METACOGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF WEB-BASED DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF ADULT EFL LEARNERS IN CHINA

By

Naiyi Xie Fincham

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Educational Psychology and Educational Technology - Doctor of Philosophy

2015

ABSTRACT

METACOGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF WEB-BASED DISTANCE LANGUAGE LEARNING: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF ADULT EFL LEARNERS IN CHINA

By

Naiyi Xie Fincham

This multiple-case study investigated the construction and development of metacognitive knowledge (MCK) about language learning in the context of web-based distance learning among a group of adult English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in China. Specifically, it explored (a) what existing MCK knowledge about language learning adult EFL learners brought to the context of web-based distance language learning, (b) how their MCK about language learning changed over time, and (c) what contextual factors interacted with the observed changes in their MCK about language learning in the web-based distance mode. Results showed that participants in this study started their web-based distance EFL learning with varying levels of MCK about language learning in the online distance context in terms of its scope and complexity. The differences in their MCK bases were also related to their readiness for self-managing their language learning in the online environment, their perceptions toward this mode of language learning, and their interactions with different aspects of the learning context. It was observed that all the participants' MCK underwent reconstructions in varied rates, scope, and depth over a period of 16 weeks. A number of contextual factors were identified as particularly significant in shaping and influencing learners' adjustments and revisions of their knowledge and understandings of online distance language learning, including the school-prescribed learning routine, forms of assessment, feedback from the teachers and peers, and forms of learner support. Notably, it was observed that the same contextual factor could have both positive and negative

influences on different participants, thereby contributing differently to the change trajectories among the participants. Findings from this study have a number of important implications for the design and implementation of web-based distance language program, online language instructors, and online distance language learners, and provide directions for future research.

To my family:

My mother Rongxiu Zu
My father Fuyu Xie
For their unconditional love, support, and faith in me.

My husband Justin Lee Fincham
For his enduring love, support, encouragement, and understanding.

Our soon-to-be born daughter Eva Chloe Fincham

In loving memory of Wenyuan Zhou

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My graduate study at Michigan State has been a valuable growing experience. As I put the finishing touches on this dissertation, I cannot help but think how fortunate I am to have had the support and love from so many incredible people, who have made this journey so rewarding both academically and personally.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation director, Dr. Guofang Li, for her excellent guidance, caring support, and constant encouragement. Her passion for and commitment to improving educational research and practices have set outstanding examples for me and inspired me to continue pursue my professional goals.

Special thanks to the other distinguished faculty members who served on my committee, Professors Matthew J. Koehler, David Wong, and Senta Goertler. I would like to thank Professor Koehler for his constant support and guidance throughout my graduate study. I appreciate all the critical suggestions he has provided for my scholarly works and academic studies along the way. His passion for the research and practices in educational technology have made him an inspiring role model for me. I am also very grateful to Professor Wong, who has always been supportive and helpful throughout my graduate studies. Lastly, I would like to thank Professor Goertler, whose excellent guidance, detailed comments and feedback, and valuable critiques have been of great help for my dissertation research and writing.

I am also grateful to Dr. Yong Zhao, my first graduate advisor and mentor, who offered me the opportunity to start pursuing my professional goals at MSU. He guided me into the field of educational technology and second language learning, provided me with rich resources and

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

With the rapid development and integration of new media and new digital technologies in second/foreign language education, technology now constitutes an important role in the ecology of learning (Benson, 2007; C. Lai, 2013). Technology is expected to enhance language instruction and learning experiences inside the classroom and to extend language learning beyond the traditional classroom (Yong Zhao & Lai, 2008). One of the biggest beneficiaries has been distance learning programs, which are now supported by web-based learning platforms and new media tools (Anderson, 2004). In the context of distance language learning, not only has traditional second/foreign language (L2) learning context been supplemented with increasing online/distance learning components, but also there has been growing demand for and availability of web-based distance education (Kostina, 2011). The rapid growth of online distance language programs has resulted in reaching more students and providing more access to rich learning materials and opportunities (White, 2014). These technology-mediated learning environments are conducive to students' learning by combining various tools with specific curricular aspects and allowing learners to choose the tools and activities that suit their learning styles and objectives (Stickler & Hampel, 2010). With such flexibility, learners are gradually becoming designers of their own learning by exercising more autonomy, while the traditionally dominant role of teachers is shifting to learning facilitators and counselors (Q. Pan, 2012). Consequently, individual learners' own contributions to the process and outcomes of learning are becoming an even more crucial variable (Breen, 2001). In particular, to be successful in technology-enhanced learning environments, one prerequisite for learners is to know enough about themselves, the learning process, and the learning environment, the type of knowledge

termed as "metacognitive knowledge" (MCK) (Flavell, 1979; Brown, 1987; Wenden, 1998) by cognitive and educational psychologists. It is the mission for researchers, teachers, and course developers to help learners develop adequate knowledge about themselves and the learning process, and use such knowledge to become more competent autonomous language learners. However, how to accomplish this mission effectively and efficiently is still a challenge (Chapelle, 2010), partly because not enough is known about distance language learners in today's web-based learning mode (Hauck, Fuchs, & Müller-Hartmann, 2012).

Helping distance language learners to become more capable in managing their learning is also a pressing issue for China's distance language education. Since as early as 1985, China has had the largest number of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Cheng, 2008). The numbers of EFL learners was estimated at more than 200 million in 2003 (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). From the mid-1990s, English has been a mandated school subject from Grade 3 in elementary school to senior high school (Cheng, 2008). The study of English is also compulsory for all tertiary students, and non-English major students beyond post-secondary level are required to study English for at least two years (L. Pan & Block, 2011). The high prestige English has gained in China is closely related to the prevailing view of English as the dominant medium for intercultural communication and a key to facilitating China's participation in the international arena as China is striving for economic prosperity and modernity (Yin, 2008). Zhao and Campbell (1995) point out that in China, English is primarily perceived as a medium for social and economic mobility. For example, performances on national or international standardized English tests are seen as important indicators of eligibility for accessing higher levels of education or better career opportunities. Therefore, it is not surprising that a growing number of EFL learners choose to continue improving their English through various channels

years after graduating from school. In recent decades, as increasing numbers of mature students are keen to pursue continuing education to upgrade their skills, China has been fast expanding its distance language programs (Hurd & Xiao, 2006). For example, according to the records of China Radio and TV University, the largest higher education institution in China that offers distance courses, in the year of 2004, there were1.3 million students enrolled in higher education programs in which English was a compulsory course (China Central Radio and TV University [CCRTVU], 2010).

In spite of the rapidly growing EFL learner population, the overall English learning environment in China is considered as an "acquisition-poor" one, where target language input is difficult to come by for the majority of learners, thus lexical knowledge is seen as the building block for any attempt of interacting with the target language (Sorace, 1985; L. J. Zhang, 2010). Although Chinese EFL learners would typically have years of formal English learning experiences at school, the typical learning situation for most of the traditionally school-based students is characterized by limited exposure to English, no adequate authentic reading materials in English, and lack of opportunities to use English in real-life situations. In addition, the dominant pedagogical style has remained to be a teacher-centered, exam-orientated, and grammar-translation model (L. Pan & Block, 2011; L. J. Zhang, 2010). Moreover, the traditionally big-sized class and the timid and obedient nature of Chinese students rendered their individual differences and needs often being ignored (Y. Xiao, 2007). Consequently, common observations of Chinese EFL learners are the discrepancies between their high scores in standardized English proficiency test and low abilities in functional communicative competency and their primary preferences for rote strategies and surface learning approaches to communication-based methods (Gu, 2003).

In recent years, the increasingly wider use of Internet communication and digital technologies and shifts in China's English education toward communication-based and learner-centered pedagogy are expected to mitigate these gaps by providing students with enriched authentic English materials and opportunities for engaging in meaningful interactions in English (Sun & Song, 2014). The same trend is also observed in China's distance language programs, which have also been undergoing reforms toward a more student-centered approach, where learners are granted more control and autonomy during the learning process to pursue personal goals regarding their English proficiency (H. Zhao, Chen, & Panda, 2014). However, research into Chinese distance English learners' learning experience indicates that they are not sufficiently prepared for web-based learning and are experiencing learning difficulties due to maladaptation to the new learning mode, especially at the initial phase of online distance learning. For example, Chen (2003) observed that Chinese adult distance language learners had trouble adapting themselves to the new circumstances in web-based language learning, lacking effective strategies and appropriate attitudes and were unable to manage their learning effectively. Another study by Jiang, Wei and En (2003) that explored potential barriers to successful online learning among Chinese distance learners also identified a number of factors that hindered online language learners' learning progress, including learners' lack of knowledge and skills of how to operate in online learning interfaces, their low motivation and inability to self-regulate self-control ability, and online instructors' insufficient understanding of learners' needs. In a cross-cultural study that looked into anxiety and affective control among distance language learners in China and UK also showed that among Chinese students, some anxiety-provoking factors were associated with an inability to apply even basic knowledge of grammar and acquired vocabulary to actual language use. Additionally, it was noted that students lacked

the knowledge and skills of reducing anxieties effectively through social strategies (Hurd & Xiao, 2010). A more recent study that investigated the utility of online learning resources by Chinese distance learners, again, indicated that students' use of online learning resources is quite limited and superficial (Lin, 2012). Implicated in these findings is that Chinese distance language learners need proper guidance and assistance so as to effectively adapt to this mode of language learning through effective self-regulation of their cognition, affect, behaviors, and the learning environment. To this end, helping learners to enhance their knowledge about language learning in online distance mode and thus improve their control and flexibility in managing their distance language learning should be one of the determining aspects in our design and implementation of distance language programs.

Statement of Problem

It has long been recognized that learners approach language learning tasks in different ways due to various individual characteristics, such as learning strategies, motivation, foreign language aptitude, etc. (Dörnyei, 2005). Over time, researchers focusing on learner strategies in second/foreign language (L2) learning have come to accept that it is not the quantity of learning strategies a learner knows or uses that determines the effectiveness of learning, but "the orchestration of clusters of strategies, that is, choosing and evaluating from a range of strategies" according to different learning situations, would lead to the success (Macaro, 2006, p. 328). Later a further recognition has been reached that the base for such effective orchestration of strategies is a solid and appropriate MCK base (Rubin, 2005). In other words, it is their MCK about language learning, i.e., learners' knowledge about themselves as learners, the learning process and context, that serves as a definite precondition to the success of learning, especially the self-regulation of learning (Wenden, 1998, 1999). Following Wenden's (2001) call that MCK

of language learning has been a "neglected variable" in second/foreign language (L2) research, a growing body of studies done over the past couple of decades have contributed to our knowledge about the crucial role of language learners' MCK in the learning process of different skill areas in traditional fact-to-face (FTF) settings. Overall, L2 researchers have found that across various L2 tasks, successful and less successful learners are distinguished by the scope, depth, and accuracy of their MCK, as learners' MCK base plays a crucial role in their defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, monitor, and make decisions regarding specific language learning tasks and in self-directed learning settings (C. Goh, 1997; Graham, 2006; He, 2011; Horwitz, 1988; Kasper, 1997; Rivers, 2001; Ruan, 2005; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Vandergrift, Goh, & Mareschal, 2006; Victori, 1999; Wen & Johnson, 1997; Wenden, 1986; Wu, 2008; Yang, 1999; D. Zhang & Goh, 2006; L. J. Zhang, 2001). In the meantime, learner's MCK is contingent upon particular learning settings and responsive to demands of learning tasks and features of the immediate learning environment. In the meantime, self-monitoring and self-reflection of strategy use, experience in practicing learner autonomy or self-regulated learning, increased learning experience and proficiency level, as well as structures of the learning environments also have influences on the construction and development of learners' MCK about language learning (Cotterall & Murray, 2009; He, 2011; Kasper, 1997; Ruan, 2005; Smith & Craig, 2013; Victori & Lockhart, 1995; Wu, 2008).

The role of L2 learners' MCK is particularly significant in distance language learning contexts. In distance education, due to the separation of the teachers and students in space and/or time, much learning occurs when students are alone, working on the pre-produced course by themselves in isolation at times and places of their own choosing. Therefore, learner autonomy and self-regulated learning are the most prominent features in distance education (Hurd, 2005;

6

White, 2003), hence the key role of learners' MCK about online distance language learning. In addition, along with the increasing popularity of web-based distance language programs, new challenges faced by online language learners have also emerged. Specifically, learners need to be able to use a variety of media technologies and resources to achieve the integration of different learning components and establish effective interactions (S. Hong & Jung, 2011). However, it was found that most learners were not adequately prepared with the knowledge and ability to effectively employ the tools and resources at hand in technology-mediated environments to enhance their learning experience and outcome (Chapelle, 2010). In other cases, although learners were aware of the online delivery mode, they did not have adequate understanding of their role as a distance language learner, nor the complexities of the learning environment (Hardy & Boaz, 1997). Hence, besides the necessities to improve the programs in terms of the design of materials, activities, means of interaction and delivery so as to better engage and assist learners, online language learners *themselves* have to develop much greater awareness of themselves and the nature of the learning process in such learning contexts (Stracke, 2007), and they need instruction and guidance to facilitate their metacognitive development on the way to becoming more capable online learners (Chamot, 2005; Ulitsky, 2000).

Currently, our understanding of distance language learners' metacognitive knowledge is still quite limited. Most of the studies concerning distance learners' metacognitive approach or self-regulation of learning have focused on their use of strategies, or ways to improve their strategic competence, yet few studies have specifically focused on the construction of learners' MCK in the learning process. According to a series of White's (1995, 1997, 1999b) earlier studies, in response to the demands of distance learning, distance language learners tended to make wider and greater use of metacognitive strategies than did students learning in traditional

7

FTF settings. Adapting a modified model of Flavell's (1979) MCK framework, she investigated distance language learners' MCK and concluded that there was marked diversity in the content of the metacognitive knowledge of students, and that learners needed to develop their own metacognitive knowledge and awareness based on their distance language learning experiences. Focusing on the role of language learners' MCK in computer-assisted language learning context, Hauck (2005) stressed that the need for distance language learners to understand and manage themselves and their learning should apply equally to language learners in online self-directed learning spaces, highlighting the importance of learner's knowledge of the affordances and constraints of the technology-enriched learning environment. Yet follow-up studies are lacking to provide empirical data on online language learners' knowledge of the context and how it relates to other dimensions of MCK. To date, relatively little is known about online distance language learners in China. Studies about Chinese learners of English at distance predominantly have focused on learner strategies (Qian, 2006) and other learner variables such as affect and motivation (Hurd & Xiao, 2010). The limited evidence so far indicates that Chinese distance language learners' lack the knowledge of self-management and self-regulation and are not quite used to taking control of their learning (X. Zhang & Cui, 2010; H. Zhao, et al., 2014). Clearly much could be learned from a study aimed explicitly at what constitutes today's Chinese distance learners' MCK about language learning and its role in the learning process.

Furthermore, while there is evidence that learners' metacognitive knowledge tends to grow with increased experience in the distance learning context (e.g., Hurd, 2006; White, 1999a; X. Zhang & Cui, 2010), research that investigates distance language learners' MCK development is still in paucity. In addition, while researchers argue that contextual factors such as learning materials and activities, task design, modes of interactions, and learner training can all contribute

to learner's metacognitive development, thus their self-regulation of learning (Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Garrison, 2003; Hurd, Beaven, & Ortega, 2001), more research is needed to understand how their understanding of themselves as online language learners and the learning process change as they interact with the learning context.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate a group of Chinese adult EFL learners' MCK about language learning in an online distance language program, with the major goal of expanding and refining the current understanding of MCK about language learning in this particular context through investigating the construction of Chinese distance EFL learners' MCK about web-based distance language learning and how such knowledge evolves over time as they progress through their learning. Specifically, this study is designed to examine how distance language learners' MCK bases influence their interaction with the learning context, and whether or how they can contribute to learners' adjustments and revisions of MCK about language learning in web-based distance context over time. It will also investigate what contextual factors related to the distance learning program may play a role in the development of Chinese EFL learners' MCK about online distance language learning.

Research Questions

The current study uses a model of metacognitive knowledge comprising knowledge of self, task, strategy, and the learning context to explore the understandings about language learning adult EFL learners have developed through their experience in the web-based autonomous learning context. The study is guided by the following inquires:

1. What metacognitive knowledge about language learning do adult EFL learners have in the context of web-based distance learning?

2. How does adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning change over time in the context of web-based distance learning?

3. What are the contextual factors that affect the changes in adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning in the context of web-based distance learning?

Organization of the Dissertation

This research study consists of six chapters. *Chapter I: Introduction*, explains the background and rationale of the study, including background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions.

Chapter II: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review, consists of the conceptual framework of metacognition and a review of relevant literature that guide and inform this study. The chapter is divided into the following headings: conceptual framework, MCK and language learning, and MCK and distance language learning. The chapter concludes with a summary of the review of literature.

Chapter III: Methodology, explains the methods used to address the research questions. It starts with a reiteration of the research questions, followed by rationale for using a multiple-case study design, a brief description of the research context, the reflective discussion of the researcher's role in this study, the procedures and results of case selection, introduction of the six participants, the description of the data collection and analysis processes, and the measures taken to establish trustworthiness.

Chapter IV: The Research Context, provides a detailed account of the research context in which the participants carried out their online English learning. It introduces the required courses and assessments, various forms of learner support, the learning management system, the learning materials, and mode of interactions available to the students.

Chapter V through VII discuss findings that address the three research questions respectively. The participants' MCK about web-based distance language learning is presented in four dimensions, namely person, task, strategy, and context.

Chapter VIII: Conclusion, consists of the discussion of the results of the six individual cases with regards to each of the three research questions. It is followed by the implications for the design and implementation of online distance language program, online language instructor, and online distance language learners. Finally, the limitations of the study and directions for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is structured to guide the understanding of the role of metacognitive knowledge in the learner's experience of language learning in general, and web-based distance language learning environment in particular. The first section presents the conceptual framework of metacognition based on the original framework of metacognition proposed by Flavell (1979) that guides this study, including the four dimensions of metacognitive knowledge, how the knowledge influences the learning and thinking progress, and the factors and conditions that can bring changes to a learner's MCK. The remaining sections focus on the influences of MCK in language learning in traditional classroom-based settings, and then on the role of language learner's metacognitive knowledge in the context of web-based distance learning specifically.

Conceptual Framework for Metacognition

The present study is grounded in the constructivist psychological theory of learning and development, in which the learners are seen as active in the construction of knowledge and the development of skills, thus learning is a generative process under the control of the learner in active response to the contextual features and demands of the learning environment (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). In essence, changes in behavior are seen as indirect rather than direct outcomes of learning. Observable behavior is mediated and controlled by such mental activities as "the acquisition, organization and application of knowledge about the world"; by the "development of skills that allow the encoding, storing and retrieval of information"; by people's motivation; and "their perception of what a task requires of them and their perception of their likelihood of success" (Winn, 1990, p. 60). Applied in educational psychology, this perspective emphasizes that learning is an adaptive, recursive, non-linear process of knowledge construction, during

12

which teachers are cognitive guides for academic tasks and learners are sense makers (Mayer, 1996). This theoretical tradition provides the ideal lenses for understanding language learners' evolving knowledge about themselves, demands of language learning processes and available strategies in a specific learning context, because it underlies the central role of the learner who is guided and constrained by personal goals and contextual demands. Under this banner of constructivism, a conceptual model of metacognition based on Flavell's (1979) original framework of metacognitive knowledge (Pintrich, 2002; Pintrich, Wolters, & Baxter, 2000) is adopted to guide this study.

Metacognition was originally referred to as the knowledge about and regulation of one's cognitive activities in learning processes (Brown, 1987; Flavell, 1979). Research across disciplines has indicated that what distinguished the more successful learners from the less successful ones is their ability to consciously monitor themselves, reflecting upon and managing their own learning and thinking process, i.e. their metacognition (Wenden, 2002). Review of the existing literature on the subject of metacognition reveals the diversity in the description, experiments, and the measurement of the concept of metacognition. However, practically all the literature on this subject refers to the pioneering work of Flavell. He introduced metacognition as "knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena" (Flavell, 1979). Flavell defined metacognition as consisting of both a component of knowledge, and that of experiences and regulation. Building on the contribution of Flavell, many terms regarding the concept of metacognition have been developed over the years, such as metacognitive awareness, metacognitive beliefs, executive skills, self-regulation, metacognitive skills and so on (Brown, 1987; Graham, 2006; Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007b; Pintrich, et al., 2000; Veenman, Hout-Wolters, & Afflerbach, 2006). Although there are various conceptualizations and models of

metacognition, the most common distinction is one between (a) knowledge of cognition (metacognitive knowledge) and (b) metacognitive regulation, the processes involving monitoring, control and regulation of cognition.

Metacognitive Knowledge (MCK)

MCK refers to one's "knowledge or beliefs about what factors or variables act and interact in what ways to affect the course and outcome of cognitive enterprises" (Flavell, 1979, p. 907). This kind of knowledge is relatively stable, statable, fallible, and late-developing, because it requires learners to step back and to consider their own cognitive processes (Brown, 1987; Pintrich, 2002; Wenden, 1998). In Flavell's original model of MCK, he distinguished three sub-components of MCK, namely knowledge of person, task, and strategy. This model was later expanded and modified by Pintrich and colleagues to include knowledge of context and how it can influence cognition (Pintrich, et al., 2000). This addition is supported by L2 researchers who highlight the importance of contextual knowledge in today's technology-rich language learning environment (Hauck & Hurd, 2005; Jegede, Taplin, Fan, Chan, & Yum, 1999; Rubin, 2008).

Person Knowledge

This category refers to "the kind of acquired knowledge and beliefs that concern what human beings are like as cognitive (affective, motivational, perceptual, etc.) organisms" (Flavell, 1987, p. 22). Also referred to as self-knowledge by some researchers (Pintrich, 2002; White, 1999b), it emphasizes an individual's understanding of human factors that facilitate or inhibit learning, such as knowledge of one's strengths and weaknesses (Wenden, 1998). In the context of learning a second or foreign language (L2), this includes cognitive factors such as learners' assessments about their target language proficiency or their strengths and weaknesses in a given

skill area, and the problems they have and quality of performance during a task (e.g., C. Goh, 1997; Victori, 1999; Wenden, 1986). One characteristic of expert learner is that they know when they do not know or are not good at something and have to rely on other compensating strategies. Such self-awareness of the breadth and depth of one's knowledge is considered an important aspect of self-knowledge (Pintrich, 2002).

In addition to knowledge within the cognitive dimension, person knowledge also entails one's awareness of a variety of personal factors and how they may interact with the language learning process. One group of factors is concerned with learners' motivational beliefs, including judgments of one's own capability to perform a task, achieve a specific learning goal (i.e. self-efficacy) or to learn another language in general (i.e. language learning aptitude), their goals for completing a task, and the interest and value the task has for them (Pintrich, et al., 2000). The need for students to develop self-knowledge and self-awareness about their motivation is supported by a substantial body of literature in self-regulated learning that shows important links between students' motivational beliefs and their learning (Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007b; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). Moreover, learners' awareness of other personal variables such as emotions evoked during a learning task, personality, age, and how they can influence the learning process is also part of the person knowledge (Pintrich & Groot, 1990; Wenden, 1998).

Lastly, Pintrich (2002) specifically underscores that the *accuracy* of self-knowledge is the most crucial for learning. If students do not know the deficiencies in their knowledge or inadequacies in their skills, it is unlikely they will make any effort to revise or improve their knowledge or skills.

Task Knowledge

Task knowledge refers to one's awareness of "the nature of a cognitive enterprise, and the implications it has for the best management of this cognitive activity and how successfully its goal is likely to be achieved" (Flavell, 1979, p. 907). It encompasses one's understanding of a certain cognitive task in terms of its goal, purpose, and demands upon one's knowledge base and skills. For example, one may be aware that writing different types of articles, e.g., persuasive or descriptive, requires different kinds of knowledge and composition skills. Or one may learn that a recall task is more difficult than a recognition task; as in the recall task, the individual must actively search memory and retrieve the relevant information, while in the recognition task, the emphasis is on discriminating among alternatives and selecting the appropriate answer (Pintrich, 2002). Moreover, the task knowledge students develop also inform the "when" and "why" they should use different strategies (Wenden, 1998).

Notably, here the notion of "task" can both mean specific tasks one engages in during the language learning process, such as completing a listening comprehension exercise, and the overall process of learning in a certain subject matter, such as learning an L2 (White, 1999b). Benson and Lor (1999) observe that language learners' conceptualizations of what a foreign language is and what the process of learning a foreign language consists of can affect their perceptions of the purpose and demands of specific language learning tasks, as well as deployment of strategies. Specifically, their study of a group of EFL learners from Hong Kong showed that students who held a "quantitative conception" of language learning – viewing language learning as "a collection of things"– tended to gear their efforts toward the accumulation of linguistic knowledge, i.e. vocabulary, grammar, syntax, while learners who held a "qualitative conception" of language learning – viewing the process as meaning-making in the unfamiliar target language culture – preferred a holistic approach so as to immerse or

16

approximate themselves in the target language culture based on their intrinsic needs. Meanwhile, they also expressed contrasting views on what motivated them to learn: while the quantitatively oriented students preferred to "be pushed", the qualitatively oriented students focused on being self-motivated.

Strategy Knowledge

Strategy knowledge refers to one's understandings of "what strategies are likely to be effective in achieving what subgoals and goals in what sorts of cognitive undertakings" (Flavell, 1979, p. 909). This definition indicates that strategy knowledge entails knowledge of identifying goals and subgoals (i.e. goal-setting), as well as the selection of cognitive processes in achievement of these goals. It contains knowledge about both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies usually refer to conscious actions taken to achieve a particular cognitive goal, such as strategies used to memorize material, extract meaning from text, and to comprehend what students read in books and hear in class (Livingston, 1997). These strategies can be used across a large number of different tasks and domains and grouped into three general categories: rehearsal, elaboration, and organizational (Pintrich, 2002). Whereas rehearsal strategies characterized by rote memorization of words are not considered effective for more complex cognitive process, elaboration (e.g., summarizing, paraphrasing, and gisting) and organizational strategies (e.g., outlining, concept mapping, and note-taking) usually result in better comprehension and learning (p. 220).

Metacognitive strategies are used to ensure that the cognitive goals are achieved through a cycle of actions through planning, monitoring, evaluating and regulating students' learning and thinking (Pintrich, 2002; Wenden, 1998). Strategies for planning involve goal-setting, task analysis, selection of appropriate strategies and the allocation of resources that affect

17

performance. Monitoring includes strategies for checking comprehension and task performance, such as self-questioning and self-checking. Evaluating refers to appraising the products and efficiency of one's learning. Examples of evaluating strategies include re-evaluating one's goals, conclusions, and use of strategies (Schraw, 1994; Wenden, 1998).

Contextual Knowledge

Knowledge of context is another important aspect of MCK, which concerns the local situational and general social, conventional, and cultural norms that are perceived to affect cognition (Pintrich, 2002; Pintrich, et al., 2000). Drawing on Wenden and Victori, and based on her observation of expert language learners, Rubin (2001) underscored the importance of language learners' knowledge of the learning context. This dimension of MCK is of particular relevance to today's rapidly advancing technology-mediated language learning environments faced by foreign language learners. For example, studies of self-directed language learning via audio and audiographic conferencing have shown that "a high level of person and contextual knowledge and the degree to which learners have control over it at various stages of the learning process are pivotal to effective learning in such environments" (Hauck, 2005, p. 72). This four-dimension framework of MCK, i.e. person, task, strategy, and contextual knowledge, is adopted for the present study to investigate the language learners' MCK in the web-based distance learning context.

Although these dimensions of MCK are discussed separately, they are highly interactive in effect. In most cases, it is the combination among all of the components that come into play and serve to guide our ways in pursuing learning goals (e.g., Flavell, 1979; Wenden, 1999; White, 1999b). For instance, to complete a writing task, the language learner needs to choose a certain strategy (e.g., to decide between skimming or read carefully with the help of a dictionary)

based on the demands of the task and personal needs (e.g., for comprehension of meaning or building vocabulary).

Furthermore, MCK is also statable (Wenden, 1986, 1998). Research shows that very young learners already can talk about their thinking and reasoning process (e.g., C. Goh & Taib, 2006), although their metacognitive knowledge is incomplete and immature compared with that of adults' (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Learners, especially adult learners, can become conscious of and articulate what they know about themselves as learners and their cognition (L. J. Zhang, 2001). Although MCK need not be explicitly articulated to be useful, it is argued that conscious access to such information, or in other words, greater metacognitive awareness, may substantially facilitate thinking and self-regulation (Schraw & Dennison, 1994; Schraw & Moshman, 1995). In fact, as Brown (1987) argues, the degree to which one could report and discuss verbally one's knowledge about cognition indicates the level of understanding of such knowledge.

Metacognitive Regulation

Regulation of cognition refers to skills used to orchestrate and oversee learning and performance (Efklides, 2009). Some researchers further distinguish two processes under this component, monitoring and control (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Pintrich, et al., 2000). They are congruent with the second component of metacognition in Flavell's (1979) original model, namely, metacognitive experience and regulation. Metacognitive experience is "any conscious cognitive or affective experiences that accompany and pertain to any intellectual enterprise" (Flavell, 1979, p. 906). It is especially likely to occur in situations that stimulated a lot of careful, highly conscious thinking, such as in difficult or novel learning situations where learners may have a sense of confusion, failure, or uncertainty. Flavell (1979) notes that these experiences

19

serve as a "quality control" that help learners revise their goals. Regulation (action) refers to the types of activities that individuals engage in to adapt and change their cognition or behavior. These actions include not only cognitive processes, but also other aspects of self-regulated learning including motivation, effort, volition, and goals (Pintrich, et al., 2000; Zimmerman, 1995). Regulation of cognition is strongly dependent on one's metacognitive monitoring activities (metacognitive experiences).

In contrast to the static nature of MCK, metacognitive regulation is more process-related and reflects metacognitive awareness and ongoing metacognitive activities individuals may engage in as they performance a task (Flavell, 1979; Pintrich, et al., 2000). While the deployment of metacognitive regulatory skills is discussed under different terms in different disciplines, e.g., "self-regulation" in cognitive and socio-cognitive psychology (Pintrich, et al., 2000; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994), "self-direction" in adult learning (Garrison, 1997; Gremmo & Riley, 1995), and "learner autonomy" in second/foreign language (L2) literature, especially in the context of distance language learning (Little, 2007), three essential skills are included in all accounts: planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Paris & Winograd, 1990; Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Planning involves identification and selection of appropriate strategies and allocation of resources, and can include goal setting, activating background knowledge, and budgeting time. Monitoring involves attending to and being aware of comprehension and task performance and can include self-testing. Finally, evaluation is defined as "appraising the products and regulatory processes of one's learning," and includes revisiting and revising one's goals (E. R. Lai, 2011; Schraw, 1994, 1998).

Research over recent decades has shown that effective regulation of one's cognition can improve performance in a number of ways, including better use of attentional resources, better

use of existing strategies, and enhanced awareness of comprehension breakdowns (Schraw, 1998). While these strategies are considered to be domain-general in nature (Schraw, 1998), they must always function in contextualized ways. In other words, if learners fail to make contact with an adequate metacognitive knowledge base, these strategies would remain weak (Wenden, 1995).

MCK and Learning

MCK can play an important role in students' learning. First, students' MCK of themselves, strategies, and tasks is linked to how well they learn and their performance in classroom settings (Pintrich, 2002). Literature across different subject matters has noted that MCK distinguishes expert learners from ineffective ones (Brown, 1987; Rubin, 2005). It enhances learning comprehension of written and audio texts (Alexander, Schallert, & Hare, 1991; C. C. M. Goh & Hu, 2013; L. J. Zhang, 2001), and improves the completion of new tasks (Vann & Abraham, 1990) and the overall rate of progress in learning (Victori & Lockhart, 1995). Second, MCK is also found to be related to the transfer of learning, which is the ability to apply knowledge gained in one setting or situation to another (Pintrich, 2002; Wenden, 1998). When students are confronted with new tasks or new learning situations where their domain-specific knowledge and skills are insufficient, their knowledge of general learning strategies can facilitate them in tackling the new or challenging tasks (Schraw, 1998). Moreover, MCK can be either an effective facilitator or a constraint. On the one hand, students who know their own strengths and weaknesses can adjust their own cognition and thinking to be more adaptive to diverse tasks, thus, better regulate their own learning (Pintrich, 2002). On the other hand, students who lack knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses, or even have "illusions of comprehension" –

thinking they understand the material when they do not – will not seek a strategy remedy to improve their knowledge or skills or engage in additional learning (Garner, 1990).

Of particular significance is the influence of MCK in the metacognitive regulation of learning, as learners need to be aware of and understand the cognitive processes before they can expect to successfully regulate their learning activities (Garrison, 2003; Pintrich, et al., 2000; Wenden, 1998, 2001). In fact, MCK is considered one prerequisite to self-regulation of learning, enabling learners to "become active participants in their own performance rather than passive recipients of instruction" (Wenden, 1998, p. 520), and providing the knowledge base for effective planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Perkins & Salomon, 1989). First, the MCK learners have acquired about themselves (i.e. person knowledge) can influence their choice of learning objectives and goals, which will then act as the criteria they use for evaluating and monitoring the learning outcomes and process (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 1995, 2000). In the meantime, learners need to use their preexisting MCK about particular tasks, strategies, or their own abilities to select cognitive actions to achieve their goals and increase learning (Griffin, Wiley, & Salas, 2013).

Further, MCK is noted to be necessary to the monitoring process (Wenden, 1999). Learners need to draw on both task knowledge and person knowledge in terms of previous performance to make judgments about the task difficulty or ease of learning (Pintrich, et al., 2000). Specifically, it constitutes the internal feedback, which reveals how well learning is proceeding or can be expected to proceed (Butler & Winne, 1995). Additionally, MCK may also suggest the reason for the problems revealed through this state of awareness and serve as the basis that guides learners' decision making during the phase of monitoring, such as how they should respond to the emerging internal feedback (Butler & Winne, 1995; Wenden, 1998).

While part of a learner's MCK is developed early and already stored in long-term memory, there is also the part that Brown and colleagues (1983) call "transient knowledge" or "late development" by Flavell and Wellman (1975), which are insights that emerge during the ongoing learning processes. MCK can be acquired formally or informally, deliberately or incidentally, and is an abstract representation of one's experience (Wenden, 1998). While earlier studies on learners' metacognitive development primarily focused on individual construction (Flavell, 1979; C. Goh & Taib, 2006; Schraw, 1998), recent studies on metacognition has revealed growing attention to the social and contextual influences on metacognitive development (Backer, Keer, & Valcke, 2012; Efklides, 2009; Pilling-Cormick & Garrison, 2007a). Overall, literature notes a number of interacting factors that can bring change to learners' MCK base, including individual construction, direct instruction, cultural learning, peer interaction, and learner structures. More importantly, researchers stressed that these factors or conditions are interrelated and interdependent in promoting learners' metacognitive development. It is the dynamic interplay of these elements that results in a synergy which contributes to students' metacognitive growth, and improvements made in one's MCK via any of these factors reciprocally affect the remaining factors (Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Schraw & Moshman, 1995).

Individual Construction

It is argued that individuals' natural inclination to become an effective learner, and to better understand the learning process as well as their actions taken during the process leads to their spontaneous construction of MCK (Flavell, 1996; Little, 2004). Such construction and reconstruction of one's MCK tends to be domain- or task-specific initially, followed by a gradual generalization to other domains (Flavell, 1987; Schraw & Moshman, 1995). That is, one can

expect metacognitive knowledge and regulation to improve as expertise within a particular domain improves (Schraw, 1998). For example, research has shown that language learners' MCK develops as they gain more experience in language learning and their proficiency level in the target language improves (e.g., Kasper, 1997). Flavell (1979, p. 908) stated, learners' concurrent monitoring of their learning process, i.e. their metacognitive experience play a major role in reconstructing their MCK base by "adding to it, deleting from it, or revising it". Griffin (2013, p. 21) supported this view, arguing that "it is the internal metacognitive experience associated with current attempts to learn that learners must monitor in order to judge their actual learning process and make online revision to their cognitive actions (i.e. regulation). Otherwise they will be guided only by incomplete and often erroneous prior knowledge". Therefore, it is recognized by researchers across disciplines that activities that stimulate and promote learner's self-reflection upon their own learning process and task completion are necessary to facilitate learners' MCK development (Garrison, 2003; Schraw & Moshman, 1995).

Formal Learning

Direct instruction or intervention in which students are taught to use a specified set of cognitive skills and are shown how to coordinate the use of these skills can also promote development in their MCK (Butler, 1997). In the language learning context, studies have yielded positive results regarding the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions with the aim of enhancing metacognitive knowledge and regulatory skills regarding language learning in general (e.g., Wu, 2008) or specific skill areas such as listening (Vandergrift, 2005; Vandergrift, et al., 2006) and pronunciation (He, 2011). Nonetheless, some researchers also cautioned that MCK developed through direct instructional approach may not be as useful to students as self-constructed theories (e.g., Schraw & Moshman, 1995), which, again, underscored the importance

24

of learners' own online awareness and adjustment of their learning and thinking process (Griffin, et al., 2013).

Peer Interaction

Social interaction in the forms of collective reasoning and collaborative learning with peers is viewed as another important source for the development of MCK. The nature of metacognition as both a private internal and shared social activity was already implicated in the early models of metacognition, according to Flavell (1987, p. 27), this is congruent with the individual needing "to communicate, explain, and justify its thinking to other organisms as well as to itself; these activities clearly require metacognition . . . [and] a penchant for engaging in those metacognitive acts termed social cognition". Schraw and Moshman (1995, p. 364) also state, "individuals working as a group would engage in more sophisticated hypothesis testing than individuals working alone", and discussion of one's metacognitive conceptions (or misconceptions) with others may "help clarify those conceptions and improve complex problem solving". Recent studies (Backer, et al., 2012; Volet, Vauras, & Salonen, 2009) focusing on learners' metacognition in higher education and adult education settings have provided evidence that collaborative learning and modeling by peers have the potential to facilitate learners' metacognitive development of knowledge and regulatory skills. In the context of language learning, studies also show that group interactions can serve reflective functions that facilitate learners' developing knowledge of how to approach language learning by offering alternatives to the perceptions a student has or reinforcing those perceptions (Lehtonen, 2000). In addition, exchanging opinions and support can also help learners to develop understandings of one's relation with others in the learning community and how to interact or work with others in order to achieve one's own learning goals (Eneau & Develotte, 2012).

25

Cultural Learning

Cultural representations or cultural beliefs (such as values, prejudices, attitudes, and stereotypes) serve as a kind of reference to learners when developing their understandings about learning in general. Collectively created beliefs which reflect views of the society the learner grew up in form a base on which the learner further constructs other knowledge about learning and cognition (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). These cultural representations are embedded in three interrelated layer of contexts, namely the overall social/cultural context, the general educational context, and the learning context(s) of a particular academic discipline, such as foreign language that the learner has experienced (Gabillon, 2002). For example, in their study that investigated the "culture of learning" in China, Cortazzi and Jin (1996) discussed how students' and teachers' views of what constituted good English learning had their roots in the Confucian tradition of learning, which include the belief that teachers hold absolute authority in learning and are infallible, the emphasis on rote memorization, repetition, reproduction and recitation, and so forth. These findings were also corroborated in other studies that investigated Chinese EFL learners' knowledge and beliefs about language learning, in which the Confucius tradition influences were viewed as a factor that potentially inhibited language learners' adjusting views of their new role and responsibilities as autonomous learners when engaging in self-directed language learning, thus hindering their successful transition to a higher level of self-regulation (e.g., J. Xiao & Hurd, 2007; Young, 1987; X. Zhang & Cui, 2010; H. Zhao, et al., 2014).

Nonetheless, other researchers were critical about the extent to which traditional Chinese heritage culture impacts Chinese students' learning attitudes and behavior. For example, Gan (2009) reported on an empirical study which compares self-directed language learning attitudes, strategies and motivation among university students in mainland China and Hong Kong, which

aimed at further investigating how these differences/similarities could be explained in terms of the cultural (i.e. Confucian) traditions or situational factors such as institutional contexts and social environments less social, more immediate institutional context. This view is corroborated by studies that investigate the influence of features in learners' immediate learning environment, i.e. the learning structure, on shaping their understandings of what is involved in the learning process and their roles and responsibilities (Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Peng, 2011).

In summary, this section discusses the conceptual model that informs and guides the present study, including the two components of metacognition, metacognitive knowledge (MCK) and metacognitive regulation, the four dimensions of MCK, the role of MCK in learning, especially its role as a prerequisite to self-regulation of learning, and finally, factors or conditions that are conducive to the development of MCK. In the following literature review sections, I will first discuss studies that investigate the MCK and language learning in traditional classroom-based settings, and then move on to focus on the role of language learners' MCK in web-based distance language learning.

Measurements of MCK in L2 Context

In L2 literature, studies carried out to investigate learners' metacognitive knowledge or beliefs in language learning have employed quantitative, qualitative, and sometimes mixed methods to document and assess metacognitive knowledge. Among the quantitative instruments, large-scale survey questionnaires are one major tool, represented by Horwitz's *Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI) and other adapted versions of it (Horwitz, 1999; Kern, 1995; Sakui & Gaies, 1999), and metacognitive awareness questionnaires targeting specific language skills (e.g., Vandergrift, et al., 2006). These instruments could elicit commonly held beliefs about L2 learning from learners, and help L2 teachers to efficiently grasp the general

trends of students' beliefs or diagnose misconceptions. However, close-ended questionnaires have their inherent limitations in terms of mapping learners' MCK comprehensively and attending to individual differences. After conducting a meta-analysis of a number of studies that used BALLI among L2 learners of different cultural groups, Horwitz (1999, p. 575) pointed out that the way BALLI was developed tended to obscure variations or minority voices within groups, and might not address some of the specific beliefs held by particular culture groups. Additionally, Benson and Lor (1999) warned that inventories of possible statement of learner beliefs might lead learners to agree with beliefs that they did not actually hold. Cotterall (1999), too, discussed the issues associated with administering learner beliefs questionnaires to a group of learners, which might result in misunderstanding of items and the ambiguities of interpretation inherent in using Likert Scale data. Even with efforts to adjust the questionnaire items according to their specific cultural and learning group, Sakui and Gaies (1999, p. 482) still found that using questionnaires alone could be problematic, as they observed that 1) learners' beliefs did change according to the instructional and environmental condition, 2) the beliefs measured in the questionnaire might not be uniform, but "situationally conditioned", and 3) students did not always interpret the items as the researchers had intended. Therefore, they emphasized the value of using interviews as data triangulation to get an in-depth understanding of the questionnaire data.

