

Chinese EFL Student Perceptions of Their Learning Through Reflections on Web-Based Learning

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Abstract

English, as a foreign language, is a compulsory course for all students in their university study journey since the 1990s in China (MOE, 1994). The significant status of English was re-affirmed by the reform of English in higher education since 2007, which was further improved in 2016 by new guidelines by the Ministry of Education in China (MOE, 2007, 2016). English has become a tool for communication acquired by students to use in their daily life, for example when studying, living, and for social communication and future work (MOE, 2016), rather than being a foreign language used to merely read English articles to understand the Western world (in China, 'Western world' refers to developed countries, for example, the United Kingdom, the United States, or Canada, etc., which have a high-level development in economic, technology and living standards (Zhang, 2018)). Standardised uniform education will be gradually replaced by individualised education to satisfy each student's needs in their daily life (Ma, 2017). The Internet, as a medium, brings a potentially revolutionary change in the way both learning and teaching take place inside and outside of class. Its use is suggested by the Ministry of Education to promote students' English learning ability, particular in learning outside of the classroom (MOE, 2016).

This research explored 19 university students' perceptions of EFL learning outside of class by accessing their ideas of and motivation for learning English, and investigating

their English learning activities on websites out of class during the research conducted. It draws on a case study approach, based on the constructivist viewpoint, to analyse students' English learning by themes. Results were obtained through a combination of weekly group meetings, individual interviews, and reflective written reports completed by students. Moreover, this study discusses the relationship between perceptions and practices, it reflects on the relationship between beliefs and the learning process (Ellis, 2008).

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Abbreviations Used in This Thesis

- CALL: Computer Assisted Language Learning
- CET4: College English Test Band 4
- EFL: English as a Foreign Language
- ELF: English as a Lingua Franca
- ESL: English as a Second language
- MOE: Ministry of Education
- SDT: Self-determination Theory
- TEM4: Test for English Majors Band 4
- WBL: Web Based learning

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

English as a foreign language (EFL) in China plays an essential part in both teaching and learning in higher education. It is a compulsory subject for all students in their study journey at university (MOE, 1994). And since 2016, English is the most common major that has been set up in universities (RCCSE, 2016), almost every university has an established English major degree course. Currently, a new developing trend has emerged in higher education, which focuses on learner-centred rather than teachercentred education, with suggestions to use advanced technologies, for example, use of web-based learning environments in teaching practise. This has also been informed by the policies of the Ministry of Education in China (MOE), who called for reform in English education in 2007 (MOE, 2007). Namely, web-based learning environments have been mentioned in the English curriculum requirements to facilitate learning English both inside and outside of the classroom to promote students' learning ability and enhance teaching quality (MOE, 2007). With the influence of the context (see Section 1.3 for more details), this research explores how university students learn English outside of their formal classes in web-based environments. The current study will achieve this by investigating students' perceptions, such as their beliefs about and motivations for learning English, and students' learning activities. In doing so, this research will be able to understand how these areas interrelated, and how ongoing discussion with learners about these experiences shapes their English language

learning practices in a web-based environment. The following figure, 1.1, shows the main content of this research.



Figure 1.1: The scope of this research

From the perspective of methodology, this research is a qualitative study adopting a case study approach based on the constructivist perspective. The research used multiple activities, including weekly meetings (group discussions and reflective reports), and interviews to investigate participants' perceptions about learning English. The activities were designed to get to know what exactly students were doing when they learn English on websites outside of class during the time they participated in this research, as well as what they gained from participating in this project. They completed reflective writings and took part in a final interview to give their views. A general introduction to the research methods is shown in Table 1.1 and more detail is given in Chapter 3.

Main research	Epistemology	Research	Data	The method
Approach	and ontology	activities	collection	of data
			methods	analysis
• A qualitative	The	• Weekly	• Reflective	Thematic
research	perspective of	meetings	reports	analysis
• A case study	constructivism	• Individual interview	• Interview transcripts	
		merview	uaiscripts	

Table 1.1: Brief information about research methods

The findings of the research will be presented by themes, such as, English learning activities, English learning focuses, ideas of and main reasons for learning English, English learning goal, problems encountered in learning journey, etc. (for the full list of themes, see subsection, 3.5.2.3).

1.2 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the three main questions shown below:

- I. What are the learning perceptions among the Chinese students involved in the study?
 - What are their ideas about learning English?
 - Why are they learning English?
 - How have they learned English over the years?
- II. How do these students learn English outside of class in web-based environments (English learning websites)?
 - What do they actually do and why?

- What problems do learners face, especially when learning via English learning websites outside of class? What makes them persist or give up? How do they overcome problems?
- III. To what extent has the experience of participating in this project affected students' perceptions and their English language learning practices on webbased environments?
 - How have their ideas about learning changed throughout the project?
 - Has the experience of participating in this project influenced their capacity for autonomous learning?

How the research questions are embedded in the research, and relate to each other, is shown in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2: How the research questions are embedded in the research

1.3 The Context of This Research

The context provides the background information and explains the motivation for conducting this research. This section includes two main subsections: first, the geographical location of this research conducted, then a background to learning and teaching English in China. This second subsection firstly explains the characteristics of the traditional Chinese educational philosophy, which has a significant influence not only on the Chinese education system but also on perceptions among Chinese people. Lastly, it discusses the report issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2007 in China to describe the current situation and future direction of English education and teaching in higher education. This section aims to explain the context of the research conducted and illustrate how it helps to shape this research.



1.3.1 The Geographical Location of This China-Based Research

Figure 1.3: The location of this research

China is officially recognised as the People's Republic of China (PRC). It is located between eastern Asia and the west bank of the Pacific. In terms of the size of land area and population, China covers approximately 9.6 million square kilometres and has a population of 1.35 billion people. Beijing is the capital city of China (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, 2014). Specifically, China consists of 23 provinces, four directly-controlled municipalities (Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing), five autonomous regions, and two mostly self-governing special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau). In total there were around 2,880 universities in China in 2016 (MOE, 2017). This research was conducted in Shaanxi Province, around the city of Xi'an (the red star in Figure 1.3). Xi'an is the starting point of the 'Silk Road' and is one of the oldest Four Great Ancient Capitals, having held a significant position in 13 dynasties in Chinese history (City Hall of Xi'an, 2018). In education, according to the document published by the City Hall of Xi'an (2018), the comprehensive strength of Xi'an's education provision ranks third in the whole of China. There are 93 universities (MOE, 2017) in which English is a compulsory subject for all students (MOE, 2007). Unlike the cities on the east coast, however, Xi'an is further away from international trade and business, so there are fewer opportunities for people here to connect with foreigners. Along with development in recent years, its international connections have increased. Also, Xi'an has hosted several different international academic conferences in recent years. "The 8th international symposium on English teaching in China", for example, was held in Xi'an in 2017. With these increasing opportunities to use English, it is necessary to look at students' actual English learning journeys. Also, Xi'an is my hometown, where I learned English for many years before I came to the United Kingdom (UK). I am more familiar with the English learning environment there than in other cities. My English learning experiences in Xi'an and in the UK motivated me to do this research in my hometown, to use what I have learned and what I have experienced to try my best to help and support students in Xi'an to learn English.

1.3.2 A Background to the Learning and Teaching of English in China

1.3.2.1 The characteristics of Chinese traditional/ancient educational philosophy

It is necessary to start by explaining the characteristics of the Chinese traditional/ancient educational philosophy, which is a significant part of the whole Chinese ancient philosophy. It has been shaped by Chinese history and developed by continuous reforms.

It is currently the dominant concept along with the learner-centred desired in education and in terms of thinking about educational problems (Yu and Yu, 1996). Similarly, in English teaching and learning, traditional philosophy-based ideas deeply influence both teachers' and students' perceptions. Here, I will briefly explain the main characteristics to help to understand students' perceptions of learning. From the historical viewpoint, the Chinese educational philosophy is mainly based on Confucius's philosophy of education and is also guided by ideas from two ancient philosophers, Zisi and Mencius. Huang Ji (1998), a famous expert in education, summarised the characteristics of the traditional Chinese education philosophy as "天 人合一、政教统一、文道结合、知行一致" (Huang, 1998, P16) (translation: the unification between nature and humans; the combination of politics and education; the combination of teaching knowledge and moral guidance; and accordance between perception and practice). This implies that education is guided by political influence and it does not only teach knowledge, but also morality. Namely, teachers play a significant role in education in both the teaching of knowledge and morals. Also, this addresses the importance of the relationship between perception and practice. This research acknowledges that teachers influence students' English learning practices, while their teaching is influenced by the MOE. The MOE provides regulation of both teaching and learning practices from a macro perspective, by taking traditional education philosophy, the requirements of social development, as well as the reflections from teaching and learning practices, into consideration (for a detailed discussion see subsection 1.3.2.2). This macroscopic analysis asks for shifting to learner-centric views, because of the problems reflected from teaching and learning practices. For example, there are some problems in educational systems with the influence of traditional educational philosophy, however, which were pointed out by Zhu Yongxin (1993). He said: "重整体而轻个体、重积累而轻发展、重趋善而轻 求真、重综合而轻分析" (Zhu, 1993, p44) (translation: the education pays more attention to entirety rather than the individual; pays more attention to accumulation rather than development; pays more attention to being good rather than digging out the truth; and pays more attention to synthesising rather than analysis). These problems were also addressed in the reform of English education announced by the MOE in 2007. The characteristics of Chinese traditional educational philosophy implies that there has been significant political influence on education since ancient times, as well as the idea of the importance of the teacher in the learning journey. This has caused some problems to emerge from traditional education ideas in the modern system, which has been further explained in the subsection 1.3.2.3. Although this influence cannot be ignored, the MOE has developed and shifted English teaching and learning ideas to satisfy the needs of contemporary society. This is not an absolute change, however; it is a gradual evolution of development to adapt to China's national conditions.

The following paragraphs focus on the discussion of a current background of English learning and teaching in China, with an overview of the English education reform (2007) reported by MOE and discussing recent Internet-assisted learning environments into teaching in higher education, which is to deepen the reform. It is also the background to building this research.

1.3.2.2 An Overview of the English Education Reform at Universities Reported by MOE (2007, 2016)

English teaching in universities is an integral part of higher education. English is one of the compulsory foundation courses for all university students, which covers English language knowledge, application skills, cross-cultural communication, and learning strategies. In 2007, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued a report about the English curriculum requirements in universities across the whole country. It aimed to include recent Internet-assisted learning environments into teaching in higher education; to deepen the reform of English teaching; to improve the quality of teaching; and to satisfy the requirements for cultivating key talents in society (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007). The recommendations in this report are regarded as the underlying principles currently

informing English teaching in Chinese universities. The report stipulates the goals of English teaching: i.e. cultivating students' comprehensive application ability, especially in listening and speaking, in order to produce students who can communicate effectively in their future study or work; enhancing students' competence in individual study; and improving the cultural literacy of students. Because of the different academic levels among universities in China, English courses should be taught according to students' different levels of competency. There are three levels of teaching instruction: general (mandatory), high, and higher. All three levels focus on listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating, which are considered fundamental English skills. On the basis of this principle, each university sets up its own English programme (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2007). Within this, there was a main goal to reform the mode of teaching; that is, to promote the implementation of the learning methods with the emphasis on individual students' needs and to develop their capacity for autonomous learning. Some specific requirements are as follows: a) to shift from a traditional teacher-centred to a learnercentred approach; b) to enhance students' ability to control learning content and learning strategies; and c) to use the Internet in class teaching (MOE, 2007, p.4). Namely, the dominant English teaching mode needs to change from the traditional style based on lectures to a more multi-method approach. This means that colleges and universities should make full use of modern information technology, especially technologies supported by the Internet, to teach English in a diverse way and to make

English learning individualised and autonomous for all students without the limitations of time and place (MOE, 2007, p.4). Meanwhile, along with the reform of English education in China, students' learning abilities have become the focus, which emphasise that students not only need to know *what* to learn, but also to know *how* best to learn English. This not only demands knowledge of English language, but also the acquisition of skills for learning.

Along with the development of English education reform since from 2007, the National Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Board has been commissioned by the MOE to make the guidelines on college English teaching (MOE, 2016), which is to provide the supplement information to the reform reported in 2007, and to promote 'the education development in China between 2010-2020' (State Council, 2010), thus to deepen the reform of English education at universities. Wang (2016) mentioned that this was an update to the report by MOE in 2007, to propose the diversity, individual differences and flexibility in English teaching at different universities (Wang, 2016). The following lists the key points:

- Adding a new preface to re-illustrate the significance of English courses at universities, in response to why universities should offer English courses.
- The English teaching goal emphasises the importance of learners being able to apply their English, intercultural communication competence and learner autonomy, specifically 'to satisfy the need for social development' (MOE,

2007), using English in studying, living, social communication and future work (MOE, 2016).

- The setting of English courses has been further explicated according to the 2007 report into three main kinds: English for general purpose, English for specific purpose, and English for intercultural communication.
- The teaching methods have been shifted into a diverse way in accordance with the individual students' needs. The main focus of English teaching changes from the teaching goals to students' needs and re-address the significance of learner-centric views.
- The significance on English learning and teaching with technologies has been re-affirmed and encourages to use 'Internet+' into English teaching and learning practices.

(MOE, 2016)

The key points listed above have been developed on the basis of the report in 2007 by MOE; meanwhile, this new guideline has also mentioned the necessity of teachers' development, which calls for both the improvement of teaching and researching abilities and shifting their perceptions, on learner-centredness for example, to adapt the implementation of the reform of English education (Wang, 2016). The expansion of the MOE 2007 strategy by the 2016 MOE guidelines illustrates the need for my study, focusing on personalised learning experiences of Chinese students learning

English via the Internet. The study, therefore, has the potential to add to the research base informing future educational developments in this area.

1.3.2.3 Reconciling Traditional and Modern Educational Views in China

The term 'autonomy' is presently very popular in China: it has rapidly developed as a central concern, not only in English language education, but in all subjects studied in educational research (MOE, 2016). There is a suggestion, however, that the idea of learner autonomy is unsuitable for the Chinese context. Both Benson (1996) and Pennycook (1997) mention that autonomy is appropriate in the West, while Chinese learners are sometimes regarded as rote and memory learners (Martinsons and Martinsons, 1996; Chow, 1995). Biggs (Biggs, 1996, p.47) even referred to them as 'tape recorders'. The fact is that, in China, memorisation cannot be separated from understanding. Chinese learners depend on memorisation for a deeper understanding, and usually learn by combining "memorization with understanding" (Marton et al., 1996, p.69). This learning method is prevalent in China due to cultural issues. Traditional Chinese culture, as previously discussed, has a significant influence on learning. It focuses on obedience, proper behaviour, moral training and the acceptance of social obligations, instead of encouraging independence and creativity (Ho, 1986). Typically, in Confucianism, there are five key relationships, as suggested by Fan (2000):

a. Master and follower: Loyalty and duty

- b. Father and son: Love and obedience
- c. Husband and wife: Obligation and submission
- d. Elder and younger brothers: Seniority and model
- e. Friend and friend: Trust

Fan (2000, p.4)

These five relationships influence both Chinese teachers and students. Teachers play the role of authority, or parents, and offer not only knowledge, but also moral guidance to students (Rao and Chan, 2009), in line with the explanation of the characteristics of traditional education philosophy at the beginning of this subsection. Students are required to be obedient to teachers. After some time, the students feel comfortable to follow teachers' guidance, and forget their own creativity. This teacher-centred learning approach is deeply ingrained in the Chinese education system. This brings several problems in English learning, for example, as mentioned at the beginning, such as the ignorance of students' individual characteristics and that learning heavily relies on teachers.

On the other hand, in ancient China, there were other ideas about learning. "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime", for example, is an old Chinese proverb. Fish are the goal, while fishing is the method. With one fish, you will be full in that moment, but if you want to eat fish forever and free yourself from hunger, you need to learn to fish. This is to say, if you help someone to figure out a problem, it is better to help them identify the problem-solving pattern, rather than give the answer to one puzzle. This also refers to the function of teachers in learning, because how to teach is decided by teachers. "If three

people are together, surely there is a teacher for me among them: I can choose something good about him and follow it, or something bad about him and change it" (The Analects of Confucius). This tells people to be modest and critical in learning. For students, however, this requires the ability to distinguish between good and bad. According to this research, students' perceptions are influenced by people around them whom they consider to be significant and worth following, for example, teachers, parents and other high performing students (see Chapter 4). Actually, Chinese students are trying to combine traditional and new learning approaches to achieve their goals. As Rao and Chan state, they like teachers to guide them but they still want to have their own space to develop their own ideas (Rao and Chan, 2009). Returning to the concept of autonomy, it is suitable in the Chinese cultural context, but produces different practices and outcomes (Chan, 2001). In this research, learner autonomy is not a primary focus, however, with the emphasis on looking at the students' English learning journeys outside of class, it becomes clear that their autonomous learning skills have improved by their development of perceptions on English learning. Just as Fu (2010) explains in her definition of autonomous learning, autonomous learning combines with the student's attitude and ability; it refers to a student who is taking charge of their own learning, making decisions about learning content, learning strategy, and learning materials (Fu, 2012). Namely, 'autonomous learning' in this research can be regarded as the learning journey students engage in when they learn English on websites outside of class. Although their learning activities are guided by

the main education goals and teacher's instructions, students make plans and finish learning tasks according to their personal needs.

1.3.2.4 English Language Learning in China

In English language learning, after studying at primary and middle schools, students have a fundamental accumulation of English language in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar (Fu, 2012). English education in universities aims to promote pragmatic English skills in listening, writing, reading, and speaking (MOE, 2007, 2016). Students are expected to use English in real-world tasks, so the 'spoon-feeding' method of teaching used in schools cannot satisfy the requirements at university. Also, students in universities are learning is at a higher level and have a clear learning direction; their learning flexible and complex and needs to be discovered and researched. Besides, university students also have a certain freedom in, and expectation of, autonomous learning. They are treated as adults; thus, students must possess self-management, self-control, and self-evaluation skills in their studies to accomplish learning tasks. University teachers are therefore required to teach learning skills, whereas acquiring knowledge is the students' main responsibility (Fu, 2012).

These subsections have given a background to English learning and teaching in China. It has also discussed the English education reform and shown that the main trend of English learning is to incorporate new technologies (for example, 'Internet+') to develop students' capacities and satisfy each student's individual differences to support them to achieve their English goals. Next, a future direction of English education in China will be discussed.

1.3.2.5 The Future Direction of English Education in China

The future direction of English education in China has been addressed by the MOE. It has developed with the dissemination of technology, especially the Internet. English learning websites supply an opportunity for the motivated individual to undertake learning in an environment that learners can mould and manipulate. Learners select their learning activities and content according to their personal goals, thereby encouraging autonomous learning. Learning English via appropriate websites could effectively foster or support autonomous learning (Xue, 2013). In Zhu's (2013) research, it is pointed out that learning English online has three main characteristics. Firstly, activity: under the teacher's instruction, learners are asked to set clear learning goals and then select learning tasks online to help them to achieve their targets independently or interdependently. Secondly, interactivity: independent learning via the Internet enables learners to share resources and provide motivation and support to each other. Thirdly, creativity: helping learners to cultivate their creativity is an important facet of modern learning (Zhu, 2013).

Alongside the advantages of learning via the Internet, there are also many problems. A study of students' perceptions of online learning undertaken in one university in China, for instance, presents such problems, for example:

- little communication between teacher and students;
- low network speed and much network trouble;
- too much freedom in the learning journey;
- and insufficient real-time communication, etc.

(Liu, Lin and Wang, 2003, p117)

Research has suggested that online learning therefore needs to be better embedded with collaborative learning activities, such as group discussion and/or team work (Liu, Lin and Wang, 2003). This research offered opportunities for all participants to take part in the weekly meetings to discuss their English learning in a group. Moreover, Dudeney (2007) summarises the influence of the Internet on the attitudes and behaviours of EFL learners. It changes students' motivations; it provides opportunities for students to use English in their everyday life; it affords students a vast amount of first-hand material that people use in their real life; and it offers new tools for students to develop new learning strategies (Dudeney, 2007). Also, learning English with new technologies is a continuously expanding concern, which now constitutes a large branch in the field of education and linguistics (Fitzpatrick and Davies, 2003).

1.3.2.6 Context of English Language Learning Websites in China

English learning websites provide learning environments for students to explore by themselves. Websites contain different types of learning materials to satisfy the various needs of an array of learners, thereby facilitating individual learners to increase their exposure to English. This large amount of online information is not tailored to individual needs, however, so there remains the question of how to select suitable information for students' specific purposes. In other words, students may have to learn how to process and select from these materials. Students can take control of their own learning content, choosing whatever materials or learning activities they prefer. Ideally, English learning websites provide an environment to support students' autonomous learning, where students take control of what content they learn, learning management, and cognitive processing (Benson, 2011). Students' actual English learning journeys on such websites is the focus of this research. The trend of learning English on websites, alongside the demands of the 'College English Curriculum Requirements', which purport to promote learner autonomy, relies on relatively new Internet technology (MOE, 2007, 2016). Many researchers, especially teachers in universities, have conducted studies on promoting autonomous learning in Internet environments. Some have made clear progress. Xue Yang (2013), for example, an English teacher in a Chinese university, divided her students into two groups. One group was required to undertake autonomous English learning via the Internet, set their own learning goals and participate in group discussions outside of class. The other group had no such

obligations and were only expected to take part in classroom activities. The results showed that the autonomous learning group's language learning performance was better (Xue, 2013). This could represent progress for both learners and teachers. Teachers must try to relinquish their control and give freedom to learners, while learners must engage more actively in their learning journeys and choose how they learn. There is still a long way to go before it could be said that autonomous learning has been confidently implemented in China, thus learners need to enhance their capacity for autonomous learning (Xue, 2013).

1.3.2.7 Summarising the Context into the Research Focus

All of the ideas above have shaped this research; identifying the research focus was a gradual process through reviewing the literature and writing up ideas. The very first idea came from my own English learning experiences, both in China and in the UK, which inspired me to be a good teacher in future. My main reason for doing this study comes from a desire to support and facilitate students in their English learning by utilising technology tools. This study achieves this by researching how students learn English on websites outside of their classes. Also, my own English learning experiences made me realise the importance of understanding students' perceptions during the process of helping them to manage their English learning in China. I believe that students' perceptions and their learning activities are correlated. People start from having beliefs to doing learning activities, which is a cycle. I want to focus on each

participant individually to explore how they learn English using websites outside of class, to investigate their beliefs about learning English, their motivation, and their specific learning activities, to explore the interrelationships between these factors and finally to support them to manage their own learning. The research topic came about as shown in Figure 1.4; the topic has been shaped by both the background of English teaching and learning in universities in China and my personal English learning experiences.



Figure 1.4: How the research topic emerged

1.4 Context and Significance of the Study

When searching the CNKI (National Knowledge Infrastructure in China), the published articles in China show the interrelationship between the topics: learning English online and learner autonomy. Figure 1.5 shows the top 10 key focuses related that come up when searching Chinese '大学网络英语学习' (translation: online English learning in higher education), according to the CNKI (National Knowledge Infrastructure in China) website.


Figure 1.5: The top 10 focuses of published articles related to online English learning in higher education in China (CNKI)

In Figure 1.5, the pie chart presents for each focus the quantity of the published articles and the percentage. These ten foci translated into English are shown below:

- 1. English learning at universities
- 2. Autonomous learning
- 3. In the Internet/Web environment
- 4. English pedagogy at universities
- 5. Web-based autonomous English learning at universities
- 6. Web-based autonomous English learning
- 7. EFL learners' perceptions
- 8. Learner autonomy
- 9. Autonomous English learning at universities
- 10. The Internet/Web environment

Because of the differences between Chinese and English, the scholars use different Chinese words to express actually the same focus expressed in English. Namely, there are ten focuses presented by Chinese; however, in English, these can easily be grouped into five focuses: English pedagogy, the Internet/Web environment, Web-based autonomous English learning, EFL learners' perceptions, and learner autonomy.

This is an example of the key foci related to the topic of online English learning at higher education that Chinese scholars are focusing on. Within these results, a large number of articles address the usefulness of advanced technologies in language teaching and learning. Until the commencement of this research, however, only 18 published articles could be found with an emphasis on the perspectives of EFL learners (for example the focus of learner perceptions on online English learning). Although this is not an absolute result, EFL students' perceptions need to be considered, since students are the main focus of the learning process.

Specifically, for the published articles on EFL learners' perceptions on online English learning, Chart 1.1 below shows a trend in the years between 2004 and 2018. Little attention seems to have been placed on this focus during these years. This research aims to contribute to the body of research on language learners' perceptions, since it is the students who play the main role and can achieve final success in their English learning journeys.



Chart 1.1: The trend of published articles on EFL learners' perceptions (relates to online English learning)

Furthermore, 'autonomous learning' is a frequently mentioned topic in the current field of English learning research. It combines with Internet-assisted, then Internet-assisted autonomous English learning is regarded as an important and effective learning mode by many scholars, such as Xue's report, "the study of collaborative autonomous English learning mode via Internet environment in University" (Xue, 2013); and Rao's thesis on "helping Chinese EFL students develop learner autonomy through portfolios" (Rao, 2006). In this research, 'autonomous learning' has been defined as students' English learning journeys with websites outside of class, in which they may learn independently and collaboratively, and make decisions on their learning activities and learning content to achieve their learning goals. This experience is influenced and shaped by their perceptions, for example, their beliefs about learning English and their individual motivation for learning English.

The topic of this research was not explicitly discovered from the database of Chinese literatures, however. The topics found can be divided into three categories, according to the CNKI's classifications: autonomous English learning, motivation, and online English learning. Figure 1.6 shows three updated examples of each topic and lists the research methods adopted.



Figure 1.6: The current studies related to the research topic in the CNKI literature database 26

These new updated examples show the research topics and methods previous researchers have used. Previous research has been quantitative or document-based, leaving a niche in the area of learner-centred studies, which are particularly important as the MOE emphasises learner-centred approaches and calls for research conducted from the perspective of EFL learners to look at individual students' learning practices, thus to support each student's English learning development (MOE, 2016). Therefore, quantitative or document-based research cannot study the individual students in depth, whereas this research has adopted a qualitative approach, to contribute to filling this gap. Also, this research has been set up based on the prior studies, and has extended it through its focus on EFL students' perceptions, which have received less attention among Chinese scholars until now, but need to be considered when aiming to achieve the requirement for student-centric ideas.

1.5 Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises six main chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, data analysis (two chapters), and conclusion. Figure 1.7 below presents a brief visual reading guide to this thesis. Also, this process describes the research process of solving the research questions.



Figure 1.7: The structure of this thesis

Namely, the thesis has been structured along the study journey of the PhD. It is a process that began from the primary motivation and gradually built the framework, then analysing and presenting the results, to finally drawing conclusions from the research.

1.6 Summary of This Chapter

The first chapter of the thesis introduced an overview of this research with the main emphasis on explaining how the research topic and questions emerged.



Figure 1.8: How this research has been shaped

Figure 1.8 above explains how this research has been shaped. It also can be used to summarise the main content of this chapter. It not only included an introduction to the research, it also briefly showed the research objectives via the three main questions and generally described the research methods. This chapter also included an

introduction to the thesis as a whole, as seen in Section 1.4. Those have all contributed to the general introduction both to this research and this thesis. In addition, Figure 1.8 also demonstrates that the literature review is interrelated with the research content, therefore the next chapter, the literature review, has been structured based on Figure 1.1.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

From the theoretical perspective of the research, this chapter presents a critical review of the relevant terms and concepts. It aims to build a conceptual framework and to justify the importance and relevance of the research aims and questions. In accordance with the research objectives and the information shown in Figure 1.1 (see Chapter 1), there are four main areas to consider: EFL in China, students' perceptions, web-based learning, and out-of-class learning, which are the four main sections included in this chapter. These sections will cover the following themes:

- EFL in China, which is to present how English has been regarded and taught at universities in China. The context has thus influenced students' perceptions and their learning activities.
 - Web-based learning (WBL), which focuses on web-based language learning pedagogy. It provides a theoretical background knowledge of how web-based technologies can assist language learning by describing its development and applications to show how to support students in the functional aspects of their English language learning. Furthermore, this section also includes a subsection on discussion of WBL pedagogy in China, which illustrates the current popular main WBL pedagogy models.

- Out-of-class learning, which is an extension of WBL, provides a further definition of its boundaries by comparing it with classroom-based learning. It also addresses the themes of collaboration, reflection and autonomy that emerge from students' experiences of learning English outside of the classroom.
 - Students' perceptions, which in this research include students' beliefs and motivations. In terms of second language acquisition, these two factors have been regarded as the most significant indicators of individual language learner differences. Mitchell, Myles and Marsden (2013) addressed the evidence shown by real-life observation, which is that, even if language learners show a similar development route, there are still differences in the rate of their learning and in their eventual success levels. The authors suggest that these disparities must be due to individual differences (ID) (Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2013). Dörnyei (2005) explains that ID includes deep-seated personal characteristics within students and may differ by various degrees among individuals. This section therefore focuses on reviewing the literature on learner beliefs and motivation and justifies how it relates to this research.

The four sections in this chapter briefly introduced above present the theoretical background knowledge related to this research. These areas of inquiry contribute to building the theoretical framework to provide a theoretical foundation for designing and conducting the research and facilitating the future analysis and discussion of the data.

2.2 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in China

English has a different role for speakers throughout the world, which are important to examine in relation to understanding the learning process. English is a first or native language for some people, whereas it could be a second or a foreign language for others. The most common terms used for classification of English language status is ENL (English as a native language), ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) to attempt to explain the distinctions in the ways English is used in different countries (Kirkpatrick, 2007). In my research, the participants are students in universities in China and they are non-native English speakers; English is not commonly spoken in the country and is generally taught as a foreign language. According to Kachru (1992), English may be viewed based on the three circles, which represent the spread, the acquisition patterns and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts. Specifically, he categorises English into three circles: the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle (Kachru, 1992). The inner circle refers to locations where English is the mother tongue such as the UK, as well as the traditional culture and basic linguistics of English. The outer circle denotes where English is used as an official language but is not the mother tongue, for example, countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, etc. Finally, the expanding circle means places where English is used as a foreign language, such as in China. The outer and expanding circles include a huge number of people who learn English, however, which indicates that English is widely used and the varieties of English have increased. Moreover, people who speak English in the expanding circle, such as in China, may have their own "local histories, literary traditions, pragmatic contexts, and communicative norms" as Kachru suggests (p.359). So how will those factors affect EFL teaching in China? How do people perceive 'English' as a foreign

language? Do they perceive English as an international language (Smith, 1976) or do they believe English should be 'native-like'? for example, choosing among Englishlike, American-like or Canadian-like in terms of the English learners' attitudes toward them. Those questions all are necessary considerations for EFL teaching and learning in China. The answers are fundamental principles for identifying students' views of English and understanding their learning journeys. This section thus has two main subsections; firstly, the related key terms for English and TEFL pedagogy in China. These will be explored to discover the answers to the questions listed above.

2.2.1 Related Key Terms of English

2.2.1.1 English as a Global Language

English has been regarded as a global language, according to Crystal (2012). This means that English has a global status due to the large number of people who speak English in the world. In China, English has a priority in foreign language teaching, even though it has no official status. It is the language that students are taught in school and is emerging as the main foreign language encountered (Crystal, 2012). Particularly in this research context, English teaching in universities is an integral part of higher education. English is one of the compulsory foundation courses for all university students, which covers English language knowledge, application skills, cross-cultural communication, and learning strategies (MOE, 2007).

2.2.1.2 English as an International Language

Smith (1976) provided an early account of World English under the term 'English as an International Language' (EIL). Smith operationalised the term 'international language' as a language other than one's mother tongue – that is, a second language – "which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another" (p.38). EIL is not equal to ESL, however, since he distinguishes it from the more traditional auxiliary language, i.e. one that is used for internal communication in a multilingual society. Furthermore, English is considered to play a role in external communication. "EIL, along with 'English as a global language' and 'World English' (Brutt-Griffler, 2002) have for some time been used as general cover terms for uses of English spanning the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle contexts (Kachru, 1992)" (Seidlhofer, 2005, p.339). Accordingly, English in China represents an international language.

2.2.1.3 English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

ELF has been regarded as a part of the more general phenomenon of 'English as an international language' (EIL) or 'World Englishes' (Seidlhofer, 2005, p.339-341). In China, English is used in communication but is not limited to communication between Chinese and English native speakers; communications also occur between Chinese and non-native English speakers. ELF has emerged as a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages. ELF interactions mostly take place among speakers who are 'non-native' of English; in most cases ELF is "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication" (Firth, 1996, p.240). This does not preclude the participation of English native speakers in ELF interaction, however, since even 15 years ago, approximately one out of every four users of English in the world was an

English native speaker (Crystal, 2003). Since the ubiquity of the Internet, the number of non-native speakers will have only further increased. Merely in China, the number of English language learners has increased up to 400 million until the year of 2012 (Bolton and Graddol, 2012; Wei and Su, 2012), while the British Council (2018) has published that there are 1.5 billion people learning English around the world, English is the most widely spoken language in the world (British Council, 2018). ELF focuses on English as a means of communication among people from different first language backgrounds and across linguacultural boundaries (Seidlhofer, 2005, p.339). Moreover, 'Speakers of ELF' refers to the largest contemporary group of English users around the world (Jenkins and Leung, 2014). English has spread from its historical boundaries to its current position as the preeminent global means of communication (Brutt-Griffler, 2002). In teaching practice in China, however, the promotion of 'ability in communication' (MOE, 2016) is easily ignored by teachers. The following section explains the current teaching pedagogy in China.

2.2.2 TEFL Pedagogy in China

The mode of teacher-centred learning in EFL teaching has been dominant in China's schools at all levels, including the tertiary level. It is based on behaviourist theories (Zhao, 2012). Woollard defines this as:

...one of the earliest established theories that had a direct and profound impact upon education, has a special place in the history of psychology. Its heyday was in the first half and middle of the twentieth century but became overshadowed by the influence of the cognitivist and social constructivist explanations of learning that continue to dominate the methods of experimentation and the principles of pedagogy to this day (2010, p. 21).

Although behaviourism was the dominant theory in the first half of the 20th century, people were used to learning forms of behaviour, for example learning a language,

through a training process, imitation and reinforcement. The stimulus-and-response process is thus formed. In China, the teacher-centred EFL teaching approach is based on the process of forming habits. Accordingly, students under this teaching approach are passive in their learning journeys (Zhao, 2012). Zhao (2012) also mentions that the traditional teaching approach is influenced by American structuralism, for example, Bloomfieldian School's idea that:

...any human language is constructed into a hierarchical system in which all grammatical elements of different levels such as phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, are connected linearly but essentially combined hierarchically, by fixed grammatical rules (Blevins, 2013, p.419).

Namely, the grammar translation approach that has been applied in China has focused on grammar drills in EFL class (Zhao, 2012). This traditional EFL teaching method cannot meet the needs of both students and social development, however. Along with the reform of English education reported by the MOE in China (see subsection 1.3.2.2), teachers may adjust their teaching methods to support their students. In China, English teachers tend to use the content of Chinese English tests (e.g. CET4 or TEM4) as the main focus of their teaching (Nie and Fan, 2018). These tests concentrate on English grammar, writing, listening and reading, and ignore speaking. English teachers therefore try to use the communicative teaching method to promote students' ability in speaking. Furthermore, McKnight (1994) commented on Chinese EFL teaching as follows:

While the currently fashionable western communicative approaches to English language teaching are known and used in some Chinese institutions, the dominant teaching strategy remains the grammar translation approach...Our Western methodology textbooks reject this as an outdated and discredited approach to language teaching and learning. It is perhaps surprising, therefore, that so many Chinese students of English have achieved such a good command of the language using this approach (1994, pp. 46-7).

Even though this source is now nearly 25 years old, and attempts have been made to change language teaching pedagogy, the communicative language teaching approach has still not fully taken hold in China, as the following section illustrates.

2.2.2.1 Communicative Teaching Method

The communicative teaching method has been proposed not only by the MOE, but also by several prominent English teachers. Nie and Fan (2018) mention the application of the communicative teaching method in universities and its potential problems. The communicative teaching method focuses on speaking English and aims to use English in communication. They believe that university students will have already gained an English foundation in middle school, therefore teaching English at university should emphasise cultivating students' ability to speak English and thus to promote students' comprehensive ability (Nie and Fan, 2018). Furthermore, Gao (2017) has addressed the necessity of teaching western culture and the significance of grammar learning in this teaching method. Learning English is not only limited to the language itself, but also includes learning the culture. English teaching at universities should therefore include the explanation of cultural aspects by using Microsoft PowerPoint (PPT) or videos, which can not only promote students' abilities in speaking and listening, but also can enhance their motivation. Gao (2017) also mentions that there is no contradiction between the communicative teaching approach and grammar teaching, since grammar is the key to understanding the sentences. Teachers should collect different kinds of sentences and explain them to students, which would help students in understanding tense and logic.

In China, this teaching method has been regarded as an attempt to change the traditional teacher-centred teaching mode, in which the teacher has the main role of teaching knowledge to students in a passive learning mode (Gao, 2017). There is a move towards a student-centred mode, in which the teacher designs the lesson plans with a view of students as the main participants in the class. Students have personal differences and different English language ability, however, so not all students will be active in the class. If teachers ignore students' differences, students may become polarised in their views of English learning. Also, because of the size of the classes, it is difficult for teachers to involve around 40 students in practising English in a 45minute class. To solve these problems and promote students' efficacy in learning English, teachers should get to know each student and use the hierarchical teaching mode (see subsection 2.3.7.1) to support all students. It is also necessary to bring cultural background knowledge into the class as well (Nie and Fan, 2018). The pie chart Figure 2.1 demonstrates the top five topics searched in English teaching pedagogy in higher education on the biggest Chinese literature resource database, the 'CNKI' (China National Knowledge Infrastructure).



Figure 2.1: The top five topics searched in English teaching pedagogy in higher education on the 'CNKI'

The top key words in Figure 2.1 are directly translated from Chinese and actually refer to two main methods, the task-based teaching method (for example, Li and Tang, 2018) and the communicative teaching method (for example, Wan, 2017). The task-based teaching method is further discussed in subsection 2.3.6.5 on web-based pedagogy in China. Both terms show a focus on creating an English learning and teaching pedagogy that is based on realism, rather than abstract language learning.

2.2.3 Summary of This Section

This section shows how English has historically been regarded and taught to students at universities, which present several key points related to this research:

- Task-based teaching and communicative teaching are the two main methods, and more importantly, how teachers make decisions on what and how to teach.
- The significance of grammar, examinations and culture in English learning

2.3 Web-Based Learning (WBL)

2.3.1 Introduction

Web-based learning (WBL) has been referred to as a branch of educational technology since the 1990s. Since the advent of the Internet, language teachers have sought to employ it in a way which complements classroom learning (Brusilovsky, 1999). It is a version of computer assisted language learning (CALL), which is that students use web-based technologies and tools in learning journeys to interact with teachers, other students, and learning materials through computers and the Internet (Beatty, 2010). This study is about how students use the web to learn English outside of classes in China. It is therefore important to spend some time exploring the use of technology in language learning, both globally and in the Chinese context. 'Technology' here is defined as computers and web-based learning, rather than other aspects such as overhead projectors, tape recorders, etc., which were not deemed relevant to this study. This section of the literature review will first highlight the terminology in the area of web-based learning to clarify the boundaries of this research. Then, more details of both pedagogical and technological aspects of web-based learning will be explored. Before the study began, it was unclear which types of technology students would be using, therefore brief sections on additional technology services are included in the text. The sections on those technologies students were not using widely have been shortened accordingly. Finally, the section on the Chinese context has been addressed in terms of its development, its status quo, and the challenges.

2.3.2 Terminology Clarification in This Research



Online learning

Figure 2.2: Six terminology terms related in this research

2.3.2.1 Web-Based Learning

In education, WBL complements constructivist learning theories (Chumley-Jones, Dobbie and Alford, 2002), which requires that learners are involved in decisions about content and processes (Benson, 2011). There are many terms used for representing WBL, for example, Internet-assisted learning, E-learning, virtual learning, online learning, etc. (Paulsen, 2003). These are based on computers and the various online options and consist of technology to support classroom teaching and building online learning environments to increase learning opportunities and promote efficiency. These terminologies do not refer to exactly the same content, however. According to this research, web-based learning is used to further students' English learning outside of class time, which includes doing activities online on different websites and downloading learning resources to use to fulfil the assignments in class or achieve their personal learning needs. The following paragraphs present a discussion about these terms and pinpoint the boundaries of this research.

2.3.2.2 Internet-Assisted Learning

Web-based learning is also known as Internet-assisted learning, where the Internet functions as a virtual infrastructure that connects all the world's computers together to form a network brimming with information and interactive communication (Beale, 2010). The Internet is a service centre. Beatty (2010) mentions several examples of using the Internet in language learning, such as www. (Web) resources, including language-learning websites, emails, online chat rooms, and bulletin boards (Beatty, 2010). 'Web' and 'Internet' are closely related terms, but they are different systems. The Internet is a huge network that connects all computers together, while 'the web' is a web page collection within this network of computers that can be accessed by web browsers to search for information (Beale, 2010). Search engines link to websites after key words are typed in. The information that appears may take the form of text, pictures, video, sound, or, increasingly, multi-media content (Atkinson and CILT, 1998). Moreover, the web is also a model for disseminating and sharing information based on the Internet (Papanikolaou and Mavromoustakos, 2012). The focus of this research is on students' learning activities on websites, for which a connection to the Internet is necessary.

2.3.2.3 E-Learning

Web-based learning has begun to overlap with the field of E-learning (Paulsen, 2003), in which E-learning is an interactive learning method which requires the Internet to access the online learning content, to monitor students' activities, and then to provide feedback on learning activities. Students can communicate with others via the Internet. Devedzic (2006) has argued that the main focus of E-learning is the access to and organisation of the learning content, rather than communication. E-learning environments can be both Internet-based and CD-ROM-based (; however, in this research, 'web-based learning' focuses only on Internet-based resources, which implies the use of the Internet to create, deliver, promote and facilitate learning anytime and anywhere (Obringer, 2005, cited by Devedzie, 2006). There are two perspectives on E-learning: technological and pedagogical. From the technological perspective, Obringer (2005) mentions that the interpretation of E-learning focuses on the means of content delivery. This research, however, emphasises the 'learning' rather than the 'e', which highlights the need for a learner-centred approach in learning (Devedzie, 2006). The pedagogical aspect focuses more on explanations of how students learn, how they get access to information, and how they acquire skills and their development through the learning process. The question of how electronic delivery can be adapted to learners and support their learning is not the focus of this research.

E-learning in a WBL context brings several advantages in learning, but also has some limitations. It has the characteristics of being self-paced, low-cost and providing up-to-date learning materials (Devedzie, 2006). A challenge for learners (including in my study) has been finding the best ways to search databases and gain credible information, however (Tanaka, 2009). Tanaka (2009) proposes using both Web 1.0 (for the term explanation see subsection 2.3.6) and Web 2.0 (for the term explanation

see subsection 2.3.6) content to enhance the credibility of the resources. A Web 1.0 search can be improved with knowledge from Web 2.0 and Web 2.0 information can be evaluated by aggregating Web 1.0 contents (Tanaka, 2009).

2.3.2.4 Virtual Learning

Web-based learning is also related to virtual learning, which refers to the implementation of web-based classes in the learning journey. Virtual learning could be created for teaching and learning in an educational setting. This normally works with the Internet and supports students' connection with others for knowledge sharing and collaboration. It has several applications integrated for content uploading, communication, assessment, and tracking tools, etc. It has several limitations, however, for example off-campus access may be slow, students' creativity is restrained by the passive learning style, and teachers need to plan well to avoid support overload. Furthermore, both teachers and students need to have training in computer techniques to administer and run the virtual learning environment (Zhao, Yang and Wang, 2010). Besides educational settings, there are several online virtual English classes which are open-access and available on several English learning websites. In this research, WBL includes learning on these open access virtual English courses, which students usually participate in on English learning websites outside of class (Devedzic, 2005a). Moreover, from students' reflective writings, it is clear that the English learning taking place in class plays an important role outside of class.

2.3.2.5 Online Learning

'Online learning' is usually interchangeable with 'Internet-assisted learning', which has been defined by Oblinger (2005) as "wholly" online learning (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005). Others, for example Lowenthal, Wilson, and Parrish (2009) regard it as the technology medium or context with which it is used. More specifically, Ally (2004) has defined online learning as:

The use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience. (p. 7)

Ally's definition includes Benson (2002) and Conrad's (2002) ideas about online learning improving access to educational opportunities for learners. It also includes the connectivity, flexibility and ability to promote interactions that were mentioned by Hiltz and Turoff (2005). Online learning has also been referred to as a kind of distance learning, which includes several learning arrangements, such as web-facilitated classes, blended courses, and fully virtual or online courses. These are different formats for the delivery of content, along with the mix of the technology tools employed therein (Blake, 2011). 'Online learning' does not have exactly the same meaning as 'distance learning', however; fully online learning means that learners never meet each other in a face-to-face context. The term 'distance learning' also includes learning environments that incorporate traditional methods, such as correspondence courses and teleconferencing (Blake, 2011). In this research, however, students are not doing distance learning; neither are their courses fully online where students never meet in real life. The main focus of this research is web-facilitated resources and online courses on websites that students use to learn outside of face-toface classes.

