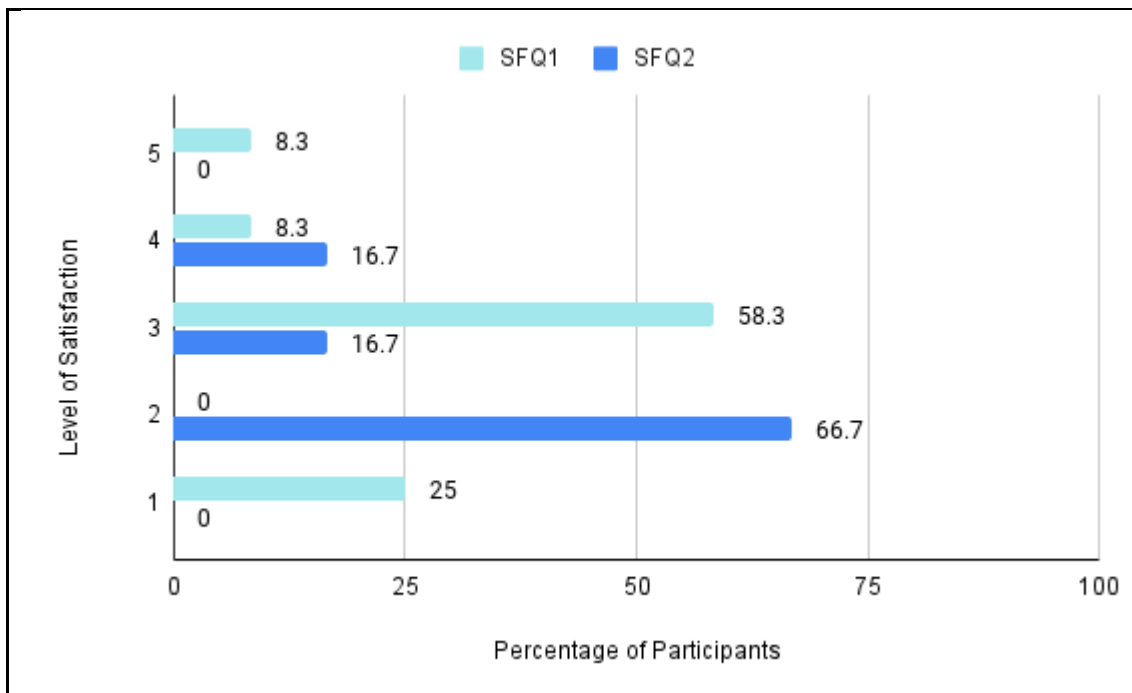
The level of satisfaction related to Wespeke's site for improving Spanish pronunciation skills is shown in Figure 6.16. In SFQ1, 8.3% were *very satisfied* users, a percentage that doubled to 16.6% if the *satisfied* participants (8.3%) were also included. However, this percentage of *very satisfied* users was reduced to 0% in SFQ2, while the *satisfied* participants doubled from 8.3% to 16.7%. However, the neutral responses contracted from 58.3% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2. Furthermore, the percentage of *dissatisfied* users rocketed from 0% in SFQ1 to 66.7% in SFQ2, one of the highest negative increases overall. However, the 25% *very dissatisfied* users in SFQ1 were reduced to 0% in SFQ2.

Figure 6.17: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Spanish Vocabulary Skills?
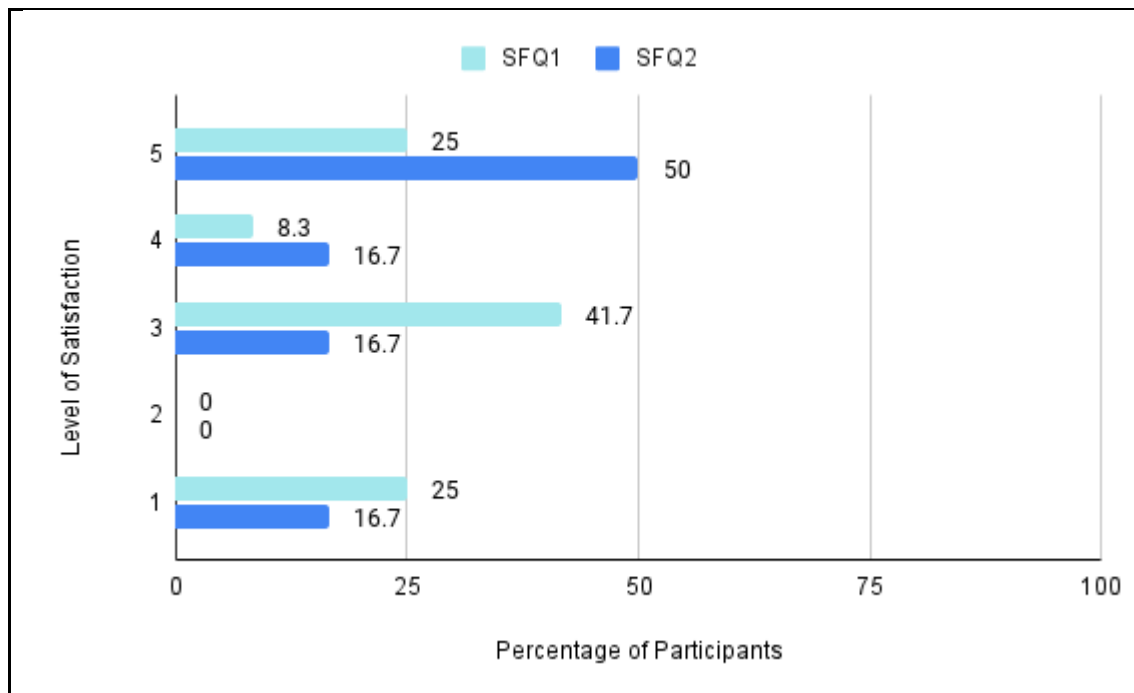

As Figure 6.17 shows, in SFQ1, 25% of participants were *very satisfied* with the possibility of using Wespeke's site to improve their vocabulary skills. This percentage increased to 33.3% if the *satisfied* users (8.3%) were included. The *very satisfied* participants doubled to 50%, and 16.7% in the case of *satisfied* users in SFQ2. Furthermore, those registering a neutral response decreased from 41.7% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, while the percentage of *dissatisfied* participants remained at 0% in both cases. However, while in SFQ1 there were 25% *very dissatisfied* users, this figure decreased to 16.7% in SFQ2.

Figure 6.18: In Your Opinion, Does Wespeke Help You Improve Your Hispanic Cultural Skills?
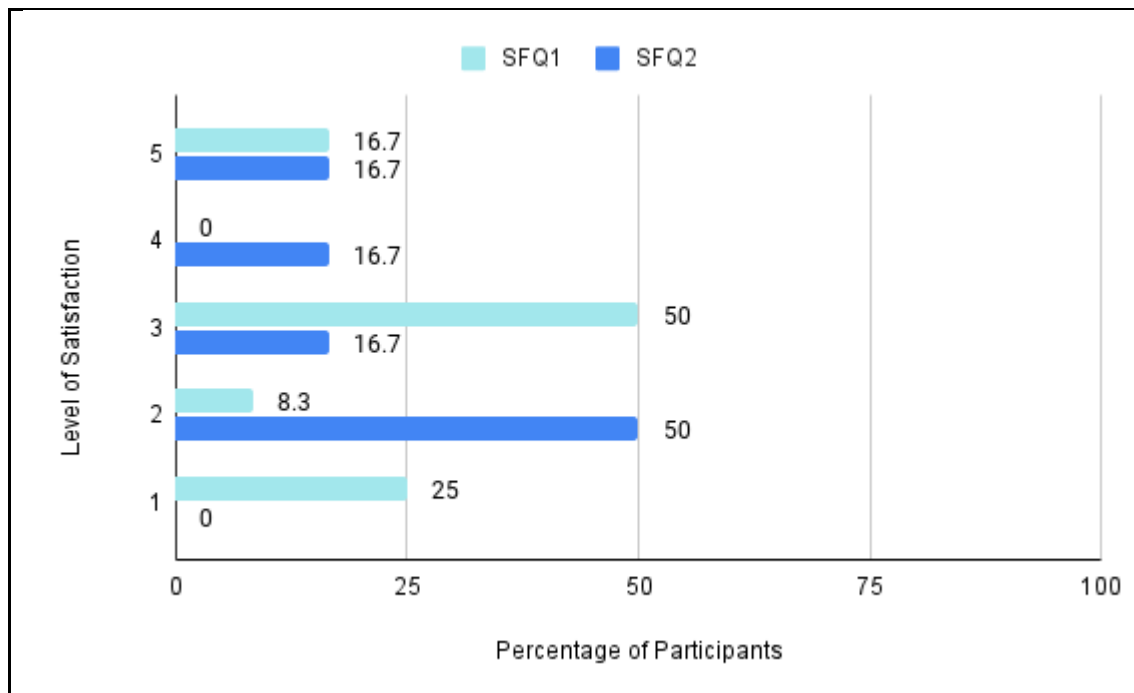
Figure 6.18 displays the last of the four additional skills that Wespeke aimed to help its users improve, in this case, Hispanic cultural skills. When asked about this in SFQ1, 16.7% of participants were *very satisfied*, a percentage maintained in SFQ2. However, *satisfied* users increased from 0% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2. The neutral participants decreased from 50% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, and the percentage of *dissatisfied* users rocketed from 8.3% to 50%. However, *very dissatisfied* users declined from 25% in SFQ1 to 0% in SFQ2.

6.2.2.4 Did Wespeke's Features Help You Develop SFL Learning Skills?

Figure 6.19: Was the Feature of Creating a Profile Helpful to You in Practising Spanish?
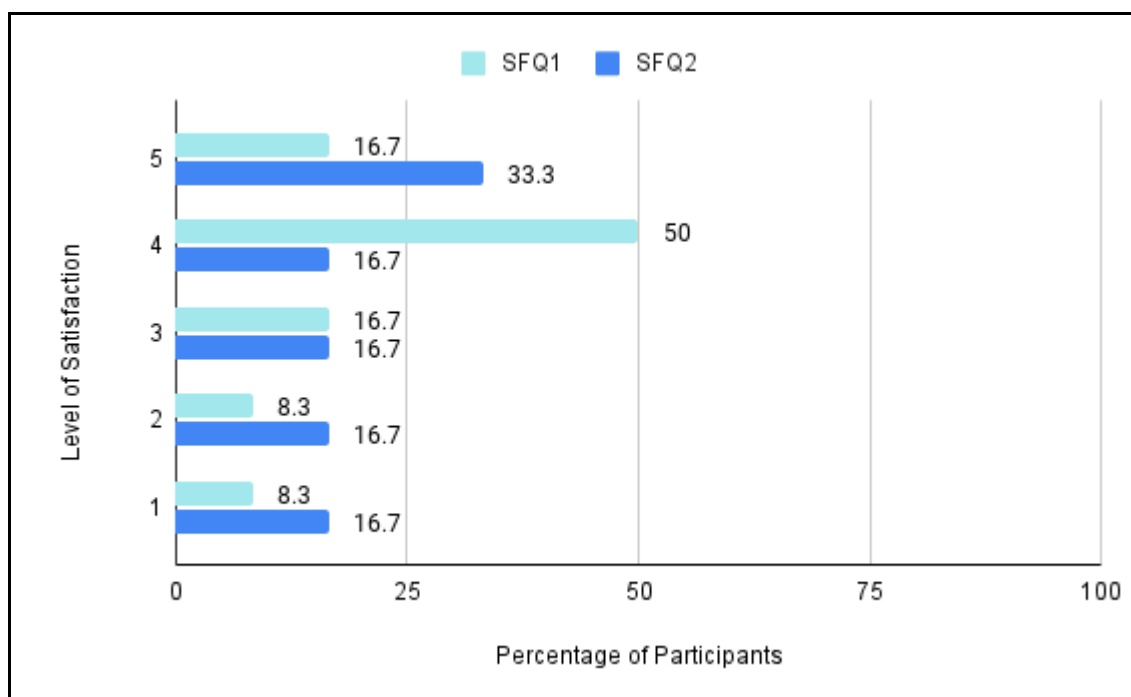
Figure 6.19 shows the first five features Wespeke used to help its students improve their Spanish level by creating a profile. When asked about it in SFQ1, 16.7% of participants were *very satisfied*, a percentage that doubled to 33.3% in SFQ2. However, *satisfied* users decreased from 50% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2. The neutral participants remained at 16.7% in both cases, and the percentage of *dissatisfied* users doubled from 8.3% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, along with the same percentage of *very dissatisfied* users.

Figure 6.20: Was the Feature of Friending Native Speakers Helpful to You in Practising Spanish?
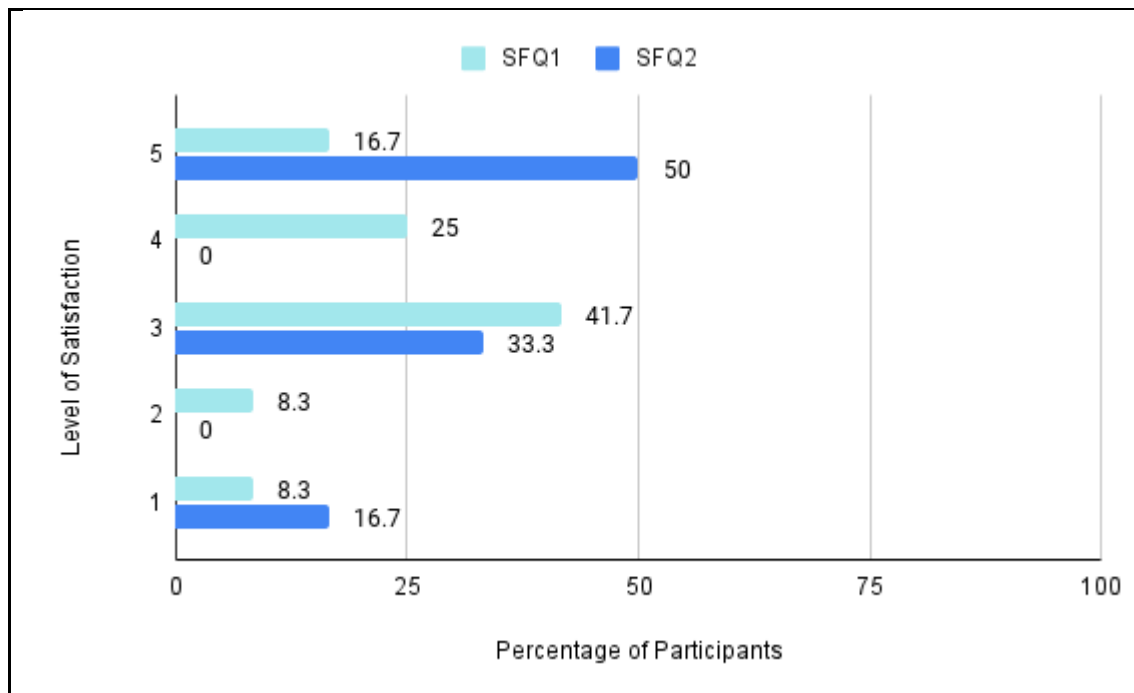
As Figure 6.20 shows, in the SFQ1, 16.7% of participants were *very satisfied* with the possibility of using Wespeke's friending feature to practise Spanish. That percentage increases to 41.7% if the *satisfied* users (25%) are included. The *very satisfied* participants jumped to 50% in SFQ2. However, the 25% of *satisfied* users in SFQ1 declined to 0% in SFQ2. Furthermore, the percentage of neutral responses decreased from 41.7% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2, while the percentage of *dissatisfied* participants disappeared in SFQ2, having been 8.3% in SFQ1. However, while in SF1 8.3% of respondents were *very dissatisfied*, this figure increased to 16.7% in SFQ2.

Figure 6.21: Was the Feature of Exchanging Languages Helpful to You in Learning Spanish?
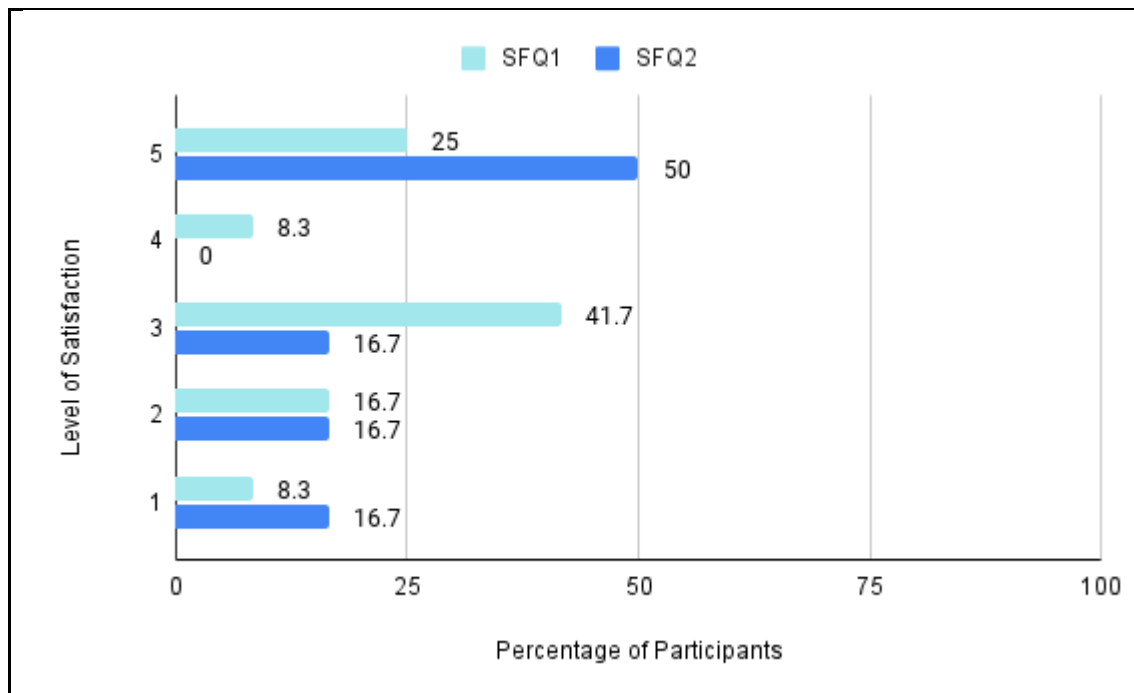
The level of satisfaction related to Wespeke's site for exchanging languages is shown in Figure 6.21. In SFQ1, 25% of users were *very satisfied*, which increased to 33.3% if the satisfied participants (8.3%) were included. This percentage of *very satisfied* users doubled to 50% in SFQ2, while the *satisfied* respondents disappeared. The neutral responses decreased from 41.7% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, while *dissatisfied* users stayed the same at 16.7% in SFQ1 and SFQ2. However, the *very dissatisfied* users doubled from 8.3% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2.

Figure 6.22: Was the Feature of Receiving Feedback from Native Speakers Helpful to You in Learning Spanish?
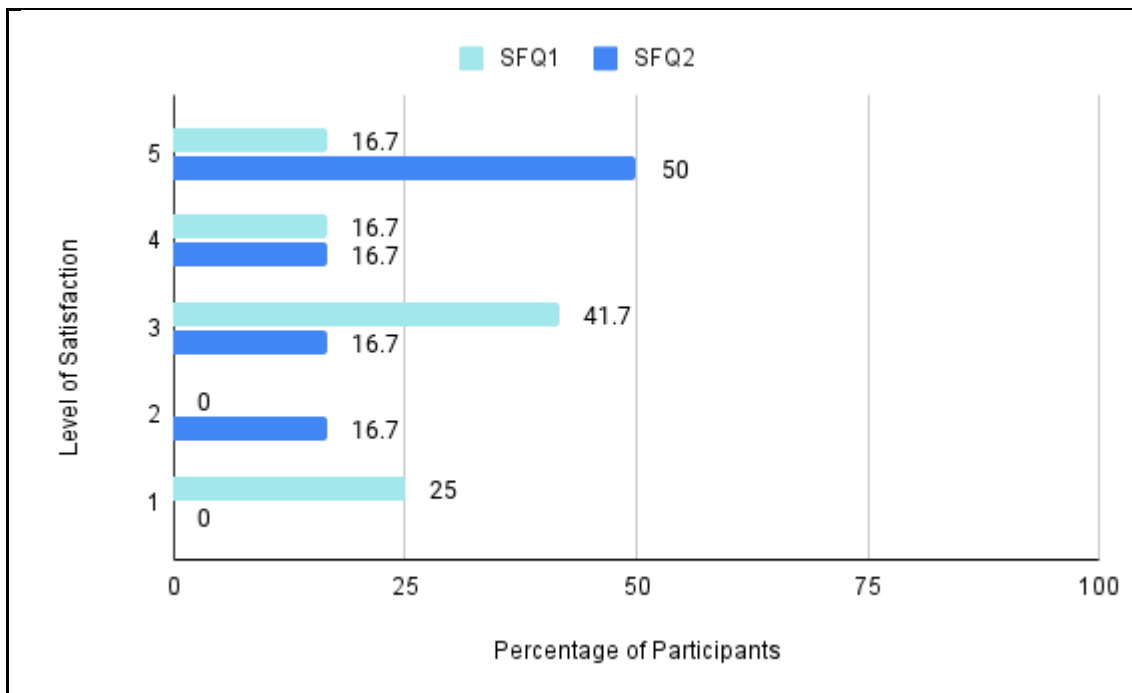
Figure 6.22 displays the feature of receiving feedback on Wespeke as a way to learn Spanish. When asked about it in SFQ1, 16.7% of participants were *very satisfied*, a percentage that trebled to 50% in SFQ2. However, the number of *satisfied* users remained the same, 16.7% in SFQ1 and SFQ2. Furthermore, the neutral participants decreased from 41.7% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, and the percentage of *dissatisfied* users increased from 0% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2. Finally, the percentage of *very dissatisfied* users disappeared in SFQ2, having been 25% in SFQ1.

Figure 6.23: Was the Feature of Giving Feedback to Other Learners Helpful to You in Learning Spanish?
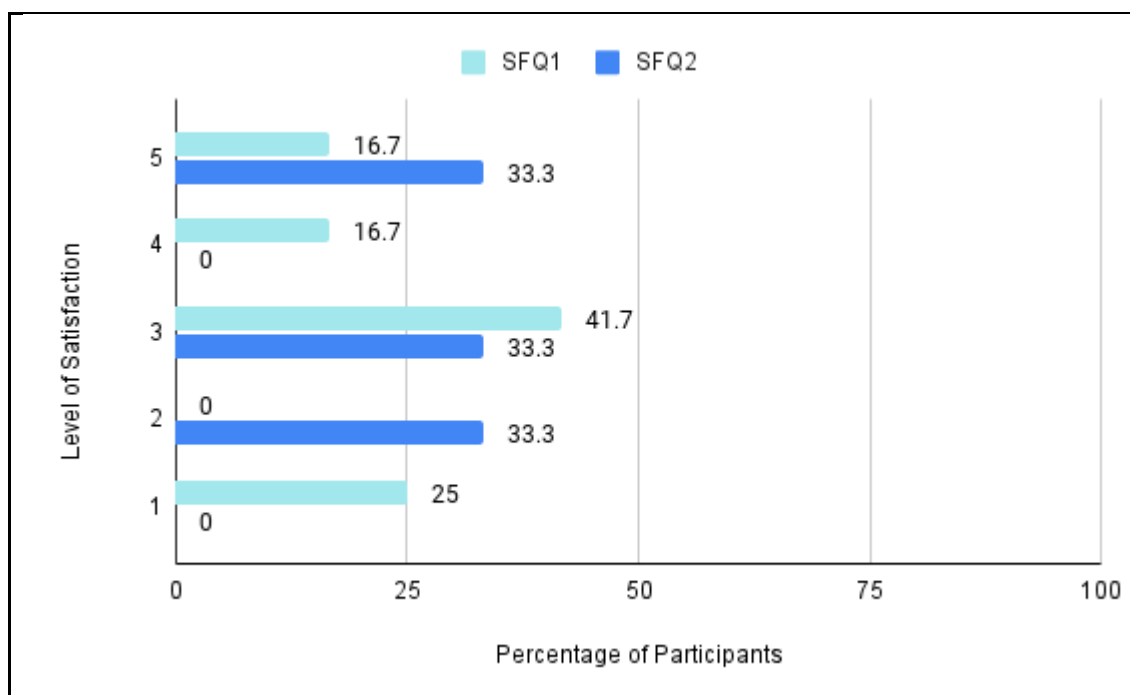
As Figure 6.23 shows, in SFQ1, 16.7% of participants were *very satisfied* with the possibility of giving feedback via Wespeke to improve their Spanish. That percentage increased to 33.3% if the *satisfied* users (16.7%) were included. These *very satisfied* participants doubled to 33.3% in the case of *very satisfied* users in SFQ2. However, the 16.7% of *satisfied* respondents in SFQ1 was reduced to 0% in SFQ2. Furthermore, the percentage of neutral respondents decreased from 41.7% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2, while the percentage of *dissatisfied* ones became 33.3% in SFQ2, having been 0% in SFQ1. However, while in SF1, there were 25% *very dissatisfied* users, this figure reduced to 0% in SFQ2.

6.2.2.5 Feedback on Future Use and Perception

The final section of the SFQ explored the future use and possibility of recommending Wespeke as a complementary tool to learning Spanish.

Figure 6.24: How Likely Are You to Return to This Site on Your Own?
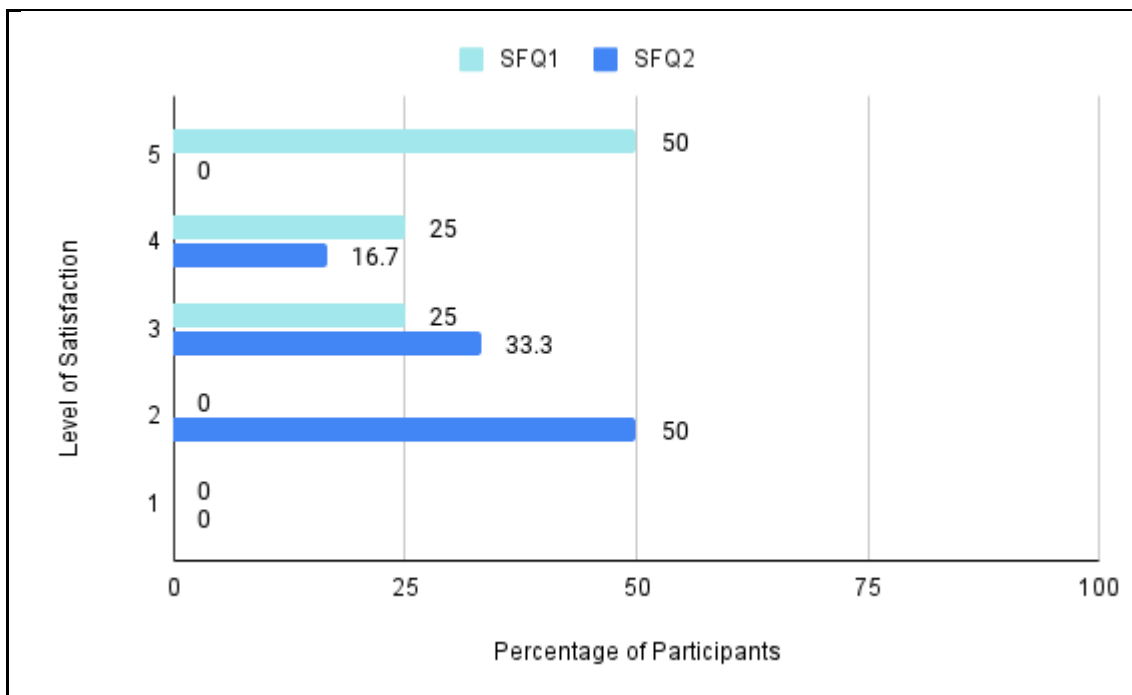
As Figure 6.24 shows, in relation to SFQ1, 50% of participants were *very satisfied* with the possibility of returning to Wespeke's site on their own to practise and learn Spanish. This percentage increased to 75% if the *satisfied users* (25%) were included. However, the *very satisfied* participants are reduced to 0% in SFQ2, and the 25% of *satisfied* users in SFQ1 decreased to 16.7% in SFQ2. It was one of the most evident signs of dissatisfaction among the participants. Furthermore, the percentage of neutral responses increased from 25% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2, while the percentage of *dissatisfied* participants rose significantly to 50% in SFQ2, having been non-existent in SFQ1. However, it is essential to highlight that there were no *very dissatisfied* users in either case.