Other researchers use qualitative methods including open-ended, retrospective interviews or self-narratives to capture how individual L2 learners construct their MCK. In her ground-breaking study that introducing Flavell's framework of MCK into L2 studies, Wenden (1986) demonstrated how verbal reports (thereof semi-structured interviews) of L2 learners can be used to determine their knowledge about other dimensions of their language learning experience

rather than language learning strategies. Based on participants' responses to the interview questions, she found that learners were able to articulate their knowledge of several other aspects of language learning including nature of the learning task, conditions for successful learning, their own strengths and weaknesses regarding language learning, etc. The researcher then came to acknowledge the values of verbal reports as a source of insight into interviewees' metacognitive knowledge. Furthermore, this kind of interview that elicits learners' retrospective statements is considered especially useful for studying adult learners, because they are "cognitively mature enough to articulate their conscious mental moves" (L. J. Zhang, 2001, p. 273). Still another type of verbal report instrument that proves to be effective in eliciting L2 learners' MCK is the yoked subject technique. In this procedure, a number of questions were put to the students, who were asked to respond as if they were speaking with another character in a hypothetical scenario, e.g., answering the questions by a new distance learner who is not familiar with the learning environment just as they are at the start of the program (Hauck & Hurd, 2005; White, 1999b). This procedure proved to be highly productive as a means of data collection in previous research into distance learners' strategy use and strategy knowledge, and their conceptions and expectations of distance language learning (White, 1994, 1999a). In spite of these advantages, the qualitative method does have its limitations. For example, when learners' MCK is inferred only from their statements, it tends to overlook the influences of the contexts on their MCK (Barcelos, 2003). In addition, since qualitative studies usually only involve a small number of participants, thus they may lack the power of generalizability.

Besides surveys and interviews, language learning journals or diaries are also commonly employed instruments to capture changes in learners' metacognitive awareness. General guidelines are usually provided for the journal, and are submitted at various intervals (e.g., C.

Goh, 1997; Ruan, 2005; Wu, 2008). More recently, blogging has emerged as a new form of language learning journal and has received increasing attention. While the essence of diary writing remains the same, blogging bears its unique advantages compared with traditional paper based journals, such as enhanced interactivity, multimodality of representation, archiving function, and flexible accessibility, and so forth (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Sykes, Oskoz, & Thorne, 2008). Yet researchers have also cautioned against the downside of learning journals. For instance, students may find themselves at a lost as to what to write about even with general guidelines, and it is difficult to get comprehensive data since most of the time learners do not turn in journal entries at a regular basis or in the same quantity (Murray, 1999; Ruan, 2005). Moreover, supplementary materials have also been used for the purpose of data triangulation. These may include collecting learner artifacts such as students records (Bown, 2009), task performance such as writing samples (Victori, 1999; Wu, 2008), course documents such as syllabus and orientation materials (Bown, 2009; J. Xiao & Hurd, 2007).

In terms of the change and development of MCK, or metacognitive growth, qualitative or mixed methods studies proved to offer valuable information. Above all, longitudinal studies with multiple intervention points for data collection are commonly used to monitor changes over time. Frequency of data collection usually varies. In essence, data is collected at least twice: beginning and end of the project (e.g., Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Kasper, 1997), and sometimes at midterm as well to better capture the change (e.g., White, 1999a). However, too many intervention points may not always be effective. In one of the longitudinal studies, Rivers (2001) initially required the participants to submit one open-ended, retrospective survey each day. Yet due to the low response rate, he had to reduce it to a weekly survey after 3 weeks.

MCK and Language Learning

In the 1970s, with the influence of research in cognitive psychology, the field of second/foreign language (L2) education started to witness a shift to a more "learner-centered" approach toward the teaching and learning process of the target language (Wenden, 2002). The recognition of the centrality of the language learner gave rise to research into various learner differences, among which the strategies language learners use to learn and use the target language have been high on the agenda. Only over the past two decades, growing attention has been given to the nature of learners' MCK about language learning and its crucial role in the learning process.

Wenden (1998) is one of the first L2 researchers to apply Flavell's framework of metacognitive knowledge to language learning. When noticing that, by then, L2 research focusing on learners' cognitive abilities was dominated by data about how learners employed different strategies and what they knew about useful strategies for L2 learning, Wenden (1986) interviewed 25 adult English learners in the US to explore their knowledge about L2 learning besides strategies to learn and use the target language. She found that learners were able to articulate their knowledge of several other aspects of language and language learning, including (1) nature of the target language, (2) assessments of their target language proficiency, (3) evaluation of the effectiveness of strategies, (4) personal factors and how they affect their language learning, and (5) beliefs about how best to learn the target language. Based on these findings, she argued that statements in this study made explicit what these general categories of MCK in Flavell's (1979) framework entail in the domain of language learning. Specifically, category (1) is what Flavell defines as task knowledge, category (2) and (4) exemplify what

Flavell includes under person knowledge and, category (3) and (5) point to the nature or strategy knowledge.

In the same study, Wenden found that learners' articulated knowledge about language learning "revealed the stated logic underlying the strategies used in implementation of the planning and evaluation process" , and could help explain why learners used certain strategies, persisting in the use of certain ones and rejecting others as ineffective (Wenden, 1986, p. 198). For instance, learners who believed that it was important to learn grammar and vocabulary first tended to use strategies focusing on grammar and vocabulary learning; and those who attached more importance to communicative competence reported deploying more strategies of using the target language in different settings. Later, Wenden (1987) reported another study that explored language learners' MCK and the relationship between MCK and learner strategies based on data collected from the same group of students. She found that common strategies used by the students were related to their knowledge about using the language, and cognitive learning strategies were related to their knowledge about the target language. Based on these studies, Wenden alerted that MCK had been a "neglected variable" that warranted close attention from L2 researchers and practitioners (Wenden, 2001).

Wenden's effort applying Flavell's model on L2 learning has been a consistent source of inspiration for researchers and practitioners who are interested in researching students' metacognition for better understanding of L2 students' learning processes and outcomes. Over the past two decades, there has been a growing body of literature that reveal the crucial role of MCK in language learning. As Chamot and O'Malley (1994) suggest:

> *metacognition . . . may be the major factor in determining the effectiveness of individuals' attempts to learn another language and . . . explicit metacognitive*

Using Flavell's framework of MCK, Victori (1999) investigated the MCK about English writing among undergraduate Spanish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) and how it influenced their task completion. Four participants, two successful writers and two less successful ones, were selected. They completed a writing task while talking about their thinking and decision-making process and were interviewed afterwards. Findings revealed that good and poor EFL writers could be distinguished by their MCK in each of the three MCK dimensions analyzed. More importantly, it was observed that "this knowledge determined the type of strategy or writing approach to be adopted by the writer" (Victori, 1999, p. 549). Overall, the two better writers held a much broader and complex view of their own writing problems (person knowledge), the nature and requirements of the writing task (task knowledge) and their own approach to writing (strategy knowledge). The knowledge served as a sound basis which enabled them to make informed decisions throughout the task completion process on various stages. In contrast, the relatively limited and sometimes inappropriate knowledge of the writing task held by the less effective EFL writers had resulted in them using inefficient strategies at different stages of the writing process. In addition, significant differences were observed in how they monitored the writing process. When the two successful EFL writers were revising and editing their essays, they were motivated by a broad range of objectives, from consistency of ideas to correct grammar and syntactic rules, which were in agreement with their own understanding of "good writing". the poor writers' lack of monitoring behaviors could be traced back to their limited view of good writing. Lastly, Victori also pointed out that the more EFL writers knew about their strengths and weaknesses in their writing, the more likely they could have a realistic picture of the problems they might have to cope with during learning and of the steps they could

33

take to improve them. This emphasis on the accuracy of learners' personal knowledge resonates with Garner's (1990) argument that without realizing problems or deficiencies in their knowledge or skills, it is unlikely that students will actively seek strategic remedy or make any effort to acquire knowledge.

Likewise, differences in MCK and strategy selection and use are also observed in Zhang's (2001) study, in which the researcher examined a group of Chinese EFL learners' strategy knowledge about EFL reading in China. Five high-score Chinese EFL learners and five low-score ones were selected from two universities to participate in a semi-structured interview. The data revealed that, high scorers not only showed clear awareness of a wider range of reading strategies, but they also knew when and how to use different strategies according to specific task requirements. The low scorers, on the other hand, did not realize that EFL reading required them to adopt different reading strategies to solve different problems they might encounter. Moreover, the researcher found that, while all learners were aware of certain person- or task-related issues that associated with their use of strategies, such as deficiencies or problems during reading, how well they understood these issues and how they made use of such information when making future learning decisions varied substantially among learners. For example, one of the common weaknesses frequently reported by both high-score learners and low-score learners was the lack of vocabulary knowledge. While high-score learners tended to treat it as normal issue associated with learning an L2 and tried to overcome it by guessing and inference, low-score learners looked at it as the biggest obstacle and deemed it very hard to tackle unless they had a dictionary at hand or ended up avoiding the unknown words.

Almost a decade later, the same researcher (L. J. Zhang, 2010) conducted another study that also investigated Chinese EFL learners' MCK system related to reading and their experience

and performance during English reading comprehension tasks. This time, participants were required to complete a reading task before being interviewed. The study yielded similar results, suggesting that there was a strong relationship between metacognition and successful EFL reading comprehension. Significant differences were identified in the MCK systems of successful and less successful EFL readers. For example, whereas the successful readers had quite clear knowledge about the conditions necessary for successful meaning-construction in reading, the less successful readers overemphasized the importance of linguistic knowledge, especially vocabulary and grammar. As a result, less successful readers were blocked by a lack of metacognitive knowledge from effectively activating appropriate reading strategies.

In addition to qualitative studies, there are also large-scale quantitative studies using survey questionnaires consisting of pre-determined statements to assess learners' MCK and explore its relationship to their strategy use. In these studies, MCK is often investigated under another notion "*learner beliefs*" (Wenden, 1999). One of the most widely adopted surveys is the *Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory* (BALLI), developed by Horwitz (1985, 1988, 1999) to assess students' commonly held beliefs about language learning. This survey contains five major areas related to language learning: (1) foreign language aptitude, (2) the difficulty of language learning, (3) the nature of language learning, (4) learning and communication strategies, and (5) motivations and expectations. One particular significant conclusion drawn by the researcher was that erroneous beliefs about language learning may lead to the deployment of less effective strategies. For instance, in one of her BALLI studies (Horwitz, 1999), in which the survey was administered among a group of university students in 3 target language groups, nearly half of them believed that it was possible to become fluent in a L2 in two years or less, and learning a L2 was mostly a matter of translating from English. The researcher suggested that

these beliefs might be to some degree contributing to learners' anxiety reactions or inefficient choice of learning strategies.

This conclusion was supported by Wen and Johnson's (1997) study that explored the relationship between learner beliefs and their use of strategy. 242 second year English major students from 5 Chinese tertiary institutions completed the Language Learner Factors Questionnaire, which was designed to collect data concerning learners' personal details, beliefs about language learning, and use of strategies. Data analysis indicated strong positive relationships between beliefs and strategy variables, specifically, learners' beliefs and strategies relating to "focus on form", "management of learning", "focus on meaning", and "mother-tongue-avoidance". In light of these results, the researchers argued that "whether learners use strategies effectively, or at all, may depend less upon strategy training itself than upon the students' beliefs about language and language learning" (p. 40), thus implying the importance of understanding students' pre-existing knowledge about the language learning process.

The relationship between language learners' MCK and their task completion process was also explored in the skill area of listening and speaking. For example, D. Zhang and Goh (2006) reported on a study that explored 278 Singaporean secondary English learners' knowledge and use of 40 listening and speaking strategies and the relationship between these two variables. These strategies were categorized into use-focused learning strategies, form-focused learning strategies, comprehension strategies, and communication strategies. The results revealed strong correlations between students' strategy knowledge and their perceived use of a variety of L2 speaking and listening strategies. The researchers further pointed out that this result indicated a reciprocal relationship between the two variables, with the knowledge-influences-use relation having more explaining power. Also revealed in the data was that although students were aware

of the usefulness of the majority of the listed strategies, only a small part of the strategies were actually frequently used by the students. Based on these findings, they concluded that to become more conscious and active strategy users in English listening and speaking, students needed to increase their repertoire of knowledge about the strategies in terms of why, when, and how to use them.

Studies reviewed in this section so far all indicate that successful and less successful L2 learners can be distinguished by their MCK base regarding language learning. Specifically, what constitutes language learners' MCK base is reflected in how learners define language tasks and selecting the cognitive tools (strategies) with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding specific language learning tasks in classroom-based settings. The next section of literature review turns to focus on the role of learners' MCK in self-directed language learning context, in particular, web-based distance language learning.

MCK and Distance Language Learning

Given the high demands for self-regulation, the crucial role of MCK in effective language learning is even more salient in self-directed language learning contexts such as distance language learning, especially in today's web-based distance language learning environment. This section focuses on MCK and distance language learning, including an overview of the evolution of web-based distance language learning, discussion of the characteristics of this type of learning context, its demands on language learners in terms of the demands of self-directed learning, and the role of distance language learners' MCK in this unique learning context.

An Overview of Distance Education and Distance Language Learning

Today, web-based distance education can clearly be seen as dominating distance learning and is expecting tremendous growth in the future (Kostina, 2011). Such unprecedented popularity is largely related to the greatly expanded and enhanced learning opportunities and cost-effectiveness, which are the result of a number of key advancements in technology. According to the major technological innovations in distance education (DE), Garrison (1985) offered a three-generation classification for the formats of DE: correspondence, telecommunication, and computers. He (1985, p. 236) defined generation as "the building upon previous capabilities" and described their development as a "hierarchical structure with an increasing differentiation of technological capacity for integrating unique delivery systems". Therefore, the more advanced models of DE is usually an integration of new technological features and the older ones. For example, web-based distance learning programs still have features from previous generations, such as learner support over the phone or printed learning materials. Below I will briefly summarize the characteristics of each generation as well as their affordances and constraints for distance language learning.

The correspondence courses started with delayed interaction between individuals through printed materials delivered by mail for self-study. Given the slow nature of the communication process and the lack of immediate feedback, Kraemer (2008) classifies them as the lowest degree of interactivity. Although they can easily reach to large number of students at a low cost, their basically one-way interaction mode and single modality of knowledge presentation are not supportive of communicative competence in language learning (White, 2003b).

In the 1960s, the second generation of distance education emerged with the development of broadcasting media, i.e. telephone, radio and TV, which supplemented the first generation

38

courses with multimedia content like audio- and videocassettes, as well as supported two-way interaction between students and instructors through telecommunication over the phone. Although the majority of the second generation multimedia systems remained asynchronous, these made distance learning a more engaging mode of learning (Kraemer, 2008). Especially, it made learning a second or foreign language at distance a more feasible undertaking, as all of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) can be practiced and students could get immediate feedback from teachers (White, 2003b). However, it did not allow for truly interactive delivery modes, given the time constraints placed on all people involved and that sometimes travel was required to host sites (Kraemer, 2008).

It is the third generation of distance learning based on information and communication technologies that made real-time interactive learning and teaching possible. Using computer-mediated communication (CMC) over the Internet, distance learners now can interact with both teachers and other learners through various forms of synchronous and asynchronous communication channels. At the same time, they can also enjoy a much heightened level of flexibility in terms of where, when, and how to learn. All of these are considered particularly beneficial for language learning (White, 2003b).

However, in order for DE to be truly effective, it is not enough to only consider applications of technological tools and administrative operations. Today's distance learning also involves other challenging elements, including "innovations in the co-construction of knowledge in an online environment, the establishment of a sense of community among participants, and aiding students in their construction of identity and development of learner autonomy in a virtual world" (Winke & Goertler, 2008b, p. 1). These are all calling for careful consideration of the human elements in distance education, i.e. learners, teachers and administrators, what they bring

to the learning task, their reactions and experiences against the affordances and constraints in the learning environment, and so forth (Chapelle, 2007; Murday, 2004a). In the next section, I will particularly focus on the characteristics of web-based distance language learning and what demands they place on distance language learners, and more importantly, argue how a solid MCK base is instrumental in answering these challenges.

Web-Based Distance Language Learning (DLL): Demands on Learners

When language learners embark on web-based DLL, they are faced with challenges from the new learning environment, as well as unique challenges brought by context of second/foreign learning. Yet prior experiences of conventional classrooms do not automatically equip distance learners with the skills and knowledge required to tackle the new demands of the DLL context (White, 2003b). In this section, first I want to discuss the inherent challenges faced by distance language learners, and then highlight the challenges learners face in the new web-based learning environments and what these challenges mean for distance language learners, as well as the role of distance language learners' MCK in this process.

Inherent Challenges in DLL

Essentially, DLL is one type of independent language learning, or self-directed language learning (White, 2003a). It refers to a situation in which "learners are working without the direct control of the teacher" (Dickinson, 1987, p. 11). Yet DLL is different from other types of independent learning such as self-access centers and after-class individualized instruction, in that distance learners usually have to study within a pre-set rigid pedagogical structure. Traditional DLL programs are essentially a type of material-centered program, in which the amount, rate and content of the learning program is determined by the course team in charge of producing the

materials, not by the students (Hurd, et al., 2001). Students are then expected to complete the course requirements at their own pace, accommodating both their own learning needs and the course requirements.

As White (2003b, 2005b) observes, when students first enter a DLL environment, they are facing a number of conditions different from traditional classroom learning, a lot of which are related to the significantly reduced regular external regulation and social interaction, including: (1) feeling of isolation due to the lack of social contact with teachers and peers; (2) lack of access to regular classroom interactions that can structure and support the learning process; (3) problem with sustaining motivation and self-discipline; (4) reduced opportunities for incidental learning due to the lack of sharing thoughts with peers or teachers through informal communication; and (5) the need to juggle the responsibilities of work and life. In particular, given that the teacher is remote from the learning site and will not be mediating between the learner and the target language materials and activities in a timely fashion, such as checking errors, providing feedback, and explaining tasks, it is the learner's responsibility to internalize and gain control of the learning (White, 2003b). All of these challenges can result in various types of anxiety and uncertainty in distance language learning, especially during the initial phase of distance learning, yet learners may not be well equipped with knowledge about self-regulatory and affective strategies that can help reducing the anxiety (e.g., Hurd, 2001; Hurd 2007; Xiao & Hurd 2010).

Furthermore, implicated in the nature of distance language learning as a form of self-directed learning is a fundamental shift in teaching philosophy and pedagogical model from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness (Martínez, 2012; Reinders & Hubbard, 2012). The role of the teacher then has shifted to a facilitator of learning, and the learners are supposed to

41

perform most of the learning functions that used to be the teachers' responsibilities. This entails a series of self-regulatory actions such as regulating and overseeing the rate and direction of their own learning, establishing their own set of learning behaviors, developing the ability to match their learning objectives with the learning sources available in the context, including materials, peers and teachers, and reaching out to seek help or assistance during the learning process, etc., or in other words, they have to develop and maintain a highly autonomous approach to learning (Bown, 2009; Hurd, 2006b; White, 2003b, 2007).

Challenges in Web-Based DLL

The advent of computer-mediated communication (CMC) has had a major impact on the traditional approach to the design of distance education instruction in terms of realizing the type of synchronous communication deemed essential for language learning (White, 2003b). In current web-based DLL, the different forms of asynchronous (e.g., email, discussion boards, and blogs) and synchronous (e.g., web-conferencing and real-time chat system) interaction are seen as resolving the above mentioned inherent challenges. First, they can secure fast transmission and multiple communication channels so that learners can receive instant feedback, and save and revisit their data (Warschauer, Ware, & Kern, 2000). Second, they have the potential to more effectively facilitate language learning because of the text-based and delayed nature of the discussion that allows greater opportunity to attend to and reflect on the form and content of the communication (Sauro, 2011; B. Smith, 2005; Strambi & Bouvet, 2003). Moreover, recent addition of real audio- and video-chat have provided language learners with much needed opportunities for speaking practice, which used to be another inherit weakness of DLL (Hampel & Arcos, 2013). Third, they provide a means for support and incidental learning among peers, both directly and indirectly, with more opportunities to share experiences, insights, concerns and

reactions to the course (Polisca, 2006). In addition, they can strengthen learners' sense of belonging to a community, thus reducing their sense of isolation (White, 2003b).

Yet along with these new advantageous features also come new challenges to language learners who wish to embark on this type of learning experience. First, while the web-based learning environment offers more enriched learning opportunities, enhanced flexibility and communication capacities, it also means that learners are faced with a more complex learning environment, in which some learners may find it difficult to identify and focus on essential areas that fit their proficiency level, learning goals and needs (e.g., Ulitsky, 2000). Moreover, as the online environments may also present additional resources or optional learning materials, this can be an advantage for some learners, but a distraction for others. Therefore, learners need to figure out their own path through the materials, to select from multiple sources according to their own needs and to keep track of a range of learning materials and tools. All of these can be overwhelming and time-consuming for distance learners, especially novice learners (White, 2003b). Meanwhile, they also need specialized knowledge and skills of how to use technologies or Internet applications in language learning tasks. Research on learner readiness for hybrid or fully online language courses has shown that students lack expertise in using specialized tools that are often necessary for computer-assisted language learning such as creating and editing of sound and video files, which can affect their preparedness in participating in a higher-tech language course (Goertler, Bollen, & Gaff, 2012; P. J. Smith, 2005; Winke & Goertler, 2008a).

In addition to getting themselves familiar with the technologies, to truly take advantage of the new digital environments learners need to be comfortable with and able to utilize the multimodality in meaning-making and presentation of knowledge (de Andrés Martínez, 2012). Central to this concept of multimodality is that technology-mediated environments offer the

possibility to combine a variety of different modes in the making of texts, and the variety of web-based or digital tools allow us to combine these modes easily for meaning-making (Hauck, et al., 2012). Learners, then, need to be able to effectively use and coordinate different modes, such as online speech, online writing, audio, video, and image, to make sense of available information, to complete learning tasks, to plan their learning routine, and to develop their target language competence. The variety and simultaneity of modes available to make meaning and the additional technological challenges they raise can lead to confusion and uncertainty, which can cause learning difficulty and anxiety for language learners (Hauck & Hurd, 2005). Furthermore, to benefit more from the communication opportunities provided by the web-based environment, online distance language learners need to adjust to and make use of learning opportunities within an interconnected community of learners, not only on the technological level, namely using a number of new mediums and tools both synchronous and asynchronous (Benson, 2001), but also on the psychological level, namely developing an understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the online learning communities (Eneau & Develotte, 2012).

In summary, the above discussion points to an overarching theme for distance language learners: they need to transform the way they control and manage their learning from traditional classroom learning mode to an active, autonomous, and collaborative way in the technology-mediated online learning mode. To accommodate such transformation, it is essential for today's distance language learners to have the ability to effectively regulate and manage their learning; or in other words, to develop and exercise effective learner autonomy. Although there has not been a unanimous definition for learner autonomy, it is generally agreed that "the main characteristics of autonomy as an approach to learning is that students take some significant responsibility for their own learning over and above responding to instruction" (Boud, 1988, p.

23). In the context of language learning, it usually involves higher-order strategies like setting goals, choosing materials and tasks, selecting methods and techniques to be used, monitoring the process, and evaluating the progress (Cotterall, 1995b; Little, 2004). Wenden points out that autonomous learners are those who have learned how to learn, i.e. who "have acquired the learning strategies, the knowledge about learning, and the attitudes that enable them to use these skills and knowledge confidently, flexibly, appropriately and independently of a teacher" (cf. Hurd, et al., 2001, p. 344). Clearly, with the heightened demands for stronger self-regulation and learner autonomy comes the requirement for a solid MCK base of themselves as language learners, the learning process and environment, as well as appropriate learning strategies in this context.

<p style="text-align:center">MCK in Distance Language Learning (DLL)</p>

The demands and opportunities of the distance learning context make it necessary for students to re-evaluate their roles and responsibilities as language learners and the need for self-regulation requires them to develop a comparatively higher degree of metacognitive knowledge. Yet so far a dearth of studies has been specifically dedicated to distance language learners' MCK; studies focusing on online language learning programs are still limited in quantity and diversity. Nonetheless, the crucial role of MCK in distance language learning is well recognized by distance language learning researchers.

In a series of her earlier studies, White (1994, 1995, 1997) looked into how different learning modes, classroom or DLL, might influence language learners in terms of strategy use and found that distance learners tend to respond to these challenges of distance learning with more active use of self-management strategies. Specifically, she compared strategy use of a group of university foreign language students enrolled in distance programs and that of students

in face-to-face classes, using self-report questionnaires and yoked subject study in which students were asked to put themselves in the place of a new learner. Findings showed that distance learners made wider and greater use of metacognitive strategies than classroom learners, most notably with regard to the strategy of self-management, including comprehension monitoring strategies such as checking up on their understanding of the target language and problem identification. In the meantime, she also concluded that mode of study was the predominant influence on metacognitive dimensions of strategy use. In other words, the wider and greater use of metacognitive strategies by distance language learners is a response to the demands placed by the distance learning context.

Building on these findings, White (1999b) investigated the details of distance learners' MCK in a later study. She used a modified model of MCK (person, task, strategy, and goal knowledge) to explore the MCK of 31 adult novice distance language learners of Japanese and Spanish by deploying the yoked subject procedure conducted over the phone. Participants in this study were enrolled in a distance language program without a web-based learning management system. The dimensions and categories of metacognitive knowledge which were foregrounded in student reports were self-knowledge and strategy knowledge, with the least reported knowledge being the goal knowledge; and the content of each category has its uniqueness related to distance language learning. The results also supported Flavell's (1979) observation that the different dimensions of metacognitive knowledge are found to be distinct but also highly interactive, thus indicating that the dynamic interactions among them should not be ignored. The researcher concluded that there was marked diversity in the content of the metacognitive knowledge of students, which implied that learners needed to develop their own metacognitive knowledge and awareness based on their DLL experiences.

Focusing on language learners' MCK in computer-assisted language learning context, Hauck (2005) stresses that the need for distance language learners to understand and manage themselves and their learning applies equally to language learners in online self-directed learning spaces. She adds that:

> *the degree to which language learners are aware of both themselves (. . .) and of the affordances of the learning environment, and the degree to which they demonstrate control and flexibility in the use of [metacognitive strategies] such as self-management and thus autonomy, are interdependent. (Hauck, 2005, pp. 68-69)*

Based on her observations of two groups of adult online distance language learners who participated in two types of awareness-rising activities that were designed to familiarize students with the characteristics of independent online language learning, learners with a high level of metacognitive knowledge were also efficient in deploying self-management skills, that is, they were aware of how they learned best, and able to set up the learning conditions most favorable to them. The researcher also stressed that attention to online self-directed language learners' MCK, could contribute to our understanding of the realities of the early stages of independent language learning, which should serve as the basis for the design and implementation of interventions that aim to facilitate their metacognitive growth.

To date, topics of studies about Chinese learners of English at distance predominantly focused on learner strategies; little systematic research has been done to look into Chinese distance EFL learners' MCK in the context of web-based distance program. A search through the literature only came up with a few studies that offered some insights into Chinese English learners' understanding of themselves as distance learners, the learning process and strategy use. The first study reported by Hurd and Xiao (2006) was a cross-cultural study aimed at investigating the differences between adult distance learners in China and the UK in terms of

47

their motivation, perceptions of successful distance language learning, perceived difficulties and strategy use, and the extent to which cultural background may contribute to learning approach. Data analysis was based on students' responses to a questionnaire administered in both cohorts. The researchers found some major differences in approach appeared to be closely related to cultural background. For example, there were a lot more Chinese students being vocationally oriented toward learning (i.e. learning for work or diploma) than UK students, who were mostly learning for personal enrichment and pleasure. Chinese learners were also found to have higher levels of self-awareness, and lower levels of key aspects of autonomy such as the ability to pace, prioritize and self-monitor, which, argued by the researchers, was linked to a culture of dependence on the teacher as the sole authority. In addition, Chinese learners appeared to favor spontaneous actions over advanced planning and organization, and were experiencing greater language-specific difficulties and more problems related to language learning in distance mode; for example, self-discipline, maintaining motivation and negative comparisons with other students. Further, strategies used by students to improve their language learning tended to reflect their views of factors in successful distance language learning. For instance, Chinese students preferred strategies linked to reflective practice and creative language use, but used fewer strategies aimed at developing time management and prioritization skills than their UK counterparts. Also, the researchers pointed out that the emphasis on mastering grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation in China would account for higher figures in the Chinese cohort for strategies related to acquiring "good language learning habits", such as note-taking and rote memorization.

Recently, Zhang and Cui (2010) conducted a study that investigated learning beliefs held by distance English language learners in China using survey instruments, which focused on their

beliefs about the nature of language learning, the role of the teacher, the role of feedback, language learning strategies, and self-efficacy. To examine differences in language learning beliefs between beginner distance learners and those with more experience, the survey was administered in both of the first- and third-year cohorts of an undergraduate English program delivered through a combination of media including TV, video, and the Internet. Results showed that students held similar beliefs and perceptions as learners in conventional classrooms regarding aspects like the nature of language learning and strategy use; yet differences in beliefs about autonomous learning were identified between first- and third-year distance learners. While third-year students tended to believe in the importance of their own feedback and reflection on their study, seeing themselves as learners who decided for themselves about how and what to learn, the first-year students expected more help from teachers and other people, and still believed that the teacher should tell them how to learn, offer help when they need it, and provide feedback about their progress. The researchers discussed the low level of autonomy among the beginner students and the challenges they were faced in relation to the traditional teacher-centered one-way transmission of knowledge. In their views, although distance language learners in China believed strongly in the importance of autonomous learning, they were not autonomous enough in their approach to distance learning from the outset. Nonetheless, the different belief patterns identified in novice and experienced distance learners in terms of autonomous learning did provide evidence of metacognitive growth as students became more experienced with distance learning, thus warranting further probing into the growth or change mechanisms in context.

Similar findings are yielded in a more recent large scale study of Chinese distance learners by Zhao, Chen and Panda (2014, p. 951), who found that overall Chinese distance

learners "could not apply their self-regulated abilities skillfully and especially lacked strategies of metacognitive monitoring", and "they were not used to rethinking or evaluating the rationality of their planning". The researchers went on to discuss how the age-old classroom-based and teacher-dependent learning culture in China had cast significant impact on students' readiness for self-regulated learning. And although post-1990 reforms in China's distance education such as flexible delivery mode and expanded student body have led to the shift towards a more independent study strategy, they are not radical enough to change the traditional culture of learning in China so as to nurture effective self-regulated learning. It is predicted by the researchers that as "the pursuance of open access, open learning and self-learning will be vigorous in future", "self-regulated learning will be a prominent issue, too" (p. 955).

One significant implication from these studies is the influences of a particular learning context on learners' metacognitive development whether consciously or unconsciously, as a response to the demands of this learning context. The next section will discuss the development of distance language learners' MCK over time.

The Development of MCK in DLL Context

To date, research that focuses specifically on distance language learners' MCK development is still in paucity. There are only a few studies that provide some insight into the overall patterns and developmental trends of distance language learners' MCK (Hurd, 2000, 2006a; White, 1999a; X. Zhang & Cui, 2010). One common theme shared by these studies is the increased metacognitive awareness as learners become more experienced with this learning mode. Specifically, students overall were beginning to develop a greater awareness of what was needed for effective language learning in terms of overall skills and attributes as they progressed through the course, especially with regard to metacognitive strategies.

More importantly, White (1999a) points out that each individual learner holds their own

unique understanding of the task, i.e. language learning at distance, based on their experience

overtime, and underscores how the development of these new understandings are influenced by

features of the particular distance learning context. Building on these findings, White (1999a,

1999b, 2003a, 2009) goes on to propose the concept of "learner-context interface", a process-

oriented theoretical perspective through which distance language leaners' learning experience

and metacognitive growth can be interpreted and predicted from the learners' point of view. This

theoretical perspective views distance language learning as "an individual process in which

learners develop and assume control of a personally meaningful and effective interface between

themselves and the learning context (White, 2003a, p. 5)". In this dynamic process, initially

learners draw on their MCK base when they first enter the distance learning context to make

sense of the new content and context of learning. As learners are influenced in new ways by the

distance learning context by interacting with elements in the learning context, they extend and

develop their learning skills and knowledge about themselves as learners, including knowledge

of their preferred ways of learning and how to proceed within a distance language learning

context, as well as ability to match learning needs with resources within the learning context and

skills of self-management in establishing a personalized language learning environment within

the parameters of their own work and home environments. Consequently, all of these can be

viewed as one indication of leaners' metacognitive growth (White, 1999a).

The construction of a personalized learner-context interface is the result of the interplay

of personal and contextual influences. The personal influence entails a number of individual

attributes, including learners' knowledge about language learning, their motivation and affect, all

of which have a bearing on how learners interpret, relate and respond to the learning context and

the kind of interface they are able to construct with the learning context (White, 2009). The contextual influence refers to features of the distance language course that includes resources, course work, assessments, and opportunities for interaction, support, learner control, as well as access to other target language sources (White, 2003b). In addition to these externally observable features, it also includes the affordances and constraints which individual learners perceive available and relevant within the learning environment (White, 2005b), i.e. their contextual knowledge. White (2003b) goes on to argue that in order to develop target language skills within the distance context, learners must develop the interface; otherwise, the learning context would remain relatively inert and lack personal meaning or significance.

Equally importantly in this process is the influence of the particular distance learning context, which could potentially promote or hinder learners' MCK development through certain contextual affordances. This is supported by empirical evidence that when given sufficient facilitating contextual affordances, it is possible for students to adjust and enhance their MCK regarding language learning in this particular context (Cotterall & Murray, 2009; Hurd, et al., 2001; X. Zhang & Cui, 2010). In the context of distance language learning, learners can be influenced by a variety of contextual factors, including learning sources, learner support, opportunities for interaction, the teachers and tutors, the learning community, and features of the learner's immediate learning environment (White, 2003b, 2014).

Conclusion

The literature review indicates that language learners' MCK is contingent on particular learning settings and contextual factors. Learners' knowledge about themselves and the learning process can substantially influence their choices of actions and assessment of their learning progress. A solid MCK base is a prerequisite to effective strategy use and fundamental to one's

52

readiness for self-regulation of learning. In the meantime, monitoring and reflecting on strategy use, experience in practicing learner autonomy or self-regulated learning, increased learning experience and proficiency level, as well as structures of the learning environments also influence the construction and development of learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning. Review of the existing literature also reveals gaps in our knowledge about L2 learners' MCK. First, while there are abundant studies of L2 learner's MCK in traditional classroom-based learning settings, more research is much needed to look into L2 learners' MCK about language learning in other types of learning settings, especially the increasingly popular virtual learning environments supported by new media and technologies that demand a high-level of self-regulation. This gap is particularly salient in the MCK of EFL learners in China, where, in spite of the large and continuing growing population of online EFL learners, few studies have been done to investigate their MCK about language learning in today's nontraditional learning environments. Second, there is still much to learn about how MCK evolves over time as learners gain more experience with the learning context that mainly consists of self-directed learning and coordination of various learning resources. Third, given that the construction and development of MCK is closely related to features of a particular learning context, research into interactions between contextual factors of a learning environment and the changes in L2 learners' MCK is of great importance in expanding our knowledge in how MCK development can be facilitated through design features or interventions. The present study seeks to address these needs by investigating Chinese EFL learners' MCK about online English learning as they start their learning in a structured web-based distance English program, how their MCK changes over one semester and what contextual factors in this particular learning context interact with these changes.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used to investigate the research questions. The overall research design is a multiple-case study, consisting of primarily qualitative methods, with some quantitative measurements used at the outset of the study. It was conducted virtually with a groups of students who enrolled in the "Associate-to-BA" English program at CF Online, an online institute run by a national university specialized in foreign language education. Six participants were selected for this study by adopting a purposeful sampling strategy which aimed at obtaining the maximum variations (Patton, 2002). In addition to the registration information of all students who agreed to participate in this study, an *Online Learning Readiness Scale* questionnaire was employed at the beginning of the study as a preliminary assessment of learners' self-perceived readiness and efficacy for learning in an online environment and to identify students for further in-depth interviews. Qualitative methods used included three individual interviews, supplemented by collection of student artifacts (assignments, online posts, online session participation records) that were conducted throughout the course of the semester, with the intention to establish how students' MCK about language learning in the web-based distance learning context was constructed and developed over time as they were adapting to learning in such an environment. All surveys and interviews were conducted in participants' native language, Mandarin Chinese. In addition, analysis of the assessments and feedback they had gained for their coursework, as well as interviews with the course instructor were conducted for the purpose of data triangulation. While there are other aspects that undoubtedly have an effect on how students understand and conceptualize their learning process and learning experiences, these aspects will not be considered for the purpose of this study. Following is a reiteration of the research questions and an elaboration of the case study design adopted in the

research, including a brief introduction of the research context, the role of the researcher and the selection and description of research participants. Then, methods used to elicit and collected data will be explained, followed by discussion of the procedures of data management and analysis.

Research Questions

The current study uses a model of metacognitive knowledge comprising knowledge of self, task, strategy, and the learning context to explore the understandings about language learning adult EFL learners have developed through their experience in the web-based autonomous learning context. The study is guided by the following inquires:

1. What metacognitive knowledge about language learning do adult EFL learners have in the context of web-based distance learning?

2. How does adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning change over time in the context of web-based distance learning?

3. What are the contextual factors that affect the changes in adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning in the context of web-based distance learning?

The Multiple-Case Study Design

A multiple-case study was designed to answer the research questions. Case study is the most commonly adopted strategy used with an interpretivist paradigmatic stance in social research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). It is "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson, 1993, p. 179). In other words, case study allows the researcher to concentrate on a particular issue in great depth without losing contextual

information. Therefore, case study strategy fits the purpose of this project in that the aim of the research is to understand the complexity and dynamics of distance learners' MCK about language learning which, according to the literature review, is substantially influenced by the learning experiences which are shaped by the unique online learning context. Moreover, the criteria proposed by Yin (2008, p. 4) that – " the more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g., "how" or why some social phenomenon works), the more that the case study method will be relevant" – also supports this choice of methodology for the present investigation.

Multiple-case study is the type of case study in which several participant/programs are selected from several research sites or multiple participant/programs are selected within a single site to show different perspectives on the issue under investigation (Creswell, 1998). Yin (2008) suggests that the multiple-case design uses the logic of replication where the procedures are replicated for each case. This way could lead to "analytical generalization", i.e. the development of a theory which helps in understanding focal issue in other cases or situations (Robson, 1993), and provide possibilities to compare the differences and similarities across cases. Such capacity, again, meets the needs of this study. As the review of literature implies the uniqueness and complexities of individual learners' understanding of themselves as language learners and the learning process which is context bound, a multiple-case study approach warrants holistic investigation and analysis of such knowledge and its development within the particular social context rather than to merely explore general trends. In this study, the "overall case" is Chinese adult EFL learners' MCK about language learning in web-based distance language learning, with each individual participant enrolled in the same online language program and of the same year group being the unit of analysis, thus all the participants in the same context together constitute

the multiple-case study. It is expected that focusing on several individual learners in the same learning mode could help achieve a comprehensive understanding of the development of MCK, and the possible antecedents, contextual factors, perceptions and experiences that are related to the construction and development of online distance English learners' MCK.

Role of the Researcher

As stated by Cohen and colleagues (Cohen, et al., 2013), the researcher's social identity, professional background, and personal experiences play an essential role in both data collection and interpretation. In the study, the relationship between the researcher and the researched was mainly as a teacher-student or expert-novice relationship. Participants' view of the researcher as a teacher was established when the researcher was introduced by the course instructor as a researcher who was working with CF Online. The teacher role of the researcher was strengthened by the fact that the researcher provided weekly tutoring sessions for the participants as a constructive incentive. Seeing the researcher as a teacher who was easy to approach, participants would send her their working samples for feedback and correction and ask questions regarding the course content through emails or during interviews and tutorials. While this helped establish and maintain rapport with the participants, it might have brought in some respondent bias (Robson, 1993) during the data collection process, at least with one of the participants, Yang. For instance, during the interviews, it appeared that he was trying to have a good impression in front of the researcher (e.g., at the end of the first interview he asked, "Did I sound too shallow?"). This might also be partly the reason why he was also very reluctant to talk about his weaknesses and deficiencies.

Alongside the role of being a teacher, participants also treated the researcher as an expert EFL learner whose English was good enough to pursue a PhD degree in the US. Given their

desires to become competent English speakers, they saw the researcher as an inspiration and motivation. One participant, Lan, told me than she decided to participate in this study because she was very impressed by and admired my English self-introduction during the first online sessions. Their views of the researcher as an expert EFL learner helped lessen the distance between the researcher and the participants, motivating them to be open about their thoughts, questions, and concerns during the semester, as well as suggestions or criticisms about the program.

Furthermore, the researcher's own background and experience led to assumptions and preconceptions regarding effectiveness and ineffectiveness of L2 learning in a web-based DLL context, which may have an effect on the study. The acknowledgement of such possible researcher bias (Robson, 1993) diminishes potential negative effects as the researcher utilized various strategies to reduce the influences. When asking the research questions or probing, the researcher also kept in mind not to ask intruding or leading questions. During the interviews, if the researcher was unsure about her own understanding of that the participants said, she would seek participants' confirmations. Moreover, the researcher systematically asked the participants to clarify any confusion or uncertainty through summaries of the interviews. However, given the opportunities of extra tutoring sessions and the assistance on task completion provided by the researcher upon inquiries of the participants, their effect on the development of participants' MCK could not be completely ruled out.

Research Context

The study was conducted in an online EFL program for adult learners offered by CF Online, run by a leading national university specialized in foreign language education, headquartered in Beijing, China. Based on students' personal goals and their previous

educational level, this institution offers adult EFL distance learners a wide range of programs on different levels and tracks (degree/non-degree). This online institution has been operating for over 10 years, and has established its own instructional system and learner support. Participants of this study are all in the program named "Zhuan-Sheng-Ben", which literally means "Associate-to-BA" track. If they complete this program with a successful BA thesis defense, the students, who usually enroll in the program with an associate degree or equivalent, will get a degree of BA in English with their chosen concentration. As a typically material-centered program with pre-packaged curriculum, this program consists of two phases of study: a general learning phase with the emphasis on English language proficiency for the first two years of the study, followed by a specialized learning phase to cater for students' professional needs. The present study focuses on the first semester of students' first year of study, during which students are expected to complete two mandatory courses – "English in Daily Life" and "English at Leisure" – over 16 weeks.

According to the school's admission regulation, students who wish to enroll in the "Associate-to-BA" program are required to provide proof of degree (Associate or above) from a national or regionally accredited institution, which must be verified through the online Qualification Recognition and Verification Service operated by the Ministry of Education. In addition, to assess and verify students' entering English language proficiency and the overall literacy level, all students are required to take placement tests administered by the school in both English and Chinese. A student will not be admitted to this program if he or she fails the placement tests (passing score 60 out of 100). However, the placement tests can be waived if the students are able to provide at least one type of official proof of their English proficiency from the list of acceptable credentials. These credentials include: 1) Associate degree in English from

59

a nationally accredited institute; 2) BA degree from a nationally accredited institute; 3)

certificate of the College English Test-Level IV, or score 425 or above in the College English

Test Level IV test; 4) certificate of Public English Test-Level III; 5) Cambridge English:

Business Certificates (Preliminary level or above) (Beiwai Online, 2013). A detailed discussion

of the learning context for participants in this study, i.e. the "Associate-to-BA" program will be

provided in Chapter IV.