2.3.2.6 Offline Learning

Offline learning has been regarded as an effective complement to online-learning. More and more importance is being attached to this concept by experts and scholars in distance education (Wu et al., 2008). Wu (2008) mentions that the concepts of online and offline learning are both based on blended learning, which is explained by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) as a combination of face-to-face learning and online learning. 'Offline learning' could be categorised as formal or informal learning, taught or participatory, independent or collaborative. More specifically, offline learning includes tutorial classes, question and answer sessions in class, lectures, workshops, group projects, seminars, and independent reading activity, etc. (Wu et al., 2008). Along with the development of online learning, offline learning has also been developing in various formats. In this research, the participants' reflective writings show that students take online English courses to preparing for tests; after that, they collaborate and discuss their English learning problems in groups. Offline learning is not my focus in this research, but it can be tracked through their English learning activities out of class. Also, in their reflections, the students mentioned that they would like to have a combination of online and offline learning to best fulfil their English learning tasks at university, hence the inclusion of the term here.

2.3.3 Web-Based Pedagogy

2.3.3.1 Historical Development of Web-Based Pedagogy

The rapid development of the Internet-using population has had a significant impact on web-based pedagogy. This fast-growing number of Internet users requires diverse web-based services and products as well as educational products and resources. Since the early 1990s, the worldwide web has proven to be a valuable tool and an important medium for education. Using web-based interaction, students, teachers and staff can connect to information in synchronous or asynchronous ways, display and deliver various text-based and multimedia learning materials, and link to meeting places in cyberspace. When educators and students are used to the value of the web as an instructional medium, they will search for appropriate educational resources for themselves as well as others.

People become interested in using technology in their learning journeys, while the pedagogic theories support this process as how they use them could enhance their learning, such as web-based pedagogy (Attwell and Hughes, 2010). The focus of pedagogy has changed to student-centred education and shifted from teaching to learning, which brings new roles for both teachers and learners, even attempting to reinterpret learning. There are many learning frameworks and models that could be used in the web-based learning environment to illustrate students' interactions as well as to inform the design of the environment. From a historic viewpoint, a much earlier reference from the psychology field provides a foundation for understanding the process of learning within these environments. As Duchastel (1995) states:

Applied learning psychology studies the interaction between learner and environment and the resulting internal processes that constitute learning. As such, learning psychology guides learning technology in the design of learning environments. (p. 215, cited by Attwell and Hughes, 2010)

Behaviourist and constructivist ideas are two main theoretical positions that have used to explain how learning takes place, which specifically show their roles in the design of online learning materials, activities, and delivery formats (Beatty, 2010). The constructivist approaches have been much indicated in the research on the pedagogy of using technology on learning. The essential key idea of constructivism is that "learners construct their own knowledge actively and meaning from their experiences" (Attwell and Hughes, 2010, p.16). Doolittle and Camp (cited by Attwell and Hughes, 2010) focus on different ideas of constructivist theory and list eight principles to provide the nature of ideas of constructivist pedagogy, focusing on the "student's role in knowledge acquisition through experience, reflection, and construction" (p.16):

- . Learning should take place in authentic and real-world environments;
- . Learning should involve social negotiation and mediation;
- . Content and skills should be made relevant to the learner;
- . Content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's prior knowledge;
- . Students should be assessed formatively, serving to inform future-learning experiences;
- . Students should be encouraged to become self-regulatory, self-mediated, and self-aware;
- . Teachers serve primarily as guides and facilitators of learning, not instructors;
- . Teachers should provide for and encourage multiple perspectives and representations of content.

(Doolittle and Camp, cited by Attwell and Hughes, 2010, p.16)

Moreover, Knud Illeris (2007, cited by Coffield, 2008, p.3), mentions three different

meanings of the term 'learning' in everyday speech. Learning can refer to:

- . the outcomes of learning, i.e. what has been learned
- . the mental processes used by individuals while learning
- . the interactions between individuals and their environment

(Knud Illeris, 2007, cited by Coffield, 2008, p.3)

There are various theories and models of learning in relation to web-based learning. A

decade ago, Franklin and van Harmelen (2007) propose the need for new pedagogic

models, especially for using Web 2.0 technologies for learning. They say:

...our consultative work revealed a strong feeling that educationalists do not as yet know how the increased use of Web 2.0 technology will interrelate with learning and teaching, and in turn demand new pedagogies and new assessment methods. (p. 21)

Two years later, Beetham, McGill and Littlejohn (2009, p. 12) produced a useful table

summarising new pedagogic approaches along with key theorists, as shown in Table

2.1.

Pedagogic approaches	Key concepts	Key theorists
Learning 2.0	Learners' familiarity with web 2.0 technologies opens up a completely new space for and style of learning,	Downes, Anderson, Alexander,
	focusing on: collaborative knowledge building; shared assets; breakdown of distinction between knowledge and communication	Walton
Learning 2.0 counter- evidence	Evidence that pro-active, creative web 2.0 practitioners is still in the minority of users (1:9:90 rule): many learners	Redecker

Table 2.1: A summary of new pedagogic approaches along with key theorists(McGill and Littlejohn, 2009, p. 12)

	are introduced to such practices by	
	teachers. Ubiquity, accessibility and	
	ease of use are, however, features of	
	technology that are changing informal	
	learning practices	
Connectivism	Individual processing of information	Siemens
	gives way to development of networks	
	of trusted people, content and tools:	
	the task of knowing is offloaded onto	
	the network itself	
	Deiling on Wangels action of	T
Communities of enquiry	Building on Wenger's notion of	
	communities of practice, (higher)	Garrison and
	learning conceived in terms of	Anderson
	participation, with learners	
	experiencing social, cognitive and	
	pedagogic aspects of community	
Theory/practice, practical	Action (practice) and discussion	Vygotsky,
inquiry	(theory) in shared worlds is	Garrison
	internalised, leading to personal	
	capability (practice) and	
	conceptualisation. Specifically	
	facilitated through social technologies	
	and computer supported cooperative	
	work (CSCW)	
	work (CSC w)	
Academic apprenticeship	Literacy as situated social practice is	Holme
	best acquired through an	
	apprenticeship model, situated in	
	disciplinary ways of knowing	
E-learning, e-pedagogy	New forms of learning and teaching	Mayes and
	are enabled – and required – by digital	Fowler,
		Cronje

technologies.	Typically,	more	
constructivist and	d learner-led		

The table has listed new pedagogic approaches, or how existing approaches may apply to a web-based context. Then, the following subsections are selected as having the most relevance to this research, from the pedagogic perspective in web-based learning environments.

2.3.3.2 Vygotsky's Ideas

The ideas of Vygotsky are based on the social constructivist approach. His research focused on school-based learning and developed the idea of the 'zone of proximal development' which is the gap between 'actual developmental level' which children can accomplish independently and the 'potential developmental level' (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). When children interact with others (more capable peers or adults), they can accomplish. Namely, "interactions with the social environment, including peer interaction and/or scaffolding, are important ways to facilitate individual cognitive growth and knowledge acquisition" (Attwell and Hughes, 2010, p.21). Attwell (2010) points out that Vygotsky's ideas can relate to 'technology enhanced learning' and particularly 'personal learning environments' (p.21). A 'personal learning environment', which is not only to provide an opportunity to offer access to more knowledgeable others, but also could achieve a connection that allow learners to link learning to performance in practice. Scaffolding learning, for example, could possibly support this process to take place (Attwell and Hughes, 2010). More specifically, as mentioned by Feden and Vogel (2006), the individual's learning development is supported by a six-steps approach, scaffolding, within their zone of proximal

development (Feden and Vogel, 2006, cited by Attwell and Hughes, 2010). "Knowledge, skills and prior experiences" reflect from the individual student's general knowledge and are used to create the foundation for potential development (p.21). The teacher's role is to assist students to complete tasks within their ZPD. Students interact with others to complete learning tasks. "The use of language and shared experience" are essential to implementing scaffolding as a learning tool (Feden and Vogel, 2006; Attwell and Hughes, 2010, p.21).

2.3.3.3 June's Theoretical Framework for Pedagogical Features of Web-Based Learning

In addition, June (2001) has mentioned the significance of the pedagogical features in web-based learning. She mentions in the learning process, three variables: learner variables, teaching variables, and communication variables.



Figure 2.3: The theoretical framework for pedagogical features of web-based learning (June, 2001, p29)

The three variables are shown in Figure 2.3, to illustrate students' English learning on websites out-of class in this research, which include the discussions on students' learning content, their interactions with others via different learning activities or technology services on websites, and their autonomy and collaboration.

In WBL, English learning websites are mostly designed based on a constructivist mode of instruction, but are not limited to it; the learning materials also have a behaviourist function. The next subsection looks at the design of online learning activities or materials to support students' learning.

2.3.4 The Design of Online Learning Materials/Activities

More specifically, the modes of instruction (behaviourism and constructivism) from the perspective of second language acquisition (SLA) in WBL, serve to explain the design of online learning materials/activities and show how they support students' learning. Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to the processes by which learners acquire a new language. There are various hypotheses on how second languages are learned. Two modes of instruction will be illustrated here, with reference to web-based learning, behaviourism and constructivism, to describe their role specifically in the design of online learning materials, activities, and delivery formats (Beatty, 2010). A definition of the negotiation of meaning has been made by Nunan (1993) as an understanding of the communication between listener and speaker. Ellis (1998) further explains how discourse influences language acquisition, which means that acquisition can be enhanced by a comprehensive input. If two learners work together to complete a task without communication, they are in agreement about how to do the task and they can complete the task without interaction. If they have another task requiring them to communicate, then the negotiation of meaning may help language learning. Technology, such as web-facilitated technologies, may improve learners' language learning by the negotiation of meaning through collaboration between two learners or between learners and the technology services embedded in websites, which can provide a comprehensive input to learners by using different kinds of media (Beatty, 2010). Moreover, web-based learning can be adapted to all characteristics of input addressed by Krashen in earlier years (1987) as "comprehensible, interesting and/or relevant to the acquirer, ungrammatically sequenced and sufficient quantity" (Krashen, 1987, p.22). The problem, however, is how web-based resources show the appropriate input for learners, which may be easy or difficult. Along with the continuous

improvement of science and technology, artificial intelligence for example, the services on websites can make complex decisions, according to learners' output. As for SLA, Bailin (1995) doubts that SLA theories consider social factors, emphasising that language learning is not merely about learning grammar rules, but is also related to the social context in which the learning takes place (Bailin, 1995). In terms of the web, its features can achieve this to provide a vivid environment for students who interact with others for both academic and social purposes via different technology services (Lai, 2017). Teachers will be flexible in their teaching to adapt to different learning experiences and backgrounds, which need to be accommodated. While the features of the web can bring opportunities to individualise and track learning through various technology service tools (Lai, 2017).

2.3.4.1 Behaviourist Model of Instruction

Language learning theories have been influenced by earlier practices and also the theories of other subjects. Behaviourism is similarly influenced by earlier practices such as Ivan Pavlov's ideas of classical conditioning, which refers to a situation where a dog comes to expect a meal when someone rings a bell. Later, Skinner (1968), whose ideas are most related to behaviourism, defined another approach called 'operant conditioning', which focuses on stimuli and responses. This approach differs to classical conditioning in that a person can make independent responses instead of only reacting to a stimulus. Skinner also mentions rote learning with memorisation through repetitive drills, with rewards such as by grades or marks when students show positive

responses (Beatty, 2010). For example, all the participants have the experience of reciting the vocabulary list to learn English.

Several learning materials on the web are based on the behaviourist model, which believes that learning should take place strictly by sequence. Behaviourism believes that the learning process can be divided into instructional steps and rules, and that learners have little background knowledge. Learning activities move from simple to complex, with tests at key points. Teachers or websites are regarded as sources of learning materials. Along with these instruction practices, it is obvious that is promotes the accumulation of students' knowledge; however, which its deficiency has been discussed (Lv and Yang, 2013). For example, there are two outcomes of behaviourism: programmed instruction and mastery of learning. Specifically, programmed instruction is a contribution by Skinner, which mainly refers to learning takes place step-by-step. Such programmed instruction tends to use multiple-choice questions, constructed response answers, and hotlinks. Such activities usually appear in the English tests in China and move to the Web in the form of small word games or Chinese-English translation games, for example (Yang, 2010). Rivers (1981), however, doubts whether the focus of programmed instruction is on language details rather than communication; and Oxford (1995) states that this kind of learning cannot satisfy the complex nature of learning and its repetitive drills are boring for some learners.

Currently, the functions of programmed instruction are embedded within online courses and several small games available on English learning websites, which students in this research used to learn English outside their classes. Another method developed by behaviourism is 'mastery of learning', defined by Lai and Biggs (1994) as being related to the time learners need to acquire relevant knowledge. Fosnot (1996) complemented this approach, saying that learning can be divided into parts and learners can master learning by achieving individual parts within each level in a process of skills accumulation (Fosnot, 1996). It is necessary to provide new materials when learners fail to achieve initial goals. Similarly, teacher will motivate or stimulate learners to think about an answer instead of only requiring a limited answer, such as "I don't know". Mastery of learning assumes that if learners finish a task, they know it forever, but actually sometimes learners easily forget, as knowledge is often only stored in the short-term memory (Beatty, 2010). That why participants in this research have mentioned that their learning problem on websites is that their English learning is difficult to acquire in depth and what they have learned is easy to forget. the beginning of this research, for example, on learning new English words, this problem has been solved by taking the activities within communication (for details see section 5.2).

To conclude, behaviourists of instruction believe that the learning process always goes from simple to complex and can be divided into different levels, and that learners make correct answers to the questions in one step, then either progress to the next step or complete the task again if they make a mistake. The control of the sequence is through the design of learning activities, not by learners themselves. It is unable to explain some social behaviours. People could imitate behaviour that they had not reinforced by observing the behaviour of another person (Alonso, López, Manrique and Viñes, 2005).
2.3.4.2 Constructivist Models of Instruction

Unlike behaviourism, constructivist models address how learning involves the construction of new ideas based on experiences and new knowledge (Beatty, 2010). Learners take control of the learning content to satisfy their needs; they are responsible for making decisions concerning their learning. Learners rely on schema theory, which was first mentioned by Bartlett in 1932. This explains ways in which knowledge can be organised (Bartlett, 1932, cited by Nunan, 1993). Nunan (1993) explains schema theory as "describing the way knowledge is organized into related patterns, based on the influence of previous experience, and how it can affect the future learning" (p.71). Schema theory is the difference between behaviourism and constructivism, in that behaviourism believes that learners come to learning with a blank mind and constructivism believes that learners already have rich ideas and experiences when they come to learning (Nunan, 1993). This encourages learners to build their knowledge on what they have already generated; collection or memorisation of information is not enough. Furthermore, the role of the teacher in this model is as a facilitator to provide learning opportunities to learners and encourage their reflective thinking (Anderson, 2011). Knowledge is acquired by the interpretations of the ideas developed through learners' self-discovery process (Nunan, 1993). Pennington (1996) listed some components involved in building an ideal teaching environment:

- Facilitate learners in developing and making specified cognitive representation for the second language
- Make learners learn in a preferred and motivating learning environment
- Provide both conscious and unconscious input in learning processes
- Provide learning opportunities and performance feedback as well
- Enable learners to learn based on their personal goals
- Enable learners to connect with others

- Enhance learning in cultural and social aspects
- Enhance the interactivity in both learning and communication
- Locate learners in an appropriate learning context
- Enlarge the learner's 'zone of proximal development'
- Set up learner independence

(Pennington, 1996, p.7)

Pennington's ideal teaching system was adapted to the ideas of constructivism. Teachers are regarded as facilitators instead of an authority. Moreover, constructivism supports collaboration, which "develop learners own plans and understandings through joint effort and have the opportunity to come to new understanding through the give-and-take of interaction, argument and discussion" (Watson and others, 1999, p. 142).

In addition, the potential is there for technology to play a revolutionary role in supporting new forms of learning conversations in educational settings" (Edelson, 1996 cited by Driscoll, 2000, p.380). Collaboration includes discussion and sharing not only limited to the group-work activities in classrooms for example, but Internet, software and websites including technological services: chatting, forums and blogging, and web projects, all provide opportunities for students on social negotiation and learning (Can, 2009). Employing websites to apply collaborative learning, problembased learning and goal-based scenarios, making Open Software and Course Management Tools accessible to learners, and using distance learning applications, online courses for example could serve to implement the multiple constructivist conditions for learning (Can, 2009, p.64).

More recently, social constructivism is a learning development, which employs Internet to offer opportunities for dialogue and discussion. The interactivity constructs meaning socially by students' talks with others. In the China context, the applications of it on websites, particularly on networked reading (Wu, 2016) and writing exercises (Chen, 2017), provide a unique platform for collaboration; students can write for real people who respond immediately and who take part in a collective activity (Bajbouj, Najwa, and Nurul, 2015).

2.3.5 Current Pedagogical Philosophies in Web-Based Education (Personal Learning Environment)

Razavi and Iverson (2006) further explain the idea of a personal learning space, in which they address the significance of integrating weblogs, e-Portfolios with social networking functionality to support e-learning, managing knowledge and developing communities of practice (Razayi and Iverson, 2006). This new learning environment is called a personal learning environment (PLE) and it emerged to avoid the limitations of virtual learning (Alharbi, Platt, and Al-Bayatti, 2013). In the PLE, learning can be web-based, but it is not limited to it. A PLE can be regarded as a learning approach to learn English based on web content outside of class in order to achieve the individual's learning needs. PLEs are particularly relevant to my study, since learners ultimately have and use the control to shape their learning environment to suit their needs, and as such form a major part of my understanding on how students used technology to meet their learning needs out-of-class. More specifically, if the traditional model of virtual learning is to integrate different services into a centralised system and towards the learning journey being more teacher-led, the PLE should provide learners with a variety of different services and allow learners to control what they select and use. In a PLE, students not only have personal spaces and control over their own learning, but a PLE also creates a social context. A PLE is not a particular software application; it is more of a new learning approach using technological tools (Attwell, 2007). It could, for example, be combined with Web 2.0 services and motivate learners to learn in an active way rather than passively receiving knowledge. Learners have the freedom to use and control these services and tools by themselves in accordance with their personal learning development. Their learning processes thus become dynamic. Compared with traditional virtual language learning environments, a PLE focuses more on learners' learning development and provides a variety of different services. It hands control to learners, who will select, use or integrate these services to satisfy their learning needs (Zhao, Yang and Wang, 2010). If learners have little motivation and cannot plan their learning, however, they may have difficulties using web-based learning in PLE and they will need to improve their skills in technology, communication and self-motivation as well (McKimm, Jollie and Cantillon, 2003).

The Web 2.0 services briefly shown in Table 2.2 offer different ways for learners to access information, create, and share their opinions and knowledge. The advanced development of Web2.0 does not mean that Web1.0 has been replaced, however. The tools, when combined, contribute to supporting students' learning. Web1.0 has been regarded as a resource centre and functions as an online library where you can get access to information, but you cannot edit or share those contents. Web 2.0 makes those functions possible; it connects not only between information and user, but also connects between users. You can access information, but more importantly, you can take part in it, which promotes an active and vivid experience of learning. To conclude, these Web 2.0 tools in learning based on learning environments (LE) can be divided

into three parts: digging for knowledge, coding the knowledge, and shifting the knowledge (Zhao, Yang and Wang, 2010).

a. Knowledge Digging

'Knowledge digging' refers to searching for knowledge and digging into the data, thus aggregating and classifying information. This process enhances knowledge integration and innovation. Knowledge digging is divided into two aspects: search engines and RSS. Search engines, for example Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, or Safari, are an important information management tool used for searching information. This enhances not only social function, but also efficiency in information searching (Beatty, 2010). Learners need to produce the information for the search engines, but they can also get relevant information for their learning. Learners can also subscribe to RSS feeds to receive information of interest from the web.

b. Knowledge Coding

Knowledge coding can be presented by two applications: Bookmark and Mind Map. Learners can create, edit, add and share their knowledge with others and they can work together on a shared learning project. The mind map is a thinking tool, which helps to organise and manage the knowledge chain and can also be used to group resources (Zhao, Yang and Wang, 2010).

c. Knowledge Shifting

Knowledge shifting includes three services, Blogging, Tagging, and Diigo. Students can present their ideas and experiences using blogs; meanwhile they can communicate and exchange their ideas with other students as well. Diigo is a useful learning tool for students to mark and make notes on their learning process. Tagging is for labelling students' thoughts and interested points. With these tools students can take part in online learning; they are not only receivers of knowledge, they become contributors and providers. Knowledge can be accumulated, shared and exchanged in this process (Papanikolaou and Mavromoustakos, 2012).

Web-based learning in the PLE has to consider learners' needs and experiences. Appropriate computer skills are necessary for learners to get the best out of web-based learning. Web pages need to be designed with guides for software tools, because students will be frustrated if their learning on the Internet is slow to load and they cannot open up the images or videos or text files as they need them. Nonetheless, webbased learning usually acts as an efficient way of delivering learning materials and encourages learning in a more independent and active way (McKimm, Jollie and Cantillon, 2003). In the near future, the web will be embedded with interactive services, dynamic applications, and interaction with machines, which will make information more relevant and meaningful; computers will also have a higher level of understanding (Zhu, 2017). Namely, computers will become 'humanlike' to interpret information and have the intelligence in dealing with it to fulfil the individual users' needs (Ohler, 2008). Techniques of artificial intelligence could be applied in education, for example, especially in language learning. It would not only provide individual services to meet different learners' needs, but it would also offer intelligent communication with learners (Zhu, 2017). Alharbi, Platt and Al-Bayatti's (2013) research showed, however, that students spent most of their time on getting familiar

with the tools needed to build PLEs, and their PLEs were much similar to the virtual learning environments (VLEs).

2.3.6 Communication and Interactivity in Web-Based Learning

From the technology aspect, the development of WBL has changed students' ways of learning from simplification to diversity (Papanikolaou and Mavromoustakos, 2012). For example, at the beginning students only get access to information and deal with a single learning task, but now they are not limited on this, not only receiving but producing information while learning, and they interact with other people as well.

Since the world wide web opened up the Internet to everyone, it has been possible to connect the world in a way that people could understand, share information, and communicate (Beatty, 2010). Web1.0 is the first stage of the web, with only flat data that can be readable. It also has been called the 'informational web' by Hauck and Young (2008). The interaction is only limited between websites and users. It is a source of information created by a small number of people, but it has been used by a much larger number. Zhao, Yang and Wang mention (2010) that under Web1.0, students could only access information passively; they can only read and listen. They did not have opportunities to broadcast their ideas by writing or speaking, thus in this era, there are no comments, no feedback; only readable learning information. The function of Web1.0 is therefore like a reference book. Web 1.0 provides advantages in learning in terms of student autonomy, use of authentic materials, with multi-literacies, and a low level of interaction. There are two aspects for educational use: information searching and rote training, for example drill exercises, in keeping with the

behaviourist-training model (Papanikolaou and Mavromoustakos, 2012). With the continuous development of network technology, Tim O'Reilly announced Web 2.0 in 2005, which dramatically changed the relationship between people and their content. 'Web 2.0' is referred to as a second generation of web-based communities and online services (Chunyan, Haitao and Guolin, 2014, p.68), for example sites for social networking, social indexing, and wikis. These kinds of services provide possibilities for collaboration, sharing between users, and creativity. These Web 2.0 sites usually have a rich and user-friendly interface and users can add value on the sites as they use it (Zhao, Yang and Wang, 2010). If Web1.0 has been regarded as the "readable", then Web2.0 could be regarded as the "writable" of the world wide web. The data have become interactive. It also allows users to interact with each other, which implies that students can freely communicate with other students and teachers as well. This technological environment is full of information sharing, collaboration and participation. Namely, this interactivity has increased collaboration and sharing among users through social software. For some students, however, who are not active in groups, they cannot gain much more benefit from these interactions. The purpose of using interactive, communicative tools is to enhance students' motivation in their learning activities and achieve pedagogical objectives (Papanikolaou and Mavromoustakos, 2012). Web 2.0 tools have been categorised based on different functions, which are shown in Table 2.2. More detail is explored in subsection 2.3.3.5 on personal learning environments (PLE).

Table 2.2: Web 2.0 tools

Functions	Discussion	Collaboration	Publishing	Relation	Subscription	Coding
Tools				building		
Forum	Х	X	x			
Wikis		х	х			
Blog		х	х			
Social		Х	Х	X		
network						
RSS					Х	
Bookmark						Х
Podcast			Х			

2.3.7 Web-Based Pedagogy in China

In recent years, the rapid rise of English teaching based on the Internet has become an important means in English teaching, which is not only to take advantage of the computer's many functions, but it is also based on ideas from cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics (Liu, 2016). The purpose of web-based pedagogy is to help students understand the meaning of language, to cultivate their ability to analyse, and to improve their ability in language communication. Liu mentions that web-based English teaching is the result of scientific and technological progress in the information age and the combination of cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics. The function of web-based teaching has two aspects; firstly, it has been regarded as a resource bank from which teachers and students can obtain a lot of materials for learning and teaching; secondly, it has been regarded as a teaching tool for teaching English using various methods provided via the Internet, in which the main way is to offer opportunities for communications between teachers and students and between students. In accordance with these two aspects, web-based teaching has promoted

English teaching based on alternative pedagogy (Liu, 2016). In 2015, the government reports at the third session of the 12th National People's Congress proposed an action plan called 'Internet+' (Zhang, 2015). This idea of Internet plus education has become a new trend. Internet plus education does not mean, however, that traditional teaching methods will be replaced; rather, it is a complement to traditional classroom teaching. The following points illustrate the current popular web-based English teaching pedagogy in China specifically:



2.3.7.1 Hierarchical Teaching Mode Based on the Web

The hierarchical teaching mode is based on the web environment and has been widely employed in English education at Chinese universities (Li, 2016). In other publications, this has also been called layered teaching (Wang, 2013). It is a teaching method by which different groups of students can be taught by different methods. Specifically, students first need to be categorised into different groups by their levels of English ability, which refers to taking students' English test scores, intelligence (from teachers' evaluations), and comprehensive abilities into consideration. When students come to university, they have different backgrounds in terms of English learning experiences and their English levels are uneven. Once they have been stratified, teachers then help them to set their particular learning goals and explore their individual interests, then finally motivate their learning in different aspects. Moreover, this mode also needs different assessment standards in order to help students to fulfil their own learning tasks and goals (Su, 2017).

From the theoretical perspective, this mode has been developed based on two main fundamental teaching theories. One theory is based on Vygotsky's idea of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZDP) (Vygotsky, 1978). The other learning theory comes from the educational ideas of Confucius. '因材施教' means teaching in accordance with students' aptitude (Su, 2017). These two theories all imply that educating students should be based on their individual learner characteristics and give them particular teaching according to their needs. As Su (2017) has demonstrated, the hierarchical teaching mode on the web helps to discover students' potential abilities and facilitate them to build a new ZDP to promote their learning ability. Furthermore, the study has shown that the hierarchical teaching increases students' motivation to learn English (Su, 2017). Meanwhile, Yu (2018) addressed that the hierarchical teaching mode is an evitable trend that increases both teachers' and students' motivation and enhances teaching quality and efficiency in English education in China (Yu, 2018).

2.3.7.2 O2O (Online to Offline)

Another web-based pedagogy has been called O2O, which refers to taking advantage of Internet technology and combining online and offline teaching to promote the complementary advantages of each process. This extends the space and time of classroom teaching to the new teaching mode of the network. O2O also supplies twoway interaction both between teacher and students and between students. O2O has many advantages, for example it could enrich learning resources, include diverse learning methods, and even promote learning efficiency (Sun and Ma, 2018).

2.3.7.3 Web-Based Interactive Teaching Mode

In the learning process, students need to constantly innovate in terms of their learning ideas and methods to keep up the updated knowledge, understand their motivation to learn, and actively improve their knowledge and skills. At this point, the teacher needs to learn to guide students to deal and process the information received. Teachers should guide students in terms of how best to learn, so that students can be active in their learning process. Then, it is necessary to build a place where the information can be shared between teacher and students (Wang, 2017). Internet-based interaction could guide English teaching via an online management platform, which could not only allow students to understand the teacher's plans, but also for teachers to understand students' study situations, then comprehensively link teaching, assessment and evaluation together. The Internet also provides a real language environment to offer learning opportunities for students in doing listening, reading, speaking and writing tasks at any time (Wang, 2017). In fact, this mode is open, without any limits, as long as students learn to manage their study by themselves, then they can benefit the most. Students are therefore required to have a higher autonomous learning ability (this ability 'learner autonomy' is discussed in subsection 2.4.4.1).

This teaching mode has certain advantages, such as providing learning opportunities for individual needs. It also facilitates students in discovering the most suitable learning resources to fulfil their learning goals; the student has the main role in the learning process in this mode. Moreover, this teaching mode can not only alleviate the issue of a lack of teachers of English, but can also change the learning style of the traditional classroom-based teaching mode to improve the environment and experience for students in the process of learning English. Besides, as Wang (2017) has mentioned, this teaching mode could stimulate students' motivation for English learning by increasing their understanding of English culture and intercultural communicative competence (Wang, 2017). Wang (2017) has pointed out that this mode has significantly helped in promoting students' listening ability and increasing their learning motivation (Wang, 2017). However, as for participants in this research, they mention less that they have encountered this teaching mode, but they have shown their wishes related to it, reflected from their ideas on a perfect English learning website.

2.3.7.4 Problem-Based Learning

The problem-based learning (PBL) teaching method is another teaching model based on the ideas of constructivism. It has been widely recognised by the educational community, and has become a development trend in educational reform in China (Lei, 2009). It has the features of being "problematic, situational, autonomy, inquiry, cooperation, reflection and diversity of evaluation" (Zhi, 2009, p.3).

PBL teaching focuses on students' own learning journeys to encourage them to solve problems through group work, designing tasks, presentations, by the problems encountered in self-directed learning, and also by using new knowledge to solve problems in the learning process. It is a learning cycle of reflection (Lei, 2009). This process could stimulate students' interest, improve their autonomous learning, and promote their abilities in teamwork, logic and innovation, which would all promote their comprehensive ability in the English language. In addition, PBL also provides a new perspective for English teaching research at tertiary level on presenting new ideas and methods for solving problems in the process of teaching. Teachers have to change their teaching ideas, and conduct research on pedagogy to continuously improve their teaching ability. According to this research, PBL takes place through participants' discussion about their English learning difficulties that emerged on websites; also they collaborate on websites to solve their learning problems from their homework or English examinations. (for further details see Chapter 4.)

2.3.7.5 Task-Based Approach

The task-based approach is used to promote English ability by completing language tasks. When students do the tasks, they use the Internet and new media to search for information, exchange ideas, and work with others in groups. During this process, their language abilities are practiced and progressed. Teachers could design different language tasks for students in order to meet every student's individual learning goals, which could take care of every students' learning needs and help them to build their confidence and promote teaching efficiency (Lin, 2016).

Compared to traditional teaching in class, task-based teaching pedagogy provides the opportunity for students to take part in learning activities. They are not passive receivers of knowledge who take notes and simply do exercises in a textbook. They

are active, part of the learning, and during the process of finishing tasks they use their knowledge and practice their English. In doing so, step by step they improve their use of and communication in English (Lin, 2016). Also, task-based teaching is helpful for improving interaction and understanding between students and teachers by increasing opportunities to communicate. Students are usually divided into small groups based on their English levels; therefore, they have enough time to express their ideas and they will not feel stressed when they feel their English abilities are at a similar level. They will have more confidence to communicate with others. Finally, it is not only their language ability (for example in communication) that is promoted, but also their ability to study with others. Lin (2016) also mentions that task-based teaching also requires teachers to move from platform to students, namely, teachers consider students' actual learning and provide opportunities to negotiate with them by walking around students, rather, they only focus on the tasks and play the main role at the front of classroom/platform; it is not only a change of the role in learning, but they will also gain a better understanding of their students. As for the learning content, the taskbased teaching approach relies on various kinds of resources. Students complete tasks not only using textbooks, but also on the Internet, where there is a large amount of learning information (Lin, 2016). In Lin's class, for example, when he taught a lesson called "Spring Sowing", he gave a piece of homework for all students to collect as much vocabulary as they could that related to the topic and to find a small story that related to this topic in western culture on the Internet. Then, in the class, he divided his students into different groups and shared their stories and their understanding of the topic. He mentions that this kind of task is helpful for students to understand online articles as well as how languages are used within them (Lin, 2016). Students begin to understand how to use English, which is a complex process; the task-based approach can help them to practice their ability to use English. A challenge, however, is that teachers must take into consideration students' personalities and ability levels.

2.3.7.6 Immersion Teaching Mode

Immersion teaching mode refers to teaching English by using English. Students are immersed in an English language environment in which teachers use only English in class with students. The mother tongue is used as minimally as possible and teachers may not only teach English language, but may also teach some subjects in English. Namely, in this teaching approach, English is not only the learning content, but also the learning tool or means to get access to knowledge. It challenges the traditional notion of foreign languages being taught in isolation and instead combines it with subject knowledge teaching (Chen, 2016). The principle of all-English teaching is one of the main tenets of immersion teaching. In the course of teaching, the immersion English learning mode can eliminate the interference from the mother tongue for the learner. It is consistent with the requirements of the College English Listening and Speaking Course (Chen, 2016). It is suggested that the best way to learn a language is to make learners highly engaged and immersed in a large amount of language input for the purpose of communication and use; the knowledge that learners receive will eventually be translated into the learner's output. In the implementation of immersion teaching, the key is thus to create a language-learning environment where students actively participate in learning, and web-based learning environments and resources may offer key components to providing a realistic and immersive experience for students. Chen (2016) also states that teachers should play the role of facilitator. Many universities in China have built self-access centres, i.e. a distance learning system

based on the Internet to create a personalised college English teaching environment and improve the efficiency of college English teaching.

2.3.8 Practical Implications of Web-Based Learning in China

Web-based language learning in China has been developing for nearly 20 years. Research began in the broad field of Internet-assisted language learning, to an increasing focus on each particular aspect within this mode, such as web-based learning. This development means also that research is expanding from formal learning to autonomous learning (Wang, 2015). This research emphasises web-based English learning, particularly learning English via English learning websites, which is one aspect within the Internet-assisted learning environment. This subsection thus reviews the status quo of China's web-based foreign language learning research. The challenges emerging from this research are highlighted based on a comprehensive understanding of the current status.

2.3.8.1 Background of Web-Based Language Learning in China

In China, the idea of learning English via the Internet was first addressed by Gu's (1998) article *Internet and foreign language teaching and learning*, published in the Journal of Technology Enhanced Foreign Language Education in 1998 (Gu, 1998). From then on, research exploring this area has overwhelmingly increased (Dai and Zhu, 2009). The research has largely focused on comparative studies between traditional teaching and Internet-assisted teaching, which aims to best facilitate English teaching at universities. Hu (2002) and Fan (2006), for example, conducted studies on the advantages of Internet and web-based learning to facilitate their formal

teaching in school. Those studies, however, all emphasised theoretical discussion and lacked analysis of practical problems; therefore, their influence on guiding learning practice via the Internet is limited (Dai and Zhu, 2009). Later on, web-based foreign language learning further developed based on the reform of English teaching and learning since 2007 (MOE, 2007). This development is not only limited to formal English learning at universities, but also extends to English learning outside of the classroom (Dai and Zhu, 2009). The reform requires enhancing students' autonomous learning capabilities and building a lifelong learning system for all, based on Internet and web technologies (MOE, 2007). This idea of 'lifelong learning' refers to the ways in which individual learners choose activities or select learning resources based on their personal needs, without any limits of time and place. It also works in tandem with regular or formal education to constitute a modern system of education (Bao, Chen and Zeng, 2014). This research focuses on web-based English learning outside of the classroom, which is informal learning and emphasises learning English via English learning websites.

Web-Based Language Learning: English Learning Websites (ELW)

Most Chinese students (including those in my study) use English learning websites for their Internet-based English studies, making it necessary to explore these in more detail here. An ELW is a collection of web pages which provide services to help users learn English, which provides an environment in which learners can select their learning activities and learning content according to their personal learning goals (Xue, 2013). It can be defined as a particular website, for which the main purpose is the provision of various aspects of English learning with different technology tools embedded. The function of ELW is not only to answer questions and provide learning materials, but also on enhancing students' English learning motivation and promoting autonomy (Feng, 2012). There are a vast number of ELWs available on the web, which can be generally divided into three kinds: those stemming from educational settings and which have been developed by educational institutions such as universities; those developed by private language learning centres for a commercial purpose; and those created by language learners for their own knowledge building and sharing (Feng, 2012). There are no quantitative statistics to show how many ELWs exist in China, but a survey by Liu (2015) showed that students are not familiar with ELWs and only 25% of students knew of more than six ELWs (Liu, 2015). ELW still needs further development and most students have not realised the advantages of using it in their study, for example, the flexibility in terms of time and the wide choice of resources. Students learning English at ELWs tend to have individual differences according to their learning goals and learning abilities in making decisions on selecting materials (Xu, 2018). In just the learns way, the participants in this research have also encountered this problem when they learn English on websites (see subsection 4.4.2.2). Table 2.3 is a sample list of ELWs in China, which appeared highest in the listings when searching ELWs with the search engine 'Baidu'. Whether or not those websites could be regarded as the optimal choice for learners, however, would depend on

learners' learning experiences and their personal needs.

Hujiang	http://www.hjenglish.com
New oriental	http://www.koolearn.com/?sem=1&a_id=ff8080811d9c20
	9a011daef6edf90003&kid=ff8080814fd2d352014fd55507
	<u>ff4a90</u>
BBC-English learning	http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/
163open course/163	https://open.163.com
Study	https://study.163.com/courses-search?keyword=英语
Chinese University	http://www.icourse163.org
MOOCS	
Kekenet	http://www.kekenet.com
Bigear	http://www.bigear.cn
YYWZ123	http://www.yywz123.com
24en	http://www.24en.com
CoffeeEnglish	http://www.caffeenglish.com

Table 2.3:A list of English learning websites in China

The features of ELWs listed in Table 2.3 are all analysed and shown in Table 2.4 and Table 2.5. Table 2.4 has been adapted from Lv's (2015) research, presenting the contents that should be included in ELWs based on his research and teaching practice (Lv, 2015).

Websites Notice	Websites introduction
websites notice	
	• Website notice
	• News
Web-class	• Top-quality course
	• Fine micro class
	Grammar lectures
Learning materials	Award-winning courseware
	• Teaching audio and video
	• Translation skills
	• Writing guides
	• Newspapers
	• English stories
	• Research trends
	• Songs
	• Films and dramas
	• Reference
English contents	Basic fundamental English
	Business English
	Practical English
	 Particular English (Law or Medical English)
	• Vocabulary
	• English interpretation
	• English examinations
	• English culture
	• English literatures
	• Thesis centre
English exercises	Reading practice

Table 2.4: The contents of English learning websites (Lv, 2015)	

	Listening practiceOnline assessment
Discussion	Research discussionFAQ
	Experience exchangeAssignment tutoring
Embedded technology services	EmailSite searching engine

In addition, he illustrates the principles of designing ELWs, such as:

- a. The ELW should be designed based on student-centred learning and takes full consideration of individual learners' needs.
- b. The designer/author should be very familiar with students' English learning, for example English teachers.
- c. ELW should meet the requirements of key English teaching and learning syllabi.
- d. ELW provides online courses in multi-forms.
- e. ELW should have an interactive interface.
- f. ELW should have a proper structure to make sure they load smoothly.

(Lv, 2015)

On the other hand, the features of ELWs are also categorised by technology tools based on not only Web1.0 and Web 2.0 functions, but also on computer technology, which is shown below, listed in bullet points:

- Site search engine
- RSS
- Blog
- Podcast
- Forum
- Hyperlink

- Video
- Personal user account interface (connecting with social network and email)
- PC client
- Built-in Online dictionary
- Multi-media learning resources
- Broadcast

The two tables have been used to present the features of ELWs as listed above; the specific features that students use have been analysed in section 4.4.

. Censorship of the Internet in China

The management of the Internet in China is controlled by the government. The Chinese State Council issued an order in 1997 on "the Interim Regulation of the People's Republic of China on the Management of International networking of Computer Information (97 Amendment)" (State Council Order, 1997, 2016). This order means that all material on the Internet that is available in China is required to meet these regulations and that the government takes the responsibility to manage people's virtual activities, as indicated in Article 4 of these regulations as "The State shall implement the principle of unified planning, unified standards, and level-by-level management of international networking to promote its development". Article 6 also states:

To carry out international networking of computer information, the output and input channels provided by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications in its public telecommunication network shall be used. No units or individuals shall establish or use other channels for international networking on their own accord. (State Council Order, 1997, 2016).

These explicitly demonstrate the management of the Internet in China by the government. Certain websites, for example Facebook and YouTube, cannot be made accessible to the public, because some content published on these websites violate the law in China (Wang, 2012). For Chinese English learning students, this means that they cannot access a wide native English-speaking community, which indirectly influences the fact that students tend to be better at reading and writing than listening and speaking (Fu, 2016). It is also a possible reason that it is difficult for Chinese English students to access real communication in English. Some of the ELWs in the Chinese context focus on dealing with this problem; they have English native speaking teachers who can communicate with students, which slightly increases the opportunities for students to practice their English (Feng, 2012). These communications are often quite forced, however, and students usually feel that they have little opportunity to use English naturally. This was reflected in their writings in this research.

2.3.9 Summary of This Section

Web-based learning has provided many opportunities for learning by providing access to a large amount of learning resources, creating and posting information, and also communicating and collaborating with others in learning (Papanikolaou and Mavromoustakos, 2012). The web designer and content author need to ensure that the learning environment meets students' needs. The technology tools must be applied appropriately. Students also need to understand their own learning and be familiar with those technology services in order to make full use of the tools to support their learning. Web 1.0 tools offer learners an opportunity to access huge amounts of information; Web 2.0 provides and enhances the interaction and collaboration in the learners' learning process. In the future, the development of Web 3.0 could provide a semantic web that is referred to as the 'executable' of the www with interactive services, dynamic applications, and interaction with machines. In other words, computers will be more humanlike; they will be able to interpret information and have the intelligence to deal with it to fulfil the individual users' needs (Zhu, 2017). English learning websites are a collection of those services that apply these technology tools into English learning practice.

Based on those advancements of the web, a challenge is how to use them and how to make them not only support students in learning, but also adapt to each learner's learning process. This influences the effectiveness of each learner's learning experience. It is therefore essential to build a PLE on the web that considers individual learner differences and takes into account their learning experiences. This will enhance each student's English learning on the web and promote their learning abilities (Zhao, Yang and Wang, 2010).

2.4 Out-of-Class Learning

2.4.1 Introduction

As Lai and Gu (2011) mention, "learning is distributed among multiple settings and across a multitude of resources" (Lai and Gu, 2011, p.317). Also, Barron (2004) pointed out the notion of 'learning ecology', which he defined as "the accessed set of contexts, comprised of configurations of activities, material resources and relationships, found in co-located physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning" (p. 6). His ideas have referred to learning both in and out of school and

includes the physical setting and virtual setting. We therefore need to take into account "what learners are going through both in and out of school to understand their learning processes" (Lai and Gu, 2011, p.317). Sefton-Green (2006) challenged educators to expand the horizons of learning and to consider a "wider ecology of learning" (p. 4). He argues that "learning in out-of-school settings needs to be accorded status and understanding as we seek to enhance the education system more generally" (p. 6). In alignment with these ideas, Benson (2008) points out that classroom learning is only one form of language learning, while studies conducted by Lamb (2002), Nunan (1991) and Pickard (1996) have reported that successful language learners usually attribute their learning achievement to their active learning engagement outside of the classroom. This suggests a positive association between language achievements and out-of-class learning (Inozu, Sahinkarakas, and Yumru, 2010). More research to investigate learners' learning outside of class is called for (Benson, 2008), a gap this study seeks to help address.

Current studies on language learning outside of class have shown various learning activities outside the classroom. Freeman (1999) researched how learners learn English as a second language in UK universities, which has demonstrated "a clear predominance of out-of-class activity time over in-class activity time" (Freeman, 1999, p.80-88). Pearson's research (2004) reported that Chinese students in New Zealand learn English using various resources; students mentioned that their enjoyment of learning English in out of class learning is more than their English learning in class (Pearson, 2004). Studies on students in university who learn English as a foreign language in several regions, such as Hong Kong (Hyland, 2004), Turkey (Inozu et al., 2010), and Taiwan (Shen et al., 2005), all show a similar array of activities for out of

class learning, but at different frequencies. Similar activities have been also found among Indonesian English learners (Lamb, 2004). Murray (2008) reports "engagement with pop culture, such as movies, TV programs, music, novels, and magazines, was a significant part of their language learning outside the classroom and played a prominent role in their language learning" (Murray, 2008, p.2). These studies all show that students from different regions are actively engaging in learning activities outside of the classroom. Those learning activities provide more language learning opportunities, for example, "maintaining motivation for learning" (Lamb, 2007, p.757), providing a supportive learning community, and offering a place where students can learn autonomously (Gao, 2009). Meanwhile, the selection of out of class learning activities might be influenced by the context and students' personal beliefs of learning.

In alignment with those previous studies, this research has been conducted in a Chinese context. It aims to investigate university students' perceptions of English learning using websites and web technologies outside of their English classes and examine how they enhance or impede students' learning activities.

Three themes: 'collaboration', 'reflection', and 'autonomy', have emerged from students' English learning processes out of class. This section has been structured as a discussion on these respective themes.

