

**Portfolios
and
Learner Autonomy:
the case of undergraduates
learning German**

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BY

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if you try hard
you mat get it Rayt.

My daughter Clara, 6

DECLARATION

This work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of a degree, qualification or other course.

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Ulrike Bavendiek

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Abstract

Ulrike Bavendiek: Portfolios and Learner Autonomy: the case of undergraduates learning German

In the present thesis the impact of a language learner development scheme to promote learner autonomy in mostly L1 English-speaking students in a German Language Degree Course at the University of Liverpool is examined.

For the purpose of the investigation, a new, theoretically motivated process model of learner autonomy is put forward. In order to investigate the claimed effects identified from the model, a guided independent language learning programme, based on portfolio learning, was developed and established as an assessed part of the German Course. The aim of the Scheme was to raise awareness of the language learning process and thereby improve metacognitive language learning strategy use and motivation. There were two sections to the study, quasi-experimental and longitudinal.

The quasi-experimental study was carried out with the 55 students in the experimental group and 22 students in the control group. The anticipated effects of the Portfolio Programme on the students' use of metacognitive language learning strategies and on the feeling of control over the learning process could not be confirmed. Yet, in surveys and interviews, the students from the experimental group reported some improvement with regard to these variables.

In addition to the expected effects of the Programme, the students' own accounts of the experience were investigated. It was found that the reported effects sometimes differed from those derived from the theory. In-depth interviews with individual students suggested that only students with a specific set of learner characteristics can benefit from the Programme.

For the longitudinal study, the learners were asked at different points throughout their Degree Course about the effects of the treatment they experienced in their first year at University. Thus, both immediate and long-term effects were recorded and all data was triangulated. Since the Portfolio Programme builds on experiential learning and awareness of the learning process, some effects took time to manifest themselves in the learning experience. The reported long-term effects therefore differed from those reported immediately after the treatment.

Finally, the relationships between the individual effects were investigated with the aim of subjecting the underlying theory to critical analysis. Although there was a productive synergy of the individual effects of the Portfolio Programme, further research is necessary to pinpoint the areas most efficiently targeted for learner development.

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1. Introduction

Teaching languages in different educational and cultural settings over the last twenty years, I became intrigued by the role autonomy and specifically strategies were assumed to play in language learning. In particular, I noticed a discrepancy between the importance ascribed to the concept by linguists and educationists on one hand and by learners and practitioners on the other hand.

As a preparation for lifelong learning, learner autonomy has sometimes been seen as an educational goal in itself. It has also been argued that autonomous learners are more motivated and better able to direct their own learning. Thus, the concept implies better language learning achievement. By definition, autonomy is therefore a positive and desirable condition worth being promoted. As a consequence, the construct of autonomy, alongside related terms such as independence, self-direction and learning awareness, has influenced the practice of foreign language teaching, as can be observed in the ever increasing numbers of self-access centres and language advisers. As Gremmo and Riley (1995:154) already observed in 1995, 'developing learner autonomy is nowadays a much stated goal in the national curricula'. Interventions in the form of learner development programmes were introduced to traditional language courses with the aim of fostering autonomy. Yet the autonomous approach is based on philosophical, psychological, political and educational theories rather than on empirical evidence. In fact, when I started this project in 1998, empirical evidence of the effectiveness of pedagogical procedures aiming at autonomy was rare, as Benson (2001:186) and Dickinson (1987:1), among others, point out. Yet, before interventions to the current language teaching practice should be promoted, I believe that the following three basic questions need to be addressed empirically:

1. Can language learner autonomy be promoted through pedagogical interventions?

2. If so, which interventions are effective in the promotion of language learner autonomy?

3. What are the effects of greater language learner autonomy?

My position as language adviser at the University of Liverpool came with the explicit responsibility to promote autonomous language learning. However, although the idea of language learner autonomy appealed to me because of its sound theoretical background, some doubts remained with regard to the claimed benefits. I therefore decided to investigate the effects of supported independent language learning on the people engaged in such a scheme, trying to answer the aforementioned questions. I was fortunate to be able to conduct the present, interventionist study, since my position allowed me to establish a learner development programme and to research its impact on the students.

Following this introduction, I will outline the origins of the idea of language learner autonomy in the second chapter. I will then review the theory, with a focus on the developmental process towards autonomy. Arguing for an awareness raising approach, chapter three will close with a new definition and process model of language learner autonomy derived from the literature.

Based on the model, a treatment was developed with the aim of promoting awareness and reflectivity. It is based on the guided, supervised portfolio work described in chapter four.

The Portfolio Programme was introduced as a mandatory part of the first year post A-level German Degree Course. In addition to their regular language lessons with the tutors, the students had to complete four projects for their individual portfolio of independent language learning. After completion of each project, the language adviser not only provides feedback and guidance, but also encourages the student to reflect on the learning process in a one to one discussion. In addition to the learning conversations, learner diaries are used in order to develop the students' independent language learning skills. The

effectiveness of the Programme and the individual learner development tools will be examined as part of the investigation.

Chapter five will provide an overview of the studies, which will be presented in chapters six to eight. The studies are predominantly based on the students' self-reports and comprise both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantification of elusive constructs such as reflectivity and motivation posed one of the biggest challenges of the research project. The appropriateness of the research instruments will be evaluated as part of the conclusions. However, this thesis is based on the belief that such difficulties have to be overcome in order to gather evidence regarding the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions.

In the final chapter I will summarise the results from the different parts of the study and develop pedagogical recommendations for learner development based on the outcomes of the investigation.

2. The role of learner autonomy in language learning

Over the last three decades, autonomy in language learning has become an important idea both for research in applied linguistics and language teaching practice. Having evolved from a range of ideas and developments in the 1960s and 70s, learner autonomy is an abstract, multifaceted concept that has been defined from different angles and purposes in the research literature. Palfreyman (2003b:184) notes that it is 'a reference point and subject of debate for language education professionals' with 'different interpretations'. He further observes that learner autonomy is generally accepted as a 'good thing' in the research and teaching communities due to the very ambiguity of the term itself. Yet if interpretations are not made explicit, practical consequences can lead to disagreement, since they are drawn from more precise understandings of the term.

In the second chapter the construct will therefore be explained and defined for the purpose of this study. Starting with interpretations which highlight different dimensions of the term autonomy, I will then compare it to the related concept of independence. Finally, I will give a historical account of the concept and describe its roots, leading to a more contemporary understanding.

2.1. What is autonomy in language learning?

Benson and Voller (1997:1-2, emphases in the original) identify five different dimensions in the definitions of autonomy in language education. They note that the term is used in the research literature to describe '*situations*', '*a set of skills*', '*an inborn capacity*', '*the exercise of learners' responsibility*' and '*the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning*' (cf. Broady and Kenning 1996).

In the first part of the chapter, the same categories will be used in order to group the definitions and explanations in the literature on autonomy in language learning. However, it has to be noted that each of the researchers cited below

works with a multi-faceted concept of autonomy, each including several dimensions. Oxford (2003:76-80) develops a model of autonomy containing the four perspectives 'technical, psychological, sociocultural and political-critical'. She argues that

Future research should combine as many perspectives as possible in any given study. No single perspective should be considered antithetical to any other perspective, although some theorists would have us believe that antagonism is inevitable. (Oxford 2003:90)

2.1.1. Five aspects of autonomy

2.1.1.1. Autonomy as a situation

A general perception of a problem in lock-step teaching procedures in the 1970s (cf. Broady and Kenning 1996b:11) coincided with the introduction of self-access centres for language learners in schools and HE institutions. One of the initial forces to promote language learner autonomy came from applied linguists and staff establishing and working in self-access centres, which had been introduced in many educational institutions in response to the increasing demand for language learning. As a consequence, the emerging concept of autonomy in language learning was sometimes related to self-access and self-instruction, i.e. to learning without a teacher. Dickinson (1987) explains:

This term [autonomy] describes the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. In full autonomy there is no involvement of a 'teacher' or an institution. And the learner is also independent of specially prepared materials. Dickinson (1987:11)

In this definition, autonomy is the situation in which the learner works alone in self-instruction, whereas self-instruction itself can be partial, e.g. as part of a language class.

Pure self-instruction is logically based on self-access, without any teacher

intervening to filter or enhance the language input.

Self-access centres can play a facilitating role for the development of learner autonomy in this view, since they provide the environments, conditions and resources, such as choice, flexibility and multimedia access to authentic materials and possibly native speakers, which are regarded as beneficial for the development of learner autonomy, as pointed out by Esch (1996).

Yet, although autonomy is often related to self-instruction or self-access, I would agree with most researchers that learning under these specified conditions does not in itself represent autonomy.

2.1.1.2. Autonomy as a capacity

Most researchers agree with Little (1991), that

Essentially, autonomy is a *capacity* - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. (Little 1991:4, emphasis in the original)

Little argues further that the capacity for autonomy is innate. Yet it becomes stunted if not used. The fact that learners do not need to draw on their capacity in formal education, but can to an extent rely on the teacher to organise their learning, often results in the loss of the ability to manage their learning.

2.1.1.3. Autonomy as the exercise of learner responsibility

In some cases, autonomy is regarded as the mental state of taking ownership of or responsibility for the learning process. This can either be in self-access or self-instruction, as outlined above, or in a traditional classroom setting, in case the learner made the conscious decision of this being the preferred way to achieve a higher proficiency level in the foreign language. Holec (1987) explains

that the learners need to have real choice and take responsibility for their decisions as the managers of their learning:

Learners should have the choice between taking full responsibility for the process or simply submitting to it. They should be free to decide whether they want to self-direct their learning or to let others direct it for them. (Holec 1987:147)

2.1.1.4. Autonomy as a set of skills

Holec (1981:3) developed the most quoted definition of autonomy in language learning. He specifies autonomy as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning'. This definition makes two diverse demands on the abilities of autonomous learners: On the affective level, they have to be willing, which means that they need self-regulation of their emotions and motivational skills. Hurd (1998:70) calls this the 'willingness to take an active part'.

On the cognitive and metacognitive level, on the other hand, the learners need the skills and strategies necessary to take responsibility for their learning.

As opposed to the capacity for learner autonomy, which is innate, the ability to take responsibility needs to be developed. Holec (1981) states that the

ability to manage one's own learning is not inborn but must be acquired either by 'natural' means or (as most often happens) by formal learning, i.e. in a systematic, deliberate way. (Holec 1981:3; cf. Bimmel and Rampillon 2000:5)

Autonomous learners need the skills to plan, organise, monitor and evaluate their learning.

Yet institutionalized learning offers little room to practise this ability. In fact, most decisions regarding the content and process of learning are usually made by some educational authority, such as curriculum writers and teachers.

Since skills need to be developed through practice, the learners must be given

the space to develop their autonomy. Broady and Kenning (1996) explain that

it is difficult to imagine how students might achieve the goal of greater autonomy without actually being engaged in taking responsibility for the organisation and conduct of their learning. (Broady and Kenning 1996b:9)

Various approaches to learner training are based on the recognition of learning skills and strategies as an important precondition for full autonomy, as discussed in chapter three.

2.1.1.5. Autonomy as a right

Giving learners a voice in what, how and when they learn is sometimes regarded as an entitlement. In this view, learner autonomy is a right as well as a responsibility of the learner. Krumm (1996:62) refers to the pedagogy of Freinet when he claims that learner autonomy is based on the right of the students to own both their learning processes and rhythms. Kenny (1993) goes one step further when he argues that true education is not possible without autonomy:

Only when autonomy is being allowed to function is education taking place at all. For where autonomy is repressed or ignored [...] then what we have is not education but some sort of conditioning procedure; the imposition and reinforcement of dominant opinion. (Kenny 1993:440)

Meeting the needs of the individual learner is the basic idea of learner-centredness and individuality in education. Yet, whereas choice with regard to the process of learning can be accommodated in many educational contexts, it is more difficult to grant with regard to the content of learning. Consequently, material for self-instruction, which allows the learner to work at their own pace, yet prescribes the content of learning, will not necessarily lead to autonomy.

2.1.2. Autonomy and independence in language learning: a clarification of terms

As in the present study, many researchers use the terms autonomy and independence as synonyms. Although attempts have been made to distinguish between both terms through the feature of interdependence, i.e. the involvement of others, there is disagreement as to what both terms refer to. Deci and Flaste (1996) define autonomy and independence as follows:

Independence means to do for yourself, to *not* rely on others for personal nourishment and emotional support. Autonomy, in contrast, means to act freely, with a sense of volition and choice. (Deci and Flaste 1996:89, emphasis in the original)

However, in this study learning is generally understood to be a social-interactive process, resulting from interaction in the broadest sense, including interaction with text. Language learning cannot take place in isolation, without the input of target language speakers. Encounters with speakers and texts will usually have some form of affective response, which the autonomous or independent learner is able to manage. Both terms can therefore be used for the same concept.

2.2. A historical account of learner autonomy

The idea of autonomy is not new. McDevitt (1997) observes:

Good teachers, like good parents, have always recognised that their students, or their children, are with them for a very short time. Thus, their students must be equipped with the means to cope when they are no longer around. [...] In this sense learner autonomy has always been an implicit goal of all education. (McDevitt 1997:35)

It is therefore revealing of the language teaching practice prior to the 1970s that applied linguists and language teachers started to recognise the lack of learner autonomy as a major problem for the efficient learning of languages. Consequently, the quest for greater autonomy carried with it the call for

considerable changes and innovations in language teaching.

Gremmo and Riley (1995) pinpoint the problem when they observe that

the capacity to think and act independently has always been highly regarded by most, if not all, of the world's societies, even if in practice it has often been the privilege of an elite. (Gremmo and Riley 1995:152)

With the introduction of compulsory education, the goal of learner autonomy often disappeared behind the goal of effectively transmitting knowledge to high numbers of students. In the language teaching context, this meant that language teachers were faced with the challenge of teaching a foreign language in institutionalised education to more people than ever before. Different methods were developed to confront the new challenge, such as the audiolingual and audiovisual methods. However, in a 'breakaway from [the] method concept', teachers and researchers shifted their attention towards the roles of the 'curriculum', 'language learning research' and 'human relations' as explained by Stern (1983:113). The outcomes of research in various disciplines were amalgamated in different approaches. Rösler (1998:3) thus describes the confident, post 1970s approach to foreign language pedagogy as one that was eager to integrate new findings and developments from other disciplines into the theory and practice of language learning and teaching, rather than applying new methods. The assumption that better instruction methods would lead to ever increasing language proficiency was replaced by an interest in the learning process itself, as noted by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:5).

The most influential innovation in language pedagogy of the time was the new focus on communicative competence and in its course the move towards communicative language teaching (cf. Stern 1983). Benson and Voller (1997:10) note that 'the question ceased to be, "Should we be teaching languages communicatively", and became, "How do we teach languages communicatively?"'. The imaginative changes brought about by the communicative approach, for a short time overshadowed the search for learner autonomy. The ideas of individualism and learner-centredness, however,

developed from within that framework.

The search for learner autonomy evolved naturally from diverse scholarly debates and discourses of the 1960s and early 1970s, as well as from advances and developments in technology and educational institutions. (cf. Benson 2001; Benson and Voller 1997; Gremmo and Riley 1995). Especially the political and philosophical arguments had a strong influence on early discussions of the concept. The work at CRAPEL (Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pédagogiques en Langues) under the directorship of Henri Holec (1972-1998) can be regarded as the cornerstone of the academic debate of language learner autonomy in Europe. Edith Esch, who had worked at the Centre, later became an important proponent of the concept in the UK. In 1990, the idea was firmly established in the wider debate of language learning methodologies through a CILT (Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research) Conference with the title 'Autonomy in Language Learning' (Gathercole 1990). In the same year, the University of Cambridge Language Centre was the first to be established as an Academic Service under the directorship of Esch and the first language adviser was put in post. Since then, the role of the language adviser in addition to the language teacher has been developed in the UK. It was based on the perception that the users of the newly established language centres would benefit from an adviser, who could guide and help them make the best use of the resources.

In the academic year 1995/1996, some TQA (Teaching Quality Assessment) reports found that many Self-Access Centres were still not used to their full potential (Mozzon-McPherson and Vismans 2001b:1). The FDTL (Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning) funded project SMILE (Strategies for Managing an Independent Learning Environment) brought together Language Advisers from different universities in the UK with the aim of disseminating good practice of advising for language learning. In this context, the project leader, Marina Mozzon-McPherson (2001:12) established a particular form of language learning advice on the view that 'knowledge is constructed through negotiation and interaction with others rather than taught by experts'. In a dialogue with the language adviser, the students reflect on their learning processes and

behaviour. This develops their metacognitive awareness, which, in turn, should help them choose more efficient learning strategies. The approach is currently being taught on a programme for the 'Online Certificate in Advising for Language Learning' at the University of Hull.

In the following paragraphs, discourses and developments leading to the concept of learner autonomy for language learning will be briefly outlined, with a focus on the most significant for this study, the psychological discourse.

2.2.1. The origins of the idea of learner autonomy

The discourse of learner autonomy is loaded with interpretations and assumptions about learning. It draws on established discourses in order to legitimate itself (cf. Palfreyman 2003b:185). In the following section, I will try to bring hidden associations to light by investigating these individual discourses, so that the beliefs underlying the term in the present study can be clarified.

2.2.1.1. Technological advances

In their beginnings, most self-access centres started as simple resource centres, offering a 'Mediothek', i.e. technology useful for language learning, such as audio and video facilities and computers for individual use. Technological and industrial advances such as the burgeoning travel industry, photocopiers, video and tape-recorders, telephones and finally CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) and CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) gave easy access to target language material and speakers of the target language. For a short time, this led to the illusion that language teaching had become superfluous and that in future only 'facilitators' would be needed to help the learners find their way through the abundance of language learning material.

2.2.1.2. The political discourse

It had long been recognised that in a participatory democracy, citizens have to act on their own authority. In the 1960s, self-determination, autonomy and responsibility were identified as crucial goals in education. All educational experiences were expected to empower its participants and raise their confidence. To start with, students demanded relevance and participation in decisions regarding their learning. As Benson (1997:29) explains: 'learner autonomy represents a recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems'. The political discourse brought with it the call for lifelong learning, which greatly influenced the educational discourse of the time. A logical response to the challenge of preparing students for lifelong learning was the recognition of the importance of learning how to learn.

2.2.1.3. The educational discourse

The educational discourse dominating the agenda in Applied Linguistics was based on three social trends:

4. The political idea of education as a right and a form of empowerment and
5. the practical demand for a workforce that was able to cope with ever changing challenges resulted in the call for lifelong learning. Key skills and transferable skills were regarded as more important than specific knowledge, which would date quickly.
6. Immigration played an important role in Western Societies and due attention was paid to the linguistic needs of immigrant workers. At the same time, more and more people started to travel for leisure and work purposes, turning language learning into an essential element of the global society.

As a consequence of those trends, language learning became less of a scholastic pursuit of a group of relatively homogenous learners, as had been the case in much traditional language teaching before, but a real need for learners from diverse backgrounds. Appropriate language use in the target

language community became the aim of language teaching, which at the same time had to respond to the individual learner needs, backgrounds and experiences. This resulted in a new focus on learner-centredness and individualization. Self-access centres were often introduced to cope cost-effectively with large numbers of learners.

Based on the demands of adult learning (cf. Holec 1981), the idea of learner autonomy can be regarded as a logical consequence of the challenges of the time.

2.2.1.4. The psychological discourse

In response to behaviourism, constructivism started to influence emerging theories of learning, emphasising the fact that knowledge cannot be transmitted but must be created or 'constructed' (cf. Benson 2001, Kolb 1984). Constructivism adds an epistemological view to the discussion of learning, based on the understanding that 'knowledge is subjectively perceived and actively constructed by learners' (Müller 2000:46). Wolff (1999:42) elaborates on the theory of the 'moderate constructivism'¹, which is the most influential model in educational theory, since it concerns itself with the processing of information, as Wendt (2000b:19) explains. Wolff (1999:42) describes how knowledge is stored in schematic structures, which represent it in different forms (networks, frameworks, schemata, routines). Ultimately, each person integrates new information and experiences into their own existing structures, or patterns of connections. The result of any learning process therefore necessarily differs for each person, because every individual has different experiences and different knowledge. Accordingly, van Lück (1996:7) describes learning as a circular process of self-organisation and construction, in which structures of knowledge are built, reorganised and extended.²

In this view, learners have to be active participants in the learning process, and the focus consequently moves from teaching to learning. Reinmann-Rothmeier and Mandl (1996:41, cf. Wendt 2000) thus ask for a move from the primacy of

instruction towards the primacy of construction.

Furthermore, all learning is individual and 'personally significant' by definition. Individual meanings and knowledge systems are constructed from individual experiences. This corresponds to the ideas of learner-centredness and individualism.

Müller (2000) describes the consequences of this approach for the teacher:

The results of learning processes are unpredictable and heterogeneous, because individual differences exist both on the part of the previous knowledge and of the constructed or newly arranged knowledge. (Müller 2000:46)

Two seemingly disparate approaches from within the constructivist framework were adapted to the needs of this study: Kolb's experiential learning cycle and Thomas and Harri-Augsteins' 'learning conversations' will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.3. A contemporary understanding of learner autonomy

For reasons explained above, many proponents of the idea regarded the promotion of learner autonomy as an important goal in itself and argued that learning skills should be assessed alongside language skills (e.g. Holec 1981:4).

In the 1990s, however, the arguments for autonomous language learning concentrated on the aim of efficiently achieving greater language proficiency, seeing autonomous learning predominantly as a means to this end. Little (1995:176) states that 'the whole point of developing learner autonomy is to enable learners to become autonomous users of their target language'. In fact, the quality of the target language use resulting from a more autonomous form of language learning is sometimes regarded as superior, because the 'authenticity of the communicative exchanges is guaranteed', as Legenhausen (2003:67) argues. He concludes on his comparison of peer-to-peer talk of learners in a

communicative and in an autonomous classroom, which provided the learners with a range of choices (Legenhausen 1999):

Since students [in the autonomous classroom] are not concerned with 'do as if' exercises, but engage in activities of their own choice and according to their own interests and needs, they do not construe a contrast between authentic and didactic tasks. (Legenhausen 1999:181)

The autonomous approach is consequently regarded as beneficial for learning languages. This is also supported by the fact that language learners themselves appreciate greater autonomy in the classroom. In their study on the perception of classroom environments, Burden and Williams (1998) find that

[students] obviously value personal recognition [...], enjoy being actively involved in language learning and appreciate opportunities to work independently. (Burden and Williams 1998:31)

However, the same study shows that students perceive the level of independence granted to them in a classroom as much higher than their teachers do. This finding can be read as a warning to teachers not to overwhelm their students with a level of autonomy they cannot cope with, because seemingly little steps towards greater learner responsibility are regarded as major changes by the students. Rather, more choice and responsibility should be introduced gradually, giving them a chance to rise to the challenge.

As described previously, the term autonomy was sometimes associated with the situation of learning without a teacher and self-access centres were regarded as the most suitable environment for the promotion of learner autonomy. Yet, some researchers and language teachers in traditional settings, especially teachers in HE and secondary schools, have emancipated themselves from the idea that self-instruction or self-access are prerequisites for autonomous language learning (Dam 1995, Little 1991:3, cf. Little et al. 2003). Thus, autonomy has become a goal that teachers and learners in traditional classroom settings can

work towards. Vieira (2003) developed a definition of a pedagogy of learner autonomy in traditional settings:

A pedagogy for autonomy in the school context seeks to move the learner closer to the learning process and content, by enhancing conditions which increase motivation to learn, interdependence relationships, discourse power, ability to learn and to manage learning, and a critical attitude towards teaching and learning. (Vieira 2003:224)

Following the assumption that autonomy in learning needs to be promoted and fostered, rather than occurring naturally in the majority of pupils, new techniques for enhancing language learning were developed, as discussed in the email discussion list AUTO-L, which is managed by members of the AILA Scientific Commission on Learner Autonomy. Diverse practices such as negotiation and the 'process syllabus' (Breen and Littlejohn 2000a), reflection and the promotion of language and learning awareness (Little 1997a; Dam 1990), 'implicit input enhancement techniques' (Legenhausen 2003:66) and the authenticity of both the texts and the use of the target language in the classroom (Little 1997b) are being tested. Another promising approach to promoting autonomy within the limitations of institutional language learning is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) 'in which a number of content subjects are taught through the medium of a foreign language' (Wolff 2003:211), common in many 'Gymnasien' (grammar schools) in Germany. A third approach, chosen for this study and discussed in detail in chapter four, is portfolio learning. Vieira sums up the limitations and possibilities in her conclusions:

What emancipates us as professionals is not to do as we would like, but rather narrow the distance between that and what is feasible at a given moment of our professional history. (Vieira 2003:236)

Although teachers in the autonomous language classroom do not engage in traditional instruction in an attempt to transmit knowledge, in most cases they remain in ultimate control of the learning content. Dam (2003:135) even argues that 'it is largely the teacher's responsibility to develop learner autonomy',

thus adding to the teachers' responsibilities, rather than shifting it towards the students. However, the teaching practices mentioned above were developed under the real constraints of institutional learning and can be seen as pushing the boundaries towards greater learner involvement. Although still interventionist techniques, they give the students room to develop.

However, at times, such reinterpretations and practical applications diffuse the original idea of autonomy. Gathering the diverse activities listed above under a single definition such as 'autonomous language learning' becomes all but impossible. Thomsen (2003) consequently redefines learner autonomy:

As a general pedagogical goal, learner autonomy entails that the learner is fully *involved* in planning, monitoring and evaluating his or her learning. (Thomsen 2003:29, emphasis added)

Such a neutralized definition of autonomy denies its political and critical roots and turns it into an applicable concept in a variety of institutional and cultural settings, as Schmenk (2005) observes. It also makes it prone to misinterpretations. Recently, it has been noted that the term autonomy can now carry connotations which are detrimental to most of the original ideas behind it, such as learner empowerment and choice. Palfreyman (2003b:187 emphasis in the original) even finds that 'certain interpretations of autonomy can in fact *serve* established organizational discourses of structure and control'. Analysing university documentation and interviews with staff at a Turkish HE institution, he concludes that there are two distinct discourses of learner autonomy: The 'educationist discourse' focuses on 'attitudes and capacities in learners', whereas the "'training" interpretation' focuses on 'what learners should be able to *do*' (cf. Palfreyman 2003b:190 emphasis in the original). In this understanding, the learner is made responsible 'for coping with the organization' (Palfreyman 2003b:195). Demands and obligations imposed by the institution are thus redefined as 'learner needs'.

La Ganza (2002) finds that the term autonomy has altogether become too vague for his research purposes and therefore develops 'the construct of psychological space between the teacher and the learner-working-on-a-task',

in order to cover the practice of teacher and learners working towards a shared goal, with as little teacher intervention as possible.

With the realization that one of the most important characteristics of the autonomous language learner is the focus on self-expression and meaningful use of the target language, the search for autonomy has almost fully merged with the support for the communicative approach. Greater learner control regarding the process and content of learning is sometimes the only distinguishing feature between both approaches. Crabbe consequently (1999:3) describes the movement towards learner autonomy as 'an attempt by an international group of educationists to examine the relative roles of teachers and learners'.

2.3.1. The understanding of learner autonomy in the present study

As will be seen in the next chapter, the present investigation is based on a constructivist and experimental view of learning. In this framework, autonomy is developed from within the learner, based on previous experiences and the learner's individual characteristics. Learners are not regarded as 'deficient' or 'in lack of autonomy', but as individuals who can be encouraged and helped to draw greater benefits from their learning experiences. There is no notion of an 'ideal language learner' whose characteristics, skills and learning behaviour the students should aim towards. On a similar basis, Smith (2003) distinguishes between weak and strong pedagogies for learner autonomy. Whereas a weak pedagogy aims to lead the learner towards a predefined version of autonomy, which entails certain skills, strategies or situations, a strong pedagogy builds on and enhances the learners' own autonomy. In the learner development scheme developed for this study, the 'strong version' of learner autonomy will be envisaged.

Figure 2.1: 'Weak' and 'strong' versions of pedagogy for learner autonomy by Smith (2003:131)

Approach	Goal
<p>'Weak version':</p> <p>Awareness-raising ('training'/'preparation' for self-directed learning/learner autonomy)</p> <p>Learning strategy syllabus</p> <p>Presentation and practice of discrete 'good learning' strategies</p>	<p>→ Self-directed learning/learner autonomy (as envisaged by the teacher/syllabus/institution)</p>
<p>'Strong version':</p> <p>Exercise of students' own (partial) autonomy (via (partially) student-directed learning + reflection)</p> <p>Negotiated syllabus</p> <p>Experience of and reflection on student-directed learning</p>	<p>→ Awareness-raising (enhancement of student-directed learning/development of students' own autonomy)</p> <p>←</p>

¹ 'gemäßiger Konstruktivismus'

² 'Lernen ist ein zirkulärer Prozeß von Selbstorganisation und Konstruktion, in dem Wissensnetze neu aufgebaut, umgeordnet oder erweitert werden.' Van Lück (1996:7)

3. The process model of learner autonomy

In the present study, it is assumed that autonomy can be promoted. This view justifies interventions in the learning process which aim to help students develop greater autonomy. In this case, the intervention is a guided independent language learning programme especially developed for the investigation. It is based on a process model of learner autonomy which I extracted from the research literature on autonomous language learning. The implementation of the independent learning programme in a HE Modern Language Degree course will provide empirical data to test its underlying theoretical assumptions.

The chapter will start with the discussion of two comprehensive educational theories, which were very influential for the discussion of the practical and theoretical dimensions of language learner autonomy: Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) and Thomas' and Harri-Augstein's theory of self-organised learning (1985). I will then continue to present arguments for and theoretical assumptions behind the promotion of greater language learner autonomy. Summarising the research literature on the subject, I will finally develop the process model of learner autonomy.

3.1. Two relevant theories of experiential learning

Two disparate theories of experiential learning were utilized and adapted for the learner development scheme established for this study: Kolb's experiential learning cycle and Thomas and Harri-Augsteins' 'theory of self-organised learning'.

3.1.1. Kolb's experiential learning cycle

Kolb's experiential learning theory is a cognitive learning theory in the sense that it acknowledges the role of consciousness in learning. Based on the work of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget, it regards experience as the major component

in the learning process (cf. Kolb 1984:20-25). Different from traditional and behavioural learning theories, which are predominantly interested in learning outcomes, the focus of any experiential learning theory is on the process of learning. Kolb (1984) explains:

Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience. [...] Learning is [...] a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience. [...] Learning is an emergent process whose outcomes represent only historical record, not knowledge of the future. (Kolb 1984:26)

From these assumptions, Kolb develops the experiential learning cycle, which he describes as

a four-stage cycle involving four adaptive learning modes - concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb 1984:40).

The following is a simplified version of Kolb's learning cycle (Kolb 1984), adapted from the Lewinian Experiential Learning Model (Kolb 1984:21):

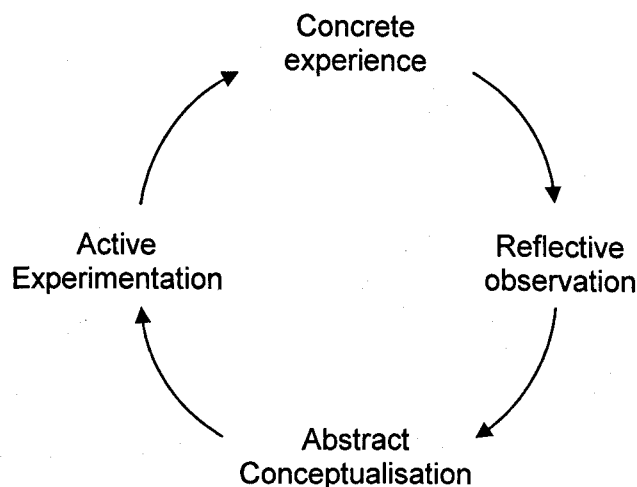


Figure 3.1: A simplified version of Kolb's learning cycle

Starting with the actual experience, the learner then reflects on it, observing the event and evaluating its outcome. From this, s/he abstracts, generalises and draws conclusions, which are then tested in active experimentation, which will again provide an experience to start another cycle.

Kolb believes that not progressing through one of the stages in the cycle can hinder learning. The educational process is therefore understood as helping the students to complete their cycles. In this context, the learning conversations developed by Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1991) can be seen as a procedure to assist students in following the cycle by reflecting on their learning experiences, abstracting from it and finally organising new experiences.

3.1.2. Thomas and Harri-Augstein's 'theory of self-organised learning'

Thomas and Harri-Augstein found that, although learning experiences provide a good resource for learning, conclusions drawn from them can be detrimental to further learning (1985). They explain that

it was suggested that certain of the constructions which we impose upon our experience develop into personal myths and models about our own intelligence, talents and potential. These mostly pessimistic assumptions about our own learning processes are often the major influence on our capacity to learn. (1985:38)

They developed the 'learning conversation', which is based on the idea that raising the learners' awareness of their learning process through a set of 'dialogues' (Thomas and Harri-Augstein 1991:207) will eventually lead them to complete self-organisation. Crucially, at the beginning of the process the learner is supported by an experienced other, who guides the conversation. Students are made conscious of their learning through learning contracts and their subsequent evaluation in conversations, which are guided and controlled by a 'manager'. In a second step, the 'personal myths about their learning' are challenged, with the aim of improving the learning process. The ultimate goal of the conversation is to pass control from the manager to the learners, so that

they are enabled to conduct the conversations internally, on their own. The learners must have space to assess the 'relevance' and 'viability' of the learning themselves. Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1991) manage to integrate the goal of learner autonomy into the experiential learning theory.

They maintain that learning behaviour can be automatic, an 'unconscious doing of the task (i.e. the "skilled" task robot)' (Thomas and Harri-Augstein 1991:213). Yet if the behaviour is inefficient, it needs to be raised to the level of consciousness to become more efficient. Thus, awareness of the learning process can be a necessary requirement to improve one's learning.

Giving the learner choice with regard to the learning process and content and at the same time supporting them through the cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization and fresh experimentation is believed to be beneficial for their learning. In the remaining part of the chapter I will outline the individual ideas on which the learner development scheme created for this study were founded. From this discussion, I will develop a process model, or 'virtuous circle' of autonomous learning, which summarises the individual stages from guided independent language learning to greater learner autonomy.

3.2. Five elements of learner autonomy

3.2.1. Guided independent language learning

If 'learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb 1984:38), it is important that students are provided with relevant experiences. In the context of autonomous language learning, this means that 'the only way of becoming autonomous is to be autonomous', as Little (2000: conference paper) puts it.

In a learner development programme based on the experiential learning theory, the learners therefore start with the concrete experience of independent learning. Although the learning experience is structured, the students are

confronted with a variety of choices regarding the process and content of their learning. Making their own decisions with regard to their learning is a crucial experience on their way towards autonomy.

3.2.2. Consciousness

Language learning processes, as many other forms of human behaviour, can be more or less conscious. It is generally assumed that consciousness is multi-layered (Kelly 1955:476) or multi-faceted (Van Lier 1996:69-70), yet this knowledge has not been implemented in the second and foreign language learning research so far and is put on the research agenda by Breen (2001:175). For the purpose of this investigation, I will refer to preverbal constructs as 'not conscious', 'nonconscious' or 'subconscious'. In other words, implicit knowledge of the learning process will be regarded as subconscious, whereas explicit knowledge is seen as conscious. This simplified notion of consciousness is appropriate for an investigation which is solely based on learners' self-report data. The term awareness is related to consciousness. Both terms will be used interchangeably.

Good language learners are likely to operate a range of efficient learning processes, such as skimming a text or picking out relevant vocabulary from a conversation and subjecting it to memory, without being aware of it. The lack of awareness may even speed up the process, making it a powerful tactic. Yet it may also hinder progress if the processes applied are inefficient or futile.

Linking consciousness to flexibility, Gleitman et al. (1998) define the role of consciousness for human behaviour as follows:

Perhaps we need consciousness in order to break away from automaticity, to pay attention to our performance on precisely those tasks on which we must preserve flexibility. For these, we must remain mindful of what we are doing, so that we can choose, step-by-step, how our actions will unfold. Consciousness, in other words, plays its role whenever we must avoid becoming victims of habit and whenever we have reason to give up the efficiency afforded us by nonconscious

processing. (Gleitman et al. 1998:340)

Efficient as nonconscious processing can be, it can also hinder the development of higher, or more efficient processes. In order to change and improve one's learning, it is crucial to become aware of it. McDonough (1995) finds that

processes that you can focus attention on, and strategies that you can adopt voluntarily, are activities which you can review and evaluate; therefore, they affect motivation, choice of future action [and] attributions of responsibility. (McDonough 1995:8)

Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1985) ascribe automaticity to internal 'robots':

These robots are incredibly useful in doing many of the routine tasks which would bore us silly if we had to carry them out at the full focus of awareness; and yet these same robots are always with us and can, too easily, take us over, [...] leaving very little of our free self available to create and enjoy new experiences. (Thomas and Harri-Augstein 1985:177)

Thomas and Harri-Augstein's learning conversations are rooted in psychoanalytic psychology, which is concerned with nonconscious internal processes, which can have a detrimental effect on a person's life and therefore need to be brought to consciousness to be changed.

Consciousness of the learning process can generally enhance learning. Rubin (1987) points out that successful learners also benefit from an awareness raising exercise:

Making learning decisions conscious can lead both poorer and better learners to improve the obtaining, storing, retrieving and using of information, that is, can lead them to learn better. (Rubin 1987:16)

Similarly, van Lier (1996) emphasises the fact that learning is enhanced when the learner is conscious of the learning process. He points out that

consciousness

allows for increasing self-regulation, for deeper processing, for more efficient learning actions, and for feelings of knowing, unknowing, and appropriate levels of confidence in one's own abilities. (van Lier 1996:71)

Awareness of the learning process, which is the prerequisite of all deliberate learning action, does not come naturally to all learners, but often needs to be cultivated. Holmes and Ramos (1991:200), for example, point out that 'learners do not, unaided, analyse their own learning effectively or diagnose their own problems successfully'. Raising awareness of the learning process has therefore become a widespread suggestion in Applied Linguistics. The Constitution of the Association for Language Awareness names the 'conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning' as an essential element of language awareness (cf. Scott 1994:91).

In order to raise awareness, it is important to help learners notice their processes and to reflect on them. Awareness of the language as well as the learning process is a necessary characteristic of the autonomous learner. Ridley (2003:78, emphasis in the original) regards the 'understanding of the language learning process' as 'a belief on the part of the learner that *he*, not the teacher, is the key agent in the process – in other words, that he is the origin of his learning behaviour'.

For van Lier (1996:73, emphases in the original) consciousness means 'the *organizing, controlling, and evaluating* of experience'. On the way to autonomy, therefore, reflection on the learning process can be seen as the stage immediately following the experience of independent language learning.

In recent years, foreign language teachers and researchers have been concerned with the development of tools to raise learning awareness. In the learner development programme developed for this study, open tasks, learner journals and learning conversations are used with the aim of enhancing the learners' consciousness of their learning, as discussed in chapter four.

3.2.3. Language learning strategies

The term 'language learning strategy' is rather elusive, as pointed out by Wenden (1987b:7), because it has been defined from various angles in different research contexts. For the purpose of this study, I will therefore position the term within the parameters of the cognitive theory of experiential learning described in the beginning of this chapter.

Research into language learning strategies is complicated by the fact that strategies are 'largely unobservable cognitive processes' and behaviours can only be 'applications of learning strategies' (Chamot and Rubin 1994:773).

Nold et al. (1997:28) also recognise the fact that strategies are not behaviours or actions, defining them as the essence of actions. In their definition, strategies are used more or less consciously by the subjects to stir their own actions in order to attain an identified goal, e.g. with regard to motivation, attention and information processing. Rather than being actions themselves, they structure the way actions are carried out in order to achieve a previously identified aim.³

In this definition, Nold et al. (1997), in accordance with many other researchers, describe strategy use as a more or less conscious process. Mißler (1999:109) finds that the number of language learning strategies available to the learner grows proportionally to, and the strategies themselves become more fine-tuned with, increasing language learning experience.⁴ In this view, it is the language learning experience itself, not the consciousness of the experience, which plays the major part in the development of language learning strategies.

Nevertheless, in the context of this study, which is based on cognitive learning theories, consciousness is regarded as essential for strategy use. Consciousness allows learners to favour efficient over less efficient behaviour.

Dickinson (1988) explains that

it is necessary for a learner to be or become aware of her own learning strategies if they are to be improved. Consciousness allows one to analyse processes/strategies and to distinguish those which are effective from those which are not so effective, which in turn enables one to retain

the effective ones and replace the ineffective ones. (Dickinson 1988:50)

Once they have identified the purpose or aim of their learning, they can choose a course of action likely to bring the expected results. Cohen (1998) states that strategies are

learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner. The element of choice is important here because this is what gives a strategy its special character. (Cohen 1998:4)

Choice is crucial for learners, because it allows them to apply the most effective strategy in any given language learning context. This is especially important with regard to the cognitive style of the individual, which is consistent and habitual. Whereas learning is easy when the cognitive style suits the task, it can be difficult or almost impossible in case the learner's personal style and the learning task do not fit. In that case, 'individuals may be helped by developing learning strategies for dealing with the material which is not initially compatible with their style' as Riding and Rayner (1998:80) explain.

However, 'after a certain amount of practice and use, learning strategies, like any other skill or behavior, can become automatic' (Oxford 1990:12). Since such nonconscious processes can be highly efficient, as explained before, this does not necessarily pose a problem. However, should they prove to be inefficient, thus hindering the progress of the learner, they need to be addressed and raised to the level of consciousness again.

In fact, in the experiential model of language learner autonomy developed for this study, consciousness is regarded as a prerequisite for strategy use. Similarly, Nold et al. (1997:30) work from the hypothesis that learner strategies develop through the analysis of learning actions.⁵ Reiss (1985:518, emphasis in the original), likewise, finds that 'above all, the good language learner is an ACTIVE participant in the conscious learning process.'

According to their principal goal, second language learner strategies can be classified as second language learning versus second language use

strategies. If 'the learners' needs to communicate clearly predominate over any interest they might have in learning the FL', the strategy is categorized as a language use strategy (Faerch and Kasper 1983b:22). If the main function is learning, the strategy would be regarded as a learning strategy. O'Malley and Chamot (1990:1) define learning strategies as 'the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information'. In this investigation, I will exclusively focus on language learning strategies.

From all learner characteristics influencing achievement, such as cognitive style and aptitude, learner strategies can be regarded as most susceptible to intervention, as observed by McDonough (1986:146). Their dynamic nature motivated a copious research activity on language learning strategies, with the outlook of a direct implementation of the results in the pedagogical context.

The research on language learning strategies can be broadly described as being rooted in two distinct theoretical backgrounds (cf. Wenden 2002). Based on the idea of the 'good language learner' (cf. Rubin 1975, Naiman et al. 1978) researchers tried to identify behaviours or strategies of high achieving language learners with the aim of helping less successful learners to acquire some of the 'good' strategies and thus enhancing their language learning capabilities. They suggested a link between strategy use and proficiency. Since this approach entails an expectation of high achievement for the less successful learner, it has to be seen as an important and optimistic step forward from the notion of the 'talented' learner, with talent being a given advantage or 'gift' which some learners, unfortunately, do not possess. However, this positivist view of learning is based on the ideas that there is a range of strategies worth using by most, maybe all learners, and that knowledge of strategies can be taught, i.e. transferred from the teacher to the learner. Many learner training or study skills workshops are based on this idea of learning, presenting strategies to the learners and giving them the opportunity to practise these strategies in specially prepared situations. Although this pragmatic approach is based on the direct teaching of strategies, it advises against being overly intrusive. Rather than involving the learner in additional sessions of strategy training, it is generally

acknowledged that it should be incorporated into the language learning context, as argued by Wenden (1987c). Cohen (1999) in his strategies-based instruction (SBI) programme combines strategies instruction with strategy integration. Similarly, Grenfell and Harris (1999:103-104) argue for embedded strategy instruction, developing a cyclic model which includes six stages:

1. **'consciousness raising'**
2. **'modelling'**
3. **'general practice'**
4. **'action planning; goal setting and monitoring'**
5. **'focused practice and fading out the reminders'**
6. **'evaluating strategy acquisition and fading out the reminders'**
(1999:75-103)

Integration is crucial for strategy training, because there are at least two separate stages with regard to the awareness of a new strategy, as Scott (1991:280) points out. First, the students need to know about a strategy. At a second stage, when the students feel the usefulness of that strategy, they experience the 'click of realisation'. As a consequence of this discussion, strategy training is now often embedded in some form of content based learning. The most influential strategy training or learning-to-learn programmes in Applied Linguistics all include a direct presentation of strategies by the teacher, e.g. those by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Chamot et al. (1999), Grenfell and Harris' (1999) and Macaro (2001) (see Harris 2003 for an overview).

In the meantime, research has shown that there are no 'good' or 'bad' strategies, but strategies that work or do not work for the individual learner in a particular situation or stage in their language learning (Oxford and Nyikos 1989; Yang 1999). Efficient learners are able to adapt their choice of strategies to the tasks and their individual learning styles, as Yamamori et al. (2003:382) point out. As a result, strategies instruction aims to teach students a broad range of strategies as well as the effective management of those strategies (cf. Chamot and Rubin 1994). However, in his review of strategy instruction programmes, Yang (1998) warns that 'strategy training that is not applied can lead to even

more passive knowledge being passed on in the curriculum'. More importantly, strategy instruction programmes are backed by little evidence that they work, as Dörnyei (2005:177) summarises in his overview. Yamamori (2003:385), among others, found that the relationship between strategy use and achievement is not linear. On the other hand Nakatani (2005:87) in his quasi-experimental study on strategy training and oral proficiency, discovered a causal link between both variables. More longitudinal studies are necessary to describe changes in learner strategy use and identify possible causes.