Selecting the Cases

In this section, I will discuss the background of potential participants chosen for this

project, and how the individual cases were selected, including the procedures of initial contact

and consent process and identifying the interview participants.

While being an online institute, CF has established local learning centers in all the major

cities of the 22 provinces, 4 municipalities, and 5 autonomous regions in China. Based on their

geographic locations, enrolled students are managed and supported through local learning

centers. Students in this study all registered at the Beijing headquarter learning center and

belonged to the Fall 2013 "Associate-to-BA" cohort, and total number of students was 120 by

the time the semester started. They were enrolled in the 2.5-year "Associate-to-BA" program to

earn a bachelor degree or an undergraduate certificate (without thesis defense) in English with a

specialty area of their choice, such as Translation, Business English, Tourism English, or Legal

English. The first school year consisted of a Fall semester (September 2013- January 2014) and a

Spring semester (March 2014 –July 2014). Each semester was about 16 weeks long. This study

was carried out during the Fall 2013 semester.

Recruitment of Case Study Participants

The researcher first made contact with the course instructor Ms. Snow[1] at CF Online, who was the instructor of the two required courses in first semester of the "Associate-to-BA" program, and described this project. After the researcher obtained the school's permission through Ms. Snow to carry out this project, she then drafted an email to all the potential participants, in which she briefly introduced this study, its purposes, things the participants needed to do, types of data to be collected, potential benefits from participating, emphasis of voluntary participation and withdrawal, protection of confidentiality and privacy and the link to the first survey. This email, together with the consent form and a link to an attachment of the *Online Learning Readiness Scale* (Appendix A) in Word document were sent to all of the first year students in the Associate-to-BA program from the school's official account to their registered personal email accounts. In this email, students are informed that this project was designed to help them become better English learners in the virtual context. Further, weekly online tutoring sessions for speaking via video/audio chat on the internet were offered to the participants, with the purpose to establish and maintain rapport with the participants and to use it as a constructive incentive to encourage participation.

While originally the plan was to send this email during the first week of class (September 15, 2013), due to unforeseen circumstances[2], it was not sent until October 7th, and the second reminder was sent 5 days later. Students were given until the end of the third week of October to consider and respond to the recruitment. As this study was identified as Exempt by IRB, thus students' submission of the first survey was seen as their willingness to participate in the study

---

[1] The teacher is presented under pseudonym.
[2] The IRB Approval was not finalized until October 1, 2013, right at the beginning of a week-long National Day holiday.

and their acknowledgement of the consent process. Twenty-nine students agreed to participate and returned the completed the *Online Learning Readiness Scale* (OLRS) survey either via SurveyMonkey® or email attachment. Adopting the purposeful sampling strategy with the aim of obtaining the maximum variations of cases, once the survey data were obtained, I contacted Ms. Snow to retrieve the registration information for all the students who completed the survey. In registration information, their entering English proficiency level, gender, and age were taken as references together with the survey results for the selection of interview participants. To ensure a diverse case profile, interview participants were selected based on the following criteria:

1) There should be students of both high and low perceived self-efficacy for online learning (based on the OLRS survey results);

2) There should be students of different proficiency levels in English (based on registration information);

3) There should be both female and male students and in different age groups (based on registration information).

As it turned out the majority of students were waived of their entrance exams by providing official credentials of their English proficiency that met the admission requirements; however, not all survey participants had English proficiency test scores on file. Therefore, the evaluation of their English proficiency had to be based on their highest educational degree shown on file, in which case, a student with a BA degree was considered having a higher English proficiency than those who had an Associate degree. As a result, eight students were selected, and a second invitation was sent to them to set up the initial interview, together with a link to the General and Technology Background Survey on SurveyMonkey®. Two participants chose not to participate in the interview study, and the others agreed to continue. Therefore, eventually there

were six single cases, which fit the originally proposed sample size (Table 1). This sample size was considered appropriate because it is both big enough to ensure diversity and small enough for me to manage the data and focus on in-depth analysis, given the available time and resources I have had.

Table 1: Basic information of the interview participants

Name[3]	Gender	Age	English Proficiency / Education Level	OLRS Score (Total: 108)
Yang	M	21	66	82
Cai	M	25	70	95
May	F	38	Associate Degree in English	71
Jing	F	27	Associate Degree in Business English	80
Lan	F	59	BA in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language	89
Gao	M	38	BA in Applied Pharmacy	75

Introducing the Participants

Students in this study all have work and/or family commitments. They are all adult learners, with an age range from early 20s to late-50s, and come from a variety of occupations. Below are the profiles of the six individual cases based on data from the initial surveys and first interview.

Cai

Cai is a 25 year old male from Beijing, working as a customer service specialist in an insurance company. He enrolled in the program with an Associate degree in Business Management. He was required to take the placement test and his score was 66 out of 100. Prior to this program, he had studied English for about 15 years. All of his previous English learning

---

[3] Participants are presented under pseudonyms.

was in traditional classroom settings characterized by teacher-fronted learning or a typical face-to-face (FTF) approach, which he described as, "in general, the teacher would be in the front of the classroom talking, and I sit there listening". The focuses, as Cai recalled, were mostly on the acquisition of basic linguistic knowledge by rote learning, including "memorizing vocabulary, reading the textbook, and doing grammar exercises in the workbook".

Cai had the highest score (95/108) in the Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS) among all the participants. Specifically, his self-ratings were high in areas including computer/Internet literacy (18/18), online communication (17/18), and motivation for learning online (22/24), and slightly lower in self-directed learning (23/30) and learner control in an online context (15/18).

Cai had no previous distance learning experience, and the reason for him to choose to continue his English learning through this online distance program was that the flexibility and convenience of this learning mode could help him fulfill both work and life responsibilities, and that the school had a "nationally prominent reputation in foreign language education." He had been using computer and the Internet for about 3 years, about 10 hours every day, and he had experience using most of the online resources and tools including online chatting and social media. While he had used all of the listed Internet communication technologies and activities, he did not check any of them in terms of their language learning potentials.

Cai's English study was largely driven by his interests in the language and its culture. He hoped to "be able to communicate with foreigners smoothly when they needed help" and ultimately to "be able to do real-time translation". His other motivation was career oriented, though only in a quite vague sense. As he explained, "Although my current job does not require any use of English, but I believe that with strong English ability, I will be able to have a better

job with higher pay in the future". Cai's expectations related to this English program at CF Online were that, after the 3-year program, he would "be able to communicate in English effectively, at least about common topics".

Yang

Yang is a 21 year old male from Beijing, working as a central security control system operator in a security service company. He enrolled in the program with an associate degree in Safety and Security. He was required to take the placement test and his score was 70 out of 100 in the entrance English exam. Prior to this program, he had studied English for about 15 years, all in traditional classroom setting characterized by rote learning.

He scored 82 out of 108 in OLRS. He had slightly lower self-efficacy beliefs in two aspects under the category "motivation for learning in online context", including "I am open to new ideas" (Partially disagree), and "I like to share my ideas with others" (Partially disagree). Yang had no previous experience in distance learning, and he checked all of the four listed reasons for choosing this online program to continue his English study, including "I enjoy using computers", "I wanted to try a new way to take a course", "this program works well with my other commitments in life", and "I think I can practice English more on the computer and via Internet". Later in the first interview, it seemed that the novelty of learning English in an online environment was indeed a major attraction to him. Although he had only been using computer and Internet for 3 years, he appeared to be quite comfortable using them and receptive to the potential of different web applications and Internet communication tools for language learning.

Yang expressed strong interest in learning English, particularly the "cultures and customs in foreign countries", which was also the major motivation for him to continue his English study

at CF Online. His other motivation, though expressed rather weakly, was his belief that "strong English ability would be useful in future job hunting".

May

May is a 38 year old female from Hebei Province, currently working as the Chief Accountant at a multinational engineering company in Beijing. May enrolled in this program with an associate degree in English, so her entrance exam was waived. Prior to this program, she had learned English for about 9 years in a traditional classroom setting focusing mostly on doing grammar exercises with very little attention given to listening and speaking. In college she did more listening exercises to prepare for the College English Test IV. There had been a long interval since her last English learning experience in junior college.

She had the lowest score (71/108) in OLRS, with more negative ratings than the other participants, especially regarding self-directed learning ("I carry out my own study plan": strongly disagree), self-control ("I manage time well": disagree; "I can direct my own learning progress": partially disagree; "I am not distracted by other online activities when learning online": disagree), and online communication ("I feel confident in expressing myself": partially disagree).

She had no previous experience in distance learning, and the reasons for her to choose an online program this time were that she wanted to try a new way of taking a course and this program works well with her other commitments in life. She had been using computers for over 16 years, and over 10 hours every day. She had experience with all the listed Internet resources and communication tools, and noted the potentials for language learning in most of them.

Her decision to continue studying English was mainly driven by her need for professional development, both in her current job and future opportunities. Her current needs were more pressing, since she got a new job in a multinational company where English was the working language. Besides, she had found that most of her current co-workers had very high English proficiency, which became another source of pressure that drove her to improve her own English. Another motivation for her to improve her English ability was that she hoped to travel abroad on her own, for which she believed adequate communication skills in English were required. She also expressed the desire to go study abroad, "if" she could learn really well. Yet the way she put it seemed to imply that it was not all in her control, or she did not want to make it a big deal, which again was congruent with her passiveness and "taking-it-easy" attitude. The goal she set for herself in this program, in addition to "passing all the courses", were to be able to talk to foreigners fluently and to convey her thoughts correctly through writing and speaking.

Jing

Jing is a 27 year old female originally from a southeastern province of China, currently working as secretary to the chairperson of a science and technology company based in Beijing. She enrolled in the program with an associate degree in Business English, and her entrance English exam was waived. Prior to this program, she had learned English for about 9 years, of which the first 6 years were in traditional classroom settings characterized by rote learning and teacher-centered lectures. During the following 3years of junior college, she focused her English learning mainly on improving her listening and speaking skills. In particular, she had frequently participated in the school's English Corner activities and actively engaged in interactions with her instructor who was a native English speaker during speaking classes. Although little attention was given to reading and writing at school, after she started working, she got more opportunities

67

to develop her reading and writing abilities through reading English documents and drafting English emails. In addition, she had 4 years experiences working overseas in a Middle-eastern country, during which she used English most of the time. Since she came back from aboard, English has remained the main language she uses at work.

She scored 80 out of 108 in the OLRS. While she chose "strongly agree" and "agree" for most of the items, the two statements she did not quite agree with were "I carry out my own study plan (partially disagree)" and "I repeated the online instructional materials on the basis of my needs (disagree)". She owned or had easy access to all the equipment listed in the survey, and had been using computer for over 15 years, about 10 hours every day. She had experience using all the listed online resources and communication tools, and thought sites like Wikipedia could facilitate language learning. She had no previous experience in distance learning, and the reason she decided to choose this online English program was that "it was the only program on the market that had FTF instruction during the weekends and would also grant a BA degree".

Lan

Lan is a 59 year old female from Beijing, currently a Mandarin Chinese instructor working in Seoul, Korea. She enrolled in this program with a BA degree in Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language, and her entrance exam to the program was waived. She has a long English learning history that dates back to the early 1980s, yet most of it was "nonsystematic and periodic" learning, such as professional development trainings and short-term language programs. In other words, Lan has not had much experience with traditional classroom-based English instruction. In addition, she also had a 2-month overseas working experience in the US as an interpreter for a Chinese engineering company in the late 1980s. Her current job requires the use of English as the working language.

She scored 89 out of 108 in OLRS. While she gave positive ratings for all of the items, she felt less confident regarding abilities of time management, dealing with distractions, and control over the learning process. She had no previous experience in distance learning, and the reason for her to choose this online English program was because she could fulfill both work and life commitments. Her learning in this program had to be fully online without access to a physical learning center and the FTF class, since her workplace was outside China. She owned basic equipment required for online learning, and had been using computers for over 20 years, about 5 to 6 hours every day. She has experience using all the listed online recourses and communication tools in daily life, and sees in several of them potential values for language learning, including Wikipedia, social media tools, listserves, audio/videocast, mobile phone, and computer games.

Lan's motivation to continue learning English was out of her all-time desire to be able to communicate in English fluently and admiration for people who could do so. She believed that "learning another language does not only mean to acquire the linguistic knowledge, but also to broaden one's horizon and enrich one's life". Another motivation for Lan to continue improving her English ability was related to her professional needs. As she was a Mandarin Chinese teacher in a school based in Korea where English was their working language, she felt that "strong English ability could be very helpful in enhancing the teaching of Chinese" and could also help her "better communicate with the students as well as colleagues".

Gao

Gao is a 38 year old male from Tianjin (about 85 miles southeast of Beijing), currently working as the chief pharmacist at a regional hospital in Tianjin. He enrolled in this program with a BA degree in Applied Pharmacy, and his entrance exam was waived. He started learning

English since in the early1980s continuously from the last two years of elementary school to the end of technical school (about 8 years total), after which his English studies were interrupted, on and off until now, and were all in non-traditional classroom settings, typically in the form of open enrollment tutoring programs offered by private schools or local universities.

Before signing up for this program, he had a 3-year learning experience in an online medical school and obtained his BA degree in Applied Pharmacy. He was the only participant who had online distance learning experience prior to enrolling in CF Online. Yet, interestingly, he scored 75 out of 108 in the OLRS, the lowest among all of the six participants. He provided several negative ratings regarding time management, control of learning progress, dealing with distractions, and confidence in expressing himself in an online context. This might be because he was more aware of the challenges and difficulties faced by online learners than those who had no previous experiences. He chose this online program to continue his English study because it best fit his busy schedule. He owned basic equipment required for online learning. He has experience with all the listed internet resources and communication tools, and saw in most of them potential values in facilitating language.

Gao's motivations for continuing learning English were grounded in some of his principal beliefs about life and learning. As explained in his own words, "learning was my way of life" and "I couldn't live without a clear goal". His expectation for learning through this program was to substantially improve his knowledge and skills in English, especially knowledge related to his professional and personal interests. In his view, anything that was potentially "thought-provoking" was particularly motivating to him, and things like how to get a high score in the exam or to get a BA degree in order to get promoted at work were not much of his concern.

70

Data Collection

Procedure

Data were collected at various time points throughout the semester (Table 2). Data collected at the beginning of the semester consisted of participants' responses to the OLRS survey (Appendix A), Language Learning Background and Technology Use Survey (Appendix B), their registration information, and the first individual interview. The survey data were used to establish the basic profile for each case. The first individual interviews with all six participants were scheduled during week 7 (October 23-26, 2013). The second individual interviews were conducted during week 13 (December 2-6, 2013), which fell on the second week of their study of the second course "English at Leisure". The third individual interview was done during the week after their final exams (January 15-19, 2014). Given that students had not yet acquired a level of English that allowed them to engage in talking reflectively about their learning experiences or understandings, in order to ensure that participants can express their thoughts freely and accurately, all the survey questions and interviews were administered in Mandarin Chinese. Translation of the extracts included in the study report was done by the researcher. Meanwhile, Participants' assignments, grades, and test scores were collected when they were made available online on the CF Online platform. The Discussion Forum was searched and monitored throughout the semester to collect participants' posts. The complete data collection timeline at the three phases are shown in the table below:

Table 2: Data collection timeline

Time	Data Collection			
	OLRS Survey	Background Survey	Interviews	Other student data
Week 4 (10/07/13)	1st request	---------*National Day Holiday Week* ---------------------------		
(10/12/13)	2nd request			
Week 5	Collection	Collection		
Week 6 (10/23-26/13)			1st	
Week 11				1st and 2nd assignments
Week 12 (12/02-06/13)			2nd	
Week 13				1st Instructor evaluation
Week 15				3rd and 4th assignments
Week 16 (01/11/14)	-------------------------- *Final exam* --			
Week 17 (01/15-21/14)			3rd	Discussion forum posts
02/19/14				2nd instructor evaluation and interview
03/03/14				Final exam scores

Instruments

Online Learning Readiness Scale

Initial evaluation of potential participants' self-efficacy belief in their readiness for self-directed online learning was measured by using the Online Learning Readiness Scale (OLRS), which was translated into Chinese in this study. The OLRS is an 18-item Likert scale survey, which is developed as a multidimensional instrument for college students' readiness for online learning (Appendix A). It includes five dimensions: self-directed learning, motivation for learning, computer/Internet self-efficacy, learner control, and online communication self-efficacy. Its internal consistency and construct validity have been tested, and the factor structure of the scale confirmed in a large scale study involving 1,051 university students in Taiwan who enrolled in at least 1 of 5 different online courses (Hung, Chou, Chen, & Own, 2010).

Registration Information

Basic demographic information for all the participants who agreed to be part of the study and retuned the OLRS survey was provided by the school's registration office, which was sent via email by the course instructor, Ms. Snow. While the registration information consisted of a variety of personal information, only their English entrance exam score or education background (in the case of a waived entrance exam), gender, and age were taken as primary references for the selection of interview participants. Nonetheless, the registration information indicated that the six interview participants came from diverse occupations and family backgrounds.

Language Learning Background and Technology Use Survey

With the purpose of establishing the baseline of each individual participant's case profile, this survey (Appendix B), which was administered in Chinese, was used to collect information on participants' previous experience with language learning, online or distance learning, reasons and motivations for continuing English learning and enrolling in an online distance language program, and their ownership and accessibility of a variety of electronic and digital equipment which were deemed necessary for online learning (Ushida, 2005a; Winke & Goertler, 2008a). The survey also asked them about their knowledge and experience of using various multimedia tools in daily life and language class (Winke & Goertler, 2008a).

First Individual Interview

Guided by the interview protocol (Appendix C), a semi-structured open-ended interview was conducted with each participant during Week 6. The interviews were carried out on the internet via QQ chat and were audio-recorded. The aim of this initial interview was two-fold. One was to address the first research question regarding the entering state of learners' MCK about language learning in the web-based distance learning environment. The other was to

establish the baseline against which the second research questions would be answered. Questions

in the initial interview ranged from learners' knowledge of themselves as language learners (e.g.,

ability, strength and weaknesses, motivations), reflection upon their previous L2 learning

experience, approach to and strategies for L2 learning, their perceptions and understanding of

learning English through an online program, and how they plan to manage their online language

learning in terms of goal-setting and personal study plans (Bown, 2009; Graham, 2004). In

addition to these open-ended questions, a yoked subject procedure was carried out with each

participant. This procedure has proven to be effective in eliciting rich data of learners' MCK

from a different angle (White, 1999a, 1999b). Participants were asked to imagine themselves

responding to a number of questions asked by a hypothetical character, i.e. a prospective online

EFL learner who was considering signing up for the same program yet was unfamiliar with web-

based distance learning. The questions were phrased in such a way as to represent the kinds of

things a prospective student might ask.

Second Individual Interview

During Week 12, the second interview was conducted with each participant (Appendix

D). The purpose of this interview was to document learners' knowledge in the four dimensions at

the time when they had already had some experience in learning English through this online

program. The interviews were carried out on the internet via QQ chat and were audio-recorded.

Questions in this interview focused on participants' recall and reflection upon their English

learning since the first interview, including their recounts of both positive and negative

experience in general and regarding specific learning tasks or components against their original

goals, plans, or expectations. Participants were also asked to provide their self-assessments of

learning progress in general and regarding specific skill areas, as well as their use of strategies,

74

tools, and resources. In addition, participants were asked how they wanted to plan and manage their study for the rest of the semester, including their learning goals and expectations. Based on each participant's background and initial MCK state, these questions were customized to fit his or her own situation. In addition to these interview questions, participants were asked to complete a number of statements concerning their experience of learning English through the online program. In her investigation of the change in distance language learners' emerging beliefs about language learning, White (1999a) adopted this procedure and found it effective in gaining more information about the changes in learners' perception about distance language learning. Participants in this study were invited to do the same activity in order to obtain a fuller account of their understandings and beliefs relating to web-based distance language learning.

Third Individual Interview

The final interview (Appendix E) was carried out with each participant during the week after their final exam. The interviews were carried out on the internet via QQ chat and were audio-recorded. Interview questions centered on the same dimensions of learners' MCK about language learning in a web-based distance mode, including questions in the same format as those in the midterm interview that prompted the students to reflect and evaluate their experience and progresses in this program. In additional to self-reflection and self-evaluation of their learning experience during the second half of the semester, participants were also asked to comment on their learning process during the entire first semester, their goals, expectations, and plans for the rest of the following semesters. At the end of the interview, another yoked subject procedure was carried out with each participant with the aim to obtain more information about the changes in learners' perceptions about distance language learning.

Other documents of Participants' Learning Behavior/Course Participation

In addition to participants' self-reports of their learning experience during the semester, their course participation was also recorded based on other data sources. These included submitted assignments, grades and feedback, unit self-quiz submission and scores, Discussion Forum posts, and scores of their final exams. Observation of their participation patterns during teacher-led online learning sessions (VOB) was carried out by saving the chat logs shown on the public screen during the sessions and taking notes of both audio and text-based interactions specifically involved the participants. Moreover, additional course participation records were obtained in cooperation with the course instructor. Ms. Snow was asked to evaluate these participants' assignment submission, VOB and FTF tutorial participation, Discussion Forum participation, communication with the instructor, and overall progress made (Ushida, 2005a). The forms (Appendix F) were sent to Ms. Snow twice, at the midterm and end of the semester. An interview was also conducted with Ms. Snow after the second evaluation form was completed, and the forms were used as prompts during the interview to obtain more detailed information.

Other Qualitative Data From the Learning Context

A variety of program-related documentation was also collected, which included program introduction, orientation materials and student manual (i.e. *Guide To Success*), assignments instructions and grading criteria, final exam instruction and sample tests, and announcements and posts on the online learning platform and the school's social network account. In addition, the PowerPoint used by the instructor during VOB and FTF sessions were collected. These documents provided important contextual information that helped to interpret and understand students' comments about their learning experience and changes observed in their MCK about

online language learning. A list of additional data related to the program is presented below in Table 3.

Table 3: Additional data sources

Data source	
From the learning context	Program introduction
	Orientation materials
	Students manuals
	Assignments (general information, instructions, grading criteria)
	Exams (general information, instructions, test sample)
From each participant	Completed assignments
	Final exam grades
	Posts on course discussion forums, and responses to the posts
From course instructor	Assessment of participants' assignments
	Reflection and evaluation on each interview participant's course participation and learning progress at the midterm and end of the semester, in addition to an end-of-semester interview.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved mainly qualitative data analysis following the inductive approach (R. K. Yin, 2008). For the selection of individual participants, the OLRS surveys collected from all the potential participants were analyzed by generating frequency and descriptive statistics. The total score in each dimension and for the whole survey were calculated for each participant, and then means for the total score regarding each dimension and the whole survey were generated. Participants with lowest and highest scores in each dimension and the whole survey were also identified. Next, these scores were then cross-referenced with their English proficiency levels, gender and age based on the registration information, based on which eight interview participants were selected. Second, data from the Language Learning

Background and Technology Use Survey were analyzed, and a descriptive summary statement was written for each participant as part of the basic case profile.

To analyze the qualitative data from the interviews (see Table 4 for a summary of data analysis), which was an ongoing process, combining individual cases and cross-case analysis, a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2003) was applied with the assistance of qualitative data analysis software (NVivo® 10). The overall process followed three concurrent flows of activity: data documentation and reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Robson, 1993). The analysis of interview data started as soon as the first interview with the first participant (i.e. one individual case) was completed. For each interview under each individual case, the general steps included: First, the recorded interview was transcribed and keyed in to the software immediately after they were finished. While transcribing the data, the researcher also read it without any attempt for categorization; second, the researcher then read the transcript again and began to code the text guided by the four dimensions of MCK about language learning (for instance, for the theme "Person Knowledge [PK]", some sub-categories included "strength [PK-STR]", "weakness [PK-WEAK]", "personality [PK-PER]"). Initial codes were first recorded as free nodes (i.e. discrete smallest units). When more free nodes emerged (at the end of coding the first round of interviews for all cases), tree nodes were established to display thematic relationships of the free nodes, which allowed for the formation of themes and categories. This was a cyclical and inductive process, and the themes and sub-categories were constantly under adjustments while the interview data from the second and third round of interviews were being coded. In the meantime, for the purpose of within- and cross- cases analysis, in NVivo®, all the data sources belonging to the same participant were organized under a single case, named under the participant's pseudonym. This phase of data analysis was to

address the first research question and participants were further grouped into low and high MCK groups. Results from this phase of analysis also served as the baseline against which the second research question regarding the changes in participants' MCK would be answered.

After all the data from the second and third round of interviews were coded, two steps were taken to address the second research question. First, within each case, the researcher compared and analyzed text segments under the same categories and subcategories, search for changes, including new, modified, refined, contrasting expressions. Then the observed changes were summarized for each case. Second, cross-case analysis was conducted by comparing and contrasting the identified changes in individual cases.

To address the third research question, the researcher re-examined systematically and chronologically the text segments where changes were identified to look for relevant contextual factors. The researcher also examined other parts of the data sources to identify connections. For example, regarding the program's documentation, the researcher first carefully read through these materials, identifying implicit and explicit statements of goals and objectives of learning, demands and requirements for the students, suggestions about how to succeed in self-directed online English learning, and suggestions about how to study the target language. The feedback provided by the grading teachers was also analyzed as part of the contextual influences. Furthermore, participants' work samples were examined for the purposes of data triangulation and verification. For example, participants' knowledge about their deficiencies in writing and pronunciations (person knowledge) was checked and verified by reviewing their writing samples and recordings.

Table 4: Summary of data sources and analysis

Research Question (RQ)	Data Sources	Analysis
RQ1: EFL learners' MCK about language learning in web-based distance mode	1. First individual interview 2. Participants' "Guide to Success" assignment 3. Participants' "English in Daily Life" assignments, grades, and feedback	1. Inductive content analysis (1) First level of coding guided by the 4-dimension of MCK; (2) Establish sub-categories (3) Compare and contrast within and across cases 2&3. Triangulate and verify participants' self-reports
RQ2: Changes in EFL learners' MCK over time	1. Three individual interviews 2. Participants' assignments of the two English modules, grades, and feedback 3. Course instructor's evaluation and interview	1. Inductive content analysis 2&3. Triangulate and verify participants' self-reports
RQ3: Contextual influences on changes in EFL learners' MCK	1. Second and third individual interviews 2. Assignments of the two English modules, grades, and feedback 3. Course instructor's evaluation and interview 4. Observations of VOB and Discussion Forum 5. Course documents	• Inductive content analysis; identify contextual influences in participants' self-reports 2, 3 & 4. Triangulate and verify participants' self-reports 5. Content analysis to identify contextual factors

The issue of trustworthiness was addressed through providing thick descriptions

(Creswell, 2008) and credibility checks provided by participants (Robson, 1993; R. K. Yin,

2008). This study has obtained and provided thick descriptions of the participants' perceptions,

observed learning behaviors and surrounding environment. These thick descriptions could create

transparency and assist the reader in judging the transferability of the findings (Ary, Jacobs,

Sorensen, & Walker, 2013). For the credibility check, each time after the completion of

interviews and summarizing the data, the summaries were sent back to the participants to

immediately correct errors of fact or challenge interpretations. When necessary, follow up

questions regarding confusions or ambiguities that arose during the process of transcribing and summarizing were sent to the participants for further elaboration and clarification.

Summary

This chapter described the research method used to address the three research questions, including the researcher's role in this study and a brief overview of the research context. How individual cases were selected and the six individual participants in this multiple-case study were also introduced. This was followed by discussion of the process of data collection and analysis, including elaborations on the research instruments and the multiple data sources. The following chapters focus on findings of the study. Given that identifying influences of the learning context is one of the objectives of this study, Chapter IV will provide a detailed description of the research context. Chapter V, VI, and VII discuss findings regarding the three research questions respectively.

CHAPTER IV: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Because contextual influence is one of the main focuses of this study, this chapter provides a detailed account of the academic context in which the student participants carried out and managed their English learning at CF Online. Descriptions of the learning context were based on information provided by the school's official website and program documents available in the school's learning management system, including course materials, program introduction, student manuals, information and instructions on assignments and final exams. As mentioned earlier, this study was conducted with a group of students enrolled in the "Associate-to-BA" program, an online EFL program for adult learners offered by the School of Online Education (also known as CF Online) of a key university under the Ministry of Education specialized in foreign language learning, headquartered in Beijing, China. Being one of the 68 higher education institutions nation-wide authorized by the Ministry of Education to provide accredited online programs, CF Online was founded in the year 2000 and has developed its own learning management system and built-in multimedia instructional components with online and offline learner support.

If students, who usually enroll in the program with an associate degree or equivalent, complete this program with a successful BA thesis defense, they will get a degree of BA in English with their chosen concentration. If students do not complete the thesis defense but have passed all the required courses, they will get a BA certificate. As a typically material-centered distance language program with pre-packaged curriculum, this program consists of two phases of study: a general learning phase with emphasis on English language proficiency for the first two years of the study, followed by a specialized learning phase to cater for students' professional needs. The present study focuses on the first semester of the students' first year of study, during

which they are expected to complete two mandatory English modules – "English in Daily Life" and "English at Leisure" – over 16 weeks.

Students are provided with printed course books and audio materials (CDs) as offline learning materials. Meanwhile, all the curriculum, syllabus, supplementary learning materials and activities, communication and interaction channels, as well as learner support are managed by the institution's online learning platform, CF Online. For the most part, students are expected to engage in self-directed learning via the web-based learning platform. 6 online tutoring sessions are offered throughout the semester during weekdays, supported by the VOB (Voice of CF) synchronous web-conferencing system, which is embedded in the online learning platform. Students can join on a voluntary basis. Meanwhile, students living in Beijing or other big cities where the institution has set up physical learning centers may also choose to attend a face-to-face (FTF) class offered on each weekend (with the exception of national holidays), during which important content in each unit is highlighted and explained by the course instructors. Apart from 6 mandatory deadlines for assignments and self-quiz, students are on their own as to when and how to study each unit, complete tasks, finish unit quizzes, attend online synchronous instruction sessions, and participate in communications and interactions with peers or tutors.

<center>*Required Courses and Assessments*</center>

Orientation: Guide to Success

In the first semester, there are three credited courses that students in the "Associate-to-BA" program are required to take. Students can study the course materials through the online courseware and the printed textbook, both containing the same content. Prior to the two English modules is a one-credit orientation course, *Guide to Success,* which aims to help students adapt

to the new mode of learning and develop a more autonomous approach. The course consists of two main parts (Figure 1): first is the "Introduction" section which is written in Chinese and contains key information students must know to manage their study, including (1) functions and instructions of different online learning components such as the synchronous learning session VOB, the Discussion Forum, and guidelines on how to arrange offline study group activities; (2) general information on the curriculum for this program; and (3) instructions and regulations regarding forms of assessment, and management of one's student status throughout the program. The second part, all written in English, consists of 10 units, covering knowledge and skills desirable for online distance language learning, including self-management in the online learning environment, effective language learning strategies, and how to monitor and assess one's own learning progress, etc. Each unit contains hands-on activities that encourage students to make their own study plan and engage in self-assessment. For example, in "Unit 4 Let's Plan Our Study", students are guided through the processing of making different types of planners that fits their own schedule (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Content of the Orientation Course "Guide To Success"

Figure 2: Guide to Success > Unit 4 Let's Plan Our Study > Activity

Students are required to complete an assignment designed to assess their knowledge gained during the orientation. The assignment consists of 42 multiple choices questions and 17 open-ended questions. Of the 42 multiple choices questions, 36 of them are based on the "Introduction" section which mainly focus on how to use and navigate the learning management system and important regulations, with the rest of them being about learning strategies. However,

a close review of the learning strategies indicated a lack of emphasis on learning strategies, in that these questions were more of a fact-check rather than assessing students' understanding of effective learning strategies (Figure 2), and the first two questions were not even related to strategies. The 17 open-ended questions consist of activities that assess students' familiarity with the learning context (e.g., "Copy and paste a screen shot of one post on the Discussion Forum that you find helpful"), self-reflective questions including changes in perceptions, personal goals and anticipated difficulties in online English learning, and records of study group reflections which is required to complete with the student's own study group members.

5. Learn to develop learning strategies 方法篇

35) The primary objective of A Guide to Success is to _____.

A. introduce how to learn English well   B. help you to understand yourself

C. grasp computer application skills for online learning

36) As a distance learner, you will have multiple roles to play at the same time. According to Guide To Success, this is called_____.

A. the role of a distance learner   B. understand new role

C. many roles in one

37) Since language learning is first of all skill learning, a highly recommended learning method in Guide To Success is:

A. Learn everything by heart.   B. Learn from a teacher.

C. Learn by doing.

D. Learning by translating

38) What is the best explanation for "integration of five skills"?

A. Practice the five skills together instead of separately.

B. Practice the five skills inseparably with different degrees of emphasis on a particular skill.

C. Practice the five skills inseparably with the same degrees of emphasis on a particular skill.

39) To learn a language well, you should act and rehearse instead of _____.

A. making mistakes again and again   B. repeating mindlessly

C. thinking without learning   D. learning without thinking

40) Which of the following are those six potential reasons for listening difficulty?

A. Speech tempo, vocabulary, sentence structure, content, unnecessary pause, and lack of concentration.

B. Speech tempo, vocabulary, sentence structure, content, transcript mistakes, and mental fatigue.

C. Speech tempo, vocabulary, distraction, unfamiliar background, unnecessary pause, and lack of concentration.

English Module 1: English in Daily Life

In the first semester, the first required English course is "English in Daily Life" which

consists of one orientation, eight units, and a review unit (Figure 4). The course aims at

developing knowledge and skills in functional language use, with little attention to explicit

instruction on grammar or syntactic rules. As stated in the orientation:

> *The purpose of this course is to develop comprehensive language ability by integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, with the main focusing being speaking and listening skills. It emphasizes "Learning by doing"4.*

Figure 4: Homepage for "English in Daily Life"

According to the course orientation, students are suggested to complete each course in

eight weeks, and in the same order, namely to finish studying the first course before moving on

to the second. The courses are thematically structured, with each unit covering a specific topic.

The topics in the first course "English in Daily Life", encompasses 8 themes, including family,

home/house, daily routines, getting around, local community, life and relationships, health and

social issues. In each unit, task-based activities are designed in a progressive manner, namely

new activities are built on what learners are required to listen, read, or do in the previous tasks,

---

4 Original text: 这门课程培养英语听、说、读、写的综合技能，但是侧重点在听和说上，强调"Learning by doing（做中得学）。

89

and most of the tasks require students to complete tasks upon listening to dialogues (see Figure 5 for the list of all activities in Unit 6). For example, in "Unit 6 Life and Relationships", the first activity "Personal Matters" consists of 2 tasks. Task 1, "Find out Personal Information" (Figure 6), introduces the students to how to ask and respond to questions regarding personal information, and asks students to match the questions with their proper responses. Next, in Task 2, "How to Ask Personal Questions", students are asked to listen to how questions are asked for personal information, and practice on their own. Later on in this unit, asking for personal information in different social situations is embedded in all the other tasks.

Figure 5: English in Daily Life > Unit 6 > Activities

English in Daily Life > Unit 6 > Activities

❖ **Activity 1: Personal Matters**
    ❖ **Task 1**   Find out Personal Information
    ❖ **Task 2**   How to Ask Personal Questions
❖ **Activity 2: Two Marriage Stories**
  >>About this activity
    ❖ **Task 1**   Choose a General Topic
    ❖ **Task 2**   Choose a Title
    ❖ **Task 3**   Summarise Events
    ❖ **Task 4**   Match Descriptions
    ❖ **Task 5**   Understand Events and Time
    ❖ **Task 6**   Understand Relationship Terms
    ❖ **Task 7**   Read for Information
    ❖ **Task 8**   Write a Summary
    ❖ **Task 9**   Read for More Information
    ❖ **Task 10**   Summarise Winston's Marriage
    ❖ **Task 11**   Talk About Relationships
❖ **Activity 3: Interview**
  >>About this activity
    ❖ **Task 1**   Elicit the Information You Want
    ❖ **Task 2**   Work out the Original Question
❖ **Activity 4: Join Ruth and Sharon**
  >>About this activity
    ❖ **Task 1**   Listen for General Information
    ❖ **Task 2**   Listen for Specific Information
    ❖ **Task 3**   Summarise Ruth's Marriage
    ❖ **Task 4**   Understand Various Functions

    ❖ **Task 5**   Express Regrets
    ❖ **Task 6**   Talk About Your Regrets
❖ **Activity 5: Marriage Language**
    ❖ **Task 1**   Choose the Best Answer
    ❖ **Task 2**   Understand Announcement
    ❖ **Task 3**   Analyse Information
    ❖ **Task 4**   Look for Role Names
    ❖ **Task 5**   Report a Chinese Marriage
❖ **Activity 6: Wedding Questions and Answers**
    ❖ **Task 1**   Talk About Weddings in the West
    ❖ **Task 2**   Work out Appropriate Questions
    ❖ **Task 3**   How to Answer Questions About Chinese Weddings
❖ **Activity 7: Language Points**
  >>About this activity
    ❖ **Task 1**   Listen for General information
    ❖ **Task 2**   Listen for Details
    ❖ **Task 3**   Express Your Plans and Hopes
    ❖ **Task 4**   Work out Meanings from the Context
    ❖ **Task 5**   Practise Aloud and Record Yourself
    ❖ **Task 6**   Review This Unit

Figure 6: Unit 6 > Activity 1>Task 1 "Find out Personal Information"

	Question	Answer(s)
J. A	1. Are you going out with anybody?	A. No, not at the moment.
	2. Do you have a boyfriend?	B. Probably towards the end of next year.
	3. Are you married?	C. Not any more. I was divorced 18 months ago.
	4. How long have you been engaged?	D. Not yet! We're getting married in June.
	5. Do you have (any) children?	E. Yeah! I got married last year.
	6. Where did you meet your wife?	F. No, not yet. We're hoping to start a family next year.
	7. How long have you been married?	G. You must be joking! I'm having too much fun being single!
	8. When are you getting married?	H. About six months.
		I. At work. We used to be colleagues.
		J. Yes, I am. In fact, I'm engaged.
		K. Next year, I hope.
		L. Three years...and we already have a daughter.

✔ Done

One writing assignment (deadline: November 5, 2013) and one read-aloud assignment (deadline: November 19, 2013) are required by this course. For the writing assignment, students are asked to write about one of their routine trips to work or back home by referring to a sample passage of the same topic in the textbook and using the suggested expressions (Figure 7). The grading is based on students' performance in three aspects: language (50%), content (40%), and structure and format (10%). On the assignment page, students have access to the file "Marking Criteria", which contains a detailed break-down of scores regarding different levels of performance in these aspects. For the read-aloud assignment (Figure 5), students are to listen, read, and record one sample passage. The marking criteria for read-aloud assignments are based on accuracy and fluency in pronunciation, intonation, and other oral skills such as pace, stress, liaison, and reduction. For both assignments, students can submit unlimited times before the

deadline, and only the last submission will be graded. For the grading of each assignment, all

submitted assignments are distributed by the system among all the online instructors of the

"Associate-to-BA" program nationwide. Grades and feedback usually are available online for

students to check in 2 to 3 weeks, and a national average score for the assignment is also

provided to the students.

Figure 7: Writing assignment for "English in Daily Life"

Assignment 01 for "English in Daily Life"(Units 1-4)

The total marks for this assignment are 100 points. Time allowed for completing this assignment is 1 hour (60 minutes).

PLEASE WRITE ALL YOUR ANSWERS ON THE ANSWER SHEET.

Writing

(1)
My Routine Trip

Instructions:Following the example in Unit 4, Activity 6, Task 2, write a brief account (120-150 words) describing your routine trip to a work place or to a study place.

The following expressions can be helpful for your writing, so you are suggested to use of them in your assignment.

A is about … (minutes/miles/kilometers/stops) from B
(regular/direct) bus service
all the way
It takes me about … (minutes/hours)
I spend the time (doing)
enjoy the peace and quiet of …
think about …
pass … on the way
I prefer …
It is quicker/cheaper/more expensive to do the whole journey by/on … *(Note: A particular means of transport is needed here.)*

English Module 2: English at Leisure

The second course, English at Leisure, which also emphasizing "learning by doing",

covers cultural topics in English speaking countries, such as shopping, holiday traditions, dining,

home improvement, entertainment, travel, sports and performance art. The overall design of the

course materials is the same as the first course, consisting of task-based activities in a

progressive manner. One writing assignment (deadline: December 10, 2013) and one read-aloud

assignment (deadline: December 15, 2013) are attached to this course. For the writing

assignment, students are to write a letter based on an imagined scenario, and there is also a

sample text as reference in the textbook and a list of words and expressions to use was provided

with the instruction (Figure 8). The read-aloud assignment has the same format and requirements

as the first one.

Figure 8: Writing assignment for "English at Leisure"

Assignment 01 for "English at Leisure" (Units 1-2)

The total marks for this assignment are 100 points. Time allowed for completing this assignment is 1 hour (60 minutes).

PLEASE WRITE ALL YOUR ANSWERS ON THE ANSWER SHEET.

Writing

（1）

In Task 1, Activity 7 of Unit 2, we looked at the conventions of writing a personal letter and examined the structure of Jack and Elsie's letter. Now, you should put what you have learned into practice and write a personal letter. Imagine the following situation:

You held a party at home to celebrate your birthday. You invited a dozen people, including your British friend Tony. Tony sent you a very interesting English book as a gift, but he couldn't join your party for he had to attend a business meeting out of town. You've read reviews which say the book is excellent.

The details of your party are given in the following table:

day of party:	last Sunday evening
gift you received:	an English book
time gift arrived:	last Friday
number of people at party:	a dozen (friends, colleagues and immediate family)
food:	sit-down meal
drinks:	white wine, beer, champagne and soft drinks flowed freely
John:	had a hangover the following day
Rick:	was as entertaining as ever
Gao Lan:	Rick's wife; looked wonderful in a bright red silk *qipao* -- the traditional Chinese dress
Zhou Yan & Li Chenhui:	particularly asked you to pass on their love and best wishes

Your letter should include these points:
·regrets for his not having been able to come
·comments on his gift
·thanks for the gift
·description of the gathering
·good wishes

A closer look at the course objectives and the nature of the assignments revealed some inconsistencies between these two components. First, while the courses emphasize the use of English to serve various purposes in various social situations, these assignments seemed to attach much greater importance on linguistic competence rather than functional and communicative

94

language ability. The writing assignments in both courses are basically mock-writing exercises with little room for students' own production and expression of idea, especially the second one which was based on an imagined scenario. Although the Marking Criteria covers more than just linguistic accuracy, the most salient component in the assignment instruction is the recommended works and expressions for students to use. As one of the participants (May) commented, "The writing assignment is easy, all you need is to use those words correctly"[5]. Moreover, for the two read-aloud assignments, although the assignment is named "Speaking Assignment" in Chinese, students are not required to produce any oral output on their own, only to repeat the sample text. Although as the instructor commented, "The assignments' were not difficult to finish, rather the main purposes were to serve as a kind of regulator so as to help students regulate their efforts and form some type of learning habit", such types of assignment could influence what the learners view are the valued knowledge or skills in English learning. As Garrison (2003) points out, it is through the assessment practices and the amount of content covered that students are shown what competence in a subject really means, the fact that the focuses of these assignments still attach substantial importance to linguistic accuracy over communicative fluency could potentially affect what learners perceive to be involved in language learning, and their way to approach the course materials.

