

**Conceptions of Language Learning Beyond the Classroom:  
Exploring Language Learning Ecologies and Careers**

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## **Abstract**

This research explored changes in Asian learner's conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class English language learning during pre-university study abroad in Australia. Ecology of language learning is employed as a theoretical framework to examine the impact of study abroad experience as an environmental change on students' conceptions and pathways of language learning. The key elements of constructing a learning environment examined in the literature review include learner agency/autonomy, conceptions and beliefs, and metacognitive awareness of language learning.

The participants were ten international students who enrolled in a ten-week pre-university English course at a university English Language Centre. This qualitative research was conducted through multiple data sources; namely, semi-structured in-depth interviews, diaries, and class observation. Narrative inquiry is employed as the method for analysing the data.

Findings show that learners' conceptions of learning English at home changed while studying in Australia through out-of-class learning experiences. The integration of in-class and out-of-class learning through increased opportunities to use English in both contexts can influence changes of conception associate with language learning. The narrative analysis enables the examination of the degree of change in their conceptions as patterns of students' language learning pathways, and shows individual differences in the change process.

## Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled "*Conceptions of Language Learning Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Language Learning Ecologies and Careers*" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: Ref No: 5201500243 on 16<sup>th</sup> April, 2015.

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Date: 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2015

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

In the era of increased student mobility associated with globalisation, more and more students are traveling overseas to be educated in English (Benson, Barkhuizen, & Bodycott, 2013; Kinginger, 2015). In accordance with the need for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills, the importance of acquiring languages alongside other pivotal skills are often addressed. However, the changes in language learning environment that these students actually experience are not well understood.

It is generally believed that learners gain great benefit from immersion in the English speaking environment; however, the gap between learners' expectations and the reality of their learning experiences are not so obvious for most teachers and researchers. The ecology metaphor and learners' conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class language learning is helpful to examine the dynamics of study abroad experiences as a change of environment in students' lives. Attention to language learning beyond the classroom in recent empirical studies forces reconsideration of how language learning takes place, the value of learning spaces outside of school, the (new) role of teacher to support learners, and what is "learning" after all (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Doyle & Parrish, 2012; Lai, 2014; Lai et al. 2015; Lai, Zhu, & Gong, 2014; Murray, 2014b; Nunan & Richards, 2015; Richards, 2015; Sockett & Toffoli, 2012). However, what out-of-class learning actually means to learners has not been unravelled. Do they consider out-of-class learning as an extension of their in-class learning? Is it more about assignments and projects they are obliged to complete to be assessed for the course? Or does it really lead to authentic learning and develop their autonomy after the course? Also, there is 'less attention to the cognitive processes and linguistic development of *individual* learners' to see the impact of out-of-class learning (Duff & Kobayashi, 2010, p. 76, italics in original).

The broad aim of this research is to achieve a better understanding of what learners think of their learning environments and the mechanism for constructing a holistic language learning environment. This thesis investigates what learners think about their own language learning experiences back in their home country and how their thinking may have changed as a result of experiencing study abroad. What the change of learning environment means for them within their history of learning English is also explored. The construction of one's language learning career over the long term will be examined from ecological perspectives. The language learning ecology framework highlights the components in constructing the ecology of language learning by exploring their relationships and connections. It also allows us to understand how languages are learned and how teachers can support more efficient language learning processes for learners.

This study was conducted with students and teachers at the Macquarie University English Language Centre, Australia. The student participants were undertaking a 10-week English course to prepare for entrance into a university degree. They were all from Asian countries and relatively new to Australian life. Study abroad is considered as a unique experience, both in general and in academic life, as each student comes abroad with their own expectations and desires (also from their family) towards their new life experience. In current literature, individual differences in expectations, the gap between learners expectations and the reality after their arrival, and how individual learners act upon the new environment have not been widely discussed from the learner's points of view.

