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**Relevance and the L2 Self in the Context
of Icelandic Secondary School Learners:
Learner Views**



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ÚTDRÁTTUR

Undanfarin ár hafa orðið miklar breytingar á íslensku málaumhverfi vegna mikillar nálægðar við enska tungu. Margir Íslendingar þurfa að nota ensku næstum daglega á ýmsum sviðum, þó að íslenska sé auðvitað þeirra móðurmál. Færni í ensku er mörgum nauðsynleg í starfi og í háskólanámi. Þá er flest afþreyingarefni sem ungt fólk notar á ensku og oft tengist enskan ástundun íþróttu, eða öðrum áhugamálum. Auk þess að notast mikið við ensku í daglegu lífi stunda ungir Íslendingar enskunám, bæði í grunnskóla og framhaldsskóla. Færni í að skilja ensku í bíómyndum og tölvuleikjum getur orðið til þess að sumir Íslendingar telji sig færari í notkun málsins en efni standa til. Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar benda til þess að ungir Íslendingar hafi lítinn skilning á því að þeir þurfi á góðri færni að halda í málinu, bæði í formlegri og óformlegri ensku, að skólagöngu lokinni. Þá virðist einnig að þá skorti hvata til að leggja sig fram í enskunámi í skóla. Með því að rannsaka og vinna úr viðhorfum nemenda til enskunáms og því hverjar þarfir þeirra á því sviði séu að skólagöngu lokinni er mögulega hægt að leiða að því líkum hvað vantar upp á í námi í ensku. Á þann hátt verður mögulegt að búa unga Íslendinga undir að nota málið nokkurn veginn vandræðalaust í framtíðinni.

Ritgerðin fjallar um það hvernig viðhorf nemenda til enskunáms í skóla hafa áhrif á námshvata og um það hvert gildi formlegs náms er í málaumhverfi þar sem enskan er víða notuð fyrir utan skólastofuna. Samkvæmt eldri kenningum er hvatinn til þess að læra annað tungumál tengdur annaðhvort því að nemandinn þurfi að nota það af praktískum ástæðum eða þá að hann stefni að því að verða hluti af viðkomandi málsamfélags. Nýlegar kenningar ganga út frá því að tungumálanemandi sjái „sitt mögulega sjálf“ sem hæfan málnotanda. Margar rannsóknir á hvata í tungumálanámi nota megindlegar aðferðir en á síðustu árum hefur meiri áhersla verið lögð á mikilvægi einstaklingsins í eigindlegum rannsóknum. Fáar rannsóknir hafa fjallað um tungumálanám í skyldunámi í landi þar sem notkun hins erlenda tungumáls er mikil utan skóla. Einnig hefur gildi verið lítið rannsakað í sambandi við hvata í tungumálanámi.

Rannsóknin byggist á hugsmíðahyggju og túlkunarfyrirbærafræði. Viðtöl voru notuð til þess að opna og kanna til fulls umfjöllunarefni ritgerðarinnar. Gagnasöfnun stóð yfir þangað til mettun var náð og gögnin voru greind með þematengdri kóðun. Viðmælendur voru í tveimur aldurshópum og víða af landinu. Rætt var við sextán framhaldsskólanemendur í því skyni að fá skoðanir þeirra á yfirstandandi enskunámi. Úr viðtölum við tuttugu og tvo unga Íslendinga í háskólanámi eða vinnu fengust gögn um viðhorf þeirra til ensku í framhaldsskóla og hvert þeir

töldu gildi þess eftir framhaldsskólanám. Viðtölin fóru fram á íslensku og voru afrituð orðrétt.

Niðurstöðurnar sýna mikilvægi Íslands sem rannsóknarefni þar semenska er notuð daglega en Íslendingar þurfa mjög góða málfærni bæði í háskólanámi og við vinnu. Aftur á móti er það svo að vegna þess hvað enskan er áberandi í umhverfinu og mikið notuð álíta sumir skólanemendur margra ára enskunám óþarft. Sumir virðast hafa einnig óraunhæft mat á eigin færni til þess að nota málið. Sýnt er fram á að gildi enskunnar birtist sem mjög einstaklingsbundið og breytilegt eftir hugmyndum um notkun hennar í dag, sem var og sem verður. Margir þátttakendanna höfðu skýra sýn á hvernig enskan gagnaðist þeim bæði í háskólanámi og vinnu og hvernig framhaldsskólanámið nýttist þeim í því sambandi. Þeir gerðu sér grein fyrir því að aukin færni kemur ekki úr umhverfinu utan skóla. Gildi tekur einnig til almennrar þekkingar og annarrar færni sem fengist hefur úr enskunámi í skóla. Að lokum sýna eigindleg gögn að Ísland stendur fyrir utan viðurkennd líkön um hvata í annarsmálsnámi. Nýtt uppfært líkan er sett fram sem nær til Íslands (og ef til vill einnig til annara landa þar sem enskan er áberandi í umhverfinu).

Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar benda til þess að framhaldsskólanemendur telji enskutíma skemmtilega og að námskröfur verði litlar. Þeir búast við að fá góðar einkunnir með lítilli fyrirhöfn og sýna lítið sjálfræði í námi. Þeir eiga erfitt með að greina hvaða færni þeir þurfa að búa yfir í framtíðinni. Tillögur eru settar fram um nýjar áherslur fyrir enskukennara og enskunemendur á Íslandi, sem felast meðal annars í því að gefa nemendum aukið val á námsefni og verkefnum.

ABSTRACT

The linguistic environment in Iceland has changed in recent years due to extensive exposure to English. Many Icelanders use English almost daily in a wide variety of situations in Iceland, although Icelandic remains their first language. English is a necessary feature in a broad spectrum of employment contexts, in tertiary study and for entertainment, sports and hobbies. As well as using English frequently, young Icelanders also spend years studying English at school both at compulsory and post-compulsory level. Anecdotal evidence suggests that young Icelanders may have limited understanding of the proficiency level and register differences that they will need after school and lack motivation to put effort into studying English. Exploring learner perceptions about classroom learning and English needs after school and taking student views into account offers the possibility of isolating undeveloped areas of language learning and thus of preparing young Icelanders better for using English successfully in the future.

The thesis addresses how students' perceptions of learning English at school affect their study motivation, and what relevance formal study has for them in a context of extensive exposure to the language outside the classroom. The traditional view of motivation in second-language learning allows for a division between using the language for practical purposes and becoming part of the native speaker community. More recently motivation has been seen as envisaging one's future 'possible self' as a competent language user. Although many studies of second-language learning motivation use quantitative methods, recent qualitative research has stressed the importance of participants' individual contexts. Little research has been done into compulsory language learning at school in a context of extensive exposure outside the classroom. Similarly, the concept of relevance has not been studied as an aspect of second-language learning motivation.

The theoretical perspective of this qualitative study is that of interpretative hermeneutic phenomenology, within an epistemological framework of constructivism. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for open and exploratory discussion of the areas concerned. Data were obtained until saturation was achieved and analysed through thematic coding. Interviews were carried out with two different age groups of participants in various regions of Iceland. Sixteen participants at secondary school were interviewed to gain their views on studying English in the present time frame. A further twenty-two interviews were taken with young Icelanders at university or in employment, who provided retrospective

observations on secondary school English and its relevance to their needs after school. The interviews were conducted in Icelandic and transcribed verbatim.

The results of the study show the importance of Iceland as a new research context. Daily use of English is common but high levels of proficiency are needed for tertiary study and employment. The high level of exposure to English in Iceland, however, means that studying it at school over a period of several years is seen as an anomaly by some school learners who may overestimate their productive skills. The *relevance* of English is presented as a deeply individual and dynamic relationship between the present, past and future. Many participants at university and in employment have a clear view of their current needs in English and of the increased proficiency gained at secondary school, which could not have been gained from general exposure to English outside school. Relevance also applies to world knowledge and other skills gained through English studies at school. Finally, the rich qualitative data obtained show that Iceland stands outside present paradigms of motivation in second-language learning. A new extended framework attempts to encompass Iceland (and possibly other countries in Northern Europe where there is similar exposure to English).

The study suggests that secondary school learners of English expect classes to be undemanding and entertaining. They anticipate attaining good grades with a minimum of effort and show little evidence of autonomous learning or of foreseeing accurately the level of English proficiency they are likely to need in the future. Suggestions are made for areas of focus for teachers and learners of English in Iceland, including allowing learners more choice of material and tasks in the classroom.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Betty Diana and Colin Charles Jeeves.

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Prologue

From growing up in London to teaching in Reykjavík

My own language background is a monolingual English environment in London. I studied French and English at university, and some Spanish. Moving to Iceland in the late 1970s, however, was the start of a new language-learning process for me, as I was then both taking classes in Icelandic and working in an Icelandic environment, while at the same time English was the language used at home. I therefore have experience of foreign-language learning in the classroom setting, with little exposure outside it; of second-language learning in an L1 environment, both in classes and from exposure in the community; and of teaching my own first language both in L1 and L2 environments. Wanting to put myself in the shoes of the foreign-language learner again, I recently took a beginner's course in German, a language I had not studied before.

I completed my postgraduate certificate of education in Iceland in 1989 and have worked as an English teacher in secondary schools in Iceland since then, with the exception of two years in EFL/ESOL teaching in London. There I also took the DELTA qualification in teaching English to adults at Westminster College (now part of the University of Westminster). It was during these years in London that I first became consciously aware of the differences in emphasis between teaching English as a foreign language and teaching English as a language for day-to-day use. I also came to realise more fully that the English courses offered at secondary school level in Iceland did not suit all students, and became concerned about students who were constantly struggling to keep up. A desire to be better equipped to help less able weaker students led me to take a diploma in special-needs teaching at the University of Iceland in 2003, and I have designed English material and taught in the special-needs department of a secondary school. In 2008 I completed an M.A. at the School of Education

of the University of Iceland, in which I compared reading proficiency at age 16 in Icelandic and English. Apart from secondary school teaching, I have also been involved in foreign-language teacher training at the University of Iceland's School of Education.

My starting point in this study was the desire to understand more fully the learning context of my own students. Even after teaching for twenty years, there were several things that I found troublesome: not hard to understand intellectually but hard to grasp the implications of. Understandably perhaps, the age difference between my students and me presented a gap in mutual understanding. When my own children became teenagers I felt able to keep track of trends in young people's lives, but as I approached the age of my pupils' grandmothers I was clearly out of my depth in discussions of popular culture. Upbringing had changed and Icelandic children enjoyed a level of freedom and independence far removed from my experience, brought up as I was in London by parents born before the outbreak of World War II (or, in the case of my father, before World War I). My experience of secondary education was also very different from theirs and must inevitably have coloured my attitudes towards school. I had attended single-sex schools in London in 'the swinging sixties' while my Icelandic students had been in co-educational schools from the age of six or earlier. Language learning was also different: I studied French, a language I seldom heard or used outside class, Latin and Ancient Greek. For Icelandic students it was English, which they heard from early childhood; Danish, a language closely connected to their first language; and, only as a third foreign language, French, German or Spanish, none of which they could be expected to encounter much in Iceland.

What has interested me over the years has been how individual differences affect how people learn languages; how important context and environment are in language learning; and how hard it is to teach or learn a language to advanced proficiency. I have lived in Iceland for over 30 years and yet I must be satisfied with good, but not native, proficiency in the language. When I moved to Iceland, foreign residents were something of a rarity and not learning Icelandic was not on the cards. Although most people knew some English, it was not the accepted *lingua franca* that it is today.

The linguistic environment in Iceland has changed greatly during the past 30 or more years. The number of immigrants has risen dramatically, travel abroad has become more common, and the advent of cable television and the Internet brought with it a huge increase in exposure to material in foreign languages for entertainment, study and general information-

gathering. A large proportion of this material is in English, and since Icelandic is a relatively small language, spoken by fewer than 400,000 people, this means that many people in Iceland, and certainly most young people, use receptive skills in English on a daily basis. Many use productive skills as well. This in turn has meant that even children entering primary school have some understanding of English, and most adolescents have a good understanding of what could be termed ‘Television English’, and are able to communicate at a basic level. English is a compulsory subject at Icelandic schools from the age of 10 until approximately 18 (that is, six years in compulsory education and between one and four years at post-compulsory level), meaning that the question arises of what aspects of English should be taught at school. Exposure to ‘Television English’ does not open up to Icelanders specific domains of English such as economics, sociology or health science, and it has been observed that the actual language level of many young Icelanders is not as high as they appear to believe (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010).

On the other hand, to say that Icelandic students are not interested in English would be incorrect. To judge from snippets of conversations overheard at the school where I teach, students spend a considerable amount of time watching English-language television material. Many seem to code-switch with ease between Icelandic and English, using slang, loan words and catchphrases from films and television. With the increase in students entering post-compulsory education in Iceland, the range of proficiency in English creates a difficult situation for the teacher, both because of differences in general cognitive ability and because of different exposure to English outside school. If all 16-year-olds are obliged to take the same courses in their first year at secondary school, finding material to suit different abilities may be difficult. If more able students move directly into advanced courses, the difference in age and maturity may be problematic, or students may feel dissatisfaction at no longer being ‘top of the class’.

It seemed a sensible way to approach the question of what to teach in English classes at secondary school, and how necessary, useful, practical, interesting, boring, entertaining, motivating, or relevant studying English is at post-compulsory level is, to talk to students themselves. This study sets out to elicit and interpret their responses. It was my hope that by using semi-structured interviews and approaching the question of relevance with an open mind and a willingness to listen to, and hear, what learners and former learners had to say about English in their lives and about learning English at school, I might begin to understand the perspective of the

students I encounter every day at school. Administering a large-scale survey possibly based on previous research into motivation and the concept of the *L2 Self* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b) would have enabled me to elicit responses from far more than a mere 40 individuals. However, it was the word ‘individuals’ that prompted me to embark on hours of interviews and even more hours of transcription of interview material for the study.

For this research project I am, therefore, studying my own field of work. I was aware of the need for objectivity while carrying out this research. Every attempt was made to avoid jeopardising the validity of the study by approaching the field of study with expectations. I also tried to guarantee a level of objectivity through researcher distance, since I do not know personally any of the respondents in the main study.

In brief, my main objectives when I started on this project were to chart students’ perceptions of studying English at post-compulsory level and to explore whether there were aspects of their studies that they found relevant and, if so, in what way. A further aim was to establish whether a difference existed between how learners currently at secondary school regarded the relevance of their English classes and how young people who had matriculated a few years previously regarded secondary school English classes, in their case with the benefit of hindsight.

Introduction

Approaching research

For the mind does not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently. (Plutarch, 1927, p. 257)

Although Plutarch is referring here to listening to lectures, the image he draws could equally well be applied to language learning. Following academic lectures can be difficult, just as learning a new language is hard work for most of us. Learning from a lecture does not involve merely filling one's head with facts but seeing and thinking about matters in a different light and acknowledging diverse perspectives. Similarly, memorising words and grammar rules does not constitute learning a language, and instead the learner may be called upon to reformulate from scratch how ideas are communicated. For example, it is a jump that many English-speaking learners of French find awkward that one no longer 'is' a certain age but rather 'has' that age.

The search for Plutarch's 'kindling' might be seen as the search by scholars and language instructors for the desire to embark on and persevere with learning a foreign language, and this is what the study of individual motivation in foreign- and second-language learning concerns itself with. For the past half century, different ideas about how to teach foreign languages have been tried out and found wanting. Learners have translated texts and learned paradigms; they have considered functions and notions of the language; they have been immersed in language, subjected to drilling in language laboratories, and taught by ways both natural and silent; they have communicated, and they have carried out tasks. And they have, to a greater or a lesser extent, learnt the language being taught. Nevertheless,

the very fact that new methods of language teaching and learning continue to be introduced and discussed suggests that the optimal method remains undiscovered.

In recent years the discussion has moved from **what or how to teach** to **how to get students to learn**. It is this impulse to think, this motivation, that is now seen as the important factor in foreign-language teaching. An essential element of motivation is the relevance of the language to students, or how it impinges on them. Not only must a foreign language be relevant (and this could be in a variety of ways) but instruction must be relevant to learning those aspects of the language for which individual learners see a need. Relevance may be viewed as one form of kindling necessary for learners to keep the flame of interest alive during the years that it takes to learn a foreign language well.

Defining constructs

So far I have introduced constructs such as *learning*, *instruction*, *motivation*, *relevance* and *perceptions*. There are words and ideas that we use at one time or another assuming that others' understanding of them will reflect our own: one person's definition of a spicy dish or a well-behaved child may differ from another's. In an academic context, assumptions of understanding cannot be made, and providing clarification aids comprehension.

Constructs represent ideas or concepts in an academic setting. Thus learning may seem an easy concept to grasp since we share an understanding of how children learn to dress themselves, or what 'No' means. In educational research, however, more precision is called for to explain the construct of learning. For example, 'learning vocabulary' can be construed as involving pronunciation, morphology, spelling and usage over and above merely knowing the translation of a word. When discussing instruction I refer to the task whereby someone attempts to help others gain knowledge they did not possess before. Formal instruction frequently takes place in a classroom where a teacher (and at times another student) is the instructor, whereas informal instruction may occur outside the school environment.

Perceptions form the backbone of this dissertation. I use the word to mean the opinions participants have of their experience of studying and using English, and how they 'see' English in their lives. Like opinions, perceptions are personal and individual, and are liable to change. As such

they do not represent what things **are** but what they **appear to be** to the perceiver at a particular point in time.

Motivation I take in the study to be the “long-term drive” (R.C. Gardner, 1960, p. 8) needed for the accomplishment of any enduring task, be it completing a patchwork quilt, taking up a new sport, or studying a language. Motivation involves a certain level of interest in the task in hand. The subject of motivation is discussed in more detail in chapter 2 (section 3).

Relevance is construed here as the quality of being close or significant in context to the individual in the present and the future. Chapter 2 section 6 contains an in-depth discussion of relevance. Motivation and relevance are not viewed as fixed entities but are dynamic and can be activated by learners and by teachers.

Importance of the study, originality and contribution to new knowledge

It is hoped that through personal accounts of the significance of English in 21st-century Iceland the study may contribute to knowledge about motivation in learning English as a foreign or second language. It is anticipated that the individuality of the data will bring out the uniqueness of the experience of English language learning in Iceland and will also enlarge upon shared ideas learners may have about how English pertains to their lives.

There are several areas of importance in which the study is intended to contribute new knowledge to the discussion of second-language acquisition. Although the context of this study is Iceland, a geographically isolated country with a population of less than 400,000, the linguistic environment of Iceland is closely comparable to that of other Scandinavian countries where English is in a prominent position in business, education and entertainment. Data to be gathered for the study may well be applicable to the wider context of Scandinavia and Northern Europe.

Recent research into motivation and language-learning has been largely based on the *L2 Motivation Self System* (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b), a recent approach to motivation in second-language learning combining elements from the psychology of the *self* with established paradigms of motivation. Much of this research has been of a quantitative nature and has been done in countries with little exposure to the second language (usually English). However, the L2 Motivational Self System paradigm has not been applied to the Icelandic context, and it is hoped that the present study may contribute to knowledge about the place of the framework in Scandinavia.

It may transpire that the framework cannot be applied in its present form to Iceland due to the significant exposure and use of English within the everyday life of students. If this is the case, the same may be true of other Scandinavian and North European countries.

Several factors mean that the **context** of Iceland may be different from other countries where the L2 Motivational Self System has been researched. Firstly, Dörnyei's system concentrates on language learning in the classroom where there is little or no exposure to the second language outside school, whereas in Iceland English has a clear presence in the form of entertainment, the media, and Internet use. Exposure to English in Iceland will be discussed at more length in Chapter 1; suffice it to say at this point that 86% of telephone survey respondents claimed to hear English on a daily basis (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011) and that in 2010 films from English-speaking countries constituted 82% of all films shown in cinemas (Statistics Iceland, 2013a). Only children's films are dubbed into Icelandic, the rest are shown in the original language version with Icelandic subtitles.

It may also transpire that the study will further knowledge about the third element of Dörnyei's framework, the *L2 Learning Experience*, about which future research is needed (Dörnyei, 2009b; Ushioda, 2008a, 2009, 2011a). The L2 Learning Experience allows for motivation to be linked to enjoyment in the classroom or to a positive view of the future second-language user, but what is clearly needed is a more detailed look at the dynamism of the classroom and the individual's identity as a member of the classroom community and as a member of other communities outside the classroom. Through a more holistic approach to the complexity of language learning motivation the study hopes to allow a clearer picture of motivational factors to emerge.

The study also seeks to establish that **relevance** may be a construct worthy of consideration in the discussion of individual differences and motivation in foreign and second-language learning. Relevance in the study is construed both in the present (while students are at school) and with hindsight (after leaving school) and is connected to constructs such as *International Posture* (Yashima, 2002) and the development of the L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b). Relevance may take a wide variety of forms and the study may show that elements of classroom learning such as experiencing choice of materials and tasks and being encouraged to express personal opinions are considered relevant and of value to learners. By investigating the topic of relevance to students of English studies in secondary school, the study also hopes to provide knowledge about a construct which has not previously been studied in relation to second- or

foreign-language learning but which may transpire to be a significant individual difference in motivation.

A further significance of the study will hopefully lie within its provision of rich **qualitative data**. Several scholars have called for the need for more qualitative research into motivation and the L2 Self (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Kim, 2009; Lamb, 2009; Ushioda, 2009; Ushioda & Chen, 2011) as a counterbalance to the many quantitative studies into language-learning motivation which have been done. The study will take the individual's particular situation into account (Norton, 2001; Ushioda, 2009) and will allow participants' voices to be heard (Barkhuizen, 1998) by presenting an in-context view of young Icelanders' uses of, and attitudes towards, English. In this way, participants will be allowed to speak for themselves rather than having pre-determined quantitative labels applied to them. It is also hoped that the cross-sectional aspect of the study (with data obtained from participants at different ages and in different life-situations) will give a perspective to the teaching and learning of English in Iceland that has been missing, and perhaps in other similar contexts where English exposure is high.

The study anticipates filling the need for credible research data about the status of English in Iceland. My aim with this research is to support, or refute, anecdotal evidence about the status of English in Iceland, its widespread uses and the level of aptitude needed for these uses, Icelanders' perceived proficiency in English, as well as the influence of English on Icelandic and Icelanders' attitudes toward Icelandic, with plausible data gained through trustworthy research methods. The study may help to illustrate more clearly the diversity of contexts in which young Icelanders use English, both in Iceland and abroad, and, by doing so, to explore the perceived connection between the English studied as the first foreign language at school and the English used outside school, in a country where exposure to English has increased dramatically in recent years. Furthermore, it may throw light on perceived proficiency gains in English at secondary school and whether such gains appear relevant to learners, who at age post-16 are likely to have the maturity and cognitive ability to reach levels of ability superior to those gained during compulsory education. Clarification may also be obtained as to whether all learners feel they are making progress in areas such as the productive skills, self-assessment, autonomous learning, and goal-setting, and whether, by the time they leave secondary school, Icelanders are in fact able to function at the proficiency level set down by the new National Curriculum (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 2012b), that is the level of Proficient Users (Europe,

2001). With regard to the necessity for advanced proficiency in English, the high percentage of study material in English at Icelandic universities should be borne in mind, as well as the need for high-level skills in business and other professions. It has been pointed out that in the Norwegian context, a context quite possibly comparable to that of Iceland, “educated professionals need improved English proficiency” (Hellekjær, 2012, p. 17).

Data that are trustworthy and authentic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), gained through semi-structured interviews in the first language (Icelandic) with current and former secondary school students, should provide valuable information about present and retrospective views of the relevance of secondary school English studies with regard to employment, future study, and leisure. Data may also bring to light discrepancies between perceived and actual future uses of English after school. The study should also give an important indication of young Icelanders’ developing language identity as speakers of both English and Icelandic, an area which has been researched (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, 2011; Ingvarsdóttir, 2004), but which is worthy of further study.

Another area in which it is hoped the study will provide valuable new knowledge is that data may be instrumental in preparing learners better for university study and employment after school. In the long term, ascertaining how students perceive the relevance of their English courses at school could lead towards valuable improvements in the school curriculum, as well as promoting a new vision of students’ personal involvement in their studies. It may also allow for negative attitudes towards a subject studied compulsorily for over six years to be addressed.

Finally, I should emphasise that, despite seeking to explore the implications of an Icelandic context for Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System, this study is grounded in his work. Equally, it is indebted to research by Kormos, Ushioda, Yashima, Larsen-Freeman and other scholars in the fields of second-language acquisition and motivation. It is hoped that investigating perceptions of relevance, an area which has not been studied in relation to foreign-language learning, will add a new dimension to the discussion of motivation, language learning and identity. It also remains to clarify at this point that the objectives of the study do not include an investigation of teachers or of instructional methods in English classrooms in Iceland. Although participant perceptions of teacher behaviour or teaching methods may be forthcoming, the focus of the study is firmly on the learners themselves.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study are:

1. What characterises learner perceptions of practical and personal relevance of secondary school English studies in Iceland?

2a. What vision of future L2 self do English language learners (aged 18-20) at secondary schools in Iceland have, and what is the connection between relevance of English at school, motivation and future L2 self among learners?

2b. Does the L2 self of employees and university students (aged 22-24) in Iceland match their earlier vision, and, in retrospect, what is the connection between relevance of English at school, motivation and L2 self among young people after leaving school?

Question 1 opens up the area of learner perceptions of relevance, which have not been studied in relation to foreign-language learning, but which may add a new dimension to the discussion of motivation, self-concept, international orientation and the L2 Self. It also introduces the potentially complex nature of relevance, linking, for example, to present interest and enjoyment, personal fulfilment, and future needs.

Question 2a addresses the topic of learners' perceptions of themselves as future English users. It also aims to explore learners' views of their English studies as personally relevant and a feature of their developing identity as L2 users, along with opening up a discussion of motivation and student willingness to expend effort in learning.

Question 2b focuses on the present reality of English use in the lives of young people in employment or university study and prompts an evaluation of the part English at school played in their present development as L2 users, and of their motivation and past willingness to expend effort in learning.

Furthermore, the research questions may reveal participant perceptions of a number of features of the classroom environment, such as syllabi, instruction, assignments and evaluation. All three questions leave space for an open discussion of the L2 Self in the Icelandic context, since the questions are intended to explore the field in depth without limiting responses to the pre-established classifications of a survey form.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 describes the background to the study. Here the context of Iceland and the Icelandic education system are explained. In Chapter 2 the literature on motivation in foreign-language learning is reviewed, paying

particular attention to Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System. The construct of relevance is also explored, and its application in different fields. Chapter 3 considers the research design and methods and the ontological and theoretical framework on which the study is based. Approaches to analysis and matters of reflexivity and plausibility are addressed, and the pilot study is reported. Chapter 4 describes the study itself and covers sampling, data collection, analysis, results and trustworthiness. Chapter 5 contains an exploration of the results of the study. A tripartite paradigm is presented, which attempts to extend the L2 Motivation Self System to include Iceland and Scandinavia. Chapter 6 discusses the results of the study and their implications. Triangulation of findings is included here. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis. Implications of the study for the classroom are discussed and the study's contribution to research is presented. Here limitations and weaknesses of the study are accounted for and suggestions for further research are made.

1 Chapter 1 Background to the study

1.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 introduces the background to the study. After a short discussion of language learning in general and the importance today of learning English, the research context of Iceland is described. Features such as the position of English in Iceland and the Icelandic education system are explained. In particular, English school studies are delineated, as well as the uses school students have for English outside school, and the uses young people in general have for English after leaving school.

1.2 Learning languages

Under normal circumstances, with the necessary physical features and appropriate input from the environment, we all learn our ‘mother tongue’ or first language (Nunan, 1999). The process normally takes place without insurmountable difficulty and by the time we reach adulthood we have few memories about how we went about it. We may remember being read to by our care-givers, or being corrected when we made mistakes, but broadly speaking our perception will probably be that first-language acquisition ‘just happens’.

Learning a second language is something most of us have done, are currently doing, or will do in the future. Reasons for learning a second language vary: parents may speak different languages or the language of the community may differ from that of the home. Some people emigrate to another country, or have a partner who speaks a different first language. In these cases the second language is linked to the sociocultural environment (Dörnyei, 2009a; Lantolf, 2005), and will probably be learned and used communicatively in context. There are clear differences between learning and teaching a first language and a second language after childhood:

parents seldom wonder whether they are “teaching” their baby language correctly, and for most children learning their first language presents no great hurdles. This may not be true of the older foreign- or second-language learner who already knows one language and who has different motives for learning a second (Mitchell & Myles, 1998).

For other people, foreign-language learning is a school subject, taught because of historical connections with a country, business links, or because it is a ‘world language’ possibly linked to success on the economic and class ladder (Weenink, 2008). Language-learning in the classroom may be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, but may also be fraught with all manner of concerns: *Will it be interesting? Will I learn a lot? Will I understand what the teacher is saying? Will I get good grades?* The teacher will be asking him/herself a different set of questions: *Is the material I have selected suitable? Will my students make progress? Will they like me, and will I like them?*

Questions such as those above, that learners may ask themselves, reflect different areas of language acquisition such as socio-cultural aspects of language learning, cognitive ability, aptitude, self-concept, autonomy and the role of the teacher, curriculum-planning and emotive factors. They also underline the obvious but often-overlooked fact that, even though language teaching and learning often takes place in a classroom group, the group is made up of individuals, each one with his or her own personal make-up, intelligences, learning history, aspirations and fears.

People thus learn a second or foreign language¹ for a variety of reasons, and background and context have an important role for the individual learner. The individual, however, is important not only when questions of ‘why’ (*Why should I learn another language?*), ‘which’ (*Which language should I learn?*) or ‘where’ (*Where shall I learn it?*) are considered, but also of ‘how’ (*How will I learn it?* and *How well will I learn it?*).

Research into second- and foreign-language learning has for some time concerned itself with the differences between how individuals learn languages and how these differences affect the level of proficiency attained (e.g. Archibald, 1996; Cook, 2008; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Skehan, 1997). Studies on individual differences in second-language learning have focused largely on aptitude for learning, learner strategies, and motivation. Although research into aptitude for learning a second language has shown that some individuals have more propensity for languages than others (e.g. Carroll, 1964; Carroll & Sapon, 1959; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1965; Skehan, 1997), work on learner strategies has been seen as more helpful for learners,

since all learners can be helped to adopt strategies which will benefit them (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 1994).

It is motivation, however, that many scholars over the past half century have concentrated on exploring, and that seems to offer the widest scope for continuing research (e.g. Dörnyei, 2009b; R. C. Gardner, 1985; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Khanna, 1990; Kormos, Kiddle, & Csizér, 2011; Ushioda, 1993). A simple Internet search of the key phrase ‘motivation in second-language learning’ produces over four million results, while searching simply for ‘motivation’ brings up over 200 million references, implying huge interest in these subjects. Developments in motivation in second-language learning will be discussed in the next chapter, but broadly speaking motivation refers to a strong enthusiasm for something, which often involves taking a course of action leading over time to a changed (improved) future state. Thus being motivated to become a professional squash player may involve interest in sports and exercises, training and possibly changes to diet and lifestyle, and being motivated to learn a language will involve enthusiasm for exposure to the language, practice, and study, with a view to knowing more.

1.3 Learning English, today’s lingua franca

Although people have various reasons for learning various languages, English is the language seen today by many as being of the greatest general usefulness, the language that cuts through borders and cultures and can be used anywhere. It has been estimated that as many as one and a half billion (1,500,000,000) people in the world use English as a first, second or foreign language (Crystal, 2000).

The position of English as a *lingua franca* has, in recent years, come to the forefront of the debate about the use and teaching of English in the world today. The borders between English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), English as a Second Language (ESL), English for Special Purposes (ESP), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) have become blurred. Emphasis has shifted from the notion of ‘global English’ (Crystal, 1997, 2001a, 2004; Graddol, 2006) in which native-speaker ability is held up as the goal of all learners, and a subsequent focus on the forms and functions of non-native English (Kachru & Nelson, 2001), to a view of English as a medium for international communication, or a ‘lingua franca’ (Canagarajah, 2007; House, 2003; Jenkins, 2007; Phillipson, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2009). Similarly, Yashima (2002) introduced the concept of the ‘international posture’ of

many users of English for whom communication in English is more likely to be with other non-native speakers than with native speakers of English.

English is increasingly used as the language of instruction in European universities, with many courses taught in English (EMI) from undergraduate to doctoral level (Coleman, 2006; Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, & Pitzl, 2006). Emerging from this increase in study through English at European universities is an increase in research into what this means for the students who have to cope with studying through a second language. Much of this research has been concerned with the spoken language (Björkman, 2008; House, 2003), but studies have also looked at reading, writing and listening to academic language in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009; Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010; Hellekjær, 2009, 2010; Mauranen, 2010) as well as at the general situation of ‘internationalisation’ of universities (Carroll-Boegh, 2005). The impact of English on the national language, Icelandic in the case of this study, has also been researched (e.g. Council, 2010; Hilmarsson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2010).

1.4 Introducing Iceland

The study reported here, exploring individual perceptions of young Icelanders of studying English at secondary school, was carried out in Iceland. Much of Iceland’s land mass is uninhabitable and the main centres of population are around the coast of the island. In 2011, when the study was done, the population stood at just under 320,000 (Statistics Iceland, 2012c), with over 60% living in the Greater Reykjavík area and approximately 5% in isolated rural areas.

The Icelandic language is closely related to Faroese and Norwegian (and somewhat less so to Danish and Swedish). It is a Germanic language, as is English. For most Icelanders, Icelandic is the first language, learnt in childhood and spoken at home, at school and at work. There is a strong tradition of coining new words in Icelandic rather than accepting loan words from other languages, for example for technological innovations. However, in recent years the influence of English has become stronger and loan words and phrases from English have become commonplace, especially in areas where jargon is common such as the computer sector, and also in the spoken language.

Until recently, the population was fairly uniform, with few foreigners settling permanently. Whereas in 1986 just over 650 foreign citizens immigrated into Iceland, a quarter of a century later the total was more than four times this figureⁱⁱ (Statistics Iceland, 2012c).

1.5 The “extended use of English” linguistic environment in Iceland

It is appropriate at this point to explain the position of English in Iceland in more detail, since the study was carried out in a linguistic context that differs significantly from that of much recent research into motivation in second-language learning. Recent research into the L2 Motivational Self System reveals, for example, an Asian context where English is important for university entrance examinations and high status employment but there is little contact with English speakers and little use of the language outside the learning situation (Lamb, 2009; S. Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009). In Hungary, where much of the original research leading to the development of the L2 Motivational Self System was carried out, there is similarly little access to English in the community (although the situation may be changing through increased use of the Internet). Research in Sweden (e.g. Henry, 2013) describes a language context where there is extensive use of English.

On the other hand, Iceland offers an environment where young people hear and use English from a young age. Growing up with another language, albeit one which may be used receptively more than productively, gives Icelanders a unique set of attitudes to the language. The position of English in the Philippines, where English was adopted as a national language, was discussed in a seminal study of motivation in second-language learning (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Here interesting parallels can be seen with Iceland, where there is extensive exposure and access to English, although for most people it is not the language of the home.

Historically there has been ease of access to English in Iceland, and at the present time exposure to English is substantial, through popular culture via television and radio, Internet-based searches for information and dealings with non-Icelandic-speaking foreigners. The association of English (at least for young people) with the media, entertainment and computer games, as well as with chatting with friends, may give it a biased positive and “fun-related” aura. Little research has been done on the level of exposure to English experienced by Icelanders, and there is limited availability of statistical data on foreign-language television broadcasts, cinema films, or books. That being said, data from 750 respondents in a telephone survey revealed that 86% of respondents heard English every day (65% for more than one hour a day), and 43% read English every day. Figures for productive use of English were lower (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011). Two recent studies at the University of Iceland have also discussed exposure to English in Iceland. Data gathered for one revealed that during

one week 73% of terrestrial television broadcasts in Iceland were in English (García Ortega, 2011); the other suggested that children in Iceland are affected by high exposure to English through the media and popular music (Thórsdóttir, 2012).

Generally speaking, television material is broadcast in the original-language version. Despite a certain quantity of home-produced programmes in Icelandic, a large proportion of the material broadcast is foreign. On the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, dubbing into Icelandic is generally confined to children's material and some general interest programmes such as wildlife series (for a full discussion, see Hilmarsson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2010). Similarly, at the cinema only children's films are dubbed into Icelandic. Of the foreign-language programmes broadcast for an adult audience, some are in other European languages, very few in non-European languages, but it would seem fair to estimate that the original language of over half is English. Two other Icelandic television stations also show a significant amount of their schedule in the original English (these two channels show fewer programmes in languages other than Icelandic and English).

However, it must also be borne in mind that an estimated 93% of Icelandic homes have access to the Internet (Statistics Iceland, 2011b) and therefore to a wide range of television material from the USA, Britain and other European countries. Internet access at home and at school also gives, of course, widespread access to other material in English and other languages. Computer games, many of which involve online communication with other players, are popular in Iceland and are, almost without exception, in English. Popular music is frequently accompanied by lyrics in English, even among Icelandic artists. Popular novels in English (and other European languages) are often translated into Icelandic very soon after publication in their country of origin, although translating books with little appeal to the mass market is not considered viable. This means that specialised books, including university and some school textbooks, are used in English.

In terms of more formal language situations, most official websites have an English version, as do businesses ranging from multinational companies to farms offering tourist accommodation. Surveys show that approximately 90% of course material at tertiary level in Iceland is in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009). At the School of Engineering and Natural Science at the University of Iceland, over a third of courses are taught in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007).

English has not yet become a second language in Iceland, but it is not a foreign language either (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, 2011). However, it would appear that Iceland (and possibly by analogy Scandinavia and other North European countries) are becoming part of Kachru's "expanding circle" of English (2006, p. 242). It could be argued that "English has become the 'common language'" (Björkman, 2008, p. 35) in Iceland or that it "may have a 'semi-official' status" (Crystal, 1997, p. 4). It has been said that "English represents significant linguistic capital in Iceland" (Hilmarrsson-Dunn, 2009, p. 54), and is clearly seen as a language that is "prestigious" and of "worldwide significance" (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 142). Currently the official status of English in Iceland is that of a foreign language (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009), as can be seen from the discussion of English in the section "English and other foreign languages" of the new national curriculum for upper-secondary school (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 2012b, p. 103).

Although Iceland should not be classed as a bilingual Icelandic/English country, the context of extended use makes it interesting to keep in mind that early research into contexts where the use of two languages is a fact of life suggested that bilingual communities can develop, and that the first language or language of the home need not be endangered by the second or world language (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Recent research has discovered a complex language situation in Canada, where early work into second-language motivation was carried out. Not unlike young people in Iceland today, French speakers in Canada see English as the language of popular culture and necessary for career advancement (Oakes, 2010).

A recent report on the situation of Icelandic in Iceland comments that in the future, language domains are likely to function in Icelandic, English, or both (Hilmarrsson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2010). At the present time, however, an acceptable language situation does not seem to have been established in Iceland, since:

There exists a conflict in Iceland between the necessity of having a population educated in English, in order to communicate in the wider world, and the desire to keep the indigenous language intact and fully functioning. (Hilmarrsson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2010, p. 208)

The current linguistic situation in Iceland, then, is of Icelandic as a home language and a context of **extended use of English as a further language** or as a "Utility Language" (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2012).

This leads to the question of exactly what relevance English and studying English at school have for young Icelanders. Although a glance at the television schedule for any day of the week will show subtitled programmes in English, and overhearing teenagers chatting together will reveal English slang in their speech, little formal research has been done to chart more precisely how important English is to young Icelanders or whether the English taught at school is of benefit to them. This is a gap in research that this study proposes to fill.

1.6 The Icelandic education system

The majority of Icelandic children attend pre-school from the age of one or two until they start primary school in September of the year they turn six. Primary and lower secondary education is compulsory to the age of 16, when pupils either leave school or continue to grammar school, comprehensive school or vocational school for a further four years. First-year university students in Iceland are therefore frequently aged 20 or older and have been at school for 14 or more years. Figure 1 below illustrates the division by age of the Icelandic school system (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 2012a).

The Icelandic national curriculum in use at the time the study was conducted (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 2007) stipulates that English be taught from Year 4 (age 10 years) until Year 10, when pupils complete compulsory education. In fact, some schools and even pre-schools begin teaching English earlier. There are three study programmes whereby students major in languages, or natural or social sciences. Danish is taught as a compulsory subject from Year 5 to Year 10. Students who continue to upper-secondary school are obliged to study both English and Danish for one or two years (depending on the study programme they have chosen), along with a third, and in some cases fourth, language (depending again on their major programme of study). Many schools offer some choice of third and fourth language. Figure 2 illustrates the number of core credits taken by subject and by academic study programme of the Icelandic National Curriculum (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 2007). In addition to this core, students take approximately 50 credits in these and other subjects. One subject course normally lasts for one semester of approximately 15 weeks and is worth three credits. Students on all the study programmes must, for example, take five one-semester courses in Icelandic, and five courses in English on the languages and social sciences programmes, but

only three courses on the natural sciences programme. At the time of writing a new secondary school curriculum is being adopted.

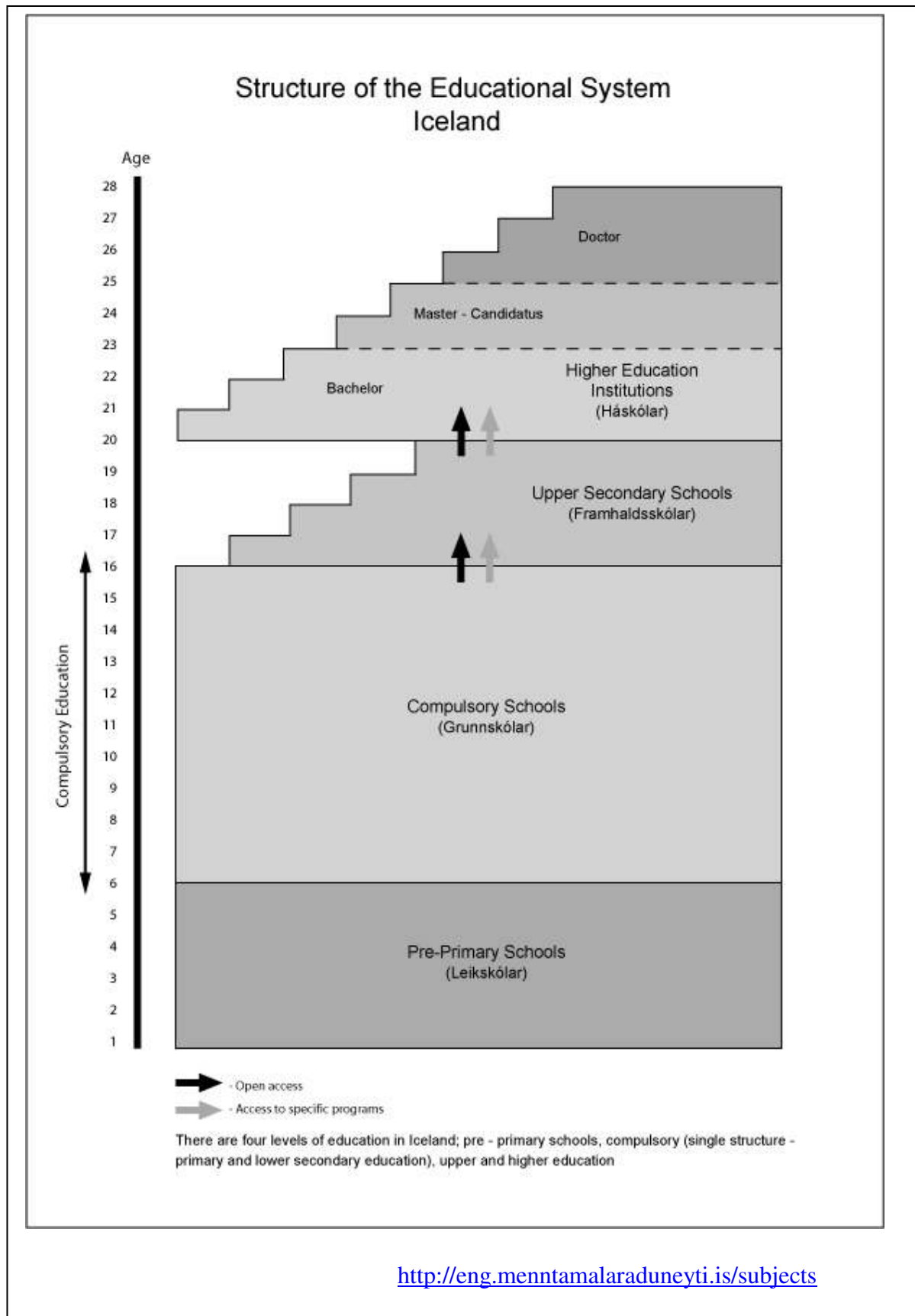


Figure 1 The Icelandic School System

The core in the academic programmes is as follows:			
Subject	Study programme in languages	Study programme in natural sciences	Study programme in social sciences
Icelandic	15	15	15
Mathematics	6	15	6
Danish/ Norwegian/Swedish	9	6	6
English	15	9	15
Third language	15	12	12
Fourth language	9		
Social sciences	3	3	6
Geography			3
History	6	6	9
Social studies determined by the school			6
Natural sciences	9	9	9
Physics		3	

Figure 2 The Icelandic National Curriculum 2007: Core credits by study programme

1.7 Learning English at school in Iceland

By the time students start secondary school in Iceland they have already been learning English at school for at least six years. It might seem that motivation to learn English could be taken for granted in Iceland due to the context of extended use. It could certainly be posited that young Icelanders want to know English, but if they fail to find their English classes at school relevant to them, they may not be motivated to expend effort on study. In Icelandic schools, English is taught largely as an academic subject and the question of what is relevant to teach, given the context of extended exposure and use, seems to be absent from the discussion of language teaching and learning. Little needs analysis is carried out in secondary schools in Iceland, and little emphasis placed on encouraging students to think about their future language use, about their need for proficiency in different language registers, or about the part the language plays in their lives.

First-year English courses at Icelandic secondary schools tend to focus on building up grammar language skills through the use of ‘traditional’ internationally-marketed EFL coursebooks which often divide language learning into isolated areas such as grammar, reading comprehension and listening skills, and which are often designed with recognised examination

systems in mind. Classwork may involve textbook readings and workbook exercises, which learners may continue with as homework. Many courses will also involve some literature, perhaps a shorter classic such as Orwell's *Animal Farm* or a volume of short stories. Second-year courses may continue in the same vein, with more advanced textbooks working towards an examination such as the Cambridge Certificate of Advanced English or of Proficiency in English. Here there may be a stronger emphasis on essay-writing and on more demanding literature (e.g. a novel by Sillitoe or a play by Tennessee Williams). English courses in the third and fourth year of secondary school may concentrate on more areas such as business English, drama or other literature, or project work of some kind. Some students will take these courses as optional courses, since the curriculum allows some freedom of choice on completion of core credits. However, since no textbooks are designated by the Ministry of Education, secondary school teachers are free to use material of their choosing. Some teachers prepare their own course material. Many courses at all levels involve oral exams, collaborative tasks, and Internet use.

Assessment may be by continuous assessment, with or without a final written examination. A passing grade is 4.5 (i.e. 45%, with grades awarded on a scale of 1-10). There are no standardised national examinations at the conclusion of secondary school. Each school takes responsibility for matriculating its own students for university entrance. This means that subject teachers are responsible for making up examinations and assessing the students they teach throughout secondary school.

The focus of this study is not on teachers of English in Iceland, who are dedicated, professional, hard-working individuals who have the interests of their students at heart (Ingvarsdóttir, 2004). Some foreign-language teachers encourage students to work on metacognitive aspects of English language learning through use of the European Language Portfolio (Sverrisdóttir, 2007), in which autonomy and choice play a central role. However, research in Iceland has uncovered a dissonance between the teaching of English in Iceland and later needs (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007; Jeeves, 2010), as well as a lack of skills in reading (Torfadóttir, 1991), basic vocabulary (Torfadóttir, 2003) and advanced writing (Berman, 2007; Jeeves, 2012; Sigurðardóttir, 2007). School pupils in Iceland may be expected to be autonomous learners (Lefever, 2005) but individualised study in English language learning appears to be lacking (Ingvarsdóttir, 2004). The study adds to the literature on teaching and learning English in Iceland by establishing the part relevance and choice can play in improving students' learning experience and its outcomes.

Research in other countries has also shown significant but narrow exposure to English (Henry & Apelgren, 2008), dissatisfaction with teaching materials (Chambers, 1999) and general boredom as language learning progresses (Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002). This last-mentioned factor in itself is cause for concern in Iceland, where the school population has changed dramatically over the past 35 years. In 1975 there were 8,370 students at secondary schools, as opposed to 24,459 in 2006, and the percentage of Icelanders matriculating (usually at age 20) has increased from 9% in 1959 to 64% in 2009. The fact that a higher proportion of the population in Iceland is now not leaving school at age 16 has brought with it a broadening of the level of ability of students at post-compulsory and tertiary education in Iceland. Moving beyond these figures on secondary school matriculation, it should not be forgotten that learning extends beyond the academic environment. Lifelong learning is now the order of the day, and with it comes the need for study skills and autonomous learning strategies to last a lifetime.

The situation of the **compulsory** foreign or second language at school has not been fully considered by recent paradigms of motivation such as the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b). We have seen that in Iceland English is taught for approximately seven years at compulsory level, and normally for a minimum of three terms at post-compulsory secondary school. Some children pick up a good deal of knowledge of English before they start school study (Hilmarsson-Dunn, 2009), and research has shown that many Icelandic children have reached the curriculum objectives for early courses in English before formal instruction has begun (Jóhannsdóttir, 2010), meaning that already at the outset of instruction learners may not view English as a ‘foreign’ language.

Attitudes towards the compulsory study of English at school are likely to differ from attitudes towards a language that students choose to study. In the case of compulsory courses, some students may concentrate on attaining no more than passing grades with the simple aim of passing their final exams. Their main motivation for study may be to finish school, rather than to improve their proficiency in English or any other subject.

Moving from the motivational model to national educational demands, the Icelandic national curriculum (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2004) has open utilitarian objectives, such as preparing students for participation in democratic society, employment and further study, as well as giving them a comprehensive and individually suitable education. The new Icelandic curriculum for secondary schools (2011) allows for individual approaches to the curriculum in all subjects, based on student development within the

'key competences' of learning, health, creativity, equality, democracy and human rights, sustainability, Icelandic and foreign-language literacy, and numeracy and information literacy (2011). Although this curriculum had not taken effect when the study was carried out, relevance in education is viewed here in terms of the individual, with a common core of subject-matter (including Icelandic and foreign languages) forming a necessary foundation for all students.

The objectives of the national curriculum in foreign languages in force when the study was done (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 1999a) have specific learning outcomes and behavioural objectives. After three terms students should be able, for example, to:

employ different reading strategies, i.e. intensive reading, skimming and scanning, and know when to use each strategy

and

relate orally or account for what s/he has read, seen or heard (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1999, p. 23 (my translation))

Similarly the European Language Portfolio (Materials, 2006) has utilitarian objectives of the kind that students may be able to relate to and see the relevance of, and which involve students envisaging themselves as English language users in the future and activating their Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2009b). Official curricula, however, do not necessarily reflect what goes in the classroom, since curricula, teacher beliefs and student beliefs are not always compatible (Balint, 2004; Davies, 2006). There may also be a fear among teachers that "the current curriculum is not appropriate for a portion of the student population" (Balint, 2004, p. 28). With specific regard to the curriculum for English in Iceland, there is a question whether national and school authorities, teachers and students regard English as an academic or a vocational subject, that is to what extent students should learn about the language or learn how to use it. It may be that inconsistencies exist between learning objectives and student tasks at school.

With regard to English in countries with significant exposure to a second language, what form of the second language learners should be taught at school is something that needs consideration (although it is not discussed within the L2 Motivational Self System). The fact that there is extensive exposure to a colloquial form of the language through television

shows, films, song lyrics and computer games does not mean that students have no need to acquire other registers. In terms of what sort of English should be taught in Icelandic schools, or indeed in any school system where students are likely in the future to use the language in native and non-native international settings, there is a need to focus on aspects of English which enhance oral communication (Seidlhofer, 2005) as well as those which are of benefit in study at tertiary level and in employment. It would without doubt appear beneficial to teach aspects of the language that will not be 'picked up' from general exposure to television and popular culture. It has, after all, been said that:

...the English language is, in a sense, not a single language, but many languages, each belonging to a particular geographical area or to a particular kind of situation. (Leech & Svartvik, 1994, p. 9)

It is evidently those situations that students are not exposed to that need particular attention in school instruction. Formal situations calling for a formal register in English are not, generally speaking, encountered by many Icelandic teenagers. Preparing them for eventualities such as having to write formal emails or letters, make presentations at work or university, attend business meetings, or talk to work colleagues on the phone is a necessary part of English instruction, in the same way as practising emergency stops is a necessary part of driving instruction. It is because it is beyond everyday use in driving that it needs special attention.

1.8 English outside and after school – the relevance of English in Iceland

Above I have outlined the linguistic environment of Iceland (and, by analogy, of other countries in Scandinavia and Northern Europe with similar linguistic environments). It is this context, with its high level of exposure to English, extended period of formal instruction in school, and need for advanced proficiency after school, that makes the consideration of relevance in second-language motivation and individual differences valuable. Since issues arising in Scandinavian and North European countries have not so far been explored in any detail with regard to the L2 Motivational Self System or other paradigms of motivation or individual differences, the present study introduces a new context that is worthy of further investigation.

In countries such as Iceland, with a small population and a first language that is, generally speaking, not understood abroad, the importance

of knowing other languages is evident. Young people are well aware of the fact that they need foreign languages to communicate with foreigners, to travel and to study abroad (Hilmarrsson-Dunn, 2009; Jeeves, 2010). Taking into account the fact that just short of 400,000 trips abroad were made by residents of Iceland during the period May 2007-April 2008 (more than one trip per head of the population), it seems fair to assume that “the language aspect of the individual’s global identity” (Dörnyei 2005, p. 118) is important to Icelanders. Fifty, or even twenty-five, years ago, Danish was likely to be the lingua franca used with Scandinavians, but the increasing dominance of English as a world language in recent years means that English has taken over this role. For young people in Iceland, Scandinavia and possibly much of northern Europe, English has huge importance in opening doors to all manner of areas, including study, work, hobbies, relationships, and travel.

Little research has been done on students’ use of English outside the classroom while they are still studying the language as a compulsory school subject. This means that a dichotomy may exist between academic study of English (grammar forms, vocabulary tests, compulsory reading texts, and so on) and the language used in everyday leisure and part-time employment situations. The gap between levels of proficiency already attained (and undoubtedly boosted by exposure to English outside school) and the advanced proficiency needed for academic study and professional work may be unclear to teenage students. The present study hopes to contribute to understanding the complex and dynamic motivational situation faced by both teachers and learners of English in contexts of extended use and exposure.

Although not all Icelanders will continue to tertiary education, the Icelandic statistical bureau’s forecast is that 74% of secondary school students will do so (Statistics Iceland, 2009), meaning that a high proportion of young people need, and will continue to need, a good reading comprehension ability in English. However, because much exposure to English is receptive and colloquial (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, 2011) it does not open to Icelanders the world of English as the language of law, of business and finance, or of scientific research. Neither do Icelanders have sufficient opportunity to develop output skills for expression (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011) and their spoken proficiency may be characterised by good pronunciation (gained from watching American and British television since childhood) but limited command of register and ability to discuss serious topics. Teenage learners may identify with the English-speaking environment on the television screen and fail to appreciate that they themselves are not part of

the culture portrayed. Because they understand the language used, and identify with the youth culture images, they may be erroneously led to believe that their language proficiency is similar to that of the characters they are watching, and that it extends beyond the day-to-day situations in which those characters are typically portrayed.

What they may also not realise are the limitations of the language used in films and television sit-coms (Hayes, 2006; Webb & Rodgers, 2009). This may lead learners to believe in a limited and inaccurate scope of the English language. It may also give learners a false sense of their own proficiency, until the point comes when more productive demands are made on them, in employment or tertiary education. Through exposure only to a limited type of English “students develop passive (or receptive) language skills and may overestimate their actual language proficiency” (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 54). The responsibility of schools to prepare students as well as possible for studying content through English cannot therefore be underestimated (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009) and at a national level the status of both English and Icelandic needs to be formalised (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011). A curiously similar situation has been observed among speakers of Southern Sotho in various southern African countries, where research has brought to light an over-confidence in proficiency and lack of understanding of the need for different registers of English (Coetzee-Van Rooy & Verhoef, 2000).

Contrasting and conflicting attitudes to English, however, arise from its being an obligatory school subject for nine or more years. If learners are exposed to English-language media from an early age and use English informally for social networking, interactive computer games and tourism throughout their childhood and teenage years, they may feel little need for classroom study, or at least for the sort of classroom study that is provided in Iceland. On the other hand, young Icelanders, especially those who have completed their schooling, may realise that what they learned at school went beyond what they learned from their personal use of English outside school. Evidence that other gains are made through English courses at school (for example, self-confidence or world knowledge) would also suggest that English classes are relevant to young Icelanders. This dichotomy between the ubiquitous so-called ‘youth culture English’ (Henry & Apelgren, 2008; Norton, 2001) and the English studied at school gives a unique slant to the question of motivation which is not addressed by Dörnyei’s system and which this study hopes to investigate.

A fundamental question is what impact curriculum guidelines should have on students’ lives. A study carried out in the context of U.S. middle

and high school (sixth and ninth grades), reports that students “demonstrate a shallow understanding of how school relates to the real world and show limited awareness of the skills and knowledge needed for success in the future” (Johnson, 2000, p. 272). It seems essential that students should be helped to understand and find the relevance that school study of English (and other subjects) has to their lives after school (Johnson, 2000; Kember, Ho, & Hong, 2008).

In conclusion a word should be said about relevance. The construct of relevance will be explored more fully in Chapter 2. Relevance covers the whole spectrum of how the language engages with the student’s present and future life. Many secondary school students use English frequently outside school with non-Icelandic-speaking friends and relatives and in their part-time jobs as well as for entertainment. This familiarity with English also gives the language enormous relevance for all young Icelanders, not just those who are aiming for lengthy university study or high-prestige jobs. Because the language has become a necessary tool for life in today’s global and Internet-connected society, students need the best preparation they can get at school. The question remains, whether Icelandic schools are managing to make the study of English connect with learners’ lives outside and beyond school and to provide an adequate breadth of proficiency.

1.9 Summary

In this chapter I have described the background to the study and its context. I discussed in general terms how and why we learn foreign languages, and more specifically the importance of learning English, today’s lingua franca. I introduced the context of Iceland and accounted for the significant exposure to English in Iceland. I also described the Icelandic education system, the teaching of English in Icelandic schools, and the relevance of English is to young people outside and after school. Chapter 2 discusses the literature which forms the basis of the study.

2 Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the study was introduced. The importance of English in today's world was mentioned and the research context of Iceland was described. Chapter 2 constitutes a review of the literature on which the study is based. Interest in motivation and individual differences in second-language learning are discussed, including a discussion of the long-standing distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation in second-language learning that emerged from early research in North America. Particular attention is paid to Dörnyei's recent L2 Motivational Self System and to studies based on the paradigm. I explain the construct of relevance and emphasise its importance as part of an evolving dynamic framework of motivation in second-language learning and show that the context of Iceland offers an exciting new dimension for study of individual differences, motivation and relevance of English as a second language.

2.2 Learning languages

People learn other languages for a variety of reasons. Some may move country; others need a foreign language at work; many are obliged to study a foreign language at school. Some people are fascinated by the similarities and differences between languages, while for others language learning is a tiresome chore. One thing that seems to hold good for almost all of us is that whereas we all learn our first language to a similar level, there is a huge spread in ability attained between people when they learn a second or foreign language. In this way, the difference in people's second-language proficiency is likely to differ radically from the difference between their proficiency in their first language (Fry, 1977). The question of why some people do better than others in second- or foreign-language learning at

school is frequently a matter of concern for teachers. Some students participate in classroom tasks, are conscientious about homework and do well in assessment. Others appear to work just as hard but rarely achieve good grades, and some simply show a minimum of interest and avoid classroom participation.

In Iceland, English is the foreign language that has the most important role as an unofficial lingua franca, not only in business and politics but in all realms of communication, and no less among school students than among the working population (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007; Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010; Jeeves, 2010; Jóhannsdóttir, 2010). The same could be said to be true of some other North European countries. It is therefore important that young Icelanders finish school with a good knowledge of English, and for this to be the case English language classes at school need to be geared to their linguistic and individual needs. The increasing dominance of English in popular culture and the importance of the Internet in today's society, giving as it does vast accessibility to material in English, mean that existing models of learner motivation and individual differences may need reappraisal. This study hopes to elucidate the situation and make suggestions for possible reworking of present paradigms.

Before discussing motivation and research into what induces people to spend time learning another language, it is appropriate to situate current research into foreign- and second-language teaching and learning within the broader field of linguistics. The following section outlines some fundamentals in the fields of linguistics and of language learning. Some main areas and trends in research are outlined and then, more specifically, the area of research concerned with individual differences between second-language learners. Here the focus is on motivation and research into what induces people to spend time learning another language, an occupation that seems to be easier for some than for others. I then move on to outline the development of the L2 Motivational Self System. Following this, I turn to a discussion of relevance and its potential significance as a factor in motivation in second-language acquisition.

2.3 From linguistics to motivation in second-language acquisition

2.3.1 Linguistics and applied linguistics

In seeking to position my study within a theoretical framework, I would like us to step back briefly in time and consider that the study of language

is by no means modern. The publication in England of a book on the “right writing of our English tongue” (Mulcaster, 1582) certainly suggests a prescriptive concern about written English. The scientific study of language known as linguistics, however, emerged much more recently. In the nineteenth century European students of philology compared the written form of classical languages, while American scholars focused more on expanding anthropological studies of Native American communities by recording their (spoken) languages (Crystal, 1971; J. Lyons, 1970; Robins, 1964). Linguistics continued for some time to be dominated by comparative and descriptive study of the structure of language and by prescriptive rulings on accepted use based on Latin and Greek usage. The emphasis changed in the middle of the last century when Chomskyan theories of generative grammar dismissed the focus on describing language, in favour of discussing language performance and creativity as well as children’s “innate predisposition to learn a language” (Chomsky, 1965, p. 25).

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, a broad distinction can be made between theoretical and applied linguistics. Theoretical or ‘traditional’ linguistics centres on studying and describing the forms of language: morphology, lexis and semantics. Cognitive linguistics discusses language and the workings of the human mind (Evans & Green, 2006). Applied linguistics, on the other hand, concerns a vast range of topics where the study of language and of other subjects intersects. These include areas such as psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics and sociolinguistics. Fields of practical application within these areas will include the study of children’s acquisition of language, educational linguistics, language disorders, and first and foreign language teaching (Archibald, 1996; Crystal, 1968, 1971, 2001b).

2.3.2 Approaches to second-language acquisition

Second-language learning, a field of study within the domain of linguistics for over half a century, has been studied from differing perspectives at different times as new theories develop, gain support and are replaced by new ideas. Different views of what is important in language learning mean that research has also developed along various lines. From a linguistic perspective, for example, there is interest in what forms the language takes, how it is structured and how it differs from other languages (Archibald, 1996), while a cognitive perspective will give prime importance to the mental processes involved in using language, for example, in what order

learners acquire language items and how the brain stores first- and second-language vocabulary (Hamers & Blanc, 2000). The emphasis, from a sociocultural approach, to second-language acquisition is on how the language is used in society (Lantolf, 2005; Lantolf & Beckett, 2009).

As interest in language learning as a branch of applied linguistics developed in the mid-20th century, a cognitive approach focusing on the process of learning was dominant. Views of how languages are acquired were dominated in the years after World War II by the opposition of behaviourist and innate theories of language which claimed, on the one hand that language can be learned just like any other activity through repetition, and on the other hand that it is humans' unique inborn facility for language that distinguishes them from other living beings (Archibald, 1996; Cho & O'Grady, 1996; Chomsky, 1965; Fry, 1977; J. Lyons, 1970; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; O'Grady, Dobrovolsky, & Katamba, 1996; Skinner, 1963). According to behaviourist theories, all learners can succeed with sufficient classroom drills and repetitive language laboratory exercises based on contrastive analysis of the first language of the learner and the 'new' language, and thus concentrating on the differences between them (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll & Sapon, 1959) supported the view that second-language learning proceeded along the same lines for everyone and that it was quantifiable. Students' lack of success later precipitated a move to other, more communicative, approaches where language is not a solitary task learned and practised in isolation (Corder, 1981; Diller, 1978; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Swain, 2000).