Self-quiz and Final Exam

In each course, the online self-quiz for each unit is another required course work, and students must complete and submit all the unit self-quizzes before the final exam for the score to be valid as part of the total score for the course. While the self-quiz can only be done once and

---

[5] "那个写作作业就很简单了，只要用对了那些给的单词和短语就行了"。

will be graded and submitted automatically by the system, an unlimited practice section is available for each self-quiz, consisting of a pool of questions from which the self-quiz questions are drawn randomly. Therefore, students can get a full score in the self-quiz simply by remembering or copying the answers of the exercise questions.

In addition to the assignments and self-quizzes, each course has a final exam that consists of a paper-based test on listening, reading, and writing and a speaking test to be taken with another language partner. Both of the final exams are scheduled on the same day at the end of the semester, and all students are required to come to the campus to take the tests in the designated classrooms. According to the test instruction, the main focus of the final exam is on "listening and speaking skills". At least 50% of the questions/activities are taken directly from the textbooks, with the rest of the questions matching the topics and difficulty level of the courses. Before the final exams, students are provided with topic pools (4 topics for writing, 6 topics for speaking) for both the writing part and the speaking part, so they can prepare beforehand. While each course has its own paper test, there is only one speaking test, which consists of two topics, one for each course. During the speaking test, students have conversations with another language partner they choose before the exam on two topics randomly selected by the testers from the topic pool. The full score for both the paper test and the speaking test is 100, with the paper test taking up 70% of the course final exam score, and the speaking part takes up 30%. Sample tests are provided for the students to get familiar with the format of the paper-based test. Grading of the final exams is carried out by instructors working at local learning centers, and it takes about 2 months for the scores of the final exams and the total final scores for both courses to be available in the system.

For the two mandatory English modules, the final score for each course consists of students' performance in three areas: course assignments, self-quiz, and final exam. Among them, the final exam takes the majority of the final score of the course. Specifically, the total score for each course is calculated as such: Final total = average score of assignments×20%+ average score of self-quiz×10%+ total score of final exam×70%. To pass the course and gain the 6 credits, the final score of the course needs to be 60 or higher.

Pre-scheduled Teacher-Directed Tutorials

To facilitate student's self-study of the two courses, FTF tutorials are scheduled on every weekend (except during national holidays) on the campus of Beijing Foreign Studies University, 11 times total. Each FTF session lasts 4 hours that covers one or two units in the course. Based on the FTF lesson plans provided by the course instructor and the interview with her, the main focus of FTF session is on language function and performance, and aims to reinforce students' self-study of the course materials by engaging them in group or paired activities based on the tasks in each unit. The instructor would explain the tasks by integrating related key language points listed in the course materials, and provide feedback on students' performance. Prior to the final exam, an FTF session is dedicated to the preparation for the final exam and answering students' questions. For example, in the first FTF session that covered Unit 1-2 in "English in Daily Life", activities included taking turns doing self-introduction, a panel interview for the students to get to know each other, paired conversations, and monologue to talk about one's ideal home. Participation in the FTF class is recommended but not mandatory, and the students are reminded in the course orientation that they should not rely solely on the FTF class to study the course materials but plan their own learning pace.

Online teacher-directed tutorials are also scheduled, which are delivered through the school's web-conferencing system "VOB". In this first semester, a total of 6 teacher-led VOB sessions were delivered. Two of them were specifically designed as assignment tutorials and delivered before the writing assignment submission deadlines of the two courses respectively. These sessions aimed to help students better understand the purposes and demands of specific language tasks and provided opportunities for learners to improve their work before submission through self-checking, revising, and asking questions. The whole session was in the form of PowerPoint presentation, with the instructor being the sole presenter, who started from explaining the purposes, requirements, the grading criteria of the assignment, and related language points or rules, and then encouraged the students to share their works and ask questions. Sometimes, exercises or mini quizzes were arranged after each language point or certain rule was explained by the instructor, and students posted their answers on the public chat screen. The correct answers were posted by the instructor shortly after. The first VOB assignment tutorial was on October 30, 2013, and focused on the requirements and procedures of the first writing assignment. In particular, the instructor directed the students' attention to the fundamentals of English writing including capitalization, punctuation, format, using conjunctions to ensure logical cohesion, and the format of English passages.

The second VOB assignment tutorial was on December 4, 2013, in the same PowerPoint presentation format. What was worth noticing about this session was, while this session was originally dedicated to the second read-aloud assignment only, the instructor changed the agenda to answer students' questions about the second writing assignment as the students strongly demanded. Therefore, the first part of the tutorial focused on the format and process of writing a

letter in English, and the second part was about English pronunciation, intonation, and other essential speaking skills.

Of the other four VOB sessions, the first was an orientation to online distance language learning at the beginning of the semester, and the second and third were both delivered in two consecutive weeks following the orientation week and were designed as "speaking camps" that encouraged students to communicate in English during the online session on topics related to the units that students were currently supposed to be studying. Based on the researcher's observation of these VOB sessions, students' participation in the text-based interaction was much more active than speaking interactions, during which the teacher talked for the most part with only a handful of students speaking up.

<center>*Learning Management System*</center>

The learning management system (LMS) is developed and maintained by the school itself, and the main functionalities resemble mainstream LMSs such as Blackboard and Moodle. Upon successful registration to their program prior to the fall semester, students can access the courses by going to the CF Online homepage and login with their username and password, and then they are directed to their personal homepage (Figure 9), where they would find all the required courses in the first semester. On the personal homepage, students can navigate to different parts of the course website to manage their learning process, including enrolling in courses, accessing courseware, checking current course progress, submitting assignments, checking grades, scheduling final exams, and connecting to VOB and the Discussion Forum, etc. Public announcements such as updated class schedules and open lectures are also displayed on the homepage, together with contact information for learner support. Also on the homepage students can see their current learning progress regarding all the courses in this semester, with

<center>99</center>

the green bars indicating the target progress and yellow bars showing the students' actual progress in that course.

Figure 9: Home screen of the online learning platform of CF Online

Learning Materials

Offline Materials

For each course, students are provided with printed textbooks and audio materials (CDs). Both of the courses are thematically structured, each consisting of one orientation unit, eight themed units, and one review unit. Each theme-based unit is organized in the order of Objectives, Warm-up, Activities and Resources, and all the dialogues in each unit are available on the CDs. All the four language skills are integrated in the activities, with an overall emphasis on listening and speaking skills, in other words, communicative capacities.

Online Materials

Meanwhile, the same content in each course is also available in the form of a multimedia interactive module that is embedded in the learning management system. When using the online courseware, students are provided with a multimedia glossary on each page, with which students can access the meaning, pronunciation and examples of new words in the unit as needed (Figure 10). In addition to the courseware, a number of other stand-alone unit-based learning recourses are also available and can be accessed on the course's homepage (Figure 4), including course MP3 files, one unit instructional video delivered in Chinese, and another unit instructional video delivered in English. The instructional video in Chinese is in the form of a lecture delivered by the instructor in front of the camera, and the other video is the recording of a whole classroom instructional session, with the teacher interacting with the students through various types of activities. Noticeably, while the whole-class instructional video provides a more authentic scenario of learning and using English, the quality of the video is rather poor, with low resolution and a very small window that cannot be enlarged.

Figure 10: Activity page in Unit 2 of "English in Daily Life"

Interactions with Teacher and Peers

Students can choose to interact with their teachers and peers through various types of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in terms of different synchronicity and degree of privacy, as summarized in Table 5. From the beginning of their program, students were encouraged and reminded constantly of initiating and participating in discussions on the Discussion Forum. They were also assigned to a study group that consisted of 10 members. Study group members were required to get together and complete the first assignment following the orientation and study of *Guide to Success*, and were encouraged to get together online or offline to study and practice collectively. A general guideline on how to arrange group activity is also available in the Introduction section of *Guide to Success*, which includes tools students can

use to keep connected with group members and carry out learning activities, as well as benefits

of engaging in group learning activities. However, except for the first group activity required by

the *Guide to Success* assignment, students were on their own to decide to arrange more group

activities, and there was no requirement on students keeping record of additional group activities.

Table 5: Means of communication available to students

	Synchronous CMC	Asynchronous CMC
Public	• VOB online class • Group chat via QQ or WeChat	• Discussion Forum
Private	• Private chat during VOB online class • Study group discussion on VOB • Private communication via QQ or WeChat	• Emails • Short messages sent within CF Online system

Learner Support

There are different types of learner support available for the students during the learning

process. First, various types of learning aids are embedded in the interactive multimedia

courseware. For example, the course content is both in text on the screen and audio-recorded by

native speakers of English. Students can choose to read the text or listen to the content, or both at

the same time. On each screen in the courseware, the left column all consists of a media player, a

recorder and the glossary. Moreover, on the course's home screen, students can download the

MP3 file for each unit and watch the video lectures given by the course instructor at CF Online.

Second, besides the course instructors who can help with course related questions, each student

also has an academic adviser and a tutor to turn to. The academic adviser answers general

questions about the process and procedure of the online distance learning program, such as

registration, course enrollment, financial issues and so forth. And the tutor, who works as a

volunteer, is responsible for the study group and provides assistance by answering language

learning related questions and proofreading work samples sent by the students. Furthermore, a toll-free hotline is available 24/7 to help students solve technical difficulties and is displayed in red characters at the top right on every screen. Last of all, the school has a public social networking account on WeChat for all its online distance learners, which delivers on a regular basis information regarding strategies for English learning and use, tips for online learning, announcements for public lectures, and information on contemporary cultures in English speaking countries.

Summary

Overall, the structure of the program can be seen as materials-centered (Bown, 2009; Kostina, 2011). In terms of the teaching philosophy and pedagogical model, while the course materials are developed to emphasize language use, the rest of the pedagogical components seem more of a traditional model characterized by explicit and implicit emphasis on linguistic accuracy over communicative competence and one-way transmission of information during the teacher-directed learning sessions. The forms of assessment are also quite traditionally oriented, attaching more importance to linguistic accuracy, with little room for personal meaning creation and negotiation. It has rigid sets of goals, pre-determined lengths, and pre-set or recommended linear progression throughout the semester. In spite of the strictly planned curriculum, students still have some degree of control over their learning. Students learn at their own pace, which can be faster or slower than the recommended rate of progress, i.e. one unit per week. While working on a certain unit, they can decide how to go about the study: they can follow the order of the content and activities shown in the courseware or jumping between different activities or sections; they can choose to learn with the multimodal representations of knowledge (e.g., textual, audio or video). They can control whether or not, or how to use the learning aids on the

104

left side bar; and they can decide what type of knowledge or language skill in the target language they want to focus on and then choose the preferred learning resources they could use, e.g., the student may do the extra reading or listening tasks in the Supplementary Resources section based on which aspects of the target language he or she wants to improve. Moreover, it is up to the students to decide if they want to seek for help or engage in social interaction with teachers or peers and in what way(s).

CHAPTER V: EFL LEARNERS' MCK ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING IN WEB-BASED DISTANCE MODE

This chapter presents and discusses findings that answer the first research question, "What metacognitive knowledge about language learning do adult EFL learners have in the context of web-based distance learning?" At the beginning of the semester, the 6 participants reported 472 instances of MCK, encompassing all 4 dimensions, namely person (PK), task (TK), strategy (SK) and context (CK) (see Figure 11 for a summary of the frequency count for each dimension). Significantly, the interview data revealed contrasting differences in the scope, depth, and specificity of learners' MCK about language learning in the web-based DLL context among the six participants (see Table 6 for a summary for each participant's MCK). Such variations in their MCK base were reflected in how they approached their online English learning in this program, rendering them starting this semester with different levels of readiness. Findings will be discussed under each MCK dimension in terms of main themes and significant patterns that emerged from the data.

Figure 11: MCK dimensions (Frequency)
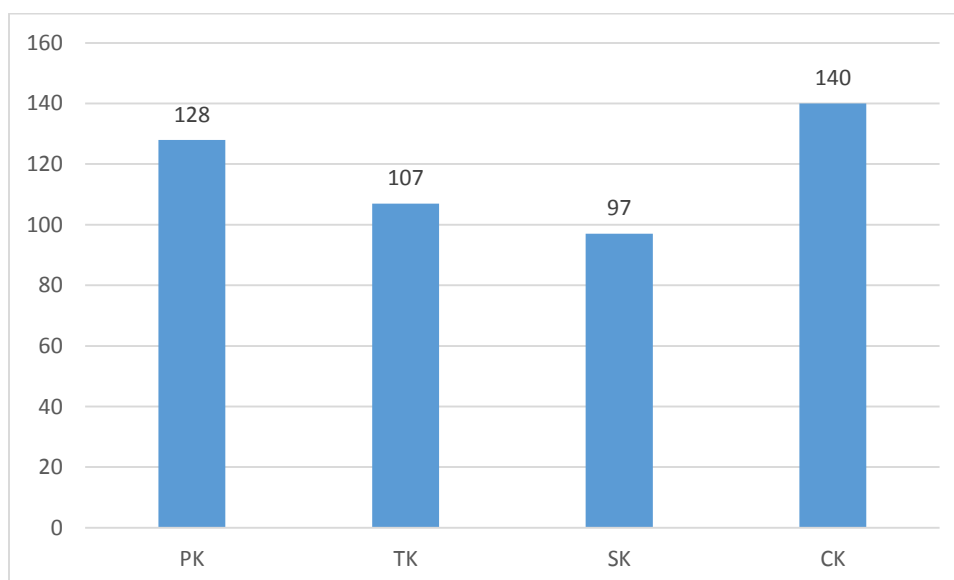
Table 6: Summary of participants' MCK at the beginning of the semester

Name	Basic Profile	Key Characteristics of MCK
Cai	• Male, 25 • Low English proficiency • High OLRS score • No DLL experience	Overall a weaker MCK base: • PK: Low self-assessment, especially weak in vocabulary and grammar; unrealistic study goals • TK: English learning involved building vocabulary and grammar; online learning needed more efforts • SK: Limited in self-regulated of learning: planning on following the teacher and FTF class; Self-study was to preview the key words and language points • CK: Online learning was less effective than FTF; Teacher was dominant; keeping in touch with peers served as external motivation
Yang	• Male, 21 • Low English Proficiency • Medium OLRS score • No DLL experience	Overall a very weak MCK base: • PK: Inaccurate, inflated self-assessment; no clear study goals • TK: English learning involved building vocabulary; online learning was novel and interesting • SK: Limited in self-regulated of learning: planning on following the teacher and FTF class; FTF class was real learning, self-study was preview; inflexible strategy used in all tasks: direct translation; asking the teacher questions was the most effective strategy • CK: Online learning was less effective that FTF; teacher was dominant
May	• Female, 38 • Medium English proficiency • Low OLRS score • No DLL experience	Overall a weaker MCK base: • PK: The biggest barrier was the negative effects of personality weaknesses: high anxiety when speaking English, lack of persistence, "take-it-easy" attitude • TK: "English learning does not require understanding"; Vocabulary was the key to everything • SK: Limited in self-regulated learning: planning on following the teacher, keeping up with the FTF class; rote learning-based strategy • CK: Uncertain about the effectiveness of online learning; teacher should perform most of the learning functions
Jing	• Female, 27 • High English proficiency • Medium OLRS score • No DLL experience • English used in daily work	Overall a solid MCK base: • PK: clear Self-assessment; strengths in communicative abilities; realistic study goals • TK: Language was a tool for communication; online learning was all up to one's own control • SK: Clear planning, awareness of self-monitoring; emphasizing communicative language strategies and social competence • CK: Understanding of program's requirements in relation to personal needs; teacher should be a coach when needed

Table 6 (cont'd)

Lan	• Female, 58 • High English proficiency • Medium OLRS score • No DLL experience • Self-directed English learning experience • English used in daily work as Chinese language instructor	<u>Overall a solid MCK base</u>: • PK: Clear self-assessment; realistic study goals • TK: Language learning as meaning making appropriate to another culture; social interaction was key to success • SK: Detailed planning on time management and learning activities; multiple ways for self-monitoring; broader task-specific strategy knowledge; strong social competence • CK: Understanding of the nature and requirements of the program; teacher was to provide guidance and direction
Gao	• Male, 38 • Medium English proficiency • Low OLRS score • Previous DLL experience • Previous self-directed English learning experience	<u>Overall a highly sophisticated MCK base</u>: • PK: Clear and well-informed self-assessment; clear study goals; emphasis on the psychological readiness for online learning • TK: Language learning was learning how to express oneself properly in another culture; personal theories of key conditions required for successful online learning • SK: Detailed study plan based on previous self-directed experience; differentiated strategies use for different language tasks; emphasis on social interaction • CK: Understanding of the online learning environment and the particular program; differentiated evaluations of available learning sources and tools

Person Knowledge

All participants started out this program with some knowledge about themselves as language learners, and how it might influence their English learning in the online context. Their personal knowledge was grouped into three sub-categories: self-assessment, personal qualities, and self-motivational factors (see Figure 12 for a summary of the frequency count for each sub-category).

Figure 12: Content representation of person knowledge (Frequency)
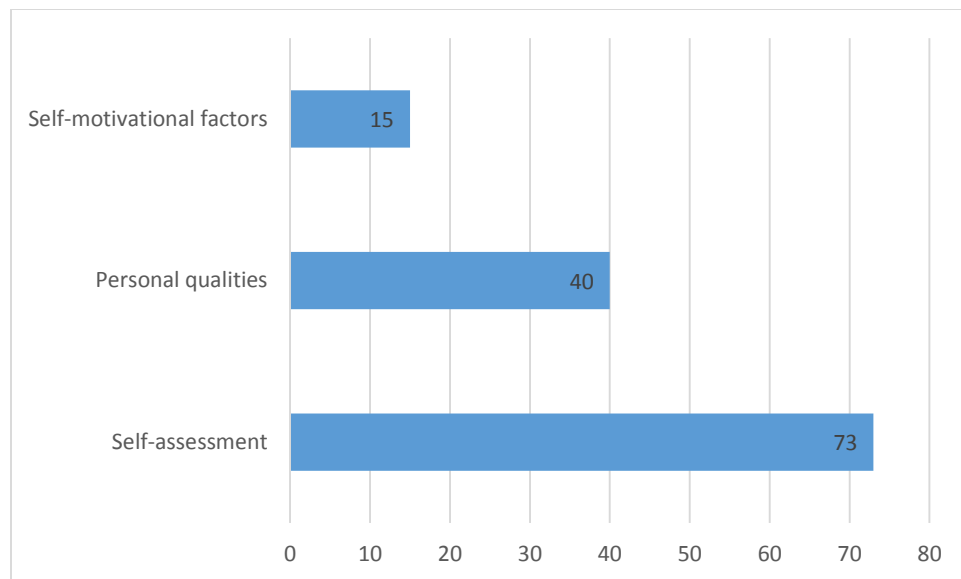
Self-Assessment

The self-assessment category refers to participants' knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses as English learners in specific skill areas or their general English ability. This category was in the foreground of participants' self-knowledge. Overall, learners' self-assessments were mostly negative (72.4%), emphasizing problems and weaknesses in their English knowledge and skills. Among the cited weaknesses, low linguistic proficiency, especially insufficient vocabulary knowledge, was the most prominent in all participants' self-knowledge. Accordingly, enhancing linguistic proficiency through vocabulary building was one major learning need perceived by all six participants. For example, Cai evaluated his current proficiency levels as "quite low in all aspects", among which writing was the worst, because he had had "very limited vocabulary, lots of grammar mistakes, and very little writing practice"[6].

---

[6] "（我的）词汇量很小，语法也有好多错儿，写作基本没怎么练过。"

Apart from this common concern, participants' self-knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses varied substantially in terms of accuracy and specificity. On the one hand, some learners' self-knowledge was generally vague, limited or even inaccurate. For example, in Yang's case, not only did he not have accurate self-knowledge about his current English proficiency, he even showed a tendency to over-estimate his English ability. When first asked about his self-perceived weaknesses in English, he was rather reluctant to provide any direct answer; instead he referred to his weakness as "not spending enough time studying". When asked to elaborate on this question, he responded that his abilities regarding the four language skills were "all fine", except that he was "only a little weak in writing". And his descriptions of his problems in writing were rather ambiguous, again indicating his limited knowledge about the writing process in English:

> 写……有的时候……写的时候，就是……应该是用单词，可能……其实是他们是用另一个单词，然后我有时候用的是最……简单的那个表达意思。可能有的时候语法不通？还有时候，写的，它比如说，150 到 200字，然后我写得少点，不到 150。

> （*Sometimes…in my writing…like the choice of words...others might use a different word, while I used a rather simple one; maybe…sometimes, my grammar was not making sense…? Or, sometimes, like if the word limit is 150-200, I could not write that many.*）

In fact, a review of his first writing assignment indicated serious problems in his grammar, syntax, and extreme lack of attention to the mechanics of writing, including punctuation, capitalization, and basic formatting. Meanwhile, although he did not mention any weakness in his speaking English, based on the few times he attempted to say something in English during the interview, it was clear that he had trouble pronouncing the words properly and forming complete and grammatically correct sentences. Later a review of his read-aloud assignments confirmed this evaluation. While Yang's apparent over-confidence might be partly

attributed to his intention to have a good impression in front of the researcher (e.g., at the end of the first interview he asked, "Did I sound too shallow?"[7]), it could also be an indication of his lack of sufficient self-knowledge to detect what his problems were. This was again shown in his response to one of the questions in the "*Guide to Success*" assignment regarding foreseen difficulties or anxieties about online English learning, for which his response was: "My major difficulty is that my understanding is poor, so I have to do more memorization to make up for it[8]". This statement showed that while he clearly was not totally comfortable with his ability to learn, he did not yet understand the nature of the problem nor knew how to fix it.

On the other hand, other learners held a much clearer and specific self-assessment of their proficiency in different skill areas, which was always grounded in information gained from self-monitoring of their ongoing task performance, as well as self-observation of changes in their proficiency level over time. For example, Jing, who was quite confident that her speaking English was better than a lot of EFL learners in China because of her school and work experience, stressed that there was still a long way to go before she reached the highest level, and that her limited vocabulary knowledge was one major barrier to her having in-depth communication. As she explained,

> *啊，我觉得我不是成功的。我觉得我顶多就是能够简单地交流，但是在……确实在……如果把英语的学习分为5个阶段的话，我觉得我目前可能是在2.1阶段。*
>
> *(Ah…I don't think I am a successful English learner yet. The best I can do is to engage in basic communications in English. But…actually… if, say there are 5 phases of English study, I think right now I am at phase 2.1).*

---

[7] "我是不是说得太浅了？"
[8] "我的问题就是理解上比较差，所以我要多记多背把这一块弥补。"

我觉得这个（词汇）是我最需要加强的地方。因为我觉得我已经有了一定的英语基础，有了一定的英语架构了，然后在词汇量增加的时候，也会增加我们的阅读量，以及跟别人谈论的深度。

(I think this [vocabulary] is what I need to improve the most. Now that I have already had some foundation in English and had established the structure of English, further expansion of my vocabulary will then lead to increase in reading and in the depth of the conversations that I can have with others.)

Gao, who had a long English learning history in both traditional and non-traditional settings, provided a detailed account of the fluctuations in his English ability and how they were related to the various instructional styles and teaching qualities he had experienced at different stages over his more than 20 years of English learning history:

那时候就是初中英语老师教得还不错。而且那个时候我们的中考要求也是比较高的，所以我那个时候感觉……就是英语基础非常好。那么后来之后呢，就是说我们那个时候……我毕业，没有上高中, 就只上一个中专。从那以后就完了，从那以后我英语一下子就下滑了。因为，那个时候，年龄，才十几岁，也不知道自己应该怎么样去学。就是跟着老师学。

(During middle school years…our English teacher at that time was really good, and the high school entrance exam at that time also had quite high standards for English, so I was able to build a pretty good foundation in English back then. … After that, I didn't go to high school, but a technical secondary school, that's when my English started going downhill quickly; because I was too young back then, knowing nothing about how to learn English on my own. So I had no choice but following the teacher.)

工作几年之后，就觉得，应该好好学习学习英语。那时候在天津大学，它有一个大学英语的辅导班。在那里头，上到了大学英语第三册，从第一册开始一直上到第三册。之后，我决定参加高考，所以就真是努力学英语了，为了参加高考。那段时间，我的英语是提高到了一定水平的。……虽然后来是没有上大学，但是英语我是一直坚持学到2006 年从北医毕业，拿到他们网院学士学位。不过毕业之后呢，就是差不多2006 年的时候就完了。一直到现在，很长时间没有接触英语了。因为工作时间，长期跟英语没有接触。而且，也没有这方面压力了。所以我这一下子水平又下来了。

（Years later after I started working, I still hoped that I could really improve my English, so I enrolled in a tutorial class offered by Tianjin University, where I studied College English (I) through (III). After that I decided to go

back to college, so I studied English really hard to prepare for the College Entrance Exam. During that time, my English was substantially improved. … Although I ended up not going to college, I did not stop learning English until I graduated from the online BA program at the Peking Medicine University in 2006. Since then, I haven't studied or used English for a long time, because my job doesn't need English, and there's been no point for me to keep studying, so my proficiency level went down a lot. ）

Of the four language skills, Gao thought his reading comprehension was "relatively better", since "grammar and reading comprehension were the major focuses of all the previous English courses". Yet the lack of emphasis on and practicing in other skills areas had then resulted in his "incapability" to listen, speak, and write, as reflected in the following self-evaluation:

所以呢，就是……我能看，你给我一篇文章，我能看。但是你要让我去说，去写，我不行，完不成这个……能力。这方面能力不具备。

(So… I can read. When you give me an article, I can read it. But if you ask me to speak or write about it, I can't do it. I have zero ability in this regard.)

Personal Qualities

During the first interviews, participants talked about a range of personal qualities that they thought important for language learning in general and online language learning in particular, including personality traits, personal preferences, attitudes, age and social skills. While all participants cited "persistence" and "hard work" as key qualities for success, the influences of personal traits appeared to be much greater to some learners than to others. For instance, May was particularly concerned with how her "timidity" and "lack of persistence", could impede her progress in learning English and her performance in using it. At the outset of the semester, May was preoccupied with deep self-doubt in her effectiveness as an English learner and her ability to keep up with this online English program. To May, one of her major

problems was that she "lacked the courage to speak up" as she felt very nervous when talking in English, even more so with native speakers:

> 我觉得…就是不好意思那种，总是不敢张嘴。而且，听力呢……听中国人说英语，我还好。一旦外国人说英语，我就立马就，就紧张起来了。
>
> *(I feel…really embarrassed, really dare not to open my mouth. Also, while I am fine when listening to Chinese people speaking English, as soon as I am with foreigners, I get nervous right away.)*

She even felt anxious when being around people whose proficiency levels were higher than hers. As she recalled, while in class, she was usually very self-conscious and dared not to speak up for fear of being laughed at. Her recollection of these experiences indicated that she had been subjected to a strong affective filter, which gave rise to high levels of anxiety and inhibited her from effectively engaging in social interactions in English. She believed that development in her English ability would go smoothly as long as she could be bolder and more "thick-skinned".

May thought another weakness that had made her a less successful learner was her lack of perseverance in learning and unwillingness to endure hardship, as reflected in the following:

> 我这人，唯一的就是，干什么事，就吊儿郎当。一开始比较有信心，然后过两天就坚持不下去了。所以，这是我最大的问题。就是，不爱吃苦。学习是一个挺苦的事儿。
>
> *(The one thing always true about me is: no matter what I do, I take it easy. Usually I set off with lots of confidence, and then after a few days my motivation would start waning. So this is my biggest problem: unwilling to bear any hardship, yet learning is a really hard process.)*

Furthermore, May's understandings of the demands of online distance learning added more uncertainty to the prospect of her learning in this online program, as she stated, "this (online language learning) probably needs more self-discipline. Without it, it would be very

difficult to keep on. In any case, it would be a big challenge for me[9]." Actually, she was quite torn between online and classroom learning, since none of them could accommodate both of her weaknesses at the same time. On the one hand, she thought traditional teacher directed learning in the classroom should be more effective because less self-discipline would be required; but she would still dare not to speak up because "FTF class could cause psychological burden". On the other hand, she felt more courageous to participate during VOB sessions since "no one could see", but it would only work if she could be persistent, which she was not sure about at that moment.

The importance of being persistent and brave was also cited by Jing, who stressed that "persistence was the key to all endeavors"[10], and "bravery was especially crucial for language learning, because one had to be brave enough to imitate how other people spoke and to communicate with others courageously"[11]. Meanwhile, Jing and another two participants, Lan and Gao, were also aware of characteristics of adult learners that could affect their learning progress and outcomes. For instance, Jing thought that correcting their accent and pronunciation would be "almost impossible" for adult EFL learners, as their way of speaking English had already "fossilized"; therefore adult learners should be focusing on expanding their knowledge about authentic expressions in English.

More significantly, Gao, based on his previous experience with online distance learning, specifically emphasized the importance of "psychological readiness" for online learning. In his

---

[9] "这个（网络英语）应该也是需要更多自制力，不然的话，很难坚持下来。反正对我来说是个很大的挑战。"
[10] "坚持是做任何是都必须的"。
[11] "对学外语来说，勇敢是特别必要的，因为一个人要足够用该才能去模仿其他人说话，和别人交流"。

view, to get prepared psychologically for online learning, one needed to assume the central role

in the learning process and remain motivated and confident throughout. In his own words,

> 根据我之前在北医网院的经验，基本上来讲是这样的：网络教学首先它
> 面临的最大的问题，并不是课程的问题，最大的问题在于学习心理的问
> 题。一句话，是学习者他自身的问题。也就是说，最大的问题在于什么
> 呢？他缺少一个自信心。比如他一开始学的时候，他觉得这个东西特别
> 难学。"唉，我没有这个能力。" 然后呢他开始学，学⋯⋯就发现，越
> 学越难，困难越来越多啊。这困难也没地方找人去帮忙去解决。这样一
> 来，越学越困难，那干脆就不学了。

> *(Based on my observations during my previous study at Beiyi, the biggest
> challenge for online learners is not about the curriculum but their own
> learning psychology. In short, the key to success is in themselves. A lot of
> online learners ended up quitting because of the loss of confidence over time.
> For example, when one student may feel the program quite difficult at the
> outset, he would doubt himself, "oh, I am not capable of this". As the semester
> goes, the course would get more and more difficult…plus if he had no one to
> help solving the problems, eventually he would just quit.)*

Self-Motivational Factors

Self-motivational factors refer to participants' knowledge about their interest,

motivations, and goals in English learning. All participants in this study expressed their long-

lasting interests in learning English and learning about its culture, as well as admiration for

people who could speak English fluently. All learners were driven to continue their English

learning through this program by a mixture of motivations (see Figure 13 for the frequency count

for different self-motivational factors), including to facilitate professional development or to

secure a brighter career path (career-oriented motivation), to be able to communicate effectively

with Laowai (native speakers) (communication-oriented motivations), and to enhance and

improve one's own capacity as a life-long learner (self-enhancement orientation). Interestingly,

for some, career-oriented motivation was more urgent. For instance, May lately started a new job

in a multinational company where English was the working language. Besides, she had found

116

that most of her current co-workers had very high English proficiency, which became another

source of pressure that drove her to improve her own English. Lan, who was a Mandarin Chinese

teacher in a school based in Korea where English was their working language, felt that strong

English ability could be very helpful in enhancing the teaching of Chinese and could also help

her better communicate with the students as well as colleagues. For others, however, this

motivation seemed to be more of an influence of the commonly shared belief among Chinese

people that English was an essential means for social mobility, rather than a clear personal

motivation. For example, neither Cai or Yang had an immediate use for English in their current

jobs, and they only held a vague assumption that better English skills could bring better career

opportunities in the future.

Figure 13: Motivations for continuing English learning (Frequency)
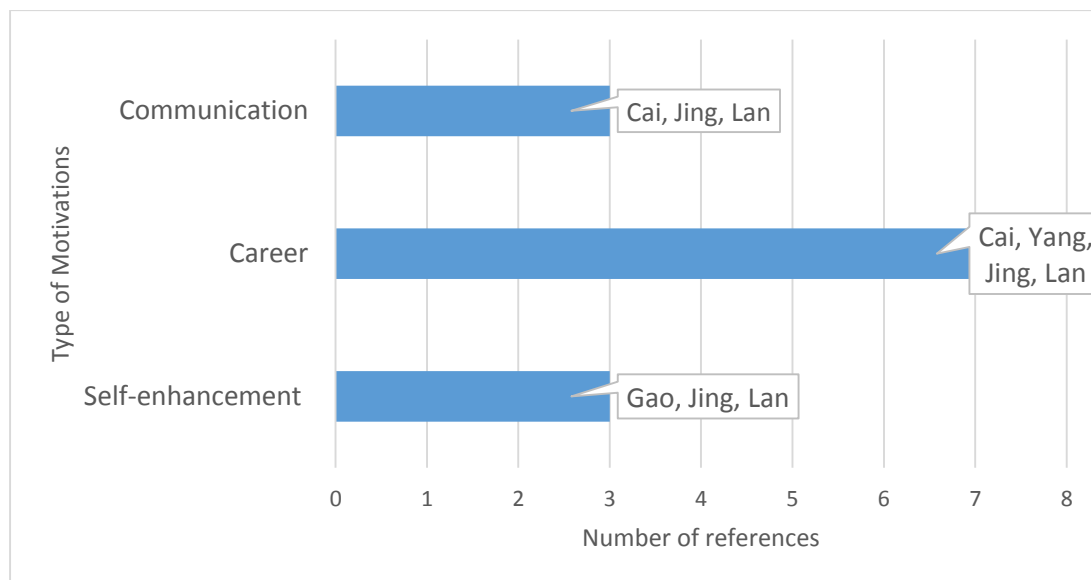
Other learners' decision to continue their English study was primarily grounded in their

intrinsic motivations to improve their knowledge and ability in English; other instrumental

motivations, such as a BA degree or better career prospects were viewed as only supplementary

or secondary. Jing, for example, wanted to take advantage of living in Beijing by making the most out of the rich learning resources and opportunities available to her. In Gao's case, his motivation to further develop his English proficiency was driven by his all-time goal to keep pursuing true knowledge and skills. As explained in his own words, "learning was my way of life"[12] and "I couldn't live without a clear goal"[13]. His expectations for learning through this program were to substantially improve his knowledge and skills in English, especially knowledge related to his professional and personal interests. In his view, anything that was potentially "thought-provoking" was particularly motivating to him, and things like how to get a high score in the exam or to get a BA degree in order to get promoted at work were not much of his concern:

> *但是我对一个事情，能够停下来去思考的时候，我就特别感兴趣。我甚至可以去深入的搜索这方面的资料，甚至去跟别人去矫情去抬杠去，我都有可能。比如说，日常英语涉及到的医学这方面，这方面，我觉得它只是给我一个方向。那么我在这个方向上我还可以继续深入学习下去。我对这个卷面的东西，不是特别感兴趣，考分如何如何，我不要求，我只是想能够去展开一个深入的思考。我觉得，这个人活着是非常有意思的事情。*

> *(I am really interested in those things… that could make me stop to think. … I would not mind spending more time and energy to dig deeper, or even arguing with someone. For example, one of the units in "English in Daily Life" is about medicine. It points to a direction for me, toward which I can keep exploring. I don't care much about the exam or how much I can score; all I want are opportunities to think in-depth. I believe this is one way to have a meaningful life.)*

Furthermore, learners also varied in the specificity of their study goals, namely what they expected to gain from this program, which also seemed to be tied to their knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. Some learners demonstrated a clear and comprehensive consideration

---

[12] "学习是我的生活方式"。
[13] "我或者不能没有一个明确的目标"。

of their study goals in relation to current proficiency level, career goals, or life goals. And their expectations out of learning through this online problem were also quite realistic, reflecting their understanding of the program's affordances and their own learning needs. For example, Jing and Gao particularly stressed that each individual should have their own agenda, rather than following the teacher "blindly". And to set realistic and practical learning goals one must consider one's current proficiency level and what one hoped to use English for professionally. Jing also held a clear and realistic vision as to what she expected to learn from this program:

> 首先我打算，之后的话，选择英语翻译类的。因为，现在在我的工作中，遇到很多需要翻译的。其实，简单的意思都能够达到，但是没有翻译得那么精准。在英文翻译成中文的时候比较没有中文翻译成英文的时候那么有难度。所以我想在英语翻译这一块儿学习一下。北外专业的老师教，如何更准确的去翻译。这样的话，可能对我以后的就业，会比较有帮助。
>
> *(First of all, my plan is to choose the specialty in "Translation" in the 3rd year, because right now my work involves lots of translation. Although I could get the general meaning right, I still need to work on the accuracy. … Therefore, I hope to learn more about English-Chinese translation from the professional teachers at CF. I think this will benefit my career in the future.)*

Nonetheless, other learners showed varying degrees of uncertainty and ambiguity in their personal goals, some of which even seemed unrealistic given their current proficiency level. For example, May's goal was more of a tentative projection (e.g., "If I could learn English well, I also want to go study abroad"[14]). Cai was aiming for being able to communicate with native speakers fluently after the 2.5 years study in this program. And in Yang's case, at the time of the first interview, he was not very sure about what exactly he expected to learn in this program.

---

[14] "如果我能把英语学好的话，我也想出国留学。"

119

Perhaps somehow inspired by the conversation with the researcher, he thought his goal "might be to fix his weakness"[15], which was writing.

Task Knowledge

At the beginning of the semester, task knowledge reported by participants could be grouped into three sub-categories: nature of language learning, demands of web-based DLL, and perceived difficulties in web-based DLL (see Figure 14 for the frequency count of each sub-category).

Figure 14: Content representation of task knowledge (Frequency)
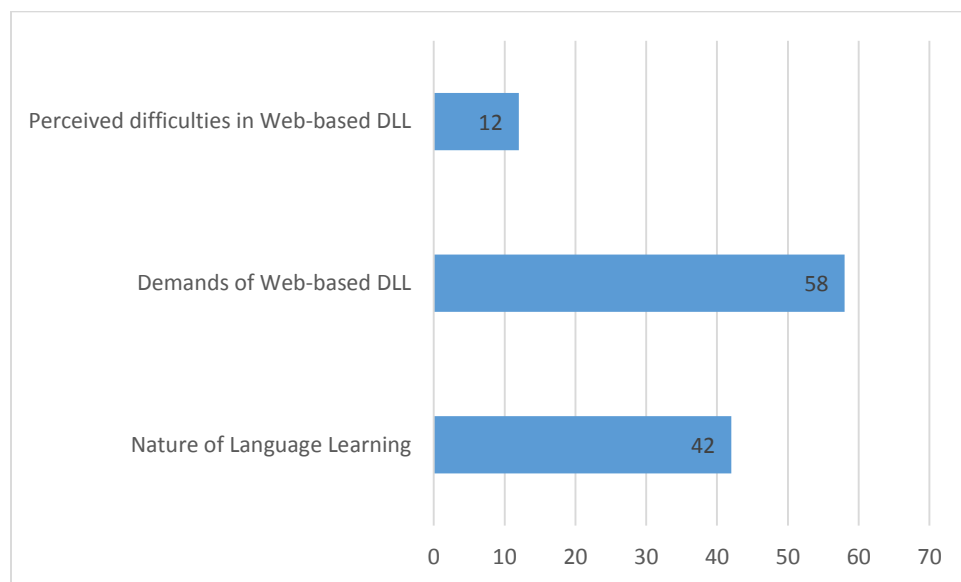
Nature of Language Learning

The data showed that learners held two different views toward what was involved in the process of language learning. These views were also reflected in their knowledge and selection of learning strategies and how they evaluated their learning process and outcomes. Some learners

---

[15] "(我的目标) 可能应该是补足我的弱项吧。"

interpreted the process of language learning as primarily quantitative in nature (Benson & Lor, 1999). To them, learning another language was mainly about learning the linguistic knowledge, namely vocabulary and grammar. May even went as far as claiming that learning English did not require comprehension. As she explained, "English learning does not require understanding. Unlike in math, one has to understand the equation in order to use it to solve problems"[16]. Therefore, when learning English, all she had to do was to "memorize everything". Moreover, she noted that learning English mainly involved learning the vocabulary and useful expressions, and acquiring a large vocabulary was the key to the development of all language skills.

Other learners held a more qualitative conceptualization of language learning, such as Jing, Lan, and Gao. While also acknowledging the crucial role of vocabulary building, they all stressed that learning a language should be more than just studying the linguistic knowledge, but also developing the knowledge and skills to use the language appropriately in various real-life contexts. For example, in Lan's opinion, learning a foreign language usually involved comparing one's own culture with the foreign culture, and language served as the bridge that connected countries and people. As a result, these learners all emphasized the importance of developing knowledge and skills to express one's thoughts in English correctly and appropriately.

Demands of Web-Based DLL

In terms of knowledge, skills, conditions necessary for web-based DLL, all participants talked about the important role of self-discipline and self-control in online language learning due to the lack of regular external supervision from the teacher. For example, Jing emphasized that

---

[16] "我觉得学英语是不需要理解的。不像数学，你的理解了那些公式之后才能做题。"

learning English through an online program meant one had to totally rely on oneself to plan the

time and learning pace so as to accommodate one's own ability and goals:

> *你可以个人支配你自己的时间。因为学习的进度跟时间都是你自己调整的。没有老师去强迫你说，你一定要在一周之内学习4个单元或是5个单元。完全是根据你个人的能力。*
>
> *(Since it's up to you to arrange the time and pace of your study, you have control over how to allocate your time. The teacher would not force you, asking that "you must finish 4 units or 5 units within a week". It all depends on your own capabilities.)*

In addition, all participants acknowledged the need to maintain social connectedness with

the teacher and their peers in online learning, since online learning could make one feel lonely

and isolated. As Cai explained,

> *我们的学习小组有QQ群；我们一起做作业，成功指南作业；我们也互相鼓励，比如问问你学到哪里了，自己得赶上；因为一个人学的话，有的时候会觉得孤单；和同学们聊天就会好一些。*
>
> *(Working with others through our QQ group, we could do assignments together, like the one we just did for "Guide to Success"; we could also motivate each other, such as through asking about each other's progress and striving to catch up. If you were just learning on your own, you might feel lonely from time to time, having someone to talk to could definitely make you feel better.)*

In Lan's case, she believed that interacting with the teacher and other students was not

only necessary for online language learning, but also the key to any endeavor if one wanted to

succeed. At various points during the first interview, she brought up the essential role of social

interaction:

> *其实要想成功的话呢。它不是你一个人的问题，不是你一个人就能成功。你一定要跟老师或同学，要有一个互助，有一个互动。那么你才能在同学和老师的帮助下，来提高自己和达到你的目标。其实靠一个人是不行的。*

(If you want to be successful, you need to realize that you can't be successful by just working on your own. You must have interactions with the teacher and other students. Only with their help can you achieve your goal.)

Moreover, learners with a broader and deeper understanding of the demands of web-based DLL were aware of other important conditions for successful online language learning. The first condition cited was to "fully take on the role" of an online distance language learner. In Lan's opinion, this meant to "maintain a learning state of mind" and "truly take ownership of the materials"[17]. For Jing, it should involve pacing one's study according to one's own ability.