Figure 6.25: Would You Recommend This Site to Your Friends Who Are Learning Spanish?
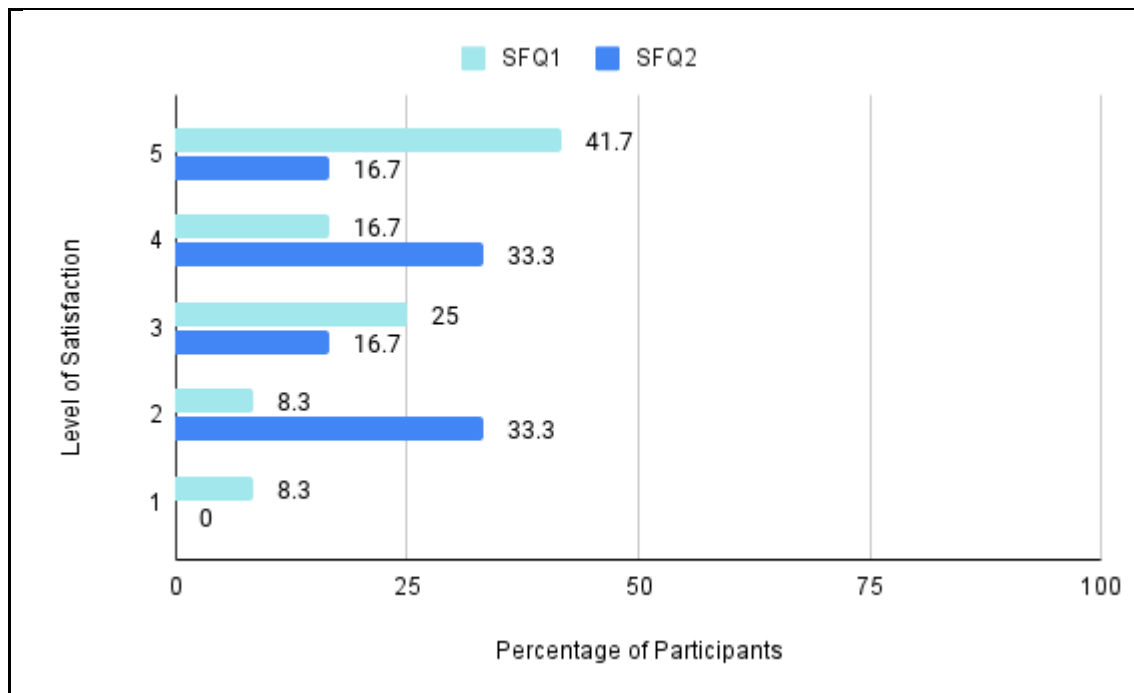
Figure 6.25 shows the answers to recommending Wespeke to learn Spanish. When asked about it in SFQ1, 41.7% of participants were *very satisfied*, which decreased to 16.7% in SFQ2. However, *satisfied* users doubled from 16.7% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2. The neutral participants decreased from 25% in SFQ1 to 16.7% in SFQ2, and the percentage of *dissatisfied* users quadrupled from 8.3% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2. Finally, the percentage of *very dissatisfied* users was 0% in SFQ2, having been 8.3% in SFQ1.

6.2.2.6 Summary of the Comparison Between Initial and Final SFQs

This section explicitly answers RQ2: How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills? Table 6.1 shows in detail the satisfaction or dissatisfaction percentage variation between the SFQ1 and the SFQ2. It does not include the five sections developed in the whole SFQ, as it only focuses on the three sections needed to answer RQ2: core skills, other skills, and the features available on Wespeke (from questions 9

to 24). The site design (section 6.2.2.1) and future use (section 6.2.2.5) have been

previously explained to reinforce the participants' viewpoints about their learning

process.

Table 6.1: Comparison Between Initial and Final SFQ

CRITERIA	QUESTION	SFQ1	SFQ2	SFQ1	SFQ2
		Positive (5, 4)		Negative (2, 1)	
CORE SKILLS	9. Does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish speaking skills?	41.6	16.6	16.6	33.3
	10. Does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish listening skills?	25	33.3	25	66.6
	11. Does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish reading skills?	41.6	66.6	25	16.6
	12. Does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish writing skills?	50	66.6	25	16.6
OTHER SKILLS	13. Does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish grammar?	25	50	25	16.6
	14. Does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish pronunciation?	16.6	16.6	25	66.6
	15. Does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish vocabulary?	33.3	66.6	25	16.6
	16. Does Wespeke help you improve your Hispanic culture?	16.6	33.3	33.3	50
FEATURES	17. Was the feature of creating a profile helpful to you in practising Spanish?	66.6	50	16.6	33.3
	18. Was the feature of friending native speakers helpful to you in practising Spanish?	41.6	50	16.6	16.6
	19. Was the feature of exchanging languages helpful to you in practising Spanish?	33.3	50	25	33.3
	20. Was the feature of receiving feedback helpful to you in practising Spanish?	33.3	66.6	25	16.6
	21. Was the feature of giving feedback helpful to you in practising Spanish?	33.3	33.3	25	33.3

As shown in Table 6.1, two significant increases in dissatisfaction emerged when

assessing the skills that could have been improved using Wespeke. Regarding listening

skills (question 10), 25% of students were initially equally satisfied and dissatisfied. In

SFQ2, the satisfaction level (33.3%) rose to 66.6% dissatisfied, reflected by Robert,

who pointed out that "much of the conversation has to do with text or messaging." The

features related to pronunciation skills (question 14) obtained a rate of 16.7%

satisfaction in both the initial and final SFQ. Initially, 25% of participants were

dissatisfied before this rose significantly to 66.6% in the final SFQ, summarised in

Crescentia's comments that she "never spoke to anyone directly, only via text."

In parallel, other skills experienced an increase in satisfaction rates. For example, reading skills (question 11) rose from 41.6% to 66.6%, and dissatisfaction decreased from 25% to 16.6 in the final SFQ. Likewise, writing skills (question 12) increased from 50% to 66.6%, and the dissatisfaction rate fell from 25% to 16.6% in the final SFQ. Grammar satisfaction levels (question 13) also rose from 25% in SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2, while dissatisfaction with this feature fell from 25% to 16.7%. The vocabulary skills (question 15), equally, increased from 33.3% to 66.6%, while dissatisfaction decreased from 25% to 16.7%.

The level of satisfaction with acquiring Hispanic cultural skills (question 16) did not experience the same tendency. Although it doubled from 16.7% to 33.3%, the percentage of dissatisfaction also increased from 33.3% to 50%. Furthermore, when the participants were asked about their speaking skills (question 9), the satisfaction level plummeted from 41.6% to 16.7%, and dissatisfaction with this feature doubled from 16.7% to 33.3%.

Turning now to specific features, which is the main focus of RQ2, creating a profile (question 17), achieved an initial satisfaction score of 66.6% before declining to 50% in the final SFQ. However, after ten weeks of using the platform, dissatisfaction increased from 16.7% to 33%. On the one hand, the feature that met with increased satisfaction by the users was receiving feedback (question 20). In this case, satisfaction doubled from 33.3% to 66.6%, and dissatisfaction reduced from 25% to 16.7%. Similarly, the level of satisfaction with the feature enabling the friending of native speakers (question 18) increased from 41.6% to 50% and maintained the same level of dissatisfaction at 16.7%. On the other hand, exchanging languages (question 19) did not follow the same trend, as it increased its level of satisfaction from 33.3% to 50% and expanded the dissatisfaction rate from 25% to 33.3%. Furthermore, giving feedback

(question 21) maintained the same level of satisfaction, 33.3%, and dissatisfaction rose slightly from 25% to 33.3%.

From the results obtained in the feedback questionnaire, after five weeks of using the Wespeke platform, the most beneficial feature in helping users develop language skills was receiving feedback from their LEPs (question 20). A total of 66% of participants considered it helpful for learning Spanish. As Ben indicated when commenting on the top marks he had given to this feature:

> *I could learn and build from the mistakes I made, albeit if they were only small grammatical issues.*

Another 16.6% of users were neutral about this feature, while the remaining 16.6% assessed it as not useful. Shahzad's viewpoint was that it was helpful,

> *to a slight extent, but again [it] was difficult to get someone to help me.*

Friending native speakers was the second-best feature in terms of helping users develop language skills. After five weeks of using Wespeke, this feature's rating increased from 41.6% in SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2. As Ben said in this respect:

> *This was extremely helpful. I could talk to like-minded people who were enthusiastic and willing to help me, meaning that my experience was a productive one.*

By contrast, 16.6% of users thought that the feature was not helpful, which was replicated in both SFQs. However, there were no additional comments related to this. Some users' opinions on this topic will be further explored when analysing data from the focus groups later in this chapter.

Occupying third place among the features analysed was exchanging languages. Although the dissatisfaction level increased from 25% (SFQ1) to 33.3% (SFQ2), the rise in satisfaction was higher, as it increased from 33.3% to 50%. Ben further elaborated on this in his comments, indicating that it was beneficial in helping users develop language skills*:*

> *because culturally, I could differentiate between the typical opening*
> *conversations of English people compared to Spanish people. Specifically, the*
> *opening questions and responses to such conversations.*

Although the level of satisfaction decreased from 66.6% (SFQ1) to 50% (SFQ2), and 16.6% moved from satisfaction to dissatisfaction, the latter level doubled to 33.3%, placing the feature of creating a profile in fourth place. According to Ben, it was beneficial in helping users develop skills because:

> *I could present my profile in such a way that allowed people to message me*
> *and discuss the information within my profile (i.e., my age, hobbies etc.).*

There were no additional comments from the participants who considered this feature unbeneficial.

Giving feedback occupied the final position of the five features assessed by the participants as beneficial in helping them develop language skills. Its level of satisfaction remained at 33.3% in both SFQ1 and SFQ2, and the level of dissatisfaction increased from 25% to 33.3%. According to Ben, it was beneficial:

> *because it helped to form and build the relationship between my contacts and I*
> *and show that I was willing to help them equally as they helped me [in*
> *practising/learning the language].*

Focusing on the quantitative data obtained from SFQ2 about Wespeke features that users thought to be most beneficial in helping them develop language skills, it is clear that the data were skewed because of the small sample size and the limited number of responses options. Hence, a nonparametric measure of rank correlation (Pallant, 2016) was applied, specifically *Spearman's rho*, which calculated the strength of association between the two variables. Table 6.2 shows the correlation obtained after combining these five features (questions 17–21 from the SFQ) with the four core MFL skills. According to Jost (2016), the correlation, denoted by r, measures the amount of linear association between two variables; r is always between -1 and $+1$ inclusive. The R *squared* value, denoted by R^2, is the square of the correlation. It measures the proportion

of variation in the dependent variable attributed to the independent variable. The *R squared* value, R^2, is always between 0 and 1 inclusive. The points need to be exactly on the trend line for a perfect positive linear association. *Correlation r = 1; R squared = 1.00*; the points are close to the linear trend line in a large positive linear association. *Correlation r = 0.9; R squared = 0.81*; the points are far from the trend line in a small positive linear association. *Correlation r = 0.45; R squared = 0.2025.*

Table 6.2: Correlations Between Wespeke Features and the Four Core MFL Skills

CORRELATION	R^2
1. Giving Feedback + Listening	0.9143
2. Receiving Feedback + Reading	0.8963
3. Receiving Feedback + Writing	0.8963
4. Exchanging Languages + Reading	0.8521
5. Exchanging Languages + Writing	0.8521
6. Friending + Reading	0.8244
7. Friending + Writing	0.8244
8. Profile + Listening	0.64
9. Friending + Listening	0.64
10. Exchanging Languages + Listening	0.6215
11. Receiving Feedback + Listening	0.6
12. Profile + Reading	0.3122
13. Profile + Writing	0.3122
14. Friending + Speaking	0.1882
15. Receiving Feedback + Speaking	0.1765
16. Giving Feedback + Reading	0.1742
17. Giving Feedback + Writing	0.1742
18. Exchanging Languages + Speaking	0.1423
19. Giving Feedback + Speaking	0.0672
20. Profile + Speaking	0.0471

Table 6.2 shows that from the different correlation squared values (R^2) obtained, none of them confirmed a perfect positive linear association ($R^2=1$). However, "Giving Feedback + Listening" ($R^2=0.9143$) were very close to it, as well as the correlations 2 to 7. "Friending + Reading" ($R^2=0.8244$) and "Friending + Writing" ($R^2=0.8244$) could be considered as significant positive linear associations as they are also very close to $R^2=0.81$. The nearest R^2 to a small positive linear association ($R^2=0.2025$) was

"Friending + Speaking" (R^2=0.1882). Seven cases (from number 14 to 20) of small

positive linear associations were obtained from the correlations generated.

The following three figures show an example of each of those perfect (Figure

6.26), large (Figure 6.27), and small (Figure 6.28) linear associations (see Appendix X

for additional positive and negative correlation coefficients).

Figure 6.26: Giving Feedback + Listening Correlation
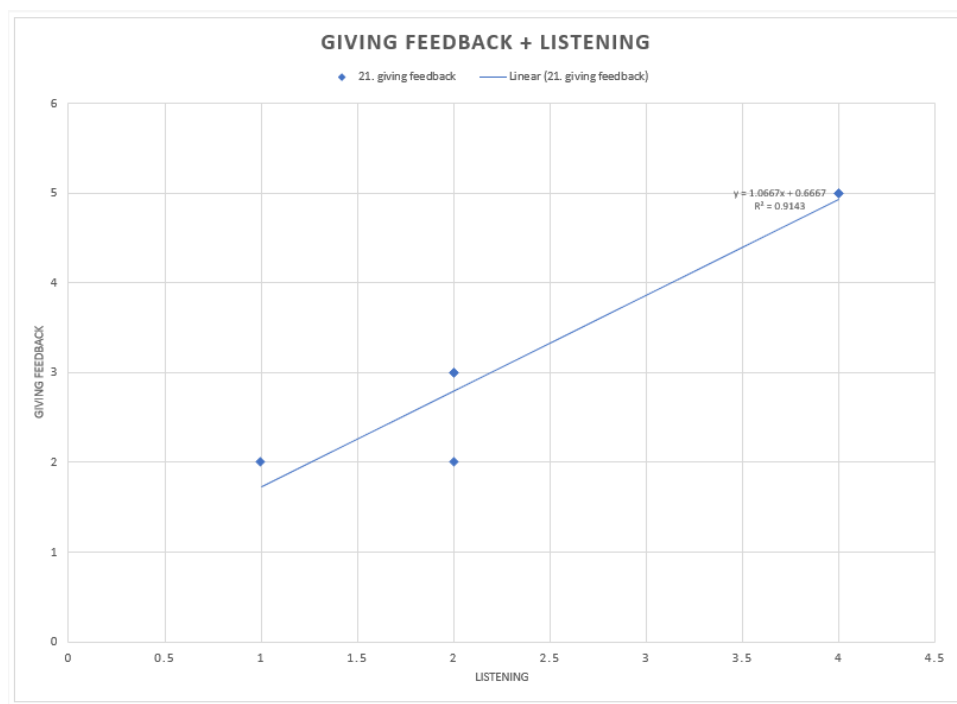
Figure 6.27: Friending + Writing Correlation

FRIENDING + WRITING
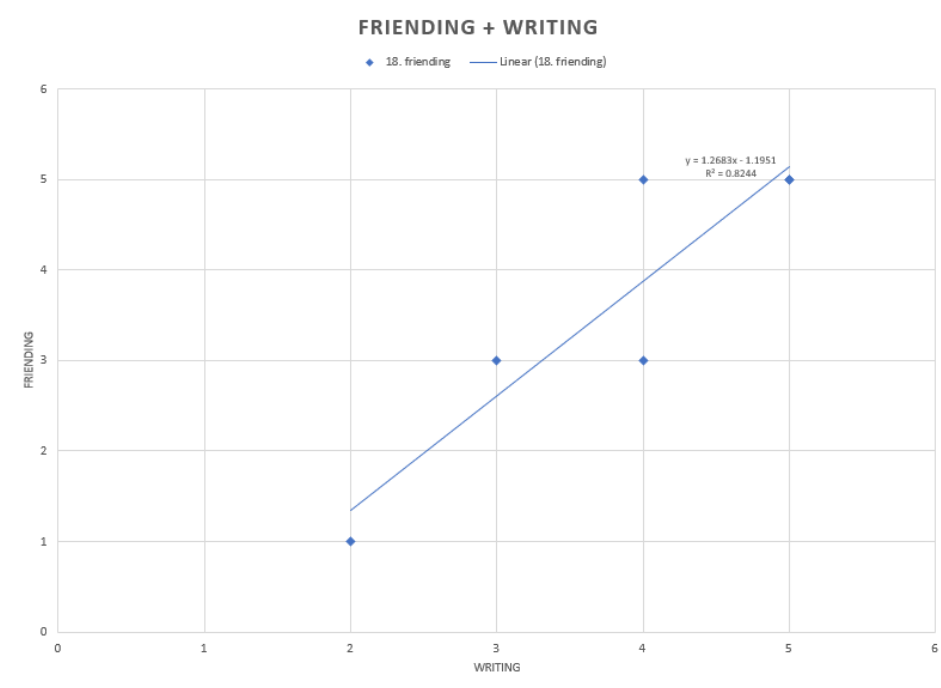
Figure 6.28: Friending + Speaking Correlation

FRIENDING + SPEAKING
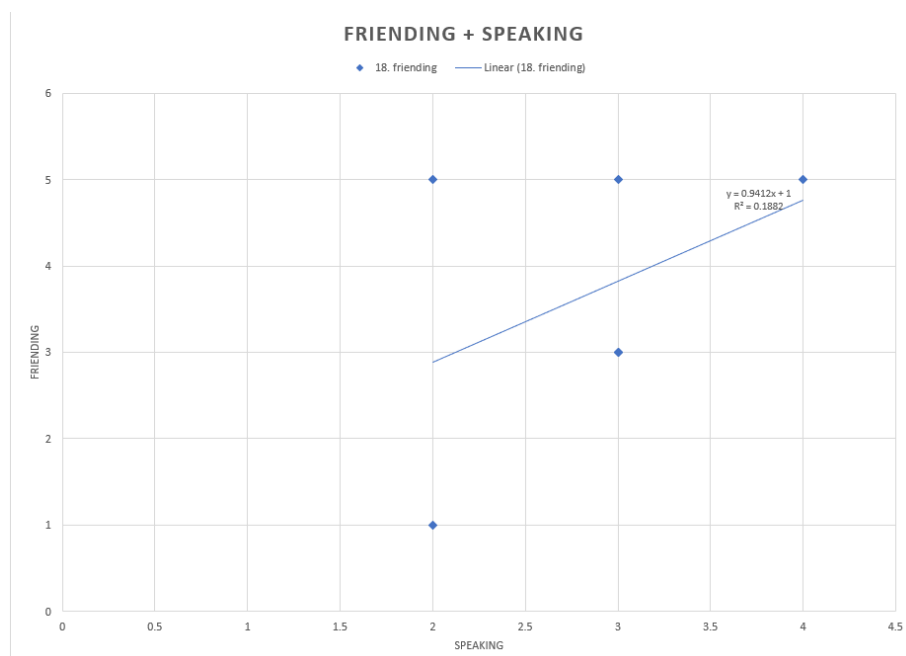
6.2.3 Focus Groups and Logon Sheets

The last two data collection tools to be analysed are the focus groups and logon sheets. The first one was used to deepen the participants' viewpoints on Wespeke, and the second was to determine in detail how the participants interacted on the platform and reflected on how they used it. Following an abductive strategy, they will be analysed by focusing on Wespeke's features to develop SFL learning skills.

6.2.3.1 Creating a Profile

As seen in Figure 6.19, in the initial SFQ1, 66.7% of participants indicated that creating a profile helped them practice SFL. In comparison, 50% held this viewpoint in the SFQ2.

In focus group 1 (FG1), Gary complained about Wespeke's system not offering him enough LEPs. However, it did not have enough information about his interests to offer him potential LEPs. He also complained about how generic those "interests" categories were. For example, he commented:

> *What do you mean when you say they are all interested in education? Do you mean you're interested in being educated? Are you interested in the educational system in your country? You are yourself an educator?*

Once he provided more information about his interests, he received more LEP proposals and could interact with other users and exchange languages. Ben contradicted Gary when saying:

> *The fact that so many contacts are listed immediately means that there is no hassle in setting up communication, and the site refrains from creating numerous problematic steps before you can start to talk to others. Instead, the site offers this in a simple and easy way.*

Furthermore, in the logon sheets, as previously seen, Ben best described the practicality of creating a profile when saying that he could present his profile to allow people to message him and discuss the information within his profile. This reflection meant that

some participants understood that creating a profile was a means of accessing the

platform and practising the concepts learnt in the classroom.

6.2.3.2 Friending a Native Speaker

Figure 6.20 showed that the percentage of very satisfied users in the SFQ1 (16.7%)

trebled to 50% in SFQ2 when referring to the feature of friending a native speaker as

helpful to practise SFL. In FG1, George mentioned that he liked:

> *the availability of many Spanish natives and their friendly behaviour and consent to teach me Spanish.*

This comment confirmed Wespeke's social-constructivist approach, allowing users to

learn and practise foreign languages. Similarly, Gary— also in FG1—referred to

Wespeke's friending feature in terms of:

> *a reciprocal arrangement, as the expectations of the other person are going to benefit from us as well. It's negotiating that side of things so that you get equal shares and thoughts what people want, again, trying a way of doing it.*

Using terms such as "arrangement," "negotiating," and "shares" might have suggested

economic transactions to users. That was not the case; participants used the platform for

social transactions and exchanged Spanish and English. Paul, in the same FG,

contradicted Gary. From his viewpoint:

> *People like to call out on there to make friends, only going for the sole purpose of improving. There is also the fact of languages.*

Hence, from Paul's perspective, the social aspect of the LLSNS was more important

than the learning aspect. Trudy and Crescentia (FG1) doubted the possibility of making

more meaningful friendships on the platform. Crescentia (FG4)—due to the Spanish

level of the participants—complained that they could not have a proper conversation

apart from exchanging greetings. However, she valued the experience as positive, in

general. It was explained to them that time was needed to trust each other and develop

rapport as in any other relationship. Through the logon sheets, Ben added:

> *Yes, I would say [exchanging languages with a native speaker] was extremely helpful. I could talk to like-minded people who were enthusiastic and willing to help me, meaning that my experience was a productive one.*

As this comment suggests, learning through socialisation was confirmed as Wespeke's underpinning principle.

6.2.3.3 Exchanging Languages

The percentage of very satisfied users with the exchange languages feature on Wespeke doubled from 25% in the SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2, as Figure 6.21 showed. In the focus groups, most participants said that they preferred to text instead of speak due to their Spanish level. For example, Gary (FG1) said:

> *Wespeke allows you to communicate through instant messaging, which is a perk you've got. I think a video-audio-based approach at this stage of the game... well, it'd be said far beyond my capabilities and my biggest fear, I think in attempting that would be freezing.*

Trudy (FG2) added:

> *They really want to talk to you instead of text, but I don't want to do that. I know no one's up. However, for you to learn the language, you do have to do that more.*

These excerpts are essential in highlighting the metacognition students applied to their learning process. Nevertheless, in both cases, even knowing what to do, they did not want to do it because they felt uncomfortable. Gary added (FG3):

> *Certainly, it is an altogether different experience as you write it down where you got time for consideration. But—while speaking—you've got to be working in real-time. So, you've got to get it out straight away. Moreover, that is a skill in itself, which probably requires practice.*

He had even said he was "terrified" about talking to strangers, and that was why participants preferred to text each other rather than engage in conversation and speaking practice. Initially, in FG2, Chris stated:

> *[Wespeke] was very average as I had one positive contact where we properly used the platform for exchanging languages. The other people I contacted, we only had very short conversations.*

However, in a late logon sheet, he added:

> *I was pleased that I had been able to make a useful connection first on the app then using another platform, and it felt like we were actually exchanging languages and learning from each other.*

This comment confirms that, even if the participants had to change platform, Wespeke helped start the language exchange process, and the research project worked as intended.

Crescentia (FG3) also doubted the intentions of some of Wespeke's users:

> *like the guy who was half-naked. And, you know, isn't if they want to learn English, yes, but not Spanish speaker as that sort of thing. So, the doubt is as to whether they are there actually to exchange languages in that type of thing.*

This comment confirms previous research by Malerba (2015) that found how some users are "confused" about social networking in relation to learning and the kind of use they can make of it. In this respect, Shahzad also added in a logon sheet:

> *The idea is a great one; the format allows a language learner to learn first-hand from speaking to natives and picking up the language and cultural habits.*

These comments also underlined participants' satisfaction with using Wespeke to learn SFL while taking advantage of some of the opportunities for socialising that social networks promote for language learners.

6.2.3.4 Receiving Feedback

As with the feature of friending a native speaker (Figure 6.22), the percentage of *very satisfied* users who considered receiving feedback from native speakers helpful for learning SFL also trebled from 16.7% in SFQ1 to 50% in SFQ2. However, not all students agreed on this point in the logon sheets. For example, from Shahzad's viewpoint, "[receiving feedback was helpful] to a slight extent but again was difficult to get someone to help me."

Chris agreed with Shahzad in FG4: "They were interested in conversing more in English and didn't want to do the Spanish side of it, or they were wanting to speak a lot

more advanced, that sort of thing." Apparently, besides the language levels, some users

preferred to receive feedback on their English more than give it to the SFL learners.

From a different perspective, Ben added: "I could learn and build from the

[corrected] mistakes I made, albeit if they were only small grammatical issues." From

my viewpoint as a teacher/researcher in the process, the effectiveness of feedback

exchange also depends on the engagement and rapport among participants, meaning that

the more involved a participant was with their LEPs, the more feedback they were likely

to receive.

However, the most positive experience in this group about receiving feedback

was mentioned by Chris (FG4):

> *It was with a guy called Andrés in Colombia, and he was actually really*
> *interested in learning English and very helpful with my Spanish. Very good at*
> *correcting... He wanted to exchange WhatsApp [numbers], and we did, and we*
> *carried on messaging on that.*

6.2.3.5 Giving Feedback

Interestingly, in Figure 6.23, the percentage of *very satisfied* participants who

considered that giving feedback to English as a Foreign Language learners was helpful

for learning SFL doubled from 16.7% in SFQ1 to 33.3% in SFQ2. The *satisfied*

participants (16.7%) in SFQ1 changed their appreciation to *very satisfied* and

contributed to double the figure in SFQ2. Gary (FG1) did not want to be rude. He

decided not to correct his LEPs unless asked to explicitly:

> *You're a foreign speaker of the language, your English is excellent, and your*
> *class of vocabulary is well above even of an average English speaker.*
> *However, there are still flaws in how you ask yourself, and I don't make any*
> *effort to correct it. You haven't invited me to do it. It would be rude to do so."*

However, George's experience (FG1) was the opposite:

> *She was typing to me in English, and there were a lot of small errors in that.*
> *So, what I did, I didn't tell that it was an error, but I typed it again, like*
> *correcting the sentence. So, I typed it again, so at least she can understand that*
> *OK, there was a mistake in the last sentence, and corrected that; it's the*
> *rectification.*

Such an approach was a straightforward way of giving feedback to their LEPs.

Ben was the participant who best synthesised the underpinning principles of this feature. In the logon sheets, he considered that giving feedback:

> *helped to form and build the relationship between my contacts and I and show that I was willing to help them equally as they helped me.*

Moreover, he later added*:*

> *Overall, I would say that the site functions as a great platform to enhance one's learning whilst also giving the learner a chance to help others improve theirs.*

These two excerpts summarise the social-constructivist principles Wespeke was based on as a platform to learn and exchange languages.

6.3 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings related to RQ2: How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills? The four data collection tools used—the user experience questionnaire, SFQ, focus groups, and logon sheets—following an abductive strategy, confirmed that Wespeke followed a social-constructivist approach to learning foreign languages.

Explicitly referring to Wespeke's features, according to the participants, this is the order, from most to least helpful, in which they rated the features in learning and practising SFL: (1) Receiving feedback, (2) friending native speakers, (3) exchanging languages, (4) creating a profile, and (5) giving feedback.

Furthermore, the participants ranked how Wespeke helped them improve the four core language learning skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking. Such results may seem discouraging at first reading, as LLSNS are intended to practise productive skills (speaking and writing) rather than receptive ones (listening and reading). However, as the participants mentioned in the focus groups, even if they admitted that

the only way to improve these productive skills was through practice, they were adamant about speaking because they were beginners in terms of Spanish proficiency. Moreover, they preferred to communicate through writing, so they had more time to think and review their language use before exchanging languages.

Finally, the participants were generally satisfied with the tools Wespeke offered to practise Spanish, apart from some online connectivity and technical challenges that were constantly mentioned throughout the research.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The study's findings have been presented in the previous two chapters based on detailed data extracts. Chapter 7 analyses and discusses these key findings concerning the research questions: What theories of Second Language Acquisition do LLSNS adhere to? How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL skills? While the literature review provided preliminary answers to both Research Question 1 (RQ1) and Research Question 2 (RQ2), this chapter critically discusses the empirical findings through the lens of research literature in the areas of SLA, Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT), LLSNS, and Blended Language Learning (BLL), paying particular attention to how these areas intersect with research on SFL.

Similar to the preliminary findings from the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3, the analysis of the empirical data shows that although LLSNS' commercial marketing discourse frequently advertises these platforms using keywords associated with theories of social constructivism (e.g., focusing on the potential for collaboration, interactivity and the platforms' social dimension), the data from this thesis show that the intersection of LLSNS and SLA is a more complex and contradictory space. Several theories of learning are in fact intertwined, and the argument that social constructivism is the sole approach guiding teaching and learning in LLSNS cannot be upheld; indeed, there is a clear mix of behaviourist and cognitive SLA approaches in evidence. As a result, language learners who have been drawn to use LLSNS because of their assumed *social* focus may become disillusioned and abandon them. To examine this more closely, the first section of this chapter explores the findings for RQ1 through the lens of Bronack,

Riedl, and Tashner's (2006) five principles of social constructivism. The second part of

the chapter considers RQ2 by following Hinkelman's BLL ecology model (2018).

7.2 RQ1: WHAT THEORIES OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DO LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ADHERE TO?