Whereas the research into expert strategy use and the practical applications of its outcomes aim directly at greater learner efficiency, proficient use of strategies is also recognised as one of many requirements for learner autonomy, with its broader agendas. More efficient strategy use in this approach is regarded as a means for learner empowerment. Mozzon-McPherson (2001) describes the crucial difference between an approach to learner strategy development that regards efficient strategy use as yet another body of knowledge that needs to be transferred to the learner and an approach that is concerned with the development and empowerment of the learner in the educational context:

Although the work on strategies has made autonomy more practical – and therefore accessible to the practitioner – at times it may have created the impression that it is a set of skills acquired by learners and taught by teachers and/or advisers. This approach supports the traditional teacher-learner model and a notion of knowledge which can be either transmitted or discovered. (Mozzon-McPherson 2001:11)

Based on the constructivist theory of learning, language learning strategies need to be an integral part of the learners' experience. They need to make sense for the individual in the particular learning context. The use of a broad range of language learning strategies can be fostered or promoted, but not taught directly. Nevertheless, education with the aim of promoting efficient strategy use needs to be systematic and considered. It involves students monitoring and reflecting on their behaviour and strategy use in their language learning process, and self-assessing or evaluating the efficiency of their

approach. The students thus become more aware of the efficiency of their own learning processes. Rather than being taught potentially useful strategies in a group setting, the students are assisted in their individual reflective processes. Input of new and different strategies is given in the form of suggestions. Skills and new knowledge are presented with the aim of broadening the range of strategies available to the student and helping them integrate new strategies into their existing systems, in order to give them greater, more informed choice. Nunan et al. (1999) advocate an awareness raising approach similar to the one employed in this study for the promotion of language learner autonomy.

For both, the instruction based and the awareness raising approach to learner development, Palfreyman (2003a) cautions against focusing too closely on strategy use. He argues that

interpreting learner autonomy and learner development as essentially the honing of an individual's repertoire of learning strategies [...] deprives these constructs of much of their validity and relevance to language education. (Palfreyman 2003a:243)

3.2.3.1. Metacognitive language learning strategies

Hsiao and Oxford (2002) note that 'each existing classification system in and of itself involves an implicit theory about the nature of L2 learning strategies and even, to some degree, about L2 learning in general' (2002:368). In the model of learner strategies employed in this study, language learning strategies can be classified according to a hierarchy of processes. Most researchers, e.g. O'Malley and Chamot (1990:44-45), divide them into cognitive, metacognitive and affective-social strategies. Cohen (1998:7-8) presents a model with four different levels, attributing affective and social strategies to different categories, which will form the basis for this investigation.

Whereas cognitive strategies work on an 'operative, cognitive processing' level and 'are directly related to individual learning tasks and entail direct manipulation or transformation of the learning material', metacognitive strategies function on an 'executive' level and 'involve thinking about the

learning process, planning for learning, monitoring of comprehension or production while it is taking place, and self-evaluation after the learning activity has been completed.' (O'Malley and Chamot 1990:8). '*Affective strategies* serve to regulate emotions, motivation, and attitudes' and '*social strategies* include the actions which learners choose to take in order to interact with other learners and with native speakers' (Cohen 1998:8, emphases in the original).

Although the classification scheme is useful and has been applied in most recent strategy research, the distinction between the individual strategy levels, especially between cognitive and metacognitive strategies, is less than clear, as Cohen (1998:12), O'Malley and Chamot (1990:144) and Mißler 1999:128-131) admit. The same strategy can be regarded as an executive thinking process in one instance and an integral part of the task approach in another instance. Cohen (1998) explains:

The same strategy may function at different levels of abstraction. For instance, skipping an example in the text so as not to lose the train of thought may reflect a metacognitive strategy (i.e. part of a conscious plan to not get distracted by detail) as well as a cognitive strategy to avoid material that would not assist in writing, say, a gist statement for the text. (Cohen 1998:12-13)

Metacognitive strategy use is governed by 'knowledge about learning', which Wenden calls metacognitive knowledge (Wenden 1991:33). According to Wenden (1991:35-45), the term covers the learners' 'person knowledge' which refers to the knowledge of themselves as learners, 'task knowledge' and 'strategic knowledge'. Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986:vii) prioritise among those three when they state that 'the most important knowledge is self-knowledge'.

Since it is notoriously difficult to distinguish between knowledge and beliefs, especially when it encompasses subjective and personal knowledge about one's own learning, it is assumed here that knowledge about learning includes learners' beliefs. By definition, this means that the knowledge held by the individual learners about themselves and the language learning process can differ from the more substantiated knowledge of the researcher or the experienced practitioner. As a result, students' self-directions can be

misguided and may contradict the advisor's experience, e.g. when they decide to look up all the new words in a text before trying to make sense of it. Similarly, beliefs about their capabilities as language learners can have a negative impact on their motivation, and therefore need to be addressed, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

Knowledge about learning can be used consciously or subconsciously, as Wenden (1998) explains:

[Metacognitive knowledge] is activated deliberately when the nature of the learning task requires conscious thinking and accuracy, when the task is new or when learning has not been correct or complete. However, it may appear automatically, evoked by retrieval cues in the task situation. (Wenden 1998:520)

Subconscious influences of adverse knowledge and beliefs on the learning process can hinder learning without the learner noticing, as opposed to the conscious application of declarative knowledge and beliefs, which can be questioned in the learning conversation. With relevance to this study, which concerns itself with language learning by first year students in HE, Horwitz found a range of 'beliefs with varying degrees of validity' (Horwitz 1988:293) in a similar group of Canadian language learners. She argues that such beliefs are likely to have an impact on the language learning process. Rather than 'correcting' students' beliefs or 'teaching' them about learning, the approach followed in this study is based on reflection. As discussed earlier in the chapter, helping the learners become aware of the knowledge and beliefs they hold about learning, encouraging them to reflect critically on them and at times giving them information about the language learning process can therefore be regarded as an important step to help overcome language learning problems.

Cotterall (1999b:45-46) suggests that 'prompts to engage in metacognitive activity might be most effectively presented in the context of dialogue about the learning process'. Thus, in the learner development programme developed at the University of Liverpool, one-to-one advisory sessions were introduced with the aim of supporting students' reflections on their learning.

Knowledge about learning can be regarded as a prerequisite to consciousness of the learning process discussed earlier. Sometimes called metacognition, it is 'a sophisticated awareness of one's mental processes' or 'the seventh sense' as defined by Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986:7). The students are encouraged to reflect on their language learning and its outcome in relation to their goals. In the process, they will refine their knowledge and beliefs as well as gain the ability to competently direct their learning. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) maintain that

students without metacognitive approaches are essentially learners without direction or opportunity to plan their learning, monitor their progress, or review their accomplishments and future directions. (O'Malley and Chamot 1990:8)

Metacognitive strategies are the strategies which are used for the planning, organising, monitoring and evaluating of one's learning process. Since it is usually the teacher, who plans, organises, monitors and evaluates learning, the competent use of metacognitive strategies can be regarded as one of the most distinctive characteristics of the autonomous learner. Little (1996:23) acknowledges the efficient use of metacognitive strategies as the defining feature to manifest autonomy:

In the domain of formal learning [...] autonomy is a capacity for self-direction. This capacity is exercised in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of learning activities. [...] [the learners] develop their autonomy through a continuous effort to understand what they are learning, why, how and with what degree of success. (Little 1996:23)

However, Nisbet and Shucksmith (1986) object to the idea of continuous reflection. They point out that metacognition needs to be a possibility for the learner, not a constant practice:

But this kind of introspection cannot be constantly conscious and deliberate, or we could never learn because of thinking about learning. What is required is an early introduction to the practice of monitoring one's learning, and the capacity to call it into play in deciding how to

tackle a task. (Nisbet and Shucksmith 1986:7)

Although the effective management of all language learning strategies, including cognitive, affective and social strategies, can be important in both classroom based and independent learning, it is the organisation of the learning event as represented in metacognitive strategy use which would usually be the responsibility of the teacher. The use of metacognitive language learning strategies is therefore especially important for self-direction in autonomous language learning.

3.2.4. Control

The innovations and theories outlined so far in the chapter emphasise the importance of learner involvement in the learning process both mentally and practically. Guided independent language learning provides them with choices and responsibilities. Control is transferred from the teacher to the learner. Within the limitations of the relevant educational context, the learners make decisions regarding both the content of their learning and the processes, and act accordingly. Consciousness helps them to learn from their experiences, subjecting successful processes to memory, refining them for future use and dismissing less successful processes. Through consciousness, the learning processes become learning strategies, which can be consciously selected and applied to best effect.

When the learners are able to direct and manage their learning processes effectively, not only do they become able to control them, but, equally important, they gain a feeling of control. By claiming ownership of their learning, taking responsibility and being able to exert that responsibility through the proficient use of language learning strategies, they should become more motivated, as explained in the next part of the chapter.

3.2.5. Motivation

Like autonomy, motivation is a multidimensional construct. In language learning, motivation involves the 'attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort that learners make to learn an L2' (Ellis 1997:75). Because of the indefiniteness of the concept, most research, especially in education, is based on 'reductionist models' of motivation, which 'reduce the multitude of potential determinants of human behaviour by identifying a relatively small number of key variables to explain a significant proportion of the variance in people's action' (Dörnyei 2001:11-12). Such theoretical models of motivation are useful for the identification and investigation of individual variables influencing language learner motivation, but do not give a full picture of the concept.

Over recent years, research into motivation in language learning has been revolutionised by Zoltán Dörnyei and his summary of motivational research in language acquisition so far. In order to develop a comprehensive theory of motivation in language learning, he started pinpointing the challenges facing research (cf. Dörnyei 2001:9-17). Taking the dynamic nature of motivation into account, several researchers have started to distinguish between 'initiating motivation' and 'sustaining motivation' (Dörnyei 2001:82). Specifying the difference, Williams and Burden (1997:121) talk about the 'generation and maintenance of motivation'. Ushioda (1996:10) who recognises the problem of cause and effect of learning experience and motivation, describes motivation as having 'a dynamic cyclic relationship with learning experiences and success'. Dörnyei and Ottó's process model of motivation (Dörnyei 2001:85-100) acknowledges both different action phases and the factors influencing their motivation.

Lately, Dörnyei (2005) has combined diverse theories on language learner motivation in a construct based on the psychological notion of 'self'. Based on this model, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005a) have used cluster analysis in order to define motivational profiles based on individual learner differences. They identified 'distinct subcommunities who share similar cognitive and motivational patterns' (2005a:615).

Practitioners are predominantly interested in theories that leave room for intervention, since it is in their interest to help students enhance their motivation. In this study motivation is regarded as an affective variable that is linked to teaching and learning practice and environment. The educational context may either foster or hinder self-determination. Understanding the motivational impact of the learning context is crucial for nurturing learner motivation. Ushioda (1996:22) points to the practical purpose of research into learner motivation when she asks how 'effective motivational thinking' can be developed 'through appropriate and constructive processes of intervention, whether externally or internally initiated'.

Two reductionist models of motivation have special relevance for language learner autonomy and give space for positive intervention in the learning context: Self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985), and attribution theory based on Weiner (1980, 1984). Both are cognitive theories of motivation, because they 'place the focus on the individual's thoughts, beliefs, and interpretational processes that are transformed into action' (Dörnyei 2001:11). Before explaining attribution theory, which can be regarded as one of the cornerstones of this investigation, self-determination theory and its conceptual link with learner autonomy will be outlined.

3.2.5.1. Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory is based on the benefits of learning anticipated by the student. It distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Deci and Ryan 1985). Intrinsically motivated learners perform a certain action because they enjoy doing it and achieve some satisfaction from it. Intrinsic motivation is sustained through self-determination and the feeling of competence, which are both regarded as inborn needs. Ushioda (1996) describes intrinsic motivation using the following characteristics:

- **it is self-sustaining because it generates its own rewards;**
- **it leads to voluntary persistence at learning**
- **it focuses on skill development and mastery**

- **it is an expression of personal control and autonomy in the learning process (Ushioda 1996:19-20)**

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, drives learners who are interested in a reward of some kind, such as good marks, praise, or the avoidance of embarrassment. Whereas intrinsic motivation is associated with self-determination, extrinsic motivation presupposes some form of outside control. Motivation can be located along a continuum of internalised rewards, between total external control and pure self-determination. The feeling of loss of control, i.e. when the learner perceives no link between action and achievement, is labelled amotivation (Deci and Ryan 1985).

This psychological theory of motivation is built on the assumption that human beings prefer the feeling of control over the feeling of being controlled. In independent learning some control over the learning process is shifted from the teacher to the student. According to this theory, it is important to create conditions that allow choice, and which are perceived by the learner as being informational rather than controlling. The focus needs to be on the learning outcome and competence, not on performance and achievement in relation to others. Students should consequently become more intrinsically motivated while engaged in independent learning.

Intrinsic motivation has often been associated with learner efficiency and achievement. Some studies indeed suggest a link between intrinsic motivation and achievement. In a study with adult language learners, Ehrman (1996) found that, after a similar amount of training, intrinsically motivated learners showed a higher level of proficiency in oral and reading comprehension tasks than extrinsically motivated learners. Intrinsic motivation is also linked with higher sustaining motivation, keeping students involved in language learning, as shown by Ramage (1990).

However, the relationship between intrinsic motivation and proficiency has been questioned in recent research, which shows that most learning behaviours are motivated by both forms of motivation and that extrinsic motivation can be a

powerful force. Given the fact that much foreign language learning is taking place in formal education, initially often without any perceived need of the learner to learn the language, extrinsic motivation must be an important drive. Consequently, Noels et al. (2003) advance a fine-tuned self-determination continuum, which proves to be a more efficient instrument for their study on motivation. Investigating adult learners of French, they found a weak link between more intrinsic types of motivation and perceived language learning success. They also showed a connection between those kinds of motivation and the feeling of autonomy (Noels et al. 2003:53), thus supporting their own findings (Noels et al. 1999) as well as those of Dickinson (1995:169), Dörnyei (2001:29) and Ushioda (1996:20), who had suggested a similar link. Being emotionally independent of external rewards for sustaining one's motivation can in fact be regarded as one of the most important characteristics of the autonomous learner.

Dickinson (1995) relates the best researched model of motivation in language learning, Gardner's social-psychological model of integrativeness (1985), to self-determination theory. Gardner emphasises the fact that language learning, as opposed to most other learning, contains a social and cultural dimension. In this view, the learners' attitudes towards the target language community have consequences for learning the target language. Learners who are predominantly driven by the desire to interact and communicate with speakers of the target language, or who even want to integrate into their community, show an integrative attitude, whereas learners who learn the language for other purposes such as better career prospects are instrumentally motivated. Dickinson finds that integrative motivation can be compared to intrinsic motivation, since it gives learners 'a compelling purpose for learning which is intrinsic to the language' (Dickinson 1995:170). Both extrinsic and instrumental motivation, on the other hand, focus on external rewards. Again, to keep motivated, learners with an integrative motivation would not rely on rewards other than using the language and could therefore be regarded as being more able to manage their motivation independently of a teacher. However, Noels (2003:128) argues against the idea that integrative and intrinsic motivation

can be regarded as the same construct. Her research shows that both are linked to different sets of variables.

3.2.5.2. Attribution theory

The concept of self lies at the core of the attribution theory of motivation. According to this model, individuals tend to 'search for understanding, seeking to discover why an event has occurred' in order to maintain or build self-esteem (Weiner 1984:18).

The theory concerns itself with the classification of perceived reasons of previous learning failure or success. These causal attributions are seen as carrying with them psychological consequences, such as emotional reactions and future expectations. It recognises the impact of past experience as well as the students' mental processing of this experience, on motivation. The feeling of success or failure and their attribution to causes is dominated by the individual's perceptions. Weiner (1984:16) states that 'one acts on the perceived, rather than the real, world'. The reasons are constructed by the individual and only ever represent an individual truth. They can differ between different people involved, e.g. between the learner, her parents and the teacher. The model thus fits into the broader framework of a cognitive theory of experiential learning.

Weiner (1980) identifies the underlying properties of perceived causes and originally classifies them along two dimensions:

Table 3.1: Taxonomy of attributional causes (cf. Weiner 1980)

Dimensions	locus of causality	
	Internal	External
causal stability		
Stable	Ability	task difficulty
Unstable	Effort	Luck

Although the potential number of causal attributions is endless, this early, two-dimensional model is very clear and suitable for the purpose of this study. It defines controllability as being within the domain of the learner and

changeable. Weiner (1984) later refines the model, adding a third dimension of responsibility, combined of the two rather similar categories of controllability and intentionality. Yet it is felt that this third dimension confuses the model, because it classifies some stable and external causes as controllable, and therefore within the responsibility of the learner.

Attribution theory has sparked numerous empirical studies into the perceived reasons for academic success or failure. In the field of second and foreign language learning, most researchers aimed to identify and categorise students' attributions in qualitative studies (Little 1985, Vispoel and Austin, 1995, Tse 2000, Williams et al. 2004). The variety of attributions recorded can partly be explained by the different contexts of the studies. The school children and teenagers investigated in the studies by Little (1985), Vispoel and Austin (1995) and Williams et al. (2004) identified slightly different reasons from the University students in the study by Tse (2000). The cultural background of the learners and the target language may also influence their range of attributions.

Using a grounded theory approach, Williams et al. (2004:22-23) identified 21 different categories of attributions for doing well and 16 categories for not doing well. The category receiving by far the most attributions was (lack of) effort, followed by (lack of) ability, (lack of) interest, teacher and (lack of) strategy. The cause to which one attributes success or failure has consequences for persistence. If the cause is rooted in the variable, internal domain of the learner, such as strategy use or effort, it enhances the feeling of control. Yet, if the reason for failure is perceived as external and/or stable, the learner may feel powerless and cease active involvement in the learning process.

Williams et al. (2004:25-26) in fact confirm a self-serving bias in the attributions of students who regard themselves as usually successful. Whereas they attributed a successful learning event to internal reasons such as effort, strategy and ability, students who perceived themselves as usually unsuccessful were as likely to ascribe their success to the task as to effort.

Attribution theory is based on an aspect of language learner motivation that is likely to be influenced by a learner development programme, the feeling of

control over the learning process. Since perceptions are individually constructed, learners can be encouraged to make more self-biased and therefore motivating attributions.

3.2.5.3. Possible effects of learner development on motivation

It is assumed that the Portfolio Programme developed for this study enhances both intrinsic motivation and the feeling of control over the learning process. The guided independent learning scheme itself, providing the learner with choice, purposeful learning and evaluative feedback, should in itself further intrinsic motivation, as suggested by Noels et al. (1999 and 2003:23).

In addition, many researchers assume that a learner's efficient language learning strategy use may help sustain motivation, e.g. Lamb (2001:85), Dörnyei and Skehan (2003:623), Schmidt and Watanabe (2001:315), Vandergrift (2005:80) (cf. Mißler 1999:174-177 for a review). Several empirical studies, e.g. by Oxford and Nyikos (1989) found that the use of learning strategies is linked to a learner's motivation. Vandergrift (2005:84) observes a relationship between metacognitive listening strategy use and the level of self-determined motivation in his study of international learners of French. Schmidt and Watanabe also based their investigation of more than 2000 language learners on the hypothesis that motivated learners use more language learning strategies, because they are more actively involved in the learning process (2001:315). They found a strong relationship between motivational strength and metacognitive strategy use (2001:343-347).

However, efficient strategy use is a precondition for the feeling of control over the learning process. It is assumed that students who are not only involved in decision-making, but also feel able to manage the learning process efficiently, are more likely to take responsibility for its outcomes. This, in turn, results in a competent use of affective strategies, resulting in greater self-motivation.

Most research into learner motivation takes achievement as an important determinant of high or low motivation. However, although it may be possible

to determine a link between the two variables, it is not clear whether motivation is the cause or the effect of achievement.

3.3. Definition of language learner autonomy

Summarising the research literature discussed above, greater learner autonomy can be regarded as the result of the following interventions, processes and affective states:

- independent language learning, giving the learner a range of choices and the associated self-determination of their learning
- higher consciousness of the learning experience, raised through learner development tools
- efficient strategy use
- the feeling of control over the learning process
- self-sustaining motivation

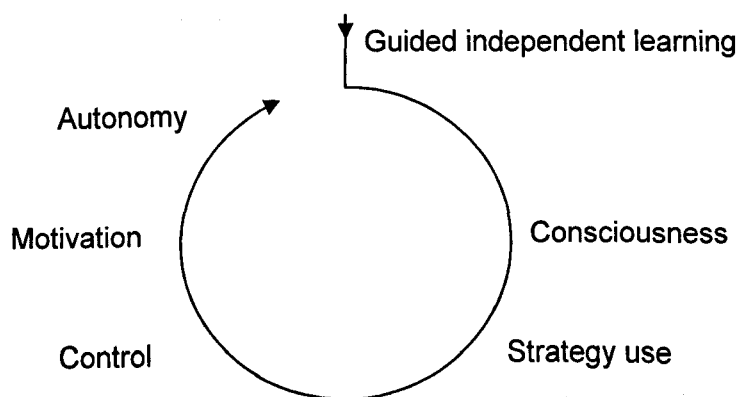
For the purpose of this study, I define language learner autonomy as the ability to fulfil one's perceived language learning needs and aspirations by exploiting one's environment for language learning efficiently enough to sustain the necessary motivation.

In this definition, learner autonomy engages the learner in a continuing process of language learning for as long as the need or desire persists. It is hoped that students who had undergone the learner development training will engage in efficient further language learning on their own volition during their year abroad and especially after leaving the HE languages degree course with its, at times, imposed needs and requirements.

3.4. The virtuous circle of language learner autonomy

The virtuous circle of learner autonomy can be regarded as the summary of the literature on autonomous language learning discussed in this chapter. Figure 3.1 illustrates how a learner development programme developed within the cognitive theory of experiential learning should lead, through a number of steps, to greater learner autonomy.

Figure 3.2: The virtuous circle of language learner autonomy



The cyclical shape indicates that autonomy by definition involves the learner in a continuous learning process. Having been supported through the cycle, the learner should be motivated to engage in further learning. Since reflection on the experience slowly becomes an integral part of the learner personality, the new learning experience undergoes the same cognitive scrutiny as the learning experienced in the cycles initiated as part of the learner development programme. Thus, the students should become increasingly able to manage their learning efficiently and feel in control, leading to the ability to self-motivation and resulting in further learning.

In this model, the developmental nature of autonomy is recognised and, thus, can serve as a starting point for further empirical research, helping to identify the break in the logical claim between learner development programmes and their individual effects, in case they fail to result in greater learner autonomy. If a supervised independent language learning scheme does not lead to results regarding one or more of the later stages, more specific questions can be

raised. For this purpose, instruments must be developed which help quantify or qualify the individual stages in the circle.

³ Strategien werden danach als Grundstrukturen von Handlungen, d.h. als Operationen oder Handlungskomponenten aufgefaßt, mit denen Handelnde mehr oder weniger bewußt ihr eigenes Handeln beispielsweise als Hinsicht auf Motivation, Aufmerksamkeit oder Informationsverarbeitung zu steuern suchen, um ein angestrebtes Handlungsziel zu erreichen. Lernstrategien sind daher nicht mit Lernhandlungen identisch, sondern sie strukturieren die Art und Weise der Ausführung von Lernhandlungen, die zur Erreichung eines Lernziels eingesetzt werden.' (Nold et al. 1997:28)

⁴ 'Mit zunehmender Erfahrung vergrößert sich die Anzahl der zur Verfügung stehenden Lernstrategien, und die einzelnen Strategien verfeinern sich' (Mißler 1999:109)

⁵ 'Es wurde von der zentralen Hypothese ausgegangen, daß Lernstrategien sich in Auseinandersetzung mit Lerntätigkeiten entwickeln ...' (Nold et al. 1997:30)

4. Portfolio Learning

In the present chapter I will explain the role portfolio learning can play for the development of greater language learner autonomy. I will then briefly outline the applications of portfolio language learning in HE institutions in the UK. Finally, the Portfolio Programme developed for this investigation in the School of Modern Languages at the University of Liverpool will be described.

4.1. What is portfolio learning?

The communicative and humanistic teaching philosophies brought with them a trend towards autonomous language learning in Applied Linguistics, as reviewed in chapter two. Sophisticated learner development schemes were established with the aim of helping learners become autonomous and take charge of their language learning. Wenden (1991:136-162) provides a range of examples for programmes promoting learner autonomy.

Portfolio work can be seen as one such learner training scheme. The students are expected to build their own portfolios of independent learning. The completed portfolios are evidence of their work for the teacher or language adviser and enable them to give appropriate feedback, and, if the institutional context requires it, use them for assessment purposes. For the students, on the other hand, it is a record of their achievement. At the same time, the learners can be guided with the help of tasks, worksheets, and individual supervisions as appropriate.

Building a portfolio of independent language learning can be a training process in itself. Encouraging students to plan, monitor and assess their learning will foster their reflection on their language learning and therefore ultimately enable them to take charge.

Yang (2003) describes the use of portfolios as follows:

As a purposeful collection of student work, portfolios show student effort, progress, achievement, and self-reflection in one or more areas [...]

use of portfolios may encourage students to take more initiative and control of their learning, to become more autonomous learners, and to reflect on their learning over time, portfolios may be a useful tool for learner training. (Yang 2003:294)

4.1.1. Portfolio learning as learner development

In many subject areas, portfolios have been used for a long time, e.g. as showcase portfolios for artists, or process portfolios in staff development. In addition, educational portfolios include reflective elements, as pointed out by Guard, Richter and Waller (2002:1), and can therefore be used to increase the metacognitive and social/affective learning skills of the students. Portfolio learning creates space to develop the five dimensions necessary for greater learner autonomy, which are guided independent learning, consciousness, language learning strategies, control and motivation. Also, portfolio learning and evaluation naturally link the quest for greater learner autonomy with the assessment requirements of institutional settings. In addition, they provide the necessary structure for learners in need of guidance towards greater autonomy. Hartman (1995) outlines the advantages of portfolio learning as follows:

Portfolios encourage active student involvement and invite students to apply known principles and generalisations to new problems and situations; to think creatively; to gain skills in using materials, tools, and technology germane to the subject; and to prepare for transfer, graduate school, or employment. They also commit students to personal achievement (empowerment) and encourage them to develop realistic self-evaluative skills. Finally, the portfolios illustrate the students' depth of knowledge and skills. (Hartman 1995:35 quoted in Guard, Richter and Waller 2002:1)

Portfolio learning offers the opportunity for the learners to select and organise their own learning content. At the same time, portfolio instructions add the scaffolding necessary to direct the learners through the process. Esch (1994:37) argues that in order to help students become more autonomous learners, it is important to provide 'circumstances and contexts for language learners which will make it more likely that they take charge [...]'. In this sense,

portfolio learning encourages learners to take responsibility, while still providing support and guidance.

If based on the constructivist paradigm, portfolio learning addresses the six issues, suggested by Wolff (2003:213), which need to be considered for the promotion of greater autonomy: learning content, learning objectives, learning context, social forms of learning, learning strategies and evaluation.

Portfolio learning can be regarded as the perfect combination of intervention in the learning process

to make the students aware of alternatives which could accelerate their learning, and allowing the students to develop without intervention to choose the most appropriate strategic behaviours for them in a self-directed learning programme. (McDonough 1999:59)

Encouraging the students to reflect on their learning is one of the main benefits of the use of portfolios. The students need to step back from their own learning process in order to evaluate it. The distance thus gained may give them the opportunity to abandon inefficient learning strategies and to try out new learning modes.

However, until recently the described benefits of portfolios in language learning were largely based on theoretical assumptions. Yang (2003) was one of the first researchers to collect quantitative data on the effects of portfolio use for language learning. He found that the majority of Taiwanese college students investigated in the study preferred portfolio assessment to traditional tests and generally approved of the portfolios (2003:311-312). The present study also sets out to collect and evaluate empirical data with the aim of determining the effects of portfolio work on the language learners. Here, a control group is used in order to ascribe the identified effects to the treatment.

4.1.2. Portfolio learning: The problem of assessment

Since it allows the individual students choice regarding the content, process and goals of their learning, portfolio learning is learner-centred. Portfolios are suitable evaluation tools for the individual learner's progress. Apple and Shimo (2004) observe that,

because portfolios contain a record of concrete examples of student work done over time, they can accurately demonstrate a learner's progress in the target language, give learners the opportunity to reflect on their own progress and work collaboratively with peers even after the actual assessment ("grade") has been given, and help learners take responsibility for their own progress toward both class-oriented and personal learning goals. (Apple and Shimo 2004:3)

On the other hand, the variety of learning goals, aims and objectives for different learners makes reliable, valid and fair assessment a key issue for the use of assessment portfolios in formal educational settings. Levy (2002:15) explains that portfolio evaluation, as a form of alternative assessment, focuses on 'documenting individual student growth over time rather than comparing students to one another'. According to Huerta-Macias (1995:9), the students should be 'evaluated on what they integrate and produce rather than on what they are able to recall and reproduce'. Since all forms of assessment have a 'backwash' effect. i.e. the assessment determines the learning, some researchers believe that it is 'feasible and desirable to bring about beneficial changes ... by changing examinations', as explained by Cheng and Curtis (2004:10). If this 'positive washback effect' occurs, portfolio assessment will lead to enhanced and deeper learning, because the students know that surface learning does not suffice to achieve a high mark, as argued by Tiwari and Tang (2003). However, since in the current political climate the role of assessment is shifting more and more towards comparability and accountability (Abrahams 2001:27), with an emphasis on standards rather than on learning (Gibbs 2003), portfolio assessment also needs to take the overall quality of the final product into account. This is particularly important in order to 'express the "value added" that independent learning is claimed to bring' (Ciel Language Support

Network 2000:2). The dimensions of portfolio assessment, as explained by Salvia and Ysseldyke (2001) are

intended to assess a student's effort (sometimes termed *commitment* or *purposefulness*), use of specific strategies or problems (for example, the scientific method), problem solving, and overall quality of the product (usually evaluated holistically). (Salvia and Ysseldyke 2001:243).

Nevertheless, the students can work on their portfolios under relaxed conditions at home or in the library, and their proficiency level is not the only factor taken into consideration when evaluating the portfolio. Portfolio assessment therefore opens a window of opportunity for students who do not perform well under examination conditions or who entered the University with relatively low grades. As an additional benefit, the students are involved in the evaluation process in that they not only choose the project, but reflect on the process and product of their learning. The awareness shown in this discussion influences the mark. Participatory Evaluation, as developed by Alderson and Scott (1992) aims to give learners new insight into their learning and therefore conforms to the goals of the Portfolio Programme.

In order to make portfolio assessment acceptable and transparent to students and staff, the performance indicators and marking criteria need to be as clear as possible. In fact, such criteria become part of the instruction process themselves, outlining the aims and objectives for the students to strive towards. Identifying the characteristics of high-quality work becomes a learning goal in itself. Consequently, students are encouraged to self-assess their work, which for many learners is an empowering experience.

Since the learners are not instructed, but work towards the instructional goals on their own, regular formative feedback is a crucial element of the portfolio learning process. The students need to draw on this feedback for the planning and execution of their future work on the portfolio.

4.2. A historical account of portfolio learning in HE institutions in the UK

Self-access facilities were originally established in some UK institutions with the particular aim of making use of the ever increasing range of resources and new technologies for language learning. However, it soon became apparent that specialist staff were needed to help students and teachers to access and exploit the available resources to their full potential, as described in chapter two. In addition, some form of learner training was necessary to support the students in their self-directed learning.

Learner portfolios provide a tool for learner development. Consequently, portfolio learning has been playing an ever increasing role in language learning internationally and in the UK, as testified by a number of workshops and conferences organised by the Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, CILT, CercleS (Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur) and AULC (Association of University Language Centres), to name but a few. Prestigious and well-documented programmes advancing the use of portfolios for language learning in UK HE institutions include 'Translang' at the University of Central Lancashire (FDTL funded project, phase 2), DILL at the University of Salford and the Independent Learning Project at the University of Manchester.

Recently, many institutions have turned their attention to the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which supports students in the planning and organisation of all their foreign language learning experiences. Little (2003:230) names the promotion of plurilingualism, raising cultural awareness, making the language learning process more transparent and fostering the development of autonomy as the main pedagogical functions of the ELP. Yet, although an incentive for lifelong learning, the focus of the ELP is on documentation. A more detailed form of learning support seems to be necessary for undergraduate students. The move towards PDP (Personal Development Planning) in HE, with its recognition of the role of reflection in education, reflects this need and has added new impetus to the pedagogical reasons behind the use of portfolios for language learning.

4.3. The Portfolio Programme in the School of Modern Languages

The University of Liverpool introduced self-access facilities as part of the Languages Centre in 1995. In January 1999 I started working as a language adviser in the Centre. In addition to my responsibilities as teacher on non-specialist German language courses and librarian in the Self-Access Centre, my main responsibilities, according to the job description, included:

- Advising students on self-access language needs
- Developing self-study plans for autonomous language learners, using different media, such as audio/video cassettes, CD-ROM and face to face tuition
- Providing the initial assessment for self-access language learners
- Giving support and guidance to enable learners to become autonomous
- Keeping up to date with developments in the field of self-access foreign language learning, including use of the Internet.

Student numbers on non-specialist language courses were low and only few students and staff embarked on independent language learning, drawing on the advisory service and the resources on offer. One of the strategies to promote the use of the Languages Centre, outlined in Bavendiek (2001), was to reach out to specialist language students from the School of Modern Languages. The collaboration between staff in the Languages Centre and the German Department led to a better use of the Centre by students on German degree programmes in the School of Modern Languages. In addition, the co-operation revealed some of the challenges facing the Department of German at that time:

- Based on the national decrease in the number of students studying German up to A-level, new courses had to be introduced for ab-initio and post-AS-level students. This resulted in learners with diverse learning histories and proficiency levels in German gathering in the same language classes for part of their studies.

- An increasing diversity in the student population with regard to the courses they followed. Whereas Single Honours students would focus solely on their German Studies, other students would combine their German language studies with other languages or even study the language as an additional subject or as part of a Science and German or German and Law degree.
- Due to the focus on examinations in secondary schools, many incoming students were increasingly dependent on their teachers and unable to plan, organise and evaluate their own progress, thus not being able to take full advantage of their time at the University.

To address the issues of less homogeneous learner groups can be very costly and staff-intensive, as observed by Hurd (1998:73). At Liverpool, however, there was an abundance of resources available in the University Languages Centre. It was therefore decided to link an individualised programme of guided independent language learning to the traditional language classes and to make it part of the assessment. Although this, too, had consequences for the staffing levels in the department, the financial implications are by definition proportional to the number of students involved. Whereas an ever increasing diversity in the ML student population with regard to proficiency levels, course requirements, specialist subject areas and goals may lead to excessive small-group teaching, the adviser in portfolio learning spends the same amount of time with each individual student. A small number of students reduces the contact time, making it a cost-effective way of dealing with student diversity. At the same time it was expected that the guided independent language learning scheme would help the students develop into more efficient language learners.

For independent learning to be assessed in the context of a degree course in Higher Education, however, it needed structure and guidance. I therefore developed the Portfolio Programme.

As explained earlier, guided portfolio work is a form of structured and supervised independent learning. In guided portfolio work, students build

their individual portfolio of evidence of their independent, i.e. non-class related learning. A complete portfolio at the University of Liverpool had originally included four completed projects in addition to an initial diagnosis project (Appendix 2), as well as documentation of the learning process, the project journals (Appendix 3). As discussed in chapter seven, it was soon found that three projects in the first semester were difficult to organise for both students and staff, so we lowered the number of projects the students were required to do to the diagnosis project and three regular projects after the first cohort had completed the Programme.

At the beginning of the first semester I outlined the Portfolio Programme to the students. A written introduction to the Programme in both English and German was handed out to the students and displayed in the Resources Centre and the German Department for future reference. All participants were also invited to a tour of the Resources Centre, in order to familiarise them with the facilities.

The students were required to verbalise their reflections on their learning for each project in the project journals.

At the beginning of the first semester the completed diagnosis projects were evaluated with the aim of identifying the individual student's respective needs. Each subsequent project was marked by the language adviser and discussed in an advisory session.

10 generic worksheets for suggested projects were on offer to choose from (Appendix 2). Each project focuses on one skill. As Scott et al. (1984:115) propose for standard exercises for reading comprehension, each project is a 'principled procedure which could apply to any text and which would guide the student towards more efficient and critical reading strategies'.

Portfolio learning combines structuring and supporting elements with characteristics usually associated with independent language learning. For the Portfolio Programme at the University of Liverpool, the supporting elements include:

- A written introduction to the project, outlining the general structure and the requirements of the students (Appendix 1).
- A mandatory diagnosis project, which includes work on all four language skills to help students and language adviser identify individual strengths and weaknesses at the beginning of the academic year. It forms the basis of the first advisory session.
- Regular language learning advice and feedback on projects in individual counselling sessions with the student and the language adviser, as described later in the chapter.
- The project journals, as described later in the chapter.
- A set of suggested generic language tasks to complete (Appendix 2 and described later in the chapter)

The student, on the other hand, can determine:

- Which skill s/he wants to focus on
- When, where, with whom etc. s/he wants to work
- The content
- Which problems s/he wants to follow up and what action to take

If appropriate, students are encouraged to design their own projects.

The Portfolio Programme forms part of the assessment. It counts 20% towards the mark for the first year language modules. The portfolio mark consists of 10% for the language and 10% for the reflection and the organisation of the projects, based on the content of the project journals, the advisory sessions and the general appearance of the projects. It was hoped that awarding 50% of a project mark for the learning process would focus the learners' awareness more on their learning. However, in order to satisfy institutional demands of

accountability and maintaining academic standards, the other 50% had to be awarded for the quality of the final product.

In 2001 the Languages Centre merged with the School of Modern Languages and staff offices and the Self-Access Centre were moved into the School. The second cohort in this investigation may therefore have perceived the Portfolio Programme more as an integral part of their degree.

In accordance with the German Department, the pedagogical aims and objectives of the Portfolio Programme include:

- The achievement of higher competence in German
- The development of important key and transferable skills, such as computer skills and communication skills and the ability to direct one's own learning
- The enhancement of language learning strategy use
- The possibility to focus on individual strengths and weaknesses, especially important in groups including both post-A level, post-AS level and former ab-initio students.
- The possibility to work on specialist German
- More class time to be spent on communication and interaction

In the meantime, the School of Modern Languages at the University of Liverpool has started focusing on student reflection for learning. In the German Section, the Portfolio Programme in the first year prepares the students for the use of reflective log books during the year abroad. Both the Portfolio Programme and LUSID (Liverpool University Student Interactive Database), especially its use for the year abroad log books, are promoting reflection as an important component of the learning process, as outlined by Marshall (2003) and Strivens and Schäffer (2004). The Portfolio Programme may soon be embedded in the wider practice of PDP (Personal Development Planning).

4.3.1. The tools for learner development

Portfolio language learning has two main, distinct educational goals: To help the learners achieve better target language proficiency and to help them develop a higher degree of autonomy to direct their own learning. The instructions, guidelines and tasks in portfolio learning have to be carefully designed to fulfil both functions. Most language teachers are confident of creating conditions which promote language learning. The methods and tools for learner development, in comparison, are still in their infancy. Yet through the intense academic debate on learner autonomy over the last decades, some forms of learner development have been recognised as more beneficial than others and some guidelines for good practice evolved. The Portfolio Programme in this study is based on the idea that the students' reflectivity can be raised by cultivating a language with which to converse about their language learning, which in turn should foster their capacity to learn, as explained by Harri-Augstein and Webb (1995:202). Both learning diaries and individual sessions with the adviser encourage the students to converse about their learning and thus develop those skills and competencies, as explained in chapter 2.

Three of the most established tools for learner development were adapted to the aims and conditions of the Portfolio Programme. These are the open tasks, the learner journals and the advisory sessions. The project journals encourage the students to describe their learning strategies and form the basis of the learning conversations. Similarly, the advisory sessions invite them to explain and discuss their learning processes. Both aim to raise the learners' awareness of their learning. In addition, the tasks combine choice and structure for the learning event.

4.3.1.1. The portfolio tasks

Portfolios can be regarded as an intersection of instruction and assessment (Paulson, Paulson and Meyer 1991:61). The portfolio tasks therefore fulfil a double role: they provide the criteria against which the submitted projects can be marked and they are designed to inspire the students, to acquaint them

with the use of a variety of resources and encourage them to try out new ways of language learning. The selection of tasks was chosen with the view of helping them broaden their range of language learning activities, including the use of many media, such as audio, video, email and the Internet as well as the involvement of native speakers and peers.

By enabling the learners to choose texts or topics according to their own interests, I aimed to create greater authenticity for them. It is important that they have a chance for self-realisation, because they need to develop sensitivity for their own aspirations and desires and also have the freedom to fulfil these in order to become self-directed and self-motivated learners.

Champagne et al. (2001) regard self-realisation as one of the defining characteristics of the autonomous learner:

Portfolios of work show us, through the content learners choose to investigate in-depth, something of who they are, what they think and what they would like to do. In deciding on topics for pieces of work, planning and undertaking field work and presenting what they have learned, participants are not only directing themselves, but clearly expressing who they are. In the process, they typically alternate between depression and elation, despair and excitement, enthusiasm and ennui, extreme pride in what they have done and loathing of the whole thing. These human emotions are indicative of participant engagement in their work (and with autonomy). (Champagne et al. 2001:50)

The freedom to choose the material to learn from can also be seen as an opportunity for students especially from other subject areas to improve their specialist German.

When possible, the students are asked in the project sheets to submit earlier stages of their work, such as drafts and notes with their final projects. These instructions aim to draw the students' attention to the process of learning in addition to their usual focus on the product.

Self-directed learning depends on the initial self-assessment of the learner, in which they identify or 'diagnose' their own strengths and weaknesses. Hammond and Collins (1991:116) describe diagnostic self-assessment as a

'forward looking process, the objective being to help people decide what should be learned'. To this end, the compulsory diagnosis project was developed, which includes tasks for the four language skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking. Since the ability to realistically self-assess one's own achievements is one of the most challenging capacities of the autonomous learner, the language adviser plays a crucial role at this stage. After marking the projects, she encourages the students to reflect on their achievements. It is her duty to put this self-assessment into perspective and at the same time to raise the learners' awareness of the expectations of the course they had embarked on, thus reminding them of the performance criteria for first year language students at Liverpool University.

Writing the project sheets turned out to be one of the most challenging tasks when designing the Portfolio Programme. There is a very fine balance between over-instruction and a lack of clarity regarding expectations and marking criteria. Too tightly prescribed projects leave no room for the students to develop their reflective and independent learning skills, or may even tempt them to imitate the skills demanded of them. Vague performance indicators, on the other hand, leave the evaluators with not much more than subjective impressions when marking the projects, with consequences for the credibility of this form of assessment for the students and other staff in the department. All portfolio tasks, including those in this project, are inevitably a compromise, located somewhere between the two poles.

4.3.1.2. The project journals

The project journals can be compared to learning diaries, with the difference that they are limited to the learning experience gained through the completion of one single project each, rather than the entire target language learning experiences over a given time. As a pedagogical tool, they are expected to raise students' reflectivity and awareness of the learning process. Porter et al. (1990:231-238) name the promotion of autonomy and confidence among the benefits of the use of learning logs.

The format was designed to help the students structure their learning (Appendix 3) and prompt them to follow Kolb's (1984) learning cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation.

More specifically, the journals aim to develop the use of the following metacognitive language learning strategies:

planning:

- setting a goal, i.e. determine what should be achieved by completing the chosen project (question 2)
- choosing an appropriate activity (question 3 *activity*)

monitoring:

- identifying learning outcomes from an individual session (question 3 *What did you learn?*)
- identifying problems from a single learning session (question 3 *problems*)

evaluating:

- choosing appropriate follow-up activities (question 3 *follow-up*)
- assessing the affective impact of an activity (question 4)
- identifying learning problems (question 5)
- identifying language problems (question 6)
- setting a goal based on the problems identified (question 6)
- self-assessment (question 7)

In addition to their main purpose as a learner development tool, the project journals in this study were used to prepare the students before and aid during the advisory sessions, as suggested by Gardner and Miller (1999:197).

The journals were assessed as an integral part of each project. It was hoped

that assessment would provide an incentive for students to engage in journal writing and thus convince them of their effectiveness.