Second was to "create a conducive learning environment" for online language learning, which, in Gao's and Jing's opinion, involved constructing a physical environment favorable for learning and getting a thorough understanding of the online learning context, i.e. everything about the CF Online program. As reflected in the following excerpt from Jing:

首先的话，你肯定是要根据自己的程度，来选择一个适合你的。这边的话是有，高升专的，也就是专科学习跟本科学习。是不同程度的。其实，我个人认为，不代表说，你一定要去学本科的学。关键是在看，你要的是什么。根据你自己的基础选一个合适的，并且在下学期的时候，第二学期的时候，你可以根据自己的兴趣和爱好，选一个自己有兴趣的方向去学这个英语。然后，另外一个的话，当然，最基础的，就是你必须对电脑操作是比较熟悉的。而且你在学习的初期，一定要对那些，新生拓展训练里面的相关课程，必须要学习。因为这个跟正常的上课是不一样的。所以你必须知道你接下来要怎么做，以及接下来这些课程，它的层次，递进关系是怎样，这样才能安排好你的学习。

(First of all, you should choose the right program based on your own level. The school offers programs that target different starting levels. Just because the "Associate to BA" track is more advanced doesn't mean you have to sign up for this one. The key is to choose one that fits your ability. … Second, at the initial stage, you must carefully study the orientation course "Guide To Success", because this online program is very different from the conventional classroom learning. To effectively manage your study, you must have knowledge of what to do next and of the following courses, understanding how they are related to each other.)

---

[17] "保持一个学习的状态"、"真正地掌握课本的内容"

Perceived Difficulties in Web-Based DLL

Related to their understandings of the demands of web-based DLL, learners were also conscious of difficulties they might encounter in this online English program. For example, to May, the biggest challenge was to keep up with the learning pace without much external supervision, since she was worried that her lack of persistence might result in her quitting. And she was still hesitant about speaking up in front of others, even in an online learning environment. In addition, other learners prepared themselves for online language learning based on their previous experiences with online learning or self-directed language learning, such as Gao and Lan. For example, when talking about the importance of establishing a learning routine, Gao warned that,

> *反正我感觉就是，嗯，头一学期恐怕是最乱的。只要，只要把这个最乱的学期，这个生活方式能够定下来。开好这个头，那么以后就按照这样的生活方式走下去就好了。*
>
> *(I am afraid that the first semester will be the messiest period of the whole online program. As long as you can get through the first semester, establish a good routine, in the following semesters you just need to keep up with the routine.)*

Lan was concerned the "largely varied proficiency levels among the students", which made it hard to practice with peers at a similar level. She believed that in order to benefit more from the program, it was important to adjust one's attitudes toward finding language partners who could fit one's expectations and figure out ways that could help both parties improve. However, these concerns were absent in inexperienced learners, such as Cai and Yang, who only projected technical difficulties (e.g., trouble in accessing internet or VOB) in their online learning.

At the beginning of the semester, participants reported a range of strategies regarding how to manage their English study in this program, go about specific tasks, and get help or stay connected within the learning community. Their strategy knowledge was grouped into three sub-categories: metacognitive strategy, task-specific strategy, and social and affective strategy (see Figure 15 for the frequency count of each sub-category), with metacognitive strategies foregrounded in participants self-reports. The data revealed that participants' strategy knowledge varied substantially in terms of its scope, appropriateness, and specificity. Whereas some learners' strategy knowledge was rather limited, superficial, and sometimes even misconceived, others demonstrated a much broader and comprehensive strategy repertoire.

Figure 15: Content representation of strategy knowledge (Frequency)
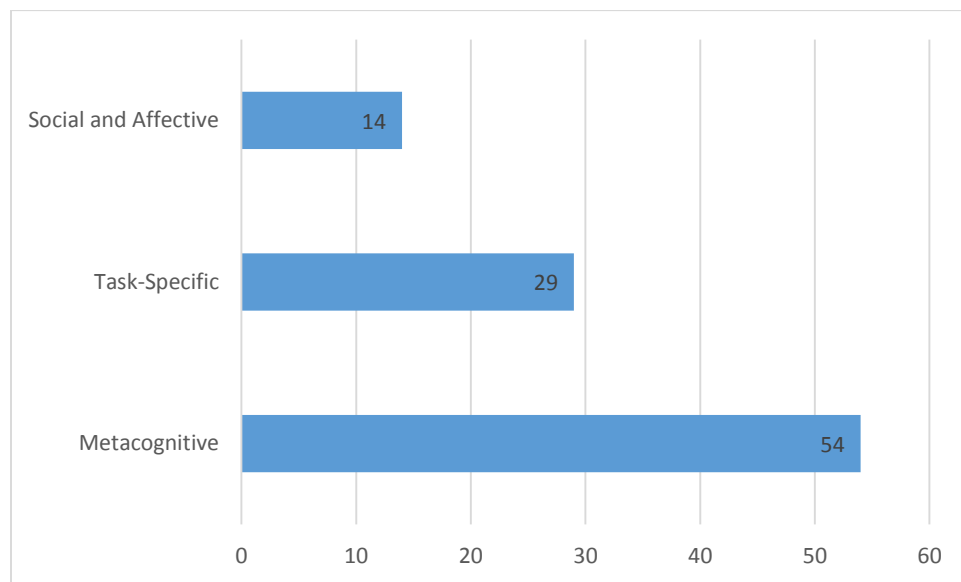
Metacognitive Strategy

Metacognitive strategy knowledge comprises an understanding of how learners manage their web-based DLL through planning, monitoring, and evaluation. The results showed

distinctive differences in participants' knowledge about self-regulation of online language learning. For Cai, Yang, and May, their proposed learning approach basically mirrored that of how they had studied in traditional classroom-based learning, namely, to "closely follow" the teacher and the FTF class agenda. This implied that online English learning to them was still an extension of classroom learning, rather than something qualitatively different. In particular, they tended to view the weekend FTF session as the primary channel for learning, and the self-study period during the weekdays as "preview phase" and supplementary. In spite of their general assumption that online English learning demanded much more self-discipline and self-directed efforts than did traditional classroom-based learning, their study plan at the beginning of the semester did not reflect much purposeful self-management. In other words, their self-study did not have much "personal agenda" in terms of learning focuses, choices of materials, or decision on learning rates that were connected to their personal needs. Their engagement with the learning materials was quite limited and superficial, mainly focusing on the key words and language points listed at the beginning of each unit, with much less attention paid to the progressive learning activities in the units. Moreover, these three learners' knowledge about how to monitor their learning process was mainly to rely on feedback from the teacher and comprehension checks during FTF and/or VOB sessions, namely to see if they could follow the teacher's instruction and the tasks. When it came to evaluating the effectiveness of their English learning methods, none of them had much to say regarding their strategy use, and when they did comment on their learning methods in the past, they attributed their unsatisfactory learning outcomes to insufficient time spent on learning or lack of persistence, rather than the use of strategies itself.

Taking May's case as an example, although she recognized the importance of having a good study plan, at this point she was not sure about what a good study plan might entail. She

did not have specific plans for time management or sequencing the learning materials, except "forcing" herself to listen to the course MP3 that was downloaded to her phone on the way to and from work, which to her, was an indicator that she was "learning something". She did not have specific study goals, either. All she was aiming for was to keep up with the FTF class agenda and memorize all the key words and language points.

On the other hand, some participants began the first semester with a strong personal agenda and clear study plan. Lan set up a specific time table that consisted of fixed and flexible learning periods on a daily basis. She also wanted to get herself very familiar with the course content in each unit before watching the instructional video and getting down to the exercises and self-quizzes. As she explained,

> 现在我给自己定的计划，就是平时每天至少学两个到两个半小时。……
> 而且特别是，像每周三晚上有两个小时是给 VOB 的，每周六晚上两个小
> 时是我们的学习小组活动。但是，我也知道这两个小时不能总是有保证
> 的，所以我就在周日这天补齐，因为只有这一天我有大块的时间留给自
> 己。

> *(Right now my plan is to spend 2 to 2.5 hours studying every evening during*
> *the weekday…particularly, 2 hours in every Wednesday night would be*
> *dedicated to school's VOB and 2 hours every Saturday night to our study*
> *group. However, I know I can't always guarantee the 2 hours during*
> *weekdays, so I will make up whatever I have missed on Sundays, since it's the*
> *only day that I can have a big block of time to myself.)*

The most remarkable was Gao's case. Not only did he have his own principle of effective time management in web-based DLL, which was to "plan and get down to everything ahead of time"[18], but he had also set his own detailed study plan that broke away from the school recommended linear model of learning (i.e. one unit per week). This plan, namely the "four-round learning cycle", was adopted from the previously learning mode he had used to prepare for

---

[18] "计划和做任何事都要提前。"

the College Entrance Exam. Starting from establishing a general structure of the course content and moving up to focus on the most challenging language knowledge and skills, each round was characterized by different learning focuses and sub-goals. As he elaborated,

我第一轮已经过了。用一个月的时间，把整个的高日的 8 个单元我都学完了。但是，这个学完了是把听力都跳过去了。因为我觉得，听力非常重要, 第一遍是，获得一个知识的框架，而不是去获得知识的内涵。内容，具体的如何如何，我先不管它。

(Round One, which I already finished, was to go through all the 8 units in "English in Daily Life". But in this round I skipped the listening part, since listening is very important, and the purpose of Round 1 was to gain a basic framework [of the course], not to acquire the knowledge in-depth.)

到第二轮开始，我就把第一轮落下的听力，我把它从新拾掇起来，现在正在进行当中。因为听力是重中之重。每一句话都得听懂它是什么意思

(Round Two, which I am currently at, is dedicated to all the listening tasks. Since listening is the most important, I strive for understanding each and every word and sentence.)

然后就进入到下一轮，这一轮开始就进入到单词，词汇了。因为我发现他要求掌握一些重要的、特殊的词汇。再一部分就是写作。写作这方面，我感觉，它还是跟听力有关系。因为你要是把这个听力听会了，你学到的是一个模板。你把这个模板学会了之后，你就套吧。

(Round Three focuses on vocabulary, especially advanced vocabulary related to specific themes in the course. And another focus is writing, which I think it's related to listening.… The key to writing is to memorize those templates you have heard in the listening tasks.)

基本上来讲，第四轮，最后一轮就剩会话了。会话我觉得是最高的要求，就是各个方面知识能够融会贯通。是知识的一个综合运用。

(Round four is for speaking, which I believe bears the highest demand. It is the comprehensive and flexible application of all the previous acquired knowledge and skills.)

In the meantime, learners like Lan and Gao were also aware of a variety of resources at their disposal to monitor their learning process, including obtaining feedback from different sources other than the teacher. Compared to learners with less knowledge about self-regulated learning, they showed greater self-consciousness in terms of monitoring their comprehension and

task performances in both self-study and teacher-led learning situations. For example, Lan talked

about a number of ways that were useful for monitoring her progress, including collective

learning with her study group peers, comprehension checks during VOB sessions, and self-

questioning during independent study periods. When trying to recall an article she had already

studied, she would ask herself questions about it to see if she had really understood it.

Particularly, when talking about opportunities to monitor her learning through interactions with

other students during school's VOB sessions, Lan explained:

> *所以我说那个VOB 比较好嘛。就是说，他有个互动的感觉。你要如果真的就是自己的话……比如说我可以自己去背一下文章，我可以自己去进行对话，自己来说。但是毕竟个人的氛围达不到conversation 的那种……程度。如果，比如说上 VOB，我真的跟一个同学一起来说，诶，我就能找到我自己不足的地方。*

> *(This is another reason why I think VOB is really great, namely the interaction. If you are studying only by yourself, like trying to memorize some texts or doing self-talk, the feeling is never like a real conversation. But during VOB, when I can really talk with another student, I will have the opportunities to discover my weaknesses.)*

Task-Specific Strategy

Participants' strategy knowledge regarding different language tasks also varied markedly.

While some participants' task-specific strategy knowledge was limited and sometimes even

problematic, others' held a more in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of different

language learning strategies for different tasks. For example, Yang's knowledge about how to

approach different learning processes was largely overgeneralized from one unvarying, inflexible

routine consisting of "looking up every word in dictionary", "translating everything into

Chinese", and "asking the teacher or classmates when questions arose" regardless of what kind

of task he was doing. And May, unaware of the importance of using appropriate strategies for

specific tasks, believed that, in addition to increasing her vocabulary, as long as she could "be brave and speak up", her course of learning English would go smoothly.

On the other hand, other learners reported various strategies that had worked effectively for them in different situations. For instance, Jing found watching and imitating original English videos without Chinese subtitles particularly beneficial for both speaking and listening. Lan, in particular, talked about how she was experimenting with different methods that could help her practice different language skills simultaneously in one activity. As shown in the following extract,

> *高日呢，它的重点是听说。读写呢，是辅助听说的。那么我在自己说的过程当中，或者在听的过程当中，我是不是对这个生词，或是整个的句子，能很快的给记录下来。…*
>
> *你看我试了一段儿，比如他说，问路什么，然后我马上就写出来了，我就觉得我又会写了，我又会说了，我又能听懂了。然后，这个词，如果说我真的写不下来，我马上就知道了，我这个词不行。我马上就把这个列为重点，或者给它挑出来，放在那儿，专门去练习一下。就记住了。*
>
> *(For "English in Daily Life", the focuses are on listening and speaking, and reading and writing are supplementary… I usually take a short passage and listen to its recording, checking if I could write it down immediately…*
>
> *I have been experimenting with this exercise for a while. Taking the dialogue about "asking for direction" for example, after hearing what he was asking about, I could write it down immediately; it meant that I already knew how to write it, say it, and understood it all at once. If there were some words that I couldn't write down, I would know my problems at once, so then I could single them out and do more practice.)*

Social and Affective Strategy

All learners in this study recognized the crucial role of social interaction in online learning and different ways to establish, maintain, and benefit from interactions with the teacher and other students for different purposes and through different channels. For some participants, the main purpose of maintaining contact with peers was to reduce their feeling of isolation in the

130

online environment and to push themselves to study. For others, social interaction was a crucial part in constructing a conducive learning environment and a successful learning experience in this online program. As Gao elaborated,

就是在开学的时候，学生最齐的时候，尽可能多结识一些各类的学生。跟不同的同学能够建立一个，电话也好，短信也好，什么联系方式也好，QQ、微信也好，尽可能去多联系一些不同的学生。这样一来呢，学习能够有一个动力。这样，至少有你的同伴在。有你的同伴在，遇到困难的时候，你可以跟他们去诉说这些东西。你要是自己孤独的，一个人去学，除非你有特别特别大的毅力，那你得有多大的毅力才能够去学这个东西啊。

因为在开学的时候能认识一些老师，所以尽可能跟老师取得一些联系。这样一来，有什么困难，将来的时候，不管是见面也好，网上也好，熟悉了，出现问题也好问。这样，尽可能的给自己营造这样一个心态。这样，基本上把框架搭起来之后，继续往下学就没问题了。

(At the beginning of the semester, you should try to know as many classmates as possible, and keep in touch with them in various ways – through phone calls, texting, QQ, WeChat, etc. In this way you could have more motivation to learn, because you know you have accompanies, who could offer comfort, encouragement and help. If you are just on your own – unless you have great perseverance, but who can have such perseverance?!

It's the same with the teachers – try to know as many teachers as you can at the beginning, and keep in touch with them, so that in the future when you need help, you have someone to turn to, be it through the internet or in person. Once you established such mentality of learning, or the basic framework, you'll be fine.)

Emphasizing the crucial role of others in a successful learning experience, Lan was the only participant who had arranged regular study group activities from the beginning of the semester. To her, one of the major benefits of group activities was that they could serve as an effective monitoring tool. As reflected in this extract,

我感觉，这个小组呢，也可以做一个监督。就有点像个监督员似的。我感觉，小组的同学，如果跟他们交流的话。他们就是你的一个很好的监督。就会检验你的学习，是不是已经完成了这个单元了。因为我们都是在围绕这个"daily routine"，大家都在围绕这个方面来做。所以……比如

你的听写完全都达到了，那么就说明你已经做得很不错了。如果说你都没有达到这个，你就需要再，再补充一下，或是再给你的学习计划完备一下。再多加一些时间。多挤时间来学习。

(In my view, the study group could be just like a supervisor. … Your interaction with other group members is a good monitoring tool for you to tell whether you have learned the unit well. …Like right now we are learning about "daily routine", our group activities will be around this topic, too, such as the dictation exercise we did with the teacher in class. So if you have no problem doing these exercises, it means that you have accomplished the learning task [for this unit]; otherwise, you would know what still needs more work or effort to be fixed.)

Contextual Knowledge

At the beginning of the semester, participants' knowledge of the learning context encompassed 5 sub-categories: opportunities and constraints of the web-based distance learning environment, role and expectations for the teacher, characteristics of the particular English program, their assessments of learning sources and tools, and features of their personal learning environment (see Figure 16 for the frequency count of each sub-category). Participants' assessments of the available learning sources and tools were foregrounded in their knowledge about the learning context, and some of the participants were particularly sensitive to how certain features of the CF online program could serve their own learning needs.

Figure 16: Content representation of contextual knowledge (Frequency)

132
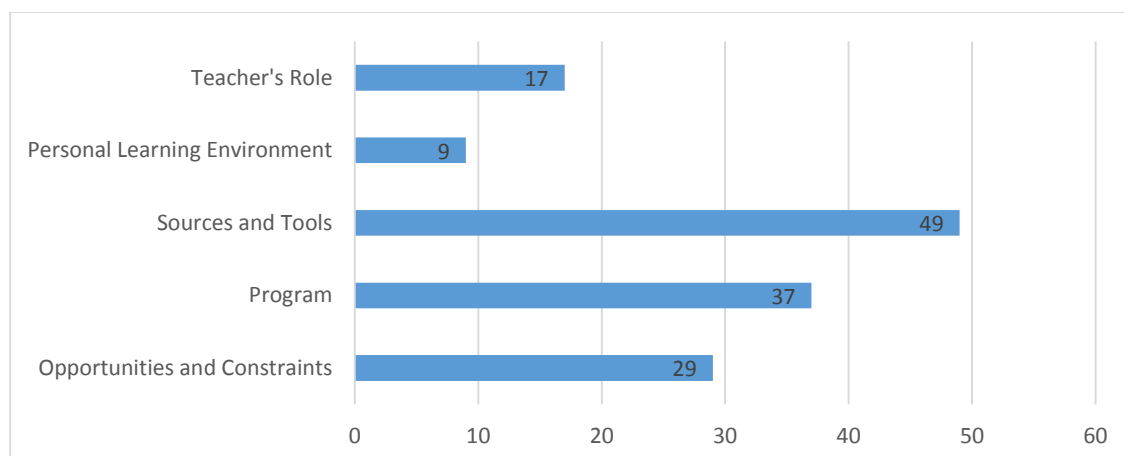
Opportunities and Constraints of Web-Based Distance Learning Environment

All participants cited flexibility and convenience as the biggest advantage of online learning, and they enjoyed the freedom of deciding when, where, and how to carry on their English study. However, seemingly paradoxically, some learners viewed the lack of teacher supervision and strict learning structure as a major disadvantage of online language learning, which render it "less effective" than traditional FTF learning. In Cai's words,

教室里学效果快，有老师盯着；网络上没人看着你，得全凭个人自觉。

(Learning in the classroom is more effective, since the teacher is there watching you; but learning online totally depends on your own self-control, since no one else is there with you.)

Yang also viewed that the limited time for FTF instruction and insufficient opportunities for interacting with other students as the major disadvantages of online English learning:

嗯……负面就是，咱们平时那个面授课啊，就有点短点，一个礼拜就两天嘛，而且就半天儿，时间感觉有时候练不出来；时间毕竟短点儿。不像上学，全日制那种。还有老师跟同学之间互动稍微少点儿。

(Em… the one disadvantage is the time for the FTF session is too short, only two half days every week. I don't think it's enough for any real improvement to happen. …There's too little time, not like previous full-time learning in school. …Also the interaction between the teacher and students is not enough.)

Moreover, participants were aware of the opportunities to get personalized feedback and assistance from the teacher and other students. For example, Cai recalled an incidental learning episode during one VOB session:

可以及时得到（老师的）纠正和帮助；比如说，昨天 VOB 的时候，老师给我们纠正了一个我一直读错了的单词，lunch，好多人都读成"lanch"，昨天才知道不是这样读的。

(I can get timely correction and feedback from the teacher. Like during the VOB yesterday, the teacher corrected the pronunciation of one word that I had been pronouncing it wrong the whole time, i.e. "lunch", many of us had been

saying it as "lanch"; I didn't realize that it shouldn't be like that until yesterday.)

Lan also talked about the benefits of using structured and pre-selected learning materials designed to fit learners of their proficiency level, which was much effective than searching for English learning materials blindingly on the Internet.

Role of the Teacher

During the first interview, participants were asked about their expectations of the teacher's role in the process of web-based DLL, as this was considered a reflection of their readiness for autonomous learning (Cotterall, 1995b, 1999), which was the key to distance learning (White, 2003b). Significantly, participants held two distinctive views toward what role the course instructor should play in web-based DLL. Some of them (Cai, Yang, and May) expected the teacher to be the leader and authority figure in online distance language learning, and themselves being just the followers. For example, May expressed a strong preference for teacher-directed learning and expected the teacher to be dominant in the learning process by taking over all the main learning functions. In her own words,

> （老师）首先肯定是要把，书本上的知识教给我们；然后就是，督促大家去学习。然后，鼓励我们把。因为都是工作了的。大部分都是在职的人在上这个，所以好多时间不是能够保证的。然后就是监督大家、督促大家，去保证学习的时间。

> *(First of all, [the teacher] should teach us the content in the textbook; next, she should supervise us, push us, and encourage us to study. Since most of us are working full-time, it's hard for us to guarantee the time for study, the teacher should check on us, making sure we are learning.)*

On the contrary, other participants, like Jing, Lan, and Gao, expected the teachers to be more of a facilitating role, providing guidance on strategy use and pointing learners in the right direction to focus on when necessary. As Jing explained,

134

啊……这个可能就是跟在开学典礼的时候老师讲的，说 "you want me as a tutor, or as a teacher...as a coach".所以，作为一个 coach 好了，引导一下就行了。对，我觉得老师就是及时和我们……公布一些网院的动态。还有就提醒，就作为一个比较好的 reminder 吧。然后其它的话，还是要靠自己，因为毕竟不是像以前学校那种，学习。

(On the first day of school, the teacher asked us, "Do you want me as a tutor, as a teacher, or as a coach?" To me, I prefer the teacher to be "a coach", just providing some guidance. ...I just need the teacher to keep us informed with the information disseminated by the school and to be a good reminder. The rest is really up to ourselves. After all this is not like learning in school previously.)

Gao also expected that the teacher to be a "good pointer", who directed students' attention to essential knowledge, skills, and errors commonly made by English learners. Lan added that, with the teacher's guidance, one would not "get lost" during online learning, since there were so much to learn.

More importantly, these two contrasting views also correspond to participants' metacognitive strategy knowledge. Those participants who expected the teacher to be dominant in web-based DLL were usually the ones who were not prepared with clear study goals, plans, or means to monitor their study in this program, such as Cai, Yang, and May. On the other hand, learners who thought they should take control of their learning started this semester with specific personal goals and plans for time management and learning routine, such as Gao and Lan.

Assessments of Learning Sources and Tools

At the beginning of the semester, all participants had some knowledge about various learning sources and tools available to them and how they could facilitate their learning in this program (see Figure 17 for the percentage of different sources and tools reported). For all the participants, learning resources or tools that could potentially allow time and opportunities for interaction with the teacher and other students were seen as extremely useful, which included

VOB and FTF sessions offered by the school, students self-arranged VOB practice sessions, after class FTF group activities, audio chat through social media, etc.

Figure 17: Assessment of recourses and tools (Percentage)
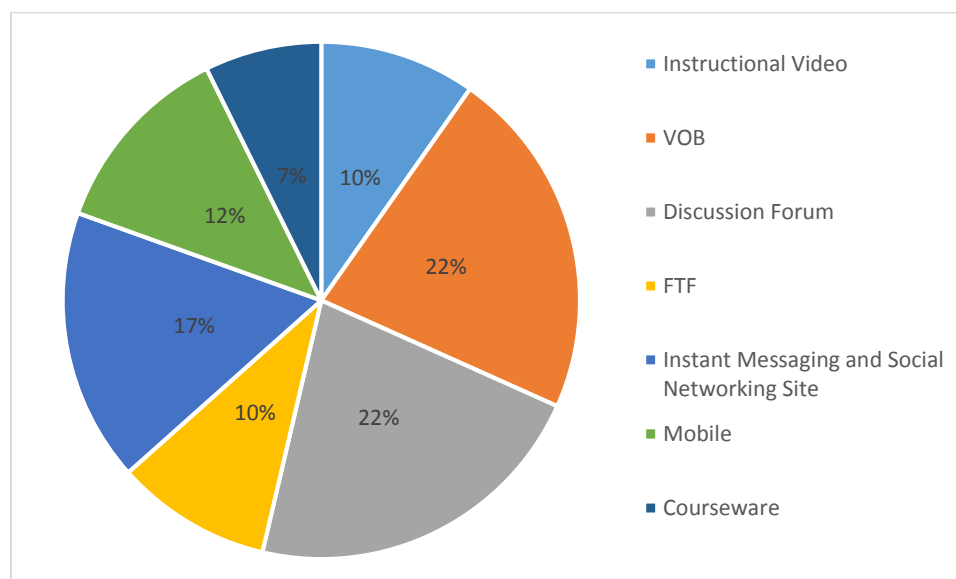
For example, Lan, who described herself as a "visual learner" with a strong preference for visual materials, thought the instructional videos and the VOB sessions were most helpful, because watching the videos made her feel like she was "learning in the classroom for real"; and during the VOB session she felt like she was "actually participating in the class". Jing also stressed that different learning components afforded different learning opportunities. For example, she viewed the VOB sessions the most useful to her, as they provided opportunities for personalized incidental learning:

> 你在VOB的时候，你还可以边通过网络来查询一些老师正在讲的点，但是你不懂，你可以现在当场查，也许你马上就领会了。就可以很快的融入到大家的学习中。不像课堂上去的话，可能一个点你不懂，但是当时你无法运用其它的工具；所以导致你，一个点不懂，接下来的那些，你就不知道他们在说什么。所以我觉得这一点的话，你可以……对你是比较有好处的。…另外一个的话，在VOB中，即使有的时候自己可能正在

忙，但是可以听别的学生啊，或者老师的指点，这对于自己的话，有些纠正错误啊，还有纠正口语上面的一些比较让自己忽略的一些点的话，我觉得就是有提高的机会。

(During VOB sessions, you can even use the internet to check out the stuff the teacher is talking about at that time; if you have trouble understanding, you can look into it right away, and you could learn something immediately. Unlike in traditional classroom learning, since you don't usually have these tools, you can't solve the problem as soon as you have one, otherwise you may not be able to follow the rest of the class….Another advantage about VOB is, even if you are doing something else during the class, you can still hear the teacher's instruction, which may help correct your errors in pronunciation. Or, from the conversations between the teacher and other students, you may discover things you have overlooked before.)

Furthermore, Gao evaluated the variety of resources and interaction channels in terms of how they could serve different purposes based on his learning needs. Of the array of learning resources provided on the learning platform, Gao rated them according to their perceived importance to his learning needs and their overall quality:

基本上北外网站上我发现有这么几类资源 …… 反正我觉得这几类资源对我的用处不一样。比如说，模拟考试、单元重点这类的，对我来讲的最重要的。所以我会去好好去看一看。还有一块，我觉得是，S 老师讲的还是有必要去看的。不过 C 老师讲的那个，视频看不清楚。而且，他用的都是全英文授课。对我来讲，我不需要全英文授课。因为我需要的是……英文的东西，我通过这个课本就可以看了。我没有必要让他去给我讲一遍，那不就跟照书念差不多。

(On CF's website, I have found several types of resources. … As far as I understand, different types of recourses serve different purposes. For example, mock-up tests, unit-based key points and the kind are most important to me, which I will go through carefully. Also, I think it's necessary to watch the Teacher S's instructional videos. However, the Teacher C's videos do not have very good quality, which makes it very hard to watch. Also his videos are all in English. All- English teaching is not very useful for me. If I need English-only resource, I can just go to read the textbook; it's not necessary for him to teach it all over again in English, which is no different than reading the whole book.)

Moreover, all participants found the cell phone a very useful and convenient tool for language learning. In addition to the most frequently used e-dictionary applications, participants also made use of other applications (e.g., grammar exercise, news broadcasting) and functions

(MP3, recorder, camera) to fit their needs for learning "anywhere, anytime". They were particularly attracted to the school's social networking account on WeChat, and found a lot of the messages, such as language learning tips and cultural facts of English speaking countries, both informative and motivating.

The value of the Discussion Forums in information sharing and distribution was also recognized by all the participants. However, at this moment, they all tended to be information collectors rather than contributors, which might be due to the fact that they were all new to the program, so there was not much experience or expertise worth sharing. Despite its contribution in maintain the learning community, some of the participants were also critical about its reliability and efficiency as they found it was not updated timely enough. As Gao noticed,

> 论坛资源也是不错的。但是我发现有个问题，老师并不是都回复。我翻到了以前的帖子，因为有些问题，我觉得我也想问这个问题，但是老师没有回复。所以给我一个印象就是说，论坛这个东西不太可靠。还不如说见面去问呢。
>
> *(Discussion Forum is good, too. But the problem is, not every question was answered by the teacher. I went back to check the old posts, some of which asked questions that I wanted to know as well, but there's no response from the teacher. So my impression is, I can't count on this, I'd better go ask the teacher directly.)*

Still another interesting observation was that, although the online multimedia courseware was considered as a core learning component, not all participants found it useful at this stage. At the time of the first interview, Yang and Cai were not even aware of the multimedia courseware at all, and the printed textbook was the primary learning material they were using.

The CF Online Program

Noticeably, those participants who emphasized the importance of getting oneself familiar with the learning context also demonstrated a deeper understanding of the features and

opportunities related to this particular program at CF Online, as well as how these program

features could serve their own learning needs. For example, Jing discussed how she would tap

into the potential learning opportunities she thought might be helpful for the development of her

English ability in the long term. Particularly, she valued the school's expertise in foreign

language education, believing that her English, especially writing, could improve substantially

with the guidance of the teachers here.

> *以前的专科学习的话，它就是，特别笼统。就是像……就像高中一样，拿出一本书，然后跟你讲语言点。但是他很少去教你，一些……就是……他只是对着教材去讲解，没有去教你怎样更好的学习。还有怎样更好的去正确的运用这些东西。没有深化到课外的东西。那现在在北外的话，我听好多老师的课，我觉得他们在讲课的时候，他会深化，因为他的自己的知识积累的够多。所以可能也是老师的程度是不一样的，他们平时的积累，文化水平，还有他平时的积累也确实是不一样的，所以他们所传授、传达的东西，也绝对不是一个层次的。*

> *(The instruction in my previous junior college was too general, like in high school, where the teacher would just follow the book, only teaching the grammar points, rather than teaching you how to learn better, or how to better use these grammar points, or how they could be applied to situations beyond the textbook. But at CF, I have attended classes taught by different teachers, who, I discovered, could go much deeper. These teachers are different [from those in junior college] in terms of their knowledge base, education background, which resulted in their teaching on a much more advanced level.)*

Gao considered this online English program as having the "most effective and advanced

design" he had ever experienced. This was mainly drawn from his own comparison of the

features and demands of this program and those of the previous courses he had attended.

Essentially, in Gao's view, as reflected by the read-aloud assignment and speaking test, the

uniqueness of this program laid his primary emphasis on speaking and listening skills, rather

than reading and grammar as did all the previous English courses. These two skill areas were

exactly what he needed to develop the most. Thus he believed that it provided valuable

opportunities to fix his weaknesses and "to develop true abilities of using English". To support

this view, Gao also provided a quantified argument based on his own calculation:

> 因为，以前是什么呢……就是说我参加4、6级考试也好，参加大学英语也好，传统那套，上海外语教研社出版那本教材来说。它基本上来讲就是强调阅读。阅读占到了60%的分数。然后就是听力占了一小部分。再有就是选择题啦，完形填空啦，之类的。

> 但是，到了北外之后发现，北外正好把这个给倒过来了。像这个高级日常英语，我们现在一开课就讲，这个高日。它占分占得特别多，听力和口语的权重非常大。再加上写作。这3方面加起来的权重，我算了一下，占到了70%多。也就是在这个期末成绩来讲。就这个期末成绩来讲，这个阅读和其它的文字方面的，类似于大学英语考试那种，也就占到28%。也就是说你再有能力，在阅读方面，也不过就是拿到28分左右。

> *(Before, no matter it was the tutorials for Public English Test IV or VI, or for College English, the emphasis was on reading, which took up 60% [of the exam's total score], with a small portion for listening and all of the rest for grammar.*

> *But here at CF, it's the total opposite: like in "English in Daily Life", listening and speaking take up the majority… as reflected in what to be covered in the final exam. Based on my calculation, their portion will be over 70%. Yet reading and grammar questions, like those in College English, only take about 28%. This means, no matter how good you are at reading, you can only get 28 at the most.)*

Features of Personal Learning Environment

As part of their contextual knowledge, participants were also aware of influences

of features of their immediate learning environment on how their online language learning

should be planned and managed. Among these features, availability of time for study and

opportunities or constraints in one's physical environment were the most salient in affecting how

participants plan their study. For example, since Yang and Lan's work schedules were quite

regular, they were able to set specific time periods for their online English learning, whereas for

Jing, whose schedule was always unpredictable, she chose to study whenever there was free time

available. In Cai's case, his choices over learning materials and activities were also influenced by the actual physical environments where the study took place. In his own words,

> 平时在工作时，是租的房子，上网不是很方便，我就看课本；在手机上下载MP3 课件；回家时候上网方便，我就看视频；周末参加面授课。
>
> *(During the weekdays while I am staying in the rental apartment without Internet access, I would study the textbook and listen to the course MP3 files on my cell phone; when I am back at home where I have easy access to the Internet, I would watch the instructional videos online. And I will attend the FTF class on the weekend.)*

Limited and fragmented time for study was a concern for participants with heavy life and work responsibilities, which also served as a stimulus for better time management. For example, Lan's biggest concern was that the her time and energy to study were very limited since the responsibilities of work and life would take up most of her day. She thus stressed it highly important to utilize effectively and efficiently the limited time she had for study.

Conclusion

This chapter presented findings that address the first research question, "What metacognitive knowledge about language learning do adult EFL learners have in the context of web-based distance learning?" While the results showed that participants demonstrated MCK of web-based DLL in all of the four dimensions, namely person, task, strategy, context, there were contrasting differences in the scope, depth, complexity and specificity of their MCK. Some learners' MCK was relatively limited and sometimes problematic, whereas others held a much broader and complex view of themselves as language learners, the learning process and their own approaches. These differences endowed them with a either weaker or stronger MCK basis that turned to inform the participants' decisions on how they were to interact with the learning context, which contributed to the adjustments and revisions (or lack thereof) of their MCK about

language learning in the web-based distance context. This is the focus of the second research

question, the results of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI: CHANGES IN DISTANCE EFL LEARNERS' MCK

This chapter presents findings that address the second research question, "How does adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning change over time in the context of web-based distance learning?" Overall, refinements and revisions were observed in all the four dimensions of participants' MCK about web-based DLL. However, given the different MCK profiles with which participants started this semester, the rate, scope, and depth of changes were also varied among the six participants. In general, for those participants who started with a relatively weaker MCK base, it took them much longer to adapt and adjust their understandings and expectations of English learning in the web-based distance mode, or in some cases, not many significant changes occurred at all. On the other hand, participants who were endowed with a more solid MCK base managed to have a quicker and more efficient adaptation to this mode of learning (see Table 7 for a summary of participants' change trajectories). Also noticeably were that, for some participants, certain aspects of their' MCK, especially the dysfunctional aspects, remained unchanged or unnoticed throughout the semester. Findings related to this research questions will be discussed in term of the four dimensions of MCK.

Table 7: Summary of changes in participants' MCK

Name	Basic Profile	Key Change (or lack thereof) in MCK over time
Cai	• Male, 25 • Low English proficiency • High OLRS score • No DLL experience	<u>Overall trend: Maintaining a FTF learning approach in the online context</u> • PK: Increased concrete understandings of weaknesses and deficiencies in grammar, writing, and speaking; • TK: Re-interpretation of the nature of online language learning as "test-oriented"; • SK: Awareness of setting specific study goals and plans; emphasis on strategies for test preparation; • CK: Less reliance on teacher, more on supplementary sources and peers; preferences over materials and tools useful for test preparation
Yang	• Male, 21 • Low English Proficiency • Medium OLRS score • No DLL experience	<u>Overall trend: From overconfidence to confusion in the online learning mode</u> • PK: Limited development in knowledge about problems and deficiencies; inaccurate assessment of progress; • TK: Little change beyond realization of the need for more time on self-study; • SK: Little change in learning approach; confusion about strategy use; heavy reliance on peers; confusion about failure in asking the teacher questions • CK: Preference over exploring new, interesting resources on the Internet
May	• Female, 38 • Medium English proficiency • Low OLRS score • No DLL experience	<u>Overall trend: from a passive observer on the way to an active participant</u> • PK: Some new understandings of weaknesses in different skill areas; reinforced concern over the negative effects of personality weaknesses; • TK: Started to see the need to take more initiative and responsibility; revised previous assumption that online learning was easy; • SK: Little change in overall learning approach; remained focus on rote memorization of vocabulary • CK: Less reliance on the teacher; increased knowledge of how to use other sources to facilitate self-study
Jing	• Female, 27 • High English proficiency • Medium OLRS score • No DLL experience English used in daily work	<u>Overall trend: Little change due to little challenge</u> • PK: Some new understandings of weaknesses in writing and speaking; awareness of motivation change; • TK: Realization that only minimal effort was necessary since the courses were too easy; • SK: Adjustments to effort and time regulation to just meet the basic requirements; • CK: Focused on exploring more challenging and informative resources on the Internet

Table 7 (cont'd)

		Overall trend: From slow start to effective adaptation
Lan	• Female, 58 • High English proficiency • Medium OLRS score • No DLL experience • Self-directed English learning experience English used in daily work as Chinese language instructor	• PK: Increased self-knowledge of progresses and weaknesses; Refined study goals; • TK: Refined understandings of language tasks in the program; • SK: Adjustments to previous study plan; increased strategy knowledge regarding different tasks; reinforced belief in peer interaction; • CK: Increased understandings of learning opportunities provided by the program
Gao	• Male, 38 • Medium English proficiency • Low OLRS score • Previous DLL experience • Self-directed English learning experience	Overall trend: From an ideal vision to practical adjustments • PK: Increased self-knowledge of progresses and weaknesses; realization of the need for instrumental motivation; • TK: Refined understandings of how to benefit from the process of task completion; • SK: Realization of the need for a more practical and effective study plan; • CK: Increased knowledge about additional learning opportunities provided by this program and the limitations of the program

Person Knowledge

Over the semester, all participants' person knowledge had undergone varied degrees of reconstructions in terms of how they viewed themselves as English learners, particularly in an online distance learning context. Developments in participants' person knowledge were observed in their self-assessment of the improvements (or lack thereof) in their knowledge and skills of English, personal qualities that affected learning gains or progress, and motivations for learning.

First, participants developed more concrete knowledge of their deficiencies in different skill or knowledge areas. These new understandings pointed to new directions in their following studies and motivated them to adjust learning strategies and materials accordingly. For participants who only had vague ideas of their English ability at the beginning, they started to

attend to problems in writing, speaking, and reading, even though acquiring vocabulary and grammar knowledge still remained a major concern. For example, Cai came to realize that his grammar knowledge and writing skill were still in "elementary level", which led him to look for additional resources that could help him improve his grammar.

Yang also learned about some deficiencies in his knowledge about the fundamentals of English writing, such as some basic punctuation and grammar rules, problems that he had long been unaware of. This indicated a slight improvement compared to his previous state of not knowing what his problems were in English. However, it appeared that Yang's inadequate MCK base, together with his irresponsiveness to contextual cues, had impeded or sometimes even misguided his decision making process of approaching and interacting with the learning materials and tasks, and obscured the path to a more accurate evaluation of himself and the learning process. Takeing the read-aloud assignment as an example: The two read-aloud assignments were due on November 5th and December 15th respectively, and one VOB session designed to elaborate on the pronunciation rules and help students prepare for the read-aloud assignment was arranged in the first week of December. However, as he explained, since he was "very confident about his speaking" and the assignments were "very easy" in that "it could be done just with the cell phone", Yang finished and submitted both of them at the same time on September 25th. He did the recording only once without much practicing or listening to the sample, and he did not re-do the 2nd one after the VOB session about pronunciation after the VOB tutorial session, even though he knew that unlimited re-submission was allowed before the deadline. His scores for both assignments were a lot below average (1st: 80/88; 2nd: 80/89.8), and the feedback for both indicated similar problems in his pronunciation, including vowels, pausing,

146

and stress[19]. Despite these calls for attention, in the midterm interview he still thought his pronunciation was "fine", except for some trouble with "a few long words". Later in the third interview, when specifically asked about his reaction to the feedback on his read-aloud assignment, his response indicated that he was not aware of the feedback at all.

The same situation was observed in his writing assignments. By midterm, he thought his writing "improved a lot" because he had "learned many new words", yet in fact the feedback on his 1st assignment alerted him about grammar errors and the score was a lot below average (82/90). This implied that not only he did not understand what was involved in monitoring and evaluating the writing process, but he was also not able to draw proper conclusions from the available feedback, be it internal or external, regarding his task performance and make adjustments accordingly.

Learners with higher levels of MCK provided more detailed observations of the improvement or problems they had noticed during task completion and self-studies. For Jing, her self-assessment became less positive as the semester proceeded. For one thing, she did not think she had learned much from the two courses as they were too easy for her. For another, from watching various English TV programs and talk shows she found on the Internet, she came to see that there were actually plenty of room for improvement in her speaking and listening, two areas she used to think she was very good at.

Throughout the semester, Gao observed that, though still a challenging task to him, writing was the one area in which he had seen the most improvement, in that he grew from

---

[19] Original feedback: "朗读完整，单音基本准确。但不够熟练，断句和重音有时不当；元音发音过于松弛，w, th 等音不稳定。需认真模仿练习。" (Pronunciations of single sounds are mostly correct, but lack fluency. Pausing and stress are not accurate; and vowels are pronounced too loosely. Problematic pronunciation for "w", "th". You need to follow the examples and practice more.)

147

"having zero knowledge and ability of English writing" to "being able to write *something* out".