2.4.2 Collaboration in Out-of-Class Learning

Learners usually collaborate with others on an assigned task of their own volition. Collaboration is important in the learning process, which can enhance learners' skills in both social and cognitive aspects. Collaboration as a main factor in language learning is important in the online learning process as well, helping learners to finally acquire languages. When learners use computers and discuss the learning process with others, for example the content of the target language and the learning activities, learners are engaging in collaboration and in scaffolded learning, which involves helping each other to promote their language skills. This subsection reviews the literature related to the term 'collaboration' in three main parts: firstly, its definitions will be explained, as well as the differences between 'collaboration' and other terms such as 'cooperation' and 'teamwork'. Secondly it reviews the benefits of collaboration, especially on how the web facilitates the negotiation of meaning; and it discusses the challenges involved. The final part focuses on a discussion of the relationship between collaboration and self-study online language learning. This part addresses the importance of collaboration in language learning, especially collaboration in the self-study online learning environment, and presents theoretical knowledge related to collaboration.

2.4.2.1 Definition of 'Collaboration'

'Collaboration' can be defined as a process where two or more learners are working together to finish a common task or achieve a similar goal. Collaboration is manifested in the learners' behaviours when working together: for example, listening to others' ideas, which will lead to further discussion until a task is finished. Johnson and Johnson (1990) list three types of goals as motivators in language learning: individualistic goals (which refer to goals that are personal and nothing related to others), competitive goals (which refers to a goal that can only be achieved if others fail), and cooperative goal (which refers to a goal that can be achieved when others

can reach it too). The third type of cooperative goal involves collaborative ideas (Johnson and Johnson, 1990). Collaboration and cooperation are different in some ways, however. Biggs and Moore (1993) describe the activities in collaborative learning as usually being set by learners and the activities in cooperative learning are set by the teacher. Also, Dillenbourgh et al. (1995) added their description of the differences; such as that in cooperative learning only coordination is needed, while in collaboration, the activities are not only coordinated, but also synchronous. Kohonen (1992), however, uses these two terms interchangeably. In some cases, O'Neil (1994) uses the term 'teamwork' instead of cooperation or collaboration. To conclude, these two terms focus on different aspects of the learning process, but share some similar meanings.

Collaboration usually works with a task or an activity that facilitates real communication in order to solve a problem or answer a question. This could take the form of verbal, written or electronic discussion. A real collaboration needs at least two learners who are engaged in discourse around making decisions on the tasks (Fischer, 2016). The content of their discussion will be focused on "what is most important, the sequence of problems in the task, and how to deal with these problems" (Beatty, 2010, p.121). The process of collaboration is usually based on "a semi-autonomous learning situation", in which they will have a question or a problem to be solved through their discourse to make decisions on what is being learnt (p.121). During the process of their collaboration, they negotiate meanings, which offers opportunities to encourage comprehensible input and comprehensible output. Then, this facilitates learners in enriching their vocabulary, promoting their skills, and enhancing their language awareness. Learners have thus acquired languages by talking with others about

learning problems, learning content, learning activities, and solving the learning problems. Computers, although they cannot be active in discourse, can still provide comprehensive input and offer opportunities for encouraging comprehensive output by prompting learners to do tasks and answer questions (Beatty, 2010).

As mentioned earlier, collaboration takes place when learners make decisions on learning materials and learning methods. Learners have also usually been engaged in scaffolded learning, which involves helping each other in promoting their language development. It is necessary to explain the term 'scaffolded' here. Chaudron (1988) has defined scaffolded instruction as a process of discourse that could promote learners' recognition or production of linguistic structures. The importance of this definition focuses on the sequences in the discourse, which means the sentences are constructed in meaningful ways rather than by simple repetition (Chaudron, 1988). There are six elements listed by Ellis (1998), to help teachers create a successive scaffolded instruction:

- . Gain the interest in a task
- . Make the task simplified
- . Keep working on a goal
- . Understand the differences between what has been done and the ideal solution
- . Manage the disappointments while the process of solving problem
- . Show an ideal situation of the actions to be conducted

(Ellis, 1998, p.161)

It is necessary to address here the fact that conversations in scaffolded instruction will be different according to the communication objective. Communication between learners differs from communication between learners and teachers, for example, or a conversation between learners and computers. These communications offer opportunities to negotiate meanings. Scaffolded learning is the result of second language acquisition (Stevens, 1992), which refers to a situation in which learners work with others who can facilitate or guide their learning. WBL can have these functions in that the Internet takes a connective role among learners to facilitate learners' communication. Also, computers could take an active role in responding to learners' enquires and providing comprehensive input. The design of questions in computer programs offers opportunities for comprehensive output.

2.4.2.2 The Benefits of Collaboration

The most significant benefit of collaboration is enhancing learners' awareness and promoting their learning skills. Specifically, Nunan (1992a) has mentioned that collaboration could facilitate learning in a communicative environment. This promotes learners' awareness and the development of skills, for example collaboration helps to support:

- . To better learn and learn about learning
- . To enhance learners' awareness of themselves, of the learning language and of learning
- . To promote the meta-communicative and communicative skills
- . To control the differences between personal needs and group aims both in social aspect and in linguistic aspect
- . To recognise the close link between content and method
- . To realise the activities with making decisions on the real communicative tasks

(Nunan, 1992a, p.3)

Derycke, Smith and Hemery (1995) supplemented Nunan's ideas, showing that collaboration can also facilitate the achievement of the pedagogical objectives. Some

of the objectives can merely be achieved by using the group activities, such as group problem-solving, games, etc.; learners are working together to deal with questions, their language and skills are explored and developed supported by collaboration at the computer (Derycke et al., 1995, p,182). While O'Neil (1994) used the term 'teamwork' instead of 'collaboration', he suggests six skills within the process of language learning:

- . Adaptability: refers to getting access to problems and interacting with them appropriately
- . Coordinating: refers to using group work to finish a task
- . Making decisions: refers to making decisions based on the available information
- . Interpersonal: refers to working with others cooperatively
- . Leadership: refers to the guidance of the group
- . Communication: refers to motivate learners in communicating with their ideas (O'Neil, cited by Beatty, 2010, p,114)

Jacobs (1998) also summarised the benefits of group work in language learning. He mentions that collaboration could promote learners' motivation, enjoyment and independence; also learners could learn how to work with others and could enhance their learning (Jacobs, 1998). Benson (2011) proved that collaborative learning could enhance learners' independence, thus promoting autonomous learning.

2.4.2.3 Collaboration in Online Self-Study: Benefits and Challenges

Specifically, collaboration on computers has benefits in language learning. Some educators worry that working with computers may result in a lack of social interaction. Crook (1994) proved, however, that computers could help learning through the process of social organisation. He observed that when a small group of learners worked at a computer outside of class time to finish a task, their collaboration was more learnerinitiated rather than teacher-initiated. This collaboration could be achieved by email, chat rooms, or other social networking environments (Crook, 1994). Learners usually use their personal computers at home or work in the school library in computer centres, where students can work together online and also enhance their individual skills. Learners state that they like to collaborate, for which Argyle (1991) gives three main reasons: "to improve rewards (marks), to further relationships and to sharing activities or information" (cited by Beatty, 2010, p.121). The first motivation is extrinsic, while the other two kinds of motivation are intrinsic, which shows the desire to help each other. The main reason for students collaborating in online learning is the desire for social contact and to work as part of a team.

One of the benefits of online collaboration is that it involves the sharing of ideas and information. McConnell (1994) sees "making public" as a characteristic of collaborative learning, which has both social and democratic aspects (McConnell, 1994, p.16). Also, collaboration could help learners to open up their innate resources (Gould, 1996). In collaborative communication, a learner has a learning goal to achieve and others will help him to complete the task (Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992). Another important issue is willingness, as efficient collaborative learning is largely dependent on the willingness of learners. If the learners in a group do not want to address their learning, they will end up with nothing to learn and they will turn to learning by themselves (McConnell, 1994), as described earlier (Johnson and Johnson, 1990). It is not enough to be willing to share information or learn in groups; it is required to take part in discussions and form hypotheses. Wegerif and Dawes (1998) highlight the importance of exploratory talk and the necessity of negotiating meanings

in constructivist learning. They distinguished collaboration from the negotiation of meanings, on the basis that the latter includes more cooperative conditions. Moreover, they demonstrated the effectiveness of online learning and the benefits of learners working together. Effective online learning should be promoted by discussion, which involves accepting areas of disagreement (Wegerif and Dawes, 1998). Efficient online collaboration thus needs learner willingness and critical thinking.

Besides the benefits shown above, collaboration also involves challenges, especially in terms of online collaboration. In this subsection, the challenges are described as two main types: the general problems of collaboration in language learning and the problems involved in online collaborative learning. These challenges are not disadvantages of collaboration, however; the issues nonetheless require enhanced collaboration in particular contexts and/or with particular learners. For example, in my study, the collaboration happened through the group discussion (designed as part of the research activity), which influenced students to expand their collaboration online and out of class, where they continued their discussions on learning English (for discussion, see Section 5.2). Since the collaborative learning element is so personalised, it is not easy to achieve in out-of-class self-access environments, but nonetheless in terms of universities in China, students are living in the dormitory together, and several universities (including the ones in this research) have the university door closed during weekdays, so students stay inside the university and their group-living experience supports them to study together. However, the collaboration of students in this research stays at a lower level, necessitating teacher facilitation.

2.4.2.4 The General Problems of Collaboration in Language Learning

Some perspectives on the problems of collaboration in language learning are described by Kinsella and Sherak (1998): a situation where people who have moved to a new country and need to learn its language may feel uncomfortable in collaborative situations; or little input from some learners in a collaborative group; or the teacher's and/or learners' lack of ability to facilitate collaborative activities; or teachers' regard collaborative learning as inefficient and time-consuming; or teachers feel insecure about achieving predetermined outcomes, which is a concern for many teachers. Beatty (2010) mentioned it in relation to his working experiences in Beijing (1989-1992), where the teachers were unwilling to use small groups or activities in case some questions emerged that they could not answer, and that they would risk losing 'face' in front of their students. This shows that collaborative skills need not only to focus on learners, but also teacher training, to include how to facilitate collaboration. Johnson and Johnson (1990) listed three types of learning goals that they suggested learners needed to learn cooperative skills. Some learners may innately acquire these skills or may have gained them from previous experiences, and the learners in collaboration activities will guide others in collaboration. Sometimes learners will be helped by teachers, if they have difficulties in finishing the tasks. Problems relating to social skills in discourse will attract learners' and teachers' attention and their resolution will probably benefit their learning (Breen, 1998). In other words, the challenges associated with collaboration may provide both learners and teachers with opportunities to improve their learning.

2.4.2.5 The Problems of Collaboration in Online Learning

Some problems with collaboration in online learning have been identified by teachers using this strategy. The learners are not necessarily told the aim, but they benefit from the activities. Learners may be tasked with playing an online game, for example, while the teacher focuses on the game's content. Sharan and Shachar delineated nine strategies which need to be applied in collaborative learning (1988):

- . Explaining while showing the examples
- . Generalising
- . Showing a specific example
- . Showing the ideas in a structured way
- . Managing ideas
- . Showing the hypotheses
- . Repeating ideas
- . Expanding ideas
- . Taking a stand

(Sharan and Shachar, 1988, p. 60)

These nine points present positive aspects of collaborative online learning; however, there can be have negative aspects as well because the aims and goals are different between teachers and learners. There are some influences on collaboration, for example:

- . Learners' characteristics may influence collaboration in a contradictory situation
- . The aims of the program may not motivate collaboration
- . The method may be too difficult for learners to apply
- . The content may discourage collaboration

(Beatty, 2010, p.133)

These factors challenge collaborative learning. Also, the willingness to collaborate, as mentioned before, also influences collaboration in online learning (McConnell, 1994).
Wegerif and Dawes (1998) summarise the challenges of collaborative learning in eight aspects:

- . One learner in a group acting as a leader, using the keyboard, reading the questions from the screen to ask questions to others but only allowing quick responses, some members saying only Yes or No.
- . Learners with good keyboard skills could not bear waiting for those who typed information slowly;
- . Less confident learners contribute little;
- . If friends work together they tend to agree with each other, and disagree with others' ideas or suggestions, which can exclude or upset them;
- . Communication content is often related to learner friendships;
- . Discussion mainly focuses on online arrangements rather than the learning task;
- . Discussion become relaxed and lost focus on the task.

(Wegerif and Dawes, 1998, p.11)

These challenges can take place in online learning; however, these are not necessarily disadvantages of collaboration, as they can be resolved to some degree.

In summary, the previous subsections demonstrated the benefits and challenges of collaboration in language learning and considered whether and how collaboration can enhance learning, particularly from the perspective of constructivists, as described in subsection 2.3.4, collaboration achieves the negotiation of meanings by providing communication/interaction opportunities (Fischer, 2016). It more relates to constructivism and can be explained by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), as it stresses the "gap between what individuals can do by themselves [...] and what they can do in collaboration" (Stahl, 2013, p. 78). Learners adapt what they have acquired to the type of discourse when communicating with other learners. The best way of promoting language learning with websites is therefore for the websites to be used to provide opportunities to adapt personalised discourses. This has been achieved not only through the design of software, but also through

collaborative learning activities that implicitly or explicitly motivate learners to adopt different types of discourses (Wang and Zhang, 2018). In recent years, along with the development of web 2.0, this approach increases a lot of opportunities for learners to communicate and interact with learning activities via websites, as well as with other people, as the students in this research for example. Namely, socio-technical environments fostering collaboration are facilitated by the Internet, and they support participants to share information, deal with problems and construct knowledge when they collaborate with others (Fischer, 2016). Based on the ideas above, this research explores the needs and opportunities for collaboration that have emerged from students' English learning experience during the research conducted by specific application domains (including Baidu cloud, forums, blog, and chatroom) and identifies its challenges grounded in findings (see Section 5.2).

2.4.3 Reflection on the Learning Process Outside of Class

Reflection, which refers to a mental process, is also like a construct of thinking; people may use this to achieve their goals or simply 'be reflective' and then gain an unexpected outcome (Moon, 2006). Since the late 1990s, the theory of reflection has been applied in the area of education, usually related to students' reflective writings such as diaries or reflective reports. There is evidence that learning behaviour can change as a result of the reflective process. In terms of learning, it mentioned by Mezirow (2000) as "how to negotiate and act upon our own purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

In the academic context, reflection/reflective learning or reflective writing is usually a conscious activity and based on a purpose, with a specified learning outcome. It may be reflective before or is the outcome of the reflection. The outcome and its process are usually reflected in written form, which can be seen by others, as follows:

- The practices within reflection help people understand the relationships between what they do (which can be called practices). Reflection is connected to practice, which aims to articulate what they are really doing. Then, people can develop ideas and progress actions via reflection (Moon, 2013).
- Reflective practices help people understand the links between emotions, ideas and actions. That is, the emotion will influence the way of thinking and then affect actual behaviours (Moon, 2013).
 - Reflection can also be described as 'organised' or structured thought, such as "What might you think about? How do you feel about this? And how are you dealing with these feelings?" The actual work is influenced and guided by the emotions and the context; for example, a school environment (Ghaye, 2011).
 - There are several kinds of reflections. Looking backwards helps one to understand practice. It is important to look back on experiences and learn from them. However, this is limited to what people can remember. It is also significant to reflect here and now; to be reflective not only on what has happened, but also on what is happening in the present (Ghaye, 2011).
- During the process of reflection, it is not necessary to constantly focus on the problems within the experiences. It is important to reflect on one's own strengths. That is, positive reflection needs to be identified and it helps people to develop what they can do instead of what they cannot. Paying attention to the successful

aspects of experiences helps people to avoid negative influences during reflection (Moon, 2013).

Reflection can occur in many ways. For example, by self-questioning, using questions such as "What went well?" or "What went wrong" (McMillan and Weyers, 2013).

It can be concluded that providing learners with opportunities for reflection within a learning environment helps them form abstract conceptualisations and transfer knowledge to future situations (Taylor, 2017). It helps learners critically analyse their own performance in order to make improvements in English learning, which may apply in the future. The strategies that have been found within literature to promote reflection, include social interaction, providing feedback and promoting spontaneous reflection (Stoner and Cennamo, 2018). However, there is little guidance within the literature on how reflection is best incorporated to support learners in a learning environment (Stoner and Cennamo, 2018).

Accordingly, the idea of reflective learning in China has been applied a very long time ago. As Confucius said :学而不思则罔, 思而不学则殆 (translation: Learning without reasoning leads to confusion, thinking without learning is wasted effort). Namely, learning and thinking must be closely related to acquire knowledge. It is a process of 'questioning-solutions-sharing reflections-improvement' (Liu, 2017, p. 414). The research conducted on the topic of reflection in China mostly focuses on teachers and their reflective teaching, with few studies emphasising the students' reflection (Liu, 2017), a gap this study helps to fill, with its focus on students' reflection, students review the learning materials and learning methods and gain benefits from online programs (e.g. English learning websites). When they browse the web, they need to make decisions on the content they want to learn, then understand what the tasks will give them in terms of learning. Learners therefore need to consider their ideas about learning and what has motivated them, or what goals they have for their learning. Websites provide a learning environment for learners to practise and develop their learning skills, thus acquiring the language. This is a reflective process, through which they link ideas together, restructuring them and finally evaluating their learning process. Learning starts from simple memorisation to constructing and developing ideas, then to evaluation and reflection.

Reflection is also a learning process to construct meanings/perceptions of new and revised interpretations, collected from experiences (Taylor and Cranton, 2012). It is therefore fundamental to the learning process in exploring and validating beliefs, as well as making informed decisions (Taylor, 2017). For the students in this research, the findings show that their reflection supports their perception development (see Section 5.3).

2.4.4 Autonomous Learning Outside of the Classroom

The main characteristic of 'autonomy' in the context of my research is personal responsibility in the learning approach. It can manifest in different ways and at different degrees. Cotterall (1995) has defined autonomy as "the extent to which learners demonstrate the ability to use a set of tactics for taking control of their learning" (Cotterall, 1995, p.195). This set of tactics includes tactics for setting learning goals, selecting learning tasks and materials, planning practice, and evaluating learning progress. Those all constitute the research agenda for students'

English learning experiences outside of classroom settings. Students show these tactics to various degrees, which can be attributed to their different beliefs about learning. Also, it has been argued by Cotterall that it is necessary to justify students' readiness for changes in beliefs and behaviour before fostering autonomy (Cotterall, 1995). This research aims to investigate students' English learning practices on websites outside of class time to identify their learning activities, which may contribute to or hinder the development of their autonomous English learning out of class.

2.4.4.1 Definition of 'Learner Autonomy'

Learner autonomy refers to the capacity to take control of one's learning (Benson, 2011). It manifests in individual learner differences (Reinders, 2000, Jiménez Raya and Lamb, 2003). The original term 'learner autonomy' first entered the field of language teaching in the Council of Europe's Modern Language Project, established in 1971 (Benson, 2011). During this project, the Centre for Research and Applications in Language Teaching (CRAPEL) at the University of Nancy, France, was set up. Consequently, research on autonomy became a central topic in the language teaching field. The founder of CRAPEL, Yves Châlon, is considered to be the father of autonomy in language learning. After his death in 1972, however, Henri Holec became the new director of CRAPEL. His contribution to the field cannot be underestimated. In 1976, for instance, he led a seminar at the University of Cambridge to disseminate ideas about autonomy that has become a key early document underpinning the approach (Holec, 1981). When considering a definition of learner autonomy, it is

necessary to state Holec's concept, as it is fundamental and the most frequently cited. In Holec's (1981) report to the Council of Europe, autonomy is regarded as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (p.3). As such, Holec's definition of autonomy is as follows:

To take charge of one's own learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e.:

determining the objectives;

defining the contents and progressions;

selecting methods and techniques to be used;

monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.);

evaluating what has been acquired.

Holec and Council of Europe (1981, p.3)

Holec's definition centred on taking responsibility for learning and that learners need to make decisions during the learning process according to their needs. With the development of this subject, there have been various iterations and definitions seeking to expand on the central concept. Little (1991) elaborated on the definition of autonomy by referring to a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action (Little, 1991). It is necessary that learners develop a particular kind of psychological relationship to the process and the content of their learning. This capacity is not only shown in how the learner learns, but is also presented in the way they transfer what has been learned to wider contexts (Little, 1991).

The two definitions by Holec and Little effectively express the nature of autonomy. Specifically, autonomy is an individual capacity. Learners should set their own personal learning goals in accordance with their own learning needs. Moreover, Dickinson (1987) has also defined autonomy as "the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions" (p.11). In his definition, he employs the term 'full autonomy' to explain that learners are fully independent from teachers, institutions, or specially prepared materials. They take full responsibility for making their own decisions. Autonomy does not necessarily mean that learning is absolutely independent of a teacher's guidance, however. It also does not mean that in class, teachers will do nothing and learners get along with everything as best as they can (Little, 1990). Successful language learning is both individual and collaborative. Dickinson (1995) points out that for full autonomy to be present, it is not necessary that learners should be fully independent or working alone (Benson, 2011). It is also argued that autonomy should be recognised principally according to three aspects in which a learner can take control: "learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content" (Benson, 2011, p.92). 'Learning management' means controlling behaviours, which relates to the planning, organisation, and evaluation of learning, and is classified into two aspects: self-directed learning and learning strategies. 'Cognitive processes' refers to psychological factors such as attention, reflection, and metacognitive knowledge, which will be explained in detail later. Moreover, taking control over learning content is a part of learning management, focusing on the 'what' and 'why' aspects of language learning (Benson, 2011). The process of WBL out of class allows students to take responsibility for, and control of, their study. Students shape their learning according to established learning goals, personal needs, preferred learning methods, and appropriate learning levels, etc. In conclusion, autonomous learners tend to be more motivated, more aware, and more proactive (Lamb and

Reinders, 2005). It is a modern development that informs and enables management of English learning, cognitive processes, and English learning content.

In the literature on autonomy, it is suggested that taking control of the cognitive process will help individuals to guide their learning. This process relies on the development of metacognitive knowledge (Lamb, 2006a), which, along with metacognitive skills, constitutes the metacognition defined by Wenden as the knowledge of knowledge (1998). There is a difference between metacognitive knowledge and skills: knowledge refers to personal knowledge (knowledge of the learner itself); task knowledge (knowledge of the learning task); and strategic knowledge (knowledge of the learning strategies that are selected to use for tasks) (Flavell, 1979). Metacognitive skills are general skills that are used in managing or guiding learning. That is to say, metacognitive skills abide in the aspects of planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning (Wenden, 1998). Also, Wenden (1998) restated the concept of task knowledge as being of particular importance, describing task knowledge as understanding the purposes and demands of a task. Decisions about a learning task are interrelated with decisions on learning content; learning place and time; learning strategy selection, and evaluation standards. 'Metacognition' therefore outlines the procedure by which metacognitive knowledge is deployed.

2.4.5 Affordances and Shortcomings of Language Learning with Websites Outof-Class

Van Lier's (2000) discussion of the notion of 'affordance' has been defined as "the opportunities for learning or interaction provided by a context in relation to the

abilities of the learner" (Van Lier, 2000, p.253). This idea has focused on the interplay between a learner's capabilities and the learning environment. Language learning based on websites outside of the classroom provides access to real people and real content, which could support students to practice their English skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. It also has shortcomings, however; for example, how to maintain learning motivation during the process, how to control the quality of learning activities and resources, and whether students are over-reliant on some skills over others. This is discussed further in the data analysis section, see subsection 4.4.2.

2.4.6 Summary of This Section

This section has expanded the section on web-based learning and narrowed down the focus of this research. This research concentrates on students' learning process when using websites outside of class to further understand out-of-class learning. Meanwhile, this section has elaborated on three themes: collaboration, reflection, and autonomy, which have been reflected in this research in students' English learning processes on websites outside of class to support their learning development. As Figure 2.4 shows, TEFL pedagogy supports designing learning activities on websites, which provide the learning opportunities, but the reasons for what students choose and why students choose to do or not do particular activities are affected by their perceptions.



Figure 2.4: The interrelationship among pedagogy, activities and perceptions

2.5 Students' Perceptions



Figure 2.5: The contents of perceptions of learning English in this research

In this research, students' perceptions refer to their beliefs about learning English and their motivation; students' motivation is extending beliefs in their perception (see Figure 2.5). Learner beliefs and motivation are correlated, which has been shown by Mori (Mori, 1999). 'Beliefs' have been defined in a number of ways, but there is general agreement that they are "propositions individuals consider to be true and which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, and provide a basis for action" (Borg, 2011, p. 370). It has also been influenced by various factors, such as context (Lai, 2013), individual background and learning experiences (Stockwell, 2013). Motivation, in turn, has been regarded as the expanded ideas of learner beliefs with more specific and detailed framework (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013). These two factors are correlated, as shown from this research, by the students' English learning experiences.

2.5.1 Learner Beliefs

This research looks at students' English learning journeys, especially in web-based English language learning outside of class, and English as a foreign language (Moe, 2016) in China. The evidence shown through real-life observation is, however, that even if language learners can be shown to follow a similar developmental route, there are still differences in the rate of their learning and in their eventual success levels (Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2013). These differences must be due to their individual differences (Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2013), such as learner beliefs, which is one of the individual difference (ID) variables in language learning. Dörnyei (2005) explains that ID includes the dimensions of enduring personal characteristics, which may differ by various degrees. Despite ID's theoretical premise that one learner is different from another, ID research usually pays little attention to a particular individual, focusing instead on the shared characteristics of particular types of individuals (Dörnyei, 2005). Ushioda (2009) explains the need to take a person-incontext relational view of these multiple contextual elements (Ushioda, 2009). Among several factors in individual learner differences, this research looks at learners' beliefs. Learners may have considerably varied beliefs about language and language learning. These beliefs are assumed to have a probable influence on the process and outcome of learning (Ellis, 2008).

Why are learners' beliefs so important in language learning? It is because they have a significant influence on learning behaviour. In other words, learning behaviours are guided by beliefs, which means that no matter whether learners are in an autonomous learning mode or not, they will have a particular set of beliefs or behaviours to support this mode. Learners' beliefs can either promote or hinder the development of their autonomy (Cotterall, 1995). The problem is that "erroneous beliefs about language learning may lead to the deployment of less effective strategies" (Horwitz, 1987, p.126), and then somebody will be needed to correct the erroneous beliefs. If these erroneous beliefs are not modified, the learner's progress will be impeded (Ellis, 2008). However, Ellis also stated that the relationship between beliefs and learning/proficiency is weak. Actually, there is no guarantee that learners will always act based on their particular beliefs. They may be influenced by situational constraints which conflict with other strongly held beliefs or personal reasons. If learners' beliefs have an influence on learning, it is possible that they do so indirectly, by impacting on the kinds of learning strategies learners employ (Ellis, 2008).

In the first attempt to investigate learners' beliefs by Horwitz in 1987, groups of learners were given a BALLI (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory) questionnaire. The responses were analysed and categorised into five areas: "(1) the difficulty of language learning; (2) aptitude for language learning; (3) the nature of language learning; (4) learning and communication strategies; and (5) motivation and expectations" (Horwitz, 1987, p.556-577). Wenden (1987) categorised the beliefs of 25 adults in a part-time class at an American university into: "(1) use of the language (for example, the importance of 'learning in a natural way'); (2) beliefs relating to learning about the language (for example, the importance of learning grammar and vocabulary); and (3) the importance of personal factors (i.e. beliefs about the feelings that facilitate or inhibit learning, self-concept, and aptitude for learning)" (Wenden, 1987, p.119-129). Both of these studies identified very common learner beliefs. Later, Wenden attempted to link the beliefs to metacognitive knowledge, instead of simply listing them. The metacognitive approach regards the learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning as 'theories in action' (Wenden, 1999, p.435-411), a conclusion she arrived at as a result of analysing the contents of learners' self-reports and interviews.

As for what determines learners' beliefs about language learning, finding the answer to this question has meant returning to the report by Little and Singleton (1990), who believed that learners' prior language learning experiences had an impact on the formation of attitudes to language learning. Some students said they preferred to learn by repeating orally and writing down the production activities, for example which was a reflection of their previous instructional experiences. Also, they stated that learners' beliefs could be influenced by culture (Little and Singleton, 1990). Horwitz (1999) demonstrated, however, that there is little evidence to show that cultural background impacts on learners' beliefs in the review of her research on second language learners' beliefs. According to Gardener (1988), cultural beliefs also involve the role of the social environment, as shaped by individuals. Riley (1989) indicated that beliefs about language learning are culture-specific. These all imply that beliefs are not only a kind of cognitive concept, but also social constructs born out of experiences (Gardner, 1985,1988). To get to know learners' beliefs is thus to understand their world.

This research considers learners' beliefs in the following categories: the nature of language learning; the difficulty of language learning; language learning experiences; and motivations. The first research question asks about the learners' beliefs via a reflective report and interviews. Specifically, it will be categorised into several subquestions:

- What are their ideas about learning English?
- How have they learned English over the years?

2.5.1.1 Definition of Beliefs

It is difficult to define beliefs; a chronological view of attempts to do this shows:

. In 1986, Wenden stated that beliefs referred to 'metacognitive knowledge' and 'beliefs' in tandem. 'Metacognitive knowledge' means "the stable, statable although sometimes incorrect knowledge that learners have acquired about language, learning and the language learning process, and to knowledge or concepts about language learning or learner beliefs. There are three kinds: person, task and strategic knowledge" (Wenden, 1986, p.163); and "beliefs, they are

opinions which are based on experience and the opinions of respected others, which influence the way they (student) act" (Wenden, 1986, p.205).

- In 1988 Gardener described 'cultural beliefs' thus: "the expectations in the minds of teachers, parents and students concerning the entire second language acquisition task" (Gardener, 1988, p.110).
- In 1995, Barcelos used the phrase "culture of learning language" to explain how "Learners' intuitive implicit (or explicit) knowledge is made of beliefs, myths, cultural assumptions and ideals about how to learn languages. This knowledge, according to learner age and social economic level, is based on their previous educational experience, previous (and present) readings about language learning and contact with other people, like family, friends, relatives, teachers and so forth" (Barcelos, 1995, p.40).
- . In the same year (1995), Miller and Ginsberg described "Folk linguistic theories of learning": "They are the ideas that students have about language and language learning" (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995, p.294).
- . In 1996, Cortazzi and Jin saw beliefs as "culture of learning" focused on "the cultural aspects of teaching and learning; what people believe about 'normal' and 'good' learning activities and processes, where such beliefs have a cultural origin" (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996, p.230).

. In 1997, Riley referred to beliefs as a "learning culture" involving "a set of representations, beliefs and values related to learning that directly influence (students') learning behaviour" (Riley, 1997, p.122).

These different terms above share some common understandings. Firstly, all emphasise that beliefs refer to the nature of language and language learning; secondly, some definitions focus on the cultural and social aspects of learners' beliefs (such as Barcelos, 1995; and Cortazzi and Jin, 1996). They stressed that beliefs are multidimensional, including not only a cognitive dimension but also a social dimension, since people are born into interactions with others and/or with their environment. By looking at the folk linguistic theories of language learning, Miller and Ginsberg (1995) suggest that it would help learners to frame and interpret experience.

Currently, beliefs 'have already gained a strong foothold in the field of Applied Linguistics over the past few years: the discursive, sociocultural/dialogical, affective, and complexity/ecological approaches' (Kalaja, Barcelos, and Aro, 2018, p.222-237). More specifically,

- . Kalaja (2016a), carried out a longitudinal project, which was about university students holding beliefs about the two languages (mother-tongue and English) and their identities (Kalaja, 2016a).
- . Kalaja (2016b) came up with the idea, that perceptions are closely related to motivation (Dörnyei and Kubanyiova, 2014).
- Aro's (2016) studies show the possibilities of truly longitudinal research of viewing beliefs in relation to "L2 learner action, or agency" (Aro, 2016a-2016b, p.7).

. Aragão's studies (2011) (and a recent review by Barcelos, 2015) tends to explain "a close interrelationship between beliefs and emotions" (Aragão, 2015, p.8).

Learner beliefs are a result of the complexity turn (e.g., Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008), which are not isolated. Whether the beliefs are right or wrong, learner's self-concept are constituted (Mercer, Ryan, and Williams, 2012, p. 6; Mercer, 2012, p. 11), as two dimensions: cognitive and affective, which need to be considered on both internal (motivation, attitude and personal experience) and external factors (context of learning, others' influence, including teacher or parents or classmates) (Kalaja, Barcelos, and Aro, 2018, p.222-237). In my study, the relationship between students' beliefs incorporated with motivation, and their learning activities is weaved together, , in doing this research, to explain what they are and how they develop their beliefs.

2.5.1.2 Contextual Approach

Beliefs can roughly be divided into three kinds: normative, metacognitive and contextual. 'Normative beliefs' have been recognised as the opposite of knowledge and are investigated in a discrete way. Metacognitive beliefs have also been regarded as metacognitive knowledge and are usually investigated through interviews, giving learners the opportunity to talk about their experiences in their own words. Kalaja (1995) suggested that both of these approaches indicate mental traits (Kalaja, 1995). This is incomplete, however, because the definition of 'beliefs' also requires a social aspect. Investigations of beliefs therefore need broader definitions of multiple understandings of the term and an awareness of the influences those beliefs will probably play in learning experiences. Both the normative and metacognitive

perspectives do not consider the experienced base of beliefs. That is, they ignore the beliefs in learners' own terms; regard beliefs as a fixed, a priori construct; and ignore the social contexts of beliefs.

Beliefs are not structured or linear but complex and embedded within sets of beliefs, forming a multi-layered web of relationships. Compared to these two approaches, the contextual approach is to investigate beliefs in the social context. Several researchers have suggested that beliefs are shaped by students' cultural backgrounds and social contexts (for example: Barcelos, 1995 and Riley, 1997). Several studies have investigated beliefs from different perspectives, defining beliefs variously based on different theoretical frameworks, different types of data collected, and different analytical methods used. They all aim, however, to facilitate a better understanding of beliefs instead of generalising them. They demonstrate the existence of beliefs within learners' contexts. They took the learners' emic perspectives into account to use multiple methods to collect the data. Within this approach, the basic idea is to combine different methods to interpret learners' beliefs within the context. These different studies do not use questionnaires, instead employing a variety of methods such as diaries, reflective reports, narratives, and discourse analysis. This kind of research usually includes methods grounded in learners' own perspectives and their interpretative meanings. It is hence important to understand the contexts in which learners construct their experiences. Within this approach, studies indicate that beliefs are contextual, dynamic, and social, which is why my study focuses both on current beliefs and prior experiences of English language learning. Crucially, beliefs are referred to as part of students' experiences and are interrelated with the environment. This environment does not mean the physical space only, but also refers to the

interactions between human beings and the wider world (Barcelos, 2000). In addition, White (1999) also points out that there are connections between learners' beliefs and how they develop over time. Beliefs are thus recognised as "situationally conditioned" (Sakui and Gaies, 1999, p.473) and "relational and responsive to context" (Benson and Lor, 1999, p.459).

2.5.1.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of the Contextual Approach

The contextual approach describes a definition of beliefs as contextual, dynamic and social. Because it employs different kinds of methods to understand beliefs, it generates diverse forms of data. All are qualitative and interpretative, however. Additionally, this approach shows a much more positive view of learners than the other two approaches (the normative and metacognitive approaches), by describing the learners as social beings interacting in the environment. This approach also has some limits, however, such as being time-consuming. Although this approach tries to research beliefs in conjunction with learners' actions, more studies need to be pursued to advance the understanding of beliefs, and there is little knowledge about how students understand the world in which they live.

2.5.1.4 Emerging Beliefs

Another type of belief needs to be addressed, namely emerging beliefs. Compared to stable beliefs, emerging beliefs are ideas that a learner holds in mind and brings to learning. That is, some emerging beliefs arise during learning; a learner perceives them as new but their learning activities will be influenced by them. Some emerging beliefs will repeatedly act upon the learning activities and may then become an integral part of a learner's belief system (Barcelos, 2000). This means that these emerging beliefs change to stable beliefs over time, in a specific context, and for a specific learner. On the other hand, if the emerging beliefs are less frequently acted upon in fewer activities, some beliefs can nevertheless be recognised as stable for a specific learner for a specific period of time. Even if they are infrequently used, they can still become an integral part of a learner's belief system (Mercer, 2011).

To conclude, learner beliefs are part of learners' perceptions constructed with their experiences (Dewey, 1938; Kalaja, 1995; Barcelos, 2000). Beliefs change along with experiences, since they are social, dynamic and contextual. Experiences affect beliefs and beliefs also cause experiences (Yang, 1992). According to Hosenfeld (2002), beliefs are "stable/unstable, emerging/fading away, used/unused, new/old, idiosyncratic/universal, evolving/unchanging, recurrent/infrequent" (Hosenfeld, 2002, p.37-54).

2.5.2 Motivation

Generally speaking, 'motivation' concerns human behaviour as choices, involving persistence and expanded effort. In other words, motivation is responsible for "why people decide to do something; how long they are willing to sustain the activity; and how hard they are going to pursue it" (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013, p.4). There are two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation (IM) refers to managing behaviours that are performed for their own satisfaction and pleasure; for example, doing something in terms of satisfying the curiosity. Extrinsic motivation (EM) deals with behaviours performed in order to gain some external benefit, such as to get an extrinsic reward like a higher score or to avoid losing face or receiving punishment. There is a third type of motivation, amotivation (AM), which refers to the lack of any kind of motivation, either intrinsic or extrinsic.

Extrinsic motivation has tended to be regarded as something that can influence intrinsic motivation. Some studies have confirmed that learners will lose their intrinsic motivation in an activity if they have to do it to achieve some external requirement (e.g. Lepper and Greene, 1978). Not all studies have found this negative relationship, however. Deci and Ryan (1985; see also Ryan and Deci, 2000), for instance, use self-determination theory (SDT) to replace the intrinsic and extrinsic classification. According to SDT, extrinsic motivation can be seen as a continuum representing different degrees of external control or internal regulation (such as self-determination), according to how internalised these extrinsic goals are. These extrinsic goals are internalised with people's self-concept. The personal value of being able to speak a particular language could, for example, co-exist with the intrinsic regulation of motivation, such as the enjoyment of learning a particular language.

The motivation to learn a foreign language is unique and can be divided into three stages from a historical overview: "the social psychological period, the cognitive-situated period, and the process-oriented period" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.40-69). The following sub-sections describe these three periods, as well as exploring the current social dynamic perspective to develop a framework for explaining motivation.

2.5.2.1 Social Psychological Perspective

The main social psychologist who focused on this period is Robert Gardner. He worked with his colleague in Canada to research second languages as communicating factors between different communities. He considered the motivations for learning other languages to be a main affective factor in terms of enhancing or hindering intercultural communication and affiliation. The key idea in this period of time was that individuals' L2 attitudes, their L2 community and their ethnocentric orientation have a direct effect on second language learning behaviour (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). In 1985, Gardner presented a theory of L2 motivation, which contains three aspects: "motivational intensity or effort, desire to learn the language, and attitudes towards learning the language" (cited by Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013, p.41), believing that motivation has been seen as a kind of central mental 'engine' or 'energy-centre' which includes effort, will, and task enjoyment (p.41). This is a key assumption that Gardner made about the relationship between motivation and orientation ('goal'). The function of a goal is to enhance motivation and direct it to several sub-goals. Although the 'orientation' does not appear in the motivation, its function is labelled as 'integrative' and 'instrumental', which is associated with Gardner's work. The integrative motive (as shown in Figure 2.6) is referred to as the "motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings towards the community that speaks the language" (cited by Dörnyei and Ushioda, p.41). The 'integrative' aspect has been critically debated over the years, however (Dörnyei, 1994).



Figure 2.6: Gardner's conceptualisation of the integrative motive (Gardner, 1985, cited by Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013, p.43)

Figure 2.6 illustrates five aspects concerning motivation by Gardner (1985). While he argued the goal could not be used to measure for motivation, "the effortful behaviour, a desire to attain the goal, and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question" (Gardner, 1985, p. 50), are reflected from second language learning and can be used to access motivation (Semaan and Yamazaki, 2015). Dörnyei (2003) argued against Gardner's idea of integrativeness, which was a broad concept that could not explain the motivation at micro level, such as the extent to which motivation is situated, diverse to each person in the context of second language learning (Dörnyei, 2003). The students' motivations in this research are diverse and to varying degrees as well, which could not be represented broadly. The elements within Gardner's framework, as Figure 2.6 shows, however, provide a starting point from which to begin organising students' ideas, which then need to be further analysed. In addition, the orientation,

students' learning goals for example, constitutes one aspect used to explain the motivation in this study.

2.5.2.2 Cognitive-Situated Period

Perspectives on L2 motivation were further developed in the 1970s and 1980s. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, a number of researchers (e.g. Brown, 1990; Julkunen, 1989; Skehan, 1989, cited by Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013), believed that a new and alternative research perspective was needed to regenerate the field. A seminal article published in 1991 by Crookes and Schmidt criticised the viewpoints in the social psychological period and reopened this research area. These ideas indicate a change in the 1990s, which Dörnyei (2005) regarded as the cognitive-situated period of L2 motivation. This period has two main interrelated perspectives:

- 1. It is necessary to combine language motivation research with the cognitive revolution in mainstream motivational psychology.
- 2. It is necessary to focus on language learning instead of on the views of ethnolinguistic communities and learners' attitudes, and to pay attention to the analysis of motivation in specific learning contexts.

(Cited by Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013)

These two ideas focused attention more closely on motivation in the classroom setting and teachers, which was of less concern before. This period tends to integrate existing theoretical frameworks with cognitive ideas. These ideas were published in The Modern Language Journal in 1994 (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013)

• Tremblay and Gardner's Model of L2 Motivation

This model of L2 motivation (Figure 2.7) shows an example of this shift to adopting a wider view of motivation. It includes three concepts: language attitudes \rightarrow motivational behaviour \rightarrow achievement, while expectancy-value and goal theories are regarded as mediating variables between attitudes and behaviour (see Figure 2.7).



Figure 2.7: Tremblay and Gardner's (1995) model of L2 motivation

• Dörnyei's Framework of L2 Motivation

One of the most influential frameworks of L2 motivation was Dörnyei's (1994a), which focused on concepts from mainstream psychology which were applied to the language learning setting (see Table 2.5).

Language Level	Integrative motivational subsystem
	Instrumental motivational subsystem

Table 2.5: Dörnyei's framework of L2 motivation (Dörnyei, 1994, p.280)

Learner Level	Need for achievement
	Self-confidence
	• Language use anxiety
	• Perceived L2 competence
	• Causal attributions
	• Self-efficacy
Learning Situation Level	
Course-specific motivational components	Interest (in the course) Relevance (of the course to one's needs) Expectancy (of success) Satisfaction (one has in the outcome)
Teacher-specific motivational components	 Affiliative motive (to please the teacher) Authority type (controlling vs. autonomy-supporting) Direct socialization of motivation Modeling Task Presentation Feedback
Group-specific motivational components	Goal-oriented Norm and reward system Group cohesiveness

The framework shown in Table 2.5 is an extensive list of motivational components categorised into dimensions. The first two levels, based on Gardner and Clément's theories, were combined with the findings of Dörnyei (1990), thus a third dimension drew on findings reported in educational psychology. The purpose of separating the three motivational levels is to show their independent influence on each other. This means that if two levels of the dimensions are kept similar and the parameters for one level are changed, the level of motivation will probably change. That is, the same learner in the same situation will show a different degree of motivation depending on what the target language is. Meanwhile, if the target language is the same, the same learner's motivation can still change because the learning situation will influence it, for example the teacher. The three levels of motivation thus influence each other independently. More specifically:

- a) The language level refers to the L2, including the culture, community, intellectual and pragmatic values and benefits.
- b) The learner level refers to the learner's individual characteristics, which apply in the learning process.
- c) The learning situation level refers to the situation-specific motives rooted in various aspects of language learning in a classroom setting (Dörnyei, 1994, p.273-284).

This framework is relevant to my study as well, since this learning situation is not necessarily limited to a classroom setting, but may incorporate learning via websites, where the course-specific motivational components, group-specific motivational components and teacher-specific motivational components can be achieved online.

• Williams and Burden's Social Constructivist Model

Another influential framework of L2 motivation is the social constructivist model by Williams and Burden. This model is important to this research, as factors in this framework have been used to explain students' motivation of learning English (see subsection 4.3.2.1). They both believed that motivation is different among individuals, being influenced by social and contextual factors such as cultures, the contexts and the social situations in which people live in and interact. These are all influences on motivation. This approach is called social constructivism (Williams and Burden, 1997). Williams and Burden's framework of L2 motivation (see Table 2.6) lists detailed motivational factors, categorised into internal and external factors.

Table 2.6 Williams and Burden's framework of L2 motivation (Williams and Burden,1997, p.121)

Internal Factors	External Factors
Intrinsic interest of activity:	Significant others:
• arousal of curiosity	• parents
• optimal degree of challenge	• teachers
	• peers
Perceived value of activity:	
• personal relevance	The nature of interaction with
• anticipated value of outcomes	significant others:
• intrinsic value attributed to the	• mediated learning experiences
activity	• nature and amount of feedback
	• rewards
Sense of agency:	• nature and amount of appropriate
• locus of causality	praise

• locus of control RE process and	• punishments, sanctions
outcomes	
• ability to set appropriate goals	The learning environment:
	• comfort
Mastery:	• resources
• feelings of competence	• time of day, week, year
• awareness of developing skills and	 size of class and school
mastery in a chosen area	
• self-efficacy	• class and school ethos
-	
	The broader context:
Self-concept:	• wider family networks
• realistic awareness of personal	
strengths and weaknesses in skills	• local education system
required	• conflicting interests
• personal definitions and	• cultural norms
judgments of success and failure	• societal expectations and
• self-worth concern	attitudes
• learned helplessness	
Attitudes:	
• to language learning in general	
• to the target language	
• to the target language community	
and culture	
Other affective states:	

• confidence	
• anxiety, fear	
Developmental age and stage	
Gender	

These factors are all distilled from reviewing the mainstream literature and representing the trends in motivation development research in the 1990s. In addition, the factors within Table 2.6 are used to explain students' motivation of learning English in this research, although not all are represented.