By the late 1960s, ideas put forward by Chomsky, that language was an innately human skill that could not be mastered by simple repetitive drills, had been popularised. What became more interesting and more fruitful for researchers than behaviourist approaches to language teaching was to explore the errors language learners made. Viewing errors as a natural part of language acquisition would lead to greater understanding of the interlanguage developed during the learning process and would shift the focus from language teaching to language learning (Corder, 1981; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Norrish, 1983; Nunan, 2001). Research in the second half of the last century also brought into focus issues connected to the optimal age to learn both first and subsequent languages (Bley-Vroman, 1989; Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003; Lenneberg, 1967; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978).

Sociocultural theory, on the other hand, concerns itself with the role of second and foreign languages in society: here interaction between people is

the prime source of learning, especially through the *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986, 1994). In terms of instruction, the communicative approach shifted the emphasis from accuracy-based audio-lingual study to meaning-based communication between social beings, where being understood was more important than being correct (Nunan, 1988; Widdowson, 1994; Zimmerman, 1997). Language learning is seen as taking place within a social framework (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), interaction is all-important and the human need to communicate that “we are members of a common race and that we need each other” (Fry, 1977 p. 166) is acknowledged.

Aspects of foreign and second-language learning seen as important from a sociocultural perspective include identity (Norton, 2010; Pavlenko, 2004), private speech (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009), and the position of the second language in society (Jenkins, 2007). Increased importance is also given to the classroom, as emphasis moves from innate and therefore immutable factors to matters that can be influenced by the environment, by teachers and by the changing needs of the learners (R. C. Gardner, 1985).

Although communication is still regarded as an essential feature of language teaching and learning, the focus in instruction has more recently moved again towards an acceptance of the necessity of addressing both accuracy of language forms and interaction (H. D. Brown, 2007; Gass, 2002; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Schmidt, 1990, 1995). This is especially true in the context of literacy and academic achievement.

With this brief overview of linguistics and the branch of applied linguistics known as second-language acquisition I have attempted to position the study within a relevant framework of scholastic literature. The importance of the study lies in its attempt to broaden yet further the boundaries of knowledge within foreign-language teaching and learning. The participants in the study, as well as their language teachers, have been influenced by the developments delineated above. They are likely to have experienced rote-learning, for example of poems in Icelandic, and they will also have been encouraged to express themselves in first and foreign-language classes at school, will have used their own interlanguage, and learned English words and phrases from friends and relatives situated in a more advanced ‘zone’. Although these may be features of language acquisition that many learners share, we shall now turn the discussion towards the significance of the differences between language learners.

2.3.3 Individual differences in second-language acquisition

In recent years, interest has developed in the differences between language learners and how dissimilar the learning process can be for students (Cook, 2008; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Research into individual differences centres less on universals about **how** learning takes place than on **why** it does not follow the same path for everyone. Here we see a concern not only with how second-language learning differs between students but also a more practical and pedagogical stance on how the learning experience can be improved and higher levels of success achieved by those who find the process difficult. The study reported here demonstrates clearly that, although unifying themes can be seen within the results, each participant has his or her unique personality, likes, dislikes and aspirations. It is for this reason that a closer look at individual differences is useful at this point.

Individual differences have been defined as “characteristics or traits in respect of which individuals may be shown to differ from each other” (Dörnyei, 2009c, p. 181). It has long been recognised that learners differ in the level of second-language proficiency they attain and in the learning methods they follow, even though these differences may not be apparent in their first-language ability (Dörnyei 2009a).

The construct of individual differences has been well researched (Braten, Lie, & Andreassen, 1998; Dörnyei, 2006; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ehrman et al., 2003; Gathercole, 2007; Skehan, 1997; Sternberg, 2002) and is seen as comprising, in the main, language aptitude, motivation (and attitudes) and cognitive style, including learning strategies (Dörnyei, 2006; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Other variables include attributes of personality such as shyness/openness and a willingness to take risks (Skehan, 1997). Shyness may of course be a factor in the first language but may well be more severe in a foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). According to the authors, other particularly stressful factors in the language classroom, and factors that may lead to students opting out of foreign-language learning altogether, are tests and a fear of being seen in a negative light. This latter aspect of classroom learning may be troubling if the learner is deeply conscious of a gap between the self he portrays as an (imperfectly-speaking) foreign-language user and “the ‘true’ self” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128) he feels himself to be.

For clarification of the construct of individual differences, I will here outline briefly learner differences in aptitude and learning strategies before moving on to a fuller discussion of differences in motivation.

2.3.3.1 Aptitude

Aptitude for second-language learning is one area of difference between learners that has been well researched (Dörnyei, 2005; e.g. Ehrman et al., 2003; Ellis, 1997; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1965, 1972; Skehan, 1997). Despite behaviourism assuming that, with the correct training, all learners would achieve second-language proficiency, differences between students' level of attainment suggested that some had a greater aptitude for learning second languages than others. The Modern Language Aptitude Test isolated areas of language learning aptitude which were thought to predict successful foreign-language learning: these included aspects of phonetic coding and memorisation, and an understanding of grammar and of the patterns of language (Carroll, 1964; Carroll & Sapon, 1959).

Although a general propensity for learning foreign languages can be established in this way, this type of testing gives no hints as to how 'success' can be achieved. A decade later, Rubin (1975) refocused attention on the student by discussing the attributes of a good language learner (although querying the imprecision of the term 'successful'). Rubin isolates three facets of the learning process which could enable weaker students to perform better: aptitude, motivation and opportunity. She points out strategies that will help students become good language learners: a willingness to make guesses, a desire to communicate, an acceptance of mistakes and vagueness, an ability to see patterns, and a determination to use learning opportunities, to monitor communication for comprehension and to pay attention to language forms.

From Rubin's taxonomy of "good learner strategies" it can be seen that an emphasis was developing on the differences between language learners and how all learners could be helped, not merely those who showed an 'aptitude' for languages. This represented a move from a theoretical study of the cognitive processes involved in learning a second language to a study of learners and their role in language acquisition. Language aptitude has been shown to have a strong correlation both with motivation and with success in learning languages. However, its attributes, such as phonemic coding ability, grammar-analysing ability, and memory have tended to be seen as innate and immutable, although a recent study shows a connection between language aptitude and instruction (Sáfár & Kormos, 2008). It has been suggested that further research into aptitude should explore linguistic constructs in relation to cognitive functions and aspects of communicative competence such as sociolinguistics and discourse (Dörnyei, 2006; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Skehan, 1997) as well as the effect of instruction on lower proficiency language aptitude (Sáfár & Kormos, 2008).

Age as a factor affecting language aptitude has been studied at some length, with a *critical period* before puberty during which languages are thought to be more easily learned (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003; Lenneberg, 1967). Adults learning a second language, on the other hand, may benefit from having more developed cognitive and analytical skills, better knowledge of their first language and possibly proficiency in other languages (Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978). The participants in the study were between 18 and 28 years old and thus all within a fairly limited age bracket. None of them had moved to Iceland from other countries or lived in other countries (although many had travelled abroad on holiday). The age factor will thus not be covered in depth in this review of research literature.

2.3.3.2 Learning strategies

Further to the multi-faceted area of aptitude, a second factor associated with individual differences in second-language learning involves cognitive styles and learning strategies. Cognitive style refers to information-processing while learning strategies concern all aspects of study (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). For educators, cognitive styles and learning strategies offer more fruitful discussion than aptitude, which is a fixed quality and allows little room for change. All cognitive styles help learners in particular ways and there is also the possibility of developing new learning strategies. A cognitive style may involve *field independence* and *field dependence*, meaning that some learners prefer individual work and analysis of study material while others take a more holistic view of study and may prefer to work in groups. Learning strategies involve the steps language learners take in order to acquire the new language, ranging from homework tasks to classroom interaction.

Learning strategies hark back to Rubin's characteristics of a 'good language learner' (Rubin, 1975) and the emphasis on students' making use of opportunities to learn. By the end of the last century it seemed that teaching strategies for improved learning was possible. Learning strategies constitute a way for students to take an active part in the process of their own learning, especially "when persistence appears to be flagging" (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003, p. 612). Recognising the individual differences between learners in terms of their favoured cognitive styles and learning strategies is also reflected in the theory of multiple intelligences, which acknowledges "that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles" (H. Gardner, 1993, p. 6).

For today's teacher, juggling large classes with learners from different backgrounds and with differing levels of aptitude, learning strategies offer a way for both differentiating between students and unifying them. In this sense strategies are a useful construct in the context of the study, since although curriculum objectives will stay the same for the whole group, acknowledging the differences between learners may help the teacher help the learners achieve those objectives.

2.3.3.3 Motivation

In addition to aptitude and learning strategies, motivation is a highly significant individual difference, and is what this study is concerned with. Motivation is what pushes some students to expend effort towards high level achievement and lack of it results often in boredom and lack of success. Working hard necessitates interest and may be fuelled by the expectation of reward from an external source, or by an inner desire to prove ability to oneself or to significant others. In the domain of foreign languages, different levels of motivation are compounded by issues such as interest in other cultures and self-confidence.

Integrative and instrumental motivation

Motivation had been researched for many years in the domain of psychology before motivational variables of second-language learners in Canada were investigated by Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1959). It seemed that foreign languages were not learnt through reinforcement and rewards, and that student test scores in the foreign language and language aptitude in the first language did not show a strong correlation. Learning a new language was seen as quite distinct from learning other school subjects, involving matters of identity and culture and, with success dependent on a range of individual factors, motivation was thought to go some way towards compensating for a lack of language aptitude (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; R. C. Gardner, 2007; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Horwitz et al., 1986; Mercer, 2011).

Early work by Gardner and Lambert (R. C. Gardner, 1960; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1965) sought to explain factors which might influence the acquisition of a second language. Their work was carried out mainly in Canada among English first-language students of French with the aim of considering the effect of attitudes and motivation towards the language group on students' learning:

We argue that an individual acquiring a second language adopts certain behaviour patterns which are characteristic of another cultural group

and that his attitudes towards that group will at least partly determine his success in learning the new language. Our use of attitude as a motivational construct presupposes an intention on the part of students to learn the language with various aims in mind, and to pursue these aims with varying degrees of drive strength. (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1959, p. 267)

From this research stemmed a subsequently much-debated distinction between *integrative* and *instrumental* orientation in motivation. It appeared that although ‘linguistic aptitude’ might logically be assumed to relate to second-language learning and proficiency, in fact motivational factors concerning group membership and usefulness had more influence (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1959). The significance of these findings was that foreign-language learning was now not seen in terms of language items or intelligence (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1965), nor “as some vague urge to work diligently in a foreign-language course” (R. C. Gardner, 1960, p. 2), but as a phenomenon having identity-influencing properties and involving using the language in order to achieve “group membership, not of language acquisition per se” (R. C. Gardner, 1960, p. 12). However, in terms of level of language attainment, it is worth bearing in mind that within Gardner’s socio-educational model of motivation it is anticipated that learners will achieve a high language ability, or “Near-native-like proficiency [which] requires approximately 10 years of consistent and persistent practice” (R. C. Gardner, 2001, p. 4).

Learners in bilingual areas of Canada were seen as wanting either to feel accepted in the ‘new language’ community (although, in fact, Gardner (2001) points out that the two language communities will not necessarily meet), or to be able to use the language for some purpose. They sought therefore either to ‘be’ the language or to ‘do’ the language. In Louisiana, on the other hand, some school learners of French had little interest in a French identity, but saw the language as a means to career advancement (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Importantly, research in the Philippines, where English was not the language of the community, showed that learners had a similar instrumental motivational tendency, seeing success in the language as determining “one’s upward mobility and one’s future” (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 122).

Integrative motivation had been thought to affect identity, encouraging learners to change the way they expressed themselves and how they behaved. The Philippine study is also significant for its finding that local identity can be maintained despite societies’ adoption of “prestigious world languages” (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 142). In fact, it actually

seemed that “striving for a comfortable place in two cultures seems to be the best motivational basis for becoming bilingual” (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 130). It would seem that motivation to learn a second language need not detract from motivation to maintain one’s first language.

Research in Canada established some differences between second-language motivation in instructional and naturalistic settings (R. C. Gardner, 1985). Language aptitude and intelligence appeared to have less effect on learning in informal exposure than in school, while motivation could be affected by the character of the teacher or the teaching materials. Learners outside school are able to decide for themselves whether they mix with speakers of the second language group. A later study added self-confidence and learning strategies as important facets of foreign-language learning (R. C. Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997).

In later research undertaken in Europe and Asia, Gardner (2007) distances himself from the ‘integrative/instrumental’ motivation debate and adopts the terms ‘Openness’ and ‘Attitudes toward the learning situation’. Two contexts, ‘Cultural’ and ‘Educational’, are seen to influence language learning, the former involving pronunciation and therefore affecting the identity of the learner, and the latter concerning aspects of classroom study, for example course materials and the personality of the teacher. Being part of an international community, or International Posture, which has also been presented in other second- and foreign-language research (Csizér & Kormos, 2009a; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Yashima, 2002, 2009), replaces the desire to ‘integrate’ with a second-language community, and it is only this ‘open’ sort of motivation that will lead learners to “achieve a true mastery of the language” (R. C. Gardner, 2007, p. 19). Weenink (2008), however, sees an instrumental facet to cosmopolitanism, whereby it may be a desire for “cultural and social capital” rather than an altruistic feeling of oneness with other cultures (Weenink, 2008).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Earlier views of the role of motivation in general (that is, not only in second-language learning) include Deci & Flaste (1995), who, like Markus and Nurius (1986), and Higgins (1987), also touch upon the power of ‘threat’ as motivation away from a course of action. In their discussion of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation in education, Deci & Flaste (Deci, 1975; Deci & Flaste, 1995) seek to establish that in fact learning “in order to put the material to active use” (Deci & Flaste, 1995, p. 47) produces better test results than learning in order to obtain a good grade on a test (an obviously extrinsic reward). Competence, or the feeling of pride that accompanies completion of a difficult task, is a form of intrinsic motivation that schools

would do well to foster since “the activities of learning and discovery are rewarding in their own right because they allow a child to feel competent” (Deci, 1975, p. 212).

Similarities can be seen with Bandura’s (1997) construct of *self-efficacy* (the feeling of confidence in what an individual can accomplish) and the *confidence* and *satisfaction* elements of Keller’s (1987) ARCS theory (the other two elements of the acronym being *attention* and *relevance*). Keller’s inclusion of relevance in his theory of motivation and instruction will be discussed later on in this chapter. Self-efficacy is an essential factor both in students’ ability to continue progressing after the controlled learning environment of school, and in teachers’ ability to support learning among students of differing cognitive ability. Bandura also argues that students derive more satisfaction and support from “a series of attainable subgoals” (Bandura, 1997, p. 217) than from larger goals in the more distant future. This rather down-to-earth view of motivation may be more viable and more ‘learner-friendly’ than envisaging a view of self at a distant point of the future.

Other scholars have also discussed a possible conflict between distal goals after school and feelings and motivation while learners are at school (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Csizér & Kormos, 2009a; Kormos, Csizér, Menyhárt, & Török, 2008). Kormos and her colleagues discuss students’ present-situated beliefs and their difficulties planning for the future. Motivation in terms of future goals may be problematic since many students, not knowing what employment awaits them, “do not have stable views concerning how knowledge of English is going to be useful in their future careers” (Kormos et al., 2008, p. 74). Crookes and Schmidt suggest that student success in language learning should be viewed from student involvement in class, meaning that motivation is seen “in terms of choice, engagement, and persistence” (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, p. 502) and that establishing future goals alone is not the key to success or failure.

Chambers (1999) bases discussion of motivation to learn German as a foreign language in Britain on Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model. Chambers, like Crookes and Schmidt, situates himself in the present and discusses student perspectives of second-language learning, at the outset of learning and two years later. He reports a decrease in interest during teenage learning of German as a foreign language, possibly because students do not expect the level of effort needed and see little future use for German. However, the in-class motivation of teenage German students learning English did not decrease, ostensibly because of their belief that English was an essential world language. This evidence points to issues

outside the classroom having effect on in-class motivation, and to the importance of short-term goals to second-language learners.

Motivation and the Self

Since the mid-1990's the discussion of foreign- or second-language learning motivation has been dominated by research by Zoltán Dörnyei, research which produced in 2005 the first outlines of a second-language motivational self system. Dörnyei set out to investigate the reasons for differing levels of success or failure in foreign- or second-language learning, based on the perspective of the *Self*. In his more detailed 2009 (Dörnyei, 2009b) exposition of the system, Dörnyei explains how he combines accepted views of motivation in second-language learning (e.g., R. C. Gardner, 2001; Ushioda, 2001) with the theory of Self taken from psychology (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and with factors connected to classroom learning. Here Dörnyei steps aside from the long-standing distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation in second-language learning (R. C. Gardner, 1960; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Instead Dörnyei returns to the field of psychology and to the concept of *possible selves*, brought to the fore in the mid-1980's by Markus and Nurius (1986) and by Higgins (1987), but not previously applied to second-language acquisition.

The idea of possible selves was introduced by psychologists Markus and Nurius (1986), and represents the future views an individual has of him/herself. In general terms, future views include an ideal self, a likely self, and what could be called a 'worst-case scenario' view of the self one fears becoming. The ideal self view is the self "we would very much like to become" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954). This could involve getting top grades and a sought-after job, amassing a fortune, finding the ideal partner first time around, or creating a masterpiece. The likely self is more down-to-earth and involves a future that is more probable. Here the individual achieves some goals and is compelled to forego others, possibly finding the ideal partner but having to be satisfied with a less prestigious job than he or she desired, while the masterpiece may never progress beyond an initial idea. The self one is afraid of becoming would transpire if nothing were to go according to plan, no exams were passed, no job offers received, and no long-term relationship established. Previous views of possible selves had focussed more on the concepts of *ideal* and *ought*, by which the *ideal* self represents the person's hopes and ambitions while the *ought* self centres more on moral obligations and duties.

The fact of envisaging the future is significant since it allows for "growth and change" (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 957) and for active

involvement of the individual in constructing his or her own future identity on the basis of the “extremely heterogeneous set of possibilities” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 959) that college students foresee at the beginning of adulthood. However, envisaging a future that seems possible, likely or to be avoided does little to motivate an individual to action unless he or she has the self-belief or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) to take such action. A sufficiently strong belief in one’s power to affect the future will mean one can work towards that ideal future self, or take steps to avoid the negative, unwanted and feared future. This idea of reducing the difference, or the *discrepancy*, between a present state of affairs and a desired or unwanted future state of affairs stems from Higgins’ theory of self-discrepancy (Higgins, 1987). Higgins uses a construct similar to the selves of Markus and Nurius and claims that it is the discrepancy we perceive between our present self and our ideal future or future-to-be-avoided self that prompts us to action. He also makes a distinction between one’s own perceptions of an ideal future self and one’s assumptions about someone else’s opinions. This point could clearly be applied to the classroom, since although a student may envisage a clear path to a future ideal self he or she may at the same time be aware that a teacher sees this ideal self as unattainable.

The complex relationship between past, present and future and the motivational self has created a potentially confusing terminology of *self-concept*, *self-efficacy* and *self-esteem*. Learners’ perceptions of their present standing or ability in a given area are contained within the construct of self-concept, whereas self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) engages the element of future use of skills. Thus, in an educational setting self-concept is the perception of general ability in a given subject (e.g. “I’m good at English”) and self-efficacy is the management of particular tasks (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). For example, a learner might imagine “I’ll easily be able to cope during my trip to New York”. Unfortunately, it has been pointed out that perceptions of general ability may not be linked to specific criteria of success (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), meaning that learners may express a general satisfaction with their overall proficiency despite being aware that they perform better in some skill areas than in others. Bong and Skaalvik (*ibid.*) conclude that although self-concept and self-efficacy are closely linked (with self-esteem constituting a general evaluation of worth) strengthening self-efficacy for the future through establishing attainable short-term goals will have a greater motivating effect and produce greater satisfaction among learners than concentrating on present self-concept. Both these concepts are seen as important in helping learners to “set

challenging yet attainable academic goals for themselves... [and] persist longer on difficult tasks” (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 32).

The intricacies of constructs such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-beliefs are discussed in some detail in Mercer’s (2011) study of language learner self-concept. Mercer points out the multiplicity and domain-specificity of self-concepts. In her view, the characteristics of self-concept have been limited by its use in quantitative psychological research, thereby preventing the emergence of new representations of the construct. Of particular interest are observations made about the need for research into informal language learning outside the classroom and about changes in language self-concept over time and in different situations as “learners’ external frames of reference change” (Mercer, 2011, p. 131). These comments have clear links to the study reported here. The significance of the individual in language learning over and above other subject learning had been recognised and voiced some years earlier, when it was suggested that “no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

Because extrinsic motivation is likely to weaken if the source of rewards is removed (Deci & Flaste, 1995), students need to be helped “to internalize the responsibility and sense of value for extrinsic goals” (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56) and find a sense of *volitional extrinsic motivation* (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000), in which the teacher’s motivational role is reduced. Autonomy and responsibility, as well as a visualised practical future use of the learned foreign language, have been seen as essential to keeping up motivation in the long process of learning a language (Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999; Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2000). This concept of self-determined long-term extrinsic motivation is supported by research into motivation in sports (Ntoumanis, 2005).

Also from the field of psychology, Miller & Brickman (2004) discuss motivation centred on “personally valued future goals” (ibid., p. 26) with a similar emphasis on future objectives. They emphasise the importance of students’ ‘distal’ goals, or goals which will not be attained while they are at school but rather years into the future, and which their present efforts work towards. Students need to realise that certain school tasks have “instrumental value” (ibid., p. 25) and are a preliminary necessity in working towards a valued future. The “self-schemas” described by Miller and Brickman (ibid., p. 15) resemble the possible selves seen in Dörnyei’s theory of second-language motivation, and are situated clearly in the future.

Self-efficacy and self-regulation (Bandura, 1997) are paramount to maintaining motivation. Here extrinsic and intrinsic motivation appear almost fused together as a long-term strategy in which the fulfilment of immediate goals gives way to distal, future goals. Nonetheless, here the emphasis seems to be on students in danger of failing at school, with the authors concerned about the fact that “many students have had school experiences that crush their confidence and destroy their perceptions of schooling as instrumental to their future aspirations” (Miller & Brickman, 2004, p. 27). The fact remains, however, that “perceived instrumentality and personally valued future goals” (Miller & Brickman, 2004, p. 18) may be of benefit to all students, in that they can envisage a future goal and set themselves more easily attained sub-goals leading to it.

Research into motivation in learning a second language has thus moved from a discussion of the instrumental and integrative dichotomy in a bilingual context to more general issues concerning identity, goals in the nearer and more distant future, student autonomy and internalisation of responsibility. The ability to “see” one’s future self is seen as an important element in motivation. Research has also turned to a broader range of cultural and national contexts.

It is, then, the study of how second-language learning differs for individual students that has re-emerged as a central issue in research into second- and foreign-language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009c). Although cognitive and sociocultural aspects of learning a second language provide a wealth of research possibilities, it would seem that the question of differences between individuals in their learning process create more opportunities for discussion and seem most likely to further understanding of second-language learning and teaching. Even though acquisition of a second language may follow a similar pattern for all students, a class is not a homogenous entity and “at the end of the lesson, the group turns into 25 individuals who go off to use the second language for their own needs and in their own ways” (Cook, 2008, p. 135). It is this focus on the individuality of the student in context that is the concern of the study.

In this section I have traced how differences between individual learners became an important area of focus in the study of how people learn second languages. I have accounted for some influential psychology-based concepts and theories of motivation and how they relate to second-language learning motivation. The section below centres more specifically on one recent and significant paradigm of second-language motivation.

2.4 Recent developments in the study of motivation as an individual difference

With respect to recent research into individual differences and, more specifically, motivation in second-language learning, it is the work of Zoltán Dörnyei that has perhaps been most influential. The importance of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b, 2009c) lies in its fusing together of ideas from language learning motivation theory and the study of the self from psychology. Issues of goal-setting and motivation are linked to the future, to goals learners will achieve in the future or to a 'self', a new identity, they will become in the future.

2.4.1 Origins of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System

Previous to the L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei's work had been concerned with individual differences in language learning (see also e.g. Brantmeier, 2003; Braten et al., 1998; Skehan, 1997; Stanovich, 1986), language attitudes (see also e.g. Davis & Bistodeau, 1993; Ellis, 1997; Yamashita, 2004) and general theories of motivation.

The 'process model' of second-language learning motivation (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998) stressed time as an important factor in motivation. Moving from the wider field of general motivation, second-language motivation is now seen as "a dynamic entity that changes in time" (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, p. 45) in a three-part time context. The setting for motivation is instigated and goals outlined in the 'preactional' stage. A period of 'executive' motivation follows during which activities are carried out: in the school setting, this would involve in-class work, homework and assessment. Following this, there is a 'postactional' stage, during which students evaluate what they have done. They will, in effect, 'process' their motivation, their learning and the attainment or lack of attainment of their goals. Each of the three stages is influenced by a combination of social and learning aspects of motivation such as personal desires and family expectations, self confidence, relevance, and awareness of negative consequences of failure. This theory, although having practical application for the classroom environment, is centred on time factors affecting motivation. The element described by Dörnyei in his later theory in terms such as 'self' or 'self-image' or 'vision' is not expanded upon at this stage, although emphasis is put upon learners' active participation and personal involvement through their "more or less organised collections or internalised perceptions, beliefs, and feelings related to who one is in the social world" (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, p. 53).

The concept later described as ‘keeping the vision alive’ (Dörnyei, 2009b) is also present here in the form of maintaining “the motivational impetus for a considerable period (often several years)” (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, p. 45). Similarly, the potentially negative consequences of not achieving the desired goal foreshadow elements of the ‘Ought-to self’ of Dörnyei’s later L2 Motivational Self System. Here it is not the benefits of attaining the goal that are uppermost in learners’ minds, but what might happen if they fail to attain it. In that case, “the perceived possible negative consequences may activate enough energy to keep going” (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998, p. 60). In this respect, it is the ‘executive’ stage of motivation that is most necessary of attention, at least in the classroom setting where a compulsory curriculum offers little goal-setting choice.

Dörnyei’s research was conducted in the context of schools in Hungary. As this research into language learning motivation continued the Hungarian learner became clearly situated as an individual motivated by self-images of the future. Studies carried out over 15 years aimed at determining “the exact nature of the identification process that underlies L2 motivation” (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p. 453) and presenting second-language learning motivation as “related to achieving possible selves and to resolving self-discrepancies between actual and ideal selves” (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p. 454). We see here a clear shift from second-language learning as of importance instrumentally in terms of employment or integratively through adapting into the culture of the language, to its affecting an inner sense of identity. Language learning had been seen as a more personal form of study than other school subjects (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972) with the need to change one’s very mode of expression and adopt new cultural norms. Now it is envisaged by Dörnyei as moving out of the classroom, with its emphasis on assignments, exams and grades, and affecting even more clearly a learner’s evolving self-vision as a future language user.

2.4.2 The L2 Motivational Self System

It was thus by returning to earlier elements from the psychology of the self that Dörnyei was able to reformulate his process model, based on research carried out in Hungary, into what became the L2 Motivational Self System. Dörnyei “opens up a novel avenue for motivating language learners” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 9) by combining concepts of self (Higgins, 1987; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Miller & Brickman, 2004) with already well-accepted facets of motivation:

The L2 Motivational Self System represents a major reformation of previous motivational thinking by its explicit utilisation of psychological theories of the self, yet its roots are firmly set in previous research in the L2 field. Indeed, L2 motivation researchers have ... typically adopted paradigms that linked the L2 to the individual's personal 'core', forming an important part of one's identity. Thus proposing a system that explicitly focuses on aspects of the individual's self is compatible with the whole-person perspective of past theorising. (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 9)

Dörnyei's "L2 Motivational Self System" (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b, 2009c) has three main facets:

i) The *Ideal L2 Self* represents an individual's imagined future. Here the second-language learner is attempting to reduce the difference between his or her present self and the idealised future self. In terms of second-language use, this imagined future self will motivate the learner (both instrumentally and integratively) to take part in activities that support learning. To elucidate better, my own images of an Ideal Self in, say, German or Polish, might include conversing with native speakers, listening to news broadcasts, understanding websites or reading literature.

ii) The *Ought-to L2 Self* represents a view of the individual which in some ways opposes the Ideal L2 Self. It is both the image of self that an individual wishes to avoid and the self he or she feels obliged to be. Again, this possible future image will motivate the learner (in this case, extrinsically) to action. For myself, I see images of the Ought-to Self involving attempting to use the language but, for example, not taking part in a conversation, changing to the English version of a website or abandoning reading a novel.

iii) The *L2 Learning Experience* does not represent an individual's view of self, but is rather an umbrella term for a range of aspects of language learning in the classroom situation, such as course material, peer influence and the significance of the teacher. Dörnyei points out that the experience of students in the classroom has still to be explained more fully and that "future research will, it is hoped, elaborate on the self-aspects of this bottom-up process" (Dörnyei, 2009c, p. 218).

Dörnyei sees the Ideal and the Ought-to Selves as corresponding to the pre-actional stage of the earlier process-oriented model, where goals are established, and as including elements of integrative and instrumental motivation (R. C. Gardner, 1985; Noels et al., 2000). The L2 Learning Experience involves the executive stage of the earlier model, the stage at which the learner moves towards his or her goals through classroom

language activities, and has links to intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei lists extensive implications for the classroom of his ‘self’-centred paradigm, referring to “past research conducted in the spirit of the situated approach” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 106). These implications include creating a motivating classroom environment, encouraging positive attitudes and goal-setting, stimulating learning with relevant materials and student autonomy, and promoting student self-reflection.

A central tenet of the L2 Motivational Self System is that both learners in a context with little exposure to the foreign language (that is, a traditional foreign-language classroom), and those learning a language (such as English) used internationally and “associated with a global culture” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 104), will be able to create an ideal image of themselves as future users of the language. Previously there had been a long-standing and much-debated division of motivation into aspects and language attitudes seen as integrative (the desire to become part of the language society and culture) or instrumental (the desire for some utilitarian gain such as career advancement) ever since the terms were first proposed with regard to the bilingual context of Canada (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1959). Dörnyei’s claim that second-language learners of English have less (or no) interest in becoming part of a native English-speaking community, but rather of an international community linked to no culture in particular, effectively resolves the integrative/instrumental debate. Learners take part in “the process of becoming a member of a particular group” (R. C. Gardner, 1960, p. 12), the group being possibly a global community of second-language English speakers rather than a community using English as a first language. They will also create and hold in their minds images of themselves conversing in the foreign language, working, and broadly speaking being able to cope, in the same way that a sportsman may envisage winning a prize (Dörnyei, 2009b).

Dörnyei lists six conditions essential for ideal self motivation. Learners must have (or be helped by teachers, parents and others to imagine) an ideal future self based on dreams and wishes, and must be able to create a strong visual image of the future self. Here merely thinking “I wish I knew German” seems insufficient. A series of imagined photograph captions might capture Dörnyei’s framework better: “Here I am ordering a meal in Berlin”, or “That’s me chatting with my new German friends”. However, the learner’s imagination must be kept in check: the implausibility of visualising oneself as the German Chancellor or a best-selling German novelist, for instance, will weaken the image. Subsequently, the ideal self

must be maintained and its attainment worked towards, with the negative consequences of failure kept in mind.

Many of these features of the L2 Ideal Self will be negotiated in the classroom, since the L2 Motivational Self System concerns itself not only with research into motivation but also with “the direct impact of the students’ learning environment” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 29). Achievement is presented as involving success or failure. Successful language students envisage an “ideal self ... associated with the mastery of an L2” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 27). The focus on the school environment brings with it an emphasis on “the high rate of language learning failure” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 110), despite little explanation being given of what failure or success involves. Dörnyei points out that creating this ideal image of oneself may in itself be problematic. Although teenagers may find peer pressure an impediment to study, keeping the negative image of ‘What-might-happen-if-I-don’t-study’ may help them remain motivated. Here focus is on identity, with young people possibly being torn between present membership of a laid-back and sometimes rebellious group and future membership of a dedicated and professional group. The Ideal L2 Motivational Self System suggests methods in image-creating, although there is a certain vagueness about the notion that teachers should “devise creative ideal-self-generating activities drawing on past adventures, on the exotic nature of encounters with a foreign culture, and on role models of successful L2 achievers” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 34). It has, in fact, been pointed out that English textbooks do little to promote the idea of second-language users and tend to contain texts about monolingual celebrities (Cook, 2008).

Contrasting the L2 Motivational Self System to a socio-educational view of integrative motivation (R. C. Gardner, 2001; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972), Dörnyei mentions the difference between studying a language in the bilingual context of Canada and studying “as a school subject without any direct contact with its speakers” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 24). Apart from the environment outside school being different, reasons for learning and the desired level of proficiency may differ. Gardner, for example, sees second-language acquisition as calling for “the development of near-native-like language skills” (R. C. Gardner, 2001, p. 2) while Dörnyei’s (2005, 2009b) use of terms such as ‘mastery’ and ‘success’ seems less specific. Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) also point out that their results are obtained in a ‘foreign language’ setting, with little exposure to the L2 outside school and that therefore:

In environments which offer frequent opportunities for direct contact with L2s (i.e. ‘second-language acquisition’ contexts), the motivation construct that best describes the learners’ disposition may have a different structure, with some of the main motives assuming a different level of importance. (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, p. 457).

The transition from viewing motivation as a difference between individuals caused by a desire to integrate into a second-language environment or to have practical benefit thus makes way for a radically new approach. It is future self images, both positive and negative, that motivate the learner, although in this paradigm the learning situation itself has not yet been explored and its significance is still uncharted. The L2 Motivational Self System was established from research in Hungary, a country where traditionally-studied languages include Latin, German and Russian, and where English has only become significant in more recent years (Petzold & Berns, 2000) and is not a mandatory subject at school (Csizér & Kormos, 2009a). Similarly, the socio-educational model put forward by Gardner and Lambert presents an environment where traditionally language communities do not intermingle (R. C. Gardner, 2001). The passage quoted above suggests that environment and context have a large part to play in second-language learning motivation and that the findings of the Hungarian studies may not be applicable in a different context. Figure 3 shows my interpretation of the L2 Motivational Self System as a visual representation. It attempts to show the three main elements of the paradigm. Two of these elements incorporate possible future selves (who one wants to become, and who one should or should not become). The origins in the literature of psychology and motivation are also shown. The third element of the paradigm, the L2 Learning Experience, is portrayed in the figure as being made up of four factors. More detail is not included since this element has not been fully developed.

2.4.3 Further studies supporting the L2 Motivational Self System

According to MacIntyre et al. the L2 Motivational Self System paradigm introduced by Dörnyei in 2005 “holds a great deal of promise” (MacIntyre, MacKinnon, & Clément, 2009a, p. 58) and it has had enormous influence on research into motivation in second-language acquisition. The paradigm has been applied to different national contexts and to differing groups of learners. Some studies have validated the system while others have isolated areas for further research. Perhaps Dörnyei’s greatest achievement is not to

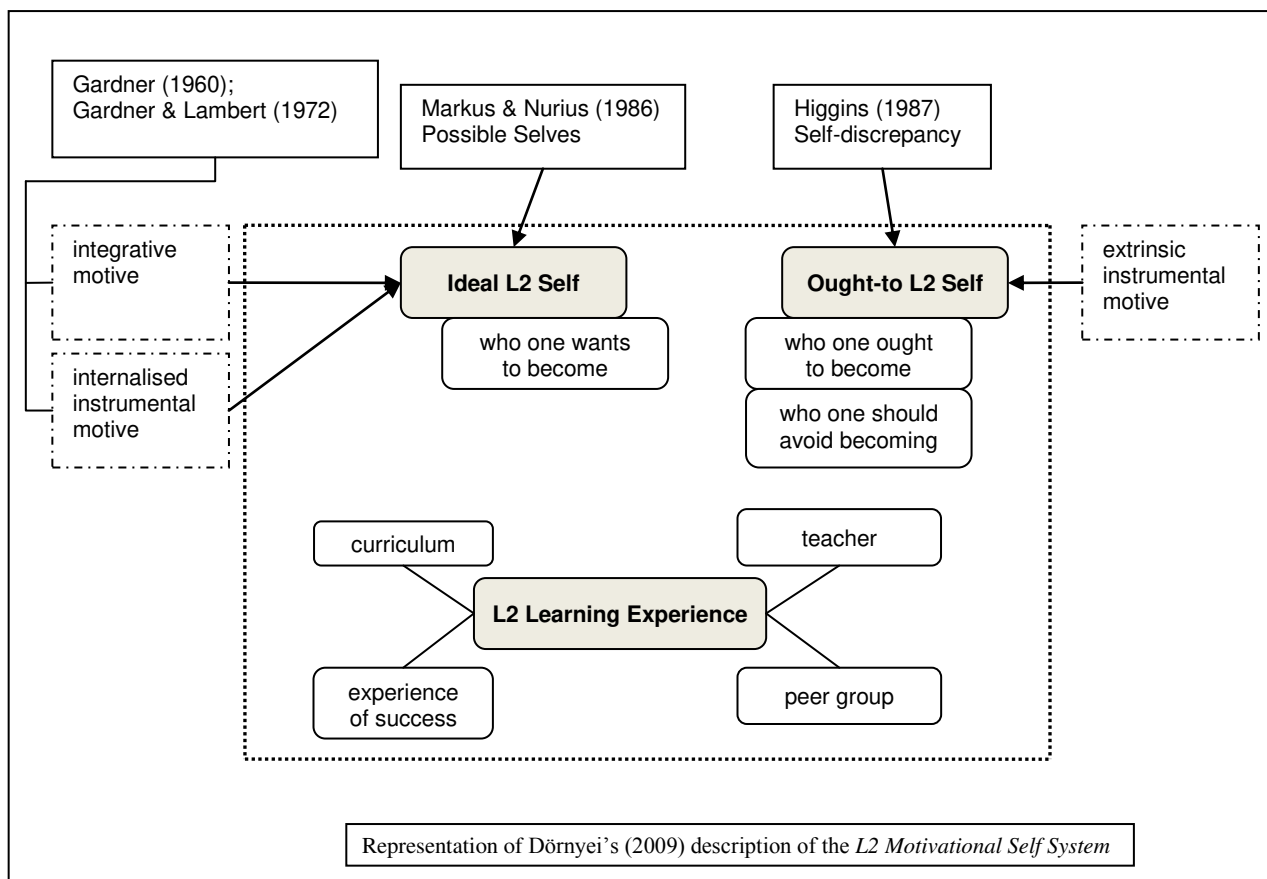


Figure 3 Representation of Dörnyei's (2009) description of the L2 Motivational Self System

have constructed an ultimate framework of second-language learning (indeed Dörnyei himself acknowledges that other, more dynamic, views of language learner motivation must also be considered (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, 2011)), but to have presented a system that has been the catalyst for such intense renewed interest in motivation as an individual difference in second-language learning and for a plethora of investigations into how and why people make the effort to learn languages.

Research that further explores Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System has been carried out in Europe, Asia and North America with regard to several languages and with various objectives within the field of individual differences in second-language acquisition. Aspects of individual differences that have been investigated include identity, learning style, context, and anxiety.

For the most part, studies investigating the L2 Motivational Self System have taken a quantitative approach, being often based on questionnaires used in the Hungarian research.

2.4.3.1 Studies outside Europe

Several studies have been carried out outside Europe. Ryan (2009) reports a large-scale study of 2,400 Japanese university and high school students. Issues of integrativeness which had dominated the discussion of language learning motivation since the 1960's were now seen to be irrelevant in the context of Japan, where learners did not anticipate mixing with native speakers of English. On the other hand, becoming part of an international community of second-language English speakers was important for Japanese, just as it was for the Hungarian participants, suggesting that some aspects of the L2 Motivational Self System "are indicative of common patterns to be observed in environments where the L2 target community is not immediately available" (S. Ryan, 2009, p.129). One facet of the Ideal L2 Self in Japan was thus its pathway to personal fulfilment and to membership of the international community.

"International posture" (Yashima 2002) describes a positive attitude in Japan to, and 'willingness to communicate' with, speakers of other languages. In relation to the Ideal L2 Self the concept corresponds to Gardner's integrative orientation and involves wanting to participate in a global community, or "having things to communicate to the world" (Yashima, 2009, p. 155). Students will find English-language learning connects to their own lives as they create "new images of themselves linked to global concerns, and through the process find meaning in learning English" (Yashima, 2009, p. 159).

Three further quantitative studies carried out in single-country contexts are those by Al-Shehri (2009) and Papi (2010). Al-Shehri explored the relationship between favoured learning style, imagination and the Ideal L2 Self of 200 Saudi and Arab university students of English. Papi surveyed over 1,000 Iranian teenage students taking compulsory high school English, focusing on connections between the L2 Motivational Self System, motivation and anxiety about learning a second language. Results suggested that the Ideal L2 Self linked to reduced anxiety, for example about test-taking or speaking in English in class, while the Ought-to L2 Self was associated with higher anxiety. Their study is significant for its focus on emotions in the language learning class. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) the area of emotions is deserving of more attention: it is an area that the study reported here focuses on to a large extent and shows to be significant. Lamb (2013) describes a classroom context where there is a need for Indonesian learners of English as a compulsory subject to be encouraged to imagine themselves using the language outside the classroom.

A large-scale study with 5,000 participants ranging in age from pre-teens to middle-aged compared motivation in Japan, China and Iran (Taguchi et al., 2009). The researchers found support for the claim “that Hungary can be seen as a prototype of a general foreign-language learning context” (Taguchi et al., 2009, p. 88), and research findings pointed to the Ideal L2 Self correlating with instrumentality (as was also found by Yashima (2009)). Although the study supported the view that Dörnyei’s paradigm is not country-specific, some differences were seen between the three countries. The Japanese participants, for example, did not connect the Ideal Self with employment success, and it appeared that in the highly-competitive Chinese society the classroom experience was of little significance. Students were not concerned about enjoying the learning process and the Ideal L2 Self was formed largely in terms of attaining good proficiency and good grades, the reason for this being that students “simply cannot afford the luxury of caring for the niceties of the classroom experience” (Taguchi et al., 2009, p. 87). A similar situation was seen in Iran, with the added fact that participants also linked the Ideal L2 Self with finding a life partner.

Questions pertaining to the L2 Self, the learning environment and anxiety were raised in a study of native English learners of French as a second language in the French Foreign Legion (Z. Lyons, 2009). Participants gave little importance to an ideal L2 self and felt minimal integrative motivation. Classrooms were associated with stress and physical violence, which seems to have affected notions of identity and self-confidence. The shared image striven for by participants, in which speaking the second language was important for success, was that of being a Legionnaire, not that of becoming part of a national community.

Apart from encouraging further research into emotions and the L2 Motivational Self System, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) mention the need for further research into the dynamism of self-images and into the experience of learning. These two factors are emphasised by Noels (Noels, 2009) in her Canadian study of ESL, heritage language and modern language students. She makes the point that, in general, people do not have one ideal self to which they adhere inflexibly: instead “multiple selves are a normal, adaptive part of human life” (Noels, 2009, p. 308). Noels stresses that individualism, autonomy and challenge are also important factors in motivation, but points out that in other cultural contexts where group membership or ‘collectivism’ is valued an emphasis on autonomy leading to an individual, motivated self may not be observed. Individualism is highly valued in the context researched in the study presented here and

‘multiple selves’ are the order of the day. A tension similar to that described by Noels between individualism and pressure to collaborate (at least in the classroom context) could be said to exist in Iceland. Once again we see that context is all-important in studies of the self in second-language learning, a fact which suggests that a paradigm that fits some contexts may not be applicable to others.

A further Canadian study, in this case concerning the self-images of high school girls (speakers of English as a first language who were learning French) indicated the value to research into motivation of quantitative measurement of the discrepancy between present and future L2 selves (MacIntyre, MacKinnon, & Clément, 2009b). The authors believe that in this way motivation can be strengthened on an individual basis among students. Learners’ use of the language beyond the classroom in the present time as well as in the future does not form part of Dörnyei’s L2 Motivation Self System but is explored here in the Icelandic context. The element of individualism is also of importance in the Icelandic study, which puts forward the belief that learners need to be helped to locate their own relevance within their language studies.

A study of second-language motivation in Chile, a linguistic context where the first language, Spanish, is spoken by millions outside the country, explored the fields of language self-concept, emotions and individual context, including age, among Spanish-speaking learners of English (Kormos et al., 2011). Similar questionnaires and variables as in the Dörnyei (2005) study were used. Kormos et al. extend Dörnyei’s tripartite L2 Motivational Self System (the *Ideal L2 Self*, the *Ought-to L2 Self* and the *L2 Learning Experience*) to make a three-tiered “inter-active system of motivation” (Kormos et al., 2011, p. 511) made up of self-guides, attitudes, goal systems and beliefs about self-efficacy. Attention is drawn to a weak appearance of the visual imagery crucial in the L2 Motivational Self System and a firmer relationship between the Ideal L2 Self and self-efficacy beliefs about being able to attain this ideal state. The authors point out that, despite differences between Hungary and Chile, English has become an important global language in “the often borderless and globalized cultural environment” (Kormos et al., 2011, p. 510) of young people.

2.4.3.2 Studies in Scandinavia

Few studies have considered the L2 Motivational Self System within a Scandinavian context. A recent study of learners’ attitudes to learning a foreign language other than English (Henry, 2010) takes a Swedish

perspective. This innovative study concludes that the future L2 English self in Sweden may affect the formation of a future L2 French/German/Spanish/sign-language self, as learning a second foreign language is measured against the yardstick of learning English. This was found to be especially true in the case of boys, who appeared to be more negatively influenced than girls towards learning a foreign language other than English.

Yang and Kim's (2011) comparative research between countries took in the perspectives of China, Japan, South Korea and Sweden. Their concern was to extend support for the L2 Motivational Self System beyond the studies described above when the new motivation framework was extended from Hungary to Asia, by considering the socio-historical context of a country with access to the second language in the past and significant exposure to it in the present. The study confirmed that social discourse surrounding the role of English in particular countries can affect the creation of a firm Ideal L2 Self, and that in some European countries "English is recognized as a semi-official language" (Yang & Kim, 2011, p. 146).

In fact, exposure to English in Sweden may not be quite as great at the authors claim, and state-run television channels do not broadcast English-language programmes without Swedish subtitles, although it may be the case that "the widespread use of English across academic disciplines is recognized as one of the most important reasons for learning English in Sweden" (Yang & Kim, 2011, p. 128). Nonetheless, it was the level of exposure to English in the environment that made the authors' findings so significant. Previous research had clearly shown strong support in China and Japan for Dörnyei's new paradigm, in terms of instrumental motivation and for becoming part of an international community through learning English, but it was exposure to English that gave the Swedish participants "opportunities to envision their future L2 selves" (Yang & Kim, 2011, p. 153) and therefore create a strong ideal L2 self. From these studies it would appear that the L2 Motivational Self System is far from a 'one-size-fits-all' framework and that the L2 self must be considered in relation to classroom behaviour and environmental and cultural factors (Yang & Kim, 2011).

A recent quantitative study in Norway addressed the reasons students give for choosing between various English courses at upper-secondary school in Norway (Skarpaas, 2011). Perhaps unsurprisingly, a general belief that a good knowledge of English will be of practical benefit in the future emerged from the study. However, what also came to light is that learners appear to be more motivated to study English because of its usefulness than in deference to academic or other outside requirements.

The author concludes that providing relevant and adequate productive practice in the classroom and thus preparing learners for employment or tertiary study is essential, if this emphasis on the part of students is to be recognised and responded to.

2.4.3.3 General comments on studies of the L2 Motivational Self System

Finally, returning to Hungary, a study of Hungarian school and university students has suggested that age alters perceptions of the ideal L2 self, with younger participants being attracted by cultural associations of learning English and older participants being interested in using English in international situations (Csizér & Kormos, 2009a). Also significant is the authors' conclusion that factors such as learning environment, age, and whether language study is voluntary or compulsory, mean that motivation is too complex and inconstant a concept for "a universally applicable theory of motivation" (Kormos & Csizér, 2008, p. 349). This points to motivation being dynamic and inconstant. Secondary school learners in Hungary were found to be uninterested and unenthusiastic about their English studies (Csizer & Kormos, 2008).

Research carried out in different countries investigated the paradigm of the L2 Motivational Self System and has produced a variety of interesting results. Some factors that appear worthy of note are that: most of the situations studied involve little exposure to the second language outside the classroom; the unique context of each study appears to affect the results in specific ways, suggesting that generalisations across all countries cannot be made; and quantitative studies using similar survey formats have been favoured by many of the researchers, meaning that few opportunities arise for exploring new areas.

The next section will consider methodology and context and their significance for the L2 Motivational Self System.

2.5 Investigating learners' classroom experience

We have seen that the L2 Motivational Self System is a bipartite paradigm of Ideal and Ought-to Selves, along with a third and little-researched element, the L2 Learning Experience, which is made up of factors such as the curriculum, the role of the teacher, and the social environment of the classroom (Dörnyei, 2009b, 2010). According to Kormos and Csizér (2008) the dynamism between the learning environment and the ideal self means that they cannot be regarded as separate entities. If this is the case, it would appear sensible to ask learners themselves how they perceive

motivation in the language classroom, which is what the study presented here does. Certainly in the context of Iceland, where there is daily exposure to English, learners' current identity as second-language users is of significance both in its own right in the present and with regard to a future L2 Self.

Another matter needing further research is "cross-cultural variation" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, p. 352). This centres on the extent to which motivation in language-learning and the forming of possible selves is dependent on context, the language being learned and the context in which it is learned.

In the next section I will review the context and methodology of L2 Motivational Self System studies, and then go on to suggest aspects of the L2 Learning Experience that need elaboration, such as identity, autonomy and levels of proficiency. I thus hope to extend the present L2 Motivational Self System and introduce the element of relevance as a factor in individual differences in second-language motivation.

2.5.1 Contexts of research into the L2 Motivational Self System

Research into motivation in language learning in contexts where English is needed for practical purposes shows that students have little interest in integrating into a language community, seemingly because, although English is needed for academic and employment purposes, there is very little opportunity for mingling with native English speakers (e.g. Rahman, 2005). Although studies have been done in learning contexts other than Hungary, the fact remains that most research has been in done in 'traditional' EFL contexts where there is, and has been in the past, limited exposure to English (for example, China, Korea, Japan and Iran). In these contexts exposure is largely restricted to the classroom, and access to English-speakers outside the learning environment is minimal.

It is so far unclear to what extent Dörnyei's new paradigm of motivation in second-language learning is applicable to contexts such as the plurilingual North European and Scandinavian environment where there are multiple forms of access and exposure to English, it is used as a semi-official language in business and administration, and is also the language of popular culture. An interesting parallel is observable in the Philippines, where English has in fact "become one of the national languages" (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 130) and where "both instrumental and integrative orientations towards the learning task must be developed" (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 142). Gardner and Lambert

also draw attention to the fact that in many countries two or more languages are in general use.

New questions concerning motivation may also arise when studies are made of advanced learners of English as a compulsory language, since much of the research carried out so far is based on learners (for example at university level) who have chosen English as their field of study. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System does not address motivation to learn a compulsory foreign language for many years by a population that may use the language receptively and/or productively in a wide range of contexts on a daily basis. Researching more contrasting learning contexts may give a new perspective to individual differences and images of the Ideal L2 Self in motivation, as Yang and Kim point out (Yang & Kim, 2011).

2.5.2 Methodology of research into the L2 Motivational Self System

2.5.2.1 Quantitative studies

In the main, studies of individual differences and motivation in second-language acquisition, especially of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, have been quantitative, involving questionnaires with up to 100 items (S. Ryan, 2009), participants ranging from a few hundred to several thousand and factor analysis of results. However, scholars are now calling for a move to qualitative studies (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 2010; Larsen-Freeman, 2011b; Ushioda, 2010) or mixed-method research which would take individual differences in context into account, allowing for "more complex theoretical paradigms" (Dörnyei, 2006, p. 62). One limitation of using quantitative research is that similar measurement instruments will by default produce findings which have features in common.

Statistical support has thus been given to Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, as findings from one country corroborate those from another. On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that many of the studies reported above are based very closely on questionnaires devised for Dörnyei and Csizer's original Hungarian studies, which may not always have been adapted for use in dissimilar educational cultures. By default, questionnaires do not give participants the option of responding 'outside the box', that is they allow only a range of responses dictated by the questionnaire-composers, but frequently give few options for open responses. Quantitative research can also be affected by participant bias if it involves self-reporting (Assor & Connell, 1992). Participants may feel

obliged to give what they feel are acceptable responses rather than accurate ones, and researchers have no opportunity to probe deeper.

2.5.2.2 Qualitative studies

Few qualitative studies have been conducted recently exploring second-language learning motivation and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System. A mixed-method study looking at the attitudes of tertiary learners of English in Hungary (Kormos et al., 2008) was based on Dörnyei's 1998 'process model' and included interviews with 20 learners. Case studies were carried out in Indonesia (Lamb, 2009) along with interviews with teachers and young teenage students to form part of a mixed-methods study, and with Korean students in Canada (Kim, 2009). In the latter study the uniqueness of each individual's situation and the permutations and dynamism of motivational factors come across clearly. An extended qualitative study explored language learner self-concept from the perspective of the student and showed the "dynamic, complex nature" (Mercer, 2011, p. 10) of the construct changing through time.

However, it is Ema Ushioda who has perhaps made the loudest claims for a shift in emphasis and methodology in motivation research towards "a person-in-context relational view of motivation" (Ushioda, 2009, p. 220). A student's context for learning is not pre-established and unchanging but "a relationship that is dynamic, complex and non-linear" (Ushioda, 2009, p. 218). Thus, language learners' constantly-changing second-language identity means that interacting with them and allowing them to express their identities through individual personal stories must be an essential part of research into second-language learning. Similarly, learners' current classroom participation will affect their changing identity and their future second-language selves (Ushioda, 2011a).

2.5.2.3 Complexity Theory

Within recent years, Complexity Theory has come increasingly to the forefront of the discussion of language acquisition and language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2011b; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Ushioda, 2009). Complexity Theory sees language acquisition as a multi-layered and multi-faceted process of elements working together in a dynamic, ever-changing pattern. The learner's present and future situations are both important since expectations change during the years acquisition involves, and "the language that is the aim and content of instruction is a moving target for learner" (Cameron & Larsen-Freeman, 2007, p. 236). Learner progress cannot be measured on a linear basis since each individual moves

along a different learning path, and variation and individuality need to become part and parcel of research into second-language learning (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Dynamism can therefore be seen as an integral factor affecting individual differences in second-language acquisition. This study reflects the fluidity of the second-language learning experience and the changes evident in learner perceptions at different ages and stages in life.

Complexity Theory is also seen as a possible way of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) and of looking at complex frameworks rather than linear relationships between variables (Dörnyei, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2011a, 2011b; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Ushioda, 2010). Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) situate language clearly within a sociocultural framework, and view understanding language as inseparable from understanding its users. They reject the insignificant role given to language instruction within the discussion of language development and stress the need to recognise learners as autonomous and goal-conscious individuals operating within specific environments and contexts (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Other scholars also support dynamic systems/complexity theory and have, for example, stressed “the need to work towards the evolution of a holistic, bio-social SLA” (Firth & Wagner, 1997, p. 296), and the fact that “there are social and interpersonal as well as psychological dimensions to acquisition” (Nunan, 2001, p. 91).

2.5.2.4 Holistic approaches

In a recent article Dörnyei discusses the importance of environmental factors and time on second-language acquisition and suggests that mixed-method research may give optimal results (Dörnyei, 2009a). However, he concludes that commenting on “the ongoing multiple influences between environmental and learner factors in all their componential complexity, as well as the emerging changes in both the learner *and* the environment as a result of this development” (Dörnyei, 2009a, p. 244) is a hard task, especially since few guidelines exist about applying Complexity Theory empirically to second-language acquisition. Apart from qualitative studies, longitudinal research is also needed, in order to study the dynamic nature of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) and the effects of age and time (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002; Henry & Apelgren, 2008; Williams et al., 2002).

This move towards a more holistic view of the second-language learner calls for research methods that do not reduce differences between individuals to figures and statistics. Methods of conducting research which

show the extent of individual differences (and similarities) are more conducive to strengthening understanding of the second-language learner experience. It is for these reasons, as well as the fact that “a fixed set of factors” (Kormos & Csizér, 2008) cannot be applied to all ages and all situations, that the study discussed here uses qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured interviews that allow a wide spectrum of opinions and attitudes to be voiced.

We have seen that factors of the L2 Motivational Self System such as research context and methods warrant further investigation. Moreover the fact remains that little work has been done on the third element of the framework, the L2 Learning Experience. Most teachers will agree that the classroom is a complex workplace both for instructors and learners, where the interplay of a number of factors makes each study situation unique. I will now move on to consider some aspects of the L2 Learning Experience, which so far has been only loosely defined.

2.5.3 The L2 Learning Experience

Through discussion of Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System, interest has been rekindled in the field of individual differences among language students, and the door has been opened for further research into what makes language learning easier for one learner than for another. However, Dörnyei himself points out that the link between issues of motivation and classroom behaviour and practices remains to be developed with regard to the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2009b, 2009c). Examples of elements the L2 Learning Experience includes are “the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success” (Dörnyei, 2009b).

This study concentrates on the learners themselves and their experience of the learning situation. There was no intention at the outset to investigate teachers, syllabi or instructional methods *per se*, although interviews were likely to elicit participant perceptions of many facets of school-based learning. I present here therefore a brief discussion of three features of the language classroom (and in fact of any subject classroom) that I believe to be important: identity, autonomy and proficiency, all features which are not elaborated by Dörnyei. Identity and autonomy are clearly linked to the impact of the teacher, the curriculum and the learner’s position within the peer group. Similarly, proficiency demands, or the level at which instruction is pitched, obviously affects the experience of success or failure. Since easily obtained success, or success despite lack of effort in an effort

to shore up self-esteem, has been seen as a demotivating force (Damon, 1995; K. Kristjánsson, 2010), effort is another element to be considered when proficiency levels are discussed.

How learners perceive their identity as language users and how identity can be created and negotiated within the classroom and outside it are other important features of the study that will be discussed in the following section. The term ‘identity’ is used here with regard to language learners in a more general sense than that of the L2 Self. Whereas the L2 Self is connected to the ‘possible selves’ of Markus and Nurius (1986), that is of hoped-for or feared imagined future selves, identity represents the various roles that individuals take on in different social situations as they meet “the challenges of a complex social world” (Gergen, 1991, p. 145).

2.5.3.1 Identity

Identity can take many forms. An individual may see her/himself as a parent, a child, an employee, a student, or any other myriad identities, depending on what group she/he is in at any given time. Language identity is an important factor in any individual’s make-up and may involve negotiation (Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) or time (Dörnyei, 2005; R. C. Gardner, 1985; Kinginger, 2004). Local or first language has been seen as the most important element of identity (House, 2003).

What is significant about Gardner and Lambert’s findings regarding the adoption of English as an official language in the Philippines is the possibility of taking on a new linguistic identity without damaging a previous established identity:

...one can with the proper attitudinal orientation and motivation become bilingual without losing one's identity. In fact, striving for a comfortable place in two cultures seems to be the best motivational basis for becoming bilingual. (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 130)

Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System allows for the images conjured up by the Ideal L2 Self to be the basis for motivation in second-language learning. Within this system the teacher’s role moves from imparting knowledge about the language to helping the student create a desired future view of him/herself as a successful second-language user. This will demand the setting of objectives towards a goal decided upon by the student. Possible ideal selves must be realistic, that is they must be attainable, and must also link into each student’s individual circumstances.

Schools are seen as having an important role to play in the discussion of language use and identity (McKay, 2010). The learner needs to be seen as more than a deficient second-language user (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Mori, 2007). In the classroom setting, language teaching needs also to be individualised, as students are encouraged to visualise their Ideal L2 Self and work towards the picture conjured up. Specific study material may be appropriate along with different learning strategies, since the student aiming towards becoming, for example, a horse trainer has different goals and needs from the student who hopes to become a professional footballer. The importance of the Ought-to Self comes into play as students contemplate not only the pleasant future of equestrianism, sports or their medical specialisation, but also what the future holds if they fail to achieve these goals.

In the same way as a nation may be construed as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), so can language learners be seen to form a community in the classroom. In this way, a community of language learners as seen by the school or teacher may have different characteristics for the community members (the students) themselves, each of whom has individual values and objectives with regard to learning. The second-language classroom may thus present different past images related to the language as well as “possibilities for an enhanced range of identity options in the future” (Norton, 2010, p. 355). This means that expending time and energy in learning a second language involves a willingness to accept a changing identity in terms of language (Norton, 2001). What must also be remembered in the discussion of individual differences and motivation in language learning is the learner’s individual context and the uniqueness of each learner’s past and present situation and future aspirations (Legenhausen, 1998; Norton, 2001; Ushioda, 2009).

Thus it appears that by studying the learning context and process of the individual a fuller and deeper picture can be drawn about the nature of second-language learning. The figures and statistics of quantitative research may show trends and averages for some composite learner, but do not give insight into the imagined communities that learners belong to and aspire to belong to through language learning. Dörnyei’s Ideal L2 Self goes some way towards doing this, but seems to be situated firmly in the future, in a wished-for future self, whereas the individual should be seen in a wider context in present as well as future time. Because Icelandic youngsters use English so much in their daily activities it is important to take present language identity into account when considering motivation in learning, as this study of relevance in English studies in Iceland does.

With increasing freedom of movement between European countries today, multilingualism has become the order of the day, although English seems to have taken precedence as the ‘other’ language that young people use in other European countries (Henry, 2010; Henry & Apelgren, 2008; Kormos & Csizér, 2008). The European Union, for example, promotes a European identity (Commission, 2008). Young Europeans today, with few or no memories of a divided Europe, as well as students outside Europe, envisage an ‘international identity’ (Csizér & Kormos, 2009a; S. Ryan, 2009; Yashima, 2002), often aided by proficiency in English, while research in Iceland points to a strongly-felt Nordic identity, especially among girls (Bjarnason, 2009). Negotiation of language identity continues today, however, as people continue to cross national and sociocultural borders (Block, 2007; Pavlenko, 2004) and identity is accepted “as a key construct in SLA research” (Block, 2007, p. 872).

It would seem, therefore, that allowing students their individual identity in the classroom should be a central feature of Dörnyei’s so far unexplored L2 Learning Experience.

2.5.3.2 Autonomy

When talking about the development of learner autonomy, it is a question of how learners can be made willing and able to direct their own learning - a move from teacher-directed teaching to learner-directed learning (Dam, 1998, p. 20).

What we see from this quotation is that in any consideration of learner-individual differences, the individual must be kept in focus. The perspective of learner autonomy is that of the individual learning a language (Dam, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2003; Thomsen, 2003; Ushioda, 2008a) and involves the participation and collaboration of both learners and teachers in the teaching/learning process. Centring the classroom on the learner rather than on the teacher may be the best way to engage students and to provide for learning continuing beyond the classroom setting (Dam, 2003). Here we see a holistic view of the learner which harks back to recent views of identity in second-language acquisition (e.g., Block, 2007; Legenhausen, 1998; Norton, 2010; Ushioda, 2008b), so that “the teacher's knowledge about language learning - what to learn and how to learn - is combined with the learners’ knowledge about themselves, their background, their likes and dislikes, their needs, and their preferred learning styles” (Dam, 1998, p. 20). Lying behind the concept of learner

autonomy are not so much language-teaching techniques as a different perspective on the learning process, a perspective that calls for involving students in the learning process by considering why, what and how well they are learning (Dam, 1995; Little, 2002; Thomsen, 2003; Williams et al., 2002).

Learner autonomy is rooted in Vygotskian principles of learning as social constructivism, as students build on previous learning and are supported by the teacher and by their peers (Benson, 2007; Thomsen, 2003; Ushioda, 2003). Autonomy in learning is closely linked to intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Riley, 2003; Ushioda, 2003), implying as it does that students make decisions about study goals and take responsibility for their strengths and weaknesses as learners (Legenhausen, 2003; Ushioda, 2008a). It has been claimed that true motivation must be found from within the learner self (Riley, 2003; Ushioda, 2011b). What becomes paramount is “the autonomy of self-reward” (Bruner, 1961, p. 26) rather than the actual content of learning. The reward at the end of the year/course is therefore a gain in knowledge and learning strategies personal and relevant to each individual (Nunan, 1988; Ushioda, 2011a) rather than simply a teacher-imposed grade.