While he thought that overall the two writing assignments were not difficult, he stressed that it was the process of writing – including the processes of using a dictionary to check appropriate word use and getting detailed feedback from his tutor – that truly helped him develop the basic writing skills and familiarity and accuracy in language use. As reflected in these extracts from the second and third interview respectively:

> 目前的写作能力还是属于比较低的水平。我还得不断去想，然后去查字典，看看这个词汇是不是这么去用。这种表达方式有没有问题，所以我经常在这上头花费了很多的时间。因为这个过程，英语写作……这么多年来，这个对我来说，没怎么练过。没有一个系统的训练。

> …我写这么短短100个字的作文，我差不多得用4，5个小时的时间，甚至还得多。好像实际上，正常人来讲这算不上什么，但是对我来讲已经是构成一个很大的困难了。现在已经是一个很大的进步了。因为确实我能写出来啦！以前是根本写都写不出来。一开始我写作文，还有语法的问题；现在，经过不断的积累，查词，就把语法的问题基本克服掉了。所以我现在就是用词有时候还可以更好。更好地选一些词去用。

> *(My writing now is still very poor in that I still rely on the dictionary a lot to make sure if I have used the words correctively. The whole writing process is very slow and inefficient… as I have had no systematic training and practice in English writing prior to this.*

> *… Well, writing is still quite difficult for me, like it could take me 4 to 5 hours to finish a 100 word essay; BUT at least now I can actually write something out, which is a really great improvement! Before, I couldn't write anything at all. Also, when I first started, I had lots of trouble with the grammar; now, after continuous practice and the use of dictionary, my grammar problem has basically been solved. My focus now is to make sure I can convey my ideas accurately and properly.)*

Furthermore, learners developed some new knowledge about how certain weaknesses in their personality had rendered their self-study less effective. In May's case, what she feared at the beginning of the semester that she might have trouble keeping up turned out to be quite true as she progressed through the semester. At midterm, May was a little stressed out when she found herself lagging behind the FTF class agenda, because she missed it twice due to changes in

148

her work schedule; and at the same time, she was very anxious about the coming final exam. At this point, she was feeling kind of "paralyzed", not sure whether she should go back to work on the missed units or move forward to focus on the final exam. Also she noted that she had little idea about how to prepare for the final exam. In the last interview, she recalled that in the 2nd half of the semester she decided to mainly focus on preparing for the speaking test based on the provided guidelines, because this was what she worried about the most, and also because she thought reading and listening required long-term efforts to develop, not something she could get ready for in a short time. Looking back, May believed that her procrastination in the semester was the result of her laziness and "taking-it-easy" attitude. In her own words,

> 自制力我觉得我还是挺差的。就是……有点什么事，比如说累啦，或者是家里有点什么事，我肯定是把其它的放在第一位，并不是把学习放在第一位。反正总是在推啊……明天吧，明天再学，就是这样……可能……还是动力小吧。就觉得没有很大的压力。虽然自己总是有一个很美好的愿望，但是自己的压力没有那么大。觉得这个东西，有是最好，如果没有了，也没有特别大的影响。

> *(I think I am really weak in self-disciplining. Like when I feel tried, or there is something else needed to be done, I would definitely do those things first; studying was never my priority. I have always been pushing it till later, till tomorrow…Maybe it's also because there hasn't been a lot of external pressure yet. While I have always had this beautiful dream [about being good at English], I haven't been pressuring myself too much. I am always like: well it's good if I could have it, but if not, it's not too big of a deal.)*

At the end of the semester, May realized that she had to fix her passive learning attitude by adopting a more proactive approach and taking more responsibilities in her English learning. As she explained,

> 我得做一些改变。我觉得我应该积极一些了，还是要有压力，不能凑合了。可能刚上这个课的出发点和我现在有些不同了。当时就想拿个证，差不多就行了；但是现在压力挺大的，我觉得如果我想拿证的话，就必须得特别努力才能拿到。

(I have to make some change. I think I should take more initiatives; I need to give myself more pressure and be more motivated to do better. Compared to earlier, when I thought I could get the diploma without much difficulty, I now think that if I want to graduate, I have to work really hard. Counting on luck or something else will not do it; I must put in real efforts.)

For Cai, the one aspect about online distance learning he found himself really struggling to adapt to was the lack of external supervision and regulation. At midterm, Cai realized that his lack of self-discipline and the absence of "strict, intensive deadlines in this online program" had resulted in serious procrastination in his work, and he acknowledged that he failed in keeping up with the FTF class agenda. According to the official schedule, by then the FTF class instructor should have already finished all of the 8 units in the first course "English in Daily Life". However, in his self-study, Cai had just finished the self-quizzes of Unit 1 and 2 in "English in Daily Life"; for the rest of the units he could "hardly manage to finish looking up all the new words and locate the key points in the texts just to get ready for the FTF classes". In contrast to his original plan at the beginning of the semester, he only finished watching the instructional video in the first unit, and he had not listened much to the course MP3 files, either. He attributed this to his own ineffective learning approach, namely, not being able to utilize the study time productively:

> *效率方面比较低。这方面得改一改。同样的时间内，比如我学3个小时，人家也学3个小时，人家可能好几个单元都做完了，我就……还那儿坐着呢。这样的话，一是时间浪费的比较多，二是现在没有这个时间了。*

> *(My studying is not efficient, and I have to fix this. For the same 3 hours, others might have finished studying several units; I would still be… sitting there, or distracted by other things. I really don't have much time to waste.)*

As the semester proceeded, some learners were also aware of the fluctuations in their motivations for learning, as well as feelings and emotions they had observed arising during the learning process or with particular learning episodes. They further reported how these changes

150

affected their learning and sought out ways to keep themselves motivated and positively engaged. For instance, Jing noticed her declining motivation due to the lack of challenges in the coursework and acknowledged that she was reluctant to make any effort more than necessary to meet the minimal requirements as she did not feel challenged. Consequently, she was not quite satisfied with her performance in this semester. She expected herself to be more engaged and "diligent" when the course content became more difficult and challenging in the future.

Gao was concerned with himself not being effectively concentrated and engaged as the semester proceeded. Based on what he learned from talking with other students, he realized that relying on intrinsic motivation only was not enough to keep the learning going effectively and that he needed to connect his English learning with real-life purposes. As he recalled,

> *…你像刚才我跟你说的这些同学，他们学英语都是有明确目标的，跟自己的工作有相关的性的东西。而像这个同学他不一样，你问他学英语干什么，他说，学英语也没什么干的，就是为了混个学历呗。他这种心态跟我差不多。就是跟工作联系不是特别大的。在这种情况下，要是自己去写这个东西。平常学又没有好好的学过，也没有在工作当中实际接触过，你要去楞写的话，恐怕还真是不行。*

> *(…. For those classmates I have told you about earlier, their English learning is driven by a clear goal, which was related to their job. But for this one [student] …when I asked him, "What are you learning English for?" He responded, "nothing really, just to get a degree". My own situation is a lot like his, namely, I have no use of English at work. Under such circumstances… take writing for example, I had learned nothing about [how to write] previously, and I have no practical use of it in my actual work. So it really is very tough now that I am asked to write this [assignment].)*

As a result, Gao concluded that he needed to "create some practical needs to use English", as "merely reading the textbook and other materials couldn't not generate more motivations"; and without motivation, he was "unable to keep the learning going".

151

Task Knowledge

For participants like Cai, Yang, and May who started this semester with a relatively weaker MCK base, the first semester was a transitional period during which they were trying to make sense what online English learning actually meant for them. Noticeably, changes in their views of the nature of language learning, and online language learning in particular, were stimulated by their awareness of certain "misfit" between the kind of language learning they had been familiar with and the emerging demands placed on them by this online distance learning program. One recurrent theme regarding this "misfit" was related to learners' inadequate self-regulation against all the freedom they got in online learning. For these learners, learning in absence of the teacher's regular instruction, supervision and monitoring was the most challenging feature to adapt to, which forced them to realize the urgency of strengthening their self-discipline and take more initiatives during the learning process. Yet, as this realization did not come until much later in the semester, they did not go much further to act upon this knowledge and work out ways to enhance self-regulation. For instance, Cai provided a perceptive observation that online English learning demanded constant and regular efforts and time, and that counting on last minute effort or hoping for immediate learning gain was not realistic. Accordingly, he also emphasized the importance of having step-by-step goals that could direct one's learning on a daily basis. And these goals should stick closely to the school's agenda for the FTF class.

In May's case, her learning experience in the 2nd half of the semester, especially in preparing for the final exam, led her to develop new understandings about this online program and what she should do as an online English learner. First, she began to question and re-examine

her previous assumptions that online distance learning was "easy", and that "not much hard work was needed to graduate". This view got overthrown after the first semester:

> 其实我是觉得……就是听到一些其他的同学，他们上成人教育的时候，我就觉得他们很轻松。但是对于我来说，我上北外的成人教育，我并没有等于玩儿着过，但是我真的是在学着过的。就是说，你必须要付出这个努力，你才能得到这些东西。不是说你轻轻松松地就能拿到毕业证。

> *(Previously I had heard about other people's online distance learning experience…… it appeared to be quite easy. But for me, this online program at CF is not the case. So far it hasn't been easy at all, I have indeed made real efforts to study. In other words, you must work hard for it. Hoping to get the diploma without much effort is not possible.)*

In line with her determination to take on a more positive learning attitude, May also came to realize that in online language learning, it was up to herself to detect and solve her own problems, rather than waiting for the teacher or others to pointed it out:

> 网络上的学习，比如课件或是面授，可能你不知道的东西在这些教程里都没有解答。他可能不觉得这是问题。但是你还是不知道的。这样的话，我觉得你就需要去求救。自己单独去找老师、同学、或者朋友去解释这个问题。

> *(While learning English through an online distance program, no matter you are watching the instructional video or attending the FTF class, it's possible that the questions you have are not explained in the video, or the teacher doesn't think there may be a problem. But you still don't know how to solve it. At times like this, you should step forward and seek help from others on your own, be it the teacher, your classmates, or your friend.)*

Another significant observation was the un-changed or un-noticed aspects of these participants' knowledge about the web-based DLL process or specific tasks. It seemed that sometimes certain aspects of their previous knowledge base might be too rigid to give rise to any change happening internally. For example, in the last interview, Cai came to re-interpret the nature of this online English program as essentially "test-oriented", just like the traditional model that he was most familiar and comfortable with. Accordingly, his solution to effective online

153

English learning was actually to maintain the "studying to the test" learning approach. Following this reinterpretation, he reset his learning goals and study plan, as well as how he should select and approach learning tasks and materials, all to make sure he could pass the prospective tests.

For May, although she realized the need to stop being a passive learner, some of her beliefs about language learning were so deeply-rooted that they continued to limit her perceptions of actively expanding her strategy repertoire. Her firm belief that vocabulary knowledge was responsible for most of the difficulties she had experienced in the development of other language skills led to her decision that she could not do anything else unless her vocabulary expanded to a certain level. As a result, she made a lot of effort in the first semester trying to increase her vocabulary through memorizing the word-list, only finding herself getting more frustrated by the lack of positive outcomes. In order to fix this, she went to look for different resources and applications on the Internet with the hope that they could enhance her vocabulary learning. However, she ended up feeling quite confused and discouraged, as she felt "none of them seemed very effective after trying for a couple days". She attributed her unsatisfactory progress in vocabulary learning to her poor memory and had little clue as to what to do.

Adjustments in perceptions and expectations toward English learning in this web-based distance language program were also observed in those participants with a higher level of MCK base. For Gao and Lan, although they wanted to make sure all the content and tasks in the two courses were learned and mastered, they soon realized that there was too much to study in too little time. Therefore, they had to make changes to their study plan and re-prioritize their learning activities, which were reflected in the new developments in their strategy knowledge. Jing's case, however, was the opposite. Soon after the semester started, based on her self-assessments of the

154

courses' difficulty level, Jing realized that the course content was too easy for her, so she decided

that she could skip the easy tasks and content and only work on the more difficult ones in order

to learn more efficiently. As she explained,

> 我觉得这样的话，会提高效率。因为对于那些你本身已经懂的，或对你
> 来讲偏简单的东西，如果全部去做，其实对我自己没有什么提高。所
> 以，我就去选那些我不懂的，然后来做。然后，至少，就像明天，因为
> 我今天不是没有空，我就没有去学校，但我明天会去。明天上三和四单
> 元，但实际上我就只看了第三单元，第四单元我待会就简单的把生词看
> 一下，然后把句型看一下，然后明天就主要听老师讲吧。

> *(I think this way is more efficient, because doing those [activities] that I
> already knew or are too easy will not help me improve; therefore, I would
> rather study those that I don't know yet, and then go to the FTF instruction.
> Like for this week, I just studied Unit 3; for Unit 4, I only browsed through the
> new words and the key sentence structures, and I will see what the teacher has
> to say tomorrow.)*

Strategy Knowledge

Regarding changes in participants' strategy knowledge, the results showed that more

references were made as to how to adjust the overall planning and management of the learning

process than to deal with specific learning tasks and processes. In other words, changes in

knowledge about metacognitive strategy were more than that of task-specific strategy.

For those participants who did not have a detailed study plan at the beginning, they

gradually came to realize the importance of making specific study goals and plans. However, by

the end of the first semester, these realizations had not led to much significant change in their

actual learning approach, and their strategy knowledge largely remained the same. For example,

Cai primarily planned to just follow the pace of the FTF class, yet he soon found "the instruction

too fast to follow" and himself performing poorly in the teacher-directed learning activities such

as the dictation exercise. He thought that his lagging behind was because he "overlooked" the

importance of following a detailed study plan that specified what was needed to be done daily

and weekly. Specifically, he came to the realization that to be able to keep up with the teacher he should "evenly distribute his time and efforts on a daily basis", instead of trying to finish everything all at once right before the deadline or the exam. More significantly, aligned with his re-interpretation of the online English program as a "test-prep" model of learning, most of his views toward how to learn were anchored by the concern of "how to do better in the exams". For example, reflecting upon his experience in the first semester, Cai further concluded that the "best way" for him to learn was doing exercises like practice tests:

> 我感觉，我这个人就得多做这种试题才行。我感觉对我进步最大的还是通过做练习的方式。网站上就有这种练习题，前面是听力，下面是阅读，就是这种方式比较好。通过做练习的方式，慢慢适应过来。
>
> *(I think for someone like me, what really works would be doing exercises just like the exam. There are exercises like this on CF Online's website, such as the one with listening exercise first, and then followed by reading; this is the most effective method for me. After doing enough exercises like this and building up my vocabulary to a certain amount, I think I will get better at this type of learning.)*

Along with his changed views toward the nature of this program, Cai's goal-setting in this program was revised as well. As he elaborated, "when starting the program, I only had a dream without knowing which specific direction I should go". At the same time, considering his current learning progress, he also came to realize his original goals in his English learning as "not being very realistic". In the last interview, Gao proposed his new learning goals in this program that mainly consisted of passing several "achievement tests", including "keeping up with the teacher's pace and pass all the courses exams, passing College English Test III (CET-3) in the next semester, give BBC English Intermediate test a try in the 2nd year, and deciding on the specialty course in the 3rd year". Meanwhile, it seemed that his knowledge of task-specific strategy still remained to be rote learning in nature. For instance, from taking the final exam, during which he had to count on his own very limited skills to "improvise" since he "failed to

memorize the drafts he had prepared", he concluded that he needed to stock up more "mental resources" by memorizing good sample texts from the textbook:

> 因为现在可能是基础比较弱嘛，就是可以尝试背一些作文。比如一些话题的，政治方面，或是大家都关心的交通问题，环境问题等作文可以尝试背一下。然后，可以照一些四六级的那个作文，可以看一下，它们怎么写的。先了解一下。
>
> *(I think, since my foundation is so weak, I should try to find and memorize more sample texts about popular topics such as politics, transportation and environment, as well as sample writings from the College English Test IV and VI. So at least I could have something stored in my head to use when I am taking the exam.)*

Another participant, Yang, however, went little beyond recognizing that he needed to spend more time and effort in studying, and his overall learning approach remained unchanged throughout the semester, namely to use the dictionary to look up every word, translate everything into Chinese, and try to ask the teacher as many questions as he could. For the last strategy – "asking the teacher questions", while he believed that this was one of the most important thing a student should do, he was increasingly baffled by his not being able to come up with questions to ask. Moreover, it appeared that the decisions he made about his learning was seldom backed by purposeful planning. For instance, he usually only worked on the first learning task in order of each unit while studying the textbook, hoping the teacher would cover the rest.

Moreover, even at times of confusion or uncertainty, Yang's own metacognitive awareness was not sufficient enough to lead to learning or problem-solving, unless it was pointed out or explained by someone else. For instance, it was always his belief that questions in reading comprehension tasks were presented in the same order as the paragraphs, and each paragraph would always have one corresponding question. Therefore his strategy for reading tasks was to find answers in the "corresponding paragraph". However, his experience of doing the reading

comprehension questions during the final exam challenged this view, where he found the questions "strangely ordered". He brought forward his confusion about this during the final interview, which was cleared up by the researcher. Another instance of misconception was concerned with Yang's vocabulary learning strategy. When talking about his difficulty in choosing the proper meaning for a new word in the dictionary, he said his usual solution was to "choose the very first one on the list"; yet sometimes he found the first entry "seemingly unfit". And the solution at times was to "write it down and ask the teacher later".

Yet even forming the questions to ask did not come easily for Yang. In both the midterm and end-term interviews, Yang expressed his "puzzlement" that he had been "having trouble coming up questions to ask the teacher". While he believed that the most effective way to learn was to ask the teacher questions whenever one arose, he found that he did not know "how to ask questions", nor could he "find questions to ask the teacher at the FTF class". As research in cognitive psychology indicates, a prerequisite for being able to ask questions about new topic matter is a proper knowledge structure to formulate the question and to interpret the response (Miyake & Norman, 1979); therefore, this situation, being an enigma to him throughout the whole semester, may imply that the difficulty level of the course was considerably beyond Yang's current proficiency level and learning ability, thus he did not understand enough to even begin asking questions. It was also likely that he had been carrying on with his study under an illusion of comprehension, though obviously he himself was not aware.

For those participants who already had a specific study plan, not only did they see the need to improve their plan soon after the semester started, they also quickly enacted this new realization and worked out a new plan that they perceived to be a better fit between their own learning needs and the program's requirements. In particular, for Gao and Lan, the first semester

158

witnessed their efforts in constructing a learner-context interface that was more personalized, effective, and practical. As the semester proceeded, both came to see the need to revise their study plan when they realized the conflicts between the demanding workload, the limited time, and that their own previous learning management was not quite effective. As a result, they managed to establish a more feasible learning routine. For instance, at midterm, Gao acknowledged that his original plan – the "four-round learning cycle" – was "too unrealistic to follow", since there was "too much to study yet too little time to cover all of them". Consequently, he realized the need to re-prioritize his study based on the program requirements and his most urgent learning needs, namely, to browse through all the course content first and then mainly focus on listening tasks:

> *啊……来不及了，都往后拖了，现在我只能是把书，课文都看一遍，然后做一做听力。把课文的内容都得过一遍。别的不会，哪怕，写作可以放一放，咱至少把听力拿下来，自己也算是有收获了。*
>
> *(Ah… There's no time for that [the four-round learning cycle]; I had to hold it off. Right now all I can do is to make sure that I go over all the texts and finish all the listening tasks. So, even if I can't attend to everything – like writing, as long as I have mastered all the listening, I have at least accomplished something.)*

Lan also made changes to her study plan to achieve a more personalized learning pace and sequence, including picking and choosing what should be the priority and most important content to study by using the self-quiz and the instructional video as guidance. As she recalled, after reading through the student manual for the second time, she discovered that the timeline on the weekly submission of unit self-quiz was "only recommended rather than mandatory". She was then "quite relieved" and decided to revise her study plan according to her own schedule, rather than "rushing to meet the weekly deadlines". In the meantime, as she increasingly felt that "there were too much to study yet too little time to cover them all", she realized the self-quiz

could be used to inform her of what the focuses in each unit should be, since "they must be very important otherwise they would not be in the self-quiz". She thus decided that mastering all the dialogues, tasks and the followed exercises in the self-quizzes should be her top priority when studying each unit, and she would "go over the tasks repeatedly" until she was sure that she had understood them and got all the exercises right. Likewise, she came to view the teacher's instructional video as a pointer to direct her attention to the most important content in each unit. In this way, even though she could not study all the details, at least she would know that she had the most important part of the course covered by following these two resources. As she explained in the extract below:

> 我以前是按部就班，一个单元，一个单元，我就按自己一开始的学习计划，一步一步的来。但现在感觉……我也不知道这样行不行，但是是没有办法的办法。我现在是怎么学习呢：比如，高休，我不可能每个单元都非常详细的学完。冯雪老师的讲解，我现在有的时候也不一定都能看完。但是我现在是要把每个单元主要的内容，我要先知道。比如，高休的第八单元不考，但是第七单元，我已经都知道了大概内容了。还有第六单元它在讲什么。我把这个整个的高休要涉及到的几个 UNIT，它的主题，我先要知道，我要了解。然后，把每个单元的重点，我一定要先了解。我现在是这样做了。原来是一步一步的。觉得……太细了，也……不是说不好，但有些东西，学得太细了，也是很耽误时间。就是时间不行。要根据我现在的目前的情况，要进行调整, 抓到重点。

> *(Before, my approach was like a step-by-step style, one unit after another, following my original plan. Now…well I am still not sure if this would work…I know it's not possible to study every little detail in each unit, nor could I finish watching all the instructional videos. But what I MUST know beforehand are the main points and themes in each unit. For instance, for "English at Leisure", Unit 8 won't be tested in the final exam, but for Unit 7 I already knew what the main content was. …And I MUST get myself familiar with the key language points in each unit. My study used to be too meticulous, wanting to cover everything without any differentiation or specific focus; well it might work in other situations, for now it just took too much time, which I don't have. That's why I needed to make adjustments based on my current situation, which was, in short, to start with the most important and avoid unfocused efforts.)*

160

On the other hand, over the semester, Jing reduced her effort of studying the course content to the level that they were just sufficient enough to meet the basic requirements, and she was more interested in watching English TV shows and programs on the Internet that she found entertaining, informative, and motivating. Although she was aware of what effective online learning methods were, she admitted that the current learning task was not challenging enough to prompt her to make any change. Nonetheless, she was ready to adopt a more effective learning approach when the course got more demanding.

Furthermore, for Gao and Lan, growth in their strategy knowledge was also reflected in their enhanced awareness of new ways to monitor their learning progress and problems in how specific language tasks were approached. For example, Gao found out that another effective way to check if he had mastered the knowledge he had learned in class was to see if he could apply it to real-world situations, such as when he was watching movies or browsing English websites. He also emphasized that focusing on the process of completing a learning task was much more beneficial than what score he got at the end. Taking his final exam preparation for example: he realized that the process of preparing for the final exam was "much more meaningful than the actual test", especially the preparation for the speaking test with his language partner, as reflected in the following excerpt:

> 而且这个复习的过程比较有意思。……特别是口语的问题。这个口语，它要求两个人得合作啊。所以就要求每个人都得写出一个东西来，然后两个人再对一对。而且在这个过程当中，得需要互相讨论。就是这样写合理不合理？这样的表述不太合理，那样的表述比较合理。就这样的一个互相讨论的过程，也是一个提高的过程。

> *(The process of preparing for [the exam] was very interesting to me…especially for the speaking part, which required two students to work together. Therefore, both of us had to write something, and then share and compare our ideas. During this process, we had to discuss and figure out if the*

stuff we wrote was reasonable or not, and if the expressions were appropriate or not. It was such interactive process that helped us improve.)

For Lan, at the end of the semester, particularly from her experience with the final exam, Lan concluded that her weakest point now was reading. Not only because she "had spent the least amount of time in reading during the semester than listening and speaking", but her reading strategies also appeared to be "inefficient and ineffective":

> *我就是阅读练得太少了。而且我一直习惯就是，一句一句 地读下来。但是考试的时候，那些阅读文章都很长。就是我需要抓住主要的意思，要知道怎么跳读，快读，找到主题。我就是太慢了；等我读完之后，剩下的时间就不够了。*
>
> *(So far the reading exercise I have done was too little. What I am used to is … [to read] sentence by sentence. But during the test, the passages for reading were all quite long. This meant I needed to capture the gist, knowing how to skip, browse and look for the main themes. Yet I was too slow; after I was done [reading], there was not enough time for other things anymore.)*

In addition, she went on to survey the two courses in the following semester and learned that reading would be increasingly emphasized in the future studies. This led to her decision that she "needed to acquire more effective strategies in reading, such as quickly understanding the organization of an article by capturing small transitional words like first, second, third"[20].

Contextual Knowledge

Along with the changes and adjustments in the other dimensions of the participants' MCK about web-based DLL as discussed earlier, participants also developed new understandings of this particular learning context and how to utilize different learning materials to facilitate their learning. Most significantly, those participants who viewed the teacher as the dominant figure and themselves as mere followers in the learning process re-examined this

---

[20] "（我）需要学会更有效的阅读方法，比如能很快地掌握一篇文章的结构，通过抓出一些小词啊，比如 first, second, third。"

assumption and started to see the limitations in solely relying on the teacher and the FTF classes. In particular, they came to realize how to use other learning sources available in the program so that they could work together to facilitate their self-study. For example, at the end of the semester, Cai recognized that he did not have to rely on the FTF class solely to learn, and that he should try to make more use of other learning sources provided by the school. In his own words,

> 你看我们同学没有参加面授课，但是考试的时候，成绩会比我好。因为他首先英语水平比较好，而且，他不听老师讲也没事，因为面授课的东西网上都有。可以通过网上的那些学一下，问一下，重点那些也可以知道。因为经过一些面授课，一些重点，应该是都在网上能找到⋯⋯所以要把网上的视频都看一看；所以如果实在没时间去面授课的话，也可以先把视频看一看，然后再结合书本，做一下练习题。这样的话，也有听力的效果。同时网站上会有一些论坛，如果不会的话，可能向老师提问。然后经过这个学期的面授课，认识了很多同学，可以跟他们多沟通交流。如果自己真没去的话，可能向那些同学问一下，讲了些什么东西，大概可以了解一下。

> *(Lot of my classmates didn't go to the FTF class, but they still did better in the final exams than I did. Of course it could be that their English was better than mine in the first place. Also, it wouldn't hurt if they didn't attend to the teacher's instruction, because what's taught in the FTF class can also be found online. ... Therefore, if I really have to miss the FTF class, I can also watch the instructional videos first, grasp the key points, and then study the textbook and do the exercises. In this way, I can also improve my listening. At the same time, if I have any questions, I can ask them on the discussion forum or contact the teacher. Also, as I came to know many of my classmates in the first semester, I can also ask them and learn about what happens in the FTF class.)*

As this excerpt also reflects, his peers were playing an important role in his learning. Especially, Cai noted that he learned a lot from his language partner in this course, as well as other students in his study group who shared their study notes and tips during the semester. Moreover, during FTF classes Cai also came to know some classmates who he had taken as inspiring role models for himself because of their strong persistence and motivation to learn, including Gao, another participant in this study.

Furthermore, other participants came to see additional learning opportunities relevant to their learning needs both within the program and on the Internet. For example, Gao came to realize certain features related to the particular instructional design of this program that had provided valuable learning opportunities, which could help fix his weaknesses and enhance his English proficiency in the long run. In particular, in his view, the courses' emphasis on listening and speaking skills, the "interactivity", and opportunities for deeper processing were very helpful in guiding him through the learning materials. As reflected in the following extracts:

而且，课文当中很大的篇幅就是 dialogue。而且你要学会不断地去听。一个 dialogue 你得反复地去听。第一个 task 是怎么回事，第二个 task 又问你这是怎么怎么回事。这样一来就是对 dialogue 的理解要求特别特别高了。

(It's not just that the dialogue is the dominant part now, but you have also got to listen to it repeatedly by following different tasks: the first task asks something about the dialogue, and the second asks something else…anyway, the dialogue now very high demands for deeper understandings.)

还有就是……这个 text 跟以前也是不一样。text 对于以前来讲，都是问你几个问题，写个 ture, false，也就是这个。阅读理解嘛。现在不是这样了。现在就算是一个 text，它也是要求你去理解这个东西。它第一遍让你先有一个粗略的发现，然后有一个更细节的发现。

(… Also, the text part is very different from those I saw before. … Rather than those true-or-false questions previously, it now has questions that help you gain a step-by-step comprehension of the text, from grasping general ideas to specific details.)

而且，再有一个没有的，就是它要求你去写。以前就是做个选择题。现在不一样了，现在都是要求你去写这个东西。写的过程，就得考虑考虑这个语言怎么去表达了。

(Still another new feature was the requirement for writing. Before, there were only multiple choices questions, but now, it also asks you to write things done. When it comes to writing, you then need to consider how to use the language properly.)

In the meantime, over the semester, participants who already had a thorough understanding of the program also observed some limitations that they perceived as constraining

164

their English learning. For example, Jing did not think the self-quiz and the final speaking test could effectively measure students' true learning outcomes and language abilities, as they did not require any spontaneous output by the students themselves. Gao cited the low availability of personalized and timely tutoring and feedback, as well as the need for more clarity, elaborated instructions and expectations that could better facilitate, guide, and inform students' self-study. As he elaborated,

> 我觉得这个教材将来可以这么编：就是教材中，需要大家掌握的词汇，
> 要把它们分成几个级别。就在现有的单词表上，给附上星号，就是星级
> 越高的一定要把它死记硬背。而且一定要把关于它的各个方面的东西，
> 同义词啊，近义词，反义词，发音各方面都要掌握了。一星级的就是基
> 本上过了就完了。这样一来，便于分清主次，便于大家的学习。

> *(I think one way to improve the learning materials is to differentiate the vocabulary into different levels by marking them with stars, with more stars meaning more importance. For example, for those five-star words, the students must study them thoroughly and know how to use them, including other relevant information such as their synonyms and antonyms. For one-star words, just recognizing them would be enough. In this way, our vocabulary learning will be more focused and efficient.)*

Conclusion

This chapter presents findings related to the second research question, "How does adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning change over time in the context of web-based distance learning?" While changes were observed in all dimensions of participants' MCK about web-based DLL, these changes varied greatly among these participants. These variations were also reflected in the rates and effectiveness of their adaptation to this new mode of learning. On the one hand, some of them were quick to adjust their perceptions and expectations toward English learning in this web-based distance program and worked out a more effective study plan that was a better fit between their own needs and the program's requirements. On the other hand, others were only starting to realize and re-examine their

165

previous assumptions about this new mode of learning and were not able to enact any significant

change to their self-management of learning in this program. These various change trajectories

were the interplay of both learner and the contextual factors, and the next chapter will discuss

findings regarding the contextual influences that interacted with the observed changes (or lack

thereof) in participants' MCK about web-based DLL.

CHAPTER VII: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS AND MCK CHANGE

This chapter discusses findings that address the third research question, "What are the contextual factors that affect the changes in adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning in the context of web-based distance learning?" Results from the analysis of participants' self-reports generated during the interviews and the nature, requirements, and demands of the learning context revealed a number of contextual influences unique to this learning context that interacted with the changes in the participant's MCK about web-based DLL. Significantly, it was observed that the same contextual factors could have both positive and negative influences on different participants, thereby contributing differently to the change trajectories among different participants. These contextual factors included: the school-prescribed learning routine, forms of assessment, feedback from the teachers and peers, and learner support (see Table 8 for a summary).

Table 8: Summary of contextual influences

Contextual Factor	Components	Influences on Changes in MCK
School-prescribed learning routine	• Pre-determined curriculum package • pre-scheduled teacher-led tutorials • Timelines for coursework submission and final exams	Positive: • Structure and guidance for self-regulation for students with no autonomous learning experience Negative: • Little room for personal exploration • Demotivating
Forms of assessment	• Assignment for "Guide to Success" • Assignments for "English in Daily Life" and "English at Leisure" • Final exams • Unit-based self-quizzes	Positive: • Directed learners' attention to specific knowledge skill area Negative: • Misled learners' attention due to inconsistency between assignment focus and pedagogical focus
Feedback from the teachers and peers	• Spontaneous feedback during teacher-led tutorials • Feedback on assignments from grading teachers • Feedback during peer interactions	Positive: • Directed learners' attention to problems and deficiencies • Facilitated monitoring of learning progress • Helped develop task and strategy knowledge, and awareness of useful learning sources Negative: • Lack of quality feedback on task performance from the grading teachers
Learner support	• Orientation: Guide to Success • Teacher-led tutorials: VOB and FTF • Study group tutor	Positive: • Facilitated the development of knowledge about self-management of online learning • Provided opportunities for self-reflection and self-improvement of task performance Negative: • Unreliable support and feedback from tutors • Insufficient efforts in learning community maintenance

The School-Prescribed Learning Routine

The school-prescribed learning routine consists of the pre-determined curriculum package, pre-scheduled teacher-led tutorials, and timelines for coursework submission and final exams. As a material-centered program, it was expected that all students followed the planned curriculum, which was reinforced by a linear arrangements of FTF learning sessions directed by the teacher that were aligned with the pre-determined course content and mandatory dates for assignment submission and final exams. All of these components virtually formed a school-prescribed learning sequence, suggesting a desired learning pace for the two courses throughout the semester.

On the positive side, for those who had no autonomous learning experience but traditional classroom-based teacher-directed learning, such prescribed learning path appeared to be exactly what they needed to guide and regulate their learning, at least in the initial, transitioning phase of the program. For example, participants like Cai, Yang, and May perceived this recommended path as the "authority route" that must be followed. At the beginning of the semester, Cai, Yang and May set their individual study plan during the week based on the FTF class schedule as to which units they should be working on during the week. Moreover, the very existence of a weekly teacher-directed FTF learning session appeared to make such an impression on these learners that it was where "real learning" should happen, as the teacher-centered learning was the most familiar mode of learning to them. With the FTF class being the "real learning session", the self-study was viewed by these learners to be a "preview" phase, during which all they needed was to get familiar with key words and language points and wait till the FTF class to learn the language points and tasks in each units. Meanwhile, whether or not they were able to keep up with the FTF class was taken by them as the major, if not only,

169

indicator of their learning progress. Such self-assessment sometimes did lead to their re-evaluation and adjustments of their learning approach. Taking Cai's case as an example, his awareness that he had failed in keeping up with FTF class agenda had led him to consider what had caused this undesirable outcome and what he should have done to avoid it. From there, he came to the conclusion that he needed to distribute his time and effort evenly and set specific, periodic goals based on the school-set agenda. As he explained in the following extract,

> 它每个单元都是有时间规定的，做自测，做练习。当时没注意么，也是刚第一学期，不知道。然后……下学期的话，要跟着那个进度，什么时间做。不能最后一块冲击，这样的话，不行。都得有目标，分阶段的，每个阶段干什么必须得跟下来，要不然，就打不好这基础。上课之前，老师也是让预习嘛，应该也是分开，就是每天都有固定的时间学习。不能最后统一集中做。这样的话，一是学不好，二是太累，根本完不成。总之就一句话吧，把一个整个的目标分成阶段完成，就会好一点。

> *(There is a timeline for every unit, indicating when to do the exercise and self-quiz. I didn't really take it seriously at that time, as this is just the first semester… I didn't know about this before. In the future, I should follow that timeline strictly. Rushing to finish everything at the end won't work. I need to have periodic goals, specifying what needs to be done within a given time frame; otherwise, it's hard to build a solid foundation. I should divide the learning materials, making sure I spend time to study every day. If I wait to do everything till the end, the consequences are that I won't learn much, I will be too tried, and nothing will get done.)*

On the downside, there were also constraints of a rigidly structured program in providing online language learners the opportunities to exercise their autonomy in planning and monitoring their learning. This is especially true for those who have strong already-established beliefs in the authority of the teacher and the school, and they tend to perceive this prescribed sequence of learning to be the only right way to learn. As a result, they would not tap into the opportunities to pace their learning and develop skills of selecting materials and activities according to their own background and needs. Yang for example would only choose to preview the first learning task in order in each unit, thinking to rely on the teacher to finish learning the rest of the content.

170

Moreover, not only could solely following the "authority route" could render learners overlooking their own learning needs and preferences, but it may also lead to confusion and anxiety if learners viewed it as the only way to measure their learning gains. For example, Cai emphasized that he only needed to work test-related materials. At midterm, May got very anxious over missing a couple of FTF classes and felt "handicapped" about what to do next. Also she "dared not" to read anything outside the textbook as she believed that extracurricular materials would not help much before she could master the vocabulary in the course content.

Yet viewing the school-prescribed learning routine as the only right path was not observed in learners who had higher levels of knowledge about self-regulated learning, like Gao and Lan. They did not view the recommended path as the one and only path to follow. Instead, they had their own agenda as to how they wanted to proceed with their learning and attempted to come up with a learning routine that better fit their own needs and goals. For example, at the outset, following his own study plan, i.e. the "four-round learning cycle", Gao finished going through the content of the first course soon after the semester started, getting way ahead of the FTF class schedule. For Lan, she felt quite troubled by her initial assumption that the timeline for the weekly study progress was mandatory, as it was incompatible with her own schedule and study goals. After reviewing the student manual again and making sure that she did not have to follow this timeline as long as she submit all the self-quizzes before the final exam, she worked out a new study plan that worked better for her own time. Although Jing did use the FTF schedule as a reminder to regulate timing of her self-study, this was based on her self-evaluation that the course content was so easy that minimal effort was sufficient to pass the two courses, and she was certain that going through the key words and grammar points before the FTF class would be enough for her to follow the teacher's instruction. Moreover, these learners did not

171

view the recommended path as the primary way to assess their learning process. Instead they focused on the observed changes in their proficiency level in different skill areas during ongoing learning episodes, and they viewed the FTF class as a means to check their learning outcomes or to identify overlooked problems.

Furthermore, the negative impact of a rigid course structure seemed to be more salient for learners with a stronger sense of or expectation for learner autonomy. In particular, the cases of Jing and Gao showed that sometimes such pre-packaged learning content could even be demotivating for more autonomous learners. In Jing's case, she reduced her effort to the minimum as she felt unchallenged by the learning content, and went on to search for more interesting and informative materials on the Internet. Gao also found a lot of the learning content uninspired as he could not relate them to his own life or profession. As he recalled,

> *你像 WD 他跟我说，他觉得这本书编得特别特别好，我说为什么？他说，第一课就讲打招呼。他实际工作当中就遇到了打招呼的问题。这样，第一课就教他该怎么样去打招呼，用什么样的语言来充实自己。当然对他来讲是非常实用的。但是对我来讲就不实用。因为我没机会去遇到外国人，所以对我来讲就不是特别实用。*

> *(Like what WD said to me, he thought that this course [English in Daily Life] is very helpful. I asked, "why"? He said that a lot of the topics were exactly what he needed at work, such as greetings in different situations, which he used every day. While it is useful for him, it's not for me, as I have no chance to meet any foreigner in my life. Therefore, such topics are not very practical for me.)*

Forms of Assessment

For the first semester, the assessments included the five assignments, self-quiz for each unit, and the final exam for each course. In addition to the highly specified learning routine by the school, the assessment served as another major factor that shaped how learners adjust their understandings of what was involved in online English learning in this program and how to

proceed with it. For one thing, completing and meeting the requirements of different forms of assessment, particularly the final exam, were considered a priority for all participants. Moreover, the knowledge and skills being assessed became the focus of learners' attention during self-study or teacher-led sessions. For example, not only did learners like Gao and Lan make sure they had met the basic requirements of each type of coursework, but they also capitalized on the learning opportunities afforded by different tasks in order to understand their own strengths and weaknesses in different skill areas and evaluate the effectiveness of their task-related strategies. As reflected in Gao's comments on the read-aloud assignment being "an excellent design",

> *但是这个朗读没办法作弊。这是你自己说话的声音呐，那你没法作弊了。而且，这个东西，你得不断的去读。唯一的办法就是不断的去读。这样读来读去，自己的听力水平就在提高，朗读的水平也在提高。*

> *(Since the read-aloud assignment requires you to record your own voice, it's not possible to cheat. The only way to get it done right is to listen to the sample and practice, repeatedly. In this process, your listening will improve, so will your speaking.)*

In addition, the final exam, which made up 70% of the total final score for each course, appeared to be a strong influence on learners' plan of regulating their time and efforts. As learners reported in the second and the last interviews, in the second half of the semester, their major concern and efforts were all centered on preparing for the final exam, especially the speaking part. Further, the very experience of taking the final exams, both negative and positive, led to additions or revisions to their knowledge about their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as problems in their approaches to different language tasks. For example, Yang experienced a lot of uncertainty and confusion when completing the reading comprehension task, which led him to question the way he approached reading tasks. In Cai's case, the final exam experience played a determining role in his reconceptualization of the nature of this online program, which resulted in the re-direction of his learning toward the "test-prep mode". For Jing and Lan, the

experience of taking the final exam added to their MCK regarding the weaknesses needing to get fixed and problems calling for more attention. However, Jing was a little disappointed that the "speaking test was too superficial and mechanical" as "it only required the students to speak off of the scripts they had prepared, leaving little room for spontaneous performance", thus she doubted "if it really reflects the true communication skills".

As the only form of formal self-assessment, the self-quiz component that consisted of pre-quiz practice, the quiz, and automatically generated scores also to some extent facilitated learners' self-monitoring of the learning process. For instance, Cai viewed the unit-based self-quizzes as indicators of his learning outcomes for the unit content and tried to analyze the questions he got wrong to help him improve. Later when he started to view the whole learning process as "test-oriented", he considered the self-quiz as the most important learning source because the tasks and questions were in the same format as those in the final exam. Lan viewed it as the key reference for important content she should master first, especially when she realized that it was not possible for her to learn everything presented in each unit. She thus did the self-quiz practice repeatedly till she was confident that she had understood them all. However, other participants, such as May and Jing, did not view the self-quiz as an effective means for self-monitoring, because the questions were direct copies from the textbook, and one could just "cheat" to get a high score. As Jing pointed out,

> 它的 *exercise* 跟底下的自测，是一个很 *tricky* 的设计。所有题目都是一模一样的。因为我比较 *pay attention* 在书上的内容，所以那个自测的话，我觉得是为了提交而提交的。
>
> *(The questions are exactly the same as those in the Exercise section, so it's a "tricky" design, making it really easy to cheat if you want to. For me, I would rather pay more attention to the content in each unit; therefore, I would turn in the self-quiz just for the purpose of submitting [to meet the requirements]).*

174

Feedback from the Teachers and Peers

For students in this program, feedback on their task performance was also made available in different forms, including the teachers' grading and comments on the five assignments, programmed feedback on self-quizzes and tasks in the interactive courseware, and final exam grades, as well as unstructured or spontaneous feedback from instructors during the VOB and FTF classes, tutors assigned to each study group, and peers. All participants recognized the value of teacher feedback in facilitating their learning, especially those who deemed teacher feedback as the main source of information to indicate their learning progress; therefore, most of them paid close attention to the feedback they got from the teacher on all occasions. For example, Cai recalled one incidental learning episode during a previous VOB session, in which the teacher corrected a pronunciation error that he and many other students were not been aware of for the whole time until then.