4.3.1.3. The advisory sessions

The hypothetical relationship between reflection, awareness, strategy use and control was described in chapter 2. Metacognitive awareness and reflection can be fostered through interaction, discussion and negotiation. Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1991) describe the practice of learner counselling:

In any effective conversation, control is passed back and forth among participants as they recognise the nature of what each has to contribute. But all participants are not equal. Most conversations are asymmetric. In the early stages of the Learning Conversation the learner provides the evidence on which the collaborative research into the nature of her or his learning is based. The manager of the conversation guides and controls it. As the learners' awareness of their own processes increases, the manager hands over control of the awareness raising activities to them. He or she then begins to encourage them to challenge their personal myths about their own learning capacity. The learners are encouraged to change the emphasis of their attention. The Learning Conversation moves into the next phase. They begin to explore how the learning can be improved. The manager encourages them to explore alternative models of theories about how they can learn more effectively. Gradually the manager hands over control of this exploratory activity to the learner until eventually only the quality of the learners' personal investigation remains under the manager's insights which allow them to conduct more and more of the conversation for themselves. The ability to conduct most of a learning conversation with yourself is the essence of 'self-organisation'. (Harri-Augstein 1991:207)

The pedagogical purpose of the advisory sessions is therefore to enable learners to reason about their language learning and hence raise their awareness of the issues involved. The advisor aims to change behaviour, by encouraging the students to become reflective learners, rather than transferring knowledge about strategies. Accordingly, the adviser has to take care throughout the sessions to assist the learners in developing their own learning conversations. Rather than teaching the students about language or learning strategies, the adviser relies on her knowledge and expertise to assist the

students in organising their own learning processes. Stickler (2001) therefore adds good counselling skills to the qualifications any language adviser should have, which include in-depth understanding of the language learning process in general and the learning environment of potential advisees in particular:

A language adviser will most probably see her role primarily as that of an expert in the learning of languages and in supporting learners with their tasks in this area. But in order to further the performance of her role, the use of counselling skills may well be crucial. The successful employment of counselling skills can change a dialogue from an exercise that is primarily advice-giving and adviser-centred, to one that encourages reflection, furthers self-determination and focuses primarily on the advisee. (Stickler 2001:41)

However, the inexperience of the learners with this form of learning advice often results in false expectations regarding the purpose and outcome of the sessions. One of the most commonly cited problems among language advisers is the fact that the students expect to be taught directly, i.e. they hope for a transfer of knowledge from expert to novice, rather than an indirect counselling session, which draws on the experiences, knowledge and beliefs of the learners themselves. Pemberton and Toogood (2001:70) found that even learners who exhibit a thorough understanding of the concepts behind self-directed learning, still regard the adviser predominantly as a language teacher. Riley (2001) explains this inconsistency:

It is only to be expected that individuals will tend to replicate the social roles and relationships with which they are familiar, so that there will be an isomorphism between society and social interactions. (Riley 2001:179)

The students 'insist on membershiping the *counsellor as teacher*' (Riley, 1999:39, emphasis in the original), since this is a role they are familiar with. Cameron (1990) links roles and their inherent expectations to motivation:

Built into the scripts or roles are often expectations of outcomes from a particular interaction. When the interaction does not appear to be producing the expected outcomes, motivation can drop rapidly. Cameron

(1990:73)

Because social identity is constructed and legitimated by the members of a given society, the negotiation of new roles between adviser and learner is one important aspect of the advisory sessions. The fact that the language adviser is usually a member of staff in a university department also contributes to the persistence of the students in regarding her as a teacher, as highlighted by Cotterall (1999a:101).

The inexperience of the students with the discourse of advising, the traditional conceptions of teacher and learner roles, and an occasional mismatch between the learner's and adviser's expectations can lead to a communication resembling a face-to-face teaching session more than a learning conversation. Many students develop ways to exploit the adviser for a more traditional, direct form of learning, such as using the adviser for proof reading, private teaching or conversation practice. Gardner and Miller (1999:195-196) cite proof-reading and one-to-one teaching as activities which contradict the aims of counselling, since they do not help the learner become self-reliant.

In the Portfolio Programme, the students are expected to meet the language adviser once for the discussion of each project. Prior to the session, I mark the project and read the project journal, taking notes of points regarded worthy of further discussion.

All sessions are conducted in the advisor's office and appointments have to be pre-booked. In the first session with each student, it is important to 'set the scene' or 'establish a rapport', as emphasised by Jamieson (2001:54). Gardner and Miller (1999:193) list confidence, comfort and the relationship between teacher/counsellor and learner as important aspects of effective counselling. Similarly, Candy (1991) describes the atmosphere beneficial to learner autonomy with the characteristics of

low threat, unconditional positive regard, honest and open feedback, respect for the ideas and opinions of others, approval of self-

improvement as a goal, collaboration rather than competition. (Candy 1991:337)

Since an atmosphere of trust is crucial so that students can speak about their limitations and achievements, I take care to conduct the sessions in a relaxed, friendly manner and to repeatedly assure the students of the confidentiality of our conversations, especially with regard to other members of staff in the department.

A session normally starts with a short general exchange in order to make the student feel comfortable. The students are then asked to decide whether they want to use German or English throughout the session. Although they are encouraged to use German, the ultimate decision rests with them. If it is felt that the communication is hindered considerably by the use of the target language, languages are switched as appropriate.

Ideally, the main part of a session would start with the adviser listening to the student's reflections on their learning, probing and discussing when she senses a problem or a point worthy of deeper reflection. Keeping the sessions flexible and adaptable is therefore regarded as important, since it gives the learners an opportunity to introduce topics and issues relevant to them. However, as explained above, conducting a free learning conversation needs practice, and the project journals provide a useful grid for many conversations. In cases where the journals are too short or too general to give an insight into the student's learning, I usually encourage the student to talk me through the learning process, in order to get a more elaborate account. Since students' beliefs can be detrimental to their learning (Horwitz 1987:120), I try to detect views which can be unfavourable to their learning and examine them with the student, with the aim of increasing their self-esteem as language learners.

In order to make the students feel that the sessions are relevant to their learning and thus worthwhile, it is at times necessary to adapt to their expectations and turn into a more descriptive or directive mode. This may include responding to their language related problems, e.g. discussing their mistakes, grammar

points etc. and sharing knowledge rather than giving them time to let their own ideas evolve.

5. Overview of the study

For this study I was offered the opportunity to develop a programme based on principles of independent language learning, derived from the literature in chapter three, and to follow a cohort of students from the experimental group in order to pinpoint the effects of the treatment. Data from a control group were used to link the differences between both cohorts to the treatment.

The subjects' self-reports about their experiences and learning behaviour form the main part of the data. Since this is a longitudinal study, the students were asked at different points in their university language degree course to describe their understanding of the effects of the learner development scheme on themselves as language learners. The study thus covers both immediate as well as long-term effects of the scheme investigated and describes the influence the treatment had on the development of the learners over a period of time.

The claimed and assumed effects of guided independent language learning are often in regard to abstract and complex constructs, such as motivation and reflectivity. One important part of the study was therefore to narrow these constructs down to aspects which are clearly defined and are likely to be influenced by the treatment. Once conceptualised, measuring tools had to be chosen or developed with the aim of gathering quantifiable data for the defined variables, which could form the basis of the experimental and correlational sections of the investigation.

The effects of the Portfolio Programme were first measured using a pretest-posttest design. A control group was considered necessary in order to ascribe reported outcomes of the treatment to the condition. The correlational part of the study served to test the assumption that the variables representing reflectivity and motivation are associated.

When a study works with new conceptualizations and operates variables for which the validity has not yet been tested in other investigations, the triangulation of data is extremely important, since it helps obtain confirmation and verification, as O'Leary (2004:115) explains. The surveys employed for

the longitudinal study consequently include items referring to variables utilized in other parts of the investigation.

Two questionnaires administered at different times after the treatment aimed to elicit self-report information from the experimental group on the perceived outcomes. Again, the variables for the different effects were correlated to investigate their interactions.

The surveys also invited the students to evaluate the efficiency of the Portfolio Programme, with a particular focus on the two learner development tools employed in the treatment, the project journals and the advisory sessions. Open questionnaire items were included as appropriate, in order to not limit the data to a prescribed set of categories.

The self-report data were supported by observational data from the project journals.

Based on the results from the quantitative analyses, individual subjects from the cohort were chosen for final, in-depth interviews targeting their experiences of the Portfolio Programme and as language learners in a university language degree course. The information was used for individual case studies, complemented by other significant information that was available to the researcher, such as comments in the questionnaires and marks in individual language modules.

5.1. The research questions

The general research questions to be answered by this study are:

1. Does participation in the Portfolio Programme influence the students' reflectivity, use of metacognitive language learning strategies or feeling of control?
2. Do the learners experience any other immediate or long-term effects,

specifically regarding their target language proficiency, confidence, motivation and activities undertaken for language learning?

3. From the learners' viewpoints, will or did participation in the Portfolio Programme have a long-term impact on their language learning in less structured learning environments, i.e. during the year abroad or after leaving university?
4. What are the associations between the variables under investigation, i.e. consciousness of the learning process, reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies, feeling of control over the language learning process, confidence as a language learner and motivation?
5. How efficient are the Portfolio Programme and its individual tools, the project journals and the advisory sessions?

5.2. The purpose of the study

Aiming to identify and encompass the effects of the learner development scheme designed for this study, I applied a variety of approaches to evaluate the data. The study therefore comprises longitudinal and cross-sectional as well as qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. May (1993:89) observes that some research questions may require multi-method approaches. Robson (1993:69) also stresses the advantages of multi-method enquiries, where the weaknesses of certain methodologies can be counteracted by others.

The data collection process lasted four years. During this time I was closely involved with the Programme both as a researcher and as the language adviser. Accordingly, I was able to adapt the purpose of the investigation as the study proceeded.

I started the investigation with an explanatory purpose in mind, predicting what supposedly happened in supervised independent language learning based on the relevant research literature, and consequently testing these assumptions. I found that the answers to the initial questions were not as straightforward as

assumed and that the quasi-experiment did not deliver the clear results originally envisaged. New issues evolved at the same time, based on my growing experience with the Programme and through conversations with participating students, colleagues and fellow researchers. I decided that a detailed description of the students' experiences of the Portfolio Programme would not only help to illuminate the effects, but also what elements of the scheme had initiated those effects. I therefore developed two more questionnaires in order to elicit self-report data. Since my experience had shown that my own assumptions about independent language learning did not always reflect the learners' experiences, I included open questions in order to give the students a forum for their own concerns with the Programme.

Some of the most revealing comments from students about the Programme were made in passing, e.g. when chatting after a session, or when they apologised for not handing in required work. The substance and candour of these remarks encouraged me to finish the investigation on an exploratory note. I selected individual students for semi-structured interviews, thus adding a qualitative element eliciting richer data, which may lead to new insights and questions regarding the effects of learner development.

If evaluation "refers to the wider process of collecting and interpreting data in order to make judgements about a particular program or programs", as Nunan defines it (1990:62), the whole of the investigation can be regarded as an evaluation. The Portfolio Programme was developed based on the perceived needs in Higher Education Language Teaching in Britain today, namely the need for students to take responsibility for their learning, and the suggested measures to meet these needs, e.g. enabling and encouraging them to take control through learner development. The study is then concerned with the impact of the Programme and whether it delivers the desired objectives. The results of this summative evaluation could eventually influence decision making in relation to similar programmes and the general development of language learning and teaching in Higher Education.

However, the motivation for undertaking the research is essentially scientific, aiming to gain knowledge about language learner development from the data and test the claims underlying the call for autonomy in language learning.

5.3. Research design

This empirical study is a hybrid, combining a variety of small studies and employing different research strategies. It includes quasi-experimental components, surveys and case studies. In the following section, the different research strategies and their application in the investigation will be described.

5.3.1. The quasi-experimental design

The purpose of an experiment is to determine a cause-effect relationship between a treatment, i.e. the cause, and an effect. To this end, a sample is chosen from a population and the subjects are randomly assigned to one of two groups; the experimental group, which undergoes the treatment, and the control group, which does not undergo the treatment. Differences between the two groups on a second, carefully selected variable are then measured after the treatment phase. If the statistical analysis reveals that the probability of the differences occurring by chance is low, the effect can then be ascribed to the difference in conditions, i.e. the treatment.

Since in a true experiment the partition of respondents into the different groups is random, there is a probabilistic equivalence between the two groups (Cook and Campbell 1979:341), which means that all variables are controlled for. The only variables which show differences between the two groups are the condition, or independent variable, and the effect under investigation, the dependent variable. In this study, a true experiment was neither feasible nor ethical. Therefore, I sought to employ other two-group designs, simulating the main features of the true experiment, but without the rigour they require regarding random assignment.

If it is not possible to manipulate the independent variable to determine whether it has an effect on the dependent variable, a quasi-experiment with an experimental and a control group that occur normally can be conducted. In this case, participation in the Portfolio Programme is not the only factor that differs between the two groups. Since the other factors may cause the difference between the groups, the internal validity of the study is less strong. However, as Bryman (2001:39) points out, 'the results of such studies are still compelling, because they are not artificial interventions [...] and because their ecological validity is therefore very strong'. Randomly choosing individual students from a naturally occurring group and subjecting them to some special treatment would not apply to the criterion of ecological validity, which Bryman (2001:31) defines as being 'concerned with the question of whether social scientific findings are applicable to people's everyday, natural social settings. [...]'. Following a course that is markedly different from the course their peers are following could have an influence on the attitudes the subjects exhibit towards the treatment. The Halo and Hawthorne effects may exert a much greater influence.

For this investigation, the pretest-posttest non equivalent group design is appropriate. Two groups, an experimental and a control group, are selected, but not randomly. Both groups receive the same pre-test questionnaires. The experimental group then receives the treatment, i.e. members of that group participate in the Portfolio Programme. The control group does not undergo the treatment. The group differences regarding the gains over the time of the treatment are then analysed and interpreted.

Cook and Campbell (1979:104-106) identify four threats to the internal validity of this type of research design. 'Local history' is the one most probable to influence the validity of this particular study. Since the treatment and non-treatment groups were cohorts at different universities in the UK, it has to be kept in mind for the interpretation of the data that events other than the treatment may have affected one or the other group, therefore distorting the results.

The focus of the quasi-experimental study is on inferred causation, which is examined by comparing the changes in pre-treatment and post-treatment scores of both groups. However, in this study a second focus is on the changes themselves, as they occur within the experimental group over the course of the treatment. The pretest-posttest, or within-subjects design, allows the comparison of a group's performance on the dependent variable at two different times in the experiment, usually before and after the treatment. One advantage of a before-after design, as described by Robson (1993:96), is the fact that it counteracts the individual differences between subjects, which could mask the treatment effects. With the same group of students being investigated twice, and the scores from both phases in the experiment compared, it will be possible to describe the changes observed in the experimental group in greater detail. Since there is a time span of at least 6 months between the pre-test and the post-test, it is assumed that order effects, such as fatigue or practice effects, are negligible.

The greatest challenge for the researcher conducting an experimental or quasi-experimental study lies in the design phase. A fault in the research design leads to data that cannot be analysed. Once the design is specified, the researcher needs to stick thoroughly to the plan.

5.3.2. The survey design

The aim of most survey studies is to describe, analyse or explore a group's attitudes, opinions, or characteristics. The information necessary for answering the more general research questions has to be specified and the best method for gathering the data decided. In the case of questionnaires and interviews, the individual items need to be transformed into questions which should elicit the necessary information and be easily comprehensible for the subjects of the study. The methods of data collection in survey studies are mainly questionnaires and interviews, but can include other techniques, such as diary studies. Most surveys are cross-sectional, since they describe a situation at one particular point in time. Yet in a panel survey, several cross-sectional surveys

are conducted with the same sample at different times, as explained by Robson (1993:131).

If data are collected from a representative sample of a population, the results of the study can be generalised. Bryman (1989) defines survey studies as follows:

Survey research entails the collection of data on a number of units and usually at a single juncture in time, with a view to collecting systematically a body of quantifiable data in respect of a number of variables which are then examined to discern patterns of association. (Bryman 1989:104)

The data thus collected are statistically systematized employing univariate descriptives and frequencies and identifying correlations between different variables.

In this investigation, the survey sample only includes students who had experienced the Portfolio Programme. I will employ the survey design to investigate the subjects' attitudes towards the Programme and its individual learner development tools and the experienced effects. Finally, I will focus on the interaction of different variables. Therefore, the results of the survey studies complement the findings of the quasi-experimental part of the investigation.

For the survey studies, three different data collection methods were applied in three different phases of the experiment. The questionnaires targeting the immediate effects were distributed as soon as the cohort had finished the Portfolio Programme, namely at the end of their first year on the German degree course. The second questionnaire focuses on the long-term effects of the Programme. It was administered at least one year after the treatment had ended for each cohort. The project journals which the students were required to hand in with each project while involved in the Programme will provide further data for analysis. The journals, akin to diaries, can be regarded as self-administered questionnaires.

Whereas most pitfalls of experimental and quasi-experimental studies lie in the design, the problems with surveys are of a more practical and tactical nature. Difficulties such as questions which are not answerable or poor response

rates can affect the validity of the research. These issues will be discussed in greater detail when establishing the data collection methods.

Like quasi-experimental studies, survey studies use statistical methods for the analysis of the data. According to Brown (1988) both types of investigations are therefore

(1) systematically structured with definite procedural rules, (2) based on a step-by-step logical pattern, (3) based on tangible, quantifiable information, called data, (4) replicable in that it should be possible to do them again, and (5) reductive in that they can help form patterns in the seeming confusion of facts that surround us. (Brown 1988:5)

5.3.3. The case study design

Like experiments and surveys, case studies are primary and empirical forms of enquiry, since they are based on observations rather than on theory and therefore depend on data. However, case studies do not yield results which can be statistically generalized for a wider population or, as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:17) explain, they cannot be used to 'sort out the typical from the unique'. Whereas experiments and surveys are applied to collect highly specified data, which is then used to test patterns and regularities, case studies concern themselves with fewer cases (often only one case) and can therefore take much richer, fuller data into account. Thus, case studies always use a variety of sources and consider the real life context. Their ecological perspective makes them appropriate for investigating the complexities of language teaching and learning, as Tudor (2003) explains:

The ecological perspective on language teaching focuses attention on the subjective reality which various aspects of the teaching-learning process assume for participants, and on the dynamic interaction between methodology and context. It thus confronts us with the complex and multifaceted nature of teaching and learning as they are actually lived out in specific settings. (Tudor 2003:1)

Although case studies should start with a plan and some research questions, the strength of a good case study lies in its flexibility. Rather than adhering to

a previously determined design, the case study evolves and develops, changing its focus and discovering new views. This exploratory approach, however, can lead to an overwhelming amount of unstructured data, which is difficult to analyse. Some structure, although flexible, is therefore recommended to keep the study focused and the amount of data manageable.

O'Leary (2004:117) points out that 'the process of doing a case study is not easily articulated, because a case study is not really a "methodology". Rather, it is an approach to research that is predicated on in-depth case analysis.'

Hence, the main challenge for the researcher in a case study comes *in*, not *before* the data collection phase. Robson (1993:162) lists the characteristics required from a good investigator in a case study: 'Personal qualities such as having an *open and enquiring mind*, being a "*good listener*", general *sensitivity* and *responsiveness to contradictory evidence* are needed.'

Case studies can be either exploratory, when they generate assumptions and hypotheses to be tested in future studies, or confirmatory, when they set out to verify, falsify or explain results from previous studies.

In this investigation the case studies of individual students are developed with both purposes in mind. Following the quasi-experimental and survey studies, they are conducted to test and illuminate some of the results from those studies. Consequently, semi-structured interviews with partially prepared questions were used to elicit the information I needed. However, the questions are sufficiently open to allow for improvisation and exploration.

This study employs all three main research designs, quasi-experimental, survey and case study and deals with both qualitative and quantitative data. Regarding the facts that this is a longitudinal study and the data collection took place over several years, that the study emerged and new aspects came into view over the years, that a variety of data collection methods was used to throw light on the learner development scheme and that random sampling was not practical, this investigation can be regarded as a case study in itself. Robson (1993) states:

In an important sense each enquiry is a case study. It takes place at particular times in particular places with particular people. Stressing this signals that the design flexibility inherent in the case study is there in all studies until we, as it were, design it out. (Robson 1993:165)

More generally, Wengraf (2001:Introduction) believes that 'research is as much a question of inventing a practice as it is a question of understanding the point of rules'.

The qualitative vs. quantitative debate has moved on in recent years, recognising the fact that it is based on a flawed opposition of two paradigms, outlined by Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:12). If 'research is a systematic approach to finding answers to questions' (Hatch and Farhady 1982:1), both kinds of data have to be dealt with in the appropriate ways. Brumfit (2001) explains:

The debate [...] is often couched in terms of 'quantitative' versus 'qualitative' research. However, a careful consideration of these concepts will make it clear that they cannot really be opposed to each other. If we are examining something that can be objectively described (either numerically, or by explicit and economical records of other kinds), there is no sense in not making use of such data. On the other hand, if the questions we are interested in cannot be quantified simply, we should not avoid them solely on those grounds. We cannot limit observation to what can be measured without ignoring most of the areas that teachers and learners are interested in. It is much more important to break down our questions into those parts for which objective and measurable categories are appropriate, and those for which such categories cannot neatly be devised. As long as the status of our observation is made clear in our reporting, and as long as objectivity is achieved where that is possible, the research will be valuable. (Brumfit 2001:151)

It is hoped that this study can be regarded as a case in point, drawing on both types of data and analysing them accordingly in order to reach new insights.

5.4. Research methods

Only a minor part of the data for this investigation is gathered through direct observation. The subjects' behaviour regarding the submission of the journals and attendance of the advisory sessions was observed in order to draw conclusions about their attitudes towards the Programme.

The bulk of the data is based on the students' self-reports in questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and journals. Henerson et al. (1987) summarise the basic assumptions the researcher makes when working with self-report data:

When you use self-report procedures, you assume that the people whose attitudes you are assessing have the self-awareness to recognize their own beliefs and feelings and the ability to articulate them. You also assume that they have no reason to lie about their attitudes. (Henerson et al. 1987:20)

Because these underlying assumptions are very strong, the validity of studies relying on introspection is sometimes questioned. Seliger (1983:181), for example, wonders whether a learner's experiences can be taken as a true representation of the processes taking place within her. In addition, factors such as the Halo- and Hawthorne effect and subject expectancy will in fact exert an influence on the responses the researcher collects, especially in this study, since I interacted with the students in the roles of researcher, language adviser and member of staff in the department. Breen and Mann (1997) explain:

Learners will generally seek to please me as the teacher. If I ask them to manifest behaviours that they think I perceive as the exercise of autonomy, they will gradually discover what these behaviours are and will subsequently reveal them back to me. Put simply, learners will give up autonomy to put on the mask of autonomous behaviour. (Breen and Mann 1997:141)

Riley (1996:251) points to the observer's paradox, when he compares the difficulty of investigating a concept such as autonomy with a blind man trying to investigate bubbles, destroying them with his touch.

In this investigation, the effects of the observer's paradox are regarded as moderate, since I was acting as a participant observer. I aimed to minimise the people variables such as the Hawthorne-, Halo- and subject expectancy effects by taking the following measures:

- Without deceiving the students about the goals of my investigation, not disclosing any information regarding the particular areas of interest in my study
- Granting confidentiality and assuring all participants that no information obtained through the data collection process would be shared with other members of the department and that no individual would be identifiable from the data and findings of the study
- Trying to minimize my position of authority and emphasise my role as a researcher. I am grateful to my colleagues in the German Section that they accepted my request to not become involved in the teaching and assessment of the years 2 and 3 of the cohorts in question
- Emphasising the fact that the study had a scientific rather than an evaluative purpose, and that it is not policy-oriented. The findings would therefore not have any financial or organisational implications for the continuation of the Portfolio Programme

However, keeping in mind its limitations, the importance of the findings merit the methods of investigation. O'Malley et al. (1985) showed that alternative methods of data collection, namely direct observations, did not yield useful data when investigating the use of learning strategies. More abstract concepts, such as motivation and reflectivity, appear even more elusive when approached through observational techniques, so the researcher relies on the subjects' own accounts for their investigation. Most students, when prompted, can reason about what they want to achieve, why they would choose one course of action over another or what they believe works for them. I would even argue that in order to determine the effectiveness of a learner-centred approach, such as

independent language learning, the most crucial information is the learners' own perception. Allport (quoted in Weiner 1984) emphasises this idea:

the best way to gain information about an individual is to directly ask that person. We may not be aware of psychological processes, such as how we learn, perceive, and remember, but we often are quite aware of psychological content (whom we like, why we have succeeded, and when we plan to act). (Allport quoted in Weiner 1984:16)

The following table gives an overview over the general questions the investigation was designed to answer, the precise research questions relating to them, the research methods, and the research strategies. The predominantly exploratory case studies were not included in this original design, but served to triangulate and illuminate the findings from the quasi-experimental and the survey studies. Details regarding the research questions, the data collection instruments, procedures and data analyses will be considered when dealing with the studies in question.

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Table 5.1: Focus of the studies, research questions, data source and research design and analyses

	Research question	Data source	Research strategy
The experienced effects of the Portfolio Programme	Do the students participating in the Portfolio Programme expand their reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies during their first year German course?	Pretest-posttest questionnaires aiming at the use of metacognitive language learning strategies	Quasi-experimental study
	Does participation in the Portfolio Programme affect students' reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies?		
	Do the students participating in the Portfolio Programme gain a greater feeling of control over the learning process during their first year German course?	Pretest-posttest questionnaires aiming at the feeling of control over the learning process	
	Does participation in the Portfolio Programme affect students' reported feeling of control over the learning process?		
	Do the project journals manifest a change in the level of reflectivity over time?	Project journals	Survey study
	How do the students evaluate their own achievements regarding the specified learning objectives of the Portfolio Programme, i.e. -target language proficiency, -language learning skills, -control over the learning process, -confidence -motivation?	Questionnaires on the immediate effects of the Portfolio Programme	
	How do the students evaluate the long-term impact of their participation in the Portfolio Programme regarding -the consciousness of the learning process? -the use of metacognitive language learning strategies? -the language learning activities they employ for their independent language learning?	Questionnaire on long-term effects of the Portfolio Programme	
	Do the students expect participation in the Portfolio Programme to benefit them in their independent language?		

	<i>Do the students feel that participation in the Portfolio Programme benefited them in their language learning during the year abroad?</i>	<i>Questionnaire on long-term effects of the Portfolio Programme</i>	<i>Survey study</i>
The interaction of learner variables	Does a high reported metacognitive strategy use coincide with the perception of control over the learning process?	Pretest-posttest questionnaires aiming at the feeling of control over the learning process and the use of metacognitive language learning strategy use	Quasi-experimental study
	What are the relationships between the investigated effects? In particular, do they support the hypotheses that -efficiency of language learning skills and strategy use is associated with the feeling of control over the language learning process? -the feeling of control over the language learning process is associated with learner confidence? - learner confidence is associated with motivation?	Questionnaires on immediate effects of the Portfolio Programme	Survey study
The tools for learner development	Do the students learn to appreciate the project journals as a way of organising their learning over the course of the first year?	Project journals	
	Do the students learn to appreciate the advisory sessions over the course of the first year?	Advisory sessions	
	Do the students perceive the Portfolio Programme and its tools, the project journals and the advisory sessions, as effective for improving their language learning behaviour?	Questionnaires on immediate effects of the Portfolio Programme	
The learners' view of the Portfolio Programme	Which characteristics and aspects of the Portfolio Programme are dominant in the learners' viewpoints?		
	Based on the students' experiences, what is the most efficient use of staff time in a HE language course: class teaching or individual supervisions or both?	Questionnaire on long-term effects of the Portfolio Programme	
	For those students who favour a combination of both individual supervisions and class teaching, what do they think supervisions should focus on, the language or the learning process or both?		

5.5. The pilot study

In a pilot study conducted between January 1999 and April 2000, I aimed to evaluate the effects of independent language learning combined with a learner development programme, consisting of learner journals and advisory sessions, on students' motivation and their use of metacognitive language learning strategies. Working as a language adviser in the University Languages Centre, I collected data through needs analysis sheets, study plans, questionnaires and the taping of advisory sessions. However, the fact that students did seek initial advice but eventually dropped out of the independent study programme made it impossible to evaluate any effects.

A questionnaire distributed at the end of the academic year revealed that

the students were not aware of the demands of an independent learning programme. The reasons they mentioned for ceasing their self-directed learning programme included problems finding the time to study, problems motivating themselves and, most crucially, they had 'hoped to be taught the language rather than being left on [their] own with the material on offer'. (Bavendiek 2001:129)

This finding from the pilot study coincides with the experiences of other researchers. Jones (1998:381) and Little (1984, summarised in Little and Singleton 1990:14) found that students in their investigations either preferred taught classes to learning on their own, or actually dropped out of independent learning programmes. Fu (1999) describes the dilemma for the language adviser:

One of the most 'non-fulfilling' aspects of the work for the counsellor is that there are so many single-visit users. A person will come for what the counsellor perceives is a substantial and interesting discussion or learning dialogue, and then the counsellor never sees that person again, therefore getting neither any feedback nor report on progress (or lack of it). (Fu 1999:107)

As a consequence, I decided to link an element of independent language learning to a traditional language class and to make it part of the assessment. For independent learning to be assessed in the context of a degree course in Higher Education, it needed to be more structured and guided. I therefore developed the Portfolio Programme.

Although it seems to be a paradox that assessment is used to promote independent language learning, the anticipated benefits justify the approach. Correspondingly, Hurd (1998) observes that

in reality, those on a programme with an autonomous learning element have more limited choice than those who can simply 'use' their Centre in whatever way suits them best. Nevertheless, these students who are, paradoxically, compelled to work autonomously and consequently have to find ways of coping, are more likely to develop effective language learning strategies in order to complete their independent tasks in the time available. (Hurd 1998:71)

The Portfolio Programme was accepted by the Faculty of Arts as an integral part of the first year German language course. However, its discontinuation would have been in the best interest of the University had it proven to be unworkable, disruptive or overly unpopular with students or staff. I therefore felt the urgency to start gathering data with the first cohort in the Programme. Although the individual data collection instruments were piloted with non-participating students known to the researcher, most questions were meaningless to students who had not undergone the treatment. These limitations were particularly disappointing with regard to the questionnaires, which I feel would have benefited from piloting.

5.6. Sampling

Ideally, this study should have been conducted with a large sample of students from several universities and with subjects randomly assigned to the experimental or control groups. However, due to the intensity of the treatment, easy access to the students was a priority. My role as a language adviser at

Liverpool University also promoted the necessary co-operation with students and teaching staff. Finally, the required quality of student involvement demanded a strong incentive for them to participate. I am therefore grateful to the German Section that they allowed me to introduce portfolio work as an assessed part of the first year, post A-level and post AS-level language courses.

All first year students in the mainstream German language degree course starting in the academic year 2000/01 or later underwent the portfolio treatment. For personal reasons, I was not able to supervise and conduct the Portfolio Programme in the first semester of the academic year 2001/02. Although a colleague was introduced to cover my position as language adviser during that time, the differences in the portfolio treatment, especially the fact that she was not a German speaker, dissuaded me from gathering data from that cohort. Data were therefore collected from all students in the first year cohorts of 2000/01 and 2002/03.

The sample for the experimental group comes to a total of 55 subjects from the German Section at the University of Liverpool.

At best, the control group differs in only a minimum amount of other factors. Therefore, a similar, post A-level first year cohort of French at the same university was targeted in 2000/2001. Yet, due to a misunderstanding between researcher and tutors, I received a full set of completed pre-treatment questionnaires but only 4 post-treatment questionnaires.

An email was posted to the German Studies List (Professional Organisation of German Lecturers in Higher Education) in August and again in September 2002 to find volunteering lecturers from other universities to assist with the study. 10 lecturers replied to the email. Since the samples should be as similar as possible in all aspects other than the guided independent learning treatment, I excluded Oxbridge and ex-polytechnic universities, because students in these institutions could be expected to differ on a number of variables from students involved in the experiment, as Coleman (1996:38 and 186) showed in his survey. On the other hand, students from the control and the treatment

groups should differ as much as possible on the independent learning variable. A second criterion for exclusion from the study was consequently an independent learning element as a compulsory part of the language course, such as extended project work, or regular student use of a well-staffed languages centre.

A telephone interview with all tutors from appropriate universities was conducted to confirm the second criterion for inclusion in the study. None of the tutors teaching the students from the control group had a specialist interest in independent learning issues. Yet, a certain amount of strategy training is good practice in many language courses today. Since it is usually restricted to cognitive language learning strategies, it should not distort the results in this study.

Four universities were chosen to participate in the study, with a combined cohort of approximately 100 students at the beginning of the first year. Due to the problems encountered during the data collection process, which are described in greater detail for the quasi-experimental study, the experimental group only includes 22 students from whom both the pre-test and the post-test questionnaires were collected.

To comply with modern requirements of research ethics when collecting data from humans, summarised by Ruane (2005:16-31), all students from both the experimental and the control groups signed a form of consent, vaguely outlining the purpose of the data collection and asking them for permission to use all the information they were giving me for the study. Only one student from the experimental group was initially concerned about data protection issues and refrained from handing in the first set of questionnaires. However, she later changed her mind and not only allowed me to use the project journals, but also fully participated in the study, even agreeing to a case study interview.

Any investigation that claims to look for the typical and infer findings about the larger population should be based on probabilistic or random sampling to be representative and ensure external validity. However, the practicalities in this as in so many other studies made probabilistic sampling almost impossible. The

study is therefore based on convenience or purpose sampling, where I as the researcher selected the samples with the view of achieving a particular purpose. Although the quasi-experimental study takes account of the problem of natural occurring groups, the results from the survey studies are, strictly speaking, only meaningful for first year German students at the University of Liverpool in this particular set-up. However, the reader is invited to compare the situation with other HE institutions and consider the generalizability of the findings accordingly.

The sampling procedures for the individual case studies will be explained in eight.

5.7. The subjects

22 students from the original lists of registered first year students for the relevant years were excluded from the study due to attrition, usually during the first semester. Since the reasons for dropping out of the course can be varied and are not known to the researcher, this could affect the interpretation of the results and therefore undermine the validity of the study. Four further subjects were excluded because they were German native speakers, and, although they had participated in the Portfolio Programme as a mandatory part of their first year course, improving their German was not a priority for them.

50 subjects entered the University with A-levels in German or an equivalent non-UK qualification. Two students joined the course with German AS levels. At the University of Liverpool, students also have the opportunity to take up German as complete beginners, if they can combine this with at least one language which they studied at A-level. In their second year of German, they then join the new intake in the post A-level German course and go on their year abroad in their third year. Experience shows that these students are well prepared for the post A-level course and have no difficulties keeping up with the rest of the group. Three subjects from the experimental group followed that course.

In the first set of questionnaires, 50 students from the same group describe themselves as English native speakers, two as bilingual (English + Bengali and English + Welsh) and three as Danish, Hungarian and Greek native speakers, respectively. This is solely based on the information the students supplied in the questionnaires and may not always comply with common definitions of mono- and bilingualism. Talking to students from the group in greater detail, I know that among those who described themselves as English native speakers only, at least two spoke German at home with a parent, one student had passed her Abitur (A-levels) in Germany and several other students had lived in Germany for at least some time. Similar confusion reigns with Welsh and other languages.

Since previous language learning experiences influences the language learning process, especially regarding personal and affective variables and the use of language learning strategies, as Mißler (1999:303-307) demonstrated in her work, I also elicited information about the language learning experiences of the students before entering university. All students who entered the course had at least one A-level in a modern foreign language. The minimum number of foreign languages learnt was thus one, with German being the only foreign language. The maximum number of second or foreign languages learnt was four.

This compares to a control group of 22 subjects with 17 English native speakers, three native speakers of Swedish, French and Italian, one bilingual student with English and Russian as first languages and one trilingual student with Slovak, Polish and English as native languages. Apart from this student, who can be regarded as a highly experienced language learner, all other students had learned between one and three second or foreign languages before entering university. Since the number of international and bilingual students varies from year to year, both groups are treated as typical regarding their previous language learning experiences.

No data from mature students were used in this study.

6. The quasi-experimental studies

6.1. Aims of the quasi-experimental studies

The main aim of the Portfolio Programme was to raise students' consciousness of the learning process and thus to help them gain control of their learning. As explained in chapter three, the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies indicates the extent to which learners consciously plan, organise, monitor and evaluate their language learning. In addition, Attribution Theory advocates the idea that the feeling of control over the learning process is linked to learner motivation.

Two questionnaires targeting the use of metacognitive language learning strategies and the feeling of control over the learning process were developed and handed out to all students undergoing the treatment at the beginning of their first year at university, i.e. before the start of the treatment and again towards the end of year 1, i.e. after the treatment. A study following the pretest-posttest design would determine any changes in the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies and in the subjects' feeling of control over the learning process.

The changes observed in the pretest-posttest design could, however, be caused by other factors, such as maturation during the first year at university or participation in the language course. To exclude the possible effects of rival explanations, the same questionnaires were handed out to a control group of first year Modern Languages students at Liverpool and other British universities. The same pretest-posttest analysis was carried out for the control group to identify the changes. Since the Portfolio Programme is an assessed part of the first year German language course at Liverpool University, it was in the best interest of students and staff to let all first year students undergo the treatment. I therefore settled for a quasi-experiment with a naturally occurring group design (Brown 1988:155).

The first part of the quasi-experimental study aims to establish a cause-effect relationship between participation in the Portfolio Programme and the change in the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies over the course of the treatment.

Following Attribution Theory, the learners' motivation should increase through the feeling of control over the learning process. The second part of the quasi-experimental study focuses on the question whether any changes regarding the feeling of control are caused by the participation in the Portfolio Programme.

Finally, the relationship between the subjects' reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies and the feeling of control over their language learning will be evaluated.

6.2. Research questions

The research questions to be answered by this study are:

1. Do students expand their reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies during their first year German course?
2. Do students gain a greater feeling of control over the learning process during their first year German course?
3. Does participation in the Portfolio Programme affect students' reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies?
4. Does participation in the Portfolio Programme affect students' reported feeling of control over the learning process?
5. Does a high reported metacognitive strategy use coincide with the perception of control over the learning process?

6.3. Materials

6.3.1. Research tools

Two different constructs were operationalized in this study: *use of metacognitive language learning strategies* and *feeling of control over the language learning process*. Therefore, two questionnaires were designed for this part of the study. Questionnaire 1.1. elicits information on the perceived feeling of control over the learning process by the learner and questionnaire 1.2. focuses on the use of metacognitive language learning strategies. Whereas questionnaire 1.1. and 1.2. refer to the time before the students entered university, the second set of questionnaires, 2.1. and 2.2. were administered as post-test questionnaires, specifically targeting the experience of language learning at the end of the first year at university. Apart from a number of initial questions in questionnaire 1.1., which aimed to elicit some general information about the subjects, the main bodies of the two questionnaires were the same for the pre-test and for the post-test questionnaires.

6.3.1.1. Questionnaires on the use of metacognitive language learning strategies

Measuring frequency in strategy use, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford 1990) is an established instrument in the field of language learning strategy research. The validity of this particular research tool is well documented in the literature, as summarised by Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995). The questionnaires 1.2. and 2.2. used for this study were adapted from SILL. Individual items were selected and modified with regard to the objectives of the study. The questionnaires comprise 15 questions focusing on metacognitive strategy use only.

The strategies were classified depending on the relation of time between strategy use and learning event, i.e. pre-assessment/planning, monitoring and self-evaluation. They aim to elicit information on students' reported frequency of metacognitive language learning strategy use before and after the

intervention. 15 closed items specify the use of one strategy each. All items are formulated as questions. The response options are based on an attitude scale ranging from *Never or almost never true of me* to *Always or almost always true of me* with a scoring from one to five.

6.3.1.2. Questionnaires on the perceived feeling of control over the language learning process

Questions 1-6 in the questionnaire were designed to elicit general information about the individual language learners. The responses were used to develop learner profiles for further reference. The questions targeted native language/s, extent of previous language learning experience, contact with native speakers and language levels. The open question 3 *Why did you decide to study that language in particular?* aimed at Gardner's (1985) division between integrative vs. instrumental motivation. The closed item *What was the language learning experience like?* in connection with the open question *Why did you enjoy/not enjoy learning the language?* was included to elicit information about the intrinsic or extrinsic quality of the motivation.

Research into learner motivation for second and foreign language learning has seen a breakthrough in recent years. As explained in chapter three, it is no longer predominantly concerned with the initial goals for choosing a course of action, but it has come to acknowledge that motivation is a complex quality which is dynamically evolving (Dörnyei 2001:16-17; Dörnyei and Ottó 2000:2-4). From all the variables that have been identified to influence learner motivation, *feeling of control over the language learning process* is most strongly linked to independent language learning (Dickinson 1995:166; Ushioda 1996:27). It is therefore the motivational variable most likely to change through involvement in the learner development scheme.

Question 6 *How did you feel about what you achieved?* paves the way for question 7 *Why were you/ were you not happy/satisfied?* A closed item format was adopted, providing a choice of answers, in order to focus the responses towards the specific research question. An open section was included in case

the students did not feel that the proposed responses included their own perceived causes of achievement. If a considerable number of students could not agree with any of the attributions on offer, the construct validity of the newly developed instrument needed to be questioned.

Since it is notoriously difficult to develop new instrumentation for research into affective variables, the questionnaire was piloted with a small group of students familiar to the researcher. The subsequent discussion revealed that the students did not like to be restricted to a prescribed number of responses to choose from the eight options, as initially envisaged. Instead, they tended to qualify their answers and often argued convincingly for seemingly contradictory views. Thus, it was accepted that students do not think in absolute terms about their achievement and respondents were allowed to choose any number and combination of answers. Table 6.1. shows the closed questionnaire item 7 with the selection of responses:

Table 6.1: Questionnaire item 1.1.11. and 2.1.7.

**7. Why were you/were you not happy/satisfied?
Please tick every answer that applies to you.**

<i>Favourable circumstances (e.g. good teacher, native speaker available for practice etc.).</i>	
<i>Unfavourable circumstances (e.g. bad teacher, not enough time to study, temporary sickness etc.).</i>	
<i>The language is quite easy.</i>	
<i>The language is quite difficult.</i>	
<i>I put in a lot of/enough effort.</i>	
<i>I did not put in enough effort.</i>	
<i>I find language learning easy.</i>	
<i>I find language learning difficult (e.g. feeling uncomfortable using the language, poor memory, problems understanding grammar etc.).</i>	
<i>Other Please explain:</i>	

6.4. Procedures

6.4.1. Data collection

The questionnaires were administered by the language tutors teaching the cohorts involved in the study. Since experience shows that the response rate is much higher when a questionnaire is completed by a 'captive' audience (Wray et al. 1998:170), the tutors were advised to stay in the room and collect the questionnaires. At Liverpool, the tutors of German received the questionnaires with an oral briefing. However, due to a misunderstanding, one subgroup was sent home with the post-treatment questionnaires. As expected, only a small number of questionnaires was returned from this subgroup. All students from the experimental group who had not handed in their questionnaires were contacted by the researcher either in person or by post.

A pretest-posttest design depends on data being collected at particular points in time during the investigation. It was decided that the pre-test data collection should be completed by the end of the second week of the academic year. During this time students are usually present at university and missing questionnaires could directly be traced from the students. I collected a total of 53 pre-test questionnaires on the use of metacognitive language learning strategies from the cohort of 55 students. Data protection issues deterred one student from filling in the pretest-posttest questionnaires. A second student started her study after week two in the academic year. Two students missed out one part of the set of questionnaires. Consequently, 51 complete pre-test questionnaires on motivation were collected.

The data collection towards the end of the academic year proved to be more complicated. By definition, the data had to be gathered after the Portfolio Programme, when all the advisory sessions had been completed. The attendance rate in the language classes is generally lower at that time of the year and students could not easily be contacted because of exams and holidays. The time span for the data collection was consequently extended over the holidays and students who had failed to hand in their second set of

questionnaires received the questionnaires, an accompanying letter and a pre-paid envelope by mail over the summer following their first year at university. Yet only a small number of participants returned the questionnaires by post. 45 completed post-test motivation questionnaires were collected from the sample. Three students failed to fill in the second post-treatment questionnaire focusing on metacognitive strategy use. The number of responses for that particular questionnaire is therefore 42.

I sent out a total of 190 pre-test questionnaires to the control group. Illness prevented one participating tutor from administering the questionnaires. I received a total of 99 completed pre-test questionnaires from the sample.

Increasing pressures towards the end of the year to cover the curriculum caused most tutors to hand out the questionnaires to the students to be completed in their own time. From the 145 post-test questionnaires I sent out, only 22 with a matching pre-test questionnaire were returned.

6.4.2. Analysis

The data were organised and values ascribed to the answers in the questionnaires. Next, the data were entered and the statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $\alpha < .05$.

6.4.2.1. Hypotheses

It was expected that the subjects' reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies and the feeling of control over the language learning process would improve over the course of the treatment and that, indeed, the gain could be attributed to their participation in the Portfolio Programme. Also, it was hoped that a relationship between both variables would be found, to assert the claim that metacognitive strategy use benefits the learners' feeling of control and therefore their motivation. The following variables are under investigation:

1. reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies – pre-test
2. reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies – post-test
3. difference between total pre-test and post-test scores of reported metacognitive language learning strategy use
4. differences between pre-test and post-test scores of reported use of individual metacognitive language learning strategies
5. reported feeling of control over the language learning process – pre-test
6. reported feeling of control over the language learning process – post-test
7. difference between total pre-test and post-test scores of reported feeling of control over the language learning process
8. differences between pre-test and post-test scores of individual causal attributions

The hypotheses to be tested in this study are:

1. There is a significant difference between the mean of the pre-test reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies' scores and the mean of their post-test scores.
2. Regarding the observed change in the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies over the course of the treatment, there is a significant difference between the means of the experimental and the control groups.
3. There is a significant difference between the mean of the pre-test scores and the mean of the post-test scores of the reported feeling of control over the learning process.
4. Regarding the observed change in the reported feeling of control of the learning process over the course of the treatment, there is a significant difference between the means of the experimental and the control groups.
5. There is a significant systematic relationship between a subject's

reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies and the feeling of control over the learning process.

6.4.3. The use of metacognitive language learning strategies

A value between 1 and 5, according to the Likert-scale values (1 for *never or almost never true of me* to 5 for *always or almost always true of me*), was attributed to each answer in the questionnaires. 15 variables were created for each questionnaire, corresponding to 15 items. After entering the data, SPSS computed two new variables containing the sum of all the individual variable scores for each subject in each questionnaire, in order to compare the total means between the pre-treatment and the post-treatment questionnaires. A difference variable D , expressing the difference between the scores, was computed subtracting the pre-treatment score from the post-treatment score. The value on this variable will be negative if a student reports less use of strategies after the treatment than before. A univariate investigation provided details regarding the central tendency and dispersion of scores on this important variable.

A within-subjects study compares the same people in different situations. Since the descriptives of the pre-treatment and the post-treatment variables had shown that the scores on both variables were normally distributed and the difference in their variances acceptable, a paired t-test was used to determine the significance of the findings. By applying a two-tailed test, the results of the study were kept open, accepting the fact that there could be a decrease in the reported use of metacognitive strategies over the course of the treatment.