A by-product of learner autonomy, over and above enhanced language proficiency and understanding of learning as a life-long process, is preparing the individual for life after school by developing “a self-esteem which supports them not only in their learning but when coping with other exigencies of life” (Dam, 1998, p. 36). Those continuing from secondary school to tertiary study will also be better prepared for independent study if they realise that the responsibility for learning lies with them and not with the university institution (Csizer & Kormos, 2008).

Linking of theories of motivation with classroom practices and learner autonomy has been called for (Benson, 2007; Noels et al., 2000; Ushioda, 2003): the teacher-centred classroom is seen to be less conducive to learning than an “autonomy-supportive environment” (Noels et al., 2000, p. 76), especially when motivation must be maintained over a lengthy period of time as in language learning (Csizer & Kormos, 2008). Within the learning context the teacher’s role becomes one not of ‘motivating students’ but of raising student awareness about the language, about communication, and about learning, so that learners can construct their own “strategic competence for intentional learning” (Legenhausen, 2003, p. 67). Learning strategies and skills to advance language skills after school need to be taught, and increased focus needs to be put on developing productive skills through the use of interesting study material (Csizer & Kormos,

2008). For autonomous learning to take place, classroom learning needs to shift its focus onto “the meanings students want to express and the things they want to do that are relevant to them” (Ushioda, 1996, p. 43). Teachers also need to allow their students to take part in the evaluation process: if they are involved in planning their studies, keeping track of what and how well they are doing, they will develop the ability not only to use the language in classroom tasks but also to reflect metacognitively on the learning process (Thomsen, 2003).

In the classroom situation, autonomy allows students to be individuals. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) (Europe, 2012) has been designed with a view to promoting student autonomy and encouraging self-regulated learning (Pérez Cavana, 2012). It encourages students to keep track of their progress (Little, 2002, 2006) and is linked to increasing levels of proficiency (Europe, 2001). The European Language Portfolio also addresses the construct of ‘international posture’ (Yashima, 2002, 2009) and language learners’ desire to be part of an international community (Csizér & Kormos, 2009b; Kormos et al., 2008).

Clearly too, by situating learners within the larger context of Europe and by stressing not a numerical grade in an undefined assessment scale but an actual ability to understand this sort of spoken language or write that sort of text, with or without help, the ELP fosters learner self-confidence and autonomy. Thus the framework of the ELP can be instrumental in shifting responsibility and motivation from the teacher to the students themselves:

It does not make sense to continue thinking of motivation as something that is done by one person to another, of teachers motivating their students, the only true motivation being self-motivation. (Riley, 2003, p. 244)

2.5.3.3 Proficiency

Motivation and levels of language proficiency have received little attention, although Henry and Apelgren (2008) do show a link between motivation and early progress in a new language. Proficiency levels are not addressed *per se* in the L2 Motivational Self System and Dörnyei’s discussion of language proficiency appears to be limited to terms such as “successful mastery” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 103) and “language learning failure” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 110), although no explanations are given of what is implied.

Despite an understanding that language-learning motivation may be guided by a future vision of oneself as a successful language user, the fact

that “international holidays are becoming increasingly accessible” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 34) is not a sufficient reason to maintain motivation to the level of proficiency needed by the advanced English user in Northern Europe entering university or employment today. After six or more years of English in compulsory schooling, the question remains, how to motivate students to continue their efforts to a higher level of proficiency, and whether they appreciate a need for more than basic holiday phrases and vocabulary. The significance of the present study is that it takes into consideration the high levels of receptive and productive proficiency in English needed in the Icelandic context.

Traditionally, classroom language learning is organised by proficiency level. The majority of European course books for language learning are linked to the Common European Frame of Reference (Europe, 2001), giving prospective learners a transparent view of proficiency level and material. Other textbooks may be specifically linked to internationally recognised examining bodies, such as the University of Cambridge ESOL examinations, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or the Michigan Test of English.

Early research into motivation in second-language acquisition made reference to “successful and unsuccessful students” (R. C. Gardner, 1960) and to “success in second-language acquisition” (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1959, p. 271). Gardner defines second-language acquisition as “the development of near-native-like language skills”, which is likely to take 10 years to achieve (R. C. Gardner, 2001). This time estimate is close to the view, based on figures from the US Department of State, that language learning to “minimum professional proficiency” necessitates approximately 1,000-1,200 hours of study (Diller, 1978). In the context of Iceland with a school year of 180 teaching days, loosely estimating one hour of English on 150 of those teaching days, “minimum professional proficiency” would not be reached until after approximately eight and a half years. It is Gardner’s discussion of the learner’s “long-term drive to acquire all aspects of the language” (R. C. Gardner, 1960, p. 8) that implies the bilingual context of this study (even though, only a few years later, Diller dismissed the bilingualism of Montreal, calling it “a city of two unilingualisms” (Diller, 1978, p. 32). It is clear that the type of proficiency discussed here is that needed in an environment where the language being learned is used at all times. With regard to levels of proficiency in bilingual countries, it should be borne in mind that learners with another first language are not expected to attain the same proficiency as speakers of the language as a first language. In Wales, for example, school pupils may take examinations in

Welsh as a first or second language (Welsh Joint Education Committee, 2012; Welsh Government, 2012).

Although Dörnyei's quantitative research depends on figures and statistics showing correlation of different variables, few data are presented showing how terms such as 'success', 'lack of success' or 'failure' are construed. Grading systems are used in schools, universities, adult education centres and other educational establishments, and although some students may not find value in school achievement (Covington & Roberts, 1994), grades do give a benchmark for levels of attainment and remain the only available measure of student proficiency, and therefore of success or lack of success. Basing evaluation, for example, on the self-assessment of learners or research participants may give an inaccurate perspective on proficiency.

Other scholars, on the other hand, tend to use terms such as 'successful', 'unsuccessful', and 'failure' with regard to language learners (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 2005; Kormos et al., 2008; Mercer, 2011; Weiner, 1979). Diller also writes about proficiency levels, making the distinction between proficiency levels of 'minimum', 'full', and 'native speaker'. These could be likened to the Council of Europe's B1 'Threshold Level'; B2 'Vantage' or C1 'Effective Operational Proficiency'; C2 'Mastery' 'approaching the linguistic competence of an educated native speaker' (Europe, 2001).

Ushioda (2010) points out that research into motivation in second-language learning has been much concerned with proficiency levels in terms of grades, possibly as a result of the fact that, broadly speaking, quantitative studies of motivation have been *de rigueur*. Grades were one factor for analysis used by Gardner and Lambert in their ground-breaking research (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1965, 1972) into correlation between intelligence, language aptitude, language achievement, attitudes and motivation. The emphasis on grades as external rewards has been condemned by some as detracting from the real purpose of education (Bruner, 1960; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Noddings, 2006; Pope, 2001). It is an emphasis which may lead some school students to "sacrifice not only present happiness, but real learning as well" (Noddings, 2006, p. 210).

Grades alone do not inform students of whether they have sufficient knowledge of any school subject for their present and future needs. What level of proficiency a student should strive to attain is dependent on many factors, such as level of interest and relevance for present or future employment. Dörnyei 2010 discusses language proficiency in terms of "mastering" and "a working knowledge", although without defining the

implications of these terms. What some learners may see as ‘a working knowledge’ may indeed be experienced as ‘mastery’ by others whose goal is simply being able to get by in the foreign language at a basic level. Likewise, some learners may not have sufficient overview of the complexities of the foreign language to appreciate what proficiency level is necessary for professional life. They may also have unrealistic hopes for language achievement, and a belief they have near-native proficiency may cause problems and possibly reduced motivation if they realise later on that their language skills are lacking. This situation has been observed for example in Southern Africa, where non-native speakers of English rate their proficiency too positively and in effect disempower themselves from tertiary education (Coetzee-Van Rooy & Verhoef, 2000).

Learners need to have some understanding of what level of proficiency is relevant to their individual situation. This will in turn affect their level of motivation, perhaps to improve their knowledge of the language, perhaps to stop learning if they feel they have attained an adequate proficiency level. Not all learners want or need to reach a level of spoken English, for example, at which they “can present a complex topic ... confidently and articulately, and can handle difficult and even hostile questioning” (Council of Europe/Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2006) but they do need to have benchmarks against which they can assess their proficiency. The increase in the number of universities in other countries offering courses through English (Coleman, 2006) also means that Icelandic learners must have the confidence and proficiency to cope with study abroad.

It is for these reasons that the study addresses the individual situation of learners through qualitative research and explores how relevance and lack of relevance are perceived as motivating and demotivating factors with regard to studying English at post-compulsory (and thus fairly advanced) level.

To recap, the central ideas put forward here with regard to Dörnyei’s as yet uncharted L2 Learning Experience concern the importance of the individual in the learning process. Study of individual learner differences must include not only quantifiable differences between students but also as full a picture as is possible of the uniqueness of the individual. Qualitative studies of learners in the classroom environment investigating, among other things, proficiency goals, identity and autonomy can therefore further the study of individual differences and motivation. These are all matters that the study addresses.

We have seen that by extending the L2 Motivational Self System through a closer exploration of its third element, the L2 Learning

Experience, several areas come to light where the individual learner is significant and where statistical data seem out of place. Linguistic identity, especially for learners who will need the second language for work or study, involves a personal acceptance of relevant sociocultural aspects of the language, with or without jeopardising their first language culture and identity. Learner autonomy is closely linked to motivation and involves personal relevance in terms of choice and ownership of the learning process. Levels of proficiency need more clarification within the paradigm as needs will vary between contexts and between learners.

Having considered motivation as an individual difference in second-language learning and aspects of the L2 Motivational Self System awaiting further research, I end this review of the literature by exploring the notion of relevance and its significance in a revised paradigm of motivation.

2.6 Relevance

Relevance was defined in the Introduction as “the quality of being close or significant in context to the individual in the present and the future”.

The word relevance can be used in a variety of fields, and although people use it (and its other forms and opposites *relevant*, *irrelevance* and *irrelevant*) with little concern about being misunderstood, the fact remains that its definition is not clear-cut. A quarter of a century ago, Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995) described relevance as “a fuzzy term”. Dictionary definitions explain that something relevant is “closely connected or appropriate to the matter in hand” (*Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English*, 2009), or has “significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand” (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2009). The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English gives the explanation “directly relating to the subject or problem being discussed or considered” (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 2012). ‘Irrelevance’ on the other hand is “a lack of importance in a particular situation”.

In everyday life, people work on an assumption of relevance, needing a context for comprehension. For example, the question “Would you like some more?” is relevant and comprehensible in the context of a meal, but irrelevant and incomprehensible in the context of changing a flat tyre. Normally, because relevance is assumed, information is processed, and a relevant context is looked for (more help with changing the tyre? more coffee while the tyre is being changed?). Lack of relevance, or incongruity, is an important feature of humour (Martin, 2006). It is not, for example, the Spanish Inquisition *per se* that is funny in the classic Monty Python

sketches, but the incongruity of the appearance of three cardinals in a scene totally unrelated to medieval Spain.

It is within the discussion of motivation as an individual difference in second-language learning that relevance is significant. Including a relevance factor will contribute a new dimension to existing models of motivation, and will also extend contexts of study to include North European countries with sociohistoric access to English as a foreign language, where the population needs an active use of English in everyday life. We saw in the previous section that identity, autonomy and proficiency are three elements of classroom language instruction that have direct bearing on the individual, that is, they can be viewed in terms of relevance for each individual.

The L2 Motivational Self System presented by Dörnyei gave a new perspective to the study of motivation in second-language learning, and moved the focus from learning a second language for practical reasons or because of desired cultural links with the target language. Instead Dörnyei proposed that learners were guided by a future view of themselves as second-language users. This new view of motivation combining the study of language learning with elements from the psychology of the self prompted more quantitative research seeking to explore and substantiate Dörnyei's paradigm. The current situation in studies into the L2 Motivational Self System is that quantitative research has been carried out in a variety of country contexts while qualitative or mixed-methods research still needs to explore Dörnyei's influential framework further, with a view to discovering other facets of motivation. Relevance is one such facet, discussed in this qualitative study and supported by a complexity/dynamic systems approach which allows for the emerging interrelation of different factors in motivation (Larsen-Freeman, 2011b; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008).

Relevance has been studied to some extent in the domains of information technology (Hjørland & Sejer Christensen, 2002; Saracevic, 1975) and second-language acquisition (de Paiva & Foster-Cohen, 2004; Foster-Cohen, 2004). The construct has been looked at in psychology (Kember et al., 2008) and career guidance (Johnson, 2000) as have similar constructs such as *regulatory fit* (Higgins, 2005). Relevance has not, however, been explored in the context of motivation and individual differences in second-language learning and teaching, and it is this that the study sets out to do.

Dörnyei has stated that the third aspect of the L2 Motivational Self System, the L2 Learning Experience, has still to be expanded and

consolidated. It is possible that relevance is an aspect of the classroom environment which may influence learners' experience of the classroom, linking their language learning to their individual interests and occupations outside the school environment. In this sense, relevance and motivation would also be related to autonomy in the classroom, a feature of language learning much stressed in the European Language Portfolio, since learners who have the opportunity to be in control of their study and "are able to scope it according to their developing interests, ... are exploiting but also nourishing their intrinsic motivation" (Little, 2004, p. 105). Relevance is here seen as associated both with future proficiency needs and with learners' interests in the context of the present.

Relevance may also be essential to motivation to study English in the context of countries where the language operates as a *lingua franca*. Reasons for this status of English may include the fact that the numbers of people speaking the first language are small, that international business (and some domestic business, for example, tourism) cannot be carried out in the first language and, significantly, that cultural exposure to English is widespread. Several North European countries, including Iceland, fall into this category. English is relevant to people's lives in these countries, and promoting awareness of the relevance of learning English to the high level of proficiency necessary forms an important part of the English teacher's role.

I begin by discussing relevance in the fields of logic, information technology, and most recently in second-language acquisition. I then describe the role relevance has in general terms in education and mention other constructs similar to relevance. In the final section of this chapter I propose relevance as an individual difference in motivation in second-language learning and explain how the construct is used in the context of this study.

2.6.1 Relevance Theory and logic

In philosophy, relevance is not a necessary feature of classical, or formal, logic, where inferences can be valid despite being unconnected (that is, despite the premises and conclusions being unrelated). In formal logic it is the form of arguments that makes them valid (logical) or invalid (illogical) rather than whether they are true or not. Informal logic, on the other hand, deals with argument in everyday life; for example, opinions on politics or culture, expressed in newspapers or on the Internet (Groarke, 2011). Informal logic is expressed in natural language using words (rather than

using symbols as formal logic does). As such, it could be argued that informal logic has more relevance to the daily lives and thoughts of people in general than formal logic. In pragmatics, however, the branch of linguistics studying how context affects meaning, and how utterances are interpreted over and above their purely semantic content (Korta & Perry, 2008), relevance became a fundamental element. In his “Cooperative Principle of Conversation”, Grice (1989) links utterances to relevance and context, and produces four maxims: *Quantity*, *Quality*, *Relation*, and *Manner*. Grice’s claim was that relevance in utterances can be assumed, essentially meaning that the human mind connects statement with context and an implied relevance gives meaning. In this way, meaning takes precedence over form (as in formal logic). In a sentence such as “Dogs bark, therefore dogs make a noise”, relevance is assumed, and the intended (but not actually stated) meaning, is “Dogs make a noise” since most hearers would interpret “Dogs bark” and “Dogs make a noise” as one and the same thing.

It was from Grice’s Maxim that Sperber and Wilson developed their “Relevance Theory” (1986/1995). The theory maintains that context and relevance are a prerequisite for understanding and, indeed, an essential need of the human brain, since “the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition” (Sperber & Wilson, 2005, p. 608). Input, in the form of aural or visual stimuli, becomes relevant when and if the stimuli connect with previous background information and produce conclusions that make a difference to the individual. Relevance Theory states that relevance only exists if the context of information is available, and if one has the background cognitive environment knowledge (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995). Thus any statement can be relevant or not relevant, depending on whether the individual can place the statement in a context for which he or she has background knowledge. Since “[h]uman cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance” (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995, p. 260), relevance would appear to be an essential factor in understanding.

In the context of second-language learning, for example, a student supposedly learning the passive verb form in English will have trouble understanding the statement “You will be seen shortly” unless he or she can contextualise the statement. The learner who can situate the statement, for example, in a hospital casualty department or a waiting room before a job interview will see that the statement has relevance, while for the learner who cannot contextualise it in any meaningful way it will be irrelevant and meaningless. Extending this theory to the classroom, classroom tasks that may be relevant and necessary to the teacher may appear irrelevant, and

therefore uninteresting, to students if they find no connection with their own lives and contexts. Thus it is not hard to imagine a learner planning on studying computer science at university finding a news article about recent technological advances fascinating, and another interested in becoming a dancer finding it considerably less so. (The role of the teacher in this situation might be to suggest a relevance to the student, perhaps to do with computer use in choreography).

Relevance as a concept in linguistic pragmatics has been further defined, or personalised, by Gorayska and Lindsay (1993) who argue that relevance is goal-related and individual. Thus relevance, although absolute in the sense that something either is or is not relevant to achieving a goal, must be seen in the context of 'how'. The fact that "what is relevant to some people may not be relevant to others" (Gorayska & Lindsay, 1993, p. 307) relates clearly to the concept of individual differences and the learner as a unique, holistic entity. It would seem that although learning correct spelling, for instance, often forms part of a second-language curriculum, individual students may differ in seeing more or less relevance of spelling to their particular situation and context. It would therefore appear that relevance of curriculum aims, study material and classroom tasks will affect individual students' motivation, and needs to be taken into account both by researchers and by teachers.

2.6.2 Relevance and information technology

Relevance has been discussed and researched not only with regard to logic and pragmatics, but also in other fields. Any information retrieval system used to classify data must be able to extract information relevant to a search undertaken (Saracevic, 1975). Research into relevance in information retrieval centres on aligning information systems with the needs of users, taking into account how information is sorted, stored and retrieved, and to what uses it is put. Relevance is not an absolute to be decided by the designers of the system, but is goal-based:

Something (A) is relevant to a task (T) if it increases the likelihood of accomplishing the goal (G), which is implied by T. (Hjørland & Sejer Christensen, 2002, p. 964).

The dichotomy observed here is that since users may not have the expertise to appreciate what information is relevant to their search (their 'task' or 'goal') the expert help of the system-designer may be needed. This gap between expert and novice knowledge inevitably brings with it the

intentional or unintentional possibility of bias (Hjørland, 2010) as the expert and the novice may not share the same perception of the task and how it can be achieved. Hjørland draws a parallel with a classroom situation in which a teacher (in this situation, the ‘expert’) may observe that students ‘need’ to improve their English grammar (the teacher’s bias) although students themselves may see no point in studying grammar (the students’ bias). The teacher may be able to win the students over by explaining the relevance of grammar study to their own situation. If the goal to be accomplished is effective language use, and if that necessitates accurate use of grammar, then studying grammar will “increase the likelihood” of accomplishing that goal. The teacher’s perceived need may then “become conscious and ‘inner motivational state’” for the students (Hjørland, 2010, p. 222) and they will be persuaded that studying grammar is relevant for them.

2.6.3 Relevance and second-language acquisition

Relevance Theory as a branch of pragmatics has been applied to second-language acquisition (de Paiva & Foster-Cohen, 2004; Foster-Cohen, 2004), where it is seen as helping to “explain the inner workings of the learner mind” (de Paiva & Foster-Cohen, 2004, p. 282). Individuality is again uppermost and the importance of individual context of utterances is stressed. In this way, relevance will trigger what aspect of language (for example, form or communication) the learner pays particular attention to. Little work has been done so far on Relevance Theory in second-language acquisition, but a trend towards personal relevance seems to be developing. Swain (2000) also suggests that it is through output using the language in relevant contexts that students make cognitive gains.

2.6.4 Relevance and education

Finally, if we consider the paramount purposes of education, relevance is a significant factor in school curricula. The aim of education may be to build an intellectual oligarchy where justice reigns, in the Platonic tradition (Hewitt, 2006; Honderich, 1995), to train the body physically, intellectually and emotionally (Rousseau, 1762/1966), or to benefit society through a pragmatist emphasis on practical consequences and improvements (Dewey, 1910, 1913, 1951). Within the context of more recent discussion of curriculum, education may be intended to produce successful, confident and responsible young people (Education, 2011), or to encourage pupils’ active participation in democratic society (Icelandic Ministry of Education,

2008). Whatever philosophy of education lies behind a school curriculum, the content of education must inevitably be relevant to its goals.

With particular reference to foreign-language learning today, the concept of relevance is evident in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which places increased emphasis on language learners' needs and on learner autonomy, and which offers descriptors of relevant skills and proficiency (Europe, 2001; Little, 2006). For example, if literature is to be used in foreign-language teaching (which has been the case for many years in Icelandic schools) works studied must fulfil criteria of relevance for the students. In order to be of value in the learning process, novels, plays and poetry must draw the reader into an imagined world. To do this, they should be "relevant to the life experiences, emotions, or dreams of the learner" (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 6), and so should be chosen with care with a particular group of learners in mind.

2.6.4.1 Relevance and the student

The concept of relevance plays a part in the fields of logic, pragmatics, information science, curriculum, and foreign-language learning. It is the element of individuality that gives relevance its application to these diverse fields. Thus, relevance is a feature of school studies and students' understanding of any subject. One student's perception of happiness, wealth, or love will be different from another's: their attitudes depend on context, personality and a range of other factors. Similarly, mathematics, geography or foreign languages will have different relevance for different students according to their background knowledge, cognitive style, age, likes, personal characteristics, and so on. Relevance may be different and may change with time and context; what remains stable is the human mind's need to contextualise 'the matter in hand' with personal significance.

It would appear, therefore that relevance and motivation must be linked. Tasks will be perceived as relevant if they clearly lead to a goal that an individual wants to attain. Equally, perceiving a task as relevant to one's own situation will increase motivation to carry it out successfully. For example, classroom tasks which students may feel lack relevance may be reinterpreted as useful and relevant if students are encouraged to see the larger picture of their future lives and careers. To take an example, students who play competitive sports may be able to comprehend the relevance of grammar exercises to their English proficiency if they are encouraged to see them in the same light as training drills in football, swimming or any

other sport. They then become relevant technical exercises that are an essential part of improvement of a skill.

Although, as discussed above, Relevance Theory has been applied recently to second-language acquisition, the construct of relevance has been little discussed within the field of foreign and second-language learning and teaching. My belief is that the link between relevance and cognition, the idea that humans seek for relevance in their attempts at understanding, means that relevance deserves closer attention within the field of language acquisition and within the field of education in general. Just as language is important for “meaning making” (Bruner, 1996, p. 184), so it would seem, is meaning essential for learning. Learners need to be helped to discover their own individualised meanings in study subjects, because if relevance supports cognition then establishing relevance will facilitate learning.

In the next section I will discuss constructs which have been used in motivation and second-language learning research and which have a clear bearing on the concept of relevance.

2.6.5 Other constructs bearing on relevance

Although relevance has not been explored in individual differences in second-language learning, similar concepts linked to the construct of relevance in the study have been researched in educational psychology.

The ARCS (Keller, 1987) model was mentioned previously with regard to self-efficacy. It situates attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction as the most important factors for successful study. Relevance is seen as covering learner interests and skills, intrinsic value of learning content as regards the present, practical usefulness in the future, challenge and choice. Relevance thus involves the process of learning, and learning styles and strategies, as well as enjoyment of the subject and its usefulness for future careers. Choice, both in tasks and means towards task completion, is also important in this paradigm.

Ryan and Deci (2000) discuss extrinsic motivation and suggest that it is the “inner acceptance of the value or utility of a task” (*ibid.*, p. 55) that learners need to find. It would seem that if learners can be made to see the relevance of a task to themselves, then despite the fact that the task itself may not seem enjoyable (Dörnyei, 2001; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000) volitional extrinsic motivation will motivate learning. The authors go on to draw a distinction between two behaviour types:

behaviors that are volitional and accompanied by the experience of freedom and autonomy - those that emanate from one's sense of self - and those that are accompanied by the experience of pressure and control and are not representative of one's self. (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 65)

Extrinsic motivation, with its elements of individual choice and autonomy, is seen here to have a close link to the idea of relevance. Since not all classroom activities will be enjoyable to all classroom students, teachers need to encourage strategies of extrinsic motivation to help their students see the relevance of study.

Feeling "right" about a task increases motivation to perform well. Participation in any activity can be influenced by individuals' approach to it and whether they experience "value from regulatory fit" (Higgins, 2005). This implies that students could be encouraged to engage with their own perceived relevance of any given task (be it to gain a good grade, to avoid failing the course, or because the topic holds particular interest for them) and find their individual 'value' in it:

The increased strength of engagement produced by [regulatory] fit is experienced as feeling right about what one is doing, ... Fit makes people feel right about both their positive responses to things and their negative responses to things. (Higgins, 2005, p. 212)

Moving to the language classroom, Noels and her colleagues (2000) express concern about learners experiencing a lack of relevance in their language studies, pointing out that some students may see the learning process as a 'puzzle' having "few repercussions in everyday life" (Noels et al., 2000, p. 75) despite enjoying learning a language. The solution would appear to be to persuade students that learning the language is not only useful, but also of personal value to them.

The relevance of students' personal stories in context is discussed by Norton (2001) in qualitative research that reveals the importance of students' past and present identities and the investment in learning that they may be willing to make. Rather than concentrating on a possible future identity, Norton suggests that second-language students be encouraged to welcome their new identity as a class member and seek to draw as much benefit from it as they can. There are similarities here with 'Happenstance Theory' (Krumboltz, 2009). Although goal-setting may be commonly regarded as a motivational technique, Happenstance Learning Theory suggests that the uncertainty of the future means that obliging students to

pinpoint future career goals may not be in their best interests. Instead they should be encouraged “to capitalize on the opportunities they find” and make the best of whatever opportunities arise, since “every situation can be seen as presenting potential opportunities if individuals can recognize them” (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 136).

This view of life suggests that many situations may have relevance for people, if they can be encouraged to grasp it. Young people may not be able to visualise a clear future ideal self, and may be better prepared for the future being encouraged to find relevance in many different learning situations circumstances than being focused on one objective, which in the dynamic manner of human existence may prove undesirable or uninteresting later on.

Research into motivation among students at tertiary level has concerned itself, among other things, with discipline-specific motivation in context (Breen & Lindsay, 2002), and with relevance of academic content to local issues, everyday life, and practical uses (Kember et al., 2008). Feelings of pleasure or displeasure may, of course, be linked to success or failure (Weiner, 1979) but enjoyment can itself be a central part of the learning experience regardless of success, which is itself “a vague term” (Breen & Lindsay, 2002, p. 700). However, if learners do not get the feelings of pleasure they expect from learning tasks, “persistence will dwindle and students may well choose to give up” (Breen & Lindsay, 2002, p. 718). In a qualitative study carried out in Hong Kong, Kember and his colleagues discovered that establishing relevance and interest, and allowing choice, were the factors most often mentioned by participants as supporting student motivation for learning. They also suggested that guidelines would help curriculum designers and teachers to “enhance motivation through establishing relevance” (Kember et al., 2008, p. 252).

In a discussion of foreign-language learning in England, Williams, Burden and Lanvers (2002) describe relevance and future needs analysis as essential parts of the learning process. Teachers, they say, “have a significant role to play in investing the content of their teaching with value, and in engaging learners in discussion about why they are studying languages” (Williams et al., 2002, p. 524).

Relevance can also be inferred in the claims that Ushioda makes for a greater move to qualitative research into motivation. Models of motivation need not be based on teachers’ classroom strategies, as has been the case with quantitative studies, but need rather to take into account the individual situations of learners, for some of whom “learning a language is just one small part of their lives” (Ushioda, 2011a, p. 20) but all of whom has their

own interests and aims in life. Qualitative studies may produce frameworks in which motivation is “actively shaped through personal meaning-making, intentionality and reflexivity” (Ushioda, 2011a, p. 13).

Relevance thus plays a part in a range of contexts, from comedy to philosophy and information technology. It is an important feature of curriculum design in education and may be construed under other terms, such as ‘value’ or ‘meaning’. This chapter concludes with my interpretation of relevance as an individual difference in motivation.

2.7 The construct of relevance as an individual difference in motivation in second-language learning

Research in the fields of individual differences and motivation has opened up vast new areas of exploration and discussion within the domain of second-language teaching and acquisition. Aspects of individual differences such as aptitude, age, sex and personality have been considered and have illuminated why some students find it easier than others to learn second languages. Relevance has been studied in some fields but is now deserving of exploration within language learning. My belief is that a discussion of relevance with regard to language learning may lead to new and fruitful discussion of how language students can be helped to achieve their full learning potential. What is significant about relevance in language learning is that it is a factor that allows for change and can be influenced by both learners and teachers.

Relevance seems, thus, to be not vague or hazy, but neither is it a fixed construct. Relevance is linked to a pertinent topic or subject, implying that its meaning may change according to context. Being concerned with a ‘matter at hand’, relevance is also time-situated in the present. For the purposes of this study, the context, or the ‘matter in hand’, is the student him- or herself, and his or her experiences, preferences, inclinations and perceptions in a present time frame. Despite being connected to future goals (Hjørland, 2010), relevance must exist in the present.

As a result of a close consideration of the literature on relevance, the definition arrived at is presented here. This is the standpoint from which the study was conducted:

Relevance is a contextualised close or significant connection situated in a present time reference, linking possibly to a future goal, and having meaning for the individual.

It is hoped that the exploration of student perceptions of relevance that this research involves may lead to a closer study of relevance as an individual difference in second-language learning, or to sub-divisions such as practical relevance (needs for work, study, travel, daily life, etc.) and personal relevance, such as experiencing ideas and emotions through the medium of English, enjoyment, and personal fulfilment.

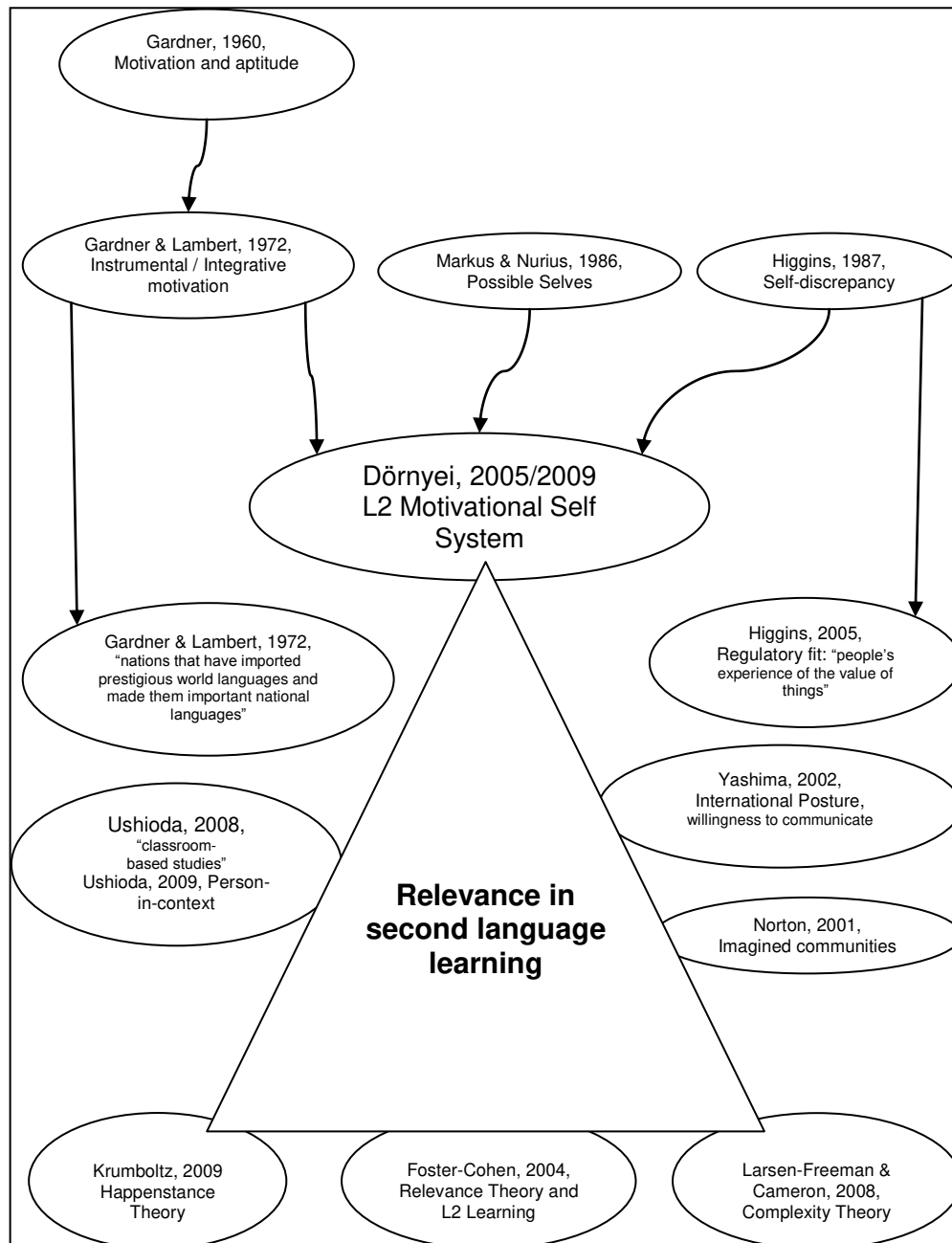


Figure 4 Visual representation of relevance in second-language learning

Figure 4 is a visual representation of relevance in second-language learning as it is conceived in the study. Relevance in second-language learning is seen as both stemming from and influencing the L2

Motivational Self System, which is itself shown with references to the literature it grew out of. Research by scholars such as Ushioda, Yashima and Larsen-Freeman is recognised for its importance in the development of the construct.

2.8 Summary

Chapter 2 has been an overview of the literature informing the study. Second-language acquisition has been discussed and in particular the recent emphasis on differences between individuals learning second languages. Research into motivation as an individual difference has been charted and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System has been explained, both its origins and recent work done in support of the paradigm. Areas worthy of further research have been mentioned, such as the classroom element of the framework and the need for more qualitative research and research in different linguistic contexts. The construct of relevance was introduced and its application to fields other than second-language acquisition accounted for. The case was made that relevance is an important individual difference in motivation in second-language learning. Referring back to the construct definition in the Introduction, motivation in the study is conceived as an enduring impetus and interest to accomplish an extended task.

I now turn to Chapter 3, which covers the methodological and theoretical foundations of the study. The literature review presented here and the theoretical foundations explained in the next chapter serve the purpose of underpinning the study itself. The study will be accounted for in Chapter 4.

3 Chapter 3 Methodological and theoretical foundations

3.1 Introduction: Making sense

I have now reviewed the literature that forms the background to the study. In this chapter, I will account for the theoretical perspective underlying the design of the study and for the epistemological and ontological background. Returning to the point of departure, I will demonstrate how the epistemological grounding of the study led logically to the methods used to collect data. Data collection itself will be covered in the next chapter. Quality validity of the data obtained will also be discussed in Chapter 4 along with trustworthiness and authenticity of the study itself. Validity is not deemed an intrinsic element of a method but concerns how results are reached in the study (Maxwell, 2002).

Finally, the pilot study is described and consequent changes made are accounted for. I will thus attempt to make sense of the epistemological, theoretical and methodological framework of this study. This involves:

... organizing the undisciplined confusion of events and the experiences of those who participate in those events as they occur in natural settings. ... Behind the selection of method is often, but not always, an explicit or implicit theoretical framework that carries assumptions about social “reality” and how it can be understood. Various qualitative methods offer different prisms through which to view the world, different perspectives on reality, and different ways in which to organize chaos. (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 5)

Figure 5 below shows the epistemological and theoretical framework of the study in diagram form. Working from Crotty’s (1998) framework for research, questions of ontology are considered within the agenda of epistemology. A theoretical perspective of interpretative hermeneutic

phenomenology led to a methodology of phenomenological research and the use of interviews to collect data.

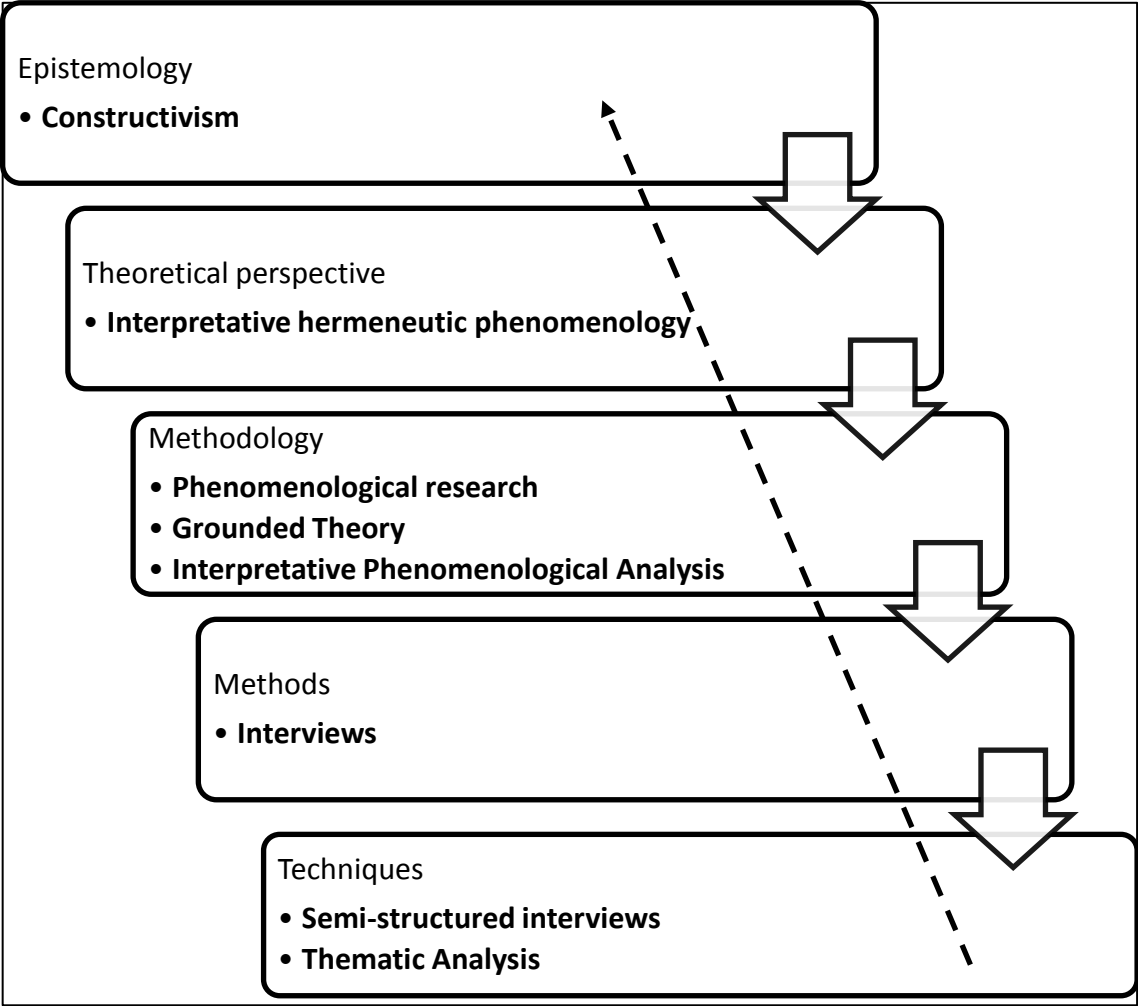


Figure 5 The epistemological and theoretical framework of the study

3.2 Perspective and aims: Stepping down off the teacher’s podium

The aim of this study was to investigate the concept of relevance of English studies at secondary school. The central research question under consideration is: **What characterises learner perceptions of practical and personal relevance of secondary school English studies in Iceland?**

Other areas explored are young Icelanders’ perceptions of themselves as present and future users of English (their ‘L2 Self’) outside the school environment and general motivational factors concerning learning English at school. In order to avoid limitation to one time context, the investigation

covers perceptions of relevance among students at secondary school and among young people in further education and employment. In this way, it was hoped that a broader range of experiences would come to light.

The impetus for this study was my desire to step down off the teacher's podium and see the English classroom in Iceland from the perspective of the students. Although quality control is the norm at the school where I teach, with students completing online and (in some cases) in-class evaluations of course material, assignments and teaching methods, there is, on the whole, little opportunity for them to express themselves at length about their studies. One of the difficulties attached to learner needs analysis concerns methodology (Corder, 1981), and talking to learners themselves may be the optimal solution to this problem (Barkhuizen, 1998). Furthermore, even less information is available on former students' opinions of the relevance of classes to their lives after school. The goal of the study, however, was not simply to compile a descriptive account of findings but ultimately to offer **a new perspective for curriculum and pedagogical improvement in the English classroom**. As Mortari and Tarozzi point out, researchers in education or other practical areas "must produce useful results for practitioners" (Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010, p. 17).

3.2.1 Comments and reflexivity

The aim of qualitative research in education is to understand different points of view of students, teachers and others involved in education. Making judgements about beliefs and opinions is not the objective. The need for educators to make efforts to understand students' experience is becoming increasingly necessary since the world, society, and technology have changed, and continue to change, so dramatically. My own experience of language learning at school was of English as a first language and later as an academic subject. The focus was on correct usage and on the established canon of English literature. Foreign-language learning was restricted to the classroom setting with little or no outside exposure and with a great deal of time spent on dead languages, Latin and Ancient Greek. These learning experiences are no more than tangential to the experience of Icelanders in their late teens and early twenties learning English today, and they are even further from the experience of younger students beginning to learn English in Iceland now. Equally, they bear little resemblance to the experience of most teachers of English in Iceland, who grew up with a very different 'reality' of English in the environment.

Through interviews and analysis according to the principles of

interpretive phenomenology and grounded theory research, and from the perspective of phenomenology grounded in social constructivism, it was hoped that the concept of relevance of English at secondary school in Iceland could be explored, and a plausible picture provided of reality constructed through dialogue with participants. Plausibility through acknowledgement of the researcher's background experience as above is one way to strengthen the validity of a study (Creswell, 2007).

3.3 Choosing appropriate methods: From objectives to techniques

Bearing in mind that I wanted to explore the area of the relevance to students of English at secondary school, a qualitative study based on an epistemology of constructivism seemed the obvious way of obtaining data, as it were, 'straight from the horse's mouth'. Qualitative research has been described as that which "produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Carrying out a survey of students' beliefs about the relevance of English classes might well have been less time-consuming than taking individual interviews, transcribing them and coding responses into a manageable whole. On the other hand, a qualitative study is often undertaken "because a problem or issue needs to be explored" (Creswell, 2007, p. 39) or in order "to understand an area where little is known" (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 27). This is the case with regard to the study since the area of relevance in second-language learning has not yet been explored.

The distinction made by Crotty (1998) between objectivist and subjectivist research holds good here since it is the inherent view held of scientific findings that must form the basis of any research study. Techniques and methods are chosen because they are likely to provide a pathway to the knowledge being sought, but it is the treatment of those data that will reflect the researcher's ontological and epistemological view of meaning.

Embarking on this study in a field which has received little attention, I was aware that understanding of relevance would be constructed (or would construct itself) via the medium of interviews with 'insider' participants (Kormos, Csizér, & Sarkadi, 2009; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). However, I had little inkling of what that knowledge would comprise. Thus, I felt the significance of Miles and Huberman's requisites for qualitative research: "a little creativity, systematic doggedness, some good

conceptual sensibilities, and cognitive flexibility - the capacity to rapidly undo your way of construing or transforming the data and to try another, more promising tack” (Miles & Huberman, 2002, p. 394).

Interviews, then, are the form of data collection that seemed most appropriate to this study and most likely to produce rich data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; J. D. Brown, 2001; Charmaz, 2006; Polkinghorne, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). I had some idea of the topics I wanted to cover, and how I thought these areas could be approached without asking leading questions, and I felt it essential to stress at the beginning of the interview that I was not looking for specific responses and that there were no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers. Kvale and Brinkmann discuss the need to build up “a good interview interaction” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 131), asking questions in everyday language and encouraging participants to talk freely. Nevertheless, I felt the need to be open about the purpose of the interview and made no attempt to hide my interview script, explaining that I was afraid of forgetting questions. This being said, I chose to follow a semi-structured format (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) but allowed the participant to go ‘off track’ to a certain extent, both to maintain the dynamics of the interview and also because I was aware that important and unforeseen data could emerge. As is the norm in qualitative research, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Giorgi, 1997; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Reid et al., 2005; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

I decided to use semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Reid et al., 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008) since they would afford the most useful and relevant data. What a semi-structured interview involves is “neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27). The interview has “a loose agenda” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 58) without questions being vague or leading. Having a written interview schedule was intended to reduce possible nervousness on my part, taking into account that interviewer anxiety may have a negative effect on the interview (Smith et al., 2009). Creswell (2007) suggests a protocol of approximately five questions. Bogdan and Biklen (2003), on the other hand, relate a long, fruitful but totally ‘ad-libbed’ interview during which it was felt unnecessary to ask any of the scheduled questions. My approach was to start out with questions from the protocol but to diverge from it if I felt the participant was particularly concerned with other matters. I would then try to steer the interview back to the next planned question. In fact, however, in one case the participant’s own concerns (e.g. her dyslexia) were so pressing and my questions so irrelevant to her situation that I abandoned

the protocol. What I gained from doing this was the unique perspective of a young woman in a situation in direct contrast to that of the majority of the participants.

3.4 Theorising about methods: From techniques to methodological theory

Thus the method I intended to use was semi-structured interviews. By using one-to-one interviews to “learn from the insights of the experts” (Reid et al., 2005, p. 1) I hoped to be able to explore what relevance learning English at secondary school has for secondary school students and young Icelanders. My view was that the experience of young people studying English for many years in a country where they hear and use English every day was a phenomenon worthy of investigation. By ‘phenomenon’ I refer here to “the meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences*” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57).

I will now explain the methodology of analysing and understanding the data collected before discussing, in the next section, the theoretical framework and subsequently the epistemological considerations lying at the heart of the study. Referring back to Figure 5, I am now moving up the framework diagram.

The methodology of this study is that of phenomenological research, making use of elements taken from Grounded Theory and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). By phenomenological research I mean the attempt to understand phenomena and experiences by approaching them in a new light (in the case of the study through interviews with people experiencing the ‘phenomenon’ of studying English in Iceland), analysing data and drawing conclusions (Crotty, 1998). It is in this way that, even though I have **taught** English at school in Iceland for over 20 years, my knowledge of the experience of **learning** English is minimal. Since ultimately all experience is unique, events or experiences cannot be fully understood by other people. Nonetheless, phenomenological studies attempt to present as close an understanding as possible of a particular experience or phenomenon from the perspective of those most closely involved (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Interview data in phenomenological research are recorded and transcribed verbatim (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 1997; Smith et al., 2009). Notes are made immediately, which aids keeping track of themes between interviews. Rereading data will clarify underlying

nuances, as will paying attention to the choice of words, tone of voice, pauses and silences. What the researcher must do is to ‘read between the lines’ to uncover possible deeper meanings lying behind the actual words said. Eventually the analytical process will become circular and iterative, thus giving a solid basis to patterns and themes extracted (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Shinebourne, 2011).

As data continue to be collected, responses are coded and recurring themes isolated so that a common core of participants’ experience can be presented. Several participants may make similar comments or, in other areas responses may have little in common. In both cases interviews will add to the emerging picture of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Smith et al., 2009).

The Grounded Theory approach also makes use of analytical coding to extract themes and areas of interest from data. In-depth interviews (up to 60 in number) provide rich data about participants’ insights into a previously little-researched experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open and axial coding are features of grounded theory approach that the study made use of (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Axial coding (that is, organising codes around a central theme) is valuable to give coherence to analysis (Charmaz, 2006). The ‘constant comparative method’ (Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) by which coding categories are reassessed as interviews bring new perspectives to light, was also used in the study. Another aspect of grounded theory approach is ‘saturation’ (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This occurs when no new codes or categories appear and “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). Saturation was sought in the study.

Although the coding of categories in these research data shares some features with grounded theory approach, grounded theory research aims at forming a theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), something that this study did not set out to do. Qualitative research is not expected to establish final definitions of concepts, in this case a definition of relevance in English-language learning in Iceland, which will be universally agreed upon, since the positivist view of the world this implies is likely to be anathema to many qualitative researchers. On the contrary, qualitative study aims to explore and expand concepts by illustrating their many-faceted nature. Similarly, the picture of reality revealed through contact with some participants of a group is not expected to be applicable to an entire population. Although such extended

generalisation is not anticipated, there may be generalisation in the sense that the picture may be applicable to other settings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a relatively recent approach to qualitative research. Its roots in hermeneutic phenomenology will be discussed below, but I will mention briefly here my borrowings from IPA for the methodology of this study. IPA has been applied mainly in psychology and the health sciences, but has also been adopted into areas such as social science, education, art and entrepreneurship (Conroy, 2003; “Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis,”; Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009). Its focus lies on “the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 1) in an attempt “to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people” (ibid., p. 16). Data collection is normally through semi-structured interviews which are transcribed and analysed. Sampling is purposive. However, IPA concentrates on a very small sample (as few as three participants) and is therefore primarily concerned with an idiographic narrative. It also deals primarily with difficult issues, such as chronic pain, palliative care or bereavement therapy (Reid et al., 2005). Clearly, studying English at school is in a different category of experience, and yet, in my opinion, any experience that takes place for approximately 250 hours over the course of two or more years (as English classes at secondary schools in Iceland do) will have significance in anyone’s life. The following comments sum up the similarities and differences between the IPA and grounded theory approaches:

Clearly there is considerable overlap between IPA and what grounded theory can do, and both have a broadly inductivist approach to inquiry. On the whole, however, an IPA study is likely to offer a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the lived experience of a small number of participants with an emphasis on the convergence and divergence between participants. By contrast, a grounded theory study of the same broad topic is likely to wish to push towards a more conceptual explanatory level based on a larger sample and where the individual accounts can be drawn on to illustrate the resultant theoretical claim. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 202)

My approach in this study has been to emphasize the uniqueness of each participant’s contribution, to see each person’s account of learning and using English as distinctive and special, and yet also to draw together

converging themes to make a whole. Working towards the formation of a theory, however, was not my initial intent.

3.5 Framing the theory: From methodology to theoretical perspective

I have now discussed the methods used in the study. It can be seen from Figure 5 that phenomenology forms its theoretical framework. More specifically, this interpretive phenomenological study has its basis in the tradition of Heidegger's textual hermeneutics (Palmer, 1969) and the work of Gadamer (Laverty, 2003; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009), who believed that it was only by "confronting other beliefs and other presuppositions that we can both see the inadequacies of our own and transcend them" (Warnke, 1987, p. 172). This theoretical framework guides the study, giving it logical support and context (Crotty, 1998).

Phenomenology is an attempt to understand the world, the people who inhabit it and their experiences. Through studying other people's lives and events in those lives, phenomenological researchers believe they can gain insight into perspectives other than their own and that, by doing so, "possibilities for new meaning will emerge" (Crotty, 1998, p. 78) which will enable them to make more sense of the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Laverty, 2003; Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010).

Phenomenology as developed by Husserl sought to expose truth by extracting the essence of phenomena (Palmer, 1969; Smith et al., 2009; Tugendhat, 1994), situated as they were outside time and context. For this to be possible, 'epoché' or 'bracketing' was necessary, so that "a fresh and unprejudiced perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010, p. 15) could be gained. This theory was later expanded by Heidegger, who emphasised the role of hermeneutics, or interpretation, in textual understanding, and again by Gadamer, for whom "all understanding involves an act of interpretation" (Dancy & Sosa, 1993, p. 151). This implies that bracketing our existing ideas and beliefs is both impossible and unnecessary since we need a standpoint from which we can base our understanding of phenomena (Laverty, 2003). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis acknowledges as well the dynamism involved in interviewing and the double hermeneutics of the participant who is attempting to make sense of his experience and the interviewer who is attempting to make sense of the participant's account of his experience. Phenomenology from the IPA perspective is always concerned with an

interpretation of the experiences, views and perceptions of a person in a unique context of time and situation (Smith et al., 2009).

The aim of this research was not to seek any absolute explanation in the tradition of Husserl but rather to understand the experience of students at secondary school through an interpretation of students' own voiced opinions during interviews. It is an attempt to gain insight into the "multiple realities" involved in any qualitative research (Creswell, 2007, p. 16). Through an interpretive phenomenological approach to the interviews conducted I hope to present a comprehensible interpretation of students' perceptions of relevance in English language learning, an interpretation which I hope is "plausible given the data" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 24).

3.6 Philosophising about knowledge: From theoretical perspective to epistemology

The double hermeneutic process of making meaning from other people's expressions of their experiences implies necessarily a belief that there are no ultimate truths to be discovered by science and displayed in a final, immutable version, that knowledge is not absolute but can be constructed in context and through a dynamic interaction between researcher and participant. This constructivist view of meaning is the epistemology forming the foundation of this study, the "theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). The terms 'constructivism' and 'constructionism' have both been used to describe this world view of meaning created through the interaction of individuals within society. Crotty, however, distinguishes between constructionism, "the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning" (1998, p. 58) and constructivism, or the individual's creation of meaning within society.

Subjective social constructivism lies in opposition to the positivist paradigm of knowledge as objective, universal and quantifiable (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Howitt & Cramer, 2005; Kincheloe, 2006). Typically, positivist quantitative research starts out from a theory that will either be supported or proven wrong, and will thus create new knowledge. Post-positivist qualitative research is also based on pre-established theories, whereas from the constructivist perspective knowledge and reality are as diverse as the experiences of individuals. It concerns itself with the idea of knowledge being 'put together' among and between people and within society, making use of many 'materials':

The interpretive *bricoleur* understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her own personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and by those of the people in the setting. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6)

From a social constructivist point of view, then, we construct both reality and our own selves by engaging with the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Bruner, 1987; Crotty, 1998). Similarly, learning itself is a socially constructed process which aims at expanding knowledge and the skills by which we create knowledge (Bruner, 1960, 1966; Laverty, 2003; Riley, 2003).

In this way, it is my belief that a concept such as ‘relevance’ cannot be explored from pre-conceived perspectives or pre-ordained definitions. The word ‘relevance’ must be given a framework of meaning, first by the researcher in order to provide a form for the study and to establish his or her own perspective (Willig, 2007). However, in order to construct a fuller picture reflecting the complex reality of expert participants in the field rather than the researcher’s own limited perspective (Morse & Richards, 2002), qualitative research rooted in an epistemology of social constructivism provides the most viable tools. Through the dialectical methodology associated with constructivism, knowledge is created as ideas, concepts and experiences are discussed in interviews, and “reconstructed understandings of the social world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 184) are produced. Authenticity of research is supported by the researcher accounting for his/her own experiences and actually through this awareness becoming more open to the experiences of others. The researcher’s own experiences and background allow a personal interpretation of data obtained, albeit with these interpretations always supported by evidence (Creswell, 2007).

There are instances in the data gathered for this study that illustrate clearly how knowledge “is actively created through questions and answers” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 54). Participants’ experiences appear not as static or fixed in meaning, as their own reflections, prompted by interview questions, lead them along new paths of introspection. This is shown, for example, when a participant returns to a question asked earlier in the interview and gives a fuller response, or says that a question asked by the researcher introduces an aspect of the experience that he or she has not considered prior to the interview.

With this study, I hope to explore the world of the English learner at secondary school and present their perceptions of the relevance of English

studies to their lives. The world of the young Icelander studying English grammar and vocabulary, watching English-language films, using English at work, and reading university textbooks in English, is complex and is comprised of far more ‘realities’ than I imagined when I first started researching it. I hope to be able to say that I have “made sense of the world in a particular way” (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 5), and in a way that suggests the possibility of new pedagogical emphases in English instruction.

3.7 Pilot study

A pilot study was carried out between September 2009 and January 2010. The goal was to gain a perspective on the value of the research project as a whole and its possible breadth, as well as to tighten up the research design and interview technique (Robson, 2002; van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001; Wallace, 1998). A similar question framework was used for the younger and older groups of respondents. Interviews began with matters such as the purpose of the interview, confidentiality and anonymity, length, and the fact that the interview would be conducted in Icelandic. Permission for audio recording was sought. A few opening questions situated the respondent by age and place of study or work (in order to ensure data were correctly ascribed to participants), and ascertained general uses of English and attitudes (in order to elicit information about relevance of English to the participant’s present life). Participants were asked to evaluate their own proficiency in English and the main sources of this proficiency. It was my belief before beginning the study that young people regard English in a positive light and feel confident about their proficiency and I hoped that these first questions would create rapport (Smith & Osborn, 2008) by making participants feel at ease and, at the same time, introduce the broad fields of studying and using English. However, it was stressed that the interview was intended to explore attitudes and that there were no correct or incorrect answers. Further questions covered present significance and future needs of secondary school students or a retrospective evaluation of significance and needs. These questions sought to address, or operationalise, constructs of relevance and motivation as they are envisaged in the study. Respondents were asked to provide feedback on the interviews, both on whether the questions were clearly phrased and made sense, whether any were redundant or others need to be added, and on the interview technique of the interviewer.

3.7.1 Participants

The pilot study was intended to comprise six interviews: two with students at secondary school; two with university students; and two with young people in full-time employment. In fact three interviews were taken at secondary school. I tried to meet respondents at their place of study or work in order to disturb their day as little as possible.

Participants in the pilot study were all known to me, being students at the school where I work, children of colleagues or family friends. As was the case with the main study, finding participants in employment was the most troublesome. Table 1 shows the age, location and occupation of the pilot study participants.

Pilot study September 2009-January 2010				
		Age	Sex	Location
1	Bára, a university student of health sciences	23	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
2	Erna, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	19	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
3	Halla, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	20	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
4	Íris, a clerical assistant	23	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
5	Jói, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	19	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
6	Siggi, a university student of social sciences	22	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
7	Sveinn, a self-employed businessman	24	Male	Greater Reykjavík area

Table 1 Pilot study participants

3.7.2 Participant feedback and gains

Valuable feedback regarding questions and interview technique led to the interview questions being in a state of constant revision over some months. Questions that needed rewording were isolated and altered, but broadly speaking the topics discussed were found interesting. Participants did not appear to experience being interviewed in Icelandic by a non-native

speaker as a problem. One mentioned feeling that ‘correct’ answers were expected at school but that after only a short time she felt free to give her own personal responses, suggesting that the question framework was establishing a certain level of rapport, as had been hoped.

One participant’s dislike of English classes made me aware of the fact that negative experiences in secondary school English combined with positive perceptions toward English in everyday life made for an interesting perspective. From this the importance of asking open-ended questions and valuing each participant’s unique point of view was made clear. The fact that young people were willing to give up an hour after work made me appreciate that participants had a story they wanted to tell. I also began to appreciate the significance of collaboration between researcher and participants in the research process, and I felt how new knowledge was being created as participants took time before replying to questions they had not considered before.

I was struck by participants’ sincerity and honesty. It seemed that if school students were prepared to admit to an interviewer they knew was a teacher that they had, for example, used online cribs instead of reading set novels (which they themselves seemed to view as morally wrong), then their other responses were likely to be equally honest. Similarly, the mere fact of obtaining criticism, rather than a blanket response that “Everything was fine”, suggested that participants felt sufficiently at ease during the interviews to voice their opinions.

3.7.3 Changes made after the pilot study

After considering feedback from pilot participants, the total number of interview questions was reduced and the wording of questions was improved. Questions were added about the importance of English in participants’ lives, specific gains from secondary school English, and national identity. Birbili raises the importance of piloting interviews as a means of “eliminating translation-related problems” (Birbili, 2000, p. 4) since concepts may differ between languages. The pilot study thus allowed the wording of some questions to be improved, for example, in order to encourage a wider range of responses which could then be further explored (e.g. *What do/did you personally get out of your English studies?* asked to elicit attitudes towards personal relevance). Although one participant regretted not seeing the interview framework before the interview, I decided that pre-prepared responses would reflect a different perspective from spontaneous ones and therefore did not send the questions to

participants in advance of interviews. The final interview framework is discussed more fully in Chapter 4 and can be found in English translation in the Appendices.

As regards interview technique, I heard myself sounding impatient in some pilot interviews and so determined to allow participants to complete responses without interruption, and to encourage longer responses by using more effective prompting and probing. I also realised that having a quiet interview location was essential if the recording of interviews were to be audible.

3.7.4 Emerging themes

Three pilot interviews were transcribed verbatim *in toto* and the remaining four in part. From the outset the potential of this area of research was evident and, as the pilot study progressed, a wide spectrum of replies was appearing, as well as patterns of similar responses.

Preliminary analysis soon identified several coding categories such as pleasure and enjoyment; social factors connected with knowing English; positive (possibly exaggerated) self-assessment and a sense of security contrasting with a lack of self-confidence; and gaining knowledge and skills through English. These categories also emerged from the main study.

Participants' positive feelings towards English seemed to be closely associated with enjoyment and increased self-esteem. The fact that English classes themselves were stress-free and homework unnecessary boosted self-esteem: "I liked going to a class where, you know, I understood pretty well everything". Boredom, however, was also apparent: "You got out your big heavy book full of grammar exercises, and you sat and sweated over them for a whole hour, one after the other".

Self-assessment of proficiency was generally positive and secondary school English "always easy", meaning that good grades could always be expected. About starting at secondary school (at age 15/16) one participant said:

To begin with, I thought 'Well, I don't need to learn any more English.' I was so good at primary school ...

Inaccurate over-confidence in proficiency was also evident in feelings of insecurity. One participant who wanted to consider himself bilingual, for example, admitted a lack of "theories and concepts" in English. This

inability to operate on a cognitive level in English suggests a lack of bilinguality (Hamers & Blanc, 2000).

One coding category that appeared early on in analysis of pilot interviews consisted of gains in world knowledge and study skills, for example learning about the connection between English and Old Icelandic.

Data on participants' wide range of uses of English also foreshadowed similar findings in the main study. Uses included watching television and films, listening to music, using computers and holidaying abroad. Talking to non-Icelandic-speaking work colleagues called for specific speaking skills and advanced proficiency was clearly necessary for reading university textbooks in English. There was a certain naivety about the practicalities of using English, which is also seen in the main study. Íris was explaining here how much she used English at work:

Of course you know that English is really the main language, the most international language, that most people use it for talking together. So maybe I wasn't surprised but ... I may not really have realised it.

As was again the case in the main study, participants mentioned aspects of English that they felt were not covered sufficiently at school, in particular writing and advanced speaking practice.

The main gains of the pilot study were thus that interview format was improved, my own initial nervousness was reduced, and some clearly significant themes had emerged. It was of value to have reached that point in understanding the interview process before embarking on the main study.

3.8 Summary

This chapter described how methodology was chosen, and the theoretical framework and epistemology of the study. The pilot study was described and subsequent changes to the interview framework were accounted for. Initial themes emerging from analysis were mentioned. In Chapter 4 I will describe the study itself.

4 Chapter 4 The study

4.1 Introduction

I have now covered the theoretical foundations of the study and the pilot study. Chapter 4 covers the study itself. Sampling and the population are accounted for and the participants are described. Data collection and methods of analysis are covered. Stages in analysis are related in some detail and diagrams show the steps in the development towards the model of relevance in second-language learning presented.

4.2 Sampling and saturation

The choice of participants used in this study was purposeful (Seidman, 2006) or purposive (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Polkinghorne, 2005; Robson, 2002; Smith et al., 2009), meaning that participants were chosen “because they can offer a research project insight into a particular experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 48). This non-random type of sampling where “some element of human judgement enters directly into the selection of the sample” (OECD, 2004) may also be described as judgement sampling (Marshall, 1996; OECD, 2004; Wardhaugh, 1986) or, in a Grounded Theory approach, theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Robson, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). One important feature of this type of sampling is that “subjects who disagree (confirming and disconfirming samples)” (Marshall, 1996, p. 53) must be considered. The likely diversity of responses was thus borne in mind, since the “most useful accounts describe unexpected and unanticipated aspects of an experience” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 143). Sampling was thus not intended to be statistically representative, but to be sufficient in quantity and diversity to form the basis of this descriptive enquiry.