Each student's unique study abroad experience and their conflicts and changes in learning behaviour should be depicted more vividly if we value learner's voices and their point of view. Students' past English learning experiences, their

conceptions of the relationship between learning English in-class and out-of-class, and how the conceptions were changed by the impact of environment change in Australia, are examined through a qualitative approach. This approach was selected to better understand the ways of constructing individuals' ecology of language learning within their language learning pathways.

This thesis comprises six chapters: in Chapter 2, relevant literature is reviewed to draw out the key components of the theoretical framework employed in this research. In Chapter 3, the methodological approach for this research is illustrated by explaining the research participants, instruments used for data collection, and methods for data analysis. Chapter 4 presents major findings from the data analysis. The findings are discussed further to argue the impact and contribution this research has made to the field of language learning in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 the conclusion to this thesis is presented and includes the limitations of this study and implications for the further research.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

A shift has occurred in recent years from classroom-focused research to out-of-class learning in EFL contexts. Although the importance of out-of-class learning for learners has been discussed, as out-of-class language learning becomes more important a theoretical framework is required to account for the relationships among the different learning settings encountered by the learners. Viewing out-of-class learning as an extended space of in-class learning, this review draws out the key components that create the dynamics of language learning processes situated across settings. Particular focus is on the *relationship* between in-class and out-of-class learning as a new approach to examine the role of out-of-class learning.

Relevant theories are reviewed in this chapter to define terms used for elaborating language learning ecologies as a framework to investigate the components of language learning. The three main areas below are drawn out to identify the key factors that construct a learning ecology:

- 1) **Language learning ecologies:** The important components of constructing one's ecology of language learning will be addressed by defining each term: Social interaction; affordances and niche; learners' agency/autonomy, conceptions and beliefs of language learning; metacognitive awareness of language learning; and language teaching is also discussed from an ecological perspective.
- 2) **Language learning ecologies over time:** Language learning pathways and careers as individual language learning processes will be discussed. The aim is to illustrate the key ideas of how languages are learned in a variety of contexts beyond the classroom over the long term. Study abroad as one of the contexts for impacting one's language learning ecology within a pathway of language learning is discussed.

3) **In-class and out-of-class learning:** Recent studies focusing on out-of-class learning are reviewed. The need to integrate in-class learning with out-of-class learning to make learning more meaningful is argued.

## **2.1 Language Learning Ecologies**

The term “ecology” was first coined by Ernst Haeckel, a nineteenth century German biologist. Haeckel was referring to ‘the totality of relationships of an organism with all other organisms with which it comes into contact’ (van Lier, 2000, p. 251). Ecology has been used as a specific research approach for cognition, language, and learning, particularly in the field of psychology and learning (van Lier, 2000). In the field of linguistics, ecology is ‘a study of language as relations (of thought, action, power), rather than as objects (words, sentences, rules)’ (van Lier, 2000, p. 251).

In recent ecological studies in the field of applied linguistics, '[e]cology is an area which investigates the interrelation between an organism and other elements in an ecosystem and has been used as a metaphor to understand human phenomena, including psychology' (Menezes, 2011, p. 60). The use of language learning ecologies as a theoretical framework can highlight the elements of and interrelationships in learners' learning environments. It also allows us to understand the importance of looking at what is occurring, both inside and outside the classroom settings, and its correlation to create a holistic learning environment. In this section, I will draw out and define each component for forming a language learning ecology.

### **2.1.1 Towards the definition of language learning ecologies**

Barron (2004) defined a learning ecology as 'the accessed set of contexts, comprised of configurations of activities, material resources and relationships, found in co-located physical or virtual spaces that provide opportunities for learning' (p. 6). She pointed out that '[e]ach context is comprised of a unique configuration of activities, material resources, relationships, and the interactions that emerge from them' (Barron, 2006, p. 195). In other words, learning takes place across settings simultaneously with many different types of materials. Also, learners themselves create or pursue activities outside the classroom in their learning processes. Barron (2006) considered all these dynamics of learning as an 'individuals' overall learning ecology' (p. 195).