Following the same pattern, individual difference variables were computed for each questionnaire item, with the results from the pre-treatment questionnaire being deducted from their paired values showing in the post-treatment questionnaire. This detailed analysis gives a clearer picture of the changes in the use of metacognitive language learning strategies reported by the students involved in portfolio work.

Finally, a comparison of means between the experimental group and the control group examined whether participation in the Portfolio Programme is one of the causes of the previously determined change in the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies. Since several independent variables are examined in this study, a factor analysis (ANOVA) was computed to investigate the hypothesis that participation in the Portfolio Programme leads to a different, preferably higher, reported use of these strategies.

6.4.4. The feeling of control over the language learning process

Question 7 *Why were you/were you not happy/satisfied?* aims at the individual subjects' causal attributions for success and failure. According to attribution theory, *feeling of control* is determined by the causal attributions people make when experiencing success or failure in an achievement situation, as described in chapter three. The causes can be internal or external and stable or unstable. They have different effects on the learners' feelings of responsibility and self-efficacy. They can ultimately determine whether a learner is likely to persist in her effort. The subjects' responses were therefore categorized as seen in table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Values ascribed to responses for questionnaire items 1.1.11. and 2.1.7.

Stable	internal	external
	Language aptitude	Difficulty of Language
	<i>I find language learning easy.</i>	<i>The language is quite easy.</i>
	4	2
unstable	<i>I find language learning difficult.</i>	<i>The language is quite difficult.</i>
	- 4	-1
	Effort	Circumstances
	<i>I put in a lot/enough effort.</i>	<i>Favourable circumstances</i>
	4	-2
	<i>I did not put in enough effort.</i>	<i>Unfavourable circumstances</i>
	4	2

The numbers reflect the scoring system.

Although not in the area of responsibility, the learner's belief in their own language aptitude is highly beneficial to motivation. It therefore scores 4 points on the *feeling of control over the learning process* scale. The opposite statement, *I find language learning difficult* displays self-doubt and low self-confidence as a language learner. Since the learner is not in control of this stable cause, it is the most debilitating of all possible attributions. The response is attributed with a score of -4 on the scale.

Difficulty of language is an external cause, yet it probably enhances the learner's persistence when the language is perceived as easy. It receives a value of 2 on the scale. Regarded as difficult, this attribution has a negative impact on the feeling of control, since the student has no influence over this stable and external cause. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many students consider German to be a "difficult" language as opposed to other languages taught at the University, such as French and Spanish. This perception can also help them to cope with perceived failure and thus

reclaim their confidence as language learners. Consequently, the response only obtains a negative value of -1 point on the scale.

If the cause for success is attributed to favourable circumstances, the students do not take advantage of the potential benefit the experience could have for their motivation. Unfavourable circumstances perceived as a cause of failure, however, help retain a positive self-image. The causes are thus allocated values of -2 and 2, respectively.

The autonomous learner must take responsibility for the learning process. By definition, responsibility can only be claimed for internal, unstable causes. Accepting effort as the cause for success or failure means that the student takes control. Even in case of perceived failure, this attribution motivates the student to try harder. Therefore, these two causes both receive a positive value of 4 on the scale.

The total of the individual attribution values at the start of the experiment and after the first year were calculated. These two new variables were used to compute a difference variable D , resulting in a positive value if the student had reported more positive attributions after their engagement in the learner development scheme. Since the differences in variance and distribution between the pre-treatment and the post-treatment variables were negligible, a two-tailed, paired t-test was computed with the aim of establishing the confidence interval.

The changes between pre-test and post-test were evaluated by isolating the individual variables relating to the possible responses in the questionnaire. For this test, the variables were reduced to a nominal scale with two levels, *applies* and *does not apply*. Based on a crosstabulation for each pretest-posttest pair, the number of students attributing their perceived success or failure to each individual cause at both stages of the investigation was determined. The crosstabulation further ensured that only subjects who handed in both questionnaires were considered. Since more pre-test questionnaires than post-test questionnaires were collected from the cohort, it was important to keep n

for the compared samples equal.

In order to compare the means on the computed difference variable between experimental and control group, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test whether participation in the learner development scheme had a significant impact on students' feeling of control over their language learning process.

6.4.5. The relationship between the feeling of control over the language learning process and the use of metacognitive language learning strategies

A correlational analysis was carried out to illustrate the relationship between the two most important variables in this study. In order to determine the relationship, it is not important at what point in the experiment the learners responses were measured. Consequently, both pre-test and post-test responses from the experimental group $N = 55$ for the variables *use of metacognitive language learning strategies* and *feeling of control* were combined, to result in two variables with a larger sample of 110 cases. Each case therefore contains the pair of previously calculated questionnaire results from the same set of questionnaires. The relationship was analysed computing the Pearson correlation coefficient r .

6.5. Results

6.5.1. The reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies

Table 6.3: Results from the pretest - posttest analysis of questionnaires 1.2. and 2.2.

N = 39

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Frequency of use of all learning strategies pre-treatment	39	50.59	7.49	34	66
Frequency of use of all learning strategies post-treatment	39	48.33	9.0	31	70
Difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment	39	-2.26	6.33	-14	11

39 students from the experimental group handed in both the pre-treatment and the post-treatment questionnaires complete. The descriptives of the difference variable *D* show a range of 25 scores on a 60 point scale, with two students reporting a reduction in the use of metacognitive language learning strategies of -14 points on the 15 combined Likert-scales and two students reporting an increase of 11 points. On average, students report a lower use of these strategies of $D = -2.26$ after the treatment. The paired-samples, two-tailed t-test reveals that this sample scores a mean of $\bar{X}_{pre} = 50.59$ points in the pre-treatment questionnaire, compared to a mean of $\bar{X}_{post} = 48.33$ points in the post-treatment questionnaire. The difference is significant ($p < .05$).

The following table lists the individual questionnaire items with their univariate descriptives. The biggest gains and losses are highlighted for further discussion:

Table 6.4: Results for individual items from the pretest - posttest analysis of questionnaires 1.2. and 2.2.

N = 41

Questionnaire item		N	Mean	SD	D Mean
Pre-assessment/planning					
<i>Do you read, talk or think about language learning issues and ways to improve your learning?</i>	pre	41	3.15	.96	-.07
	post		3.07	1.01	
<i>Do you compare your learning techniques or style to those of other learners?</i>	pre	41	3.37	1.26	-.24
	post		3.12	1.14	
<i>Do you have a long-term goal for your language learning?</i>	pre	41	4.12	1.25	-.20
	post		3.93	1.91	
<i>Do you have a short-term objective for your language learning?</i>	pre	41	3.20	1.03	-.61
	post		2.59	1.05	
<i>When you encounter a new foreign language task, do you consider what you already know about the skills/activities needed to complete the task?</i>	pre	40	3.50	1.06	.10
	post		3.60	1.01	
<i>When you encounter a new foreign language task, do you think about the resources you will need to complete the task?</i>	pre	41	3.85	.94	.27
	post		4.12	.78	
<i>When you encounter a new foreign language task, do you consider what you want to achieve by completing the task?</i>	pre	41	3.37	.97	-.24
	post		3.12	.82	
<i>Do you organise your learning events in advance?</i>	pre	40	3.10	1.06	-.25
	post		2.85	1.1	
<i>Are you actively seeking opportunities to practise the language?</i>	pre	41	3.15	1.32	-.10
	post		3.05	1.38	
Monitoring					
<i>Whilst learning the foreign language, do you try to keep your concentration focused on the task involved?</i>	pre	41	3.80	.87	-.02
	post		3.78	.65	
<i>Have you ever switched techniques or strategies which proved to be less efficient?</i>	pre	41	2.85	1.24	.00
	post		2.85	1.04	
Self-evaluation					
<i>Do you try to notice your language errors and learn from them?</i>	pre	41	3.78	1.08	.20
	post		3.98	.88	
<i>Do you check your learning outcomes or whether you have achieved your goals and objectives?</i>	pre	41	3.29	1.06	.00
	post		3.29	1.06	
<i>Do you check the efficiency of your learning strategies and change them, if necessary?</i>	pre	41	2.98	.91	-.07
	post		2.90	1.02	
<i>Do you keep a systematic record of your learning?</i>	pre	41	2.41	1.4	-.32
	post		2.10	1.3	

The biggest loss with an average of $-.61$ points on the Likert-scale affects the variable *short-term objectives*. Also, the students reported less *systematic record keeping*, with a mean of $-.32$ and *organisation of learning events in advance*, with $-.25$. An increase in strategy use was, however, observed in the *thinking about resources*, with an average added value of $.27$, the *noticing of errors* with $.20$ and an added value of $.10$ for consideration of required knowledge and skills.

Compared to a mean loss of -2.26 points on the variable reported metacognitive language learning strategy use among the students involved in the Portfolio Programme, students from the control group report an even greater reduction of $D = -4.23$ during their first year at university. However, the ANOVA reveals that this is not a significant difference ($p < .05$). As a result, the hypothesis claiming that there is a significant difference between the two groups in the change in reported metacognitive strategy use cannot be accepted.

6.5.2. The students' causal attributions for language learning success and failure

42 pairs of pretest-posttest questionnaires were collected from the experimental group. Table 6.5. includes the descriptives of these matched questionnaires only.

Table 6.5: Results from the pretest - posttest analysis of questionnaire items 1.1.11. and 2.1.7.

$N = 42$

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sum of attributions values pre-treatment	42	2.50	3.70
Sum of attributions values post-treatment	42	2.52	4.16
Difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment	42	0.02	3.71

The scale for the causal attributions ranges from -7 for attributions most detrimental to efficient motivational thinking to 16 as a possible maximum, indicating causal attributions most beneficial to self-motivation. Before the treatment, the students score an average of $\bar{X}_{pre} = 2.50$ on this scale. This remains almost the same over the course of the treatment, and the same group of students scores $\bar{X}_{post} = 2.52$ after the treatment. On average, the students from the experimental group therefore gain only $D = 0.02$ points on this scale. The frequency output reveals that for 12 students, their confidence and sense of responsibility as learners of German had suffered during their first year at university, with two students reporting a loss of -8 points on the scale.

Based on the two-tailed, paired t-test, the hypothesis that the students improve their strategic motivational thinking cannot be accepted with $p = .23$.

The difference between the numbers of students adopting the individual causes before and after the treatment gives a clearer picture of the changes, as seen in table 6.6:

Table 6.6: Results for individual responses from the pretest - posttest analysis of questionnaire items 1.1.11. and 2.1.7.

N = 42

Possible response in the questionnaire	N	number of pre-test attributions	Number of post-test attributions	Change over the treatment period
<i>Favourable circumstances (e.g. good teacher, native speaker available for practice etc.).</i>	42	29	20	-9
<i>Unfavourable circumstances (e.g. bad teacher, not enough time to study, temporary sickness etc.).</i>	42	33	31	-2
<i>The language is quite easy.</i>	42	6	5	-1
<i>The language is quite difficult.</i>	42	15	14	-1
<i>I put in a lot of/enough effort.</i>	42	27	22	-5
<i>I did not put in enough effort.</i>	42	8	13	5
<i>I find language learning easy.</i>	42	9	8	-1
<i>I find language learning difficult (e.g. feeling uncomfortable using the language, poor memory, problems understanding grammar etc.).</i>	42	7	11	4
Total number of attributions	42	134	124	-10

The most frequently chosen cause for success and failure in learning German is *circumstances*. It is more favoured as a cause of failure than of success. *Effort* is the second most quoted cause by this cohort, with the difference that students seem to be generally more willing to state that they put in a lot of effort than to admit that they did not put in enough effort in case of failure.

Students report a slightly higher number of attributions with a total of 134 in the pre-test questionnaire than in the post-test questionnaire with a total of 124. The biggest loss over the first year at university regards the attribution of success to *favourable circumstances* and *effort*. The biggest gains regard the *lack of effort* and *difficulty of language learning*. Overall, students report a greater degree of failure in the post-test questionnaires, with a total of 6 more attributions seeking causes for failure and a total of 16 attributions less on causes for success. Attributions made for reasons of failure tend to score lower points on the variable 'feeling of control over the learning process', because failure and most reasons attributed to it are likely to undermine rather than strengthen the feeling of control.

The comparison of means between experimental group and control group indicates that the difference in means regarding the change made over the first year at university, with a value of $D = 0.02$ for the experimental group and $D = -1.86$ for the control group, is not significant at $p < .05$. The hypothesis claiming that participation in the Portfolio Programme causes a significant change in the feeling of control over the learning process is therefore not accepted.

6.5.3. The relationship between the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies and the feeling of control over the learning process

A scatterplot depicting the relationship between the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies and the feeling of control indicates that there is no linear relationship to be found from this sample. The Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient is $r_{obs} = .104$. The relationship is not significant.

6.6. Observations and Discussion

The quasi-experimental study did not prove any significant effects of the Portfolio Programme. This confirms Rolus-Borgward's (2002) and Nold et

al. (1997:47) findings that metacognitive instruction programmes so far have not shown the results they set out to achieve.

Results from both the experimental and the control groups demonstrate that students generally report a lower frequency of metacognitive language learning strategy use after their first year at university. This may be explained by the fact that the most accelerated learning for Modern Languages students takes place during their A-level studies and again during the year abroad (Coleman 1996). Apparently the students thought more about their language learning during their A-level revision period than during their first year at university. After one year of university study the learners report a lower frequency use regarding the strategies *short-term objectives*, *systematic record keeping* and *organising learning events*. However, although the difference is not significant, the total loss of strategy use seems to be halted by portfolio work in the case of the students from the experimental group. The strategies the students report using more frequently after participation in the Portfolio Programme include *thinking about resources*, *trying to notice language errors* and *considering what you already know about the skills/activities needed to complete the task*.

Although familiarising students with a variety of resources for language learning is only one among many aims of the Portfolio Programme, many students perceived this as the most important and functional outcome, as will be seen in chapters seven and eight. Similarly, discussing language mistakes and errors was regarded as only a minor component of the advisory sessions by the researcher, yet some students stated this as having been the most beneficial element in other parts of the study. The third important advantage of the independent learning scheme experienced by the students was the fact that they could choose their own topics. Many students decided to work on something they had a special interest in, either as a hobby, after encountering the subject in secondary school or as a specialist subject at university. Considering what they already knew therefore seems to be a strategy they used when planning their individual projects. These perceived benefits are reflected in the changes apparent in their metacognitive strategy use.

Since participation in the Portfolio Programme is expected to foster effective motivational thinking, after the intervention students should be better able to motivate themselves attributing success or failure to causes that they can control and which will help them preserve a positive self-concept. Yet, the data from the questionnaires did not confirm this hypothesis. Whereas the feeling of control over the learning process remains almost the same for the experimental group, after the first year of their language studies the control group exhibits a slightly reduced sense of control.

Evaluating the changes over the course of the treatment in greater detail, it is evident that students had to cope with a lower sense of achievement once at university. In the post-test questionnaires, more attributions were made to perceived failure and fewer causes were found for apparent success. There is reason to believe that many Language Degree students were regarded as high-achievers in their secondary schools. In fact, their perception of themselves as efficient language learners prompted many to study Modern Languages, as will be seen when discussing the individual case studies. Yet at university many of those learners would have found themselves in the middle or lower ranges in the class. In an interview study, Dörnyei (2001:152) isolates 'reduced self-confidence (experience of failure or lack of success)' as a demotivating factor. For the language learner starting a university course it is therefore crucial to cope with this sense of relative failure without it having an adverse effect on their overall motivation.

The number of students, who sought an explanation for success in *favourable circumstances* decreased by 9. Yet the students did not specify *unfavourable circumstances* instead, an attribution that might have helped them cope with the demotivating factor of reduced self-esteem. Ushioda (1998) explains:

By projecting the responsibility of their loss of motivation onto external causes in this way, learners may be better able to limit the motivational damage and dissociate the negative affect they are currently experiencing from their own enduring motivation for wanting to learn the language. (1998:86 cited in Dörnyei 2001:150)

However, the researcher is a member of the Modern Languages teaching team and criticising the Department in such a way may have appeared to be impolite.

The attributions referring to *effort* mirror most clearly the underlying change from experienced success to failure. The total number of students identifying these causes did not change, but after the first year at university the students named it as an explanation for failure rather than for success. Crucially, they claim responsibility for the learning outcome. Students with a socially competitive outlook may also exploit this attribution to keep face in case of failure. As Nicholls (1984:63) describes, whereas lack of effort is associated with guilt, lack of ability is associated with embarrassment.

The most disturbing outcome from the analysis is that for more than one quarter of the students a sense of failure is linked with low expectations of themselves as language learners. Claiming *difficulty of language learning* as a cause, these students do not cope well with the lack of success experienced during their first year at university, with possible consequences for their motivation.

The assumption that strategy use and motivation are interlinked underpins much of the theoretical work done in this area. A greater feeling of control is seen as the bond that links them. However, no such relationship could be found in the data from these samples.

7. The survey studies

The survey studies are based on data from three different survey instruments. The project journals, akin to learner diaries, were filled in by the students while working on each project. They are analysed in the first section of this chapter, the aim being to determine the students' levels of reflectivity at different points of the treatment and their acceptance of the journals as a learner development tool. Data from the advisory sessions are included in order to compare the learners' approval of both tools.

The second survey instrument is a questionnaire filled in after the completion of the Portfolio Programme in the first year. It targets the immediate effects of the Programme as perceived by the learners.

Finally, a third survey instrument, another questionnaire, aims at the long-term effects of the treatment and at the students' evaluations of the scheme.

The analyses in this chapter are based on the self-report data collected through the instruments mentioned above. The findings will be contextualised in the final chapter of the thesis in order to lead to general conclusions regarding the effects of the Portfolio Programme.

The opportunity to link the data from different sources for individual students and to draw on the resulting learner profiles for inferences was regarded as an important aspect of the enquiry. Although all data were treated as confidential, anonymity could therefore not be granted for any part of the data collection process. The advantages of the learner profiles were assumed to outweigh the possible negative consequences regarding the frankness and honesty of the responses.

7.1. The project journals as a research tool

This first part of the chapter focuses on the analysis of the project journals.

Consciousness and reflectivity are regarded as prerequisites to efficient strategy use. As outlined in chapter three, students should become more reflective of their learning through participation in the learner development scheme. It was expected that the students would realise the importance of reflection and consequently write longer entries towards the end of the independent learning programme. The project journals provide valuable data to test this hypothesis.

The development of the students' task-attitude over the course of the year will be described to evaluate the influence journal writing has on the perception of the usefulness of the tool.

The results reflect back on the journals themselves as one of the main tools in the scheme to promote independence. If they help raise the students' awareness of the learning process, the journals should mirror this increasing reflectivity.

Diary studies have become an important research technique over recent years, since they give access to the first person experiences of the learning process, as Nunan (1992:118) points out. Bailey (1990:215-218) gives an overview of studies in language learning and teacher education, which benefited from such first-person accounts. Champagne (2001), Halbach (2000), Nunan (1996) and Simmons (1980) are examples of studies which aimed at insights into the use of language learning strategies or other independent learning processes.

The project journals were designed with two functions in mind, as a pedagogical tool and as a research tool. As a research tool, they serve to identify

- a change in the level of reflectivity.

- students' attitudes towards the journals as a learner development tool.

7.1.1. Research questions

The research questions to be answered in this part of the study are:

1. Do the journals manifest a change in the level of reflectivity over time?
2. Do the students learn to appreciate the project journals as a way of organising their learning over the course of the first year?

7.1.2. Procedures

7.1.2.1. Data collection

The project journals formed an integral part of each project the students completed over the year. A written introduction to the Portfolio Programme (Appendix 1), giving all the necessary explanations and setting the rules and regulations for assessment, highlighted the fact that the journals were an assessed part of each project. Blank copies of the project journals were displayed in the Language Learning Resources Centre on the same rack as all the other information regarding the Portfolio Programme.

The students were expected to submit the journals together with the rest of the projects by the given deadlines. However, some students brought them to the advisory sessions instead or even later, after I had reminded them. Students were encouraged to write in their journals whenever they finished an activity for the project. Yet many students mentioned the fact that they had filled in the journal after they had completed the project. Some indicated that they had only completed the journals to do me a favour as a researcher.

The data for this part of the study are drawn from the project journals alone. The

actual language work in other parts of the projects was not taken into account.

7.1.2.2. Analysis

For each student, all project journal entries were entered into a Word file, which can be found in the attached CD-Rom/journals. The word count facility determined the word count for each project journal in order to determine the students' task attitude, i.e. the students' willingness to participate in the task.

A score was given for the level of reflectivity displayed in each individual journal according to the following criteria:

0 - no entry

1 - description/explanation is inappropriate or only fairly appropriate, general and/or repetitive - this includes entries which mirror instructions given in the worksheets, such as "*watching the news*" or entries which can easily be applied to most language learning situations, such as "*vocabulary - look up/learn*".

2 - description/explanation is specific, relevant, detailed and/or varied.

To illustrate the procedure, I have chosen entries from two journals describing the completion of the same listening task - news.

Table 7.1: Scores for the level of reflectivity: two examples

Question	subject 11 project 3 (news)	score	subject 21 project 3 (news)	score
What do you hope to achieve doing this project and the activities involved?	<i>I would like to improve my listening skills in the way that I can assess a mass of information and pick out the most important facts.</i>	2	- become more aware of current affairs in Germany - improve my listening skills - be able to pick out important points	2
Activity:	<i>Listening + taking notes</i>	2	<i>watching the news</i>	1
What did you learn?	<i>I became in tune with the German language and so I understood what was being said in German without needing to translate into English.</i>	2		0
Problems:	<i>I have a fear of listening exercises and when I started to listen to the news, I was easily confused and didn't know what to write down.</i>	2		0
Follow-up:	<i>I will have a plan in which I will listen to everything and then try to write things down quickly.</i>	2	<i>vocab - look up/learn</i>	1
Did you find any of the tasks or activities particularly enjoyable, easy, difficult or disagreeable and if so, why?	<i>I was dreading the "Nachrichten" project as I am not very confident with my listening skills. However, as I got more used to listening to the news every day, I became more confident with this area of learning.</i>	2	- it was enjoyable to watch the news and to see what was happening in Germany.	2
Did you identify any problems regarding your learning?	<i>I did find it extremely difficult to understand everything which was being said on the news programmes and I could not write brief notes about each topic, quickly enough.</i>	2	- not easy to find consecutive news programmes.	2

Over the past weeks, have you identified any language problem you want to work on over the following weeks [...]?	<i>My listening skills are quite dire and so I am quite determined to incorporate (sic!) listening to the news into my routine.</i>	2		0
Do you think you have reached the objectives stated under question 2?	<i>I am certainly nearer to reaching my goal but at the moment, I am still not totally confident with my listening skills but the Nachrichten project was unexpectedly quite interesting to work on and so I would enjoy listening to the news on a regular basis.</i>	2	<i>- I felt I had reached the objectives as I was able to write short summaries (sic!)</i>	2

It is evident that the procedure does not account for many differences obvious in the examples chosen. However, a more precise distinction complicates the rating without necessarily leading to greater clarity.

An interrater reliability test was conducted and confirmed the consistency of the rating system.

A new SPSS file was created with one case number for each project the students were expected to hand in, $N = 250$. Information regarding each individual project journal, such as number of words and scored level of reflectivity, was then entered and univariate statistics used to give a clearer picture of the data.

In order to test the hypotheses that task attitude and expressed level of reflectivity improve with participation in the learner development scheme, a new variable was created which contained the sequential number of each project, i.e. whether it was the first (1) or the third (3) required project in the academic year.

A first screening of the data suggested that other factors may have influenced word count and expressed level of reflectivity. Three more variables were consequently generated. With word count and scored level of reflectivity as dependent variables respectively, the independent variables included project number (ordinal), task type (nominal) and student (nominal). As a measure of significance a one-way-Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for each pair of variables.

A final ANOVA aimed to determine a possible relationship between word count as the independent and scored level of reflectivity as the dependent variable.

For all significance tests, the significance level was set at $\alpha < .05$.

7.1.3. Results

7.1.3.1. The task attitude

One way to determine students' perception of the project journals is to investigate their task attitude reflected in the journals themselves. According to Dörnyei (2001:234), if task attitude is high, students are keen to participate in the task. Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) in their study on variables in oral task performance use word count as an indicator of task engagement. Similarly, in this study the number of words students use to complete the journals is used as a rough but nonetheless illuminating way to investigate task attitude. Since this study focuses on the students' acceptance of the project journals alone, word count refers only to the number of words written in the journal, rather than in the whole project.

On this variable, the actual word count is the value attributed to each project handed in. If a student handed in a project for assessment without a project journal attached, the word count is zero, since this behaviour is an important indicator of the student's attitude towards the usefulness of the project journals. Missing values were attributed for projects not handed in for assessment. There can be a variety of reasons for not submitting a project for assessment and

students' attitudes towards the project journals in particular probably play an insignificant role.

I collected 236 projects with 183 project journals from the cohort. 78 percent of the projects were submitted together with a project journal. The 30 students involved in the Programme in the academic year 2000/01 were expected to hand in a total of five projects over the two semesters. Since three projects in one semester proved to be difficult to schedule, the 25 students from the 2002/03 intake only had to complete two projects per semester. The projects are presented here in their chronological order.

Table 7.2: Number and percentage of projects handed in complete with a project journal

	project 1	project 2	project 3	project 4	project 5	total
N (students)	55	55	55	55	30	250
N (projects, valid)	54	52	50	52	28	236
N (journals)	40	40	37	42	24	183
Valid percent	74.1	76.9	74	80.8	85.7	

N (students) refers to the number of students who were expected to hand in that particular project number. N (valid projects) is the number of projects in fact collected. The rows below show the total numbers of project journals handed in with the projects and the percentages of projects complete with journals of all the collected projects.

Apart from a drop for project 3, the continuous increase in the percentage of students handing in their projects with the journals attached indicates that students took the writing of the journal more seriously with each project they completed. However, I only asked students about the benefits of the journals at the end of the year, so it remains open whether the increase had been caused by the fact that students found the journals more helpful with time or that they

realised that completing them would lead to a better mark.

The deadline for project 3 for the first cohort was at a time of year when they were extremely busy with assignments. Only 91% of students from the whole group handed in that particular project, as opposed to 98% for project 1, 95% for projects 2 and 4 respectively and 96% for project 4. Time constraints may therefore have caused other students to hand in the project, but neglect the writing of the journal.

Table 7.3: Univariate descriptives for word count

N = 236

Word count of journals 1-5	
Minimum	0
Maximum	712
Mean	143.87
Std. Dev.	121.56

Table 7.3. presents simple overall statistics on the journal data. *N* refers to the 236 projects that were handed in by the experimental group. The mean of 144 words and the Standard Deviation must be read as recognising that a sizeable percentage of journals were included with a word count of zero, as seen in table 7.2. The mean of those journals handed in would be 186 words, with a Standard Deviation of 106 and a minimum word count of 34.

The journal filled in with 712 words is quite explicit. The student must have spent some time and effort completing it compared to the student using only 34 words.

Variables influencing word count

Of all the factors that may have influenced the explicitness of the project

journals, the following three will be investigated:

- variable A: project number (5 values projects 1- 5)
- variable B: task type (15 values tasks 1-15)
- variable C: student (55 values cases 1-55)

Variable A: project number

The first issue to be investigated is whether the time the students have been involved in the treatment influences the number of words they use. Projects are numbered one, for the first project in autumn, through to four and five for the last projects in spring. If task attitude changes with the students' experience of independent learning, i.e. if they come to acknowledge the usefulness of the project journals to help them organise their learning, project number should have a significant positive effect on task attitude.

The average word count for the journals for different project numbers is as follows:

Table 7.4: Mean of word count for sequential project numbers

		word count journal 1	word count journal 2	word count journal 3	word count journal 4	word count journal 5
N	Valid	54	52	50	52	28
Mean		152.0	129.6	133.6	160.2	142.9
SD		145.3	94.5	104.8	140.6	108.5

The table shows that the students use the second highest number of words for project no. 1. The number of words then drops, but rises again for project 3 and 4.

The drop in the average number of words written in journals no.5 may be caused by the fact that only students from the 00/01 intake had to complete project no. 5. The data show that students from this cohort generally use a

lower average number of words used for each journal and consequently exhibit a lower task attitude. This is partly due to the fact that more students from this intake failed to submit the journals with their projects. The difference in the behaviour of members of both groups may have been caused by faults in the experimental design or by factors I was not able to control, such as the language tutors' behaviours. However, another possible reason for the different reactions to the treatment is the previous language learning experience of the students. Students from the 02/03 intake generally seemed to be better prepared for independent learning than students from the 00/01 intake.

Although we have seen that the average number of words the students use to fill in the journals changes over time, the ANOVA suggests that project number was not a significant factor for the number of words, with $p = .69$. The hypothesis that students develop a higher task attitude with regard to the journals over the year cannot be accepted.

Variable B: task type

Some of the activities on offer may cause students to write more words than they would need to describe other activities. Task type is therefore another variable that could influence word count.

However, the ANOVA did not find a significant relationship between the number of words the students use to complete the journals and the task type, with $p = .69$.

Variable C: student

It can also be assumed that task attitude largely depends on the individual student rather than on any of the other factors tested before.

The ANOVA indeed shows that there is a significant relationship, with $p = .000$. The relationship is remarkably strong, with a squared correlation coefficient of $\eta^2 = .555$. This means that student is the variable that most consistently determines word count.

Even ignoring all subjects who failed to hand in one or more of the journals, leading to a word count of zero and thus lowering the means, there is still a huge range of means between different students. This shows that the extent of the journal entries depends mostly on characteristics of the individual student.

Subject no. 30 completed two journals with an average word count of 49 words, and subject 27, likewise, needed an average of 78 words. In comparison, subject no. 51 used an average of 375 words per journal, followed by subject no. 10 with 370 words on average.

7.1.3.2. The expressed level of reflectivity

Each project journal was evaluated for its expressed level of reflectivity. If the hypothesis holds true that participation in the learner development scheme raises the level of reflectivity, the attributed scores should be associated with the sequential project number.

60 project journals randomly chosen from the sample N were rated independently by a second rater. The interrater reliability test confirmed the reliability of the measure with a Pearson Correlation Coefficient of $r = .99$.

In this calculation, I will only look at submitted project journals, since not handing in a journal with a project does not indicate that the student has a level of reflectivity of zero. Rather, I assume that this behaviour is related to task attitude.

The procedure results in N (included) = 183 and N (excluded) = 67.

Table 7.5: Univariate descriptives for the level of reflectivity (with score = 0 as a missing value)

N (valid) = 183 and N (missing) = 67

Scores of level of reflectivity of journals 1-5	
Minimum	6
Maximum	73
Mean	32.8
Std. Dev.	12.9

On average the learners reach a score of 33, with a standard deviation of 13 indicating a fairly low consistency among different students and projects.

Variables influencing the scores for the expressed level of reflectivity

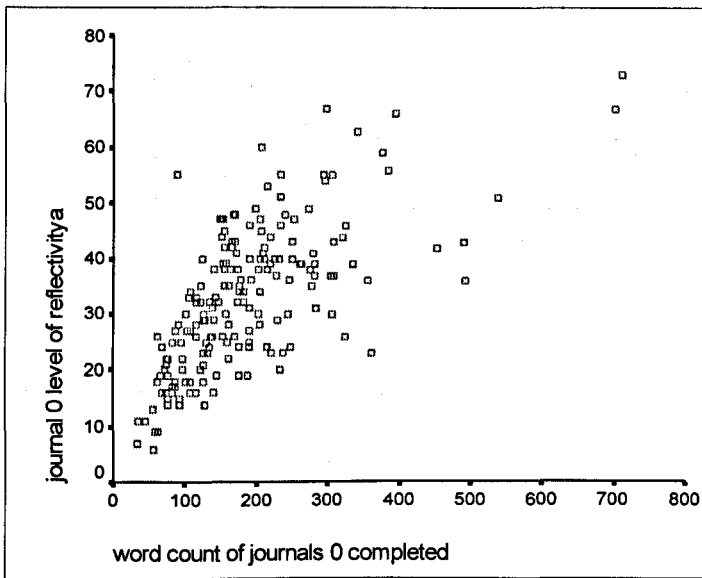
First, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the variables word count and expressed level of reflectivity will be calculated to determine any relationship. The following variables are then tested to determine their effect on the expressed level of reflectivity:

- variable A: project number (5 values project 1 – project 5)
- variable B: task type (15 values 1-15)
- variable C: student (55 values case 1-55)

Word count

First of all, it is important to note that there is a positive linear relationship between word count and the attributed scores for the level of reflectivity. This means that there is an association between task attitude and level of reflectivity.

Figure 7.1: Relationship between journal length and level of reflectivity.



With an increase in words, the ascribed level of reflectivity rises.

The relationship is significant with $p = .000$ and very strong with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r_{obs} = .68$.

This, of course does not mean that students who keep their project journals short necessarily possess a lower level of reflectivity, or even no reflectivity, when they choose not to hand in a journal. Rather, it shows that I measure what the students articulate in their journals, not their general capability.

Variable A: project number

The ANOVA establishes a significant positive relationship with $p = .041$, between the sequential number of the project and the scored level of reflectivity. The relationship, however, is very weak with $\eta^2 = .054$.

The expressed level of reflectivity seems to be at its highest in the diagnosis project. It then drops and, with slight variations, roughly remains at the same level. It was anticipated, however, that the level of reflectivity would increase rather than drop over the course of the treatment, as is obvious from the data below.

Table 7.6: Relationship between sequential number of project and scored level of reflectivity.

	level of reflectivity project 1	level of reflectivity project 2	level of reflectivity project 3	level of reflectivity project 4	level of reflectivity project 5	total
N	40	40	37	42	24	183
Mean	38.0	33.1	30.8	31.4	29.2	32.8
SD	16.4	11.4	8.6	12.8	12.9	12.9

Variable B: task type

The ANOVA did not find a significant relationship between task type and expressed level of reflectivity.

Factor C: student

The average levels of reflectivity exhibited in the different project journals of individual students differ widely in the cohort, with a total mean of 33 and a range of 45 scores.

Subject no. 3 shows the lowest level of reflectivity with only 9 scores (for only one project handed in), followed by subject no. 30 with 10 scores on average. The highest mean in the cohort was attributed to subject no. 55 with 54 scores and the second highest to subject no. 53 with 53 scores.

The one-way ANOVA confirms a strong significant positive relationship with

$$p = .000 \text{ and } \eta^2 = .58.$$

7.1.4. Observations and discussion

The following table summarises the variables influencing task attitude and expressed level of reflectivity.

Table 7.7: Investigated factors possibly influencing word count and score of level of reflectivity

	word count	expressed level of reflectivity
word count		$p = .000$
		$r_{obs} = .68$
project no.	<i>no significant relationship</i>	$p = .041$
		$\eta^2 = .054$
task type	<i>no significant relationship</i>	<i>no significant relationship</i>
Student	$p = .000$	$p = .000$
	$\eta^2 = .555$	$\eta^2 = .58$

Among the variables tried, the factor that has the strongest effect on expressed level of reflectivity is word count. This strong association reflects the fact that what I measure is not only their metacognitive ability, but also, crucially, what they are prepared to share with the language adviser. In other words, I have no direct access to their thoughts, a limitation found in all analyses based on self-report data. What students are prepared to share, however, is largely determined by their task attitude.

The second most consistent relationship was established between expressed level of reflectivity and student, closely followed by the one between task attitude and student. There is a high consistency among different projects of individual students. Student characteristics seem to determine task attitude

and level of reflectivity. These attributes may be shaped by learning experiences, beliefs, general attitudes towards staff and study at the University etc.

The fact that task attitude does not change significantly over the course of the year and is most strongly related to the individual student suggests that learners hardly “learn to appreciate” the journals as a learning tool with their experience of filling them in. Whereas some students seem to value them right from the start, others detest them as an extra burden right through to the end of the Portfolio Programme, often deciding not to fill them in at all in spite of the disadvantages this behaviour brings regarding their marks. This confirms the findings of Garner (2000:101) and Halbach (2000:87), who found that many students decided not to complete the learning diaries in their studies, even if they formed a compulsory part of a language course.

The sequential project number does have a very weak but significant effect on the expressed level of reflectivity. However, the relationship shows a drop over time on this variable. Since this general drop seems to coincide with a rise in the percentage of projects handed in complete with the journals, it seems that the students had learned to follow the rules and submitted the journals. Yet some students seem to have detested the journals, and so kept the time spent on them to a minimum.

The fact that student is a factor far outweighing the influence of sequential project number also suggests that for the majority, metacognitively less aware students are not turned into metacognitively highly aware learners during the course of one year. The contents of the journals reinforce this finding. Many students kept recording the actual activities they had done, rather than beginning to reflect on the process of learning. Simmons (1996:61) also found that her subjects showed confidence writing about the more practical issues of what they had learned, but would not review the processes.

The factor analysis demonstrates that task type has no significant effect on word count or expressed level of reflectivity.

Finally it has to be stressed again that the most consistent relationship was established between word count and expressed level of reflectivity. This can be regarded as a warning not to overestimate the validity of the findings. Rather than evaluating a cognitive ability, I evaluate what students verbalise in order to deduce clues regarding this ability.

7.2. The advisory sessions as a research tool

The measure of task attitude towards the advisory sessions can only be the students' attendance at the sessions, since their length and content are influenced by the language advisor. As with the project journals, students' participation in the sessions will be interpreted as an indication of their acceptance of them as a valuable tool for their language learning.

Since the role of the language adviser and the practice of advising were both new, they had to be negotiated between both participants in the learning conversations. In order to introduce them to the new educational procedure, participation in the advisory sessions was made an obligatory part of the portfolio projects. It was hoped that the students would be keen to attend once they had recognised their value. Yet if the students failed to draw any benefits from the sessions, this would reflect in their task attitude and some might eventually cease coming. A comparison between the submission rate of the learner journals and the attendance rate of the advisory sessions will help to understand their approval of both learner development tools.

It was originally planned to analyse the recorded sessions with the aim of determining the development of the students' reflectivity over time. However, the data from the learning conversations proved to be unsuitable for the necessary quantifications. This was due to the fact that the sessions were largely unstructured, allowing both the learner and language adviser to develop their own lines of thought. The approach complies with the philosophy of advising followed in this study. Riley (1997:119) reflects on learning conversations, observing that counselling is a 'complex and variable

discourse type which overlaps with a number of other types and situations' and identifies the aims of informing, diagnosing, evaluating, negotiating, helping and consulting. This complexity reflects in the conversations recorded for this study. In addition, the roles of the adviser and the learner were yet to be negotiated. Many students referred to more familiar roles during our interaction, treating me as either a "knower" (Riley 1997:115) in a more traditional teaching role or as a native speaker. In both cases the students were focused on the language rather than the learning process. Because I felt that I had to act out these roles to a certain extent, and that the discussion of the texts they had handed in was a real need for them, many sessions were spent discussing their mistakes and thus helping them directly with their language learning. Yet, when listening to the recordings, I was reluctant to categorise this very focused and determined student behaviour as less reflective than the discussions of their learning processes, which I had usually initiated myself.

7.2.1. Research question

The subjects' participation in the advisory sessions was analysed to answer the following questions:

3. Do the students come to appreciate the advisory sessions over the course of the first year?
4. Which of the two learner development tools do the students prefer, the project journals or the advisory sessions?

7.2.2. Procedures

7.2.2.1. Data collection

The rules and regulations of the Portfolio Programme state that the advisory sessions form an integral part of each project. The students received five percentage points added to the mark of the project for each session they attended.

A timetable suggesting times for the advisory sessions was on display in the department until the deadline of each project. The students were expected to fill in their names and appear at the agreed time in the language adviser's office. The adviser would have marked the projects beforehand and taken notes for the individual discussions. The sessions were scheduled lasting 20 minutes for the first discussions of the diagnosis projects and 15 minutes for each subsequent project.

Initially it was envisaged that the students should discuss each project with both their tutor and the language adviser. The tutors would focus on the language and the adviser on the learning processes. However, the scheme was found to be unfeasible, and, in view of the workload of tutors and students, was abandoned almost immediately. Yet the confusion it had caused determined much of the data collection process with the first subgroup. As a

consequence, participation in the advisory sessions of this subgroup differed considerably between the projects.

The tutors conducted the fifth set of sessions with the first cohort alone. One of the tutors was also very keen to keep involved throughout the Programme, and consequently developed a strong interest in issues of independent language learning. Although this at times complicated the data collection process with regard to the advisory sessions, I also benefited greatly from the goodwill and involvement of the staff in the department. In addition, I enjoyed the fruitful conversations with my colleagues as practitioners with first-hand experiences of the Programme.

7.2.2.2. Analysis

In the chronological order of the projects, the total number of projects submitted was compared to the number of advisory sessions held for that particular set of projects. From those who had been expected to attend the sessions, the change in the percentage of learners actually participating was observed over the first year. The difference between the rates of attendance for the sequential project numbers can be regarded as an indicator of their changing attitude towards the sessions.

Finally, the overall attendance rate was compared to the submission rate of the project journals in order to draw conclusions regarding the students' approval of these learner development tools.

7.2.3. Results

7.2.3.1. The change in task attitude

For the 208 assignments I collected for the projects 1-4 over the two years, I conducted 167 advisory sessions. 80 percent of the submitted projects were followed by an advisory session. Due to the confusion regarding the

attendance of advisory sessions in the first cohort, caused by the initial plan to conduct two sessions for each project, the following calculations are based on the figures for the second cohort only.

In table 7.8, the projects are presented in their chronological order.

Table 7.8: Number and percentage of projects with attendance at advisory sessions, second cohort only

	project 1	project 2	project 3	project 4	Total
N (students)	25	25	25	25	100
N (projects, valid)	25	24	24	24	97
N (sessions)	22	19	22	20	83
Valid percent	88	79	92	83	

No steady rise in attendance can be observed from the data. However, the low attendance rates for the projects 2 and 4 for this cohort may be explained by the fact that the advisory sessions took place very late in the semesters, before Christmas and the summer exam period, respectively.

7.2.4. A comparison of task attitudes: The project journals and the advisory sessions

The rate of attendance in the advisory sessions for the cohort was 80 percent. The comparable rate of submission of the project journals is 76 percent for projects 1-4. However, if only the second cohort is regarded, where the language adviser conducted all feedback sessions herself, the attendance rate was 86 percent. Sessions individually scheduled with the language tutors by students from the first cohort are not covered in the rate of 80 percent. Including these general feedback sessions, the true rate of attendance would be closer to 85 percent for the first cohort. Consequently, if all feedback sessions are taken

into account, the students attended approximately 85 percent of the sessions.

7.2.5. Observations and discussion

Participation in the sessions does not rise over the course of the year, but fluctuates according to other demands on students in the academic year. This indicates that they do not appreciate the advisory sessions more once they are familiarized with the concept of the learning conversation.

However, taking into account students' problems with the organisation of the sessions, e.g. forgetting the correct time of the appointment, being off ill on the day, arriving late, and the fact that sessions were usually not retrospectively postponed, the attendance rate can be regarded as high, e.g. when compared to the general attendance rate in the language classes. Comparing the students' approval of both learner development tools, it has to be noted that none of the problems mentioned above would prevent a student from filling in a journal. The students therefore seem to have taken greater care to organise their participation in the advisory sessions than to fill in the journals. In addition, weighting of the advisory sessions for the project mark was less than that of the journals, providing only little incentive. Both these facts indicate that the task attitude for the advisory sessions was higher than that for the project journals.

Yet, although appreciation of a task is one of the factors influencing task engagement, it can be assumed that other aspects have also played a role. Some students may have felt that it was too impolite or would reflect badly on them if they did not show up for an individually arranged session with the language adviser. The halo effect can be assumed to have exerted a greater influence on participation in the advisory sessions than on the completion of the project journals.

It was also observed that many students adapted the advisory sessions according to their own needs. More specifically, they focused on the language rather than the learning process, positioning the language adviser in the roles of

language teacher and native speaker. Accordingly, some students referred to the sessions as 'feedback sessions'.

For a number of students, the reason for attending the sessions could have been the possibility to directly work on their proficiency in German, rather than to improve their language learning skills. Clemente (2003:211) also observes that some learners bring their own purpose to the new discourse of the language learner counselling session by using it as an opportunity to practise the target language.

7.3. The immediate effects of and attitudes towards the Portfolio Programme

The triangulation of data is particularly important when investigating complex constructs such as motivation and reflectivity with newly developed measurement tools. A third questionnaire, 2.3. (Appendix 7), similar to a programme evaluation form, was therefore developed to target the students' perception of the Portfolio Programme. Nine closed items invited the students to assess the perceived benefits of the Programme on a rating scale, scoring one to four. Questions 10 and 11 targeted their attitudes towards the assessment of portfolio work and questions 12 and 13 addressed their overall evaluation of the Programme. Questions 10-13 were open ended.

The general significance of the Programme for the students will be evaluated when analysing the responses to question 12.

The survey singles out two learner development tools utilized in the independent learning programme, the project journals (question 7) and the sessions with the language adviser (question 8). The students' estimation of them as tools to enhance their independent language learning, however, should be regarded in the context of their views on learner development per se. The questionnaire therefore elicits students' attitudes towards the importance of learning skills (question 3) and the role of assessment in the Programme

(question 10 and 11).

Possible outcomes of portfolio work are specified, such as increased target language proficiency (question 1), the acquisition of language learning skills (question 2), the feeling of better control over the learning process (question 4) and increased confidence (question 5) and motivation (question 6). The respondents will rate their own perceived achievements regarding these objectives. The interaction amongst individual effects will be illuminated with the aim of testing the model outlined in chapter three. According to the process model of learner autonomy, engagement in portfolio work should improve the use of language learning skills and strategies and thus raise the feeling of control, confidence and ultimately, motivation.

Finally, the responses to the open questions will be categorized in order to discover possible aspects of the students' experiences which were not anticipated by the researcher when designing the study.

For practical reasons, the form of the Portfolio Programme was changed during the first semester with the first cohort. Students were no longer required to discuss each individual project with both tutor and language adviser. Instead, the language adviser conducted most feedback sessions herself. Question 9 was therefore dropped from the questionnaires.