A preliminary benchmark of 32 interviews was established at the outset of the study. An equal balance of male and female participants would be sought from different parts of Iceland.

Data were gathered until 'saturation' (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Robson, 2002) was reached, that is, when no more new material is forthcoming. When this point would be reached was hard to foresee: examples can be found of studies into student perceptions and attitudes based on fewer than 20 interviews (Barkhuizen, 1998; Kormos, Csizér, & Sarkadi, 2009; Lamb, 2009; Lyons, 2009) while others are based on more than 80 (Christison & Krahnke, 1986; Peacock, 1998).

4.3 Participant population

4.3.1 Representation and distribution

The population of interest in this study is secondary school students in Iceland aged 18-20 and university students and young people in employment aged 22-24. Much consideration was given to how a representative sample of the population involved in this study could be found. It seemed essential for the study that interviews be taken over a wide geographical area. Iceland is not a large country, its population at the end of the last quarter of January 2011 standing at 319,560. However, population distribution is unequal, with 64% (203,570 inhabitants) living in the Greater Reykjavík Area, that is, the capital city and its immediate surrounding municipalities.

Of 32 upper-secondary schools in Iceland 14 are in the Greater Reykjavík Area. However, there are almost twice as many secondary school students and seven-fold the number of university students in Greater Reykjavík as in the rest of the country. For this reason it seemed reasonable that more than half the total number of participants should come from the Greater Reykjavík Area. There are almost no fee-paying schools in Iceland, which meant that when selecting schools to approach for participation, differences of socio-economic group between schools was not a factor for consideration. Nonetheless, there are differences between Icelandic secondary schools in terms, for example, of student numbers, academic reputation and whether vocational courses are offered or not. In order to obtain data from a broad range of schools, different types and sizes of schools were approached.

There are three universities in the Greater Reykjavík Area and a further four in the rest of the country. Most universities in Iceland are state-funded,

with relatively low student fees, but there are also two private universities. The workforce in Iceland is unevenly distributed throughout the country, with approximately 64% of the working population of Iceland located in the capital area (2011a). There is proportionately more unemployment among young people in other parts of the country than in and around Reykjavík (“Directorate of Labour”, 2012). This suggested immediately that finding young people in employment outside Reykjavík who were willing to take part in the study might be difficult.

The problem of finding a sample of the school student population that could provide data reflecting secondary school students’ general beliefs and attitudes towards English in Iceland as a whole was given some attention. In order to obtain as broad a picture as possible of students’ classroom experiences in Iceland, students in several areas of the country needed to be interviewed, and that the fact that there are far more secondary students in or near Reykjavík than in the rest of the country should not influence too directly where interviews took place. Initially, therefore, it was decided that the total number of secondary school participants interviewed should be divided fairly equally between the Greater Reykjavík Area and the rest of the country. It was also decided that students taking the language study programme (that is, specialising in some combination of Danish, English, French, German, Norwegian, Spanish, Swedish, and Latin) should be excluded from the sample. It was felt that the views of students who had opted to specialise in languages and to take several extra advanced language courses would be less representative of the general population than the views of students on the social and natural sciences study programmes. Nonetheless, it transpired that some participants either intended to take, or had taken, English courses in addition to their compulsory three or four semesters of study, out of interest or because they saw English as an easy option.

Similarly, it was considered inappropriate to take interviews with university students majoring in languages. On the other hand, it was felt that a wide range of university schools and faculties should be represented. Eight interviews with university students were planned, and the majority of them would be with students in Reykjavík.

Data collection was planned for the second half of the school year, which in Iceland runs from the beginning of January to the middle of May.

4.3.2 Age

When planning the study, it was foreseen that participants would be in two age groups, 18-20 years and 22-24 years. These age limits were not arbitrary. In Iceland, post-compulsory (upper-secondary) education begins at age 16. The majority of students matriculate from secondary school after four years of study, at age 20. The school year is divided into two semesters, and while English is a compulsory subject for a minimum of three semesters, some students will take a further three or even four courses. By the time they reach the age of 18, many students will have completed three semesters of English.

When students begin their university studies they are therefore usually aged 20 or older, as are young people entering employment after matriculation from secondary school. It was considered that participants aged between 22 and 24 years would have had several years' experience of using English after secondary school, but would nonetheless be able to recall their English studies at school.

4.3.3 Access to the community

Access to participants would be by personal contact by the researcher with secondary schools and university staff, via trade unions and workplaces, and through snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Robson, 2002). Every effort was made to access a variety of participants, from several of the universities and secondary schools in Iceland, and from a range of occupations.

4.4 Participants in the study

By the time it was felt that saturation had been reached in the main study (and taking into account the difficulties encountered in finding participants in some of the areas listed above), a total of 38 interviews had been taken with 40 participants (one interview was with a group of three participants). As planned for in the research proposal, sixteen of these interviews were with secondary school students aged 18-21. More interviews were taken with university students and young people in employment than had been anticipated: eleven with university students aged 19-28 and a further eleven with young people aged 21-24 in employment. There were thus a total of 20 male participants and 20 female participants. Interviews taken with participants studying or working in the Greater Reykjavík area totalled 23, while 14 interviews were taken with participants studying or working outside Greater Reykjavík.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of participants by group, age, sex and location. It also gives participants' pseudonyms used in the study.

4.4.1 Description of participants – location, sex, field of study/work

The first interviews taken were with secondary school students. The reason for this was partly that the main focus of the study is on perceptions of secondary school English, and it seemed right and proper to obtain secondary school students' opinions at the outset of the study. Another reason for beginning with this group was that the spring term in Iceland is broken up both by an Easter break and by other shorter breaks at different times during the term. Interviews were to begin in January and students could not be expected to participate in a research project late in the term, at the beginning of the revision and examination period.

Participants from secondary schools were Addi, Birna, Bogi, Daníel, Edda, Einar, Hannes, Ingi, Jóhanna, Kolbeinn, Númi, Soffía, Telma, Trausti and Unnar. Three were studying on the natural sciences programme while another three were on vocational training programmes. The remaining ten students were on the social studies programme. These participants ranged in age from 18 to 21.

University student participants were Agla, Bjarki, Hera, Elsa, Hanna, Rannveig, Jakob, Linda, Marta, Orri, Rósa, Snorri, and Tómas. Three were studying animal and land resources, two health sciences, two social sciences, two engineering and natural sciences, two humanities, one sports and health sciences, and one environmental science. They ranged in age from 19 to 28.

Participants in employment were Baldur, Dagný, Diljá, Egill, Freyr, Haraldur, Lilja, Magnús, Steinunn, Svava, and Tinna. Their ages were from 20 to 23, and they were in various occupational settings including a shop, a warehouse, an automobile repair centre, and a restaurant.

4.4.2 Making contact with participants

In most cases, participants were reached through contact persons. Contact persons were administrative personnel, teaching and human resources staff. In a few cases, participants were found through personal contacts. No participant was known personally to me before the interview took place. In total, letters introducing the study and seeking participants were sent by email to 106 contact persons.

Main study February 2010-February 2011				
		Age	Sex	Location
At secondary school				
1	Addi, a secondary school student on the natural sciences study programme	19	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
2	Birna, a secondary school student completing matriculation after a vocational training programme	20	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
3	Bogi, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	18	Male	Southern Iceland
4	Daníel, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	19	Male	Northern Iceland
5	Edda, a secondary school student completing matriculation after a vocational training programme	20	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
6	Einar, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	19	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
7	Hannes, a secondary school student on a vocational study programme	21	Male	Southern Iceland
8	Ingi, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	19	Male	Northern Iceland
9	Jóhanna, a secondary school student on the natural sciences study programme	19	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
10	Kolbeinn, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	21	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
11	Númi, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	18	Male	Northern Iceland
12	Soffía, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	18	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
13	Telma, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	18	Female	Southern Iceland

14	Trausti, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	19	Male	Northern Iceland
15	Unnar, a secondary school student on the natural sciences study programme	19	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
16	Vala, a secondary school student on the social sciences study programme	18	Female	Northern Iceland
At university				
17	Agla, a university student of health sciences	26	Female	Europe
18	Bjarki, a university student of humanities	21	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
19	Elsa, Hanna and Rannveig, university students of animal and land resources	19-20	Female	Northern Iceland
20	Hera, a university student of humanities	22	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
21	Jakob, a university student of social sciences (and in employment)	23	Male	Distance-learning
22	Linda, a university student of social sciences	22	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
23	Marta, a university student of health sciences	22	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
24	Orri, a university student of engineering and natural sciences	22	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
25	Rósa, a university student of engineering and natural sciences	21	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
26	Snorri, a university student of environmental science	28	Male	Southern Iceland
27	Tómas, a university student of sport and health sciences	22	Male	Southern Iceland
In employment				
28	Baldur, a skilled tradesman	21	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
29	Dagný, in the retail trade	21	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
30	Diljá, in health care	23	Female	Northern Iceland
31	Egill, in the retail trade	22	Male	Greater Reykjavík area

32	Freyr, in the catering trade	23	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
33	Haraldur, in sales	23	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
34	Lilja, in sales	22	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
35	Magnús, in information technology	20	Male	Greater Reykjavík area
36	Steinunn, in sales	22	Female	Greater Reykjavík area
37	Svava, in health care	24	Female	Northern Iceland
38	Tinna, in education	22	Female	Greater Reykjavík area

Table 2 Overview of the participants of the main study

Emails were sent to school principals, and in some cases directly to teachers. They were asked to supply contact information for any students willing to take part in the study. Students were then contacted and an interview time convenient for the student was arranged. The principal or teacher was then contacted again in order to ascertain that a room would be free at the time arranged for the interview. In the Greater Reykjavík Area, eight schools were contacted and interviews were taken at seven of them. Interviews were taken at four schools outside Reykjavík. In total, 26 contact persons at 13 secondary schools helped in finding the 16 participants in the secondary school category.

Interviews with university students were organised in a similar manner. Response to initial letters to teaching or administrative staff was not good, but a general letter to all students via email prompted a number of replies, all of which were answered. In some instances, no further contact was made by the potential participant, or participants did not present themselves for an arranged interview. Six university participants were found at three universities in the Greater Reykjavík Area. At regional universities, seven participants were found at five different universities. In brief, a total of 26 people were contacted in order to find the 13 participants in the university category.

Finding participants in employment proved the most problematic. Firstly, there were no obvious institutions in this category that were likely to be able to suggest names of potential participants. Secondly, it was possible that young people aged 22-24 who had gone straight into employment after school would not be interested in taking part in a study focussing on English at school. The 11 participants in the category of

young people in employment were found via emails to 54 contact persons. It took 46 emails to shops, companies, hotels, and other organisations in Reykjavík to find nine participants. Eight places of employment outside Reykjavík were contacted and two participants were found. Several potential participants did not reply, refused to take part or failed to attend an arranged interview. A few participants were found via help from family, colleagues and friends.

4.5 Interviews

A total of 38 interviews were transcribed and analysed to form the basis of data analysis. Three further interviews were not used: in one case the sound quality was poor due to nearby building work; one participant did not fit the established age parameters; and it was considered that one interview would give imbalance to the data. Other interviews had been taken with university students in the same discipline and it seemed unnecessary to include more data from one area than others. Judgement sampling (Labov, 1972; Wardhaugh, 1986) was used in this way to try to reduce bias.

4.5.1 Characteristics of interviews

Interviews were one-to-one and face-to-face, and were conducted in Icelandic (the first language of participants). This was done in an attempt to facilitate ease of expression, although some code-switching to English (popular among young Icelanders today) was anticipated. Two participants offered to speak English but reverted to Icelandic when I explained that interview conditions needed to be the same for all participants. Authenticity and trustworthiness are further supported by respondent anonymity and by the fact that interviews are transcribed verbatim, despite this necessitating subsequent translation into English of any passages quoted directly in the research.

Interviews used for the main study range in length from 23 minutes to 58 minutes, the average length being 38:23 minutes. The total length of all the interviews in the main study is 24 hours 19 minutes and 18 seconds. Interviews with male participants total 12 hours 38 minutes and 11 seconds, while interviews with female participants total 11 hours 41 minutes and 7 seconds.

All the interviews followed the same pattern. After some initial small talk about the participant, student assignments on the walls of the classroom being used as an interview room, or the weather, the research study was explained briefly and participants told that the purpose of the study was to gather opinions and experiences, that there were no right or

wrong answers, and that the interview would take between 30 and 45 minutes. I explained my own background briefly: that I have lived and taught English in Iceland for many years. This I felt was necessary as participants might notice that I speak Icelandic with a slight accent (which nonetheless does not impede understanding). Permission to record the interview was requested. I also explained participant anonymity and invited participants to choose their own pseudonyms.

Questions were asked in the same order in each interview. On occasions, participants touched on areas brought up in later questions. In this case, the question was usually asked again according to the framework, and in this way fuller data were often gained. Prompting was used when it was felt necessary. Prompts were written into the interview question framework so ensure that similar wording was used in each interview.

In no cases did I give participants remuneration or any other reward for participation in the study. One secondary school participant did, however, receive ‘bonus points’ from his teacher for taking part, and others were allowed to miss class for the interview.

4.5.2 Timeline of when interviews were taken

A year was spent collecting data for this study. The first interviews were taken in February 2010 and the final interviews with young people in employment (a category in which it was particularly difficult to find participants) were taken during the winter of 2010/2011. Table 3 below shows the interviews on a timeline from February 2010 to February 2011.

	School	University	Employment
Feb 2010	4	3	x
March	x	4	x
April	7	x	x
May	5	2 (1+1 group of 3)	2
June	x	2	x
December	x	x	1
January 2011	x	x	3
February 2011	x	x	5
Total	16	11	11

Table 3 Interview timeline

4.5.3 Interview question framework

The development of the interview question framework was mentioned in Chapter 3 with regard to the pilot study. However, it is appropriate at this point to include further discussion of the content of the questions before data analysis is considered. The questions can be found, translated into English, in the Appendices.

Interview questions were based in part on questionnaires used originally by Dörnyei and his colleagues (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Csizér & Kormos, 2009a; Dörnyei & Clément, 2001; Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002, 2005) and subsequently adapted and translated to different contexts and countries. For example, in establishing the Ideal L2 self as a user of English in Asia (Al-Shehri, 2009; Csizér & Kormos, 2009a; S. Ryan, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2009), researchers have used questionnaire statements based on work carried out in Hungarian.

For example, in the present study, establishing the Ideal L2 Self as a future user of English is elicited by asking younger participants about the relevance of English to them, as in Question 11 *How do you think you will use English in the future?* In the study, the area of practical relevance to future needs and employment is approached by asking *One of the objectives of secondary schools according to the national curriculum is to prepare students to use English in everyday life, at work and in study. Do they do that?* (Question 12) and *What difference would it make for you if you weren't doing/hadn't done English at secondary school?* (Question 18) and seeking clarification. Personal relevance is explored through Question 7 *What do/did you get out of your English studies personally?*. These questions operationalise the construct in the study of relevance as contextualised significance for the individual.

Similarly, older respondents were asked what difference it would make to them had they not studied English at secondary school. Older respondents were also asked questions intended to explore “executive and retrospective motivation” (Kormos et al., 2008, p. 69), based on Dörnyei and Ottó’s (1998) process model of motivation.

Other questions are aimed at delving into students’ perceptions of multilingual identity (for example, Question 17 *What difference would it make for you if you didn't know English?*) and of their willingness to expend effort in order to ensure successful language learning. Asking about level of effort taps into the study’s definition of motivation, that is to what extent participants feel or felt an impetus to persevere towards improved proficiency in English. Question 13 *How much effort are/were you*

prepared to put into learning English? is used in similar form by Ryan (2009) and Taguchi, Magid and Papi (2009).

There was intentionally no attempt to ask directly about teachers or instructional methods since this lay outside the aims of the study. However, there are several questions (for example, Question 5 *What is your opinion of your English studies at school?*; Question 15 *What is/was most fun, [of what you are learning/learned in English?]*; Question 18 *What difference would it make for you if you weren't doing/hadn't done English at school?*) that ask indirectly about what goes on in the English classroom, and data were obtained on participant perceptions of teaching and classroom activities.

As new themes appeared across the interview data, some new questions were added to the interview framework to explore these new areas, for example, about perceived Icelandic identity. In a final question, participants were asked if they had any more comments they wanted to make. Very often, valuable new data were gained at this point, emphasising the fact that general, open questions give participants the chance to talk about matters of their own choice.

Attention was paid to the wording of questions. Open questions (Giorgi, 1997) were used as far as possible instead of closed questions (except when thought necessary for clarification) in order to “avoid as much as possible questions that can be answered by ‘yes’ or ‘no’” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 97). Care was also taken not to ask leading questions in order to avoid conveying pre-conceived ideas to respondents (Christison & Krahnke, 1986), and (as in the case of a study of plagiarism) “without presupposing that students start from the same premises as academics” (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997, p. 187), although, as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) point out, all questions are intended to lead somewhere.

If, in any particular interview, it became apparent that the semi-structured format was not producing substantial responses, the questions were abandoned and an unstructured format was used. However, it was hoped that active listening and careful use of probing, prompting, paraphrasing and asking for clarification or examples would open up the intended area of study and obtain in-depth responses. Listening is not a passive process and it takes “concentration and discipline to listen properly” (King, 2001, p. 26). Silences were also respected to allow respondents time to formulate their thoughts in words.

The question framework was deliberately not given to participants prior to the interview. The rationale behind this was that participants would give more spontaneous responses if they had not had time to “prepare” for the interview.

4.5.4 Interviews with secondary school students

Interviews with secondary school students (16 in total) were split evenly between Reykjavík and the north and south of the country. All secondary school students were interviewed in their own schools, with the exception of one who, at her own request, was interviewed at my place of study. The schools provided an empty classroom, office or interview room where interviewing took place. All of these environments, except one, were quiet, and interruptions, although they did occur, were brief and did not seriously affect the flow of conversation. In one instance, the noise of nearby building work caused the recording to be almost inaudible and resulted in the interview not forming part of the main study data. In an attempt to minimise the power imbalance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Nunan, 1992) of the interviewer-interviewee situation, the participant was invited to sit down first and I sat next to or opposite him or her. In this way, the teacher's desk was not used. In some schools, students were given time out of class to be interviewed. Others were interviewed during a free period, or at the end of the school day. One chose to use a day off for the interview. One received 'bonus points', given by the teacher for optional extra work, for volunteering to take part in the study. Some small talk, for example about the school building or interview room, the weather, or the student's timetable, took place before the interview itself began and the recorder was turned on. Similar small talk, for example, about events taking place at school or weekend plans, was continued after the interview, but not recorded.

4.5.5 Interviews with university students

Six interviews were taken with students at university in Reykjavík, and three with students in Northern and Southern Iceland. In most cases, university student participants were interviewed at the researcher's place of study. The meeting room there is spacious, with large windows, and contains a large table surrounded by chairs. As with the younger participants, the participant was invited to choose a seat first. Some small talk took place before the interview itself began and the recorder was turned on.

One interview took place in the student cafeteria at a university outside Reykjavík. As it was already late in the afternoon and at the end of a full day of classes for them I offered to interview them as a group, and they agreed. The cafeteria was almost empty and there was no distracting background activity.

4.5.6 Interviews with participants in employment

Of the young people in employment, nine were in employment in the Greater Reykjavík Area, and two in the north of the country. When organising interviews with employees there were more factors to be taken into account than when interviews with students were set up. Most interviews had been organised through the employer, permission having been granted for the participants to be interviewed during working hours and at their place of work. In these cases, I went to the places of employment and took interviews in a meeting room or coffee room. In no case did there appear to be pressure on the participant to return to work at any given time. One participant preferred to meet me at my place of study before she went to work.

Two interviews were taken outside the Greater Reykjavík Area. I was not invited to conduct the interviews at participants' workplaces. At the request of the participant, one interview took place in a coffee shop and the second participant asked me to come to a local school where she was taking a course. The recordings of these interviews were affected by some background noise and other disturbances.

4.5.7 Language considerations during interviews

All interviews took place in Icelandic, the native language of the respondents. Taking interviews in one language inevitably involves finding ways of translating words and concepts that may not be directly translatable (Birbili, 2000). Translating some questions into Icelandic posed problems. In these cases, if the participant appeared not to understand, the question was rephrased. One example is that the word 'relevance' has no direct translation in Icelandic, meaning that various were used such as 'value' (Ice. *gildi*); 'importance' (Ice. *mikilvægi*); or 'significance' (Ice. *þýðing*). A certain amount of English slang and code-switching was expected as English slang is commonly used among young people in Iceland.

4.5.8 Ethical considerations

4.5.8.1 Confidentiality

Interviews were one-to-one and face-to-face, and in a situation offering a certain level of privacy. All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. It can be placed unobtrusively on a table or other surface between the interviewer and the respondent, and no external microphone is necessary. Persónuvernd (the Data Protection Authority) was notified about

the research project and raised no objections to the study. As no participants were younger than 18 years old, parental permission did not have to be sought.

All participants were informed, both in the introductory letter or email and before the interview began, that anonymity and confidentiality would be ensured.

4.6 Methods of data analysis

4.6.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and Grounded Theory

A discussion of approaches to analysis in phenomenological research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Grounded Theory can be found in Chapter 3.

Although this study does not follow the dictates of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] data analysis completely, elements of the approach suited this study well. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis favours semi-structured interviews and “systematic qualitative analysis” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 4) following initial observations and impressions. In the tradition of IPA, the researcher has attempted to engage with participants and isolate common themes in the data. Similarly, attempts have been made to keep to the IPA tenets of sensitivity, rigour, coherence and impact (Smith et al., 2009). However, this study is not concerned with micro-analysis of a very few cases, as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is, but rather with collecting and collating data from 40 sources.

Elements of grounded theory research, such as saturation and axial coding, are used in this study, although it does not seek to “generate or discover a theory” (Creswell, 2007, p. 63) based on students’ experiences of studying English at school, but rather to explore and open up the field of relevance in English-language learning in Iceland as a whole.

4.6.2 Data analysis procedure

Analysis of interview data involves the hermeneutical interpretation of meaning within texts “in an attempt to ‘read’ these in ways that bring understanding” (Crotty, 1998, p. 87). In this study, I have tried to analyse data in depth, and has made use of linguistic analysis, concentrating on the language structures used, such as impersonal and passive forms, and of aspects of deconstruction, involving breaking down what is said and unsaid

in order to construct new meaning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this way, I have attempted to take the role of “the researcher-as-interpretive-bricoleur” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183).

I made initial notes in English immediately after each interview was taken, either audio-recorded immediately subsequent to the interview being recorded or in writing later the same day. I transcribed interviews as soon as possible after they were taken and made further notes at that time. Emergent themes were noted, as were connections between points raised by several participants.

Coding, condensation and interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Smith et al., 2009) were used to organise and group themes. Initially, I read one interview through and noted and coded all points of interest (Charmaz, 2006; Smith et al., 2009), for example by colour or symbol. This meant I could group points or elements into categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or themes. I read further interviews in the same way, and coded points either into the existing categories, or created new ones. As analysis of interviews continued, categories were combined, expanded or divided as a clearer picture of common themes emerged from the data. Through ‘condensation’, I shortened passages of several sentences into phrases or sentences expressing the essential meaning so that I could then evaluate whether this material was relevant to the objectives of the study. Themes isolated through coding and condensation form the basis of a description of the subject of the study. Interpretation involves going beyond the actual words used by participants to the deeper, underlying significance of their responses. Through this exegesis of text, I did not try to reduce interviews to any central core but rather expanded them as possible meanings were explored. My purpose in exposing concealed layers of meaning in these interviews is not to impute feelings or opinions to participants but rather, by concentrating on not “selectively interpreting and reporting statements, ...overlooking any counterevidence” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 213), to show the richness of the data through multiple meanings and emotions expressed.

Any uncertainties regarding understanding the recording, or interpreting what participants meant, were discussed with my adviser or in doctoral seminars with native speakers of Icelandic.

Analysis was done using colour coding on interview transcripts; colour coding on notes pages (summaries) of interviews; collecting, listing and sorting significant quotations from interviews; hand-drawn spidergrams on paper; and computer-generated mindmaps to which notes pages were attached. Each stage in the analysis process was dated and stored

electronically so that the progress of analysis could be subsequently tracked. A date is included with each figure presented here in order to show the analysis process and ultimate development of a paradigm.

4.6.3 Presentation of data analysis

In the following exposition of analysis process, I use both mindmaps and tables. By using mindmaps to organise coded data I was able to move categories with ease and subdivide areas as seemed appropriate. The advantage was having a fluid system that allows for differing levels of depth to be viewed on a computer screen at any time. Thus in the mindmap pictures presented below, plus signs to the side of coding categories indicate subtopics of further data, with examples and quotations from interview data supporting each category. However, the level of detail a single mindmap can contain means that expanded visual presentation in printed form is not feasible. I therefore present topics and subtopics of data in the form of tables and charts, where more detailed analysis data can be read more easily.

4.6.4 Developing a model

After the first few interviews with secondary school students, it became clear that English studies at secondary school affected students in a wide variety of ways, and that a simplistic “practical/personal” distinction would not suffice as an interpretation of the significance of English to young Icelanders.

Initial analysis used open coding and focused coding in a first attempt at axial coding, the axis explored being termed *The Classroom Experience*. It represented an attempt “to give coherence to the emerging analysis” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60), and was a first foray into compiling a holistic picture from the jigsaw of comments made by respondents. The title of this first attempt at coding is borrowed from Dörnyei’s paradigm of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005), where the third element is the L2 Learning Experience.

The classroom, or “the immediate learning environment and experience” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 105), being the central stage of English studies at school (even though evidently learning is also carried out elsewhere, for example at home or via a virtual learning environment), it constituted an effective spring-board for analysis. During open coding of the interviews I did my best to ‘bracket’ my own teacher-oriented classroom perspective, and step instead into the shoes of the students in

order to interpret the meaning of their experience as expressed in interviews (Creswell, 2007).

The questions asked about the data concerning student actions and experiences in the classroom were: *What is done? What is learned? What is felt? What metacognitive strategies are used?* Questions were answered in both positive and negative terms, since the interviews elicited both positive and negative feelings experienced in class, as well as information about what students felt was missing from their English studies. Questions were not asked about metacognition *per se*. However, participant responses brought to light aspects of metacognitive learning skills that would seem to have their origins in the classroom, or school system.

This first axial coding, done approximately one month after the first interview, was taken was based on data from two participants in the School Group (Addi and Birna) and one in the University Group (Bjarki), and yet with even such a small amount of data a wealth of themes appeared. Figure 6 below outlines the axial coding used in *The Classroom Experience*. Participant perceptions of the classroom are divided into three areas dealing with what learners do, feel and learn, and a fourth area concerned with metacognitive skills, such as learner responsibility.

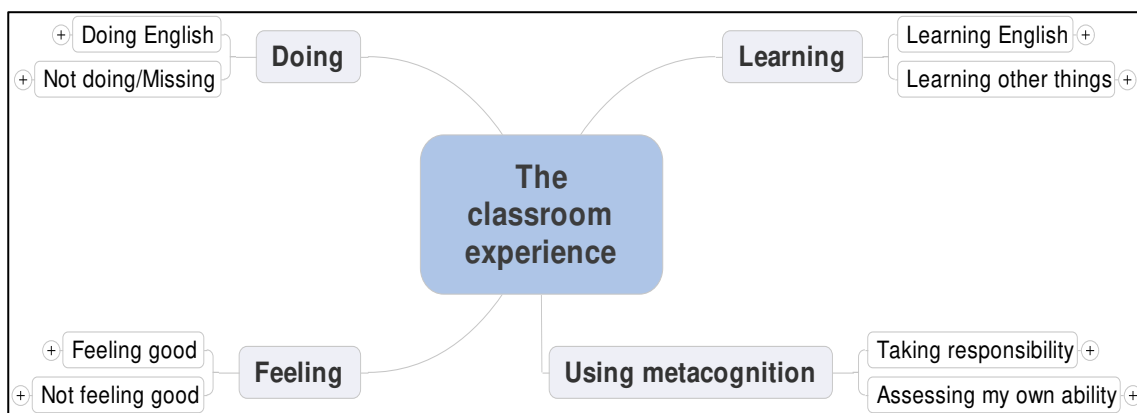


Figure 6 The Classroom Experience (analysis carried out in February 2010)

Figure 7 below charts this first analysis in more detail, with mindmap subtopics expanded. Participants mention what could be seen as traditional EFL classroom work such as writing essays, doing grammar exercises and taking examinations, although what they perceive themselves actually learning seems somewhat limited. That positive emotions are associated with the English classroom is clear, and great emphasis is placed on English being ‘fun’, despite the fact that textbooks are seen as boring and error-making as uncomfortable. A lack of autonomy is also apparent, with

participants looking to their teachers for syllabus-planning, evaluation and in-class entertainment, and settling for mediocre grades.

Doing a narrow but focussed analysis at the outset of the study gave me insight into what being a teenage student of English in Iceland means. I felt that although I may not have stepped into their shoes by this stage, I had at least untied my own shoelaces.

Two weeks later, the next stage in analysis centred on emerging themes of whether participants saw English as a foreign language, a second language or an additional first language. Here I used two pilot study interviews (with a university student and a self-employed businessman) and two interviews from the School Group in the main study. Although this avenue of analysis was soon abandoned, it showed that even early on in the analysis process dissonances were apparent in how participants talked about their actual and their desired proficiency. Although participants had a very positive view of their ability in English, and seemed to liken it to their ability in Icelandic, the words they used to talk about English suggested that it was a school subject needing ‘practice’ and ‘training’, not terms native speakers might use about their first language. Nonetheless, English is a language they choose to use in their lives outside school for reading, computer games, etc. Siggi, a pilot study participant, says that English has always been an easy subject for him at school and that he now reads in English as well as he does in Icelandic. He recalls being surprised about not knowing some words in vocabulary exercises at secondary school because he considered himself “pretty good” at English. Although he associates himself with all things British he knows that he would not be taken for a native speaker in Britain because there are fairly common words he is unsure how to pronounce. The level of proficiency he would like is the ability “just to talk so that it flows out of you and you can just let your thoughts wander and the language will follow”. A comment I wrote by hand on a first reading of the transcript reads that Siggi’s view of English seems to be “English is my L1 (except for the difficult stuff)”. The title of the mindmap featured in Figure 8 shows this dichotomy: participants seemed to wish that their ability in English was at native-speaker level despite the fact that they acknowledged lacking native-speaker fluency and accuracy.

The Classroom Experience, expanded (a)	
Doing	Learning
<i>Doing English</i>	<i>Learning English</i>
<p>Writing <i>essays/reports; exams/tests; grammar exercises from textbook; spelling</i></p> <p>Reading <i>novels; plays; class textbook; grammar tables/charts; about linguistics; about the history of English; about US/UK politics and other matters; feedback from teacher</i></p> <p>Speaking <i>oral exams; pair conversations; classroom chat; class and group presentations</i></p> <p>Listening <i>oral exams; pair conversations; classroom chat; watching films</i></p>	<p>Writing <i>essay structure; vocabulary; accuracy in writing; spelling</i></p> <p>Reading <i>reading skills; "literature": Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Salinger; vocabulary</i></p>
<i>Not doing/Missing</i>	<i>Learning other things</i>
<p>Reading/writing <i>learning scientific terms; loan phrases from French</i></p> <p>Listening/speaking/ <i>formal speaking practice; sufficient speaking practice</i></p> <p>school trip abroad or collaborative project</p> <p>choosing tasks</p> <p>anything I didn't know already</p>	<p>Origins of English, linguistics</p> <p>US/UK politics</p> <p>Various US/UK topics</p> <p>Study skills <i>using a dictionary; how to make presentations; working in groups</i></p> <p>Personal development <i>there is more that I can learn, even difficult literature can be fun; patience to translate rather than guess</i></p>

The Classroom Experience, expanded (b)	
Feeling	Using metacognition
<i>Feeling good</i>	<i>Taking responsibility</i>
<p>Safety <i>no stress in class; easy “piece of cake”; speaking English is no problem; no worry about next task - the last one went well; getting evaluation from teacher gives security; watching films is cosy</i></p> <p>Pride <i>I’m better at English than southern Europeans; getting good grades; reading literature I wouldn’t read otherwise</i></p> <p>Companionship <i>if the teacher is fun and knows my name; I can have close foreign friends if I can express myself deeply</i></p> <p>Pleasure <i>some novels; reading about linguistics; writing essays on interesting topics</i></p>	<p>I won’t read books unless they are fun Allowing the system to dictate how many courses I took <i>i.e. only taking compulsory courses doing enough</i> <i>don’t need to work to do ok; would only have worked harder if demands had been greater; do enough to get ok grades</i></p> <p>Teacher-based <i>I wouldn’t read these books if I didn’t have to; self-assessment dependent on grades; pleasure depends on teacher being fun; teachers’ responsibility to make difficult material fun</i></p> <p>Student-based <i>wanting to know what something means, not guessing; lack of ability might be my fault – I only took compulsory courses; learning from my own mistakes</i></p>
<i>Not feeling good</i>	<i>Assessing my own ability</i>
<p>Boring textbook with endless grammar Making errors in essay annoys me Some boring novels After school, not getting grades makes me insecure about my ability Wishing we could talk more</p>	<p>Getting good grades determines my ability Getting feedback shows my lack of ability If I don’t get a grade I can’t be sure of my ability Trusting ability from years ago - top of class in primary school</p>

Figure 7 The Classroom Experience, expanded to show subtopics

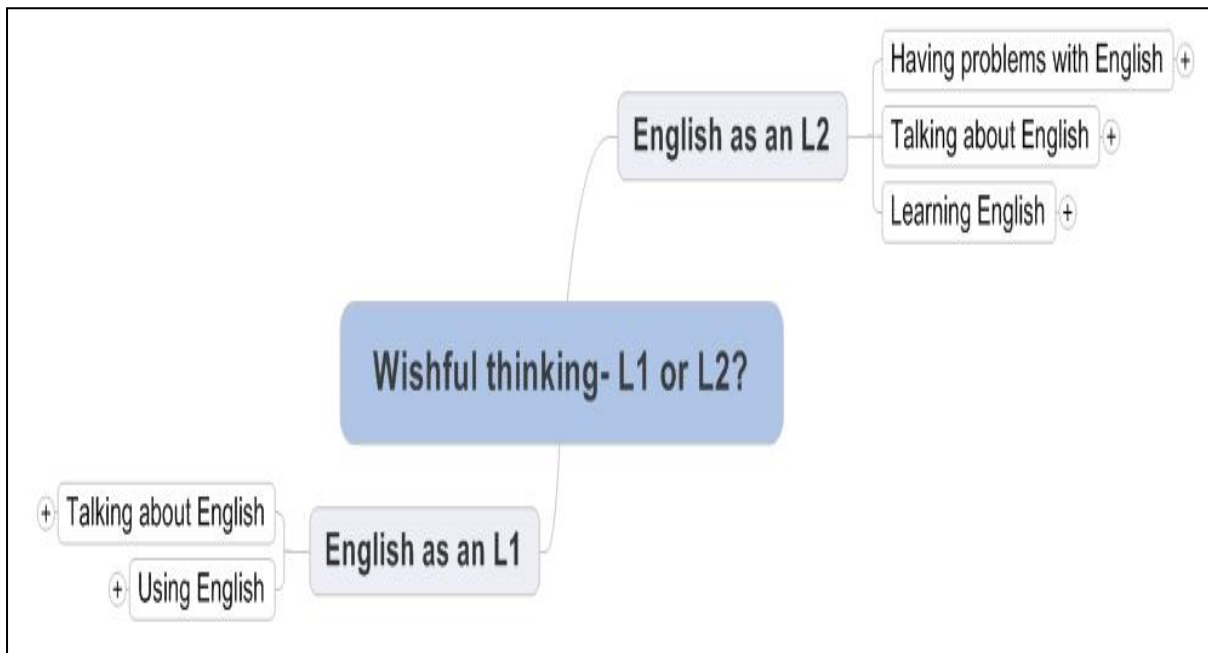


Figure 8 Wishful thinking? (analysis carried out in March 2010)

As more interviews were taken and transcribed, many responses seemed to fall into the domains of how participants felt about English at secondary school and what they learned in English classes. Four months into collecting interviews for the main study (that is, in April 2010), a further mindmap was created to log these aspects of personal relevance, along with observations of what seemed to lack relevance at secondary school and the implications of these findings. Figure 9 below illustrates the mindmap categories of personal relevance. Six interviews were used here, three from the pilot study and three from the main study. Data from the pilot study came from two university students (Siggi and Bára) and one young man in employment (Sveinn). Data from the main study were from two participants in the School Group (Addi and Birna) and one from the University Group (Bjarki). The area concerned with feelings includes aspects such as self-esteem due to high self-evaluation of proficiency, friendship, enjoyment (for example, of using English and of group work in class), and feeling secure (for example, about foreign travel). I have used the term ‘character-building’ to describe one participant’s classroom ambition. The cognitive area covers deepening proficiency in English and learning about the language, as well as gaining new knowledge in other fields, for example through class reading material or projects. Included in the category ‘Lacking relevance’ are negative perceptions such as boring set novels and grammar books and unnecessary speaking exercises (since speaking can be ‘picked up’). The main implications here are that more choice, more learning and simply more ‘doing English’ are necessary in

class. Learners also appear to need self-assessment strategies and encouragement to take responsibility for their own progress.

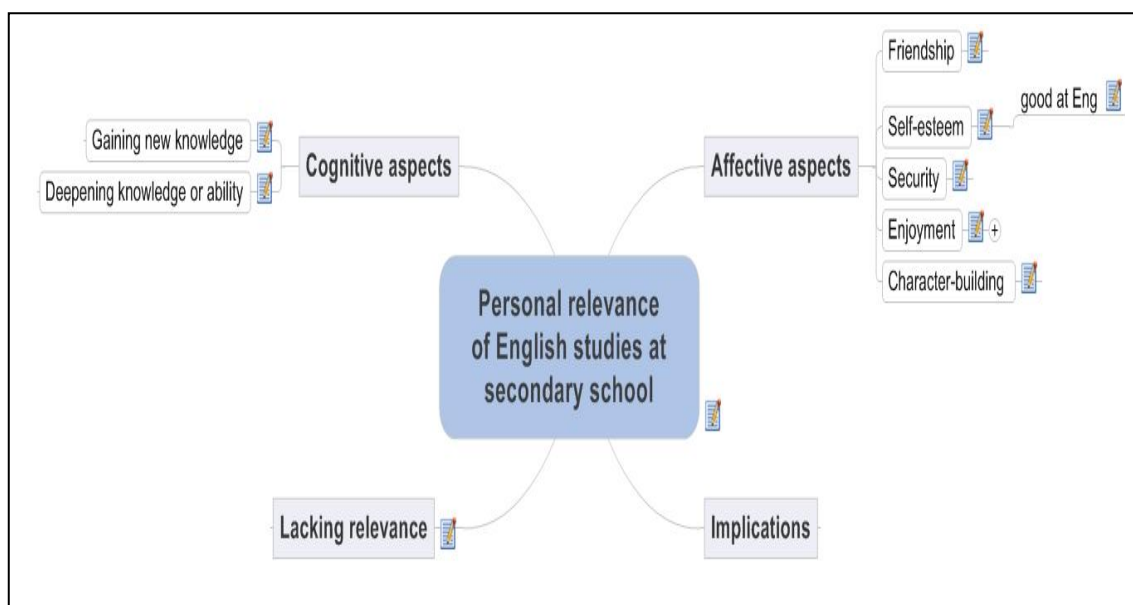


Figure 9 Personal relevance of English studies (analysis carried out in April 2010)

Six months later in October, nine months after interviewing for the main study started, all the interviews with the School Group had been taken and further analysis had been done. At this stage, four main areas of relevance of English studies at secondary school were isolated from this interview data. Although no attempt was made to make the data fit any previously presented paradigm, they were considered in the light of the work on possible selves of Markus and Nurius (1986) and on the ‘L2 Motivational Self’ of Dörnyei (2005, 2009b), as discussed in the review of the literature in Chapter 2. The four areas of relevance were given the terms of the *Inner Self*, the *Learning Self*, the *International Self*, and the ‘*English Self*’. The first three categories concerned English studies at school, whereas the ‘*English Self*’ had to do with students’ identity as English users outside school. The *Inner Self* concerned the strong common thread running through interviews of students’ strong feelings towards English studies. These feelings include pleasure, self-esteem and interest. This topic also concerned areas such as self-assessment, responsibility for learning, and boredom. The *Learning Self* dealt not with how students feel about their English learning, but about what they are learning at school: extended language proficiency, study and social skills, and new world knowledge accessed through the English language. Included in this coding category were student perceptions of the role and responsibility of the classroom teacher, as well as the circumstances during which students perceive

themselves to be learning English. As the coding name suggests, the *International Self* centred on student beliefs about how secondary school English affects their dealings with foreigners abroad and on their reasons for future travel abroad. This includes the idea of using English as a ‘stepping-stone’ in countries where one has not yet acquired the native language. On the other hand, in the *‘English’ Self* dealt with learners’ beliefs about the role of English in their lives in Iceland. Here we see participants using English at work and with non-Icelandic-speaking family members. The belief that it is the responsibility of Icelanders to be able to use English with foreigners in Iceland is also included here. Each *Self* was described on a sliding scale of presence or absence of elements, e.g. both positive and negative feelings towards English at secondary school. Figure 10 shows this ‘Four Self Model’. It is based on all the interviews in the School Group.

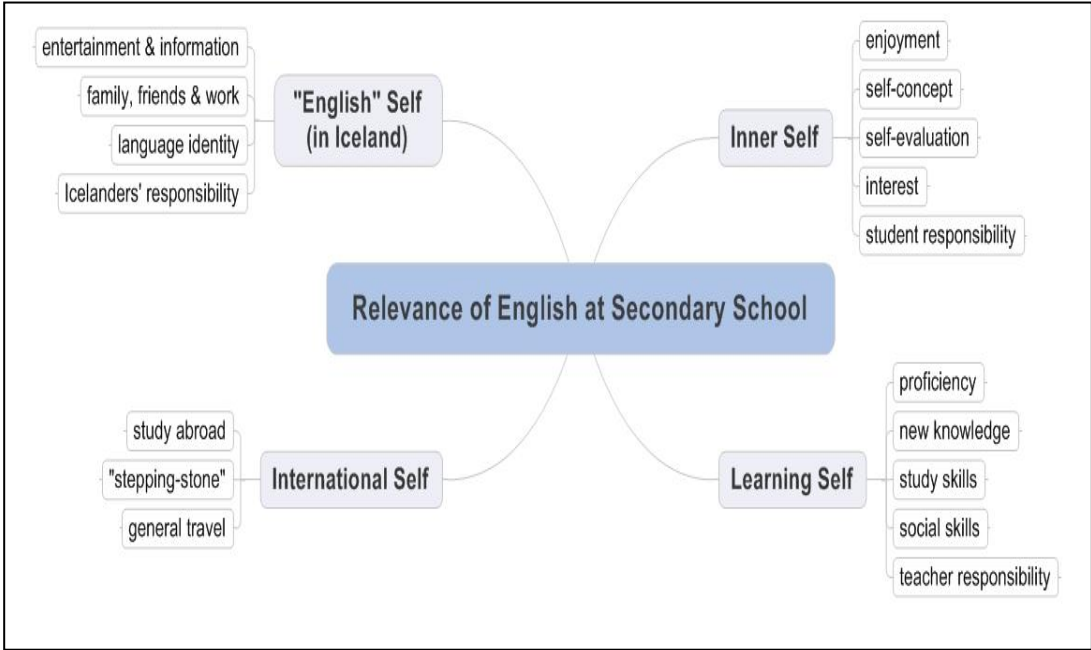


Figure 10 The relevance of English at secondary school (analysis carried out in October 2010)

Although *the Inner Self* and the *Learning Self* (corresponding to the domains of feeling and learning in earlier analysis) at this stage seemed viable coding categories, the *International Self* and the *‘English’ Self* were not, in fact, altogether clear-cut themes in the interview data. Although the vast majority of participants plainly mentioned using English, or planning to use English, for tourist travel or for living or studying abroad both in English- and non-English-speaking countries, the geographical location of their other uses of English was more difficult to pinpoint. Communicating

through computer-based technology, social networks and “collaborative virtual environments” (Jarmon, 2009, p. 3) meant that where participants were situated became less relevant. Participants in Iceland may, for example, use Skype to talk in English with non-Icelandic speaking friends abroad in much the same way as they communicate face-to-face with friends when they are abroad. Similarly, computer games involving virtual worlds give players a “sense of presence, co-presence, and place-presence” (Jarmon, 2009, p. 3) which transcends the boundaries of geographical location. Figure 11 shows that the ‘*English*’ *Self* coding category included positive and negative aspects of language identity (as do Dörnyei’s (2005) *Ideal and Ought-to Selves*). It shows also that being a user of English is not linked to a country context. Equally, not having the ability to use English (what I have called ‘*Englishless Self*’) is strongly felt as an undesirable position in which to be.

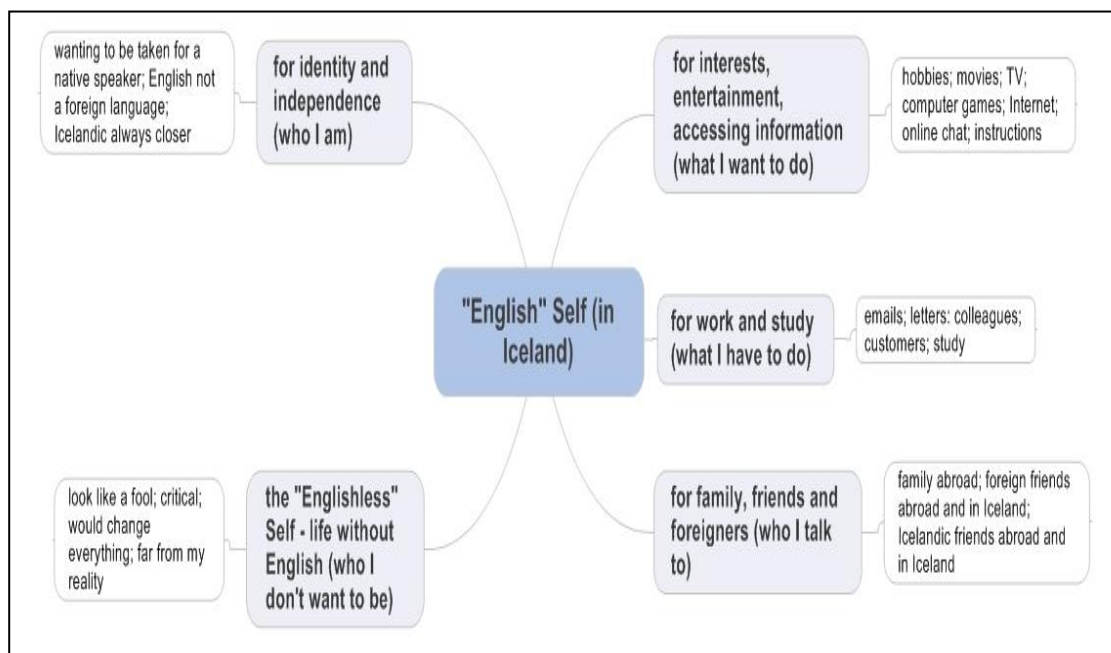


Figure 11 The ‘English’ Self (analysis carried out in March 2011)

Later, as more interviews with older participants at university and in employment were taken, transcribed and analysed, this four-themed framework evolved into a tripartite structure. The two large categories concerned with inner feelings and learning were maintained within one branch of relevance called *The study of English at secondary school*, while the ‘*English*’ *Self* and the *International Self* were combined into a second branch called, at this stage, *The context of English outside secondary school*. These three categories, based on data from all the interviews and with divisions into several sub-categories, are shown in Figure 12. At this stage it

began to be evident that data could be grouped into three main areas, that of what feelings participants express about English and studying English concerned their emotions (for example, pleasure because English is easy, anxiety about making mistakes and appearing stupid); what they perceive themselves to be learning (e.g. current affairs in Britain or America, collaborative work with peers); and how they use and regard English outside school (a vast range of uses including reading and Internet chat, acceptance of English as a necessary tool linked with pride about being Icelandic).

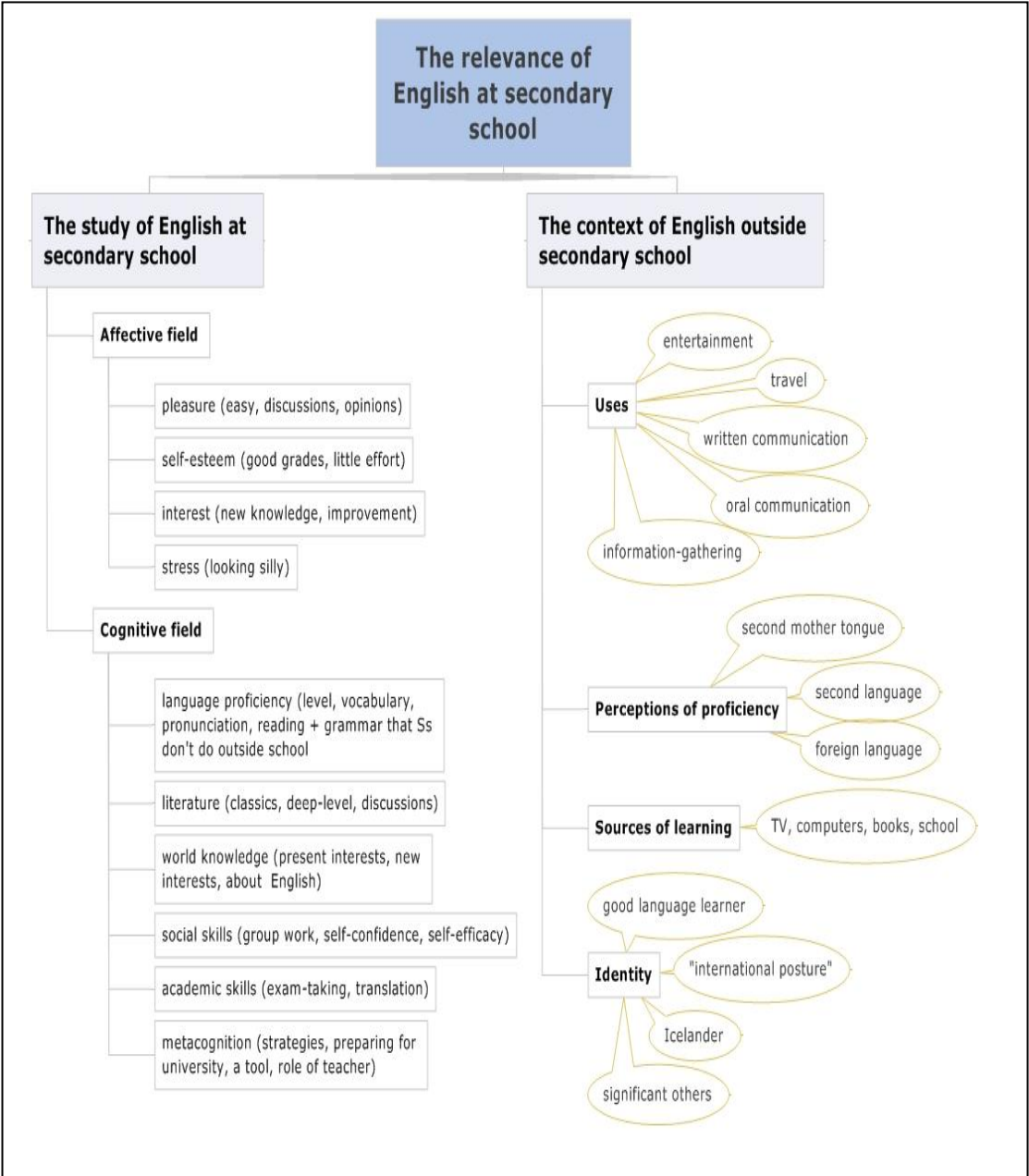


Figure 12 The relevance of English at secondary school (August 2011)

During more thorough analysis of data from participants in the University and Employment Groups, the three main categories were later

given the umbrella terms of *Affective*, *Cognitive*, and *Interactive*, covering the areas of what participants *felt* about English studies at secondary school, what they *learned* from these studies, and how they *used* English outside school and foresaw using English in the future. Elements from the *International Self* and the *'English' Self* were thus combined to form the *Interactive* domain. Throughout this iterative process of reassessing and integrating coding categories it seemed progressively appropriate not to differentiate between participants' use of English in Iceland and abroad, since virtual interaction via electronic mail, instant messaging systems, voice over Internet protocols, and virtual worlds form such a large part of their communication. It seemed that **what** participants were using English for was more important than **where** they were situated when engaged in using the language. Figure 13 shows sub-categories of the three domains, *Affective*, *Cognitive* and *Interactive*.

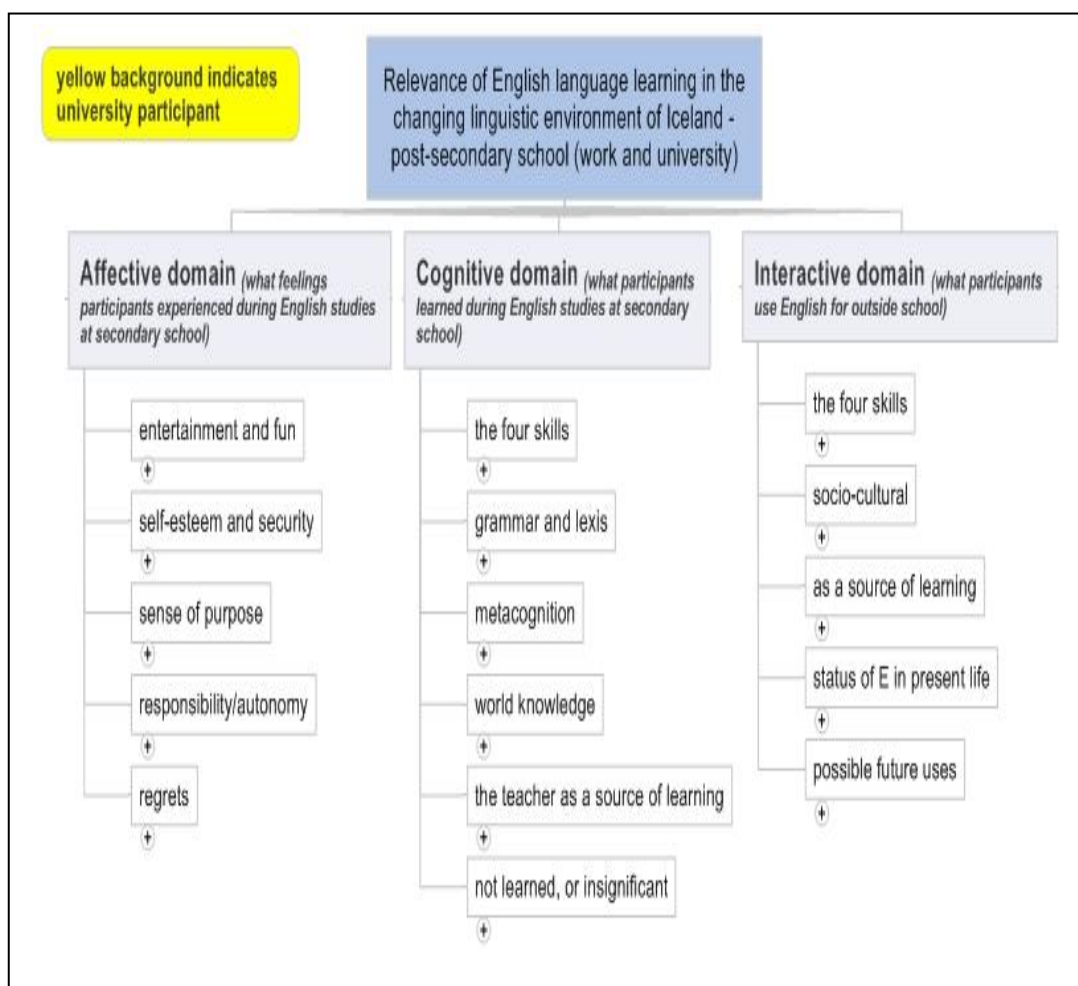


Figure 13 Three domains of relevance (analysis carried out in September 2011)

Each domain was further divided into sections with supporting examples of both positive and negative data. The expanded domains are

shown below as charts in Figures 14-16. What is immediately clear from Figure 14 is the amount of data under the headings ‘entertainment and fun’ and ‘self-esteem and security’. Learners appear to have positive feelings about English and studying English. Figure 15 shows that many participants talk about English at school in terms of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and that they also mention aspects of English they perceive as not taught, or taught but unnecessary. There are two particularly striking features of Figure 16. One is the variety of uses that participants have for English and the range of contexts in which they find English an essential tool, which include watching television, volunteer work abroad and attending lectures. The other is that television is perceived as a highly valuable source of learning, accounting for up to half the English proficiency participants have. Despite this belief, some participants prefer the security of watching television with English subtitles.

Relevance of English language learning: Affective domain				
entertainment and fun	self-esteem and security	sense of purpose	responsibility/autonomy	regrets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easy, no stress, no effort • effort: 3 of 23 say effort level was great or 9, 9 say little or 3-4 • classes themselves or teacher • books and close study e.g. symbols • films • essays on books • expressing ideas through writing • not fun enough to take non-compulsory courses • Literature as falling into another world • Poems, beautiful language • boring or depressing books • looking up words not fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good grades • better than other Europeans • praised for ability at lang. school in UK • confident about speaking • confidence • confident enough to take course thru English at uni • not wanting to make a fool of oneself • confidence not that good - has studied 6 years thru E, but is not good at languages • seeing self as a special case, better than peers • good to have read literature classics • fear of teacher changed to respect • fear of oral and listening exams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • useful job-related vocabulary • badly organised, not demanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher has responsibility for student learning • students are not autonomous learners • felt little pressure from T, put few demands on self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • little or no choice • little teacher feedback on writing • no teacher interest in English • learning pointless vocabulary • watching pointless films • would like NS proficiency but know does not have

Figure 14 Relevance of English language learning: Affective domain (analysis carried out September 2011)

Relevance of English language learning: Cognitive domain					
the four skills	grammar and lexis	metacognition	world knowledge	the teacher as a source of learning	not learned, or insignificant
<p>reading and writing <i>literature</i> <i>university-type textbooks</i> <i>writing formal and business emails</i> <i>writing only learned at secondary school</i> <i>spelling</i> <i>close reading, looking words up</i> <i>writing helps learn the language</i></p>	<p>more than basic grammar job-specific vocabulary difference between verbs and nouns correct usage lexis (learnt grammar in compulsory schooling)</p>	<p>reading strategies for university-type textbooks not taught strategies for dealing with new words not taught strategies for learning new words habit-forming looking words up, repeated checking not taught strategies for avoiding errors - just ask friend</p>	<p>famous authors new knowledge from textbook texts increased knowledge about known topics classics of literature discussions on contemporary issues, world outside Iceland</p>	<p>needs to speak better than students doesn't seem to explain objectives</p>	<p>anything at all extra words, e.g. this/that spelling not in practice, not by doing unchallenging, undemanding tasks strategies (see metacognition above) academic vocabulary</p>
<p>speaking and listening <i>pronunciation</i> <i>doing presentations</i> <i>travel vocabulary, ordering food, chatting at dinner parties</i> <i>little about WHAT</i> <i>speaking practice is done</i> <i>ability is seen as speaking ability</i> <i>aim is NS ability</i></p>					

Figure 15 Relevance of English language learning: Cognitive domain (analysis carried out September 2011)

Relevance of English language learning: Interactive domain				
the four skills	socio-cultural	as a source of learning	status of English in present life	possible future uses
<p>reading</p> <p><i>original version books, not translated, for fun</i></p> <p><i>information-gathering on the Internet</i></p> <p><i>instructions</i></p> <p><i>study material</i></p> <p><i>has always read more outside school</i></p> <p><i>online sources for assignments</i></p>	<p>cultural aspects of living abroad harder than language itself</p>	<p>learn a lot from TV, films, computers</p> <p>50% from TV, 50% from school and studying abroad</p>	<p>use more than expected, every day</p> <p>needs as much as Icelandic</p> <p>not part of Icelandic society without E</p> <p>expectation that you know E</p> <p>would be lost without E</p> <p>did lang. course in US, couldn't always express self well</p> <p>did lang. course in UK</p>	<p>probably abroad postgraduate, but worried about having to write in English</p>
<p>writing</p> <p><i>emails at work</i></p> <p><i>for searching on the Internet</i></p> <p><i>'chatting' on the Internet</i></p> <p><i>written assignments</i></p> <p><i>doesn't write</i></p>				
<p>listening and listening</p> <p><i>with friends and family in Iceland and abroad</i></p> <p><i>as a volunteer in Africa</i></p> <p><i>as part of a mountain rescue team</i></p> <p><i>at work, face to face and on Skype</i></p> <p><i>answering unexpected questions at work</i></p> <p><i>important not to make a fool of oneself</i></p> <p><i>lectures difficult, concentrate on words and miss content</i></p> <p><i>friends (NNS), but lacked fluency and speed</i></p> <p><i>audiobooks</i></p> <p><i>TV with E subtitles because doesn't understand all</i></p>				

Figure 16 Relevance of English language learning: Interactive domain (analysis carried out September 2011)

Finally, it was decided to rename the ‘domains’ and return to the ‘selves’ terminology (e.g. Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Mercer, 2011) that had been used at the beginning of analysis. I also felt that the fact that participants appeared very aware of their individual identity, their place within family, friends, and work groups, also meant that they should be allowed to present their voices as ‘themselves’ in their own right, or as persons-in-context (Ushioda, 2009). Figure 17 shows the final stage of analysis of all data which forms the basis of the paradigm presented at the end of the next chapter. Although this analysis was constructed as a mindmap it is presented here as a chart in order to allow for an adequate level of detail to be shown. Here we see that some changes have been made since the analysis shown in Figures 13-16. The Affective Self covers feelings of pleasure, security, responsibility and boredom, while the Cognitive Self deals with language skills, world knowledge, metacognitive skills and an absence of learning gains. Within the Interactive Self are the various uses for English that participants have outside the school context. For each subtopic one or two short quotes translated from the data are given, with the name and group (School, University or Employment) to which the participants belong.

It should be stressed at this juncture that at some points the coding categories might be seen to overlap. It could be argued that ‘autonomy’, for example, is learnt at school and should therefore be positioned within the Cognitive Self, or that learning social skills makes a learner feel good about him/herself and thus belongs to the Affective Self. Certainly a participant who expresses pleasure about perceived gains in proficiency in English is contributing data about feelings and about learning gains. On the other hand, Figure 17 below represents what I believe is the most appropriate category organisation of the data obtained in the study and presents the final stage of data analysis. The new linguistic context of Iceland in which English is used on a daily basis by a large proportion of the population (and in particular of the young adult population) calls for new perspectives and new configurations of data and concepts, which future research will hopefully support or seek to modify and improve.

The Relevance of English at Secondary School: perceptions, proficiency, and use		
Affective Self (perceptions and feelings)	Cognitive Self (proficiency and learning)	Interactive Self (use in Iceland and abroad)
fun, stress-free	the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing	work, study, information-gathering, travel, cooking, etc.
-quite high grades without having to be studying all the time (Linda, university) - one of the few books that you almost cry over (Jakob, employment and university)	- secondary school helped me tremendously (Magnús, employment) - she helps us with pronunciation (Soffia, school)	- if you go abroad you can get by completely (Soffia, school) - all kinds of material to do with work that you have to read (Baldur, employment)
self-esteem, security	cultural and world knowledge	social and family contacts, independence, entertainment, fun
- there are quite a lot of people who speak English in France, of course not very well (Addi, school)	- English literary works that I might otherwise not have read (Bjarki, university) - an article about medicine ... I'm going to study medicine, Birna, school	- there's something inside you that makes you write music in English (Kolbeinn, school) - How are you supposed to be able to do this and that if you don't know English? Soffia, school
responsibility, autonomy	metacognitive and social skills	life without English "very far from my reality"
-I could have studied better (Agla, university) - being at school wasn't at all bad, it's just that when you're 16, 17, 18 you can't be bothered with it (Tinna, employment)	- you have to keep on going steadily over the semester (Bogi, school)	- English is very important for me...I need it almost as much as Icelandic (Bjarki, university) - you sort of don't function properly in society if you don't know English (Hera, university)
boredom, pointlessness	- no gains and nothing learned	
- I slept through it and it was so boring and I didn't learn anything and I didn't understand anything (Egill, employment)	- I don't think high school English does anything much for students (Tómas, university)	

Figure 17 Relevance of English at secondary school (analysis as of February 2012)

4.6.5 Language considerations during data analysis

All data obtained for this study are in Icelandic. I have discussed earlier in this chapter the fact that interviews themselves were conducted and transcribed verbatim in Icelandic. Data analysis was thus conducted on the material in its original Icelandic form but notes, observations and analytical memos were made in English. Entire interviews were not translated into English. Quotes from data, however, were translated into English when analysis was written up in order to support themes and sub-themes (Birbili, 2000; Regmi, Naidoo, & Pilkington, 2010), since the thesis was to be written in English.