To answer RQ1, the literature review in Chapter 2 showed how Computer-Assisted

Language Learning (CALL) has evolved into a social stage during the last decade. Here

learners are positioned as collaborative language prosumers who use social media via

mobile devices and Web 2.0 technologies to complete authentic tasks (Thomas,

Reinders, & Warschauer, 2014) in real and/or virtual environments (BLL). This social

or networking focus is often cited as a core aspect in the design of LLSNS when aiming

to adhere to the principles of social constructivism (Álvarez, 2015, 2016; Álvarez &

Fernández, 2019; Liu et al., 2015; Malerba, 2015; Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou, 2017).

The findings from the literature review were compared with those arising from

the data collection tools used to explore Busuu and Wespeke (e.g., user experience

questionnaire, site feedback questionnaire (SFQ), focus groups, logon sheets) to answer

this RQ. Both LLSNS were the most used worldwide until 2016, and both met the

definition of an LLSNS proposed by the still influential definitions provided by Boyd

and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011) to develop two case studies to illustrate tendencies

in the field. While it could be argued that these definitions of LLSNS are over a decade

old and that LLSNS have evolved in the meantime, I suggest that these definitions

remain influential as they capture the intrinsic ethos of social networking in an

educational context. The eight key features that these researchers identified are central

to social constructivist pedagogies in that they encourage learners to create a language

learner profile; add, search, and communicate with a circle of language learning peers;

exchange feedback on their language learning activities; upload language learning

content; and develop a peripheral awareness about which peers are in the LLSNS and available to learn with them as a member of their peer learning group.

A corpus consisting of 39 research articles was analysed to investigate which SLA theories are most popular and prominent. Around 78% of these empirical studies suggested that the design of activities in the LLSNS studied (e.g., Babbel, Busuu, English café, Italki, Lang-8, LingQ, Livemocha, Palabea, Polyglot Club, and Wespeke, as shown in Table 3.9) were grounded in and supported by two main theoretical frameworks of SLA: socio-cultural theory and social constructivism. In contrast, 20% of the research did not mention any theoretical framework.

To understand this complex context, it was necessary to distinguish between the theoretical frameworks followed by the empirical studies and the theories of SLA that underpin the learning activities presented in the LLSNS themselves. Chapter 3 (section 3.3) focused on the former, while Chapter 5 (sections 5.3 and 5.4) explored the latter. Section 3.3 showed that out of 39 empirical research studies about LLSNS identified for this study published between 2009 and 2021, only ten (25.6%) focused on SFL as one of the languages investigated, and only one was explicitly centred on SFL (see Table 3.8).

7.2.1 Busuu

Chapter 5 (see section 5.3) found that the *networking aspect* of Busuu was not consistent with the conclusions of previous research studies. For example, Brick (2012) found that Busuu allowed learners to practise their oral skills with native speakers, while Peckenpaugh (2018) showed that 63.2% of students in an American university felt as though Busuu helped them improve oral proficiency. Furthermore, while the Busuu platform promoted itself to language users and potential language users as if it were based on the principles of social constructivism (Busuu, 2021), Álvarez (2016)

showed that the design of its learning activities incorporated pedagogical features from different language learning theories (e.g., behaviouristic, cognitive, and constructivism) within an ecological system of nested semiotic spaces. These theories were interwoven in the platform but in complementary ways (Álvarez, 2016); however, this study found that Busuu did not encourage social (constructivism) but individual (behaviouristic) learning.

Regarding the native or non-native speaker/teacher dichotomy, most LLSNS advertise language exchange with 'natives' as the best way to learn a language. Furthermore, researchers also mention it as an advantage (Brick, 2012; Guikema, 2013; Malerba, 2015; Peckenpaugh, 2018; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021). However, recent studies reject such a distinction between these types of teachers. For example, Thompson and Cuesta (2019) suggested that making comparisons of L2 Spanish teachers (or other Modern Foreign Languages) based on their native or non-native language mastery "is inconsistent with the pedagogical goals that guide contemporary second language teaching practices" (Thompson & Cuesta, 2019, p. 655). It should be added that such a comparison is out of place, especially in the current multicultural and multilingual world (Bárkányi & Fuertes, 2019). Moreover, Ahn et al. (2021) concluded that "the notion of native speakerism is an actively and purposefully propagated myth (an ideological construction), elaborated by the relevant stakeholders" and "native speakers of English are not determined based on 'who you are' (race and nationality) but 'what you know' (learnt expertise)" (pp. 12-13). Hence, 'what you know' becomes the most crucial factor in that study, while 'who you are' is the least important in determining one's nativeness in a language.

Furthermore, specifically referring to Busuu, during the four weeks of this first stage of research, participants expressed disappointment via each of the data collection

tools utilised (user experience questionnaire, feedback questionnaire, logon sheets, and focus groups) about the absence of a *networking feature*; this was the case, although this particular feature was prominently advertised in order to obtain their initial participation in the site. As a result, Busuu users in the study described a cycle of initial motivation, followed by frustration, and finally, demotivation, thus confirming what previous researchers had concluded when investigating other LLSNS, such as Clark and Gruba (2010) and Orsini-Jones et al. (2013) in their earlier studies.

Moreover, data showed that Busuu did not follow the five fundamental principles of social constructivism synthesised by Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner (2006): "learning is participatory; knowledge is social; learning leads to development; knowledge emerges through meaningful activity with others; and learners develop dispositions relative to the communities in which they practice" (Bronack, Riedl, & Tashner, 2006, p. 221). Therefore, these five principles will be used in the following sub-sections to structure the findings of RQ1 related to Busuu.

7.2.1.1 Is Learning Participatory in Busuu?

As experienced by users in this study, Busuu did not follow the first principle of social constructivism, as learning was not participatory. On the contrary, individual learning was encouraged in the online layout, thus undermining the notion of an LLSNS as a community of practice in which learners share goals and engage in continuous and meaningful collaborative activities (Saona-Vallejos & Thomas, 2020). Participants expected to be involved in a social learning experience through their interaction in a group. However, none of them could complete the third task in the user experience questionnaire, namely, accepting language exchange partners (LEPs) into their support network, as Busuu had suspended the "peer friending" feature during the development of their mobile platform. Hence, at this point, Busuu fulfilled only three (37.5%) out of

eight of the basic features every Social Networking Site (SNS) should have, according to the definitions of Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011), in that language learners were only allowed to create a profile, upload user-generated content, and receive feedback.

Since 2016, Busuu's "peer friending" feature was reduced to exchange (spoken and written) "conversation" exercises which enable users to receive personalised feedback. This "interaction" feature did not offer opportunities for social exchange as it was asynchronous and merely recorded participants' voice/written messages based on exercises. Such structured "dialogues" did not involve opportunities for the negotiation of meaning, and the "speaking" exercises did little to help develop spontaneous communicative skills as they involved the recitation of already provided phrases only, without promoting the use of fundamental communication skills in the learning tasks (Jee & Park, 2009). Hence, while Busuu has promoted itself on its site as "the largest community for language learning" globally, data from the participants in this study suggests that it does not fulfil the requirements of an LLSNS, contradicting previous academic research. For example, Brick (2012) found that Busuu encouraged more comprehensive cooperation between students, and peer review was pivotal in the site's design; Peckenpaugh (2018) concluded that "what Busuu lacks in syntactical flexibility, it gains in social network feedback." Vesselinov and Grego (2016) stated that "Busuu was designed to combine self-paced language study with a supportive social network of language learners around the world." (Vesselinov & Grego, 2016, p. 3). The results of this thesis do not agree with these previous stances.

This study found that some learning was possible in Busuu, but this was typically individual rather than participatory. For example, in the third open-ended task of the user experience questionnaire (e.g., work on any lesson by yourself), 100% of

participants engaged, and 35.7% verbally expressed satisfaction with it. However, as Ngo and Eichelberger (2020) have argued, learning on LLSNS should be a social process that is a non-linear relational activity co-constructed between learners and their environment. Moreover, it was also impossible to complete the first two open-ended tasks (find peer language learning supporters; practise Spanish with an LEP for five minutes) as the "friending" feature (the possibility of linking your profile to a potential LEP) had been suspended.

To summarise, the user experience questionnaire on Busuu showed that only four out of eight (50%) tasks worked: the ones that had to be completed without social interaction, which confirmed that it had stopped following an SLA approach informed by social constructivism, contradicting the social stage in CALL (Otto, 2017). Otto (2017) asserted that in the 21st Century, the socio-cultural theories were clearly used in CALL instruction, and the student is considered a social being whose MFL learning happens via social interaction through language use. Learners become prosumers of knowledge, inside and outside the classroom, using wireless mobile devices to access lessons and interact with other learners (Otto, 2017). However, findings from this thesis showed that the desired social learning and interaction were no longer present in Busuu.

7.2.1.2 Is Knowledge Social in Busuu?

Busuu also contravened Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner's (2006) second principle of social constructivism: knowledge is constructed singly rather than developed through interaction as there were no peers to create a meaningful learning environment. None of the participants could complete the third specific task of the user experience questionnaire; none of the students could find or accept peers for language interaction (Saona-Vallejos, 2018).

However, some support for the individualist approach can be found in Chik and Ho's (2017) study: "LLSNS may be considered 'stand-alone' courses in which learners have the choice to engage individually or in interaction with others in the learning community to practice and receive feedback on their language use" (2017, p. 164). Hence, after four weeks of using Busuu, the highest number of *very dissatisfied* users was related to the "ease of finding contacts". A total of 71.4% were *very dissatisfied*, which increased to 85.7% of *dissatisfied* users following SFQ1 and 70% for SFQ2. Such a reaction from the participants confirmed the importance they gave to the social aspect of LLSNS. Concerning Chik and Ho's (2017) study, the participants in this thesis preferred to interact and learn from/with others instead of doing it individually.

Furthermore, according to Eid and Al-Jabri (2016), "SNSs provide convenient and speedy ways of peer-to-peer exchange of knowledge and collaboration, which seems to be a preferred method of learning" (Eid and Al-Jabri, 2016, p. 15) as the participants in this thesis confirmed. However, they expressed their discontent via the SFQ as they could not find peers to practise their new SFL skills through interaction. Hence, learning in Busuu was neither social nor participatory but individualistic, as the different means to practise the language were to be completed alone (writing/recording messages by themselves) rather than through social exchange.

7.2.1.3 Does Learning Lead to Language Development via Shared Activity in Busuu?

In the LLSNS, learners were expected to exchange social knowledge and practise the four basic language learning skills, but they were only able to create a profile, upload user-generated content and receive asynchronous feedback, and this was the main reason for their dissatisfaction. Three features were not enough to develop a consistent Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for learning, and no new features have been

added to Busuu's platform since the platform was capped in 2016. This aspect is also related to the repetitiveness of the learning activity types as a drawback. In this research study, students indicated that the exercises were "repetitive" and "boring," and the cloze exercise format did not challenge them, and this was similar to findings presented by Kétyi (2014), in which 18.4% of participants did not enjoy the time using the application, while 50% enjoyed it only slightly. In addition, this thesis' findings confirmed those of Malerba (2015, p. 257), which showed that: "The design of the didactic units rather than favouring the contact and the collaboration with native speakers, isolate learners and engage them in repetitive behaviourist-like exercises," as well as those of Rosell-Aguilar (2018, p. 16), whose participants "found the tasks too easy and repetitive."

The highest range of participants' opinions on Busuu related to the usefulness of its features; hence, on the one hand, the majority agreed when measuring the friending feature: up to 60% considered it not helpful. On the other hand, the features most valued by the participants in SFQ2 were vocabulary (22%) and receiving feedback. Rosell-Aguilar's (2018) results were similar in that vocabulary was the best-liked feature on Busuu, while receiving feedback was the third least liked. Kétyi's (2015) participants found vocabulary and writing the most helpful features on Busuu.

Synthesising these results, it is clear that learning on Busuu did not lead to language learning development via shared activity for participants in this study. Busuu's stated aim was to follow Vygotskyan principles in which the improvement of an individual's knowledge emerges as a consequence of social interaction mediated by people, communication, and concepts (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). Busuu aimed to translate these principles into collaborative exercises, including giving and receiving feedback on writing and recording audio messages. Although Busuu recommended

making peer group friends (top tip number eight as indicated by Lawley, 2021) and using the conversation feature of the platform to "interact" with LEPs (Campbell-Howes, 2021), the latter simply provided recorded messages. Moreover, such "interaction" meant using asynchronous and impersonal messages as they were not addressed to a specific LEP but were only a recorded answer to an open exercise to be corrected by any other user. Hence, while Busuu promoted these as collaborative exercises, they were adaptations of the principles of stimulus–response and more akin to behaviourism (Skinner, 1957) than social constructivism.

7.2.1.4 Does Useful Knowledge Emerge Through Meaningful Activities With Others in Busuu?

Related to the fourth principle, the results from this study showed little evidence of meaningful interactive activities among participants, and the participants showed divided opinions about the skills that could be improved using Busuu. For example, 60% of participants, the highest figure in SFQ2, stated that their listening and reading skills (passive skills) improved after using Busuu. However, referring to speaking and writing (active skills), after using the platform for four weeks, up to 70% did not believe so.

In contrast, Kétyi's (2014) study found that 37% of users considered that Busuu helped them with their reading and 28% with their listening (passive skills). Similarly, 28% thought that Busuu helped them with their writing, but only 15% thought the same about speaking (active skills). In Rosell-Aguilar's case (2018), these percentages plummeted to 12.9% for listening and 8.6% for reading (passive skills). Curiously, referring to active skills, Rosell-Aguilar reported speaking (16.2%) as receiving the highest percentage of the four basic skills as participants thought they had improved, while writing (7.6%) was the lowest.

These data suggest that participants expected a counterpart to practice and improve their productive skills rather than the receptive ones. Therefore, they decided to give higher scores to those skills that did not need a language learning partner to practise with, while lower scores to those activities designed along social constructivism lines. The significant differences among these results may also be due to the different samples and contexts in which each investigation took place, or as Ellison and Boyd (2013) put it, these three studies refer to the same LLSNS but in "different socio-technical contexts" (Ellison & Boyd, 2013, p. 166).

7.2.1.5 Do Learners Develop Dispositions About Busuu?

The fifth principle of social constructivism is that learners develop dispositions relative to the communities in which they practise (Bronack, Riedl, & Tashner, 2006). Rolé (2020) defined those learning dispositions as the zeal to learn and identified "resourcefulness, resilience, reciprocity, and responsibility as the defining pillars of online collaborative participation" (Rolé, 2020, p. 30). However, in the case of Busuu, learners were not able to create an online learning community. Consequently, the participants could not develop any of the learning dispositions previously mentioned and found the platform "repetitive" and "boring." Instead, participants were involved in a cycle of initial motivation, followed by frustration, and finally, demotivation (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Orsini-Jones et al., 2013), which confirmed the difficulty of engaging users to conduct their own autonomous learning activity (Jones, 2001).

When participants were asked about returning to Busuu on their own, in SFQ1, 71% of participants said they would return, and 14% had some doubts. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that none of the participants said they would not do so; however, some explained that this was due to their commitment to participate in the research. These figures decreased to 70% in SFQ2 who said they would return, and 30%

had some doubts. It is important to remember that the participants in this study had free access to the premium features for three months. Kétyi (2015) concluded, in this respect, that "the students thought that Busuu provides limited help with the language skills and the vast majority wouldn't pay for the app after the trial period" (Kétyi, 2015, p. 310).

Accordingly, when asked if they would recommend Busuu to other users to learn Spanish, on the one hand, in SFQ2, 60% of participants were neutral, 20% said they would not recommend it, and 20% agreed to recommend the site. On the other hand, Kétyi's results were more categoric in affirming that 73.3% of students expressed that "Busuu can help, but is not the ultimate tool for language learning" (Kétyi, 2015, p. 310).

Concerning RQ1 and the qualitative questions from the SFQ used to determine the SLA theories that underpinned Busuu, the participants were asked why they would return to the site or why they would recommend it or not; the viewpoints were divided. One student, for example, said: "It is a great app. Although I can only see it as an additional feature. You still need to speak to people and use books." Additionally, another one affirmed: "This was supposed to be a social network site to help improve my Spanish. I never found anyone ever that I could connect with." Both answers confirmed the lack of evidence for the social constructivism approach used to promote it but not found in the actual activities on the platform.

Moreover, 50% specifically pointed out the impossibility of contacting other users when asked about what they disliked in the platform. For example, one said: "Not clear at all how to connect with users and won't connect when you find out how to search for users." In SFQ2, 66.6% mentioned not being able to find "friends" (language-exchange peers) and demanded "clearer instructions about how to find peer

language learning supporters and other profiles." Furthermore, 33.3% complained about the grammar contents: exercises not sufficient, too repetitive and boring, "lack of an index with subjects to jump into the desired theme directly," or "difficult to go back to an exercise when needed instead of having to go back to the first page of the task." The impossibility of contacting other users confirmed that the site was no longer following social constructivism learning principles. At the same time, the repetitiveness of the exercises confirmed their shift from a social to a cognitive orientation, from participation to an acquisition metaphor, and from L2 use to L2 learning (Wang & Vázquez, 2012).

Furthermore, 57.1% of participants recommended improving its social aspect. For example, one participant suggested: "The social aspect of the network should be implemented." It is useful to highlight the importance the participants gave to keywords they associated with a network-based learning environment but could not find in Busuu. The keywords *social* (position 5), *users/use*r (7, 9), *LLSNS* (11), *feedback* (12), and *friends* (15) were found as the most frequently used words by participants in the feedback questionnaire.

To summarise the findings in the case of Busuu, as a consequence of the platform not offering actual social interaction between its users anymore, this research found that learning was not participatory and knowledge was not social. Hence, learning on Busuu did not lead to language learning development via shared activity. Furthermore, little evidence of meaningful interactive activities among participants was found in this investigation. As a result, learners could not create an online learning community. After that, the participants could not develop resourcefulness, resilience, reciprocity, and responsibility through their interaction on the platform. Instead, they

found it "repetitive" and "boring." Unfortunately, participants fell into a cycle of initial motivation, followed by frustration, and finally, demotivation while using Busuu.

After discussing the findings for RQ1 about Busuu, the next section will focus on Wespeke. However, as highlighted in Table 4.9 (Chapter 4, Methodology), the task-supported lessons only occurred in the main study on Wespeke. For the first stage of the research, the participants used the learning materials provided by Busuu in the first case or did not use any specific materials (just as users generally do not when using these LLSNS) in the case of Wespeke.

7.2.2 Wespeke

Turning now to Wespeke, as the platform did not offer specific learning content for SFL, the research study was designed so that participants used the LLSNS to practise using the language in communicative situations. However, under her own initiative, one participant directly asked her online LEPs to practise the specific linguistic structures of Spanish she needed to improve, for example, the contrast between the indefinite past and the imperfect past and the uses of the subjunctive. The platform received positive reviews from the Spanish language learners in the study immediately after the user experience test. Some of the adjectives used by the participants to describe it were: "useful," "rapid," "easy," "exciting," and "fun." When asked what they liked most about the platform, the participants identified: "The ease to get in contact with people interested in language and willing[ness] to learn and share language knowledge."

In terms of research on Wespeke, Guikema's (2013) is the only empirical study of the platform I am aware of. She highlighted interpersonal communication as Wespeke's primary activity because the language learners in the study were linked with native speakers in order to exchange views on shared interests while developing relationships and getting involved in real linguistic and cultural exchange opportunities.

In addition, the messaging and scheduling tools enabled language learners to find and connect with other users simply and efficiently. Most importantly, reaching a clear understanding of each other was possible through the use of the buttons: "Write it," "Slow down," "Say it again," or "Rephrase," which could be used at any time during the chat and enabled learners to use meaning negotiation strategies, such as checking for comprehension, rephrasing, or asking for clarification (Guikema, 2013).

More recently, other researchers have referred indirectly to Wespeke as a language exchange SNS to practise SFL (Munday, 2019). Moreover, Wespeke has also been identified as a web-based videoconferencing site to connect learners with speakers of the target language worldwide (Henshaw, 2021) and as a conversation platform to enable students to engage in synchronous conversations with native speakers (Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021). However, none of these research studies has provided an in-depth exploration of the platform's social networking functionality, thus limiting my ability to compare previous research with the study outlined in this thesis. Hence, the five principles of social constructivism synthesised by Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner (2006), already used to analyse Busuu, will be used to analyse Wespeke.

7.2.2.1 Is Learning Participatory in Wespeke?

As section 5.4.1.1 of the thesis showed, in relation to RQ1 and Wespeke, all the participants were able to complete every task suggested in the user experience questionnaire, which corroborated that Wespeke used a social constructivism framework to incentivise the foreign language learning process through mutual exchange and interaction (participatory learning) between its users.

After completing the user experience questionnaire, participants completed the SFQ, which aimed to investigate the theories of SLA that Wespeke adhered to (RQ1). The main difference between Busuu and Wespeke related to the ease of finding contacts

to exchange languages with, which is the main principle of social constructivism (Galbin, 2014). In the case of Busuu, in SFQ1, 71.4% and 14.2% of participants were *very dissatisfied* and *dissatisfied* with the opportunities available to find contacts. However, conversely, in the case of Wespeke, 55.5% said they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the possibility of finding contacts.

Even if Álvarez (2016) had already determined that learning was participatory in Busuu, this situation changed, as previously noted (section 7.2.1). Additionally, Philominraj, Bertilla, and Ranjan (2020) proposed participatory learning as one of the most suitable practices for language learning as it prompts students to become cognisant of their learning process, language awareness, and self. Furthermore, it encourages the development of metacommunicative as well as communicative skills. Hence, it confronts and comes to terms with the conflicts between individual and group needs, both in terms of social, procedural, and linguistic content.

In particular, in this research, through the practice of SFL on Wespeke, learners were better able to focus on their specific language needs, making their language skills compatible with those of their LEPs. Moreover, they could reflect on their learning process (metacognition). For example, one student asked her peers to practise the topics she was primarily interested in, i.e., the difference between the indefinite and the imperfect past tenses and the use of the subjunctive tense in Spanish. Such an experience on Wespeke became a symbol of participatory learning.

7.2.2.2 Is Knowledge Social in Wespeke?

The results of this study indicated that learning is participatory in Wespeke because it was found to follow a social constructivism approach. Hence, the knowledge acquired through the platform was also social; the participants learnt SFL through social interaction.

The research results of this thesis (section 5.4.1.1) confirmed that knowledge

was social in Wespeke. In the same vein, Ranjan and Philominraj's (2020) study, which

focused on SFL learners in face-to-face higher education in India, found that (as in

online settings) students used the most social strategies (interacting/cooperating with

others, asking questions) and metacognitive strategies (arranging/planning, self-

assessing, focusing on their learning). Conversely, the least used were memory

strategies (matching images and sounds, creating mental linkages, reviewing

thoroughly).

Finally, the most crucial section of the SFQ was the one that focused on the

skills that could be improved using Wespeke. Furthermore, it underlined social

constructivism as the SLA theory that Wespeke adhered to (RQ1), and it was tightly

correlated with the features of LLSNS that could be most beneficial for students using

these features to develop language skills (RQ2), which will be discussed in the second

part of this chapter (section 7.3).

7.2.2.3 Does Learning Lead to Language Development via Shared Activity in Wespeke?

According to this study's findings, the learners in Wespeke were able to exchange social

knowledge and practise the four basic skills with more knowledgeable others,

specifically with Spanish speakers, and develop a ZPD for learning.

The reason for the ratings referring to the participants' development of their four

basic language skills, as indicated in Chapters 5 and 6, was clarified through the focus

groups. It was not that the participants did not believe that their speaking skills could be

improved via conversation and interaction, but rather that permanent internet connection

problems prevented them from interacting with their LEPs. The same cause was also

alleged where participants rated writing higher than speaking.

However, as Zhang (2016) concluded, language learning is complex, as when studying it, it is essential to include "the cognitive context (e.g., working memory, intentionality, motivation, L1 & L2 knowledge), and the social context (e.g., educational system, relationships with other learners and the teacher). In addition, language learning also includes the physical environment, the pedagogical context (e.g., the task, materials, and ways of teaching and learning), and the socio-political environment" (Zhang, 2016, p. 151). In this thesis stage, the cognitive context referred to SFL B1 (CEFR) university students. Nevertheless, then, Wespeke permeated all the other aspects of the language learning process; the social context (in this case, the relationship with peers was not only physical but also virtual) and the pedagogical context (learning through virtual language exchange on Wespeke, without using any specific materials from the platform). Finally, the socio-political environment affected the language learning process (while all these students were based in England, most were foreigners and interacted with Spanish speakers in different parts of the world).

Furthermore, Godwin-Jones (2019) suggested an ecological approach when analysing the language learning process. From his viewpoint, "studying variables in isolation can be informative but may convey a cause-and-effect impression that belies the interdependence of individual traits, social interactions, institutional forces, socio-economic factors, and political or power relations" (Godwin-Jones, 2019, p. 18). Consequently, to answer RQ1 (What theories of SLA do LLSNS adhere to?), once it was determined that LLSNS aimed to adhere to a social constructivism approach, this thesis focused on investigating if this was the case for both LLSNS studied. Finally, for RQ2 (How do the features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills?), an ecological approach was followed through blended learning and task-supported language lessons (section 7.3.2).

7.2.2.4 Does Useful Knowledge Emerge through Meaningful Activities with Others in Wespeke?

This research's results showed evidence of meaningful interactive activities among participants in the study, and the participants shared their opinions about the skills that could be improved using Wespeke. It is essential to highlight that all the features mentioned in the SFQ focused on SFL via the social constructivism aspects of the LLSNS reflected in those features.

At first sight, the quantitative results from the SFQ, analysed in Chapters 5 and 6, may seem contradictory to those referring to the skills that could be improved while using Wespeke. However, due to the internet connection issues previously mentioned, participants concluded that the feature of language exchange was more achievable through writing and reading (asynchronous interaction) instead of speaking and listening (synchronous interaction).

Still referring to the results after four weeks of using the platform, the other two features which divided opinion were exchanging languages and giving feedback. The variety of participant responses on the features present in Wespeke reflected that not all the participants realised the importance of the social interaction in the LLSNS in improving their language learning.

Finally, as previously indicated, one of the main difficulties of this research stage was that there are no publications focused on Wespeke to compare and discuss. However, Kato, Spring and Mori (2016) suggested that useful knowledge can emerge through meaningful activities with others utilising a video-synchronous computer-mediated language partner programme, pairing language exchange partners learning each other's languages (in that case via Skype), particularly when integrated into an ongoing course and when structured to support meaningful communication.

Specifically, for this thesis, a structured SFL course for beginners was implemented and delivered in the main study of this research (section 7.3).

7.2.2.5 Do Learners Develop Dispositions about Wespeke?

It has already been mentioned that resourcefulness, resilience, reciprocity, and responsibility are the pivotal learning dispositions of online collaborative participation (Rolé, 2020). Unfortunately, in the case of Wespeke, only a few learners were able to create an online learning community due to permanent internet connection issues. These connection issues led first to motivation, followed by frustration, and finally, to demotivation, as mentioned by Clark and Gruba (2010) and Orsini-Jones et al. (2013). Finally, however, some students were able to cope with these problems by suggesting their LEPs move from Wespeke to WhatsApp and Skype to continue their learning via language exchange.

Moreover, when the participants were asked about returning to the site on their own once the study had finished, 57% had decided not to continue with it after four weeks of using the platform, confirming the high level of attrition when learning with LLSNS pointed out by Nielson (2011). Hence, it is necessary to be reminded that at this stage of the research, participants were using Wespeke at their convenience, on the go, whenever they had free time, and according to the language exchange agreement they had with their peers. Thus, as indicated previously, offering video, voice, and text chat in one platform demanded an optimal broadband connection from both sides of the LEP partnerships, which was not always available. Unfortunately, connectivity became an issue and a deterrent to using the platform.

However, when asked if they would recommend Wespeke to other users to learn Spanish, remarkably, none of the participants disagreed with recommending the site in the pre- and post-use of the platform stages. Such results also significantly differed with

Busuu, as 60% were doubtful. All those results reflect the participants' general assessment of each of the LLSNS studied in this thesis.

Nevertheless, to find out if students could develop learning dispositions about Wespeke, it may be helpful to relate their self-regulated online learning with their intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Moore and Wang (2021) linked intrinsic motivation to lifelong learning, interest in online education, learning about course content, discovering with the best teachers, and chances not otherwise available. The same researchers linked extrinsic motivation to ascending in a career, advancing in formal education, better serving society, obtaining a certificate, and interacting in an online community. In Moore and Wang's research, "students looked inward to find the motivation to persist within the course" (Moore & Wang, 2021, p. 130). In this study about Wespeke, intrinsic factors underpinned the participation in such an online community (extrinsic motivation). Participants were interested in lifelong learning, curious about online learning, and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity not otherwise available. They were not interested in earning a certificate or advancing in formal education or their careers but in the possibility of practising and learning SFL through social practice.

To summarise the discussion about Wespeke, the findings showed that learning was participatory, knowledge was social, and learning led to language development through shared activity. Furthermore, useful knowledge emerged through meaningful activities with others. However, not all learners could develop dispositions about Wespeke as only a few participants could create an online learning community due to the permanent internet connection issues.