7.3.1. Research questions

Questionnaire 2.3. was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Do students perceive the efficient use of language learning skills and strategies as an important goal in an HE foreign language learning context?
2. Do the students perceive the Portfolio Programme and its tools, the project journals and the advisory sessions, as effective to improve their language learning behaviour?
3. How do the students evaluate their own achievements regarding the specified learning objectives of the Portfolio Programme, i.e. target

language proficiency, language learning skills and strategies, control over the learning process, confidence and motivation?

4. What are the relationships between the acknowledged effects? In particular, do they support the hypotheses that

a) efficiency of language learning skills and strategy use is associated with the feeling of control over the language learning process?

b) the feeling of control over the language learning process is associated with learner confidence?

c) learner confidence is associated with motivation?

5. Which characteristics and aspects of the Portfolio Programme are dominant in the learners' viewpoints?

7.3.2. Procedures

7.3.2.1. Data collection

Questionnaire 2.3. was distributed and collected in connection with questionnaires 2.1. and 2.2. after the completion and discussion of the last project.

7.3.2.2. Analysis

The responses to the closed questionnaire items were entered into SPSS. A Word file contains all the answers to the open questions and any comments made on the questionnaire forms for a qualitative analysis (CD-ROM/questionnaire responses).

Univariate statistics were employed to analyse students' responses to the self-report items. Percentages illustrate the cohort's distribution of answers to the closed items in the questionnaire.

Since the quantitative data from the questionnaire are ordinal, the Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients were calculated to describe the strengths of the relationships between individual variables.

In order to reduce the data from the responses to the open questionnaire items, categories were identified and the data grouped accordingly.

7.3.3. Results

44 valid questionnaires were collected from the 55 students from the experimental group. The response rate is 80%. 11 students did not hand in the completed questionnaire.

The reasons for not handing in the questionnaire are probably manifold, including such mundane reasons as not attending that particular classroom session or general forgetfulness. However, for the interpretation of the data it will be assumed that students who did not fill in the questionnaire might be equally or more critical of the Portfolio Programme than the rest of the cohort. Robson (1993:143) tackles the issue, stressing that 'those who do not participate may well differ from those who do, but it is extremely difficult to allow for this'.

7.3.3.1. Students' perceptions of the importance of learning skills and strategies

Students who do not regard the development of language learning skills and strategies as a valuable educational goal will have difficulties evaluating whether the Portfolio Programme assisted them in developing these skills. It is therefore essential to first determine students' perceptions of the benefits of learner development.

No subject states that s/he has not acquired any new language learning skills and strategies. Thus, they all answered question 2.3.3.

Question 2.3.3. If so, how would you describe the importance of those learning skills or strategies for you after leaving university?

Table 7.9: Answers to question 2.3.3.

N = 44 (80%) valid, 11 (20%) missing.

	Not important	slightly important	moderately important	very important	total
Raw	0	11	21	12	44
Valid Percent	0	25	47.7	27.3	100

All respondents think that learning skills and strategies will be of at least some importance for them in the future. Yet, some students from the experimental group do not regard the learner development scheme as sufficiently important to be an assessed part of their first year German course.

Question 2.3.10. Do you think portfolio work should be assessed as part of the language program for first year students in the future.

Table 7.10: Answers to question 2.3.10.

N = 44 (80%) valid, 11 (20%) missing.

	No	yes	total
Raw	7	37	44
Valid Percent	15.9	84.1	100

84% of the students who responded to the questionnaire are happy for portfolio work to be assessed. Of the total cohort, 67% confirm that they wish to see the additional effort they are making for the Portfolio Programme acknowledged. However, do they prefer this mark to reflect the quality of their language work, as in traditional language courses, or do they regard the enhancement of language learning skills and strategies as a separate objective worthy of assessment?

Question 2.3.11. Do you think independent learning skills, as marked by the language adviser, should count towards your first year mark at all?

Table 7.11: Answers to question 2.3.11.

N = 43 (78.2%) valid, 12 (21.8%) missing.

	No	Yes	total
Raw	16	27	43
Valid Percent	37.2	62.8	100

63% of those who answered the question think that learning skills should be marked. However, of the total cohort of 55 students engaged in assessed portfolio work, only 49% explicitly legitimize this method.

Of the 43 students who answered both questions, 25 agree for both portfolio work in general and independent learning skills in particular to be assessed, and five students prefer neither of them to be assessed. Yet 11 students evidently want the assessment of their independent work relate to their language proficiency alone, rather than to their learning skills and strategies.

7.3.3.2. Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the tools for learner development

As shown above, the questionnaire respondents in this study agreed with most researchers that the efficient use of language learning skills and strategies is beneficial to second and foreign language learning. The question whether efficient strategy use can be fostered by some form of intervention in the learning process is still open, though. Moreover, the exact type of intervention most likely to enhance language learning is not clear. In this study learning diaries and advisory sessions are employed as the main learner development tools. Their usefulness will be scrutinized by the experimental group.

Two questions target the value of the instruments:

Question 2.3.7. How do you feel the writing of the project journal has improved your language learning behaviour?

Table 7.12: Answers to question 2.3.7.

N = 42 (76.4%) valid, 13 (23.6%) missing

	not improved	Slightly improved	moderately improved	very much improved	total
Raw	14	15	7	6	42
valid percent	33.3	35.7	16.7	14.3	100

14 students think that through the help of the project journals their language learning behaviour has *not improved*.

Subject 39 is the only student who never handed in a project journal. Yet, she indicated that her language learning behaviour had *slightly improved* through the journals. All six students who answered *very much improved* handed in all their project journals. However six students who believed that the project journals had *not improved* their language learning also presented all project journals. For these students, the assessment of the journals might have been the main incentive. It can be assumed that they resented the fact that the journals were imposed on them.

The data suggest that the majority of students do not regard the project journals as an efficient tool to enhance their language learning. One third of the respondents claim that the journals did not help them at all.

In order to contextualise these responses, it is interesting to compare them to students' attitudes towards the second main tool of the learner development scheme, the advisory sessions.

Question 2.3.8. How do you feel the individual sessions with the language adviser have improved your language learning behaviour?

Table 7.13: Answers to question 2.3.8.

N = 42 (76.4%) valid, 13 (23.6%) missing

	not improved	Slightly improved	moderately improved	improved	total
raw	2	11	19	10	42
Valid Percent	4.8	26.2	45.2	23.8	100

Two students did not answer this particular question, one of whom never attended a session with the language adviser.

Of those who answered the question, only five percent thought that through the advisory sessions their learning behaviour had not improved.

7.3.3.3. Students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Portfolio Programme

The overall perceptions of the Portfolio Programme are captured by the responses to question 12, which examines whether students regard portfolio study as a worthwhile part of their first year German degree course.

Question 2.3.12. Do you think portfolio work should be offered for first year students in the future?

Table 7.14: Answers to question 2.3.12.

N = 43 (78.2%) valid, 12 (21.8%) missing.

	no	Yes	total
raw	2	41	43
Valid Percent	4.7	95.3	100

The vast majority, 95% of the students who filled in the questionnaire, agree that portfolio work should be offered in the future. Only 2 students openly object to it.

The students were also asked to what degree they think they attained some specified goals. Although the question focused on the Portfolio Programme, it is difficult to ascribe effects such as improved proficiency and feeling of control to a single cause.

Question 2.3.1. How do you feel your overall proficiency of German has improved through the additional tasks for the portfolio?

Table 7.15: Answers to question 2.3.1.

N = 44 (80%) valid, 11 (20%) missing.

	not improved	slightly improved	moderately improved	very much improved	Total
Raw	2	6	26	10	44
Valid Percent	4.5	13.6	59.1	22.7	100

82% of the respondents agree that portfolio work has helped them to at least moderately improve their proficiency in German. Interestingly, two students think that their language proficiency has not improved through the additional tasks.

Question 2.3.2. Through portfolio work, have you acquired any new language learning skills or strategies, which could improve your language learning in the future?

Table 7.16: Answers to question 2.3.2.

N = 44 (80%) valid, 11 (20%) missing.

	no, none	no, hardly any	yes, some	yes, many	total
Raw	0	3	36	5	44
Valid Percent	0	6.8	81.8	11.4	100

No student believes that s/he has not acquired any new language learning skills or strategies. More than 90 % of the students who answered the question believe that they have at least learned some new skills or strategies. The students value the independent learning scheme almost equally for proficiency and learner development.

The theories underlining the Portfolio Programme combine in the assumption that better language learning skills and strategies result in a higher feeling of control and with it in more confidence as a learner and increased motivation, as outlined in chapter three. Questions four to six aim at the change in these feelings as caused by involvement in the independent learning programme.

Question 2.3.4. *Having done portfolio work, do you feel more in control of your own learning now?*

Table 7.17: Answers to question 2.3.4.

N = 44 (80%) valid, 11 (20%) missing.

	Less in control	No change	Somewhat more in control	Considerably more in control	total
Raw	1	11	23	9	44
Valid Percent	2.3	25.0	52.3	20.5	100

Almost three quarter of the respondents claim that through portfolio work they gained somewhat or considerably more control of their learning. However, one student even feels less in control, attributing this change to Portfolio work.

Question 2.3.5. Having done portfolio work, do you feel increased confidence in yourself as a language learner?

Table 7.18: Answers to question 2.3.5.

N = 44 (80%) valid, 11 (20%) missing.

	Less confidence	No change	Somewhat more confidence	Considerably more confidence	total
Raw	1	14	18	11	44
Valid Percent	2.3	31.8	40.9	25.0	100

Although the influence of portfolio work on the feeling of confidence seems to be slightly lower, 66% of students confirm that they noticed somewhat or considerably more confidence.

Question 2.3.6. How do you feel portfolio work has influenced your motivation for learning German?

Table 7.19: Answers to question 2.3.6.

N = 44 (80%) valid, 11 (20%) missing.

	Less motivation	No change	Somewhat increased motivation	Considerably increased motivation	total
Raw	1	9	26	8	44
Valid Percent	2.3	20.5	59.1	18.2	100

77% of the students who answered the questionnaire felt more motivated to learn German after engaging in guided independent learning.

The univariate statistics performed above show that most students confirmed the anticipated benefits of the programme under evaluation.

7.3.3.4. The relationships between individual effects of the Portfolio Programme

The project journals and advisory sessions were designed to raise the learners' consciousness of their language learning. Awareness is regarded as a precondition for effective strategy use, which should lead to a higher feeling of control and therefore higher confidence as a language learner. Finally, the increased confidence should reflect in higher motivation.

For this part of the investigation, the relationships between five variables will be examined. The variables include responses to the questions targeting the changes in proficiency in German, skills and strategy use, feeling of control, feeling of confidence and motivation to learn the language. As explained at the beginning of this chapter, only data from the questionnaires 2.3 were considered for these calculations.

Table 7.20: Spearman rank-order correlation coefficients between effect variables (two-tailed)

	Improved proficiency in German	Acquisition of language learning skills and strategies	Better control of learning	Increased confidence as language learner	Higher motivation
Improved proficiency in German		$\rho_s = .512$	$\rho_s = .546$	$\rho_s = .589$	$\rho_s = .636$
Acquisition of language learning skills and strategies	$\rho_s = .512$		$\rho_s = .572$	$\rho_s = .460$	$\rho_s = .609$
Better control of learning	$\rho_s = .546$	$\rho_s = .572$		$\rho_s = .450$	$\rho_s = .424$
Increased confidence as language learner	$\rho_s = .589$	$\rho_s = .460$	$\rho_s = .450$		$\rho_s = .569$
Higher motivation	$\rho_s = .636$	$\rho_s = .609$	$\rho_s = .424$	$\rho_s = .569$	

$p \leq .004$ for all correlations in the table

The strongest relationship exists between an increase in motivation and higher proficiency in German, followed by the association between motivation and the acquisition of new language learning skills and strategies. The link between proficiency in German and confidence is also very strong.

The weakest correlation can be found between motivation and control over the learning process, followed by confidence and control over the learning process.

Since this is a correlational study, it gives no indication of the cause and effect relationship between the variables. It is therefore not obvious from this investigation whether the feeling of higher proficiency raises motivation or whether somehow increased motivation causes a higher feeling of proficiency. Similarly, it is impossible to state that a more efficient use of language learning skills and strategies triggers an increase in motivation.

The associations between control and confidence and control and motivation, although present, are the weakest the data suggest. Although the acquisition of language learning skills and strategies coincides with the feeling of better control over the learning process, this control is not always translated into confidence, as predicted in the model outlined in chapter three. Instead, an increase in perceived language proficiency shows much closer links with motivation and confidence.

7.3.3.5. The Portfolio Programme: The students' point of view

Although closed questionnaire items tend to extract the data the researcher is interested in, they also confine the picture to her dimensions. Two open components were therefore added to the closed questionnaire items 2.3.11. and 2.3.12., in order to discover aspects of portfolio work which are important to the students. In the following table the identified categories are organised in rows. Each row contains model answers to the two different questions, the subject number of the student who provided the answer and the total number of students whose responses or part of the responses were assigned to that

category. The table starts with the responses from students who answered *no* in the closed part of that particular question.

Table 7.21: Questionnaire 2.3. Categorization of answers to open questions 2.3.11. and 2.3.12.

	<i>Do you think independent learning skills, as marked by the language adviser, should count towards your first year mark at all?</i>		<i>Do you think portfolio work should be offered for first year students in the future?</i>	
Classification of comment	Example	No of rsp	Example	No of rsp
No				
Strategies are individually different	<i>don't think that learning skills is really something you can be marked on - it's just whatever works for you</i> subject no. 14	3		
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment add (unnecessary) pressure / increase workload	<i>there's a lot of pressure anyway, without adding more</i> subject no. 51	1	<i>Too much work compared to other languages</i> subject no. 40	2
Strategies must have time to develop	<i>These should only be assessed in the following years and be allowed to develop</i> subject no. 43	2		
Product not process should be assessed	<i>I think that the mark should be according to the quality of the work</i> subject no. 52	1		
Writing about learning process is difficult	<i>it's quite difficult to put on paper learning processes that have occurred [sic]</i> subject no. 29	1		

Yes				
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment encourage / improve (independent) language learning	<i>It is v. important to feel able to learn on your own. That marks count for it makes this necessary. subject no. 30</i>	6	<i>It helped me become used to doing independent work, which proved to be very helpful. subject no. 36</i>	7
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment focus on individual progress and strengths and weaknesses	<i>It's the only way to judge people's progress subject no. 27</i>	5	<i>Helps students to work at something they find difficult (reading, listening, writing) and try and find the best learning strategy for them subject no. 33</i>	8
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment improve language proficiency	<i>improve certain skills – listening e.g. subject no. 25</i>	1	<i>It did help me a lot and through analyzing [sic] my mistakes, I have been able to correct them. subject no. 15</i>	8
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment take pressure off exams / improve marks	<i>I feel more relaxed doing my own work and can concentrate more than I could in an exam subject no. 21</i>	4	<i>Yes as it helps take the pressure off them during exam & it counts to the final mark subject no. 21</i>	3
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment are motivating	<i>It is some kind of an incentive/motivation subject no. 9</i>	5	<i>Even if it is not included in the marks, it's still good that 1st ys are given the opportunity to learn subject no. 29</i>	1
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment familiarize with the Language Centre and / or the use of different media			<i>gives interest /introduces lang. learning centre subject no. 9</i>	4
The Portfolio Programme and its assessment make space for individual interests			<i>encourages branching out into other areas of German than in lang. classes subject no. 32</i>	2
Being in charge is enjoyable			<i>It was good to be in charge of my own learning subject no. 12</i>	1

Of the students who objected to the ideas of independent learning skills being assessed or portfolio work being offered for students in the future, three

thought that portfolio work is not worth the added pressure. Three responses relate to the problem of individual differences in learning, which are difficult to assess. Two students pointed out the fact that strategies need time to develop and therefore should not be assessed in the first year. One student objected to the idea of the learning process being assessed and another student mentioned the particular problem the Portfolio Programme was designed to address, the lack of learning awareness.

Of the responses in favour of the continuation of the Portfolio Programme or the assessment of independent learning skills, 13 generally approved of the emphasis put on the development of language learning skills or strategies. The same number of answers indicates that learners welcomed the opportunity to focus on their own strengths and weaknesses and to be assessed accordingly. However, nine students cited better language proficiency as their main incentive for portfolio work. These students may have appreciated any additional activity that would have helped them improve their language skills.

Seven responses reflect the fact that the Portfolio Programme eases the pressure of exams. Subjects no. 5 and 21 were so concerned about the exams, they mentioned this fact in response to both questions.

Six students appreciated the Portfolio Programme as a motivation to cover more work. This outweighs the three students who believed that the Programme was not worth their time.

The encouragement to use the Languages Centre or different resources for their learning of German was mentioned as a positive outcome of the Portfolio Programme by four students.

Two students welcomed the opportunity to follow their own interests and one student enjoyed the fact that she was in charge of her learning.

Finally, the students were asked to suggest improvements to the Portfolio Programme. Fifteen recommendations were collected and categorised. The following table lists one of the original recommendations for each category, the

case number of the student who made the suggestion and the total number of students offering a similar idea.

Table 7.22: Questionnaire 2.3. Categorization of answers to open question 2.3.13.

<i>If so, can you suggest any improvements?</i>	No of suggestions
<i>More time to complete work, deadlines not to coincide with other deadlines subject no. 1</i>	5
<i>Keep the language library open!!! subject no. 25</i>	2
<i>The necessity, through marks and shared projects, to spend more time with native speakers (best way to learn?). subject no. 30</i>	1
<i>Less words in essay topics!!! subject no. 28</i>	1
<i>More advice, for sources eg websites for Internet project, or Films for film project subject no. 32</i>	1
<i>Having optional portfolio work, so that people have opportunity to practise things they are bad at. Maybe offer option of having portfolio work assessed, or having exam work count for more – may be taken more seriously then, and be more useful. subject no. 14</i>	1
<i>To try + think of different portfolio projects if at all possible subject no. 6</i>	1
<i>- students should be advised to complete different Portfolio tasks instead of just doing the same one. subject no. 33</i>	1
<i>I don't understand the point of the project journal – I don't feel it's needed. subject no. 52</i>	1
<i>Have an overall task that includes all aspects of the language, this will establish the individuals [sic!] weak points. This will then help determine what the individual needs to practise within the language. This will help in choosing further portfolio projects. subject no. 18</i>	1

In addition to the practical advice given by individuals regarding organisational issues, subject number 33 would have liked to see the choice of projects for students constrained, obliging them to choose different projects rather than giving them the opportunity to address the same weakness over the course of the year. She had chosen to do the same reading comprehension project twice. One student would have appreciated the opportunity of more interaction with native speakers through the Portfolio Programme and one student wanted portfolio work to be optional, so that students could decide whether it counts towards their first year mark. One learner would have liked to see the project journals abolished. Although she had completed it, subject number 18

suggested a project similar to the diagnosis project. However, the highest number of students would have liked to see better co-operation among staff regarding deadlines.

7.3.4. Observations and discussion

The answers to the questions reveal that the students generally accepted the development of skills and strategies as a goal focused on in a Higher Education language course. The majority of students also approved of the Portfolio Programme and would like to see it continue in future. Only two students openly objected to the idea of the Portfolio Programme as a compulsory element of the language course.

The picture changes slightly with regard to the question of assessment. Although 84 % of the respondents wanted their portfolios to be assessed, only 62.8% of them, i.e. 49% of the entire cohort, said that they wanted the mark to reflect language learning skills and strategies. Assuming that students who had not handed in the final questionnaire might have generally been more critical of the Programme, it is not clear whether assessment of independent learning skills and strategies met with the approval of the majority of students in the sample.

The negative answers to the open questions regarding the continuation of the Portfolio Programme and the assessment of skills and strategies reflect some key problems of portfolio work. An assessed independent learning scheme adds more pressure to a demanding curriculum, which some students found difficult to cope with. The fact that only the individual student is able to decide whether a strategy works for her makes it difficult to assess skills and strategy use, i.e. the process of learning. Finally, to assess them from the start, without giving students much guidance and time to reflect and develop, is in fact problematic.

Many students, however, appreciated the feedback on additional language work or language learning skills and strategies. They regarded the assessment as a motivating factor as well as a chance to experience less pressure during the

exams. They also welcomed the fact that the feedback related to their individual progress and thus gave them the opportunity to work on their weaknesses and according to their interests. Another positive outcome mentioned by the learners is the fact that the Programme introduced them to a variety of resources for language learning. However, the responses also show that the students were at times more concerned with the practicalities of their studies, such as deadlines, marks and exams, than with the rather elusive aims of learner development.

With regard to the two learner development tools, the questionnaire responses suggest that students perceived the individual sessions with the language adviser as more helpful than keeping a learning journal. An explanation that offers itself in this context is the "halo effect". The students may have wanted to be polite or feared negative consequences, since I carried the roles of language adviser, researcher and internal examiner in the School all at the same time and the answers to the questionnaires were not anonymous.

The fact that a member of staff of the University had taken time to discuss their learning individually with them could also have influenced their answers. They may have found that guidance from an "expert", maybe even in my role as a native speaker, was by definition useful.

Individual feedback was perceived as more beneficial to their language learning than the more independent reflection with the support of the learning journals. It is generally accepted among educationists that a change of behaviour can be achieved and knowledge constructed through conversation and negotiation with others. As described in chapter three, Thomas and Harri-Augstein (1985) develop this idea further, claiming that in order to become independent, one must learn to conduct this conversation and negotiation about one's behaviour with oneself. According to this theory, the advisory sessions offer more guidance through the reflective process than the project journals, which are less supportive and would therefore demand more independence. Introducing project journals at a later stage in the students' development towards autonomy, as suggested below, might therefore lead to greater acceptance.

**Learning
conversation with
an "expert"**

**own reflection
structured by
"experts", i.e.
learning diaries,
project journals,
marking criteria**

**independent
reflection**



Thus, the students' preference for the advisory sessions may have been caused by their relatively low level of reflectivity. They needed somebody to initiate and structure the dialogue for them, i.e. many of them were only at the beginning of their journey towards autonomy.

One of the aspects of portfolio work regarded as most important by the students is the development of new language learning skills and strategies. In addition, no student believed that it caused no positive change at all with regard to their strategy use.

Roughly one quarter of the respondents did not detect any changes with regard to their motivation, confidence and feeling of control. All the other students who filled in the questionnaires declared at least some positive change, with the highest percentage of students acknowledging change in their motivation and the lowest percentage finding a positive change in their feeling of confidence.

According to the virtuous circle of learner autonomy developed from the literature in chapter three, portfolio work influences the feeling of control and confidence and thus increases motivation. Instead, in this study the relationship between motivation and the feeling of control is the weakest of all possible relationships between the five variables. Similarly, the association between control over the learning process and confidence is weaker than anticipated. Motivation seems to be most strongly linked to the perception of proficiency, followed by the perception of the efficiency of strategy use. The findings indicate that factors other than those suggested in the virtuous circle have an effect on motivation. Consequently, a traditional language class aiming to improve students' feelings of proficiency and self-efficacy may have a greater effect on motivation than a learner development scheme, which focuses on learner

responsibility and control. Yet, although there is little statistical support for the theory on which the Portfolio Programme was based, most students regard the scheme as beneficial. The question whether the students would like to see the Portfolio Programme continue for first year students in the future may have been most strongly influenced by the Halo- and the Hawthorne effect. Yet the high percentage of students who agree with the suggestion permits the conclusion that most students regard the portfolio projects as beneficial for first year students of German.

7.4. Long-term effects of and attitudes towards the Portfolio Programme

This is a longitudinal study. One of the cohorts from the experimental group was investigated from their first week at university through until the second week before their final exams. The second cohort was examined from their first week until the end of their second year, before they went on the year abroad. Three students from the group followed the ab-initio German course and therefore entered the first year post-A-level language module in their second year at university. Students on this course receive some extra tuition and enter the year abroad in their third year, after only one year of post A-level German language teaching.

Questionnaire 3.4. (Appendix 8) was developed to examine the students' perceptions of the long-term effects of the Portfolio Programme and their attitudes towards supervised independent language learning as opposed to taught language classes. They experienced a combination of both in the Portfolio Programme. The question included the most desirable focus of individual supervisions from the students' point of view, i.e. whether they should centre on the language or learning processes or both.

The questionnaires were adapted to the learning experiences of the three cohorts in the experimental group. Questionnaire 3.4.2. was administered to students in their second year, questionnaire 3.4.3. to the ab-initio German students and questionnaire 3.4.4. to the students at the end of their final

year. In addition to a closed item giving a choice of answers, each question contains an open ended part headed *comments* or *please explain*, which invites students to elaborate on their particular answers.

The following table gives an overview of the focus of the questions, the time it relates to for the different student cohorts and the question number in the questionnaires.

Table 7.23: Questionnaire items for 3.4. and their relation to point in time in the students' university course

Focus of question	Questionnaire 3.4.2.	Item no.	Questionnaire 3.4.3.	Item no.	Questionnaire 3.4.4.	Item no.
Increased consciousness of the learning process	present/ end of year 2	1	present/ beginning of year 4	1	present/ end of year 4	1
Use of strategies for independent language learning	present/ end of year 2	2	present/ beginning of year 4	2	present/ end of year 4	2
Continuation of learning activities during the second year	immediate past to present	3	N/A		past	4
Expected advantage for the year abroad	near future	4,5	N/A		N/A	
Experienced advantage for the year abroad	N/A		immediate past	3	past	3
Motivation to continue learning German after leaving university	N/A		future	5	immediate future	6
Ability to continue independent language learning after leaving university	N/A		future	4	immediate future	5
Best use of staff time in HE Language Course	general	6	general	6	general	7

Since all the students who had been involved in the Portfolio Programme in previous years were involved in the study as subjects from the experimental group, it was impossible to pilot the questionnaire.

The fact that all subjects were engaged in a full-time HE language course over the time of the investigation, often studying other languages in addition to German, made it as difficult for them as for the researcher to ascribe any changes to their participation in the Portfolio Programme. No attempt is therefore being made to claim a cause-effect relationship. Rather, the students' perceptions of the impact of the treatment on their own attitudes and behaviour form the basis of the analysis. When the perceived outcome of the Portfolio Programme is investigated, the phrase *through participation in the portfolio project* was included in the questions to focus their attention on the treatment variable.

The answers to the closed parts of the questions were coded and the data were entered into SPSS. Univariate statistics of the responses to the closed items were used to illustrate the students' perceptions of the long term effects and the efficiency of the advisory sessions in particular. A frequency distribution gives the total number of students choosing a response and their percentages.

All questions invited the respondents to explain their choice of answer. The answers to the open ended parts of the questions were copied into a Word file (CD-ROM/questionnaires), and a limited number of key aspects was identified where possible. The comments were thus classified into a smaller number of groups in order to simplify the results. The total number of students mentioning an identified aspect in their answers was given when appropriate. This leads to a more detailed picture of their experiences and beliefs. However, since all coding procedures involve some loss of information, students' comments will be included to illustrate the individual points as well as the richness of the data. The responses to the open parts of the questionnaires will consequently be used to add an impression of the students' experiences and exemplify noteworthy aspects of their reasoning.

7.4.1. Research questions

1. How do the students evaluate the long-term impact of their participation in the Portfolio Programme regarding
 - a) the consciousness of the learning process?
 - b) the use of metacognitive language learning strategies?
 - c) the language learning activities they employ for their independent language learning?
2. Do the students expect participation in the Portfolio Programme in their first year to benefit them in their language learning during the year abroad or after leaving university?
3. Do the students feel that participation in the Portfolio Programme benefited them in their language learning during the year abroad?
4. Based on the students' experiences, what is the most efficient use of staff time in a HE language course, class teaching or individual supervisions or both?
5. For those students who favour a combination of both individual supervisions and class teaching, what do they think supervisions should focus on, the language or the learning process or both?

7.4.2. Procedures

7.4.2.1. Data collection

I administered the questionnaires during language classes in the second week before the year end and final exams. For the ab-initio students, the questionnaires were sent out by mail before the beginning of their final year. Students not attending the particular language classes were approached by me or their tutors. Questionnaires were sent out by post to subjects who had missed filling one in after the end of the teaching year. Since most of the students left the university afterwards, either because they had finished

their studies or because they went on their year abroad, it was particularly difficult to trace missing questionnaires.

7.4.2.2. Analysis

The questionnaires were analysed in a similar way as the questionnaires 2.3.

7.4.2.3. Hypotheses

Based on the theories discussed in chapter three, participation in the Portfolio Programme should raise the consciousness of the learners and simultaneously improve their metacognitive language learning strategy use. From the results from questionnaire 2.3., it was also expected that participants continue using some of the language learning activities which they encountered whilst engaged in the Programme. In addition, it was assumed that supervised independent language learning prepares the students for language learning in a less structured learning environment, as they encounter during the year abroad or after graduation, and that they in fact experience some benefits whilst in residence abroad.

The Hypotheses regarding the long-term impact, which will be tested in this part of the study, are:

1. Attributed to participation in the Portfolio Programme, the majority of students report a higher level of consciousness regarding their language learning process a year or more after the treatment ended.
2. The majority of students continue using one or more of the strategies they encountered whilst participating in the Portfolio Programme at least a year after the treatment ended.
3. The majority of students continue using one or more of the activities they encountered whilst participating in the Portfolio Programme in the year following the treatment.

4. Through participation in the Portfolio Programme the majority of students feel enabled to continue their independent language learning during residence abroad or after leaving university.

5. On return, the majority of students report an advantage attributed to participation in the Portfolio Programme for independent language learning during the year abroad.

6. The majority of students would choose a combination of taught language classes and individual supervisions with a focus on both language and the learning process as the best use of staff time in a HE language course.

7.4.3. Results

From the cohort of 55 students, 42 questionnaires were collected. The first cohort consisting of 30 students handed in 23 completed questionnaires, the second cohort of 22 students completed 16 questionnaires and all three ab-initio students sent in their questionnaires. The response rate is 76%.

7.4.3.1. The long-term impact of the Portfolio Programme

Question re. consciousness of the learning process. *Through participation in the portfolio project, do you think you have become more conscious of your language learning processes? (E.g. do you sometimes think what kind of language learner you are or whether a learning approach is efficient etc.?)*

Table 7.24: Answers to question re. consciousness of the learning process.

N = 42 (76%) valid, 13 (24%) missing.

	No, not at all	No, not very much	Yes, a little	Yes, very much so	Total
Raw	1	11	23	7	42
Valid Percent	2.4	26.2	54.8	16.7	100

72% or almost three quarter of the respondents claimed that their consciousness had risen at least a little through participation in the Portfolio Programme. According to most students, the intervention therefore succeeded in fostering a lasting, more reflective approach to language learning. Subject no. 40 described the experience as follows:

Through self-analysis one becomes more conscious of language-learning processes that one uses well or not so well.

12 students who answered the open part of the question confirmed that the independent learning programme had made them review or try out new approaches to learning. Four students declared that they had benefited from being pointed in the right direction regarding their individual weaknesses. Student no. 33 summed up both aspects:

Through the project, I learnt more about the way I tackle certain tasks + it made me think about whether my approach was efficient enough. The projects also highlighted some grammar problems which I attempted to rectify.

One student who found her consciousness had risen is not sure whether this could be attributed to the treatment and in this respect agreed with one student who answered *no* to the same question.

Among the students who stated that they had not achieved higher awareness of themselves as language learners, two students assumed that they had forgotten what they had learned. Student no. 54 blamed her laziness for not taking full advantage of the Programme. The fact that the Programme was assessed was regarded as a disincentive for further engagement by subject no. 24:

To be honest, I have not thought about it because it was assessed work that I had to do.

Question re. strategy use. *Do you still use strategies you have learned doing the portfolio project to develop your language independently of a teacher? (E.g. do you consciously summarise films – even in your head-to check your understanding or approach a native speaker with a specific language learning objective in mind etc.?)*

Table 7.25: Answers to question re. strategy use.

N = 42 (76%) valid, 13 (24%) missing.

	No, never	No, hardly ever	Yes, sometimes	Yes, often	Total
Raw	2	12	23	5	42
Valid Percent	4.8	28.6	54.8	11.9	100

The picture is slightly less positive regarding the actual use of language learning strategies. When filling in the questionnaires, 67% of the informants claimed that they still used strategies which they had encountered whilst working on their projects. Two students stated that they never used any of these strategies and only five students used them often.

Student no. 25, who was still benefiting from the Programme regarding her strategy use, wrote: *I am able to focus more on points i'd [sic] like to study more in depth.*

The question aims at strategy use or the “complex procedures that individuals apply to tasks” (O'Malley, Chamot 1990:52), consisting of a cognizant condition-action sequence, as described in chapter three. Yet individual comments raise the suspicion that some students did not know what the question was aiming at. Seven of the comments are very general and three answers reveal the fact that the students mistook activities for strategies, referring to the activities suggested in the portfolio handouts, such as *watching the news* or *film*, rather than strategies.

The examples given as part of the question shift the focus towards metacognitive language learning strategies. However, two subjects clearly referred to cognitive strategies in their explanations, as seen in the following example:

I have found the skills I learnt through doing the portfolio project have been useful to me in my study of French, German and Spanish. Tips on revision and vocabulary learning were especially useful.

Student no. 5 was not sure whether the modification of her language learning behaviour could be attributed to the Programme and one student admitted that she had hardly done any portfolio work.

The time span between the students' participation in the Programme and the time when they filled out the questionnaires ranged from one year for the 02-03 intake to three years for the 00-01 intake. The data show that the use of strategies learned in the Portfolio Programme diminished with time. From those who answered the question, 39 % of the first cohort claimed that they had never or hardly ever used any of the strategies in their final year, as do 33% or one of the three students in the ab-initio group. Of the group that answered the question only one year after completion of the last project, only 19% claimed the same.

The following question did not appear in the questionnaire for the ab-initio students, since they did not have a second year of post A-level language teaching following the independent learning programme.

Question re. learning activities. *Did you continue in your second year to do one or more of the learning activities you encountered during the portfolio project? (E.g. watching the German News regularly or exchanging emails with a native speaker etc.)*

Table 7.26: Answers to question re. learning activities

N = 39 (71%) valid, 13 (23.6%) missing, 3 (5.5%)N/A.

	No, never	No, hardly ever	Yes, sometimes	Yes, often	Total
Raw	5	8	20	6	39
Valid Percent	12.8	20.5	51.3	15.4	100

The same percentage of students as for the question regarding strategy use, 67%, declared that they continued to do learning activities in their second year which they had discovered while engaged in the Portfolio Programme. Yet five students stated that they had never used any of these activities to improve their learning.

All the students who responded to the open part of the question thought that the activities had or would have been beneficial to their learning. Subject no. 52, who indicated that she had hardly ever done any of the suggested learning activities after completing the Portfolio Programme, explained: *I should watch the German news. Etc. and I have good intentions, but they never came to fruition.*

25 students answered the open part of the question. They all claimed to have engaged at least occasionally in one or more of the suggested learning activities over their second year. When referring to the activities, they all mentioned the resources they had used rather than the steps recommended to make efficient use of those resources. The following table ranks the activities alongside the number of students citing them in the comments:

Table 7.27: German language learning activities the students stated doing in their second year of studies

Activity	Number of students
Watching German TV / news	16
Reading German magazines/newspapers	5
Writing German emails / letters to friends	3
Working with German Internet pages	2
Watching German films	2
Meeting German native speakers for conversations	2

16 students mentioned watching German TV or the news as one of the activities they had continued doing in their second year. It seems that satellite or cable TV were the most popular of the language learning resources introduced in the first year, followed by magazines and newspapers.

Introducing students to resources and activities which would encourage them to continue their independent language learning was one of the objectives of the Programme. The responses indicate that this goal was at least partly achieved.

7.4.3.2. The impact of the Portfolio Programme on language learning in an independent learning environment

The need for independent language learning fluctuates throughout a learner's career. Learner autonomy plays a crucial role during the year abroad and immediately after leaving university, when keeping up and improving language proficiency for job interviews is imperative for most language degree students. The ultimate aim of a learner development scheme is to prepare students for these times. It was assumed that students who were engaged in supervised independent language learning in their first years at university would be familiar with activities and strategies which would help them enhance their language proficiency in the less structured language learning environment during the

year abroad. 100% of the respondents preparing for residence abroad when answering the question claimed that they were motivated to improve their German outside formal language lessons whilst abroad. The following table shows that almost all of those students thought that having participated in the Portfolio Programme would help them to progress in their language learning during the year abroad.

Question re. expected advantage for the year abroad. Through participation in the portfolio project, do you think you will be more able to take full advantage of the language resources surrounding you during your year abroad, i.e. improving your German efficiently outside formal language classes?

Table 7.28: Answers to question re. expected advantage for the year abroad

N = 16 (29.1%) valid, 6 (10.9%) missing, 33, (60%) N/A.

	No	Yes	Total
Raw	1	15	16
Valid Percent	6.3	93.8	100

In accordance with the expectations of the researcher, 15 out of 16 students expected advantages during their year abroad due to the treatment. Subject no. 39 explained:

Yes – through ‘immersion’ in the language in the language lab (e.g. watching TV, reading and speaking etc) I feel that this will be helpful when we are in the ‘real’ immersion environment. I think it will also lessen the culture shock, if you are used to say, watching the news in French and are familiar with programme layouts, presenters etc. Just one less thing to think about!

The only student answering *no* to that question commented that she was not sure whether *this can be attributable to participation in the portfolio project.*

However, only 39% of respondents from the final year and ab-initio groups reported that they had experienced those advantages.

Question re. experienced advantages for the year abroad. *Do you think participation in the portfolio project has helped you take the full advantage of the language resources surrounding you during the year abroad?*

Table 7.29: Answers to question re. experienced advantage for the year abroad

N = 26, (47.3%) valid, 7, (12,7%) missing, 22, (40%) N/A.

	No	Yes	Total
Raw	16	10	26
Valid Percent	61.5	38.5	100

More than 60% of the respondents declared that the treatment had not enhanced their language learning whilst in the target language community.

It has to be noted that two of the respondents did not spend any time of their year abroad in a German speaking country. Both students did not believe they had benefited from the Programme during residence abroad. Although one of them thought that her consciousness had risen a little, she had not been able to apply that awareness to further her learning of a different target language under different circumstances.

The students' comments in the questionnaires help explain the discrepancy between their expectations of the influence of the Portfolio Programme on the year abroad and their experiences. Of those who commented on their negative answers, three students who had returned from the year abroad were not sure whether efficient use of resources could be attributed to the Portfolio Programme e.g. subject no. 4 states: *I would have used the same language resources whether I had done the project or not.*

Subject no. 37 explains:

The things I did for the portfolio were generally things I already did (watching films, looking at websites), although the portfolio project did help me to think about these things in a more structured way, with

objectives in mind.

Six students from the final year group declared that they had forgotten the Portfolio Programme completely by the time they had gone abroad, and that it therefore could not have helped them study the language. Subject no. 24 stated that *there was 1.5 years between finishing my Portfolio project and going abroad so the things I had done in my portfolio were forgotten, so no it didn't help.* The same students believed that the Programme had none or only little lasting influence on their consciousness of the language learning process. Five respondents misunderstood the question, defining "resources" differently from the researcher. Subject no. 26 explained:

During the year abroad there wasn't any great need to make use of resources as the language was all around you anyway – I only really used the library + internet.

One student was more interested in learning about her specialist subject than improving her language.

Among those students who believed that involvement in the Portfolio Programme had helped them improve their language proficiency during the year abroad, subject no. 20 wrote:

The projected [sic] highlighted different areas to me, which I was able to use during my year abroad and to really improve my language skills – it particularly made me feel confident using the ideas/resources whilst abroad.

Subject no. 30 linked a feeling of control over different learning approaches to higher language learning motivation, as predicted in chapter three:

I was more determined to learn language in every possible way – watching T.V., talking to natives, reading newspapers etc., because I had learnt how much different methods expanded my language knowledge in different ways.

For reasons probably unrelated to the independent learning programme, two out of a total of 26 respondents from the final and ab-initio groups felt neither motivated nor enabled to continue their learning of German after leaving university. 24 subjects from the same groups stated that they intended to further engage in learning German. On this basis, the answers to the next question show whether the same students still felt enabled to continue their independent language learning three years after completion of the Portfolio Programme.

Question re.ability to continue independent language learning after leaving university. Through participation in the portfolio project, do you think you will be more able to continue your language learning after leaving university even if you have no chance of taking formal lessons?

Table 7.30: Answers to question re. expected ability to continue independent language learning after leaving university

N = 23 (41.8%) valid, 8 (14.6%) missing, 24, (43.6%) N/A.

	No	Yes	Total
Raw	5	18	23
Valid Percent	21.7	78.3	100

78 % of the students who wanted to continue their learning of German still expected the Programme to have a positive impact on their independent language learning three years after completing the last Portfolio Programme. Subject no. 18 states:

It has alerted me to the many ways through which it is possible to learn a language in a more relevant (&enjoyable) way.

Of the seven students who answered *no* and responded to the open part of the question, six students again questioned whether enhancement of their language learning was due to the Portfolio Programme, e.g. subject no. 14 maintains *Not sure I learnt anything in portfolio project that I wouldn't do out of common sense afterwards – e.g. watch German tv, read books, etc.*

7.4.3.3. The benefits of individual supervisions and language classes: The students' point of view

The majority of students regard the opportunity to discuss progress and problems in individual supervisions with a member of staff as beneficial, as shown earlier in the chapter. Yet in some cases the introduction of language centres and advisory services in HE institutions in Britain in the nineties was driven by finances as much as by new pedagogical insights and the rise of new technologies for language learning (Edwards 2001:115). The aim therefore was to limit rather than extend staff-student contact time. Independent learning programmes were sometimes introduced to replace rather than supplement expensive language classes.

The experimental group in this study had the benefit of both regular German language lessons and a supervised independent learning programme. They were in a strong position to give the students' point of view when confronted with the more realistic picture, i.e. having to decide what the best use of staff time is. In case they chose a combination of both class teaching and individual supervisions, they also had to decide what the supervisions should focus on, i.e. the language, learning processes or both.

Question re. best use of staff time. *In your opinion, what is the best use of staff time in an undergraduate Higher Education Language Course: (Please tick one choice only)*

Table 7.31: Answers to question re. best use of staff time.

N = 41 (74.5%) valid, 14 (25.5%) missing.

	teaching language classes	teaching language classes combined with individual supervisions for Independent Language Learning. If so, should the supervisions focus on			supervising independent language learning without formal classes	
		the language, e.g. discussing mistakes, explaining grammar, giving the opportunity to practise	learning processes, e.g. discussing learning approaches, strategies, evaluate efficiency	A combination of both a) and b)		
Raw	2	11	2	25	1	41
Valid Percent	4.9	26.8	4.9	61.0	2.4	100

Two students thought that language classes in themselves were sufficient. Subject no. 7 explained

Staff time should be used mainly for direct language learning e.g. as much oral work as possible as this makes best use of the staff's own skills and knowledge. Learning processes should be looked at in the course of class work. E.g. different Topics [sic!] should be approached with different learning strategies in mind so that students can then use the one which is best suited to them in their own time. This allows them to then actively discover which approach is best for them.

The student was not opposed to strategy training, but would have liked to see it as an integral part of the language classes. She stressed the individual aspects of learning strategies. Student no. 38 was more explicit

I think, when it comes to independent language learning, each person has to work out for themselves over time strategies which work for them, because everyone's mind works differently. It is maybe a good idea to give optional help with independent learning for those who find it hard to do on their own, but generally, I think once we're at university, we can take responsibility for learning ourselves, and teaching language classes is enough.

Independent language learning featured high on both students' agenda. They could be regarded as proficient language learners. Student no. 38 in particular reached a high proficiency level in all three languages she had studied. She seemed to naturally combine language instruction with independent language learning, for which she felt able to take responsibility. However, she was adamant that language lessons were more beneficial for her than individual supervisions and did not regard them as a threat to her autonomy. In contrast, she perceived the individual supervisions as interfering with her personal strategy use and learning style.

93% of the respondents thought that the University should offer a combination of language classes with individual supervisions. Subject no. 31 commented:

I think it's important for there to be formal, structured language classes so that we have something to go from and something to refer back to, but these should definitely be followed up by one-to-one sessions where each student can ask the questions they need to, get detailed feedback and discuss any problems.

In accordance with 15 other students who commented on this choice, she welcomed the variety of the teaching methods offered by the combination of formal classes and supervisions. She also stressed the importance of individual feedback, alongside 11 other respondents. However, she did not associate individual feedback solely with independent learning.

Six students believed that group teaching in language classes was too general to gain maximum results for the individual learner, two learners had enjoyed the interaction and speaking practice they had gained through the advisory sessions, two students were grateful for the additional support they had

received and one student had been motivated by the individual contact with the adviser.

Subject no. 44 sums it up:

One of the skills one should acquire at university is the ability to conduct one's own learning and research. Over-emphasis on teaching language classes is inconsistent with this aim. Classes are necessary to the extent that they are less labour intensive, and they stimulate debate and exchange of ideas amongst students. Other aims, such as practice speaking the language, a) and b) above etc., can be more efficiently (with reference to the student's learning experience, not the university's staffing budget!) achieved in individual or small group supervisions. The learning process is accelerated as the time with the tutor is spent identifying and addressing that student's particular weaknesses. It forces the student to participate in the learning process, as he is unable to hide among the crowd [...].

This student accepted learner independence as a goal in university teaching and regarded supervised independent learning as a means to achieve that goal. She appreciated the feedback on the language and learning processes. The opportunity to practise the language with a native speaker was welcomed and she had consequently chosen to speak German during all her advisory sessions. However, she was aware of the antagonistic forces that drive decision making in HE, such as the quality of the student experiences vs. financial considerations.