The question of foreign-language use in a qualitative research project has been little researched and there seem to be many contrasting viewpoints on the problems involved in not using the same language (frequently English) for gathering data and writing up research (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). In much of the literature on interviewing for qualitative research, language use is simply not mentioned (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Nunan, 1992; Wolcott, 2001). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) limit discussion of language factors to the proficiency and cultural acceptability of interpreters. Any transferral of unvoiced experience from the participant's mind to the written words of a researcher involves inevitable "disjunction" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 10) due, among other things, to the limitations of language to describe experience and the difficulty of exploring experience to the full (Polkinghorne, 2007). Further threats to trustworthiness may present themselves when a researcher both takes interviews and translates them (Temple & Young, 2004), or transcribes interviews in a language that is not his or her mother tongue. It has been claimed that few researchers are fluent in the language of the group being studied (Temple & Young, 2004), and that translation of quotes should be done by a professional translator (van Nes, Abma, Jonsson, & Deeg, 2010). Translation of quotations from interviews in this study was done by me, using what is hoped will be considered "elegant" free translation" (Birbili, 2000, p. 3). I have lived in Iceland for over 30 years and use the language on a daily basis. When first in Iceland, I took university courses in Icelandic as a second language, and Icelandic is now the language I speak at home. I also have experience in translating a variety of texts from Icelandic to English, and in proof-reading in English. However, help from native Icelandic speakers (colleagues and family members) was solicited when interview passages of poor audio quality were being transcribed.

This having been said, to strengthen trustworthiness one entire interview translated from the original Icelandic is included in the Appendices.

4.7 Trustworthiness

There has been a tendency in recent years for qualitative research to adopt criteria such as ‘trustworthiness’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘quality’ in favour of the traditional terminology of internal and external validity used in quantitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Shinebourne, 2011). Acknowledgement of researcher background, credible data obtained by building rapport with participants, rich description through careful interpretation and triangulation with other research are all ways to enhance the quality validity of a study (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2002; Mortari and Tarozzi, 2010, Trochim, 2006).

The study establishes construct validity by defining major constructs such as ‘relevance’ and ‘motivation’ in the Introduction. The quantity of interviews increases internal validity, which could nonetheless be compromised if respondents fall victim to “participant bias” (Robson, 2002, p. 102) and give answers they consider the interviewer expects. Responses from the pilot study, however, suggest that this will not be the case, and the fact that none of the respondents in the main study is personally known to the interviewer also strengthens internal validity. Extracting recurring themes through coding and clustering (Miles & Huberman, 1994) from interviews with many individuals who are not known to each other is a further boost to trustworthiness. Data collection and methods of analysis have been documented in order to strengthen external validity, although the aim of this qualitative research is not on generalising findings.

Authenticity is enhanced through interviews being recorded, transcribed verbatim and quoted from in the published data. Inter-researcher reliability is substantiated through consultation with other researchers in similar fields on analysis of some interview data. Since “the statements and writings of colleagues are data as much as those of laymen” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 254), research findings were considered in the light of results from other research projects currently being undertaken into the role and place of English in Iceland today. Authenticity and validity have been strengthened by changing names of respondents and other identifying information in order to preserve anonymity of data.

Efforts were made to conduct interviews in both urban and rural situations, and in a variety of tertiary education establishments and employment environments. Data from other sources, such as National Curricula and reports on youth well-being carried out by Rannsóknir & greining (The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis) for the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Kristjánsson, Guðmundsdóttir, Pálsdóttir, Sigfúsdóttir, & Sigfússon, 2008) were referred to. Rich data from interviews, using probing and clarification, are an important basis for this phenomenological investigation of the notion of relevance. It was hoped that, through a grounded theory approach to data, each interview would “elicit views of this person’s subjective world” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 29) and lead to a comprehensive representation of the topic.

In any research involving participants’ responses to questions, be it through questionnaires or interviews, written or oral, the researcher must inevitably ask himself or herself the questions: *Are these answers truthful?; Is this participant telling me the truth?; Do these responses represent what he or she thinks is expected or appropriate?*. By not giving participants the interview framework before the interview took place, it was hoped that participants would answer spontaneously, and therefore truthfully, not having the opportunity to make up responses they considered “appropriate”, possibly by doctoring the truth.

Trustworthiness of responses in this study is also strengthened by the fact that many participants discuss behaviour which does not portray them in a good light (for example, laziness, lack of effort; reading online notes on a literary text rather than reading the book itself; reading part of a novel instead of the entire novel). It seems to me that participants’ willingness to admit to what could be seen as irresponsible behaviour (knowing, as they did, that I was an English teacher myself) suggests that other responses, on less emotionally-fraught topics, were not untruthful. As mentioned above, one interview translated into English is included in the Appendices.

4.7.1 Triangulation of data

Triangulation of data is effected by various means in the study, and primarily by collecting data from many participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Responses to open-ended interviews were obtained from two different age groups of students and young people, during and after completion of secondary education. Findings were compared between these groups and were discussed with other researchers working on the role of English in Iceland.

Triangulation of findings with other studies and transferability to different contexts are discussed in Chapter 6.

4.8 Summary

In this chapter the study was presented. Data collection was described and sampling, participants and interviews were accounted for. Methods of data analysis were given and diagrams were supplied to illustrate the lengthy analytic process. Finally questions concerning translation and trustworthiness were discussed.

In Chapter 5, the results of this study will be presented.

5 Chapter 5 Analysis and Results

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present the findings of the study. Firstly the findings on secondary school students' views of the practical and personal relevance of English at school will be given, how English relates to their lives outside school, and their future views of themselves as second-language users (here called the School Group). Following this, I will present the retrospective views of the two older age groups, of English at secondary school and its relevance to their present study or work situation: university students (the University Group) and young people in employment (the Employment Group). The chapter concludes with an overview of participant perceptions of the classroom context and a summary of what all three participant groups have in common.

5.2 Opening notes

5.2.1 Terminology

For convenience, findings have been organised according to principal coding categories. As we saw in the previous chapter, three main coding areas were established that distinguished a) an affective field of feelings connected with English and English studies at secondary school, b) a cognitive field of what was gained in the learning context through English classes at secondary school (including metacognitive skills) and c) an interactive field covering what participants used English for outside the context of school. These fields coincide with the model presented in the next chapter.

Taking into account previous work done on the concept of self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Markus & Nurius, 1986;

Mercer, 2011; Ushioda, 2009), these fields were later given the terms the **Affective Self**, the **Cognitive Self** and the **Interactive Self**. It should be stressed, however, that these selves are not proposed in conflict with the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b), but rather as an expansion of the paradigm and especially of its third element, the L2 Learning Experience. No attempt was made during analysis and coding to impose the three components of the L2 Motivational Self System onto the interview data, but rather to let the material ‘speak for itself’. Although the L2 Self within Dörnyei’s paradigm is clearly seen in terms of ‘future’ and ‘possible’, I am using the term ‘self’ here in the broader sense of “a person’s essential being that distinguishes them from others” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). ‘Self’ is thus construed here as incorporating the learner as a holistic entity and including a wide range of “language learners’ current experiences and self-states” (Ushioda, 2009, p. 255). In the new linguistic context arising in Iceland, where the first language is used at home and for many general purposes but where a major foreign language, English, is becoming part and parcel of everyday life for people in all walks of life, it would seem that using the ‘other’ language will affect Icelanders’ self-perceptions and identity. Consequently, there is a need for embracing an open view of what the process of language learning involves and how it is linked to negotiating identities (Norton, 2010). A history student, a shop assistant or a care worker adds to that part of his or her identity the capacity (or incapacity) to perform that role through the medium of English when necessary. This ‘English-using self’ thus becomes an aspect of identity since, regardless of whether one *wants* to use English and regardless of how much *effort* and *accuracy* using English involves, the presence of English in Iceland has become a fact of life. An exhaustive discussion of the constructs of self and identity is beyond the scope of this study but further research into language use as a factor of identity in contexts of extensive exposure to, and use of, English would certainly be worthwhile.

5.2.2 Presentation

In the quotations from interviews “...” represents words omitted from a longer passage of speech. Words in *italics* were spoken in English. Quotations in normal font have been translated from Icelandic by the researcher. Translation may not at all times be word-for-word but attempts rather to be an “‘elegant’, free translation” (Birbili, 2000, p. 3).

5.2.3 Themes arising within the data as a whole

Generally speaking, it seems true to say that all participants link English with enjoyment and with necessity. It appears that a lack of English would impoverish them. It is hard to make a clear-cut distinction between practical and personal aspects of their daily or almost daily use of English. English is commonly used in participants' daily lives for watching films, TV series and news programmes, speaking English with non-Icelandic family members and with friends, listening to popular songs, searching for information on the Internet, and sending work-related emails. Some participants also read university course material in English and books for pleasure, while many play computer games and take part in computer chat groups. For the most part, participants in all three groups (School, University and Employment) are happy with their present level of proficiency in English, although the productive skills of some appear to be fairly basic. English is of immense practical use for travel since participant responses indicate that "there's always someone who knows English". All in all, English seems to be so much a part of young Icelanders' lives that the idea of having their knowledge of English wiped out is "dreadful...a total catastrophe", as one informant suggests. Not knowing English would involve an entire change of lifestyle and, in the words of one participant, "would make the world much smaller".

5.3 The School Group: findings from interviews

5.3.1 Affective Self

Participants in the School Group came from a total of ten secondary schools. At the time interviews were taken, they were between the ages of 18 and 21 and had taken an average of 5.1 courses in English at secondary school (each course being approximately 16 weeks long and two courses being taken in one academic year). Participants came forward for a variety of reasons. The fact that they were approached initially by a teacher at their school may have influenced their decision to take part in the study. Some may have been attracted by the chance of skipping a class, but others were evidently keen to be interviewed, giving up a day off or staying on at school after classes. One informant stipulated that the interview should neither be difficult nor involve speaking English, and he seemed to believe from the outset that his negative perceptions of English at school might contrast with other participants' views.

School Group participants clearly have a range of feelings towards studying English and towards English as a whole. By and large, the English classroom is a comfortable place to be, with little to cause students stress or discomfort. Classes often entail doing entertaining tasks, such as watching films and discussing novels. Films may be seen merely as a more enjoyable task than doing grammar exercises, but some tasks are cause for real merriment, as Soffia explains:

..it was difficult to make something up, a sort of dialogue. It was really fun and the whole class was in stitches, we laughed and it was so stupid and funny and it was, I thought it was really fun anyway... It was quite difficult but, still it was good fun and it turned out very funny.

English itself is seen an enjoyable language. Jokes, for example, are funnier in English than when translated into Icelandic. English is easy to pronounce and easy to use: “actually very easy to talk English”. Most students feel secure about their level of proficiency in the language and express few feelings of anxiety about forthcoming tasks or tests.

Although Númi describes his own English proficiency as “not exceptionally good”, he has this to say about secondary school students in general:

...like lots of people I know, probably most people at school here, when there’s an English exam coming up, they all think “Oh it’s only English, I’ll pass”. People aren’t worried about English, not at all – they maybe study the evening before the exam, take the final exam, pass it.

Birna seems to feel only pleasure at the prospect of an upcoming group assignment soon, even though she is unsure what it will entail:

I think [the teacher] is going to choose some topic. Last year it was sports, and we got to choose within that, do PowerPoint and an essay, and I’m looking forward to that.

English teachers themselves constitute another source of enjoyment in English classes. Although a few are seen as bad teachers or are not well regarded for other unspecified reasons, many are mentioned in very positive terms. They are funny, they teach well, and classes are calm and stress-free. Some are praised specifically for listening to their students, chatting to them, being firm and encouraging, or just for being “livelier” than the norm. Whether the (in the main) relaxed attitude of students in

English classes extends also to teachers could form a further area for research.

Teachers who allow students to choose study topics are probably particularly well-regarded, since being able to make personal choices links closely to enjoyment. Writing in English, for example, can be fun, if one chooses one's topic, as Bogi explains:

Well, anyway what I think, when you can write about your own interests, that's the best, because writing about some nonsense is so boring.

The fact that students find English at school pleasurable is undoubtedly linked to the fact that good grades (or what participants perceive as good grades) can be achieved with little effort. When asked how hard, on a scale of 1-10, they are willing to work to learn English at school, many give a value below five. "English is my easiest subject" says Ingi. Jóhanna admits being quite willing to expend effort on English, but adds "but even so, I don't really need to slave over it". A participant who had failed four subjects the previous term said he had never had to repeat an English course.

There are, of course, exceptions to this general rule. Daníel admits to not liking English and not knowing it well:

I think you often like what you're good at best. You know, I can see that the people in my class who are good at English, they really enjoy doing it, they understand it ...but because I'm so insecure about English and I find it hard to read books, and that's why I don't enjoy it so much. ... I've been in English just to learn it but I haven't thought about whether I like it or not. I just do it, because I have to, never given a thought to whether I find it particularly fun.

As far as he is concerned, English is a "chill-out subject" only for other students. Although, interestingly enough, his lack of proficiency does not prevent him from attaining good grades (he is one of the few who say they put effort into English), Daníel is worried about using English in university study:

... of course most of the books at the university are in English and I'm a bit stressed out about how I'm going to cope with that, since my vocabulary isn't so good and so on, but I'm sure I'll manage...

Many students talk about being sure of future good grades. Teacher demands seem to remain constant, meaning that Addi can be unfazed by his upcoming presentation: “the [presentations about] the movie and about London went well, so I don’t expect any great change there...”.

Study material at school also provokes emotions in participants. Some are excited by being introduced to new areas through textbooks and other readings, while others find reading and discussing novels enjoyable. Birna realises that reading material on a broad variety of topics is an attempt to suit a wide range of students, since “what I find boring others might find interesting”. Grammar exercises and other “ordinary tasks” or “textbook stuff” are thought by few to be fun, while some participants find all study material and tasks boring (“something you really don’t want to read about, camels in Australia or some such rubbish”) unless they are connected with student’s own lives and interests:

I like it a lot. I think these classes are more useful because the ones before were mainly just what do you know in English, then you take an exam, but now it’s helping you with real life.

...writing about your hobbies is the best.

Many participants experience having little choice either in study material or tasks, but when this is an option students welcome it:

No, nothing like that [tasks involving choice] that I can think of, it’s just very *basic*, the same for everyone.

I like it when we get to choose something, not always some set text.

For students who are shy (as in the case of Birna, who spent all her primary school years abroad, only returning to Iceland at the age of 16), group work gives them an opportunity to meet new people and makes a welcome change from individual tasks:

Yes, it was a group. It was good fun, a change from other courses.

The School Group’s assuredness about getting good grades reflects a more wide-reaching self-confidence in their standing as users of English. Their self-esteem is given a boost not only by their positive view of their ability in English but also their superiority to other Europeans. Addi talks, for instance, about possibly moving to France, where people speak English

“not very well, of course, but you can understand them”. Another talks about her monolingual pen friend’s envy of her plurilingualism, and yet another pities foreign tourists in Iceland who do not know English and contrasts it with her own situation of being able to express herself with foreigners when she goes abroad, be it as a tourist or an exchange student at university. Participants were not asked to demonstrate their level of English proficiency and were not tested in any way. However, the terms they use to express their competence and their needs suggest a low level of language competence, which may mean that they would encounter difficulties expressing themselves in demanding circumstances. Hannes, for example says:

...you can always get by in other countries. For example, if you go abroad then there’s always somewhere someone who speaks English. . . . Obviously, it’s useful to know the language, if there aren’t subtitles with a film or something.

To sum up, it is evident that these school learners connect a wide range of emotions to English and the study of English. Positive feelings linked to entertainment and self-confidence are apparent although negative feelings, particularly about study material, are also mentioned.

5.3.2 Cognitive Self

Moving on from how participants feel about their English studies at secondary school, another coding area isolated during analysis concerned what participants said they learned in English classes. Briefly, during analysis I grouped data in this category into sub-areas of proficiency in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, general world knowledge, academic and metacognitive skills, and social skills. The last item in this list is situated here because strengthened social skills appeared in the data to be something participants felt they had gained in English classroom. Certainly it would be true to say that they also seemed to experience positive feelings towards these gains; however, these were emotions felt not *towards* the classroom subject, English, but *as a result of* what went on in the classroom. Included here is what participants felt was missing from their study of English in terms of proficiency. Also accounted for in this section are participants’ perceptions of teacher responsibility, and of the sources of their proficiency in English.

Generally speaking, participants believe that their English language skills have improved during their years at secondary school. Vocabulary is

often mentioned, with many participants saying that encountering new vocabulary is the most valuable thing they have done in English classes. Although for some this involves rote-learning which they see as pointless, others do tasks they find demanding and useful, such as making up sentences using ‘new’ words, and finding and learning vocabulary connected with possible future jobs. Reading news articles and looking up unknown words is also seen as useful.

Some participants are aware that knowing more vocabulary brings with it better understanding and a greater expressive ability. Birna says that “it’s helped me tremendously to get this vocabulary and to understand more than before and be able to express myself better”. More advanced vocabulary (in this case gained through reading literature at school) is also seen as a necessary prerequisite for deeper thinking through the medium of English since, “when things are getting deeper, you somehow need deeper vocabulary to explain them”. Others see little purpose in learning lists of words out of context. Telma seems ambivalent about vocabulary work, claiming that it is useful and yet at the same time implying that it is unnecessary:

I’ve been learning loads of new words and we make wordlists, we look for words. I think that’s the most useful thing, learning new words. *[Yes, just simply learning new words?]* Yes, you know, since you basically know everything else, and it’s just words that you’re learning now. *[Are there many words that you don’t know?]* Not usually. If you’re reading a sentence, if you see a word you don’t know but you manage to read the sentence anyway, then you sort of see what it means yourself.

Apart from learning words, participants also improve their understanding of register and appropriateness: difficult words are used when writing, but the easiest words possible in speech, to ensure that one’s interlocutor will understand. Soffía points out that the language of movies contains incorrect usage and contemporary slang, and that it is good to know “the old words...the difficult words” that she can only learn at school.

Proficiency in the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking is mentioned by participants. A girl who sings in a band is particularly pleased about receiving instruction in pronunciation. General fluency is assumed to be gained from watching movies and many participants rate their own speaking proficiency highly. Nonetheless, although there may be oral exams, some students appear to speak more English outside school

than in class. One reason participants give for this lack of systematic speaking practice is that students are shy about talking in the classroom. Daniél is certainly reluctant to speak English and would appreciate being pushed (the responsibility of the teacher to put pressure on students is clear here):

I've got away with hardly talking at all... it's not often that I speak English in class, actually it's very seldom...I think it's necessary to talk, to make us talk more even though it's difficult and boring at first, and maybe stressful, but I think it's absolutely necessary. It just must be.

Much in-class emphasis in Iceland is put on reading and writing English, and unsurprisingly the School Group says that their skills in these areas have improved. For some, the improvement is in reading fluency. Edda, who, at 21, has returned to school to finish her matriculation exams (after completing vocational training), has moved from having to concentrate deeply on each page of a novel to her present level of ability where “you don't realise that you've been reading an English book”. Another example is Jóhanna, who is using the same science textbook in her fourth year at school that she used in her first year (not the same chapters!), and is finding it much easier to understand now, although she may also have improved understanding of the subject (a ‘schema’) that helps her. Other participants mention the fact that they have learned new strategies for reading literature, for example, discussing not only what is happening in the story but also “...why, and what the author is trying to say”. Literature has also often formed the basis for writing activities, and broadly speaking participants believe that their written English has improved as a consequence of school writing tasks. Paradoxes can be observed in the comments of some participants, such as Trausti who claims that he has always found English easy (“I've never had to work hard at English”), that writing poses few problems (“I can sit in front of the computer and write a 10-page essay in English and I don't have to spend hours and hours looking up this and that word because I just know it”), and yet says that he is poor at spelling in English and that his main gain in English at secondary school has been in writing. Kolbeinn also mentions having improved his writing skills, but sees this more as “polishing” his proficiency than learning something new.

English grammar is taught at secondary school level in Iceland, although few participants in this study give it special mention. Typical

space-fill exercises in grammar books and course workbooks are viewed as boring and minimally useful, but possibly necessary. What has been of most value to one participant, who is conscious of her native-English-speaking relatives sometimes making what she sees as grammatical errors, is learning grammar. What is perceived as desirable both in writing and speaking, however, is accuracy in actual use (which is seen in opposition to being able to fill in correct answers in a workbook). Here the Affective/Cognitive coding overlaps due to the fact that self-esteem seems to be closely linked to accurate language use. If “you use some big words and then use them wrong, you look like an idiot”, which means that learning to use the language correctly (which students do at secondary school) is important. According to Vala, who sets such store by learning grammar, credibility is also enhanced by using English correctly:

Because it's nicer to talk right and people pay more attention to you if you talk right. ...Someone makes mistakes when he's writing, then he's stupid or an idiot. He doesn't know what he's talking about, that's how it is, you know. I don't want to be the idiot who's always making mistakes.

Other less specified gains from studying English at secondary school include preparation for university study, a developing ability to think in English when speaking English, and self-confidence about using English. Despite a fairly universal feeling of competence in English, many participants at secondary school perceive room for improvement and believe that they will continue to make progress in English after matriculation. Although Daníel has a poor view of his own proficiency, he also believes that all Icelandic secondary school students lack total competence in English:

...I'm not saying I'm the worst but there are some who are better than me, maybe most of them. Even though they're better I don't think they're good enough to live in the States or in Britain and talk and talk and talk and talk and talk, you know. Of course there's no-one in secondary school that good that he doesn't need to learn more, there's no-one at all I don't think that good at English that he doesn't need to learn more, you can always improve.

A few claim that they have no need to improve their ability in English, for example Addi, who says this about his own proficiency:

I think it's just very good, I'm very happy about it at any rate. I don't think I really have to, not to improve, not that much, I think it's quite okay.

Soffía is aware of no gaps in what she is learning at school. In class, she watches films and does listening tasks, makes videos, reads and presents books, and does grammar exercises. It is her belief that English study "is so varied that I don't actually see there's anything missing".

Kolbeinn, however, is ambivalent about whether he has gained from studying English at secondary school. It seems that the more he talks about his gains in writing, the less significant they become to him:

I'm basically sure that, basically sure that your vocabulary and, and, and just your writing proficiency, how good I am at writing, I think it would be quite different. ... But based on how, maybe, my generation uses the Internet and movies and all of that such a lot now, I don't think there would be any tremendous difference. But there would definitely be some difference. ... I wouldn't be able to define, find out, you know, I wouldn't be going into the themes of books or stories, or characters, you know, finding the inner character of some person. Yes, of course there would definitely be a difference, but, [*a 4-second pause*], oh I don't really know, yes, yes, there would always be a difference but [*a 3-second pause*] not much. ... I don't think there would be a huge difference.

English classes at secondary school do not only provide language learning but also 'world knowledge' which is of value to many students. Several participants value the opportunity they have had to read works of literature (mainly the classics, such as plays by Shakespeare, but also contemporary novels and poetry) that they would not otherwise have read. Reading "high-quality English literature" is seen as prestigious (although reading *Moby Dick* and *Oliver Twist*, as one participant would like to do, may be unrealistic in the original version). One participant has been reading about linguistics, realises that he is "rather interested in it", and thinks he may have found his university specialisation. Others mention having learnt, through project work, about movies, handiwork, famous people, England during the Second World War, teenage culture, politics, and the USA, and for one participant at least it is this content which has given her more than learning about the English language itself. English even helps with learning French, since the meaning of unknown French words can often be inferred from known English words.

Participants learn more than facts in English classes, and varying methods of assessment seem to help some to realise their own learning strengths and weaknesses. Continuous assessment, for example, seems to boost qualities such as focus and perseverance.

It took some weeks of absence due to illness for Edda to appreciate how “rusty” one could become without school instruction. Bogi has learned that working “steadily over the term” suits him better than taking a final exam because he has “a lot of trouble studying for final exams”. Númi, who is not conscious of having made any language gains whatsoever in English at secondary school, who sat throughout class before coming to be interviewed without opening his case or getting out a pen, and who has never read an entire book, nonetheless has clear opinions about second-language learning. He believes that listening practice in a familiar foreign language can be beneficial, although he is aware that no-one makes progress from watching an unsubtitled film in a language of which he or she has no knowledge:

[watching films] may not be the most wonderful way to learn, if you were, if I told you to just watch this movie, it doesn't have subtitles, it's English and you don't know any English. You wouldn't actually learn anything, but since the foundation is there, it's an okay kind of practice.

Strategies for learning, for example for vocabulary acquisition, do not feature highly in participants' comments on their English classes. About encountering new words, Kolbeinn says:

I mean, sometimes there are words in books and sentences and you have no idea what they mean, so then maybe you try to find them out.

Telma normally guesses new words from context. Trausti sees his vocabulary increasing through reading more demanding literature and knows that he lacks the self-discipline to do such reading on his own. On the other hand, he seems at a loss to explain why he finds English easy, claiming at different points in the interview that this must result from good teaching at primary school or from watching television as a child. Little mention is made of how vocabulary or grammar are learnt, although some participants make vocabulary lists and do workbook exercises.

Perhaps confidence in one's own ability cannot be taught directly, but Soffía and Unnar have both benefited from their respective teachers' belief in their capabilities. Unnar says of his teacher:

Of course Elsa is a wonderful teacher, and she had tremendous belief that I could do better, which I did later on. It's this encouragement, that's the thing I've got most out of English.

However, teachers' attention can also affect students' self-perceptions and confidence negatively. One student describes the indignation she felt when her teacher likened her manner of talking English to that of a low-class character in a set book, "as if my aunt was on heroin and had a baby when she was 15".

The role of the teacher in the English classroom is commented on by many School Group participants. As mentioned above, teachers' attitudes and behaviour can encourage or discourage students. Other teachers may be passive, as Númi's seems to be, since he was allowed to sit throughout class without getting his books out of his case. Similarly Daníel has seldom spoken English in class. Passivity is seen as a bad thing, as participants appear to crave a certain level of discipline, talking in terms of wanting teachers to "make you talk more" and "getting away with it". It seems that study should be fun but must also be useful in terms of learning. Teachers, however, play important roles in explaining difficult material, providing assessment and being entertaining. Bogi is critical of a teacher who "never explained [essay-writing] well enough". Many participants depend on teacher evaluation for assessment of their English proficiency. When asked how he evaluates his proficiency, for example, Addi replies, "I don't know, I just look at the grade and am pleased or not." The bottom line in learning English at secondary school seems to be that teachers must be entertaining, although what this actually entails is hard to pinpoint. Having a "boring" teacher leads to bad grades. Having a teacher one dislikes means one is unwilling to study. Hannes describes school life thus:

It is fun, the social life is good, but there's a very big difference between teachers. Some are very good, and some are fun, but others are, they need to get their act together better. You know, don't understand students well enough, don't listen to them and so on.

For Kolbeinn, who at 21 is slightly older than some others in the School Group, the teacher seems to have become a figure of respect. He no longer demands that teachers be entertaining, but rather seeks their positive view of him as a student. He puts this down to his own age and increasing maturity:

... maybe it's when you're in more advanced courses ... Then it may be that it's like your reputation in the eyes of the teacher is more important, what you're doing, how well you're doing, and if you're matriculating soon then you certainly want to get more than just a pass grade. So I think that everyone matures a bit in each course, the further on you are, you've gained more knowledge every single semester, every single year.

A few participants make comments suggesting that, through English classes at school, they strengthen social skills, or 'interpersonal' and 'intrapersonal' intelligences (H. Gardner, 1993), that is they are reinforcing skills within the learning context that will be transferable later on to other more interactive situations beyond the school walls. These types of intelligence represent the ability to understand oneself and others, and form part of Gardner's "pluralistic view of mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition, acknowledging that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles" (H. Gardner, 1993, p. 6). Strengthening all the fields of intelligence is one key aspect of classroom instruction in any subject (Hall Haley, 2004).

Bogi changed primary school because of bullying. However, at secondary school he now seems to value being part of the group, saying that the best thing about English classes is "...group work, like if you're with good [students] who work well then there's less pressure on you instead of having to do it all alone." Birna, who lived abroad as a child, appreciates her teacher's emphasis on group work, as she seems to empathise with lonely students: "when you know another person then you know someone else at school and some people find it hard to make friends so they get to make friends as well." Soffia has gained confidence about facing an audience when giving a presentation, and although she does not see any need to improve her English skills as such, this self-assurance is useful to her as a singer in a band.

The final area considered in this section about cognitive aspects of English studies at secondary school centres on perceived sources of learning, and is based on responses to the question: *In a few words, where or how have you learned most of what you know in English?* It is interesting to note that the majority of participants see television, movies, and computer games as the predominant sources of their knowledge of English (Birna, Soffía, Addi, Einar, Hannes, Ingi, Trausti, Unnar). Some, like Trausti, say that they had some spoken ability in English before they started English at school (at around age 10-11). Unnar believes that most teaching of English takes place via the Internet outside school, and that

students who do not use the Internet much do not attain such a high standard of English as those who do. Hannes explains where his knowledge of English comes from, and how it has been built up:

I would say that I'm pretty good at speaking, but not as good at writing. At school I've learnt more to write than to speak. ... [I've learnt English] just like most Icelanders, just from television and just like, it's like, I don't know, just a second language that's taught from when you're a kid. You know, first you read the subtitles and then it sticks in your mind. ... Then you just speak it.

Addi, on the other hand, sees learning as a more effortless process, "it came sort of automatically" although he too gives credit to school learning: "and of course it was at school at the same time".

Apart from entertainment, other people are the second most important source of learning English. These may be family members, an English-speaking relative or friend visiting or living in Iceland, with whom one uses different vocabulary from that used in school, where speaking English is more concerned with "practice in talking, pronunciation and so on". Jóhanna is an example of a participant who has a very clear picture of where she has learned English:

of course grammar comes first and foremost from school I've been learning [English] for a very long time. And then from television, you watch it or now you download everything, so it doesn't have Icelandic subtitles. ... in English, then of course you have to listen, or with English subtitles, you get an awful lot from that. Then just from books as well, I think, if you read books, I've read English books, and then I have friends I talk to on the computer on MSN, both who live here and don't know Icelandic, or abroad... You know that also really helps a lot. ... Then I've worked here in a shop, and in a hotel... that helps as well.

We see here that many participants in this group believe their proficiency in English has improved as a result of secondary school English classes, although some are less positive or believe they have no need of improvement. Clear gains in factual knowledge about a range of subjects are perceived and some participants feel they have also gained learning strategies. Again others have little idea of how to learn independently. The English classroom is seen a social environment where students gain collaborative skills. Finally, there is a clear feeling that television has provided the most important context for learning English.

5.3.3 Interactive Self

The third area of coding of secondary school participants' interview responses has the umbrella term of *Interactive*. Here are to be found participants' comments on their uses of English and on their linguistic/language identity. There are three sub-areas: participants' present uses of English unconnected to their school study of the language; participants' anticipated uses of English after leaving school; and their perceptions of their English proficiency and language identity as Icelanders using the non-mother-tongue of English. There was no intention in this study to assess participants' proficiency through testing. However, participants' comments on their self-perceived proficiency are of interest as they throw light on how well participants cope with actually using English. Although at this stage of their lives, participants are using English in a wide range of contexts beyond the classroom, the data indicates that they base their opinion of their proficiency on school assessment rather than on any external benchmarks in the contexts in which they use English outside school. This contrasts with the University and Employment Groups who, having left school, must find other ways to assess their language abilities.

Considering firstly how School Group participants use English beyond their school studies, entertainment is most often mentioned. Watching films and television shows, listening to popular music, and playing computer games all involve using English. Two participants write songs in English; one because "there's something inside you that makes you write music in English"; the other tries to use "some words that not everyone understands so that people take more notice". Taking part in sports may also involve using English, as Telma explains:

Yes, there are foreigners in basketball, usually from the United States. But there have been some from Eastern Europe.... Yes, we use English among ourselves.

Using computers does not only involve entertainment but also maintaining contact with friends and family. This is very important to participants, several of whom have non-Icelandic-speaking friends or relatives, with whom they communicate either face-to-face or via online messaging or social networks (such as MSN and Facebook) or voice-over-Internet Protocol services (e.g. Skype). English is the lingua franca that Hannes uses with his relatives abroad and with friends in other countries:

And I talk English with my family abroad. Because I don't know their first language, so I just speak English. I can talk with my family abroad and you also get to know people who only speak English. Here in Iceland, yes. Both friends who have maybe just moved here and tourists or something. ... I really use English a lot. Both writing and speaking. Sometimes we talk on the phone, sometimes we talk through Facebook and so on, and MSN. I have so many friends who only speak English, abroad you know, in Britain and all over the place, who I can talk to.

Participants use English in a variety of part-time or summer work situations, such as in shops, for giving assistance to foreign tourists or in fast-food outlets, like Addi, who “was working with foreigners at McDonald's and then you talk a lot of English”.

Soffía probably had to learn some specific vocabulary when she was dealing with tourists:

For example, I worked up on a glacier talking to tourists. That was obvious, to be able to talk to them and tell them stuff, and things like that.

Similarly, holidaying abroad is common among Icelanders, and English is the language that participants use when they themselves are tourists.

Computer use through English is commonplace for all these participants, be it for social purposes as mentioned above, for entertainment in the form of downloaded material, or for information-gathering in forms such as for hobbies, interests, or current affairs. Bogi says:

[Not knowing English] would make a big difference. I wouldn't be able to use the Net so much, the Internet. It's a very good way to get information. Computer games and the television and so on, you know, English is connected to everything. I wouldn't be able to talk to my relatives in America.

Talking about the connection between hobbies, the Internet and English, Kolbeinn says:

...this Internetisation ...it's all in English, what we look at ...people of my age, they use the Net an awful lot, and the Net may not be their hobby but their hobby is on the Net.

Of course, some computer programs have been translated into Icelandic, and a great deal of information is available online in Icelandicⁱⁱⁱ.

However, participants do not seem to regard Icelandic as a viable option for computer use, particularly not for social networking, because, as one comments, “I can’t stand how stupid the Icelandic translation is”. With regard to computer use in general, Soffía, who does not mention having a Net-based hobby, explains how essential English is:

...everyday things are all so tied up with English. Like computers, they’re not all in Icelandic. How are you supposed to be able to do this and that if you don’t know English?

Participants also often use English with Icelandic friends simply for fun, as Telma, for example, explains:

...of course I speak English every day just like with my friends, maybe we’re just *joking* in English, sort of being funny somewhere by talking in English.

Even though participants in the School Group talk about using English outside school, when asked to self-assess their proficiency in English they tend to base their evaluation on grades given by teachers. They seem to lack ways to self-evaluate their own language use. Attention is drawn above to the close connection between English at secondary school and pleasurable feelings of fun and entertainment. These positive emotions also seem to affect evaluation of proficiency, which is viewed by many in very favourable terms, although sometimes not unconditionally. Birna, for example, has “always been good at languages”, while Soffia and Unnar say:

I think it’s very good. At any rate I’ve been doing very well - top grades. So I think it’s very good.

I would say it’s very good. If I say it myself, I would say that I speak pretty well faultless English. ... To some extent, at any rate.

Some participants are more critical of their level of proficiency. Einar confesses to not being able to shake off his Icelandic accent, and that spelling is problematic both in English and Icelandic. Finally, Telma seems willing to admit to being less than perfect, but then backtracks to re-establish her excellence:

Of course I understand and speak English, but generally the big problem is writing English, so I – but I am terribly good at it still [*she laughs*].

Unsurprisingly, since computers play such an important part in their lives, participants' anticipated future uses of English also include information-gathering, communication and entertainment via the computer. Tourism is seen as equally important in the future as in the present, but for this one may not need to know "all the words in the world". However, many participants foresee spending long periods of time abroad travelling, studying or working. Some anticipate living abroad on a permanent basis, and English is seen as "a world language":

Obviously I want to travel a lot. Obviously English is a sort of world language that will help me a lot, and then of course I want to move abroad too. So it's like English should help me for the first few months while I'm sort of getting used to the language and the culture and so on.

Others have their sights set on going to university abroad, and regardless of whether they plan on studying in an English-speaking country or not, they anticipate that courses will be in English. Countries that secondary school participants mention as possible destinations for long-term residence are Australia, Denmark, France, Indonesia, Norway, Sweden, the UK, and the USA. One participant has such a clear picture of the future that she sees herself using English at conferences she will attend:

all sorts of conferences, and something big, you know. It would be held in English, when there are lots of people together from different parts of the world.

There is some diversity in whether participants see themselves using English in tertiary education in Iceland. Daniel (who admits "I don't have a very good vocabulary", and who actually mentions English vocabulary 15 times in the course of the 31-minute interview) knows that "at university, of course, the books are mainly in English, or most of them". He is worried about how he will cope, unlike Ingi, who sees himself as well prepared for university abroad or in Iceland. Ingi's view is that university will resemble secondary school, but will be harder. This may be true, although his ideas about reading material at university are not

accurate, since 90% of reading material at tertiary level in Iceland is in English (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010):

... if I went to university in Iceland then [reading material] would definitely be in Icelandic. I would expect that.

Both Ingi and Telma imagine that they will use English at university level primarily for online searches for information or essay sources. Unnar, on the other hand, has a totally opposing view since he is contemplating a future in either medicine or business and realises that all his reading will be done in English. Similarly Jóhanna, who wants to study medicine, says:

I can't see myself reading books in any other language than English, and then for all the time that I'm studying, and of course it's a pretty long course.

Although interviews were taken in Icelandic, there was some code-switching with English (although not initiated by the researcher). Some words could be construed as loan words from English, words that have been unofficially accepted into Icelandic vernacular and take Icelandic inflexions, such as *dánlóda*, to download, *djóka*, to joke, and *dubba*, to dub. Others could be seen as more obvious examples of code-switching, that is, inserting words from one language into another language, such as *conclusion*, *fancy*, *visual effects*, and *way back*.

Finally I will report on how participants seem to view their linguistic identity as Icelanders with daily exposure to and use of English. These perceptions come across throughout the interviews, but in particular in response to questions 16 and 17, *What effect does it have on you as an Icelander that there is so much English around us in Iceland?* and *What difference would it make for you if you didn't know English?*

Knowing English to what is described as a level that allows one 'to get by' (Ice. *bjarga sér*) gives School Group participants a sense of security, and a sense of self-esteem. They feel prepared for travel abroad, to any country, since they see English as **the** international language that people all over the world are likely to know. They also seem to see themselves as good language learners, who have had little trouble attaining this proficiency. Addi says:

I remember when I was beginning English, you know in 4th grade or something, then I didn't do well at first, I found it hard to understand, then after six months it was just a *piece of cake*.

Some School Group participants mention friends whose proficiency is less than their own, and express surprise that any young people in Iceland today should be so weak in the language. Unnar makes no connection between low ability in English and English studies at school but suggests another possible reason for his friend's lack of English skills:

Sigurbjörn, he's quite superbly bad at English, it's just amazing. He couldn't, if you asked him today, he couldn't speak English to save his life. He doesn't use the Net. ... He can't be following the media in English. For example, I watched Discovery Channel a lot. I did that, watched Discovery, Civilization, National Geographic Channel, watched it a lot for a while. When I was in 10th grade and 1st year in secondary school, I spent a lot of time getting to know all sorts of things, in English. Then you become much better at listening to English and remembering what's said. Not just listening to the words, but hearing what's said and remembering it.

Participants see it as their obligation to learn English, knowing that using Icelandic abroad is not a possibility. Far from seeing this as unjust or unfair, they seem to accept this as a fact of life. As Daníel says, "...if you go abroad somewhere, well you're not going to start speaking Icelandic, that's not quite going to work".

What is perhaps most striking to observe, however, is just how large a part English plays in participants' lives. Several talk about using English every day, although there are exceptions. Daníel is an example of a young man who uses English rarely, spending much of his free time as he does playing sports:

...my interests don't demand knowledge of English, I don't need to use English, actually I never need to use English except you know, of course on the computer.

Not only do participants see a variety of reasons for using English on a daily basis (for example, Soffia's comment that "It's like that somehow with people now, they use English a lot to express themselves") some also feel that people, and specifically young people, can barely function in Iceland without knowing English. Númi knows that some older Icelanders know little English and that, when travelling abroad, they have to depend on "someone else to talk or, you know, collect documents or do something". He seems to find this acceptable and understandable, but for him "at this age, in these times" not knowing English would be unacceptably limiting. For

others, life in Iceland without English would be strange, and would put one “in rather a bad position”, or make one “a bit of an aborigine”.

Edda seems to experience a sense of shock, or perhaps shame, over how much time she spends using English:

...you're reading something in English every day, you're watching something, you know, ...terrible sometimes how much you watch on the computer ..., then you're watching shows and it's really, it's an awful lot in fact, you're always around the television and English.

Even though using English is an integral part of being young in Iceland today, participants do not feel that they are losing their identity as Icelanders. Unnar expresses this inner quality of being Icelandic:

...not being afraid of living somewhere else, but always having some sort of Icelandic, ...always having an Icelandic, I don't know what to call it, spiritbeing an Icelandic doesn't mean isolating yourself from other countries but is completely, I think it's Icelandic to associate yourself with foreign countries.

Even so, some participants are afraid of the Icelandic language being, not contaminated, but rather wiped out by English. Telma, for example, seems unsure about the future of Icelandic and also unsure about her own linguistic position vis-à-vis English and Icelandic:

I think that English will more or less take over Iceland, going by how quick kids are at learning English through movies and music and so on. ... definitely maybe dangerous for the Icelandic language but I don't think it'll take over the Icelandic people completely, maybe a bit. I'm, of course, I'm completely Icelandic-speaking, but I sometimes just, I speak English every day, like with my friends. We're maybe just joking in English, having fun somewhere by speaking English... maybe English- and Icelandic-speaking, I don't know.

For Daníel, the fact that English plays such a small role in his life strengthens his identity as an Icelandic and distances him from Europe:

...whenever there's anything English going on then it reminds me that I'm not very good at English and am good at others things [*he laughs*]... speaking Icelandic is comfortable, compared to English you know ... I never think of myself as some European or anything like that, hardly ever.

Finally, there is the question of what is missing at secondary school. Student perceptions on areas not covered at school were ascertained by asking: *What is missing in your knowledge of English that you don't learn at school but that you would find useful or fun to learn?* Addi has a very positive view of his own English skills and sees only one gap in his knowledge that could pose a problem when he starts university. He shows a certain naivety about the language of university study when he says:

Nothing except maybe *scientific terms*, you know. They don't go into that much of course, mainly what things are called in Icelandic, like in biology and so on. You know, it's probably Latin or something at university. That's maybe the only thing I would have difficulties over.

Jóhanna mentions that culture should be taught, as she says it is in Danish and Spanish, although she herself sees the ubiquity of English-language culture in Iceland as a problem. She and several other participants, however, stress that more emphasis should be put on speaking skills. The lack of speaking practice in class (both, it seems, for fluency and accuracy of pronunciation) is excused by the fact that teachers may assume students already have good oral skills or that students may be too shy to want to speak English in class. Kolbeinn explains the importance of correct pronunciation:

I think they should put more emphasis on pronunciation. It's just so important. If it's going to be of use abroad and in other countries where English is spoken, maybe Britain or England. Maybe you're at a conference or you're working somewhere in another country, and you don't pronounce the words right, then there might be people from other countries and they all have limited knowledge of English, and they don't understand you because your pronunciation isn't right.

Vala has a strong regional British accent and wishes that school would help her acquire a more neutral accent:

I really have to think hard not to speak with an accent, it's very difficult for me to speak just with an Icelandic accent or just Oxford English, you know it's terribly difficult for me. ... if you're on the languages study programme then they go into phonetics and so on, but here there's very little of that. They do a *session* about the difference between an American and British accent but you know... they never took Scottish pronunciation, or Irish.

Númi has a very unclear idea of his own proficiency. His comparison of his own and his brother's level of English suggests a belief that school teaches nothing (since his brother, who has not yet started secondary school, is better than him at English). Númi certainly seems to be aware that school has not taught him to self-evaluate his proficiency accurately:

I don't think I'm good at English, not brilliant at all, like my little brother who's four years younger than me, 14 I think he's actually better than me at English. ... Maybe that's because everything is more technical and, you know, he knows things like Youtube, things like loads of blogs and videoblogs, and of course everything's in English, and he's been into these things since he was 12 years old. Watching movies and TV series. It may well be that I'm better at English than he is, you know, there's nothing I really feel that I'm lacking.

It is clear from the above quotations that the School Group uses English very frequently and in a wide range of contexts, although largely for entertainment (including computer use). Some seem to be aware that more speaking practice in class would be beneficial, perhaps because they are aware of their limitations when they use English outside school.

To sum up, participants in the School Group view English in a generally positive light. Classes are comfortable and good grades can be easily attained. In-class oral activities are, however, stressful. Learning vocabulary is important to them, as is grammar accuracy, and most are aware of having improved at school. Classes and teachers should be entertaining, and some valuable world knowledge is gained through classes, but grammar textbook activities are boring. Participants in this group would like to see more choice of assignments and feel more pressure to practise speaking English. They see much of their knowledge of English coming from television and computer use, and foresee using English mainly in these areas in the future. Some expect to use English at university and all expect to use English when travelling or living abroad in the future.

What might be seen as giving cause for concern is participants' lack of self-assessment skills and the fact that only some realise that textbooks at university will be primarily in English. The high level of confidence of some in their English language skills seems to be at odds with the experience of others who may have a more realistic evaluation of their proficiency and who would like more support (for example, in pronunciation) at school.

Findings from the School Group were reported above and I will now turn to the University Group participants.

5.4 University Group: findings from interviews

The University Group had taken an average of 5.2 English courses at secondary school (i.e. just over two and a half years of study). Results indicate that university students have a wide range of both positive and negative feelings when they look back on their school years of studying English, although some differences are apparent between the comments of the University Group and the School Group. Generally speaking, English is associated with fun and good grades but the importance of the teacher is less stressed, with some mentioning their age and increased maturity as a factor. The University group participants are aware of gains in proficiency in the language as well as in knowledge about the language and about a variety of other topics, such as culture, literature, and general world knowledge. They describe using English in many different situations outside school in much the same terms as the School Group does. They also see television and computers as the basis of their knowledge of English, just as the School Group does. However, the University Group appears more aware than the School Group of a need for high-level English skills. With some noticeable exceptions, it would seem that secondary school English does have relevance for university students in Iceland. The University Group participants are aged between 19 and 26.

5.4.1 Affective Self

Many participants at university level associate English studies at secondary school with obtaining acceptable grades with little effort. Participants were not asked specifically about their grades in English, so their perception of what constitutes a ‘good’ grade may vary from person to person. Even bearing this in mind, it seems significant that participants report not having had to work hard or do homework, having lacked ambition or having been in a position to correct the teacher in class. One participant explains that simply doing assignments was sufficient to ensure an acceptable grade, another that his level of effort (on a 1-10 scale with 10 representing the subject participants had to expend most time and effort on) was between three and four. Although he had to work harder in Icelandic, this effort level gave him “fairly good grades” in English.

Linda’s comments bring up the notion of secondary school English being fun, not only because it is easy but also because it is entertaining:

I didn’t work very hard, I have to admit. I think I actually did best in English as well - I didn’t have to work very hard, I got quite high grades

without having to be studying all the time, but I mean, I handed in all the assignments ... there may often have been a lot to read, you know, like for books that you had to write an essay about, but that was just fun. I don't see that as homework, reading some book or other.

Reading literature is seen by many participants as especially enjoyable. Participants were pleased to have read novels and plays by well-known authors such as Steinbeck, Salinger, Conrad, Tolkien and Shakespeare, or to have seen film adaptations of books, and to have had the opportunity to discuss them and “practise writing what you were reading and thinking”. Through literature participants seem to have discovered qualities in the English language that they do not mention in relation to language textbook work. One read poetry by Sylvia Plath at school: the fact that she did not understand it did not diminish her enjoyment:

... we had to read poetry in one course. That was amazing. We were reading a lot by Sylvia Plath, very strange all of it, I didn't understand half of it, but when we'd gone over it, then I found it amazing. ... the language was just often so beautiful and I mean, it's the same when you read Icelandic poetry. It was just so beautiful, such beautiful use of words, that's what I think.

A male participant read a novel that was “a really beautiful book ...one of the few books that you almost cry over”. One participant's enjoyment of reading cost her a night's sleep. Having made up her mind just this once to let the film version of a book suffice for an exam the next day, she decided at least to glance at it before going to sleep and could not put it down, it was “such fun ... amazing”. Works of literature in English can also be imaginatively powerful and significant:

... some books are just that good that the story somehow stays with you, it tells you something, you know, and it's just some world that you fall into. And then some literature is just somehow important and has an influence in society and knowing it somehow deepens your understanding of other things, like details that are referred to. It's the same with films, you know, it's all connected, and reading a, what's it called, a masterpiece.

Although in broad terms participants associated English with good grades and little effort, difficult reading material, whether it was literature or, in the case of a science student, an article on astrophysics, called for effort but also produced enjoyable knowledge gains.

What was also fun for participants in terms of reading literature was being able to read a book they had selected themselves. Broadly speaking in Icelandic secondary schools, courses for younger students entail reading set books, and only higher level courses may offer students a choice of what they read. It is these later courses in years 3 and 4 at secondary school that participants say were fun, but any tasks involving choice or personal interests (examples given were writing about one's own opinions on some topic or about one's own grandmother) are seen by participants as being fun: "To decide what you want to do".

The importance of the teacher is great, but perhaps less important for this group of participants than for the younger group of secondary school participants. University Group participants felt that works of literature had been well selected by teachers, that they had been able to make suitable suggestions for free reading, or that their teaching on literary analysis had been enjoyable. One University Group participant mentioned that her teacher had been lively and funny: there had been a lot of laughter and chatting. The teacher got students involved: "mainly, you know, he somehow managed to make everyone take part, it was great fun".

However, just as was the case for secondary school participants, there were participants in the University Group for whom many aspects of English at secondary school were boring and tedious. We have already seen that earlier courses in which language study is a key part are viewed as boring, even "deadly" and childish, "just like in primary school ... just some projects you had to hang up on the wall". Doing grammar exercises and translations is not fun, and although learning grammar is seen as necessary, being in class when the teacher "hammers these verbs and stuff into you" seems far from enjoyable. Having little or no choice of study material is seen as a bad thing. Participants complain about some works of literature. Books may be depressing, or simply out of touch with participants' lives. One participant was considering going on to study English at university, until a school syllabus included works by Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, and he lost interest.

Tómas sums up how he sees the problem with literary classics at secondary school:

I think there's a bit of snobbery about old books in English literature which isn't getting through to students at secondary school level. ... I went onto some cheat website just to get the *key points* about a book because it was so boring. I just couldn't be bothered to read it. I started reading it and I closed it. It was just, I just couldn't relate to it, it didn't grab my attention, it wasn't fun and it didn't interest me in any way.

He goes on to explain the type of books he feels would grab the attention of secondary school students:

...just books that people are talking about or that young people know about ... that maybe half the class has at least heard of, maybe thought 'Maybe I ought to read that' and when they see that it's part of the curriculum, then maybe 'Since I'm supposed to read it, why not give it a go?' rather than some ancient book they've never heard of, have no idea what is about, and have no interest in reading. ... the kids are coming to you to learn, you just have to meet them half way.

Positive feelings of self-esteem and security are felt by many University Group participants in connection with studying English at secondary school. Participants feel that they have benefitted from doing oral presentations in English at school, for example, that they have developed a sense of security about speaking English, and that they can read and write almost anything in English. Snorri says that secondary school English has "given one self-confidence to communicate, and just ... not to be scared of the language".

Again there are exceptions. Orri for one says that he never had to make a presentation in English, as he did in Icelandic. He feels that speaking is the hardest part of learning a foreign language (in direct opposition to the view of the majority of participants, who believe that they 'picked up' English effortlessly from television), and that being able to prepare a presentation would mean that "you could write down exactly what you're going to say and not be scared at all that you were talking rubbish or something". He clearly feels far from secure about using spoken English. In a similar fashion, Hera feels that she is worse at English than all her friends. She found reading and writing in English difficult before she went to England as an exchange student (at around age 17), and, after returning, still finds it "terribly hard" that she is expected to understand all the words in a reading text. Other participants mention being shy about speaking English, being afraid of oral and listening exams or fearing not being understood by the teacher in an oral exam or making basic grammar errors, such as saying 'go' instead of 'went'. Orri spent a whole summer listening to radio programmes in English because he felt he was not as good at English as he should have been. Bjarki is particularly concerned about having to write in English if he takes his M.A. abroad. His above-average proficiency meant that he skipped some courses at secondary school. He is now insecure about what his level of written proficiency is, since he is no

longer writing for a teacher who gives feedback on his written production. Talking about what he gained from English at secondary school, he says:

...writing English, but in fact I haven't done much of that recently. Almost all of what I've written in English has been informal, talking to people over the Net and so on, on chat sites. I've always tried to write correctly, I use it as a chance to practise my English, but of course the built-in spell-check programs are a problem. So I'm a bit scared that actually I'm losing my ability to write correct English, because of course in these English exams, these translations you did at secondary school you got a grade for spelling and so on, but now you just have to write well enough for the computer to understand. And because I haven't been writing formal texts I haven't been getting any comments about whether the language is correct. ... No-one's going to tell me off for making grammar mistakes when I write on the Net.

Finally, there are mentions of feelings of responsibility and autonomy. University Group participants bring up the belief that their lack of effort and responsibility was not the fault of the school. Agla, for example, who described herself as particularly unmotivated, says that the preparation she got from school for university study could have been better "but I don't know whether it's the school system or me. ... For example, I could have studied better". Marta complains that set books were depressing and boring but finally puts her negativity down to the mere fact of adolescence:

...you often read books about anorexia and about depressives, you couldn't be bothered, we didn't get to choose ... Oh, I don't know, maybe it was just adolescence and I couldn't be bothered to read...

Hera says much the same, and that her school was not to blame for the fact that she got away with doing so little in English. Elsa feels that students should take responsibility for their own learning and that teachers should not make allowances for students who may be shy about doing oral presentations in English. In her eyes "there isn't much the teachers can do ... it's just the students themselves". However, in general these older participants do not seem to have wanted to take responsibility for learning English when they were at school. Several say that they would not have wanted to take more than compulsory classes. This does not appear to have occurred to Bjarki at all, although perhaps if he had done more English at school he would not now feel so nervous about the possibility of doing his M.A. in English. Orri, on the other hand, who repeatedly mentions not being good at English, did act responsibly when he decided to make a

concerted effort to listen to English on the radio when he was at secondary school, knowing that all his future university textbooks would be in English. Even though he has made this conscious decision to improve his English he does not come across as a responsible or autonomous language learner when he describes himself in this way:

I was quite a hardworking student and I spent less time on English than for example on maths and I didn't always do my English homework. ... But I always studied [grammar], at least for the exams. I always did well in grammar but when there was some text maybe my vocabulary wasn't good enough, but I still think I put in, oh I don't know...English was definitely [the subject] I spent least time on.

I have reported above the findings in the Affective Self category for the University Group. Easy tasks and good grades are mentioned, as well as enjoyment of literature and dislike of grammar exercises. These older participants seem to have a clearer idea than the School Group that studying English at secondary school has improved their proficiency, or at least made them more confidence about using the language. Some seem to believe that their own immaturity hampered their ability to learn at school. These participant comments suggest that more “before and after” research of this kind could provide valuable data about learners’ classroom experience of English.

5.4.2 Cognitive Self

Moving on from what feelings come to light when the University Group participants talk about their English studies at secondary school, this section presents their comments about what they perceive they actually learnt in English in the learning context of school. As for the earlier section about secondary school participants, comments here have been divided into the following areas: proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking; general world knowledge, including knowledge of literature; study and metacognitive skills, and social skills. Also in this section is a discussion of what participants felt they did not learn at school or was of little relevance or use to them. Finally, I present participants’ comments on where they perceive their knowledge of English has come from and what a difference it would make to their proficiency if they had not studied English at secondary school.

Most University Group participants, when asked about what they got out of studying English at secondary school, say with little hesitation that

they have gained depth in the language and improved proficiency. Many see this in terms of vocabulary expansion, which is seen as gained particularly through reading difficult texts such as science textbooks in English, which give useful academic terms. Spelling is also mentioned, and a better ability in writing English through doing a variety of practical tasks, including essay-writing. Participants talk about improvements in English in terms of learning to use the language correctly, and that this resembles progress they are making in using Icelandic at this stage more than learning a foreign language. Writing practice is seen as useful, along with the more advanced grammar that is not taught until secondary school and which is necessary for writing accurate English, for example, in university assignments.

Jakob, who is both in employment and in distance-learning at university, looks back on his secondary school English and realises the importance of studying grammar and learning correct usage:

... when I look back at things that I wrote when I was starting English at secondary school, I thought they were good. What you mainly see was wrong was that sometimes the grammar was terrible. It was because, you know, you hear so much, you watch movies and you listen to music and somehow it doesn't always get through to you how grammar works in English. It was really important that that came slowly and surely.

In a similar tone, Snorri sums up the feelings that other participants also voice that learning how to use the language correctly is an important aspect of secondary school study:

...like technique you know, just using English, knowing how to use a major language and I mean there are all sorts of ways to express yourself in it, you know, and having control of formal and informal language, knowing how to write a formal letter, knowing how to express yourself informally as well, but doing it right. I think that increases people's credibility, even though it's unfair just to look at that, but it is part of how good a language user you are, what sort of *vocabulary* you have.

Although, on the whole, participants seem satisfied with this improved proficiency in English, Agla, the only participant who is studying entirely through the medium of English, acknowledges that "it's only secondary school, it's only the foundation". She found it difficult to understand academic vocabulary when she started university study, but does not seem

to see teaching specific vocabulary to be within the parameters of secondary school English because secondary school students go on to study such a range of subjects:

...it's difficult with the academic stuff because some people go into business studies and that was completely different vocabulary and I don't know any of it now and have no need to know it, so it's the same with the vocabulary I'm talking about.

Elsa, on the other hand, is pleased that she did learn academic vocabulary at secondary school, as well as getting general practice in writing and using English:

...we had this enormous *biology* book, in biology, in our natural sciences courses, the material was in English and I think this book is used at university too, and it helped me learn all sorts of academic terms, and then there was just lots of practice work at school. We got lots of opportunities to write and the exams were often in-class essays. So it helped me a lot to be able to write English easily. And also to read and understand and talk.

Courses in English at secondary school may involve a level of practice that resembles studying a first language rather than a foreign language, with the proviso that a teacher is essential for checking the accuracy of work done. Bjarki sees his increased proficiency in terms of spelling and vocabulary:

Actually I think that English teaching at secondary school helped me with spelling and more difficult words, and perhaps, this grammar, but then there's the question of whether you get a bit rusty, whether when you're not using it and writing correct English that you get a grade for ... that there's someone who's assessing what you're learning. But they weren't really teaching you the language, it was more like teaching Icelandic in so far as ...teaching you to write correct English, rather than teaching you the language.

Apart from gaining proficiency in the language itself, University Group participants talk about having made other gains through English classes at secondary school. The awareness of greater accuracy itself brings with it "self-confidence in communicating, and just not to be afraid of the language".

Learning how to work with a written text in order to ensure understanding is something that Hera has gained at secondary school:

...when you're reading a text, with textbooks in English, there's also the discipline of looking up all the words you don't know, and even if you think you know them, you look them up anyway because it can such a huge difference. One word can completely change the whole text. ... this teaching in study strategies came in very handy.

Making use of skills learnt in English classes is also valuable, as Elsa says:

...we also had an article the other day that we had to translate and then there was the fact of having done that before, and there was some very academic stuff. So you learned, you remembered how you had translated an article before ... What helped me most was those in-class essays and those, what are they called, writing tasks.

These comments contrast with the lack of learning strategies exhibited by Orri, mentioned in the Affective Self.

One of the most frequently mentioned factors that University Group participants felt had benefitted them at secondary school was reading literature. We have seen that participants express positive emotions towards reading literature at school. Here we also see that they value the opportunity to study literature which they would otherwise not have read. Literature seems to give participants a different perspective on the world and to teach all manner of lessons. Linda explains that "you have to read a lot of books in order to know a lot, and not just academic books but also well-known novels – it's very useful to have read them".

Works by Shakespeare appear to be uppermost in the minds of many University Group participants when they explain what they learned in English at secondary school. The benefits seem to involve learning not only the plot but also the process of reading such an old play. Elsa, talking about reading a Shakespeare comedy, says that it was fun "to learn how to understand this book, because it's unbelievably special, I mean the choice of words". The process of reading the play seems to have been entertaining and educational, and the story itself amusing. What is more, through reading literature in English at school Elsa has now developed the desire to read on her own out of class:

I'm pleased about having read some books, about knowing a bit about literature, because I don't really read anything apart from school books. Actually I have just started it now, it was reading at school that made me start, and now I've begun reading books in English because I enjoy it.

Jakob feels strongly about the value of reading Icelandic and foreign "classics of literature" and, like Elsa, seems to believe that reading literature should be done at school:

And I think it does people an awful lot of good, it's immensely enriching, and these are things that you really can't learn in primary school either and people are very unlikely to start doing things like that themselves. Like looking at grammar or starting to read some sort of literature classics and so on, that's not something that people, most people in Iceland, are likely to do themselves.

Also enjoyable in English classes and beneficial in terms of general world knowledge gained is reading newspaper articles on various current affairs and having class discussions about the content.

Although many University Group participants have little hesitation in saying what they gained from studying English at secondary school, they are also quick to criticise English classes, particularly with regard to what they feel was missing or of little value or relevance. People feel in the main that they have not learned academic or specific job- or study-related vocabulary, have not developed spoken fluency and have not improved their pronunciation. Linda feels unsure as to what exactly the learning objectives of her English courses were. Bjarki and Elsa both feel that greater demands could have been made of them. Orri seems to feel regret that he was not helped more at school, that doing oral presentations involving preparation of a text to be read aloud would have helped his spoken proficiency and his self-confidence. He describes the situation he finds himself in now, and seems to wish school could have taught him more:

...when I've met people who were speaking English, I started talking and then I was 'Oh, how do I say this?' and then 'Oh', and then the discussion just died, and the conversation was much shorter than it would have been in Icelandic and ... I was going to say something then I just 'Huh, oh no I think I'll just skip saying it'... Yes, there could have been better preparation there.

Tómas, who appears particularly self-confident about his own proficiency in English, nonetheless describes his thoughts about what other students at secondary school find missing at school and would want to learn. He echoes Orri's comments but adds further points which may in fact reflect ability he finds himself lacking:

Yes, I think they want to be better and I think they want to learn more practical things. They want to learn how to say things correctly in English, how to think in English, how to use the right expression, how little proverbs work, how just sayings and so on, they want to, if they need to, blend in to English society, or just express themselves well in English, not just sort of make themselves understood.

This type of deeper understanding may suggest a desire for an understanding of register. It is also wished for by Bjarki, who is made to feel uneasy and incompetent because he does not meet the language expectations of the scholars he reads:

when you're reading a textbook and there's some French saying ... you don't quite get it, you don't follow, because it's something the author obviously assumes the reader will understand, but you don't, in spite of thinking that you're pretty good at English.

University Group participants were asked where they had learned the English they knew at this stage of their lives, that is by their early twenties. What is interesting to note is that three of them see their learning situation as special, and their particular proficiency as explained by this special situation. Three participants were brought up in households where English was at times used: because of a non-Icelandic-speaking guest; because the participant's parents had studied in an English-speaking country; or because of non-Icelandic-speaking employees in the family business. Another participant feels his situation to be special because he spent one summer in an English-speaking country. Otherwise, learning had come from television, films and reading. Even Agla, whose entire university education, reading, lectures and assignments, has been through English, claims that half of her knowledge of the language comes from television and half from studying at university and living abroad. So important is watching entertainment material in English in the form of films and television shows that it is perceived as coming in the place of classes:

the ones who were best at English weren't the ones who studied most in English at secondary school or primary school, I don't think, but those who spent most time on the Net, so I think maybe [secondary school] helped me but it didn't necessarily help them at all.