In terms of language learning ecologies, Kramsch (2002) used the ecology metaphor to mediate two fields; language acquisition, in which the learners are seen as processing information; and language socialisation, which considers that learners practice the language in a community of practice. She argued that the ecology metaphor can 'capture[s] the dynamics interaction between language users and the environment as between parts of a living organism, [and it] seems to offer a new way of bringing together frames from various disciplines to illuminate the complex relationship under investigation' (p. 3). For Kramsch (2002), the ecology metaphor allows us to realise that 'learning is a nonlinear, relational, human activity, co-constructed between humans and their environment, contingent upon their position in space and history, and a site of struggle for the control of social power and cultural memory' (p. 5).

van Lier (2004), who first introduced the ecology metaphor in applied linguistics, indicated:

*the ecological approach looks at the entire situation and asks, what is it in the environment that makes things happen the way they do? How does learning come about? Ecology therefore involves the study of context. In addition, things are happening all the time, in schools, classrooms, at desks and around computers. So ecology is also the study of movement, process, and action (p. 11).*

van Lier (2004) compared the characteristics of the ecology framework with sociocultural theory, identifies its similarities and differences, and suggests that ecological approach can provide ‘an alternative to traditional ways of doing educational theory, research and practice’ (p. 20). He also emphasised that the ecology framework can provide ‘a new worldview that touches all aspects of how, why and what we educate may break through the perpetual stalemate of a system that never seems to change in permanently meaningful ways’ (van Lier, 2004, p. 20).

The ecology metaphor has also been used to describe a learning situation and a system of creating social environment for language learning that involves ‘the interaction of various learners, teachers, materials, and other elements’ (Palfreyman, 2014, p. 176). Lai et al. (2011; 2014) and Palfreyman (2014) used the ecological framework to capture – as important – the elements of language learning across settings and concepts of out-of-class language learning. Palfreyman (2014) emphasised that the ecology metaphor is a powerful tool to examine a range of learning resources in the environment, and to allow us to view and explore a specific context that learners are situated in, which often involves changes in elements within learners’ life development. The language learning ecology framework can therefore help us to gain insights into how language learning occurs and the elements constructing learners’ surrounding environment from different dimensions. In the following section the focus is on the following elements: social interaction, affordances and niche, agency/autonomy, and learners’ conceptions and beliefs about language learning as the important interrelated aspects of forming a language learning environment.

### 2.1.2 Social interaction

Social interaction is a crucial part of constructing an effective learning environment as well as a process of language learning. van Lier (1996) modelled 'the growth of proficiency' as 'a map of the road travelled by the learners in their learning careers, from the first exposure to the language, to full proficiency or however far they happen to get' (p. 41). He described language learning as movements or cycles of language learning processes including '*exposure – engagement – intake – proficiency*' (p. 41, italics in original). van Lier (1996) started the argument with the importance of social interaction as exposure to the target language. He points out that 'language use and language learning are part of the social world in which learners live' (p. 35) and '[t]he basic environment for the processing of language is social interaction, particularly conversation' (p. 54). However, '*quality of exposure*' (p. 47, italics in original) which involves attention –or in Vygotsky's words; 'awareness of the activity of the mind' (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 70, cited in van Lier, 1996, p. 49) – is necessary for the further processes.