The majority of all the respondents, 61 percent, favoured a combination of learning advice and language work in the advisory sessions, as they had experienced them during the Portfolio Programme. Some of the students who chose this answer commented that both aspects of the supervisions had been valuable for their overall progress, as described by student no. 49:

It needs to be a combination of a & b because although discussing mistakes is very important, I actually found that, longterm, discussing learning approaches/strategies was far more beneficial to me. It's not something I had examined before.

On the other hand, as explained by student no. 11, 27 percent would have liked to focus solely on the language during the supervisions:

With formal language classes you can practise the language and then work on individual mistakes and hang-ups with the tutor.

Two students would have preferred to concentrate exclusively on their learning processes in the individual supervisions, as explained by subject no. 41:

I think help with independent language learning would be useful. It would be interesting to know about different learning processes as I am not aware of that many and tend to use the same method all the time. It would help us to evaluate our own learning.

Only student no. 29 would have chosen to learn the language through supervised independent language learning only. She studied German in combination with a specialist subject and regarded the first year language lessons as a waste of time.

I think learning a foreign language is something you have to be motivated to take on board yourself. The language classes in 1st year didn't really add much to A-level, and as all we needed for the law + German course was 40% pass I didn't concentrate on my language as much as I should have – lessons were boring. It would be better if the lessons were scrapped, we had more English law modules to choose from + had to reach the required standard of German ourselves – then I/we would have more [sic!] motivated to learn + the learning would have been more constructive.

Many Language Centres target non-specialist language students for their independent language learning programmes, yet the drop-out rate is very high (Bavendiek 2001:131). Although student no. 29 was technically regarded as a language specialist, her situation was in part similar to non-specialist students in that an important part of her course was not language related.

For many students embarking on self-directed language learning it is not apparent from the beginning that it often requires more determination,

motivation and organisation than a traditional language class to achieve a similar outcome. The fact that student no. 29 neither believed that her consciousness had risen at least a little through participation in the Programme, nor that she had continued to do independent language learning activities in her second year, make it hard to believe that she would in fact have benefited from a course solely based on independent language learning with supervisions.

7.5. Observations and discussion

The problem of attribution can be regarded as the main obstacle to the interpretation of the results in this long-term study. Since language learning formed a major part in the subjects' life during the time of the study, it is difficult to attribute any changes identified in their language learning capacity or behaviour to participation in the Portfolio Programme. Many students were aware of the problem and made their reservations explicit in the open parts of the questions.

However, not every student who revealed doubts about the attribution of a certain effect to the treatment answered *no* to the question whether the change took place. Some students acknowledged the effect but in the open answer to the same question raised doubts about the attribution.

The problem of attributing effects to the treatment is called maturation and is a common problem in longitudinal studies. As Brown (1988) explains

Different individuals can have different experiences that cause them to mature or change over time. Such experiences might include other simultaneous learning; a family catastrophe; or psychological, emotional, and physical changes. (Brown 1988:32)

The difficulty of separating out the treatment effect may also have strengthened other extraneous variables, such as the Halo effect and subject expectancy. Still, programme participants are a valuable source of information and, in spite of the pitfalls, their experiences and opinions should be taken into account

when investigating the effects of a programme such as the learner development scheme in this study.

The students' problems in answering the question regarding the change in metacognitive language learning strategies may also be due to the design of the study. In order to minimize the effect of the extraneous variable 'subject expectancy', or 'hypothesis guessing', the level of reactivity was decreased as far as possible. As Cook and Campbell (1979) explain:

We still lack a sophisticated and empirically corroborated theory of the conditions under which hypothesis-guessing (a) occurs, (b) is treatment specific, and (c) is translated into behavior that (d) could lead to erroneous conclusions about the nature of a treatment construct when (e) the research takes place in a field setting (1979:66-67)

The theory which had instigated the Portfolio Programme was not explained to the subjects of the study as clearly as necessary. I avoided clarifying and using the term 'metacognitive language learning strategy' or explaining the difference between a strategy and a learning technique. This was considered a necessary but at times artificial limitation. Summarising parts of the theory behind the Portfolio Programme in the introductory session felt like a natural approach for the groups who were not involved in the data collection process. In fact, clarity of the purpose of portfolio use and explaining the rationale behind a new learning approach to the learners seems to be a precondition for greater autonomy, as explained by Richter (2001:8), Dickinson (1990:206), Garner (2000:33) and Pilkington and Garner (2004:9). O'Malley and Chamot (1990:54) also stress the fact that at least one component of a strategy training programme should be explicit. Wenden (1991:105 emphasis in the original) lists '*informed*' as the first principle in her guidelines of strategy training and explains: 'The purpose of the training should be made explicit, and its value brought to the students' attention.'

However, explaining the theory under investigation to the subjects of the study would probably contribute to results distorted by extraneous variables such as hypothesis guessing and the halo effect.

The majority of students confirmed positive changes regarding their consciousness of the language learning process, their use of language learning strategies and the language learning activities they employed in their independent language learning. According to most students' perceptions, the Portfolio Programme in the first year of study therefore had a positive long-term impact on their further language studies. Some students stated that they felt more able and willing to review their language learning processes. Others particularly welcomed the individual advice on their language and learning, especially the chance of discussing individual weaknesses. They also found the independent language learning activities, introduced as part of the Programme, useful.

Most students continued to use at least one of the resources employed in the Programme in their second year. This translates into a higher use of the Resources Centre among second year students who had participated in the Programme than those from other languages, who were not required to use the Centre in their first year (anecdotal evidence from the staff in the Resources Centre). The same students would also make more use of the Centre for languages other than German. The Portfolio Programme therefore also showed to be an efficient way to foster good learning habits and to introduce students to new ways of learning and to the facilities available.

The most distinct change the subjects confirmed regards their level of consciousness, and therefore the most elusive goal of the Portfolio Programme. The least distinct change was acknowledged with regard to the most substantial goal, the activities they continued using. The students were keen to agree to changes in their minds, but for some students these did not translate into a change in behaviour. However, it could also be argued that greater consciousness yields long-term effects, and that it therefore took time for the students to notice the change.

Although 15 out of 16 students in their second year expected to experience advantages during their year abroad as a direct result of the Portfolio Programme, only 39% of those who had already returned actually reported

such advantages. This finding does not support the assumption that supervised independent learning is an efficient practice for preparing students for language learning during the year abroad.

Some students thought the time span between the Portfolio Programme and the year abroad was too long and that they had therefore forgotten what they had learned. This is the most commonly cited reason for not having benefited from the independent learning scheme during the year abroad. Yet, not only the time span posed problems, but also the new learning contexts. Transfer has been noted as an important part of learning a strategy (Larsen-Freeman 2000:163), yet these students were not able to transfer their learning regarding the efficient use of resources from the supervised language learning situation to a different situation and therefore “forgot” what they had been learning. Since in this study learner development was based on raising language learning awareness rather than training strategy use, the problem of strategy transfer was not anticipated. However, Mißler (1999:156, 184-187) lists characteristics of the learning situation as a source of important variables influencing strategy use, alongside others such as demographics and personal, cognitive, motivational and affective characteristics. The transfer of acquired skills and strategies should therefore play a more prominent role in any learner development scheme. A continuation of some form of supervised independent learning in the second year, and an illustration of the potential use of consciousness and reflection for the year abroad might help future students to transfer their reflective language learning from the portfolio situation to the year abroad.

The learners’ responses to this question in particular seem to be distorted by their doubts about the attribution of the investigated effects to the suggested cause. Students’ learning during the year abroad is influenced by many other factors, such as individual characteristics (Bavendiek 2004:3) and the level of criticality (Mitchell et al. 2004:1). In addition, students can be expected to mature and change considerably during residence abroad. The students were therefore right to regard maturation as a variable that was possibly more influential than participation in the Portfolio Programme.

Although inconsistent with many students' experiences while in residence abroad, 72% of the students in their final year still believed that they had gained an advantage through participation in the Portfolio Programme for their future language learning after graduation.

Only one student in this study explicitly favoured supervised independent language learning over regular language classes. Abolishing regular classes from a language course is therefore not an option endorsed by student opinion.

On the other hand, only two of the students who had experienced both language classes and individual supervisions were prepared to sacrifice the supervisions. However, it has to be noted that both these students can be regarded as highly efficient language learners who were prepared from the outset to take full responsibility for their learning. Some learners with a high degree of autonomy therefore seem to favour rather than dislike formal language classes and regard individual learning advice as an uninvited intrusion and an interference with their personal learning. These learners show a sensitivity towards the "ethical issues of whether counsellors have the right 'to meddle' with matters relating to personality and whether they can counsel without violating the principle of individual autonomy" (Mozzon-McPherson 2001:13 summarising Riley 1997).

Most importantly, the vast majority of the students in this study preferred a set-up similar to the one they had experienced in the Portfolio Programme, with a combination of language classes and individual supervisions. They appreciated the individual meetings with the language adviser, since they manifested a change in teaching methods and provided individual feedback. 66% of this majority agreed that the advisory sessions should hinge on both, the language and language learning processes. 29% of this group would have liked to focus on the language alone and only 5%, i.e. 2 students, thought that discussion of their language learning processes should have been the sole focus of the sessions.

Most students in this study regarded the Portfolio Programme as a valuable part of their first year study that had helped raise their language learning

consciousness. They especially appreciated the staff-student contact time, which seems to have been a determining factor in their experiences of the course. However, more consideration needs to go into the transfer of acquired skills and strategies to other language learning situations, especially to students' learning during the year abroad.

In addition, it should be kept in mind that one third of the students in this study would have liked to focus on language issues alone, either in class or in a combination of classes and advisory sessions.

Since some of these students seem to have already taken charge of their language learning, those objections need to be investigated further. Forcing any proportion of students into a, from their point of view, pointless exercise should not be tolerated in the name of autonomy.

8. The case studies

8.1. Aims of the Case Study

Whilst previous parts of the study dealt with general effects and attitudes towards the Portfolio Programme, the case studies of four individual learners are concerned with the interaction of individual differences (ID). Skehan (1989) was one of the first researchers to identify the importance of individual differences for language learning and to summarise the research activity in that important area of study. Rather than working on the general principles of the language learning process, ID research aims to specify the differences between learners and the consequences of various learner characteristics for language learning. In the context of this study, it is hoped that individual learner characteristics can help explain the differing perceptions of the Portfolio Programme.

Some of the findings from the quasi-experimental and the survey studies are difficult to interpret without a more detailed description of the individual learners and their perceptions. In addition, responses to the open questions in the questionnaires introduced new aspects to the investigation which can be the focus of the last part of this longitudinal study. Individual students were therefore invited at the end of their studies to discuss their impressions of the Portfolio Programme and its effects with me.

One important aim of the case studies is the triangulation of data, with the view to support or invalidate some preliminary conclusions from previous parts of the investigation. In addition, it is hoped that possible causes for and interpretations of the results so far would be uncovered and thus new categories developed to explain the students' diverse perceptions of a learner development scheme such as the Portfolio Programme.

According to Yin (2003), case studies are useful to investigate the influence of multiple variables. He describes the scope of a case study as follows:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (Yin 2003:13, emphasis and structuring in the original)

He continues:

The case study inquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin 2003:13-14, emphasis and structuring in the original)

The observed effects were analysed in their real contexts, in order to identify determinants that may have influenced the impact of the learner development scheme, but had not been considered when the study was planned. In other words, variables which were not controlled, but may have affected the results of the study, were explored in these vignettes of individual subjects.

Previous language learning experience can be regarded as an important power in the development of the language learner personality. Each subject will therefore be introduced through a brief description of their language learning before and during their university studies. It can also be assumed that aspects inherent to the personality of the learner play a role in the perception of the Scheme. Some traits may make a learner more susceptible for the learner development programme.

Consequently, I will develop a picture of the learner personality of each subject chosen for the case studies from the data, addressing their consciousness of the learning process, reflectivity and use of language learner strategies, motivation and the feeling of control over the learning process and independent language learning behaviour. The perceived impact of the Portfolio Programme by each learner will then be summarised. In other words, there will be a

dense description of two distinct areas of exploration: the individual language learner personality in its environment and the impact of the Portfolio Programme. Finally, I will try to explain the latter with the help of the former.

8.2. Research questions

In this part of the investigation I aim to identify individual learner characteristics in order to describe the four case study students in greater detail. Finally, the emerging profiles will be compared in order to specify features that influence the perception of the Portfolio Programme.

1. What aims of the Portfolio Programme were predominant in the individual student's understanding?
2. Was s/he able to adapt the work for the portfolio to her or his own learning needs?
3. How beneficial did the individual student think the advisory sessions and the project journals were?
4. How important a part of the advisory sessions did the student think the use of and work on the target language was?
5. Can any underlying ID variables or variable clusters be identified from the data that seem to be linked to the perception of the Portfolio Programme?

8.3. Materials

8.3.1. Research tools

A multiple case design was chosen for this part of the study, since it can strengthen the validity of the findings, as explained by Yin (2003:46-52).

In order to draw up learner profiles for the chosen cases, questions aiming at the students' language learning experiences and motivations were asked in questionnaire 1.1, which was handed out to each cohort on arrival in their first year German course. In addition, all data from the research tools which had been designed for other parts of the investigation were revisited for the case studies, with the aim of developing pictures of the learner personalities and describing the impact of the Portfolio Programme on the individual learner. The data were entered in a file for all four cases, so that it allowed easier comparisons.

8.3.1.1. The semi-structured interviews

Interviews were conducted with the four students selected for the case study in the final weeks of their studies, with the aim of extracting more data. Sampling procedures for the four subjects are explained in the next section.

One serious limitation to the investigation which transpired especially in chapter seven is the fact that the subjects of the study were not familiarised with the theory or terminology of independent language learning. Keeping the subjects naïve in respect to the aims of a study is often regarded a necessary preventive measure, because it limits the influence of hypothesis guessing on the findings. The success of the precaution is mirrored in the variety and complexity of the students' comments in previous parts of the investigation, which exceeded and sometimes challenged the researcher's ideas and anticipations. Yet, it also led to the confusion obvious in some responses, which did not always provide answers to the researcher's questions, because the students misunderstood the question. To come to the roots of the subjects' perceptions with regard to my own research agenda, it was thus necessary to ask them frankly, trying to get a response to my lines of thoughts. To an extent, the students selected for the interviews were therefore introduced to and participated in the discourse of independent learning. As a side effect, this may have helped them become the authors of their own learning processes, because they were familiarised with

the arguments behind and the terminology to describe autonomous language learning.

Furthermore, the interviews took place three years after the treatment. Thus, it was important to establish a common ground between interviewer and interviewee, making sure that each student remembered the Portfolio Programme well enough to contemplate it. For the reasons mentioned above, a constructionist interview approach was chosen for the case studies. A constructionist interview is regarded as a creative encounter. Rather than trying to extract some personal truth from the interviewee, it is recognised from the beginning that meaning is constructed between interviewer and interviewee. In the analysis, the content of what the interviewee is saying is therefore approached through the way this meaning was created in the interview process. In a constructionist interview, the "focused interaction" is regarded 'as a *topic* in its own right, not as something which can stand in the way of "authentic" understanding of another's experience' (Silverman 2001:95, emphasis and quotation marks in the original). The interplay between the participants in the interview can be as revealing as the content of what is being said. In this approach, the interviewer is allowed to act as a partner in the conversation, rather than solely as a researcher who has to stick to a fixed protocol. This means that she can react flexibly, following lines of investigation that open up during the interview.

However, since a multiple case study was planned, a fixed set of questions was prepared to be answered by all interviewees, complemented by questions which were either prepared or invented during the interview on previous comments and responses from the individual students.

8.3.1.2. Topics of the semi-structured interviews

The first prepared question served to remind the students of the Portfolio Programme and its individual elements.

Since the interviews were designed to reveal more about the long-term impact of the Portfolio Programme, the question whether the students could make sense of the Scheme within the context of their learning was of special concern. In particular, it was important to see whether the learning aims perceived by the students match the outcomes anticipated by the researcher, which will be revealed in *what* the students say in response to the second question. Yet, *how* they answer may indicate whether they have taken ownership of these aims.

The learners' acceptance of the individual learner development tools was also discussed. In chapter seven it was hypothesized that the appreciation of those tools may depend on the current level of support the learner needs in order to reflect on their language learning process. If a student needs more support than the project journals provide, they will not be able to gain many advantages from them, which may reflect in their disapproval. Equally, experienced independent learners may be better able to make the best of the opportunity to develop their own lines of work, whereas less experienced learners may adhere to the instructions in the generic worksheets, only drawing minimal benefits from the experience. Discussion of the learning process with the language adviser, on the other hand, may appear superfluous to the experienced independent language learner.

The long-term effects were addressed in a question regarding the students' learning behaviour in their second year of studies and during residence abroad. The anticipation had been that through the Portfolio Programme, the students would acquire reflective skills, ideas and strategies, confidence as learners and ultimately the motivation to continue their independent studies. To this respect, two questions were included in the semi-structured interviews, targeting the independent language learning behaviour during the second year of study and during the year abroad. Finally, the students were asked whether they think university language teaching should combine classroom work with individual supervisions, and whether those supervisions should be dealing predominantly with language or with the learning process. In the current practice on language advising it is not regarded necessary that the adviser is able to speak the target language. In fact, it can be argued that it helps focus on the learning

conversation when the adviser is not able to offer support with or speak the target language. However, it can be concluded from some students' comments that they are seeking help predominantly for their language, not for their learning.

8.4. Procedures

8.4.1. Sampling

For the purposive sampling for the case studies, only subjects from the first cohort, who were in their final year at the time of the interviews, were selected. The year abroad formed an important aspect of the interviews, since it allowed conclusions about the actual learning behaviour of students in a less structured language learning situation. The second cohort, who had only completed their second year at the time of the interviews, had not had that experience. Furthermore, it was anticipated that the students would be more open towards or after the end of their studies with a member of staff who was not involved in their final exams. Students from the German with Law course, which differed considerably from the mainstream course in the final year, were not invited.

In previous parts of the investigation, it was found that the level of reflectivity is largely linked to the individual, and hardly changes over time. In addition, it was hypothetically concluded that the impact of the individual learner development tools may have been influenced by the students' ability to reflect on their learning. A student's level of reflectivity was therefore chosen as the category likely to be related to the perceptions of the learner development scheme. Consequently, the individual scores on the variables 'level of reflectivity' were compared within the chosen cohort. The student with the highest and the student with the lowest score on this variable were then invited, but could not make it to the interviews. The student with the second lowest score was on the German and Law course. The students finally interviewed were therefore

subject B, with the third lowest level of reflectivity and subject A, with the second highest level of reflectivity within the first cohort.

Deviant cases are often the ones most likely to throw up new aspects for investigation. In chapter three it was theorised that the learner development scheme would have a positive impact on the students. This, in turn, should reflect in the students' perceptions of the Programme. Yet, although the majority of participants deemed the Portfolio Programme a worthwhile intervention, other students were quite critical of it. Their experiences will put the theory under further scrutiny. Therefore, I looked at the subjects' general attitudes towards the Programme as expressed in the questionnaires 2.3. Subject B, who had been selected on grounds of her low level of reflectivity, also showed an extremely low acceptance of the Programme in the questionnaire. In addition to her, a second student expressing extremely negative views in comparison to the majority, subject D, was chosen for a one-to-one interview. In order to draw comparisons, the student with the most positive view of the Programme in questionnaire 2.3 was also interviewed. She is subject C.

8.4.2. Data collection

All the data collected for other parts of the study were used. In addition, with the agreement of the Head of the German Section, some internal data such as marks were used to draw a general picture of each case. It also has to be noted that I was working in the Department while the students were undertaking their studies. Anecdotal evidence may therefore colour these student vignettes, even if not mentioned explicitly.

After collecting the data for questionnaire 3.4, I explained my plan to conduct a case study to the students. I invited each student both orally and in writing to see me for a 30 minute interview before they left Liverpool after their final exams. All interviews were conducted and taped in the researcher's office.

8.4.3. Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and each turn was numbered for easy reference. The transcriptions were included in the 'archive' for each case, which also contained the tapes, notes, records, project journals and original questionnaires from that particular student. The information was drawn on for the dense descriptions of the selected learners and their perceptions of the Programme.

All cases were compared with the aim of exploring variables influencing the perception of guided independent language learning. The case reports below contain a summary of the relevant data and the findings. Reference to the original data is given in brackets, naming the data source, i.e. questionnaire and question number 1.1.1 – 3.4.7, number of the project journal and case number followed by the number of the turn for the final interviews.

For reasons of confidentiality, the language combinations of the students, the exact marks and grades and details of their year abroad are not revealed, so that individual students can not be identified from the data. The corresponding information is blanked out in all the data sources. However, all the students participating in the case studies were informed of the reason for the final interviews and had no objections to the publication of the data.

8.5. Results

8.5.1. Learner Profile: Student A

8.5.1.1. The language learning environment and language proficiency

Student A comes from a bilingual family background. German was not one of the languages spoken in her home.

In school, she was placed on a fast-track language course in addition to her

German lessons. She discontinued that additional language after two years.

The student entered the university with a good A-level in German. In comparison with her peers in the post A-level German language module, her language proficiency could thus be expected to be higher than average from the start. Yet, this was not confirmed by the language tutors, who awarded her average marks in the first year.

However, the marks for the German language work of student A increased in the second year, and, in the final year, her German language work was assessed as usually good and sometimes excellent.

At University, she learned her third foreign language on a beginners' course in addition to her German studies. She followed both languages through to her final year. She spent one part of her year abroad in a German speaking country and the other part in the target language community of her second foreign language.

8.5.1.2. Consciousness, reflectivity and language learning skills and strategy use

The fact that student A is bilingual, and had studied German up to A-level and a second language on a fast-track course suggests that she had a fair amount of language learning experience. Yet her reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies recorded at the beginning of her University studies (1.2) only matched the average of the experimental group at that point in the investigation. In questionnaire 1.1, she explained that she was especially worried about her vocabulary and grammar, in particular grammatical cases. The relative precision of this comment indicates that she had already identified some individual weaknesses and learning objectives at this point. This concern with complex grammatical phenomena and vocabulary learning in particular appears in several of her responses throughout the study. In fact, she contacted the language adviser outside the regular sessions with regard to the problem of vocabulary learning in both her chosen languages, thus being one of the very

few students to approach the adviser with a problem outside the regular sessions.

Throughout the study, she not only showed an ability to identify precise follow-up activities and short term objectives (all journals), but also voiced ideas on how the German language teaching should be better organised, e.g. with continuous assessment in the first year (2.3.13), the sole use of the target language in class (3.4.7) and English to German translations in the final year (A22). This shows that she took an active part and was prepared to direct her learning.

It can also be assumed that student A's participation in a beginners' language module had an impact on her learning awareness. Ab-initio modules are seen as some of the most demanding language modules in the School of Modern Languages, since successful students reach the equivalent of A-level proficiency in only one year. Experience shows that the students need to possess and develop sound language learning skills and strategies in order to pass these fast-track modules.

After her first year at University, the student still reported a use of metacognitive language learning skills and strategies that matched the average of the group, having decreased slightly over the year in accordance with the rest of the group (2.2). A comparison between the student's pre- and post-treatment questionnaires shows that the reported use of each individual metacognitive language learning strategy remained largely the same. A variation of more than one point on the five-point Likert-scale was found only with regard to the student's less frequent comparisons of learning techniques and styles with those of peers and her greater readiness to switch techniques or strategies when they had proven to be inefficient (2.2). She may have started to draw consequences from her learning experiences for future learning actions as a result of the Portfolio Programme.

The student was selected for the case studies because she had scored one of the highest average values in the first cohort for the level of reflectivity identified from the project journals. Although not especially high for the first project,

for the second, fourth and fifth projects, the student received a much higher score than the average student in the group (journals 1, 2, 4 and 5). The journal for project no. 3 had not been handed in, which suggests a slightly lower task attitude. Although the increase in the level of reflectivity over the first year indicates that the student benefited either from portfolio work or more generally from her language programme, the change did not translate into a greater reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies (2.2).

In the survey handed out immediately after the end of the Programme (2.3), the same student reported that she had acquired some new language learning skills and strategies through participation in the Portfolio Programme.

In response to questionnaire 3.4, three years after the end of the treatment, student A agreed that she still sometimes used strategies learned through the learner development programme and believed that she was much more conscious of the language learning process.

8.5.1.3. Motivation

A member of the subject's extended family is a German native speaker. As a pupil, subject A particularly enjoyed finding herself on a visit to Germany, able to 'speak German fluently with only a little trouble with vocab' (1.1.9). Her motivation to study German seemed to be targeted towards the German speaking community. She showed positive attitudes towards it throughout her studies. In Gardner's terminology (1985), she had an integrative orientation towards learning the language.

She exhibited a pragmatic outlook on language learning, regarding language as a tool rather than as an academic pursuit. She knew about the importance of language practice, trying to keep as immersed in the language as possible: *'Just try to keep going. [...] I may not be able to understanding [sic] it, but at least I'm being submerged in the language [...].'* (A41) However, more generally this student tended to concentrate her efforts on authentic language use rather than on the learning conversation. She focused on genuine communication

rather than on language practice. This became clear when she explained one of the learning activities she undertook in her second year.

A22: In the German Reading Room they have 'Süddeutsche' [German newspaper] so I was always trying to get the closest to the days that I could. Like, it is usually only a day later, because of the... - and I [...] tried to read it, but I don't know, I can't read last week's newspaper as it were, because I probably already read it in an English newspaper so the topic is not so interesting to me any more [...]. But if it's something that I haven't read especially, then I tried to [...] get a copy and read it.

Similarly, she expressed some ambivalence towards her formal language studies during the year abroad, because it kept her from immersing herself in the language while studying all the content modules she was interested in (cf. 3.4.3):

A: Well, I did (...) the intensive course which led to the DSH Prüfung (German Proficiency Exam).

I: Was that optional or did you have to do it?

A: It was optional but I think the University here expected that I did at least one language course which, I think, on one hand it's good, it shows that your language improves, but on the other hand it's also a bit of a pain, because you might not be able to do the topics that you'd be really interested in doing, because you only have so much time in the week and can't really do everything. But it is a good guarantee that you're learning some [...] language, not just passively through studying history.

In the comment above she seemed to slightly dismiss her pragmatic focus on language use as 'just passive' learning.

A fair amount of instrumental motivation also shone through in the student's concerns about the borderline status of her grade. She came to see the language adviser in her final year, in order to discuss work that had been handed back with a mark lower than the one she had anticipated.

Student A was determined to continue her learning of German after leaving the University (3.4.6).

8.5.1.4. The feeling of control over the learning process

On entering the University, the student stated that she was satisfied with her previous achievements in German, attributing her success to favourable circumstances and to the fact that she had put in a lot of effort (1.1.10). Yet she also revealed that she found both the language and language learning difficult, indicating self-doubt (1.1.11). When discussing this particular comment in the final interview, she explained:

I34: In the questionnaires you mentioned [...] that you found language learning difficult in school. Did you?

A34: I probably did, but that's... -in school it was probably the thing I found the easiest to do as well [inaudible], so languages would seem the least difficult of a lot of difficult things in school for me.

Not regarding herself as a gifted language learner, or more generally as a gifted learner, she compensated her perceived shortcomings with much effort throughout her studies.

After the end of the Programme, she found herself moderately satisfied with her achievements in German in her first year, attributing her success again to favourable circumstances and the fact that she put in enough effort (questionnaire 2.1.6-2.1.7). Although less satisfied with her achievements at University than with her achievements at school, she did not express the same lack of self-confidence as before. She found neither the language nor language learning particularly difficult at that point. Accordingly, she perceived the biggest impact of the Portfolio Programme with regard to her confidence, which she thought had increased considerably over the first year (2.3.5). Still, she mentioned again her problems with vocabulary learning and grammar as affecting her motivation (2.1.7).

Student A recognised motivation as a decisive factor for her learning and, knowing about its dynamic nature, exhibited self-awareness of the strains some learning tasks, such as learning vocabulary, put on it (2.1.7). When asked how she generally motivated herself, she explained:

A39: Generally I force myself to do things. I mean, I do force myself to do as much work as I can and try not to miss deadlines for weekly courseworks.

I40: Alright.

A40: I mean, if I stop that then next thing I end up not doing anything, not learning anything, so I try to keep it going all the time.

I41: That's important, once you're out it's very difficult to get in again so you just try to keep [...] going.

A41: Just try to keep going. I may not be able to understand it but at least I'm submerged in the language as it were.

Subject A seemed to have taken some responsibility for her learning throughout the investigation. She stated effort as a determinant of her success at different stages. She was always aware of the importance of independent study.

After the treatment, she reported that she felt somewhat more in control and somewhat more motivated through portfolio work (2.3.4; 2.3.6). During the interview, she showed an awareness of the link between confidence, learning behaviour and progress, as can be seen in the next extract:

A35: But I think my main trouble is trying to get sort of fluency in not so much spoken German but in written German. [She suggests regular English to German translations for the fourth year of study.] If anything, it increases your confidence. It may not be right, but the fact that you can see something in your language and put it into another language [...] It may not be right, but I think confidence makes a lot of difference and you may make the effort to learn one or two words or a certain grammar construction or idiom.

8.5.1.5. Independent language learning behaviour

Even before entering the university, student A enjoyed the opportunity to use German in Germany (1.1.9). Her focus on the authentic use of the language accompanied her throughout her language learning career. In her second year, she helped organise an extracurricular German Club (A23-25). She was a regular user of the Resources Centre, watching TV and videos in both her target languages (A10). She habitually read German newspapers (A26) and

maintained email contact with German native speakers and conversation exchange partners (3.4.4).

During her year abroad, she enrolled on as many modules as possible, including a language module (A21). She regarded her content modules as more important than the language module (3.4.3; A21), though. However, she found it hard to make contact with German native speakers, due to the anonymity and overcrowding of the University system (A22).

8.5.1.6. The reported effects of the Portfolio Programme

Student A was well able to use the Portfolio Programme to further her own learning. To the question *'what do you think the aim of the Portfolio Project was?'* student A responded:

A8: From my point of view, to improve my German.

I9: To improve your German?

A9: Try and improve it in a more efficient way. I think to recognise perhaps not just your faults but also things that you don't know and you'd like to know. Perhaps you can do some independent research as it were, to certain grammar points that may not always be covered in class. Or you even... -to revise simple things, that we should know but we don't, but we won't need doing them in class because we should know of them. And I [...] found it quite useful in a way, because I think during the first year especially my German improved quite a lot.

In the interview, the student took immediate ownership of the aims of the Portfolio Programme, explaining it from her point of view. She completely focused on its impact on her language, with no reference to metacognitive strategy use or motivational aims. Again, this reflects her pragmatic approach to language learning. She appreciated the Programme because it had allowed her to enhance her language proficiency. Asked about other possible aims of the Scheme later in the interview, she was, however, able to pinpoint monitoring and self-assessment as possible additional aims (4.13-14). In accordance, she rated the importance of language learning skills or strategies as moderately important (2.3.3), recognising their significance for the areas she was

consciously struggling with, vocabulary learning and grammar. She illustrated her view of the importance of language learning skills and strategies:

A42: I think everybody must have their strategies, [...] but they are probably not being conscious that they have strategies. I think [...] they do what they feel is right for them. It may not be the best way and if you sort of suggest, "perhaps you should do it like this", then I can see why people would feel it's a waste of time. Because maybe they feel there's nothing wrong with their way. Or it seems like a lot of work to suddenly [...] manage with other strategies, completely different from what they'd done before. But I don't know, I think I've become open to practising new strategies [explains what strategies she used to learn a new language on her own when preparing for a trip].

In this extract, she expressed empathy for students who had experienced a loss of routine through the awareness raising strategy training programme. In the same turn, however, she explained how her own receptiveness for new strategies had benefited her language learning. Accordingly, she suggested a combination of language classes and individual supervisions focusing on both language and learning processes for future students (3.4.7).

In the questionnaire targeting the immediate effects of the Portfolio Programme (2.3) she acknowledged moderate changes to her learning processes and behaviours.

Student A exploited the self-monitoring tools and the knowledge and experience of the language adviser to solve language and language learning problems, applying new strategies immediately (A30-31). Although not sure whether she could attribute this behaviour to her participation in the Portfolio Programme, student A explained a change in her learning strategies:

A32: I'm learning more [...] efficiently. I don't know if this was suggested to me, but I started taking, when I've learned the vocab, you see, the German and I just think what is that in English and check it afterwards, but with the English I cover up the German side and then try and write it out in German so it not only gets the word right but there's all the spelling and the gender. So I started to learn the gender and also the not always hundred percent rules.

In questionnaire 2.3, she agreed that both the writing of the project journals and the participation in the advisory sessions had moderately improved her language learning behaviour. When asked directly about the impact of the project journals and the advisory sessions, she talked about the effects they had on the areas of language learning she found most problematic, the learning of vocabulary and the use of grammatical cases, again reflecting her pragmatic focus on the learning outcome. She did not comment on the general usefulness of the tools themselves.

8.5.2. Learner Profile: Student B

8.5.2.1. The language learning environment and language proficiency

Student B, an English native speaker, had completed her German A-level and a GCSE in another foreign language at school. She continued studying German on the Degree Programme, and started her GCSE language again as a beginner. After the first year, she studied German as her only foreign language.

Subject B came into the University with a relatively low mark for her A-level German, and received lower than average marks for her language work throughout her studies.

She spent her entire residence abroad in a German speaking country.

8.5.2.2. Consciousness, reflectivity and language learning skills and strategy use

Before and after the treatment, this particular learner reported a metacognitive language learning strategy use slightly higher than that of the rest of the cohort. In accordance with her peers, however, the score dropped slightly over the year.

The student handed in all the projects, but only three of the project journals. The level of reflectivity expressed in the journals was extremely low throughout.

Her entries were mostly too general to guide any further action. She mentioned some common language learning activities and strategies, such as 'talking to people' (B34) or 'listening to TV, music' (B34) or 'cover the vocab and try to remember' (B44).

Generally, this student seemed to rely on the teachers for both structuring her learning and providing the necessary motivational incentives (B23; B49). In the final year, she complained that the portfolio projects had not been sufficiently demanding in comparison to the standard of work required in later years. This is especially surprising given the fact that the portfolio tasks had been designed with the specific aim of giving the students the space, encouragement and guidance to engage in independent language learning at their own level. All the tasks were generic and the students had to choose their own texts to learn from. However, this particular student would have preferred the language adviser to define the language level in order to encourage her to aim higher and achieve more, as can be seen from the next exchange:

B29: I think the Portfolios should be a little bit harder.

I30: Harder?

B30: Yes.

I31: In which sense?

B31: Just so it's not such a big step from the first year to the fourth year in the language. I think, maybe more difficult topics, more higher [sic] language.

I32: So that I, for example, I say 'you read "Die Zeit" und "Der Spiegel" [German upmarket news magazines, aiming at an educated readership], and no other newspapers'. Something like that?

B32: Yes. Although it would be difficult, but it would help them in the future.

I33: Ah, that's interesting, just to raise the...

I33: Just to raise the level, because, I think, it's very much like A-level and you expect after A-level to come to Liverpool and do a degree in languages, it will be harder. But I didn't really find it that much [...] different. Obviously learning new vocab, but in the first year I was just learning more vocab, but not really learning anything [...] different.

This exchange shows clearly that in the first year the student was not able to create her own meaningful learning tasks. She did not recognise the potential of portfolio learning for doing so. This corresponds with her admission that in the first year she had not understood the aims of the Portfolio Programme and the project journals in particular (B7; B19; B59).

The same student regarded language learning skills and strategies as only 'slightly important' (2.3.3) in the questionnaire at the end of the first year. In the final interview, she seemed to recognise their importance, but in the same answer confused learning strategies with learning activities (B34). She was reluctant to change her strategies (B43-B47; B63), but, when challenged, admitted that it could have been useful to try out new ones (B66) and to reflect on learning processes (3.4.7). She appeared to be confident as a learner, commenting: 'I think I am aware of what kind of language learner I am, but I haven't realised this through portfolio work' (3.4.1.). It seems that she was not sufficiently aware of her learning processes to recognise their importance for her achievement.

8.5.2.3. Motivation

According to student B, her initial motivation for studying German lay in an interest and pleasure in learning languages (1.1.3). Still, this intrinsic motivation was constrained, since she rated the experience as only 'moderately enjoyable' in the same questionnaire (1.1.8) and explained that, although she enjoyed 'the grammar aspect of learning languages' (1.1.9), she felt 'uncomfy speaking a different language' (1.1.11). After one year, not only did she still feel uneasy speaking (2.1.7; cf. journal4), but she also thought that grammar was difficult (2.1.7). She explained this in the final interview about her last year:

B53: Sometimes in lessons [...] I don't feel comfortable to speak it. [...] The conversation classes, I enjoy them, because I feel comfortable with my group. But, say, in the language classes, I compare, I know I shouldn't, but I constantly compared myself to other people [...]. It's like everyone is better than me [...]. See them doing the work and they'll get more credit for it. [...] I just don't want to look silly, you know, although I don't know as much as everybody else. I do still feel like that, but

sometimes I meet up with a few people from the course and we talk German when we go out in our free time. So I enjoy doing that then, it's just a lot more relaxed then.

Her uneasiness about speaking in class was caused by her competitive outlook and the need to avoid embarrassment. In some classroom situations, this overshadowed her desire to speak the target language, which she felt comfortable doing in smaller groups of friends.

Subject B was willing to create speaking opportunities outside the classroom. Especially during the year abroad she asserted herself, insisting on colleagues speaking German with her (B15) and actively seeking out opportunities to talk to young people, *'because I noticed [...] the teachers in school, they would talk different German to people my age'* (B17). During her residence abroad, she seemed to have developed the motivation to engage with native speakers, which was lacking in the data that had been collected from her in the first year.

Yet, she showed a predominantly extrinsic and instrumental motivation once she was back in the language classes. She seemed to largely depend on the University's system of rewards and incentives in order to sustain her motivation whilst there (B48).

Student B said that she wanted to continue to study German after leaving the University (B21), but did not want to use the language for professional purposes.

8.5.2.4. The feeling of control over the language learning process

Learner B perceived the importance of success for sustaining her motivation (B41). However, the same quotation from the interview showed her tendency to view success and failure of a learning activity in absolute terms.

On entering the University, she felt only slightly satisfied with her previous achievements in German (1.1.10). She thought that she had put in enough effort, but found German a difficult language to learn (1.1.11). At that point,

her feeling of control over the learning process was slightly higher than that of the average student in the experimental group. Still, over the first year of her University course, her score sank by 8 points in a scale of 23, and was one of the lowest in the experimental group. Crucially, she did not ascribe her slightly higher feeling of achievement to effort. Indeed, she mentioned not only the difficulty of the language, but also her personal difficulty with learning languages.

This student was in the lower third of the language group with regard to her marks. It can be assumed that she had experienced difficulties in keeping up with the rest of the cohort from the beginning. Due to her low level of reflectivity, she may not have known how to address her problems, which had probably led to her low feeling of control.

8.5.2.5. Independent language learning behaviour

During her time at University, the student seemed to mainly rely on the teachers to organise her learning. Apart from signing up for the Conversation Exchange Programme (I49-B49) and occasionally watching TV or a German film (3.4.4; B41), there is no other evidence in the data of any non-assessed independent learning activity.

However, during the year abroad, the same student took responsibility for her learning. She insisted on speaking the target language with native speakers, and tried to create learning opportunities to further her language (B37; I13-B18). The data also suggest that she gave up that independence as soon as she was back in the UK (B11).

8.5.2.6. The reported effects of the Portfolio Programme

Student B was chosen for the case study because her appreciation of the Portfolio Programme expressed in questionnaire 2.3 was the second lowest in the first cohort. She reported only a few slight improvements (2.3.1-2.3.8; 3.4.1-3.4.6), yet still regarded the Scheme as sufficiently beneficial to be

assessed (2.3.10; 2.3.11) and to recommend it in its current form for future students (2.3.12; 3.4.7). During the final interview it appeared that this seemingly positive evaluation may have been based on indifference. When assessing the usefulness of the advisory sessions, she said: *'I think it is a good idea, I can't see any disadvantages with it (both laugh)'* (B25).

However, she later specified: *'From the skills that [...] you gain, I don't think you learn that much in that area, but I think the language, yeah, you definitely learn things there'* (B28).

Student B's doubts about the Scheme focused on the more abstract aims of 'learning to learn' (2.3.2-2.3.6; 3.4.1-3.4.2; B60-64). She recognised some positive effects on language proficiency (3.4.7; B28) and the efficient use of resources and learning activities (2.3.12; B34), though, and valued the Programme for encouraging a *'fun way to learn'* (B19). However, she ultimately believed that the Programme had no lasting effect on her language learning (3.4.1-3.4.3). She explained:

B26: The portfolio had had no influence on how I learn now. [...] I don't think back to anything that I could have gained from the portfolio work. So I think there is something that you do, you may enjoy it, but I don't think you learn all that much from it.

It can be assumed that the low level of language and language learning awareness this student possessed in the first year made it impossible for her to recognise the potentials of the Programme for her progress. The possible inability of some learners to benefit from such learner development Schemes has pedagogical implications for their establishment, which will be discussed in the conclusions.

When asked about the aims of the Scheme in the final interview, her response was:

B7: Well, at the time I wasn't sure, but I think now, it's to try and get students to learn independently. How to learn a language, realising these different ways of learning a language, not just sitting in a classroom listening to a teacher and then doing some essays. But to go to the

library or listen to some German TV, you know. Being encouraged to, like, write emails to some native speakers of German. So I think that was the aim.

With hindsight, she was able to pinpoint her problem in the interview:

B59: I think with the projects, it might be helpful to... - when the students begin them, to explain the aim of them, to explain why they're doing them, because I didn't really understand at the time why we were doing them. I think maybe to underline the aims and objectives of the portfolio work would be quite helpful, just as an idea.

Without an awareness of the aims and objectives of the Portfolio Programme or the potential advantages of independent learning skills on her language learning, this student was not able to fully benefit from the Scheme.

There is reason to believe that student B's observed indifference towards the advisory sessions (B25) may have been brought about by politeness towards the researcher. In questionnaire 2.3., she was one of only two participants in the research who found that the sessions with the language adviser had '*not improved*' her language learning behaviour (2.3.8). Still, she recommended language classes combined with individual sessions focusing both on language and on the learning process for future students (3.4.7).

Regarding the project journals, she thought that they had only '*slightly improved*' her language learning behaviour (2.3.7). She described her inability to recognise their use at the time in the final interview:

B19: I think at the time I didn't understand the need to do them. And I didn't think they were very helpful. But now, looking back, I think maybe they could be, because I'm realising now why they were given to us, but at the time I didn't really think it helped my German.

8.5.3. Learner Profile: Student C

8.5.3.1. The language learning environment and language proficiency

Student C is a native speaker of English. She was admitted to her degree course with one good A-level in German and continued to study it as her only language with good and very good results throughout.

She spent most of her year abroad in a German speaking country.

8.5.3.2. Consciousness, reflectivity and language learning skills and strategy use

Both before and after the treatment, student C reported the most frequent use of metacognitive language learning strategies in the group. Over the year, her score even increased by four points. The evaluation of the project journals, however, shows a level of reflectivity much lower than the group average. This was partly due to the fact that she did not fill in the final questions in each diary, which had been designed with the aim of helping the students evaluate their learning.

Her entries refer both to language and content learning (journals 1, 2 and 4). Language related responses are often general.

She rated both the importance of language learning skills and strategies (2.3.3) and of independent learning (3.4.2) high, but would have preferred advisory sessions exclusively dealing with language problems. Although she monitored and evaluated her learning processes and learned from the experience, she did not regard this as reflection on the process, as can be gathered from the next extract:

I52: Do you sometimes consciously think about language learning or do you just do it?

C52: I think I just do it, really. I found that when I was in Germany and I was watching a lot of TV [...], when I thought about it too much it would

be too difficult, you know. You need to get past the stage of when you hear a word you don't understand, you got to look past it and carry on and pick out what you can. [...]

I53: [...] Well, if you do that, if you say, 'well, I have to get past that stage', then, basically, you do think about language learning, don't you? [...]

C53: Because [...] I've learned that in the past, that it doesn't help, because if you stop to think about one word then you're missing the rest. [...] so [...] yes, I do.

This passage also reveals the advantages of the constructionist approach to interviewing. Whereas the researcher had the use of metacognitive learning strategies in mind when asking the question, the student clearly referred to cognitive strategies. However, they reached common ground through further discussion, and the interviewer obtained a clear answer to her question.

8.5.3.3. Motivation

Before entering the University the student's contact with native speakers was limited to a holiday and a school exchange to Germany. The data revealed a very high degree of integrative motivation, though. At the beginning of her first year, she explained:

I have always been interested in German. I loved the country and wanted to be able to communicate with native Germans. I began learning German in year 7 of High School and it immediately appealed to me. (1.1.3)

Rather than a general appreciation of foreign languages and cultures, she showed a clear preference of the German culture and people at the expense of other languages:

C47: I like the language. I've always liked the language and before I chose the language I'd heard it was a beautiful country. And then, French just didn't appeal to me at the time. [...] I can't really explain it, but it just didn't. I thought, well, my brother and sister, they did French at school. And so when it was my turn, I thought I'll be different, I'll do German. So

that was another thing. But I enjoyed it the minute I started it, so I carried on.

She evaluated the experience of learning German as 'very enjoyable' in both her pre-treatment and post-treatment questionnaires (1.1.9; 2.1.5). She described the experience as follows:

I enjoyed being able to communicate with native Germans (and being understood!). I also enjoy being able to read German newspapers etc., and to write letters to my German penpals. (1.1.9)

I really enjoy learning German. I enjoy extending my vocabulary and grammar knowledge in order to communicate with native speakers. (2.1.5)

Her project journals and the final interview also suggest a joy of learning the language (journal 1, C38; C46; C47) and a genuine interest in the content of the texts she had chosen to work on (journal 1; journal 2; journal 4).

Her strong intrinsic and integrative motivation carried her through her studies. Her friendships with German speakers helped her sustain and boost her motivation when necessary (C48).