When asked how good their English would be if they had not studied English at secondary school, the perceptions of some University Group participants were that they had built up a solid foundation in English, learned accuracy in using the language, and in particular in using grammar. Bjarki says that his reading and his vocabulary would be poorer, but that the difference would not be very great. Jakob certainly feels that there are two reasons why secondary school is the place for learning grammar: firstly, that primary school pupils are too young to learn complex grammar; and secondly that young people will listen to English in movies and read English in books of their own accord, but need to be made to study grammar.

We have seen here that many University Group participants believe they have gained valuable high-level proficiency in English at secondary school, as well as learning skills that are useful in tertiary education. It is interesting to note that participants in the University Group talk about secondary school English as a "foundation" or a "basis" in much the same way that School Group participants talk about primary school. This implies an increasing level of difficulty in English study and increasing demands made on students as each new school level opens up new areas of the language that students may not have been aware of at the previous level.

5.4.3 Interactive Self

Having looked at how the University Group seems to feel about English at secondary school and what they learn in classes, it is appropriate to turn to how they actually use the language in their day-to-day lives. Results will be presented in three sections covering firstly present and future uses of English, along with participants' self-assessment of their proficiency in English. Following this, participants' perceptions of whether their use of English in the present differs from their anticipated uses when they were at secondary school will be given, and lastly their observations on their own language identity as English-using Icelanders will be presented, and their views on what difference it would make to them if they did not know English at all. Code-switching between Icelandic and English will also be mentioned.

Unsurprisingly, at least in an Icelandic context, University Group participants reported using English for reading academic textbooks. Linda says that in the four courses she is taking at university, all the material in three courses is in English, and half of the material in the fourth course. She sees herself using English mainly to translate these textbooks, but also when she is watching television or listening to music. Although she does not use English much for social purposes nor write English, she reads more English than Icelandic, buying ‘chicklit’ novels and biographies online for her own leisure reading. Jakob finds it difficult to combine reading in English with doing assignments in Icelandic (which is often the case in Icelandic universities). It seems that, although the English material may not pose problems, working through two languages may be, because “sometimes the connection is missing”. Jakob is writing a novel in English (which in itself suggests a high level of self-confidence about using the language), reads English at university, but has little opportunity to use the spoken language. Orri also reads in English but avoids speaking because “it’s uncomfortable talking wrong in front of people and especially when you make grammar mistakes and use the wrong tense and so on like a little kid”.

Few of the participants have to write in English, so they may be unsure of how proficient they actually are. Linda feels sufficiently confident about her ability in English to have registered for a course in which all teaching and written assignments will be in English. Hera claims that she is good at English, although she does not use it much and her reading and writing are poor due to her dyslexia. She nevertheless feels confident about taking a summer job involving dealing with foreign tourists. In terms of listening, Agla, who has been studying through the medium of English for some years in a (non-English-speaking) European country, but who still claims that she is “not much of a language person” talks about how difficult lectures were for her to begin with. She sees herself having learnt half of what she knows in English from the television, so has evidently spent some time watching and listening to television. Nonetheless, it took her some time to grow accustomed to listening to academic lectures:

It took a while because, for example to begin with in lectures you were concentrating so hard on un..., you know, understanding the words that you couldn’t actually listen [*she laughs*]. Do you follow? ... you were always thinking about what the instructor was saying, except that if you’re listening to the content then you aren’t concentrating so much on the words and it’s different. So that you maybe walked out of the lecture not exactly sure what had been said, you know, it’s hard to explain it.

Agla sees herself using English in a more pro-active way in the future, when she anticipates “going to conferences and always reading, always something new coming up, and articles, and reading everything in English. I think I’ll definitely be using the language”.

All participants talked about watching films and television series in English, using the Internet in English for pursuing hobbies and interests or for finding information, and listening to music with English lyrics. In fact, it appeared that this was so much the norm that, in some cases, participants did not mention this type of language use until asked. Bjarki, for example talks about writing and reading English on Internet chat sites “and of course just watching movies and on the computer and reading on the Net”. English is the language used for communication with people who do not speak Icelandic, whether they are native or second-language speakers of English. Using social networking sites such as Facebook, and other computer-based means of communication such as MSN and Skype, in English is common, in order to keep in touch with non-Icelandic-speaking friends and family in other countries. Alternatively, using English abroad when participants are holidaying is seen as normal, even though many participants have learned other European languages and some are aware that not all Europeans speak English. Linda, for example, claims that English is “such an international language” and that she was “shocked” when she went to France because “no-one speaks English, you know, it’s just ridiculous”.

University Group participants can no longer depend on the grades their English teachers gave them at secondary school for self-evaluation of English proficiency, as the School Group participants do. Despite some specific language difficulties being mentioned connected, for example, with reading university textbooks in English, University Group participants’ self-assessment of their English proficiency is, for the main part, good. What this self-evaluation is based on is unclear (precise questions about proficiency were intentionally not asked as interviews were in no way intended to resemble a test or inquiry into ability), although it would appear to be at a fairly basic level, as explained by Marta:

I can read books and magazines and I can get by okay everywhere, but I’m no grammar genius [*she laughs*]. I never was, not good at it, but I think I try hard. I always have a subscription to [an online English-Icelandic dictionary] and I try to look things up if I come across something I haven’t seen. I would say I’m pretty good at English.

Rósa's self-assessment is interestingly similar, and even without having studied English at secondary school she would "get by", although university study would be difficult:

I can say everything and I understand everything in English, maybe the odd word that, when I'm reading some academic stuff at school, but I mean, I can easily get by and, you know, live abroad. That's no problem.

...[without secondary school English] I would understand less but I'd get by ... it would take longer. You wouldn't be able to be in full-time study because it would take you such a long time to read.

Tómas seems to see himself as exceptionally good at English:

I think my English is very good. If it's a long time since I last spoke English then I tend to slur [Ice. *slörra*] a bit but otherwise no accent, a good knowledge of the language. I think I'm even rather *eloquent* when I speak, don't use words like 'like' and 'erm' and so on.

It is Orri who is the exception among the University Group participants, and for him it is the productive skill of speaking that is particularly difficult:

I've always thought that I'm not good enough at English. That's changed a lot since I began at university and started reading pretty well everything in English. I can watch TV programmes and read everything but I often find when I start speaking that I'm sort of 'Oh, what am I going to say? What's that called again?', and I stammer quite a bit. I think I understand it okay but still. But I was definitely worse before I started university.

Some participants in this group see their present use of English as representing exactly what they expected when they were at school. Bjarki says:

Yes, I think I'd say [my use of English] is pretty much the same, I expected that I would have to read English at university and I've been reading English for fun for a long time, since I was in secondary school and primary school, so I think it's very similar to what I expected then.

Both Elsa and Linda foresaw needing to use English either abroad or for university study, and Elsa took more than compulsory English courses at school. Bjarki, on the other hand, seemed not to have such a clear view of the future and took only the courses at secondary school that he was obliged to take. He seems to regret not having studied English in more depth since the in-depth vocabulary that he lacks “is probably something that was taught in more advanced courses”. He may also lack techniques for reading more demanding texts because he took only compulsory English courses at school. Similarly, some other participants say they felt that learning specialised vocabulary could wait until it became necessary at university.

Finally, there is the question of how participants perceive life with no knowledge of English. Since this situation is evidently far from reality, the question also arises of how participants see their national and linguistic identity.

Without exception, participants perceive life without English as unfeasible and almost incomprehensible. It would mean a total change, with no university study and, in the case of Agla, no living abroad. English is essential for reading movie subtitles (since watching Icelandic television programmes is “silly”), for understanding gadget instructions (for example, mobile phone instructions), for contact with foreigners in Iceland and for travel abroad. Even living in Iceland, without English “you become sort of speech-less” and do not quite fit in to society. Hera explains how much a young person becomes an outsider from society in Iceland without English:

Yes, I think you sort of don't function quite right in society if you don't know English, and that's without going abroad. ... you don't understand the television, you can't read about anything except in Icelandic, I think that's very limiting. ... all the international debate, maybe you want to know a bit more, then you're just lost. Then there's also, like my Gran. She doesn't speak English but she's a totally different generation, being on the Net doesn't matter so much for her. I mean, you can't keep your side of a conversation going, because it's all about what you were watching on television yesterday, what series are on the Net, and you haven't seen any of this stuff.

Bjarki sums up participants' perceptions of life without English when he says:

In fact, I'd have to move into some other field completely. It would make the world much smaller. I wouldn't be able to read for pleasure,

would only be able to read Icelandic literature, and I wouldn't be able to get information about my main interests on the Net, and I wouldn't be able to read the majority of the reading material, I wouldn't be able to communicate with the people I do communicate with now via the Net, it would be harder for me to pursue my hobbies, play games ... yes, it would change quite a lot ... my whole way of life and study and everything ... I think English is very important for me ... I need it almost as much as Icelandic.

However, far from this dependence on English weakening participants' national identity as Icelanders, it seems to make no difference to them at all. Participants see it as their responsibility to learn English, as Marta explains:

I think it's actually my duty to know [English] because my language is so uncommon.

What is more, they see their ability to function in another language as proving that they are not an isolated and ignorant nation, possibly in contrast to southern European countries where little emphasis is placed on teaching English. Elsa, who studies at a regional university with students of various different nationalities, with whom she speaks English, believes that "deep inside people are always Icelanders". Linda does not see English slang endangering Icelandic, any more than Danish slang used in previous times has affected Icelandic to any serious degree. Hera dismisses the idea that Icelanders' daily use of English could undermine their national identity, saying:

I was born and brought up in Seltjarnarnes [a suburb of Reykjavík], and even though I don't live there any more I'm still from Seltjarnarnes, just like I'm from Iceland even though all the programmes on television are in English.

Some code-switching between Icelandic and English was evident in the University Group interviews. Interestingly however, no University Group participant offered to do the interview in English and the one participant who has done all her university studies through the medium of English used not one English word during the interview. In similar fashion to the School Group, some code-switching terms are (half)-accepted slang in Icelandic today, such as *týpískt* (typical), *fantasíur* (fantasies), *pikka upp* (pick up), *meika sens* (make sense), *party* (party) and *challenge*. Other

words have been borrowed into the language and ‘Icelandicised’. Examples of these are *representera* (represent), *glærushow* (slide show), *túristabísness* (tourist business), *dánlóda* (download) and *fokked* (fucked). *Slörra* (slur) is an example of a word in this group that is used incorrectly, since the meaning of slur is inappropriate in the context that Tómas uses. There is a third class of words and expressions. These seem to be quite simply used instead of the Icelandic words, possibly because the subject being discussed is English or possibly because they express some concept easy to get across in English but harder to express in Icelandic. These are words such as *biology*, *freaky*, *fugue*, *counterpoint*, *Hobbitinn* (referring to the book title *The Hobbit*), *revolver*, *revolution*. Other English words said as part of a sentence in Icelandic may have been used to impress, such as *key plot points*, *going through the motions*, *eloquent*, *smart ass*, *cardio*, and *patriotism*.

What is interesting to note here is just how much the University Group uses English and at the same time how little their identity as Icelanders is affected. Being able to read large amounts of English textbook material is something that secondary school English classes have developed and which is evidently worthwhile. However, there is clearly a lack of awareness about the level of proficiency necessary at tertiary level, and participants’ are unsure of what their real ability is. It would seem that preparing learners for using English in the future is a key area that schools need to address. I will now move on to reporting the data from participants in the Employment Group.

5.5 Employment Group: findings from interviews

As well as data collected from interviews with secondary school students and university students, information was also gathered through interviews with ten young people in employment. These participants are of a similar age to the University Group, aged from 20 to 24. Participants in this Employment Group were more numerous than was originally planned, but each participant had such a unique story to tell that, although common themes emerged soon in analysis, interviews continued until some level of saturation seemed evident.

Findings have been organised in a similar manner to findings on participants at university. Three main coding groups were established covering affective, cognitive and interactive fields, that is, participants’ feelings about English at secondary school, their gains through studying English at school, and their current uses for English in their lives. The

interactive field also includes participants' perceptions of their present proficiency in English and of their identity as Icelandic users of English. Code-switching between Icelandic and English is also covered.

On average the Employment Group had taken 3.6 courses in English at secondary school level, meaning that they took on average one and a half courses fewer than the School Group and the University Group. A 'course' in Icelandic secondary schools constitutes approximately four hours of class study a week over a 15-week term. Two participants in the Employment Group intend going on to tertiary education – they both took five courses in English at secondary school. The reasons for some participants taking fewer courses could include factors mentioned by participants, such as that fewer courses were required for their vocational training, that they were exempted from foreign-language study, or that they dropped out of school.

5.5.1 Affective Self

Just as in the interviews with School Group and University Group participants, a range of strong emotions about English at secondary school came to light in the interviews taken with young people in employment. For many, English at secondary school was fun and little effort was required to attain satisfactory grades, especially in first-year courses. Dagný, for example, had been an "exceptional" student in English. She was always top of her class, and found English at secondary school too easy. In-class presentations could be prepared in 15 minutes, and using primary-school-level vocabulary was enough to guarantee a pass grade, whereas two to three days were needed for presentations in other subjects. Others talk in similar fashion about expending effort at a level below five (on an imagined 1-10 scale of effort), not doing homework, or revising for merely one hour for the final examination and passing with a top grade. Lilja says:

... I can truly say that, for these first [courses] I didn't work at all. You know, I didn't study at all for the exams and I still did okay.

Despite this easy path to good grades, some participants would prefer to have had to work harder. Tinna remembers the sense of pride she felt each time she got to "a good colour" in the box of colour-coded reading texts, although in fact she is unsure whether this was in primary or secondary school. Magnús and Dagný both feel that English was too easy at secondary school. For Magnús, English should be difficult, but not too

difficult: listening to stories and filling in words is too easy, although “if it was like mathematics, then I wouldn’t even try”. He goes on to say:

...they could try to have more difficult books and so on. Just think, you’re this old and to prepare you for real life they could have more difficult books and more difficult courses. ... Of course it’s fun, you have these books with little stories, and there’s a recording and you just have to remember the words that appear in a particular recording and write them into the story afterwards, and things like that. You know, I think that’s far too easy.

Dagný simply finds it “just a joke” and “not normal” to get such good grades in English, although she half enjoys doing well:

Yes, [getting good grades] is great fun, I’m not complaining about it, but perhaps it’s not always fun. I would have liked to do badly once in order to have to work harder.

... I was, like, ‘Great, got 10 in English’ and I didn’t think any more about it, but then I had really worked hard in biology and I got 8, and I was just ‘Yes!’, you know because I’d worked hard and I was really pleased with 8, but because you don’t have to work hard in English, it was like, if I’d maybe got 9 then I would’ve been, ‘That can’t be right’ because it was so easy. I would have thought like that.

Material studied in English classes also gives rise to positive feelings among participants. Books studied are fun, because of the content but sometimes also because participants feel a sense of achievement at reading a story: “It was just fun when you were reading in English and you understood the story. ... I would say it was the most fun thing about it [studying English]”. Participants recount reading works of literature by authors such as Roald Dahl, Joseph Heller, J.R.R. Tolkien, Harper Lee, J.D. Salinger, William Shakespeare and John Steinbeck, although no-one mentions reading poetry. Some have reread English books they studied at school. Steinunn liked all the books she read at secondary school, although this seems to surprise her since “it’s not often that teachers choose books you really want to read”. Her comment reveals the low opinion she has of English teachers.

Doing all sorts of in-class tasks is considered fun. These may include writing activities such as summaries or essays based on books, films or TV programmes, restaurant reviews, writing a story, or doing a presentation. Only one participant mentions enjoying doing grammar exercises, and one found learning domain-specific vocabulary connected to the trade he was

learning enjoyable, this interest motivating him to study for the first time. Writing seems to be the usual medium for doing class activities, although presentations imply speaking as well. Magnús sums up the enjoyment of doing written assignments:

being able to read a whole book and do an essay from it ... the only English study that I find fun is when we have to read books and do essays from them.

In some cases the source of enjoyment is not the class content but the teacher. Certainly for a student who has “never found studying particularly easy”, a teacher who is “a character”, who makes classes good fun, and who suggests different learning strategies is a huge help.

This group of participants also has a wide range of negative experiences and bad feelings about English at secondary school. Just as a good teacher makes studying enjoyable, so a teacher that a student dislikes, or who makes himself “incomprehensible” and demands that students only speak English can make classes unpleasant. We have seen that some participants enjoyed the books they read in class, but others did not. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* is cited by one participant as a book that was too difficult (it was read in first year at secondary school at age 16-17). Other books, such as those read in second year, were not only “terribly difficult” but also written in “old English ... not these modern English books”.

Reading material in English textbooks may be seen as boring. For Egill, having no choice of what books he read meant that he aimed only at passing the course:

...there were just some crap love stories, there was nothing that I wanted to read at all ...when I’m reading something boring then I can’t be bothered to do it, I’d rather just skip it ... still, you’re taking an exam, you just have to get through it.

However, his lack of understanding also seems to have negatively influenced his enjoyment of English at school, since he admits “I didn’t learn anything in English, nothing ... I slept through it and it was so boring and I didn’t learn anything and I didn’t understand anything”.

Haraldur, on the other hand, avoided doing tasks completely and managed to pass courses by doing well on the final examination. He appears not to have found all the assignments themselves uninteresting, enjoying for instance watching films in class and reading *The Hobbit*, but rather admits to having simply been lazy. He saw writing activities as

pointless “because I wasn’t learning anything because I knew it all”. However, he did not get top grades, but seems to have felt that the fact he was not learning anything new outweighed the effort he would have had to exert to complete assignments. Being allowed no autonomy in of learning and no choice seem to have made English study a very negative experience for him.

That this lack of interest and commitment may be age-related is an opinion voiced by Tinna, a young woman working in a pre-school and planning on university study:

I really enjoy knowing English and being able to speak it ... But I mean when I was at secondary school it wasn’t terribly good fun ... I mean it was often real torture to have to read these books, but when I look back it seems just fine. ... I can remember often not finding school fun, but that’s the way it is Maybe just being a teenager, being at school wasn’t at all bad, it’s just that when you’re 16, 17, 18 you can’t be bothered with it.

Shyness is mentioned as a problem in English classes. Several participants have experienced nervousness about oral presentations in class or oral examinations. Some speak of other students feeling nervous, even though they themselves do not. Egill mentions needing “a bit of courage” to speak a foreign language, and that this courage cannot be gained through writing exercises. Tinna recalls being nervous about speaking English in front of the class while not finding it stressful to talk to native speakers in English, and, with hindsight, being grateful for the training she received at school:

...but still if you think back, it is necessary in order to learn to talk ... I’m really happy now that I learnt so much English when I was at secondary school because it’s helped me, but I don’t remember being so terribly happy when I was at secondary school.

Baldur seems to feel insecurity about his level of English, but like Tinna, he sees the root of the problem being his own attitude when he was at school. Speaking quietly and indistinctly, he says:

Actually, I was more or less taught everything, it was just a question of whether I managed to learn everything. I can’t be disappointed with school, disappointed with myself...

One participant relates particularly unpleasant experiences and emotions linked to English at secondary school. She was found to be dyslexic when she was 16, and got little help at school, except for a dispensation from studying English after failing the same course several times. She describes putting effort into learning but not receiving assistance with her dyslexia, stammering that “then you were just considered stu..stu..stupid”. Although she would like to return to study, she now feels “scared because then I’m using English books”.

The final sub-category of coding in this area of feelings connected with studying English concerns student responsibility, autonomy, and effort. Tinna’s feelings of gratitude for what she learned at secondary school have already been commented on, as have the views on effort of several participants who found English very easy. Other participants exerted little effort; Svava almost seems to be trying to spite a teacher whom she evidently dislikes. She became quickly disillusioned with English at secondary school:

...at any rate I had high hopes when I came out of primary school and was starting at secondary school that we were being prepared for university, and we were all, okay you’d work harder because when you go to secondary school ...it means that you’re interested and when you end up with crazy teaching then you stop. ... I never revised for an exam, I just went and did it and my only aim was to pass the exams and I won’t have any more expectations and I won’t put in any more effort. I’ll put in more effort somewhere else, and I find that today you know, I read more books in German than in English because the German teaching at school was incredibly good, incredibly good...

Egill, who “didn’t understand anything”, blames his teacher for making English lessons boring, and gives a teacher in another subject credit for helping him to boost his level of interest, and to do his homework and other assignments. For him, it seems that the teacher holds the key to enjoyment and learning, while he remains passive. Indirectly, Steinunn puts the blame for her failure on her teacher, who she says used the wrong teaching methods and did not treat students equally. The paradoxes in what Steinunn says are striking, since she claims to be a victim of bad teaching, and yet only fails when she herself stops working:

...most of the teachers fine, except my English teacher, but you know, the school, maybe it didn’t suit me, even though the courses were okay. I did fine if I studied and made an effort, then I did fine, but in the end I

couldn't be bothered, so of course I failed. ... [the teacher] had favourites, so that some people got more teaching than others, ... for example my friend was her favourite because she had been an exchange student in Canada, so of course she got much better teaching than the rest of us....

Some students did work hard at secondary school. Magnús puts his level of effort as nine on a 1-10 scale and reaps the rewards now, since writing, which he had found difficult in primary school, has become “no problem” for him. Lilja soon discovered that she had a false estimation of her own proficiency and regretted not having worked harder in her first year. Had she done so, she says, the second-year course she took might have been easier. She believes that the problem may not have been that the course was difficult, but rather that students do not realise the limitations of their knowledge. She shows signs of being an autonomous and responsible learner, albeit in retrospect:

So I don't think it's necessarily that 300 is so hard but I think it's more that kids don't realise, and I say that about myself, you know, don't realise in 100 and 200, they think they know it all and then they've just scraped through those courses, and then they go into 300 and then it's no longer possible to bluff your way through it, no it's not. ... If I was doing it again I'd work harder in 100 and 200, definitely 100%, because in 300 I studied like I don't know what because I knew, I'd realised that I wouldn't pass without studying, but just think if I'd worked harder in 100, 200, and not taken it for granted and thought that I knew it, then I would have been even better in 300.

Just as in the case of the School Group and the University Group, however, English is not seen as a difficult subject at school, nor one in which students scrape by with a pass. The fact that tasks were boring and inconsequential, with little emphasis placed upon explaining the purpose of activities, caused an unwillingness to work hard and students now regret they were not pushed to participate more and fulfil their potential. Some participants enjoyed reading literature at school, but there seems to be a similar level of criticism aimed at schools and dependence on teachers as among the School Group participants. There is in general some criticism of English studies in the Employment Group, although whether this is a symptom of a broader dissatisfaction about life and work is unclear. Diljá's story shows very clearly that some students at secondary school may not be getting the support they need and have little idea of where they can turn for help.

5.5.2 Cognitive Self

What Employment Group participants say they learned in English courses at secondary school will be presented in six sub-categories. Firstly, gains in language proficiency will be described, and then other gains in academic, social or metacognitive skills. Learning about literature in English and general world knowledge obtained through English courses will be presented. Following this, a section is devoted to what participants feel was lacking in English teaching, and what they would like to have learnt at school. Sources of English learning will be presented, that is participants' perceptions of where they have gained the English that they know, followed finally by their ideas about what difference it would make to them had they not studied English at secondary school.

Several participants talk about making gains in grammar at secondary school. Baldur, a skilled tradesman in the car industry, has gained accuracy in spelling and grammar. Accuracy, he believes, is useful, since "you can be hard to understand if you don't spell right, or decline words right, so it's useful, to make you easier to understand". Several other participants express similar ideas; that grammar is only learnt at school and more specifically that grammar beyond a basic foundation is learnt at secondary school. Despite claiming to have learnt nothing in secondary school English, Haraldur believes that he did gain knowledge concerning "something to do with grammar maybe, *nouns* and the difference, you know, between nouns and verbs and all that".

Vocabulary also features in participants' perceptions. Freyr has learnt the words for foodstuffs, spices and kitchen equipment, and others have learnt words through extensive reading and through having to give definitions in exams. Learning vocabulary in isolation appears as a major feature of secondary school English courses, but participants also mention improving their reading proficiency through literature and through textbooks in English in other subjects. Dagný, who is taking an extra secondary school course in physics through distance-learning, realises that "there are words ... that I learned later when I was 18 or 19, not 16 ...". She gives credit to secondary school for deepening her general vocabulary and enabling her to read specialised texts more easily now. Practising writing skills was useful as well, where grammar and vocabulary are put into practice, as Lilja explains:

...mainly verbs and so on ... and some words that I didn't know before, now I know what they are and how you use them ...I think that although 300 was terribly difficult, it actually taught me the most.

... sometimes we had to hand in essays about TV programmes, in English ... maybe the plot or something. Yes, I liked that. I felt I learned a lot from it too.

Magnús works for a telecommunications company, and thinks that his knowledge of formal business language improved at secondary school. For him, writing essays seems to encompass practice in a range of skills, as well as being fun:

...when you're writing an essay you're expressing yourself and it's fun to express yourself. ...in an essay you're learning so much. You're learning sentences, you're learning how to pronounce words, how to pronounce sentences, and how to present yourself, you know, when you're reading the essay out. ... you have to learn to talk to the class without looking at your paper all the time ... apart from learning English you're also learning to face a crowd.

Here we see that Magnús is improving his presentation skills as well as his English skills. Other Employment Group participants also talk about gaining learning skills at secondary school. One, for example, finds it useful to call up a mental chart of verbs when she is writing in English, while another was taught to memorise new vocabulary through mnemonics. Deeper proficiency in English has also given participants increased independence, responsibility, self-confidence and self-esteem. Regarding self-esteem, Freyr says:

...there was even a man here the other day who said, 'You know, I almost feel ashamed, because I've come to your country and you speak such good English that I'm ashamed not to know a single word in Icelandic.'

Freyr goes on to talk about self-confidence and responsibility at work:

...it's really important to me not to make a fool of myself. I hate [people] who always have to [say], 'Yes, sorry, I'll have to ask'. ... I just want to tell [clients] what they want to know, and that's how I think it ought to be in this job.

Egill, on the other hand, has not gained learning strategies at school. He does not find it helpful simply to be told the meaning of a new or difficult word encountered in class if he "can't see through the word or try to find

out what it means”, and seems to feel that his teacher should offer other strategies.

Employment Group participants mention having read English literature at secondary school, although books tend not to stand out as of especial significance to them. Several read Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*: for Haraldur it was “just a good book”, whereas Svava found it far too difficult, akin to reading the Nobel prize-winning Halldór Laxness in 5th grade. Tinna remembers reading *Animal Farm* because she was “of course, terribly interested in animals, of course”. Baldur and Steinunn enjoyed reading ghost stories and horror stories. No participant mentions particular gains from reading literature in English, and Tinna’s comment about *Animal Farm* suggests that she had little understanding of the book.

What participants do have a lot to say about is what they perceive as lacking value or usefulness in English studies at secondary school and what they would have liked to do but did not get the opportunity to do. Learning vocabulary out of context, with Icelandic translations given by the teacher, was what Egill felt was useless, as he could not learn new words this way. Writing a diary was pointless for Haraldur because he learned nothing new from it, while Magnús saw no clear purpose in watching films. It was merely an easy way out for the teacher:

...like the teacher couldn’t think of anything to do and just let us watch a film, some English film, as if you don’t watch enough films at home. I didn’t see there was much point to it.

Four of the five male participants mention aspects of English at secondary school that seemed pointless to them. Baldur explains in detail how “Oxford English” was taught at his school, goes to great pains to describe what it is, and seems to have little idea of why such emphasis should be placed on it:

Oxford English, it’s more complicated than American, or English in America ... there are different words and different conjugations ... it was only Oxford English that was taught, the other wasn’t on offer, but I’m more used to the other kind. ... Oxford English is more complicated, ... I can always understand everything in ordinary English more or less but there are words in Oxford English that I wouldn’t understand. ... something that you usually talk about, and then in Oxford English there may be another word for it, which is really special, which no-one uses, and no-one talks about that word, but you have to learn it.

Things that participants would have liked to do in English at secondary school include learning more academic and specific vocabulary, and practising speaking skills. Several mention that they regret not having had more pronunciation practice, and practice in making presentations. Emphasis may have been put on reading and writing English, but the problem remains that, even if the teacher speaks English in class, students are reluctant to express themselves in English in class:

you're so shy about speaking English, and ... when I'm speaking to other Icelanders, I find it terribly difficult to speak English ... I find it so silly to talk to Icelanders in a language other than Icelandic

Steinunn, who did not finish secondary matriculation but who now "chats" in written English on the Internet, knows that she hesitates when speaking English because she lacks fluency. She says:

There was very little done as far as I remember, it was mainly reading and taking exams, just, you know, reading and writing. Most emphasis was put on that, at least where I was. ...Yes, working with others [would have been fun] or even just you know with the teacher, just getting practice in speaking English, in having a conversation in English, in being able to get by without having to stop and think all the time.

More preparation for the future would also have been helpful, as well as learning more specific vocabulary, linked to interests or future work:

No, I didn't think so [that English was practical]. There was nothing you could use in the future, as if nobody was thinking about that. It seemed to me that no-one was thinking about that.

I think what I lack mainly is difficult words, that's the main thing I've noticed, perhaps mainly academic words.

...they could have widened [learning English] and broadened our horizons, made it more exciting, so you could take one course maybe in some sort of English in literature, English for business, English for health.

Several others talk about not getting help with losing their Icelandic accent, or with learning to speak with an English, rather than an American,

accent. Magnús puts on an exaggerated Icelandic accent to show how he does not want to speak, asking and answering:

...who wants to speak with an accent like that? No-one wants to speak like that. ... when you're an Icelander you have a certain pride and you want to be in the same boat as others.

Magnús, as well as others, also feels that courses in general should have been harder and more demands should have been made. There was little depth in tasks and they were gone over too quickly. Written work was returned corrected but without feedback or explanations. Some feel that more advanced grammar should have been taught and more time spent on practical exercises involving using new grammar and vocabulary both in writing and speaking. Svava, who is now in part-time vocational study, seems disappointed that she has not reached a level of proficiency that allows her to make use of English sources in assignments:

Yes, after all these years learning English, I think it's the absolute minimum that you can use sources in English, but I've stopped doing that, I just don't think I can cope with it with my English

Participants make interesting comments about where they have learnt English. Television, films and computers are seen as the major sources of learning, although schools have provided teaching in grammar, writing, and domain-specific vocabulary. Dagný explains:

...the thing is that actually I talk like characters on television talk, and then I know the other grammar, so I probably don't know any grammar in America, but I know English grammar, that is, what we've been learning. ... So all the grammar part and things like that, it all comes from school and all the rest comes from the television actually and films.

Others, such as Baldur, Haraldur and Egill, have learnt from computer games as well, with English just “seeping in”, although Baldur believes that learning through computer games and learning at school complement each other well to give “a good result”. Steinunn has gained vocabulary from online chatting, mainly written and mainly with Americans. Specific vocabulary such as that which Freyr finds so essential to his work was learned only at school, where “I found it very useful that I wasn't just put into any old English, but that it was English connected with the industry”.

Finally, Tinna stresses her belief in the power of television and films to teach English when she explains why, in her opinion, Icelanders surpass other Europeans in proficiency in English. She had gone to language school in Spain and:

... everyone was surprised that I knew English so well, because like Germans in Germany, and in Spain, really nobody knows English because the television there is translated into Spanish or German. It's only taught in school, so there's a really big difference.

Finally, there are participants' perceptions of what difference not studying English at secondary school would have made to them. Here participants do not appear to be at all in consensus about the value of secondary school. For Egill, Haraldur, Steinunn, Svava and Lilja the difference would be minimal. Haraldur's opinion is:

It wouldn't have changed anything in how much English I know, because I didn't learn anything. ... [would have changed] very little anyway, about my knowledge of English. That's the honest answer.

Egill says:

I don't know, I don't think it would make much difference. Not much. Yes, it would make a bit of a difference, but I don't think it would make a big difference.

Several participants talk about gaining a "foundation" at primary school. Although Lilja found her third course at secondary school very difficult, she feels that by the end of primary school her knowledge of English was sufficient for her to "get by". This foundation, together with the English she learnt from watching films, means that not doing English at secondary school would "not have made a particularly big difference". Nonetheless she is surprised that she was only obliged to take three courses at secondary school.

For Freyr, who works in catering, however, secondary school English made an enormous difference. There he learnt words relevant to his future job, and thus improved his proficiency in a way that he would not have done by himself. For him, television English was not enough:

...that's why this English is part of this education that I have, because it's relevant to the industry, so yes I think it would have made a huge

difference if I hadn't taken these two English courses. Because then you would have to teach yourself ... it was an enormously long list and I would never have been bothered to do it if I hadn't taken these courses. No, you know, I wouldn't do it of my own accord just because I was going to work in a restaurant ... but I would definitely watch English films and even get better that way, but it would make a difference, yes. It would have made a big difference.

It is evident that many Employment Group participants have gained an extra depth in English proficiency at school. Many feel that they gained from reading literature and some are conscious of the fact that their improved accuracy in writing and speaking is important for them at work. With hindsight, participants seem to realise that they have benefitted from difficult courses at school and that their own immaturity was detrimental to their learning at the time. Others, however, believe they gained little or nothing at school (possibly because they have not had the opportunity of taking career-oriented or English for Special Purposes courses). Skarpaas (2011) makes interesting observations on the importance learners attach to the practical applicability of English courses in the Norwegian context.

Finally I will report the findings in the Interactive coding category.

5.5.3 Interactive Self

In this section I will present findings on the Interactive Self, that is on how Employment Group participants use English in their everyday lives and how they self-assess their proficiency. Also presented here are participants' perceptions of their present use of English compared to their anticipated use when they were at secondary school and of their own language identity as Icelandic users of English. Responses to the question *What difference would it make for you if you didn't know English?* are also accounted for in this section.

Many of the participants use English every day in work-related capacities or for their own leisure. Reading, watching television, listening to music, searching on the Internet, chatting via computer games or social networks are some of activities they mention. Employment environments ranging from car maintenance centres to fashion shops call for English on a daily basis. Baldur has to read the instructions on "all sorts of goods and materials and things connected to work that aren't translated into Icelandic", since presumably not using them correctly could cause damage. Working in an internationally-franchised fashion shop calls for frequent email correspondence with head office, writing sales reports and reading

standardised work descriptions (for example, about where and how new lines should be displayed in the shop). It seems that many employment situations in Iceland involve speaking English, both with customers and colleagues. Dagný and Egill both work in shops and have to deal with non-Icelandic-speaking customers. Egill encounters problems selling beds through the medium of English because:

...the English I use here at work and ordinary English are quite different. People ask about mattresses and I may not have the words to explain a mattress for them. Maybe that comes with practice, just trying to find, picking out the words you use.

Before he started working in catering, Freyr knew he would have to explain dishes and ingredients to customers in English, but he also has to answer a wide variety of enquiries from customers who “can ask about everything”. This means that sometimes he has to do a quick Internet search at work before passing the answer on to a customer. Tinna also has to speak English to foreign parents at the pre-school where she works. Although some foreign parents may be native English-speakers, others are Polish or from countries in Africa. She has also been asked to interpret for the pre-school principal, who apparently sees her as more proficient in English.

Many workplaces in Iceland employ non-Icelandic-speaking staff, and English always seems to be the language of communication with them. For one participant working in a warehouse, this means that she is transported into an English-speaking environment for the entire working day:

...it was last year, then I just hardly spoke any Icelandic here all day. When I left, you know, when I was walking home I'd started thinking to myself in English as well because I was only ever talking English. ... but they know a bit less than us, you know, well, in their countries films aren't in English, it's all translated. So it's not as if you have to use everything you know, but still you have to use [English].

Two participants do need a high level of proficiency in English at work. Jakob is employed part-time by a non-governmental organisation, and has to be capable of writing formal letters abroad without errors, “like at work, in order to be able to sound rather serious it's important to write well”. Magnús works for a telecommunications company. He writes up to 30 emails a day in English, and uses video-conferencing. As he says, “English

is just [number] one, two and three, what we use when we're dealing with other countries".

Apart from work, participants watch English and American films. The lyrics of the music they listen to are in English. They use Skype and Facebook in English. (Facebook has been translated into Icelandic, but the translation, according to Dagný, is in some sort of "ancient Icelandic" that no-one under the age of 50 uses!). Dagný has "made friends through knowing English" because the foreign members of her women's football team spend more time with the Icelandic girls who speak English well. Other hobbies necessitate using English, for instance belonging to a mountain rescue squad, and particularly being part of the communications team, as Egill is, because they could be sent abroad in the event of a natural disaster.

Having foreign family members and friends also means that most participants use English, possibly face to face if they live in Iceland, or via the computer, whether they live in Iceland or abroad. Freyr likes joking in English with his half-Scottish girlfriend, and Magnús chats with his young niece, who has just started learning English at school. Computer chat is often spoken but may also be in writing, in which case grammar and vocabulary are informal and spelling is not important. Travel abroad is very common for these participants. Some go on holiday or visit family members who live abroad, while others, like Tinna, have worked abroad for short periods of time. Magnús spent five years travelling with a family member when he was a child. Egill, who admits to having been "a bit of a dunce" at school himself, did voluntary work in Africa, and is the only participant who has actually taught English. He explains:

I taught English as well, or sort of, you know. There were three or four boys there who spoke a bit of English and I was sort of trying to broaden their vocabulary. ... It's different there, incredibly strange, kids out in Africa and English. Because they're so interested in learning it that if you say one word and they know what it means, then it sticks, it sticks completely. They just suck up words. It was really easy to teach them English. And it was really fun how much they picked up, how much they learned.

Reading for pleasure in English is also common, with several participants saying they prefer reading books in the original English rather than translations into Icelandic. Magnús especially likes "adventure books, which can take you out of this ordinary world for a while".

Writing is not something that many participants do for pleasure, although Lilja, for example, does write comments and texts on websites, and Svava writes letters occasionally to native and non-native speakers she knows. Steinunn, however, “chats” in writing every day and has improved her vocabulary and fluency through doing this. Magnús also writes for his own pleasure, posting stories on the Net and getting feedback from other people, and Jakob is writing a novel in English. For this reason (and also, he assumes, in case he goes on to postgraduate study abroad), the increased depth of proficiency that he gained at secondary school is of benefit:

...you need to be able to write texts that are not just comprehensible but rather need to be well-written and ... the vocabulary as well that’s used in these classes is often different from what people use and may be vocabulary that you don’t always think you need, but it’s very convenient to have it.

There are exceptions to the general rule of participants using English on a daily basis. Diljá is dyslexic, does not have a high level of proficiency or self-confidence about English, and avoids using it at all costs. She only watches television in English if there are subtitles. She uses the Internet in Icelandic but belongs to a choir where she often sings in English. Although she thinks she pronounces the lyrics correctly, she does not understand them. She is so nervous of speaking English that she has stopped going to basketball practice, even though she enjoys the sport, because she fears having to speak to the English-speaking coach who has tried to engage her in conversation:

And there’s a man and a woman who coach who speak English and Icelandic too, but more English, and it’s a challenge for me to go to practices because I don’t understand when they’re explaining the exercises and speaking English, and I haven’t wanted to go to practices because of that. ... There’s so much that prevents me, just because of this. Because I am interested in it but I don’t dare go, that’s it, yes, wow.

The note of surprise at the end of this quote seems to suggest that Diljá has suddenly realised why she is reluctant to go to basketball practice.

Diljá goes on to talk in more general terms about her low level of proficiency in English, or rather what she assumes to be her low level of proficiency (since in fact she hardly ever uses English). In stark contrast to Baldur’s and Freyr’s awareness of being competent enough in English not

to have to ask for help from others at work, Diljá fears having to ask other players for explanations at basketball practice and does not appear to see any way out other than not attending practices:

...I'm backing out of it because I don't understand the exercises ... of course I ask the girls but I think it's so boring always, always 'Hey, sorry, what was he saying?' because I want to take responsibility, stand on my own two feet.

Her self-evaluation of her ability in English is in fact so low that not only does she feel prevented from doing a sport she enjoys, but also possibly doomed to failure as a mother. She took only one term of English at secondary school:

I remember so little of it, it's such a long time ago [*a 5-second pause*], but I don't know, if I had a child today, and of course they begin learning English so young, I don't know whether I would be able to teach my child. ... that I wouldn't be able to teach my child English. ... because I was diagnosed with dyslexia in 10th grade, and then of course it was all over, then I was going to secondary school.

Most participants, however, self-assess their knowledge of English as good or excellent: they can use the Internet, watch films, make themselves understood, and they perceive themselves as more competent than other Europeans. Some find it more stressful to talk to native English speakers than non-native speakers, and Dagný discovered that she was not always understood when she was in Britain because she was using American English vocabulary. In her case, however, her knowledge of British English helped her:

I used some words that aren't used in England, and then I realised. Of course I knew the other word, I mean the English word and I just changed it. Then they understood me.

Magnús, in contrast, believes that his English is actually “sometimes better” than his Icelandic. He, Tinna and Freyr have all been praised by native and non-native speakers for their ability in English. Both Tinna and Magnús have been taken for native speakers (Tinna by a native speaker, and Magnús by non-native speakers). Tinna explains what happened when she was at language school in Italy:

...there was a middle-aged English woman who was an English teacher, and she thought that I was actually from England when I was talking – she thought my English was that good. ... I was very proud of myself.

The result is that Tinna assesses her proficiency very highly:

... So that, yes, now of course I watch a lot of television, movies without subtitles and so on, it doesn't make any difference to me. I understand it all.

Haraldur used to have to look up words in a dictionary when he was younger, suggesting that he no longer needs to. Interestingly, he bases his self-assessment on his ability eight years previously, at primary school, rather than at present:

I would say it's very good because I use the computer so much. Got 9 on the standardised test anyway, took secondary school English at primary school because I scored so high.

Baldur, who, along with Diljá, Egill, Freyr and Steinunn, took fewer English courses at secondary school than the average for the Employment Group, dismisses his proficiency in English briefly:

In English? Okay I guess. I think I can make myself understood, and understand English too.

Svava is aware of reading being more difficult than speaking: using English when travelling abroad is no problem, but reading a newspaper is difficult because it is written in “much more sophisticated English than is taught in secondary school”. Her self-assessment is such that she can neither read academic texts nor write accurately:

I don't feel that I have a good enough foundation to use articles without using a dictionary for every other word...I think at least you ought to be able to use sources in English, but I can't do it with my English. ... And I was often terribly lost when I was writing texts in English, because no emphasis was put on word order. You know, there are little points that make a huge difference.

Participants were asked whether their current uses of English corresponded to their expectations when they were at secondary school. A few felt that they had foreseen completely that they would use English as

they were in fact doing. Haraldur, for example, knew then that he was living in an “international society” in which everyone uses English. Tinna has a similar view, and knew she would use English for travel, which she has done. Notwithstanding the fact that participants were aware of the importance of English in everyday life in Iceland and abroad, life has taken unexpected turns for many of them and they use English in more diverse ways than they foresaw. Dagný spent one year at university and knew that she would have to read textbooks in English there, but, having quit university, she did not expect to speak and read English in her job in as a shop assistant. Egill, similarly, had little idea he would have to sell furniture through English, and certainly had no vision of himself teaching English to youngsters in Africa. Magnús, who seems to have a strong foundation in English from travelling a lot when he was a child, nonetheless did not anticipate how well he would do in his present job or how much he would need English there. Tinna found using English in Spain self-evident, but says “no, it wasn’t uppermost in my mind when I started working at a pre-school that I would have to use English”.

It is Lilja, however, who expresses most surprise at finding herself in a situation where English has become so much of a “second language” to her that she can say “it wouldn’t actually make much difference if I was working abroad somewhere”. Her present use of English is significantly more than she anticipated:

Yes, I use it much more. I would never actually have believed that I would have to use it like this, especially before I came here. ... So you know I’m actually very grateful for how much importance is placed on English here.

When, after some initial interviews, the significance of English in the lives of young Icelanders became evident, a question was added into the interview framework to try to elicit from participants how they perceived their linguistic identity, and whether English was eroding their national identity, which in Iceland is traditionally strong. Only one participant, Magnús, perceived English as being closer to him than Icelandic and several expressed anxiety about how English is affecting the Icelandic language, and especially the language used by people younger than themselves.

Although Haraldur claims that “language isn’t something that determines who you are, it’s just a way of expressing yourself”, he complains about teenagers’ deteriorating Icelandic:

I don't know whether Icelandic will die out or something. That could easily happen if you look at how some of these young kids are talking. ...Like idiots ... talking some totally crazy Icelandic, using abbreviations, changing words and loads of English slang, and writing, just look at how they write Icelandic, totally crazy, some of them, kids of maybe 15 or so.

Svava also fears for the future of Icelandic, saying that she has trouble understanding some younger Icelanders because they use so much slang. Her view is slightly different from Haraldur's because, although English may be having a negative effect on Icelandic, young people's ability in English may be merely superficial and "these slang words, I don't think that shows how good Icelandic youngsters are at English".

It was important to most participants to be able to speak and use English well. English is seen as an easy language, with simple grammar:

It's not like in Icelandic, then people decline words and the word may sound the opposite to what it.., when you've declined it or something, but English is almost always the same and the only thing you do is add on one letter at the end.

Baldur goes on to explain that Icelanders who know English well can speak quite fluently since there are no difficult sounds, whereas foreigners who know Icelandic well can always be identified as non-native speakers. He did, however, himself have difficulty understanding his (Icelandic) teacher of English at school, suggesting that English may not always be such an easy language. English is seen as an international language that Icelanders must learn because Iceland is such a small country. In Tinna's view, English "isn't necessarily a foreign language"; this is reserved for languages she doesn't know, such as German and Spanish.

Knowing English well means not making a fool of oneself, and being able to travel:

I'm not stuck here, there's nothing that keeps me here really. So my knowledge of English is very important to me because if I'm going to go somewhere I have to know it and I have to know it 100% and more.

Despite wanting to know English to a high standard, participants are strongly aware of their Icelandic identity. Dagný says "I'm an Icelandic", Freyr claims "you won't find a more Icelandic man than me". He has lived abroad but says "of course I'm always an Icelandic".

There is also the question of what life would be like without any knowledge of English. All the participants believe that their lives would be very different if they did not know English. They would not be able to function in the jobs they have, travel, watch films without subtitles, or understand the instructions for gadgets such as mobile phones. They would be dependent on other people for help in all these areas of their lives, and that would put them in an unpleasant situation. Television, films and computer use feature as very important elements of participants' lives, mainly it would seem for entertainment but also for gathering information, following what is going on in other parts of the world, and keeping in touch with friends and family. Since instructions on imported packaged food are not in Icelandic, basic functions such as cooking would be difficult. Many participants know people who know less English than they do. Egill's grandmother finds it hard to shop where there are foreign assistants who do not speak Icelandic, Dagný's mother would not be able to cope with university study because the textbooks are in English, and Lilja feels pity for her foreign work colleagues with their poor English skills. Magnús would not have the hobbies he has, most of which are all connected in some way or another with English.

Magnús (who spends his weekends on his father's fishing boat) sums up what English means for young Icelanders today:

I would say that among all of my friends, English is something they think they need to know, and something that will help them in everyday life when they've come into the labour market and so on. So I think it's great, compared to when I was a kid, then nobody wanted to learn English, it was just boring. Kids today like English and try to talk English with each other. They like talking *gibberish* when they're kids and when they start understanding English they like talking English with each other. You know, I love it, my family loves it, my friends love it, English has just become something that is daily life, or a daily part of life and it helps people, whether they're buying something on the Net or just chatting to people in other countries.

Finally, the Employment Group uses little code-switching between English and Icelandic, with the exception of two participants who explain how they use English at work. A few English words in general use in Iceland nowadays are used, such as *inbox* and *outbox*, *Facebook*, *hæ* (hi), and *bæ* (bye) are used, as well as words which have been adapted to Icelandic grammar usage, such as *pikka upp* (pick up), *punchlæn* (punchline), *bonda* (to bond), and *dánlóda* (download). Steinunn talks

about *spelling* and *grammar*. Magnús, who works in telecommunications, uses several jargon terms in English such as *videoconference call*, *business English* and *the business package*. Some of these he adapts to Icelandic grammar, for example, *international kontaktum* (contacts), *vinnumeil* (work mail) and *publisha* (my spellings, since these words were spoken, not written, by participants). Freyr, who works in the catering trade does the same, and also gives examples of phrases he often hears or uses, such as *a party of four*, *a party of two*, and *Could you make a table reservation for me?*.

It did not come as a surprise to any participants in the University Group that English textbooks were used in tertiary-level courses, but several participants in the Employment Group express surprise at how much they have to use English at work. Some have to speak English, while others are expected to write emails, but most use English more than they anticipated. The exception here is the catering trade employee, whose vocational training has prepared him well for his job.

Due to the wide range of employment types and the differing expectations of participants in the Employment Group, it is difficult to make generalisations about the findings. We see, however, that the Employment Group has very similar uses for English to the School Group and the University Group, that is, for entertainment, travel, and reading and searching on the computer. Additionally, the Employment Group participants use English at work to an extent that they did not anticipate. A basic level of English is now no longer sufficient for many of them as they need to use specific vocabulary and their reputation at work may be at stake if they make mistakes or cannot express themselves adequately. Their identity as speakers of Icelandic does not seem to be jeopardised by their daily use of English. Several complain about English teaching at school, and yet there is little evidence to suggest that they voice their complaints to teachers or school authorities. It may be that dissatisfaction was not felt at the time, but has developed after leaving school, perhaps because this group of participants uses English in ways that school English did not prepare them for (whereas the University Group is mainly obliged to use the language for reading, a skill that was emphasised at school). It is interesting that no participant mentions having suggested changes to the curriculum or in-class activities and assignments to teachers.

5.6 Perceptions of the classroom

Although the focus of the study is not on instruction, participant perceptions of the learning environment are evident in the data. That the teacher is the central figure in the classroom is clear. What is more, he or she seems to walk a narrow line of being expected to be entertaining, creating a relaxed atmosphere and using innovative teaching methods, while at the same time maintaining discipline. I present here an overview of how participants appear to view teachers of English, course content, discipline, participation, and satisfaction with instruction.

5.6.1 Teacher proficiency and personality

Perhaps understandably, good teachers are perceived as needing to know more than students. There is little suggestion in study data that participants are conscious of teachers having extensive knowledge and proficiency in English. Several participants are pleased to have learned about the history of English, which does suggest they value gaining new information from a well-informed teacher. Generally speaking, teachers' language skills seem to be judged on accent and vocabulary. Freyr comments that "if my pronunciation is better than the teacher's, then the teacher is obviously not terribly good".

Rich knowledge of literature is not perceived as an advantage in a teacher: rather than holding such cultural and linguistic knowledge in esteem, Jakob sees it as limiting his teacher's ability:

she simply wasn't very good...she had a sort of one-sided experience of the English language through literature.

On the other hand, some participants value the care teachers put into selecting suitable material, allowing choice of assignments, and welcoming different opinions, for example about literature. Similarly, students appreciate teachers who show an interest in them, for example by taking the trouble to learn their names.

Participants perceive the teacher as wholly responsible for creating a pleasant classroom environment. Teachers are expected to make classes fun: a teacher who is "fun" can make even difficult material easy.

5.6.2 Course content, instruction and assessment

Instructional methods for first- and second-year classes, according to participant perceptions, include class discussions, writing essays or other texts, individual grammar exercise work (corrected in class) and translations. Some activities, such as making wall posters, are perceived as childish and a waste of time. Vocabulary learning is seen as important although teaching of vocabulary may be ineffectual; especially, it seems, if the teacher is unsure of word meanings, as Egill explains:

...you were working through the book and there were some words you didn't understand. Then he wrote on the board, the word and then, if he remembered what it meant, then he read it out and wrote it.

Equally, Svava for one seems to see no reason for going over news articles which contain "words that, you know, I've never heard before".

On the other hand, Egill is full of praise for another (native-speaker) teacher who used a book about academic reading: this was "a really good course" because "it's like black and white, how Americans and Icelanders organise their books". Other participants feel they are not ready for university textbooks in English. Study strategies are not mentioned to any extent, although some participants welcome the fact that instruction has made them accustomed to using dictionaries.

Third and fourth year optional courses (for example, on literature or films) seem to be more interesting and rewarding than first and second year courses and the teacher is not obliged to work so hard to make classes fun. Reading well-known works of literature they perhaps would not read otherwise seems to give many participants pleasure. Ingi's more practical view may not be typical:

Personally I don't think I'm going to have to find metaphors in poems and that sort of thing, you know, in daily life.

Broadly speaking, participants perceive continuous assessment as preferable to final examinations and appreciate feedback from their teachers.

5.6.3 Discipline and participation

Methods of keeping class discipline are not mentioned as such, which suggests that keeping order in class is not perceived by participants as

problematic. There is a strong conviction that the atmosphere in English classes should be relaxed: learners appear to be unwilling to do tasks they are not interested in. Hera is the only participant who mentions being afraid of her English teacher, but it seems that this scariness was little more than a ploy to establish discipline:

...the only teacher who got everyone to do their homework...we were shaking we were so scared of her, but then bit by bit she got us to respect her so after a while she was just great fun.

Nonetheless, many participants seem to feel strongly about the lack of classroom speaking practice and their perceptions indicate that they value “being made” to speak English in class. They seem to recognise the fact that learners will choose to speak Icelandic with each other and with the teacher if there are no repercussions, and therefore want teachers to push them more into speaking:

If it was just ‘You only speak English here in here’, I think it would work, you know.

We’re finishing English now. We just need to work systematically; just make us talk and read difficult texts.

Just English in every class.

Although Jóhanna points out that “perhaps they don’t practise that because they assume we get enough practice or something”, it would appear that some teachers do not, or cannot, maintain the disciplinary standards they set. Einar, for example, admits the teacher tries but cannot enforce the use of English in class, meaning that “if you can get away with [using Icelandic], you do”.

5.6.4 Satisfaction

What is clear, however, from participants is that despite having little idea of the reasons behind course syllabi (whether instructors talk about learning objectives and outcomes or not is hard to gauge) many view course content as adequate and see no gaps in instruction.

Teachers may vary but even having a teacher who “isn’t very nice, a bit special” and who taught “strange sentences and conjugations” does not have to mean the participant failed the course. Being taught by a good

teacher is essential, and a good teacher seems to be perceived as one who makes his or her classes fun. Linda, a university student, explains what an English teacher should be like:

I don't mean that the teacher has to be telling jokes or something, I mean that he's interested in what he's doing and what he's teaching and finds neat ways to teach... I think the most important thing is that he's interested in what he's doing.

5.7 Summary

The main findings of interviews with participants in the School Group, the University Group and the Employment Group have been reported here. What is most striking about the data is the enormous amount of information forthcoming from participants about English and English studies at secondary school, and the huge diversity of perceptions and opinions. Certain categories of responses were recognised early on in data analysis and the themes emerging from analysis are clear (presented as a chart in Figure 17). However, the range of uses of English and attitudes expressed towards school English is significant, and supports the importance of further qualitative research of this kind.

Findings were coded into three main areas termed the *Affective Self*, the *Cognitive Self* and the *Interactive Self*. As explained in section 5.2.1. above the term “self” is used here in its broader meaning of what distinguishes and makes people different from each other (Oxford Dictionaries, 2013). Through constant comparative analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) categories were seen to emerge which could be grouped into clear themes. At the same time, the data maintained its qualitative differences and the individuality of participant responses was upheld. As the L2 Learning Experience (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b) was explored, these themes were given the term *Self* that Dörnyei uses in the other two elements of the L2 Motivational Self System, the term ‘self’ being used here to include views of present as well as future identity. The representation of the L2 Motivational Self System adapted for a Nordic context has thus not been forced upon the data, but is clearly emergent from it since relevance is seen as a new important element.

The Affective Self dealt with feelings about English study at secondary school, ranging from feelings of pleasure because English is easy and English classes fun, to feelings of boredom and anxiety. The School Group appears to make more demands on the teacher, expecting classes to be

entertaining and fun. Some participants express negative feelings towards their English studies, feel they have gained little and enjoyed little, and a few avoid using the language productively. Others, largely in the older University and Employment Groups, experience feelings of regret that the English instruction they received at school was inadequate and that their present needs in English were not sufficiently catered for. Some participants in these groups seem to believe that it was their immaturity when they were at school that had prevented them from taking more responsibility for their own learning.

The Cognitive Self showed what participants believe they learned in English learning context. What seems clear is that many participants in the School, University and Employment Groups perceive that they have gained valuable added depth to their English proficiency; some have also gained a deeper understanding of literature and new knowledge about a range of topics. Others feel classes have been a waste of time and gains minimal.

In the Interactive Self the situation moved out of the classroom. Participants' many uses of English, in Iceland no less than abroad, were reported. In the case of secondary school students, their anticipated uses in the future were reported, while the older participants' present uses were compared retrospectively to their expectations some years earlier. It is perhaps not surprising that young people aged between 18 and 28 share some uses for English regardless of whether they are at secondary school or university or in employment. English is needed for entertainment, for computer use and for communicating with people who do not speak Icelandic. However, participants in the University Group need English for reading large quantities of academic matter, and the Employment Group uses English in a variety of different situations needing specific vocabulary, making their English needs after secondary school more demanding than they anticipated. Finally, participant responses to questions regarding their self-perceived identity as Icelanders using English daily were given, along with their views of what life would be like if they had no knowledge of English. Here little difference between the School, University and Employment Groups is evident, with most participants perceiving English as an essential feature of their lives and scarcely less important than their mother tongue, Icelandic. Their feelings of national identity, however, do not seem to be in danger, as, almost without exception, participants affirm loyalty to Iceland and the Icelandic language.

The same day-to-day uses of English are mentioned as are discussed by the School Group and the University Group: television, computer games, searches for information on the Internet, and chatting with friends and

family. Similarly, participants perceive most of their knowledge of English as coming from computer and television use. There is a noticeable difference between the University Group participants, whose uses of English after secondary school harmonise with their expectations, and the Employment Group participants, who use English in a much wider range of environments and need a depth and specificity that they did not foresee.

The School Group has little idea of what level of English will be expected of them after school and in what circumstances – some seem to foresee using English mainly for entertainment and tourism. Choice and challenge are important to all three groups; that is having some say in what tasks are done at school and having to expend effort. Understanding the purpose of activities is also important, as is gaining learning strategies which can be used after school. Most participants mention wanting better speaking skills, both improved fluency and accent. Finally, although many participants in all three Groups do say they gain proficiency and accuracy in English, they wish for more specific language, be it academic vocabulary or work-related language. All Groups say that the main sources of their knowledge of English are computers, the television and films. English is seen as an easy language, and participants' success at school is easily attained and boosts their self-confidence. English is also clearly associated with entertainment and fun, as well as with information-gathering via the Internet. English is an essential part of the lives of almost all participants, whether they are at school, at university or in employment. However, daily use of English does not diminish their identity as Icelanders.

Looking at the classroom context as a whole, participants appear to see it as unthreatening place. They do not seem to perceive their instructors as fountains of knowledge nor as disciplinarians. On the contrary, many of them perceive a comfortable relationship with instructors who they feel may have less language proficiency than themselves. In the classroom they seem largely uncritical of syllabus content; yet many are clearly uncertain about learning objectives.

Chapter 5 has looked at the results of the study. Results were accounted for, taking each participant group in turn and following the categories that emerged from analysis. I move on in Chapter 6 to discuss the results in the light of the literature and present an adapted model of the L2 Motivational Self System arising from the study.

6 Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 is devoted to a discussion of the results of the study. I begin with a discussion of the three elements of the paradigm presented in Chapter 4 (see Figure 17) and compare the findings within the three participant groups, that is: participants at secondary school, at university and in employment. Participants' attitudes to the classroom are covered briefly prior to a discussion of the construct of relevance as an individual difference in second-language learning as it appears in the study, and as the relevance to young Icelanders of English and of studying English at secondary school. I then discuss the results of the study in the light of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System. I present a new model of motivation in English-language learning for Scandinavia and Northern Europe. The model expands the L2 Learning Experience of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and takes the construct of relevance into account, thus permitting the inclusion of Iceland and other countries in Scandinavia and Northern Europe. I discuss triangulation and the transferability of the findings. At this point I return to the research questions guiding the study and consider to what extent they have been answered. The chapter ends with some personal comments on the study.

6.2 The Affective, Cognitive and Interactive Selves

Three main coding categories were extracted from analysis of interview data, covering the feelings participants expressed concerning English studies at secondary school, the learning gains they made in English studies, and the ways in which they used English in their everyday lives. I called these categories the *Affective Self*, the *Cognitive Self*, and the *Interactive Self*. In this way I am extending the use of the term 'self' to

include not only the L2 Self of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (that is a future possible self) but also the highly individualistic experience of learning and using English that engages participants' inner beings and personalities. The Affective and Cognitive Selves have their basis in an exploration of the third element of the L2 Motivational Self System, the L2 Learning Experience. In the learning context of school, the individual's self-image and self-concept are clearly important factors (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Kormos et al., 2011). The Interactive Self is conceived here as independent of the classroom setting: it involves the ways in which young people in Iceland (at secondary school or university and in employment) use English in their everyday lives. In terms of the construct of relevance (as defined at the end of Chapter 2), we see here that using English is highly relevant to young Icelanders, that is, it has contextualised present significance for them.

It should perhaps be recalled at this point that using English both in Iceland and abroad frequently and for purposes such as entertainment, study, work and general social interaction forms part of Iceland's new linguistic context. It is for this reason that the necessity of using English and the perceived level of success with which these interactions with English are carried out are discussed here under the blanket term of Interactive Self. It is clear, for example, that in Iceland reading in English affects not only language self-concept but more importantly self-concept in its own right. University study in Iceland, for instance, necessitates reading in English to such an extent that inadequate reading proficiency will not only affect self-perceptions as a language user, but may also mean that taking on the identity of a university graduate will never be realised. Similarly, an Icelandic teenager keen on computer games is likely to perceive him/herself not only as a game player but as an English-medium game player (although he or she may not use this terminology). Interacting with English in Iceland thus becomes an integral part of one's self, of 'who one is'. It has been pointed out in other contexts that popular culture in the digital age influences identity-making and language learning beyond the classroom (Pennycook, 2010).

I will now turn to a more detailed discussion of the three self categories as they emerge from the data.

6.2.1 The Affective Self

The *Affective Self* demonstrates clearly that a wide range of emotions is involved in studying English. For young people in Iceland, the English

language is closely associated with entertainment, which can be seen as related to the large amount of subtitled American and British television material broadcast in Iceland^{iv}. The link between English and entertainment in Iceland seems to colour learners' perceptions of the role of English classes, which are seen primarily in terms of enjoyment and relaxation. Although some participants mention working hard in English classes and in home preparation, many see little need to expend effort due to their belief that they will attain acceptable course grades without working hard. This in turn means that the classroom provides, for learners at least, a largely stress-free situation. It would appear that the English classroom in Iceland is the "safe place" conducive to language-learning (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 89).

On the other hand, although learners are very concerned with English studies being anxiety-free, ego-boosting and fun, they also express a desire for challenging tasks in which they can express their opinions and personalities. "Fun" clearly constitutes more than entertainment in the form of television programmes, music or films, even though (according to one participant) jokes are funnier in English than in Icelandic.

Interacting with the language, be it in writing essays or song lyrics, in devising dialogues for cartoons or in reading modern poetry, gives feelings of pleasure and promotes learning. Creating wall posters, on the other hand, is seen as a childish activity more suited to primary than secondary school. Learners seek the opportunity to communicate their own ideas, and thereby demonstrate the capacity for being "good language learners" (Rubin, 1975). They may, nonetheless, be more concerned about enjoyment than learning gains, and cautious about moving out of their "comfort-zone".

Feelings of high self-esteem about proficiency in English give young Icelanders a sense of security in their ability to travel and be independent. For members of a small nation with limited global influence, this is an important factor. Their stature on the world stage, or International Posture (Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Yashima, 2002, 2009), is enhanced by their belief in their own proficiency as superior to that of Southern and Eastern Europeans, and they gain some form of cosmopolitan capital (Block & Cameron, 2002; Weenink, 2008).