van Lier (2004) also pointed out that language learning is an area of activity and 'the roles of language in social activity are the core of the definition of language' (p. 20). He argued for replacing Krashen's (1985) 'input metaphor' with a wider context of interactions with others by emphasising activity and perception from an ecological perspective. He illustrates four views of learning in interaction: trigger, input, negotiation, and affordance. In criticising Krashen's five hypotheses for second language acquisition (Acquisition, Natural Order, Input, Monitor, and Affective Filter), van Lier (2004) argued that language learning and acquisition are not two different ideas, and that perceptual learning is 'an important facet of agency' (van Lier, 2008, p. 176), 'which is multisensory and takes place in the context of real work in the real world' and 'it is a matter of increasingly sophisticated ways of perceiving real features



in the environment' (p. 176). While Krashen's input theory stressed that comprehensible input is all that is needed for acquiring a target language, for van Lier explicit grammar teaching, repetitive drilling, or social and peer interaction are all useful in some extent. van Lier (2008) emphasised that engaging in meaningful interaction can make learners more active to comprehend input by naturally focusing on form. There is therefore a great shift from the focus on the linguistic input to perceiving language learning as a social practice engaging in meaningful activities in contexts beyond the classroom (Menezes, 2011; van Lier, 2007).

### **2.1.3 Affordances and niche**

In ecological theory, affordances refer to 'the fit between the an animal's capabilities and the environmental supports and opportunities (both good and bad) that make possible a given activity' (E. J. Gibson & Pick, 2000, p. 15). A niche is defined as 'a set of affordances' (J. J. Gibson, 1979, p. 128) that refers 'more to *how* an animal lives than to *where* it lives' (p. 128, italics in original). Ecological niche is also described as 'the part of ecological space (defined by all combinations of biotic and abiotic environmental conditions) where the species population can persist and thus utilize resources and impact on its environment' (Polechová & Storch, 2008, p. 2). Affordances and niche are two useful concepts to help us understand the reciprocity of the interrelation as well as the mechanism of language learning (Menezes, 2011).

#### **2.1.3.1 Affordances**

For van Lier (2004):

*Ecological linguistics (EL) focuses on language as relations between people and the world, and on language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world. The crucial concept is that of affordance, which means a relationship between an organism (a learner, in our case) and the environment, that signals an opportunity for or inhibition of action. The environment includes all physical, social, and symbolic affordances that provide grounds for activity (pp. 4-5).*

van Lier (2000) also argued that how learners perceive and interpret their learning environment can influence their actions of engagement within and with their environment.

*In terms of language learning, the environment is full of language that provides opportunities for learning to the active, participating learner. The linguistic world to which the learner has access, and in which she becomes actively engaged, is 'full of demands and requirements, opportunities and limitations, rejections and invitations, enablements and constraints – in short, affordances (Shotter & Newson, 1982; cited in van Lier, 2000, p. 253).*

Menezes (2011) illustrated the concept of affordance by claiming that 'different individuals have different perceptions of the world and that the complementarity and interaction between individuals and the environment emerge from different social practices' (p. 61). The language learning ecology framework can draw out prominent components that create affordances for learners within variable settings both inside and outside the classroom. Learners themselves as social agents also create their learning environments through social interactions. An individual's learning ecology is formed by the fusion of multiple learning settings, both formal and informal, and its diversity is a crucial constituent for quality learning experiences and learning outcomes (Lai, Zhu, et al., 2014). Lai and Gu (2011) for example examined self-regulated use of technology as a tool to enlarge learners' affordances outside of the classroom using the ecological framework. They identified that embracing technology for out-of-class language learning is also a significant tool to help learners self-motivate and lead them to engage with authentic resources in the ecology of learning (Lai & Gu, 2011). From the ecological perspective, the connection and relationships

between in-class and out-of-class settings that comprise a learning environment can provide learners with wider affordances to engage with language learning and further connect their learning to their real life.