Interspersed with instrumental motivation, her intrinsic motivation drove her to constantly seek opportunities to practise:

C20: I try to do as much as I can, because I want to use German in my career and there's a lot to learn. And I don't think that it's enough, you know, to go to a few language lessons a week. You need to keep on learning vocab and phrases.

8.5.3.4. The feeling of control over the language learning process

Both before and after the first year at University, student C described herself as 'very satisfied' with her achievements in German. In both questionnaires, she attributed her success to favourable circumstances and to her putting in enough effort. Her score for the feeling of control over the learning process is very close to the group average and did not change over the course of the year. She

took part of the credit for her perceived success as a learner of German and recognised the importance of personal effort for her language learning.

8.5.3.5. Independent language learning behaviour

Student C appreciated the role of independent language learning for her progress. She wrote: *'I believe it is important to develop language independently as well as with a teacher and it's important to make the most of all learning opportunities.'* (3.4.2) References to learning activities in addition to class work run through all of the data collected from student C (3.4.3-3.4.6; C17; C20; C48; C52).

During her residence abroad, she interacted with native speaking colleagues on her placement, who often chose to communicate with her in English (C13; C15), but, on the other hand, invited her to join in activities outside work. Yet in her spare time, she did not have as much contact with native speakers as she had wanted to (C13; C10). If direct contact with native speaking friends was not feasible, she continued learning German on her own, with the help of books, newspapers and the television (C10-C13).

8.5.3.6. The reported effects of the Portfolio Programme

Student C was chosen for the case study because her evaluation of the Portfolio Programme was the most positive of all the students participating in the Scheme. She rated its effects on all aspects of language learning that were considered in questionnaire 2.3 most positive and strong. Of course, such an overwhelmingly positive appraisal begs the question of the sincerity of the responses and it can be suspected that people factors, especially subject expectancy and the Halo- and Hawthorne effects, may have played a role. Drawing on other data collected from this student, especially the one-to-one, in-depth interview, the genuineness of the responses was therefore evaluated, raising no doubt about the fact that she had genuinely appreciated the Portfolio Programme. As a highly motivated and experienced independent language

learner, who knew the importance of practice for progressing in the language, she seized the opportunities the Programme offered. Immediately after the Scheme had ended, she explained: *'It [the Portfolio Programme] gives a selection of opportunities to students in order to improve their language skills in all areas (ie. Written, oral, etc.)'* (2.3.12). When asked about the assessment of independent learning skills, she further wrote: *'it shows how organised you are as a language learner and enables you to recognise your strengths and weaknesses in the language'* (2.3.11). She managed to adapt the scheme to her learning needs and described the aims of the Programme from her own perspective:

C6: I think it [the aim] was to concentrate on our different skills so we could see what we need to improve on. So, for example, I remember there was a "Freies Schreiben" [free writing] and so that was really good, because it gave us the opportunity to see how good we were at that. And also, well, it was just to test our abilities in different areas, I think.

I7: To test your abilities, yes [...], but more for yourself.

C7: Yes. So we knew where we stood.

She also ranked the long-term effect on her learning strategies highly, which were targeted in questionnaire 3.4.2, and acknowledged some positive changes with regard to her consciousness of the language learning process (3.4.1) and her language learning behaviour in the second year (3.4.4). A closer inspection of the responses gives rise to the suspicion that this student in particular voiced opinions and described behaviours which she might have exhibited anyway, independently of the Portfolio Programme (3.4). Some of her answers suggest that she could already be regarded as a fairly independent learner when entering the University. Yet, although attribution to the Scheme may be questionable at times, it was assumed that her descriptions are accurate and can be used for the learner profile.

Student C did not express direct objections to any aspect of the Portfolio Programme. However, she valued the practical outcomes for the language higher than the possible outcomes for her learning process. She appreciated the advisory sessions very much, but mainly for the opportunity to speak

German and to receive individual feedback on the language work (I27-C29). When asked directly about the impact of the conversation about the learning process, she replied:

C32: No, I do [...] find it useful. I think it [...] was good to talk about how we were progressing. But I think something that we've not had, really, is a one-to-one session with anybody [...] in the whole course, in four years, so [...] for me, that was really important.

She had enjoyed the opportunity to choose the tasks and the content and thought that it had motivated her (I33-C34). However, with hindsight she found that the project journals had '*not [helped her] immensely*' (C24). When the researcher suggested that she may not have needed the journals, since she had already been used to independent language learning when starting her Degree course, she agreed (I25-C25).

Generally, learner C focused on her language learning and, at times, seems to have perceived the reflection on the learning process as a distraction (3.4.7; C42).

8.5.4. Learner Profile: Student D

8.5.4.1. The language learning environment and language proficiency

Student D is an English native speaker. She had passed her A-levels in two foreign languages with good grades. At university, she learned four languages, two as a beginner. She continued studying three languages up to her final year. For her German language modules she received mostly lower than average marks.

She spent only part of her year abroad in a German speaking country.

8.5.4.2. Consciousness, reflectivity and language learning skills and strategy use

When student D entered the university, she had already studied two languages up to A-level. Her experience, however, did not reflect in her reported use of metacognitive language learning strategy use, which was lower than the average score of the experimental group before the treatment. Thus, she showed the lowest score from all the students in the case study.

After the treatment, student D reported an even lower score, having deteriorated more than the average student in the group. This is particularly surprising since she had studied on a fast-track beginner's language module at the same time, which might have enhanced her language and learning awareness, as suggested in the discussion of case A.

There are some noteworthy differences of more than one point on the Likert-scale between her reported learning behaviours before and after the treatment. Although subject D had started to compare her learning techniques or styles to those of other learners during the year, this seemed to have no effect on her learning behaviour, since she had stopped switching learning strategies when they had proven to be inefficient. The most negative change, however, took place with regard to her indifference towards the creation of learning opportunities. On entering the University, she had stated that she had occasionally sought opportunities to practise the language. Yet after one year on the Degree Programme, she claimed that she never or almost never actively did so.

Whilst working on her portfolio, student D showed a good ability to reflect on her learning. She handed in all her project journals, which were extensive and precise. A word count above average for every single journal indicates that she took care in filling them in. Across all five journals, she showed an average level of reflectivity that was higher than that of the rest of the group. She had no problems identifying her weakest skill, listening, and she kept focusing on it, choosing three listening projects. She was able to specify exact problems,

mentioning 'adjectival endings' (journal 2), 'gender of nouns' (journal 2), 'word order' (journal 2) and 'passive' (journal 5) as difficult points.

Student D also showed reflection in her critical comments on some of the teaching methods used at University (D14-18; D51; D66; D68).

Her interest in the learning process seemed to have diminished over time. In the final interview she explained why she thought trying to identify one's own weaknesses was pointless:

D13: I just think, well, generally you [...] know, don't you. I mean I don't think we really need to think about it a lot, to know where you are going wrong. And I think most people will probably say everywhere, anyway.

The interviewer also asked whether she would have attended a counselling session with a language adviser who did not speak the target language, only focusing on the learning process. Since the student's answer to this question can be seen as potentially undermining the researcher's professional role, the interviewer voiced her own doubts about the concept in the question. Student D replied:

D35: You can tell yourself the stuff that someone else could tell you, couldn't you?

I36: Could you?

D36: Yes, if [...] someone doesn't know what the language is, you need actual help on that language, don't you? I think you're right.

I37: So just the learning processes, talking about your approach and what you did and how you think you were doing. That wouldn't help [...]?

D37: No.

I38: You wouldn't go to a session like that?

D38: No.

This student regards the adviser as somebody who 'tells you stuff', thus expecting the transfer of knowledge. In her opinion, this knowledge should relate to the language, not the learning process. She did not think that she could

learn from the reflection on her learning processes.

Many data collected from this student point to a high reliance on the language teachers. In the first questionnaire, she cited 'had a very good teacher' (1.1.3. + 1.1.11.) as an initial motivation to study German, in addition to her enjoyment of learning languages. She still mentioned the motivational force of that particular teacher in her final interview (D55-59). The same reliance on language tutors was still apparent in her last comment in the final questionnaire before she left the University, when she explained:

The opportunity to practise is so important, - and explanations of mistakes is probably the most important thing. Too often, we go over exercise + are told the right answer without it being explained. German is v. hard to learn, we need as much help as poss. (3.4.7a; cf. 2.3.7)

8.5.4.3. Motivation

Student D started on a Modern Languages Degree Course because of a 'very good' German teacher and because she had enjoyed learning languages at school (1.1.3). Yet, she only described the experience as 'moderately enjoyable' (1.1.8). Comments in all her project journals suggest complex feelings towards language learning:

*Definitely don't like talking in other language, but hate listening more!
(journal 1, cf. journal 4)*

*Time wasn't a problem. However, motivation most certainly was –
Listening + Writing [sic] are my two most hated parts, and so motivation
to do it was near -on impossible. (journal 5)*

Grammar not really strong point (journal 1)

The comments mirroring a lack of satisfaction with the tasks and herself as language learner far outweigh the positive interpretations (journal 3). Yet, in the final interview she distinguished between her first two years at University as the time when she had still been motivated, and the third and final year as the time when she had experienced serious problems sustaining sufficient motivation to carry on learning. When asked about one of her comments in the final

questionnaire, where she had described herself as a 'less motivated student' (3.4.3), she explained:

D47 I think I'm going to blame it on you [the institution], but again, I think I was quite motivated in the first and the second year. Like I would go and watch telly and stuff. But now this year abroad has put me off so much. And also, the year abroad has actually made me think: 'What is the point in learning languages?', because everyone speaks English. It's [...] really done the opposite of what it should have done, because we've all been told: 'Oh, it's really good to learn languages and things'. But you go out there, the Germans speak perfect English, it's ridiculous. [...] And also, just because I've had enough, it's just [...] got to the point where you can't be bothered any more. You've had enough. You just want it to finish. And I think, or I don't think that people on Single Honours feel like this, but the people who are on MEL [Modern European Languages] just think, oh my God, I've had enough, please let it end.

I48: Because you've got three [...] different languages, it must be hard.

D48: It is really hard. And just, it's [...] so horrible, to go into a lesson and even though you know that other people have spent the entire year in Germany, they've been there the whole time, they do something, like what, six modules every year more than us in that language. Even if they do that, you're still treated as the same. So you go into the lesson and when you're getting the worst marks you can't help but feel, like, you're really going wrong. But then you have to think, I'm doing two other languages, so they not let you...- just can't make it all the time, you know, when you're coming out with fifties all the time and things like that and they're getting in the higher sixties and stuff.

In the extract above student D refers to two negative influences which diminished her existing motivation. First, she described the feeling sometimes found among English native speakers that use of the target language is not necessary or possible when communicating with members of the target language community. Second, she explained the devastating effect perceived failure can have, especially when paired with effort. She believed that both factors had eroded her initial, intrinsic motivation.

Student D's data evoke an almost complete lack of enthusiasm for either the target language community or its culture. In case of her second post-A level language, she even developed a serious dislike of its community during the year abroad 'the people were rude, rude, rude, rude, rude, rude, they were just horrible people. No-one spoke to us in [target language], so we ended up

getting into our Erasmus groups and just speaking English' (D24). When talking about her time in a German speaking country, she described herself as *'homesick'* (D29) and distinguished between *'them'* and *'us'*, as can be concluded from her comment about reading newspapers in Germany: *'it's hard to get interested in somebody else's news really [...]. You want to know what's going on at home'* (D28).

Student D's main incentive for mastering the target languages seemed to be academic. In the data, there is no evidence of a genuine interest in the target language community or a willingness to engage with it. However, she did show some intrinsic motivation for learning languages - *'I love translation in all my languages'* (D54) - and her instrumental motivation was also fairly strong (D62, D79).

Aware of the fact that sustaining her motivation was a problem for her, she developed some affective strategies to push herself and to overcome her sense of disengagement:

D 54: The other thing is, I love [the third target language]. I love it, it's my fav'...- by far my best subject. So I keep in my head 'there is one language that I'm good at'. And also, what's the other thing I do... - oh yeah, I concentrate on things I like best, like translation. I love translation in all my languages, so I really work hard on my translation side, so that I can pick up the best ...- I'm going for 'do what you're best at most'. Like, really concentrating on getting it as good as I can possibly get it and the things I'm not so good at just not really, you know, worry about them too much.

Yet, these affective strategies did not keep her motivated. Not only did she refer to herself as a *'less- motivated student'* (3.4.3), but, when asked whether she felt motivated to continue her German studies after graduation, she replied: *'No - I feel only that it would be a shame to forget everything - but really can't say I'm motivated to carry on learning'* (3.4.6).

8.5.4.4. The feeling of control over the language learning process

At the beginning of her university studies, student D felt moderately satisfied with her previous achievements in German (1.1.10). She attributed this to favourable circumstances, the ease of the German language and the fact that she had not put in enough effort (1.1.11). At that point in time, she obviously felt confident and capable of improving her German, providing she made an effort. Her score for her motivational thinking was higher than that of the average of the group.

Yet the first year seemed to have eroded her feeling of control over her learning of the language. On a scale of 23, she lost six points for her motivational thinking. After the treatment, she was still moderately satisfied with her achievements, and still claimed favourable circumstances (she underlined 'good teacher') (2.1.6; 2.1.7). However, she regarded herself as having put in enough effort and, crucially, found language learning difficult (2.1.6; 2.1.7).

When the discrepancy between her feeling of control before and after the first year was addressed in the final interview, student D replied that the big classes at university, as opposed to classes of about four pupils at school, had undermined her confidence. She also explained that the language tutor in her first year at University was '*a lovely teacher, but everyone else was so horrible to her and they just made the classes so difficult for her and so made it hard for her to teach us*' (D59). The competition with other successful language learners also added to the problem:

D62: You're put in with a lot of people who are a lot better than you as well [...] and I think it just must be a massive gap between A-level and first year [...] in A-level [...] I never felt like I was really bad at grammar, but the second I got here I was bad at grammar, really bad at grammar and that's never changed.

8.5.4.5. Independent language learning behaviour

References to independent language learning are scarce in the data of student D. While talking about the importance of language learning skills and strategies in the final interview, she was asked what she did in order to improve her grammar, which she had identified as a problematic aspect of her learning of German:

D66: And I find it really difficult to motivate myself to learn grammar. If the teachers can't even teach it to me, why is a book going to be able to teach it to me?

The interviewer subsequently explained that not every teacher 'gets through' to every student, because teaching and learning styles may not always be compatible, and suggested different approaches:

I69: Have you tried another approach, like sit down with grammar books and see [...] whether that would work for you or ...

D69: I could do, but...

I70: talk to [...] other students, because sometimes it's just that somebody else explains it better than your teacher.

D70: Yes, but that's what I'm doing at the moment. Actually [...] there's a girl in my class [...] she's fluent, really amazing. Her grammar is up there. So now I've got her to explain it to me and she does it in simple terms. That's all I need, just someone to say 'no, no, no, it's this'. So she's helping me.

Subject D needed several triggers to mention the action she had undertaken independently of her teachers in order to address the problem she had previously identified. The extract also reflects her belief that she preferred the presence and input of a competent other for her learning. It further shows that she was motivated and capable of organising an appropriate learning event. However, her dismissal of books as a source of help is surprising in view of data

from the first year, where she repeatedly mentioned the use of grammar books which she found helpful at the time (journal 1; journal 2).

In the final questionnaire, she said that she had sometimes watched German television (3.4.4; D28, D47), went to the cinema, *'tried to [...] join the gyms'*, *'tried to get newspapers'* (all D28) and *'tried to put ourselves in situations like going on the train station and stuff'* on her year abroad (D26). However, she devalued most of these experiences with expressions like *'[...] but it's pretty basic, stuff like that, isn't it?'* (D26) and *'but, I mean, you can't speak that much in a gym, anyway [...]'* (D24).

8.5.4.6. The reported effects of the Portfolio Programme

Generally, student D seemed to be honest and outspoken. Her immediacy and lack of approval of the Programme made her an ideal partner in an interview that aimed to find out more about the limitations of guided independent language learning. Her relaxed and open attitude allowed the interviewer to be challenging at times, without spoiling the friendly atmosphere.

According to the student, the Programme had pointed her towards new learning resources and activities (D7; D42; D80). She also liked the fact that she had been able to choose her own topics. Otherwise, her perceptions of the effects of the Portfolio Programme were extremely bad (questionnaires 2.3 and 3.4). In addition, she was one of only three students in the experimental group who argued that Portfolio work should not be offered for first year students in the future *'[...] cos [sic] is not really all that helpful – ends up being a rush job which is seen as less important than other work'* (2.3.12). However, she suggested that portfolio work should be offered on an optional basis (2.3.13).

She summarised her perceptions in the final questionnaire:

To be honest, the Portfolio Project was just something else that we had to do in first year. At the time, it felt like another piece of work, and afterwards, I forgot it pretty quickly. Sorry! Maybe if it were continued to a lesser extent throughout the course, it would be more helpful for the less-

motivated student like me. (3.4.3)

Her negative assessment of the Programme may be rooted in her refusal to regard the learning process as a topic worth of reflection and discussion. She showed an awareness of the individual nature of learning skills and strategies when she argued: *'Don't think that learning skills is really something you can be marked on – it's just whatever works for you'* (2.3.11). Yet, this relativist view of learning strategies defies intervention and progress.

The constructionist approach to interviewing proved particularly beneficial for the conversation with subject D. At the beginning of the interview, it was not clear whether she was aware of the potential impact that reflection on the learning experience could bring for her learning. It was therefore felt necessary for the interviewer to rephrase some questions, and, at the same time, explain the rationale behind the Scheme. This, in turn, led to the interviewee gaining new insights and changing her mind during the conversation, as can be seen from the following extract:

I6: Now can you just outline what you think the aim of the Portfolio was?

D6: [...] well, the good thing about it is that it makes you aware of the resources available in the Uni. I think [...] that is basically what it is, isn't it? Just getting us to get used to watching telly, just knowing what to watch, what's a good thing to do, what to read [...]). I think that's the main aim, isn't it? [laughs].

I7: [laughs] Isn't it? Yes.

D7: I mean, I understand that it also got this whole learning side to it. How... -what kind of learner you are, but I quite didn't get that at the time and I'm still not quite...- I mean, I've spoken to people about this, because I knew I was coming to see you and no-one can remember what kind of learner they are. Say, I'm not sure how useful that was, really, to find out what kind of learner we are. It was good for showing us where things were and how to use them.

I8: So the practical side of it was good?

D8: Yes.

The interviewer then asked what she meant by *'what kind of learner you are'*, because students' individual learning styles had not been systematically

addressed in the Scheme (I9 – I10). The student replied that she referred to question 3.4.1. in the final questionnaire about the students' consciousness of the learning process, and explained that she had no idea what that meant (D9). The researcher explained and illustrated her own ideas of the aims of the Portfolio Programme (I11-I13), to which the learner replied that identifying language points to focus on does not help, because *'everyone just says everything'* (D13-D14). However, while making her point she changed her view, concluding: *'I'm sure that is helpful if you know that there's one area where you're really bad at, but I'm another one [...]. I just need everything. [laughs]'* (D14). The interviewer decided to challenge the last statement:

I15: You just need everything [laughs]. Ok, but if you want to improve everything, how do you go about that?

D15: Well, I don't know [...]. I think that is why this does come in handy, but the problem is that it's given to us as a piece of work to do in the first year. And I think you just do it [...]. It's just treated like all other essays, you do it, and then that's it, it's done.

At the end of the interview, both interviewer and interviewee had reached common ground regarding the role of consciousness and reflection for language learning. From this point of view, the student was better able to pinpoint the advantages and pitfalls of the Portfolio Programme. Her acceptance of the Scheme had improved slightly through the conversation, but her perception of the shortcomings still remained acute:

I76: The next comment 'Do you think portfolio work should be offered in the future?'. And you said 'Shouldn't be offered because it's not all that helpful'.

D76: Dear me, that's very negative [laughs].

I77: No, it's very interesting [...].

D77: No, [...] I don't agree with that [...]. I changed my opinion.

With hindsight the student found that the reflection on her learning process could have benefited her. However, at the time she had been largely unaware

of the potential learning outcomes of the Scheme (D15; D78), since she had regarded the projects as a 'rush job' (D75).

The project journals were not seen by the student as useful tools (2.3.7; D42), as she illustrated in the interview:

D31: I thought it's a waste of time. [...] I don't think I learned...- I think we just filled that in about five minutes before we had to hand it in. [...] I don't think there was going any thought put into it. It was just like 'oh, I've got to do this', so we did it.

I32: So you didn't see any reason. It didn't help you at all?

D32: I don't think so, not as far as I remember.

This view is surprising given the fact that she seemed to have taken care in filling the journals in.

The advisory sessions, on the other hand, were appreciated as having 'moderately improved' her learning. She relates the positive outcomes solely to the work on the language:

D34: Just have a one to one and being told what's wrong. It's just because so often, well, we just always get our work back, don't we, and I don't know about other people...- well, I do know other people. No-one checks their work apart from the really good students. [...] But going through it and finding out what the mistakes are and why you've made those mistakes is so much more helpful than just getting work back.

As seen above, this student does not see any value in the discussion of the language learning process (D35-D38).

8.6. Observations and discussion

The students from the case studies shared some general perceptions of the Portfolio Programme. In order to discuss the influences of the IDs, the dimensions of the language learners' personalities, which were discussed as part of the individual cases, are dealt with separately. The findings for each

learner are summarised under each particular aspect. For ease of comparison, the results will be presented in a table later in the chapter. The aim is to find learner features which may explain the different perceptions of the Portfolio Programme.

8.6.1. The perceptions of the Portfolio Programme

Generally, all the students in the case study were more interested in the development of their language than in themselves as learners. In their views, the most important benefits of the Scheme were the opportunities to practise the language and the familiarisation with new resources and language learning activities. They hardly appreciated the project journals as a learner development tool, but three of them were more favourable of the advisory sessions. Above all, they valued the fact that they received personal feedback on their language mistakes or the opportunity to speak the language with a native speaker in the sessions. They expected to draw on the expertise of the language adviser, either as language teacher or as native speaker. They also accepted specific advice on their language learning, but may have regarded reflection without the input of new knowledge as less beneficial.

With hindsight, each of the four students recognised some benefits of the learner development element on their learning.

Among all participants in the Programme, student C rated the experience as most beneficial for her language learning. Student A was also slightly more positive than the rest of the experimental group, especially regarding the perceived effects on her confidence and the impact of the project journals. In contrast, subjects B and D reported very few benefits of the Programme and thus presented two of the most critical evaluations of the Scheme.

The language learning experience

Case A can be regarded as a highly experienced language learner. Including the two languages she had learned as a child, she started to learn her fifth

language in the first year. Subject D also focused her studies on language learning. She could draw on the experience of learning two foreign languages up to A-level before she even started on the Modern European Languages Course, on which she studied two more foreign languages in addition to her two post A-level languages.

When entering the University, student B had studied one foreign language up to A-level and one as a beginner. Subject C had only ever studied one foreign language until she graduated.

The proficiency level

Subject A entered the University with the best A-level grade in the case study group. Subject C and D had a similar grade, and subject B started with the weakest mark. On graduation, subjects A and C were assessed as being in the top quarter of the year group by their German language tutors. Learners B and D were among the least successful 25 percent of students according to their German language marks.

The level of reflectivity

Subject A was chosen for the case studies, because she had expressed a high level of reflectivity in the project journals. Student D showed an average level of reflectivity that was only slightly higher than the average of the whole experimental group. Student C's expressed reflectivity in the journals was much lower and case B was chosen as the student with the third lowest level of reflectivity in the cohort.

The metacognitive language learning strategy use

Student C reported the highest frequency of metacognitive language learning strategy use at the beginning of her University studies, followed by student B, who scored slightly higher than the group average. Case A met exactly the average score of the experimental group and student D's questionnaire responses scored slightly lower.

One of the intended effects of the Portfolio Programme had been a more efficient use of metacognitive language learning strategies, which should reflect in a change on this variable. In a range of 25 points between -14 and 11, the average change in the reported metacognitive language learning strategy use in the experimental group over the course of the treatment was minus two. From the students in the case study, subject C was the only student who showed a positive change of four points. Subject A met the group average of a two-point loss. The data from learner B indicated a slightly greater loss of three points and the data collected from student D showed a total loss of six points.

The independent language learning behaviour

The data suggest that students A and C were keen independent language learners, who were used to complementing their German classes with independent study. In contrast, students B and D relied heavily on their teachers to structure and organise their learning.

Motivation

All the students in the case study were motivated to learn German, as can be expected on a Modern Languages Degree Course. They all showed instrumental motivation and said that they enjoyed learning languages, thus revealing a good degree of intrinsic motivation at the beginning of the course. A divide, however, was observed between students A and C on one side, and students B and D on the other side. Whereas the former two students expressed a high integrative orientation towards the target language communities, the data imply a lack of this aspect of the integrative dimension in student B's and D's motivation. In the framework of Csizér and Dörnyei (2005a:626-634) the motivational profiles of students A and C can be seen as most motivated, since mastery of the foreign language is part of their 'ideal self', and implied in their 'hopes, aspirations, advancements, growth, and accomplishments' (2005a:616-617). In the cases of students C and D, their motivational profiles veered more and more towards the 'ought-to L2 self', consisting of the features they 'ought to possess' (2005a:617). Especially towards the end of their studies, they seemed to be more concerned with

the reduction of negative outcomes than with self-fulfilment with language learning. They also lacked the strong instrumental motivation of wanting to integrate the language into their career after graduation.

The level of control over the language learning process

When starting their studies, student A expressed a low feeling of control over her language learning processes. On a range of values for possible attributional combinations from minus seven to sixteen, this particular student scored minus three. Student C received a positive score of two, and students B and D were more confident, with values of three and four, respectively.

However, the picture changed completely after the first year. Subjects A and C both received a positive score of two for their attributions, which, within the experimental group, equalled the average feeling of control over their learning. Student A had thus gained five points on the scale, whereas student C had maintained her confidence. Yet, students B and D had lost their healthy sense of control over the first year at university. Student D reported a loss of six points on the scale and student B reported a considerable loss of eight points. After the treatment, they scored minus two and minus five points, respectively.

Table 8.1: Results from the individual case studies.

	Subject B	Subject D	Subject A	Subject C	Range	Group average
Perception of the effects of the Programme	not very positive	not very positive	positive	Very positive	N/A	N/A
Language learning experience before entering University	Fair	extensive	very extensive	Little	N/A	N/A
Language learning experience after entering University	Fair	very extensive	extensive	Little	N/A	N/A
Proficiency level at the beginning of the course	Satisfactory	good	very good	Good	N/A	N/A
Proficiency level on graduation	Satisfactory	satisfactory	very good	very good	N/A	N/A
Average level of reflectivity	13	35	52	20	67	33
Metacognitive language learning strategy use - pre-treatment	54	47	51	66	32	51
Change in metacognitive language learning strategy use	-3	-6	-2	4	25	-2
Independent language learning behaviour	Little	very little	extensive	extensive	N/A	N/A
Motivation	No integrative orientation	no integrative orientation	strong integrative orientation	strong integrative orientation	N/A	N/A
Level of control over the language learning process – pre-treatment	3	4	-3	2	15	3

Change in the level of control over the language learning process	-8	-6	5	0	15	0
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The learner profiles seem to largely split into two types of learners with different dispositions. The table highlights some interesting similarities between learners B and D, who both claimed to have gained little benefit from the Portfolio Programme, and learners A and C, who felt that the Scheme had had a positive impact on their language learning. To start with, students A and C can be regarded as successful language learners, graduating with exceptionally high marks for their German language. They also had a strong integrative orientation. They showed an interest in the target language communities and expressed a pragmatic outlook on language learning. The authentic use of the target language played an important role in their learning. This agrees with Dörnyei's (2003a:5) summary of the research literature, saying that 'an "integrative" component has consistently emerged in empirical studies even in the most diverse contexts, explaining a significant portion of the variance in language learners' motivational disposition and motivated learning behavior'.

Both students also expressed a strong long-term instrumental motivation, since they wanted to use their German language skills in their future careers.

Although the data revealed little about their independent language learning behaviour at school, the two learners seemed to have taken responsibility for their learning at least from the beginning of their university studies. They were aware of the importance of language practice and willing to complement their classes with self-organised learning events. They seized the opportunities the Portfolio Programme offered in terms of guidance, encouragement and feedback. They were able to recognise many benefits of the Scheme and to adapt them to their own learning needs.

Student C was able to keep her feeling of control over her learning intact, whilst student A, who had come in with some self-doubt of her linguistic ability, gained confidence throughout the first year.

Both students particularly appreciated the direct impact the Programme had on their language skills. When asked directly, they did recognise the importance of learning skills and strategies, though. Learner A expressed an average frequency and variety of strategy use when coming in, and also an average loss over the first year. Student C scored exceptionally high on the metacognitive language learning strategy use variable and even managed to increase that score over her first year at University.

In comparison, learners B and D graduated with lower than average marks for their German language. The data collected from them showed hardly any integrative orientation in their German language studies. Their main incentive for studying the language on a Degree Programme seemed to have been the pleasure they had gained from their language learning at School. They were not able to sustain their motivation as well as learners A and C. By the end of their studies, neither of them aspired to use the language in their future careers. Especially student D expressed a serious disengagement from her German studies in her final year.

Both students seemed to have experienced some form of disorientation as language learners during their first year at University. They had started their studies as confident learners of German. At that time, their attributions for learning success and failure showed the belief that they were in control of their learning. In fact, they had expressed a higher feeling of control than students A and C. Yet, in contrast to them, they lost their confidence over the first year at University.

Students B and D relied heavily on the institution for upholding their motivation and managing their learning. Subject B's dependence seemed to be caused more by her inability to organise meaningful learning events than by her unwillingness to do so. Student D, on the other hand, seemed to be overwhelmed by the demands of studying four foreign languages. Due to

her decreasing motivation and her inability to direct her learning, there was little evidence of any self-organised learning activity.

The level of reflectivity measured in the project journals and the metacognitive language learning strategy use expressed in questionnaire 1.2 do not fit in neatly with the identified two learner types. Student D seemed to have a higher than average ability to reflect on her learning and student B came in with a relatively high score on her reported metacognitive language learning strategy use. Yet the differing impact of the learner development scheme for the two groups is again obvious in the data. As opposed to cases A and C, students B and D lost more points on that scale than the average student in the experimental group.

The data from the case study do not support Missler's (1999:105) claim that the extent of previous language learning experience reflects in a student's reported metacognitive learning strategy use. In spite of their extensive language learning experience before and during their first year of studies, students A and D reported little metacognitive language learning strategy use. Student C, on the other hand, who only ever learned one foreign language, scored extremely high on that variable. Neither do the results of the case study confirm the hypotheses that the level of reflectivity and the proficient use of metacognitive language learning strategies are related or that they influence the perception of the Portfolio Programme on the whole or the individual learner development tools in particular, as suggested in chapter three. Also, there is no evidence to support the assumption that they are linked to language learning success.

The two students with an integrative orientation and the willingness and ability to organise their learning appreciated the learner development scheme on the whole. The results from this small-scale case study thus indicate that the Portfolio Programme benefited mostly the students who needed it the least. Learners who were inclined to work independently exploited the Programme to their advantage. Focusing on their language learning, they were also able to gain some benefit with regard to their motivation and learning strategies. It is of some concern, however, that the two students who needed more support

with their independent language learning did not benefit much from the individualised learning programme. As student B suggested, a clearer explanation of the learning aims and objectives may have helped them understand the arguments behind the Scheme and consequently benefit more. Transparency of aims is crucial to enable participants to reflect on and take ownership of those goals. Understanding the benefits and demands of independent language learning can increase the ability to take charge.

Most importantly, the Scheme also failed to increase the students' motivation or at least to counteract the negative influences of the first year on the Degree Course. This contradicts the assumption that autonomous learning considerably increases motivation. Instead, high motivation seems to be necessary for learners to benefit fully from an independent language learning scheme. Vandergrift (2005: 84) discusses the possibility that the cause-effect relationship between the two variables may be different from that usually anticipated. In this view, motivation is necessary to engage actively in independent language learning.

9. Conclusions

In the final chapter, I will summarise and discuss the findings from different parts of the study. Revisiting the theoretical basis of the study in chapter three, I will outline the anticipated effects of the Portfolio Programme on metacognitive awareness, strategy use and motivation. Next, I will turn to the effects experienced by the students, with a special focus on their perceptions of the individual learner development tools. Thus the conclusions will be based on the anticipated effects of the Portfolio Programme set against those experienced by the learner.

I will then return to the question regarding the interaction between the ID variables investigated in this study. Based on the association between individual effects, the empirical evidence will be examined with regard to the process model of language learner autonomy.

In order to keep the results in perspective, the limitations of the study will be discussed in the second part of the chapter. Drawing on the students' own accounts of the impact of the scheme and its individual tools, I will then make some pedagogical recommendations for the implementation of learner development schemes in UK HE institutions. The changes made to the Programme at the University of Liverpool will be described as an example. The results of the study will finally be evaluated in the context of present research trends in the field. Based on this, I will end my conclusions with an exploration of aspects worth further investigation.

9.1. Summary of findings

The results of this study are complex and some of them were unexpected. The following table gives an overview of the research questions, the data source used to answer the question and the results. It shows that the results from one part of the study at times contradict the results of another part. Such idiosyncrasies are a challenge, and the attempt to explain them can open

new lines of thought which may consequently be followed up by further research. They can also point to inherent shortcomings in the study. Therefore, this investigation will be scrutinised accordingly, with a special focus on the newly developed research tools, which can thus be evaluated.

Table 9.1: Focus of the studies, research questions, data source and results

Focus of the studies	Research question	Data source	Results	Chapter
The experienced effects of the Portfolio Programme	Do the students participating in the Portfolio Programme expand their reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies during their first year German course?	Pretest-posttest questionnaires aiming at the use of metacognitive language learning strategies	NO, there is a slight but significant reduction in the use of metacognitive language learning strategies	6.5.1.
	Does participation in the Portfolio Programme affect students' reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies?		NO, the control group showed an even greater reduction, but the difference is not significant	6.5.1.
	Do the students participating in the Portfolio Programme gain a greater feeling of control over the learning process during their first year German course?	Pretest-posttest questionnaires aiming at the feeling of control over the learning process	NO, the gain is very small and not significant	6.5.2.
	Does participation in the Portfolio Programme affect students' reported feeling of control over the learning process?		NO, the control group showed a reduction, but the difference is not significant	6.5.2.
	Do the project journals manifest a change in the level of reflectivity over time?	Project journals	YES, there is a significant but very weak relationship between level of reflectivity and project number.	7.1.3.2.
	How do the students evaluate their own achievements regarding the specified learning objectives of the Portfolio Programme, namely -target language proficiency, -language learning skills and strategies, -control over the learning process, -confidence -motivation?	Questionnaires on the immediate effects	All anticipated effects were confirmed by the majority of students immediately after the project. Most students would like to see the Programme continue in future.	7.3.3.

	How do the students evaluate the long-term impact of their participation in the Portfolio Programme regarding -the consciousness of the learning process? -the use of metacognitive language learning strategies? -the language learning activities they employ for their independent language learning?	Questionnaire on long-term effects	The majority confirmed an effect on - consciousness, - strategy use - learning activities	7.4.3.
	Do the students expect participation in the Portfolio Programme to benefit them in their language learning during the year abroad or after leaving university?		YES (94%)	7.4.3.
	Do the students feel that participation in the Portfolio Programme benefited them in their language learning during the year abroad?		NO (62 %)	7.3.4.
	Can any ID variables or variable clusters be identified from the data that seem to be linked to the impact of the Portfolio Programme?	Case study	YES, namely language proficiency on graduation, change in metacognitive language learning strategy use, change in the feeling of control over the language learning process, independent language learning behaviour outside the Programme and integrative orientation seem to be linked	8.6.
The interaction of learner variables	Does a high reported metacognitive language learning strategy use coincide with the perception of control over the learning process?	Pretest-posttest questionnaires aiming at the feeling of control over the learning process and the use of metacognitive language learning strategy use / questionnaire on the immediate effects	NO & YES, no significant relationship could be found in the pretest-posttest questionnaire, but the questionnaire on the immediate effects reveals a significant relationship	6.5.3. 7.3.3.4.

	<p>What are the relationships between the investigated effects? In particular, do they support the hypotheses that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -efficiency of language learning skills and strategy use is associated with the feeling of control over the language learning process? -the feeling of control over the language learning process is associated with learner confidence? - learner confidence is associated with motivation? 	Questionnaires on immediate effects	YES, significant relationships were found between all the variables investigated	7.3.3.4.
The tools for learner development	Do the students learn to appreciate the project journals as a way of organising their learning over the course of the first year?	Project journals	NO, there is no significant relationship between task attitude and project number	7.1.3.1.
	Do the students learn to appreciate the advisory sessions over the course of the first year?	Advisory sessions	NO, there is no steady rise in attendance	7.2.3.1.
	How important a part of the advisory sessions did the students think the use of and work on the target language was?	Case study	Personal feedback on mistakes and the opportunity to practise were regarded as a very important aspect of the sessions	8.5.
	Do the students perceive the tools of the Portfolio Programme, the project journals and the advisory sessions, as effective for improving their language learning behaviour?	Questionnaires on immediate effects	Project journals – NO, only a minority (31%) thought their learning was at least moderately improved by them Advisory sessions – YES, the majority (69%) thought their learning was at least moderately improved by them	7.3.3.2.
	How beneficial did the individual students think the advisory sessions and the project journals were?	Case study	Project journals - hardly beneficial; advisory sessions were regarded as more beneficial by most learners	8.5.

	Based on the students' experiences, what is the most efficient use of staff time in a HE language course - class teaching or individual supervisions or both?		Combination of both (97%)	7.4.3.
	For those students who favour a combination of both individual supervisions and class teaching, what do they think supervisions should focus on - the language or the learning process or both?	Questionnaire on long-term effects	Combination (66%) Language (29%) Learning processes (5.3%)	7.4.3.
The learners' view of the Portfolio Programme	Which characteristics and aspects of the Portfolio Programme are dominant in the learners' viewpoints?	Questionnaires on immediate effects / questionnaires on long-term effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encourages and enables independent learning - helps focus on strengths and weaknesses through individual feedback - helps improve language proficiency - adds/takes pressure off exams - familiarises with language centre/resources - motivates - provides space for individual interests - encourages to take responsibility - facilitates reflection on learning approaches - will help learning during the year abroad - difficulties of assessing strategies 	7.3.3. 7.4.3.
	What aims of the Portfolio Programme were predominant in the individual student's understanding?	Case studies	The opportunity to practise the language and the familiarisation with new resources and language learning activities	8.5.
	Were the students able to adapt their work for the Portfolio Programme to their own learning needs?	Case studies	The students who reported the most benefits of the scheme were those who were best able to adapt the Programme to their own learning needs	8.5.

9.1.1. The anticipated effects of the Portfolio Programme

The most surprising finding of the study for me was the fact that the students' self-confidence and use of metacognitive language learning strategies did not improve over the first year of their language degree studies. In accordance with the change in strategy use, the project journals also revealed a decrease in the level of reflectivity towards the end of the Programme. On all three variables chosen to be investigated, *reflectivity*, *use of metacognitive language learning strategies* and *feeling of control over the learning process*, students' self-report data thus show a reduction or no change during their first year at university. It was argued that the transition from school to university causes an upheaval to the individual's language learning process. This line of reasoning needs to be further investigated if appropriate measures to counter the effects are to be developed.

Essentially, the present investigation did not provide any statistical support for the hypotheses that the Portfolio Programme affects the feeling of control over the learning process or the reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies. The data do not show a significant difference between the experimental and the control group regarding the change over one year on both variables. Pilkington and Garner (2004:1) equally conclude from their study on the use of portfolios for language learning in HE that 'the portfolio cannot be assumed to be a certain guarantee of raising skills and learning awareness, nor of generating conditions for transfer and reflection'.

Nevertheless, the Portfolio Programme still appears to halt the decline with regard to both variables over the first year to an extent. The students at Liverpool, who had participated in the learner development programme, seemed to fare better than the students from other universities on the variables *change of feeling of control over the language learning process* and *change of reported use of metacognitive language learning strategies*. An investigation with a larger control group might have produced significant

results. A tentative conclusion from the study is therefore that there are indications that learner development in the form of the Portfolio Programme can help counteract the negative effects of the transition from A-level to university. However, since at this stage the effects of the Scheme on the investigated variables are not based on experimental or quasi-experimental data, and research findings from other authors in this field so far have been inconclusive, further investigation is essential.

The following arguments can help explain the findings regarding the development of reported metacognitive strategy use and feeling of control.

The impact of the learning situation on language learning strategy use has already been recognised in the literature (Missler 1999:184-187) and may account for the reduction in reported metacognitive strategy use over the first year. It can be assumed that A-level language learning, with its strong focus on exams, poses markedly different demands on the students from language learning during the first year at university. Language learning strategies developed for A-level studies may be less useful once the students are at university, where they are confronted with a more open curriculum, which requires more self-direction. Especially revision strategies appear to be dropped from the students' repertoires. Participants in the Portfolio Programme seem to develop new independent language learning strategies more rapidly, thus adapting better to the new challenges of university and lifelong learning than students who do not receive the additional attention of a learner development programme.

Regarding the feeling of control over the language learning process, the data revealed that students generally experience a lower degree of success as language learners in their first year at university. Having entered the degree course as confident learners used to success, some students perceive themselves as less successful after their first year of study. Especially learners with a competitive outlook on achievement have to come to terms with the fact that they are surrounded by students who are usually much better language learners than their peers were at School, since self-

confidence as a language learner is likely to be a factor when students choose a degree course. Students who regard themselves as successful language learners are probably inclined to choose a language degree course.

The fact that the learners did not feel more in control over the learning process after participation in the Programme, however, was still surprising. Although the Portfolio Programme had to counteract the negative consequences of a reduced feeling of success, which students seem to experience unrelated to the treatment, it was anticipated that it would exert a greater effect. Instead, it only succeeded in preserving the feeling of control in spite of the difficulties of the transition, which appear to show more severe consequences without the additional attention through the Portfolio Programme. Through participation, the students seem to be able to cope slightly better with the reduced sense of achievement experienced in their first year at university.

As discussed in the next section, learners with certain characteristics failed to benefit from the Programme. The experiences of these students may also contribute to the indistinctness of the results.

The data from the survey studies evoke a more positive picture of the effects of the Portfolio Programme. When asked directly about any perceived immediate changes on the identified variables that could be attributed to the Portfolio Programme, the majority of students confirmed a positive influence on their language learning strategy use and their feeling of control over the learning process, their confidence and their motivation. In the last questionnaire, the students even confirmed a long-term change in their use of language learning strategies. Hence, with regard to language learning strategy use and confidence, the students' perceptions of the impact of the Portfolio Programme differ from the effects measured in the quasi-experimental study. Not only did they regard the development of language learning skills and strategies as important, but they also mentioned it as a predominant aspect of portfolio work. Similarly, most learners reported an improvement concerning the motivational variables *feeling of control over*

the learning process, confidence and motivation itself. The findings from the survey questionnaires reinforce the assumption that the Portfolio Programme indeed had a positive impact on the majority of students and that a bigger study with more participants might yield less ambiguous results. Similarly, the confirmed lasting impact on consciousness and reflectivity was not observed in the project journals, which may be explained by the students' obvious dislike of the research tool. It could also be argued that it needs time for these effects to take hold, since it is a lengthy process for increased reflectivity to affect language learning. Therefore, the students felt hardly any change whilst engaged in learner development and only confirmed mainly practical outcomes immediately after the Programme had finished. However, with hindsight they could feel the benefits of the reflective approach to learning, and consequently confirmed the greatest long-term transformation in view of their consciousness of the learning process.

Other anticipated effects on ID variables were confirmed by almost all the subjects of the study, such as on their language proficiency and on the language learning activities they chose to engage in. Crucially, the vast majority of students believed that involvement in the Scheme would benefit them in future independent language learning situations, such as the year abroad or after graduation. In this respect, the fact that only a minority of students who had been abroad when filling in the final questionnaire had experienced such benefits is a disappointment.

9.1.2. The experienced effects of the Portfolio Programme

The responses to open questions revealed that the students' understanding of the benefits differed slightly from those extracted from the theory underlying the Portfolio Programme. Although they rated the importance of being encouraged and enabled to engage in independent language learning highly, they found the opportunity to improve their language skills through the supervised Programme most valuable. They especially appreciated the

attention on and assessment of their individual progress and the individual, language related feedback on their performances. This can be explained against the background of their predominant focus on language progress. Whereas the reflective element of the learner development programme aims to yield rather abstract, long-term benefits for the language learner, such as the ability to improve on previous language learning experiences and to sustain one's motivation, in the questionnaire targeting the immediate effects, the learners were more interested in the practical results, such as the familiarisation with new and enjoyable activities for language learning. At that point, they also valued the Programme for its capacity to ease the pressure of exams and regarded it as a motivating form of assessment.

Crucially, almost all students regarded the combination of language classes and individual supervisions beneficial enough to recommend them for future students. From within this group, only two students thought that advisory sessions should focus on learning issues alone.

One of the most worrying results from the case studies, however, was the finding that some students did not benefit much from the Programme, either with regard to the anticipated outcomes, or based on their own evaluations. It seems that without an integrative orientation, focus on the authentic use of the target language or the willingness and ability to direct their own learning, the students were not able to gain from guided independent language learning. In short, the Scheme failed to help the students who needed it most. It appears that learner development based on reflection builds on particular learner characteristics, such as a certain degree of motivation and the willingness to take charge. Some learners, who have probably coped well in the more rigorous School system, may simply not possess these characteristics when entering HE, making them prone to failure or drop-out. The markedness of the ID variables 'metacognitive language learning strategy use' and 'feeling of control over the learning process when entering HE' does not seem to be predictive. Students with a good reported feeling of control or a high frequency of metacognitive language learning strategy use do not

outperform their peers. However, the development on the two investigated variables seems to be linked to other variables, suggesting that a certain type of learner fails to take advantage of the Programme.