2.5.2.3 Relevant Motivation Theories in the Field of Psychology

In the cognitive-situated period, perspectives were developed in more complex and extendable ways, including in relation to some theoretical psychological perspectives such as goal theory and self-efficacy theory, which are relevant to this study and thus need to be further explored, as these theories are reflected in students' English learning experiences and affect their motivation development and their decisions when completing activities (for examples, see subsection 4.3.2.3).

Goal Theories

The cognitive concept of 'goal' has largely replaced earlier concepts of 'needs' or 'drives' as the factor providing the promotion for and direction of motivated action. Currently, the research focus is on three areas: goal setting, goal orientation, and goal content and multiplicity.

From the goal setting perspective: in accordance with Locke and Latham's (1990) goal-setting theory, which explains how differences among individuals' performances result from the different goal attributes they have, Locke (1996) summarises the main findings of past research under these five points:

- 1. The more difficult the goal, the greater the achievement.
- 2. The more specific or explicit the goal, the more precisely performance is regulated.
- 3. Goals that are both specific and difficult lead to the highest performance.
- 4. Commitment to goals is most critical when goals are specific and difficult (i.e. when goals are easy or vague it is not hard to get commitment because it does not require much dedication to reach easy goals, and vague goals can be easily redefined to accommodate low performance).
- 5. High commitment to goals is attained when (a) the individual is convinced that the goal is important; and (b) the individual is convinced that the goal is attainable (or that, at least, progress can be made towards it).

(Locke, 1996, p.117-124).

It is important to address the fact that goals are not only outcomes, but also standards for evaluating performance. In the case of language learning, which is a long-lasting and continuous activity except for the final mastery of the foreign language that is the ultimate goal for language learners but not always can be achieved, it is necessary to set some sub-goals, which may be helpful in motivating language learning, recording progress, and providing immediate feedback. The goal-orientation perspective refers to mainly children's learning and their performances in school settings. Based on Ames's (1992) goal orientation theory, it has been categorised into two kinds:

- Mastery orientation, involving the pursuit of 'mastery goals' (also labelled as 'task-involvement goals' or 'learning goals') with the focus on learning the content;
- Performance orientation, involving the pursuit of 'performance goals' (or 'ego-involvement goals') with the focus on demonstrating ability, getting good grades or outdoing other students (Ames, 1992, p.267-271).

To conclude, these two categories show different reasons for achieving activities. 'Mastery orientation' refers to students' own improvement and growth, in the belief that the effort will lead to success. 'Performance orientation' stems from the belief that learning is only to achieve a goal and gain public recognition. More recently, Linnenbrink (2005; see also Linnenbrink and Pintrich, 2001) mentions the importance of the interrelationship between students' personal goal orientations and the context in which they live and perceive this context. This has been explained within the discussion of students' motivation but should also be considered more in future research.

From the goal content and multiplicity perspective, goal-setting theory and goalorientation theory all focus on individual students' performances and achievements. There is another possibility, which is that motivation will be shaped by goals that are not concerned with academic performance and achievement. Wentzel (2000), drawing on Ford's (1992) earlier work on goal content, has explored "what [students] are trying to achieve" (Wentzel, 2000, p.105-115) (i.e. the content of their goals) in a classroom situation. That is, students maybe try to learn, make friends, or please the teacher, avoid punishment or follow classroom rules. Her work illustrates how students' academic achievements are affected not only by academic goals but also social goals, and how social competence may be positively correlated to the development of academic competence (Wentzel, 2000; 2007). These ideas of Wentzel have been further explored with the student data in this research.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Albert Bandura (2001) developed the theory of self-efficacy, which refers to the learner's judgment of their abilities to do specific tasks. This sense of efficacy will decide whether they choose the activities or not, which levels of aspiration, how much effort to put in, and how long to persist. If learners have a low sense of self-efficacy, they will regard difficult tasks as their personal threats, concentrating on the difficulties instead of focusing on looking for solutions to do the task successfully. They hence lose their confidence in their capabilities easily and are likely to give up. In contrast, if learners have a strong sense of self-efficacy, it will support them to deal with difficulties with confidence to complete tasks or face the failure and try to find solutions. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory:

...efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency. People have little motivation to act or to persevere, when they are in the face of difficulties, except that they know they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions (Bandura, 2001, p10).

This does not mean that self-efficacy beliefs directly relate to actual capacities and competence: they exist within a complex process of self-persuasion influenced by several factors, such as "other people's opinions, feedback, evaluation, encouragement

or reinforcement; past experiences and training; observing peers; information about appropriate task strategies" (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013, p.16). From a theoretical perspective, self-efficacy is combined with social learning theory, which Bandura (1986) has developed as social cognitive theory, referring to learning as the interrelationships between personal, behavioural and environmental or social factors (Bandura, 1986). He (2001; 2004) extended the notion of self-efficacy to the collective efficacy of groups (e.g. families, communities, social institutions) working together towards a common goal, thus reflecting parallel moves in the field towards the analysis of motivation as a socially distributed process.

The self-efficacy theory is important in this research, not only in terms of which has been reflected in students' perceptions when they learn English on websites, but also it is used to shape this research: the design of the questions in reflective reports for example, asking students to write about their difficulties in learning English and how they solve them, their reflective writings potentially highlighting their sense of selfefficacy.

Process-Oriented Period

A major challenge for motivation theories is to explain 'impermanent motivation'. That is, to describe the processes of motivation as they happen in time. It is significant when the target interest is to master a foreign language, a sustainable learning process that will take several years to achieve. Many classroom-experienced people know too well that student motivation does not remain constant. Dynamic L2 motivation thus needs to be analysed, based on a process model such as Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998, p.48) Process Model of L2 Motivation. Accordingly, this model has been used as the reference, explaining students' motivation development in this study during the period when this research was conducted, and looks at students' motivation process, before, during, and after this research was conducted.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998; see also Dörnyei, 2000; 2001) developed a process model of L2 motivation. It is the most developed attempt to frame the process dimension. This model is presented as Figure 2.8.


Figure 2.8: Dörnyei and Ottó's (1998, p.48) Process Model of L2 Motivation

To conclude, the framework in Figure 2.8 contains two main dimensions: action sequence and motivational influences. The first 'action sequence' refers to the behavioural process through which initial wishes, hopes and desires are changed into goals, then into intentions, and finally transformed into actions in order to achieve the goals, after which the process requires final evaluation. The second dimension of 'motivational influences' refers to the energy sources and motivational forces that underlie and fuel the behavioural process (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998). Dörnyei and Ottó also divided the behavioural process into three phases, based on Action Control Theory as developed by Heckhausen and Kuhl (1985):

The pre-actional phase comes in line with 'choice motivation', that is, to the selection of goal or task to be pursued. Within this, goal setting, intention formation and the initiation of intention enactment can be distinguished. During this phrase, the main motivational influences are probably various goal properties (e.g. relevance, proximity); values related to the learning process, accomplishments, and results; attitudes to L2; expectancy of success; learner beliefs and strategies; and environmental support or constraints.

The actional phase is driven by executive motivation. During this phrase, the main motivational influences are the learning experience, autonomy, social factors (such as teachers, parents and peers), rewards and goals and use of self-regulatory strategies.

The post-actional phase refers to the evaluation of the completed action outcome and consideration of indications that will be applied in the future. During this phase, students will compare their initial expectations and action plans to how they put them into practice and form causal attributions about the accomplishments. The main processes of this phase, the internal factors and action strategies which will change to future goals, have been developed. The main motivational influences during the postactional phase are attributional factors, self-concept beliefs, and feedback and achievement grades.

This model of L2 motivation and the increasing literature on motivation in relation to autonomy have indicated the significance of developing self-regulatory strategies to sustain the motivation in the learning process.

As with the process model of L2 motivation, which also has some disadvantages, two key shortcomings were stressed by Dörnyei (2005). Firstly, the actional process under focus could be set and confined. This can only be achieved in the form of discrete learning, such as laboratory-based research. However, in real learning situations, it is difficult to predict when a learning process start or ends, or whether multiple learning processes start together, overlapping or interacting with each other. Secondly, this model shows that the actional process happens without any influences from other actional processes that may occur at the same time. That is, this L2 motivation model does not truly reflect the learning process with its dynamic and complex conditions, nor the various personal and social goals that shape a learner's behaviour. Therefore, when doing the analysis, this model has not been used as a whole to explain students' motivation process as planned. But nonetheless, several ideas within this framework have been used to analyse their motivation as well as their interrelationships, even though their motivation is not necessarily following the sequence shown in Figure 2.8.

Current Social Dynamic Perspectives

Concerning the shortcomings of the process model of L2 motivation, a new phase, categorised as the socio-dynamic phase, has been identified. This considers the complexity of the L2 motivational process, its dynamic interaction with multiple dimensions such as internal, social and contextual factors, and the growing body of L2 motivational literature and how it is applied in the modern world. From the process-orientated period of L2 motivation to this new socio-dynamic perspective; this trend is more grounded in social factors and in the analysis of L2 motivation. It is also closely related to other trends in dynamic approaches to understanding language learning (e.g. Dörnyei, 2009b; Ellis and Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Larsen-Freeman and Cameron, 2008a; van Geert, 2008).

The implications of this perspective are demonstrated in the three new conceptual approaches illustrated below.

A Person-in-Context Relational View of Motivation (Ushioda, 2009)

It means the real persons are the focus, who construct their thinking along with their identity and experiences, they are not theoretical abstractions, they have their own background, goals, motives and intentions; also the interaction between this self-reflective intentional agent, and the fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves, and is inherently part of (Ushioda, 2009, p.215-228).

Ushioda's argument is that L2 motivation is based on a relational view among multiple elements, such as contextual factors. She regards the motivation process as an organic one situated in a complex system of interrelativity (Ushioda, 2009). This is important

because the relational view has been used to frame the research questions, with the purpose of presenting why students' perceptions look at not only their current ideas, their reasons/attitudes/orientation in learning English, but also look at their previous English learning experiences. Those factors and the context together build a web of relationship, used to explain students' motivation.

The L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005; 2009)

Dörnyei in 2005 described the L2 Motivational Self System, which involves the integration of his previous research on language motivation. This system employs the psychological theories of 'self', grounded in previous L2 research, but is regarded as a significant reform of previous theories. Researchers in L2 language learning believe that learning a foreign language is not only about learning how to communicate, but can also involve transmitting knowledge in this area to other learners. It has an individualist paradigm link to personal character, becoming a part of personal identity. The 'L2 Motivational Self System' contains three elements:

- a. "Ideal L2 Self, it's one's 'ideal self' in the L2 learning. Specifically speaking, if a student would like to become a person who speaks L2, then the 'ideal L2 self' will be a powerful motivator in learning the L2, because the desire to reduce the distance between the ideal and real selves. Traditionally, integrative and internalised instrumental motives belong to this component.
- b. "Ought-to L2 Self", which is the student he thinks he should be and ought to do and meet the expectations and to avoid possible negative influences and outcomes.
- c. "L2 Learning Experience", which refers to the consideration of the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher, the

curriculum, the peer group or the experience of success) (cited by Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011, p.86).

The 'L2 Motivational Self System' has been used to explain how each participant's attitude to learning English links to their motivation. Figure 4.5 has presented how the L2 motivation self-system was adapted for this research.

Higgins (1987, 1998) distinguished between the 'Ideal L2 Self' and 'Ought-to L2 Self,' the main difference being that the focus shifts towards promotion and prevention. Ideal self-guides have a promotion focus, in line with wishes, advancements, and achievements, which end in an approaching desired state. Self-guides have a prevention focus, which means avoiding negative influences and results based on concepts of responsibility, safety and obligations, and ends with a state without fear.

Two main important theoretical developments have occurred over time; the first comes from the L2 field, the other from mainstream psychology. Specifically, in the L2 field of research in the past decade, Gardener and Lambert's (1959) idea of integrativeness/integrative motivation has become an influential concept, however it has been disproved. Dörnyei (2005) believes that his model is a complement of Gardner's theory, through it is concerned with many more theoretical aspects in different learning situations. The second theoretical development is in research on the self, which is to combine self-theories and motivation theories in the area of psychology. Motivation from a Complex Dynamic Systems perspective (Dörnyei, 2009)

Within the socio-dynamic perspective of L2 motivation research, here the terms 'complex' and 'dynamic' refer to complexity theory. Within this theory, the dynamic system, which refers to a system in which two or more factors are interrelated and change in time, will cause complex behaviour. The 'double pendulum' is regarded as the simplest example of a dynamic system; if you move the upper arm of the pendulum, the lower arm will also move, which may cause disturbance in the whole system. In a dynamic system, the continuous influences among the multiple systems essentially affect the system in a non-linear way and could potentially change the whole system (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011). Due to its complexity, qualitative exploratory research should be adopted in this area. Investigating students' self-reports could also identify some traits involved in motivation.

Based on the literature discussed above, my research is qualitative and explores the L2 motivation via data from students' self-reports (see reflective reports) and final interviews. I believe the ideas of constructivism, where students construct their ideas within their interactions with others and environments, are most relevant to my research. Therefore, their perceptions are complex, dynamic and nonlinear, relating to both internal and external factors. The frameworks of motivation illustrated in this section are all relevant to this study, and a fundamental basis for analysis. However, there is no one framework which was specifically and precisely adopted in my research. used to explain students' motivation; but nonetheless the literatures/theories/ideas within frameworks support my data analysis, guide me to code the data and explain students' ideas (for coding, see Table 3.9).

2.5.3 Summary of This Section

This section was focused on students' perceptions with a review of the literature on learner beliefs and motivation. This has provided theoretical support for this research focus on investigating students' perceptions and interpreting their perceptions concerning their English experiences.

2.6 Summary of This Chapter

This chapter has critically reviewed the literature on the main concepts and presented a relational theoretical framework, which helps to justify the theoretical focus of this research in relation to the literature. It has four main sections, which constitute the research focus: EFL in China, web-based learning, out-of-class learning, and students' perceptions, such as their learning beliefs and motivation. Figure 2.9 shows the interrelationships of the four main areas of this research.



Figure 2.9: The interrelationships among the sections in literature review

The next chapter looks at the principles of designing this research from the perspective of methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this research, a qualitative case study has been adopted as the main approach, which aims to gather data and bring a better understanding of the relevant phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Namely, the case refers to a group of (19) EFL students' perceptions of learning English at universities in China, while the unit of analysis is each individual participant. On the basis of Stake's (2005) explanations on distinguishing three types of case study, the intrinsic, the instrumental, and the collective (Stake, 2005): an intrinsic case study refers to a researcher examining the case "for its own sake"; an instrumental case study refers to the researcher selecting a small group of participants in order to "examine a certain pattern of behaviour", for example, how tertiary level students learn English, as in this study. Finally, a collective case study refers to the researcher coordinating data "from several different sources", such as schools or individuals (p.433). The instrumental and collective case studies might allow for the generalisation of findings to a bigger population, whereas the intrinsic case study is more linked to solving the specific problem of an individual case (Stake, 2005). Accordingly, the case of this research is regarded as a kind of instrumental case study, which focuses on a group of participants (19) to explore their perceptions on learning English outside of class.

This study aims to answer three main questions:

- I. What are the learning perceptions among the Chinese students involved in the study?
 - What are their ideas about learning English?
 - Why are they learning English?
 - How have they learned English over the years?
- II. How do these students learn English outside of class in web-based environments (English learning websites)?
 - What do they actually do and why?
 - What problems do learners face, especially when learning via English learning websites outside of class? What makes them persist or give up? How do they overcome problems?
- III. To what extent has the experience of participating in this project affected students' perceptions and their English language learning practices on webbased environments?
 - How have their ideas about learning changed throughout the project?
 - Has the experience of participating in this project influenced their capacity for autonomous learning?

The nature of these three questions is fundamental to designing the research, therefore it is important that a particular research question is matched with an appropriate design. Specifically, these questions focus on the students' perceptions and their learning processes with websites outside of their regular classes. Sefton-Green (2014) mentions the difficulty and complexity of capturing learning process out of class, which includes two aspects. Firstly, in terms of the practical aspect, it is diffcult to track and follow students. At an ethical level, the researcher will also encounter the problem of gaining access to students and building trust with them (Sefton-Green amd Kumpulainen, 2014). In terms of addressing these difficulties, 10 weekly meetings provided opportunities for the participating students to get together to develop their ideas and where their learning processes could be explored. Also, the methods of reflective reports and interviews have been used at different time points to investigate students' perceptions and record their learning experiences with speaking and writing.

The detailed information and considerations of the research methodology are discussed in this chapter, which includes four main sections:

- The first section focuses on the justification for choosing a qualitative case study as the main research approach. The explanations focus firstly on key philosophical issues such as epistemology and ontology. There are four types of perspectives I wish to consider in this research, from which constructivist perspective has been adopted based on the nature of this research. This is followed by a discussion on the case study method, presenting definitions, types, strengths and limits. In addition, sub-sections focus on: designed-based research and narrative inquiry, to justify how they are relevant to this study but are not regarded as the main approach. These discussions highlight the appropriateness of a case study approach for this study.
- The second section emphasises the specific research procedure and the data collection methods applied, from the beginning stage of recruiting participants to the detailed information of research activities. Guided reflective reports and interviews are the two main sources of data, whereas group discussions facilitated students in organising and presenting their perceptions. Moreover, this section also addresses three issues that emerge from the research process, such as the researcher's role, the language used by participants, and trust between researcher and participants.
- The third section is a shorter section, which presents the ethical considerations of reliability, validity, and the limitations of the approach.
- The last section focuses on the method of data analysis. Specifically, thematic analysis has been applied in this research, which is defined in this section. Three key phrases are used to present how the raw data were organised and coded.

The purpose of this chapter is to show the research design in detail, to describe the data collection process, to explain how the data were managed, and explain the approach that was adopted to analyse the data.

3.2 Case Study as the Main Approach

A qualitative case study method has been adopted in this research, which shares some characteristics with other methods in qualitative research to explore understandings of a phenomenon in depth (Creswell, 2004 cited by Creswell, 2017). Case study can be used as an educational tool as well as a means to conduct qualitative research (Roache and Kelly, 2017). Case studies can also contain quantitative analysis and document data, as the approach stems from sociology, anthropology and psychology. Since the 1980s, the case study approach has been used as a research method for looking at ideas and feelings, while previous research methods had been focused on statistical methods or on different kinds of experimental designs (Bromley, 1986; Yin, 1984; Stake, 1988; Merriam, 1988).

3.2.1 Constructivism

The philosophical underpinnings of case study research are based on a constructivist paradigm, where "the participant's creation of meaning equates to their reality" (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p.544-59). In other words, constructivists believe that the world is socially constructed by individuals in their interactions with the world. Constructivist research seeks to explore, understand and describe, and interpret participants' context-bound ideas negotiated in relation to the given environment and cultural and social factors (Merriam, 2009). Constructivism can be used to answer two

basic philosophical questions that need to be considered within research, namely ontology and epistemology. 'Ontology' refers to the nature of reality or the nature of a phenomenon, while 'epistemology' refers to how we come to know this reality (Cohen and Manion, 1989). These two together seek to explore what reality and knowledge are, which are influenced by the researchers' view of the world and the perspective they adopt (Croker, 2009). In conducting research, researchers are oriented by their own paradigms, which explain how they see this world and act in it (Richardson, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). As Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) put it, "ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions, which have methodological implications for the choice of data collection techniques" (p.21). This research project concerns students' perceptions about their English learning experiences. I believe that their perceptions are individual and their interactions with the context are relevant, which constitutes the content of this case study and means that findings will be interpreted through a constructivist lens.

More specifically, constructivism is related to interpretivism. It has been applied more often in qualitative research, which believes that there are multiple realities and interpretations. Knowledge is found but is socially constructed. According to Creswell's explanation, people seek truth in the world in which they work and live. Their subjective understandings are various and multiple based on their experiences. Those understandings are also social and historical. In other words, their subjective understandings are not merely discovered, but are formed by interacting with others (thus as social constructivism), and by the historical and cultural criteria they use in their daily life (Creswell, 2007). More precisely, constructivists believe that there is no universal truth, but "Meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction

with the world" (Merriam, 2002, p.37). That is to say, people create different understandings of the world. These are multiple and dependent on time and circumstances. The truth is thus not universal; it is personal and based on context and time. The implication of this is that people who conduct qualitative research will probably see the world in more constructivist terms rather than through a positivist lens (Croker, 2009). This is true for this study.

Positivists believe that there is only one fixed reality, so research must be undertaken to find a universal truth that is stable, observable, and can be measured. They think of the world as something that exists independently and that this reality can be quantified. There is even a new area called 'post-positivist', which believes that "knowledge is relative rather than absolute" (Lin, 1998, p.162) but "it is also possible to diminish more and less plausible claims by using empirical evidence" (Patton, 2002, p.344).

The other two perspectives of critical and postmodernist research are also not appropriate for this research. Critical research stems from a variety of approaches, such as Marx's analysis of socioeconomic conditions and class structures, as well as feminist theory. The research purpose from this perspective is to critique and challenge, and to transform and empower (Merriam, 2009). The last type of perspective I wish to consider is postmodernism, which is reflected in Lather's (1992; 2006) framework. Research from this perspective is different from the research from the other three perspectives discussed above, but influences the understandings of both interpretative/constructive qualitative research and critical research. A postmodern world is a place without rationality, scientific method, or certainties. The world is diverse, with multiple truths, and no one has the right to privilege or power. Research from this perspective is full of unique creativity and experimentation. To sum up, Table 3.1, adapted from Merriam (2009) shows the differences between these four types of perspectives. This highlights that the constructivist perspective has been adopted here and is appropriate to be used in this research.

Positivist Interpretive Critical Postmodern /Constructivist Purpose Describe Predict Change Deconstruct Control Understand, Emancipate Problematise Generalise Interpret Empower Question Interpret Types Experimental Phenomenology Neo-Marxist Postcolonial • Ethnography Survey Feminist Poststructural Quasi-Hermeneutic Action Postmodern experiential research Grounded theory Queer theory Critical race Naturalistic/qualitative theory

Table 3. 1 Differences among epistemological perspectives, adopted from Merriam(2009)

This research is qualitative, based on the constructivist perspective, which believes that:

a) "Human beings construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 1998, p.47), so this qualitative research tends to use openended questions in order that the participants can share their ideas;

b) "Humans engage with this world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives" (Crotty, 1998, p.47), so this qualitative research aims to understand the context of the participants by visiting the context and collecting information personally;

c) "The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community" (Crotty, 1998, p.47), so qualitative research is a process of inductive reasoning, in which the researcher generates meaning from the data collected in the field.

Since the world is socially constructed by individuals when they interact with the world, this research seeks to explore, understand, and describe or interpret students' perceptions, which are constructed in a context-bound environment and negotiated in relation to cultural and social factors.

3.2.2 Case Study

A qualitative case study approach has been adopted as the main research approach in this research on the basis of its uniqueness. Yin (2008) suggests that the case study has an obvious advantage in that it can seek answers to 'How' and 'Why' questions (Yin, 2008), and a qualitative case study can be defined from several different perspectives. Specifically, Bromley (1986) explains that a case study focuses on the interests of the subject through observation in natural settings, usually looking at ideas and feelings instead of testing data. It aims for a wider focus than the experimental research method (Bromley, 1986). Based on this definition, Stake (1995) explains that a case study also focuses on the specificity and complexity of a single unit or a case to understand it in a specific situation (Stake, 1995). Further, this specificity and complexity also have been stressed by Simons (2009), in her definition of the case study, referring to an exploration of a particular project from several perspectives in a real-life context, which involves different methods of gaining an in-depth understanding. Namely, a case study seeks completeness from many angles, about a person, a place, an event, or a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). No matter which method is used, the focus is always on the case. It could be studied holistically or analytically, or with a mixed method approach (Stake, 2005). In conducting this research, which has focused on the participants' perceptions on learning English, the emphasis is on exploration, not on controlling variables. This idea has been expanded by Hammersley and Gomm (2000) in their definition of a case study, suggesting that it can focus on one case or a small group of cases to analyse a large number of features (Hammersley and Gomm, 2000). Accordingly, the case in this research focuses on nineteen EFL students, who constitute a case study, in which each participant is regarded as a unit of analysis, with data presented via themes.

3.2.2.1 Strengths and Limitations of a Case Study

As mentioned above, a case study can seek understandings of multiple variables within complex social units, which is important to get to know the phenomenon. A case study also can give a rich and holistic view by considering a phenomenon in real life situations. Especially in education, Merriam (2009) has mentioned its significance in promoting the knowledge base, in which its problems and processes can be explored, and understandings can be gained that may affect or benefit practice. Also, it provides insights, which will be presented as hypotheses for future research. Its efficiency in educational studies and its potential to inform policy have been proven (Merriam, 2009).

A case study is not omnipotent, however; it also has its limitations; it cannot be generalised, for example, since it focuses merely on a single unit or instance and it aims to understand the case itself rather than generalise to a whole population (Gomm et al., 2004, p.2-4). But what we learn from a case can be transferred to similar situations (Erickson, 1986), and even a single case can advance both human and natural sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Another concern focuses on "the personal involvement and/or subjectivity of the researcher" (Simons, 2009, p.189), as well as "the way in which inferences are drawn from the single case and the validity and usefulness of the findings to inform policy" (Simons, 2009, p.189). It is almost impossible to avoid the subjectivity of the researcher. However, as Simons (2009) has suggested, this is not a problem; rather, it is regarded as essential aspects to understand and interpret the case but must be appropriately controlled. On the other hand, too much personal involvement can be a problem (Simons, 2009). In many situations in which case study research is conducted, the primary purpose is not to formally generalise the findings to inform the policy-making department, which is also the case in this research. The emphasis is on 'particularisation' to present a rich portrayal of a case to inform practice, establish the value of the case, and add to the existing knowledge of a specific topic (Simons, 2009). Simons also has commented on the usefulness of findings for policy-making, which partly rely on acceptance of the different ways in which validity is established and how findings are communicated in case study research (Simons, 2009).

3.2.3 Qualitative Inquiry

A case study is a choice of what is to be studied rather than a choice of methods. It can include many methods and sources of data to focus either on the case itself, processes, or relationships (Thomas, 2011). This research focuses on the perceptions of students and how they make use of the experiences they have in their learning process. Furthermore, it aims to look at students' ideas in the is context and focuses on the exploration of the particular and the distinctive; it does not primarily intend to predict what might happen in the future, even though there are some students who present their ideas of future English learning. In terms of this research purpose, which brings ideas into focus, the case study can incorporate qualitative methods. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a case study also could focus on quantitative data; however, this research is not to investigate the relationships among variables by using statistical procedures. The differences between qualitative and quantitative research include whether the study focuses on words or numbers, or whether it chooses open or closed questions. Moreover, the basic philosophical assumptions and the research strategies selected are also different (Creswell, 2013). More details of these distinctions are illustrated in Table 3.2, which has used both Merriam's (2009) and Creswell's (2013) explanations of the differences between qualitative and quantitative research.

Table 3. 2 Differences Between Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research

Differences Between Qualitative Research and Quantitative Research

	Qualitative Research	Quantitative Research
Focus of research	Quality (nature, essence)	Quantity (how much, how many)
Philosophical roots	Constructivism	Positivism
Sample	Small,	Large,
	Theoretical,	Random
	Purposeful	
Research Aims	Understanding,	Prediction,
	Description,	Control,
	Discovery,	Description,
	Hypothesis generation	Hypothesis testing
Data Collection	Researcher as main	Surveys,
	instrument,	Questionnaires,
	Interviews,	Tests,
	Observation,	Scales,
	Documents	Computers
Mode of Analysis	Inductive,	Deductive,
	Constant comparative	Statistical
	method	
Findings	Holistic,	Numerical,
	Comprehensive	Precise
	Rich description	

Table 3.2 shows the differences between qualitative and quantitative research in seven aspects: research focus, philosophical roots, sample, research aims, data collection, mode of analysis, and findings to further explain the appropriateness of qualitative inquiry as adopted in this research. Qualitative inquiry is what this research needs, as an appropriate way to present a holistic, comprehensive, and rich description in response to the questions of this research. Therefore, a qualitative case study has been adopted in this research. Yin has suggested a detailed design at the beginning of the study (Yazan, 2015), and this research has designed specific activities taking place in weekly meetings, aimed at supporting students to think about their English learning and provide opportunities for them to communicate their ideas. This characteristic seems to imply the relevance of another research approach, namely design-based research; in addition, the research seeks to look at students' perceptions. Students usually describe their experiences by speaking and writing, storying their lives, therefore, narrative inquiry is of relevance to the research approach. The following sub-sections are then to justify the relevance to this research by illustrating these two research approaches respectively.

3.2.4 Design-Based Research

Design-based research (DBR) is a research methodology commonly used by researchers in the learning sciences. It is also known as 'design research' or 'design experiments'. Experimental design studies tend to be clinical (Wong, Boticki, Sun, and Looi, 2011, p.1783); as Simon (1969) acknowledged, DBR focuses on eventual adoption in practice, therefore it must be situated in real-life environments where there is no attempt to keep variables constant (Looi et al., 2011). Also, design-based researchers try to optimise as much of the design as possible and to observe how the different variables and elements are working out (Barab and Squire, 2004), as does this research. Specifically, this research paid particular attention to the design of

activities in the weekly meetings, which aimed to help students to think and discuss about their English learning experiences as much as possible

In education, DBR evolved near the beginning of the 21st century and was regarded as a practical research methodology that could effectively bridge the gap between research and practice in formal education (Anderson and Shattuck, 2012, p.16). Furthermore, DBR is a methodology designed by and for educators that seeks to increase the impact, transfer, and translation of education research into improved practice. In addition, it stresses the need for theory building and the development of design principles that guide, inform, and improve both practice and research in educational contexts (Anderson and Shattuck, 2012, p.16). This research however, cannot cover all of these points mentioned here, which tends to contribute to enriching theory and "the development of design principles that guide or improve the practice and research" (p.16) in the China context as only implications, not the findings of this study.

Specifically, there are seven points to define DBR, as shown below, which are used to refer to a quality DBR study and reflect its characteristics:

- Being situated in a real educational context
- Focusing on the design and testing of a significant intervention
- Using mixed methods
- Involving multiple iterations
- Involving a collaborative partnership between researchers and practitioners
- Evolution of design principles
- Practical impact on practice

(Anderson and Shattuck, 2012, pp.16-25)

This research, therefore, includes some of the characteristics of DBR, but not quite all of them. For example:

- This research includes designed activities in each weekly meeting, where the primary purpose is to help students to think and express their English learning experiences as much as possible rather than emphasising on testing any intervention.
- The role of the researcher is as a facilitator, who tries to be independent of the research process and intervene with participants as little as possible.

As these points demonstrate, this research aligns with some characteristics of DBR due to its research activities, which brings implications to this research; however, they are not the main purposes of this research.

3.2.5 Narrative Inquiry

As the emphasis in this research is on seeking the participants' perspectives and their experiences, the data produced takes the form of written or oral texts describing their experiences of English learning in their daily life. Thus, this research may be regarded as a narrative inquiry within a case study, since these two approaches have broadly similar interdisciplinary backgrounds (Creswell, 2007).

"Narrative" has been defined as a term describing any text or discourse, or a text that is used in the context of a mode of inquiry in qualitative research (Chase, 2011), with the emphasis on individual stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). As Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) suggest, narrative also can be a method, which starts with the experiences as expressed in verbally relayed (cited by Clandinin, 2006) or written stories that "have a chronological order" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). Technically, this research expects to elicit narratives of participants' experiences of learning English; however, not all of them are good at telling stories. That is, they express their perceptions and share their experiences, but not necessarily in a chronologically connected way. This is therefore not entirely a narrative-based study, even though the procedure of conducting this research does focus on individuals and collecting data about their experiences.

3.2.6 Summary

In summary, this section has explored how and why a qualitative case study is an appropriate research approach for this study. The philosophical roots, case study conceptions, its strengths and limitations and qualitative inquiry that are associated with the case study approach have been discussed. On the other hand, this research also shares some characteristics with DBR and narrative research, but is not entirely aligned in them. Case study is an approach, originating from a broad interdisciplinary background that produces an in-depth case picture (Creswell, 2006). All of those factors support the appropriateness of a qualitative case study method for this research. Specifically, this research investigates the case (19 students' perceptions of learning English) by addressing the "what", "how" or "why" questions, which need to draw from manifold lines of evidence (Yin, 2002). This indicates the consistence to the research process, for example on designing activities to collect the data, and data analysis. The specific design of this research is illustrated in the next section.

3.3 Research Design: Data Collection and Procedures

The data collection methods were chosen based on the nature of the research questions. In terms of answering the three questions, guided reflective reports and interviews are the two main ways of collecting data. Meanwhile, group discussions help students to think, organise and develop their ideas. Namely, as the focus of this research is on the perceptions of a group of Chinese undergraduates who learn English on websites outside of classrooms, the research design included 10 weekly meetings at two universities organised respectively. In these meetings, students were asked to write guided reflective reports every week and attend the final interview at the end of this research. These methods aimed to investigate the students' ideas about learning, to understand how they learn English on websites out of class, and to what extent the experience of participating in this project affected their perceptions and their English language learning practices in web-based environments.

The data collection was conducted over one semester (around 4 months). Nineteen students were involved in this research, but they came from two universities (A-11 and B-8), therefore, this research was conducted at two universities respectively, but with the same activities in the same weeks. Figure 3.1 shows the research procedure: the research preparation, research weekly meetings (10), and final interviews.



Figure 3.1: Research Procedure

The following subsections further explain the data collection methods in more detail, as well as the reflections emerging from the data collection process.

3.3.1 Research Preparation: Access to the Participants

There are several processes that must be completed before conducting fieldwork, such as gaining ethical approval for conducting this research and contacting the target universities from which participants are to be recruited. Specifically, this research gained its ethical approval via the university's ethics review procedure. The participant information sheet and informed consent form were all composed during this process. Then, the two universities in China were contacted to gain permission for this research to be conducted in their universities. One is a public university and the other is a private university; both are located in the city of Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, in China. Xi'an is the birthplace of Chinese culture and has a large number of universities. It is also the researcher's hometown, which made it more convenient to undertake this research. For example, it was easier to get an access permit to schools and participants as a result of this connection.

Considering the ethics of this research, it is imperative to ensure that the two universities and the participants cannot be identified from the thesis. The table below shows a general description of the selected universities and how their names have been anonymised in this thesis.

University A:	Introduction
A public university, which has been	This is a public university with first
called "Foreign Language University"	batch priority for recruiting
or "AU" in the chapter on data analysis,	undergraduates. Formerly this university
for the purposes of this report.	was a foreign languages institute which
	was established in order to meet the

Table 3. 3: Table of Universities

	needs of national economic construction
	and political diplomacy. Then it
	developed as a comprehensive
	university with an academic
	specialisation in foreign language
	teaching and international studies
	(information from school websites).
University B:	Description
A private university, which has been	This is a private university that recruits
called "International Business	from the third batch of undergraduates.
University" or "BU" in the chapter on	Formerly it was an institute for foreign
data analysis, for the purposes of this	language translation and training. It
report.	developed as a comprehensive
	university with an academic
	specialisation in foreign language
	teaching (information from school
	websites).

These two universities put a lot of effort into the education of foreign languages, hence their academic specialisation in foreign language teaching.

In terms of differences, apart from the fact that one university is public and the other is private, the entrance requirements for students in each institution are also different, which is done according to scores in the national university entrance examination. The procedure of recruiting students is in 'batches', which means universities with first batch priority can select their students based on their scores and their rankings, but with the presumption that the selected students have all applied to these universities in advance. Namely, university A can recruit the academically higher attaining students, however, this does not mean that students in university A are all good at English, because the score of the national university entrance examination is the sum of many courses' scores. Participants from these two universities thus have different school backgrounds, teachers, and levels of English competency. Due to these differences, these participants can provide diverse data.

As part of the recruitment process, I visited the two universities separately, inviting all the first-year English major students to come to a meeting, at which I presented the research plan and sent the information sheet to students. Roughly 160 students in the public university and 80 students in the private university attended the meeting. After students read the information sheet, they were able to ask questions. Then, if they were interested in the research activities and willing to get involved, they were asked to sign the consent forms and leave their contact information. During this process, it was difficult to predict the number of volunteers who would take part in the research activities. Although it is important in qualitative research to have enough participants, the numbers are difficult to control. Morrow (2005) explains that more important than the number of participants are the procedures, the quality, and depth of the qualitative data. In addition, qualitative research design tends to work with a small number of participants and seeks rich information regarding people's understandings and perceptions (Silverman, 2005). Finally, the participants were confirmed after the presentation; 19 (11+8) students agreed to take part in this research, as shown in Table 3.4:

Table 3.4: Table of participants of different universities

'Foreign	Languages	University'	11 participants
(University A)			

'International	Business	University'	8 participants
(University B)			

Eleven participants came from the 'Foreign Languages University' (A) and eight participants from the 'International Business University' (B). These 19 participants constitute the full body of participants in this research. They were all from their respective universities' Department of English, the reasoning being that English major students would probably spend more time on out-of-class English learning than other students who need to study other subjects. The participants were all first-year students, around 20 years old, who typically have more spare time out of class. All participants took part in the same activities. Their differences in backgrounds and out-of-class activities provided rich data for this case study.

3.3.2 Data Collection Methods

The process of this research included 10 weekly meetings and a final interview, which were all conducted at each university respectively. Guided reflective reports and interviews were used to collect the data. Meanwhile, the group discussions that occurred in the weekly meetings among participants helped to develop students' ideas during this research, with the purpose of offering opportunities for their communication and enhancing the quality of data since all participants had no experience of taking part in a research project before.



Figure 3.2: How data was collected in this study

Figure 3.2 illustrates how the data were collected in this study, and then the following subsections further discuss research activities to explicitly explain where the data came from.

3.3.2.1 Weekly Meetings and Group discussions

After participants had been identified and selected, they took part in weekly meetings, the two main aims of which were firstly to gather them together to communicate and to exchange their ideas in group discussions, and secondly, to collect the reflective reports given out at the previous meeting. The whole process of the weekly meetings lasted 10 weeks; each meeting had a topic, as shown in Table 3.5:

Weekly Meeting	Торіс
Week 1	My ideas on English learning: (What are your ideas
	about learning?)
Week 2	My learning goal: (Why are you learning English?
	What does learning English mean to you?)
Week 3	My English learning experience: (How have you
	learned English over the years?)
Week 4	A good learner: (What kind of learner can be called a
	good learner? What kind of learner do you want to
	be?)
Week 5	My English learning experience via the Internet
	(including the benefits and problems)
Week 6	Discuss Online English learning resources (1)
Week 7	Discuss Online English learning resources (2)
Week 8	Design a new English learning website
Week 9	If I were a teacher, I would
Week 10	My ideas of English learning (What do I tell myself
	when learning English?)

Table 3.5: The topics in Weekly Meeting

More specifically, each meeting was designed around specific activities, which aimed to help students to think and talk about their perceptions. Table 3.6 is an example from the activity record in the first week's meeting.

Table 3.6: Example of weekly meeting activities

Time: Week 1 Meeting

Topic: "My ideas about learning English"

Main Questions: "What are your ideas about learning?"

Before Activities:

1. Introduce myself

2. Introduce my research and research activities

3. Collect the Informed Consent form

Activities:

A. Ice-breaker: a short name game which allows students to become familiar with each other

B. Brainstorming: "Success at school"; please try to think about a time when you did something very well at school and why you were successful in that activity.

C. Discussion time:

Working in pairs to discuss the following questions and then present your ideas in the group.

- Do you revise what you have learnt regularly?
- Do you look over your vocabulary notebook?
- Do you use a dictionary when you do homework?
- Do you do your homework when watching television?
- Do you participate in class?
- Are you prepared to ask questions if you do not understand?
- If you do not understand a word do you forget it or try to work out its meaning?

D. Hand out the reflective reports A and B. If the participants have some questions, I will answer them (5 minutes).

The activities were recorded and there were several questions prepared in advance. Their discussion was not limited to those questions, however; they were used as a starting point for a discussion.

Group Discussion

In this research, group dicussions were used as an actitivity to help students to think about their ideas and to provide opportunities for their communication, which enhanced the quality and quantity of data since all participants had no experience of taking part in a research project before.

A commonly used qualitative method is a focus group discussion, which includes groups of 4-12 people with similar backgrounds to address a specific topic (Morgan, 1997). Typically, a focus group discussion lasts one to two hours working with predetermined procedure rules and is facilitated by a moderator, who guides the discussion and assures that everyone gets involved in the discussion and expresses their views (Seal, Bogart and Ehrhardt, 1998). In this research, a group discussion method that has been used included with topics. Focus group discussions usually lie between naturalistic observation and individual interviews. What this research required, however, was the potential for spontaneous group interaction rather than the researcher asking questions and participants answering them individually, as in individual interviews.

Group discussion was the main activity in weekly meetings. It aimed to exchange ideas or information on a particular topic. It is a useful brainstorming tool in which communication can be practised. During the process of group discussion, all participants had an opportunity to express and develop their own ideas, informed by other people's views on that topic. There is likely to be a plurality of views on any given topic, with different people coming at it from different angles. With the transfer of information, everyone will benefit from sharing ideas to deepen their own understanding of language learning. Naturally, group discussion has both advantages and disadvantages. It can promote learning in a cognitive way in a learner-centred and subject-centred environment that makes learning more active; it encourages participants to think about a particular topic and provides an immediate and sometimes entertaining forum for sharing those ideas. Nevertheless, care must be taken to ensure that shy participants receive sufficient encouragement, so that the ideas discussed are representative of the cross-section and that everyone is involved in the discussion. Indeed, it is not always easy for researchers to gain the trust of participants and this could hinder the clear expression of their ideas. These problems need to be considered in advance and the researcher needs to be an effective facilitator (Galanes, Adams and Brilhart, 2007). The group discussions in this research were conducted for approximately 60 minutes per week, both to explore the questions related to the particular topic and also to share the experiences of English learning about what happened in the previous week. There were some questions listed and given to participants. These questions were based on the reflective reports, such as: "How do you learn English via the Internet (English learning websites)?"; "What do you actually do and why?"; "What are your problems?", etc.

The participants attended these meetings each week and were expected to finish reflective Report A and the weekly reflective Report B. Reflective report A aimed to record their learning beliefs (but only used once at first weekly meeting) and B was to record their learning behaviour in real situations (used every week). The reflective Reports A and B are attached and further outlined in the Appendix. The participants shared their experiences of English learning on websites outside of classroom during the research conducted at these weeks by writing the Reflective Report B (to record their learning after the meeting).

The main reason for dividing them into two groups is that they studied in two different universities and had different teachers. Also, the size of a group influences the degree of interaction (Hare, 1962, cited by Fay, Garrod and Carletta, 2000). For example, Stasser and Taylor (1991) have addressed that if groups enlarge, communication becomes less interactive and each individual participant's contribution eventually decreases (Stasser and Taylor, 1991). Specifically, the number of an ideal group size was proved by Hare (1981) to be around five members, because he found that in a group of 10 or more participants, only four or five top contributors will emerge in terms of their interaction and communication patterns. In other words, they begin to behave similarly to a group of five participants (Hare, 1981, p. 697). The real-life situation should be taken into consideration, however. In this research, the two groups were not divided into sub-groups. Participants were unfamiliar with group discussions, as their learning activities are mostly based on the style of lectures. They felt more comfortable to stay together, although the interaction was little at first. Along with their increased sense of relaxation and familiarity, the interactions among participants spontaneously increased. Instead of collecting data directly from the group discussions, they were used as opportunities for participants to get together and exchange their ideas on particular questions, then thus to support them to write their reflective reports. This does not necessarily mean that every student benefited equally from the group discussions, and individual reflective reports were still varied and personal.

3.3.2.2 Reflective Reports

The reflective reports asked participants to engage in reflective writing. Reflective writing is a purposeful activity that contains two elements: 'using I' refers to the way in which students need to write about themselves; their feelings, values, experiences, ideas and behaviours. 'Looking back' refers to how students are likely to view past experiences and reflect on how their ideas have developed: for example, what happened then, and how this is interpreted reflectively now (Williams, Woolliams and Spiro, 2012). This data collection method was used because it was intended to help students to focus on their learning development, to be clear about how their understanding and skills develop and change over time (Williams, Woolliams and Spiro, 2012). Kumpulainen and Sefton-Green (2014) have highlighted the difficulty and complexity of capturing the out-of-class learning process. Furthermore, most research conducted on students' use of technology outside the classroom is based primarily on self-reported data (Cheung and Hew, 2009).

The self-report data collection method has been challenged by Sharples (2009). He states that it is difficult for researchers to assure that participants write thickly enough in the self-report, because not everyone is good at telling a story (Shaprles, 2009). To address this, a guided reflective report has been adopted in this research, especially for young adult students (the participants in this research), who have little experience of
writing about their perceptions and learning experiences. The questions in the reports help participants to think back and consider how they learned English, so as to share their individual learning experiences.

Specifically, there are two kinds of reflective reports in this research, which have been named A and B. Except fitting with research questions, the questions listed in both reports have been shaped by the literature on reflection. Gibbs's reflective cycle (1988) and Honey and Mumford's (1986) learning cycle were drawn upon, namely the concepts of 'feelings', 'description', 'evaluation', 'form principles' and 'plan', to set the appropriate questions. Also, in Lee's (2005) framework of reflection, he mentioned three levels of depth in the thinking process: 'recall', 'rationalisation', and 'reflectivity', which refer to how the thinking process is a dynamic explanation of an issue, particularly in response to 'why?' and 'so what?' questions.