In any case, the platform had a very positive review immediately after the user experience questionnaire; some of the adjectives used to describe Wespeke were:

"useful," "rapid," "easy," "exciting," and "fun." Hence, the answers were favourable about Wespeke, yet when asked about recommending the site, some said they had already recommended it to some friends, specifying it was great for finding contacts and then, once a bit of "trust" was established, it was better to practice with them on other social media. When asked about what they liked the most on the platform, 85.71% of the participants agreed on the ease of getting in contact with people interested in languages and willing to learn and share language knowledge.

After discussing the findings of RQ1 and both LLSNS studied, the following section will focus on RQ2 and Wespeke.

7.3 RQ2: HOW DO THE FEATURES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES DEVELOP SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING SKILLS?

Most of the LLSNS explored in this study aim to enable learners to practise the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, taking learners beyond the textbook and the classroom. Furthermore, they aim to provide teachers and students with optimal resources and tools for SLA and cultural exchange and a venue for creating a distributed knowledge base and facilitating a learning community (Liu et al., 2015). Additionally, they encourage students to engage in extra contact with the language as much as possible in their own time between classes (Lloyd, 2012) and expose learners to linguistic, cultural, and technological diversity (Orsini-Jones et al., 2013). Furthermore, online chat functions aim to improve learners' willingness to communicate, partly through challenging the social rules found in face-to-face settings (Lloyd, 2012).

As the intensive 20-hour SFL course designed (section 4.12.2) was taught via blended learning, Hinkelman's BLL ecology model (2018) will be used as a lens to determine whether Wespeke was suitable for delivering such a course. Hence, it is

essential to underline that Hinkelman (2018) expressed his ideas about blending technologies in second language classrooms, mainly when dissecting the learning metaphors and ecologies (Chapter 3) and designs for BLL (Chapter 4). Therefore, based on these two chapters of his book, this is the list of Hinkelman's principles:

1. The environment is not only the conditions surrounding the teaching situation.

2. The community is the defining principle that holds together all the environment's elements.

3. The syllabus design includes all the spaces, people, and activities.

4. Students select the learning contents.

5. The environment extends beyond the individual learner.

These five principles will analyse Wespeke as a complementary tool to learn SFL via blended learning.

7.3.1 The Case of Wespeke and Blended Language Learning

As the findings of RQ1 (section 7.2.2) showed that Wespeke followed social constructivism principles synthesised by Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner (2006), this section will analyse in what ways Wespeke was suitable for delivering such a course following a blended learning approach by using Hinkelman's principles as a lens (2018).

To answer RQ2, through the user experience questionnaire (section 6.2.1, Appendix VI), the participants gave their opinions about the features offered by Wespeke, particularly concerning learning SFL. Section 6.2.2 addressed both productive (speaking, Figure 6.11, and writing, Figure 6.14) and receptive skills (listening, Figure 6.12, and reading, Figure 6.13), starting with speaking in particular as it is the most critical skill for social interaction, though the one that has attracted less research to date concerning work on task-based learning (González-Lloret, 2021).

Admittedly, the participants' Beginners' SFL level, and the researcher's inexperience in configuring tasks, limited their design. Specifically, those tasks' blended language learning aspect was restricted to "conversation" tasks to practise online the concepts recently learnt in the brick-and-mortar classroom, which became reiterative and demoralising. Broader task design possibilities could have been applied had the participants' levels been higher, such as finding similarities and differences (in texts or images), problem-solving, or sharing personal experiences and storytelling (Willis, 2009). Additionally, the internet connectivity issues became the straw that broke the camel's back.

As previously stated, Wespeke offered all communicational means (voice, text, images, and video), which meant that it demanded vast internet broadband on both participants' sides. There were constant glitches with the internet connection; the participants could not send the written/voice messages they had elaborated, and once sent, they had to wait too long to receive an answer, even when their counterparts were connected. In some cases, they received a reply days later, making the communication asynchronous. The slowness of the platform, more than the internet connection itself, demotivated all the participants and made some move onto alternative platforms (Skype and WhatsApp). Despite these circumstances, Wespeke will be contrasted with Hinkelman's (2018) principles previously listed.

7.3.1.1 Is the Environment More Than the Conditions Surrounding the Teaching Situation?

According to Hinkelman (2018), the environment includes the teaching situation's conditions and an all-inclusive description of people, tools, content, procedures, and requirements that affect learning: "In a classic TBLT view, context surrounds the learning. In a blended, ecological view, the context *is* the learning network"

(Hinkelman, 2018, p. 71). According to this view, "context" and "environment" are equivalent terms. The teacher-planned methodology is part of the environment but no longer dominates.

Specifically, in this thesis, I carefully designed the blended learning lessons, considering the procedures (TSLT → TATE, section 4.12.1), the content (SFL Beginners' level), the people (members of the public interested in learning SFL in a small city in North-West England), and the tools (Wespeke as a complementary tool to learn/practise SFL). Hence, the learning network (altogether, the students, the teacher, the classroom, the computer laboratory, Wespeke) became the context/environment according to Hinkelman's BLL principles. The in-classroom side of the coin worked smoothly and efficiently, but not the online blending.

This environment can be matched to the user experience questionnaire already seen in section 6.2.1; in general, and qualitatively speaking, the participants gave positive feedback about Wespeke after their first experience using the platform. However, the results obtained confirmed the critique expressed verbally by the participants, in that the social aspect offered by the platform was not as effective as suggested: only 33.3% could accept the proposed LEPs, 16.7% interacted with Spanish speakers, 8.3% found three LEPs, and only 8.3% convinced their new LEPs to be connected on Tuesdays and Thursdays to exchange languages for the next five weeks; all of which disappointed the users and did not contribute to the creation of an online language learning community.

7.3.1.2 Is the Community the Defining Principle that Holds all the Environment Elements Together?

According to Hinkelman (2018), socio-cultural theory suggests that the community is the core principle that keeps all the environment elements together. As Lave and

Wenger (1991, p. 49) also indicated, "learning happens in social practice", and learners become apprentices in a "community of practice." The borders between the learning institution and the society become intentionally indistinguishable, and new social practices engaging those apprentices are devised. In Hinkelman's view, "the community is the critical environment descriptor, placed at the centre of the design model. For second language learning, the work of an apprentice-student is to learn a language in the process of engaging in a purposeful (not just simulated or imagined) community" (Hinkelman, 2018, pp. 72–73).

Following every in-person session, the participants in this research were invited to use structured dialogues (TSLT) and language exchange to practise the newly learnt structures on Wespeke for one hour in the computer lab. Additionally, they could also continue practising depending on their free time and their LEPs. However, according to the RQ2 results, even if Wespeke facilitated the creation of such a community through the ease of finding LEPs, one of the first critiques that Wespeke received in the SFQ was the unreliability of the platform's speed, which confirmed the comments made by other participants in the previous stage of the research.

The ease of finding LEPs to practise the language obtained the most similarly distributed results; 25% were *very satisfied*, the other 25% were *satisfied*, an additional 25% were neutral, and another 25% were *dissatisfied*. However, as described in the introduction to this section, the initial ease of finding LEPs became frustrating when the participants realised that communication was almost impossible. Furthermore, even if I, as the teacher/researcher, had asked the participants to share their interactions while connected in their free time via the logon sheets, they were reluctant to do so. Despite that, my observations of how the participants interacted in the computer lab confirmed

the inhibiting factor of the connectivity issues and their effect on the language learning community in Wespeke.

7.3.1.3 Does the Syllabus Design Include all the Spaces, People, and Activities?

According to Hinkelman's model (2018), a course syllabus design includes all the system's people, spaces, and activities. In MFL teaching, design extends beyond the classroom when including an "authentic audience" into the system, amplifying the range of the learning community. Within a blended language learning approach, the "environment is the focus of design because it forms the process of socialisation into a target language and culture" (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 72).

In the case of the Beginners' SFL course designed for this thesis and delivered via blended learning, the spaces referred to the brick-and-mortar classroom and Wespeke's platform. The people were the participants and their online peers, while the activities matched the tasks supported for language teaching. The authentic audience was expected to be composed of the Spanish speakers who would become LEPs for the participants in this research, but it was minimally achieved.

Regrettably, the Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) syllabus design reinforced the online tasks' vicious cycle. The speaking element, not practised enough in the traditional face-to-face lessons, was intended to be achieved in the virtual language exchange sessions on Wespeke. Such was the added value to be achieved by using the blended learning lessons. However, being a Beginner-level group, participants did not feel confident enough to accept the offer. Even if I, as the teacher/researcher, had encouraged the participants to speak with their LEPs, they would not have been able to do it due to the connectivity limitations. Furthermore, learners preferred to communicate via text chat instead of speaking.

The focus group participants confirmed that writing gave them more time to think and correct their ideas before expressing them. Some of them also mentioned how terrified they were at speaking in a foreign language. However, they added that they could not wait to do so once they achieved a higher level of knowledge and proficiency in the language. All of the participants' perceptions were corroborated through my direct observation as the teacher/researcher in the computer lab during the minimal interaction the participants had on Wespeke with their LEPs.

Moreover, when participants were asked about their overall learning experience, some considered it a useless endeavour as most of their conversations were slow and uninformative. Hence this is why they stopped using Wespeke after three to four sessions. Without knowing it, they were paraphrasing Gruba and Clark's (2013) results as their "beginner" language abilities were insufficient to meet the demands of interacting with language exchange partners. They concluded that the reason for their lack of motivation lay in the fact that they had expected to have more successful interactions in the LLSNS (Gruba & Clark, 2013, p. 188). Nevertheless, with reference to the second productive skill, a few participants were satisfied with the progression of their writing skills and pointed to the correct use of accents, which they interpreted as an improvement in their writing skills (SFQ2).

Concerning receptive SFL core skills, when participants were asked if Wespeke had helped them improve their Spanish reading skills while exchanging languages, two-thirds of users were satisfied. Some participants underlined that dealing with large numbers of texts from different recipients offered significant opportunities for practice in reading and translating texts, thus enabling them to become more aware of hidden nuances and obtain invaluable experiences while learning (SFQ2).

Finally, the potential improvement of the participants' Spanish listening skills obtained the lowest rating in the SFQ, as two-thirds of the participants were dissatisfied. In sum, most participants only used the text function. However, a few said it forced them to listen and understand when they received a voice message. Moreover, the connectivity issues impeded efforts to widen the learning contents, the application of the designed syllabus, and communication among the Wespeke users.

7.3.1.4 Do Students Select the Learning Contents?

In Hinkelman's model (2018), students select the learning contents, becoming involved in a beneficial community with its own aims: "'Course design', the selection and sequencing of content, then begins to disappear to be replaced by an organic, emergent form of student-selected content." (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 70). Due to the Beginners' level of the blended learning course, participants in this research had a minimal range to choose from. They only received elementary contents through the Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration (TATE) lessons: introducing yourself, introducing other people, describing yourself/other people (professions, clothes, physical, and psychological aspects), describing your house, location of objects in places, personal daily routines, likes and preferences, other people's routines, and free-time activities (frequency). However, they were expected gradually to choose from more structures in their virtual language exchange on Wespeke, as the lessons and knowledge were built on. The aim was to achieve an SFL A1 level (CEFR) at the end of the blended learning course. As expected, all the learning contents were covered in the in-person lessons, and the goal was achieved, but with limited online language practice.

As seen in section 4.5.2 (Wespeke's context), the platform offered only English as a Foreign Language (EFL) lessons. Hence, the participants of this study could not choose any SFL learning content. However, they could choose the features they

considered would help them develop SFL learning skills. Hence, besides the features offered by Wespeke (creating a profile, "friending" a native speaker, exchanging languages, receiving/giving feedback), there were also some free basic materials in English (e.g., news adapted to an A1 level). Thus, the participants were recommended to use them to support their LEPs (who were learning EFL) and to use/analyse/compare them with SFL. That way, both parts would enrich their language learning process. However, only one participant did so; all the others excused themselves, arguing the unreliability of the internet connection.

When participants were asked to explain why they were, or were not, likely to return to the site, 50% mentioned that the platform would be helpful to learn, as well as the advantage of having people from different cultures to exchange the language with, or its relaxed and straightforward features (SFQ2). Others added that it looked like a valuable tool to learn Spanish or that they were looking forward to making new friends, and some even considered it "addictive." However, some others pointed out the need for a greater range of Spanish vocabulary to offer more conversation, and one of the final dropouts initially said they were unsure if it would work for them. These answers reflected the broad spectrum of potential LLSNS users' attitudes, but their learning approach may have helped or hindered their learning process.

7.3.1.5 Does the Environment Extend Beyond the Individual Learner?

In Hinkelman's framework (2018), it is unclear "how far the environment extends beyond the individual learner" (p.72). However, the same author gave at least two examples of that expanded environment: "what kind of interaction is there between class members or their families, friends, or peers on the Internet?" Furthermore, he added that "for design purposes, teachers need a systematic framework to analyse the

multiple roles humans and technological tools are interacting and co-creating the environment" (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 72).

These previous concepts should be linked to autonomous learning and technology. Hence, as Lai (2019) put it, teachers may initiate technology-enhanced formal language learning contexts, and later, students can build self-directed learning experiences in informal learning contexts according to their preferences. That was my initial aim as a teacher/researcher, to allow learners to build up their knowledge based on the contents covered in the conventional classroom, enhanced via language exchange on Wespeke, and broadened according to their preferences.

When asked about what the participants liked best on the LLSNS, the most straightforward answer referred to the profile matching and how the platform suggested LEPs with whom to practise the language. Others liked the idea behind the design of the site itself, namely, that it was possible to find people and exchange languages. The participants who explained their reasoning for these choices expressed their answers in the language of social constructivism theory, as suggested by Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner (2006). Counter to this, two-thirds of the participants complained about Wespeke's slowness. Some concluded that the site's slowness was their only problem, and this was a recurring issue.

In summary, regrettably, Wespeke was not an effective match for blended SFL learning, and as a consequence, it did not help learners develop their four language skills. The following section explores the TSLT approach used in the thesis.

7.3.2 Task-Supported Language Teaching

According to Ellis (2019), "Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) are often seen as incompatible as they draw on different theories of language learning and language teaching" (Ellis, 2019, p. 454).

However, Ellis (2018, 2019) also argued that they could be used together in a complementary fashion in the context of a modular course if it consisted of separated structured-based and task-based components. The rationale for such a curriculum model is the importance of developing fluency first and afterwards—via the structural module—providing the learners with explicit accuracy-oriented reinforcement.

As seen in 2.3.6.4, and according to White (1988), the syllabus of this thesis' designed course was Type A (structural and functional), focused on what is to be learnt, and not Type B (strictly using TBLT), without pre-selection of the elements to be learnt. Furthermore, Brumfit (1984) proposed an integrated curriculum, emphasising accuracy or fluency depending on the learners' developmental stage, which is the one that Müller-Hartmann and Schocker-von Ditfurth (2011) and Ellis (2018) updated and presented as TSLT.

Furthermore, Aubrey et al. (2020) acknowledged that both TBLT and TSLT are based on different learning theories: TBLT follows "usage-based theories of implicit/incidental learning" (Ellis, 2019, p. 458), while TSLT is based on skill learning theory (Aubrey et al., 2020). Moreover, in TSLT, tasks are fundamental parts of practising specific language structures (Ellis, 2019).

Hence, the TSLT followed in this course was the one proposed by Li et al. (2016), a stronger version of TSLT incorporating both pre-task explicit instruction and corrective feedback via recasts within the task, as this was expected to produce the most substantial effect on explicit and automated language. Hence, I decided not to follow Ellis' (2019) modular model but to go a step further and adopt Anderson's (2020) TATE model for language teaching, as it integrates meaning-focused tasks within a task-supported approach to language teaching that allows for both implicit and explicit learning processes to occur.

The TATE model integrates both lexis and grammar, recognising the importance of written and spoken language practice during tasks (Anderson, 2020). As explained in Chapter 4 (Methodology), in each lesson of the course I designed, the objectives, the lexis, the grammar topics covered, and the communicative goals were clearly determined beforehand. Hence, the same scheme of work was followed during the ten sessions that the intensive SFL Beginners' course lasted; two hours in the classroom, using the TATE model (60% of the total input), and one hour in the computer laboratory to practise the new concepts learnt in the classroom, plus the free time that the participants could be connected to Wespeke to practise SFL virtually (via language exchange) on the platform (40%). They had been asked to complete the logon sheets (Appendix VIII) to register what they did while connected. Unfortunately, there was some resistance from the participants to do so.

While applying the TATE model, I followed Baralt and Morcillo's (2017) recommendations for teachers using TBLT online, and I adapted the Willis (1996, 2012) task-based methodology framework for synchronous and online video-based interaction. Furthermore, for the Wespeke task, I followed González-Lloret's advice (2020) to promote collaborative technology-mediated tasks by obtaining spoken and written productive language output, as they are the type of interaction that facilitates language learning and motivates students to continue improving their language skills.

Referring to the blended aspect of the course design, I decided to follow Hinkelman's (2018) ecological approach in which teaching devices are not at the centre, nor or they mere aids; instead, they are part of complex classroom/online ecology that the teacher configures in a local situation. Hence, an ecological metaphor interconnects all social, psychological, and environmental factors and focuses attention on affordances in the environment, which foster learning "emergence" (Hinkelman, 2018).

Unfortunately, as described in section 7.3.1, only 16.7% of the participants could put that whole blended language learning scheme into practice. The remaining 83.3% could rarely practice what they had learnt in the classroom through the TATE approach online. The main reason for such a failure was the connectivity issues combined with the low level of Spanish proficiency. Furthermore, this beginner level also contributed to their frustration as they were not yet able to communicate what they wanted to say in Spanish. Finally, this led to a 50% attrition rate for the participants, which confirmed what previous researchers had concluded when investigating other LLSNS, such as Clark and Gruba (2010) and Orsini-Jones et al. (2013) in earlier studies.

On a related note, in her study on blended learning and Spanish in higher education in the USA, Gleason (2013) found that some shyer students may be encouraged to speak up in online classes as opposed to face-to-face classrooms. However, this was not the case in this study. On the contrary, as the participants indicated in the focus groups, they preferred asynchronous instead of synchronous communication. They were reluctant to use the platform to speak, and they preferred to text chat.

In their research, Romeo et al. (2017) found that instructors and students emphasised the importance of face-to-face interaction in language instruction and regarded it more positively than interaction mediated by technology. According to Romeo et al., students routinely commented that "actual face-to-face communication is irreplaceable" (Romeo et al., 2017, p.688). Unfortunately, this was not the viewpoint of the participants in this research.

7.4 SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed the key findings concerning the two research questions of the study. Each research question had its own section: What theories of SLA do LLSNS

adhere to? How do features of LLSNS develop SFL learning skills? Finally, the

corresponding LLSNS, either Busuu or Wespeke, were analysed in context. The

findings were discussed concerning the research literature in second language

acquisition, task-supported language teaching, language learning social networking

sites, and blended language learning, paying particular attention to how these areas

intersect with Spanish as a foreign language.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on discussing the findings for each research question (RQ) of this thesis. This chapter presents its conclusions. It comprises four sections: the summary of the main findings and answers to the RQs, the study's limitations, its implications, and future research that could be developed based on this investigation.

8.2 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

8.2.1 RQ1: What Theories of Second Language Acquisition do Language Learning Social Networking Sites Adhere to?

The analysis of the empirical data lifted the veil on the fact that although Language Learning Social Networking Sites (LLSNS) advertise themselves as depositories of theories of social constructivism (e.g., platforms where participants can interact, collaborate, and exchange languages while socialising), in actual fact, the intersection of LLSNS and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a more intricate and paradoxical area. As a result, diverse learning theories are entangled, and the notion that social constructivism is the only approach guiding teaching and learning in LLSNS cannot be sustained; indeed, there is an evident combination of behaviourist and cognitive SLA approaches. Hence, language learners who have decided to use the LLSNS due to their intrinsically social strategy may become disappointed and withdraw.

The analysed data showed that Busuu did not follow the five fundamental principles of social constructivism synthesised by Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner (2006):

1. Learning was not participatory in Busuu. Instead, the research found that individual learning was enforced through its platform layout, subverting the idea of an LLSNS as a community of practice in which participants share targets and immerse themselves in constant collaborative language learning activities.

2. Knowledge was not social in Busuu. According to Saona-Vallejos (2018), knowledge is individualistic in Busuu rather than built through social exchange as there were no language exchange partners to create a meaningful learning environment. None of the participants could perform the third specific task of the user experience questionnaire involving accepting peers for language interaction.

3. Learning did not lead to language development via shared activity in Busuu. Instead, participants hoped to exchange social knowledge and practise the four basic skills; however, the three features available on the platform (i.e., create a profile, upload user-generated content, and receive asynchronous feedback) were not enough to develop a reliable Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for learning.

4. Little evidence of meaningful interactive activities among participants was found in Busuu. The participants disagreed on the skills that could be improved using the platform. After using it for four weeks, 60% declared that their listening and reading skills (passive skills) improved, while 70% did not believe this for speaking and writing (active skills).

5. Learners could not create an online learning community in Busuu. Hence, they did not develop learning dispositions; on the contrary, the participants found the platform "repetitive" and "boring." As Saona-Vallejos (2019) showed, participants experienced a cycle of initial motivation, followed by frustration, and finally demotivation, confirming similar results of previous research (Clark & Gruba, 2010; Orsini-Jones et al., 2013). Furthermore, the results of this thesis corroborated the hassle of motivating users to direct their own autonomous language learning (Jones, 2001).

Therefore, even if Álvarez (2016) concluded that Busuu comprised pedagogical features and tenets from different theories of language learning (e.g., behaviouristic, cognitive, constructivist), interweaving in opposing but simultaneously complementary mechanisms (Álvarez, 2016, p. 67), since October 2016, Busuu has facilitated only three (37.5%) out of the eight social aspects every Social Network Site (SNS) should have according to Boyd and Ellison (2008) and Duffy (2011). Since then, users have only been able to create a profile, receive feedback from other users, and upload user-generated content, which was not enough for networking, meaning that learning was not participatory in Busuu. Moreover, while the platform's layout induced individual learning, it was presented as opposed to the principles of a community of practice in which learners share goals and are engaged in continuous collaborative and meaningful activity. As a result, learning was not considered participatory, as learners could not share their learning processes with other students.

Busuu is not consistent with the 21st Century educational paradigm shift that Wang and Vásquez (2012) identified. Indeed, it has moved backwards from a social to cognitive orientation, from participation to an acquisition metaphor, from L2 use to L2 learning (Johnson, 2004). Moreover, this backwards shift goes against Web 2.0 technology's core attributes, such as ease of participation, communication, information sharing, and collaboration (Sturm et al., 2009), and it does not give much consideration to a collaboration-oriented and community-based learning environment (Ducate & Lomicka, 2005).

Accordingly, as mentioned in the literature review, despite Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) being currently immersed in a social stage (see Table 2.7), Busuu does not entirely adhere to socio-constructivist principles. As a result, its users

cannot perform as collaborative language prosumers because the fundamental element of networking with other people is practically non-existent.

Busuu's stated goal was to follow Vygotskyan principles in which the improvement of a learner's knowledge improves as a consequence of social interaction mediated by communication, concepts, and people (Johnson & Golombek, 2020). Busuu aimed to achieve these principles through collaborative exercises, including giving and receiving feedback on writing and recording audio messages. Specifically, Busuu recommends making peer group "friends" (top tip number eight as suggested by Lawley, 2021) and utilising the "conversation" feature of the platform to "interact" with language exchange partners (LEPs) (Campbell-Howes, 2021); the latter only offered recorded messages. Actually, such "interaction" meant using asynchronous and impersonal messages as they were not addressed to a specific LEP but were only a recorded answer to an open exercise to be corrected by any other user. Therefore, while Busuu promotes these as collaborative exercises, they are adaptations of the principles of stimulus–response and more related to behaviourism (Skinner, 1957) than social constructivism.

In Wespeke's case, in the first stage of this research, the analysed data showed that it adhered to the five fundamental principles of social constructivism synthesised by Bronack, Riedl, and Tashner (2006):

1. Learning was participatory in Wespeke. The participants in the research were able to complete the tasks proposed in the user experience questionnaire, which confirmed that Wespeke utilised a social constructivism framework to foster the foreign language learning process through mutual exchange and social interaction among its users.

2. Learning was social in Wespeke because it followed a socio-constructivist approach. The participants learnt and practised Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) through social interaction; therefore, the knowledge obtained through the platform was also social. Furthermore, as Wespeke became specialised in English as a Foreign Language only, the participants in this thesis used the platform as a meeting point for language exchange only.

3. Learning in Wespeke led to language development via shared activity. The participants were able to exchange social knowledge and practise the four basic skills with more knowledgeable others, specifically with Spanish Language Exchange Partners (LEPs), and built a ZPD for learning.

4. Some useful knowledge emerged through meaningful activities with others in Wespeke. Nonetheless, due to internet connection issues, participants concluded that language exchange was more feasible through writing and reading (asynchronous interaction) rather than speaking and listening (synchronous interaction).

5. Not all learners could develop dispositions about Wespeke. Due to permanent internet connectivity issues, only a few learners were able to create an online learning community. However, as with Busuu, most participants became immersed in a cycle of motivation, frustration, and demotivation.

With reference to Wespeke, the data collected and analysed in the first stage of this research confirmed that it followed social-constructivist principles of learning (RQ1), as it encouraged language learning via language exchange and online social interaction. Nevertheless, it was not as much as offered and expected by the participants as the opportunities for socialisation presented by the platform were hindered by extremely slow connectivity issues. Such a situation demotivated most of the

participants; however, some students were able to overcome these problems by moving from Wespeke to WhatsApp and Skype to continue learning and practising through language exchange.

It is important to highlight in relation to RQ1 that through their site advertising, LLSNS promote exchanging languages with native speakers as the best way of learning a foreign language. However, the native vs non-native dichotomy has already been widely critiqued: "Native speakerism is an ideological construction, an actively and purposefully propagated myth" (Ahn et al., 2021, p.12). As Thompson and Cuesta (2019) put it, such a distinction "is inconsistent with the pedagogical goals that guide contemporary second language teaching practices" (p. 655). Currently, such a comparison is out of place, especially in the contemporary multilingual and multicultural world (Bárkányi & Fuertes, 2019). I have had some excellent non-native EFL teachers, and I have also met some non-native SFL colleagues who are expert teachers.

8.2.2 RQ2: How Do The Features of Language Learning Social Networking Sites Develop Spanish as a Foreign Language Learning Skills?

In the second stage of this research, the data confirmed the participants' criticism, as the platform's social opportunities were not as effective as suggested. After five weeks of using the platform, the language exchange became asynchronous, and the participants indicated that the opportunities for social interaction provided by Wespeke favoured their reading and writing skills. Thus, synchronous communication (speaking and listening skills) was rated less favourably.

Therefore, the blended aspect of the course took place only in a very limited way due to internet connection problems. As a result, less than 20% of participants were able to complete the designed online tasks and put into practice the concepts they had learnt

in the classroom, though this could only be achieved using WhatsApp rather than Wespeke. Consequently, to analyse in what ways Wespeke was suitable for delivering an SFL Beginners' course using a blended learning approach, Hinkelman's (2018) ecological blended language learning principles were used as a lens:

1. The environment in which the course took place was complex. The blended learning lessons were meticulously designed considering not only the procedures (Task-Supported Language Teaching (TSLT) → Text, Analysis, Task, Exploration), the content (SFL Beginners' level), the participants (members of the public aiming to learn SFL), and tools (Wespeke used as a complementary means to learn/practise SFL). Hence, the learning network (in unison, the students, the teacher, the classroom, the lesson handouts, the computer laboratory, the students' electronic devices, Wespeke) became the context/environment according to Hinkelman's principles.

2. The learning community was the defining principle that held all the environmental elements together. The community was placed at the centre of the design model. In second language learning, a student's work is to learn a language by engaging in a focused community—in this thesis, this refers to the students and their online peers on Wespeke. Learning happens in social practice as learners are apprentices in a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The online community was not able to develop, and participants became frustrated as there were plenty of potential LEPs, but communication with them was very limited. There were constant glitches in the internet connection, the participants could not send the written/voice messages they had prepared, and once they had been sent, they had to wait for a long period of time to receive an answer, even when their counterparts were connected. In some cases, they

received a reply days later, which made an intended synchronous mode of communication into an asynchronous activity. The community developed well in the face-to-face lessons, but in only a limited fashion online.

3. The syllabus was designed with all the learning spaces, participants, and activities in mind. The design was expanded beyond the classroom with the inclusion of an "authentic audience", which broadened the scope of the learning community. In the case of the Beginners' SFL course designed for this thesis and delivered via blended learning, the spaces referred to the brick-and-mortar classroom and Wespeke's platform. The people were the participants and their online peers, while the activities matched the tasks supported for language learning. Finally, the authentic audience that should have been composed of the Spanish speakers—potential LEPs for the participants in this research—was minimally achieved.

4. In Hinkelman's (2018) blended language learning ecology, students select the learning content, engaging in a willing community that has clearly defined goals. In this thesis, participants had a minimal content range due to the Beginners' level of the blended learning course. Nonetheless, as the lessons and their knowledge progressed, they were expected to systematically select more structures in their virtual language exchange on Wespeke. The objective was to reach an SFL A1 level (CEFR) at the end of the blended learning course. All of the learning content was covered in the classroom as planned, and the objective was reached, but with limited online practice.

5. Finally, in Hinkelman's (2018) model, how far the environment extends beyond the individual learner is blurred in terms of the potential environmental learning elements such as class members, families, friends, or peers on the internet. Of

course, some participants were already using complementary SFL learning tools (e.g., music, films, television series, free online learning materials), but this area exceeds the scope of this thesis, though they would be valuable areas to consider in the future.