### **2.1.3.2 Ecological niche**

The concept of ecological niche has been described as a relational position of animals/species within an ecosystem, with necessary requirements for individual persistence and a functional and ecological role in the ecosystem (Polechová & Storch, 2008). Menezes (2011) applied Polechová and Storch's three conceptions of niche to language learning; '(1) niche as an environment mediated by language; (2) niche as a place to act in by using the language; and (3) niche as a language user position in a discourse community' (p. 63). The author pointed out that a cycle of learning can occur 'when one responds to opportunities for interaction, to demands and constraints, or to offerings and obstacles, reorganizing and adapting themselves to the changing conditions in a niche' (Menezes, 2011, p. 62). The importance for language learners is therefore to recognise the affordances offered in the environment beyond the classroom and act in their niches (Menezes, 2011). In other words, learners need to perceive the surrounding environment by recognising opportunities to learn the target language in the environment, and respond to the functional use of the environment.

This study focuses on how learners conceptualise their language learning beyond the classroom context in the surrounding environment and how they realise their affordances and act upon their niches. Key aspects which induce learners to conceptualise their learning such as emergence of new learning environment, social interactions with others, and the development of agency and metacognitive

awareness of their own learning are all outlined as a language learning ecology framework embedded within language learning pathways.

#### **2.1.4 Agency/autonomy, conceptions (and beliefs), and metacognitive awareness of language learning**

Three main components are closely associated with affordances and niche: agency/autonomy, conceptions and beliefs of language learning, and metacognitive awareness. This is because they are all linked by learners' cognitive development within the process of language learning. Learners' agency is the key to take advantage of given opportunities by the environment, realise the potential of resources, and take greater control over creating one's learning environment (Palfreyman, 2014). Conceptions and metacognitive awareness of learning as cognitive aspects of language learning are also relevant to the development of affordances and can lead learners to take ownership of learning.

##### **2.1.4.1 Agency/autonomy**

Agency is defined by Ahearn (2001) as 'the socioculturally mediated capacity to act' (p. 112). Similar to the sociocultural perspective, but in relation to the classroom context, van Lier (2008, p. 171) referred to agency as 'situated in a particular context' and as 'something that learners *do*, rather than something the learners *possess*, i.e., it is behaviour rather than property' (van Lier, 2008, p. 171 italics in original).

Learners are therefore viewed as social agents interacting and collaborating with people around them while using available resources in their ecology of learning (Kalaja et al., 2011). Furthermore, the essential factor in being a social agent is,

redefined by Lantolf (2013) as 'the human ability to act through mediation, with awareness of one's actions, and to understand their significance and relevance' (p. 19). The capacity to act in a specific context, perception of the context, or awareness of their affordances and relevance to them are different for each person, especially beyond the classroom context (Kalaja et al., 2011); However, if learners are active participants in the learning process, in other words, being an "intentional agent" or intentionally using the target language in a context (Kalaja et al., 2011; Palfreyman, 2014), they can make learning more meaningful and actively seek more affordances in the surrounding environment (Bown, 2009).

Agency is also understood as a complex dynamic system composed of a range of components (Mercer, 2011). Mercer explored the agentic system of an Austrian student who studied three languages (English as her major, Italian as her minor, and Latin as an intensive course) in Italy to become a teacher. The case study examined this learner's agency through a complexity theory framework and illustrated multiple dimensions and components of learner agency as a complex system. She found that '[l]earner agency exists as latent potential to engage in self-directed behaviour but how and when it is used depends on a learner's sense of agency involving their belief systems, and the control parameters of motivation, affect, metacognitive/self-regulatory skills, as well as actual abilities and the affordances, actual and perceived in specific settings' (p. 435). Mercer (2011) pointed out 'the importance of understanding learners as holistic beings nested within the bigger systems of their personal histories and the entirety of their lives and multiple contexts' (p. 435).

Agency and autonomy are sometimes used in a similar vein depending on the area of study. (The differences of the terms are not going to be elaborated or clarified here.) Palfreyman (2014) for example examined the development of autonomy from

ecological perspectives and provides a wider view of language learning in social contexts situated among individuals, as well as within them. Development of one's autonomy is essential not only for promoting effective learning or becoming better language learners. From a sociocultural perspective, it is also one of the important dimensions on which learners 'develop into more responsible and critical members of the communities in which they live' (Benson, 2011c, p. 1).