Specifically, the questions in Reflective Report A aimed to help students to think about the issues around their English learning ideas. The questions in Report B aimed to help students record their learning and their reflections each week. These questions left space for students to make reflection and all fit with the cycle of reflection shown in Figure 3.3, but not necessarily, as students are different, for examples see Section 5.3.



Figure 3.3: The cycle of reflection

The questions listed below are examples from Reflective Report A:

- What are your ideas about learning English?
- Why did you choose English as your major?
- Why are you learning English? What's your learning goal?
- How have you learned over these years?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about English learning? In your English learning, what is good? What is not good?
- Did you find any good suggestions or difficult problems during your English learning?

The questions listed below are from Reflective Report B:

- What did I do this week on English learning?
- How many hours have I spent on learning English outside of class this week?
- How many hours have I spent learning English via the Internet?
- What have I seen on the Internet? Which websites have I visited? (Describe it or share the link here)
- Are there any problems I have encountered?
- Have I already solved these problems?
- How many problems have I solved? How have I solved them?
- If not, what difficulties have I met?
- What is my favourite English learning method via the Internet ?
- What's my learning plan for next week (or the future)?

For the full versions of the reflective reports, see the Appendix.

3.3.2.3 Interviews (Semi-Structured Interviews)

Interview is one of the most important sources of case study evidence (Yin, 2014). It resembles guided conversations rather than a rigid method (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Semi-structured interviews have been adopted in this research. This method uses an 'interview guide', which involves a list of questions prepared in advance that are required to be answered during the interview. Unlike a structured interview, it gives the participants the freedom to express their ideas in their own terms (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). Namely, there are five core questions listed below used to guide the interview in this research:

- 1. Please introduce yourself briefly;
 - What is your name?
 - Why did you choose English as your major?
 - How long have you been learning English?
 - How have you learned English before?
 - Have you used that/those methods until now? What are they? If not, why?
- 2. How do you feel about the weekly meetings? What are your ideas on group discussion?
- 3. Can you share your story of how you learn English via the Internet outside of your classes currently?
 - What have you done?
 - Are there any problems?
 - Have you solved any problems or not?
 - Have you received some suggestions from other participants?
- 4. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of learning English via the Internet?
- 5. What are your future plans for learning English?

These five questions are all closely related to the research questions, which stimulate data to gain a better understanding, thus answering the research questions. Both researcher and participants are allowed to diverge, however, in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail (Britten, 2007). In this study, all participants were invited to attend one-to-one interviews (or a 'personal interview'), after 10 weeks of meetings. The participants were asked the questions in a personal face-to-face style. These

personal interviews were conducted at the respective universities. For this kind of interview, it was easy for me to sense emotional changes in the interviewees. Based on these tiny changes, the way of questioning could be altered as needed. Because the interviews were arranged in advance and participants were more comfortable when talking face-to-face than on the telephone, they were able to naturally develop their thoughts. The interviews needed to be negotiated with participants in terms of time planning, however. If participants were unavailable, the interview had to be rearranged accordingly (Cohen and Manion, 1989). During the process of the interview, in accordance with participants' responses, they were asked follow-up questions and were allowed to expand in order to clarify, explore and gain a more in-depth understanding (Borg and Gall, 1989). Each interview lasted around 20 to 30 minutes and students used both Chinese and English (the issue of translation is addressed in subsection 3.5.2).

To sum up, the methods elaborated above were used to collect data in this case study, reflective reports and interview for example, but group discussion was not included.

3.3.3 Reflections

The research process has already been discussed in subsection 3.3.2. Here, I seek to explore three matters emerging from this process.

3.3.3.1 The Role of the Researcher

During the whole process of this research, I was the main instrument of data collection and interpretation, as well as the facilitator in the weekly meetings and interviews. It is necessary to mention the role of the researcher because this research is a qualitative case study. A case study-based project needs to recognise that the role of the researcher should be that of an exploreor in a natural setting rather than a controller or predictor. The researcher should avoid controlling the participants' ideas and behaviours (Creswell, 2013). It cannot be absolutely avoided, however, since the researcher is involved in the research. Indeed, this research is not designed to test or predict any assumptions; it is to explore and interpret students' perceptions of learning English. Anderson and Shattuck (2012) argue that the researchers themselves come with their own biases, insights and deep understanding of the contexts, thus they are the best research tool to interpret participants' data (Anderson and Shattuck, 2012). I therefore attempted to minimise my interventions with participants and tried my best to communicate with them so as to understand and interpret their data.

3.3.3.2 The Language Applied in the Process of Research

The language used in the process of data collection was Chinese, which I encouraged all participants to use. Sinclair (1999) said that it is impossible to ask participants to speak about their ideas or experiences of language learning in the target language; it is better for participants to use their mother tongue in order to get more data (Sinclair, 1999). As for this research, it aims to explore participants' experiences of learning English to access their perceptions, their learning experiences, and to generate rich data and strong findings. If participants had used the target language (English), the data would have been limited. It was difficult for them to express their ideas deeply by using English; some would probably have lost their motivation for taking part in this study if asked to do so. Sometimes, however, the participants preferred to use both Chinese and English, because they wanted to practice their English.

One participant, who wrote in the reflective reports, asked:

Can I use both English and Chinese in writing this reflective report, because I have limited opportunity to practice my English, and in this way I can feel the usefulness of English. I will totally tell you what I am thinking; if I can't use English, I will use Chinese—(AU-Peng- Reflective A)

The use of both Chinese and English was thus accepted in this research. The issue of translation will be adressed in subsection 3.5.2.

3.3.3.3 Building Trust with Participants

The last issue is that of establishing trust with participants. A problem that occurred at the first meeting was that participants produced little information because of a lack of trust in the researcher and between students. This situation had improved by the third week, however, since by this point they had become familiar with each other.

The eleven students from University A asked a lot of questions that were not directly related to the activities or the research itself, but to English learning methods; most planned to study abroad. In turn, when they were asked, they became shy and cautious, their answers limited and similar. Some preferred to nod or shake their heads when asked a question. One participant, who was easily recognisable as a good student, in terms of he was very confident and was adored as a 'hero' by the class, nevertheless gave limited information. The eight students from University B were quiet. Their answers were also limited; only two or three were active. Most of the students were very shy, even when they communicated with their classmates.

The situation became better from the third week onwards; participants became more familiar with each other, and more familiar with me as the researcher and activities. Moreover, all of them kept in contact by Wechat (a mobile app) at other times, where I could also contact them and discuss their ideas with them, especially during the process of organising data. This served as 'member-checking'; this is used to control the quality of data in qualitative research and allowed participants to expand on their responses, improving the validity and credibility (Harper and Cole, 2012).

3.3.4 Summary

This section explained how this research was conducted from a procedural perspective. It outlined the research methods, which are guided reflective reports and interviews, as the two main sources of data in this research. It also explained the weekly meeting activities in which the students took part in group discussions. The function of the group discussions was significant, as it helped students think and develop their ideas and perceptions. Moreover, this section outlined three issues emerging from the data collection process that it was necessary to address. These sections aimed to clarify the specific research methods adopted within this research process and its particular research procedure.

3.4 Ethics, Reliability, Validity and Research Limits

The consideration of ethics is important in research, especially in social research because what is right for one project may not be right for another. Similarly, what is right for the researcher may not be right for the participant. Ethics encourages us to look at the nature of what we are doing in the research and what principles are required in this type of research. There are some examples in social research where the researchers' activities disturbed or distressed people. In the 'Milgram Experiments', for example, the participants were emotionally stressed, which is unethical (Milgram, 1963). It is necessary for researchers to ask themselves some questions when designing research, such as those below that have been adapted from Thomas (2011):

- . Who benefits from the research?
- . Do you have permission to use participants' time and energy?
- . Is there any discomfort when participants take part in the research?
- . Are you intruding upon participants' privacy?

People have the right not to participate in research, even if the researcher believes that people may not mind about taking part in the study (Thomas, 2011). It is hence not only the aims and outcomes that are significant in research, but the ethics of the data collection methods as well. The research should minimise the risk of harm to participants (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

I began to collect data for this study after discussing with supervisors and getting ethical approval from the university's research department. This department aims to ensure that research has been conducted to the highest ethical standards and in correspondence with the University's Research Ethics Policy. Due to the specific conditions in China, a permit to undertake data collection is necessary; usually from the department in question. The participants in this research were English major students, so a permit from the English Department was essential. As they were all adult participants, they were given the information sheet first in order that they had a clear understanding of this research. This sheet explained the research activities and addressed both the researcher's and participants' responsibilities and obligations before taking part in the research, such as the condition of anonymity, in order to protect the participants' privacy, etc. After this, they were asked to sign a consent form if they wanted to be involved in this research. All the activities were conducted on the university campus, such as in the classrooms, in the library or in a school coffee bar, in order to ensure the participants' safety.

Another consideration is whether participants will all feel comfortable to share their experiences. An interesting finding from the data showed that participants held different perceptions of the 'truth'. A famous Chinese writer, Ba Jin (1986), mentioned the definition of speaking the truth, which is to say what you want to say and what you think about it. Some people, however, may not be able to discern the difference between this and a communal 'truth' or expected 'truth', due to low self-confidence. They may not say what they really think in case they make a mistake or are judged by others. Accordingly, participants who are high performing students tend to have more self-confidence, thus they share their expereinces with others more readily. On the contrary, participants whose English is not outstanding may need to build more trust in others before speaking out. As this research has shown, the less intervention the researcher makes, the more comfortable participants are and the more content they produce. Building the trust between researcher and participants and the trust among participants is thus essential.

3.4.1 Consent and Information Sheet

Consent, meaning the participant's agreement to take part in the research, is an important ethical issue. Because of any risk of harm that might occur during the research, it is necessary that participants understand what they are participating in. Before the participants agreed to take part, they were given an information sheet

showing what they were agreeing to. Thomas (2011) offers some tips on the information that participants need to know, such as the aim and method of the study; who benefits from this study; possible harm that may occur during the study; how data will be kept and when data will be destroyed, and the researcher's full name and contact details.

In this research, a presentation was given to all potential participants to provide a brief introduction to the researcher, the research activities and the research aims. After this, those willing to take part in the research were given a consent form. The information sheet of this study contained details related to17 questions:

- 1. Research project title
- 2. Invitation paragraph
- 3. What is the project's purpose?
- 4. Why have I been chosen?
- 5. Do I have to take part?
- 6. What will happen to me if I take part?
- 7. What do I have to do?
- 8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
- 9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?
- 10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?
- 11. What if something goes wrong?
- 12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?
- 13. What will happen to the results of the research project?

- 14. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?
- 15. Who is organising and funding the research?
- 16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?
- 17. Contact for further information.

3.4.2 Anonymity, Confidentiality and Data Protection

Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection are key issues when considering ethics. The researcher should carefully protect the confidentiality of participants, their data and their personal information. Access to the information was therefore restricted. In this research, all the information collected during the course of the research was kept strictly confidential. No participant could be identified in any reports or publications, due to the anonymisation of names; details of this are listed in Section 3.5. Moreover, all the data, including participants' writings and interview audio recordings, were used only for analysis; no other use was made of them without the participants' written permission and no one outside the project was allowed to access the original recordings.

3.4.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity refer to how the data are collected, analysed and interpreted. Firestone (1987) explored the differences between a quantitative and qualitative study in terms of building trust, illustrating that the qualitative study should provide enough detailed description to the reader to show that its conclusion is meaningful (Firestone, 1987). Validity can be internal or external. 'Internal validity' refers to the credibility of the research findings (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), which can be confirmed by applying several methods to solve one question, asking the participants to check their interpretations of data, and asking participants to comment on findings, etc. 'External validity' refers to whether the findings of qualitative research can be applied to other situations. 'Reliability' refers to the extent to which the research findings are consistent, which can be enhanced by the researcher's description of how the research was conducted and how findings were generated, and by an explanation of the study's underlying theory, etc. (Merriam, 2009). In this research, multiple methods have been used to collect the data and each participant could check their interview transcripts to decide whether it accurately reflected their perceptions.

3.4.4 Research Limitations

Any research has its limitations, whether in terms of the design of the research methodology, the particular context or the research process. Some limitations of this study are outlined below.

Firstly, the research questions are limited to exploring participants' beliefs, learning experiences, and motivation for learning English. Data related to English language learning experiences came from participants themselves, not from the observations or records by a third party. Some researchers doubt whether reflective reports can express the participants' real ideas, however. Sinclair's (1999) findings proved that when her students talked about their learning, it related to their different levels of metacognitive awareness (Sinclair, 1999). In addition, Dam and Legenhausen (2010) proved the reliability and validity of students' self-evaluation (Dam and Legenhausen, 2010).

Lamb (2005) stated that any research should be understood through the specific context in which it has been conducted and that participants' beliefs may change over time. Even in the same context, the different times at which different parts of the research are conducted may thus affect the data. In this research, multiple methods have been applied in order to gain more data at different times so that information could be triangulated.

Finally, it is not always easy to motivate participants to continue to write reflective reports. My participants were not in the habit of writing reflectively on a regular basis. I therefore gave out a guided reflective report which listed some questions to help them write. However, some of their writings still used general or simple sentences or even metaphors, which caused the difficulty in understanding what they wanted to express. Member-checking therefore became necessary. Through the research, I found that it was important to build trust, not only between participants and the researcher, but also among participants. They were afraid of being judged, but they started to contribute more data when they felt comfortable.

3.5 Data Analysis

The main approaches to qualitative data collection and analysis represent a diverse range of epistemological, theoretical, and disciplinary perspectives (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012, pp.3-20). Namely, the data analysis approach must be consistent with the philosophical perspective adopted in this research, as this not only guides the research design and data collection methods, but also the data analysis method. This research was conducted from the constructivist perspective, which believes that there are multiple realities and interpretations; knowledge is not 'found' but is socially

constructed. The data analysis process thus values researchers' interpretations of the data and requires them to reflect participants' constructions as truly as possible, rather than from a positivist perspective that research is undertaken to discover a universal truth in the data (Cohen et al., 2007). In accordance with this perspective, narrative analysis, content analysis, grounded theory and thematic analysis could all be used to analyse and interpret qualitative data (Cohen et al., 2007). Thematic analysis has been adopted in this research due to the nature of the data and research purpose, which is further explained in the next subsection, 3.5.1.

There are two main choices of data analysis methods; the inductive approach and the deductive approach. Which of these is used depends on the purpose of the study. That is, the inductive approach could be used when there is not enough former knowledge about the phenomenon or when the knowledge is fragmented (Lauri and Kyngäs, 2005). Deductive analysis, on the other hand, is used if the structure of the analysis is based on previous knowledge and the purpose of the study is to test theory (Kyngäs and Vanhanen, 1999). Specifically, in an inductive approach, the data moves from the specific to the general so as to observe particular instances and combine them into a larger whole or general statement (Chinn and Kramer, 1999). Conversely, in a deductive approach, the data moves from the general to the specific based on an earlier theory or model (Burns and Grove, 2005). Both of these approaches have three similar main phases, preparation, organising and reporting. These phases within this study have been elaborated in subsection 3.5.2.

To briefly summarise, in this research, which is based on a constructivist perspective, the inductive approach of thematic analysis has been applied. The details of this are discussed in the following subsections.

3.5.1 Thematic Analysis (TA)

Thematic analysis (TA) refers to the process of analysing the data in accordance with their commonalities, relationships and differences (Gibson and Brown, 2009). Specifically, 'commonalities' means to seek similarities in the data and to gather examples together, then prepare further analysis. 'Relationships' refers to the relationships between each code, with the purposes of getting to know how particular categories relate to each other or how they relate to themes; and 'differences' focuses on discovering the differences or contrasts among the data (Gibson and Brown, 2009). It is also a canon of the qualitative analytic approach, which is to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data (Clarke and Braun, 2016). "TA also can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks and indeed research paradigms. Versions of TA have been developed for use within (post) positivist frameworks, for example, that focus the importance of coding reliability (e.g. Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2012)" (cited by Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.297), and to emphasise positivism in positive psychology (Friedman, 2008). There are also versions of TA developed (primarily) for use within a qualitative paradigm (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2013). These versions emphasise the active role of the researcher in coding and identifying themes.

Specifically, TA is a systematic procedure for generating codes and themes from the data, in which each code is the smallest unit of analysis that captures potential data relevant to the research question. It is also used to build the themes on the basis of the core concept and idea. Themes provide a framework for organising and presenting the analytic observations. The process of TA is not simply to summarise the data content,

but to identify and interpret the key features of the data (not necessarily all the data, however), which are guided by the research questions (Clarke and Braun, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2006) and King (2004) argue that TA is a useful method for researching on the perspectives of different participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017), which is ultimately the focus of this research.

3.5.2 The Three Phases of Thematic Analysis in This Study

Braun and Clarke (2006) have defined six phrases of TA, which are:

- . Familiarisation with the data
- . Coding
- . Searching for themes
- . Reviewing themes
- . Defining and naming themes
- . Writing up

(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.77-101)

This research, influenced by these six phases by Braun and Clarke, was categorised into three phases, namely getting into the data, coding the data, and defining the themes.

All qualitative data analysis can be regarded as content analysis because the aim is always to analyse the content of interviews, reports, documents etc. Qualitative content analysis is essential for generating understandings in which "situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances are key topics" (Altheide, 1987 p.65). This process involves coding the raw data and building categories in order to understand the characteristics of the content (Merriam, 2009).

3.5.2.1 Getting into the Data

a) Data Translation

Most of the data in this research was written or spoken in Chinese, the mother tongue of the participants. The participants were more comfortable in this language and expressed themselves more precisely as a result. The process of language translation is therefore a necessary stage. Some researchers, however, neglect the importance of the translation of data (Larkin et al., 2007) to the whole study, which may have a negative impact on the presentation of findings (Choi, Kushner, Mill and Lai, 2012).

Since I am a Chinese person too, I have no difficulties in understanding their words, their ideas, and even their potential meanings, which is an advantage. When I translate these data into English, however, which is a foreign language for me, it is still challenging, especially as the interpretation of the data is crucial in cross-cultural translation in order to achieve conceptual equivalence. There are two methods for carrying out cross-cultural translation. One is to transcribe the data in the participants' language first and then translate the transcript into the studied language (in this case English) (Suh, Kagan and Strumpf, 2009). The limitation of this approach is that there are few bilingual researchers (Esposito, 2001). The other method is to translate the conversation with the help of an interpreter: for example, in interviews, to translate directly into the study language without transcribing them first (Esposito, 2001). This is the most popular translation method. In this research, I am both the researcher and the interpreter, so a meaning-based translation of the data into English was made directly during the interviews. Where some sentences needed consideration in translation, they were transcribed in Chinese first and then translated into English in order to ensure that the data accurately represented the meanings of participants.

Translation involves transferring meaning from one language, a native or a mother tongue (in this case Chinese), to another language, such as a study language (which here is English) (Esposito, 2001). More specifically, the translation process involves translating words, phrases, and sentences; it is not only a literal translation, but one which captures several layers of meanings. Since this is extremely difficult in the context of an interview, it is necessary to consider meanings and use logical connections between words to achieve equivalence of meaning. It is important to translate the data into the same meaning and match the cultural utterance, which comes from both the participants' language (here, Chinese and English) (Regmi et al., 2010). Moreover, cultural background can be a barrier to understanding participants' meanings (Esposito, 2001). In this research, however, I had the same cultural background as the participants and this minimised the potential risk to misunderstand participants' ideas, then assure the validity of the data. In other words, equivalence shows the validity of interpretations between two languages (Chang, Cahu and Holroyd, 1999). 'Conceptual equivalence', as mentioned before, refers to the similarity of meanings of words, ideas or concepts between two languages (Chang, Cahu and Holroyd, 1999). To achieve this, the researcher should translate data accurately and consider differences of culture (Squires, 2008). This research data was therefore translated in terms of the whole meaning of sentences instead of being only translated word by word.

For example:

英语可以带领我走向世界

English is one of the popular languages in other countries, if I learn English and when I go abroad, I can communicate with local people and understand their words. That's why English can lead me to the world.

In addition, the translation was carried out after transcription, because some students preferred to speak some English in their interviews as well as Chinese. Furthermore, considering the importance of data validity, after the data were transcribed and translated, the contents were then sent back to all participants and they checked whether their ideas had been truly reflected.

In addition, there still needs to be more attention placed on the validity of moving across language (Squires 2008). For example, participants and I having the same mother tongue, Chinese, the translation process was from Chinese to English, which has little methodological attention in literature, but has the risk of threatening the validity of data (Van, Abma, Jonsson, and Deeg, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to translate the data on the basis of meaning rather than only focusing on it word by word.

b) Data Transcription

The raw data collected in this research came from reflective reports and interviews. All the interviews were transcribed. Transcription plays an important role in data management, which is to transfer the verbal research material into a written format. There is no such thing as a completely accurate transcription however. With this limitation, Chafe (1995) suggested that transcripts should be reviewed by returning to the recordings (Chafe, 1995). In this research, the transcription is transcribed word by word directly from the recordings, both in English and Chinese, which keeps consistence with the content produced by participants. Then the original file of recordings and the transcripts were all sent to the participants and they were asked to verify those transcripts.

c) How to Report the Data

In this research, the participants were from two different universities, shown in this thesis as "AU" (University A), a group of students from a public university and "BU" (University B), a group of students from a private university. All the data came from reflective reports (A and B) and interviews, thus for example, Lily is a student from AU; her reflective reports were called "AU-Lily-Reflective A/ AU-Lily-Reflective B" and her interview presented as "AU-Lily-Interview". This format was also applied to participants from BU, such as Zoe's Reflective Reports coded as "BU-Zoe-Reflective A/ BU-Zoe-Reflective B" and her interview presented as "AU-Lily presented as "BU-Zoe-Interview".

Specifically, the table below shows how to the participants' data in this thesis have been reported.

AU	Reflective Report A/B	Interview			
Lily	AU-Lily-Reflective A/	AU-Lily-Interview			
	AU-Lily-Reflective B				
Feng	AU-Feng-Reflective A/	AU-Lily-Interview			
	AU-Feng-Reflective B				
Lee	AU-Lee-Reflective A/	AU-Lee-Interview			

Table 3.7: Table of participants' reflective reports and interviews

	AU-Lee-Reflective B				
Shasha	AU-Shasha-Reflective A/	AU-Shasha-			
	AU-Shasha-Reflective B	Interview			
Shan	AU-Shan-Reflective A/	AU-Shan-Interview			
	AU-Shan-Reflective B				
Lei	AU-Lei-Reflective A/	AU-Lei-Interview			
	AU-Lei-Reflective B				
Liu	AU-Liu-Reflective A/	AU-Liu-Interview			
	AU-Liu-Reflective B				
Jia	AU-Jia-Reflective A/	AU-Jia-Interview			
	AU-Jia-Reflective B				
Xin	AU-Xin-Reflective A/	AU-Xin-Interview			
	AU-Xin-Reflective B				
Rui	AU-Rui-Reflective A/	AU-Rui-Interview			
	AU-Rui-Reflective B				
Xi	AU-Xi-Reflective A/	AU-Xi-Interview			
	AU-Xi-Reflective B				
BU	Reflective Report	Interview			
Yan	BU-Yan-Reflective A/	BU-Yan-Interview			
	BU-Yan-Reflective B				
Zhang	BU-Zhang-Reflective A/	BU-Zhang-			
	BU-Zhang-Reflective B	Interview			
Zhen	BU-Zhen-Reflective A/	BU-Zhen-Interview			
	BU-Zhen-Reflective B				

Lu	BU-Lu-Reflective A/	BU-Lu-Interview
	BU-Lu-Reflective B	
Zoe	BU-Zoe-Reflective A/	BU-Zoe-Interview
	BU-Zoe-Reflective B	
Kai	BU-Kai-Reflective A/	BU-Kai-Interview
	BU-Kai-Reflective B	
Li	BU-Li-Reflective A/	BU-Li-Interview
	BU-Li-Reflective B	
Tony	BU-Tony-Reflective A/	BU-Tony-Interview
	BU-Tony-Reflective B	

The discussion of the analysis in the next chapters have focused on not only what has been said but also on who said what, with the report format shown as Table 3.7.

3.5.2.2 Coding the Data

Dey (1993) explains this process as: "We break down data in order to classify it, we create the concepts or employ in classifying the data, and we make the connections between these concepts, provide the basis of a fresh description" (Dey, 1993, p.31). Furthermore, coding is a way of exploring the information in the data; it categorises and marks the data according to its differences and similarities (Padgett, 1998; Patton, 2002; Tutty, Rothery and Grinne, 1996). Coding places data in particular groups and different data create new categories. It is an iterative and inductive process of organising data, which could be regarded as an important step both in data preparation and data analysis, as it means "naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes and summarizes data" (Charmaz, 2006, p.397). There are

two ways of coding the data as defined by Charmaz (2006); initial coding and focused coding. Coding is a complicated process, however; sometimes researchers move back and forth between these two coding methods in order to consider various theoretical possibilities (Charmaz, 2006).

Initial coding is usually used at the beginning, as open coding. Researchers usually compare data and explore what is happening with it. At this stage, the names of the codes are kept short and simple (Charmaz, 2006). To read and code the data, the researchers usually ask analytical questions, for example: what is actually happening in the data? What are this participant's ideas or concerns? How can I define it? What is the process and how does it develop? When does the process change? Why does the process change? What will the process be like after it has changed? How do the participants' feel when they are in the study? (Charmaz, 2006). These questions have been asked during the process of this research as part of a flexible approach to thinking, and to look at data critically and analytically. In this research, I read and analysed the data word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, or event by event (Charmaz, 1999 cited in 2006), and even used these methods together. I used a word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph approach to code the data from participants' interviews, for example, and an incident by incident approach to code the data from the participants' reflective reports, as every code should fit the data interpretation instead of making the data fit the codes, as is also the case with the analysis (Glaser, 1978). Sometimes, naming the codes by using noun forms of verbs helps to keep the focus on process and action (Charmaz, 2006). For example, this is shown in Table 3.8.

Initial coding	AU-Feng-Reflective A
Subject	In my opinion, English is not only a
Tool	subject, but also a widely used tool and
Skill Applicability	a skill in my daily life. Therefore, I pay attention on the applicability of English learning.
Reading academic articles	More specifically, I am reading
Academic writing style;	academic articles, because the style of
Communication;	academic writing is important part for me in learning English; meanwhile, an
Used in Study	ability of communication in English is
	also important for me.
	I think English is an effective and convenient tool used in my study

In addition, a constant comparative method was employed, which aims to find differences and similarities by comparing data with data, data with code, and code with code (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This helps to generate the cluster of initial codes by organising or combining similar initial codes, which then contribute to new codes. Focused coding, or selective coding, means to identify or construct codes which reflect the data (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser (2005) pointed out that the researcher should search for, identify or select one key category, which should be the most frequent and significant code. This is then related to other codes to guide the subsequent data coding (Glaser, 2005). The process of doing focused coding also means conceptually defining these categories and setting relationships between them (Charmaz, 2006). It is necessary to make many comparisons to define categories, such as comparing codes

to emerging categories; comparing different incidents; or comparing data from the same or similar phenomena, action or process in different people such as their beliefs or experiences; comparing data from the same individuals at different points in time; (Charmaz, 2003, p.101). For example, this is shown in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9: An example of reflective and focused coding

The process of coding supports understanding and categorising the data, which is facilitated to further define the themes.

3.5.2.3 Defining Themes

There is an important question of coding: what counts as a pattern/theme, or what 'size' does a theme need to be? "A theme refers to something important about the data in relation to the research question, also represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.77). There is no clear answer for what proportion of the data set needs to show evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme. Researcher judgement is therefore necessary to determine what constitutes a theme. Within this research, themes were generated from coding and research questions. These codes also include the sub-codes, called subcategories. Seven themes were categorised from the dataset:

- Previous English learning experiences
- Beliefs of learning English
- Motivation
- The nature of WBL out of class
- Collaboration
- Reflection
- Learner autonomy

Table 3.10:	Table	of Sul	<i>bcategories</i>
-------------	-------	--------	--------------------

Themes	Sub-themes			
Previous English learning experiences	 Learning activities at school 			

	- T :
	Learning activities out-of schoolAttitude
	Comments on prior English
	teachers
	 English score/grades
	Plan
	Homework focus
	English learning focusDifficulties
Beliefs of learning English	• Attitude
	• The influence of context
	 Teachers' influence
	 English status in the world
	 Parents' influence
	 A tool for communication
	 An instrument
	 For social needs
	 English culture
Motivation	 Ideal L2 self
	 Ought-to L2 self
	 L2 learning experience
	 Intrinsic motivation
	 Extrinsic motivation
	 Goal orientation
	 Learning goal
	 Internal factors
	 External factors
	 Self-efficacy
The nature of WBL out of class	 Frequency
	 Activities
	English learning skills:
	Speaking, reading, writing,
	listening etc.
	 Technology services
	 English learning websites
	 Interaction
	 Problems or difficulties
	 Functions of activities
	 Task-based
	 Problem-based
	 Examination-based
	 Hierarchical
	i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i i

	 Immersion
	• 020
Collaboration	Collaboration on websites
	 Collaboration at weekly meeting
	 Collaboration at spare time out
	of class
	 With students/teachers
	 People familiar/stranger
	 Benefits
	 Problem
Reflection	 By previous English learning
	experiences
	 By joining in this research
	 Benefits
	 Problems
	 Degrees
Learner Autonomy	 Selection of activities
	 Selection of learning content
	 Learner's role
	 Teacher's role

The seven main themes with sub-themes listed in Table 3.10, which constitute the headings for two chapters on discussing the findings of this research. The first four themes are interpreted in Chapter four to illustrate students' English learning experiences by a story line, and the last three themes, as the emerging themes in the learning process, presented and discussed with examples in Chapter five.

3.5.3 Summary

Data analysis is a complex process of meaning-making, which involves grouping or dividing the data and interpreting what the participants have said. It is also a thought process through which the researcher moves back and forth among the data and decides, either inductively or deductively using a combination of both, what the data is pointing to. These meanings constitute the findings of a study (Merriam, 2009). This section has presented the process of preparing the work for data analysis. At the beginning, it described the thematic analysis that was used to analyse the data in this research, consistent with the constructivist position, with the discussion of its procedures and important terms, and its similarities, differences, and relationships. The subsequent paragraphs illustrated how the data were managed, such as data translation and transcription. This section also explained the data format, which has been reported in the next chapters. The description of the coding process, which is an essential and significant part in analysing the data, was explained earlier in this chapter. The main themes with subcategories coded from data in this research were shown at the end of this subsection, in Table 3.10. The following chapters on the data analysis will interpret the data in these themes.

3.6 Summary of This Chapter

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the methodology of this research in four main sections to show the justification for adopting a qualitative case study as the main approach and applying thematic analysis to analyse the data. Meanwhile, it also outlined in detail the research procedure of collecting and managing the data with emphasis on its specific methods. The research ethics, reliability, validity and limits have also been clarified. This chapter has shown a full picture of the methodology of this research, not only by illustrating the research methods, but also explaining what happened in the actual research situation.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis – Stepping into the Participants' World

"It is said, that on the same tree you will scarce find two leaves perfectly alike. Just so you will, among a thousand men, scarce find two, who harmonize entirely in their views and ways of thinking." (Goethe, 1839, p.103)

4.1 Introduction

Students learning English at university, even if they have the same teachers in the same institution, will still be different. This is further addressed in the State Council's report on education reform, which addresses "尊重教育规律和学生身心发展规律,为每个学生提供适合的教育(English translation: Respecting education principles and students' personal physical and mental development laws to provide suitable education for each student). This reform was a requirement of education development in China between 2010-2020 (State Council, 2010). Cheng (2010) has interpreted this as a direction for education. He emphasises the uniqueness of each student, saying:

each student is different on their talent, nature, interest and habit; even the same student has different cognitive abilities, interests, and concerns at the different stages of growth. Once education pays too much attention on unity and neglects the differences; when emphasis is placed only on generality and when individuality is neglected, education becomes 'imposed' and limits the possibilities for students' development. Therefore, creating a suitable education is a need to adapt to each student's own development, and it is also a reflection of the "people-oriented" practice. (p. 21)

Accordingly, this chapter steps into the participants' worlds to analyse their English learning activities using websites outside of their classes.

Specifically, this chapter shows the analysis of 19 participants' English language learning experiences with websites, outside of class, based on their different learning experiences and perceptions. The participants were from two different Chinese universities. This chapter aims to provide an interpretation of the data analysis and present the findings from each participant. On the other hand, this chapter is a within-case analysis, in which each participant has been regarded as a unit of analysis as they have differences in their personal characteristics; thus, it is necessary to engage in deep discussion (Yin, 2008). Due to the complex and overlapping data and cross-related research questions, the data have been analysed and presented in three main aspects: the participants' previous English learning experiences, their perceptions of English learning, and the nature of web-based English learning (WBEL) out of class. Then, the sections following are structured as in Figure 4.1 to illustrate the 19 students' English learning stories within the discussion of the over-arching themes of this research.



Figure 4.1: The storyline of students' English learning

4.2 Individual Participants' Previous English Learning Experiences

This section aims to interpret all participants' previous English learning experiences, which mainly focuses on presenting their previous learning activities, their general attitude to their own English learning, and their English learning focus. Their previous experiences before beginning this research have been regarded as their individual background information, which refers to their English learning at high school before the national college entrance examination. The data concerning these are discussed further in subsection 4.2.1..

4.2.1 Summary of All Participants' Previous English Learning Activities

Table 4.1: How I have learned English before-what I have done?

	Attend	Т-	P-	E-	Р-	Watch	S-	EL-
	Class	Homework	Attend	online	Homework	Films	Internet	Internet
			classes	course				
AU-	X	Х	X		X			
Lily								
AU-Lee	Х	Х						
AU-	Х	Х		Х			х	Х
Peng								
AU-	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х	
Shasha								
AU-	Х	Х	х		Х			
Shan								
AU-Lei	Х	X	Х	Х	Х			
AU-Liu	Х	X	Х		Х	Х		
AU-Jia	Х	X	Х	Х	X			
AU-Xin	x	Х	x		Х			

AU-Rui	х	Х	X		Х		
AU-Xi	X	Х	X		Х		
BU-Zoe	Х	Х		X			
BU-Yan	Х	Х					
BU-Kai	Х	Х	Х		Х		
BU-	Х	Х	Х		Х		
Zhang							
BU-Lu	Х	X	Х		Х	Х	
BU-	Х	Х					
Zhen							
BU-Li	Х	Х				Х	
BU-	Х	Х	Х		Х		
Tony							

Key

• T- Homework: Complete teacher-assigned homework

- P-Attend class: Attend extra (private) English language classes
- E-online course: Complete English online courses
- P-Homework: Complete homework linked to private English language classes
- Watch Films: Watch films/drama/tv/music, etc.
- S-Internet: Use Internet to communicate socially
- EL-Internet: Use Internet to communicate about learning English

	, , <u>r</u> 1, 1	1 • •	1
I able 4 / All participants	nrovinus English	Ιρανηίης ρχηρηρής -	supplementary information
$1 u u u u \tau \cdot 2 \cdot 1 u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u u$	previous Liteusi		
1 1	1 0	0 1	11 2 3

Attitude	Comments	On	Communicative	Future	Difficulties	
to	about prior	grades/examinations	competence	Plans		
English	teachers	(H or L)	(H or L)	(W or		
learning	(P or N)			S or		
(P or N	(/			B)		
or B)				_ /		
AU-	В	Р	Н		W	
--------	---	---	---	---	---	-------------
Lily						
AU-	N	Ν	L	Н		Vocabulary
Lee						quiz
AU-	Р	Р	Н	Н	S	
Peng						
AU-	Р	Р			В	
Shasha						
AU-	Р	Ν	L	Н		Examination
Shan						
AU-			L			Grammar
Lei						and
						Vocabulary
AU-	Р	Р				
Liu						
AU-	Р	Р				
Jia						

AU-	Р	Р			S	
Xin						
AU-		Р			S	
Rui						
AU-Xi	Р	Р			W	
BU-	В			Н	S	
Zoe						
BU-		Р				
Yan						
BU-		Р	L		W	Examination
Kai						
BU-	Р			Н		
Zhang						
BU-Lu	Р				W	
BU-		Р				
Zhen						
BU-Li	Р		L			Examination

BU-	Ν	L		
Tony				

Key: N - negative; P - positive; B - including both; H - high; L - low; S - study; W - work.

Table 4.1 shows an overview of all participants' previous English learning activities, i.e. the main ways in which they had previously learned English. Table 4.2 contains supplementary information to support the interpretation of students' previous English learning experiences. The sections following will focus on discussing these different activities along with information in Table 4.2. This has been structured as two main parts: English that has been learned by taking classes and doing homework, and English that has been learned, unrelated or informally outside of class, by watching English films, dramas, television programs, and by listening to English songs. However, not all participants have data linked to all aspects in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2.

4.2.1.1 English Learned by Taking Classes and Doing Homework

The discussion in this subsection includes participants' English learning at school and outside of school, as well as online English courses, which is another kind of English class. Instead of teaching face-to-face, online courses teach via the Internet. More discussion about online

English courses is also presented in Section 4.4, along with the analysis of students' current English learning activities on websites during the research.

A. Participants Who Attend English Classes at School

English is a compulsory subject for all students. Attending classes at school and doing the homework assigned by teachers are the main ways to learn English for students, no matter what their attitude to English learning and their comments on prior English teachers, as shown in Table 4.2. Several situations show the interrelationships between the themes in Table 4.2.

Poor performances in examinations are caused by students' dislike of English classes and homework. This was shown with participants Lee-AU, Shan-AU, and Tony-BU. They did not like the content and activities in class or the tasks in homework after class. They believed this caused their performance in English at school to be poor. In relation to their poor performance and their dislike of the learning content, activities in class and homework, they also made negative comments about their prior teachers.

Poor performance in English at school does not necessarily influence students to have a negative attitude to learning English, however. Shan, for example, mentioned that his previous English learning was interesting, but he did not do well at examinations despite his interest. As he said: My English was not good, because I usually got a lower score in examinations comparing with other classmates. but I was good at speaking, I had foreign friends and we usually stayed and played together. Also, I had taken part in several activities, where my English progressed a lot, especially in speaking and listening, I did not like to do the homework and did not like to attend the classes at school, so my English teachers all did not like me.... Actually, I wanted to find an interesting way to learn English rather than getting higher scores in tests.

(AU-Shan-Interview)

Shan is an example of a student who appears to learn English best by taking social activities; he has learned English by communication with others. He also has mentioned that a realistic language environment is important for him, just like the immersion teaching approach. Learning English is not only about the knowledge students acquire, but also how they can use this for communication (Chen, 2016). The content and activities in class and tasks for homework can cause different attitudes to learning English, however. Lee-AU said in his interview, "I spent little time on learning English, because I thought it boring and not useful, the compulsory homework was nothing related to my life...". He had a negative attitude towards the homework because he felt the homework was not relevant to his needs, so he thought learning English was boring and useless. This issue of the relevance of the course to the students' needs has been addressed by Dörnyei (1994a). The relevance of the course materials had also influenced Lee's motivation to learn English (more discussion in subsection 4.3.2).

Although all participants mentioned that their previous English learning had constituted mainly of attending classes at school and doing the homework assigned by teachers, it was not completely limited to that. Only Yan and Zhen, from the private university, mentioned that

they had only learned English at school. They both made positive comments about their English teachers and they learned English by following their teachers' guidance. Their specific learning activities were different, however; as Yan said: "My homework is to do English exercise of grammar and do different kinds of English exercise in reference books as well...". Whereas Zhen's homework was "to listen to the tape of the textbook, to recite articles and to memorise vocabulary...". The difference came from the influence of their different English homework assigned by different teachers. Teachers played an important role in participants' English learning experiences, because the teacher was a key medium through which they accessed English (Gao Y.B., 2017). Also, the homework assigned by teachers influenced the focus of students' English learning.

Table 4.3 shows a list of the types of homework usually assigned by teachers. Because the participants were all first-year undergraduates, their previous English learning experiences mostly related to their learning in high school. The table also presents examples:

Focus	Homework	Example
Examination (National college entrance examination)	 Doing different kinds of test papers; Doing exercises in reference books 	 (Lily-AU, Peng-AU; etc.) (Peng-AU, Yan-BU; etc.)
Speaking	 Reciting articles from textbooks 	• (Rui-AU, Zoe- BU; etc.)
Reading	 Memorise vocabulary lists in textbooks; (Zhen-BU, Li-BU) 	• (Lee-AU, Zhen- BU; etc.)
Listening	• Listen to the tape from the textbook	• (Zhen-BU)
Textbook	• Preview the articles: Look for the meanings of new words in an English	 (Xi-AU) (Shasha-AU, Liu-AU)

dictionary to understand
them.
• Do the exercises in
textbooks (Writing tasks,
reading comprehension
tasks, translation tasks,
grammar tasks, etc.)

Due to the influence of the national college entrance examination, English learning in high school is mainly focused on preparing for that final big examination. Also, these tasks are closely related to the textbooks. It is worth mentioning that in the city of Xi'an, the high schools all use the same English textbook, according to the requirements of the Xi'an education bureau (Li, 2017). Moreover, the textbook is used to understand the language points, focusing on passing the final examination. The examination does not, however, include any oral components (Ma, 2017), therefore the teacher would usually pay less attention to speaking activities. Several teachers believe that reciting articles is a good way to learn a language, both in learning English and Chinese; they believe that students can obviously promote their language ability by doing this. Skinner (1968) advocated learning with memorisation through repetitive drills, with rewards such as by grades or marks when they show positive responses. This is an unwelcome task for students, however; for example, Tony-BU and Lee-AU mentioned that they found reciting articles boring, because it has "no relationship with daily life..." (Lee-AU) and "it was unreal"

(Tony-BU). Students did not like this task not only because of the contents of the articles, but also in terms of the way of memorising the language (Tan, 2006), similar to the task of memorising vocabulary mechanically. Surprisingly, however, participant Peng-AU, who had higher scores in his English examinations, was not as resistant to this kind of memorising task because he felt it was helpful in preparing for examinations. He said:

I think English examinations are important, I did the homework assigned by teachers, for example, reciting articles and memorising the vocabulary list...which I felt useful when I was doing the examination papers...

(AU-Peng-Interview)

To conclude, these homework tasks are all based on behaviourist theories (Zhao, 2012). It is a process of forming habits by repeated stimulation (Zhao, 2012). These tasks are appropriate because of the national college entrance examination, but were not enough to satisfy the Ministry of Education's requirements for English learning at university to develop English major students' skills (MOE, 2007).

B. Participants Who Attended Extra English Classes at a Private Language Institution

Table 4.1 shows that several participants (Lily-AU, Shasha-AU, Shan-AU, Lei-AU, Liu-AU, Jia-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Kai-AU, Zhang-AU, Lu-AU, Tony-AU) had all attended extra English classes at private language learning institutions. In essence, this way of

learning English is also through formal classroom teaching; it merely extends out of class to enhance their English learning at school. Reasons why the students had done this included the following.

a) To Get a Higher Score in the Examinations at School

Participants Shan-AU and Kai-BU clearly expressed that their English was not good because they got lower scores in their examinations. They therefore attended the extra classes to get a higher score in the examinations at school. The difference is, however, that they had different attitudes to their English teachers based on the comments they made about them (see Table 4.2). They said:

When I was in high school, I did not like to do the homework and did not like to take class, and my English teacher in high school, she did not like me either, because my English score was lower than other students in the class... I took some extra classes out of school, because my parents were worried on my poor score in English examinations...

(AU-Shan-Interview)

When I gained a lower score at the English examination, my parents would organise the extra English classes for me, sometimes my English teacher at school taught me privately out of class that was helpful...

(BU-Kai-Interview)

When these students performed badly in English examinations at school, their parents helped them to find more classes out of school to improve their English score. Shan mentioned, however, that he does not think English learning should be based on examinations; he is good at speaking English and he likes to take different activities but with a social purpose, which is not fully related to academic purposes. Kai, on the other hand, complained in his reflective report that his English learning "is mainly made up of doing paper exercises". Even though he had a positive attitude towards his English teacher, he did not express this attitude towards his previous English learning experiences (see Table 4.2). In addition, although Lei-AU did not directly express that taking extra English classes was to get a higher score, she evaluated that her English was 'not good'. She reported that she takes extra classes to enrich her English knowledge, particularly on English grammar, perhaps to get a higher score in the examinations. Lei, in contrast to Shan and Kai, learned from another textbook at a private institution to enrich her English vocabulary. For example:

I have taken several extra English classes at private language institutions to enrich my knowledge of English grammar, especially during the period of time before the examination. Until now I have still taken several online courses out of class, in which I have learned another textbook to enrich my vocabulary and promote my knowledge of grammar...

(AU-Lei-Interview)

b) To Enrich Knowledge of English

Lily-AU, Shasha-AU, Liu-AU, Jia-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Zhang-BU, Lu-BU and Tony-BU all said that they attended extra classes at private language institution to enrich their knowledge of English. Among them, Tony-BU's foundation of English in particular had been built in classes outside of school, as he said in his interview: "I took extra English courses at the private language institution; those courses help me to build a 'shaky' foundation of English".

Since he received negative comments from his English teacher at school, he learned little English there. Namely, the negative comments from the English teacher negatively influenced his English learning at school. Unlike Tony-BU, Lily-AU had higher scores in English examinations and positive comments from her English teacher, but she still took extra English classes, because as she wrote in the reflective report: "only taking the compulsory classes at school is not enough, I need more different practices to promote my English". Although her foundation of English knowledge was acquired at school, Lily looked for extra ways to promote her English development. In contrast, other students used the extra classes to supplement knowledge to support and understand the textbook at school, for example Shasha-AU, Liu-AU, Jia-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Zhang-BU, and Lu-BU. They all had a positive attitude towards English and their previous English teachers, but their learning focus was different, which is discussed further in subsection 4.2.2.