Although almost all participants express positive feelings about English and the majority talk in positive terms about the English classroom, negativity is also apparent. Being good at English and enjoying studying English are clearly linked, and some participants feel they only attain acceptable grades because they study hard. In their eyes proficiency in English is a talent, akin to a talent for a sport: not having this gift obliges one to expend effort, while the lucky others gain both pleasure and

effortless good grades from English at school. Learners who spend little of their free time watching television or playing computer games have less exposure to English than those who do, and this exposure does appear to improve the proficiency that is assessed at school. Some participants are keenly aware of having poorer pronunciation or weaker expressive competence than their peers. They are nonetheless unwilling to take the initiative and make demands for instruction or simply to take advantage of the classroom for practice and improvement. Anxiety and possible ridicule seem to characterise the English classroom for these learners. The question of whether feelings of anxiety result in or are the result of poor proficiency is raised by MacIntyre (2002). In his view, the interplay of emotions, individual differences and motivation in foreign-language learning has so far received insufficient attention but could prove to provide valuable research findings about the language learning process. This opinion certainly holds good of the Icelandic context where little research has been done into anxiety in the language classroom.

Feelings of boredom and pointlessness are also experienced in the study, linked more to irrelevant material than anxiety about performing well. Having no say in what material is studied and being obliged to read books that have no appeal alienates learners to the point that they cannot or will not progress. It is also clear that for a considerable group of learners studying English at secondary school is an experience fraught with feelings of boredom, pointlessness, inferiority, anxiety and regret. Furthermore, the data shows that dyslexia in English may lead to feelings of inferiority and low self-worth: if coping strategies are not taught, helplessness and hopelessness may follow. Later on regret and bitterness may be the feelings that linger on, with participants wishing they had been pushed or had pushed themselves more, or feeling that they were cheated out of one area of their education. Since it was not the intention of this study to investigate dyslexia in foreign-language learning, serendipity saw to valuable data being obtained about the possible repercussions of dyslexia on learners. Discussing dyslexia at length is beyond the scope of this study. However, in a study carried out in Hungary Kormos, Csizér and Sarkadi (2009) show that for many students with dyslexia foreign-language learning is a negative and anxiety-inducing experience. There is clearly a need for more research into how learners with dyslexia can be helped in the language classroom. In contexts such as Iceland where using English is such an accepted part of life, this necessity becomes even more pressing.

6.2.2 The Cognitive Self

Learning is what schools concern themselves with to a large extent, and participant responses in the study give an indication of the types of learning that go on, and that are lacking, in English classes in secondary schools in Iceland.

Secondary school English provides proficiency over and above that which is gained at primary school or from general exposure to the language. For many participants it is quite clear that they perceive that they learn colloquial language from television and films, but grammar and spelling accuracy and more formal English in general from school. It seems that, regardless of whether school learners have a conscious awareness of register in English, they do realise that there is more to English than informal, spoken language. The more extensive proficiency in English that they attain at secondary school is relevant to them partly because it gives them more choice of expression and partly because it gives them more self-confidence as users of English. More control of the language and a larger vocabulary are seen as necessary components of expression on serious matters, be they connected to school essays or business correspondence. Thus they clearly view learning not merely as *explicit* but as *implicit* (Spada, 2011); that is, they are concerned about **using** English rather than **knowing about** English. On the other hand, it may be that learners need more metacognitive understanding of the need for formal register receptive and productive skills. It is useful in the discussion of extended proficiency to consider the construct of motivation as a long-lasting drive to achieve an aim. In order to persevere towards an ever-advancing goal of ‘knowing English’ long-term motivation must be a factor.

Although higher proficiency in English is seen as a good thing and for most participants has been gained at secondary school, traditional grammar exercises such as gap-fills and reformulations may be seen as boring, useless or, in some cases, necessary but uninteresting. Whether or not this sort of rote practice does result in learning has been questioned (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Nunan, 1999) but the fact remains that “learners do not necessarily learn what teachers teach” (Europe, 2001, p. 140). Participants, on the other hand, do perceive using English as both interesting and challenging, and also believe that learners at secondary school are at an appropriate age to take on more complex grammar. They also appreciate the more interactive work done in advanced courses at secondary school involving more choice of study material and class discussions. However, there is little evidence to suggest that participants fully appreciate the level of proficiency needed for university study or some fields of employment.

Instead of taking advantage of the learning environment at school in order to learn more, some participants seem content to assume that they will cope in the future. We see here a somewhat happy-go-lucky view of the future, which may be connected to general lack of maturity or to some undefined national characteristic.

What also appears from close consideration of the data, although it is not voiced directly by participants, is that for the most part it is participants' receptive proficiency that is extended through exposure rather than their productive proficiency, although informal speaking skills are also gained. Generally speaking, productive skills are seen by participants as being gained at school, and in particular production of formal English, such as academic writing and more formal speaking. School study provides the opportunity to learn formal and academic vocabulary, "the difficult words" as Soffía says, as well as dictionary use. Here we see instruction in study skills which will enable students to maintain lifelong learning. Continuous assessment, although undoubtedly used in other school subjects too, also has a role to play in increasing learners' responsibility for their own studies. Weaker students especially learn that working steadily over the term can result in good grades, as long as it is course work that is assessed and not language skills learned from exposure to English outside school, which appears to be sometimes the case.

English at school provides other opportunities, and it is this range of opportunities, appealing to different students with different interests, personalities, aims, strengths and weaknesses, that I believe is especially valuable for learners. It is a range of learning opportunities making provision not for 'one-size-fits-all' but 'something-for-everyone' growth and progress.

Through attending English classes at secondary school young Icelanders in the study strengthen their social and study skills through collaborative projects, surmounting even the negative effects of bullying. They may overcome shyness through making presentations. Through increased linguistic accuracy, improved reading speed and comprehension they increase both their employment chances and their self-confidence. The latter observation points to how closely the Affective and Cognitive Selves are linked and how they may overlap. Young people in Iceland may get more out of reading literature, in any language, through working on analysis and interpretation of literature in English at school. Reading and study material in internationally-marketed textbooks for English as a foreign language usually focuses on a wide range of subjects, from magazine articles about celebrities to more serious articles about historical

events or famous people and places, and to dense extracts from academic work. The same is true of material chosen by English teachers in Iceland, and this diversity of material appeals to learners, and gives them valuable world knowledge, some of which will be relevant to every individual, as well as the simple message that knowledge can be gained through the medium of a second language. As far as reading literature is concerned, the fact that the Anglo-Saxon world of culture is and has been influential goes without saying: what is important for the participants in the study is that, as Snorri explains, “literature affects society” and a grounding in literature is necessary for understanding all manner of references in other contexts. However, whether reading works from the established canon of English literature aids language learning is a moot point.

There remains, however, the fact that learning gains are not made by all participants. For example, although some are positive about the heavy emphasis on learning new vocabulary, others find copying down English words and their Icelandic equivalents off the blackboard totally pointless. What is felt to be missing from English instruction at secondary school is mainly practice in speaking and pronunciation, although participants do mention shyness and unwillingness to speak English in class. Explaining the reason for some class activities seems to be wanting; perhaps learners would be more willing to take part in seemingly irrelevant activities if their purpose was made clear. Similarly, what is lacking for some participants is the experience of success, since even though they expend effort they achieve lower grades than others. If learners are in fact being tested and graded on general ability gained outside the classroom (for example, from television) rather than on study material, those who do not use English in their everyday out-of-school lives will inevitably perceive their classroom study as producing failure.

6.2.3 The Interactive Self

Initially, this element of the model was split into two sections that comprised an *International Self* and an *‘English’ Self*, the difference being whether participants were using English abroad or at home in Iceland (Jeeves, 2010). Their uses of English, however, were so varied and included so many different contexts that this proved to be an unnecessary division, resulting only in complicating an already complex situation. Contrary to my own traditional (and in today’s technological world rather naïve) view of foreign languages being used in foreign lands, participants in the study are free to roam the world from their own homes. The

geographical situation of people communicating via electronic mail or a computer-based telephone protocol makes little difference to how they communicate, and the demarcation between using English in Iceland or abroad seemed superfluous.

To bring together all the elements of the *Interactive Self*, the ways in which it appears that young Icelanders at secondary school, at university and in employment use English entails considering almost every aspect of their lives. First and foremost, young Icelanders seem to use English for watching films and television series, which they may watch with Icelandic subtitles or download off the Internet in the original version without subtitles. Only children's television and a few natural history programmes will be dubbed into Icelandic. They use the Internet in English as well as in Icelandic for finding information, but computer games are always played in English and often involving spoken or written online "chat". This extended use of English means that the young Icelanders in the study have a self-image of themselves as capable language users. They not only attend classes in English at school, just as they attend classes in geography or art, but they are also able to use the language successfully for practical purposes outside the school context.

English is the lingua franca for travel abroad, but also for conversations between young Icelanders and foreigners in Iceland. These may be tourists or foreign residents, and it seems to be assumed that all foreigners can express themselves comfortably in English. What is striking about interview data is that, almost without exception, participants have at least one friend or acquaintance who does not speak Icelandic and with whom English is the shared language. This individual might be a pen-friend, a step-parent, a family member, a work colleague, a friend, or a friend of a friend. Communication with non-Icelandic-speakers seems often to be carried out at the lowest common denominator of comprehension, meaning that little effort is made to use complex language or varied vocabulary. The same is true of communication with work colleagues. In some cases communication is face-to-face, or at least within Iceland, but many participants also have friends and relatives abroad with whom they communicate online through social networking sites.

This perception of English as involving entertainment, jokes, computer games and chatting with friends means that for many young Icelanders English seems to be a language for expressing superficial ideas and feelings in an informal register. This is the register in which young Icelanders may have receptive skills, through television shows such as "The X-Factor", "Rachael Ray", "Minute to Win it" and "American's Funniest Home

Videos”, and in which they feel safe and competent producing language. Only three participants have experience of using English in more formal circumstances. For them, the higher proficiency and more formal, academic register taught at secondary school, and not encountered through general everyday exposure to English in Iceland, is necessary for them to carry out their jobs, maintain self-respect and respect from others, and presumably for career advancement.

For most participants, English plays an important part in hobbies, from car maintenance to singing and basketball. Spare parts have to be ordered on the Internet, songs are written and sung in English, and sports training may be done through English since there are many foreign coaches in Iceland. Knowing English is perceived by participants as being as relevant as knowing Icelandic; getting by with only Icelandic is possible, but taking part in society and living life as participants wish to is not. This is clear in the case of one participant with dyslexia, whose self-declared proficiency in English is weak. Aspects of life which are taken for granted by other participants (such as watching films without subtitles or taking part in a sport coached by a foreigner) are so problematic for her that she avoids them, resulting in feelings of low self-esteem and helplessness. The same can be said of other participants who perceive their competence as lower than their peers; not having a good level of English seems to mean that a young Icelander does not fit into today’s normally accepted pattern.

In fact, using English in everyday life seems to be such an obvious part of life for young Icelanders that many participants did not mention watching television or using the Internet in English until specifically asked. Although one might expect that the “language exposure and use is intense enough to affect Icelanders’ identity” (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011, p. 9), the perception of the majority of participants in the study, who claim strong ties to Iceland and the Icelandic language, may be that English is as important to them as a communicative tool as Icelandic. Some participants are conscious of rapid changes in the prevalence of English and are anxious about the future of Icelandic. They are aware of increasingly younger children using English among themselves and also using Icelandic incorrectly. Interestingly, however, participants do not overtly accept responsibility for any possible future decline or demise of Icelandic. They seem unwilling to do without English, and yet feel strongly about the state of Icelandic.

Reading in English plays an important part in the lives of participants in university study since a high percentage of university textbooks in Iceland are in English. Participants appear to feel happy about using study material

in English, accepting that English is the lingua franca in academia. How much they actually read and to what extent they depend on lectures (normally in Icelandic) and notes from instructors is not taken into account in the study. Thus it might appear that despite participants perceiving gains in reading proficiency at school (discussed within the *Cognitive Self* as an aspect of learning English at school), some may have little interactive or practical use of reading in their capacity as university students later on, when formal instruction in the English language is over. One participant admits to reading only parts of her English textbooks and doubts that students who read all the set material do better than she does. It seems that, although students at university in Iceland **should** be reading large amounts of material in English, they may in fact not be doing so. This finding is supported by other recent research in Iceland (Ingvarsdóttir & Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2013).

In the *Interactive Self* an interesting dual situation is portrayed, in which English appears as vital for the social and cultural lives of the participants in the study, as well as for their further education and employment, while Icelandic remains the language of the home and, I suspect, the language of expressing complex ideas and feelings. It appears to me that English is a necessary tool for young Icelanders, but that the productive proficiency of most remains at a relatively basic level, meaning that complex ideas, concepts and relationships can only be discussed in the mother-tongue, Icelandic.

Self-assessment of proficiency was included within the *Interactive Self* because it appeared to affect participants' use of, and attitudes towards using, English so much. Some participants felt quite confident about, for example, taking on university study involving study material in English, or even having to submit coursework in English. The fact, however, that others felt ill-equipped for further education, unsure of their own proficiency and unsure about what steps to take to improve, suggests that something is missing in English instruction at school. This situation has already been observed in Iceland and attention is drawn to the fact that "at least a third of university students in Iceland have some difficulty in comprehending English academic texts" (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010, p. 13).

6.3 The School, University and Employment Participant Groups

In order to obtain different perspectives on the relevance of English and secondary school English studies, interviews were taken with three

different participant groups. Participants in the School Group were currently at secondary school and had completed several English courses. It was hoped that they would provide opinions about their present experience of studying English. Participants in the University and Employment Groups had completed their secondary school studies (or, in the case of one participant, had left without matriculating). University Group participants were currently studying at tertiary level and Employment Group participants were in employment. One participant was both in tertiary study and in part-time employment. It was hoped that both of these groups of participants would provide data on their past experience of learning English at secondary school and how it related to their present needs and uses of English.

Taking into account the fact that the three participant groups of School, University and Employment cover an age span of only ten years, and that all participants were living in Iceland at the time of the study and attended or had attended state schools in Iceland, it might be tempting to assume that no great differences would be observable between the groups. In fact, it is clear that all participants belong to one group, that of “individuals”, and that they all have their own personal agendas in the form of diverse backgrounds, personalities, interests, and aspirations for the future. The flexibility of the Icelandic education system means that one participant in the School Group is older than some participants in the University Group. Another participant divides his energies between part-time work and part-time university distance learning, and a third is taking extra courses, also through distance-learning, at secondary school, in preparation for subsequent university study. All participants use English on a daily basis and foresee continuing to do so and none expresses a dislike of the language itself. They also all comment that television and computers have been a major learning source of English. Notwithstanding these similarities and tangential meetings of participant groups, certain factors differentiate them from each other.

6.3.1 The School Group

Participants at secondary school are probably least critical of their English studies. Many seem satisfied with study material and classroom tasks, they express little anxiety about courses and are, generally speaking, certain that they will do well in forthcoming tests and exams. There is clearly some confusion however about what “being good” at English involves, with participants claiming “very good” proficiency and yet admitting to having

trouble writing. Trausti, for example, assesses himself as very good at English although poor at writing, although he also says that writing a 10-page essay in English is no problem because “I just know it”. Paradoxes of this kind may suggest insecurity about proficiency, although certainly many of us will recognise doing better in some areas of language learning than others. Indeed, self-concept has been shown to vary between skills in language learning (Mercer, 2011), with self-concept being seen as an overarching perception not necessarily accurately linked to self-efficacy and actual performance in specific tasks (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). For School Group participants the teacher is of utmost importance. He or she is seen as having the responsibility of explaining the language to students and for making classes fun. The teacher’s role seems to be one both of instruction and entertainment. These participants place great emphasis on the present and seem to give little consideration to the future. Some do have plans for university study but may think (erroneously) that university textbooks will be in Icelandic, or (those who realise that many textbooks will be in English) that subject-based vocabulary in English will be their only difficulty but will be easily surmountable, or that a knowledge of English will suffice for travel everywhere in the world. They demonstrate a certain naïvety about life beyond the classroom walls, as if little will change after school, and they may overestimate where and how they can use their present knowledge of English.

6.3.2 The University Group

As might then be expected, participants in the University Group have a perspective rather more detached in time. Many realise that they have developed skills over time, and that the months and years they spent reading literature, and doing grammar exercises and other tasks have given them a firmer foundation in English. While some School Group participants talk about building on the “base” of English they gained at primary school, University Group participants talk about strengthening the proficiency they gained at secondary school. University Group participants seem to be aware of the fact that they are currently extending their English skills through using the language in their present academic setting. Similarly, although many School Group participants are satisfied with their current English proficiency, participants at university are aware of gains at secondary school making them better prepared for university study. Time and length of study seem to be important factors, implying that it is the process of studying over several years that incrementally builds up skills

necessary for further study. Bjarki's predicament also makes clear how important time spent in English study is: being exempted from attending English classes because his proficiency at age 15 was good, he then seems to have lost out on gaining further knowledge and skills, and regrets this. What University Group participants have in common, of course, is that they are all using English in a way that they anticipated, that is for academic study as they intended.

Participants in the University Group and the Employment Group have a more objective view of teacher and student responsibility at school. Whereas School Group participants see the teacher as all-important, some participants in these two groups realise that it was their own lack of responsibility at school that detracted from their learning. They believe that it is at secondary school that learners have the maturity to learn more advanced grammar and make valuable gains they would not otherwise make. Advanced writing skills, appreciation of literature, and knowledge of some classics of English literature are among the things that University Group participants realise they would not have gained had they not studied English at secondary school. However, it seems to take participants time to come to this conclusion: it is not something they were aware of during their time at school.

6.3.3 The Employment Group

Participants in the Employment Group also look back to their school studies with a level of regret about their lack of responsibility, possibly because for some their proficiency is not serving them well in the current situation. Baldur feels that he has only himself to blame for not doing better, and Tinna remembers actively disliking school, even though she has now trouble identifying what made it so unpleasant. Participants in this group are now using English for purposes that they did not foresee when they were at school, and for which they were not prepared at school. Some, like Egill, have no desire to build up English-speaking skills in salesmanship, although Freyr, having gone into a career of his own choosing, is ambitious about continuing to improve his English. Here it seems that conscious choice of career and what it entails provides a more agreeable perspective to language learning. The decision to take a secondary school course in order to get used to reading chemistry in English suggests that Dagný is motivated by the relevance to her own situation of knowing English better.

It may be that the linguistic situation in Iceland has changed so radically and so quickly that schools have not had time to adjust to the various demands for English made in many workplaces today. Communicating in English with other non-native speakers, who may have a lower level of proficiency, calls for skills such as reformulating statements, making suitable vocabulary choices, and taking care with pronunciation. Participants like Baldur, who was obliged to learn “Oxford English” at secondary school, have had little or no training in such techniques. Svava also mentions the irrelevance of English at her secondary school, where using English in the future was ignored “as if no-one was thinking about that”. On the whole, participants in the Employment Group seem to feel more regret and bitterness about English at secondary school. Some seem to feel trapped in jobs they do not like and do not have ‘learning for life’ skills that can help them move on. Similarly to University Group participants, they see secondary school as a learning environment, a place where things can be learned that cannot be learned out of school. Unfortunately, many of them have now finished their education but were not able to get as much out of school as they now wish they had.

Thus comments from University and Employment school participants suggest that relevance is acknowledged better **in retrospect** than in the present. It is, for example, only after leaving school that Bjarki realises that by taking only the minimum obligatory courses in English he probably missed out on learning academic vocabulary that would be valuable for him at university. Jakob is well aware of how relevant the grammar and writing he did at school are to him in his present job, but is also conscious that he did not appreciate this at the time. There is clearly a discrepancy between participants’ needs now after school and their perceptions of their proficiency and needs while they were at school. It seems that the present is so important for learners that needs for the future are hard to envisage, and simply that being a teenager is such a full-time occupation that school must inevitably be relegated to second place. This may be connected to age and maturity, to some national feeling of *carpe diem*, or to other more general trends in western society today or current needs and context.

6.4 The Classroom

The study is concerned with learner perceptions of English and of studying English at school. Clearly, perceptions of the classroom provide information about and attitudes to the instruction of English as a foreign language, and have implications for teachers. It is, therefore, immediately

worthy of notice that many participants cite television and computers as the main sources of their knowledge of English. Nonetheless, there is a general perception that certain aspects of English need to be learned at school: for example, writing and spelling, correct grammar and formal register.

It is interesting to note also that although some participants are at university and many others are planning on further study, and therefore probably value tertiary education, there is little evidence of respect for the knowledge of English and of language teaching that their teachers presumably have^v. Some teachers are given credit for choosing interesting literature for their classes or for being entertaining or supportive on a personal level, but teachers' own knowledge of English does not appear to impress, nor does it motivate learners to exert more effort in class. On the contrary, some participants mention teachers who exhibit favouritism in class, fail to teach material adequately or use unsuitable teaching methods. Some believe their own proficiency is better than that of their teachers although participants do appear to value teacher evaluation (and therefore would seem to trust teachers' assessment of their proficiency).

In this respect it seems that participants' high regard for their own ability in English may actually work against those who perceive themselves as more competent than their instructors. The boost in self-esteem that low-stress classes and easy attainment of good grades gives secondary school learners of English in Iceland may be obtained at the expense of gaining the proficiency needed for tertiary level study and employment in today's global workplace.

Although participants seem to expect reasonably high grades with little effort, some nonetheless feel bored by childish and undemanding classroom activities. Activities involving grammar work are seen as boring, while advanced or formal vocabulary is not useful. Some literature read evidently appeals to some learners, but not to others.

Concerted speaking practice in English seems to be missing from the classroom, with learners unwilling to make even simple classroom requests in English. At the same time, oral fluency is the aspect of English proficiency that almost all participants would like to improve. Students appear powerless to take responsibility for their own learning and make use of the school hours of English the curriculum allows. Some acknowledge that a teacher has made demands for classroom communication to be in English, but that they do not cooperate.

One factor probably affecting classroom activity and engagement with study (and this may be true of subjects other than English) is the absence of assessment on a national basis at secondary level. Teachers are given the responsibility of making up a syllabus, choosing course material, teaching,

assessing coursework, and compiling and marking final examinations. Serving the two masters of providing a relaxed and entertaining classroom and evaluating learning gains made in that classroom may pose problems.

Another factor is a paucity of optional courses in English, or of more practically-based compulsory courses. It may be that students enter secondary school believing that they will encounter innovative study materials and instructional methods. Discovering that first-year courses use internationally-marketed EFL coursebooks may be a disappointment that alienates them from making effort.

What seems imperative in the classroom is for instructors to believe that what they are teaching matters, and for them to persuade learners too that it matters. It seems apparent from the older participants' responses that some Icelanders do not feel they are well enough prepared for study and work when they leave secondary school. There is no doubt that young Icelanders are interested in English. How to help them learn more than they know already is a challenge, but it would seem that well-educated and interested teachers of English do have a role to play.

Further discussion of the classroom context can be found in section below on the L2 Learning Experience of Dörnyei's paradigm.

6.5 Relevance in second-language learning and teaching

Relevance is a construct that has not been fully researched in relation to second-language learning and teaching. Relevance may be considered in various ways: in motivation in general terms, that is to what extent instruction is linked to needs or goals (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Keller, 1987); in curriculum planning, as seen in claims such as: "Concern for people, animals and the environment is ... relevant in all subjects" (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 2012b, p. 19); in relation to assessment methods and schemes, in which rating of students may be done against "a list of points deemed to be relevant for a particular level" (Europe, 2001, p. 189). Young Icelanders learn informally from exposure to English (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009), meaning that relevance may be learning those aspects of the language that they cannot gain outside school.

Relevance can also be investigated as an individual difference within the field of motivation. As such, relevance appears clearly as a dynamic force in language learning. What seems irrelevant to the learner today may assume relevance at a later date when his or her circumstances have changed: motivation has also been shown to change over time (MacIntyre, 2002). The data here support that view.

Relevance as an individual difference is open to influence by the learner and instructor; it is not fixed in the way that aptitude or learning styles have tended to be seen, and therefore becomes a means of egalitarianism. Learners do not possess, and cannot be given, equal talents, but welcoming differences and allowing choice should extend to the entire group (Noddings, 2006). Just as instructors can encourage learners to experiment with new learning strategies that may be potentially useful, so can they also encourage learners to see potential relevance to them of curriculum material and classroom-linked activities.

It is because relevance is a wide construct taking in both present and future practical uses and personal factors, all unique to the individual and all affected by dynamic interaction, that it is an aspect of motivation deserving attention in second-language learning and transferrable to other school subjects. In this way, there is a link between relevance and identity-making, since instruction (and teachers) can help learners “to re-imagine an expanded range of identities for the future” (Norton, 2010, p. 364).

6.6 Relevance of English in Iceland

Apart from relevance as a concept in learner motivation worthy of further research, the study also provides a wealth of information about the relevance of English and of learning English to the young Icelanders who took part in the study.

Icelanders are well aware of the fact that their language is spoken by fewer than four hundred thousand people and that it does not resemble other Nordic languages sufficiently for them to be mutually comprehensible. For the nation to partake in world affairs and for young people to “make the best out of the cosmopolitan condition” (Weenink, 2008, p. 1103), a language other than Icelandic must be used. For many years, Danish was the significant foreign language used with non-Icelandic-speaking people. Since 1999, English has been the first foreign language to be taught in compulsory schools (Icelandic Ministry of Education, 1999b) and was thus recognised as the most important foreign language in Iceland.

It is evident from participant responses that English is hugely significant in Iceland in domains such as entertainment, communication, education, employment, computer and Internet use, and for contact with some family members. This is apart from use in all domains abroad where using Icelandic is almost never a viable option. Several participants mention grandparents who have little knowledge of English, suggesting

both greater general access to education (with 8% of Icelandic 20-year-olds matriculating from secondary school in 1960 as opposed to 64% in 2009 (Statistics Iceland, 2013b)) and a changing linguistic environment in Iceland where the need for English is relatively recent. As for whether young Icelanders could manage without English, as older generations have done, the answer would appear to be *Yes*, with the proviso that this be on a temporary basis. Participants are clear that life in Iceland without English is possible: shopping, banking, reading books, following world events, and other day-to-day activities can be carried out through Icelandic.

However, while using only Icelandic is seen as manageable for a weekend or so, it is not the long-term reality participants know or want. Iceland has gone through enormous changes during the past 50 years and is no longer the rather isolated country it was when participants' grandparents were their age. Passenger travel from Iceland has increased a thousand-fold since 1960 (Statistics Iceland, 2012b) and through computer technology there is vastly more access to information and more possibilities for communication than there were. Globalisation is seen as a fact of life in Iceland (Hilmarrsson-Dunn, 2009) and is experienced in Iceland as well as abroad. A situation similar to that of the Philippines described by Gardner and Lambert (1972) seems to be emerging, in which two languages exist simultaneously and seemingly in harmony. Although it seems that younger Icelanders feel that their world, their reality, would not be possible without knowledge of English, their Icelandic identity does not appear to be jeopardised. This echoes comments to the effect that "...one can with the proper attitudinal orientation and motivation become bilingual without losing one's identity" (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p. 130). Some participants view English as equally important or even more important than Icelandic, and only two claim that Icelandic identity or the Icelandic language is unimportant to them. It would seem that national identity can be negotiated despite daily use of an extra-national language, but that identity as a young person and participation in youth culture in the form of television, the Internet, computer games and music necessitates English but not Icelandic.

A short aside illustrates the significance of the national language to some young Icelanders. In an interview after the Icelandic entry, sung in Icelandic, was voted on to the finals of the Eurovision Song Contest last May, the 23-year-old Icelandic contestant commented, "It's sort of going round in my head now 'We did it, and we did it in Icelandic'" (Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, 2013).

Although many of those who took part in the study report using English every day in Iceland, it should be emphasised that productive and receptive uses are not balanced, with participants reporting watching television and films, listening to music, and reading academic material, literature and general interest material on the Internet much more than speaking or writing English. Thus English seems to have more receptive relevance than productive relevance. This imbalance between receptive and productive language use may, of course, also be found in first language use, particularly with regard to writing.

This being said, the large number of Icelanders who study abroad at undergraduate and postgraduate level and, in addition to them, those who take courses in English at Icelandic universities (and this is an increasing trend) do have to write in English, and their academic and professional careers may depend on the quality of their written production in English.

It would seem, therefore, that English has great relevance in Iceland, especially to young people who share an identity through youth culture, but also to everyone who uses the Internet, watches television, has social or work contacts with foreigners, or reads for pleasure. There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence about how much young Icelanders use English ‘these days’. This study has gone some way to support common belief with research data that illustrate the importance of English to young people in Iceland, and the fact that for some it is as relevant or more relevant than Icelandic.

6.6.1 Relevance of English at secondary school in Iceland

Having established, then, that English is highly relevant to Icelanders in general, I will move on to consider what relevance studying English at secondary school has. If English is no longer a foreign language in Iceland, it might seem that classroom teaching should reflect this new standing and that formal instruction could be reduced. In fact, the study shows that English instruction at secondary school does have relevance for the young people who took part (although it could without doubt have more practical value to some). Relevance can be found in language proficiency, but may also be in subject material such as the literature canon or unrelated material such as readings about vocational studies or linguistics.

It is significant that several of the younger participants in the study, those in the School Group, believe that their proficiency in English is adequate, that they have received instruction in all necessary areas at school and that they have little left to learn. Participants foresee domain-

specific vocabulary as the only stumbling-block at university level, or that material will be in Icelandic. In fact, research in Iceland has shown that university students may not possess the high-level reading comprehension skills they need (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009; Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010). While some of the participants in this study are coping well at university, others admit to not reading textbooks, and nervousness about having to write in English is evident. Obviously a student who avoids reading study material may be lacking interest rather than language proficiency, but adequate instruction in advanced reading skills should at least ensure that students are in possession of essential study tools.

Almost all participants, however, feel that they have made gains in proficiency at secondary school that will be useful in the future. A level of 'getting by' may be sufficient for basic tourism needs, but participants are happy to be able to use a wider range of language forms than they learned at primary school. Greater demands are evidently made at secondary school, more variety of language is taught and learners are obliged to use English rather than merely learn about it. Participants talk specifically about gaining grammar and writing skills at school, suggesting that teachers are aware that these skills are not learned outside school. Writing skills in English are clearly relevant for participants in employment, to an extent that was not foreseen by them at school.

Oral comprehension and speaking skills are also relevant to the young people in the study. Listening may be practised through watching television outside class but the absence of comments about listening activities at school suggests that little advanced training is done in class. Bearing in mind that 95% of the language of American television programmes is contained within a 3,000-word family vocabulary (Webb & Rodgers, 2009), it seems unlikely that watching films and TV sitcoms prepares learners adequately for attending lectures in English or taking part in business meetings, and it is in these circumstances that Icelanders' formal language learning seems to take on relevance. As one participant points out, moving beyond the word level to a comprehensive understanding of a lecture is difficult. Evidently, though, it is the content and meaning of the lecturer's talk that are relevant to the student rather than the individual words.

Relevance is also found in English instruction at secondary school in terms of study material. Some literature read at school seems to engage learners and transport them into another world. A novel, for example, may be "a really beautiful way to show that everyone is important" (in the words of one participant) and thus may allow learners to reflect on their

own lives and situations, while poetry may charm because, as Hera says, “the language is often just so beautiful” (even though she also says she “didn’t understand half of it”!). There is little indication from participant responses that specific responses to literature are expected by teachers, but it seems rather that learners are encouraged to interpret literature on their own terms. This sense of obtaining relevance on a personal basis is supremely important, as it allows the individual to take what he or she can from any text and any task. Similarly, introducing learners to other topics, such as linguistics or medicine, has relevance for individual students (although quite possibly lacks relevance for others). It seems that if a wide spectrum of study material and classroom tasks is presented and learners are encouraged to find relevance and make connections with their individual circumstances, then relevance can provide a key to individual and autonomous learning. However, as far as literature is concerned, where there is such an enormous range to choose from, care must be taken to select works that are suitable for learners in terms of age, proficiency and background schema (Collie & Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1993).

The participants in the study perceive the self-esteem connected with proficiency in English as highly important. Feeling the confidence to travel, take university courses, use the Internet, and engage in a range of other activities means that knowing English gives a dimension to their lives that would otherwise be missing. Whatever individual dreams they have (for example becoming a football coach, a musician or a doctor) can be pursued because their image of themselves as capable learners of English provides confidence and empowerment.

6.6.2 Relevance and age

One aspect of relevance worthy of further attention is the age factor. Differences in motivation, attitudes and skills have been attributed to age (Jonstone, 2002; Kormos & Csizér, 2008) and relevance appears to be likewise affected by age. Some participants at school may see little relevance in classroom tasks such as checking unknown words in a text, while participants at university, who are only a few years older, see this as a relevant and valuable practice leading to a clearer understanding of the text. Whether this age difference is specifically related to relevance or is a question of general maturity is unclear, but it seems hard for some of the younger learners in the study to perceive future language needs, just as it is hard for others to envisage other uses of English than their present ones, such as entertainment or tourism. Kormos et al. (2002) report that

university students of English have vague ideas about future careers. Some of the students in the study carried out by Kormos and her colleagues were of a similar age to participants in the School Group in this study. It may be that it is context that is the distinguishing factor and that participants at school find their present context so all-encompassing that they cannot envisage changed circumstances for using English. This would support Dörnyei's (2009b) view that learners must create a clear vision of **future** Ideal L2 Self, although with the proviso that in the situation of Iceland it is the **changed** future L2 Self that must be envisaged, since the Icelanders who took part in the study are already aware of a present L2 Self.

6.6.3 Irrelevance

Some participants find little relevance in their secondary school studies, and express great disappointment that they learned so little. For Baldur, learning words that no-one uses lacks relevance, as does copying words and their meanings off the blackboard for Egill. Whether this lack of relevance was linked to particular schools or classes is not known, since there were few participants from each school.

There seems little doubt that relevance of specific language tasks is closely connected to needs analysis. Needs analysis, however, focuses mainly on the future (Davies, 2006) whereas relevance is dynamically situated in the present, future and the past. Relevance can therefore engage learners in their present context without depending overly on a 'pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die' belief that present effort will be of benefit in some unspecified future.

In the study, relevance took so many forms that instructors can scarcely be expected to foresee all the ways studies may be relevant to particular students (especially in the Icelandic comprehensive school system where class groups change every semester and it can be hard to get to know students). Similarly, many young people in their late teens have themselves only vague ideas about what the future holds, and what course of study or career they will pursue (Marcia, 1980). What seems more feasible is that relevance can be promoted as a difference between individuals, and learners encouraged to be proactive about engaging with it. Needs analysis can also be stressed and learners helped to understand that the future will bring changed circumstances and demands. Relevance, however, is to be found within the individual, meaning that learners become aware of ways that their English studies relate to them. Even negative feelings about English can have relevance in a positive way: Egill, for example, was able

to compare his negative learning experience at school with his positive experience of teaching English in Africa; Steinunn learned the importance of encouragement and fairness from being in a class with a teacher she felt disliked her.

Perhaps learners can be encouraged to get the best out of negative feelings and turn them to their own advantage. This, along with the benefits of studies perceived by learners, could make relevance a significant individualised facet of learning English as a second language. The role of relevance could also be transferred to other languages and to other school subjects.

Having discussed relevance in second-language learning and the relevance to young Icelanders of English and of learning English at secondary school, I will turn now to a discussion of the study results in the light of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System.

6.7 Relevance and the L2 Motivational Self System

Although the L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei (2005, 2009b) has been an influential factor in this study, it was never my intention either to support or to find fault with it. My objective from the outset was to explore perceptions of English and of studying English as a compulsory subject in Iceland. In this way, I hoped that the data would 'speak for themselves' without my interpreting them through any already established framework. Nonetheless, the importance of the L2 Motivational Self System in rekindling interest in motivation and individual differences in second-language learning means that it must be taken into account in motivation studies done today. The situation of English in Iceland, its importance in daily life and the level of exposure mean that attitudes towards the language and motivation differ from countries where English is taught as a foreign language in the more traditional sense of the term. After briefly discussing the results obtained in the light of the L2 Motivational Self System I will suggest how the study can be seen as expanding the paradigm to include the context of Iceland and other Nordic and North European countries. I have discussed the context of English in Iceland in depth in Chapter 1. Suffice it to say at this point that children hear English on television from a very young age and it continues to be the language of popular culture and entertainment as they grow up, since there is widespread access to original material with or without Icelandic subtitles. English is used in some workplaces (both because of connections with other countries and because of foreign employees) and is necessary for tertiary

study where much reading material will be in English. The present situation of English in Iceland is that “Icelandic and English will have to *share* domains, because the small size of Iceland's population and unequal amounts of funding cannot match, for example, the media output produced by the English-speaking world” (Hilmarrsson-Dunn & Kristinsson, 2010, p. 267).

6.7.1 The Ideal L2 Self

The Ideal L2 Self is the view the learner has of him/herself using the second language successfully in the future. Of the six conditions that Dörnyei lists for the Ideal L2 Self to be a motivating force (2009b), some apply to the Icelandic context while others do not. Thus there is little need for Icelandic learners of English to work at visualising and maintaining the vision of a **future** L2 self since most are already users of English outside the classroom and have been since childhood. They have, for example, heard original-language television material and seen books, magazines and household goods and foodstuffs labelled in English almost all their lives. Whether their ability in English is going to enable them to be “professionally successful” (Dörnyei, 2010, p. 79) will depend on their having a clear idea of what level of proficiency is expected in professional life. However, for example in terms of writing, secondary school learners do not appear to see any need to strive towards a future ideal, perhaps because they feel they have reached an adequate proficiency level already, or perhaps because they believe written work at university will be assessed for content alone (Jeeves, 2012).

Some participants, however, do view themselves as users in different capacities in the future. Participants at school may visualise themselves coping with textbooks at university, adapting to life abroad, or attending international professional meetings, all through English. Here they see themselves in very changed circumstances, although the condition of using English as independent users will not be new to them. The question then arises, whether they are envisaging a **future self** or a **future L2 self**, since using English as an L2 is an accepted part of their future life presenting neither anxiety nor challenge. On the contrary, many seem to view English as closer to a second than a foreign language. It is hard to make a clear statement as to whether the self-confidence of young Icelanders as L2 users of English is the result of language learning or of more general trends in children's upbringing in Iceland. It may be that Icelandic teenagers have significant self-confidence in other fields, and this would point to general rather than language-based self-esteem.

However, it is true that some participants, despite being **present** users of English, do not foresee any changed language uses in the **future**. Anticipating no change of context for using English, they expect to continue watching television programmes in English and using English for travel and Internet searches. Of course, they may well continue doing these things, but in fact, almost all the University and Employment Group participants use English in ways they did not expect when they were younger. This difficulty in reconciling present context and present uses of English with using English in future and different contexts needs to be addressed. It would thus seem that some learners do lack an appropriate **future Ideal L2 Self** and that being helped to “*create their vision*” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 33) would motivate them to work towards proficiency relevant to their futures.

6.7.2 The Ought-to L2 Self

The Ought-to L2 Self is characterised by the negative outcome of poor proficiency in the second language and can be useful in keeping learners ‘on track’ and committed to study. It also relates to other people’s expectations and to obligations felt by language learners.

This study shows clearly that most of the participants consider themselves to have good proficiency in English, and no participants expressed the idea that family members or friends pressured them to do well in English. However, several participants perceive that not only are they obliged to know English for use abroad where foreigners cannot be expected to speak Icelandic, but also that it is their duty to be able to communicate with foreigners in Iceland, whom they assume will also know English. It appears that the younger generation of Icelanders is also expected by older people to come to their aid when their own proficiency in English is insufficient. The young Icelanders in the study may be expected to write emails for their parents, or to ‘do the talking’ when the family is abroad. It seems that younger Icelanders are seen as having superior proficiency and as being capable of taking charge in situations where they might not normally do so in a first-language situation in Iceland. Participants do not seem to find these expectations burdensome and yet here we see clearly the power of obligation in the Ought-to L2 Self in Iceland.

The other dimension of the Ought-to L2 Self is also seen in participants’ anxiety about safeguarding their ego. The possibility of being laughed at or dismissed as stupid due to a lack of productive proficiency

worries them. Not meeting one's own expectations is also an aspect of the Ought-to L2 Self, as we see in Bjarki's disappointment that he does not understand phrases in his university textbook that "the author obviously assumes the reader will understand". This desire to be on an equal footing with native speakers may be linked to ideas of national pride, a topic far outside the scope of this study but exemplified in participant responses. Magnús, for example, says "When you're an Icelander you have a certain pride and you want to be in the same boat as others".

Speaking and pronunciation practice is seen to be lacking at school in Iceland. Participants express concern about speaking with a strong Icelandic accent. Grammar accuracy is also essential as it prevents learners from looking foolish by making mistakes in writing, and mentions of the inadequacy of specific vocabulary teaching would mean that after school young Icelanders may not be as well prepared for work and study as they ought to be. This means that "possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 29) are not envisioned in terms of getting low grades or failing courses, not getting a place at university or a job, but in terms of embarrassment and ridicule. Although unemployment has increased since Iceland's 2008 financial crisis, it is still far lower than in many European countries. For entrance to many courses of study at university in Iceland, a pass grade at school matriculation is sufficient. Perhaps because there is less pressure from family and society on learners to excel in Iceland than in other more competitive countries, learners are less likely to feel that they 'ought to' do well at school. It may be that this is the reason why this aspect of the Ought-to L2 Self is not very evident in Iceland, with the exception of anxieties about being laughed at.

6.7.3 The L2 Learning Experience

It is the third element of the L2 Motivational Self System, the L2 Learning Experience, that is explored to the greatest extent in the study. The L2 Learning Experience covers influences such as "the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success" (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 29) and was the element of the paradigm that remained to be investigated in depth when the framework was introduced (Dörnyei, 2009b). The first and most obvious point to be made here is that an enormous amount of information about "the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 29) was obtained in this study, and the responses to the semi-structured interview framework suggest a number of areas needing further research. Learning English at school in Iceland is shown to be a

dynamic and changing experience, far from the linear development suggested in traditional textbooks with their typical progression from present to past, active to passive, and indicative to conditional.

However, the learning experience in Iceland is a fairly traditional one, with the teacher held responsible for providing useful instruction and summative assessment, as well as for creating an environment conducive to learning and for being entertaining. This last role of the teacher seems to be of great importance to some learners. Formative assessment seems to play little part in English teaching and learning, and learner responsibility is minimal. The discourse forms participants use (e.g. “we had to read books/they made us read books”: Ice. *við vorum látin lesa bækur*) suggest that learners distance themselves from their studies and see themselves as passive recipients of instruction rather than motivated learners with a clear sense of purpose.

As far as the curriculum is concerned, participant responses show a clear dislike of traditional grammar exercises, but satisfaction with many of the works of literature read. English is seen as a pathway to cultural knowledge, and to have read classical works of literature by famous authors is a boost to one’s image as a well-educated individual. There is little mention of teaching methods (suggesting perhaps that there is little variety), but essay-writing on works of literature seems to give learners an opportunity to express their personal opinions as well as to meet the challenge of using precise and correct language. It is this desire for personal, challenging tasks which is important to learners and which suggests that English at school gives learners much more than language proficiency. English outside school is closely linked to the identity of the young Icelanders who took part in the study, since many of the media they use daily are in English. Being able to demonstrate their own identity and personality through classroom tasks comes across as important to them. Trausti, for example, found it “really fun” to do research into his favourite football team and Bjarki enjoyed writing about current affairs.

One feature of this individualism is choice: both choice of material and the freedom to express opinions. Being able to choose topics or tasks is important, and yet some learners welcome the obligation to read literature they think they would not otherwise read. It seems that finding the golden mean between allowing total freedom of choice and teaching a set curriculum is difficult, and yet being introduced to new material and being granted choice are both hugely important parts of the experience of learning English in Iceland.

Methods of assessment are rarely mentioned by participants. This may be because assessment methods are not negotiable in the classroom or because participants are happy with assessment as it is. Participants were, in any case, not asked directly about examinations nor about their grades. However satisfied or unsatisfied secondary school students are with current assessment methods, it is clear that success is taken for granted by most participants. Participants who see themselves as weak students of English pass courses because they work hard, while the majority get higher than mere passes. Whether this is because they have advanced proficiency, because English is an easy language to learn, or because teacher demands are low, is unclear. We have seen that 'success' is not defined in the L2 Motivational Self System paradigm and is not linked to an external assessment scheme. School assessment is, of course, linked to curriculum demands, which in Iceland are now expressed in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Europe, 2001). Participants' perceptions of success differ in the study: some talk about grades (although they were not specifically asked to do so) and perceptions of what constitutes 'doing well' vary, with some being happy with a grade of 7 and others expecting and obtaining 9 (grades in Icelandic secondary schools are awarded on a 1-10 scale). What is interesting to note is that 'success' is measured externally, i.e. by the teacher, rather than on an internally-experienced sense of effort and learning, and learners seem to assume that proficiency demands will not increase. Thus if learners obtained a 'good' grade in primary school courses or first-year courses at secondary school, 'good' grades are expected in the future. This view of English as an integral part of one's character supports the idea of language learning as a personal venture (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972), and suggests that some Icelandic students may not view English as a school subject in the same light as they see mathematics, history, geology, or other academic subjects.

That success in terms of grades is not connected to effort is clear. On the contrary, the view is expressed that demands should be low, the workload even to be decreased at the request of students, in order to ensure that only a low effort level is needed. Very few participants evaluate their effort levels as high, and receiving high grades does not necessarily give satisfaction since it is taken for granted. Experiencing success is important, in language learning or in any other undertaking, but success without challenge or effort is an empty accomplishment (Dörnyei, 2001). The study shows this, with participants assuming that past success will ensure present success, and feeling greater inner reward for satisfactory grades in other

subjects (which have involved hard work and study) than for superior grades in English. Such an attitude is unlikely to be a motivating influence on learners.

It must also be borne in mind that learners of English in Iceland have not selected English as the language of their choice for study. They are obliged to pass a minimum of three English courses in post-compulsory schooling and may not feel any need to obtain more than a pass grade. They may feel that the proficiency they gain outside school is more relevant and valuable than what is done in classes. Alternatively, they may not see any value in working towards high grades when pass grades will suffice for tertiary education in most subjects in Iceland. They may feel their energy is better spent working towards passing subjects that they find harder than English.

Peers feature seldom in participant responses. Some weaker learners are envious of those they think know more than they do, although this is assumed to be due to more exposure to English outside the classroom rather than to learning ability. Participants who spend (or spent, in the case of those in the University or Employment Groups) a lot of time watching television or playing computer games, for instance, are presumed to have an advantage over youngsters who spend their free time in sports or other activities not involving English. This in turn implies that school learners may not be assessed on their in-course learning but on knowledge gained outside school. This is likely to be a demotivating force for those who feel obliged to put in extra effort because they do not use English outside school. Although some group work is done in class, interaction with peers is scarcely mentioned and does not seem to impact on learning. Interestingly, many participants mention friends or acquaintances whose English proficiency is weaker than their own and express surprise that any young person in Iceland does not speak English well. The fact that there are young Icelanders who do not use English outside school or do not have a high proficiency level, and also young Icelanders who achieve acceptable grades with little effort, suggests that learning English in the classroom is not the engaging experience it needs to be for **all** learners to make progress.

The classroom experience exposed in this study comes across as a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon, full of contradictory evidence, positive and negative emotions, and varying levels of achievement. There would appear to be a need for more detailed exploration of the English classroom as a factor in second-language motivation.

6.8 Presenting a new model

Findings of the study suggest that Iceland stands outside the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b) as it is conceived today. For this reason I propose an adapted version of the paradigm that includes the construct of relevance and expands the L2 Learning Experience. Figure 18 below was introduced in Chapter 2. It is repeated here as a visual representation of the present L2 Motivational Self System, while Figure 19 shows the adapted Scandinavian/North European L2 Motivational Self System, with the construct of relevance.

We saw in Chapter 2 that the L2 Motivational Self System was developed from a merging of theories of integrative and instrumental motivation (R. C. Gardner, 1960; R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972) with theories of the psychology of the self (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Self-discrepancy theories also play an important role as learners attempt to avoid negative outcomes and minimise the difference between their desired self and the self they strive not to become (Higgins, 1987). Elements from other theories of motivation also form part of the Ideal and Ought-to aspects of the L2 Self Motivational System, for example constructs of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to Dörnyei, the third factor in the paradigm, the L2 Learning Experience, “is conceptualised at a different level from the two self-guides”. Dörnyei goes on to say that “future research will hopefully elaborate on” this component of (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 29). It is for this reason that my visual representation of the framework (a conceptualisation from when it was presented in 2009) places the L2 Learning Experience as not directly connected to the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to L2 Self.

Figure 19 presents the adapted Scandinavian/North European L2 Motivational Self System with the construct of relevance. Since it is on the L2 Learning Experience (participants’ perceptions of their studies at secondary school) that the study focuses, I now place that component at the top of the diagram of relevance. By linking the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to Self of the original system directly to the L2 Learning Experience, I show that the three components are inextricably connected and stress the dynamism of the new model of relevance as a whole. The Affective, Cognitive and Interactive Selves that emerged from data analysis during the course of the study also connect directly with the two Self components of the original framework. This illustrates how emotions in the classroom can affect the Ideal and the Ought-to Selves. For each of the selves emerging from the study, explanatory examples are given, such as fun, responsibility and security in the Affective Self box. One example of a

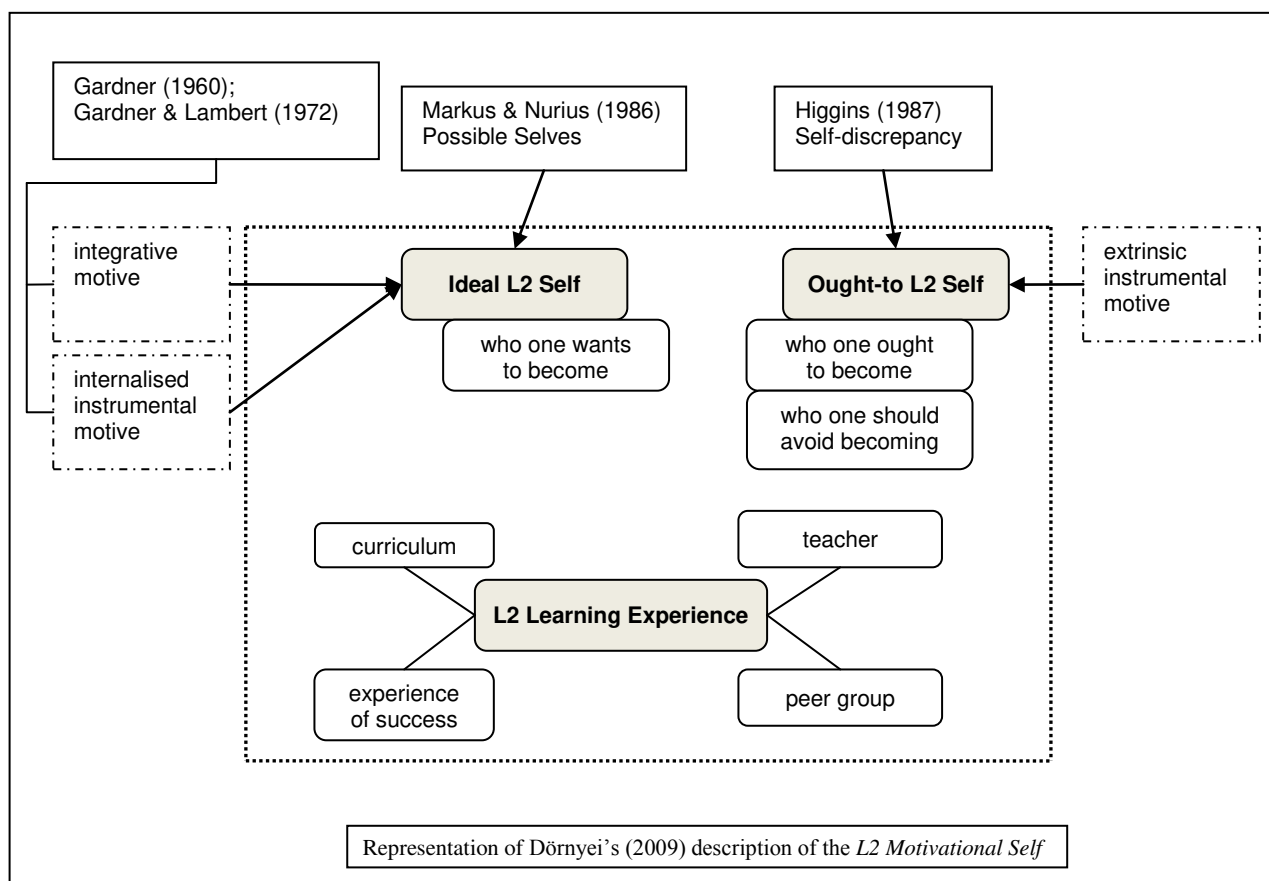


Figure 18 Representation of Dörnyei's (2009) description of the L2 Motivational Self System

negative form is also given in italics. I do this in an attempt to show the wide spectrum evident in each emergent self in the study, for example in the Interactive Self, from using English every day to avoiding using it at all costs.

Influencing the adapted framework in its entirety are theories and constructs put forward by the scholars listed on the left. These studies are all discussed in Chapter 2, but will be briefly recalled here. Relevance theory claims the importance of relevance to the human mind and states that relevant input leads to understanding or “positive cognitive effect” (Wilson & Sperber, 2004, p. 608). Higgins’s construct of regulatory fit (Higgins, 2000, 2005), developed after the self-discrepancy that informs the original L2 Motivational Self System, suggests that people act with greater purpose if they value the task in hand and implies the necessity of personal choice and involvement. Happenstance theory takes the standpoint that since no-one can foresee what the future holds, the optimum strategy is to take what one can from any situation and welcome it as ‘part of life’s rich tapestry’. This would mean that instructors should not encourage

students to work towards one singular future plan which may have a demotivating effect on a subject or study material that lies outside the plan.

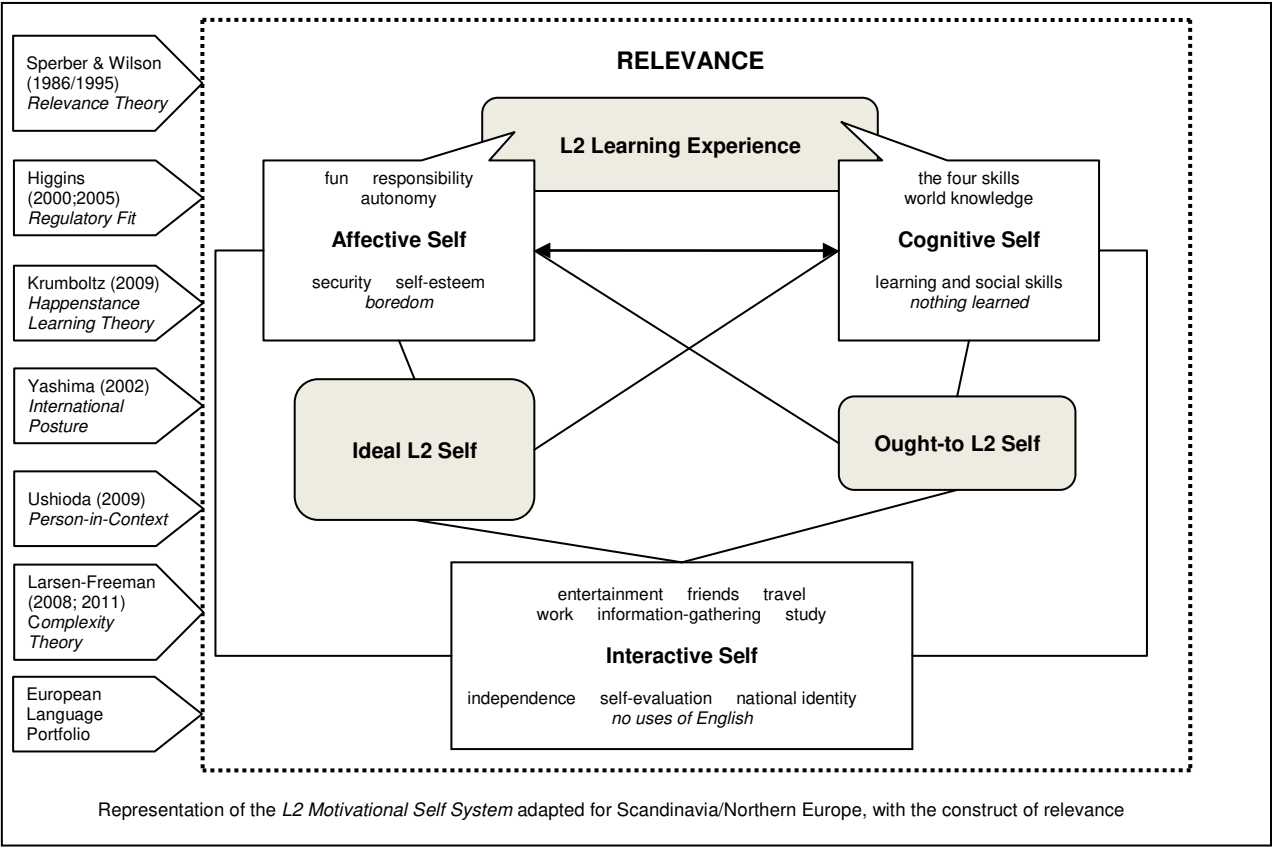


Figure 19 Representation of the L2 Motivational Self System adapted for Scandinavia/Northern Europe, with the construct of relevance

Dörnyei points out in his system that in contexts where there is little exposure outside the classroom to the language studied, learners are not concerned about integrating into the foreign-language community. What Yashima discusses with relation to international posture as an “openness ... toward different cultures” (Yashima, 2002, p. 57) is relevant to the high level of exposure in Iceland to English and American cultural material as well as to the positive attitudes to communicating through English evident in the study. The clear need for the type of qualitative research into motivation in the classroom that the study presents is stressed by Ushioda’s belief in the importance of person-in-context studies (Ushioda, 2009, 2011a). This is also evinced in Barkhuizen’s suspicion “that language learners are hardly ever asked in any overt systematic way about their language learning experiences” (Barkhuizen, 1998, p. 85). The data obtained in the study was indeed gained systematically and gives support to much anecdotal evidence of young Icelanders’ attitudes towards English

and proficiency. The present view of language learning as dynamic, complex and individual has been observed by Larsen-Freeman (Larsen-Freeman, 2011b; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) and others, and is recognised in the new framework. The data show that attitudes towards English change over time, as do perceptions of proficiency and needs. The adapted paradigm suggests the fluidity between the original components of Dörnyei's system and the newly introduced elements. Participants in the study seem indeed to experience that there is no target language because the target is always moving (Larsen-Freeman, 2011a). Finally, the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe/Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2006) stresses the importance of autonomous learning and lays out a clearly incremented proficiency scheme. The study shows the significance of these two factors and provokes questions about how Icelandic learners can be better assisted in their language learning.

6.9 Triangulation of findings

Triangulation has been described as involving attention to “adjacent characteristics of the phenomenon” (Morse, 2001, p. 207) or the use of “different methods of data collection or analysis” (Howitt & Cramer, 2005, p. 318) to ensure robustness of data. This is important in order to increase the study validity in terms of robustness and transferability of findings.

The conclusions drawn from the study are closely reflected by the results of other recent studies in Iceland and other Scandinavian contexts. García Ortega (2011) and Thórsdóttir (2012) both report on the high exposure to English in Iceland through the media and its likely (although uncharted) effects on young Icelanders' proficiency, while empirical studies by Jóhannsdóttir (2010) and Lefever (2010) show that children have some English skills before the onset of formal instruction. Both of these studies emphasise the importance of exposure to English through leisure activities such as music and computer games. Jeeves (2008) noted some over-estimation of reading proficiency in English among Icelandic teenagers.

Arnbjörnsdóttir's significant body of research records both the situation of English in Iceland as neither a foreign nor a second language (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007) and the effects of Icelanders' media exposure to limited registers of English (that is, through television and cinema), which leads to an imbalance between receptive and productive language skills (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007; 2011). Difficulties facing students in further education in Iceland who have to cope with reading material in English, but

complete assignments in Icelandic, have also been discussed (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009; Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010). Ingvarsdóttir & Arnbjörnsdóttir (2010) raise the problems instructors at tertiary level encounter when using material in English and the support strategies they use to help their students. This supports the finding of the study that university students in Iceland do not always have the English reading skills necessary for study.

Similar findings have been seen in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. Hellekjær has pointed out that, like Icelandic learners, Norwegian secondary school students are ill-prepared both for understanding textbooks and for lectures at tertiary level (Hellekjær, 2009; 2010). In a study of language identity and desired pronunciation, Rindal (2010) and Rindal and Piercy (2013) uncover the influence of American popular culture on young Norwegian learners of English. Subject choice is the topic of a recent Norwegian dissertation (Skarpaas 2011). The findings show that secondary school learners value courses in English for their likely practical value: schools therefore need to take into account the usefulness of courses they offer.

In Denmark, a report carried out for the Copenhagen Business School (Verstraete-Hansen, 2008) discusses the importance of high levels of proficiency in the workplace. Almost a third of the companies featured in the report mention a lack of language skills (with English the language predominantly used for international communication) as having a negative effect on business. Henry (2010) and Henry and Apelgren (2008) examine the relationship between studying English and other foreign-language acquisition in the context of secondary schools in Sweden. The results show a high level of initial interest in learning English. In Finland, Mauranen, Hynninen & Ranta (2010) have investigated the use of English as a *lingua franca* in academia.

6.9.1 Transferability

The fact that many of the findings of the studies described above are also seen in the present research study supports transferability (Bowen, 2005; Trochim, 2006) or generalisability (Maxwell, 2002). This is to say that parallels in the findings suggest that it may be possible to transfer or generalise the conclusions of the study to other Scandinavian countries.

The language situation in some other North European contexts also shares certain features with Scandinavia. Ushioda (2013), for example, commented recently that the ubiquitous presence of English in Holland has

resulted in language skills of a higher level among some of the population than observed in some countries where English is an official language. Similarly, courses taught through the medium of English are common in Dutch and other European universities (Coleman, 2006).

6.10 Completing the circle: a review of the research questions

At this point it is appropriate to recall the research questions and consider to what extent they have been satisfactorily answered. The research questions informing the study are:

1. What characterises learner perceptions of practical and personal relevance of secondary school English studies in Iceland?

2a. What vision of future L2 self do English language learners (aged 18-20) at secondary schools in Iceland have, and what is the connection between relevance of English at school, motivation and future L2 self among learners?

2b. Does the L2 self of employees and university students (aged 22-24) in Iceland match their earlier vision and, in retrospect, what is the connection between relevance of English at school, motivation and L2 self among young people after leaving school?

From the results chapter and this discussion chapter, it is clear that answers to the research questions have been obtained. Relevance is established as a significant element in second-language learning, and a large amount of data on perceptions of relevance has been gathered showing the importance of individual relevance in learning English in Iceland. English has enormous relevance to the Icelandic participants in the study (and may well have similar significance for young people in other Scandinavian and North European countries) and the data show that the increased proficiency gained at secondary school is perceived as valuable in tertiary study and employment, and could not have been gained from general exposure to English via television, the Internet or through other means. A difference between perceptions of relevance of learners at secondary school and those having completed secondary school is also evident. Receptive proficiency is seen by younger participants as sufficient for their needs while after school it is advanced productive proficiency that some participants realise is necessary. Although many participants at secondary school have a **future** L2 self that differs little from their **present** L2 self, older participants have, on the whole, a clearer view of the range of uses they have for English and the relevance of school studies to those uses. Their perspective encompasses actual relevance, potential but missing

relevance (i.e. activities that were not done but which would have been relevant, such as pronunciation practice), and irrelevance (i.e. activities done that lacked relevance, such as copying down lists of vocabulary or reading the novels of Jane Austen). What is also established is that English study can provide relevance of more types than language proficiency. Relevance can take the form of interesting world knowledge or improved self-esteem and independence. Choice, needs and purpose, and autonomy can be seen to be important elements of relevance, with learner participation and responsibility necessary for gains of any kind to be made. The interplay of individual differences, motivational and situational variations in the classroom and beyond it clearly supports the view of “‘hybrid’ attributes” (Dörnyei, 2009a, p. 232).