In terms of learning as social engagement, Murray (2014b) suggested that 'autonomy acts as an affordance by making learning opportunities possible' (p. 331). The development of learner autonomy can increase learner control over choices, as well as *creating* their own learning environment. Murray (2014a) further developed the argument of learner autonomy in language learning as a social construct by viewing learners 'as an integral part of their learning environment' (p. 248). van Lier (2004) explained that learners are autonomous when 'they are allowed to define the meaning of their own acts within their social contexts' (p. 8) and autonomy in an ecological approach means 'having the authorship of one's actions, having the voice that speaks one's words, and being emotionally connected to one's actions and speech, within one's community of practice' (p. 8).

As seen above, agency/autonomy is the engine for processing affordances and niche in the environment and the bridge to connect learners with their environment. In this thesis, the term "agency" is used henceforth.

#### **2.1.4.2 Conceptions and beliefs of language learning**

Conceptions of learning are an important element related to agency in learning ecologies. Investigations of learner conceptions of language learning are particularly important to the present research as it allows a view of the language learning

environment from the learners' points of view. Marton et al. (2004) emphasised the learner's point of view in learning:

*Powerful ways of acting derive from powerful ways of seeing, and the way that something is seen or experienced is a fundamental feature of learning. If we want learners to develop certain capabilities, we must make it possible for them to develop certain way of seeing or experiencing. Consequently, arranging for learning implies arranging for developing learners' ways of seeing or experiencing, that is developing the eyes through which the world is perceived (Marton, Runesson, & Tsui, 2004, p. 8).*

Kalaja (1995) defined the term "conception" by clarifying the difference between conceptions and beliefs:

*The term 'conception' has been used by representatives of phenomenography (e.g. Marton 1992; Marton & Svensson, 1992; Enkvist, 1992, 1994) who have been concerned with learning from the point of view of learners. Enkvist (1992: 1) understands conception as "a relationship between a person and a phenomenon"; she goes on to say that a conception "is not so much a mental representation or a cognitive structure, but rather a way of being aware of something (p. 193).*

According to Benson and Lor (1999), '[i]n the context of foreign language learning, conceptions of learning can be understood as conceptions of what a foreign language *is* and of what the process of learning a foreign language *consists of*' (p. 465, italics in original). The learners' conceptions of language learning is therefore how they see their language learning, how they are aware of the process of language learning, and how 'learners can make sense of a particular object of learning' (Amy B.M. Tsui, 2004, p. 139) in the potential learning environment. An investigation of how learners conceptualise their own language learning across settings provides a deeper understanding of the roles of in-class and out-of-class learning from learners' points of view. Further examination of how learners view and become aware of the relationship between the two contexts and how they connect in-class and out-of-class learning as their language learning spaces also casts light on the interrelation to their agency and creation of affordances and niche.

Conceptions and beliefs are often used ambiguously as both terms share the concept of cognitive processes in language learning and are understood as individual

difference. Benson and Lor (1999) suggested beliefs can be understood as a complex which constitutes 'three levels of analysis: conception, belief and approach' (p. 471), stating:

*Conception constitutes a higher and more abstract order of representation that constrains beliefs. The notion of conceptions of learning is of value in helping us to classify beliefs inferred directly from data hierarchically. Approach constitutes the level at which conceptions and beliefs are made manifest. The notion of approaches to learning is of value in helping us to understand the functionality of conceptions and beliefs and the ways in which they may be open to change (p. 471).*

Kalaja (1995) cited Abraham and Vann's (1987, pp. 95-7) claimed that beliefs form sets (or a philosophy) and suggest:

*that learners have, at some level of consciousness, a philosophy of how language is learned. This philosophy guides the approach they take in language learning situations, which in turn is manifested in observable (and unobservable) strategies used in learning and communication (p.192).*

Wenden (1999) differentiated between conceptions and beliefs suggesting beliefs are more 'value-related and tend to be held more tenaciously' (Wenden, 1999, p. 436).