However, overall, the feedback from the VOB and FTF instructors and the grading did not seem to play a significant role in the development of learners' MCK during this semester. First, none of them were active participants during VOB or FTF sessions. And they either "felt embarrassed" to ask the teachers questions, like Cai and May, or they had trouble forming questions to ask, like Yang. In particular, feedback from the teachers on their assignments was not informative or consistent for the most part. There was either general feedback without specifying the actual errors or problems, or no feedback at all. For example, both of Cai's writing assignments received some general feedback written in English, which only cautioned him of grammar and spelling errors without further indication of the actual errors (*1ˢᵗ: "Good. Just be more careful with the grammar"; 2ⁿᵈ: "Please be careful with the spelling. Keep on practicing."*). Yang's two read-aloud assignments' grades were below the national average, with

only the second one receiving feedback on his performance written in Chinese, including specific words that needed attention *("Overall stable performance, except for words like "throw" "everywhere" that were not pronounced clearly; you were able to use various pronunciation skills such as intonation, pace, stress, and reduction, etc."*[21]). And May did not get any feedback on her writing or speaking besides the scores.

Such feedback seemed ineffective, especially for learners like Yang, who was incapable of identifying errors on his own and had to rely on external feedback. His scores for all of the four assignments in the two courses were below the national average, and the feedback on his second writing assignment called for his attention to punctuations (*"You're writing better and better. But remember to add a space after ',' and '.'."*). The comment in the second writing assignment did catch Yang's attention, who during the third interview mentioned that his new realization regarding the use of punctuations in English writing. Nonetheless, the lack of specificity of the feedback, together with Yang's own insensitivity to contextual clues might help explain his failure to notice his own deficiencies. This was also the case with his read-aloud assignment. As discussed in the previous chapter, even though Yang attended the VOB tutorial before the deadline of the second read-aloud assignment and got some feedback from the teacher, he did not seem to relate it to his work sample or redo the recording to improve it. And in the last interview, when asked about his speaking skills, he still maintained that his pronunciation was all fine, and the only problem was that he read it too fast.

Furthermore, when feedback and comments were provided regarding students' writing or speaking, all of them tended to focus only on form, rather than meaning. Such feedback could be

---

[21] Original feedback in Chinese: "throw" "everywhere"等词发音不清晰，表现基本稳定；能比较自如地运用多数语音技巧，如语调、节奏、连读、弱读等。"

ineffective or even misleading, since it failed to direct the students' attention to other important knowledge and skills related to writing or speaking. And it was inconsistent with what the Marking Criteria had indicated as to how students' writing or speaking would be assessed. For example, for writing, the Marking Criteria included "language use, content expression, and organization and structure", yet none of the collected feedback contained assessment on content and organization. This could continue to reinforce learners' perception of English learning as a process mainly focusing on linguistic accuracy rather than functional language use. The impact of such inadequacy might be even more adverse in an online distance context without regular teacher mediation.

In this semester, peer interaction within participants' study group or the whole Fall 2013 cohort via the Internet also contributed to the participants' MCK development. For learners like Yang, who had great difficulty in understanding the learning tasks and identifying problems on his own, reliance on other classmates' help was indispensable. It was clear that only through direct instruction and explicit feedback could Yang understand the task requirements, notice his problem, or recognize the need to change his learning methods. For instance, since he had difficulty understanding the writing assignments' instructions, he had to ask other students about what and how he was supposed to write. Even though there was a sample text to follow, he still had to borrow his classmates' drafts to make sure he "did it right". From the 2nd writing assignment, for which he got more detailed feedback from the teacher and his study group peers, he learned that "there were rules to follow when writing in English just as writing in Chinese", and he should not write in whatever way he wanted. As reflected in the following extract:

> 这个……我一般写的时候，不太像在中文写作的时候特别注重标点符
> 号，逗号句号就乱用了。… … 那个我就按照我自己理解的写，他们有的
> 同学说这个前面不能跟那个，我都不知道这些。

177

(When I was writing in English before, I didn't care much about using punctuation like comma and period, not as much as I paid attention to punctuation when writing in Chinese. ... [I] usually just write whatever I think it's right; yet my other classmates told me things like certain word shouldn't follow certain word, I did not know stuff like this before.)

Through discussing their learning with other classmates, learners had also gained ideas about how others approached their online English learning, which in turn stimulated self-reflection and attempts to improve their own way of learning. For example, by talking to his classmates and other senior students, Gao worked out the types of motivational factors that could make his online English learning more effective. Jing recognized the incidental learning opportunities that emerged from collective conversations during VOB sessions, group chats on QQ, and from posts on the Discussion Forum.

Among all the participants, perhaps Lan was the one who benefited the most from peer interaction through her study group activities. Having participated in regular study group activities throughout the semester, Lan regarded this collective learning experience highly beneficial and crucial to achieve and maintain productivity in online distance learning. As she recalled how her study group peers also contributed to her improvements in speaking by providing "constructive feedback" during group study activities:

因为我们小组有时候我们会一起练习会话。最近一段时间，我们基本上是把每个UNIT里面那些会话，都来读一下。在读的过程当中，因为你自己形成了阅读的那个语音、语调、还有语流啊什么的，但是你自己不知道自己会存在什么样的问题。这个过程中，你哪一方面不足。他就跟你提出来。同学有这方面的弱点呢，我也给提出来。这样的话，就互相帮助，互相提高。所以，就知道了，有些地方我应该是弱读，有些地方连的不好。现在就是，读了几遍之后，同学就会说，这篇读的比较好一点了。OK，这样我就知道我进步了。

(Sometimes in our group VOB, we would practice speaking. Lately, we have been practicing reading out loud the dialogues from each unit. ... Since we have already formed some habits while speaking English in terms of pronunciation and intonation, sometimes we ourselves couldn't tell what our

problems were. During this process, we would point out each other's problems, so we could help each other to improve. Like now I would know which word I should stress, and which shouldn't; after a couple of times, they would say, "this time you did much better", OK, then I knew I made some progress.)

Learner Support

Over the semester, a number of learner support components seemed to have influenced learners' refinements and revisions to their MCK in various aspects, including the orientation course, "*Guide to Success*", the pre-scheduled teacher-led learning sessions, and study group tutor.

First, through studying the "*Guide To Success*" and completing its assignment, learners had the opportunity to learn how to navigate within the learning management system, the program's basic requirements and procedures, as well as policies and regulations. As reflected in their assignments, participants mentioned that they had learned about the procedures, requirements, and regulations about this program, as well as how to navigate among different learning components and resources. In the interviews later Lan and Jing also talked about strategies of managing online distance language learning introduced in the orientation. Also indicated in their responses in the assignment was that this assignment offered opportunities for them to face their fears, concerns, and expectations toward learning English through this online program. As reflected in Jing's response to one question in the "*Guide To Success*" assignment,

4. 拓展训练是否缓解或消除了你在入学前的某些担忧？如果是，它缓解或消除了你的什么担忧？ (Has studying the "Guide To Success" relieved some of your anxieties? If so, what were they?)

(答)：拓展训练确实可以有效地缓解/消除我入学前的担忧。入学前，我一度对这种新的学习模式感到迷茫，不确定自己是否可以有效地学习并学到东西，在看完拓展训练的资料后，我了解到每个课程的学习重心，网络学习的最佳方式，每周的学习安排等，从而能够让我更加自信自己可以在接下来的2.5 年中把握学习节奏，从而取得学士学位。

(Answer): Before the semester started, I used to feel confused and uncertain about this type of learning mode, not sure if the learning could be effective, or if I could learn anything at all. After studying the "Guide To Success", I learned about the key focus of each course, the best approach to online learning, and ways to organize my study on a weekly basis. Knowing all of these makes me feel more confident that I will be able to control my learning pace in the next 2.5 years, and eventually get the BA degree.

However, it appeared that not all participants paid close attention to the sections beyond the Introduction in the "*Guide To Success*", especially those concerning strategies for online language learning, such as Cai and Yang. This may partly be explained by the potential language barrier, as the Introduction section was the only part written in Chinese, and it provided essential information regarding the basic logistics involved in learning through this program. Yet the following chapters that consisted of detailed strategies on effective English learning in an online environment were all written in English, which could be quite a challenge for learners of low English proficiency. In fact, not only did Cai and Yang answer some of the questions regarding language learning strategies wrong, neither of them mentioned anything about the recommended strategies regarding planning their self-study or those about improving different language skills, not in their "*Guide To Success*" assignment nor in their self-reports on study plan and learning strategies during the interviews.

Second, the teacher-directed learning session delivered through VOB and FTF class was another salient contextual feature that contributed to learners' metacognitive development. Attending to the teacher's explicit instruction helped enhance the participants' understandings of the tasks they were engaged in, task-specific available strategies, and additional learning resources. Notably, the design of the VOB tutorials for assignment that were delivered before the submission deadlines provided learners with opportunities to refine and revise their knowledge about specific learning tasks and processes. In such tutorials, the instructor always started from

explaining the purposes, requirements, and the grading criteria of the assignment, and then encouraged the students to share their work and ask questions. It was through these structured learning activities that learners had opportunities for task-specific self-check and self-reflection. For example, as recalled by Gao, in the first assignment tutorial, Gao paid particular attention to comparing the grading criteria against the drafts shared by other students, based on which he gained a better idea of how to assess his own work. In the second assignment tutorial, Lan cleared her confusion about the second writing assignment after the teacher explained its purposes. For Jing, in addition to the opportunities for real-time interaction in English, these VOB tutorials offered her the kind of "freedom" with which she could control and direct her attention as needed. Cai and May also learned about problems in their pronunciation and speaking skills from attending the VOB tutorial for the read-aloud assignment, and then tried to improve their performance in the second assignment.

Nonetheless, the FTF class in general turned out to be quite challenging to some participants, especially Cai, Yang, and May. Since the FTF class was designed based on the premise that students came to the class well prepared, namely "having completed the learning tasks in the unit(s) prior to the FTF tutorial", the instructor would just arrange and engage students in tasks and activities that required students to use the unit's key language points in group or pairs, with the assumption that students had already familiarized themselves with the unit content. Therefore, these participants were struggling to keep up with the instructor's teaching and felt themselves under-prepared for the FTF class. As May later realized, "the teacher's teaching of the language in FTF class was very general and abstract, skipping lots of details [in the textbook]"[22]. This was when she decided that she could not expect the teacher to

---

[22] "面授课上老师讲得都比较笼统和抽象，课本上很多细节都跳过了。"

181

detect problems for her, but rather, she needed to figure them out her own and seek help accordingly. Similarly, both Cai and Yang soon found the FTF class "too fast to follow" after attending the FTF class for a few times. This led to their re-evaluation of their learning approach and effectiveness during self-study and drove them to look for ways that could make the self-study more effective.

Furthermore, how the teacher approached the language became a model for some participants as to how they could approach target language sources they encountered in daily life. For example, inspired by the English talk show videos played by the teacher during FTF class, Jing went on to search for more videos of this kind on her own time and found them both educational and motivating. Gao also talked about how he gained insight in to how to "build up" his English ability on his own from various types of in-class activities he had engaged in. He found the "modelling and guiding" by the teacher in terms of how to approach English learning materials and English sources in real-life particularly helpful. As he recalled,

> 因为我发现，老师总在课上给我们放电影。所以我自己也学会培养自己的这个习惯。看电影，能够去听人家的英文原声。一次我就把以前我最喜欢的一部电影《莫扎特》，里面另外一个作曲家去描述莫扎特，他是一个什么什么样的人，他用了一串的形容词。我就突然想起来了高级日常英语第一课里，就涉及到用形容词去描述一个人。我记得以前冯雪老师还特别要求我们在这个短文里找出 20 个形容词来。所以我那个时候有过这方面的训练了。现在再看这个电影的时候，我就变得有意识的去积累这些词汇。

> *(As I noticed that the teacher often played English movies in class; therefore, I learned to develop such a habit on my own – watching English movies and listening to the original English conversations. One time I was watching "Mozart", one of my all-time favorites, and I heard the narrator describing Mozart's character by using a number of adjectives. Then I recalled an in-class activity in Unit 1 of "English in Daily Life", where the teacher asked us to find 20 different adjectives in one article. Since I am already experienced in this regard, I would now make conscious effort to attend to such vocabulary while watching the movie.)*

Last of all, assistance and feedback from the study group tutors also helped the participants learn about their problems in English and task-specific strategies. Some participants recalled how they benefited from the feedback and assistance from their tutors on various occasions. For example, Cai, May and Gao all had quite positive experience with their tutors, who, while proofreading their writing drafts, not only pointed out errors, but also explained in detail how they could be fixed. However, the tutor's assistance seemed to be so unpredictable that it could hardly be considered a stable and reliable component of the support system. For instance, throughout the semester, Yang was not able to get hold of his tutor at all, thus did not get any tutor assistance. At the end of the semester, Gao commented on the unreliable tutor support he had noticed when he talked about the lack of sufficient opportunities and channels for him to get all the answers he wanted. As he explained,

就是我在看教材的过程当中，肯定会遇到很多的问题。那么这些问题，应该怎么去问？因为如果是在夜大，或是其它的学校里，可以去找老师问。但是在网院的话，找老师问比较困难。老师只是讲面授课，其它机会并不是特别多。所以主要是借着面授课去问。只能问一些比较重点的问题。再有一个途径，就是找小导师。可以这个小导师，越到期末越忙。那个……VOB 倒是很可以问，但是这个不是为问问题设计的。因为同一时间都很多人都在讲，这个屏幕几秒钟就刷新一次，所以你的问题就总也得不到老师的关注。总之这就是在辅导这方面的困难。

(While reading the textbook, for sure I would encounter lots of questions. How could I get them answered? If it's a traditional learning setting or a night school, I could have turned to the teachers directly. But for online learning, it's really hard to do that. There are not many chances outside the FTF classes, during which I could only ask questions that were more important. Although I could also ask the tutor, he is usually very busy as well, especially around the time of the finals. Well… VOB could be another channel to ask questions, but it's really not designed for that purpose. As there are always so many people talking [typing] at the same time, the screen is updated very few seconds, so [the questions] can never stay long enough to catch the teacher's attention. … Anyway, getting support in this regard is indeed difficult.)

Conclusion

This chapter discussed findings that address the third research question, "What are the contextual factors that affect the change in adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning in the context of web-based distance learning?" A number of contextual factors unique to this learning context were identified to have influenced the changes in the participants' MCK in different dimensions, including the school-prescribed learning routine including the pre-determined curriculum package, tutorials, and coursework submission timelines, various forms of assessment, feedback on task performance from the teachers and peers, as well as a number of learner support components such as the orientation course, the teacher-led tutorial, and the study group tutor. Notably, the same contextual factors could interact differently with different participants, thereby casting either positive or negative effects on the change trajectories in learners' MCK about web-based DLL.

In the next chapter, "Conclusions", the results from all six cases will be discussed with regard to the three research questions. It will be followed by implications of this study on the design and implementations for designers of web-based distance language programs, online foreign language instructors, and language learners enrolled in web-based distance language programs. Limitations of this study and suggestions on future research will also be discussed.

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the results of the six individual cases are discussed with regards to each of the three research questions. Next, the implications of the study are addressed for the design and implementation of online distance language program, for online distance language instructors and tutors, and for online distance language learners. Finally, the limitations of the study and directions for future research are explored.

Discussion

EFL Learners' MCK about Language Learning in Web-Based Distance Mode

The first research question sought to understand what metacognitive knowledge about language learning adult EFL learners had in the context of web-based distance learning. Results from the study indicated that learners started their first semester in this online English program with marked diversity regarding the scope and specificity of their MCK about web-based distance language learning in all of the four dimensions, namely person, task, strategy and context. Such diversity and variations are consistent with previous studies of distance language learners' MCK (Hurd, 2000, 2002; White, 1999a, 1999b). In particular, this study adds to our knowledge about how distance language learners understand the affordances and constraints of the specific online distance learning context in relation to their goals and expectations of web-based DLL. Findings of this study extend our knowledge about Chinese EFL learners' knowledge of the web-based distance learning contexts and how such knowledge is reflected in their planning and managing of online English learning.

A number of common themes regarding the entering state of distance EFL learners' MCK were identified among the six participants. First, among the weaknesses reported by

participants, low linguistic proficiency in terms of insufficient vocabulary knowledge was the most prominent in all participants' self-knowledge. Accordingly, enhancing linguistic proficiency through vocabulary building was one major learning need shared by all six participants. Such strong awareness of a lack of vocabulary was also found in previous studies of Chinese EFL learners (L. J. Zhang, 2001, 2010). This may be explained by the fact that Chinese EFL learners are learning in a typical "acquisition-poor environment" (Sorace, 1985), where target language input is difficult to come by for the majority of learners, thus lexical knowledge is seen as the building block for any attempt of interacting with the target language.

Across all cases, participants' personal interests in learning the English language and about English culture, as well as the desire to communicate with native speakers were frequently mentioned. Such interests functioned as strong motivational forces that not only drove them to sign up for this program in the first place, but also helped maintain their motivation to learn throughout the semester. In addition, learners also firmly believed that a strong command of English meant a brighter career path, even for those who did not have an immediate need to use English in their current profession. This is congruent with previous studies of Chinese EFL learners, who share the view of English as a high prestige global language and a key to social mobility (K. Hong, 2006; L. Pan & Block, 2011; Young, 1987).

From the outset, two distinct features of language learning in a web-based distance context were reported by all participants, namely the freedom to decide when and where to study and the lack of teacher supervision. Consequently, they all recognized the important role of effective self-discipline and self-management in online learning. This supports previous findings that distance language learners are generally aware of the importance of self-management and autonomous learning as a response to the demands of DLL (White, 1995, 1997). In addition,

186

findings from this study also showed that learning resources or activities that potentially allowed time and opportunities for interaction with the teacher and other students were seen by all participants as extremely useful, including the pre-scheduled teacher-directed VOB and FTF sessions, self-arranged VOB practice sessions within study groups and after class FTF group activities, audio chat through social media, and so forth. Again, this can be seen as learners' reaction to the perceived lack of interaction with their teacher and classmates in an online environment.

More significantly, however, were the contrasting differences observed in participants' MCK base, which were reflected in the ways they planned, managed, and adjusted their expectations toward online English learning, thereby responsible for the various rates of adaption and progress among them during the first semester. These findings are congruent with previous studies that reveal how effective and less effective learners can be distinguished by their MCK base (Wenden, 1998). First, learners' self-knowledge about their strengths and weaknesses varied substantially in terms of its accuracy and specificity. While some learners had a clear and complex self-assessment of their proficiency in different knowledge and skill areas which was backed by keen self-observation of task performances, others only had a vague, limited or even skewed understanding of their English ability. Moreover, participants with broader self-knowledge were more aware of how certain personal qualities could contribute to or hinder their learning in an online distance context, including personality, learning styles, social skills, self-confidence and personal interests.

Second, participants differed in their conceptualizations of the nature of the language learning. While some of them viewed the nature of English learning as mainly the accumulation of vocabulary and grammar knowledge (Cai, Yang, May), others believed it to be enculturation

187

into the English culture by learning how to express and communicate effectively in various social situations (Jing, Lan, Gao). Such differences were consistent with the quantitative-qualitative conceptualization of language learning proposed by Benson and Lor (1999), which is related to their strategy knowledge regarding the overall language learning approaches and different language tasks. Findings from this study showed that while all participants acknowledged vocabulary building as one major component of the language learning process, Jing, Lan, and Gao also attached great importance to the development of communicative ability in English through writing and speaking. Moreover, not only were they aware that different tasks required different strategies, but they also stressed the interconnectedness of the four language skills and the possibility of attending to the improvement of multiple skills simultaneously during one task. Yet the others' understanding of the main approach to language learning was mostly limited to the accumulation of linguistic knowledge (May even went as far as claiming English learning did not require any understanding, just memorization). Among these participants, the primarily adopted methods were always memorizing the list of key words, phrases, or texts by rote learning, beyond which their strategy repertoire was rather lacking. Nonetheless, these findings are only partially consistent with previous studies which show that memorization and surface-learning strategies are the predominant choices among Chinese EFL learners (Gu, 2003; J. Xiao & Hurd, 2007). Rather, it also indicates that functional communicative strategies are also part of some Chinese EFL learners' strategy repertoire.

Third, learners also differ significantly in their knowledge about self-regulated learning, namely planning, monitoring and evaluating their language learning. This type of knowledge is particularly crucial for learners in a self-directed learning environment because it "represents the knowledge base that students draw on as they make decisions about their learning" (Cotterall &

Murray, 2009, p. 34), and distance learners are especially at risk if they fail to develop knowledge and strategies that will help them to plan and monitor their work in the absence of regular classroom contact and teacher mediation (Hurd, 2000). In this study, some learners started the first semester with no specific personal study goals or detailed plans regarding time and effort regulation except to follow the teacher and the FTF class. Clearly at this point these learners were not ready for self-directed learning. Such unpreparedness was also observed in previous studies (Fisher, Hafner, & Young, 2007; X. Zhang & Cui, 2010; H. Zhao, et al., 2014).

On the other hand, others brought with them clear personal agendas and specific study goals based on their self-perceived learning needs. They were also aware of a broader range of learning resources which could facilitate the self-monitoring of their learning progress. On the whole, these learners demonstrated much stronger readiness for taking full responsibility of their learning in this online program more so than the other participants with no personal study plans or goals. This contrasting difference was also manifested in their perceptions and expectations toward the teacher's role in online language learning, which was viewed as another defining character for learners' readiness for autonomous learning (Cotterall, 1995b, 1999). While some learners viewed the teacher as the dominant figure who should perform most of the learning functions as in those in traditional FTF classrooms – from teaching the knowledge and skills to providing feedback and supervision, others only expected the teachers to provide guidance and help when necessary. Naturally, such different views of the teacher's role corresponded to the participants' perceptions of their own responsibilities as an online distance learner. For example, learners who believed that the students themselves should take on full responsibilities for their learning also stressed the importance of getting familiar with the learning environment beforehand. Accordingly, they demonstrated a much more thorough understanding of the

189

demands, opportunities, and constraints related to online distance language learning and this particular program at CF Online. This knowledge helped them make critical evaluations when choosing from different learning sources to serve their own learning needs.

These differences identified in the participants' MCK base at the beginning of the semester highlighted the influence of one's previous learning experience and personal background on shaping their knowledge about themselves as English learners, the language learning process, and their assumptions and expectations toward web-based DLL. As Wenden (1998) pointed out, MCK is "an abstract representation of a learner's experience". Hence learner's development of beliefs about what learning and teaching are or should be and what roles of learners and teachers are or should be is an reflection of the kind of learning and teaching traditions in a certain language learning context (Gabillon, 2002). In this sense, the overall "acquisition-poor" EFL learning environment and the dominant pedagogical style which has remained to be a teacher-centered, exam-orientated, and grammar-translation model (L. Pan & Block, 2011; L. J. Zhang, 2010) could help explain the entering state of some participants' MCK when the semester started. For learners like Cai, Yang, and May, all of their previous English studies had only been in traditional classroom-based settings which were characterized by teacher-directed test-oriented learning focusing predominantly on developing linguistic proficiency. This then, at least to some extent, set the stage for the traditional learning approach and expectations they had adopted for their online English learning. Jing, Lan, and Gao, on the other hand, not only had their previous English studies occurred mostly in non-traditional learning settings, but all of them also had some type of self-directed language learning experiences. Such experiences appeared to have helped them better foresee and adapt to the demands and requirements posted by this new learning mode. Moreover, Lan's own profession

190

as an foreign language teacher might also account for her relatively sophisticated MCK about language learning and self-directed learning.

Changes in Distance EFL Learners' MCK over Time

Research question 2 sought to understand how adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning changed over time in the context of web-based distance learning. Results from the six individual cases indicated that all participants' MCK about English learning in online distance context developed in all of the four dimensions yet in varied degrees. Based on the cross-case analysis, some common trends of change were identified. First, over the semester, all learners further developed their self-knowledge regarding both the progresses they had made, and some deficiencies in different knowledge and skill areas that had been overlooked, especially in those areas which they had not had much experience previously, such as writing and reading. In the meantime, their awareness enhanced regarding how certain personal factors had affected their learning process in this online program, such as "laziness", "easily getting distracted", "anxiety over new vocabulary", or "embarrassment about asking questions". Second, although to varied degrees, they all refined and revised their knowledge about the online language learning process and what was required to learn effectively in this online program. Third, over the semester, all participants developed new personal understandings about how to better manage their online English learning and how to approach specific learning tasks. In general, more references were made to improving the overall planning and management of the learning process than dealing with specific learning tasks and processes. Along with these changes also came some new understandings of how to utilize different learning materials to facilitate the self-study. This observed trend toward wider and increased metacognitive awareness regarding planning and self-management is consistent with previously studies of

191

distance language learners and self-instructed language learners (e.g., Bown, 2009; Hauck, 2005; White, 1994, 1995, 1997). They can be seen as distance language learners' self-initiated responses to the demands placed on them by the particular distance learning context, in which learners are expected to manage the learning process by themselves since such learning context does not provide the kind of regular direction and guidance that they are used to in previous classroom-based environment.

Nonetheless, given that the participants started their online language learning with varied degrees of readiness, the changes in their MCK over the semester were also in varied rates, depths and scope. On the whole, changes came much later for learners who started with a weaker MCK base (e.g., Cai, Yang, and May) than for learners with higher levels of MCK (e.g., Jing, Lan, and Gao). For Cai, Yang, and May, changes in their MCK during the first semester can be characterized more as a process of "metacognitive awakening" (Cotterall & Murray, 2009), during which they gradually realized what the unique demands and requirements of online distance language learning truly meant to themselves, and came to see the need to change how learning should be managed; yet, the extent of such changes were not strong enough to result in any substantial change in their actual learning behaviors in this semester. For example, at midterm, all three learners reported some type of uncertainty or anxiety resulted from struggling to keep up with the course's pace (i.e. the FTF class schedule) and preparing for the upcoming final exam. By the end of the semester, they all came to see that merely relying on the FTF class to study was not enough, and that in the following semester they needed to take more initiatives during self-study by devoting more study time (Yang), by setting specific study goals and regular effort and using supplemental learning materials (Cai), or simply by ensuring certain study time on a daily basis (May). Such increased awareness of time- and effort-regulation represents an

important aspect of self-management of learning, which is a "powerful index of the metacognitive knowledge and skills of learners" (White, 1995, p. 217).

For the other participants who were better prepared with a more solid MCK base at the beginning of the semester, their rates of adaptation were much faster in that changes observed in their MCK and resultant actions happened mostly in the first few weeks of the semester. By midterm, all learners reported that they had mostly adapted to this mode of learning by actively making changes to how they managed their learning through simplifying and re-prioritizing their study routines. In particular, at the time of the first interview, Jing had already adjusted her approach and study goals after discovering that the courses were too easy for her. Both Gao and Lan decided to discard their original study plan that aimed at studying everything meticulously in the textbook as they found the workload too overwhelmingly large. Consequently, they adopted a much more simplified learning routine that only focused on what they deemed the most important. In addition to new understandings of how to better proceed with language learning in this online program, there was also increased metacognitive awareness noted regarding how to better manage their feelings and emotions as they arose along with the learning process. They were particularly aware of the challenge to maintain their motivation for learning at times when they felt uninspired or difficult to concentrate. One of the strategies they resorted to was to establish personal connections with the learning materials by applying what they had learned in the program to real-life situations. This was also an indication of learners' specific awareness of transferring acquired knowledge and skills to other tasks or situations. As Wenden (1998, p. 527) argues, this process of "transfer of learning" requires the learner to acquire adequate knowledge of the strategy including its purposes and possible outcomes, as well as the kind of mindfulness that will enable the learner to determine whether there are similarities between the previous

learning tasks in which certain strategy is used and the present one. Moreover, developments in their self-knowledge as to how they could learn best within this particular learning context were also manifested in their awareness of certain limitations of this online program that were constraining their English learning. These findings, again, indicate the crucial role of MCK in self-regulated learning in terms of how it serves as the base for decision-making (Bown, 2009; Rivers, 2001; White, 2009).

Also significant was the finding that some aspects of participants' MCK remained unchanged or unnoticed, as they might be too rigid to give rise to any change happening internally. For example, by the end of the semester, Cai came to the reinforced view that this online English program was a "test-oriented" model, one he had felt most familiar and comfortable with. This adjustment in perception can be seen as Cai's way of handling the unavoidable confusion and uncertainty entailed in distance language learning in terms of what constitutes their own learning experience. For novice online distance language learners who do not have any previous experience in self-directed language learning characterized with very limited guidance from the teacher, it is easy to feel overwhelmed or lost when facing all the learning materials at their disposal, which would have been selected or filtered by the teacher for the students in classroom-based learning (White, 1999). At times like this, it appeared that Cai automatically fell back on the situations he had more experience with, namely the traditional teacher-directed classroom language learning. This was Cai's attempt to make sense of the current learning progress and make it better focused, despite that he had acknowledged initially that the abundance of learning resources was an asset of online English learning.

In Yang's case, as his MCK base was so weak, and he was quite insensitive to most contextual cues, it turned out that most of his decision-making was based on intuition. Therefore,

194

it was almost impossible for him to identify problems in his learning methods on his own without the help and reminder from the teacher or other classmates. For May, although she realized the need to stop being a passive learner, some of her beliefs about language learning were so deeply-rooted that they continued to limit her awareness of actively expanding her strategy repertoire, such as her assumption that being brave enough to speak up would solve all the problems, and that she could not do anything else with English unless her vocabulary got expanded to a certain level. As a result, in the first semester she made a lot of efforts in trying to increase her vocabulary through memorizing the word-lost, yet only finding herself getting frustrated by the lack of positive outcomes.

Contextual Factors and MCK Change

Research question 3 states, "What are the contextual factors that affect the changes in adult EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge about language learning in the context of web-based distance learning?" As the results indicate, based on the refinements and revisions of their MCK about language learning in online distance learning mode, each of the participants had started to shape their own learning experience in this program, hence their personal learner-context interface. Congruent with what White (1999a) points out, this was a result of the interplay between learner factors and contextual factors as they exerting influences on each other. A number of contextual factors in this highly structured distance EFL program have played a role in shaping the development of learners' MCK or challenging their previous perceptions. Among them, the pre-packaged learning content, the external deadlines, the pre-determined timeline for teacher-directed learning sessions, and the forms of assessment created an external structure that largely shaped how learners viewed their language learning should be planned and regulated. This was especially influential for learners who had no experience in self-

195

managing their learning without regular teacher supervision and direction. The necessity of structure in guiding distance learners' self-management of study is also highlighted in earlier studies (Murday, 2004b; White, 2003b). Moreover, the mandatory coursework deadlines and the scheduled online and FTF classes served as external motivators that pushed learners to regulate their study time and effort accordingly. As White (2003b, p. 115) points out, it is particularly challenging for online language learners to maintain motivation without the structuring effect of FTF classes. Therefore, this school-prescribed learning routine could "help them gauge their progress and guide them to the next step of learning". This was also reflected in the course instructor's comments, "one of the main purposes to have these assignments was to help students regulate their efforts and form some type of learning habit". Lastly, learners' reliance on the highly structured course may be another indication of their low readiness for self-regulated learning due to a lack of experience in autonomous learning. As White (2003b, p. 204) observes:

> *Students who have experienced only teacher-fronted language classes, or students who are less confident about their independent learning skills are two groups who may benefit from a course structure in which processes and paths are highly specified, particularly in the initial stages of the course.*

Furthermore, the design and delivery of the teacher-directed tutorials facilitated learners to acquire knowledge about specific learning tasks and task-specific strategies. In the meantime, the fast pace of these tutorials also challenged some learners' previous assumption that they could solely rely on the teacher's instruction, which led to further adjustments in their understanding of the learner's role in online distance language learning. In addition, as a crucial component of the support system in online distance language learning, peer interaction through various communication channels had also contributed to learners' metacognitive development, especially for those who had engaged in regular peer interactions and activities.

196

In the meantime, some aspects of this particular learning context seemed to have inhibited learners' MCK development. First, the rigid learning structure, characterized by the static and linear model of learning content, could not provide many opportunities for learners to set and pursue their personal goals, choose the materials they were interested in, and using them in ways that accommodate their learning needs and styles. Such personal exploration is seen as particularly important for learners to develop knowledge about themselves and how they learn best (Cotterall & Murray, 2009). Second, learners in this program were not provided with sufficient and well-guided opportunities to reflect upon their own learning process, another essential process for metacognitive development (Schraw & Moshman, 1995; Smith & Craig, 2013). This should be especially necessary for learners who have little experience with self-reflection in traditional classroom-based language learning. Third, the feedback on learners' task performance provided by the grading teachers was inadequate or sometimes even misleading, directing the learners' attention mainly to forms of the target language instead of meaning. Such impact could be particularly detrimental for learners who had to rely mostly on external feedback, such as Yang.

In addition, the discrepancy between the objectives of the curriculum and focus of the assessments could not effectively support learners' goal of improving their communicative competence in English. While the course materials are designed with the aim of developing learners' functional use of the target language, the assessments mainly focused on linguistic accuracy, and little guidance was provided to help learners understand the purposes of the learning activities or how to approach them during self-study. As a result, although being able to communicate in English fluently was the goal for most of the learners, they were not able to

develop much knowledge and skills about how to improve their communicative skills in this semester.

Last of all, the lack of effort from the school in maintaining the learning community – such as the delayed or no response from the faculty on the Discussion Forum and the inconsistency in tutor assistance and feedback –seemed to have affected learners' management of their learning through social interaction. As Hurd (2005, p. 5) argues, in a distance context, "it is tutor feedback, paper-based or online, that can best create the conditions for learners to become good critical reflectors and develop self-management strategies", therefore, the inadequacy of tutor and teacher feedback observed in this program is definitely alarming.

Implications

Findings from this study have important implications for the designers of web-based distance language courses, distance language instructors and tutors, and online distance language learners.

Implications for Web-Based Distance Language Course Designers

In distance learning, course materials are considered the main vehicle for the process of developing the knowledge and skills for autonomous or self-regulated learning (Murphy, 2008), which brings particular challenges for course designers. Results from this study indicate that it is crucial for designers of online language courses for distance learners to take into account the diversity of students' prior knowledge and backgrounds in English learning and use, and they may not assume students enrolled in distance language program are automatically adequate self-regulated learners because they are now granted with the freedom to manage their own learning. Especially in a typical test-oriented teacher-centered EFL learning context like China, learners'

198

MCK about language learning in a self-directed context may be much under-developed.

Therefore, given the inherent constraints of distance language context, namely the lack of regular

teacher mediation and direction (White, 2009), it may be more effective if course designers could

strike a balance between maintaining the structure of the course materials and integrating

pedagogical capacities for critical reflection and conscious decision-making to promote self-

regulated learning (Murphy, 2005, 2008). At the same time, it would be helpful if explicit advice

is provided and built into the course materials throughout as to when and how to do self-

reflection. In language learning context specifically, research has shown that learners' recording

and reflection upon learning progress and strategy use supported by learning portfolios and

journals as a means for awareness-raising have great values in facilitating MCK development

(Little, 2007; Lo, 2010; Smith & Craig, 2013; Yang, 2003).

Furthermore, in addition to the multimodality of knowledge presentation, multiple

sources and types of learning materials can also be provided to the students, which may include

the task-based textbook, videos of real-life interactions with native speakers, classroom-based

learning, and access to target language sources on the web. As in reality people generally learn

languages through a mixed means of materials, the use of multiple sources could reflect what

actually happens as learners attempt to approach the target language beyond the distance learning

context (White, 2003b). Moreover, considering the unique features of learners' personal learning

system, such as the available time and locations for study, as well as the opportunities to use the

target language, learning materials of various types and forms that are related to real-life

situations and accessed by different devices should to be provided to learners in order to

accommodate their diverse needs. In particular, as revealed from this study, mobile-assistant

language learning seems to have great potential in enhancing personal learning experience in a

"anywhere, anytime" fashion (Burston, 2014; Chinnery, 2006; Godwin-Jones, 2009). In addition to delivering supplementary learning materials and keeping the students updated with program notifications, other components such as language learning games or quick assessments related to the course content can also be delivered to learners. Moreover, to better facilitate learners' use of these sources, guidance or modelling on how to evaluate these materials and concrete examples of how to use them should be made available to learners at least in the initial state of learning. Last of all, to encourage effective independent engagement with the materials, it may be helpful to embed clear and sufficient in-text support along with the learning content and activities in the courseware and textbooks so as to guidance the self-study process, and to help learners better understand the task purposes.

Implications for Distance Language Instructors and Tutors

Results from this study indicate that distance language instructors and tutors play a significant role in learners' MCK development. It is highly important for instructors and tutors to keep in mind that learners' MCK about language learning is developmental and dynamic rather than static, and input and feedback from the teachers and tutors can be strong influences in shaping learners' MCK about language learning in a particular learning context. This area of knowledge and sensitivity may be strengthened through professional development or teacher/tutor preparation sessions. Moreover, the marked diversity found in learner's MCK in this study and the consequently varied rates of adaptation and adjustments pose unique challenges for online language instructor and tutors. First of all, as some students may not have a clear sense of what learning strategies may benefit them the most, thus, at least in a transitional phase like the first semester of the DLL program, teachers and tutors may not expect that students would be able to manipulate the flexibility in such program without adequate guidance.

The sharing and modeling of strategy use among instructors and students can help create a collaborative atmosphere as well as provide learners with opportunities to acquire alternative learning approaches or methods that fit better this mode of language learning (Murday, 2004a).

Second, some students may need extra assistance and guidance to adapt to the online environment, to understand the purposes and requirements of learning tasks, and to become aware of task-specific strategy. Among the desired assistance, the need to design activities or guidance that can help learners develop communicative ability in the target language seems especially urgent (Hampel & Arcos, 2013). It has been noted that many web-based language programs focus on reading, writing, and listening, rather than speaking (Hopkins, 2010), as does the program in this study. The results of this study show that distance language learners prefer and seek more opportunities for developing communicative skills, yet some of them know little about how to do it. Therefore, distance language instructors should not revert to teaching grammar and passive language skills online but should promote oral interaction and create opportunities for speaking in the target language. Limiting grammatical presentations and feedbacks that focus on forms, and posting more practice exercises online while freeing more time in the synchronous classroom for speaking would be one way to address this need. Additionally, distance language instructors should keep in mind that in the online learning environments peer discussions are as important as in the FTF context. Creating collaborative activities or assessments where students speak to each other in the target language will encourage students to develop their communicative skills and explore their identity as a learner and user of the target language (Eneau & Develotte, 2012; Kostina, 2011). Such organized and monitored group activity can also help maintaining distance language learners' motivation and strengthen their sense of being part of a learning community.

Furthermore, as shown in this study, students expect the instructors and tutors to provide detailed, timely, and individualized feedback and to be easy to reach. Specifically, it would be more facilitative if their feedback focuses not only on the product of learning, i.e. the strengths and weaknesses of the assignment, but also the process of learning, i.e. the strategies and actions that can be taken to improve the knowledge and skills in the target language (White, 2003b). In the meantime, the need for intervention for students who may be struggling should be addressed as well. While some of the opportunities or needs for intervention can be gathered from the data collected on student behavior, online language instructors and tutors should carefully monitor students' progress (or lack thereof) and provide regular contact and feedback to avoid escalating problems among students who are failing to adapt well.

Finally, as an important component of learner support, the tutors may take a greater role in the distance language learning context. First and foremost, their role and responsibilities need to be clearly defined and clarified both to tutors themselves and the students. Also, tutors need to be properly trained in order to provide effective and consistent feedback and support. It would be also very assuring to the students that both the instructor and the tutor must be available for assistance via email or virtual office hours on a regular basis to help them ease the anxiety or uncertainty as they are adapting to a new learning mode.

Implications for Online Distance Language Learners

In terms of practical suggestions for distance language learners, findings of this study offer a number of ideas. The first is concerned with the importance of developing social competence that is required for online language learning. As the data show that students enroll in online distance language program start their online distance language learning with varying degrees of readiness, thus require different levels of student-teacher interaction. While some

202

teachers or tutors are aware of this situation and may adjust their communication styles to cater for individual student's needs, others might treat their students in a one-size-fits-all manner. As in online distance learning context it is impossible to completely rely on the teacher's sensitivity to their students' needs and their motive, in order to truly get individualized support students need to take the initiative to reach out and let the teachers and tutors know about their needs through open and continuing dialogues. By actively sharing their feelings and thoughts, students' feeling of connectedness can also be strengthened, and their motivation sustained.

The second suggestion for online distance language learners is concerned with learners' competence in truly taking ownership of their language learning. This entails taking charge both internally and externally (White, 2005a). Take charging internally means to manage one's own affect, including the fluctuations of motivation and emotions one is likely to experience during the online distance learning experience. Distance language learners need to make wider and more frequent use of affective strategies to address the anxieties and uncertainties about their progress and the fading learning motivation during the learning process. In addition to self-motivational strategies, social strategies that aim for actively keeping connected with other peers and the learning community is particularly effective for distance language learners and highly plausible as well with the support of a variety of Internet communication technologies (Morgan, 2012). Taking charge externally involves distance language learners' deliberate attempts to restructuring the learning environment and circumstances to make them optimal for their own language learning. This involves constant reflection and evaluation of their own learning strategies and learning progress, which again, can be supported and enhanced by sharing and discussing with their peers and teachers (Reinders & Hubbard, 2012).

Limitations

There are some limitations to the current study. First and foremost, due to the unexpected delay at the beginning of the semester, the first individual interviews were not conducted until week 6. This delay might have influenced the data collected to address the first research questions, namely the entering stage of participants' MCK. It was not quite clear to what the extent the first few weeks' experience in the program affected their perceptions toward web-based DLL. Second, potential effects caused by the presence of the researcher and her involvement in the participants' learning process during the semester cannot be ruled out. It is possible that the individual interviews and weekly tutoring provided as incentive for participation have affected the participants' MCK development, in that by reflecting upon their learning experiences they may have become more aware of themselves as language learners, the learning process, strategies or the learning context. Yet the degree to which the interviews promoted the development in their MCK, or influenced the MCK they were able to articulate, cannot be measured. Third, the research reported here is based on a small number of students' retrospective verbal account. Their self-report cannot be regarded as a complete account of their MCK or its development over time. Rather, it reflects the knowledge they were able to articulate or were conscious of at the time. In addition, participants of the six individual cases were selected from only those students who voluntarily chose to fill out and return the OLRS survey. It is possible that the students who did not return their survey had very different MCK bases. In addition, although additional data were collected to record the participants' course performance and participation, they could only provide an incomplete account of their learning experience over the semester, as not all information regarding their actual use of the different components of the learning management system were collected. This information can improve the data triangulation

204

in terms of verifying the changes in their MCK and the resultant learning behaviors. Finally, the study did not involve any true measures of participants' language proficiency and learning gains, since for some participants the entrance English exam was waived, and no performance data on their final exams were collected as they were not available.

Future Research

Building on results from this study, several areas can be explored in future research. First, considering the very different MCK bases and the changes over the semester among all six participants, it is possible that with additional participants, or if the study extends to more than one semester, some additional characteristics of language learners' MCK and the trends of change can be identified. This can also be done by developing a survey questionnaire to be administered among a large number of online language learners, and in various types of learning environments, such as self-access centers and blended/hybrid language programs. Also, a large scale quantitative research supplemented by qualitative measures can for sure increase generalizability. In addition, among the contextual influences identified in this study, learners' social interaction with the teacher and peers is especially worthy of careful investigation, as social interaction is considered of particular importance in knowledge construction (Barcelos, 2003). Finally, interventions may be developed and tested to establish methods that help those students who struggle to adapt to online distance language learning. Interventions may be introduced in learner training or preparation at the beginning, or in forms of targeted strategy instruction during the learning process, protocols for assistance seeking and provision, or alternative activities for students who have severe difficulties with the course requirements or who have progressed beyond the basic requirements. The effectiveness of these interventions should be established to allow best-practice recommendations for future adoption.