8.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As Creswell (2013) put it, limitations can occur in any kind of research, and two main areas can be identified in relation to this thesis: the locus of the research and methodology.

8.3.1 Locus of the Research

The main limitation of this study involved the intersection of four areas: (1) Language Learning Social Networking Sites, (2) Spanish as a Foreign Language, (3) the blended language learning approach and (4) the task-supported language teaching procedures. Only one article has been published on the intersection of the first three areas (Guillén, 2020), and there is some research referring to Busuu (Álvarez, 2014, 2015, 2016; Brick, 2012, 2013; Chik, 2015; Keyti, 2013, 2014, 2015; Pino James, 2011; Rezaei et al., 2014; Rosell-Aguilar, 2016, 2018; Vesselinov & Grego, 2016; Yilmaz, 2015), but, in the case of Wespeke, only one software review (Guikema, 2013) and a few articles mention it indirectly (Munday, 2019; Henshaw, 2021; Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021).

Referring to the LLSNS, besides concern about their "research-ability" based on data accessibility and data ownership, they are part of a rapidly changing technological landscape and are permanently evolving, which makes them a complex area to research, as the data gathered may be invalid in a short space of time. This is the reason why the thesis followed Ellison and Boyd's advice (2013), suggesting that scholars should aim to produce work that contributes insights and develops theory in a way that transcends

these particular sites at a moment in time but rather is useful and informative even after the site design has shifted.

Busuu was selected as the most convenient LLSNS to be studied during the research design process as it fulfilled all eight of the social aspects every SNS should have. However, since October 2016, Busuu has facilitated only three (37.5%) out of the eight social aspects, meaning that learning was no longer participatory in Busuu.

To counteract such a regressive shift against the fundamental attributes of Web 2.0 technology, such as ease of participation, communication, information sharing, and collaboration (Sturm et al., 2009), Wespeke was chosen as the second LLSNS to be studied, as it fulfilled all of the eight social aspects SNSs are recommended to have. Unfortunately, although Wespeke partnered with CNN News to learn English globally, it cancelled all its operations and closed down in February 2019. This development was again confirmation of how educational technology is subject to constant change due to increasing commercial pressures and how this affects the conduct of research.

To overcome these previously mentioned limitations, I suggest that future studies do not restrict themselves to Language Learning Social Networking Sites but study Language Learning Apps. There are dozens currently available in the market, and besides the intertwined language learning theories on which they are based, a few observe online language exchange as their core principle to practise and learn foreign languages.

8.3.2 Methodology

Another area to consider within the limitations of this study is the methodology used. Initially, the research context was restricted to current students within higher education, and later it was widened to include adult participants from the general public; however, the groups were relatively small in both stages of the research. Hence, the results of this

study may not be generalised to larger populations. The importance of attracting a suitable number of participants was the most crucial practical piece of knowledge acquired via this research's first and second stages, as recruiting students willing to undertake the study proved challenging. Initially, when designing the study, the CEFR B1 level was thought to be the most appropriate for participation, as learners with this level should be capable of a higher level of interaction in the language being learnt and practised via the LLSNS. However, as it was very challenging to recruit participants with that level, and I had more access to beginner level participants, I decided to adapt the requirements to include more participants. The main consequence of that change was that the lesson contents had to be re-structured, making it extremely difficult to apply an ecological perspective to the lessons' blended learning development.

The participants' SFL level also limited the design of the tasks. For example, they limited themselves to conversation tasks to practise the concepts recently learnt in the classroom, which become repetitive and demotivating. Broader task design possibilities, such as comparing (finding similarities and differences), sharing personal experiences and storytelling, or problem-solving (Willis, 2009), could have been applied had the participants' levels been higher.

Referring to the data collection tools, namely, the user experience questionnaire, site feedback questionnaire, logon sheets, and focus groups, were limited by the small number of participants. The thesis contrasted the viewpoints of previous research in LLSNS and the data obtained from the participants of this study. I also designed a questionnaire for Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teachers (particularly SFL teachers), asking them about their knowledge and use of LLSNS in their teaching in order to add a third viewpoint, but again, there were not enough participants, and it was not included in the thesis.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications of the study are explained in relation to researchers, practitioners, curriculum developers, and learners.

8.4.1 Implications for Researchers

There has not been any research on the intersection of this investigation's four areas of interest to my knowledge: Language Learning Social Networking Sites, Spanish as a Foreign Language, Task-Based Language Teaching, and Blended Language Learning. Guillén's (2020) research, though valuable and influential, was only focused on the social impact of technology in the teaching of Spanish. This thesis aimed to address existing gaps in research in the four areas mentioned above, which have not been comprehensively studied.

The existent research on Language Learning Social Networking Sites has been mainly focused on their technological repercussions for learning foreign languages. However, as seen in the literature review, when referring to SLA theories and language teaching methods, in parallel with the evolution of pedagogical practice, metaphors of second language learning have evolved in three stages—from structured learning to natural acquisition, and then to community socialisation. However, while chronology has served as an organising principle in this discussion of second language learning, it also gives the misleading impression that one phase replaced the previously dominant one (Thornbury, 2017; Larsen-Freeman, 2018).

Explicitly referring to CALL, besides the three stages (structural, communicative, integrative) recorded by Warschauer (2004), I suggested a fourth "social" stage (Table 2.7), in which language is seen as participative, learners are target language prosumers and interact via social media and mobile devices and learn via collaborative learning on social networks. In this social stage of CALL, electronic

devices (not only computers) are used via authentic tasks in real/virtual world environments, and the main objective of learning a language is communication. However, Chun (2016) went further and called her fourth stage "ecological" CALL. In this stage, language is seen as symbolic and involves the development of intercultural competence; learners use mobile and use wearable devices to communicate globally via a teaching paradigm focused on digital literacies and multiliteracies. Furthermore, the main objective of learning a language in this context is to develop as global citizens (Chun, 2016, p. 106).

Larsen-Freeman (2018) proposed to move from linear "acquisition" models to complex "participation" models of language learning, a community of participation based on a more ecological model in its conception, indicating a web of actors and their relations. Although the dominant language learning metaphor is "second language socialisation," collaboration with other learners acts as the basis of the educational philosophy of social constructivism; learning happens in interaction within a community. Hinkelman (2018) also suggested an ecological approach for blended language learning.

The Companion Volume of the CEFR (2018) clearly states that "the CEFR scheme is highly compatible with several recent approaches to second language learning, including the task-based approach, the ecological approach, and all approaches informed by socio-cultural and socio-constructivist theories" (pp. 29–30). Therefore, this thesis followed an ecological approach, with further implications for teachers.

8.4.2 Implications for Practitioners

Barnett (2018) defined the ecological approach to learning as the invitation to students "*to confront and engage the world in its fullest sense*" (p. 27). From such a learning perspective, the world is not perceived as "out there". Actually, learners are helped to

understand that they are already immersed in the world in all its facets. In this approach to learning, they find connections between their core studies and the ecologies of learning itself, knowledge, culture, social institutions, individuals, the economy, and the natural environment (Barnett, 2018). Hence, the main implication for teachers in this thesis is the suggestion of applying an ecological perspective to their teaching (Álvarez, 2016; Hinkelman, 2018).

From a more practical viewpoint, particularly arising from the literature review, the necessity of teacher training was highlighted, not only for CALL or in higher education, but in general in the use of Information and Computer Technologies, as proposed by Anderson and Rivera-Vargas (2020). Hence, the ecological perspective also has implications for curriculum developers.

8.4.3 Implications for Curriculum Developers

This thesis developed a beginners' level course for Spanish as a Foreign Language applying an ecological blended language learning approach. However, as pointed out, the main limitation of this course is the level to which it was addressed: "One issue with deterministic (tool-centric) or instrumental (tool-minimised) approaches is that they decontextualise the technology in order to study its essential characteristics" (Hinkelman, 2018, p. 75). As Kern (2014) also indicated, most of the research has focused on computer devices, mobile devices, or digital devices, assuming that learning would improve by adding a device; this is, however, an oversimplification. Hinkelman (2018) suggested that teachers and researchers need to rid themselves of the focus on devices and instead focus on processes—that is, what is happening when teachers, students, content, and devices are configured in a learning environment.

In applied linguistics, van Lier (2010) defined ecology as "the study of the relationships among elements in an environment or ecosystem, particularly the

interactions among such elements" (Van Lier, 2010, p. 4). He explained that an ecological metaphor interconnects all psychological, social, and environmental factors and focuses attention on affordances in the environment, fostering learning "emergence" (van Lier, 2011). All of these principles may be possible to implement with learners from the B1 level upwards but strenuous to apply to learners from an absolute beginner level.

It is also essential to consider that the LLSNS that offer lessons on their platforms already have linguists and educators in their teams who are in charge of developing the lesson contents and pedagogy. Ideally, they should reflect on the need to align with theoretical and pedagogical tenets that accentuate the design of instructional materials. In addition, it would be advisable that they apply the research results in this area on their platforms; even better, that these LLSNS allow external researchers to collaborate with them and publish their results transparently.

8.4.4 Implications for Learners

Using Language Learning Social Networking Sites to learn Spanish as a Foreign Language via a blended language learning approach may be an ideal tool to practise and improve the four basic skills via language exchange with speakers of the language outside the classroom. The most practical reason for doing so is that learners would be utilising similar tools to the ones that they already use for networking in their daily lives. However, in order to benefit from them, ideally, these students should have at least a B1 level; otherwise, it would be frustrating and counterproductive for the users of those LLSNS.

8.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

One of the main aspects of this research has been the question of whether to use a Task-Based Language Teaching or a Task-Supported Language Teaching approach. The former was initially planned to be used during the methodology design stage but abandoned when I decided to focus on participants at the beginner level. It would address several gaps in the research if future research could use the TBLT approach and Language Learning Social Networking Sites by developing a course that considered the use of design features that are more suitable and helpful from language learners' perspectives. Moreover, concerning the development of the course, it would also be valuable from a research perspective to analyse how Spanish teachers use Language Learning Social Networking Sites inside and outside the brick-and-mortar classroom.

Another pending question related to Language Learning Social Networking Sites that has not been answered up to now is how many students engage with and complete their online courses; such research would require the use of learning analytics. Some researchers have already reported a stream of initial motivation, then frustration, and finally demotivation when using these platforms (Brick, 2012; Clark and Gruba, 2010; Orsini-Jones et al., 2013), and high levels of attrition have been identified (Lin, Warschauer, and Blake 2016; Nielson, 2011; Stevenson and Liu, 2010). As Jee and Park (2009) suggest, high levels of discipline and motivation appear to be required to use them effectively over time.

Future research on Language Learning Social Networking Sites could also meaningfully focus on how learners use the different semiotic resources of the website and the outcomes of their use, and the development and uptake of user-generated materials. In addition, from an auto-ethnographic perspective, it would be illuminating

to know how these sites can assist learning with the development of intercultural communicative competence.

It would also be compelling to explore a longitudinal approach to learners' online discourse, namely, tracking whether learners show observed input and whether they can incorporate the correct discourse meaningfully in their interactions and utilise it across several chat sessions. However, that approach would be almost impossible to obtain as asynchronous online conversations from the same participants are always voluntary. More research measuring learners' productive skills after one semester or year-long studies using LLSNS involving pre- and post-test designs would be valuable.

In summary, Language Learning Social Networking Sites are an under-researched area in relation to Spanish as a Foreign Language learning and blended learning approaches. In addressing these gaps, this study suggests that they have the potential to contribute to more participatory online language learning environments and are an area warranting further research in the future.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL

9th September 2016

Michael Thomas/Miguel Saona-Vallejos
School of Languages and Global Studies
University of Central Lancashire

Dear Michael/Miguel,

Re: BAHSS Ethics Committee Application
Unique Reference Number: BAHSS 365

The BAHSS ethics committee has granted approval of your proposal application 'Social Network Sites and Spanish as a Foreign Language: An Investigation of Busuu® as a Tool for Blended Language Learning. Approval is granted up to the end of project date* or for 5 years from the date of this letter, whichever is the longer.

It is your responsibility to ensure that:

- the project is carried out in line with the information provided in the forms you have submitted
- you regularly re-consider the ethical issues that may be raised in generating and analysing your data
- any proposed amendments/changes to the project are raised with, and approved, by Committee
- you notify roffice@uclan.ac.uk if the end date changes or the project does not start
- serious adverse events that occur from the project are reported to Committee
- a closure report is submitted to complete the ethics governance procedures (Existing paperwork can be used for this purposes e.g. funder's end of grant report; abstract for student award or NRES final report. If none of these are available use e-Ethics Closure Report Proforma).

Yours sincerely,

Nick Palfreyman
Deputy Vice-Chair
BAHSS Ethics Committee

* for research degree students this will be the final lapse date

NB - Ethical approval is contingent on any health and safety checklists having been completed, and necessary approvals as a result of gained.

APPENDIX II. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The Use of Social Networking Sites to Learn Spanish as a Foreign Language through Blended Language Learning

ACRONYMS:

SNS	Social Networking Site
SNSLL	Social Networking Site for Learning Languages
SFL	Spanish as a Foreign Language

Participant Information Sheet

Name:	**Date:** / /

*You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, please take time to **read** the following information **carefully:***

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as tools for learning and teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) and to examine how they can be used in and outside the language classroom. This would be achieved through the analysis of learners' (you) interactions to determine if the construction of language learning opportunities is encouraged or frustrated by their intrinsic social dimension.

Why have I been invited to participate?

This study is investigating the use of Wespeke® as a tool for learning SFL. You have identified yourself as a potential user.
In order to be eligible for this study you MUST:
- Be aged at least 18 years old
- Have a Beginners level of SFL
- Be able to stay after class to make use of Wespeke® in a computer room.

Am I eligible to take part? Yes ☐ No ☐

Do I have to take part?
The decision of whether or not to take part is entirely up to you. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you are a UCLan student, please, note that by deciding to either take part or not to take part in the study will **NOT** have any impact on your past or future assessments/examination marks. In addition, all data will be anonymised at the time of collection.

What will I have to do if I take part?
If you agree to take part, you will be invited to an explanatory meeting in Lecture Theatre 3 in the Adelphi Building at UCLan, Preston PR1 7BQ. The researcher will welcome you, start with a trial lesson, and then explain the exact procedure of the study and will answer any questions that you may have. You will be receive this information sheet, together with an information sheet, a week in advance of the course commencement so that you can think about it and sign both documents once you have freely decided to partake.

As soon as you have given your written consent to take part in this research, before the commencement of the course, you will be invited to take (i) an <u>online written exam</u>, just to confirm your level of Spanish, before starting the research. That written exam would take approximately 20 minutes and you will be able to do it from home. In addition, you'll be asked to take (ii) a 10-minute oral test to measure your oral level of Spanish as well. You will have to say how and when you would like to do that oral test, either face to face or via Skype.

The study will last for five weeks only. All participants will be invited to partake in ten lessons that will last for 120 minutes each, 20 hours of teaching, plus the individual practice that you should be able to be committed to. Those lessons will take place in room GR355 at UCLan, from Tue 29th of May to Thu 28th of June, every Tuesday and Thursday from 18.00 to 20.00 plus some additional time to work in the computer room.

Once the group of participants has been set up, every participant will be assigned a number (to conceal their real identity).

After the first lesson in the classroom, 20 participants will be taken to the computers room at the Worldwise Centre (Room AB128), every participant will be invited to create a free Wespeke® account, so you can start navigating the platform. *At that very same moment,* you shall be asked to complete *(iii)* an online User Experience test. You will be invited to perform three different tasks, and then you'll have online access to *(iv)* an online questionnaire to give immediate feedback about the platform you've just worked with. Overall, this part of your participation should last no longer than 50 minutes. The researcher will be in the same room at all times, observing and taking notes if you needed help. This session will be audio recorded.

Once you've got familiar with the Website and the mobile app, you'll be suggested to make free use of Wespeke®, whenever/wherever you want, you will learn/practise the topics covered in the classroom, which will mean that you shall *(v)* log on Wespeke, and fill in *(vi)* the log sheets, provided by the researcher via Google forms, and submit them online every time you make use of Wespeke® platform, for five weeks, the total time this research will last.

On weeks two (Wed 6th of June) and four (Wed 20th of June) of the research, there will be *(vii)* two focus group meetings (In English), for one hour each time; so that the participants who would like to share their experiences and 'tips' on using the platform can do so. These sessions will be audio recorded, so the researcher can take notes and analyse what participants have experienced, suggested and observed.

To conclude, after five weeks of using Wespeke®, you will be invited to take another *(viii)* online written exam, as well as another *(ix)* 15-minute oral exam, to measure if your Spanish has improved or not after having been using that SNSLL.

Finally, you <u>may</u> be invited to an *(x)* interview on a one to one basis, just in case some of your answers from the questionnaires and/or log sheets might not be clear enough so that they can be explained. That interview would be made of open questions, and voice recorded.

Even after the research has finished, you will be able to continue using Wespeke® website and mobile application to continue practising SFL, whenever/wherever you would like to.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
Participants may be able to improve their command of SFL, as some previous studies suggest. On the other hand, you will be contributing to data, which will be used to complete a PhD research.

At the end of the research, all participants who have attended the ten sessions will take part in a draw with some prizes, so that they can continue studying SFL, as a nominal token of thanks for their time.

What are the possible risks of taking part?
There are no risks of taking part in this research.

Will what I say in this study be kept confidential?
All information collected about participants will be kept strictly confidential. Participants will be given a unique participant code (for example, 102). Electronic and printed-based resources will only be attainable by the researcher and his supervisor. Any data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity.

What should I do if I want to take part?
If you would like to take part, please email Miguel Ángel Saona-Vallejos xxx@uclan.ac.uk
You need to take into account that you will be asked to attend ten lessons in the aforementioned timetable.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of this study will be used in a research and a dissertation for getting a PhD degree. They may also be used for conference presentations, presentation to participants or relevant community groups, and finally, they may be published in a peer-reviewed journal.
As with all other users, Wespeke® may be able to access the data contained in their platforms for their own statistics. No data from this study will be shared with Wespeke® by the researcher.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research has been organised by Miguel Ángel Saona-Vallejos, a PhD student at UCLan. No special funding has been received for doing this research.

Who has reviewed the study?
The research has been approved by the University Research Ethics Committee at UCLan.

How do I make a complaint?
If you have any concerns about the research that you wish to raise with somebody who is independent of the research team, you should raise this with the University Officer for Ethics (zzz@uclan.ac.uk).

Before you begin the study, if you have any questions or would like to discuss anything about the study then ask the researcher with you today or email the following researcher(s):

Contact for Further Information

Researcher Contact Details	Director of Studies Contact Details:
Miguel Ángel Saona-Vallejos	Dr. Michael Thomas
E-mail: xxx@uclan.ac.uk	E-mail: yyy@uclan.ac.uk
Mobile:	Tel:

Please sign on the left margin of every single page of this document to confirm that you have read and understood it.

APPENDIX III. CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Research Project: *Social Network Sites and Spanish as a Foreign Language: An Investigation of Busuu®, as a Tool for Blended Language Learning*
Name of the researcher: Miguel Ángel SAONA-VALLEJOS
Position: PhD student at University of Central Lancashire
E-mail: xxx@uclan.ac.uk
Director of Studies: Dr Michael Thomas / E-mail: yyy@uclan.ac.uk).

Please read the following statements and initial the boxes to indicate your agreement to participate in this research study conducted by the above named researcher.

Please tick box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet, dated 29/07/2016 for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. ☐

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be stored (after it has been anonymised) in a specialist data centre and may be used for future research. ☐

I understand that it will not be possible to withdraw my data from the study after final analysis has been undertaken. ☐

I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation / being audio recorded. ☐

I agree to the interview / focus group / consultation / being video recorded. ☐

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications. ☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

APPENDIX IV. PARTICIPANTS' PRIVACY NOTICE

The Use of Social Networking Sites to Learn Spanish as a Foreign Language through Blended Language Learning

PRIVACY NOTICE
(How your information will be used)

Who is doing this research?
This research has been organised by Miguel Ángel Saona-Vallejos, a PhD student at the School of Journalism, Language and Communication at UCLan.

What kind of information is going to be recorded?
No sensitive personal information will be asked. Just for statistical purposes, some basic personal information will be asked: name, age, gender, mother tongue, other languages spoken. Email and telephone number for direct contact with the researcher in case it may be needed.
All information collected about participants will be kept strictly confidential. Participants will be given a unique participant code (for example, 102) to anonymise their participation. Electronic and printed-based resources will only be attainable by the researcher and his supervisor. Any data generated by the study will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on Academic Integrity.

What is it going to be done with that information?
The information obtained in this study will be used in a research and a dissertation for getting a PhD degree.

Who is going to get this information?
This information may be shared with people who are interested in Social Networking Sites as tools for learning and teaching foreign languages, through conference presentations, presentations to participants or relevant community groups, and finally, it may be published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Contact for Further Information

Researcher Contact Details	Director of Studies Contact Details:
Miguel Ángel Saona-Vallejos	Dr Michael Thomas
E-mail: xxx@uclan.ac.uk	E-mail: yyy@uclan.ac.uk

Please, could you provide this information*?

Would you be able to attend the focus group meetings? Tick on the right column, please.	**Wed 6th of June 18.00 – 19.00**	
	Wed 20th of June 18.00 – 19.00	
E-mail address that you will use to create your Wespeke account:		
Mobile number to be notified of any last-minute issue:		
Name and surname:		**Signature:**

*This information will be for the researcher use only, not for the research itself.

APPENDIX V. DEBRIEF SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Social Networking Sites and Spanish as a Foreign Language: An Investigation of Wespeke as a Tool for Blended Language Learning

**Debrief sheet for participant
(User Experience and Site Feedback)**

Thank you for taking part in this study today. My name is Miguel Ángel Saona-Vallejos, a third-year PhD student working on his research project in the School of Language and Global Studies at UCLan. The general purpose of this study is to investigate the use of Social Networking Sites (**SNS**) as tools for learning and teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (**SFL**), and to examine how they can be used in and outside the language classroom. This research is focused specifically on Wespeke.

The aim of the main stage of this study is to examine the way in which the participants of SNSLLs operate and see how SNSLLs can be integrated in blended language learning environments. For that reason, as a user, you have been asked to perform three different tasks. While an exploratory (1) task has been used to enable to explore and familiarise yourself with the site, a specific (2) task has been performed using specific features of the site, and an open-ended (3) task has taken you to a section of a site to execute it, but without been provided specific instructions about how to get to the section.

Finally, after completing all the assigned tasks, you have been asked to complete a site feedback questionnaire consisting of items about your overall satisfaction with using that SNSLL. Some questions use 5-point-Likert-scales with 1 being negative and 5 being positive, while others are open-ended.

Thank you, again, for participating in this study. Please, note that your personal data will be kept strictly anonymous and is only identifiable via your participant code (E.g. 102), and you can communicate your decision about not taking part in this study at any point.

If you wish to raise concerns about the conduct of this study, contact the Director of this research, Dr Michael Thomas at telephone 01 772 893 148, or via e-mail at yyy@uclan.ac.uk In the unlikely event that is not possible, you may contact the University Officer for Ethics at zzz@uclan.ac.uk Please, include the name of the study, the researcher involved, and a description of your complaint.

Furthermore, if you feel that taking part in this study has caused any distress, please do contact the free Counselling Service at UCLan (Telephone).

It has been a pleasure counting on you for the success of this research!

Researcher contact details:	**Director of Research:**
Miguel Ángel Saona-Vallejos	Dr. Michael Thomas
E-mail: xxx@uclan.ac.uk	E-mail: yyy@uclan.ac.uk
Mobile:	Telephone:

APPENDIX VI. USER EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

(Based on Liu et al., 2015)

User Experience Tasks

User ID Number:		Date:

Exploratory Task:
Please, take five minutes to explore this SNSLL site freely. You will need to register to explore the free version of it.

Specific Tasks*:*
1.   Please, fill in as many information about your likes so Wespeke can suggest you some *Language Exchange Partners (LEPs)* according to your preferences.
2.   Please, accept at least three of those Spanish speakers suggested LEPs, and say hello to them, in Spanish.
3.   Please, write a short self-introduction in Spanish of at least five sentences.

Open-ended Tasks:
1.   Please, find and ask three users to become your LEPs. All of them Spanish speakers, who are based in a Spanish-speaking country, with a similar age as yours, the same gender as you, and who want to learn English.
2.   Find one user who is connected, a Spanish speaker who wants to learn/practice English and start interacting with them in Spanish for at least ten minutes, and other ten minutes in English (20 minutes in total).

User Experience Questionnaire Sample

Wespeke User Experience

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as tools for learning Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) and to examine how they can be used in and outside the language classroom.

What is your name? *

Ben

Exploratory Task and Registration

1. Please, take ten minutes to explore Wespeke site freely.

2. Once you have explored the site, create your profile, following the steps provided by your language tutor.

Specific Tasks

3. Please, fill in as many information about your likes so Wespeke can suggest you some Language Exchange Partners according to your preferences. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Partially achieved	○	○	○	◉	○	Completely achieved

Wespeke User Experience

Any further comments?

I think it is useful that there are so many different Partners available.

4. Please, accept at least three of those native Spanish suggested Language Exchange Partners, and say hello to them, in Spanish. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Partially achieved	○	○	○	○	◉	Completely achieved

Any further comments?

5. Please, write a short self-introduction in Spanish of at least five sentences. You have just learnt how to do it in your first lesson! ;-) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Partially achieved	○	○	○	○	◉	Completely achieved

Any further comments?

Hola! Me llamo Ben.   , soy ingles.   y trabajo en Preston. Tengo diecinueve anos. Mi numero es e   ', y mi correo e   i@gmail.com. Hasta Luego!

Open-ended Tasks

6. Please, find and ask three users to become your Language Exchange Partners. All of them native Spanish speakers, who are based in a Spanish-speaking country, the same gender as you, and who want to learn English. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Partially achieved	○	○	◉	○	○	Completely achieved

Any further comments?

---

7. Find one user who is connected, a native Spanish speaker who wants to learn/practice English and start interacting with them in Spanish for at least 5 minutes, and other 5 minutes in English (10 minutes in total). *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Partially achieved	○	○	◉	○	○	Completely achieved

Any further comments?

---

8. Invite that person to be connected on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the next five weeks, at the same time, so both of you can exchange and practise both languages. *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Partially achieved	◉	○	○	○	○	Completely achieved

Any further comments?

_____

¡Muchas Gracias!

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

APPENDIX VII. SITE FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

(Based on Liu et al., 2015)
Site Feedback Questionnaire

User ID Number:		Date:

This questionnaire is for understanding how you feel about the site you've tested. Please rate it **by circling** the appropriate number. You will be able to re-evaluate it, eight weeks later, at the end of this study.

2.1 Feedback on site design

	VERY UNSATISFIED		NEUTRAL		VERY SATISFIED
1. Ease of reading the displayed texts	1	2	3	4	5
2. Appearance of site, including colours and graphics	1	2	3	4	5
3. Ease of understanding the instructions on the site	1	2	3	4	5
4. Ease of moving around the site without getting lost	1	2	3	4	5
5. Speed of pages displaying	1	2	3	4	5
6. Usefulness of the tools provided to learn/practise languages	1	2	3	4	5
7. Fun, entertainment value	1	2	3	4	5
8. Ease of finding contacts to practise the language with	1	2	3	4	5
9. Overall practicality of the site	1	2	3	4	5
10. Overall learning experience	1	2	3	4	5

2.2 Skills
In your opinion, does this site help you improve the following Spanish skills?

	VERY UNSATISFIED		NEUTRAL		VERY SATISFIED
1. Speaking	1	2	3	4	5
2. Listening	1	2	3	4	5
3. Reading	1	2	3	4	5
4. Writing	1	2	3	4	5
5. Grammar	1	2	3	4	5
6. Pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5
7. Vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
8. Culture	1	2	3	4	5

2.3 Features
Were the following features helpful to you in learning Spanish?

	Used		Not Useful at all	Neutral		Very Useful	
1. Creating/Editing a profile	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
2. Friending Native Speakers			1	2	3	4	5
3. Interacting via written chat			1	2	3	4	5
4. Only audio chatting			1	2	3	4	5
5. Video chatting			1	2	3	4	5
6. Getting feedback from your language exchange partners			1	2	3	4	5
7. Giving feedback to my exchange language partners			1	2	3	4	5

Did you use any other features during the test session? YES - NO
If yes, which one? What did you think about these features?

_____
_____

2.4 Future use and perception

1. How likely are you to return to this site on your own?

No way   1   2   3   4   5   I'll probably return the next time I sit down at my computer.

Explain why you are or are not likely to return to this site.

_____
_____
_____

2. Would you recommend this site to your friends who are learning Spanish?
No way   1   2   3   4   5   I'll definitely recommend this site.
Explain why you would or you would not recommend this site.

_____
_____

3. What do you like best about this site?

_____
_____

4. What do you like least about this site?

_____
_____

5. Do you have any recommendations or comments to improve this site?

_____
_____

Initial Site Feedback Questionnaire

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire May 2018

This questionnaire is for understanding how you feel about the site you've tested. Please rate it by answering each question. You will be able to re-evaluate it, five weeks later, at the end of this study. It has 28 questions in total and it is divided in seven sections. You will always be given the possibility of adding comments after every question.