C. Participants Who Take Online English Courses

Participants Lei-AU, Jia-AU, Peng-AU and Zoe-BU had taken online English courses. Peng-AU stated that he looks for more opportunities to practise English and he has explored various possibilities to learn English. He not only takes online English courses, also he uses the Internet to communicate socially and communicate with others about learning English. This was reflected in his reflective report:

I have tried several new learning methods explored through the Internet before this research. For example, I took several online English courses to enrich my knowledge and I got more opportunities to practice English in reading and writing exercise; also, I like to communicate with others in English at the Internet and I also looked at forum to discuss learning notes with others...

(AU-Peng-Reflective)

Jia-AU, on the other hand, used online English courses when she entered university. These online courses are uploaded by private language institutions. Jia-AU mentioned in her interview that "I also took some extra English courses on the English learning websites, instead of going to the language institutions, the courses online were more convenient, I can use my spare time to learn English". Also, participants Lei-AU and Zoe-BU had taken online courses to learn another English textbook to enrich their vocabulary and grammar. For example, Lei stated in her interview that "I have still taken several online courses out of class, which I have learned another textbook to enrich my vocabulary and also promote my knowledge of grammar" (AU-Lei-Interview) and Zoe said, "I have taken several online English courses on learning another textbook, for example new concepts, I think it was much more interesting than the textbook we used in class" (BU-

Zoe-Reflective). In addition, Zoe-BU's report also mentioned that she had taken the online course *Focused on examination preparation* as well.

4.2.1.2 Participants Who Also Learned English by Watching English Films, Dramas, TV, and by Listening to English Songs

Participants Shasha-AU, Li-BU, Liu-AU and Lu-BU had all learned English by watching English dramas. Among them, Shasha and Li had also listened to English music, while Liu and Shasha had also read English novels. For Lu, "watching English films and dramas [was] a motivator (BU-Lu-Reflective) for her to learn English well. They are examples of Murray's (2008) idea that engagement with pop culture is a significant part in language learning outside the classroom and plays a prominent role in language learning (Murray, 2008), which can maintain motivation for learning (Lamb, 2007). Actually, most of the participants had watched English films, TV dramas or listened to English songs in their previous English learning experiences, which have been reflected in their reflective reports recording their English learning activities online (see discussion in Section 4.4). When they were asked about their previous English learning experiences, however, except for these four participants, they took it for granted that English learning takes place in a formal setting. They did not regard this kind of activity as a part of their English learning.

In terms of students' English learning activities discussed above, despite the influence of the context, such as the national college entrance examination, students nonetheless had different focuses in their English learning process. The following subsection looks at the discussion

around this aspect of learning focus: examinations, culture, words, speaking, grammar, compulsory textbooks to learn at school, and other optional textbooks.

4.2.2 A Summary of All Participants' Previous English Learning Focuses

Table 4.4: What constitutes participants' previous English learning

	Examination	Culture	Words	Speaking	Grammar	Textbook	TB-
						at school	0
AU-	Х	Х				Х	Х
Lily							
AU-			Х	Х		Х	
Lee							
AU-	Х			Х		Х	
Peng							
AU-	Х		Х	Х	Х	Х	
Shasha							

AU-	X			Х		Х	
Shan							
AU-	Х				Х	Х	
Lei							
AU-	Х	х				Х	
Liu							
AU-Jia					Х	Х	
AU-						Х	
Xin							
AU-	Х					Х	
Rui							
AU-Xi	х			Х		Х	
BU-	Х		Х	x/r		х	Х-
Zoe							
BU-						х	
Yan							

BU-	Х			Х	
Kai					
BU-			Х	Х	
Zhang					
BU-Lu	Х			Х	
BU-		Х	x/r	Х	
zhen					
BU-Li	Х	х	x/r	Х	Х-
BU-		Х	x/r	Х	
Tony					

Key: TB-O: other textbook learned outside of class

Table 4.4 shows the main focuses of participants in their previous English learning. The textbook at school was the main focus for all participants. Among them, 10 participants showed that they had done speaking activities to practise their English. They can be divided into three groups according to the different kinds of speaking activities.

4.2.2.1 Speaking

A. Participants Who Spoke English by Reciting Articles in the Textbook

Participants Zhen-BU, Zoe-BU, Li-BU and Tony-BU mentioned that they had few opportunities to speak English. The main way of them

doing so was to recite the articles in their textbook. Moreover, Zoe and Li mentioned that they also recited articles from another textbook:

I took the course focused on learning another textbook, for example *New Concept*, I thought it was much more interesting than the textbook we used at class...-I recited a lot of articles in that textbook, which helped me to accumulate the English vocabulary and sentences...

(Zoe-BU-Interview)

I recited the articles in *New Concept*, which was popular then, and I wanted to promote my English to get a higher score at the English test...

(BU-Li-Interview)

In other words, although some participants complained that this learning task was assigned by teachers at school, Zoe and Li wanted to improve their English by doing this task. This task seems fine for preparing for the examination, but it is not enough for communication

in real situations. The participants in the second group are examples of this. The decision whether to choose to do this task out of class was influenced by what the students wanted to acquire from English; a certificate or an ability in the English language.

B. Participants Who Communicated with Others in English for Social Purposes

Participants Lee-AU, Shan-AU, Shasha-AU, and Peng-AU described that their previous English learning also included informal learning based on communication. Lee and Shan had international friends with whom they usually communicate in English. Shasha and Peng used the Internet to look for opportunities to communicating with others in English. Peng also added that:

I tried to get opportunities to practice it on the English learning websites, not only to use English to chat with others, but also to discuss matters related to English learning as well...

(AU-Peng-Interview)

Peng used English to communicate with others not only for social purposes, but also for an academic purpose.

C. Participants Who Communicate with Others in English for Academic Purposes

An example of this is Zhang-BU, who learned English by communicating with her personal English teacher, who is an international undergraduate and teaches her using spoken communication.

I went to English corner every month, also, I had a personal English teacher when I was in high school, who was an international student at university, we had the speaking class every week, which brought me a lot of motivation in learning English and I felt English learning was interesting, I also went to English corner at her university every month, where I met several new friends...

(BU-Zhang-Interview)

English can therefore be used in communication for an academic purpose, which also fits with the purpose of communicating socially. As Wentzel (2007) explains, academic achievements are not affected only by academic needs, but also by social goals (Wentzel, 2007). Actually, they complement each other.

4.2.2.2 Culture

Another learning focus is around the aspect of culture. Only two participants (Lily-AU and Liu-AU) mentioned that their English learning had been focused on learning English culture; Liu achieved this by reading English novels, while Lily did so via the process of doing the tasks in English learning. For example, Lily said: "I could gain a lot of information on western culture during my English learning process, for example, the content of articles I read for the reading tasks, which included the stories or information from different aspects in different western countries, some were on introducing the festivals, and some were on famous persons' biography etc." (AU-Lily-Interview).

Namely, culture in English learning was reflected in their perceptions of the content they had read. Culture can be learned in multiple formats, however, which was also reflected from their reflective reports and their recordings of their English learning activities on websites during the research. For further explanation, see Section 4.4.

4.2.2.3 Examinations, Words and Grammar

For the last group, the discussion was focused on the examinations, words, and grammar together. These three aspects of language learning have already been discussed within the discussion of other aspects. Those are important, particularly in English examinations, and examinations are also an important influence on English teaching in formal classes. According to the Bloomfieldian School's idea, any human language is constructed into a hierarchical system in which all grammatical elements at different levels such as phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, etc., are connected linearly, but essentially are combined hierarchically by fixed grammatical rules (Zhao, 2012). Students thus have to learn these rules to connect the words together. Examinations are a way to test whether students have mastered these grammatical rules. Shasha-AU explained her formal English learning as conscious learning that is focused on doing tasks, i.e. focusing on examinations, textbooks, grammar, and words. Furthermore, Lei-AU said in her interview that "I learned [the] textbook to enrich my vocabulary and my knowledge of grammar to prepare for the English examinations" which further illustrates the

interrelationships between these aspects of the learning process. In addition, in Table 4.2, participants listed their difficulties, which were all mainly with examinations, grammar and vocabulary.

4.2.3 Summary of the Section

This section has interpreted participants' previous English learning experiences. The discussion has mainly been around the contents of the three tables (Tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3), focusing on their learning tasks, learning content, their attitude to their previous English learning and English teachers, as well as their self-evaluation of their English learning performance. The discussion implies the ways participants previously acquired their English learning. In summary, Figure 4.2 shows a process map of students' previous English learning, which shows that each participant 'travelled' from the beginning till the final stop on the map, which is 'examination'. Nonetheless, they selected their own activities and tasks during the process according to their individual differences. Also, they have different English learning outcomes, as their self-evaluations reflected in their reflective reports and final interview.



Figure 4.2: A map of students' previous English learning processes

4.3 All Individual Participants' Perceptions of English Learning

This section aims to analyse each participant's perceptions of learning English. Questions in this section include the following: What are the ideas they have about learning English? What are the reasons for them to learn English? Also, it aims to present the responses to research question 1:

- What are the learning perceptions among the Chinese students involved in the study?
 - a. What are their ideas about learning English?
 - b. Why are they learning English?
 - c. How have they learned English over the years? (The discussion is in Section 4.2.)

The discussion around sub-question c. took place in Section 4.2. This section focuses on students' perceptions of English learning, which are linked with their previous English learning experiences and their current learning activities. Figure 4.3 shows the interrelationships between these factors, which have been categorised by different participants, and is further explained with examples (see full discussion in Chapter 5).



Figure 4.3: The relationship between perceptions and learning activities

The following analysis focuses on the interpretations of participants' beliefs about learning English and their motivation, which aims to build a foundation to further discuss how this influences students' English learning on websites.

4.3.1 Learner Beliefs

Table 4.5 summarises participants' beliefs about learning English.

	The influence of	Teachers' influence	English status in	Parents' influence	A tool for communication	An instrument	For social needs	English
	context		the world					culture
AU-Lily	Х	X		х				х
AU-Lee								х
AU-Peng		X				х		
AU-Shasha			х					
AU-Shan		X		x		х		
AU-Lei		X		X			x	
AU-Liu		X						х
AU-Jia		X	х					
AU-Xin		X		x				
AU-Rui		X			X	X		
AU-Xi					X			
BU-Zoe		X						х
BU-Yan			x		X			
BU-Kai	x			x				
BU-Zhang				x	X			
BU-Lu			x		X			x
BU-Zhen	x							
BU-Li								x
BU-Tony		х	Х					

Table 4.5: A summary of all participants' expressed beliefs about learning English

'Beliefs about English' refers to the attitude and ideas participants hold towards English, and to learning English (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995). Further information is shown in Table 4.6. More specifically, in Table 4.5, which presents a summary of all participants' beliefs of English learning, the participants' ideas have been categorised into eight aspects. The following discussion will focus on these aspects respectively.

4.3.1.1 The Influence of Context

The context has influenced students' beliefs about English since they began learning it; English has an attribute brought from the context. Participants Lily-AU, Kai-BU, and Zhen-BU, for example, regarded English as a compulsory subject in school education, while Lily described it as the first foreign language she learned. Actually, the influence of context also reflects the status of English in education in China; English is a compulsory subject even from primary school (MOE, 2001). In all universities, English is a compulsory subject for all students in different majors, with the other foreign languages as optional courses (MOE, 2007), which all implies the significance of English and the emphasis MOE places on its importance in education in the context. This influence is positive for some participants, but negative for others. Lily recognised its importance and learned it actively. Kai, on the other hand, believed that he was effectively forced to learn it:

I learned English ever since I went to school, English was the first foreign language I had learned, and it was the compulsory course for me...-I learned English by following teachers' guidance and I got a higher score in the examinations, Since I was young, I had been told by my parents that I need to be a good student and finish the homework in time and behave well in school...

(AU-Lily-Interview)

My English is not good, at the beginning, English is one of the compulsory subjects, therefore, I have to learn it, and I choose to learn English because of my parents' ideas, they have said that learn English well could find a good job...

(BU-Kai-Interview)

These are two examples that would explain the concept of 'cultural beliefs' described by Gardener (1988). He explained that these were "the expectations in the minds of teachers, parents and students concerning the entire second language acquisition task" (Gardener, 1988. p.110).

4.3.1.2 English Status in the World

Another two ideas participants held were that English is a very popular foreign language (Jia-AU, Yan-BU, Lu-BU, Tony-BU) and English is the commonly used language around the world and can lead people to the world (Shasha-AU, Yan-BU, Tony-BU). This reflects their ideas concerning English's status in the world. For example, as Jia said, "I like English, because English is very popular language and if

I can speak English well, then I will not be afraid that if I go out of the country" (AU-Jia-Reflective). Shasha said, "English can lead me to the world" (AU-Shasha-Reflective). Her explanation of how English 'leads her to the world' shows that she believes English is "a popular and commonly used language" (AU-Shasha-Interview). Namely, they perceive English as a global language, which shows the international influence of English in the world. A large number of people speak English, it has been decided by the history of English (Crystal, 2012), which far exceeds the numbers of native speakers. English has been widely used in a lot of countries as a second language, and even in several countries, for example, in China, English is a foreign language with significant special status. No matter how or where they will work or study in the future, they can "communicate with others around the world" (BU-Yan-Reflective). English becomes a tool for communication, which implies the necessity of providing opportunities for students to practise their spoken English.

4.3.1.3 English is a Tool for Communication

Participants Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Yan-BU, Zhang-BU, and Lu-BU all directly expressed the idea that English is a tool for communication. But they all pointed out that this idea is not directly claimed by the context, but is developed from their experiences. For example, Zhang said: "I choose English as my major, because English is a tool of communication, I want to speak to more people from different countries and make friends" (BU-Zhang-Reflective). Rui also said something similar; "I like English, because it is a tool for communication, also if I learn English well, I can learn another subject in foreign countries when I graduate" (AU-Rui-Interview). Moreover, Rui believes that English is not only a tool for communication, but also an instrument that could be used to deliver content in other subjects in foreign countries.

4.3.1.4 English is an Instrument

English is an instrument, for example with which to learn other subjects (as Peng-AU and Rui-AU mentioned) and is used when living in western countries (Shan-AU). Peng and Rui mentioned that they wanted to study abroad and learn another subject. English would thus be a language to deliver that knowledge. Shan said that "English is essential for me to live in western countries" (AU-Shan-Reflective). Namely, English is an ability that Peng and Rui felt they should have in order to learn new knowledge, and an ability that Shan felt he should have in order to live in western countries.

4.3.1.5 Learning English is for Social Needs: A Stepping Stone to Success

Another example of this was participant Lei-AU, who used the metaphor of a "stepping stone to success" to explain the purpose of learning English, which also shows the significance of English in China from another perspective. As she said:

I believe that learning English well is important, every student has learned it, and it is evidence to show your talents when you are looking for a job. Thus, I pay much more effort in learning English ...-I have been told by my teachers and parents that I should promote my English ability, it is a stepping stone to success, and then I could have a better career...

(AU-Lei-Interview)

Hu (2014) explains why English is regarded as a stepping stone to success. As he said:

30 years ago, English is a key to access success, which means passing English examinations and getting certificates are essential requirements to graduate from university; it is also enough to get a better job and be promoted in a future career. Because students have little opportunity to use English then, so they learn English only by memorising. (Hu, 2014, p.19)

He also has addressed that this is an outdated idea, which cannot meet the requirements of society today (Hu, 2014). Nonetheless, it is still reflected in the participants' accounts (e.g. Lei-AU). Furthermore, these memorising methods were directly mentioned by participants Lily-AU, Lee-AU, Zoe-BU, Zhang-BU, Zhen-BU, Li-BU, and Tony-BU in their accounts of previous English learning experiences. They held different attitudes to memorising words or articles, however. This may be because of the fact that passing English examinations and getting certificates are still essential requirements to graduate from university. As Hu (2014) mentions, since China's reform and opening-up, the evaluation of English should not merely be judged from the paper examinations, but students' ability in communication (Hu, 2014 p.19). This also satisfies the requirements for English teaching announced by the MOE in its reform of English education in universities in 2007 (MOE, 2007). The importance of communication has increased in English education around the country.

4.3.1.6 Learning English is to Learn its Culture

In addition, participants Liu-AU, Zoe-BU, and Lu-BU referred to English learning as a process to learn its culture. Liu said that "I learned English culture by reading the original English books (AU-Liu-Reflective). Zoe and Lu mentioned that they liked English culture and that it was a part of their English learning. Moreover, Lee-AU believed that English learning is based on the yearning for culture, for example, he said that American basketball matches were his motivation to learn English: "I want to go to America to watch basketball matches, then my English learning is to support me to go to America after graduation..." (AU-Lee-Reflective). Different participants understood 'culture' from different aspects, which is summarised in Table 4.6.

English culture	Text-based	a. Literature	Liu-AU
		b. History	Zoe-BU
		c. Customs	Lu-BU
	Other forms	a. Music	Li-BU

Table 4.6: Participants' understanding of English culture

	b.	Basketball/football	Lee-BU
		Matches	
	c.	Films, dramas	

4.3.1.7 Teachers' and Parents' Influences on Students' Beliefs about Learning English

Finally, parents and teachers influence students' beliefs about learning English. Lily's parents' expectations were important for her and guided her to learn English. Instead of saying that her ideas of English influenced how she learned it, it would be fairer to say that her parents' ideas and teachers' instruction had influenced her way of learning English. Similarly, Kai thought learning English could help him to find a good job, which was influenced by his parents' ideas. These ideas that were heavily influenced by teachers and parents were not stable, however. Their ideas about learning English developed along with their own experience, unless their own experience provided evidence for what their parents and teachers had instilled in them.

Table 4.5 presented the beliefs that the participants' expressed by themselves, while the discussion of these aspects implied that some of these aspects are interrelated. The eight aspects discussed above are not isolated; they can be categorised into four types to explain the participants' understandings about learning English. This grouping is shown in Figure 4.4, which reflects that participants' understandings are not only based on the external social attributes of English, but also on its function and contents.



Figure 4.4: Categories of student beliefs about learning English

4.3.1.8 Attitude Towards Learning English

To complement the beliefs about learning English that participants held, there are also four kinds of attitudes to learning English:

A. Both positive and negative: Learning English is both interesting and boring (such as Lily-AU)

- B. Positive: Learning English is interesting (such as Shan-AU)
- C. Negative: Learning English is boring (such as Lee-AU)
- D. From negative to positive: Learning English changes from boring to interesting (such as Kai-BU)

If the activities mainly focus on examinations, on memorising words and reciting articles, participants (e.g. Lily, Peng, Shasha, Kai) felt that there was little opportunity for them to practice English. Kai indicated that this is not relevant to his life. Furthermore, if learning activities focus on real practise, Shan and Kai felt that this was more interesting. Their attitudes have been shaped by their English learning experiences, which implies the necessity of real English practices that relates to students' lives. Also, if learning activities bring new knowledge, for example the activities Lily talked about from which she acquired English cultural knowledge, learning is likely to be perceived as more interesting. Negative attitudes tended to come from overload on examination exercises.

These different attitudes towards learning English are influenced by the English learning experiences in China. Vice versa, their learning experiences also influence their attitudes (Little and Singleton, 1990). Namely, not all participants' beliefs of English learning are stable; some more ideas emerged from participants' English learning journeys using websites out of class. Kai, for example, feels that English is interesting after he collaborates with his classmates in learning English. Tony said that he learns to speak English better after he watches videos of 'TED' talks, and Lily's ideas developed along with her learning process. After taking several activities on websites, for example, she felt that English is interesting and is a tool to access much more information. Their ideas arise during learning, but whether these can change to stable beliefs and become an integral part of a belief system need time and to be tested in the learning experience. Beliefs can
be "stable/unstable, emerging/fading away, used/unused, new/old, idiosyncratic/universal, evolving/unchanging, recurrent/infrequent" (Hosenfeld, 2002, p.37-54). They are part of participants' constructions of their experiences (Barcelos, 2000). Beliefs change along with experiences, since they are social, dynamic and contextual. Experiences affect beliefs and beliefs also cause experiences (Yang, 1992). Beliefs are not structured or linear, however; rather they are complex and embedded within sets of beliefs forming a multi-layered web of relationships. In other words, participants' beliefs are not limited to their ideas about English and learning English, but also include the reasons for them to learn English. The following subsection looks at participants' motivation to learn English, which are complementary ideas to participants' perceptions about learning English.

4.3.2 Discussion on Motivation

Motivation is regarded as an extension of the beliefs participants hold about their learning process, which reflect how they perceive themselves as an English learner. Figure 4.5 has been developed based on Dörnyei's (2005) 'L2 Motivational Self System', which involves three elements: Ideal L2 self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning Experience to present how each participant's attitude to learning English links to their motivation.



Figure 4.5: The L2 motivation self-system adapted for this research

According to this research, the framework of Dörnyei's (2005) the 'L2 Motivational Self System' (cited by Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011, p.86) tends not to emphasise on explaining participants' personal identity; rather it focuses on individual participants' beliefs of what their ideals of English learning are and what they think English learning ought to be. These two 'selves' influence their English learning experience. Moreover, those three terms all influence their actual learning process, as shown in Figure 4.5. More specifically, explanations of these three terms with examples from this research are shown below:

- Ideal L2 Self. Participants (such as Zhang-BU and Rui-AU) mentioned that they would like to become a person who speaks English; they all practiced their spoken English by imitating the ways of native speakers. (However, here English native speakers are not all included, only the people from popular countries for example: the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, etc. Students are familiar with in terms of their TV programmes, music, films, etc. released in China.)
- Ought-to L2 Self. Participants (such as Lily-AU and Peng-AU) thought they should and ought to learn English and meet expectations from teachers and parents and to avoid possible negative influences and outcomes.

Moreover, Peng seemed to have both of these two 'selves' to guide his English learning. For example, Peng said:

I could have a higher score in English subject in my class, but I didn't think I was a good learner. Because in my opinion, a good learner was not [just] learning for examinations. We needed more opportunities to practice our English and communicate with others.

(AU-Peng-Reflective)

In terms of his learning process, which was externally influenced, he learned English by following teachers' instructions in order to avoid negative influences and results. Also, he took several learning activities on websites to find more opportunities to practise his English, because he believed that English is based on communication with people. • L2 Learning Experience, which in this research refers to the consideration of the learning environment and experience (e.g. the impact of the teacher or parents, the examination, or the experience of the group discussion).

Namely, these three concepts are not only limited to the examples listed above. They are also related to each participant's motivation for learning English. The following subsections focus on the discussion of participants' specific motivations.

4.3.2.1 The Definition of 'Motivation' in This Research

According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), motivation is explained as "why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it" (p.4). They categorise it into three kinds, intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation. Another influential framework of L2 motivation is the social constructivist model by Williams and Burden (1997). They list detailed motivational factors, categorised into internal and external factors to express their belief that motivation is different among individual people, being influenced by social and contextual factors. Specifically, these influences include culture, the contexts, and the social situations in which people live, as well as the other people who interact with them (Williams and Burden, 1997). In this research, 'motivation' has been generally categorised into three kinds: 'intrinsic', 'extrinsic', and 'goal orientation'. An overview of students' motivation to learn English is shown in Table 4.7. Further discussion on the specific factors follows.

	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Goal orientation
AU-Lily	Х	Х	
AU-Lee	Х		
AU-Peng	Х		
AU-Shasha			х
AU-Shan	Х	Х	X
AU-Lei		Х	
AU-Liu	х		
AU-Jia	Х		
AU-Xin	Х	Х	х
AU-Rui	Х		
AU-Xi			Х
BU-Zoe	Х		X
BU-Yan	Х		
BU-Kai	Х	Х	
BU-Zhang	Х		х
BU-Lu	X		Х

Table 4.7: All participants' motivations for learning English

BU-zhen	Х	Х	
BU-Li	Х		
BU-Tony	Х	Х	х

- A. Intrinsic Motivation:
 - Positive attitude to English culture (Lee-AU, Liu-AU, Zoe-BU, Lu-BU, Lily-AU)
 - Positive attitude to English literature (Zoe-BU)
 - Positive attitude to English and learning English (Liu-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Yan-BU, Zhang-BU, Lu-BU, Li-BU, Tony-BU, Kai-BU, Zhen-BU)
 - Positive attitude to the English community (Xin-AU, Shan-AU)
- B. Extrinsic Motivation:
 - Expectations from parents (Lily-AU, Shan-AU, Xin-AU, Kai-BU)
 - Expectations from society (Lei-AU, Kai-BU)
 - Gaining a higher score and being praised (Lily-AU)
 - Learning environment is comfortable (Zhen-BU)
- C. Goal Orientation:

- Future plans: study abroad (Shasha-AU, Shan-AU, Xin-AU, Zoe-BU, Zhang-BU, Tony-BU)
- Future work orientation: work in an international company (Shasha-AU) and become an English tourist guide (Xi-AU) or an English teacher (Lu-BU)

The participants' motivation has generally been divided into three kinds, in which intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have been explained by adopting Williams and Burden's (1997) framework of L2 motivation. Goal orientation has been explained by Gardner's theory of motivation. More specifically, participants shaped their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations based on their interactions with the culture, the contexts, and social situations (Williams and Burden, 1997). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations coexisted, such as for Xin-AU. Xin's motivation to learn English was not only that she likes English and she was curious about life and studying in western countries, she also wanted to achieve her parents' expectations, which was an external motivating factor. In fact, most people are both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated, and the relationship between these two is complex and constantly changing. Extrinsic motivation can also arouse intrinsic motivation. Lily-AU, for example - her motivation to learn English was to achieve her parents' and teachers' expectations, but during her learning process, she found that she was interested in English culture. This increased her motivation; however, in order to get a higher score, she still had to learn English via 'boring tasks' to prepare for the examinations. This made learning English boring for her and reduced her motivation. This does not mean, however, that Lily's example proves a negative relationship between intrinsic and

extrinsic motivation. The study (e.g. Lepper and Greene, 1978) shows that learners will lose their intrinsic motivation in an activity if they need to do it to meet some extrinsic requirement. Lily feels bored of learning English because of the tasks around preparing for examinations; this negative attitude is not directly related to the examination itself. Furthermore, with her learning development in WBEL, her intrinsic motivation has been enhanced, which was discussed in the subsection: 'the development of motivation during the learning process'. This relationship can be explained in this research via participants Shan, Kai, and Zhen, who learned English mainly because of their extrinsic motivations and did not show their intrinsic motivation at the beginning, but along the learning process, their intrinsic motivation has been aroused and developed. These two kinds of motivation can work together, for example, in the application of self-determination theory, which is further discussed in subsection 4.3.2.2.

Moreover, in relation to point C (Goal Orientations), participants Shasha-AU, Xi-AU, and Kai-BU used their future goals as their motivation, which is related to the relationship between motivation and orientation in Gardner's (1985) theory. The participants wanted to go abroad to study; this goal helped to arouse their motivation for learning English. The function of their goal orientation directed them to a set of goals. A more specific discussion of goals has been presented in subsection 4.3.2.3 on goal theories.

4.3.2.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Another classification of motivation is by Deci and Ryan on self-determination theory (SDT), which is used here to explain how participants internalised their extrinsic goals. In other words, their extrinsic goals are internalised with their beliefs about English and learning English and to interpret the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2011). Participants such as Lily-AU, Shan-AU, Xin-AU, Kai-BU, and Zhen-BU remembered being told by parents/teachers that they were a 'good' student or a 'good'/'useful' girl/boy when learning English, which may co-exist with the intrinsic regulation of motivation, such as enjoyment of interesting learning activities. This is one situation in which their extrinsic motivation (to meet teachers' and parents' expectations) also aroused their intrinsic interest in taking English learning activities. In addition, some participants' motivation can be explained with two mini-theories developed by Deci and Ryan (2011) in SDT (outlined following), which are used to interpret participants' motivation specifically.

A. The Effects of Social Environments on Intrinsic Motivation

The effects of social environments firstly refer to the status of English in the Chinese education system, whether English is a 'popular' (Jia-AU, Yan-BU, Lu-BU, Tony-BU) or 'compulsory' (Lily-AU, Kai-BU, Zhen-BU) or 'first' (Lily-AU) language for participants. These environments all provide opportunities for participants to learn English. During their learning process, Lily-AU and Lu-BU felt that they were interested in western culture and they felt happy doing learning activities on websites; Jia-AU felt excited when speaking English in

online chatrooms; Yan-BU got a sense of achievement when doing learning activities in WBEL out of class. Kai-BU even changed his view of English from 'a compulsory subject' to 'interesting'; Zhen-BU mentioned that she was interested in the learning content searched from websites; and Tony-BU gained enjoyment from taking activities in WBEL and wanted to learn English well.

The effects of the social environment include the expectations of society, which affected participants' motivation in learning English. In other words, the requirements of university and the potential requirement of finding a good job asked students to learn English well and pass their English examinations to get a certificate. Among the participants, Lei-AU and Kai-BU mentioned that their extrinsic motivation was to get a good job. During their learning process in a WBEL environment, they all showed development in their extrinsic motivation, which was enhanced through doing interesting activities.

B. The Development of Autonomous Extrinsic Motivation and Self-Regulation Through Internalisation and Integration This kind of development has been reflected during the learning process of participants who did activities in WBEL out of class. Their self-determination lies in choosing the activities to meet their external learning goals and enhance their extrinsic motivation. Along with this process, participants' intrinsic motivation was often aroused or enhanced as well. Zhang-BU, for example, wanted to make friends with foreigners, so she paid more attention to speaking English. She has said that she gains enjoyment from speaking activities, which motivates her a lot in her English learning. Another example is Li-BU, who learned English because of her love of English songs. During her learning process in WBEL out of class, her intrinsic motivation has been supported via learning activities that satisfy her extrinsic motivation. Whether the participants' extrinsic motivation was enhanced during the process was based on positive feedback and choice, however, which were predicted to enhance their experiences of competence and self-determination, fostering greater intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999). In other words, the activities influenced the development of participants' motivation. Rui-AU, for example, takes the activities on websites to do homework. Whether or not his motivation was enhanced was according to the task's relevance to his life. Zhen-BU, on the other hand, takes the activities on websites and her motivation was enhanced according to the task's relevance to her formal English learning at school. Namely, it was important for these participants that the activities they selected related to their learning needs for them to influence the development of their motivation.

Lily-AU, Peng-AU, Zhen-BU, Kai-BU, Lee-AU, Liu-AU, and Zoe-BU mentioned that positive feedback supports their English learning and enhanced their extrinsic motivation. Positive feedback comes from teachers, scores in English examinations, and other classmates. Specifically, Peng-AU gained confidence in learning English from higher scores; Zhen-BU said that the teacher's feedback motivates her in learning English; and Lily-AU, Lee-AU, Liu-AU, and Zoe-BU said that their motivation was enhanced when they collaborated with other classmates.

To conclude on the application of theory of SDT in this research, it mainly reflected on how each participant chose activities for themselves, then internalised their extrinsic goals. Namely, in the discussion of how participants' extrinsic motivation develops along with intrinsic

motivation, the learning activities themselves play a crucial role. The activities not only enhance motivation, but also function as a way to achieve the final goal, for example: mastery of English or other individual learning orientation. If the activities did not satisfy individual students' needs, however, their motivation reduced. This has been explained in the examples of Rui-AU and Zhen-BU. Rui-AU and Zhen-BU actually lost their intrinsic motivation with inappropriate learning activities. To achieve this internalisation process and enhance each participants' motivation, particularly during the learning process on websites out of class, the setting of appropriate learning goals is thus important as well as the selection of released learning activities. Different participants who have different goals will have different outcomes and reflections. Figure 4.6 shows this process of internalisation more clearly.



Figure 4.6: The process of internalisation of extrinsic motivation

Learning orientation is discussed in the next subsection. The learning activities themselves will be specifically clarified in Section 4.4 on web-based English learning (WBEL) outside of the classroom.

4.3.2.3 Learning goals

Participants Shasha-AU, Shan-AU, Xin-AU, Zoe-BU, Zhang-BU, Tony-BU, Xi-AU, and Lu-BU expressed that their general motivation to learn English aligned with their future study and work orientation, as shown in Table 4.7. To be specific, they are:

1. To go abroad to study (Shasha-AU, Shan-AU, Xin-AU, Zoe-BU, Zhang-BU, Tony-BU)

2. To work in an international company (Shasha-AU) or to be an English teacher (Lu-BU) or to be an English tourist guide (Xi-AU) Gardner (1985) highlighted the relationship between motivation and orientation. For the participants, their future orientation is regarded as an instrument to motivate their English learning (Gardner, 1985). For the participants whose future orientation is studying abroad (e.g. Shan-AU, Zoe-BU, Zhang-BU), this functions as a direction to influence their selection of learning activities. Zhang-BU, for example, described collecting information about western countries by looking at the different universities' homepages. Zoe-BU reported taking online courses to prepare for the IELTS examination, while Shan-AU focused on finding more opportunities to practise English by speaking with other foreigners, etc. Participants Xin-AU, Zhang-BU, Tony-BU, and Shasha-AU focused on their formal English learning and took activities to try to promote their English learning ability. Future work orientation merely helped Shasha-AU and Lu-BU to choose

to learn English itself, however and the specific learning behaviours during the learning journey are not directly related to this work orientation. This was reflected from their learning process as recorded by themselves. This may be because this particular orientation does not directly relate to the learning content of English classes or activities. For participants to achieve their future orientations, they have to learn English, so these future orientations seemed to be a motivator for participants to learn English. Actually, there is not much difference between the two groups highlighted above; they are all concerned with external future plans; participants can have sub-goals under them or not. If participants regard their goals as a wish, however, they may be uncertain of achieving that, which may influence whether their goal is achieved in the future. Lu-BU, for example, wanted to be an English teacher; however, along her learning journey, her learning behaviours did not correlate with becoming an English teacher. In her final interview, she said: "actually, I am not sure whether I can be an English teacher in the future, because I have no idea on what will happen after three years (BU-Lu-Interview). Xi-AU, on the other hand, wanted to be an English tourist guide and she took several activities to promote her ability to approach her future goal.

Just as Figure 4.7 shows, it is only if more specific learning goals are developed in learning English, that they are more precisely performance regulated (Locke, 1996). Otherwise, goal orientation as a motivator for participants might disappear or be suspended.



Figure 4.7: The relationship between learning goals and learning activities

During the learning process of WBEL, participants have their individual learning goals to guide their selection of learning activities, which are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Participants' learning goals for activity selection on websites254

	To enrich knowledge of	To learn English culture	To do the homework (on	To prepare for the examinations (on
	English	and literature	websites)	websites)
AU-Lily	X		X	
AU-Lee	X	х	x	X
AU-Peng	Х		x	X
AU-Shasha	X		x	
AU-Shan	X			
AU-Lei	X		х	х
AU-Liu	Х	Х	х	Х
AU-Jia	X		х	Х
AU-Xin				
AU-Rui	Х		Х	Х
AU-Xi	Х		х	
BU-Zoe	X	Х	x	Х
BU-Yan	Х		Х	Х
BU-Kai	Х			
BU-Zhang	Х			Х
BU-Lu	X	Х		

BU-zhen	X		
BU-Li	X		
BU-Tony	Х		Х

Specifically, there are four kinds of goal orientation for participants, which can be summed as mastery orientation and performance orientation. 'Mastery orientation' refers to the learning content (Gardner and Lambert, 1959, p.191). For example:

- 1. To enrich the knowledge of English
 - 1) To learn business English (Lu-BU, Shasha-AU)
 - 2) To learn English words (Peng-AU, Lily-AU, Zoe-BU, Zhen-BU, Lei-AU, Jia-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Lu-BU, Li-BU, Tony-BU)
 - 3) To practise speaking English (Rui-AU, Zoe-BU, Zhang-BU, Peng-AU, Shasha-AU, Shan-AU)
 - 4) To practise listening to English (Yan-BU, Kai-BU, Zhang-BU, Lu-BU, Li-BU, Tony-BU, Peng-AU, Shasha-AU, Shan-AU)
 - 5) To practise reading English (Rui-AU, Zhang-BU, Li-BU)
 - 6) To practise writing English (Rui-AU, Yan-BU, Zhang-BU, Shasha-AU)
- 2. To learn English culture and literature (Lee-AU, Liu-AU, Zoe-BU, Lu-BU, Lily-AU)

In addition, there are two other learning goals which are based on particular tasks or problems and are assigned by teachers or required by examinations.

- 1. To do the homework with the help of websites (Lily-AU, Lee-AU, Peng-AU, Shasha-AU, Lei-AU, Liu-AU, Jia-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Zoe-BU, Yan-BU)
- 2. To prepare for the examinations with the help of websites (Lee-AU, Peng-AU, Lei-AU, Liu-AU, Jia-AU, Rui-AU, Zoe-BU, Yan-BU, Zhang-BU, Tony-BU)

These two goals are not all about getting good grades or outdoing other students. They are also focused on solving problems and tasks by taking learning activities on websites (for example, Jia-BU sets her goals related to completing the tasks in homework with the help of websites; while Peng-AU and Zoe-BU focus on taking activities on websites to dealing with their weakness). According to this research, they are not, therefore, categorised necessarily under performance orientation with a focus on demonstrating ability, getting good grades or outdoing other students (Ames, 1992). This performance orientation can be explained via the example of participant Lei-AU, who wanted to get a higher score in the English examination because he thinks that it is a way to show his talents and stand out above others when looking for a job.

The participants' goals were planned in accordance with their personal preferences and requirements, which are also influenced by their perceptions. Their end goals involved either gaining external benefits or improving their language development. On the other hand, their goals were also set for academic purposes or social purposes; social competence is positively related to the development of academic competence. Participants performed differently because of different goals (Locke and Latham, 1990). More discussion on this can be seen in Section 4.4 on the specific learning activities on websites.

During the process shown in Figure 4.7, more specific goals help to guide the selection of learning activities. Locke (1996) demonstrated that the more difficult the goal, the greater the achievement, when they are both specific and difficult will lead to the highest performance. According to this research, however, whether or not the activities help to achieve the learning goals is also influenced by self-efficacy beliefs:

...efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency. People have little motivation to act or to persevere, when they are in the face of difficulties, except that they know they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions. Whatever other factors may operate as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce effects by one's actions. (Bandura, 2001, p. 10)

Namely, 'self-efficacy' is the participants' judgement of their abilities to do specific tasks. This sense of efficacy will decide whether they choose the activities or not. For example, Lee-AU, who had a low sense of self-efficacy, treated the difficult tasks as personal threats, concentrating on his personal deficiencies and difficulties instead of focusing on how to successfully do the task. As he said, "I also didn't like to recite the vocabulary list. I had a nightmare in high school, in every morning reading class, my English teacher always did the

vocabulary quiz, I always had a bad performance..." (AU-Lee-Interview). Lee-AU is therefore likely to give up; he treats this task as having no relevance to his needs. In contrast, participants such as Kai-BU and Tony-BU had a strong sense of self-efficacy. This enhanced their achievement behaviours by helping them to deal with difficult tasks with confidence to complete the tasks or to sustain effort in the face of failure. As Kai said:

I was watching English films and I selected three films without Chinese subtitles, however I totally could not understand what they were talking about...-then I tried to watch NBA matches with English comments. I felt those videos were easier for me to understand than the English films. Because I knew the background information and terminologies...-after several weeks, I watched English films and TV dramas with English subtitles, which would help me to understand the meanings, also I searched a lot of interesting videos on websites with English subtitles...

(Kai-BU-Reflective)

Kai's experience shows his process of dealing with his problem of learning English by watching English films. Along with suggestions and discussion with other classmates, he tried different activities and then he used English subtitles to help him to understand English videos. Also, in Tony's experience, he felt it was difficult to do the dictation exercises on websites. He did not give up, however; he found a solution to reduce the difficulty, for example to slow down the speed of the recording. Kai-BU and Tony-BU both tried to solve their learning problems instead of giving up straight away; their self-efficacy beliefs are not directly related to their actual capacities and competence (Dörnyei,1998). These exist within a complex process of self-persuasion influenced by several factors (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2013), for example, during discussions with other students that Kai and Tony participated in.

These goals are regarded as their interim goals; for example, they take activities to improve English skills, then finally they could use English in their future study or work that is the ultimate goal at this moment. That is why students have mentioned earlier that English is a stepping stone to success.

4.3.3 Summary of This Section

In summary, this section has interpreted the participants' perceptions of learning English, which has mainly focused on their learning beliefs and motivation. The purpose of this section was to present how they perceive their beliefs and show the relationships with learning activities. A full discussion on how it influences the choice of specific learning activities on websites is in Section 4.4.

4.4 All participants' English Learning Activities on Websites Out-of-class During the Research Conducted

All participants recorded their English learning on websites out of class by writing reflective reports during the period of the research. The following discussion will interpret their specific learning activities as well as their learning problems. Also, this section aims to respond to research question 2, which is:

- How do these students learn English outside of class in web-based environment (English learning websites)?
 - a. What do they actually do and why?

b. What problems do learners face, especially when learning via English learning websites outside of class? What makes them persist or give up? How do they overcome their problems?

This section is structured into two main subsections to illustrate the learning activities on websites outside of class and the problems the participants met during this learning process.

Table 4.9: All participants' English learning activities on websites out of class

	Online- dic	ELW	Search engine	Chatroom	Forum	Email	Baidu cloud	Dictation	game	W- video	vlog	L- Music	В
AU- Lily	X	X		X		Х				x			
AU- Lee		Х	X	x	Х	Х		x	X	X			
AU- Peng	X	X	x	X						X			
AU- Shasha		X	х	X						Х		Х	x
AU- Shan		X	х	X			Х		X	Х		Х	
AU- Lei		Х		X									
AU- Liu		X	x				Х			X			x
AU- Jia	X	X	x	X	Х		Х		X	X			
AU- Xin	X	X	x	x	Х		X			X			
AU- Rui	X	X	x	x	Х		Х			X			

AU-Xi	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х			Х			
BU-		X		X					X			
Zoe												
BU-	X	X		X			X		Х			
Yan												
BU-		х	X						Х			
Kai												
BU-		х	Х	Х					Х	Х	Х	
Zhang												
BU-Lu	X	X							Х		Х	
BU-	X	х	X	X					Х			
Zhen												
BU-Li		X					х	X	X		Х	X
BU-		х		X			X	Х	Х		Х	
Tony												

Key

Online-dic: Online dictionary;

ELW: English learning websites;

W-video: Watching all videos incl. films, tv, dramas etc;

Vlog: Making English videos;

L-Music: Listening to English music;

B: Read English books

4.4.1 Participants 'English Learning Activities on Websites

Table 4.9 has presented an overview of all participants' English learning activities on websites out of class. The top columns include the specific learning activities taken on the website, which are explained in further discussion in the following subsections.

4.4.1.1 The Classification of English Learning Activities on Websites

Firstly, these activities can be divided into two main aspects: activities on English learning websites and activities on other websites (see Figure 4.8).

English learning websites	Other websites
 Online English course Searching and downloading materials Practising English skills Word games Reading task Mock exam exercise Distation exercise 	 Online dictionary Search engine Email Baidu cloud Games Watching films, tv, dramas etc Vloce
 Dictation exercise Listening to English radio Chatroom Forum 	VlogListening to English songsReading books

Figure 4.8: The classification of English learning activities on websites

- A. Activities on English learning websites
- a) English online courses

All participants used English learning websites to learn English out of class. All of them had taken online courses, but with different purposes. Participants Lily-AU, Peng-AU, Shasha-AU, Shan-AU, Jia-AU, Rui-AU, Zoe-BU, Yan-BU, Zhang-BU, and Tony-BU, for example, had taken online courses to prepare for their English examinations. Lily-AU, Shasha-AU, Zhang-BU, Zoe-BU, and Tony-BU all mentioned that they had also taken online courses from a private language institution. For example, as Shasha-AU said:

I attended the course of 'TEM 4 preparation stage one training', which were uploaded by a private language institution that I was trusted, the course was very convenient to learn, because you didn't have to go out and get up earlier to go to a classroom, you could manage it according to your personal time schedule

(AU-Shasha-Reflective)

Namely, as discussed in subsection 4.2.1, participants attended English classes at private language institutions outside of normal classes. That is, except for the participants who had already taken online courses in their previous English learning (such as Zoe-Bu and Peng-AU) and who had used online courses since entering the university (such as Yan-BU), the rest of participants (Lily-AU, Shasha-AU, Shan-AU, Jia-AU, Rui-AU, Zhang-BU, and Tony-BU) all had experience of attending classes at private language institutions. In addition, Zoe-BU mentioned that taking English courses produced by the popular private language institutions could support the reliability and accuracy of the content that she was learning out of class.

One group of participants (Shasha-AU, Lei-AU, Liu-AU, Jia-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Zhang-BU, Lu-BU, and Kai-BU) took online courses to learn general English. Some also had particular focuses, for example on learning business English (ShashaAU and Lu-BU), on learning English culture (Liu-AU), and general English learning online courses that are uploaded by popular teachers in universities in China on a MOOC (a website of massive open online courses for universities in China) which focuses on vocabulary, grammar, and writing tips (Jia-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU). In addition, participants such as Rui-AU and Zhang-BU used individual online speaking classes, where they have an individual teacher who communicates with them in English. Moreover, the last group of participants (Lee-AU, Liu-AU, Jia-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Yan-BU, Zhang-BU, Zhen-BU, and Li-BU), took online courses to learn another subject in which English was the language to deliver the information. Participants Liu-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Yan-BU, and Li-BU clearly mentioned that they attended popular online open classes taught by popular teachers in foreign universities that are uploaded on the website of Wangyi. The interesting topics enhance their motivation in learning English; however, it also brings problems, such as the example of Li-BU, as she said, "I felt that the online courses at 'Wangyi' were not that useful, although they were interesting, they were not linked to formal English learning" (BU-Li-Reflective). Participant Lu-BU also pointed out that she had no idea how to relate the online courses to her formal English learning. The difference for her, however, is that this had not influenced her to learn English using online courses outside of class. She had chosen those online courses because they were interesting, and she acquired new knowledge from them.