There is a tendency to view beliefs 'as variable and fixed, and focus on changes in these and/or on the interaction between beliefs and learner or teacher actions, acknowledging their relationship to be a complex one' (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011, p. 281). Beliefs, therefore, should be examined with wider surrounding elements of language learning and teaching.

Purdie et al. (1996) explored the relationship between learner's conceptions of learning and their learning strategy variables from a socio-cognitive perspective by comparing Japanese and Australian learners' conceptions of learning. The study extended self-regulated learning theory into cross cultural contexts in classroom settings. As such, it suggested learner's conceptions and beliefs influence their learning strategies and how learner's conceive the conceptions of learning are likely to be influenced by the surrounding environment.



#### ***2.1.4.3 Changes in beliefs on language learning and actions***

Beliefs of second language learners are seen as emergent and dynamic, or as a complex rather than stable phenomena (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Hosenfeld, 2003). Hosenfeld (2003) pointed out that ‘many beliefs of a second language learners are “emergent” and there is a strong relationship between emergent beliefs and learning behaviours (actions) of a self-directed learner’ (p. 37). The author views beliefs as changing as they are ‘embedded in experiences continually changing and dynamic’ (p. 38). If beliefs are regarded as emergent involving with changes within timescales, conceptions can also be understood as emergent and an influential factor to learning behaviours.

Change of beliefs is one of the factors to modify the actions and behaviours of language learning to be more interactional by realising the use of the target language within the social interactions beyond the classroom contexts. However, how learners’ beliefs emerge through social interaction is still vague. As Wenden (1999) claimed, the metacognitive knowledge is a prerequisite to the construction of learner’s beliefs, the complexity of metacognitive knowledge, and the cognitive development should be further investigated.

Recent studies on learner’s beliefs employ more qualitative research methodologies using multiple instruments (Navarro & Thornton, 2011; Peng, 2011; Yang & Kim, 2011). A sociocultural framework to investigate ‘the relationship between beliefs, change and actions’ (p. 281) and deploying a contextual approach is a rather common approach in this field recently (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011). However, in order to view language learning across settings, and to explore the change in learner conceptions of language learning in the new environment as a cognitive development within a dynamic language learning process, this research employs an

ecological perspective (Kramsch, 2002). This is to support the investigation into what language learning means for learners (conceptions of language learning) and what processes learners undergo to shape their learning beliefs and behaviours while studying abroad. These are considered as individual differences.

#### **2.1.4.4 Metacognitive awareness of learning**

One important component for being an active agent and autonomous learner is the awareness of one's learning (Palfreyman, 2014). Awareness of learning is a metacognitive aspect that affects learners' beliefs and conceptions of learning during the language learning process. It stimulates learners to realise the potential of learning and affordances beyond the classroom settings. In van Lier's (1996) words, awareness is 'the cultivation of affordances' (p. 12).

Awareness of learning includes the use of materials and social resources for learning in various contexts. Palfreyman (2014) defined learner autonomy from an ecological perspective as 'a capacity for *intentional use in context of a range of interacting resources toward learning goals*' (p. 182, italics in original). The author pointed out that 'the individual can be seen as actively taking up a particular stance with respect to material and social resources, and learner autonomy as a developing awareness of these resources and of one's own use of them' (Palfreyman, 2006, p. 354). Furthermore, Palfreyman (2006) emphasised the importance of both learners' and teachers' awareness of the beneficial use of resources within their affordances in various contexts.