What is your name? *

Ben

Feedback on site design (1)

1. How satisfied were you with the ease of finding information? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

2. How satisfied were you with the quality of the information found? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

3. How satisfied were you with the ease of reading the texts? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unsatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

_____

4. How satisfied were you with the appearance of the site, including colours and graphics? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

_____

Feedback on site design (2)

5. How satisfied were you with the speed of pages displaying? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

_____

6. How satisfied were you with the ease of moving around the site without getting lost? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

_____

7. How satisfied were you with the ease of finding contacts to practise the language with? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

_____

8. How satisfied were you with the overall learning experience? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

_____

Feedback on core skills

9. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish speaking skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

10. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish listening skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

11. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish reading skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

12. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish writing skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

Feedback on other skills

13. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish grammar skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

14. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish pronunciation skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	●	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

15. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish vocabulary skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	●	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

16. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Hispanic cultural skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	●	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

_____

Feedback on features

17. Was the feature of creating a profile helpful to you in practising Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

_____

18. Was the feature of friending native speakers helpful to you in practising Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

_____

19. Was the feature of exchanging languages helpful to you in learning Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

_____

20. Was the feature of receiving feedback from native speakers helpful to you in learning   *
Spanish?

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

21. Was the feature of giving feedback to other learners helpful to you in learning Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

22. Did you use any other features during the test session?

○ Yes
◉ No

If yes, which one? What did you think about that other feature? If you didn't use any other one, write 'None'

Any additional comments?

Feedback on future use and perception

23. How likely are you to return to this site on your own? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, I will not return on my own	○	○	○	◉	○	I'll definitely return the next time I sit down at my computer.

Explain why you are or are not likely to return to this site. *

I am likely to return as it is a great tool to learn Spanish!

Any additional comments?

---

24. Would you recommend this site to your friends who are learning Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, I wouldn't recommend it	○	○	○	○	◉	I'll definitely recommend this site.

25. Please, explain why you would or you would not recommend this site. *

I would recommend because there is a plethora of partners that you can choose from that can be tailored to your personality.

26. What do you like best about this site? *

The ease in which you can find others similar to you.

Any additional comments?

27. What do you like least about this site? *

The app can be quite slow at sending messages i.e. when you press the send buttom, sometimes it doesn't acknowledge it.

Any additional comments?

28. Do you have any recommendations or comments to improve this site? *

Improvement of the send button

Any additional comments?

¡Muchas gracias!

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Final Site Feedback Questionnaire

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire June 2018

This questionnaire is for understanding how you feel about the site you've tested for five weeks. Please rate it by answering each question. It has 28 questions in total and it is divided in seven sections. You will always be given the possibility of adding comments after every question.

What is your name? *

Ben

Feedback on site design (1)

1. How satisfied were you with the ease of finding information? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	●	○	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

I felt that the site was easy to navigate and find the information I was looking for, particularly given that it was merely a click away from accessing the counterpart's bio and personal interests. As such, we could commence conversations tailored around our favourite hobbies.

2. How satisfied were you with the quality of the information found? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	●	Very satisfied

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

Any additional comments?

I feel that the quantity and generality of information was the optimum amount that could be given, and the user was allowed to expressive themselves freely if there was anymore that they felt should be added.

---

3. How satisfied were you with the ease of reading the texts? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unsatisfied	○	○	○	○	⦿	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

There is not much to add about this, other than the texts were adequate in size and colour, so there is no complaints on that front.

---

4. How satisfied were you with the appearance of the site, including colours and graphics? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	⦿	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

Everything was sufficient and I did not find a problem with the appearance of the site.

Feedback on site design (2)

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

5. How satisfied were you with the speed of pages displaying? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	◉	○	○	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

There were often problems with this, particularly with the speed in which texts were sent. Whilst at first I was uncertain as to whether this was the fault of the website or the network at the university, most of the partners how I connected to also expressed the same sentiment regarding the delay in connectivity.

6. How satisfied were you with the ease of moving around the site without getting lost? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

The site isn't overwhelmed by information or tabs, and so I found this to be no problem at all.

7. How satisfied were you with the ease of finding contacts to practise the language with? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	○	○	◉	Very satisfied

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

Any additional comments?

There was a central hub tailored to your learning preferences, which displayed pages upon pages of potential contacts to connect with. This meant that I had the freedom to message whichever contact I choose, as opposed to being offered only a limited choice. This greatly helped with communicating with partners, as I could view their interests first before messaging.

---

8. How satisfied were you with the overall learning experience? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very dissatisfied	○	○	●	○	○	Very satisfied

Any additional comments?

Overall, I would say that the site functions as a great platform to enhance one's learning, whilst also giving the learner a chance to help others improve theirs. However, the reason I would only rate my satisfaction as a 3 is based upon two reasons:

1. Firstly, the lack of connectivity and slowness of the site left a negative first impression on myself and others in my cohort. This meant that we were not overly looking forward to using the site every week, as it could be very frustrating having to load and reload the page several times throughout the short hour-long session.

2. Admittedly, my use of the site significantly dropped off towards the end of the course. Whilst I was preparing to go on holiday, and during my time on holiday, my engagement with learning Spanish decreased and so too my time spent on WeSpeke. I do genuinely feel that this would not have happened had I not of been on holiday, but I got somewhat sidetracked and have struggled to pick up since, particularly given that the only session following my holiday was indeed, and unfortunately, the last of the course.

I believe if you can look past the connectivity issue, the site is a wonderful access into the network of similar people throughout the world who are in the same position as you. I have spoken to numerous people who I otherwise would not have met and thus picked up phrases I would never have learned. Nevertheless, it is subsequently reliant on the practice of the learning and engagement with the site as to what makes it a success, and as I dropped off towards the end of the course I have to be fair and score it directly down the middle.

Feedback on core skills

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

9. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish speaking skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	◉	○	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

Yes, without a doubt it will improve the speaking skills of the learning if they make use of the headphone function. However, on a personal level I decided not to partake in this function.

10. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish listening skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	◉	○	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

Again, this answer is similar to 'Speaking Skills' question.

11. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish reading skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

Yes, dealing with large amounts of texts from different recipient offers superb practice in reading and translating texts, and so to pick up on these little lexical nuances is invaluable experience whilst learning.

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

12. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish writing skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

Somewhat a repetition to above answer, the opportunity to write in the language you are learning is unmissable. The contacts who I spoke to were very helpful in correcting any mistakes I made, and subsequently it made it a relaxed and social environment to experiment in Spanish and not feel pressure if I did indeed make mistakes.

Feedback on other skills

13. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish grammar skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	◉	○	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

Yes, so long as the contacts you speak to are willing to do so.

14. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish pronunciation skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	◉	○	Yes, it definitely helps

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

Any additional comments?

Again, this would depend upon the contacts you communicate with.

15. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Spanish vocabulary skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

Of course, as Spanish speakers will use typical vocabulary that may not be mentioned in the lesson.

16. In your opinion, does Wespeke help you improve your Hispanic cultural skills? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it doesn't help	○	○	○	◉	○	Yes, it definitely helps

Any additional comments?

This again depends upon the level of communication you have with your contacts, and the range of topics you discuss.

Feedback on features

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

17. Was the feature of creating a profile helpful to you in practising Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

Yes, as I could present my profile in such a way that allowed people to message me and discuss the information within my profile (i.e. my age, hobbies etc).

18. Was the feature of friending native speakers helpful to you in practising Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

Yes, I would say this was extremely helpful. I could talk to like minded people who were enthusiastic and willing to help me, meaning that my experience was a productive one.

19. Was the feature of exchanging languages helpful to you in learning Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	◉	Yes, it was very helpful

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

Any additional comments?

Yes, because culturally I could differentiate between the typical opening conversations of English people in comparison to Spanish people. Specifically, the opening questions and responses to such conversations.

20. Was the feature of receiving feedback from native speakers helpful to you in learning *
Spanish?

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	●	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

Yes, I could learn and build from the mistakes I made, albeit if they were only small grammatical issues.

21. Was the feature of giving feedback to other learners helpful to you in learning Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, it wasn't helpful	○	○	○	○	●	Yes, it was very helpful

Any additional comments?

Yes, because it helped to form and build the relationship between my contacts and I, and show that I was willing to help them equally as they helped me.

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

22. Did you use any other features available in the platform?

○ Yes

◉ No

If yes, which one? What did you think about that other feature? If you didn't use any other one, write 'None'

Any additional comments?

Feedback on future use and perception

23. How likely are you to return to this site on your own? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, I will not return on my own	○	○	○	◉	○	I'll definitely return the next time I sit down at my computer.

Explain why you are or are not likely to return to this site. *

I know that I will at some point return to the site, even if it is to catch up with contacts that I spoke to frequently before. I would like to continue learning Spanish, and so if I have spare time the site will be a useful tool to turn to.

Any additional comments?

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

24. Would you recommend this site to your friends who are learning Spanish? *

	1	2	3	4	5	
No, I wouldn't recommend it	○	○	○	◉	○	I'll definitely recommend this site.

25. Please, explain why you would or you would not recommend this site. *

I would recommend this site as it offers an insight into a wide range of different contacts who can really spark your interest in learning and progressing with a different language.

26. What do you like best about this site? *

I like the networking process behind the site, but also the friendliness and patience of the contacts available. The fact that so many contacts are listed immediately means that there is no hassle in setting up communication, and the site refrains from creating numerous problematic steps before you can start to talk to others. Instead, the site offers this in a simple and easy way.

Any additional comments?

27. What do you like least about this site? *

The slowness of the site was my one problem with it, and this seemed to unfortunately be a reoccurring issue. However, I must say that on the last session I used the site, there was a significant improvement in connectivity, and numerous members of the cohort agreed that they did not encounter any problems with it.

Any additional comments?

Wespeke Site Feedback Questionnaire

28. Do you have any recommendations or comments to improve this site? *

It would merely be to improve the connectivity and speed of the site, but as indicated in my above answer, it seems that there may already be efforts in place to do just that, so I am hopeful that this is being done.

Any additional comments?

One thing I would say is that some of my contacts and I agreed to transition over to Whatsapp as we felt it would be simpler to speak on there. However, this was before I was aware that there was a mobile app for WeSpeke and so after this I reverted back to communicating on WeSpeke once I'd downloaded the app. I think often we prefer to speak on platforms that are familiar to us, or ones that we use often, such is the way that social media works. I wouldn't put this down to the site itself, but more so the culture of internet users.

¡Muchas gracias!

Muchas gracias

APPENDIX VIII. LOGON SHEET

(Based on Brick, 2011b)

Wespeke as a tool for learning Spanish

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) as tools for learning Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) and to examine how they can be used in and outside the language classroom.

What is your name? *

Be

Wespeke Log-on Sheet

1. I communicated with (name of language partner) from (country) by (message, text chat, * voice chat, video chat, other?)

I communicated with Daysi from Canary Islands by text chat

2. We practised (specify the topic from the ones developed in our face-to-face lessons): *

We spoke about why she is learning English, and that she would like to move to England one day.

3. What I (we) did was this... and how I (we) did it was this way... (What way were you able * to explain something your Language Exchange Partner couldn't understand, or vice-versa)

I had to use google translate to translate the more difficult/complicated sentences, and so after telling Daysi this she started to speak more English.

4. I made mistakes with: *

I made mistakes with long sentences, particularly just with words that I am not yet familiar with.

How pleased were you?

5. I was pleased with: *

Finding someone who is willing to help with me with my Spanish but also being sympathetic to my current level.

6. I wasn't pleased with: *

Sometimes the messaging service was slow and did not send quickly

7. At this point, my difficulties with Spanish are: *

The general topics outside of the phrases we have learned in class

8. I would like to learn in Spanish: *

How to say what I enjoy to do in my spare time (hobbies etc)

Personal Assessment

9. I learnt (it can refer to 'anything' not only the structures or vocabulary you are studying, *
maybe it was pronouncing something correctly, or a cultural aspect of their country):

I learned how to say 'i have a friend who lives in Spain' (Tengo una amiga vive en Espana)

10. My learning and practising plans for next time I'll be connected on Wespeke are: *

To relearn the topics with a friend who I have met who is a Spanish teacher

11. I had this/these problem/s with the platform (please, in this case, send via email all screenshots necessary to show what the problem was):

_____

Please, explain the problem the best you can by written.

Drop in connectivity

_____

12. How long (number of minutes) were you connected in this session (approximately) in total? (Since you started to exchange with your Language Exchange Partner on Wespeke until you finished to fill in this form) *

30

_____

¡Muchas gracias!

_____

APPENDIX IX. EXCERPT OF FOCUS GROUP 1

Researcher	00:08	Today is the 5th of June [2018]. Yes! Alright, so, please tell me, how you feel this is going, what you are learning, what you are not. What did you expect? etcetera…
Chris G.	00:21	So far, so good. I'm enjoying it. I feel I'm learning a lot. I have started with various words and only words and lots of words, which is useless… For learning you need to put all that together, and not only that, I use it in front of people with people, which is the biggest part, I think. So, there's a bit of a connection…
George	00:43	Yeah. Yeah. [Unintelligible]. Yeah. Yeah. Communication. We do it on the Wespeke… Great, but do it here with people and for on the same pace. Do you know what I mean? Yeah. They are experiencing, they ask us how to experience studying Spanish. How far have we learnt? But here, everyone, I think we feel comfortable because we are all on the same page. Yeah. You think that that's kind of important in the classroom environment.
Gary	01:14	I mean, I find it an interesting experience so far because although I'm a beginner in Spanish, I have had six lessons before I started this course. And only recently. Well, they overlapped slightly. So, my last lesson would have to be the introductory lesson that we had here. And I certainly think that that's helped me a lot because if I've just come to this completely cold with no Spanish whatsoever, a possibility would've found it an overwhelming experience. And certainly, most of the people I've spoken to so far, at least some degree of exposure to the language, either through being on holiday, which is when I pick up most of mine prior to the other course I did, a couple of blogs I've got, and Spanish girlfriends. So, they had a little experience of language through that. There were two others who have done other short courses. So, most of the people I spoke to had some degree of exposure to language. And I think that's meant that you could hit the ground going and stuff picks up quite quickly. So, from that point of view, it's been great. It's also been good. And that is the... Obviously, the level of working at the moment is quite low level. Some of the things that we've been doing say, for instance, yesterday we were looking at the colours. I already knew most of those colours from my previous course. So, I mean, I could pick stuff up quite quickly from that and get a much better understanding than I would've done otherwise. So, I certainly think from the point of view of the face-to-face lessons. It's been a great experience and I have learnt stuff in addition to what I did on the previous course. Looking at clothes yesterday and although I already know probably about three-quarters of those clothes, it's not all on that list that I wasn't familiar with. So, again, I'm picking up more stuff than I would have otherwise. It's been helpful having a different teacher because obviously different backgrounds, you're from Peru. My previous teacher was from Venezuela...
Researcher	03:28	Hmmm
Gary	03:28	And so, with a slightly different perspective…
George	03:32	Yeah, me too, me too...
Gary	03:38	What I would say is the Wespeke side of things I found to be somewhat less successful for me at this stage. And I think the reason for that is that it's big as well at it is now. But yes, it is. We've got we understand what words in

isolation, maybe the odd short phrase, but to be able to construct on the fly, a meaningful sentence that can be read by someone else is extremely difficult...

Researcher 04:11 I know. I know...

Gary 04:13 I mean, I'd be taking quite a creative approach to it when I've outlined a few occasions I have done it because I know a few short phrases and sometimes you can just kind of think the word substitutes, and you can make something which is reasonably intelligible. And in fact, last night when I told the system, I put together some phrases and then dropped them into Google Translate just to see how they translated from Spanish into English. And it came through pretty, pretty well. It was good enough to get by. So, ... but I think for anything more complex for longer sentences of trying to get more complex concepts across, I think at this stage of the game, not a chance! And I think we've also got the benefit to think that with Wespeke allows you to communicate through instant messaging, which is a perk you minimal thinking time that it will do if you're actually trying to do it, through audio or through video. And I think an audio-based approach at this stage of the game... well, it'd be said well beyond my capabilities and my biggest fear, I think in attempting that would be freezing... Nothing to say is scaring at the screen.

Chris G. 05:24 I mean it...

Gary 05:24 Yes, well, yes. You know, it's a bit too much, too quick. And in fact, I'm wondering whether you've noticed the number of people that were here during the introductory session, didn't turn up to subsequent sessions and you announced that it would be using Wespeke, to explain what it was about. But haven't really maybe made it clear that you could actually start very, very gently with this and just try talking in a few phrases. You don't have to walk straight into face-to-face conversation. The sample video that we saw shows this woman talking to a Spanish speaking buddy or a French speaker in that case immediately. What's? Holly... No way you possibly do that. And I think that would put most people off if that was all they knew about this. And I would suspect has been a bit of a barrier, some speculation, I have no idea...

Researcher 06:23 No, very good point, honestly...

Gary 06:27 That was how I felt about myself. So even though, you know, there's probably got a lot of reason to call for this individual, I'm still having second thoughts about whether I ought to pursue this any further because when I sat in that room with the set headphones on and the camera pointing at me and I expect you to communicate... This would just be too much, really.
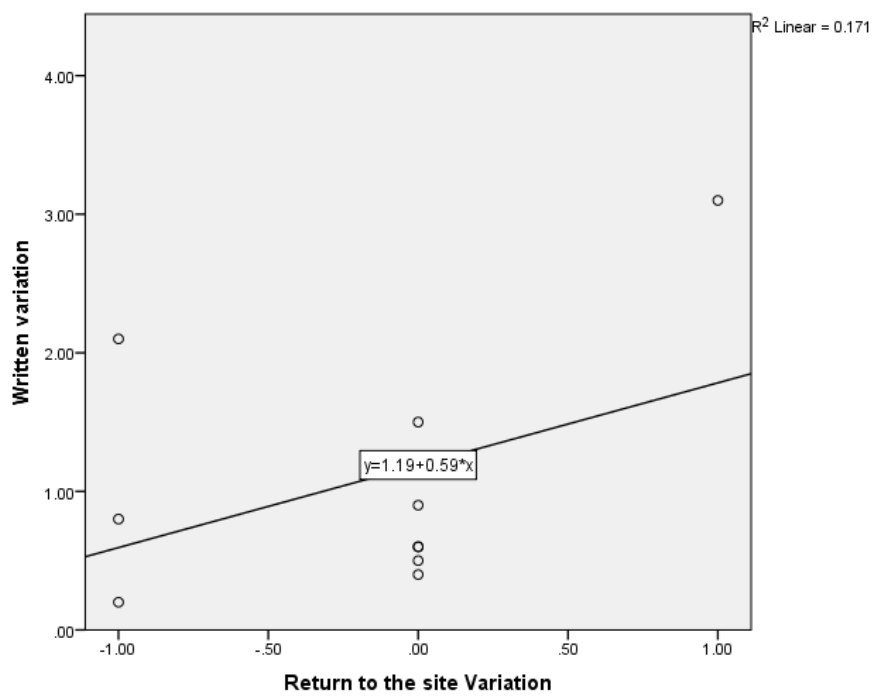
Researcher 06:47 Alright, alright…

APPENDIX X. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS
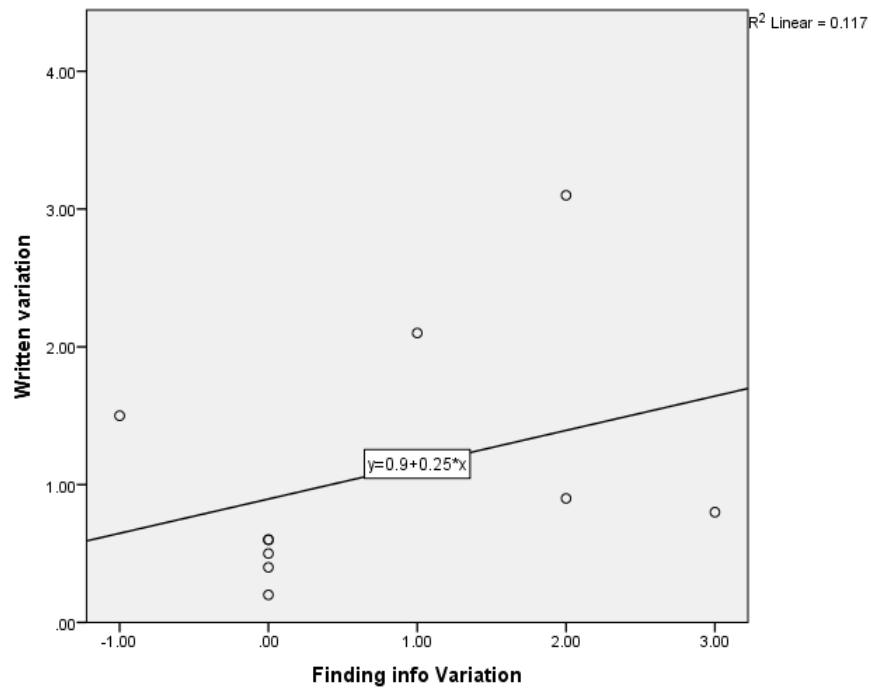
A. Positive Correlation Coefficients

Would you recommend this site to your friends who are learning Spanish?
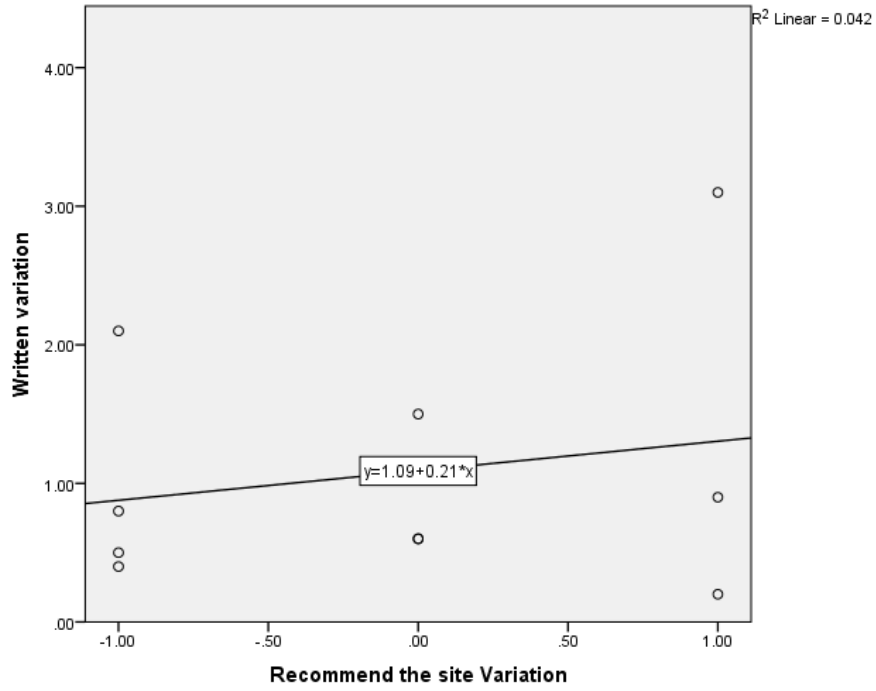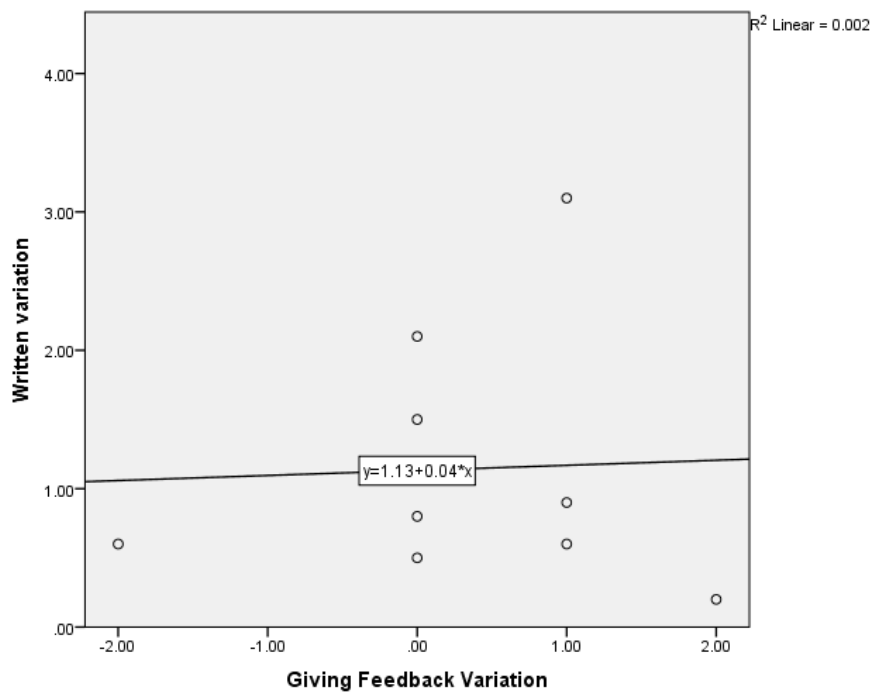

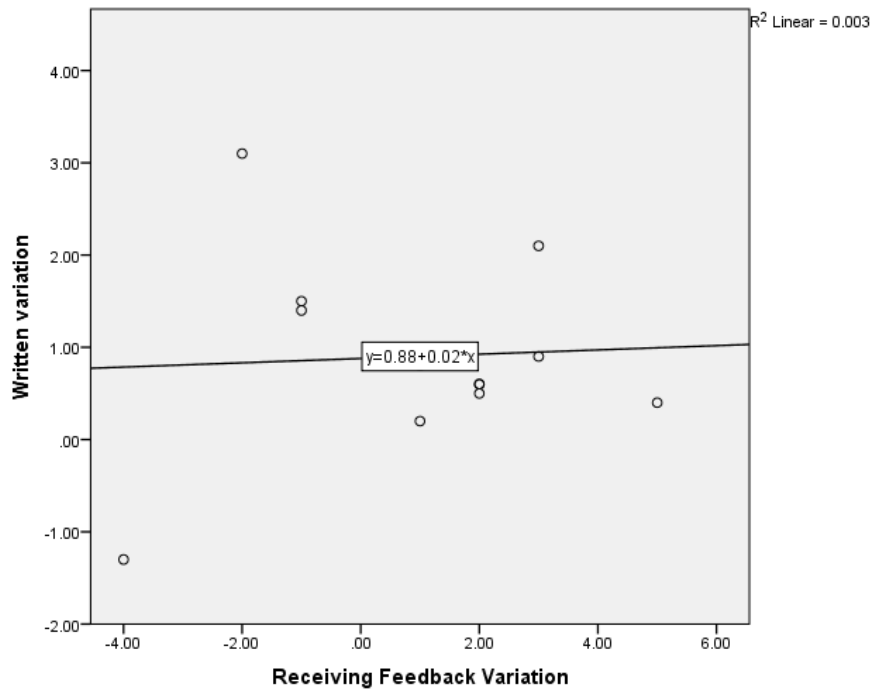How likely are you to return to this site on your own?

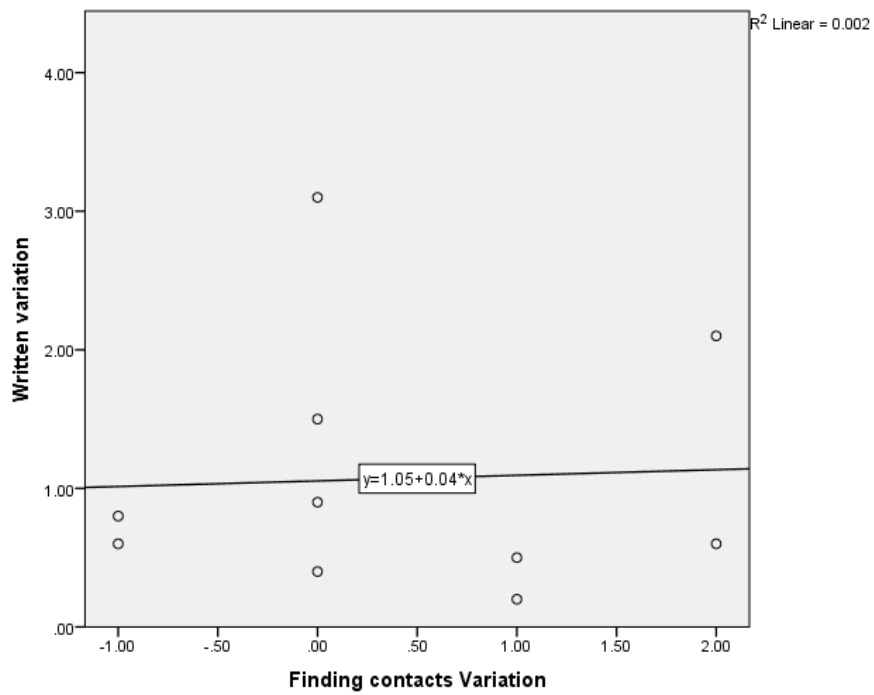Was it easy to find information on the platform?