On the other hand, some highly efficient language learners also objected to the Programme. It can be assumed that some students are already able to manage their language learning successfully when entering HE. It therefore appears crucial to identify the level of support a learner needs as early as possible.

Yet, on the whole most students welcomed the opportunity to become more involved in the learning process. Likewise, Chan (2001:514) found that the Asian learners at tertiary level participating in her study demonstrated mostly positive attitudes towards greater autonomy.

9.1.2.1. The efficiency of the learner development tools

The students' questionnaire responses confirm that the majority appreciated the advisory sessions. Especially the answers to open questions show that the students valued the meetings for the individual attention they provided. However, they seemed to seek a more direct transfer of information and advice, rather than the awareness raising approach followed by the adviser. This corresponds with the results of a study by Reinders et al. (2004), who conclude that in the consultation sessions they analysed, the language adviser should have been more directive.

Many students especially enjoyed the opportunity to converse in German with the adviser. Language work featured very high on the students' agenda during the sessions. Clemente (2003) also found that some learners were more interested in the target language use than in the learning conversation itself.

Mozzon-McPherson (2001:11-13) provides an overview of studies looking into the issues of information transfer and language related advice. She maintains that knowledge should be constructed, not transferred, and that the

adviser should not help directly with the target language. Since these suggestions are at odds with the ideas of many students having experienced such counselling, more research, especially into the long-term effects of such learning conversations, seems to be necessary in order to justify the method.

In comparison to the advisory sessions, the students deemed the project journals generally less useful. These findings were supported by anecdotal evidence which showed that the attitudes towards the project journals were often quite negative. Without much input from outside, many students were not able or willing to reflect on their learning, but rather recorded the actions they undertook in order to complete a project. Consequently, many regarded the journals as a waste of time. Again, it seems that a certain level of learning awareness is a precondition for the efficient use of learning diaries. Other students may have sensed a major disadvantage of experiential learning, which was recently pointed out by researchers such as Lawes (2003:25), who argues that 'the process of reflection as a psychological phenomenon is necessarily subjective and necessarily inward looking'. She argues that reflection without the input of propositional knowledge can be isolating and relativistic. Preconceptions can be strengthened rather than challenged.

For the present investigation, the students were required to engage with the learning diaries so that they had a chance to experience them as a learner development instrument. Yet most students failed to discover their benefits. Garner (2000) and Halbach (2000) also found that students were resistant to work on learner diaries. Yet, in many learner development programmes students are still expected to regularly record their language learning activities and experiences. I would like to argue that the advantages of learning diaries for learner development are mainly theoretical. In the view of the learners, they mostly failed to deliver the claimed benefits. If autonomy is to be taken seriously, students should not be forced to engage in an activity which many find useless. Learning diaries should therefore be an option, since they seem to help some students, but not a requirement.

The generic portfolio projects were generally very popular with the students, since they offer a choice regarding topic, skill and language level. Some students with a low level of independent language learning skills might have done better with a more directive set of tasks. Yet most students seized the opportunity to develop their own projects.

9.1.3. The process model of learner autonomy

The process model of learner autonomy can be regarded as an interpretation of the most influential theories on the subject at the time. It was therefore interesting to see which conclusions from the model could stand up to empirical examination.

The anticipated effects could not be experimentally established in the study. Thus the first part of the study did not confirm the effects of the Portfolio Programme as suggested in the process model of learner autonomy.

In addition, the association between reported metacognitive strategy use and the perception of control over the learning process was not verified through the data from the quasi-experimental study. The assumption that the reflective approach employed in the learner development scheme influences first and foremost the participants' use of metacognitive language learning strategies and consequently the feeling of control over the learning process can therefore not be confirmed.

However, in the surveys the majority of students reported an effect on all the variables investigated in the study. Furthermore, significant relationships were found amongst all the variables. Yet, a comparison between the individual associations did not validate the virtuous circle of learner autonomy. Perceived language proficiency and motivation are the variables most closely linked, followed by motivation and language learning skills and strategies. The links between the feeling of control and motivation and confidence, respectively, are the weakest of them all, rendering the explanatory power

of attribution theory almost meaningless in comparison to other motivational theories. Instead, the results from the case studies imply an overriding influence of other ID variables, such as an integrative orientation and a willingness to take responsibility for one's learning.

In addition, the results from this investigation do not support the argument that more efficient strategy use causes a better sense of control over the learning process and, as a consequence, enhances motivation. Rather, reported language learning strategy use is more closely linked to motivation directly. Although associations were confirmed in the present investigation, causal relationships are notoriously difficult to pinpoint. It is probably the case that an intervention such as the Portfolio Programme results in an effective synergy, with individual effects enforcing each other. However, it would be useful to identify the individual learner characteristics which need to be influenced for greatest positive effect.

9.2. Limitations to the study

In addition to contributing knowledge to the subject area, I believe that research projects should also aim to refine and improve research tools and methods. To this effect, I will outline the pitfalls of this investigation so that they can be avoided in future research.

One shortcoming of this examination is the limited size of the control group in the quasi-experimental study. Although statistically viable, a larger sample size would have increased the power of the tests and might have yielded clearer results. On some variables the data seem to support the findings of other parts of the studies, yet without reaching an acceptable significance level. Ideally, I should have been present to administer the questionnaires, in order to achieve a better response rate.

Other limitations were caused by the fact that the investigated treatment was also an assessed part of a Degree course. As such, the Programme had

to be acceptable for both students and staff in the Department. Yet the aims of the Scheme differ considerably from the focus on product-related assessment and accountability, which generally governs learning and teaching at both secondary and tertiary level in the UK. It can be argued that within this larger context, the Programme hardly affects the general outlook of the students, since it forms only a minor part of their learning experiences. Rather, it provides some space for autonomy, which the students appreciate. Clemente (2001) addresses the problem. She describes how it is relatively easy to introduce innovations such as the Portfolio Programme into a departmental system, yet much more difficult to change the attitudes of the majority of the teaching staff towards a more reflective and autonomous approach.

For practical and pedagogical reasons, some changes were made to the Scheme during the investigation, especially concerning the number of projects and advisory sessions. This complicated the analysis of the data slightly.

Since I was not only in charge of the development of the Programme and the research on it, but also of the day-to-day running of the scheme, inherent flaws and mistakes may have affected the findings. I often had to make decisions on the spot, regarding marks, target language use, directiveness of the advice etc., which could not all be discussed in the thesis. My own style of marking and advising will have influenced the results. Therefore a different adviser might have come to different conclusions.

When summarising the findings, it became clear that short term effects of the treatment differ markedly from long-term effects. With hindsight, it seems obvious that the impact of raised learning awareness takes time to yield results for the students. It is hoped that future studies will be more successful in considering the timescale of the effects they measure. This realisation, however, can be regarded as a valuable outcome of the study itself.

One of the main challenges of this investigation was the development of measurement tools for elusive theoretical concepts such as the feeling of

control over the learning process and reflectivity. Such tools are crucial for the evaluation of the theory of autonomous learning. In my opinion, profound changes to language pedagogy, such as those sometimes suggested by advocates of the concept of learner autonomy, should always be based on sound empirical evidence as well as on a good theoretical basis. The importance of such tools is exemplified by the SILL, which has enabled an abundance of research on language learners' strategy use.

Learner diaries have sometimes been used as research tools. However, to my knowledge, nobody has ever tried to use them for a quantitative study. I believe that they provided a good measure for the learners' attitudes towards them. Reflectivity, on the other hand, was hard to determine using the project journals, since its influence was overridden by the learners' willingness and ability to participate in the task. The fact that the measured level of reflectivity was not linked to the reported use of metacognitive language learning skills and other ID variables identified in the case studies also points to the limitations of the tool.

The biggest challenge, though, lay in the quantification of the feeling of control over the learning process. Especially the scores for individual attributions are still open for discussion. Nevertheless, the results of that part of the investigation seem to make sense in the larger context of the study.

Other limitations are inherent to the nature of the research, such as the influence of people variables and maturation. These influences were discussed in detail in chapter five.

9.3. Pedagogical recommendations

The pedagogical conclusions from the investigation are drawn directly from the students' experiences of the Portfolio Programme. In order to evaluate a scheme like this, it is especially important to take the participants' reservations

into account.

The distinct aspect of the Programme which the participants valued most was its individuality. In order to help students thrive in HE, it seems to be advisable to ease them into their studies through more individual attention than is nowadays routinely given in many university language courses. Providing the individual learner with a clear indication of the demands of the course and their position in it, in other words discussing their individual strengths and weaknesses and helping them to structure their work accordingly, provides most of them with the necessary support for a smoother transition from school to university. This does not mean that the tutors and students should be confronted with an even more explicit and prescriptive curriculum. Instead, the personal space that individual feedback opens for the students seems to be very motivating and encourages them to find learning resources and activities which they can enjoy throughout their career as language learners. In this sense, I would recommend the use of generic project work in connection with individual supervisions as an effective supplement to regular language classes. The form of the portfolio is especially appropriate, since it enables both the learner and the adviser to observe the progress.

The scheme also proved to be a valuable tool for diversification. When a new course 'Business and German' was introduced, the tutor for Business German developed appropriate projects as part of the Portfolio Programme, which she supervises herself. These projects are very popular with the students, since they give them the opportunity to practise their specialist language. Generic projects can be easily supplemented by a choice of newspapers, websites and video programmes which engage the learner in specialist language learning. Equally, portfolio work could be designed with more specific aspects in mind, such as the year abroad preparation in the second year. In this case, generic projects would focus on different skills, such as note taking in lectures and essay writing.

However, there were also some less efficient aspects to the Portfolio Programme, and changes were made accordingly at Liverpool University.

Since the experiential learning cycle on which the approach was based seems to require a minimum threshold level of motivation and learning awareness to be efficient, and thus fails to support the students most in need of help, we are now prepared to give more directive advice in the sessions. This also seems to agree with the wishes of the most efficient language learners. As a consequence, feedback sessions are much more student-led than they had been during the investigation. Previously designed around the theory of language advising, with a focus on learning awareness and reflection, and the hesitation of the adviser to 'teach' the student about language or learning, they are now often steered by the students, who like to draw on the advisers as experts in both learning and language. Accordingly, the advisers spend more time suggesting new learning strategies and providing feedback on the product. Language work and the opportunity to practise are important aspects of advisory sessions for the students. In most subjects' opinion, advisers should be fluent speakers of the languages they are advising for. Ideally, adviser and advisee also share a language they are both fluent in, in order to ease communication if necessary. At Liverpool, the students are encouraged to use German but to switch languages if they feel that they cannot fully express their thoughts.

As a further result of this investigation, the project journals were dropped as an assessed part of the Programme. Instead, the students are now expected to write an essay about themselves as language learners for the Diagnosis Project. In order to support their reflection, they have to fill in a questionnaire about learning style and learning behaviour. This model has been in practice for several years now and both the experience of the advisers and anecdotal evidence from the students suggests that it sparks deeper reflection on the learning process.

With the abolition of the project journals, assessment of the learning process also became less important. Some participants in the present investigation argued convincingly against the assessment of learning skills. These arguments were taken into account and the actual outcome of the

learner's efforts is used as a measure for the assessment. However, assessment is still largely based on the individual's progress.

The Portfolio Programme has been an integral part of the first year German language course for the last six years. During this time, it has evolved and matured. According to the students' comments in the module evaluation forms, which are part of the University's quality assurance policy, the Portfolio Programme and especially the advisory sessions are a popular part of the first year German Degree courses. In recent years, I have sometimes overheard students of German discussing themselves as learners in the corridors. The Portfolio Programme seems to add an aspect to their language degree course which few learners want to miss once they have experienced it.

The only drawback the students regularly complain about is the fact that, partly because of portfolio work, the workload in the German section is considerably higher than in the other sections in the School of Modern Languages. As a consequence, colleagues have suggested a reduction in the number of assignments in the language course, in order to keep the Portfolio Programme intact.

9.4. Outlook

The present investigation was based on an interpretation of the theory of learner autonomy based on the research until the late 1990s. In the meantime, many more scholars have embarked on the empirical investigation of learner autonomy and related constructs in the UK and Ireland.

First and foremost, Little et. al., especially in their collection of papers on learner autonomy in Secondary Schools (2003), helped redefine the concept for pedagogical purposes. An autonomous classroom, in their view, is based on communicative language learning with the added bonus of the authenticity of the target language use through classroom communication and reflection. The teacher carries the ultimate responsibility to encourage the learners

to reflect and take charge. The aim of learner autonomy is the promotion of linguistic ability. This line of theorising has facilitated the integration of more self-directed forms of learning into the curriculum and thus made the concept applicable for teachers. Findings from the accompanying investigations suggest that changes made in the classrooms, such as authentic language use, greater learner choice of tasks and materials, reflection and self-evaluative elements generally have a positive influence on the language learner. However, adapting to the constraints of secondary education, this understanding of autonomy has watered down the political, philosophical and psychological implications of the term, ignoring the fundamental change learner autonomy requires in an inspectorial educational system, largely relying on assessment for accountability rather than for learning.

Other researchers, especially those working on the UK Project on Language Learner Strategies (UK POLLS) (Grenfell 2006 for an overview) focus on strategy use in order to facilitate greater learner autonomy. Their main pedagogical and methodological concern lies in the improvement of foreign language learning in schools. This more directive approach of explicit strategy training yielded some convincing empirical results, indicating that intervention can, in fact, improve strategy use and therefore self-directed learning. In its most positive interpretation, strategy training impacts directly on learning success. However, most of the studies conducted in the UK were qualitative and did not attempt to verify a causal relationship between strategy training, strategy use and proficiency.

The field of motivation in language learning has seen considerable progress over the last ten years in the work of Dörnyei (2005:65-119 for an overview) and his associates. Acknowledging the complexity of the construct, they started to develop a comprehensive picture of learner motivation that includes a broad range of variables. In this multifaceted model, the feeling of control over the learning process as defined in attribution theory only plays a minor part and is overridden by an integrative orientation, as Csizér and Dörnyei (2005b:30) show in their large scale study based on Hungarian pupils.

This corresponds with my findings that an increased feeling of control does not necessarily occur in connection with better confidence and motivation and that a positive attitude towards the L2 community is crucial even for the effectiveness of a learner development scheme. In this light, attempts by Csizér and Dörnyei (2005a) to develop a model of the Ideal Language Self based on a redefined concept of integrativeness are therefore very promising.

This study attempted to answer the questions whether, how, and with what effects language learner autonomy can be promoted. The answers to these questions are not completely clear, since a causal relationship between the treatment and the frequency of metacognitive language learning strategy use and the feeling of control over the learning process could not be established. However, it was argued that the effects of an awareness raising programme need time to develop. It would therefore be exciting to see more research into the long-term influence of self-regulation, especially since the results from the survey and case studies suggest that the awareness raising programme was, indeed, perceived as beneficial by most students involved.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that there is a set of learner characteristics which is not only linked to achievement, but also to the perception of guided independent learning. Learner development itself seems to rely on certain learner traits for its effects. Such Individual Differences can be taken into account for the planning of future learner programmes, so that all learners have a chance to benefit.

Over the course of the present investigation, new and exciting research has been conducted into strategy research and training and good pedagogical practice for strategy instruction has been developed (see Dörnyei 2005:162-196 for an overview). This broader application of the idea can help discover the associations between individual effects, in particular the role self-regulation can play for motivation and language learning. Yet the most challenging issue for further research seems to be the investigation of a causal relationship between learner training and proficiency.

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Portfolio

What is a “portfolio”? As a student in the German Department you will be expected to engage in independent language learning in addition to your regular work for language classes. A portfolio is a collection of evidence of your independent language learning. It contains a record of all independent learning activities (your project journals) as well as the actual work you have been doing, such as essays, reports etc. It's a bit like an artist's portfolio: it shows a potential employer – or your friends and family- exactly what you are able to come up with. It's something to be proud of.

What do I gain from it? Apart from the obvious gain of greater competence in German, keeping a portfolio will help you structure your learning process and develop your learning skills. You will learn to identify your individual learning goals, needs and preferences, to plan and organise meaningful learning events, to monitor your progress and to evaluate the outcome. In short, you will become a more autonomous learner. The skills and strategies you will acquire along the way will be important for your future employers as well as yourself and your own development after leaving the University.

Who will support me in my independent learning? The language adviser and your language tutor will guide you slowly towards greater independence. During the first year we will suggest a choice of learning activities for you to engage in. We will also help you structure your learning using project journals and individual advisory sessions. During the second and third year you will be encouraged to find your own language material (e.g. in the University's libraries, on the Internet) and develop your own opportunities for learning (e.g. with a native speaker through the conversation exchange programme or the Tandem email project).

Will I get any feedback? Over the first semester we will ask you to complete a “diagnosis project”, which will be presented to you in class. This project will cover all language skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking. After completion of the diagnosis project you will meet the language adviser for an individual one-to-one session to identify your learning style, strengths and weaknesses. You will then be able to choose one project from those on offer to be completed during the first semester. In the second semester you will be expected to choose two projects. All projects will be discussed individually with the language adviser. During your second and third year at the University you are encouraged to consult the language adviser on your own discretion.

Will my portfolio play part in the assessment? Portfolio work will contribute 20% to the overall assessment of the language course. Please make sure that you follow the instructions given for each project and don't miss a deadline. If you have to miss a deadline for medical reasons, please hand in a medical certificate. Otherwise your mark for that specific project will be capped at 40%. Please check the noticeboard for deadlines and other announcements.

Why do I need to fill in the project journal? One of our goals is to make language learning a natural part of your everyday life. For this reason you will be asked to consciously observe your own behaviour (such as time management) for one academic year. Like a personal trainer, the language adviser will support and encourage you. The project journals will help you become aware of your own preferences as a language learner and will be a necessary information for the adviser.

How do I keep my project journal? Each time you have worked on your project, fill in the date and time and the activity you did, such as "browsing through magazines in the library choosing a text", "skimming text" etc. Second, describe what you think you have learned or achieved doing the activity. If you have had a problem doing the activity, please describe it in the next section, e.g. "too many technical words in the text" etc. and finally, think what you can do next to solve the problem, e.g. "make list of new words and memorise them." If you have no problems doing an activity, you do not need to write anything for "problems" or "follow-up".

How do I arrange meetings with the language adviser? Towards the deadline of each project, the language adviser will display a list with suggested times on the door of her office. All you have to do is choose a slot that suits you, fill in your name and contact number/ email and turn up on time. You are of course welcome to approach the language adviser at any other time when you feel it might be helpful.

Where can I conduct my independent studies? You are invited to use the language material and the facilities in the University Languages Centre, Ground Floor, Modern Languages Building. You can use the audio-, video and IT-equipment or register for one of our programmes, such as the Conversation Exchange Programme. All projects are on display in the University Languages Centre.

What is required for a successful portfolio? You will be required to complete **one diagnosis project and one main project in the first semester and two main projects in the second semester.** All advisory sessions are part of the projects and must be attended.

The complete portfolio includes:

- The outcome of all 4 projects undertaken.
- The completed project journal for each project.
- A list of new vocabulary (50-80 words) for each project.

It is a good idea to include all evidence of your work process such as drafts, notes etc. in your portfolio. Please make sure that the final version (the one that will be marked by your tutor) is submitted in an appropriate form.

Some recommendations:

- To enhance your vocabulary, please make it a habit to compile a list of 50 to 80 new words for each project and learn them.
- Fill in your project journal immediately after working on your project.
- Start each project as soon as possible and work on it on a regular basis.
- Consult the language adviser immediately whenever you get stuck with your project.
- Keep a list of three or four of your most common mistakes to work on at any time.

Diagnoseprojekt

Dieses Projekt soll Ihnen und der Sprachlernberaterin helfen, Ihre Stärken und Schwächen zu erkennen.

Bitte bearbeiten Sie alle Aufgaben und händigen Sie Ihre Arbeit bis zum 25. Oktober 2002, 12.00 Uhr mittags im Sekretariat der deutschen Abteilung (Zimmer 3.12) ein. Bitte schreiben Sie deutlich "zu Händen Ulrike Bavendiek" auf Ihre Arbeit.

Sie sollten insgesamt ungefähr 10-12 Stunden an diesem Projekt arbeiten.

1. Hören

Filme zur Auswahl:	
<p>Ein Mann für jede Tonart</p> <p>Eine junge Frau verliebt sich in zwei Männer...</p>	<p>Das Leben ist eine Baustelle</p> <p>Jan Nebel ist jung und arbeitet im Schlachthof. Nachdem er zwei Zivilpolizisten bei einer Demonstration verprügelt hat, verliert er auch noch den Job. Dann stirbt sein Vater...</p>
<p>Echte Kerle</p> <p>Es ist absolut kein Tag wie jeder andere für Christoph Schwenk, Hauptkommissar der Frankfurter Kripo, als er nach einem erfolgreichen Arbeitstag zu seiner Verlobten nach Hause kommt und sie mit einem anderen Mann überrascht. Innerhalb kürzester Zeit verliert Christoph seine Freundin, seine Wohnung, seinen Wagen, fast sein gesamtes Hab und Gut...so richtig merkwürdig wird es aber erst, als er nach einer durchzechten Nacht im Bett eines anderen Mannes aufwacht...</p>	<p>Rosenzweigs Freiheit</p> <p>Michael Rosenzweig, Sohn jüdischer Eltern, wird des Mordes an dem Neonazi Rainer Franke angeklagt. Die Indizien sprechen gegen ihn: Nach dem Brandanschlag einer rechtsradikalen Gruppe auf ein Asylbewerberheim, in dem Michaels Freundin lebt, schoss er auf eine Gruppe Neonazis...</p>

In der Mediothek im Modern Languages Gebäude (Erdgeschoss) finden Sie eine Auswahl deutscher Videos. Sie können diese Filme im Sprachenzentrum anschauen.

- a) Wählen Sie einen der vier vorgeschlagenen Filme und schauen Sie ihn an. Vielleicht müssen Sie Teile des Films mehrmals schauen, um ihn richtig zu verstehen.
- b) Schreiben Sie eine Zusammenfassung des Films (150-200 Wörter) auf Deutsch.

2. Lesen

Die Universität Liverpool hat eine Anzahl deutschsprachiger Zeitungen und Zeitschriften abonniert.

- a) Schreiben Sie eine Liste aller deutschsprachigen Zeitungen und Zeitschriften, die Sie in der Sydney-Jones Bibliothek, in der germanistischen Abteilung und in der Mediothek gefunden haben (keine wissenschaftlichen Magazine).
- b) Wählen Sie einen Artikel über ein Thema, das Sie interessiert (ca. eine DIN A 4 Seite) und lesen Sie ihn. Reichen Sie eine Kopie Ihres Artikels mit Ihrem Projekt ein.

3. Sprechen

- a) Geben Sie der Sprachlernberaterin bei Ihrem ersten Treffen eine kurze mündliche Zusammenfassung Ihres Artikels. Sie können Stichworte mitbringen, aber keinen ausformulierten Text. Diskutieren Sie dann über den Inhalt.

4. Schreiben

Schreiben Sie einen Aufsatz (ca. 150 - 200 Wörter) über das Thema: "Die Rolle der deutschen Sprache in Europa"

E-Mail-Partnerschaft

Bei einer E-Mail-Partnerschaft wollen beide Partner/innen durch ihre/n Partner/in die fremde Sprache erlernen oder verbessern, oder einfach die Möglichkeit haben, ungezwungen mit dem/der Partnerin in der jeweiligen Fremdsprache zu kommunizieren. Damit beide Partner/innen auf ihre Kosten kommen, gibt es klare Regeln, die zum Gelingen eines solchen Austauschs behilflich sind. Es ist ganz einfach, sich eine E-Mail Partner/in zu suchen. Gehen Sie auf die Homepage der Ruhr-Universität Bochum <http://www.slif.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/tandem/> und finden Sie dort heraus, wie Sie im einzelnen vorgehen müssen. Sie werden außerdem sehen, welche fantastischen Möglichkeiten Ihnen diese Homepage bietet.

Tipps:

- Bei der Anmeldung kann es zu längeren Wartezeiten kommen. Melden Sie sich deshalb so schnell wie möglich an!
 - Da Sie mit einem unbekanntem Partner arbeiten werden, kann es manchmal zu Problemen kommen. Wir schlagen deshalb vor, dass Sie die E-Mail-Partnerschaft nicht als Ihr erstes Projekt wählen, sondern erst, wenn sich der Kontakt etabliert hat.
 -
1. Suchen Sie sich auf oben beschriebenem Wege eine/n E-Mail-Partner/in und treten Sie in Kontakt.
 2. Stellen Sie sich vor und berichten Sie über sich und Ihr Land. Bitten Sie Ihre/n Partner/in, das Gleiche zu tun. Fragen Sie nach, wenn Sie etwas wissen möchten. Unter dem folgenden Link finden Sie eine Reihe weiterer Ideen: <http://www.slif.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/tandem/kultur/deutsch/index.html>
 3. Schreiben Sie ein Kurzporträt Ihres Partners/Ihrer Partnerin (ca. 500 Wörter).

Tipp:

- Teilen Sie Ihrem/r Partner/in mit, dass Sie ein Porträt von ihm/ihr schreiben. Sie können es ihm/ihr dann am Ende zuschicken.

Ihr Portfolio sollte am Ende mindestens die folgenden Unterlagen enthalten:

- 3-5 von Ihnen geschriebenen deutschsprachige E-mails als Beispiele Ihres Austauschs.
- Das Porträt Ihres/r Partners/in
- Das Projektjournal.

Nachrichten

Im Sprachenzentrum werden jeden Tag die deutschen 20 Uhr Nachrichten aufgezeichnet. Die Videos werden eine Woche lang in der Mediothek aufbewahrt, dann werden sie überspielt

1. Schauen Sie in den folgenden Wochen regelmäßig die Nachrichten. Wählen Sie pro Nachrichtensendung je eine Nachricht, die sie besonders interessiert und machen Sie Notizen. Die folgenden Punkte sollen Ihnen helfen, Ihre Stichworte zu strukturieren:

Datum der Nachrichtensendung

- Aus welchem Bereich ist die Nachricht? (Wirtschaft, Politik, Soziales, Internationales, Sport etc.)
 - Wer ist involviert/betroffen?
 - Wo?
 - Wann?
 - Was?
 - Warum?
 - Wie?

 - Welche Themen werden in derselben Sendung außerdem noch angesprochen?
2. Manche Ereignisse werden über einen längeren Zeitraum in den Nachrichten behandelt, z.B. große Katastrophen, Streiks, politische Gipfel etc. Wählen Sie eine solche Hauptnachricht aus und schreiben Sie darüber einen Artikel für eine Zeitschrift (ca. 200 Wörter). Bedenken Sie folgende Punkte:
- Überschrift
 - Entwicklung der Ereignisse
 - Stil (für welche Zeitschrift schreiben Sie?)
 - Eigene Meinung/Kommentar

Freies Schreiben

Für das Schreibprojekt verfassen Sie Texte im Umfang von 1000 bis 1200 Wörtern. Dabei wählen Sie selbst Thema und Textsorte. Sie können entweder einen längeren Text oder mehrere (maximal vier) kürzere Texte anfertigen. Auf jeden Fall sollen Sie Ihre Texte sorgfältig planen und überarbeiten. Reichen Sie bitte am Ende mindestens die folgenden Unterlagen ein:

- die fertigen Texte bzw. den fertigen Text
- mindestens eine überarbeitete Fassung (aller Texte)
- Ihre persönliche Fehlerliste
- Das Projektjournal

1. Wählen Sie Textsorte und Thema. Im Folgenden finden Sie einige Anregungen für die Wahl Ihrer Textsorte (z.B. Bericht, Brief, Tagebuch ...) und Themen:

- **Aufsatz:** wählen Sie selbst ein Thema (z.B.: *Hooligans in Großbritannien: Nur eine Randerscheinung des Sportalltags oder ein ernsthaftes Problem? ...*)
- **fiktive Briefe:** erfinden Sie einen Verfasser (V) und einen Adressaten (A) und überlegen Sie sich eine Situation, in der die Briefe geschrieben werden (z.B.: V = ein/e Freund/in von Musiker Ihrer Lieblingsband, A = Musiker Ihrer Lieblingsband; V = Student/in aus dem Kosovo (ehemaliges Kriegsgebiet), zugleich Ihr/e (fiktive/r) Brieffreud/in, A = Sie selbst ...)
- **fiktives Tagebuch:** überlegen Sie sich eine Situation und eine Figur, die für eine bestimmte Zeit ein Tagebuch schreibt (z.B.: ein Arbeitsloser in Liverpool); oder schreiben Sie das (fiktive) Tagebuch einer bekannten Persönlichkeit (z.B. Prince William)
- **Textbearbeitung (1):** Schreiben Sie ein bekanntes Märchen um, verändern Sie die Geschichte, tauschen Sie Figuren aus etc.
- **Textbearbeitung (2):** Schreiben Sie die ersten Sätze aus einem Roman auf und schreiben Sie selbst die Fortsetzung dazu. (Die Sätze müssen als Zitat angegeben werden, mit Autornamen und Buchtitel)
- Unter dem folgenden Link auf der Homepage der Ruhr-Uni Bochum <http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/tandem/kultur/idxdeu23.html> finden Sie weitere Anregungen für Schreibaufgaben.

2. Analysieren Sie einige Ihrer korrigierten Texte aus Schule oder Studium. Schreiben Sie eine persönliche Fehlerliste, z.B. *1. Deklinationendungen, 2. Artikel, 3. Position der Verben im Satz.*

3. Gliedern Sie Ihren Text, z.B. *Einleitung, Hauptteil (Argumente pro und contra, Schluss*.
4. Schreiben Sie den Text.
5. Überarbeiten Sie Ihre Texte bzw. Ihren Text nach der persönlichen Fehlerliste: Lesen Sie Ihren Text mehrmals aufmerksam durch und streichen Sie dabei beispielsweise alle Deklinationsfehler an. Ziehen Sie dazu ein Hilfsmittel, eine Grammatik, heran. Schreiben Sie zuletzt die Texte ins Reine.

Tipp:

Mit dem Computer geschriebene Texte sind einfacher zu überarbeiten.

Diskussion

Dieses Projekt wird in Zusammenarbeit mit einem Muttersprachler/einer Muttersprachlerin des Deutschen durchgeführt. Wenn Sie keine Deutschen, Österreicher oder Schweizer in Liverpool kennen, können Sie sich im Sprachenzentrum für das Konversationsprogramm registrieren lassen. Notieren Sie auf dem Formular "Portfolioprojekt", damit Ihre Suche vorrangig behandelt wird.

Das Konversationsprogramm basiert auf einem Austausch. Ihr Partner wird mit Ihnen Deutsch sprechen. Als Gegenleistung sprechen Sie dann ebensolange mit Ihrem Partner Englisch.

1. Im Sprachenzentrum oder im Internet
- (<http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/tandem/idxdeu21.html>) finden Sie Arbeitsblätter für das Konversationsprogramm zu folgenden Themen:
 - Was ist Kunst?
 - Was ist Arbeit?
 - Was ist Liebe?

Wählen Sie *eines* der Arbeitsblätter und besprechen Sie es mit Ihrem Partner. Machen Sie Stichworte zu den einzelnen Punkten.

2. Schreiben Sie gemeinsam eine Definition für den von Ihnen gewählten Begriff (ca. 10-30 Wörter) auf Deutsch.
3. Schreiben Sie eine Begründung Ihrer Definition (ca 300 Wörter). Was ist für Sie Kunst/Arbeit oder Liebe und was nicht? Warum?

Presse

In der Sydney-Jones Bibliothek, im Germanistischen Seminar und im Sprachenzentrum finden Sie eine Reihe deutschsprachiger Wochenzeitungen und -zeitschriften, z.B. "Spiegel", "Stern", "Die Zeit" etc.

1. Wählen Sie zwei verschiedene Zeitschriften aus, die Sie in den nächsten Wochen regelmäßig lesen.. (Denken Sie daran, daß "eine Zeitschrift lesen" etwas anderes ist als "einen Roman lesen". In einer Zeitschrift liest man nicht jede einzelne Seite, sondern man "stöbert" nach interessanten Artikeln.)
2. Bewerten Sie beide Zeitungen/Zeitschriften für die anderen Studenten auf einer Spanne von 1-10 (1=reine Zeitverschwendung; 10=fantastisch, regelmäßig lesen).
3. Schreiben Sie nun eine kurze Analyse für die anderen Studenten. Welche Zeitschrift/en empfehlen Sie, welche nicht. Begründen Sie Ihre Meinung. Gehen Sie auf die folgenden Punkte ein.
 - Name der Zeitung/Zeitschrift
 - Sprache (Grammatik, Wortschatz, Stil): zu einfach, zu schwierig...
 - Inhalt: informativ, landeskundlich interessant, witzig ...
 - Leser (was für Leute lesen diese Zeitung wohl regelmäßig?)
 - Ist die Zeitschrift so ähnlich wie eine Zeitschrift in England? Welche Gemeinsamkeiten und welche Unterschiede gibt es?
4. Wählen Sie ein Thema, das in beiden Zeitschriften behandelt wird. Schreiben Sie eine kurze Zusammenfassung (ca 400 Wörter). Worum geht es bei dem Thema?



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**TEXT BOUND CLOSE TO
THE SPINE IN THE
ORIGINAL THESIS**

Project Journal

1. Which project have you chosen to complete over the following weeks?
2. What do you hope to achieve doing this project and the activities involved?
3. Each time you have worked on your project, please fill in one section of your learning diary.

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

date and time: Activity:

What did you learn (regarding language, skills or new knowledge acquired)?

problems:

follow up:

4. Did you find any of the tasks or activities particularly enjoyable, easy, difficult or disagreeable and if so, why?

5. Did you identify any problems regarding your learning (such as managing your time, finding appropriate resources etc.)?

6. Over the past weeks, have you identified any language problem you want to work on over the following weeks, such as difficulties writing essays, verb forms, being too shy to speak in the foreign language etc.?

7. Do you have reached the objectives stated under question 2?
Please explain.

Questionnaire 1.1.

1. Language you learned:

2. How would you describe your level for that language? (GCSE grade B; A-level; beginners; intermediate; advanced)

3. Why did you decide to study that language in particular?

Please focus on both course related reasons (if any) and personal motivation.

4. Did you ever have a chance to use that language with native speakers?

yes	
no	

5. If so, on what occasion/s (e.g. school exchange, travel etc.)?

6. Is a member of your family a native speaker of that language?

yes	
no	

7. If so, what relation are they to you?

8. What was the language learning experience like?

Very enjoyable	
Moderately enjoyable	
Slightly enjoyable	
Disagreeable	

9. Why did you enjoy/not enjoy learning the language?

Please explain:

10. How did you feel about what you achieved?

Very satisfied	
Moderately satisfied	
Slightly satisfied	
Dissatisfied	

11. Why were you/were you not happy/satisfied?

Please tick every answer that applies to you.

Favourable circumstances (e.g. good teacher, native speaker available for practice etc.)	
Unfavourable circumstances (e.g. bad teacher, not enough time to study, temporary sickness etc.)	
The language is quite easy.	
The language is quite difficult.	
I put in a lot of/enough effort.	
I did not put in enough effort.	
I found language learning easy.	
I find language learning difficult (e.g. feeling uncomfortable using the language, poor memory, problems understanding grammar etc.)	
Other Please explain:	

Questionnaire 2.1.

Name:

Date:

What language/s other than your native language/s did you learn or try to learn during your first year at university?

Please fill in a separate questionnaire for each language you have learned or tried to learn during your first year at university. An additional sheet is available, if necessary.

Questionnaire 2.1.a

1. Language you learned: **German**

2. Have you had a chance during the last year to use that language with native speakers?

yes	
no	

3. If so, on what occasion/s (e.g. conversation exchange, friends, travel etc.)?

4. What was the language learning experience over the last year like?

Very enjoyable	
Moderately enjoyable	
Slightly enjoyable	
Disagreeable	

5. Why did you enjoy/not enjoy learning the language?

Please explain:

6. How did you feel about what you achieved?

Very satisfied	
Moderately satisfied	
Slightly satisfied	
Dissatisfied	

7. Why were you/were you not happy/satisfied?

Please tick every answer that applies to you.

Favourable circumstances (e.g. good teacher, native speaker available for practice etc.)	
Unfavourable circumstances (e.g. bad teacher, not enough time to study, temporary sickness etc.)	
The language is quite easy.	
The language is quite difficult.	
I put in a lot of/enough effort.	
I did not put in enough effort.	
I find language learning easy.	
I find language learning difficult (e.g. feeling uncomfortable using the language, poor memory, problems understanding grammar etc.)	
Other Please explain:	

Questionnaire 2.2.

Now, after one year at university, we want to find out which language learning strategies you are using. You will find questions about learning a foreign language. Please read each statement and tick the response that tells how true a statement is.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

1. Never or almost never true of me.
2. Usually not true of me. (Less than half the time)
3. Somewhat true of me. (More than half the time)
4. Usually true of me. (More than half the time)
5. Always or almost always true of me. (Almost always)

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers. Please make no marks on the items. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions, let the language adviser know immediately.

(Rebecca Oxford, 1989, Language Learning Strategies)

Pre-assessment/planning

1. Do you read, talk or think about language learning issues and ways to improve your language learning?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. Do you compare your learning techniques or style to those of other learners?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3. Do you have a long-term goal for your language learning (e.g. the ability to hold an everyday conversation in the foreign language in one years' time, the ability to read scientific articles in the foreign language in two years' time etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

4. Do you have a short-term objective for your language learning (e.g. knowing the forms of basic verbs in two weeks time, knowing how to express opinions by the end of the week etc.)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

5. When you encounter a new foreign language task (e.g. reading an unknown text, completing a grammar exercise, asking for the way, writing a letter to a friend),

a) do you consider what you already know about the skills/activities needed to complete the task

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

b) do you think about the resources you will need to complete the task (e.g. dictionaries, notes from previous classes etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

c) do you consider what you want to achieve by completing the task (e.g. which skill you especially want to improve, what knowledge you want to acquire, which message you want to get across etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

6. Do you organise your learning events in advance, (e.g. time and place of learning, material used for different sessions etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

7. Are you actively seeking opportunities to practice the language (e.g. meeting native speakers for practice, listening to the news in the foreign language regularly, writing to pen/e-mail friends etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Monitoring

8. Whilst learning the foreign language, do you try to keep your concentration focused on the task involved?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

9. Have you ever switched techniques or strategies which proved to be less efficient?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Self-evaluation

10. Do you try to notice your language errors and learn from them?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

11. Do you check your learning outcomes or whether you have achieved your goals and objectives?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

12. Do you check the efficiency of your learning strategies and change them, if necessary?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

13. Do you keep a systematic record of your learning (e.g. in form of a notebook, learning diary etc.)?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Questionnaire 2.3

1. How do you feel your overall proficiency of German has improved through the additional tasks for the portfolio?

Very much improved	
Moderately improved	
Slightly improved	
Not improved	

2. Through portfolio work, have you acquired any new language learning skills or strategies, which could improve your language learning in the future?

Yes, many	
Yes, some	
No, hardly any	
No, none	

3. If so, how would you describe the importance of those learning skills or strategies for you after leaving university?

Very important	
Moderately important	
Slightly important	
Not important	

4. Having done portfolio work, do you feel more in control of your own learning now?

Considerably more in control	
Somewhat more in control	
No change	
Less in control	

5. Having done portfolio work, do you feel increased confidence in yourself as a language learner?

Considerably more confidence	
Somewhat more confidence	
No change	
Less confidence	

6. How do you feel portfolio work has influenced your motivation for learning German?

Considerably increased motivation	
Somewhat increased motivation	
No change	
Less motivation	

7. How do you feel the writing of the project journal has improved your language learning behaviour?

Very much improved	
Moderately improved	
Slightly improved	
Not improved	

8. How do you feel the individual sessions with the language adviser have improved your language learning behaviour?

Very much improved	
Moderately improved	
Slightly improved	
Not improved	

9. How do you feel the individual sessions with the language tutor have improved your language learning behaviour?

Very much improved	
Moderately improved	
Slightly improved	
Not improved	

10. Do you think portfolio work should be assessed as part of the language program for first year students in the future?

Yes	
No	

11. Do you think independent learning skills, as marked by the language adviser, should count towards your first year marks at all?

Yes	
No	

Please explain:

12. Do you think portfolio work should be offered for first year students in the future?

Yes	
No	

Please explain:

13. If so, can you suggest any improvements?

Questionnaire 3.4. Year 3

Name: _____

1. **Through participation in the portfolio project, do you think you have become more conscious of your language learning processes? (E.g. do you sometimes think what kind of language learner you are or whether a learning approach is efficient etc.?)**

Yes, very much so	
Yes, a little	
No, not very much	
No, not at all	

Comments:

2. **Do you still use strategies you have learned doing the portfolio project to develop your language independently of a teacher? (E.g. do you consciously summarise films -even in your head- to check your understanding or approach a native speaker with a specific language learning objective in mind etc.?)**

Yes, often	
Yes, sometimes	
No, hardly ever	
No, never	

Comments:

3. **Do you think participation in the portfolio project has helped you take the full advantage of the language resources surrounding you during the year abroad?**

Yes	
No	

Please explain:

4. **Did you continue in your second year to do one or more of the learning activities you encountered during the portfolio project? (E.g. watching the German News regularly or exchanging emails with a native speaker etc.)**

Yes, often	
Yes, sometimes	
No, hardly ever	
No, never	

Comments:

5. Through participation in the portfolio project, do you think you will be more able to continue your language learning after leaving university even if you have no chance of taking formal lessons?

Yes	
No	

Comments:

6. Do you feel motivated to continue learning German after leaving university?

Yes	
No	

Comments:

7. In your opinion, what is the best use of staff time in an undergraduate Higher Education Language Course: (Please tick one choice only)

Teaching language classes	
Teaching language classes combined with individual supervisions for Independent Language Learning. If so, should the supervisions focus on	
a) the language, e.g. discussing mistakes, explaining grammar, giving the opportunity to practice	
b) learning processes, e.g. discussing learning approaches, strategies, evaluate efficiency	
c) a combination of both a) and b)	
Supervising independent language learning without formal language classes	

Please explain:

Subject B

- I: ok right do you remember the project in the first year
- B: I remember vaguely
- I: what do you remember
- B: a couple of the projects I remember something about news and then a couple of others as well but I did have to think before I came as to what I did because it was quite a long time ago
- I: yeah it is
- B: so
- I: yes a long time three years ok so you had the independent learning projects a choice of projects and you could choose the one you wanted to do then there were the project journals do you remember them (searching for a project journal to show)
- B: no is that were we had to read something and then maybe do a presentation on I remember having to do a presentation on like a newspaper article or something
- I: ah right yeah that was one of the projects the newspapers but let me see these were the journals (showing a journal) do you remember
- B: ah yeah the following up
- I: exactly yeah so what do you want to do then the activities you did and in the end the as you say the following up
- B: yeah I do remember now
- I: ok then there were the advisory sessions the one-to-ones with me and finally we had some questionnaires they were mainly for my own research ok can you just briefly outline what you think the aim of the portfolio project was
- B: well at the time I wasn't so sure but I think now it's to try and get students to learn independently how to learn a language realising these different ways of learning a language not just sitting in a classroom listening to a teacher and then doing some essays but to go to the library or listen to some German TV you know being encouraged to like write emails to some native speakers of German so I think that was the aim
- I: so now after three years you think that was the aim
- B: yeah
- I: yeah so that was one aim we call that learner development which means that now since you're leaving university that you will hopefully be able to continue learning on your own and the other aim was improving your proficiency simply make you work harder (both laugh)
- B: ok
- I: ok regarding your year abroad how was it
- B: I really enjoyed it
- I: you enjoyed it
- B: yeah I'd like to go back to Germany again I feel that my German just improved so much and when you come back like I came back end of May I had three over the summer where I wasn't speaking and again I had nobody to talk German to so it does go downhill and then when you come back to Liverpool University and carry on German in the fourth year you don't speak it as much you've got one hour of conversation so I do think that it goes downhill again
- I: yeah it is a problem
- B: yeah and when you're speaking German every day when you're out there you're learning all the time new things

- I: so what did you do to learn during your year abroad
- B: just try to speak German as as often as I could I did have English friends as well and sometimes I would meet with them to have a break and things (both laugh) when I was too exhausted thinking in German or something
- I: but otherwise you did go out to meet Germans
- B: yeah
- I: and what did you do
- B: I was a language assistant in a school with children aged eight to sixteen so with my teachers in the beginning they tried to talk but I was like no no I'm out here I need to talk German your English is ok but I'm here to improve my German so you know please let me speak it but if I can understand what you're saying then maybe we could talk English then this was at the beginning when I wasn't as good
- I: oh you were very good then (both laugh) to because Germans like to speak English don't they sorry we have to speak English now but otherwise I have to translate it and
- B: ok that's fine it's easier for me anyway
- I: right so you did talk to Germans you did tell the teachers to speak in German to you anything else you did
- B: I tried to meet people of my age as well because I noticed like the teachers in school they would talk different German to people of my age it was more colloquial language so I tried to meet people of my age as well a bit different language areas
- I: right did you read or did you watch telly or
- B: yeah at the beginning I tried to read newspapers when I was in (German city) so I tried to read the (German city) newspaper so I tried to do a lot and then I went to the cinema quite often as well with a couple of friends just to (inaudible) in it more
- I: oh great now looking back what do you think about let's start with the project journals do you think they helped you at that time or not and if not why
- B: I think at the time I didn't understand the need to do them and I didn't think they were very helpful but now looking back I think maybe they could be because I'm realising now why they were given to us but at the time I didn't really think they it helped my German you know a huge amount but I think it is a fun way to learn anyway because you're doing these fun topics themes so I think it's quite an interesting way to learn and plus you're doing it independently as well it's not how you're doing it in the classroom so I do think I do see the benefits
- I: right so you see the benefits in the independent learning element
- B: yes [...]