To sum up, relevance is a construct that clearly provides a new perspective on individual differences in motivation to learn a second language. It is connected with the ‘now’ of life that is so important to young people as well as with the future self that Dörnyei has researched through the L2 Motivational Self System, and concerns how learners perceive language study affecting aspects of their life and how they use the second language outside school. It is a deeply individual construct. English has relevance to all young Icelanders today because of the many and varied uses they have for the language. The high level of exposure to English in Icelandic society, however, means that studying it at school over a period of several years could be seen by younger Icelanders as an anomaly. There is an uncomfortable paradox about being exposed to English on a daily basis in society and yet having to succeed in compulsory school courses where English is taught as a foreign language.

Participants who have moved on to university study or employment are more conscious of the relevance studying English had, or could have had, for them. Linking studies more closely to learners’ lives outside school and helping learners to find individual relevance in their studies will improve the experience of learning English and will prepare students better for study and employment after matriculation.

The level of daily exposure to English means that Iceland and other North European countries appear to stand outside the L2 Motivational Self System paradigm put forward by Dörnyei. Learners are aware of a **present** L2 Self, with a future L2 Self that may be different or may remain the same. How learners can be helped to perceive the relevance of English study for their future L2 Self needs clarification. English is not, and should not be, taught as a ‘foreign’ language in Iceland, and study material needs to reflect the status of the language in society.

The importance of linking present and future relevance with language study and proficiency has already been pointed out (Europe, 2001). The high level of proficiency in English required in Iceland needs to be addressed in upper-secondary schools. The proficiency Dörnyei mentions in connection with “international holidays” (Dörnyei, 2009b, p. 34) is expected to be reached by the end of compulsory schooling in Iceland at 16 years of age. The level needed in employment or for tertiary study using material in English and (often, but not always) submitting papers in English is far higher, especially since teaching through the medium of English is becoming increasingly widespread (Coleman, 2006). Secondary school learners need to be helped, through awareness-raising, individual goal-setting and autonomous study, to attain advanced proficiency, even at the expense of top grades, short-lived self-confidence and classes that centre on having fun. This type of study, with its emphasis on metacognitive skills and on preparation for university study, should optimally be done during students’ final year at secondary school. This is a matter that needs to be addressed by educational policy makers in Iceland.

It is the responsibility of teachers to provide material that is varied in content, style and register and tasks that are challenging, develop receptive and productive language skills, that include an element of choice, and that demand involvement and effort. They also need to take advantage of the fact that learners use English beyond the school walls, and to link school and out-of-school English to a greater degree. Students need to accept responsibility for discovering relevance to their individual situations, to their lives outside school and to all their possible future needs. In this way studying English at secondary school in Iceland can become more relevant to learners, proficiency can be raised and the learning experience made more enjoyable and more rewarding.

In this study, qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured interviews have opened up the construct of relevance as a new research area. They have also afforded valuable insight into the L2 Learning Experience, the third element of the L2 Motivational Self System, which has not yet been fully explored. Through in-depth interviews and open questions possible areas for future research, such as the second-language identity of Icelanders using two languages daily, have come to light. It is the individual learner in context, and how relevance appears to him or her, that is the important feature of this study.

6.11 On a personal note

It is thanks to qualitative data obtained through interviews that this study has brought to light many areas connected with learning English in Iceland and with the connection between relevance and motivation. Much of the research into motivation in second-language learning, including that carried out to consider the L2 Motivational Self System in different contexts, has been of a quantitative nature (e.g. Papi, 2010; S. Ryan, 2009; Skehan, 1997; Taguchi et al., 2009). However, the need for research into the second-language learner ‘in context’ has been emphasised in recent years (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2011b; Riley, 2003; Ushioda, 2011b; Ushioda & Chen, 2011). Furthermore, just as early socio-educational models of motivation could not be assumed to apply to other countries (Skehan, 1997), so it cannot be taken for granted that the L2 Motivational Self System will be validated in other contexts.

The reason I favoured carrying out a qualitative study was the uniqueness of the position of young people in Iceland vis-à-vis English. Semi-structured interviews and probing would enable me to expose new aspects of the English language learning experience (Dörnyei, 2009a) whereas quantitative data would ultimately only provide answers to the questions asked and would not allow for a new perspective to be gained. It has been said of studies into motivation that they “address what might seem to be simple questions, but generate complex answers” (MacIntyre, 2002, p. 58). In the case of this study it seems that asking “simple” questions such as *What is your opinion of your English studies at secondary school?* or *What was the most useful thing that you learned in English at school?* (see the Appendices for the full interview framework) did indeed generate complex answers which throw light on motivation and the question of relevance.

The study shows a wide diversity of attitudes and beliefs about English and about motivation to study English as a compulsory foreign language at school. In fact, I was not prepared for the complexity and depth of participant responses I obtained. I was surprised that any Icelander in their late teens could believe they had nothing left to learn in English, and equally surprised to hear the opposite view expressed (by a participant of a similar age, both of them at secondary school) that no Icelander is so good at English that he or she cannot make improvements. Participants’ sincerity was touching: I heard stories of constructive encouragement (by teachers) and of bullying (both by peers and teachers), of literature that affected students deeply (or, in other cases, not at all) and of the joy of communicating knowledge to others. Having taught English for over 20

years in Iceland, I was aware of its importance to young Icelanders, but that not knowing English means that “you don’t function properly in society” was a level of importance that I had not reckoned with. Furthermore, the varying gains made in and through English at school demonstrate how relevant language study can be, while participants’ gripes about what was missing from their English studies (e.g. spoken skills and specific domain vocabulary) say a lot about their hopes and expectations, about the need for developing proficiency and establishing objectives, and also about the value of formal instruction by good teachers.

When I started out on this research project, I had my own notions about what “practical and personal relevance” would constitute. In fact, as the study progressed, relevance took on a far wider spectrum than I had imagined would be the case. To cite one example where relevance took on an unexpected form and where the boundaries between practical and personal relevance were hazy, giving class presentations in English has relevance for the singer, Soffía, because she improves her fluency, her pronunciation and her self-confidence in performing in front of others. Thus, relevance is connected not only with the English language but also with personal attributes, and the practicality of learning correct pronunciation is closely linked to an inner feeling of confidence. Trausti, on the other hand, finds relevance in learning more about a hobby that he hopes to make a career in, while it is the “beautiful use of words” in English poetry that is relevant for Hera.

The breadth of attitudes towards studying English at secondary school suggests that allowing for relevance on an individual basis is of paramount importance. Learners can find relevance in English at school but, just as learning strategies differ between learners, so will relevance. Creating an individualised instruction plan for each student may not be feasible (if, for example, as is often the case in Icelandic secondary schools, an instructor teaches over a hundred students and student groups change every semester), but because “the same teaching can be taken in different ways by different students” (Cook, 2008, p. 153) it is possible to create opportunities for individual gain from instruction. In this way, instructors need not lose sight of the individuals in their classrooms and can be instrumental in helping learners “capitalize on the opportunities they find” (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 152) at school.

6.12 Summary

The main findings of the study are striking in several ways. The fact that participants mention TV, films and computers as a major source of learning English was certainly not foreseen. However, what is also interesting is that they feel a need for better proficiency and more practical English, without being conscious of exactly what they lack or how to remedy the situation. Many see their English skills gained outside school as being reinforced in the class situation, while their productive skills remain inadequately developed at school. Thus participants lack the ability to use English confidently and accurately at an advanced level. Overconfidence appears as a debilitating and disempowering factor insofar as some participants' lack of accurate self-assessment leads them to a distressing reality check, when demands are made on them in employment or university study that are beyond them.

Also that it is clear that Iceland and probably some other North European countries belong to a linguistic environment that is typified by extensive exposure to and use of English from early childhood. For this reason the context differs from that of countries where English is primarily a foreign language with little access outside the classroom. English is not a second language in Iceland, but could be regarded as a **further language involving extended use** or a "Utility Language" (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2012).

This chapter has been devoted to a discussion of the results of the study. The findings of the study were discussed in terms of the Affective, Cognitive and Interactive Selves of the analytic model and differences between the three participants groups (School, University, and Employment) were covered. Relevance as an individual difference in second-language learning and teaching was considered, as well as the relevance of English in Iceland and in Icelandic secondary schools. It was proposed that Iceland stands outside the L2 Motivational Self System and an adapted version of the paradigm was suggested, allowing for the inclusion of relevance and thereby of the Scandinavian and North European countries where the linguistic environment involves daily use of English and a need for advanced proficiency. Triangulation of findings and transferability of the study were discussed and the research questions were reviewed. The chapter closes with some personal comments.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis. The implications of the study for the English classroom in Iceland are discussed and suggestions are made as to how learners can be helped to find individual relevance within a varied collection of study material and activities. The limitations of the study are also considered, and suggestions are made for future research.

7 Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter I consider the contribution to new knowledge the study makes. Here presenting relevance as a factor in motivation is one element. The study also explores and expands the L2 Motivational Self System through qualitative research and addresses the context of Iceland. Implications of the study for EFL instruction in Iceland are also presented.

7.2 Contribution to research

All scientific research aims to create new knowledge by exploring a subject worthy of investigation (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998). In fact, as has been pointed out, one can probably not hope that one's study does more than "add a little new knowledge to the topic" (Meadows & Morse, 2001, p. 190). It is my hope that the study presented here has contributed to knowledge about individual differences in second-language acquisition in the context of Iceland by introducing the construct of relevance to the discussion of motivation in second-language learning. Equally, by proposing a paradigm adapted for the Scandinavian context that differs so radically from traditional EFL/ESOL contexts on which previous models have been constructed, the study attempts to fill the need for new frameworks that has arisen in recent years.

The study explores the area of perceptions of the relevance of studying English at post-compulsory level in Iceland. Focussing on the complex interaction of past experiences, present interests and future goals of post-compulsory students of English, I propose that relevance makes a significant contribution to motivation, and that current instructional models of motivation do not take into account a context where students grow up hearing, seeing and using a language that they are also obliged to study as a

foreign language at school. A new perspective on the study of individual differences in second-language acquisition is thus introduced which has not been discussed before.

Relevance is an aspect of foreign-language learning that has received little attention in research and which should be taken into account in the discussion of individual differences in second-language acquisition. Although the construct of relevance has been studied in several other disciplines, relevance of classroom language studies as they relate to how learners use foreign or second languages in their daily lives has not been considered. The concept is closely linked to motivation, identity, autonomy and metacognition, and is concerned no less with learners' present than with their future time framework. Unlike individual differences such as language aptitude or cognitive style, relevance is an aspect of second-language learning that teachers and learners themselves can influence and change.

I present the construct of relevance of English in terms of a dynamic relation between the present, past and future. Relevance is thus a personal and individualised sense of meaning and is dynamic through many years of language learning as learners mature and learn more. The perspective of Complexity Theory supports this view, as it considers the classroom "across timescales, from the minute by minute of classroom activity to teaching and learning lifetimes" (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008, p. 198). Encouraging learners to reflect on the relevance to them of English, and English study materials and tasks, may increase their motivation to study, strengthen their identity as individuals and empower them as autonomous learners. An absence of a long-term view of life with its continually changing focuses and priorities may cause students to base whatever choices they have leeway to make at school on *wants* rather than *needs*. For this reason, future language needs "later in an adult environment" (Europe, 2001, p. 45) must be taken into account in the discussion of relevance in terms of students' present interests. English has an important role in the world and is also central to students' motives and needs in Iceland (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009; Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010) and elsewhere (Graddol, 2006; Jenkins, 2007; Kormos et al., 2008; Kormos et al., 2002; Yashima, 2002, 2009). The part played by relevance has not been documented until now.

The paradigm of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b) reawakened interest in the study of motivation in second-language learning, and prompted a wealth of research into motivation in various countries. Learners' images of future ideal and ought-to selves were shown

to guide to a large extent their motivation to learn. Previously motivation had been seen in terms of integration and instrumentality, a division which is thought to be outdated in today's era of English as a lingua franca.

Much of the research into the L2 Motivational Self System has been quantitative in nature (e.g., Henry, 2010; Noels, 2009; Papi, 2010; Taguchi et al., 2009). In this study, the field under concern is approached via in-depth interviews in order to gain new insight from a different perspective. Present and former learners' perceptions of English at school and in everyday life, university study and employment show that contexts such as the one in Iceland are situated outside the present L2 Motivational Self System. An adapted paradigm for Iceland (possibly applicable also to other countries in Scandinavia and Northern Europe) is presented which includes the construct of relevance. The study allows possible links to be observed between exposure to English in Iceland and perceived relevance (for many young Icelanders, television is the main source of exposure and the input in prime-time material may be reflected in a limited view of English as a means of informal conversation).

The study employs qualitative methodology, in an attempt to access deeper and more individual research data than statistical data can supply. It has been pointed out that a stronger counterbalance is needed to the many quantitative studies of language-learning motivation. A qualitative standpoint on motivation has been supported by scholars (Kim, 2009; Lamb, 2009; Ushioda, 2009, 2011a; Ushioda & Chen, 2011).

Data from the study shows that many students are strongly rooted in a fluid and ever-changing present. Students of English, a language that impinges on so many areas of life in today's society, need to keep an open mind with regard to the future, and to extract whatever is useful to them from their present learning situations (Krumboltz, 2009). The emphasis on the future goals and fears evident in the L2 Motivation Self System may not be relevant to secondary school students still in their teens. Dörnyei's framework and possible self approaches (MacIntyre, MacKinnon, & Clément, 2009; Markus & Nurius, 1986) concentrate on future goals and a future vision of what one is going to do. This study claims that for many people, and especially for young people in their teens and twenties, the future is hazy. Life is led in the present, and planning for the future is hard (Marcia, 1980). A view of language motivation centred on an image of oneself in the future does not correspond with the *carpe diem* perspective of life that seems to be prevalent today. Furthermore, the presence of English in Iceland today in the form of television and cinema entertainment, its use as a lingua franca with tourists, immigrants, in the

workplace and at home with friends and relatives (both Icelandic- and non-Icelandic-speaking), as well as on the Internet, means that many of the participants report using the language daily. This means that secondary school students may not have the “superordinate vision” (Dörnyei 2009, p. 25) that keeps them focused, for the simple reason that they see using English as a part of their lives in the present, rather than solely a future activity for which they are preparing. This focus on an entertainment- and popular-culture-based present may detract from young Icelanders’ understanding of register, and similarly to learners in Southern Africa, they may need help in grasping the fact that colloquial-register English represents only one aspect of the language (Coetzee-Van Rooy & Verhoef, 2000).

7.3 Implications of the study: the relevant classroom

The results of the study show that for secondary school learners English has a very high level of relevance in their everyday life. English is used in such a variety of circumstances and for such a variety of reasons that it would seem sensible and valuable for teachers to forge stronger links between English inside and outside the classroom.

For many learners, activities and study material in English classes also have relevance, although teachers may not be able to anticipate how material will be relevant for individual learners, since relevance will differ from learner to learner (Cook, 2008). Thus a reading passage about the history of medicine may be intended by the teacher to strengthen reading skills (and may do so) but will have especial relevance for a learner who plans on studying medicine at university. Short stories may be chosen because of their content, but will have confidence-building relevance for a student who, perhaps unexpectedly, finds he can read them and answer questions on them.

A striking implication of the study is that, while most students enjoy their English classes, feel unthreatened and secure in the near certainty of not failing, a significant few experience boredom and futility and, despite also expecting to obtain pass grades, fail to see that their studies have any relevance to their lives outside school. They are not aware of gains in proficiency or general knowledge, and seem to see no benefit to themselves in attending English classes. Despite this, they use English outside school and expect to continue doing so in the future. The fact that learners can feel so disaffected about a subject that is, in fact, such an integral part of their lives emphasises the value of the study by showing the need for new

emphases and new strategies for involving learners and helping them to find their own relevance in course work and tasks. This will be discussed in more detail below with regard to the relevant classroom.

7.3.1 Receptive and productive skills in the relevant classroom

One aspect of English at secondary school that learners find relevant is the increase in receptive and productive skills that they gain. By the time students complete compulsory education, most normally have a fairly good basic level of spoken English that suffices for general use, for example for giving directions to tourists in Iceland or in holiday situations abroad. They can communicate in writing over the Internet, read news reports and understand television programmes. Bearing in mind that in general participants in the study believe that television and computers have been the main source of their learning of English, what post-compulsory English study is right in doing, and needs to continue doing, is providing a higher level of competence and emphasising reading and writing skills which will not be obtained from these informal sources. The level Common European Framework of Reference C1 representing “an advanced level of competence suitable for more complex work and study tasks” (Europe, 2001, p. 23) is the level that young Icelanders need.

Participants tend to believe that grammar accuracy and writing are learned only at school (with listening and some vocabulary learnt from television). Accuracy and writing skills are aspects of English that learners believe they will need in the future and that they will not gain competence in on their own outside the classroom. Receptive listening skills may be learned from watching original language television shows and films. Even so, watching television material provides only a limited vocabulary with, for example, one study showing that the 1,000 most frequent word families accounted for 85% of the words used in the sample material (Webb & Rodgers, 2009). This will not prepare Icelanders for all the situations in which they will hear English in the future; and taking part in business meetings, listening to academic lectures, and talking on the phone, therefore, involve receptive and productive skills in which learners need training. Pronunciation practice is also mentioned as being relevant and necessary but little emphasised in class. Writing, however, is the skill that participants believe has most relevance for them in English study (for example, due to the stigma they feel is attached to making errors in English and to the permanence of written errors) and which should clearly be emphasised in teaching, with more focussed instruction in areas such as

grammar and syntax as well as in vocabulary (Jeeves, 2012). What we see here is a situation not entirely dissimilar to that reported by Skarpaas (2011) in Norway, where learners appear to want and need more classroom activities involving language production.

The confidence and self-esteem that are gained through post-compulsory English are also highly relevant to participants. Conquering nervousness about making presentations in English is significant for teenage learners and the benefits are easily transferrable to any forms of public speaking in Icelandic or another foreign language. Learners need to be aware, as many are, of the fact that they do possess high-level skills, that they have a good grounding on which to build increased proficiency, and that the skills they have will benefit them in the future in study and work. Being able to use a wider range of language and more advanced vocabulary will make them better prepared for tertiary study and employment.

7.3.2 Proficiency levels and effort

Although self-esteem may have importance for young people, it should not detract from deepening learners' proficiency. It is evident from the study that many learners reap good grades but sow little effort. This gives them a sense of worth they themselves know is not justified and leads (at best) to stagnation and (at worst) to insecurity or failure if they feel out of their depth when they move on to tertiary education or employment. Learners may have good ability in colloquial English, but their reading and writing skills may not exceed B1 level of the European Language Portfolio. This would mean that they may be able to "describe the plot of a film or book, narrate a simple story or report on an event" but may have trouble expressing themselves "fluently and accurately" or "with clarity and precision" as they should do at C1 level (Materials, 2006; Torfadóttir, 2007), or using "rhetorical devices, e.g. metaphors and similes" [my translation] as they should do at Stage 3 (i.e. matriculation) of the new Icelandic National Curriculum Guide (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2011, p. 102).

The academic demands of courses at secondary school need to increase in incremental stages, so that students are constantly expected to expend effort. Increased demands are already evident with regard to writing, with participants who have taken higher-level courses satisfied with their improved proficiency, although other research shows that despite years of study many learners remain unable to write in formal language (Hinkel, 2006). On the other hand, higher-level writing tasks in Iceland seem primarily to involve essays on works of literature which, although giving

learners a welcome opportunity to express their opinions, may not prepare them well enough for writing at university or in employment (Jeeves, 2012). Certainly essays of this kind do not call for the whole range of writing skills listed at C1 level of the European Language Portfolio, for example writing “clear, well-structured texts on complex subjects ..., expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion” (Materials, 2006, p. 106). If instruction took learners nearer the competencies appropriate for this level, including also being able to “read quickly enough to cope with the demands of an academic course” (Europe, 2001, p. 244) and helped them focus on useful academic vocabulary common to a range of fields (Coxhead, 2000), they might be well prepared for academic and professional life after school.

Neither do increasing demands seem to be made for presentations. Addi, for example, assumes his next grade will be good because he did well in the past. Some participants express the desire for improved fluency and better pronunciation and regret the lack of emphasis on spoken English in the classroom. Being able to express themselves well and without risk of being misunderstood or made fun of because of their accent, is relevant, both in terms of confidence and ‘credibility’. At present it seems that learners and teachers are entrusting listening and speaking instruction to popular media. The Council of Europe’s European Language Portfolio presents very clear criteria at each proficiency level, with perceptible increases in difficulty. Icelandic learners may fulfil the B1 level criteria and be able to “give a short and straightforward prepared presentation on a personal project or chosen literary work in a reasonably clear manner” but may never reach the B2 demands of being able to “depart spontaneously from a prepared text and follow up points raised by an audience” or the C1 demands of coping with “deliver[ing] announcements fluently, almost effortlessly, using stress and intonation to convey finer shades of meaning precisely” (Materials, 2006). They may not be in a position to “present a well constructed narrative, presentation or report, emphasising the main points and supporting them with examples, and responding to questions” [my translation] that the new National Curriculum Guide specifies for matriculating students (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2011, p. 102). More focussed and sequential classroom instruction in productive and interactive speaking skills would be relevant for many learners and would encourage “increased grammatical and lexical complexity” (Hinkel, 2006, p. 115).

Also seen to be relevant is specific vocabulary. The one participant who has taken vocabulary courses directly specific to his vocational training,

Freyr, is very conscious of their usefulness. Other participants, however, express anxiety about coping with general academic and subject-specific vocabulary at university or work. Taking Bjarki as an example, we see that he completed his compulsory courses in English at the age of 17 and so, having no idea at the time that he would change from majoring in science at school to majoring in the humanities at university, he missed out on advanced academic courses in English which would have had relevance for him. Scarcella sees academic English as “required for success” (Scarcella, 2003), pointing out that without it people are excluded from influencing society.

On the other hand, the reason why vocabulary is mentioned frequently by participants may be that it is stressed in the classroom. More emphasis seems to be put on vocabulary in the classroom than on discourse, and it may be that work on discourse patterns in English will prepare participants for university study better than learning vocabulary. Advanced reading proficiency calls for instruction in reading skills such as skimming and scanning of academic texts as well as extensive reading of literature (A. Brown, 1980; Clarke & Silberstein, 1979; Collie & Slater, 1987; Nunan, 1999; Thornbury, 2005). Integrated skills, including reading and note-taking, summarising and paraphrasing, which will also be needed by young Icelanders whether they are at university or in employment, require attention and specific teaching. Competent reading has been shown to be a more complex activity than knowing what individual words mean (e.g., Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995; Birch, 2007; Carrell, 1991; Lundberg & Linnakylä, 1993).

In recent years there has been increasing teaching of English for Special Purposes in Iceland, with some courses developed from a needs analysis. It operates mostly on the initiative of companies and institutions (E. Kristjánsson, 2007). In the school context, there is little specialisation in language groups, meaning that course material is generally not selected according to specific domains. However, some research points to the importance of learning words and word sets from academic word lists which are a feature of academic writing (and reading) regardless of domain (Coxhead, 2000; Coxhead & Byrd, 2007). Other studies claim that ESP vocabulary will be more helpful (Hyland & Tse, 2007). Another difficulty is that many general textbooks in academic writing are aimed at a native audience and may not be suitable for second-language users of English (e.g., Gillett, Hammond, & Martala, 2009; e.g., Oshima & Hogue, 2006).

If students were encouraged to take English in their final year at secondary school, when they are likely to have a clearer idea of what job or

tertiary study they will go into, they could collaborate in groups and work independently on these specific domains. Reducing emphasis on grades and on students' comparison of grades, and stressing instead individual self-efficacy in carrying out specific language tasks, might boost learners' motivation and encourage improved future performance (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Dörnyei, 1994). However, care must be taken over what sort of vocabulary and language are taught (Brantmeier, 2006).

7.3.3 Learner and teacher roles in the relevant classroom

We have seen that relevance is not a fixed construct but one that differs between individuals. Thus the relevance one learner finds in a classroom activity may not be meaningful to another, and vice versa. Relevance therefore both separates and unites classroom students, in similar fashion to autonomy, which seeks to help learners find ways to make their studies more individually relevant (Benson, 2003, 2011). An autonomous classroom setting (Legenhausen, 2003; Ushioda, 1996) would allow students the freedom to take advantage of opportunities offered (Krumboltz, 2009) and would, quite simply, allow for learning that is “*more effective* than non-autonomous language learning” (Benson, 2011, p. 16).

Teachers are seen in the study as being responsible for providing suitable study material and for assessing learners. Significantly, they are also responsible for entertaining students and for making the classroom a pleasant place to be. The association of English with passive entertainment in Iceland seems so strong that it pervades the classroom as well as the cinema and the home. Naturally it is desirable that learners feel comfortable in the classroom, but transferring part of the responsibility for enjoyment to students might increase their sense of participation and pleasure. It should be the case that all learners experience during their studies “that you can learn more” and that they are encouraged to make long-term learning gains from school. Entertainment may be part of the classroom ethos in Iceland (especially in language classrooms), as it surely is in many countries, and anxiety is an inhibiting factor, probably especially in speaking tasks (Dörnyei, 1994; MacIntyre, 2002). However, entertaining students is not the principal purpose of schools, and students need to take risks (Rubin, 1975) and to be willing to communicate (MacIntyre & Clément, 1996; MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998; Rubin, 1975).

Those participants who felt that they had gained nothing from English classes at secondary school and who saw classes as having no relevance or bearing on their present or future lives cannot be ignored. Perhaps through

metacognitive reflection, and with help from teachers, these learners could be encouraged to see that some aspect of their studies might have future relevance for them, be it in formal or creative writing, world knowledge, presentation skills, or something else.

Some of the responsibility for assessment also needs to be shifted from teachers to learners. Summative assessment also could involve some level of choice for learners, with learners perhaps setting individualised assessment frameworks in collaboration with peers and teachers. Choice, and the emotions accompanying the freedom to choose classroom tasks, is seen as an important factor in motivation (Deci & Flaste, 1995; MacIntyre, 2002). Creating a more “learner-oriented instructional system” (Nunan, 1999, p. 85) would also help students develop a feeling for their own progress or lack of it. Self-assessment skills are also a necessary feature of English study, since Icelanders can expect to use English throughout their lives and will not always have access to expert help. None of the participants in the study mentions getting advice on goal-setting, self-evaluation, or feedback; instead they seem to assume that the good grades they obtain mean that their proficiency is adequate for the future and that they need make no more effort. This seems to be notwithstanding the fact that participants are aware that they encounter problems watching movies without subtitles, shopping abroad, or reading university material in English. This curious paradox of grades implying competence but usage revealing a lack of competence (see also Jeeves, 2010), which is representative of the new linguistic context in Iceland, could perhaps be avoided if learners established their own level of knowledge, set their own goals and self-evaluated their performance (Europe, 2001). As it is, learners in Iceland resemble those reported in Hungary, where studying English has not “equipped students with skills for improving their own language competence” (Kormos et al., 2008, p. 74). Research has shown the importance of feedback (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Montalvo, Mansfield, & Miller, 2007; Ushioda, 1996) and the importance of self-evaluation is widely supported in the literature (e.g., Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Europe, 2001b; Hedge, 2000; Nunan, 1999; Wolff, 2003).

Teachers also need to make greater demands on students. The fact that students can pass courses without studying outside the classroom or revising for final examinations suggests a light workload. Expecting more effort and a higher standard of work from students will not only give an indication of the proficiency levels really needed after school, but will also foster internalisation of responsibility for learning (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000). At present learners seem unaware of the paradox of demanding that

the workload should be decreased while at the same time admitting that effort expended is below five on a one-to-ten scale, or of saying that classroom tasks are too difficult and that English is not hard.

Obtaining reward (in the form of high grades) for expending little effort does not imbue a feeling of competence (Deci & Flaste, 1995), but may give learners an unrealistic idea of proficiency. It may also be partly responsible for the significant drop-out rate from university study in Iceland during students' first year of study (Ingvarsdóttir & Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2010); the most recent figures available show that in 2003 the dropout rate was 16% (Statistics Iceland, 2012a). Offering more challenging tasks, allowing students to take part in setting their own performance benchmarks and making reasonable demands are the responsibility of the teacher. These factors may not only make the learning experience more enjoyable but also support increased learning that is more in line with learners' needs.

7.3.4 Study materials in the relevant classroom

The English classroom appears throughout the study as a highly structured setting, with directions coming from the teacher and being followed by the students. Mainstream textbooks of English as a foreign language appear to be widely used, since several participants mention typical EFL exercises such as grammar and gap-fill exercises (described by Elsa as “filling-in-some-sort-of-gaps and joining-things-up sort of nonsense”). I have already discussed how the linguistic context of Iceland differs from that of many countries in which Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System has been researched, such as Indonesia, Japan and Hungary. Classroom books catering for an international market in countries where there is little exposure to English in the environment are out of place in Scandinavian countries where English is heard and used every day in the community. Thus Númi's dismissal of these typical textbook exercises as “absolutely ridiculous” may be accurate, since learners do not perceive English as a foreign language in the same way that German, French and Spanish are. Workbook exercises such as filling in words or completing sentences, which may be accepted as useful by beginners in a foreign language, are seen as incongruous in English classes. Although some Icelandic learners may overestimate their ability in English, the use of mass-market EFL textbooks ‘dumbs down’ their knowledge of the language, which in terms of sociocultural familiarity borders on a second language for them. Some primary schools in Iceland are now using Scandinavian-produced material,

which seems better suited to the linguistic environment. To the best of my knowledge, only one upper-secondary school in Iceland is using English textbooks from Scandinavian publishers. Teachers report that the material is pitched at a more suitable level than British or American mass-market books and uses a more holistic and less grammar-oriented approach.

Some project work is mentioned by study participants. For example, Trausti is reading and writing about his favourite football team, which he finds both entertaining and informative. Many, however, experience little choice during their English studies, and although some are grateful for being “made to” read literature classics they would otherwise not read, others, such as Egill, who had to read “crap love stories” merely in order to pass the course, would have liked more choice. Project work can provide a valuable way of integrating language and content (Beckett & Slater, 2005).

It would seem that not allowing learners to have some say in what study materials they use widens the gap between English at school and English outside school. English study at secondary school needs to be seen as a vocational subject as well as an academic one, linked as it is to students’ individual study and employment futures. Learners need to be helped to understand, perhaps through class discussion or individual goal-setting activities, which skills class tasks are aimed at developing and why. If reading skills can be honed through reports of sports matches or specialist literature on photography or rally-driving (to name but a few examples of young Icelanders’ hobbies) then the relevance of individually chosen material will make the task more effective than the irrelevance of novels and stories that they find no connection with.

7.3.5 Review of guidelines for the relevant English classroom

To sum up, Icelandic secondary schools need to ensure that students of English

- are encouraged to reach advanced proficiency in listening, reading, speaking and writing
- receive more focused instruction in the productive skills that they do not develop outside school
- are provided with challenging classroom tasks involving individual choice
- shoulder more responsibility for goal-setting and self-assessment
- are encouraged to develop ways of finding individual relevance in study material and activities
- develop metacognitive and transferable ‘learning for life’ skills

7.4 The new model

The study presents a version of the L2 Motivational Self System which I have adapted in three ways from the original version set out by Dörnyei (2005, 2009b). Firstly, the new framework represents an investigation and expansion of the L2 Learning Experience aspect of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, which has not so far been explored. Secondly, it includes the construct of relevance, which the study has shown to be a significant individual difference among learners of English, perhaps especially on account of the extensive exposure in Iceland and young people's many uses for English. Thirdly, the model proposes three Selves emerging from the L2 Learning Experience: the Affective, Cognitive and Interactive Selves. These new Self aspects show, respectively, what learners feel about English and studying English; what they learn (including not only language proficiency but also general world knowledge and transferable metacognitive and social skills); and what they use English for outside the classroom, in Iceland, abroad and through the ether channels of computer technology. Examples to support each aspect are given, as well as what have I have termed 'negative' findings, such as apathy and boredom in class, a perception of having learnt nothing from school English, and a complete avoidance of using English. These 'negative' data were far outweighed by data suggesting positive feelings towards English, gains in proficiency and frequent and varied uses of English. Each Self includes the retrospective perspective of older participants now in tertiary study or employment, which gives an important further dimension to the findings.

The adapted version of the L2 Motivational Self System is proposed as applying to Iceland and possibly to other Nordic and North European contexts. It is my hope that the adapted model I put forward in the study may advance the discussion of motivation in second-language learning, giving it new impetus and possibly shifting it into new directions.

7.5 Limitations of the study

No research study is glitch-free. Unforeseen problems arise and mistakes are made. In the study, problems of execution encountered centred on finding participants and ensuring that an interview room was available. Few problems arose during interviews although there were occasions when I was unsure about what a participant was saying, and failed to obtain adequate clarification. This may have been due to not hearing what was said, and trusting that a native Icelandic speaker would be able to clarify

the point from the recording. Unfortunately, on a handful of occasions the words were also unclear to native speakers who were asked to help. The truthfulness of participant responses can be contested: some may have felt obliged to give what they saw as acceptable responses, some may simply have fabricated answers. It must be said, however, that there is nothing to suggest that this happened and participants appeared sincere in what they said. The fact that they sometimes displayed themselves in an unfavourable light (for example, using online notes instead of reading set books) supports the idea that participants were not trying to make up responses.

There were some unforeseen hiccups. Some participants did not come to pre-arranged interviews, and did not reply to subsequent emails. In these cases, the interview was abandoned, and I did not attempt to make contact by other means.

One university contacted sent personal details of possible participants without obtaining their consent. This came to light when I contacted one of them by email. It then transpired that none of the participants whose names I had been given in fact wanted to take part in the study, and my contact person at this university made no attempts to find new, willing participants. This was a rather serious setback, as there are few universities in Iceland.

Finally, I must accept responsibility for any possible researcher bias that may be evident in the study. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), being blind to one's background, experiences and beliefs is an impossible task. As a native English speaker with over 20 years' experience of teaching English, my background, age and experience put me at a far remove from the participants in the study. However, my aim was always to explore a complex area and to expose as many facets as possible of it. The sheer volume of data in the study (over one thousand pages of transcribed interview material) meant that certain themes emerged with a force that could only have been ignored by a researcher determined to be biased! I hope that I have, during the course of the study, developed the necessary skills "to recognize and avoid bias, to obtain valid and reliable data, and to think abstractly" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 18).

7.6 Future research

A qualitative study of this nature necessarily takes into account the responses of only a fraction of the population. Although I attempted to contact participants from different schools, universities, areas of employment, and from different parts of the country other views might have been obtained in other circumstances. Similarly, in interviews there

will always be gaps in information, areas which could have been explored further, opinions that could have been probed more deeply.

However, mixed-methods research would provide information on a wider spectrum of motivation (Dörnyei, 2009a; Ushioda & Chen, 2011). Extending the present study by creating a quantitative research tool based on participants' responses is an exciting future research possibility. A longitudinal study of students' perceptions of the relevance of studying English at secondary school might provide interesting data on changes in perspective as learners age and develop their language skills. Here I would envisage a mixed-methods approach giving quantitative data on a large section of the learner population, and interviews with a smaller number providing in-depth responses. Interviews with the same students at two- or three-year intervals could give valuable information. Case studies involving learners keeping diaries might be difficult to conduct but would also give a different, although equally valuable, type of data. Talking to English teachers at Icelandic secondary schools would also give a valuable perspective on relevance and the L2 self.

Finally, research linking perceptions of relevance to actual proficiency would allow the subjective view of L2 self in context to be explored more deeply. As it is, there are no nationally standardised matriculation examinations in Iceland. However, a proficiency test based, for example, on the descriptors of the European Language Portfolio (Davidson & Fulcher, 2007; Materials, 2006) would give an indication of the level of language use of students finishing secondary school. This could be correlated with their self-assessment and perceived future uses of English to give an interesting view of learners' practical L2 self.

7.7 Closing words

The new model of motivation in second-language acquisition proposed here introduces the construct of relevance, and is itself applicable to different linguistic contexts. The boundaries between English as a Foreign Language, English as a Second Language and English as a Lingua Franca are becoming blurred as new technology oversteps national borders and makes communication easier. Iceland finds itself in a linguistic environment different to that of Italy, of Indonesia, or of China, but in all linguistic environments there exists the deep human need for contact with others. For this contact to take place, language is an essential factor, and it is in the present time frame that our ability to use language, be it our first or second language, has relevance to us.

I give the final word to Bára, the first participant I interviewed for the study almost four years ago, who spent time in Spain as an exchange student. She reminds us that the true purpose of language is communication and that it is the deeply-felt need for making contact with other people that makes language such a vital part of being human. For her, the long process of learning a second language took on relevance when she had finally gained enough proficiency to make ‘real’ friends.

I want to travel in the future and that’s just like when you’re swimming. I mean if you’re out at sea and you can’t swim then you just drown. If you’re in some country and can’t express yourself then you don’t get far. Like in the town in Spain, when I couldn’t speak Spanish. It was like I didn’t have any real friends; it was like I just had acquaintances who would say, “Hi, how are you?” and then “Bye” ... You don’t have real friends until you can confide in them, until you can talk to them.

I see it as the role of teachers (and I include myself here) to ensure that our students do not drown in a sea of inadequate language ability. Instead we should help them see the relevance of developing sound language skills so that coping with any language situation they encounter will go swimmingly.

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9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Interview framework (including prompts)

9.1.1 Participants at secondary school (aged 18 – 20 years)

Opening – introduction

I am doing a research project at the University of Iceland about English at secondary school level. Just to tell you a little about me, I was born abroad but I've lived here for 30 years. I have three children, two of them live here in Iceland, but my son is working in England. I've taught at secondary school level for 20 years.

I'd like to ask you about your English studies at secondary school. There are no right or wrong answers – it's just about your opinions and your experience. This is an informal chat but I would still like to record it. Then I don't have to write your answers down. Is it okay if I tape the interview? I guess we'll talk for between half and three-quarters of an hour. Is that okay?

When I go through the interview again and write it up, it won't be possible to trace it to you. I'll give you a pseudonym, so you'll be Stefania or Dögg/ Albert or Markus, or something like that. Is that okay? Is there some name that you would like me to use for you?

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
(How old are you? What do you do? Are you at school? What study programme are you on? How do you like it?)
2. How many courses have you taken in English at secondary school?
3. How good would you say your knowledge of English is?
(e.g. reading, writing, or speaking)
4. In a few words, where or how have you learned most of what you know in English?
5. What is your opinion of your English studies at secondary school?
6. What do you get out of your English studies in terms of usefulness?
(How will your studies (assignments, etc.) be useful in the future?)
7. What do you get out of your English studies personally?
(How interesting do you find course material and assignments? How do classes link in to your own life and experience? Can you give me an example?)
8. What is missing in your knowledge of English that you don't learn at school but that you would find useful or fun to learn?
9. Is English at secondary school an academic subject or a practical subject?
(Why?)

10. What do you use English for now (apart from using it at school)?
(e.g. speaking English, reading, writing, listening)
11. How do you think you will use English in the future?
(e.g. reading, writing, speaking; at work, abroad, in Iceland)
12. One of the objectives of secondary schools according to the national curriculum is to prepare students for using English in everyday life, at work, and in study. Do they do that?
13. How much effort are you prepared to put into learning English?
(Imagine a scale 1-10 if the subject you put most time and work into is 10. Why? Are you satisfied with how hard you work?)
14. Of what you are learning in English now, what will be most useful for the future?
15. What is most fun?
16. What effect does it have on you as an Icelander that there is so much English around us in Iceland?
17. What difference would it make for you if you didn't know English?
18. What difference would it make for you if you weren't doing English at school?

Closure – thanks

I don't have any more questions about learning English. Is there anything that you would like to add? Thank you very much for this. It's been great fun talking to you and hearing what you think about your English studies. Good luck at school. Thank you.

9.1.2 Participants at university or in employment (aged 22 - 24 years)

Opening – introduction

I am doing a research project at the University of Iceland about English at secondary school level. Just to tell you a little about me, I was born abroad but I've lived here for 30 years. I have three children, two of them live here in Iceland, but my son is working in England. I've taught at secondary school level for 20 years.

I'd like to ask you about your English studies at secondary school. There are no right or wrong answers – it's just about your opinions and your experience. This is an informal chat but I would still like to record it. Then I don't have to write your answers down. Is it okay if I tape the interview? I guess we'll talk for between half and three-quarters of an hour. Is that okay?

When I go through the interview again and write it up, it won't be possible to trace it to you. I'll give you a pseudonym, so you'll be Stefania or Dögg/ Albert or Markus, or something like that. Is that okay? Is there some name that you would like me to use for you?

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
(How old are you? What do you do? Are you studying or are you working? At university? In which faculty? / What is your job? How do you like it?)
2. How many courses did you take in English at secondary school?
3. How good would you say your knowledge of English is?
(e.g. reading, writing, or speaking)
4. In a few words, where or how have you learned most of what you know in English?
5. What is your opinion of your English studies at secondary school?
6. What did you get out of your English studies in terms of usefulness?
(How useful are your studies to you now? e.g. grammar, novels, presentations? In what way?)
7. What did you get out of your English studies personally?
(How interesting did you find course material and assignments? How did classes link in to your own life and experience? Can you give me an example?)
8. What is missing in your knowledge of English that you didn't learn at school but that you would have found useful or fun to learn?
9. When you were at secondary school was English an academic subject or a practical subject? (Why?)
10. What do you use English for now? Do you use English more or less, or differently, from what you expected five years ago?
(e.g. reading, writing, speaking; at work, abroad, in Iceland)

11. When you were at secondary school, how did you think you would have to use English in the future?
12. One of the objectives of secondary schools according to the national curriculum is to prepare students for using English in everyday life, at work, and in study. Do they do that?
13. How much effort were you prepared to put into learning English?
(Imagine a scale 1-10 if the subject you put most time and work into is 10. Why? When you think back, are you satisfied with how hard you worked?)
14. What was the most useful thing that you learned in English at school?
15. What was most fun?
16. What effect does it have on you as an Icelander that there is so much English around us in Iceland?
17. What difference would it make for you if you didn't know English?
18. What difference would it make for you if you hadn't done English at school?

Closure – thanks

I don't have any more questions about learning English. Is there anything that you would like to add? Thank you very much for this. It's been great fun talking to you and hearing what you think about your English studies. Good luck in your studies/at work. Thank you.

9.2 Appendix 2: English translation of an interview with a participant in the School Group.

The interview opened with general chat which is not included in this translation.

Anna: Let's talk a bit about English now.

Númi: Yes.

Anna: You're on the social science study programme, so you've probably taken two, three English courses?

Númi: My first term anyway, and the second. The first year there are two courses, then the second year there are two. I'm finishing that now, I'm finishing my sixth course. [**Anna:** Hmm.] It's always like that, in each year there are two courses.

Anna: Yes, and then you're finished? You don't have to take more than..?

Númi: I think it's my last course now, no, I'm not sure [laughs]. [**Anna:** No.] Actually I'm not sure about that.

Anna: Yes. And what's your knowledge of English like?

Númi: It's, I wouldn't say it was brilliant, but I can make myself understood, and I understand what people say to me, sort of, so you know, I don't know, it may not be over average, I think it's just average. [**Anna:** Hmm.] No top grades or anything like that, just ok. [**Anna:** Just ok.] Yes, shall we say it's good enough.

Anna: Aha. And where does this knowledge come from?

Númi: I would say that it's sort of mainly from the environment and you know, what I hear said in movies, on the television, in series and so on. When I began watching, I remember actually when I began watching, you know, television series and movies that weren't subtitled, and what it was like, you know, to understand, and I thought that was just great then because then I understood it straight away then. It was actually what I had learnt before, I think I was only in 8th, 9th grade when I started doing that a lot, and what I, yes, I think that what I had learnt before that had only been the basics. But what, you know, like what I'm doing now, it's I don't think I get much out of it except for vocabulary. It's only vocabulary, I haven't learnt anything, you know you don't necessarily learn new grammar because of course it's terribly *basic*, like they say. So it's mainly hammering vocabulary into you and so on.

[**Anna:** Yes. What you're doing now?] Yes, and have done since I don't know when, since first term in second year or second term in first year.

[**Anna:** Yes]. It's a lot to do with vocabulary. We're so far on.

Anna: And how do you feel about that? What do you think about the courses, English courses here?

Númi: English courses? I don't think I put very much effort in. It's like, I try to get out of it anyway [he laughs]. [**Anna:** To?] To get out of it, because...

[Interruption from a teacher who comes into the room].

Anna: Sorry.

Númi: Where were we?

Anna: We were talking generally about what you think of the courses, English courses, and you were saying that you try to get out of it. I didn't quite...

Númi: Yes, I don't put much, maybe it's not necessarily just English, you know, you're always trying to get through it sort of, sort of maybe the easiest way. [**Anna:** Yes]. Like, no, still I wouldn't say I don't put an effort in but I don't think it's really, you know, I don't think it's absolutely unnecessary to take these courses, I don't think that, but [**Anna:** No]. But I think maybe it's a bit too much, you know. You're taking, I'm taking, even though I think it's only 2-credit courses, you know four hours a week. [**Anna:** Mmm, yes]. I don't actually think it needs to be so much. [**Anna:** No]. From my, my opinion about it, because, like I was sitting in English class just now before I came here and I really didn't do very much. I don't think I got my pencil case out, didn't open my bag. [**Anna:** Yes]. Yes, well maybe it's just me, but of course you've heard lots of different opinions here today, haven't you?

Anna: A few.

Númi: Yes [he laughs].

Anna: But.

Númi: Yes, oh I don't know, I think that what I just said is exactly what I think.

Anna: Yes, that nothing's being done.

Númi: Not much, you know, in these courses. It's basically just vocabulary and that's something that you could learn yourself actually and, you know, then take an exam about it. [**Anna:** Yes, okay]. So, I don't know.

Anna: What do you use English for, apart from going to class?

Númi: That I use it for? Of course I, like I was saying, I compose music, I write song lyrics and so on.

Anna: In English?

Númi: Sometimes in English, sometimes in Icelandic. Hmm, I use English as well to talk to people who don't speak Icelandic. [**Anna:** Yes]. Because it's such a terribly sort of international language, most people know it. Er, I play a computer game called World of Warcraft and there's a lot of European people there and they all understand English. It's English that is used there mainly, and I learn English there as well and use it there, both to write or like, maybe I can explain it if you don't know the game but there's a program called Vent or Ventrilo and it's a bit like Skype, you can talk to other people through the Internet. I use that a bit. [**Anna:** Yes]. And talk to other people in Europe in English.

And I use it, I don't know, not much more, not much more at all, maybe to read, you know and of course the Internet, that's all in English. Er, some course material of course, something I'm looking for, some source or information, if I'm writing an essay. [Anna: Yes]. That sort of thing. Everything's so technical today, if I don't understand a word I can type it in and find out what it means, just check a dictionary.

[Anna: Mmm]. And yes, I don't think I use it much more.

Anna: No. You talk about talking to people who don't speak Icelandic. Is that people here in town or do you mean more on the Net?

Númi: Both in other countries when I maybe go there, and also there are occasions when people here in town who aren't Icelandic, don't speak Icelandic, like for the past two summers I've been working with a boy who's from Lithuania, as far as I remember. He doesn't speak much Icelandic. I've tried to speak English with him, though I'm trying to help him learn Icelandic actually, to say things to him in Icelandic a bit and I think he's getting closer and closer all the time to learning it. Er, so like I was saying there are some people here in town who don't speak Icelandic.

Anna: Yes, yes. You talk about English classes. You don't think that very much, that very much is actually being done.

Númi: No.

Anna: Is there something that's useful in what you're doing?

Númi: Yes, yes, like I say, all the basics that I've taken. I've learnt a lot from that and there are still new words seeping in in these classes. I don't think classes are about anything else, I mean in these courses that I've been taking for the past three terms maybe. It's all about words, and they're hammering in new words, taking a little *glossary* as they call it, and yes that's the only thing I see in these classes, just learning new vocabulary.

Anna: I get the feeling you don't find that very useful.

Númi: Not terribly but of course it's, it is useful in fact but I don't think I particularly need, you know, to learn the words actually. I don't know, you know, I can hardly give you any examples actually, it's just, I hardly remember it, it's like, when you see it then you remember it.

Anna: Yes. Is it, is it very difficult vocabulary?

Númi: Yes, it's often very difficult words like, if I can give you something, if I can think of something, if I have something here on paper. I was in English class just now, got some vocabulary sheet [he is opening bag and looking for worksheet from lesson]. Here are some words, *failsafe* and *ensure*, *slavishly* [he says *sla* as in Slav, not as in slave], no, how do you even pronounce that, here? [he shows me the vocabulary sheet]

Anna: *Slavishly*, yes.

Númi: *Slavishly* [he says *sla* as in slave], you see [5 second pause], *undertaking*, *risaling* [A: I'm not sure what this word is as I didn't see it myself], here I recognise that, you can put it in. [Anna: Yes.] In, yes.

So you can guess what it means, *hajustly* or something like that, you know. [A: I don't know what the word is and I am reluctant to ask to see the vocabulary sheet since that will imply that his pronunciation is wrong]

Anna: Yes, all sorts.

Númi: It's often both difficult words and other words that are easy and that you've often seen before, so it's, like I say, the only thing you're doing in this now is vocabulary. [**Anna:** Yes]. I'm quite advanced.

Anna: Now I was going to ask, I don't know whether I dare now, I was going to ask whether your studies here, whether you got anything personally out of your studies, whether it connected at all with your interests, something that, yes that you get out of studying, that matters to you, not to the class but to you.

Númi: Yes, naturally, lots of words that I, that I get of course, that I get like I say, perhaps don't get and get later and maybe get more understanding of, and naturally like I say, I write song lyrics of course and so on, then it's fine to stick some words like that in, that maybe not everyone understands so that people take more notice, I think. [**Anna:** Mmm]. And then, yes that's the only thing I get personally most. [**Anna:** That you could possibly use it in]. Yes, some words like that that [unclear] you know that are, that you wouldn't notice if you maybe heard them in a movie or you know.

Anna: Song lyrics don't have to be.

Númi: No.

Anna: Easy.

Númi: No.

Anna: They often aren't.

Númi: They're often not so easy to understand, but you know. [**Anna:** Yes]. It's absolutely the foundation, to some extent.

Anna: Is there something in your knowledge of English that's missing, that you would like to do here?

Númi: Er, there's. I don't think I'm good at English myself, not brilliant at all, like my little brother who's four years younger than me, 14, going to be confirmed. I think he's actually better than me at English. [**Anna:** Yes]. Maybe that's because everything is more technical and, you know, he knows things like Youtube and so on, things like loads of blogs and you know videoblogs and of course everything's in English and he's been into these things since he was 12 years old, something like that. Watching movies and series. It may well be that I'm better at English than he is, you know, there's nothing I really feel I'm lacking, it's okay if it's, you know, it's not so much, like I said four hours a week, I think that's rather a lot since it's become, it doesn't make much difference any more. Or, you know, it's only vocabulary. [**Anna:** Yes]. It just takes time, it's a waste of time and of money, like I say.

Anna: How do you see yourself using English in five years' time, ten years' time?

Númi: To make myself understood abroad of course, er.

Anna: Yes, do you think you'll be, be abroad? Do you see that?

Númi: Well, not necessarily. [**Anna:** No]. But, you know, I might have some contacts there of course. So if I'm going to do recordings, going to do recordings, or just play somewhere, then I would need to know English of course, to be able to say things and be understood, and understand, understand other people. And yes, you know, I would use it most to talk, you can always get by even if you don't know all the words in the world.

Anna: Yes. Do you see yourself needing to write, to read English at all?

Númi: I might need to read of course, you might see a warning sign and it's good of course to be able to read what it says. Of course it's all mixed up together there.

Anna: Yes, and writing, will you do that then?

Númi: Just for example lyrics or something if I have to send, if maybe I buy something on the Net or, you know, it's everywhere, it's part of everything. [**Anna:** Yes, it is].

Númi: You can always get by somehow, ask someone else or, then you learn from that... [**Anna:** What did you say, you would ask someone else?] Yes, maybe if I need a word, I can ask someone. [**Anna:** Yes. You can get help]. Yes.

Anna: What, what would it be like, or what difference would it make if you didn't know English now? None.

Númi: It would make a very big difference. [**Anna:** Wow]. Yes, I have to say that because it's not so, as well, you know, I'd be, if I didn't know any English like you say. Do you mean that I would know like other languages that I've learnt here at school, like German, Danish and...?

Anna: Yes, we'll let you know them [I laugh].

Númi: Okay. Still I don't think that would help me much. I wouldn't understand an English person who's talking to me even if I knew German, Danish, Icelandic fluently. [**Anna:** No]. And like I said before, the Internet is mainly in English and I probably wouldn't be able to use computers if I didn't know English. [**Anna:** No]. And er, yes, I think I'd have trouble getting on, if you understand getting on, getting, sort of, getting a foothold, if I didn't know English.

Anna: Even here in Iceland? In your life now? As your life is now?

Númi: No, I don't think, yes, I probably would be able to do that. Like my mother, she doesn't know English, she doesn't know, you know, no I have to say she doesn't know English. And yes, I think she does fine anyway, but because I'm at this age, at this time, then I don't think it would be easy to, to sort of, to, you know, be versatile in, you know, like in these areas like knowing how to use a computer, knowing how to talk to other people who maybe don't know English. You might not be

able to make yourself understood if it was a Frenchman or someone from some other country.

Anna: Yes. So it would be quite.

Númi: Yes, I'm very pleased that I know English, as I say.

Anna: You're pleased?

Númi: Yes.

Anna: But if you weren't doing English here, at secondary school? If you had studied up to ninth grade, I mean at primary school, then no more. What difference would that make?

Númi: I would probably know a lot less vocabulary, I can say that, because I've definitely learnt words like I say, or I've, I do that. [**Anna:** Yes]. And, yes I wouldn't be so good at English if I'd, I mean if I'd stopped in ninth grade, but I would know something, you know, I'd be able to understand it, I'd be able to speak it but I wouldn't be able, you know, maybe I wouldn't be so good at writing it. [**Anna:** Yes]. Spelling and vocabulary.

Anna: Yes, it's mainly that.

Númi: Yes.

Anna: But the basics.

Númi: The basics were there.

Anna: You had the basics.

Númi: So maybe I would understand easier English, just you know movies, cartoons, things like that, but not if I was reading some academic text or something like that.

Anna: How do you find reading sort of academic texts now?

Númi: Sometimes it's hard, sometimes not so hard. I find it easier in English than in other languages, like Danish that I've been learning since when, maybe since seventh grade and actually just up to second year, but I don't know anything in Danish. Maybe it's because I hear it a little more, oh you know, much less, I'm not very interested in it. It's a much more international language, English, of course and so on, and you make more effort to learn it.

Anna: How much effort would you say you put into learning English?

Númi: Not much now. Not into learning it, because I don't feel we're learning any English because it's mainly vocabulary, though maybe you do learn vocabulary, you maybe don't use it as much as that base than you have. [**Anna:** Yes]. So, of course, like I said before, I try to take the easiest way out, of learning it, not having a BA degree in it. Like we've been reading short stories and for example I didn't buy the book and I got away with not reading the book but just reading notes and watching the movie, took the oral and the written exams and did just fine, just well enough I'd say. [**Anna:** Yes]. So I, yes I sort of try to get out of things.

Anna: And you did well enough, just by your own standard, did you think that?

Númi: Yes, sort of well enough, I'd say. It's not, you know, it won't be a fail grade.

Anna: No no. So that if we imagine a scale, 1 to 10, where 10 is the hardest subject, the one you spend most time on, have to work hardest for, whether it's physics or Danish or whatever, where is English?

Númi: Do you mean have to work hardest for to pass in the end, or hardest to learn, for myself?

Anna: Whichever you like.

Númi: Okay, I'd put it [there is a 6-second pause here], I'd probably put it in the middle at 5. [**Anna:** Yes, about 5]. It's in the middle. If I have to learn something in a subject then I do it. If I have to study in another subject and can't be bothered to study for English, then I do that. Like lots of people I know, probably most people at school here, when there's an English exam coming up, they all, all think well, oh it's only English, I'll pass that. People aren't worried about English here you see, not at all, they maybe study the evening before the exam, then take the final exam, pass it. [**Anna:** Yes. it's not a stressful subject?]. It's not a stressful subject at all, people aren't stressed out about it, you know.

Anna: But is it an enjoyable subject? Do you find it fun?

Númi: No. [He laughs]. I can't say that. Not unless I'm watching a movie or something like that, it's fun when we get to watch a movie.

Anna: Why is that fun?

Númi: Oh, I don't know, it's just much more fun than being, like I'm no bookworm, I read, I don't think I've ever read a whole book in my life, never a whole one, yes well maybe, anyway dangerously few, and I like watching movies much more or watching some series and even, you know, if there's an oral exam about them or a written exam about them, much more than doing some assignment which is about, you know, filling in gaps or something like the sheet I was showing you just now, or joining things up, you know. I think that's just ridiculous.

Anna: And what do you get out of watching movies?

Númi: I'm not naturally perhaps, don't exactly get practice in pronunciation, but I hear how, you know, how a lot of words are pronounced. Of course you learn from listening, and understanding and perhaps new vocabulary if you hear some words that you maybe don't know exactly then you can imagine what they mean because maybe he's pointing at something. Like if I didn't know what chair was then I would point at a chair and say *chair*. [**Anna:** Yes]. Then I might learn the word *chair*, you know. [**Anna:** Mmm]. It's easier than reading a book and then just *chair* and what does it mean, reading, you know, looking for it.

Anna: So, I don't know whether you're saying this just for me, but do you see, do you see movies as a way to, to learn or a way to kill time and have it easy in class?

Númi: Well, maybe a bit of both. It may not be the most wonderful way to learn. If you were, if I told you, just watch this movie, it doesn't have subtitles, it's English and you don't know any English. You wouldn't actually learn anything from that, but since the basics are there, it's an okay kind of practice, and it's also fine to chill as it's called, you don't have to do anything and then you leave class. It's like, like a waste of a class [Translator's note: or *a waste of time* – the Icelandic word for *class* and for *time* is the same].

Anna: Yes, if the class doesn't involve anything more difficult.

Númi: Yes, it's a bit of both, both learning and also that, of course there's a whole course at school called, er, movies and something. They watch a lot of English movies and write, although they write in Icelandic I think, but you learn of course. Actually you know you learn, you know, a bit of English from listening to it, and get practice maybe, practice.

Anna: Yes. [5 second pause]. We're talked about a lot of things.

Númi: Yes. [he laughs]. Everything under the sun.

Anna: Well, that's how it goes. Er, anything else that you want to tell me?

Númi: No, not really. I much prefer to get questions to my face and then answer them than.

Anna: I don't have any more.

Númi: I'm not much for sort of talking straight out, then I talk in circles and about the same things over and over again.

Anna: Yes, that's no fun.

Númi: Yes. There are lots of people who have the same problem as me there, so I find it more comfortable to have questions to answer.

Anna: Well, I'm mainly sort of thinking about what you say about the future. How you, or whether you, will need to use this language. Whether these courses here are useful in any way.

Númi: Of course it's a good way of keeping it up. If I'd put it to one side since primary school and had never heard any English or spoken English or needed to learn any English, then of course I'd forget it like Danish. Lots of people live just fine even though they don't know English, like my mother, so that, and in actual fact she doesn't go abroad much but when she does she just gets someone else to talk or, you know, collect documents or do something, because of course she doesn't understand English. Maybe she understands like *hi* and *bye* and *yes* and *no* and all of that, and then a little little, a little bit of vocabulary but she could never write anything in English, she's [unclear] even Icelandic vocabulary and so on, in terms of writing, I think the same or, you know, how can I say it. Of course it's going to be useful to a certain extent both if I go to university, there's a lot of material in English or even Danish, er, also like just the world wide web, the Internet, er, also just if I go on summer holiday, then of course you have to know English to get by, and yes it will be useful in the future. But whether, yes, I think if I answer directly like you were asking just now, then I

think the courses here will help me know English in the future, sort of in short.

Anna: But even so you don't find any, you don't see any connection with you. It's just some task you have to do.

Númi: Yes.

Anna: It's nothing that your mind is interested in.

Númi: My mind isn't interested, it isn't very interested in it directly, but I know that, you know, I know in my mind that it's something I need to learn, something I need to know for the future.

Anna: But if you could, for example, choose some task. Here's a course, you have to spend four hours a week, or whatever it is, what do you want to do? It's an open course, just called English...

Númi: Just a whole course?

Anna: Or two weeks, or, let's say two weeks. What would you do?

Númi: Something that would be useful for me?

Anna: Just something that you enjoy.

Númi: Of course, the first thing that comes to mind is to compose a song or something. [**Anna:** Yes]. Otherwise there's so much that I could do. I could make a short movie, I could make a *sketch*, I could make a radio play, I would do something more practical than theoretical, even though I'm a student at [X] school I'm obviously more interested in doing something practical in English, but yes, I would do something like that, rather than sticking to writing.

Anna: One question that I didn't ask was, do you think your English courses are theory courses or practical courses [I laugh], now you say... [I laugh].

Númi: It's theory. It's theory.

Anna: Obviously, since you say..

Númi: Here at least. I don't know how they do it at [Y] school. Yes, it's theory, but I think it's very difficult to learn English practically.

Anna: But you would want to do, do something?

Númi: Yes, to do a task that is a practical task, I think that should be practical rather than theory otherwise it would be doing writing, I don't think that's the same as doing a task. [Translator's note: there is a play on words here since the Iceland word for *task* translates directly into English as *practical task*. Númi seems to be emphasising the practical element of the Iceland word and contrasting it with theory].

Anna: I understand, yes.

Númi: Ideologically speaking.

Anna: Yes.

The interview closed with general comments and chat which are not included in this translation.

The total interview lasted for 33:39 minutes.

9.3 Appendix 3: Sample email to school principals or teachers of English

Original letters were in Icelandic.

YYYY school

1st February 2010

Dear XXX

I am a doctoral student in English Linguistics at the University of Iceland. My research project is about students' and young people's perceptions of English studies at secondary school. My supervisor is Dr. Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir (email: birnaarn@hi.is).

In order to collect information on students' opinions of their studies, I would like to take two interviews with students at YYYY school. The criteria are that they have finished English 300 or English 400, are between 18 and 20 years of age, and are not in the same study programme. They should not be top students, or students with learning difficulties, but preferably "ordinary" students who are neither in the top or bottom ability range. Students will be interviewed individually, and each interview will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

I will ask general questions about the student's experience of English studies and about how he or she uses English outside school. I will not ask about grades in English, or about specific course material or teachers. I am equally interested in talking to students who have a positive view of English and to those who have a negative one.

I hope that you will be able to help me get in touch with two students, a boy and a girl, who are interested in talking to me about their English studies. It would be good if the interviews could take place in YYYY school in February.

All information will be confidential. Names will be changed and it will not be possible to trace interviews to participants.

I look forward to your positive response.

9.4 Appendix 4: Sample email to potential participants at schools

Original letters were in Icelandic.

6th April 2010

Dear Student

I am a doctoral student in English Linguistics at the University of Iceland. My research project is about students' and young people's perceptions of English studies at secondary school. My main supervisor is Dr. Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir (email: birnaarn@hi.is).

In order to collect information on students' opinions of their studies, I would like to take interviews with students in secondary school education in Iceland. The criteria are that they have finished English 300 or English 400 and are between 18 and 20 years of age. Students will be interviewed individually, and each interview will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes.

I will ask general questions about the student's experience of English studies and about how he or she uses English outside school. I will not ask about grades in English, or about specific course material or teachers. I am equally interested in talking to students who have a positive view of English and to those who have a negative one.

If you are interested in talking to me about your English studies, please get in touch with me. It would be good if the interview could take place in April or March.

All information is confidential. Names will be changed and it will not be possible to trace interviews to participants.

I look forward to your positive response.

ⁱ Traditionally, 'foreign' languages are learned mainly in a classroom setting, often in the home country and with limited exposure to the language in the community. A 'second' language, however, is readily accessible in the community and learners are often settled residents in the country. One definition given is that "a language is a second language for an individual if it is readily available in that individual's environment, and the individual has many opportunities to hear, see, and use it" (R. C. Gardner, 2001, p. 11).

ⁱⁱ Total foreign immigration into Iceland rose from 662 in 1986 to 2,754 in 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ e.g. www.google.is, www.is.wikipedia.org, www.facebook.is.

^{iv} Between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. on the day of writing, subtitled English-language programmes occupy 66% of broadcasting on Icelandic state television, 75% on Channel 2, and 100% on Screen One.

^v Most teachers of English at Icelandic secondary schools have a B.A., postgraduate diploma, M.A. or, in a few cases, a Ph.D. in English or Education.