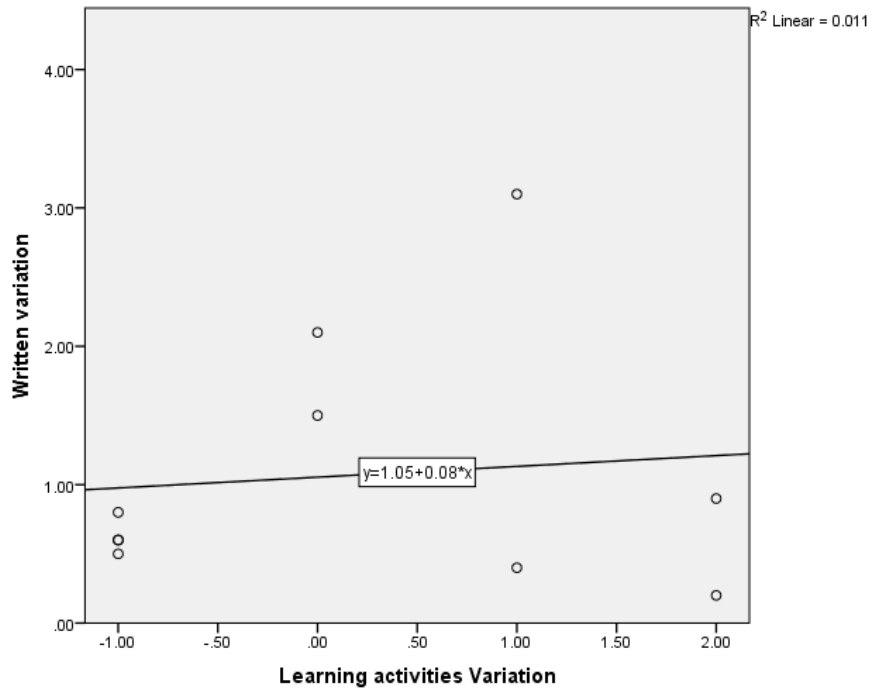Was the feature of giving feedback to other Spanish learners helpful to you in learning Spanish?

Was the feature of receiving feedback from other Spanish learners helpful to you in learning Spanish?

Was it easy to find contacts to practise the language with?

How would you rate the quality of the learning activities?
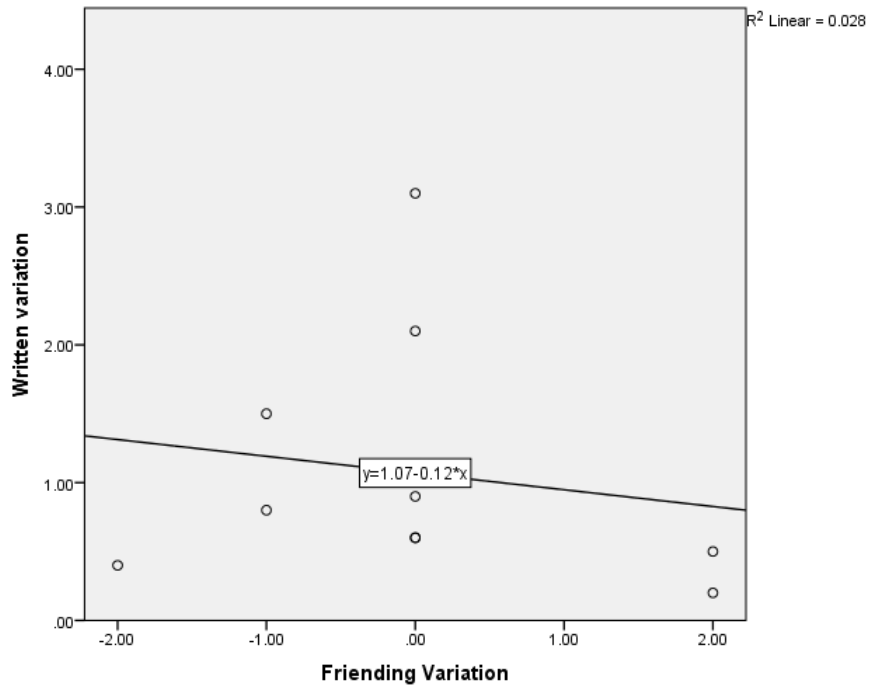

R^2 Linear = 0.011

y=1.05+0.08*x

B. Negative Correlation Coefficients

Was the feature of reading corrections/comments on other user's posts helpful to you in learning Spanish?

R^2 Linear = 0.696

y=1.24-0.39*x
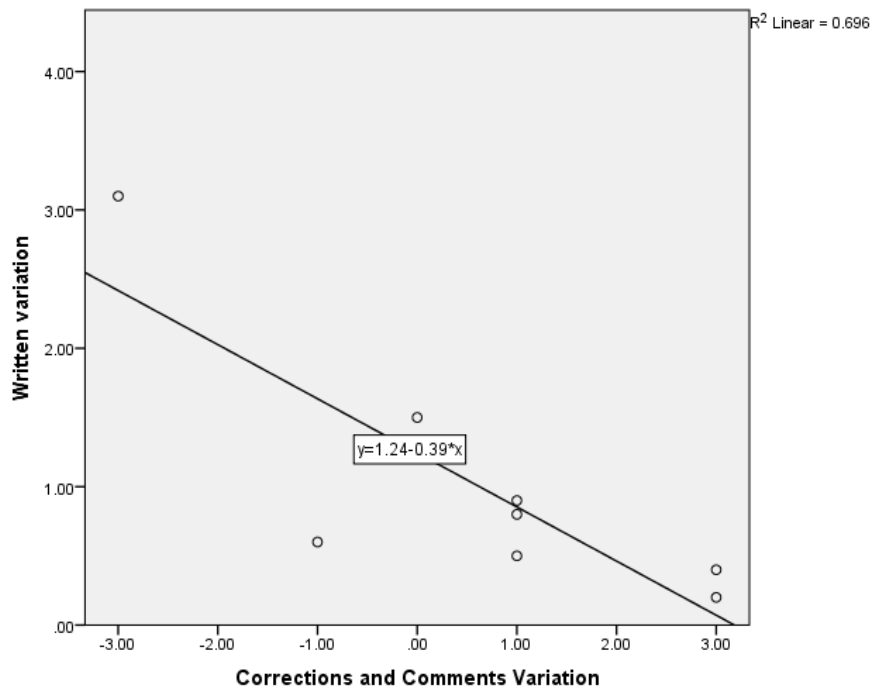
Was the feature of friending native speakers helpful to you in learning Spanish?

How would you rate the overall learning experience?
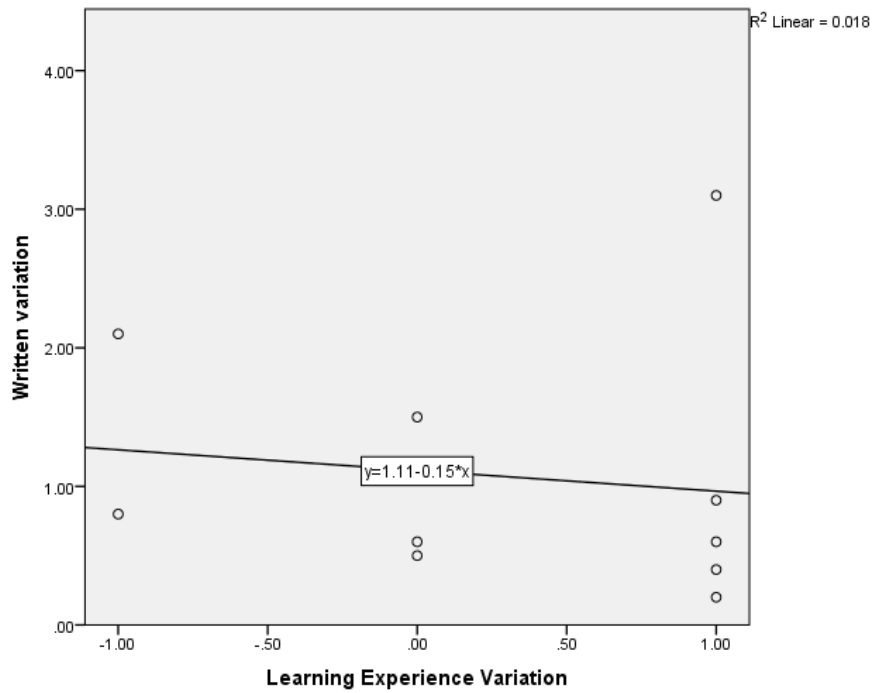
APPENDIX XI. LESSON PLANNING

Session 1. Lesson Plan (120 mins session)

Session Number: 1	Date: Tue 29/05/2018
Lesson Title: <u>Introducing yourself</u>	
Communicative Goal: To be able to introduce yourself	
Objectives: (1) Be able to communicate using these verbs: *ser* (to be), *llamarse* (to be named), *vivir* (to live), *trabajar* (to work) in the 1st and 2nd person singular (indicative present). (2) Use interrogatives: *Cómo* (How), *Dónde* (Where), *Cuál* (What). (3) Use the Spanish alphabet. (4) Use numbers from 0 to 9. (5) Greet and farewell others in Spanish. (6) **Be able to introduce yourself in Spanish**	

Focal Language Features:		
☒ **Grammar** - Personal pronouns: yo/tú - Open/closed questions (no auxiliary verbs in Spanish for questions). - Interrogatives: cómo, dónde, cuál. - Verbs: llamarse, escribir, ser, tener, vivir, trabajar (1st, 2nd person singular).	☒ **Vocabulary** - Alphabet - Numbers from 0 to 9 - UK countries and nationalities, plus some others that may be present in the group - Greetings and farewells	☒ **Listening** - The students will listen to the teacher always speaking in Spanish. - They will receive links to practise the alphabet and the numbers by themselves, as well as some useful and straightforward expressions.
☒ **Speaking and Pronunciation** Students will be practising their speaking skills during all the lesson. The teacher will correct their pronunciation on the go and will insist on the structures where he detects students have some problems.	☒ **Reading** - Students will be able to read all the handouts, and what the teacher writes on the board.	☒ **Writing** - Students will take notes about the vocabulary and structures they are learning. - They will write down the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of their classmates sitting next to them.
☒ **Other:** Cultural note about Hispanic names (everybody has two surnames).		

Description of classroom and student population
The lessons take place at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). The classroom is located in the Greenbank Building (GR355) an ample and very well-lit room, with rounded tables and movable chairs, which invites to interact with others. It is equipped with a computer, audio system, projector, screen, and whiteboards. The sessions last for two hours (120 minutes).
The participants are members of the general public who were invited openly to this free course, and some of them are UCLan students and members of the staff.
The total number of students enrolled in this group is 20. They will be divided into two groups: The first one will be the one that will make use of Wespeke after the classes (experimental group), with a maximum of 20 participants as that is the maximum capacity of the computers room (GR356). The second will not make use of the SNSLL (Wespeke

group). Before commencing the course, each participant will freely decide if they want to make use of the platform or not.

During the course presentation, one week before the commencement of it, they will receive an information sheet, and they will be invited to sign a consent form so that their anonymised data could be collected.

Once it is confirmed who the participants will be, to gather some essential statistics data, they will receive via email an online questionnaire to be filled in on google forms: https://goo.gl/R5W3Fn. They will also receive a short article that argues everybody would be able to 'learn' (but not master) any language in one hour.

Copies and materials

For this course, the teacher will use his own materials: PowerPoints and Handouts. Some listening exercises and their corresponding transcriptions will be excerpted from some A1 Spanish as a Foreign Language textbooks (*ELE Actual; Etapas A1.1; Pasos 1*).

Materials to be used in this lesson:

- PowerPoint: 'Introducing yourself.'
- A handout with all the different topics introduced.
- Links to the alphabet, numbers and some useful expressions on YouTube.

General outlook of this session: Short Introduction to the Spanish language in the world + Seven Activities + Wrap Up and closing.

Out of the classroom and before commencing the lessons	
Participants received an email with the Information Sheet and Consent Form, before the course presentation meeting. Once they signed that form, they received a link to fill in their statistical data and a short article that proposes you'll be able to 'learn' (but not master) any language in one hour.	
IN THE CLASSROOM	
Introduction to the course (5 minutes)	**Notes**
For this first day, students will be asked to come at least 15 minutes in advance so that they can receive a ring binder folder with the List of contents of the course. They will be asked to keep in order in that folder all the handouts given. They will be invited to write their names, big and clear, on a piece of paper so that the teacher can call them by their names. At 18.00, the course will start with a short introduction about the Spanish language in the world: some facts and figures to highlight its importance.	At this point, students will also be encouraged to introduce themselves to the people who are sitting next to them (still in English) to start developing some feeling of belonging to facilitate the learning process.
Some useful phrases for the classroom (10 mins)	
I don't understand. *No entiendo.* Repeat, please. *¿Puedes repetir, por favor?* Do you know…? *¿Sabes…?* No, I don't know. *No, no sé.* How do you say… in Spanish? *¿Cómo se dice… en español?* How do you write it? *¿Cómo se escribe?* Louder, please. *Más alto, por favor.* Slower, please. *Más lento, por favor.* Is this right? *¿Está bien así?* Yes / No. *Sí / No.*	These essential phrases are provided to the students to make them feel they are able to communicate in Spanish at least while they are in the classroom, as tools to give them some confidence.

Activities: *Introducing yourself* (85 mins)			
Greetings & Farewells *¡Hola! Buenos días, buenas tardes/noches. ¡Adiós!*	At this point, participants will be asked to listen, repeat and practise all these activities in couples, only	5 mins	For most learners, this may be their very first Spanish lesson, so the most practical and direct way to expose them to the language is via **Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP),** which implies a deductive approach. The teacher presents the target language and then gives students the opportunity to practise it through very controlled activities. For every added element, the students will have to practise the previous ones, that way they will be consolidating them. Although I try to only use Spanish in my lessons, at this point, it is beneficial to the students to make a comparison to L1 (English) in the presentation stage.
My name is *¿Cómo te llamas (tú)? (Yo) Me llamo…*	Introduce the idea of not trying to translate every single word but ideas. *What is your name?* is not literally equivalent to *¿Cómo te llamas?*	10 mins	
With 'T' for Tango *¿Cómo se escribe? Se escribe <u>con</u> 'T' <u>de</u> tango.*	Introduce the Spanish alphabet using the NATO one with the Spanish pronunciation	15 mins	
I'm English, from Preston *¿De dónde eres (tú)? (Yo) soy inglés, de Preston*	Introduce open and closed questions	10 mins	
I live and work in London *¿Dónde vives/trabajas (tú)? (Yo) vivo y trabajo en Londres*	Introduce non-auxiliary verbs for questions and negative sentences in Spanish, making a short reference to the article shared before commencing the course	10 mins	
My phone number is … *¿Cuál es tu número? Mi teléfono es el …*	Introduce the numbers from 0 to 9 Difference between *tú* and *tu*	15 mins	
I am 52 years old *¿Cuántos años tienes? (Yo) tengo 52 años*	Numbers from 10 to 100 Difference between 'to be' and 'to have'	10 mins	
My email is … *¿Cuál es tu correo electrónico? Mi correo electrónico es*	Introduce arroba (@), punto (.), guión (-), guión bajo (_)	10 mins	

Wrap up: *Práctica integral* (15 mins)	
Students will practise altogether the previous seven activities learnt, first with the person sitting next to them, and then around the classroom, walking around, with two more people at least	This is a good practice to consolidate all that has been previously learnt in this lesson.

Closing/Homework (5 minutes)	
Students are asked to include in their portfolios all the documents generated during this session. For the next lesson, they are asked to bring a picture of their family (printed or on their mobile) and sketch their family tree in English. The teacher will draw an example on the whiteboard so that the students can understand their pre-task.	All the learning process in these sessions is learner-centred. Asking the students to create an (e-)portfolio is to encourage them to reflect on how they learn (metacognition) so that they can also see their evolution and to have an archive of it, and finally, they can even feel responsible of their learning.
The Wespeke group will be taken from classroom GR355 to the computers room in GR356.	

AFTER CLASSROOM PRACTICE	
MAIN TASK: Wespeke Group (50 minutes)	
After the lesson, students will be asked to visit Wespeke for the first time. They will be invited to perform the User Experience questionnaire (https://goo.gl/KXLNEf), part of which is to create their profile, write some essential personal data of themselves in Spanish, and to introduce themselves orally to a Spanish speaker. That will take 40 minutes. Immediately after that, they will fill in the Site Feedback Questionnaire (https://goo.gl/e8zXi5). This will last for 10 minutes.	It is important to highlight the feeling of achievement of the learners for having been able to communicate with a native speaker, after having had one single session.

Session 5. Lesson Plan (120 mins session)

Session Number: 5	Date: Tue 12/06/2018
Lesson Title: <u>Describing your house</u>	
Communicative Goal: Describe the furniture and rooms in your house.	
Objectives: (1) Say what furniture there is in your house and its rooms.	

Focal Language Features:		
☒ **Grammar** - Determined / non-determined articles. - *Difference between 'hay' (there is/ there are) and 'está' (to be located).* - Differences between es + adjective (to be, description), está+ preposition + place (to be, location), tiene + noun (to have) to mention accessories.	☒ **Vocabulary** - Types of houses - Rooms in a house - Furniture	☒ **Listening** - The students will listen to the teacher always speaking in Spanish.
☒ **Speaking and Pronunciation** Students will be practising their speaking skills during all the lesson. The teacher will correct their pronunciation on the go and will insist on the structures where he detects students have some problems.	☒ **Reading** - Students will be able to read all the handouts, and what the teacher writes on the board.	☒ **Writing** - Students will take notes about the vocabulary and structures they are learning. - They will write down the names of the different rooms in a house, and its furniture. - Finally, they will be asked to write the description of their house in task number 2.

Copies and materials
Materials to be used in this lesson: - PowerPoint: 'HAY, to express existence, ESTAR for location.' - Handouts for the different topics introduced.

General outlook of this session: Small Talk + Two Activities + Two Tasks (including Wrap Up and closing).

Out of the classroom task	**Notes**
In the previous lesson, students were asked to bring (for this lesson) a picture of their favourite room of their house (printed or on their mobile) and describe it in English, as well as to look up the corresponding vocabulary in Spanish.	This was a preparatory task, to create interest and engagement so that students could prepare themselves in advance for the contents to be covered in the next lesson.

IN THE CLASSROOM	
Small Talk (5 minutes)	**Notes**
Introduce your family physically and psychologically to your partner sitting next to you in Spanish, to practise/remember what we did in the previous lesson.	Based on social constructivism principles, to ascertain, activate, and verify prior knowledge of the students, this initial warm-up *routine* is open-ended and allows them to get settled in and interact with other participants. Additionally, this accommodates students who may arrive a few minutes late. A summary of the main structures to be used will be displayed on the classroom screen so that students can have a look at it in case of need.
Setting up the task	
When you move into a new city, you may be asked about your new whereabouts. This lesson will help you to reply to that question.	
Pre-Task 1: *Houses* **(30 minutes)**	
Introduction and connection to the previous lesson: Once the students know the vocabulary to refer and describe the different members of their families, to abound on information about them, they can speak about the place where they live. So, a PowerPoint with types of houses in Spanish will be displayed on the screen, a handout with the same contents will be distributed to the students. The teacher will read the names aloud, and the students will repeat them. At this point, the teacher will add some	10 mins
adjectives (grande / pequeña, bonita / fea) to describe houses and immediately will make the students practise these structures orally in couples (10 mins).	10 mins
Modelling: The students will ask/answer *¿Cómo es tu casa?* to practise the displayed structures (8 mins). Immediately, the teacher will show a picture of his house and describe it to consolidate those previous structures (2 mins). **Guided Practice:** The students will be asked to stand up and move around the classroom and practise this short dialogue with two different classmates (10 mins) (While the students are working on this pre-task stage, the teacher will be monitoring around the classroom, taking notes and assessing the possible mistakes and correcting them on the go).	10 mins

Pre-Task 2: *¿Qué hay en esta oficina? What is there in this office?* (40 minutes)	
Introduction: Once the students know the vocabulary to refer to the type of house they live in, the logical next step is to say the rooms and what there is in them. Thus, the structure HAY (there is / there are) is introduced via a PowerPoint and handouts (5 mins).	5 mins
Modelling: To reinforce the knowledge of this new structure, a list of objects in an office (in Spanish and English) has already been distributed to the students, and a picture of an office with all the items of that list is shown. So, the students are asked ¿Qué hay en esta oficina? The teacher asks for two volunteers to answer the question and immediately the whole group is asked to practise it in couples (10 mins).	10 mins
Guided Practice: New pictures with different rooms in a house (living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom) are shown to the students, and they already have them in the handout provided. Those names are read aloud (3 mins) then, students are asked to ask each other which/how many of those rooms they have in their houses ¿Qué hay en tu casa? (7 mins) (While the students are working on this pre-task stage, the teacher will be monitoring around the classroom, taking notes and assessing the possible mistakes and correcting them on the go). A picture with furniture and their names will be showed and distributed. Those names will be read aloud (3 mins). A second guided practice, this time with furniture, will be added, ¿Qué hay en el comedor? The students will be invited to talk with their classmates about the furniture of two different rooms (7 mins). The teacher will immediately write on the board and highlight the possible found mistakes, eliciting the correct structures to be used so that the students can use them appropriately during the task completion (5 mins).	25 mins

Task 1: *¿Qué hay en tu casa? What is there in your house?* (30 minutes)	
Task completion: Students will be asked to describe a room in their house according to their written notes and the picture they brought. Their partner sitting next to them will do the same. (While the students are working on the task, the teacher will be monitoring around the classroom, taking notes and assessing the possible mistakes and correcting them on the go) (10 mins). **Task debrief:** The teacher will recap, highlighting the possible mistakes he has detected through the task and eliciting the correct forms, writing them down on the board (5 mins). Then, he will describe another house using those proper forms (5 mins). Finally, students change partners and describe their houses (10 mins).	Using not only a social constructivist theoretical framework but also experience learning theory (ELT), to ensure students receive the experiences they need to learn as part of a community of practice and that they are learning by doing, students are now introduced to the description of their houses. These experiences are authentic and 'challenging', so students will be able to connect emotionally with them to

	facilitate their learning process.
Task 2: *¿Dónde está/n la/s silla/s?* (18 minutes)	
Introduction and connection to Tasks 1 and 2: Some students, instinctively immediately want to start to link the existence of something to its location. To be able to explain this, they are introduced to the verb estar (to be in English) altogether with the prepositions of place in context. The corresponding handouts have already been distributed. The teacher insists on the importance of differencing ser/estar (5 minutes). **Task clarification:** The teacher will display a picture of a rabbit in different places related to a suitcase, so the students can practise and ask for explanations (5 mins). **Task completion:** The same picture of the office will be used, but this time to specify where the objects are located (5 minutes). The teacher will be monitoring around the classroom, taking notes and assessing the possible mistakes and correcting them on the go. **Task debrief:** The teacher will recap, highlighting the possible mistakes he has detected through the task and eliciting the correct forms, writing them down on the board (3 mins).	Considering that teaching and learning is based on a relationship, as well as the learners own personal frameworks and backgrounds (humanism), that students are at the heart of learning (constructivism), and that the process of building knowledge is via experiences (experiential learning), now the participants are asked to combine all the different concepts learnt in this session. This last task also allows learners to engage in hypothesis testing to contrast their growing body of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a practical environment with other learners. All of which will help them to create 'action plans' for the Wespeke experience, where they would interact with a native speaker.
Closing/Homework (2 minutes)	
Students are asked to include in their e-portfolios all the documents generated during this session. For the next lesson, they are asked to write down a description of the classroom in Spanish saying where all the furniture is located.	All the learning process in these sessions is learner-centred. Asking the students to create an e-portfolio is to encourage them to reflect on how they learn (metacognition) so that they can also see their evolution and to have an archive of it, and finally, they can also feel responsible of their learning.

The Wespeke group will be taken from classroom GR355 to the computers room in GR356.

AFTER CLASSROOM PRACTICE	
MAIN TASK: Wespeke Group (20 minutes)	
After the lesson, students will be asked to visit Wespeke and find an exchange partner (ideally someone they have already become 'friends' with previously) to practise what they have learnt in this lesson and try to describe the computer room and their houses if they feel comfortable to do so.	While using Wespeke, students are asked to fill in log-on sheets, so that the experience is transformed into learning by reflection, enhanced by interacting with a more-knowledgeable other, which will lead to feedback to analyse their actions and their understanding, and to plan for future learning. It is important also to highlight the feeling of achievement of the learners for having been able to communicate with a native speaker.

APPENDIX XII. HOMEWORK SAMPLES. MAIN STUDY.

Lesson 1: Introducing yourself
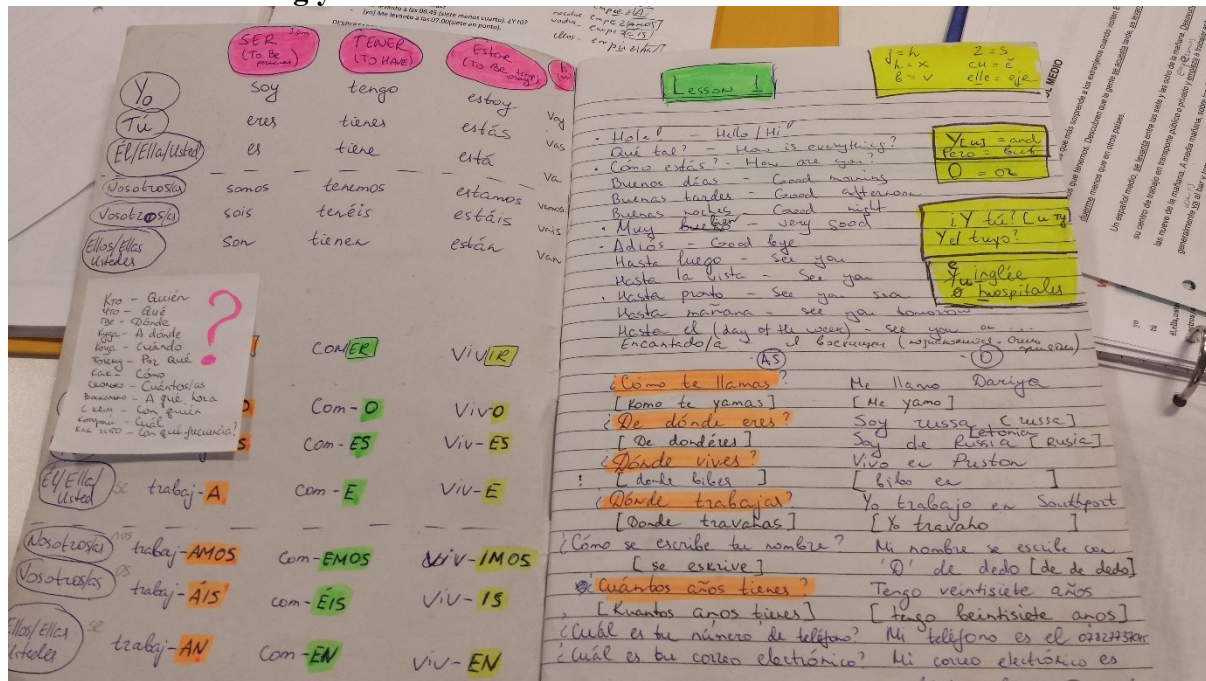
Conjugation of some basic Spanish verbs / Dialogue to introduce yourself

Grammar synthesis (by the end of the course). Possessive adjectives, reflexive pronouns, Indirect object. Irregular verbs (present tense). Definite/Indefinite articles, contractions.

Lesson 4: Physical description (some homework samples)

~~Mi~~ Me llamo Ben, soy ~~ingles~~ inglés y tengo diecinueve ~~anos~~años. No soy bajo ni alto, ni feo ni guapo. No soy del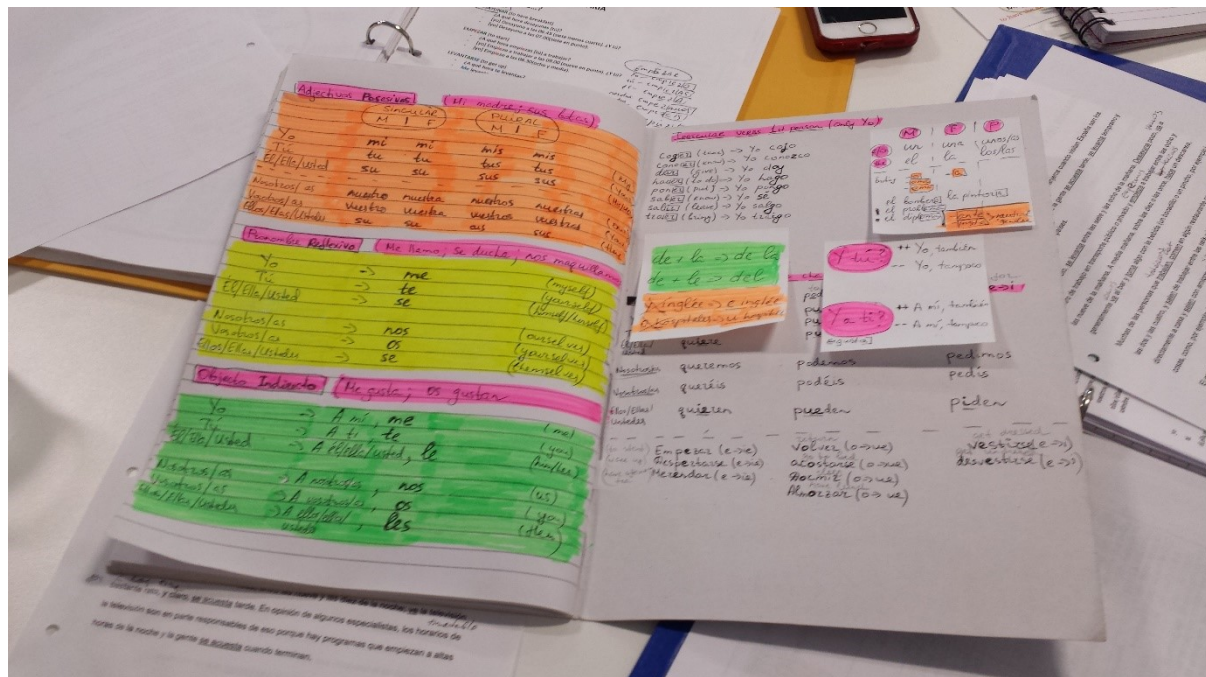gado ni gordo, soy ~~mediana~~mediano. Tengo pelo moreno rizado corto. Tengo los ojos verdes y azules. Llevo gafas y barba ~~corto~~corta. Soy ~~simpatico~~simpático, ~~Carinoso~~cariñoso, tolerante, sociable, educado. Mis amigos dicen que soy bueno y gracioso.