205

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Online Learning Readiness Scale[23]

Name: _____   Beiwai Online ID: _____

Email: _____

Instruction: *Below are some statements about aspects of online learning. Read each statement, reflect upon your experience as an online learner, and then decide if you: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) partially disagree, (4) partially agree, (5) agree, and (6) strongly agree to these statement. Remember there are no right or wrong answers, just answer as accurately as possible. Please circle the number of your choice:*

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Partially Disagree	Partially Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. I feel confident in performing the basic functions of Microsoft Office programs (MS Word, MS Excel, and MS PowerPoint)   1 2 3 4 5 6

2. I feel confident in my knowledge and skills of how to manage software for online learning.   1 2 3 4 5 6

3. I feel confident in using the Internet (Google, Yahoo, Baidu, Sina, Sohu, etc.) to find or gather information for online learning   1 2 3 4 5 6

4. I carry out my own study plan.   1 2 3 4 5 6

5. I seek assistance when facing learning problems.   1 2 3 4 5 6

6. I manage time well.   1 2 3 4 5 6

7. I set up my learning goals   1 2 3 4 5 6

8. I have higher expectations for my learning performance.   1 2 3 4 5 6

9. I can direct my own learning progress.   1 2 3 4 5 6

10. I am not distracted by other online activities when learning online (instant messages, miniblog, Internet surfing).   1 2 3 4 5 6

11. I repeated the online instructional materials on the basis of my needs.   1 2 3 4 5 6

12. I am open to new ideas.   1 2 3 4 5 6

13. I have motivation to learn.   1 2 3 4 5 6

_____

[23] All surveys were administered in participants' native language, i.e. Chinese

14. I improve from my mistakes.	1 2 3 4 5 6
15. I like to share my ideas with others.	1 2 3 4 5 6
16. I feel confident in using online tools (email, discussion board, QQ, chatrooms, miniblog) to effectively communicate with others.	1 2 3 4 5 6
17. I feel confident in expressing myself (emotions and humor) through text.	1 2 3 4 5 6
18. I feel confident in posting questions in online discussions	1 2 3 4 5 6

Based on (Hung, et al., 2010) (Hung, Chou, Chen, & Own, 2010)

Appendix B: Language Learning Background and Technology Use Survey (Beginning of semester)

1. Do you have any experience learning another foreign language other than English?

        ____ YES   ____ NO

2. If yes, please specify: _____

3. Have you taken any distance language classes before?

    a. ____ YES   ____ NO

    b. If yes, in what format?

____ Correspondence course   ____ radio and TV   ____ web-based

4. Why do you come back to continue English learning (choose all that apply)?

___ Interested in language and culture   ___ To go/travel abroad

___ To have more professional development   ___ For future job marketing

___ To communicate with native speakers   Other _____

5. Why do you choose to learn English Online (choose all that apply)?

___ Because I enjoy using computers

___ Because I wanted to try a new way to take a course

___ Because I don't like being called on in class

___ Because this program works well with my other commitments in life

___ Because I think I can practice English more on the computer and via internet

Other (please specify): _____

6. Mark if you personally own the items below. If you don't have one, mark if you can get it (by borrowing it or by using it in a lab) easily, with difficulty, or not at all.

	Own/have it	Can find it easily	Can find with difficulty	Can't get it
PC desktop computer				
PC laptop				
Mac desktop computer				
Mac laptop				
Tablet (e.g., iPad, Samsung Note, Kindle, etc.)				
Computer speakers				
Headphones				
Microphone				

Printer				
Internet access				
Webcam				
Digital camera				
Video camera				

7. How long have you been using a computer? _____

8. How hours do you use computer in a typical day? _____

9. Mark if you use the following items in your personal life, in your language class, and if you believe they are or could be useful for language learning.

		I use this for my personal life	We have used this in language classes	I think this is/ would be useful for language learning
1	Public websites			
2	Course websites			
3	Blogs			
4	Wikis			
5	Email			
6	Instant messaging			
7	Weibo			
8	WeChat			
9	Video chat			
10	listservs			
11	Video/audio materials			
12	Online digital video/audio			
13	Podcasts/videocasts			
14	Computer games			
15	CD-ROMs/DVDs			
16	online exercises/quizzes			
17	SNS			
19	Text/Multimedia messaging			

10. Do you regularly get together with a group of people online? ___ YES   ___NO

If YES, based on what common factor?

___ students   ___ family members   ___ hobbies/fan clubs

___ friends   ___ games   other _____

Based on (Ushida, 2005b; Winke & Goertler, 2008a)

Appendix C: Individual interviews (Beginning of semester)

1. Previous English learning experience:

   a. How many years have you been learning English?

   b. What other English learning experiences have you had (residence in an English speaking country, study abroad, vacations, etc.)?

   c. What are the typical ways of instruction you have experienced? Do you think it fits you?

   d. Could you describe your methods for English learning? What methods work best for you?

      i. How do you learn reading, writing,… ?

2. Compare learning English with learning other subject, what do you think are the differences and similarities?

3. How do you define "success" in English learning?

4. What do you consider the characteristics of a good language learner?

5. Do you consider yourself a good language learner? Why or why not?

6. (a) Think about areas in English in which you have done well (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, etc.). Name the one area where you have had the *most* success.

   (b) Why have you been successful in this area?

   (c) Will online learning environment enhance or hinder your strengths in English?

7. (a) Think about areas in English in which you have not done so well (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, etc.). Name the one area where you have had the *least* success.

(b) Why have you been less successful in this area?

   (c) Will online learning environment in English?

8. In the survey, you said the reason that you come back to English learning was…. Could you tell me more about your motivation to study English?

9. In the survey, you said the reason that you chose to learn English online was …. Do you think this online program can fit you in this (these) way(s)?

   a. What do you expect to learn at Beiwai Online?

10. Questions regarding technology use in the survey:

   a. In the survey, you mentioned a number of technologies that had been used in your language class. Could you tell me:

       i. What language were they used for?

       ii. How they were used?

       iii. Were they helpful?

    a. In the survey, you mentioned a number of technologies that you thought useful for language learning. In what way(s) do you think they are useful?

11. Do you think there is/might be any difference between learning English online and learning in face-to-face classroom?

    a. In which environment—classroom or online—do you feel that you can learn better? Why?

    b. How do you think the online/distance learning will affect/influence your English study? Discuss both positive and negative impact on your strength and weaknesses.

12. How do you manage to study English with this program during this semester? Could you step me through the process of learning one unit or a typical week.

    a. How do you organize your time to study English during this semester? You could try to describe how you may start the first unit.

    b. What are the resources, materials and activities on Beiwai Online or the internet you use to study?

    c. What are the tools or technologies on Beiwai Online or the internet that you use to study?

    d. What do you think the teacher's role should be in this process?

    e. What the study group or other classmates could do to help you?

13. [Yoked subject procedure[24]] Imaging that you are talking to someone who is very interested in learning English through Beiwai Online. Before making the decision, he/she is asking you a number of questions about learning English in the web-based environment:

    a. What is it like being an online distance English learner?

    b. What does online English learning involve?

       i. What kinds of things do you have to do?

    c. How do you set goals for studying?

---

[24] A number of questions are put to the students, and they are asked to respond as if they were speaking with another perspective online EFL student who is thinking about learning English through web-based distance course or is about to start learning in the same program. This hypothetical student is to be described as unfamiliar with distance learning through an online program, that is someone who is in the same situation as learner themselves at the start of the semester. The questions are phrased in such a way as to represent the kinds of things a prospective student may ask.

d. What do you need to do to be successful in online English learning? How are these different from those you use in face to face classes

e. What challenges/problems/difficulties do you anticipate in your English study online during this semester?

      i.   How you do plan to tackle these problems?

      ii.   Where can you get help?

Appendix D: Individual interviews (Midterm)

1. How is your learning progress so far?

    a. Where are you according to the syllabus?

    b. Completion of course work?

2. Could you describe how you managed your study?

    a. You can give an example of one unit or one week (Reminder of previously mentioned study plans).

    b. How have you been able to manage your study and organize your time as you have planned at the beginning (refer to the 1st interview)?

    c. Do you think that the way you have planned or managed or study is effective? Why or why not?

    d. Do you want to keep it this way or make some changes?

3. How is your study going so far?

    a. What does _____ (well, badly, pretty well. . .) mean for you?

    b. What progress do you think you have made during these past few weeks? *(Person)*

        i. Language ability

        ii. Learning skills

    c. On what basis do you gauge your progress in this program? *(Person/Task)*

    d. What has helped / worked (content, activity, tools, and strategies) for you to make such progress?

    e. Have you done anything to ensure that you are making progress in your English learning?

        i. By yourself?

        ii. Seeking for help/assistance?

    f. Have you encountered any trouble, difficulty, uneasiness during your learning?

        i. What do you think the reasons are for these issues?

        ii. Have you had any solution to solve them?

            • By yourself?

            • Seeking for help/assistance?

4. How have you utilized the available tools and resources to study? And how do you feel about their usefulness to you?

a. Have you used the learning resources and materials (refer to the 1st interview)? What else have you used? Are they helpful?

b. Have you used the learning tools and technologies (refer to the 1st interview)? What else have you used? Are they helpful?

c. Have you been keeping in touch with your teacher and classmates? If so, in what way?

d. Have you been engaged in online learning activities? How did it go?

5. So far, how do you think the web-based distance learning has affected/influenced your English study this semester? Discuss both positive and negative impact.

6. How are you going to go about your study next?

   a. What areas you want to focus?

   b. What new methods do you want to try?

7. Please answer the following questions about your experience as an online distance language learner so far:

   a. What does learning English online mean to you?

   b. As a distance language learner, what do you have to do?

   c. When I started learning English, what did you expect? What did you not expect?

   d. Regarding learning English online, what are you beginning to realize now?

Appendix E: Individual interviews (End of semester)

1. How is your learning progress so far?

    a. Have you finished all the units?

    b. Have you completed all the assignments?

2. Have you been managing your study differently since last time we talked?

    a. If so, why?

    b. How have you been able to manage your study and organize your time as you planned (refer to 1st and 2nd interview)?

    c. Do you think that the way you have planned or managed or study is effective? Why or why not?

3. Since our last talk, how has your study been going?

    a. What does _____ (well, badly, pretty well. . .) mean for you?

    b. Have you met your goal of… (refer to 2nd interview)?

    c. On what basis do you gauge that you have or have not met your goal?

    d. What progress do you think you have made during these past few weeks?

        i. Language ability

        ii. Learning skills

    e. What has helped / worked (content, activity, tools, and strategies) for you to make such progress?

    f. Have you done anything to ensure that you are making progress in your English learning?

        i. By yourself?

        ii. Seeking for help/assistance?

    g. Have you encountered any trouble, difficulty, uneasiness during your learning?

        i. What do you think the reasons are for these issues?

        ii. Have you had any solution to solve them?

            • By yourself?

            • Seeking for help/assistance?

4. How have you utilized the available tools and resources to study differently? And how do you feel about their usefulness to you now?

e. Have you used the learning resources and materials (refer to the 1st & 2nd interview)? What else have you used? Are they helpful?

f. Have you used the learning tools and technologies (refer to the 1st and 2nd interview)? What else have you used? Are they helpful?

g. Have you been keeping in touch with your teacher and classmates? If so, in what way?

a. Have you been engaged in online learning activities? How did it go?

5. Looking back into the whole semester, what progress do you think you have made?

a. Language competence

b. Learning ability

6. After this semester of learning, how would you describe yourself as an online distance EFL learner?

a. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

b. In what ways do you work best?

c. What is your preferred way of learning?

7. After this semester of learning English online, are you happy with your learning progress? Now do you consider yourself as a successful English learner in distance language class?

8. After this semester of learning English online, how do you think the web-based distance learning has affected/influenced your English study this semester? Discuss both positive and negative impact.

9. Do you think this mode of learning fits you? Why?

10. Based on your experience in this semester, what is your goal/plan to go about your study next?

a. Language competence

b. Learning methods, what do you want to the same, what do you want to do differently?

11. [Yoked subject procedure] Imaging that you are talking to someone who is about to start his/her English study at Beiwai Online. Before the new semester starts, he/she is asking you a number of questions about your learning experience so far:

c. What is it like being an online EFL student?

d. What does online English learning involve?

  i. What kinds of things do you have to do? What is involved in the learning process?

     ii.   How do you go about learning English as online distance student? What do you do to learn?

e. Do you set goals for studying? What kinds of goals? How to make sure your goals have been reached?

f. How to be successful in online English learning?

g. Have you ever felt uncertain or confused?

     i.   Can you remember one of those occasions?

     ii.   What happened? What was the outcome? What did you learn?

     iii.   Are there any other memorable occasions you can tell me about?

Interview guidance is based on White (1999a, 1999b, 2003b), Bown (2009), and Graham (2004).

Appendix F: Instructor's evaluation of students' course participation

Instructions: Please evaluate the quality of the following students' course participation regarding the listed activities using the scale provided. Provide one number in each column. If you have been impressed by or concerned with any of them, please add your comments.

Excellent   5   4   3   2   1   Poor

Student name	Assignment submission	Tutorial participation	BBS participation	Communication with instructor	Overall progress made	Com ments
e.g., Yixin						
Xiaozhe						

Based on (Ushida, 2005b)

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

Akyol, Z., & Garrison, D. R. (2011). Assessing metacognition in an online community of inquiry. *Internet and Higher Education, 14*, 183-190.

Alexander, P. A., Schallert, D. L., & Hare, V. C. (1991). How Researchers in Learning and Literacy Talk about Knowledge. *Review of Educational Research, 61*(3), 315-343.

Anderson, T. (2004). Toward a theory of online learning. In T. Anderson & F. Elloumi (Eds.), *Theory and Practice of Online Learning* (pp. 33-60). Athabasca, AB, Canada: Athabasca University.

Ary, D., Jacobs, L., Sorensen, C., & Walker, D. (2013). *Introduction to Research in Education* (9th ed.): Cengage Learning.

Backer, L. D., Keer, H. V., & Valcke, M. (2012). Exploring the potential impact of reciprocal peer tutoring on higher education students' metacognitive knowledge and regulation. *Instructional Science, 40*, 559-588.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: Freeman.

Barcelos, A. M. F. (2003). Researching beliefs about SLA: A critical review. In P. Kalaja & A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.), *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp. 7-33). New York, NY: Spinger.

Beiwai Online. (2013). Beiwai Online Admission Regulation Retrieved October, 7, 2013, from http://www.beiwaionline.com/degree/ER/webinfo/2010/02/1264986247890767.htm

Benson, P. (2001). *Teaching and researching autonomy in language learning*. Harlow, England; New York: Longman.

Benson, P. (2007). Autonomy in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching, 40*(1), 21-40.

Benson, P., & Lor, W. (1999). Conceptions of language and language learning. *System, 27*, 459-472.

Bolton, K., & Graddol, D. (2012). English in China today. *English Today, 28*(3), 3-9.

Boud, D. (Ed.). (1988). *Developing student autonomy in learning*. London: Kogan Page.

Bown, J. (2009). Self-Regulatory Strategies and Agency in Self-Instructed Language Learning: A Situated View. *Modern Language Journal, 93*(4), 570-583.

Breen, M. P. (Ed.). (2001). *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* Harlow, England; New York: Longman.

Brown, A. (1987). Metacognition, executive control, self-regulation, and other more mysterious mechanisms. In F. E. Weinert & R. H. Kluwe (Eds.), *Metacognition, motivation, and understanding* (pp. 65-116). Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Brown, A., Bransford, J. D., Ferrara, R. A., & Campione, J. C. (1983). Learning, Remembering, and Understanding. In J. H. Flavell & E. M. Markman (Eds.), *Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology* (Vol. 1). New York: Wiley.

Burston, J. (2014). The Reality of MALL: Still on the Fringes. *CALICO Journal, 31*(1), 103-125.

Butler, D. L. (1997). *The Roles of Goal Setting and Self-Monitoring in Students' Self-Regulated Engagement in Tasks*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997.

Butler, D. L., & Winne, P. H. (1995). Feedback and Self-Regulated Learning: A Theoretical Synthesis. *Review of Educational Research, 65*(3), 245-281.

Chamot, A. U. (2005). Language Learning Strategy Instruction: Current issues and research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 25*, 112-130.

Chamot, A. U., & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). Language learner and learning strategies. In N. C. Ellis (Ed.), *Implicit and Explicit Learning of Languages* (pp. 371-392). London: Academic Press.

Chapelle, C. A. (2007). Challenges in Evaluation of Innovation: Observations from Technology Research. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 30-45.

Chapelle, C. A. (2010). Research for practice: A look at issues in technology for second language learning. *Language Learning & Technology, 14*(3), 27-30.

Chen, X. (2003). A study of learner adaptability to online learning. *Distance Education in China, 2003*(11), 36-40.

Cheng, L. (2008). The key to success: English language testing in China. *Language Testing 2008, 1*(15-37).

China Central Radio and TV University [CCRTVU]. (2010). Statistical Bulletin on the Status of the CRTVUs in 2010 Retrieved Oct. 12th, 2012, from http://en.crtvu.edu.cn/about/annual-report/2010#

Chinnery, G. M. (2006). Going to the MALL: Mobile assisted language learning. *Language Learning & Technology, 10*(1), 9-16.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2013). *Research Methods in Education* (7 ed.). London; New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1996). Cultures of learning: language classrooms in China. In E. H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the Language Classroorn*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cotterall, S. (1995b). Readiness for autonomy: investigating learner beliefs. *System, 23*(2), 195-205.

Cotterall, S. (1999). Key variables in language learning: what do learners believe about them? *System, 27*, 493-513.

Cotterall, S., & Murray, G. (2009). Enhancing metacognitive knowledge: Structure, affordances and self. *System, 37*, 34-45.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

de Andrés Martínez, C. (2012). Developing metacognition at a distance: sharing students' learning strategies on a reflective blog. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 25*(2), 199-212.

Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-instruction in language learning*. Cambridge Cambridgeshire and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *Psychology of the language learner: individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, N.J.; London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Efklides, A. (2009). The new look in metacognition: from individual to social, from cognitive to affective. In B. C. Larson (Ed.), *Metacognition: New research developments*. New York: Nova Science.

Eneau, J., & Develotte, C. (2012). Working together online to enhance learner autonomy: Analysis of learners' perceptions of their online learning experience. *ReCALL, 24*(1), 3-19.

Fisher, D., Hafner, C., & Young, J. (2007). Integrating independent learning: Lessons learned and implications for the classroom. *Learner Autonomy, 10*, 33-55.

Flavell, J. H. (1979). Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring: A New Area of Cognitive-Developmental Inquiry. *American Psychologist, 34*(10), 906-911.

Flavell, J. H. (1987). Speculation about the nature and development of metacognition. In F. E. Weiner & R. H. Kluwe (Eds.), *Metacognition, Motivation and Understanding* (pp. 1-29). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Flavell, J. H. (1996). Piaget's Legacy. *Psychological Science, 7*(4), 200-203.

Flavell, J. H., & Wellman, H. M. (1975). *Metamemory*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, Ill. http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED115405.pdf

Fosnot, C. T., & Perry, R. S. (1996). Constructivism: A psychological theory of learning. In C. T. Fosnot (Ed.), *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice* (pp. 8-33): Teachers College Press.

Gabillon, Z. (2002). L2 Learner's Beliefs: An Overview. *Journal of Language and Learning, 3*(2), 233-260.

Gan, Z. (2009). "Asian learners" re-examined: an empirical study of language learning attitudes, strategies and motivation among mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 30*(1), 41-58.

Garner, R. (1990). When Children and Adults Do Not Use Learning Strategies: Toward a Theory of Settings. *Review of Educational Research, 60*(4), 517-529.

Garrison, D. R. (1985). Three generations of technological innovations in distance education. *Distance Education, 6*(2), 235-241.

Garrison, D. R. (1997). Self-directed learning: Toward a comprehensive model. *Adult Education Quarterly, 48*(1), 18-33.

Garrison, D. R. (2003). Cognitive presence for effective asynchronous online learning: The role of reflective inquiry, self-direction and metacognition. In J. Bourne & J. C. Moore (Eds.), *Elements of quality online education: Practice and direction* (Vol. Volume 4 in the Sloan C Series). Needham, MA: The Sloan Consortium.

Godwin-Jones, R. (2008). Web-writing 2.0: Enabling, documenting, and assessing writing online. *Language Learning & Technology, 12*(2), 7-13.

Godwin-Jones, R. (2009). Emerging technologoes: Autnomous language learning. *Language Learning & Technology, 15*(3), 4-11.

Goertler, S., Bollen, M., & Gaff, J. (2012). Students' Readiness for and Attitudes Toward Hybrid FL Instruction. *CALICO Journal, 29*(2), 297-320.

Goh, C. (1997). Metacognitive awareness and second language listeners. *ELT Journal Volume, 51*(4), 361-369.

Goh, C., & Taib, Y. (2006). Metacognitive instruction in listening for young learners. *ELT Journal, 60*(3), 222-232.

Goh, C. C. M., & Hu, G. (2013). Exploring the relationship between metacognitive awareness and listening performance with questionnaire data. *Language Awareness, 22*(3).

Graham, S. (2004). Giving up on Modern Foreign Languages? Students' Perceptions of Learning French. *Modern Language Journal, 88*(2), 171-191.

Graham, S. (2006). A Study of Students' Metacognitive Beliefs About Foreign Language Study and Their Impact on Learning. *Foreign Language Annals, 39*(2), 296-309.

Gremmo, M.-J., & Riley, P. (1995). Autonomy, self-direction and self access in language teaching and learning: The history of an idea. *System, 23*(2), 151-164.

Griffin, T. D., Wiley, J., & Salas, C. R. (2013). Supporting Effective Self-Regulated Learning: The Critical Role of Monitoring. In R. Azevedo & V. Aleven (Eds.), *International Handbook of Metacognition and Learning Technologies* (pp. 19-34). New York: Springer

Gu, P. Y. (2003). Fine Brush and Freehand: The Vocabulary-Learning Art of Successful Chinese EFL Learners. *TESOL Quarterly, 37*(1), 73-104.

Hampel, R., & Arcos, B. d. l. (2013). Interacting at a distance: a critical review of the role of ICT in developing the learner–context interface in a university language programme. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 7*(2), 158-178.

Hardy, D. W., & Boaz, M. H. (1997). Learner Development: Beyond the Technology. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 71*, 41-48.

Hauck, M. (2005). Metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive strategies, and CALL. In J. Egbert & G. M. Petrie (Eds.), *CALL research perspectives.* (pp. 65-86). New Jersey, USA: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hauck, M., Fuchs, C., & Müller-Hartmann, A. (2012). Promoting learner autonomy through mutiliteracy skills development in cross-institutional exchanges. *Language Awareness, 16*(3), 82-102.

Hauck, M., & Hurd, S. (2005). Exploring the link between language anxiety and learner self-management in open language learning contexts. *European Journal of Open, Distance, and E-Learning, 2005(2)*.

He, L. (2011). Metacognition in EFL Pronunciation Learning among Chinese Tertiary Learners. *Applied Language Learning, 21*(1&2), 1-27.

Hong, K. (2006). *Beliefs about language learning and language learning strategy use in an EFL context: A comparison study of monolingual Korean and bilingual Korean-Chinese University Students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of North Texas.

Hong, S., & Jung, I. (2011). The distance learner competencies: A three-phased empirical approach. *Education Technology Research and Development, 59*, 21-42.

Hopkins, J. E. (2010). Distance language learners' perceptions of assessed, student-led speaking tasks via a synchronous audiographic conferencing tool. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 4*(3), 235-258.

Horwitz, E. K. (1985). Using student beliefs about language learning and teaching in the foreign language methods course. *Foreign Language Annals,, 18*(4), 333-340.

Horwitz, E. K. (1988). The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students. *Modern Language Journal, 72*(3), 283-294.

Horwitz, E. K. (1999). Cultural and situational influences on foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning: a review of BALLI studies. *System, 27*, 557-576.

Hung, M.-L., Chou, C., Chen, C.-H., & Own, Z.-Y. (2010). Learner readiness for online learning: Scale development and student perceptions. *Computers & Education, 55*(3), 1080-1090.

Hurd, S. (2000). Distance language learners and learner support: beliefs, difficulties and use of strategies. *Links and Letters 7: Autonomy in language learning, 7*, 61-80.

Hurd, S. (2002). *Taking account of individual learner differences in the planning and delivery of language courses for open, distance and independent learning.* Paper presented at the Setting the Agenda: Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies in Higher Education conference, University of Manchester.

Hurd, S. (2005). Autonomy and the distance language learner. In B. Holmberg, M. Shelley & C. White (Eds.), *Distance education and languages: evolution and change*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Hurd, S. (2006a). Individual learner differences and distance language learning: an overview. *RTVU ELT Express, 12*(4), 1-26.

Hurd, S. (2006b). Towards a better understanding of the dynamic role of the distance language learner: learner perceptions of personality, motivation, roles, and approaches. *Distance Education, 27*(3), 303-329.

Hurd, S., Beaven, T., & Ortega, A. (2001). Developing autonomy in a distance language learning context: issues and dilemmas for course writers. *System, 29*(3), 341-355.

Hurd, S., & Xiao, J. (2006). Open and distance language learning at the Shantou Radio and TV University, China, and the Open University, United Kingdom: a cross-cultural perspective. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning,, 21*(3), 205-219.

Hurd, S., & Xiao, J. (2010). Anxiety and Affective Control Among Distance Language Learners in China and the UK. *RELC Journal, 41*(2), 183-200.

Jegede, O., Taplin, M., Fan, R. Y. K., Chan, M. S. C., & Yum, J. (1999). Differences between low and high achieving distance learners in locus of control and metacognition. *Distance Education, 20*(2), 255-273.

Jiang, C., Wei, Z., & Shi, S. (2003). Barriers to e-Learning: Literature Review and Analysis. *Distance Education in China, 2003*(11), 32-35.

Kasper, L. F. (1997). Assessing the metacognitive growth of ESL student writers. *TESL-EJ, 3*(1). Retrieved from http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume3/ej09/ej09a1/

Kern, R. (1995). Students' and teachers' beliefs about language learning. *Foreign Language Annals, 28*(1), 71-92.

Kostina, M. V. (2011). *Exploration of student perceptions of autonomy, student-instructor dialogue and satisfaction in a web-based distance Russian language classroom: A mixed methods study.* PhD Doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa.   (UMI Number: 3461175)

Kraemer, A. (2008). Formats of Distance Learning. In S. Goertler & P. Winke (Eds.), *Opening Doors through Distance Language Education: Principles, Perspectives, and Practices* (Vol. 7, pp. 11-42). San Marcos, Texas: Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO).

Lai, C. (2013). A framework for developing self-directed technology use for language learning. *Language Learning & Technology, 17*(2), 100-122.

Lai, E. R. (2011). Metacognition: A literature review *Always learning: Pearson research report*.

Lehtonen, T. (2000). Awareness of Strategies is Not Enough: How Learners Can Give Each Other the Confidence to Use Them. *Language Awareness, 9*(2), 64-77.

Lin, L. (2012). Investigating the utility of learning recourses provided by online distance learning institutions. *Distance Education in China, 2012*(7), 85-88.

Little, D. (2004). Constructing a theory of learner autonomy: some steps along the way. Retrieved from http://archive.ecml.at/mtp2/Elp_tt/Results/DM_layout/Reference%20Materials/English/David%20Little%20Constructing%20a%20Theory%20of%20Learner%20Autonomy.pdf

Little, D. (2007). Language Learner Autonomy: Some Fundamental Considerations Revisited *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 14 - 29.

Livingston, J. A. (1997). Metacognition: An Overview Retrieved April 10, 2012, from http://gse.buffalo.edu/fas/shuell/cep564/Metacog.htm

Lo, Y.-F. (2010). Implementing reflective portfolios for promoting autonomous learning among EFL college students in Taiwan. *Language Teaching Research, 14*(1), 77-95.

Macaro, E. (2006). Strategies for Language Learning and for Language Use: Revising the Theoretical Framework. *Modern Language Journal, 90*(3), 320-337.

Martínez, C. d. A. (2012). Developing metacognition at a distance: sharing students' learning strategies on a reflective blog. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 25*(2), 199-212.

Mayer, R. E. (1996). Learners as information processors: Legacies and limitations of educational psychology's second metaphor. *Educational Psychologist, 31*(3/4), 151-161.

Miyake, N., & Norman, D. A. (1979). To Ask a Question, One Must Know Enough to Know What is Not Known. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 18*, 357-364.

Morgan, L. (2012). Generation Y, learner autonomy and the potential of Web 2.0 tools for language learning and teaching. *Campus-Wide Information Systems, 29*(3), 166-176.

Murday, K. (2004a). *Individual differences and student adaptation to online language learning.* PhD Doctoal Dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI Number: 3131517)

Murday, K. (2004b). *Individual differences and student adaptation to online language learning*. Doctoral Dissertation. Carnegie Mellon University.

Murphy, L. (2005). Critical reflection and autonomy: A study of distance learners of French, German, and Spanish. In B. Holmberg, M. Shelley & C. White (Eds.), *Distance Education and Languages: Evolution and Change*. Clevedon, GBR: Multilingual Matters Limited.

Murphy, L. (2008). Supporting learner autonomy: Developing practice through the production of courses for distance learners of French, German and Spanish. *Language Teaching Research, 12*(1), 83-102.

Murray, G. L. (1999). Exploring Learners' CALL Experiences: A Reflection on Method. *Computer Assisted Language Learning, 12*(3), 179-195.

Pan, L., & Block, D. (2011). English as a "global langage" in China: An investigation into learners' and teachers' language beliefs. *System, 39*(391-402).

Pan, Q. (2012). Research on Web-based Autonomous Learning Forms - the Basis of Learning Behavior in Web2.0 Environment. *Distance Education in China, 2012*(11), 35-39.

Paris, S. G., & Winograd, P. (1990). How metacognition can promote academic learning and instruction. In B. F. Jones & L. Idol (Eds.), *Dimensions of thinking and cognitive instruction* (pp. 15-51). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Peng, J.-E. (2011). Changes in language learning beliefs during a transition to tertiary study: The mediation of classroom affordances. *System, 39*, 314-324.

Perkins, D. N., & Salomon, G. (1989). Are Cognitive Skills Context-Bound? *Educational Researcher, 18*(1), 16-25.

Pilling-Cormick, J., & Garrison, D. R. (2007a). Self-Directed and Self-Regulated Learning: Conceptual Links. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education, 3*(2), 13-33.

Pilling-Cormick, J., & Garrison, D. R. (2007b). Self-Directed and Self-Regulated Learning: Conceptual Links. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education, 33*(2), 13-33.

Pintrich, P. R. (2002). The role of metacognitive knowledge in learning, teaching, and assessing. *Theory Into Practice, 41*(4), 219-225.

Pintrich, P. R., & Groot, E. V. D. (1990). Motivational and Self-Regulated Learning Components of Classroom Academic Performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 2*(1), 33-40.

Pintrich, P. R., Wolters, C. A., & Baxter, G. P. (2000). Assessing Metacognition and Self-Regulated Learning. In G. Schraw & J. C. Impara (Eds.), *Issues in the Measurement of Metacognition* (pp. 43-97). NE: University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Polisca, E. (2006). Facilitating the Learning Process: An Evaluation of the Use and Benefits of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)-enhanced Independent Language-learning Program (ILLP). *CALICO Journal, 23*(3), 499-515.

Qian, L. (2006). An overview of research into contemporary online learners in China. *Distance Education Magazine, 2006(1),* 12-14.

Reinders, H., & Hubbard, P. (2012). CALL and learner autonomy: Affordances and constraints. In M. Thomas, H. Reinders & M. Warschauer (Eds.), *Contemporary Computer-Assisted Language Learning* (pp. 359-375). London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Rivers, W. P. (2001). Autonomy at all costs: An ethnography of metacognitive self-assessment and self-management among experienced language learners. *Modern Language Journal, 85*(2), 279-290.

Robson, C. (1993). *Real World Research* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Ruan, Z. (2005). A metacognitive perspective on the growth of self-regulated EFL student writers. *Reading Working Papers in Linguistics, 8*, 175-202.

Rubin, J. (2001). Language-learner self-management. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication, 11*(1), 25-37.

Rubin, J. (2005). The Expert Language Learner: A Review of Good Language Learner Studies and Learner Strategies. In K. Johnson (Ed.), *Expertise in Second Language Learning* (pp. 37-63): Palgrave Macmillan.

Rubin, J. (2008). From "The Good Language Learner" to "Learner Self-management" Retrieved March 23rd, 2012, from http://www.workingnet.com/joanrubin/pdfs/ReflectionsonTheGoodLanguageLearner.pdf

Sakui, K., & Gaies, S. J. (1999). Investigating Japanese learners' beliefs about language learning. *1999, 27*, 473-492.

Sauro, S. (2011). SCMC for SLA: A Research Synthesis. *CALICO Journal, 28*(2), 369-391.

Schraw, G. (1994). The Effect of Metacognitive Knowledge on Local and Global Monitoring. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 19*(2), 143-154.

Schraw, G. (1998). Promoting general metacognitive awareness. *Instructional Science, 26*, 113-125.

Schraw, G., & Dennison, R. S. (1994). Assessing Metacognitive Awarness. *Comtemporary Educational Psychology, 19*, 460-475.

Schraw, G., & Moshman, D. (1995). Metacognitive Theories. *Educational Psychology Review, 7*(4), 351-371.

Smith, B. (2005). The Relationship Between Negotiated Interaction, Learner Uptake, and Lexical Acquisition in Task-Based Computer-Mediated Communication. *TESOL Quarterly, 39*(1), 38-57.

Smith, K., & Craig, H. (2013). Enhancing the Autonomous Use of CALL: A New Curriculum Model in EFL. *CALICO Journal, 30*(2), 252-278.

Smith, P. J. (2005). Learning preferences and readiness for online learning. *Educational Psychology: An International Journal of Experimental Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 3-12.

Sorace, A. (1985). Metalinguistic Knowledge and Language Use in Acquisition-poor Environments. *Applied Linguistics, 6*(3), 239-254.

Stickler, U., & Hampel, R. (2010). CyberDeutsch: Language Production and User Preferences in a Moodle Virtual Learning Environment. *CALICO Journal, 28*(1), 47-73.

Stracke, E. (2007). A road to understanding: A qualitative study into why learners drop out of a blended language learning (BLL) environment. *ReCall, 19*(1), 57-78.

Strambi, A., & Bouvet, E. (2003). Flexibility and interaction at a distance: A mixed-mode environment for language learning. *Language Learning & Technology, 7*(3), 81-102.

Sun, Z., & Song, W. (2014). Factors affecting English learning in technology-mediated learning environment. *Distance Education in China, 2014*(3), 41-45.

Sykes, J. M., Oskoz, A., & Thorne, S. L. (2008). Web 2.0, Synthetic Immersive Environments, and Mobile Resources for Language Education. *CALICO Journal, 25*(3), 528-546.

Thomas, D. R. (2003). A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis Retrieved March 20th, 2013, from http://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/soph/centres/hrmas/_docs/Inductive2003.pdf

Ulitsky, H. (2000). Language learner strategies with technology. *Journal of Educational Computer Research, 22*(3), 285-322.

Ushida, E. (2005a). The Role of Students' Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning in Online Language Courses. *CALICO Journal 23*(1), 49-78.

Ushida, E. (2005b). The Role of Students' Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning in Online Language Courses. *CALICO Journal, 23*(1), 49-78.

Vandergrift, L. (2005). Relationships among Motivation Orientations, Metacognitive Awareness and Proficiency in L2 Listening. *Applied Linguistics, 26*(1), 70-89.

Vandergrift, L., Goh, C. C. M., & Mareschal, C. J. (2006). The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire: Development and Validation. *Language Learning, 56*(3), 431-462.

Vann, R. J., & Abraham, R. G. (1990). Strategies of Unsuccessful Language Learners. *TESOL Quarterly, 24*(2), 177-198.

Veenman, M. V. J., Hout-Wolters, B. H. A. M. V., & Afflerbach, P. (2006). Metacognition and learning: conceptual and methodological considerations. *Metacognition Learning, 1*(3-14).

Victori, M. (1999). An analysis of writing knowledge in EFL composing: a case study of two effective and two less effective writers. *System, 27*, 537-555.

Victori, M., & Lockhart, W. (1995). Enhancing metacognition in self-directed language learning *System, 23*(2), 223-234.

Volet, S., Vauras, M., & Salonen, P. (2009). Self- and Social Regulation in Learning Contexts: An Integrative Perspective. *Educational Psychologist, 44*(4), 215-226.

Warschauer, M., Ware, P., & Kern, R. (2000). Network-based language teaching: Introduction. In M. Warschauer & R. Kern (Eds.), *Network-based language teaching: concepts and practice*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wen, Q., & Johnson, R. K. (1997). L2 Learner Variables and English Achievement: A Study of Tertiary-level English Majors in China. *Applied Linguistics, 18*(1), 27-48.

Wenden, A. L. (1986). What do second-language learners know about their language learning? A second look at retrospective accounts. *Applied Linguistics, 7*(2), 186-205.

Wenden, A. L. (1987). How to be a successful language learner: Insights and prescriptions from L2 learners. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning* (pp. 107-117).

Wenden, A. L. (1995). Learner Training in Context: A Knowledge-based Approach. *system, 23*(2), 183-194.

Wenden, A. L. (1998). Metacognitive Knowledge and Language Learning. *Applied Linguistics, 19*(4), 515-537.

Wenden, A. L. (1999). An introduction to Metacognitive Knowledge and Beliefs in Language Learning: Beyond the Basics. *System, 27*, 435-441.

Wenden, A. L. (2001). Metacognitive knowledge in SLA: The neglected variable. In M. P. Breen (Ed.), *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research* (pp. 44-64). Harlow, England; New York: Longman.

Wenden, A. L. (2002). Learner Development in Language Learning. *Applied Linguistics, 23*(1), 32-55.

White, C. (1994). Language learning strategy research in distance education: the yoked subject technique. *Research in Distance Education, 3*(2), 10-20.

White, C. (1995). Autonomy and strategy use in distance foreign language learning: Research findings. *System, 23*(2), 207-221.

White, C. (1997). Effects of mode of study on foreign language learning. *Distance Education, 18*(1), 178-196.

White, C. (1999a). Expectations and emergent beliefs of self- instructed language learners. *System, 27*, 443-457.

White, C. (1999b). The Metacognitive Knowledge of Distance Learners. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 14*(3), 37-46.

White, C. (2003a). *Independent Language Learning in Distance Education: Current Issues.* Paper presented at the Independent Learning Conference 2003.

White, C. (2003b). *Language Learning in Distance Education*: Cambridge University Press.

White, C. (2005a). Contribution of Distance Education to the Development of Individual Learners. *Distance Education, 26*(2), 164-181.

White, C. (2005b). Toward a learner-based theory of distance language learning: The concept of the learner-context interface. In B. Holmberg, M. Shelley & C. White (Eds.), *Distance Education And Languages: Evolution And Change* (pp. 55-71). Multilingual Matters.

White, C. (2007). Innovation and Identity in Distance Language Learning and Teaching. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 1*(1), 97-110.

White, C. (2009). Towards a learner-based theory of distance language learning: The concept of learner-context interface. In P. Hubbard (Ed.), *Computer Assisted Language Learning: Critical Concepts in Lingusitics. Volume IV: Present Trends and Future Directions in CALL* (pp. 97-112). London: Routledge.

White, C. (2014). The distance learning of foreign languages: A research agenda. *Language Teaching, 47*(4), 538-553.

Winke, P., & Goertler, S. (2008a). Did We Forget Someone? Students' Computer Access and Literacy for CALL. *CALICO Journal, 25*(3), 482-509.

Winke, P., & Goertler, S. (2008b). An Introduction to Distance Language Learning. In S. Goertler & P. Winke (Eds.), *Opening Doors through Distance Language Education: Principles, Perspectives, and Practices* (Vol. 7, pp. 1-10). San Marcos, Texas: Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO).

Winn, W. (1990). Some implications of cognitive theory for instructional design. *Instructional Science, 19*(1), 53-69.

Wu, H. (2008). A longitudinal study of metacognition in EFL writing of Chinese university students. *CELEA Jounral, 31*(2), 87-92.

Xiao, J., & Hurd, S. (2007). Language Learning Strategies in Distance English Learning: A Study of Learners at Shantou Radio and Television University, China. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 4*(2), 141-164.

Xiao, Y. (2007). Applying metacognition in EFL writing instruction in China. *Reflections on English Language Teaching, 6*(1), 19-33.

Yang, N.-D. (1999). The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and learning strategy use. *System, 27*, 293-317.

Yang, N.-D. (2003). Integrating portfolios into learning strategy-based instruction for EFL college students. *IRAL, 41*, 293-317.

Yin, C. (2008). *Language learning strategies in relation to attitudes, motivations, and learner beliefs: Investigating learner variables in the context of English as a foreign language in China.* Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, University of Maryland - College Park.

Yin, R. K. (2008). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Young, R. (1987). The Cultural Context of TESOL - A Review of Research into Chinese Classrooms. *RELC Journal, 18*(2), 15-30.

Zhang, D., & Goh, C. (2006). Strategy Knowledge and Perceived Strategy Use: Singaporean Students' Awareness of Listening and Speaking Strategies. *Language Awareness, 15*(3), 199-219.

Zhang, L. J. (2001). Awareness in Reading: EFL Students' Metacognitive Knowledge of Reading Strategies in an Acquisition-poor Environment. *Language Awareness, 10*(4), 268-288.

Zhang, L. J. (2010). A Dynamic Metacognitive Systems Account of Chinese University Students' Knowledge About EFL Reading. *TESOL Quarterly, 44*(2), 320-353.

Zhang, X., & Cui, G. (2010). Learning beliefs of distance foreign language learners in China: A survey study. *System, 28*(1), 30-40.

Zhao, H., Chen, L., & Panda, S. (2014). Self-regulated learning ability of Chinese distance learners. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 45*(5), 941-958.

Zhao, Y., & Campbell, K. P. (1995). English in China. *World Englishes, 14*(3), 377-390.

Zhao, Y., & Lai, C. (2008). Technology and Second Language Learning. In L. L. Parker (Ed.), *Technology-mediated learning environments for young English learners: connections in and out of school*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Zimmerman, B. J. (1995). Self-regulation involves more than metacognition: A social cognitive perspective *Educational Psychologist, 30*(4), 217-221.

Zimmerman, B. J. (2000). Self-Efficacy: An Essential Motive to Learn. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 82-91.

Zimmerman, B. J., & Bandura, A. (1994). Impact of Self-Regulatory Influences on Writing Course Attainment. *American Educational Research Journal, 31*(4), 845-862.