Participants preferred to take the online English courses by popular or top teachers in order to confirm the reliability and accuracy of the learning content. No matter which popular language institution, or MOOC or Wangyi, the participants all mentioned that these are all reliable English learning websites because they are all supported by educational institutions (both public and private). Participants such as Peng-AU, Lei-AU and Liu-AU reported that they found it difficult to make selections from other websites.

b) Searching and downloading materials

WBL has the characteristic of including up-to-date learning materials (Devedzie, 2006), which the participants regard as extending and adapting content (June, 2001) in their English learning out of class. In other words, another focus of participants who used English learning websites was to search learning materials to enrich their knowledge of English; the participant (Liu) for example, "took part in an online course, called as 'an overview of British literature' to learn the culture" (AU-Liu-Reflective) according to her interest. Another kind of learning material is the information edited in text and published at English learning websites, which are original articles or online books, or examination papers uploaded and shared by people. Participants who used English learning websites often searched learning materials to finish the tasks for their homework, such as Lee-AU used searched information to write the essay and Shasha-AU downloaded the information of English grammar to use at school; and participants who used English learning websites often searched learning materials to prepare for examinations by downloading examination papers (such as Yan-BU and Zhang-BU). However, not all the examinations are compulsorily required by school; participant (Zhang-BU) for example, "took the online course to prepare the English examination IELTS." BU-Zhang-Reflective, prepares for IELTS that is not compulsory at school but is orientated by her future plan. Whereas participant (Yan-BU), "took the online course to prepare for the examination TEM4 in advance" (BU-Yan-Reflective; the

TEM4 is the compulsory examination at school). Moreover, the searched learning materials at English learning websites include watching videos, another format of learning material. For example, as Shasha said: "I also watched the videos from websites that different people shared their ideas on some topics, for example, 'how to understand the attributive clause', 'how to do the reading comprehension' and 'how to take notes while in listening' etc." (AU-Shasha-Reflective). Shasha had watched several videos published by others, while other participants (for example Zhang-BU) had uploaded their own English videos to share and communicate on the websites. Those website functions could motivate both Shasha-AU and Zhang-BU's English learning. Also, Lu-BU had used CC talks on the Hujiang English learning website to watch videos, for example: "I used CC talk at the website of Hujiang to watch some videos" (BU-Lu-Reflective). 'CC talk' is an application in the Hujiang website which allows people to make live videos. A large number of language learners and teachers have registered for the service, but as everyone can record live videos, it is difficult to confirm the accuracy of the information. These kinds of learning materials are formed by videos and text.

c) Practising English skills

Finally, English learning websites provide exercises to promote participants' English skills. For example:

• Participants (AU-Lee, BU-Yan, BU-Li, BU-Tony) took dictation exercises to practise their listening and writing of English:

I also downloaded the videos of BBC news from English learning website to do the dictation in order to practise my listening of English.

(BU-Yan-Reflective)

I did the dictation exercise online at English learning websites.

(BU-Tony-Reflective)

These examples indicate two ways of doing dictation exercises. Yan-BU did it by writing in a notebook with the downloaded videos, while Tony-BU directly wrote online, which included an interaction with the program. When he wrote, the program showed responses to make the information more related and meaningful. With this high level of understanding (Zhu, 2017), this dictation exercise is more humanlike; it can interpret the information and evaluate Tony's personal performance (Ohler, 2008). So far, it only can correct the transcripts and compare the attainment level with other users who have done the same dictation exercise, however. It still cannot offer learning solutions to fulfil individual participants' needs.

- Participants used chatrooms (AU-Lily, AU-Lee, AU-Peng, AU-Shasha, AU-Shan, AU-Lei, AU-Jia, AU-Xin, AU-Rui, AU-Xi, BU-Zoe, BU-Yan, BU-Zhang, BU-zhen, BU-Tony) and forum (AU-Lee, AU-Jia, AU-Xin, AU-Rui, AU-Xi) to communicate with others, which was either for academic purposes or social purposes.
- Participants (Li-BU, Tony-BU) play word games to memorise words.
- Participants (Lu-BU and Tony-BU) listened to English radio to practise listening to English and they did reading comprehension tasks (Li-BU and Tony-BU) to practise reading English and to increase their vocabulary.

• Participants (e.g. Lee-AU and Peng-AU) did mock examination exercises to prepare for examinations, which is the common used method to prepare for the examination.

The exercises participants chose were mainly to promote English skills, mostly listening, writing, reading, vocabulary, and preparation for examinations.

B. Learning activities on other websites

Another group of activities has been categorised as 'other websites', because the activities are not embedded in websites specifically for learning English. They exist on independent websites. Examples of these follow.

- Participants used online dictionaries to look for words, then understand the content of the textbook and to learn and organise English words (AU-Lily, AU-Peng, AU-Jia, AU-Xin, AU-Rui, AU-Xi, Yan-BU, Lu-BU, Zhen-BU).
- Search engines were one of the most commonly used ways for participants to search for learning materials, both for completing particular tasks and for exploration (AU-Lee, AU-Peng, AU-Shasha, AU-Shan, AU-Liu, AU-Jia, AU-Xin, AU-Rui, AU-Xi, Kai-BU, Zhang-BU, Zhen-BU). Liu-AU, for example, searched for information to do her homework, so she needed to produce the key words for the search engine. 'Baidu' is a very popular and important information management tool used for searching information in China (Zhang, Yang and Wang, 2010). To get the information of what you are looking for may be easy or difficult, however, as it requires not only the appropriate

computer skills, but also the comprehensive input to the computer (Mckimm, Jollie and Cantillon, 2003).

- Email, which was used to discuss the homework between only two participants (AU-Lily, AU-Lee).
- Baidu cloud, which is used to share and access English learning materials (AU-Shan, AU-Liu, AU-Jia, AU-Xin, AU-Rui, AU-Xi). For example:

"I used 'Baidu cloud', where my friends shared learning materials with me, it was very helpful. I also scanned my learning notes and shared with them"

(AU-Xi-Reflective).

- Games, which participants play in an English-speaking environment (AU-Lee, AU-Shan, AU-Jia, BU-Li).
- Watching English films, TV, dramas, etc. to learn English. With the exception
 of Lei-AU who did not mention this, all participants had watched English films,
 TV, dramas, etc. as part of their WBEL.
- Vlogs, which refers specifically to participant Zhang-BU, who created English videos on websites. As she said:

I uploaded my first video on 'Bilibili' to use English to share my stories, although my English was not good, I got a great sense of achievement...-then this week, I decided the topic of my next video on western festivals, I searched the information online and downloaded the materials, and I practised my English by speaking with my English partner, which was all used to prepare my video.

(BU-Zhang-Reflective).

The self-created videos can not only be watched, but also can be commented on and subscribed to. Namely, this website allows people to interact with each other and share

information, collaborate and participate. This could also enhance motivation (Papanikolaou and Mavromoustakos, 2012). Zhang gained a great sense of achievement through making English videos, while others enjoyed listening to English songs (AU-Shasha, AU-Shan, BU-Zhang, BU-Lu, BU-Li, BU-Tony).

Participants read English books to learn English (AU-Shasha, AU-Liu, BU-Li).

The discussion above illustrates all activities based on English learning websites and other websites with examples from participants. It can be further summarised in four aspects according to functions in English learning, namely, the functions of the activities at websites: providing learning materials to enrich the knowledge of English, offering opportunities of doing the exercise to promote English skills, being a medium for communication to practise spoken English, and entertainment (shown in Table 4.10).

Learning materials	Exercise	Communication	Entertainment		
 a. Online courses b. Websites	 a. Reading task b. Mock	a. Chatroomb. Emailc. Baidu cloudd. Forum	 a. Watching		
(Searching and	examination		films, TV,		
downloading	exercise c. Dictation		dramas etc b. Listening to		
materials) c. Online	exercise d. Word games e. Listening to		English songs c. Reading		
dictionary d. Forum e. Baidu cloud	English radios		books		

Table 4.10: The functions of all activities on websites

The following subsection emphasises those activities, to further discuss how they support English learning from a pedagogy perspective.

4.4.1.2 The Activities Participants Have Done in English Learning from a Pedagogy Perspective

	Task- based	Examination- based	Problem- based	Hierarchical	Interactive	Immersion	020
Online		Х		Х	Х		
courses							
Searching and downloading materials	x	x	Х		Х		
Online dictionary	x	X		Х	Х		
Forum	х	х	х		х		
Baidu cloud					x		
Reading task	X	х			х		
Word games				x	x		
Mock examination exercise	X	X			x		
Dictation exercise	x	x			x	x	
Chatroom			х		x	х	
Email					x		
Watching films, TV, dramas etc.						X	
Listening to English songs						X	
Reading books	1.	CC1:				x	

Table 4.11 The pedagogic perspective of activities at websites

Key: O2O = online to offline

Table 4.11 has shown the activities participants have undertaken on websites out of class, but from a pedagogic perspective, to illustrate how they support participants in learning English out of class.

• Activities based on completing tasks

Activities are task-based that refer to an approach used to promote English ability by completing tasks, which are the homework assigned by teachers for participants in this research. For example, participants have mentioned that they searched information to do the homework, Lee-AU for example, to write the essay and Shasha-AU downloaded the information of English grammar to use it in the school class. Also, a forum is a place where participants share and get information to do the homework. For example, Xin-AU and Jia-AU used it to communicate and received learning materials related to tasks in the homework. Participants (Lily-AU, Peng-AU, Jia-AU, Xin-AU, Rui-AU, Xi-AU, Yan-BU, Lu-BU, Zhen-BU) used an online dictionary to do the task of previewing articles in textbooks thus to understand based on meanings; and Li-BU and Tony-BU have undertaken a reading task, Lee-AU has done a mock examination exercise, and participants (Lu-BU, Tony-BU, Li-BU, Yan-BU, Lee-AU) have done dictation tasks.

In addition, where there is a close relationship between homework and examination, therefore, the task-based activities include examination-based activities.

• Activities are based on examination preparation

The activities used to complete the tasks of homework, while those are also used to prepare for the examinations by searching and downloading information, (for example, Yan-BU and Liu-AU), and doing the tasks of reading, dictation and a mock
examination exercise to promote English ability. In addition, participants have taken online courses to prepare for the examinations (see subsection 4.4.1.1-A-a).

• Activities based on solving problems

Participants did activities on websites in this research to solve problems by searching information and communicating with others in a forum and chatroom. Zhi (2009) has mentioned that this approach is based on ideas of constructivism. The process of problem solving includes interactivity, between participants and between participants and the computer.

For example, Shasha-AU searched on websites and then watched the video 'how to do the reading comprehension' (AU-Shasha-Reflective) for example, to look for better methods of doing the reading comprehension task; other participants communicated with others in a forum and chatroom to look for the answers of particular questions. For example,

I took part in the chatroom suggested by Shasha, where a lot of classmates were in and we could communicate in English and discussed our English learning problems, I gained a lot of suggestions, as well as my particular difficulties encountered in doing the homework, they shared with me on how they had done them which helped me a lot...

(AU-Rui-Interview)

Rui-AU solved his problems by communication with other students; it is also a learning cycle of reflection as Zhu mentioned, as this process could stimulate students' interest, improve their autonomous learning, and promote their abilities in teamwork, which would all promote their comprehensive ability in the English language (Zhu, 2016). Accordingly, the participants in this research used a process of solving problems by collaborating with others (the findings have been presented in Section 5.2).

• Activities are done hierarchically

The hierarchical mode refers to the activities undertaken by different students and according to their performances, the activities used to different responses. For example, Jia-AU registered on the website of 'youdao' online dictionary, and then every time when she used the online dictionary to look for the meanings of the new words, the dictionary would automatically create the vocabulary list for her; when she learned new words, she could delete the ones that were already understood and marked the ones that she felt difficult, then built the personal word lists. Also, the online courses, for example, Shasha-AU and Shan-AU had taken the 'TEM 4 preparation stage one training', which was a series of courses, divided into three parts. Moreover, the word game was also used to memorise words, which responded according to participants' performance, for example, as Tony-BU mentioned:

I also used word games on the website of Keke, which was more interesting used to memorise words instead of by repeating in writing the words many times at notebook, also the words you don't remember are recurred during the process...

(BU-Tony-Interview)

Those activities take consideration of participants' input and show different exercises to participants.

• Activities are interactive

Web 2.0 provides and enhances the interaction and collaboration in the learning process, where it offers a place for the information to be shared between teacher and students (Wang, 2017). According to this research, the interaction takes place between teachers and participants, between participants and students (include participants and other students) and between participants and activities on websites (see Figure 4.9).



Figure 4.9: The interactions included in the activities participants did on websites

• Activities are immersion in English

The activities offer an English language environment, which participants are immersed in. For example, when they are watching films, TV, dramas, etc., listening to English songs and reading books. Also, when participants Yan-Bu and Lee-AU for example, did the dictation exercise, and participants communicated in English with others in chatroom. Namely, English is not only the learning content, but also the learning tool or means to get access to knowledge. The best way to learn a language is to make learners highly engaged and immersed in a large amount of language input for the purpose of communication and use; the knowledge that learners receive will eventually be translated into the learner's output (Chen, 2016). Participant, Shan-AU for example, mentioned that:

I am good at speaking, I have foreign friends and we usually stay and play together. Also, I have been to Europe to take part in an English summer camp, where my English progresses a lot, especially in speaking and listening.

(AU-Shan-Interview)

Shan is an example to show how the English-speaking environment supports English.

• Online to offline activities (O2O)

This kind of activity refers to taking advantage of Internet technology and combining online and offline learning, to extend the space and time of classroom learning. It provides two-way interaction both between teacher and students and between students. However, the activities in Table 4.11 are not O2O activities; O2O activities have been regarded necessarily in participants learning journeys; it has been reflected from their perceptions of what are perfect learning websites look like, and from the problems they mentioned concerning their English learning; namely, to link the online learning to their offline learning and at the most extend to promote their English learning at school.

4.4.1.3 The Relationship Between Activities and Learning Goals

Table 4.12 illustrates the participants' learning goals for activity selection on websites. This subsection describes specific activities used by participants when they achieved their particular goals. There are four categories of learning goals, which are presented as follow, respectively, by Table 4.12 to 4.15..

• To enrich the knowledge of English

Goal	Activity and example		
To learn business English	. Online courses (Lu-BU and Shasha- AU)		
To learn English words	. Online dictionary (Peng-AU and Zhen-BU)		

Table 4.12: The examples of	f activities on websites u	ised to achieve l	earning goals (A)
······································	,		

	 Online courses (Lily-AU and Lei-AU) Watching films, tv, dramas etc. (Lily-AU and Zoe-BU) Word games (Li-BU and Tony-BU)
To practise speaking English	 Chatroom (Rui-AU and Zhang-BU) Online speaking course (personal English-speaking teacher) (Zhang-BU) Making English videos (Zhang-BU)
To practise listening to English	 Dictation exercise (Yan-BU and Tony-BU) Watching films, tv, dramas etc. (Kai-BU and Zhang-BU) Listening to English songs (Shan-AU and Lu-BU)
To practise reading English	 Online reading task (Shasha-AU) Mock examination papers (Liu-AU) Reading English books (Li-BU)
To practise writing English	. Online courses (Rui-AU and Yan- BU)

• To learn English culture and literature

Table 4.13: The examples of activities on websites used to achieve learning goals (B)

Goal	Activity and example
To learn English culture and literature	 Reading English books (Liu-AU) Watching films, tv, dramas etc. (Zoe-BU)
	 Online courses (Shasha-AU) The searched information on websites (Lily-AU)

• To do the homework

Table 4.14: The examples of activities on websites used to achieve learning goals

(C)

Goal	Activity and example
To write the essay	. Searching and downloading materials (Lee-AU)
To preview the articles at textbook	. Online dictionary (Jia-AU and Lu-BU)
To do the dictation exercise	. Dictation exercise at the English learning websites (Tony-BU)
	. Listening to English radios (Lu-BU)
To do the Reading task	. Mock examination Exercise (Li-BU)
	. Reading task at English learning websites (Shasha-AU)
To do the exercise at examination papers	. Mock examination exercise (Liu-AU)
To search and download learning resources used at school	. Searching and downloading materials (Shasha-AU)

• To prepare for the examinations

Table 4.15: The examples of activities on websites used to achieve learning goals

(D)

Goal	Activity and example
To prepare for the examinations	. Mock examination Exercise (Lee-AU)
	. Online courses (Shan-AU)
	. Searching and downloading examination papers (Peng-AU)
	. Online dictionary (AU-Xin)
	. Forum (Rui-AU)
	. Dictation exercise (Lee-AU)

The four tables Table 4.12, 4.13, 4.14, and 4.15, show which activities participants did on websites to achieve their learning goals.

4.4.2 Participants' Problems with Learning English on Websites Out-of-class

Table 4.16: A summary of participants' problems with learning English on websites outside of class

	Boring	Not useful	Unable- access/low speed/computer skills	Easy to give up	Informal	Difficulty in selection	Difficult in deep conversation
AU-Lily	X	X	x/a				
AU-Lee		x		х			
AU-Peng	X		x/1		x	х	
AU-Shasha							Х
AU-Shan							
AU-Lei						Х	
AU-Liu						Х	
AU-Jia	Х						
AU-Xin					Х		
AU-Rui	Х						
AU-Xi			x/c				
BU-Zoe	Х					Х	
BU-Yan							
BU-Kai							
BU-Zhang							
BU-Lu							
BU-zhen		Х					
BU-Li		Х					
BU-Tony							

Table 4.16 shows the problems participants reported during their English learning on websites outside of class. These can be categorised as problems related to learning English and problems related to technique.

4.4.2.1 Problems Related to Technique (AU-Lily, AU-Peng, and AU-Xi)

This kind of problems included, for example participant Lily-AU being unable to access a particular English learning website. Peng-AU had difficulties due to low Internet speed and Xi-AU was not good at using computers, which limited her English learning on websites. The first two problems have not been solved, whereas Xi's problem improved through collaboration with other students. For more discussion, see the subsection 5.2.1. on collaboration.

4.4.2.2 Problems Related to Learning English

Six problems related to learning English were mentioned by participants. Participants AU-Lily, AU-Peng, AU-Jia, AU-Rui, BU-Zoe, BU-Zhen, and BU-Li felt bored with taking online English courses to prepare for examinations (see discussion in subsection 4.4.1.1). Another problem is that some English learning activities on websites are not useful, which was reported by participants AU-Lily, AU-Lee, BU-Zhen and BU-Li. They presented their reasons, such as:

What I gained from the websites was not essential in my usual English learning. (BU-Zhen-Reflective)

There is no relationship between the learning tasks to do online and my life.

(AU-Lee-Interview)

I took an online course at 'Wangyi', which I felt was not very useful, because it was not linked to my formal English learning.

(BU-Li-Reflective)

I felt learning English with websites was interesting, but still could not feel [that it was] much more useful, because they were not directly linked to the formal English learning.

(AU-Lily-Reflective)

These extracts show that students felt that not all learning activities on websites are equally useful, either because they are not relevant to their formal English learning at school, or because they are not relevant to their real lives. Also, in Lee's case, because of this irrelevance to his real life, he said that he found it easy to give up on learning activities online. Peng-AU and Xin-AU said that learning English on websites is too informal; they need more formal practice. These problems are all relevant to participants' perceptions of English learning.

Participants AU-Peng, AU-Lei and AU-Liu provided examples of difficulty in selecting learning materials to assure the reliability and accuracy of the learning content. Finally, Shasha-AU felt it was too hard to have a depth conversations with others on websites because of her limited vocabulary. Also, she mentioned that what she had learned at school could not satisfy her need to communicate with others in English.

To summarise, these problems concerning learning English have been solved by different participants to different degrees through their collaboration with others in the learning process. This was reflected by the participants' development in their English learning during this research. More discussion on this is provided in Section 5.2.

4.4.2.3 The Ideas of Perfect English Learning Websites

On another aspect, participants' ideas of perfect English learning websites reflected their present problems. For example, Table 4.17 presents ideas participants had regarding 'perfect' English learning websites however; not all participants had views to share.

Table 4.17: An overview of ideas participants had on perfect English learningwebsites

	High	Good	Chatroom	Sharing	Virtual	Siri	Multi-	Teacher	Assessment	Collecting
	speed	looking	(C) and	board	assistant		format of	column		mistakes
		interfaces	Forum (F)				learning			
		(include					resources			
		easy control system)								
Peng-AU	x	x	С	х						
Shasha-AU					x					
Shan-AU										
Jia-AU							х		х	
Xi-AU		х			x					
Zoe-BU		х	F	x		х		х		x
Zhen-BU						х				

Participants firstly required high speed and good-looking interfaces that included an easy control system, Peng-AU and Xi-AU for example, mentioned these issues, while Zoe-BU mentioned the necessity of having good-looking interfaces at English learning websites. Following these technological and visual aspects, participants mentioned content, as well as delivery methods. Jia-AU for example, asked for multiformats of learning materials, while Zoe-BU felt a forum was a useful part of English learning websites, where students could search for their needed information. Meanwhile, a chatroom provided a place for students to communicate with each other no matter whether looking for solutions or practising English (Peng-AU-Reflective). Similar functionality was dedicated to the role of a virtual assistant and from Siri they could take the information typed into consideration and provided appropriate support to students. For example, Zoe-BU and Zhen-BU wanted to practise spoken English with Siri, while Shasha-AU and Xi-AU wanted to be facilitated by a virtual assistant when searching for the information. To make these functions viable, developers will need to improve their use of artificial intelligence software, which also needs to be applied when recording individual students' learning performances, with websites possibly collecting mistakes made by participants (Zoe-BU), thus enabling them to provide individual assessment (Jia-AU). However, the teachers' influence cannot be ignored; Zoe-BU addressed the significance of a teacher space, where students could interact with teachers and teachers provide support to students.

4.4.3 Summary of This Section

In summary, this section has interpreted what learning activities the participants have taken part in during their English learning on websites out of class, and what problems they have encountered in doing so.

4.5 Summary of This Chapter

This chapter has interpreted all participants' English learning stories based on a storyline shown in Figure 4.1 to explain their previous English learning experiences, English learning perceptions including their beliefs of English learning and motivation, as well as the learning activities on websites out of class, during the time the research was conducted. The discussion shows the interrelationships among these, and indicates that participants' learning journeys are not linear, but are influenced by multi-dimensions, which are building up to a relational web of circumstances, beliefs, and experiences. More importantly, according to their English learning experience,

collaboration brings a positive effect, which not only enhances their perceptions, but also develops their English learning activities. Also, this chapter has answered research questions one and two directly and indicated the potential responses to research question three, which will be clearly discussed in Chapter five.

The following chapter focuses on the discussion of participants' collaboration, which has been emerged from their learning journeys with websites out of class, to further address the development of participants' English learning.

Chapter 5: Emerging Reflections and Themes Throughout the Research Process

5.1 Introduction

Chapter four has illustrated all participants' English learning experiences based on their previous English learning experiences, perceptions of English learning and the activities they have done on websites out of class during the time the research was conducted; it also analyses the interrelationships among these three aspects. As Figure 5.1 shows, it is the development of participants' English learning on websites out of class. The first two elements of this relationship picture have been discussed in Chapter four, whereas the last two elements are discussed in this chapter, with the emphasis on participants' developments of perceptions. Namely, from the data analysis, the perceptions have been developed by their collaboration with others and by self-reflection during the period of study. Moreover, learner autonomy in this research perceived as metacognitive knowledge developed by participants' ideas of English learning, has been further discussed at Section 5.4.



Figure 5.1: The development of participants' English learning on websites out of class

With this in mind, this chapter is structured according to three main themes: collaboration, reflection and autonomy. Here, I aim to present how collaboration and reflection support the participants' development of their perceptions in addition to how the updated ideas influence the development of the students' capacity in terms of, for example, learner autonomy in the learning journey. In addition, this chapter also presents a discussion in response to research question 3, which is followed by two sub-questions:

To what extent has the experience of participating in this project affected the students' perceptions and their English language learning practices on web-based environment?

• How have their ideas about learning changed throughout the project?

• Has the experience of participating in this project influenced their capacity for autonomous learning?

5.2 Collaboration

Collaboration takes place in the digitally-networked environment where a large number of students are learning together (Fischer, 2016). Specifically speaking, in this research, the students used computers and discussed with others the learning journey on the websites, the content of the target language (such as when practicing speaking English in this study), the responses to the learning activities and specific learning strategies such as, where students were engaging in scaffolded learning (Stevens, 1992). They were collaborating in order to help each other to complete the tasks in the homework assigned by the teachers at school and to solve the learning problems. The students collaborated with others, including the participants in this study and other people who were students or teachers working outside of this study. This collaboration took place within four situations, which are shown in Table 5.1.

	Weekly meetings (within this study)	Online English- speaking partner	Chatroom/Baidu Cloud/Forum/Email	Group discussion with other students out of class
AU- Lily	х		X	Х
AU-Lee	х		X	X
AU- Peng	X			Х
AU- Shasha	X			Х
AU- Shan	х		X	
AU-Lei	х		X	X
AU-Liu	Х			X
AU-Jia	Х		X	X
AU-Xin	Х		x	

Table 5.1: The situations of collaboration for participants in this research

AU-Rui	X	x	X	
AU-Xi	х			X
BU-Zoe	х		х	Х
BU-Yan	x		х	
BU-Kai	х			Х
BU- Zhang	X	X	X	
BU-Lu	Х		X	
BU- zhen	x		x	
BU-Li	х			
BU- Tony	x		X	X

Table 5.1 shows an overview of where student collaboration took place outside of the classroom. Every participant took part in a weekly meeting, an activity required by this research, where they discussed their English learning. While they were given a specific topic each week, these topics were not structured and simply served as a guide for the participants to express their ideas. As Vygotsky (1978) proposed, the interactions within the social environment, including peer interaction and/or scaffolding, are important ways to facilitate individual cognitive growth and knowledge acquisition, which also applies to English learning on websites, one example of a 'personal learning environment' (Attwell and Hughes, 2010). In other words, scaffolding learning is a way to link student learning to performance in practice as adapted through the idea of a personal learning environment (Attwell and Hughes, 2010). Thus, as was the case with this research, students can use websites out of class, not only to gain access to learning resources but also to take part in activities to practice their English in terms of different aspects according to their different needs through, for example, using chatrooms, forums, Baidu cloud or email, where they can

practice both their spoken and written English while interacting with others. In fact, certain participants, including Rui-BU and Zhang-BU, for example, were looking for opportunities to practice speaking English on websites by finding an English partner.

As Table 5.1. indicates, for the majority of the students who collaborated with others in their spare time out of class, the collaboration was initiated by themselves and was not organised by the researcher or by teachers, which indicated that the students gained some benefit from collaboration in learning and that this was often a result of building friendships. However, if they were close friends, their ideas were often easily influenced since the students often agreed with their friends easily (Wegerif and Dawes,1998). For example, one student, Jia-AU, said:

I liked to study with my classmates out of class, because I felt I could solve my difficulties. Even if some could not be solved fully, I nonetheless felt better and was encouraged and had a positive attitude to learning English. Also, when I saw my classmates' progress, I felt I could also achieve this, so I liked to study with my classmates and discussed issues with them related to learning English.

(AU-Jia-Interview)

In this study, Jia-AU was encouraged to learn English in collaboration, which was mainly influenced by her idea that she could do it as others did (Johnson and Johnson, 1990). Meanwhile, another student, Tony-BU, also liked to study with his classmates because of their 'encouragement' and the useful 'outcome' gained from his classmates' feedback (Tony-BU-Reflective B). In addition, Peng-AU, a natural leader of his group, also mentioned his willingness to work with other classmates: 'I liked to study with my classmates, sometimes I talked a lot, and I still could get an inspiration from their ideas; I could even gain more ideas while I was talking' (Peng-AU-Interview).

Therefore, regardless of whether the students played the main role of a contributor or of a listener, or whether they spoke a lot or a little, they all made contributions and gained feedback when they collaborated with others, while the enhancement in their awareness of themselves and of learning English through collaboration happened to varying degrees.

5.2.1 The Benefits and Challenges of Collaboration in English Learning

In order to provide more specific detail, the following table, Table 5.2, presents what each student declared they had gained from the study, and the specific roles they took when they collaborated with others.

	Enhance interests/confidence/a sense of achievement/enjoyment	Enrich the knowledge of: English/English learning methods/ English learning websites (functions) etc.	 Main role: L: Listener C: Contributor B: Both B-L: Both but behaved as a listener often B-C: Both but behaved as a contributor often
AU- Lily	X	x	B-C
AU-Lee	X	Х	B-L
AU- Peng	Х	x	B-C
AU- Shasha	Х	x	В
AU- Shan	X	x	В
AU-Lei	x	X	В
AU-Liu	x	Х	В

Table 5.2: What students gained and their roles in collaboration

AU-Jia	Х	Х	В
AU-Xin	Х	Х	В
AU-Rui	X	X	В
AU-Xi	X	X	В
BU-Zoe	Х	Х	B-C
BU-Yan	Х	Х	В
BU-Kai	Х	X	B-C
BU- Zhang	х	x	В
BU-Lu	Х	Х	В
BU- zhen	x	x	В
BU-Li	Х	X	B-L
BU- Tony	x	x	B-L

As we can see, all the students enriched their knowledge of English and Englishlearning-related aspects, while for the majority of the students, their motivation was enhanced to varying degrees, which was reflected in their increased interest, confidence or sense of achievement or enjoyment. For example, Lily-AU noted how she had gained confidence after sharing her learning methods and resources with other students, while Lee-AU, who collaborated with other classmates to use websites for learning English, particularly for doing homework, found this helped him form a positive attitude to his learning and enhanced his enjoyment of learning English (Jacobs, 1998), even though he often acted as a listener during the collaboration. Meanwhile, Tony-BU reported it enhanced his motivation and his self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001) since his ideas were increased through greater collaboration with other classmates, while his self-confidence also increased during the process of collaborative learning. These above examples all indicate that the students' selfperceived motivation was enhanced through collaboration, while the development trends generally appeared as 'obviously enhanced' and 'fluctuated'.

• Motivation has been 'obviously enhanced' through collaboration

For a group of students, their self-reported motivation was obviously enhanced. Shasha-AU and Zoe-BU are two examples of this specific group. Their individual

responses confirm this result:

I studied with my classmates together, we were engaged in discourse on making decisions on selecting the online courses, and I felt it was useful and we also exchanged our ideas on dealing with learning problems, even though some problems could not be solved. In my opinion, collaboration provided an opportunity for us to study English tasks and to get support from each other, which enriched our ideas while it built our confidence in learning English

(AU-Shasha-Interview)

I liked to collaborate with my classmates in searching for information, preparing for the test, exchanging learning ideas and taking part in the activities. When we negotiated meanings, which provided an opportunity for comprehensive input and output, then I felt I had a great sense of achievement

(BU-Zoe-Interview)

Here, these students have reiterated how studying with others enhanced their awareness of English learning and supported them in improving their English skills

(Beatty, 2010).

• Motivation has fluctuated through collaboration

Meanwhile, for another group of participants, including Lily-AU and Lie-AU, their motivation development tended to fluctuate. While their motivation was enhanced through collaboration, several influential factors adversely affected their learning process. These included when the English learning mainly involved focusing on preparing for an examination, when the learning problems encountered could not be solved, and when the learning activities were deemed to be useless. These aspects influenced the students' attitude, which is reflected in the extracts below:

I had to do the examination paper exercise to prepare for the examination, which made me bored with learning English. Also, even when I collaborated with my classmates, when we met a problem that none of us knew how to solve, for example, the tasks in the homework, which we had to do, then the process was sad

(AU-Lily-Interview)

I learned a lot from other students who had a higher score and a good performance of English in class and I took their suggestions. But, in some circumstances, they were not useful for me and I still found it difficult to do some activities, which made me a little unhappy and confused toward learning English

(AU-Lei-Interview)

These extracts indicate that some problems could not be solved through collaboration, including, for example, how to select the learning activities and the resources to do the homework, and how to balance English learning so as to avoid that the learning journey is over-reliant on merely preparing for examinations, thus influence their motivation. Sometimes the learners would be helped by the teachers, if they had difficulties in finishing the tasks (Breen, 1998). It therefore needed the teachers' input to solve these problems. However, the teachers' collaboration could also have a negative influence, which must also be considered. For example, it is uncertain whether some teachers obtained enough collaborative skills, especially given that teachers in China were often unwilling to partake in collaborative activities, which was highlighted by Beatty's experience in Beijing, China (Beatty, 2010).

Meanwhile, collaboration enriched the participants' knowledge of English, English learning methods, English learning websites (functions of the activities), etc., and this enhanced their awareness of learning English and promoted their English skills (as discussed by Nunan, 1992a). For example, Kai-BU mentioned that his listening ability had been improved by 'taking suggestions from others', and that he had also gained a lot of 'knowledge about English' (BU-Kai-Reflective B), while Xi-AU enriched her knowledge of the functions of the learning activities on English-learning websites through discussion.

To sum up, as was addressed by McConnell (1994), 'willingness' is a precondition of collaborative learning. All the participants showed they had this willingness, and thus the collaboration enriched their knowledge and supported their motivation development as well. The students used language and shared experiences to implement a scaffolding learning based on knowledge, skills and prior experiences (Feden and Vogel, 2006, cited by Dahms et al., 2007) of learning/acquiring English. However, their collaboration could not solve all the questions that emerged during the learning process, and the teachers' input was often required to improve their ability and ensure that, in the future, they could deal with more problems encountered during the learning process.

5.3 Reflection

In this research, reflection refers to a student's mental process of constructing their thinking (Moon, 2006) through using reflective reports to record their English learning experience and discussing English-learning-related ideas. The learning behaviours changed as a result of the reflective process. The students in this research negotiated

their meanings with themselves in accordance with the development of their ideas of and motivation for learning English rather than by directly collecting ideas from others (Mezirow, 2000). Their reflective ideas manifested themselves in terms of their enhanced awareness regarding personal knowledge, task knowledge and strategic knowledge (Wenden, 1998) to varying degrees (see Section 5.4).

5.3.1 How Students Constructed Reflection in English Learning

All the students presented their reflections during the interviews. Their ways of constructing reflection could be categorised in two areas as follows:

• A group of participants, including, Lily-AU and Zoe-BU, self-questioned themselves. They asked, for example, Why did I do this? What will this bring me in terms of learning English? Why did I not like this? How could I improve? etc. to ascertain their strengths and weaknesses in learning English and raising their awareness of English learning. Here, their understanding of what they did and why they did it encouraged them to look back on their experiences and figure out the reasons for their actions. From there, they could develop ideas and improve their actions via reflection. For example, Lily-AU said 'When I learned English on websites out of class, I liked to ask myself questions such as why I looked at this and why I did this activity', while she then said, 'I also asked myself whether my classmates' suggestions were useful for me, and these questions helped me to write reflective report B' (AU-Lily-Interview). She found that after she thought about these questions, she acquired strategic knowledge on learning English, which was helpful in her learning journey:

I got familiar with the activities on English learning websites, I knew I wanted to improve my reading in English (my weakness), then I used forums at Hujiang and youdao to search for reading resources and to learn words, which I thought could help me

(AU-Lily-Reflective B)

Meanwhile, Zoe-BU also took particular activities to improve her ability in speaking English, which she was not good at because of a lack of practice:

I asked myself why I learned English. I was thinking to improve my English in speaking, because I had little opportunity to practice it in everyday life and when I talked English to myself, I felt I was not good at it. Then I searched for good activities on websites, for example the activities that included real interaction

(BU-Zoe-Reflective B)

The fact that the way you ask yourself questions is beneficial for constructing ideas

only indicated what the students gained by self-questioning. However, if the

questions could not be answered, this would influence the students' reflections.

 Another group of students constructed their thinking by looking back on their experiences. Participants Shasha-AU and Yan-BU were two examples who mentioned that they were inspired by experiences where the understanding of learning English had shifted from blurry to clear:

At the beginning, I felt English learning should be learned in class, which I addressed in the reflective report A, saying my English learning was formal learning that focused on doing homework and preparing for different kinds of examinations. Then when I entered university and I made a friend, an African exchange student, and we spoke English, I felt English was relevant to my daily life; my English speaking was not good, I therefore looked for and took speaking activities on English-learning websites. In my opinion, English became an instrument to use to communicate with others, I wanted to promote my English speaking and I felt it was necessary

(AU-Shasha-Interview)

I chose to learn English at university because English was the most popular foreign language. I learned it for many years, and English was the world language. Looking back now, I was not clear on how English as a world language functioned in my study, I even felt English learning was not relevant to me and was only a task. But along with more discussion with my classmates and writing reflective reports, I found I could have a lot to gain by learning English, and I wanted to improve my abilities in English speaking and English writing, then I would use English in my future work

(BU-Yan-Interview)

The extracts above all show that the students have enhanced their awareness of learning English and that looking back helped them to self-reflected on their English learning. It was important to look back on experiences and learn from them. However, this was limited to what they could remember. It was also significant to reflect on the here and now: to be reflective not only on what has happened, but also on what is happening in the present (Ghaye, 2011). Accordingly, reflective ideas could then be incorporated into learning practice.

5.3.2 The Challenge of Reflection in English Learning

However, reflection can also have a negative influence on learning English. For example, Zhen-BU said the following in her interview:

My English learning activities were closely related to the learning at school and I aimed to do the tasks and to solve problems encountered in class. During these weeks, I got various kinds of materials in multiple ways on websites as well as got learning suggestions after discussions with my classmates. However, some were obviously not useful for me and I only listed what I had done in my reflective reports, more importantly, I felt stressful in preparing for the tests, even though I felt better when I collaborated with my classmates on preparation. Nonetheless, my English was not as good as theirs, so I felt it was difficult and that I cannot improve my English

(BU-Zhen-Interview)

This extract shows that Zhen-BU perceived her emotion through reflective thinking (Moon, 2013), because this highlighted her weakness in English learning in terms of what she cannot do, which influenced her confidence for learning English. We should therefore pay attention to the fact that reflection must include more on the successful aspects of experiences that help people to think about what they can do rather than what they cannot do, in order to avoid negative influences (Moon, 2013).

To sum up, all the students mentioned that they got more familiar with themselves than before this research, that they understood their learning strengths and weaknesses, got to know the functions of English-learning websites and activities in terms of both technological and pedagogical aspects, which supported them in learning English. In addition, the students' reflections were also supported by their collaboration. In fact, these two could not be separated and worked together to support the students' development of their perceptions. That is, collaboration and reflection supported the students to enhance their ideas of personal knowledge (knowing about themselves), task knowledge (knowledge of the learning task), and strategic knowledge (knowledge of how to select activities on websites to use for tasks) (Flavell, 1979), which supported the students' English learning on websites out of class and was fundamental to supporting and improving the students' capacity for learner autonomy.

5.4 Autonomy

In this research, 'learner autonomy' refers to the students' capacity to take control of their English learning (Benson, 2011) out of class. That is, how the students made decisions on learning content and activities in the out of class learning process both independently and collaboratively in terms of completing learning tasks and achieving

learning needs or goals and thus promoting English skills. As Lamb (2006a) indicated, autonomy relies on taking control of the cognitive process and on metacognitive knowledge to guide the students' learning (Lamb, 2006a), while in this research, the students depended on their knowledge of understanding themselves (personal knowledge), knowledge of English tasks, homework or examinations (task knowledge) and knowledge of the functions and benefits of learning activities on websites (strategic knowledge), enhanced by collaboration and reflection to support them in developing their autonomy in learning English on websites out of class. This is shown in Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2: An ideal framework of learner autonomy according to this research

Figure 5.2 shows an ideal framework of learner autonomy according to this research, and was used to interpret the students' autonomy. This is because during the learning

journeys, there were several problems and the students had to promote their learning ability in order to solve them and ultimately improve their English skills. The following subsections focus on interpreting how the students' personal knowledge, task knowledge and strategic knowledge supported learner autonomy.

5.4.1 Students Who Enhanced Their Personal Knowledge

All the participants mentioned that they became more familiar with themselves and with English learning after taking part in this research. For the majority of them, such as Lee-AU and Tony-BU, their personal knowledge and awareness was enhanced by the collaboration and reflection conducted in this research. Here, Lee-AU said, 'Collaboration supported me to be aware of what I want to be in learning English' (Lee-AU-Reflective B), while Tony-BU mentioned 'I realised my difficulty was that I don't know enough English words to understand articles in reading and listening exercises' (Tony-BU-Interview). They thus selected activities on websites accordingly. Meanwhile, for a small number of students, including, for example, Peng-AU and Li-BU, while their personal knowledge was enhanced by collaboration and reflection, they understood themselves in terms of English learning from the beginning of this research. Their personal knowledge focused on achieving goals (Li-BU), discovering difficulties and exploring solutions (Peng-BU), as the following extracts show:

During these weeks, when I discussed English learning with other classmates, I realised that I had some difficulties in gramma and need to do more practise; therefore, I explored at the Hujiang website, where there is a lot of articles to teach English grammar points, and I feel it is difficult to make a selection; then we discuss this problem not only on the weekly meeting but also on the time when I learn English with other classmates out of class. We figured out this problem together by brainstorming and trying different methods.

(Peng-AU-Interview)

When studying with other students, I get to know what I want to do with English, for example, I want to read English novels and listen to English songs, therefore, during discussion, we were working on being familiar with activities to try any possibilities to promote English in reading and listening.

(Li-BU-Interview)

Therefore, these students chose activities on websites according to their understanding of themselves in terms of learning purposes and weaknesses, so they could achieve and improve them through learning out of class. However, personal knowledge was not enough for the students to manage their learning. They needed task knowledge and strategic knowledge as well.

5.4.2 Students Who Enhanced Their Task Knowledge

In this research, 'task knowledge' refers to the students' understandings of homework and examinations (CET4 and TEM4), which are a major focus for the students in their English learning:

Our discussion always focused on tasks in homework and how to prepare for examinations. When we studied together, we worked on a particular task, we exchanged our ideas on how to do it, and during our collaboration, I started to get to know what the task was asking for.

(BU-Zoe-Interview)

We studied together to prepare for the upcoming test. I shared my learning notes with others and Peng shared his ideas of what content would be included in test. Our discussion made me get more familiar with what the tasks asked for in test.

(AU-Shan-Interview)

All the participants mentioned that they liked to study with their classmates to enrich

their knowledge of tasks, while this included the caveat that it often depended on who

you collaborated with. Peng-AU and Zoe-BU played the role of group leader at each university, and the students were more willing to collaborate with them, especially when completing homework and preparing for examinations, because they thought these two students were top students who would get a higher score. Indeed, as Shasha-AU noted, 'Peng was really good at doing examinations' (AU-Shasha-Interview) and Shasha-AU thus preferred to study with Peng when preparing for examinations. Similarly, Tony-BU liked to study with Zoe, because he thought she had good tips for doing examinations: 'I like to study with Zoe, because she was good at learning English, and she especially got higher grades for the homework tasks. I thought she might know a lot of tips, so I wanted to learn from her and improve my scores' (BU-Tony-Interview). Meanwhile, Peng-AU liked to study with Lily-AU because 'Lily-AU was a good learning partner and I felt she understood my ideas and could give me feedback' (AU-Peng-Interview). The examples above indicate that the students preferred to gain task knowledge with top students. Meanwhile, the top students such as Peng-AU preferred to be understood and to discuss things with someone like Lily-AU, for example, who could communicate and exchange ideas with him.

5.4.3 Students Who Enhanced Their Strategic Knowledge

In this research, 'strategic knowledge' refers to the students' understandings of how to use the activities on websites out of class to complete the learning tasks. The tasks were usually homework tasks and tasks related to preparing for examinations and improving English abilities. The students shared their learning activities on websites with others at weekly meetings – a requirement for this research – so their discussions were extended to out of class time through both online and face-to-face communication. However, this did not include all the participants, because these extra discussions also included building friendships. These points were raised in the following extracts:

These weeks, I usually discussed the tasks in homework with other classmates, for example, how to do the dictation exercise, which was one of our difficult tasks. Before, I just did dictation by a common way, which I downloaded an article from the website and pressed pause button all the time and wrote anything I heard; However, when I collaborated with other students in learning English, I knew several English learning websites, especially one called as Kekenet, suggested by Zoe, where I could find materials, adjust the speed, typed online and got feedback online, then I could print out to hand back to teachers. This made easier for me to do the dictation exercise.

(BU-Kai-Interview)

During collaboration with other classmates, we could collect some ways to do the tasks in homework, however not all the problem could be solved, for example, there were a lot of resources that were difficult to select from them, when you need materials to write essays.

(BU-Zoe-Interview)

The extracts above indicate how Kai-BU had been supported by Zoe-BU and how he gained strategic knowledge to promote his English listening. Meanwhile, Zoe-BU mentioned that her problem related to her strategic knowledge, which had not been enhanced when she studied with her classmates. This shows that developing strategic knowledge still depends on the others in question.