Mi hermana se llama Rebecca, ella es inglesa y tiene veinticinco años. Ella no es baja ni alta, ni fea ni guapa. No es delgada ni gorda. Tiene pelo moreno liso largo. Tienes los ojos marrones. Lleva gafas. Es ~~simpatica~~simpática, alegre, divertida, ~~carinosa~~cariñosa, generosa, habladora, sociable, responsable.

Hola, Me llamo Chen, soy de China, soy ~~Chino~~ china, ~~mocho~~ mucho gusto.
Yo tengo treinta años, ~~ser~~ soy baja, ~~mediano~~mediana, hermosa, e inteligente.
Tengo el pelo negro y liso, tengo la cara redonda, tengo los ojos negros.

Me llamo Chris

Soy de ~~inglaterra~~ Inglaterra, soy ~~ingles~~ inglés. Soy alto tengo pelo moreno. No ~~es~~ soy ~~gorda~~ gordo ni delgado. Llevo barba. Tengo los ojos marrones. Soy joven y normalmente honesto, a veces tonto.

Hugo es mi hijo mayor. ~~El~~ Él tiene cuatro ~~anos~~años. ~~El~~ Él es bajo y muy guapo. ~~El~~ Él tiene pelo ~~castano~~ castaño. ~~El~~ Él tiene los ojos verdes. ~~El~~ Él es alegre, divertido y listo. A veces tonto como yo.

No soy alta ni baja. Soy mediana. Soy delgada, guapa, graciosa. Soy rus~~s~~a. Soy castaña. Tengo pelo liso, largo. Tengo ojos marrones y (yo) llevo gafas. Tengo pecas. Soy una chica sociable y alegre ~~chica~~.

Mi hermano es alto, joven, y muy fuerte. Él tiene pelo rubio, corto. Él tiene ojos azules. Él no lleva ~~no~~ barba ni bigote. Mi hermano es simpático, listo, bueno y generoso. Él es trabajador.

Soy morena, tengo pelo negro
Ahora tengo ~~polo~~pelo rizado, pero tengo pelo ~~lista~~liso naturalmente.
Tengo un lunar negro, y los ojos marrones.
No soy alta ni baja, soy mediana. Soy muy mala 😬 pero inteligente.
Yo soy trabajadora, tengo dos trabajos, pero no ~~mi~~me gusta porque es muy ~~cansadar~~cansado para ~~mi~~mí.
Trabajo como ~~asistente~~asistenta en una tienda de ropa y ~~asistente~~asistenta de curaduría para el museo en Preston.
Soy, callada, ~~contento~~contenta, alegre y un poco rara. 😅
Soy insegura en la clase de español ~~classa,~~ porque mi español no es ~~no buena~~bueno. 😖

~~Mi~~ Me ~~llanos~~ llamo Trudy. ~~soy~~ Tengo cuarenta y siente ~~anos~~ años

Yo trabajo como ~~un droyectista~~ proyectista inmobiliaria,

quiero hablar ~~espanol~~ español. ~~to soy~~ Soy inglesa y (yo) soy baja

~~Delivery con~~ Soy morena. Tengo el pelo rizado y largo. ~~rizado largo el pelo,~~ yo tengo los

— ojos verdes y ~~usar~~ uso gafas de forma profesional.

Mi hija ~~korby~~ Korby es bonita ~~com~~ con pelo largo rizado y ~~morena~~ moreno.

~~el pelo~~ ~~e~~Ella es ~~bajo~~ baja con los ojos marrones, ella es ~~simpatica~~simpática,

honesta y educada.

Lesson 6: Where is it located?

en mi barrio hay una biblioteca, una estacion
de tren, un supermercado, un parque muy grande
y hermosa.
Algunas hoteles, un cine, pero no hay teatros.
~~tengo~~ Me gusta: mi barrio porque hay muchas tiendas
y mi parque favorita.
La estación de tren está cerca de mi casa, así es
bueno para mi.
mi tienda favorita es el supermercado porque
mi encanta la comida.

Lesson 7: I like it!

¡me gusta la comida!

me gusta el yoga

me gusta viajar

me gusta la meditación

me gusta el ejercicio

me gusta la música y el arte

me gusta el clima cálido

¡me gusta el brócoli, lo como todos los días!

me gustan los hombres guapos

Lesson 8: Daily routines

un día normal.

me despierto a las seis o siete en punto, me levanto a las siete menos cinco, muy rápido 😊. me ducho en diez o quince minutos, con agua caliente. me gusta ducharme.

yo medita ^{durante} para viente o treinta minutos todos los días. ^{desayuno}

yo desayuno a las ocho en punto. ~~Tengo~~ ^{Tomo un desayuno muy grande} ~~muy grande desayuno~~, ^{mucho}

m'encanta la comida, especialmente la cocina de mi madre!

^{Tomo} ~~Tengo~~ cereal con fresas, frambuesas, una manzana y canela.

hago/ ^{tiendo} ~~tender~~ la cama, ^{me peino} ~~peinarme mi peto~~, ~~pongo~~ ^{me maquillo} ~~maquillarse~~ y lavarse ^{los} la platos.

Antes de salir ^{de} mi casa, ^{tomo} ~~tengo~~ un plátano con yogur y ^{una} tostada.

a las ocho menos viente, salgo de casa para ir a trabajar.

empiezo/trabajo ^{a las} ~~para~~ ^{el} nueve en punto.

para ^{el} almuerzo ^{tomo} ~~tengo~~ una grande ensalada ~~con~~ todos los días, con ~~la~~ berenjena, brócoli, champiñón ^y ~~te~~ (setas), coliflor, espárragos, lechuga, pepinos, pimiento, tomates, zanahoria y frijoles. no ^{como} ~~tengo~~ carne porque soy vegetariana, por eso como muchas verduras.

Termino el trabajo ^{a las} ~~en~~ seis o siete en punto. ^{Vuelvo a} ~~vengo~~ mi casa y ^{ceno} ~~tengo una cena~~ con mi familia.

por la tarde, leo online, escribo algún correo electrónico.

todos los días yo medita, ~~pero~~ el miércoles por la noche hago yoga.

lunes y viernes ^{voy al} ~~hago el~~ gimnasio. me gusta el ejercicio, pero es agotador.

^{Me acuesto} ~~voy a la cama~~ a las diez, pero ^{me duermo} ~~dormir~~ a las once 😊.

¡este es mi día!

APPENDIX XIII. ORAL TEST

El alumno tiene que contestar con oraciones completas.

1. ¿Cuál es tu nombre completo?
2. Por favor, ¿podrías deletrear tus apellidos?
3. ¿Cuántos años tienes?
4. ¿De dónde eres?
5. ¿En qué trabajas?
NIVEL A1.1

6. ¿Qué hora es?
7. Describe el tiempo de hoy.
8. ¿Cuántas tiendas o restaurantes hay en la calle en la que vives?
9. ¿Qué color son tus ojos / pelo?
10. ¿Qué estás haciendo ahora mismo?   Pregúntame.
NIVEL A1.2

11. ¿Cómo se llama tu jefe?
12. Dime que me siente.
13. ¿Con qué frecuencia comes en restaurantes?
14. ¿Cuál es la fecha de hoy?
15. ¿Qué deportes te gusta practicar?
NIVEL A2

16. ¿Cuántas veces al día te miras en el espejo?
17. Pregúntame dónde voy a ir de vacaciones.
18. ¿Dónde vivías cuando tenías diez años?
19. ¿A qué hora te levantaste ayer? Pregúntame.
20. ¿Es España más grande que China?
NIVEL B1.1

21. ¿Qué estabas haciendo esta mañana a las 10:00?
22. ¿Has estado alguna vez en África? Pregúntame.
23. ¿Cuántas tazas de café bebiste ayer? ¿Y hoy?
24. ¿Cuánto tiempo tardas en llegar al trabajo?
25. ¿Qué te gustaría que te regalaran tus amigos por tu cumpleaños?
NIVEL B1.2

26. Si ganaras la lotería, ¿qué sería lo primero que comprarías?
27. ¿Podrías conseguirme un trabajo en tu empresa?
28. ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas estudiando español?
29. ¿Qué es mejor: ser bueno o estar bueno? ¿Por qué?
30. Dime algo que solías hacer y ya no haces.
NIVEL B2

31.   Si hubieras ido ayer al cine, ¿qué película habrías visto? Pregúntame.
32.   ¿Con qué frecuencia te cortas el pelo?
33.   Completa la oración: Tu jefa no ha ido a trabajar. Ella debe …
34.   ¿Quién tiene preferencia, la gente que sube o baja del metro?
35.   ¿Te gusta tomarle el pelo a la gente?
NIVEL B2.1

36.   ¿Cuánto tiempo llevarás trabajando en 2025?
37.   Dime algo que se suponía harías ayer y no lo hiciste.
38.   ¿Te mudarías a Madagascar si te ofrecieran un mejor trabajo?
39.   Inventa una buena excusa por llegar tarde.
40.   ¿Conoces a alguien que haya vuelto a fumar después de haberlo dejado?
NIVEL B2.2

APPENDIX XIV. ORAL ASSESSMENT CRITERIA + CEFR

Oral assessment criteria + CEFR

Interactive communication*¤	Fluency and Coherence¤	Pronunciation¤	Grammatical and Lexical Range and Accuracy¤
• Can interact appropriately with examiner (turn-taking), and respond to questions¶ ¶ • Can exchange roles within the conversation¶ ·¶ • Can use appropriate functional language and non-verbal communication (NVC)** strategies to advance conversation and to indicate and check understanding (e.g., nodding, asking for clarification, repair strategies)¶ ¶ ¤	**Fluency**¶ • Can maintain flow of speech (at a natural pace) without undue language-related hesitation or repetition when discussing an unseen topic·¶ ¶ **Coherence**¶ • Can develop ideas coherently (flow)¶ ¶ • Can use discourse markers appropriately to organise speech¶ ¤	• Can speak with comfortable intelligibility to examiner and without intrusive features likely to distract the counterpart¶ ¶ • Can accurately pronounce and stress individual words including high-frequency and technical terms¶ ¶ • Can make effective use of stress to highlight key points and to aid meaning; can speak with a natural rhythm of stress and un-stress¶ ¶ • Can naturally chunk speech into appropriate tone/sense units¶ ¶ • Can make use of intonation to help convey meaning and interest¤	• Can use a variety of vocabulary and syntactical structures appropriate to the question, and with sufficient accuracy to allow some flexibility and precision of meaning¶ ¶ • Can manipulate grammatical forms (e.g. tense, aspect, articles, word order, comparatives etc.) with consistency and accuracy·¶ ¶ • Can control word selection, including collocation and appropriate use of subject-specific terminology¶ ¶ • Can manipulate words forms with consistency and accuracy and lexical formation¶ ¤

* The examiner sets up the exam, and start asking questions. Participants are expected to engage with the exam independently, replying to all the questions they can, according to their knowledge. Credit is given for the use of appropriate interactive strategies and participants should be encouraged to answer all that they can. In the event of a ***complete breakdown in the interaction***, the examiner may subtly stop the exam, but will not take part in the exam itself. (Adapted from http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/images/168150-cambridge-english-preliminary-teachers-handbook.pdf). This oral exam will be double checked by a professor of the Spanish department at UCLan.

** NVC may include eye contact, body language and gestures. At higher levels, students may be able to use non-verbal strategies to advance the conversation (e.g. leaning forward to indicate a desire to speak) rather than relying on perhaps unnatural set phrases.

	Interactive communication*	Fluency and Coherence	Pronunciation	Grammatical and Lexical Range and Accuracy
C1-C2	• Demonstrates good awareness of turn-taking; s/he responds appropriately to all questions • Can effectively vary role in relation to interviewer and emerging questions • Non-mechanical and generally effective use of both language and non-verbal strategies to advance conversation	• Can communicate effectively in a wide range of topics, without noticeable effort; language-related hesitation or repetition is minimal • Maintains good fluency across a number of extended questions • Connects ideas fully; occasional lapses in coherence may occur • Uses a wide range of discourse markers flexibly and mostly accurately	• Can pronounce individual words and sounds clearly so as to cause no problems of intelligibility; occasional errors in word stress possible • Uses sentence stress, intonation and chunking/pausing with sufficient control to ***aid*** meaning **NB.** A distinct L1 accent may be in evidence.	• Can use a wide variety of vocabulary and sentence structures flexibly • Majority of sentences are accurate; however, recurrent grammatical errors (e.g. tense, aspect, articles, word order, comparatives etc.) may persist • Can use a wide range of appropriate vocabulary flexibly; may be occasional errors in word choice/collocation • Manipulation of word forms is consistently accurate

	Interactive communication*	**Fluency and Coherence**	**Pronunciation**	**Grammatical and Lexical Range and Accuracy**
B2	• Generally, demonstrates awareness of turn-taking; for the most part, contributions are considered and relevant to the conversation • Can vary role in relation to examiner and emerging discussion points • Some effective use of functional language and non-verbal strategies to advance discussion; some mechanical use may still be evident	• Can communicate effectively on general and less familiar topics; may be some language-related hesitation or repetition when talking on less familiar topics • Maintains fluency across a number of speech turns; more successful with shorter turns • Connects ideas well on the most part but there may be breakdowns in coherence (flow) when discussing more complex ideas • Generally uses discourse markers accurately and effectively	• Pronunciation of some individual sounds may be problematic, but do not generally reduce intelligibility, e.g. differentiation b/p, t/d, r/l, vowel sounds • Generally, produces sounds which are key to meaning accurately • Errors in word stress do not limit intelligibility • Uses sentence stress, intonation and chunking/pausing unobtrusively without obscuring meaning	• Uses a mix of sentence structures with some flexibility and confidence (not generally mechanical) • Some grammatical errors (e.g. tense, aspect, articles, word order, comparatives etc.) evident; some errors may limit full clarity of message (e.g. *Estoy estudiando español tres meses*) • Uses an adequate range of appropriate vocabulary to allow for some flexibility and precision; use of collocation is generally sound • Word forms are generally accurate, although certain recurrent items may be problematic (e.g. bueno/bien; economía/económica)

	Interactive communication*	Fluency and Coherence	Pronunciation	Grammatical and Lexical Range and Accuracy
B1	• Demonstrates ability to fully follow the conversation • Makes attempts to vary role in the conversation • Relies on use of set phrases to continue conversation (mechanical); NVC strategies not generally evident	• Maintaining communication may rely on hesitancy and/or repetition; there is noticeable language-related hesitancy • Lapses in fluency evident in longer stretches of speech, which may restrict participation in interaction • Connects ideas in a limited fashion; breakdowns in coherence (flow) are common • Relies on mechanical use of certain discourse markers OR may not use discourse markers when they are required	• Pronunciation of individual sounds may put momentary strain on listener; articulation of sounds which are key to meaning may be inconsistent, e.g. differentiation b/p, t/d, r/l, vowel sounds • Inaccuracies in word stress may cause momentary strain • Lack of variation in intonation *and/or* unnatural chunking/pausing *and/or* misplaced sentence stress may create strain on the listener	• Limited variety or repetitive use of the same sentence structures; mechanical use demonstrates a lack of flexibility • Grammatical errors (e.g. tense, aspect, articles, word order, comparatives etc.) are frequent; some errors reduce clarity of message • Uses a limited and repetitive range of vocabulary which may be inappropriate to context; may make noticeable errors in word selection; demonstrates little awareness of collocation • May make noticeable and persistent errors in word formation; some impede communication

	Interactive communication*	Fluency and Coherence	Pronunciation	Grammatical and Lexical Range and Accuracy
A2	• May generally respond inappropriately • Makes minimal contributions to conversation • Makes limited attempts to advance conversation	• Contributions are usually short and may be repetitive; significant language-related hesitation and/or speaker abandons topic • Fluency is laboured and causes frequent breakdowns in communication • Ideas are generally unconnected; coherence (flow) is minimal • Very limited/no use of appropriate discourse markers	• Frequent problems with individual sounds and/or word stress affect intelligibility significantly • Articulation of sounds which are key to meaning regularly absent in such a way that meaning is noticeably obscured, e.g. differentiation b/p, t/d, r/l, vowel sounds • Intonation may lack variation AND misplaced sentence stress and/or unnatural chunking/pausing may regularly make meaning unclear	• Very limited range of sentence structures • Very frequent errors (e.g. tense, aspect, articles, word order, comparatives etc.) impede communication • Uses simple general vocabulary, with no obvious consideration of context or audience • Limited control of word formation, causing significant strain for the listener

	Interactive communication*	Fluency and Coherence	Pronunciation	Grammatical and Lexical Range and Accuracy
A1	• Has considerable difficulty maintaining simple exchanges • Requires additional prompting and support	• There is not fluency nor coherence as the participant only uses a vocabulary of isolated words and phrases	• Has very limited control of phonological features and is often unintelligible	• Shows only limited control of a few grammatical forms • Uses a vocabulary of isolated words and phrases

APPENDIX XV. COURSE FEEDBACK

Spanish Beginners (Research Study Group) Feedback Questionnaire

Short Course title: Spanish Beginners   Date: 29.05.18 – 02.07.18

We hope that you have enjoyed the Spanish Beginners Course. Your feedback is very important to us, as we like to know what you are enjoying and if there's anything we need to change. If there is something we need to change, we will do our very best to change it as quickly as possible. Your feedback helps us to continue what we are doing well and also helps us to improve our courses for the future.

Learning and Teaching

How satisfied are you with:	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
The quality of the teaching				✓
The approachability of the teacher				✓
The support I received from the teacher				✓

Course

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This course is well organised					✓
The timetabling is appropriate					✓
Materials in my course are useful and up-to-date					✓

Tell us more:

What do you like/dislike about the classes?

The pace of the classes is very intense. Sometimes it seems a little too fast, but it is good to be put under pressure. It is never boring!

What made you apply to study the Spanish Beginners Course?

I have wanted to learn Spanish for a long time and I now have enough spare time to devote to it.

Please turn over...

What do you intend to do to continue progressing on your Spanish?

I will look for another class and I will continue to use online resources + books.

Any other comments?

I have made a lot of progress and I am very happy with the quality of teaching that I have received.

We would like to use the information you have provided in this feedback form anonymously.

If you provide your consent below, you are agreeing that such information can be used for conference presentations, presentation to participants or relevant community groups, and finally, they may be published in a peer-reviewed journal. You agree that such information may be used in this way without payment or further contact from the researcher/teacher for up to 7 years after the date provided below, when the information provided will be reviewed.

Testimonials: I consent to the details in this pro-forma to be used by the researcher/teacher in the ways stated above. I understand that the case study/testimonial material in its entirety, individual excerpts and specific quotes may be used.

Signed:	Name (please print):	Date: 2/7/18
Email address/telephone number (please provide your preferred contact details):		

APPENDIX XVI. TABLE 3.4 EXPANDED: LANGUAGE LEARNING RELATED TOPICS IN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON LLSNS

Research Focus	Study	Number of Studies	% of the Total of Studies
Autonomy	Andriani (2013); Brick (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liaw (2011); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017); Rosell-Aguilar (2018)	14	35.8%
Collaboration	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011b); Harrison (2013); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liu et al. (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010); Pélissier & Qotb (2012)	9	23%
Interaction and discourse	Álvarez (2015); Chik (2015), Gruba & Clark (2013); Jee & Park (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	8	20.5%
Motivation	Brick (2011a); Brick (2013); Jee & Park (2009); Kétyi (2015); Liu et al. (2015); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	8	20.5%
Cultural exchange	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Harrison & Thomas (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Guikema (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	7	17.9%
Feedback	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); De Azevedo (2013); Gruba & Clark (2013); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	7	17.9%
Informal learning	Brick (2012); Chwo et al. (2012); Kétyi (2015); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	6	15.3%
Community learning	Brick (2013); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Jee & Park (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Guikema (2013)	5	12.8%
Formal learning	Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Malerba (2011); Zourou & Lamy (2013)	5	12.8%
Identity	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012)	5	12.8%
Language Exchange	Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Guikema (2013)	5	12.8%
Peers' assistance/scaffolding	Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Liu et al. (2015)	5	12.8%
Social-constructivist learning	Clark & Gruba (2010); De Azevedo (2013); Harrison (2013); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2011)	5	12.8%

Authentic materials	Brick (2011a); Brick (2011b); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Gruba & Clark (2013)	4	10.2%
Ecology of languages	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Clark & Gruba (2010); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020)	4	10.2%
Effective learning	Brick (2011a); De Azevedo (2013); Kétyi (2015); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016)	4	10.2%
Engagement	Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Malerba (2012); Liu et al. (2015); Guikema (2013)	4	10.2%
Negotiation of meaning	Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Malerba (2011); Guikema (2013)	4	10.2%
Personal Learning Environment (PLE)	Brick (2011a); Brick (2012); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Malerba (2011)	4	10.2%
Real-life contexts	Clark & Gruba (2010); Liaw (2011); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	4	10.2%
Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	Brick (2011b); De Azevedo (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	4	10.2%
Active learning	Harrison (2013); Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	3	7.6%
Basic skills	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	3	7.6%
Communicative experience	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Liaw (2011)	3	7.6%
Grammar exercises	Brick (2011a); Jee & Park (2009); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	3	7.6%
Impression management	Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Liaw (2011)	3	7.6%
Learner generated content	Malerba (2011); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	3	7.6%
Tandem learning	Brick (2011b); De Azevedo (2013); Lloyd (2012)	3	7.6%
Agency	Álvarez (2016); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	2	5.1%
Attitudes and perceptions	Chwo et al. (2012); Malerba (2012)	2	5.1%
Immediacy	Brick (2011a); Brick (2011b)	2	5.1%
Individual learning	Brick (2012); Brick (2013)	2	5.1%
Intercultural awareness	Chwo et al. (2012); Jee & Park (2009)	2	5.1%
Learning materials	Brick (2011a); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	2	5.1%
Noticing	Jee & Park (2009); Malerba (2012)	2	5.1%
Online learning community	Liaw (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	2	5.1%
Privacy issues	Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Harrison & Thomas (2009)	2	5.1%
Self-directed learning	Liu et al. (2015); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011)	2	5.1%
Socialisation	Álvarez (2016); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	2	5.1%
Structural language	Álvarez (2015); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011)	2	5.1%
TELL / CALL / MALL	Álvarez (2016); Kétyi (2015)	2	5.1%

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)	Guikema (2013)	1	2.5%
Assessment	Gruba & Clark (2013)	1	2.5%
Associationism: contiguity and repetition	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Blogging service	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Building relationships	Guikema (2013)	1	2.5%
Chat: text, audio, video	Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	1	2.5%
Cognitive view of SLA	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Computer-based training	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Conversational aspect of learning languages	Stevenson & Liu (2010)	1	2.5%
Creation of knowledge	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Creativity	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Critical literacy skills	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Cross-cultural differences	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Different learners' levels	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Discourse analysis	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Educational modelling	Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011);	1	2.5%
Efficiency	Kétyi (2015)	1	2.5%
Electrate language	De Azevedo (2013)	1	2.5%
Emotional factors	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Ethnicity	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
e-Tandem	Stevenson & Liu (2010)	1	2.5%
Flashcards	Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011)	1	2.5%
Flexibility	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Friendship performance	Harrison & Thomas (2009)	1	2.5%
Functional – notional syllabus	Liaw (2011)	1	2.5%
Gamification	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Gender	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Groups	Orsini-Jones et al. (2013)	1	2.5%
Horizontality	Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011);	1	2.5%
Immersive experience	Guikema (2013)	1	2.5%
Incentivisation	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Instructional context	Malerba (2012)	1	2.5%
Instructivist approach	Lloyd (2012)	1	2.5%
Integral awareness	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Interactive Multimedia Content	Stevenson & Liu (2010)	1	2.5%
Invisible Learning	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Language selection / alternation	Malerba (2012)	1	2.5%
Learner centred learning	Harrison (2013)	1	2.5%
Learner empowerment	Malerba (2011); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	1	2.5%
Learners' roles (student / tutor)	Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011);	1	2.5%
Learning behaviour	Malerba (2015)	1	2.5%

Learning by doing	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Learning community	Malerba (2015)	1	2.5%
Learning preferences	Lloyd (2012)	1	2.5%
Learning strategy	Chwo et al. (2012)	1	2.5%
Learning style	Chwo et al. (2012)	1	2.5%
Learning through observation	Clark & Gruba (2010)	1	2.5%
Lifelong learning	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Linguistic proficiency	Guikema (2013)	1	2.5%
Mode, design and inter-semiotic relationships	Álvarez (2016)	1	2.5%
Multimodality	Álvarez (2015)	1	2.5%
Mutual learning	Harrison (2013)	1	2.5%
Openness	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Participatory online environment	Álvarez (2015)	1	2.5%
Pedagogical usability	Stevenson & Liu (2010)	1	2.5%
Phrasebooks	Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011)	1	2.5%
Placement	Gruba & Clark (2013)	1	2.5%
Pragmatic competence	Guikema (2013)	1	2.5%
Productive skills	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Progress	Gruba & Clark (2013)	1	2.5%
Project based instruction	Guikema (2013)	1	2.5%
Reciprocity	Brick (2011b)	1	2.5%
Relationships building	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Repairs strategies	Malerba (2012)	1	2.5%
Roles	Malerba (2012)	1	2.5%
Semiotic design	Álvarez (2015)	1	2.5%
Sense of community	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Social context	Chwo et al. (2012)	1	2.5%
Social practices	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Socio-pragmatic awareness	Malerba (2011);	1	2.5%
Specific interests	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Stepping stones in SLA	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Structured language learning communities	Harrison (2013)	1	2.5%
Supportive atmosphere	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Target language practice	Bündgens-Kosten (2011)	1	2.5%
Task Based Learning (TBL)	Lamy & Mangenot (2013)	1	2.5%
Turn-talking	Malerba (2012)	1	2.5%
Web 2.0 learning environments	Malerba (2011)	1	2.5%
Word lists	Brick (2011a)	1	2.5%
TOTAL STUDIES		**39**	**100%**

APPENDIX XVII. TABLE 3.9 EXPANDED: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ABOUT LLSNS

Theoretical Framework	Study	Number of Studies	% of the Total of Studies
Socio-cultural theory	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Brick (2011b); Chwo et al. (2012); Gruba & Clark (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Liu et al. (2013); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2012); Malerba (2015); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Zourou & Loiseau (2013)	15	38.4%
Social constructivism	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Álvarez & Fernández, 2019; Brick (2012); Clark & Gruba (2010); De Azevedo (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Liu et al. (2015); Lloyd (2012); Malerba (2011); Rosell-Aguilar (2018); Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou (2017)	13	33.3%
Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development	Gruba & Clark (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009); Lamy & Mangenot (2013); Malerba (2011); Malerba (2015);	7	17.9%
No identifiable theoretical framework	Andriani (2013); Brick (2011a); Bündgens-Kosten (2011); Kétyi (2015); Liaw (2011); Guikema (2013); Vesselinov & Grego, (2016)	7	17.9%
Community of practice	Álvarez (2015); Brick (2013); Zourou & Lamy (2013); Pélissier & Qotb (2012)	4	10.2%
Ecologies of learning and teaching	Álvarez (2015); Álvarez (2016); Clark & Gruba (2010); Ngo, & Eichelberger (2020)	4	10.2%
Social interactionism	De Azevedo (2013); Harrison (2013); Harrison & Thomas (2009);	3	7.6%
More Knowledgeable Other	Harrison & Thomas (2009); Jee & Park (2009);	2	5.1%
Social Cognitive Theory	Harrison & Thomas (2009); Orsini-Jones et al. (2013);	2	5.1%
Behaviourism	Álvarez (2016); Loiseau, Potolia, & Zourou (2011)	2	5.1%
Usability Testing	Liu et al. (2015); Stevenson & Liu (2010)	2	5.1%
Active learning	Harrison & Thomas (2009)	1	2.5%
Activity theory	Malerba (2015);	1	2.5%
Cognitivism	Álvarez (2016);	1	2.5%
Collaborative learning	Stevenson & Liu (2010)	1	2.5%
Connectivism	De Azevedo (2013);	1	2.5%
Constructivist pedagogy	Lloyd (2012);	1	2.5%
Grounded theory	Álvarez (2016);	1	2.5%

Instructivist pedagogy	Lloyd (2012);	1	2.5%
Instrumental enrichment	Harrison (2013);	1	2.5%
Interactionist model	Jee & Park (2009);	1	2.5%
Interpretive paradigm	Malerba (2015);	1	2.5%
Mediation (ZPD)	Harrison (2013);	1	2.5%
Social bonding	Harrison & Thomas (2009);	1	2.5%
Structured language learning process	Harrison & Thomas (2009);	1	2.5%
TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDIES		**39**	**100%**