To sum up, the capacity for learner autonomy relies on a combination of personal knowledge, task knowledge and strategic knowledge that guides the students' learning out of class in terms of selecting the appropriate learning resources, methods and activities online in order to improve their English. While these three kinds of knowledge were enhanced by collaboration and reflection in this research, the students'

knowledge still needed to be enhanced in terms of where there were several problems emerging from the students' learning processes on websites out of class that could not be solved. That is to say, learner autonomy is a capacity needed by students for autonomous learning (Benson, 2011) and is developed with the development of students' perceptions, specifically through the enhancement of the students' personal knowledge, task knowledge and strategic knowledge, which together are known as 'metacognitive knowledge' (Wenden, 1998).

5.5 Summary of This Chapter

This chapter discussed three themes, collaboration, reflection and learner autonomy, which emerged from the students' English learning journeys on websites out of class during the research conducted, through their expressed ideas. More importantly, 'the opportunities for learning or interaction provided by a context (a learning environment) in relation to the abilities of the learner' (Van Lier, 2000, p.253) was crucial to this research since it was found there were gaps between the opportunities for learning provided by the websites and the students' capabilities. Collaboration and reflection were proven to support the students' development of language awareness and metacognitive language (referred to as a part of learner beliefs in this research) (Wenden, 1999). Nonetheless, the students' capabilities had to improve in order that they could link their perceptions in practice and narrow the gap in the interactions between their abilities and the learning environment. Specifically speaking, this means dealing with learning difficulties such as how to remain motivated during the process, how to select the quality-assured learning activities and resources, how to maintain a balance among the various English skills (i.e. listening, reading, writing and speaking)

and how to avoid being over-reliant on examination preparation. These problems were reflected in the students' perceptions expressed in this research, and they require a specific focus that involves the support and facilitation of others, such as, for example, the teachers.

Chapter 6: Reflections, Implications and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

So far, the previous chapters have presented this research in four main aspects. The introduction explained the background to the research and its significance as well as describing the research focus, questions and objectives. The literature review provided a theoretical foundation for this research, and the methodology chapter illustrated how this research was conducted, as well as discussing the justification for the research approach and method of data analysis adopted. Then, the specific data analysis and discussion chapters interpreted all the participants' perceptions and their experiences of learning English to discover the findings and highlight the significance of this research.

This chapter is the final chapter of this study. It presents an overall conclusion and is divided into six main sections. The first section responds to all the research questions respectively by summarising the findings; the second section makes an overall conclusion to this study, and the final three sections focus on discussing the research's limitations and implications, as well as highlighting the contributions made by this research; and the final section describes my final reflections during the process of doing this research. The structure of this chapter is shown in Figure 6.1.



Figure 6.1: Structure of the conclusion chapter

6.2 Re-visiting the Research Questions

This research revealed EFL students' perceptions of learning English, namely, their beliefs and motivation were investigated within learning experiences, which indicated the interrelationship between perceptions and the actions in learning journeys. Students constructed or mediated their beliefs in social interaction for example when they collaborated with others, or in their self-reflection. Then students' personal knowledge, task knowledge and strategic knowledge were enhanced, which were the fundamental basis for supporting learning activities in practice. The data analysis chapters discussed the findings through the stories of the participants' English learning experiences. These were interpreted according to several themes, while the answers to the research questions were presented within the discussion. This section reiterates all of the research questions before presenting their respective responses in the following subsections.
6.2.1 RQ1: What are the learning perceptions among the Chinese students involved in the study?

The focus of this question is Chinese students' learning beliefs. Three sub-questions are contained within it: a. What are their ideas about learning English? b. Why are they learning English? and c. How have they learned English over the years? Namely, these questions have addressed the students' ideas about learning English in relation to their learning motivation and their previous English learning experiences. Those are constituted as the perceptions students have concerning learning English.

a. What are their ideas about learning English?

Students' ideas about learning English were explained in eight aspects in subsection 4.3.1, as Table 4.5 showed. Namely, their ideas concerning learning English are related to the influence of context, teachers and parents, English's status in the world, English as a tool for communication, English as an instrument, and for social needs and to learn about English-speaking cultures. Ideas about learning English included:

- English is a compulsory course.
- It is the first foreign language they have learned.
- English is one of the most useful languages, and learning English is a trend, all people learn English.
- English is a tool for communication, and an ability that students should acquire in order to use it in their future life and career; and English was metaphorically

referred to as "a stepping stone to success", which enables competitiveness in future jobs.

• Learning English is to learn English culture, etc.

Those ideas came from their interaction with their learning environments, i.e. they were not instruction-based, but instead constructed from experiences in their life. For example, when students referred to English being compulsory, and their first foreign language, this related to their education experience at school; however, the extent to which these experiences shaped ideas of learning English were different for each student. For some students, English learning was mainly based on their compulsory school education, while some students also learned English out of school by taking activities voluntarily, taking part in English summer camp, or joining an English club, for example. The idea of English being a "useful" or "popular" language also came from students' experiences, according to what they had perceived in daily life. Therefore, each student had individual learning experiences that influenced their ideas of learning English; these ideas further influenced their selections of learning activities; meanwhile, the learning activities undertaken could develop/enhance their ideas and motivation.

The findings showed that their motivation for learning English was enhanced when their beliefs and learning activities were consistent. That was one reason to explain why students' attitudes to English changed along their learning journeys. For example, the students' attitudes to learning English were situated in four different ways: positive, negative, both positive and negative, and from negative to positive, which was interpreted with examples in subsection 4.3.1. The participants gave examples of passive learning activities, for example memorising or grammar drills, which made them bored with learning English. On the other hand, they felt motivated when doing more interactive activities, or involving learning content that was more closely related to students' daily life, which linked to their understanding that English ought to be "relevant". Their beliefs of learning English could therefore be said to mediate human activity (Alanen, 2003). In this context, learner beliefs could be regarded as a tool, used to shape students' action of learning. Although, within the context of this study, the beliefs were held somewhat subconsciously until the research made them conscious; this relationship could be further explored, with teachers making explicit use of the positive effect learner beliefs may have on language learning.

Students' reflections indicated that students were not always aware of their own beliefs, or how they influenced their attitude, and how their ideas of learning English might coincide with their selections of activities/exercises. Through the research, students better understood their self-concept, for example, by taking the designed reflective learning activities, writing reflective reports and discussion with other students, making such reflective engagement a core aspect of language learning.

Also, students have stressed that for English learning at school to be closely related to their English learning out of class, it was necessary for teachers to know more about them. The findings had indicated that students' attitudes to homework were various, and dependent on their understanding of relevance. Teachers' understanding of students' learner beliefs is therefore vital, and students mentioned that teachers should design a questionnaire for all students at the beginning of class, including questions that explore students' ideas of learning English, and their reasons for doing so, so that teachers could understand their students with multiple reference points instead of merely focusing on the English score in the national university entrance examination. Then, they could allocate the appropriate homework for students. The homework could then be used to not only promote English abilities but to also enhance motivation. In addition, students had realised that English had an instrumental value (Kalaja, 2016a), which helped them to know/learn other things, enrich their knowledge, and to get closer to the world. For example, "English is a tool for communication, and an ability that students should acquire in order to use it in their future life and career (BU-Zhang-Reflective A)" and "Learning English is to learn English culture (AU-Liu-Reflective A)". Namely, students transferred their role from an English learner to an English user. The findings also indicated that students had more preference to communicate with English-native speakers, which was influenced by the publicity and advertisements in the context, which was also influenced by them being taught in pronunciation class with the learning aim of speaking English like a native speaker (Shu, 2018), even though, as Shu (2018) mentions, the concept of 'native speaker' is complex and potentially counter-productive. This was also reflected in students' selections on English speaking activities on websites. Students had transferred their ideas of English to its learning content and learning purposes (the examples have been interpreted in subsection 4.3.1), which showed the ideas of English had been expanded and were closely related to their motivation.

b. Why are they learning English?

The reasons for students to learn English in this research were interpreted in subsection 4.3.2, which adopted Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) explanation of motivation (such as intrinsic and extrinsic), and the internal and external factors in Williams and

Burden's framework of motivation (Williams and Burden, 1997). Students wanted to learn English because of the ideas listed below, which were explained with examples in subsection 4.3.2.1:

- Positive attitude to English culture
- Positive attitude to English literature
- Positive attitude to English and learning English
- Positive attitude to English community
- Expectations from parents
- Expectations from society
- Gaining a higher score and being praised
- Comfortable learning environment
- Future plans

The findings showed that the motivation ideas came from both internal factors, such as a positive attitude, and external factors (such as, expectations from the significant people, a higher score, and being praised). There was no right or wrong way to think about those ideas, and they were not fixed or isolated. For example, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation could coexist; as a matter of fact, these positive attitudes could be internalised via extrinsic motivation. Students had the extrinsic motivation to learn English, but during their learning processes, they were still enjoying the learning activities and had a positive attitude (subsection 4.3.2.2 provides more examples of this, using self-determination theory as a reference point). Therefore, the selections of learning content and activities became important. In addition, external factors in motivational ideas referred to students' need to be recognised by people who they thought were significant to them. Feedback was important, for example, Lee-AU and Zoe-BU mentioned that positive feedback supported their English learning and enhanced their motivation to learn English. The positive feedback did not necessarily merely come from scores, but from teachers' comments and other classmates' supports as well. Motivation was enhanced when students collaborated with other classmates. Meanwhile, the "comfortable" learning environment mentioned by students included a "supportive" learning environment with suggestions and feedback from both teacher and fellow students, suggesting that collaborative learning is still a major focus in students' learning of English via English learning websites. In addition, motivation also developed along with future orientation and specific learning goals. These particular learning goals with examples were analysed in subsection 4.3.2.2, while Table 4.8 showed all participants' English learning goals, which included:

- To enrich knowledge of English
- To learn about English culture and literature
- To do the homework assigned by teachers
- To prepare for examinations

In Chapter 4, these were further interpreted as linked to goal theory and self-efficacy theory, to show how learning goals influence students' decisions related to activity choices on websites. Of particular importance was the link between difficulty of a learning activity, and whether students sustained their efforts or gave up, which was both influenced by, and in turn influenced, their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy was in part

developed via peer support, helping students to overcome the difficulties of the learning task on websites, to complete the learning goal.

In addition, the 'L2 Motivational Self System' (Dörnyei, 2005) was used to explain how each participant's attitude to learning English links to their motivation. From the result, the majority of students hold ideas concerning an ought-to L2 self, which included the idea of meeting teacher expectations. This indicated that they spent a lot of time doing the homework and preparing for examinations. A minority of students had ideas concerning an ideal L2 self that was influenced by English films, TV programmes and English literature. They wanted to become the hero or become the people who were native speakers, for example. Therefore, they spent time imitating their idols, the English words they spoke and their pronunciation. Moreover, all students had ideas concerning their English learning experiences. This indicated that a good experience of English learning enhanced motivation, the experience of success in the national university entrance examination increased students' self-confidence, but nonetheless, the findings also pointed out the positive feedback, appropriate learning tasks in accordance with students' needs, collaborative opportunities, which all could provide a good experience for students, thus enhancing their motivation.

c. How have they learned English over the years?

The findings showed that the students' ideas about learning English were influenced by their previous English learning experiences and developed in their current English learning experience. Namely, the learning activities they had encountered had influenced their ideas about learning English. As for the students' previous English learning experiences, Section 4.2 looked at participants' situations. Three tables (Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4) were used to show all participants' learning activities and what they chose to focus on in their learning. In summary, students learned English in three main ways: attending English classes in school and outside of school, doing homework, and through entertainment, such as watching English films, dramas, TV, and listening to English songs. These could be divided into formal and informal ways of learning English. In addition, their English learning purposes could be categorised into three aspects: finishing homework, preparing for the examination (the national college entrance examination), and enjoying entertainment in English. Table 4.3 listed the homework assigned by teachers, which focused primarily on the English examination, speaking, listening, reading, and the English textbook. The influence of the national college entrance examination on the participants' previous English learning experiences was obvious. In addition, their homework tasks were mainly on memorising and forming habits by stimulation (see full discussion in subsection 4.2.1). Figure 4.2 showed a map to illustrate the process of previous English learning experiences. Each participant selected a different route according to their individual differences, but all led to the final stage 'examination'.

The discussions of participants' previous English learning experiences in Section 4.2 explored participants' backgrounds to show the relationship between past experiences and perceptions of learning English. These previous learning experiences at high school had also influenced their English learning up to entering university. For the participants who perceived that they had gained a successful learning experience, particularly gaining higher scores in the national entrance examination (in English), they were more confident in their learning. Their ideas were closely related to their

learning experiences and they often acted as a leader or made suggestions when they collaborated with others in learning English at university. On the other hand, the participants with lower scores in the national entrance examination (in English), were more willing to collaborate with others as a listener or a questioner; this illustrates that the result of the examination played a crucial role in students' self-evaluation on their previous experience. But nonetheless, students' perception on self-evaluation included more indicators (communication, reading, listening or writing competence), following the reflective exercises undertaken as a result of this study, showing that such reflections are crucial to help students to move away from self-defining through the result of the examination.

6.2.2 RQ2: How do these students learn English outside of class in web-based environment (English learning websites)?

a. What do they actually do and why?

b. What problems do learners face, especially when learning via English learning websites outside of class? What makes them persist or give up? How do they overcome the problems?

The focus of this main question is on the students' English learning experiences on websites outside of their classes, particularly on the learning activities they used during the period of this research. The analysis in Section 4.4 discussed which activities students used to learn English on websites outside of class, what problems they encountered, and how they solved them.

This question presented the findings linked to English learning on websites, which had indicated that WBL supported students' learning out of class, where they made their decisions on choosing learning content, activities, resources to supplement their English learning at school and fulfil their English needs. Meanwhile, each student had encountered different problems in the learning journeys, and solved these to varying degrees, which depended on their self-efficacy, self-confidence and actual capability.

a. What do they actually do and why?

The findings showed that English learning on websites provided a vivid environment for students who interacted with others for both academic and social purposes via different technology services (Lai, 2017) to achieve their English learning needs. Namely, students completed tasks assigned by teachers, then they explored different websites and chose activities or English online courses to fulfil their learning needs. Sometimes they searched for information to do the homework as well, which depended on what kind of tasks were allocated by teachers. Their choices related, for example, to passing the different English examinations, to enriching their knowledge, to completing tasks in homework, and to solve English learning problems. The analysis of activities undertaken by different students showed that the services in websites were supported by pedagogical theories as well. Particularly on the design of English learning websites, the data addressed the usefulness of interaction within activities, which helped students to learn words, grammar, and to promote abilities in listening, reading, and speaking (see examples in subsection 4.4.1.2).

In addition, the findings also showed that students made choices about the activities when studying English independently or collaboratively with other students or friends, in accordance with their perceptions and particular learning goals. b. What problems do learners face, especially when learning via English learning websites outside of class? What makes them persist or give up? How do they overcome their problems?

Students still experienced problems on learning English on websites, which were presented in Table 4.15 in subsection 4.4.2. The problems pointed out by participants focused on two aspects: problems related to using technology, and problems related to learning English. More specifically, some students complained that low Internet speed made the websites open slowly, or some websites could not be opened at all. This problem usually made students stop their learning. During weekly meetings, students discussed such issues, and received recommendations from other students on how to solve them, again illustrating the advantage of a collaborative reflection on learning outside of class. Students discussed and collaborated with others, not only in the weekly meetings organised by this research, but also in their out of class English learning. This supported their overall English learning, as shown in the examples in Section 5.2. Problems related to technology could be solved to some degree, but for problems with learning English, the participants showed that they needed more facilitation from the teacher (examples are shown in subsection 4.4.2). The results on students' collaboration and their reflection indicated that the problems they encountered when they were learning on websites during the research could be solved by collaborating with others to some extent; however it was not enough to solve them all fully. Thus, they wanted to have more training on the various ways of English learning and guidance of using software on websites.

In addition, students' ideas of a perfect English learning website reflected their learning needs from another viewpoint. These ideas were interrelated with their learning problems (subsection 4.4.2.1 illustrated those ideas with examples and Table 4.16 listed all the ideas to provide an overview). These ideas pointed out three functions of Web 2.0 tools: digging (*high intelligence in searching*), coding (*embedded with sharing board, forum, etc.*) and shifting (*have the functionality to upload videos,* teachers' column, etc.) (Zhao, Yang and Wang, 2010), which were used to build their own learning environment. More specifically, this study has shown that it was necessary for students to have appropriate computer skills to get the best use of webbased learning. Web pages needed to be designed clearly and with guides, which would be embedded with interactive services, dynamic applications, and technology of artificial intelligence, which would make information more relevant and meaningful (Zhu, 2017); computers then became 'humanlike' to interpret information and had the intelligence to communicate with learners and fulfil the individual students' needs (Ohler, 2008).

6.2.3 RQ3: To what extent has the experience of participating in this project affected students' perceptions and their English language learning practices on web-based environment?

a. How have their ideas about learning changed throughout the project?

b. Has the experience of participating in this project influenced their capacity for autonomous learning?

This question related to the reflections of students who took part in this research, focusing on their experiences of doing the activities and how these activities influenced their future learning. Students' English learning developed along with their perceptions during the research conducted; the ideas of and motivation for learning

English were developed to different degrees by each student, since they had different reflections and experiences of collaboration on learning activities.

a. How have their ideas about learning changed throughout the project?

Students' ideas about learning English and their motivation had been developed throughout this study, as supported by collaboration in terms of enhancing students' awareness and promoting English skills (Nunan, 1992a). Their collaboration took place both on websites and via group work in out-of-class environments. From their interviews, students' collaboration was more student-initiated rather than teacherinitiated, they had a positive attitude to collaborating with others, because "It is helpful to do the homework, to get a good grade, to build friendship, to communicate, share with others and to improve learner autonomy (AU-Lily-Interview)" as they mentioned. However, if the teacher initiated collaborative activities in class, then the teacher paid more attention to teaching tasks, rather than on students' individual problems. This is similar to Beatty (2010) mentioning his experience in Beijing, China; he found teachers were unwilling to conduct collaborative activities, because they were afraid of losing face when they could not answer students' questions (Beatty, 2010), therefore, whether teachers acquired enough collaborative skills to support collaboration needed to be considered. Furthermore, students need collaboration to be student-centred, which requires the teacher to relinquish control.

In addition, students' ideas about learning English and their motivation had been developed also by their reflection, by writing the reflective reports and discussing ideas with others, as this research required. Specifically, students' ideas were enriched through their communication with others; for example, students gained more English learning methods from other students' suggestions and self-exploration as well. They shifted their English learning focus to communication competence, for example, after they used communication activities suggested by other students on websites to learn English. This was a result of their negotiations among themselves, while the negotiation depended on not only their perceptions of learning English, but also their experiences. In doing so, their ideas were updated by their experiences of doing activities, communication with others, and self-reflections.

b. Has the experience of participating in this project influenced their capacity for autonomous learning?

'Autonomous learning' in this research referred to students learning English both independently and collaboratively outside of class (also regarded as the students' English learning on websites out of class). Learner autonomy referred to a capacity to take control of one's learning (Benson, 2011) in an autonomous learning environment. Taking part in this project proved to enhance the students' awareness in terms of improving their understanding of themselves as an English learner and gaining knowledge of English learning. It also supported them to manage their English learning in the future, which has been discussed in Section 5.4. The findings concerning students' autonomous learning indicated the influential factors on their selections of activities and setting of learning goals, they made decisions about the activities to choose and set learning being an English learner (personal knowledge),

English itself, learning tasks (task knowledge), and learning activities, affected their making decisions. The findings of this research proved that students' perceptions of learning English included students' personal knowledge, task knowledge, as well as the knowledge on learning activities on websites, which could be enriched by collaboration and self-exploration. The data addressed that it was necessary to have reflective thinking during self-exploration by using what and why questions; see examples at subsection 5.3.1.

6.3 Overall Conclusion of the Research

This research has investigated students' perceptions of learning English, which includes their ideas about learning English, their motivation to learn English, and their previous English learning experiences (referring to English learning at high school, before entering university). Meanwhile, this research has also explored students' English learning on websites outside of class. These web-based learning environments provide opportunities to support their English learning in different aspects to satisfy their individual needs.

The general findings that emerged from this research are shown in Figure 6.2 to show the interrelationships between the themes.



Figure 6.2: The interrelationships of themes in this research

This research presents students' perceptions and learning experiences as an interrelated web. Furthermore, the factors of collaboration, reflection, and autonomy emerged from their learning journeys, which also contributed to that web of interrelationships as presented in Chapter 5. More specifically, there are four interrelationships within this web:

• Firstly, this research has interpreted the relationship between students' previous English learning experiences and their perceptions of learning English, which has been shown in Sections 4.2 and 4.3. Namely, students' perceptions were influenced by their previous English learning experiences.

- Another relationship is between perception and learning activities, which indicates that ideas about learning English and motivation influenced the selection of learning activities in their English learning journey on websites out of class, as shown in Section 4.4.
- The students' perceptions developed and enhanced through collaboration during the learning process. Also, the students' perceptions developed and enhanced through their reflections during the learning process. This was discussed in Section 5.2 and 5.3 respectively.
- In terms of collaboration and reflection during the learning journey, the students' capacity for learning autonomy was enhanced. Meanwhile, learner autonomy also influenced the students' perceptions, as discussed in Section 5.4.

In addition, the findings on perceptions in this research were that the students' motivations were formed by supplementing ideas with beliefs. These were used to further interpret students' perceptions of English learning from the discussions on learner beliefs (see subsection 4.3.1) and motivation (see subsection 4.3.2). Students' beliefs concerned their identity, for example on the ways they see themselves as an English learner; 'L2 self-system theories' (Dörnyei, 2005) were used in this research to explain it, which indicated a continuity of learner beliefs and motivation, to which the idea of identity linked as a bridge.

Also, in terms of learning English on websites, this research showed students' learning activities and the problems they encountered (see Section 4.4), which indicated that the web-based learning environment supported students in taking responsibility for their learning (Benson, 2011). Students could, for example, make decisions about the

selection of learning materials and learning activities, but they also needed more guidance with the technological aspects and on the English learning journey itself from teachers. Moreover, this research also discovered that the interactivity on websites enhanced students' motivation. For example, chatroom, forum and Baidu cloud mentioned by participants, were used to communicate with each other in learning English. Finally, this research provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their English learning by writing reflective reports. The discussion in Section 5.3 indicated that their English learning improved with the development of their reflective capacity; also, the development of their reflections enhanced students' perceptions. For example, from the interviews, students' own voices to present their perceptions became stronger and more self-reliant ("I think...", "I believe...", "in my opinion...") compared to their expressions at the beginning of this research ("My teachers said...", "my parents asked me to do..."). Students showed more confidence in their perceptions, which were used to self-guide their English learning.

In summary, this research investigated students' perceptions of learning English along with exploring their English learning on websites outside of class. This allowed for interpretation of each student's English learning experiences by looking at their beliefs, motivation and activities to discover the interrelationships between them. The research also explored how perception could be enhanced, as well as how the learning activities on websites can be used efficiently to promote English ability.

6.4 Research Limitations

In this research, my position is as a PhD student researcher. I have been learning English for more than 15 years and I am interested in the process of learning English in web-based learning environments outside the classroom. I therefore carried out this study to explore how contemporary Chinese university students learn English on websites outside of their classes. The first limitation of this research is my subjective influence, even though I tried my best to minimise this effect. More specifically, this influence takes place in the design of the research, while conducting the research and after the research. In other words, my background influences how I understand this topic and how I formulated and answered the research questions, as well as the methods I chose to adopt for this study. In order to do the preparation work as best I could, I therefore read a large amount of articles and books to gain a critical and theoretical foundation to support the research. During the process of conducting my research, I tried my best to create a comfortable environment for all participants. I tried to behave as a neutral facilitator and not to express my attitudes and ideas on their performance to reduce my influence and encourage them to say what they really believed. Also, the multiple methods were used to investigate their perceptions in different ways. The group discussions at the weekly meeting provided an opportunity for students to brainstorm and exchange ideas with others. The reflective reports were written by themselves after each weekly meeting; also at the final interview, they also needed to express their ideas; therefore, when they felt comfortable it was easier for them to relax and to describe their ideas. After the research, my influence was undoubtedly present in understanding and analysing the data, although there will always be the question of whether I could truly understand their ideas and interpret them objectively. A positive aspect is that I was also born and grew up in the same context as the participants, which enabled me perhaps to more easily understand their ideas. Meanwhile, when I managed all the data, I contacted each participant on

WeChat to check whether my interpretation was exactly the same as the participants wanted to present, in case I had misunderstood what they expressed.

Another limitation is from the perspective of research methodology. A qualitative case study was adopted as the research method; this has limitations that have already been discussed in subsection 3.2.2. Also, the number of participants is only a very small group compared with the larger population of students in China. Different universities in China also have different focuses in English education. Even with participants from two universities, their ideas are difficult to generalise and it is limited in its applicability to other universities. The findings of this study have been presented to show a comprehensive description of all participants with detailed information, which is meaningful to understand these students' English learning experiences and provides qualitative data. Although their ideas are unique, they may also have some similarities with other students; in other words, they could be representative. Moreover, another limitation of this research is that participants provided only a small amount of information. Students were unfamiliar with writing reflective reports and their English was limited, thus to some degree the ideas presented are also limited. Using mother tongue-Chinese to write the reflective reports was therefore encouraged and the group discussion helped participants to brainstorm and organise their ideas. Had I spent more time with the participants helping them to organise more activities to support them in thinking about their English learning, it may have led to better reflections.

6.5 Research Implications

This research has implications in both practical and academic aspects. Namely, it has social and scientific value. The analysis of the students' English learning out of class,

especially in web-based learning environments, has brought contributions in enhancing students' motivation and supporting students' English learning outside the classroom. The participants' English learning in the web-based learning environment developed their perceptions and motivation by being provided with different kinds of learning activities and resources. This had the benefit of satisfying individual students' English learning requirements based on their different needs. The implications of this research are therefore discussed in terms of the practical significance and academic value, with reference to EFL students, English teachers, training courses, universities in China, English learning website developers, future research, and myself as a researcher.

6.5.1 The Implications for EFL Students at University

The participants in this research were English major students at universities in China. In this research, they shared their English learning experiences and expressed their perceptions of learning English. For them, this was a new experience to think about themselves and their English learning. It was also a process of negotiating with themselves, when they made decisions on how to finish homework, which activities, which websites, which online courses etc. to choose to use. When they collaborated with others, the ideas from the discussion were either adopted or not; they needed to negotiate with themselves. This process of negotiation was related to their perceptions of learning English. During this research, students gained more information about their own English learning from their self-exploration and collaboration with others, but more importantly, they were continuously asked what they were doing and why in writing the reflective reports over 10 weeks, as well as the problems they encountered. Although they did not provide significant discoveries, their reports showed that their ideas had developed to different degrees. Namely, they increased their knowledge: about themselves, about learning activities on websites, and about different ways of learning English. Even though they did not have enough knowledge to acquire English, they knew that they needed facilitation and training rather than learning mechanically as rote learners. Therefore, as EFL students, the reflective activities were significant for them to develop their knowledge of themselves as an English learner, which was of benefit in their English learning out of class.

6.5.2 The Implications for University English Teachers

This research has provided detailed information about students' perceptions of learning English, which is useful for teachers as a reference to understand students. Also, from students' English learning experiences, the influence of teachers cannot be ignored. Students need facilitation while they are learning, for example, they mentioned that a perfect English learning website should have a teachers' column (see subsection 4.4.2.1). Furthermore, the students' problems mentioned in this research (see subsection 4.4.2), need teachers' considerations if they are to provide this facilitation. Therefore, teachers should understand students, for example, as suggested by students, to do a questionnaire at the beginning of a new class, and trace students' learning, by asking students to write a learning journal as a part of homework for example, to get access to students' learning problems and outcomes. In doing this, teachers could better understand relevant issues and provide suitable training workshops.

The findings of this research also provided some direction for the kinds of training courses needed by students, such as training on computer techniques and training on specific areas concerning English. Students needed several workshops with the emphasis on different aspects of English, so that students could study collaboratively and choose among different topics. As this research has shown, multi-format learning resources and collaboration could enhance students' motivation.

6.5.3 The Implications for Universities in China

Firstly, the findings of this research provide a reference for universities to debug and adjust their English learning platforms to satisfy students' needs (see Section 4.4). The findings show that when participants learn English on websites out of class, taking online courses is one of the main activities. In the universities where the participants came from, however, they already had online learning platforms, including several online English courses, but the participants mentioned these little in this research. The universities therefore need to improve the design of their online learning platforms and update their learning resources.

While universities may have the reputation that would lead students to access their online courses, this needs to be backed up with sound technology to ensure students can be assured of a quality student experience. In the study, students were very clear on what they found useful and what they enjoyed. Working with students as advisors as part of a university's re-development of online resources would therefore provide the best possible integration of learner voice into the design process.

In addition, this research has shown the significance of students' perceptions of learner autonomy. The reform of education in China (MOE, 2007), asked for all universities to pay attention to students' learning abilities, especially supporting learner autonomy. The findings of this research show that web-based learning environments could support and enhance students' perceptions of English learning, and their ideas can be developed by collaboration. This would support their capacity for learning autonomy, which helps students to make decisions in their English learning. For the universities, the students' perceptions of English learning could help to guide the universities in their arrangement of facilitation.

6.5.4 The Implication for Technology Engineers

The discussion of the findings in this research has provided valuable information for engineers when they design English learning websites. Participants have described their English learning activities on websites as well as their problems (see Section 4.4). Also, they gave their ideas of a perfect English learning website (see Section 4.4), as they perceived it. The list of suggestions shows their learning requirements and the shortcomings of the current English learning websites they used. Developers of English learning websites should take into account the participants' perceptions to build better applications for learning English as technology evolves; development of online learning needs to ensure it stays abreast of newly available features, while ensuring any new sites are based on sound pedagogical considerations, enabling students to practise various language skills, collaborate, and engage in meaningful English language learning activities.

6.5.5 Implications for Future Research

This research has two implications for future research: the research content and research methodology. More specifically, from the perspective of the research content, the findings of this research focused on English learning outside of class; however, students' English learning in school still plays a key role beyond the classroom. Future research could look particularly at how out-of-class English learning supports in-class English learning. Furthermore, the significance of teachers' influences on students' learning in this study implies that more research on how teachers facilitate students' learning outside of class needs to be done. The participants here showed that they needed teachers' facilitation or guidance, rather than having their learning controlled by teachers. It is therefore recommended that a further study needs to be conducted focusing on teachers and their teaching development, to minimise the gap between teaching and learning. Also, there is a need to do further studies with students who will become English teachers in the future, focusing on their perceptions and their reflections on being an English teacher. In addition, with the development of language laboratories, self-access learning centres in the Chinese context need more research in the near future. If a university were to undertake a re-development of teaching resources in consultation with students, this would make for an excellent opportunity to research such a collaborative effort in terms of stakeholder benefits and an evaluation of the resulting learning environment.

From the perspective of the research methodology, the idea of weekly meetings could be further used in future studies, as this brought opportunities for students to collaborate and reflect on their English learning. The students who took part in this research gained not only suggestions for their English learning, but they also experienced a new style of learning environment where they felt comfortable to present their ideas and take on suggestions from other students. The diary is one way to collect qualitative data; however, this research showed that the reflective report is applicable for Chinese students, even though at the beginning it was hard for them to write. The questions in the reflective report need to be as precisely worded as possible, however, balancing structured and semi-structured tasks. Finally, this research has shown that students' self-reflection could promote their learning through improved self-awareness. Meanwhile, self-reflection also encourages students to set more specific learning goals.

6.5.6 Implications for Myself as A Researcher

The findings of this research have enriched my knowledge of English learning on websites. The participants' perceptions surprised me at many levels. The interrelationships within students' English learning discussed in this research have made me realise the significance of the students' perception that a teacher is indispensable as they provide the best possible facilitation of students' learning development. These interrelationships can only be further explored by qualitative research. It is not enough to examine the interrelationships themselves, but it is necessary to look at the particular details of these interrelationships in research on English teaching and learning. Also, the experience of conducting this research brought me some practical knowledge, which is beneficial for the design of my future research, even though the participants were unique. The background information on the context provided a reference for me for future consideration. Before this research was conducted, for example, I had reviewed the literature in the Chinese database, in

which I found that little qualitative research has been done in the area of English education. Most research has primarily been based on a quantitative approach, even though some studies are mixed methods. Quantitative researchers believe that the objective figures are more meaningful than subjective ideas, for example that students are not willing to/find it difficult to write answers compared to merely selecting from a multiple-choice questionnaire. Actually, from my experience of doing this research, students' ideas need to be supported and they need opportunities to explain their ideas. In this way, they can provide more comprehensive information instead of selecting from multiple choice brief answers, because there are gaps in understanding when such simple statements are used. Their ideas therefore need to be further explained to minimise these gaps, which helps to interpret the data provided. Moreover, this research provides a reference point for students' attitudes to English teachers (see Table 4.2). Namely, students made different comments about English teachers according to their English learning experiences. When I become a teacher in the future, I will ensure my teaching developments include working with students, to take their perceptions, experiences and learning problems into consideration, thus to shape the learning environment, providing meaningful activities to promote various abilities of English and to achieve collaboration.

6.6 Research Contribution

This research has made contributions in both social and academic respects. It significantly contributes to the literature and knowledge in the area of Chinese students' English learning journeys out of class in several ways to understand the China specific context.

Specifically, it firstly contributes to understanding university students' EFL learning journeys in China context; It explored the university students' English learning on websites outside of class and accessed the students' perceptions of learning English. This was achieved by investigating their ideas of English learning and their motivation, as well as the discussion on students' particular learning activities on websites during the time of this research. The discussion of the themes of learner beliefs, previous English learning experience (regarded as a part of ideas within learner beliefs, as per Little and Singleton's (1990) ideas about learner beliefs; for more information see subsection 2.5.1), motivation, and learning activities on websites showed that these were all interrelated and constituted a relationship web in each student's English learning journey. Namely, these interrelationships provided useful information with which to understand students' English learning journeys. It showcased a picture of how English was learned by Chinese students at universities in relation with their learning experiences and motivation.

Also, in terms of the development of Chinese society, the MOE began a reform of education in English in Chinese universities in 2007, however there was a gap between the requirements of the reports and students' actual learning. This research thus contributed to the discussion on students' actual English learning on websites outside of class. Furthermore, it demonstrated their problems, which was significant to overcoming the barriers to achieve the requirements in the MOE's reports.

In addition, this research enriched knowledge and literature in the area of technology enhanced learning, which could be used by designers of online English learning platforms such as English learning websites, programs or activities. It provided reference information from the perspective of student users, as well as the discussion from the perspective of English teaching pedagogy, which were all necessary to take into consideration when updating or creating technology services online. The potential benefit of the web-based learning environment was to offer a place to satisfy personal learning needs. Students could access a large amount of learning resources to manage their own learning, which supported their collaboration with others as well as their development of autonomy. More importantly, however, this research highlighted students' problems and their ideas of a perfect English learning website, which were significant data to elicit further discussion in future research. In other words, it also showed the possibility of the development of learner autonomy in university students through its interpretation of these specific examples in the Chinese context, which has been reflected from the participants' English learning journeys on websites. Moreover, this research discussed the definition and development of collaboration with specific examples rather than only discussing its advantages and shortcomings.

This research therefore enriched the literature of related terms (such as the themes identified above), which had been explained and applied in the context of China to show their applicability. Particularly in terms of the Chinese literature database, this research provided rich data analysis rather than discussing general principles as previous researches had done, which supported for future study.

Finally, this research contributed to the development of qualitative research in China. It provided a reference for designing research methods and data analysis as an example for those who might consider conducting qualitative research but were unsure of the findings that would come out. Instead of relying on quantitative research methods, this study helped to fills the gap with qualitative data that incorporated contextual and social cultural factors, which could be as a potential model to support future practice in researching the area of students' English learning journeys.

6.7 Final Self-reflections about This PhD Research Process

The process of doing my PhD research and writing up this thesis has been the most precious experience of my life. It also represents my own development, growing up, and enriching my knowledge. It has taught me to take on different roles to fulfil the different tasks in each step, as a student in learning, a researcher in conducting the study, and a facilitator in helping my participants. I have gained valuable experience and lessons as both a PhD student and a student researcher.

My research journey has been divided into three main stages. The first stage was the 'preparation stage'; my supervisors started by bringing me a lot of inspiration and suggested different kinds of training courses for me to develop my research skills. This was helpful for me to get an understanding of the whole picture of conducting a research study, both quantitative and qualitative. It also brought future benefits in designing my own research. They also gave me suggestions for literature to read, which helped me to get a more precise idea of my research. I developed my various research questions at different stages. At this early stage, it was not easy to identify the research focus and build up research questions, and I realised that it was not as easy as I had imagined.

The second stage was to conduct the research and collect the data. This process brought me a lot of pleasure, not only in the process of collecting the data, but I also truly enjoyed working with the participants. Not everything can be predicted in advance, however, and the research did not absolutely stick to my timeline, so I had to adjust my schedule. This process required me not only to plan the activities in advance, but I also had to manage the time better. The participants taught me a lot and broadened my ideas about students' English learning. This motivated me, but also made me realise that there were a lot of things to do if I wished to be a teacher in the near future. Certainly, the process of data analysis did offer problems, which needed to be adjusted according to the real situation. The participants provided me with limited information in the first three weeks, for example; they even said they had never thought about the questions I asked. The situation later improved, but the participants needed more activities and more facilitation work needs to be done for teachers in the future.

And the final stage was the most difficult stage, which was to organise and analyse the data and present the findings. The writing up process took me through many tough times; the support of my supervisors helped me in many ways, with suggestions, critical comments, and continuous encouragement. It was also the process through which I developed my professional abilities and personal abilities. I sometimes got lost when I was writing the data analysis, at which point I then went back with my supervisors' suggestions. Several questions and confusing points were solved by our PhD students' group meetings, which offered the opportunities to discuss problems and exchange ideas with other colleagues. More importantly, I gained a lot of encouragement and motivation from them during my PhD journey. Those all helped me to develop my identity as a researcher. I gained knowledge in various aspects of doing research, which then guided me in conducting this PhD research and provided valuable knowledge for doing future research projects.

The learning journey was not easy; along with my research I also experienced the significance of my perceptions and my reflections on my own learning. During this process, I encountered several problems concerning my research. Although at one point I felt depressed, I was lucky to have had a lot of support and suggestions from teachers in the department. At the beginning, it was hard to face these learning difficulties; I often asked myself why I had chosen to study for a PhD and why I wanted to do this research. This was very significant for me in overcoming the fear, to face the difficulties, and to try to improve based on the comments others gave me. Actually, when I was brave enough and opened my mind, I could better understand the comments. English was not my mother tongue, so this needed more effort. A positive attitude was really helpful for me to understand both examiners' and supervisors' comments, and when I got access to their ideas, I had a great sense of pleasure and happiness. The learning process always came with happy and tough times, however. Doing a PhD taught me the most important lesson, which was to try my best efforts in doing it and stick to the path without fear.

During the process of doing the PhD, I attended several academic conferences as a delegate. For example, in the first year of my study, I took part in the IATEFL international conference, I went to all the sessions that I felt related to my study, I just listened to the speakers and although I had no questions to ask, everyone was enriching my knowledge. I did a small presentation at the student conference at the department in the same year, which was the first time I talked about my research to others except my supervisors. This experience helped me to organise my ideas and I still remember a question that I was asked that confused me. Then, after I conducted my research, I attended conferences as a presenter, both at the World Congress of Modern Languages

2015 in Canada and the 7th International Conference of the Independent Learning Association (ILA 2016) in China. Also, I wrote a conference article for the ILA 2016. These experiences deepened my confidence in my research, which was useful. Communicating with others at the conferences was a pleasurable experience. Making progress with my research was dependent on my usual student life and in overcoming each tough moment, however.

6.8 Summary of This chapter

This chapter is the last chapter of this thesis. It has focused on offering an overall conclusion to this research. Figure 6.1 showed the aspects discussed, followed by summarising the research findings and presenting potential directions for future research.

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Appendix

Reflection Report Form A (Learning Beliefs)

Name	e:	
What'	's your idea about English learning?	
Why c	do you choose English as your major?	
Why a	are you learning English? And What's your learning goal	?
How I	have you learned over these years?	



Reflection Report Form B

Name:	Time: "For example" (Week One)
What I did this week on English lear	rning?
How many hours I have spent on lea	arning English out of class this week?
How mony hours I have const on los	aming English via Internet?
How many hours I have spent on lea	arning English via Internet?
What I have seen on the Internet?	
What I have seen on the Internet?	
	1 1 1 1 1 1 N
Which websites I have seen? (Descr	the it or u can share the link here)
Are there any problems I have met?	
Have I already solved those problem	ns?

How many problems I have solved? And how I solve them?
If not, what difficulties I have met?
What is your favorite English learning method via Internet?
What's your learning plan on next week (or future)?

Weekly Meeting's Titles

Week 1.	My ideas on English learning: (What are your ideas about
	learning?)
Week 2.	My Learning goal: (Why are you learning English? What does
	learning English mean to you?)
Week 3.	My English learning experience: (How have you learned English
	over the years?)
Week 4.	A good learner: (what kind of learner could be called as a good
	learner? What kind of learner you want to be?)
Week 5.	My English learning experience via Internet (including the benefits
	and problems)
Week 6.	Discuss the Online English learning resources (1)
Week 7.	Discuss the Online English learning resources (2)
Week 8.	Imagine to design a new English learning website
Week 9.	If I were a teacher, I will do
Week 10.	My ideas of English learning (what I will tell myself in learning
	English?)

Ethical Approval Letter



12/01/2015

Jiaqi Wei School of Education

Dear Jiaqi

PROJECT TITLE: Technology-Enhanced Learning for EFL students at Universities in China **APPLICATION:** Reference Number 001979

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 26/11/2014 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 001979 (dated 30/10/2014).
- Participant information sheet 003251 (30/10/2014)
- Participant consent form 003252 (30/10/2014)

If during the course of the project you need to <u>deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation</u> please inform me since written approval will be required.

Yours sincerely

Professor Daniel Goodley Ethics Administrator School of Education

Information Sheet

Model Information Sheet

1. Research Project Title:

EFL students' perceptions of learning English on websites outside the classroom in universities in China

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this:

This research looks at the process of university students' English learning via the Internet, after class, in China, to investigate learners' beliefs about learning, to get to know how they learn English via the Internet after class and what they have gained after participating in this project. The research will explore whether the Internet will play a supportive role in their learning, enabling students to experience a free, comfortable and collaborative learning environment, and build a place where students can manage their own learning. The research will focus on students' perspectives on these issues.

3. What is the project's purpose?

This research aims to investigate students' learning beliefs, to get to know how you learn English via the Internet after class and what you have gained after participating in this project. It is an exploratory research and is intended to help students to promote their competence in independent learning.

4. Why have I been chosen?

The participants will come from two universities, and will be chosen from the Department of English, because English major students will probably spend more time on English learning after class than other students who need to study other subjects.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way. You do not have to give a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

This research includes the weekly meeting and interview. You will take part in weekly meetings, the two main aims of which are, firstly, to gather you together to communicate and exchange your ideas in group discussions, and secondly to collect the reflective reports given out at the previous meeting. The weekly meeting will last 12 weeks and will each last 60 minutes. After 12 weeks' meetings, you will be interviewed one-by-one. Interviews will take place either in the common room of the library or in a classroom. Each interview is scheduled to last around 20 to 30 minutes.

This research mainly looks at the issues from students' perspectives, and from the experiences, ideas and beliefs about English learning. So the questions discussed during the research process are all related to the English learning issues. Such as: learning strategies, learning goals and learning experiences etc.

7. What do I have to do?

You would attend all 12 weekly meetings and one individual interview at the end of the whole research process, Please feel free, to share your ideas.

8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

This research is a low risk research. All of the activities will be conducted on campus. If you feel uncomfortable or stressed at any time, you would be able to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation.

9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will help you to develop competence in independent learning, especially using Internet resources.

10. What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

The research will follow the plan and time-line step by step, but if it should stop, you would be informed immediately.

11. What if something goes wrong?

You have rights to raise a complaint if something goes wrong or you feel unhappy about an aspect of the research. For example, you could report to the researcher's supervisor (Professor Terry Lamb; <u>T.Lamb@sheffield.ac.uk</u>); or if something serious occurring during or following

your participation in the project, you could contact the researcher's university's 'Registrar and Secretary' (University of Sheffield: <u>registrar@sheffield.ac.uk</u>).

12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

13. What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data collected during the course of the project might be used for additional or subsequent research. And when the results are likely to be published, you can obtain a copy of the published results from the researcher. And you will not be identified in any report or publications.

14. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. All of your recordings will be deleted after 2 years.

15. Who is organising and funding the research?

The researcher is self-funding the research.

16. Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education's ethics review procedure. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

17. Contact for further information

Here is my contact information:

- □ Name: Jiaqi Wei;
- □ Email: edp12jw@sheffield.ac.uk;
- □ Telephone Number: (Local Number) +8615349234378; (UK number) +447895313788.

Consent Form

Model Participant Consent Form

	me of Researcher: Jiaqi Wei			
Pa	rticipant Identification Num	per for this project:		
	Please	e initial box		
1.	I confirm that I have read and [11/2014] for the above proje			
2.	I understand that my particip at any time without giving an The researcher's contact num	y reason.		
3.	I understand that my respons I give permission for member to my anonymised responses.	es will be anonymised b s of the research team to	efore analysis.	
ł.	I understand that my voice wi of the research team to have a after 2 years.			
5	I agree to take part in the abo	ve research project.		
Na	me of Participant legal representative)	Date	Signature	
Na [01		Date	Signature	
L	ead Researcher	Date		

STUDENT ETHICAL REVIEW FORM V1 - 21/03/2013

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