Throughout van Lier's discussion (1996) "Awareness, autonomy and authenticity (AAA for short)" are the three foundational principles for curriculum development 'to allow language education to unfold in a regulated yet creative manner, within a framework of individual and social *constraints and resources*' (p. 5,

italics in original). According to van Lier (1996), an ideal syllabus 'is only relevant if it is based on the three principles of *awareness* (know where you are going, what you are doing, and why), *autonomy* (have the freedom of choice, exploration, personal preferences, but also the responsibility for your own and your companion's journey), and *authenticity* (commitment and interests, relevant and real-life experiences)' (p. 20). The author argued that authenticity is not only closely related to both awareness and autonomy, but also the result and the origin of them. The three principles are also related to the *intrapersonal* and the *interpersonal* development. van Lier (1996) summarised this as follows:

*students are encouraged to develop their language awareness (and other kinds of awareness that are intricately bound up with language: learning, cognitive, social), to become autonomous (i.e. have choices and responsibilities, and develop their own sense of direction), to strive for authenticity in their learning experiences in general and their language experiences in particular (this authenticity includes consistency, integrity, and respect, in addition to rich and varied sources and resources), and to recognize – and be recognized for – their achievements (p. 19).*

The issue of awareness of learning has previously been discussed within classroom contexts. Dam (2000) describes autonomous learning as learners engaging 'actively in their own learning in order to become fully aware of the different elements involved in, and when, learning - an awareness to be made use of in other contexts' (p. 49). For Sinclair (2000), 'an explicit and conscious awareness of the processes involved in learning a language' (p. 9) is necessary to develop autonomy. Conscious awareness is required and needs to be developed for "Informed decision-making" which involves 'reflection on learning: planning learning and setting goals, self-assessment and monitoring of progress, evaluating learning activities and exploiting learning resources' (Sinclair, 2000, p. 9).

To sum up, agency and awareness of learning are closely related. They reinforce making one's language learning meaningful and taking ownership of one's

own actions within the environment. The development of conscious awareness of learning can help learners expand their learning spaces beyond the classroom. Environments outside the classroom can influence the quality of out-of-class learning activities both positively and negatively. More importantly, in the process of constructing a learning ecology both inside and outside the classroom contexts, learners need to be aware of their own learning to some extent to realise their affordances and niche in the potential of the learning environment.

### **2.1.5 Language teaching from an ecological perspective**

When exploring effective teaching support beyond the classroom context, especially in the phase of change in the environment, teachers should consider what makes learning more meaningful for learners from an ecological perspective. Marton et al. (2004) pointed out:

*What is of importance for the students, however, is not so much how the teacher intends the object of learning to come to the fore, but how the teacher structures the conditions of learning so that it is possible for the object of learning to come to the fore of the learners' awareness. ...What they actually learn is the lived object of learning, the object of learning as seen from the learner's point of view, that is, the outcome or result of learning (pp. 4-5).*

In order to deal with the complex nature of language teaching and learning, Tudor (2003) asserted the need for an ecological approach to re-evaluate the relationship between theories and teaching practices by highlighting the factors that influence individual language learning. For example, even though technological language teaching and learning is one important element for learning nowadays, the potentiality of a technology-rich environment alone cannot guarantee quality of learning or outcomes (Tudor, 2003). The appropriateness of the usages, users' perceptions and attitudes, and the context in which it will be used are also important.

For Tudor (2003), 'an ecological perspective involves exploring language teaching and learning within the totality of the lives of the various participants involved, and not as one sub-part of their lives which can be examined in isolation' (p. 4). The authors argued that the reality of language teaching involves constraints of inner logic within one small class-ecosystem, and is shaped by the perceptions and attitudes of all participants including students, parents, school administrators, and teachers (Tudor, 2003). According to Tudor (2003), to formulate an ecological perspective in practice, teachers should acknowledge that language teaching is fundamentally diverse and that pedagogical decision making should be done according to the local realities of what language learning and teaching mean to the participants in their lives. It is also important for teachers to understand the dynamics of teaching-learning situations (Tudor, 2001). As such, Tudor (2003) concluded that 'the essence of an ecological perspective on language teaching is precisely that it works with situations in their own terms and in the light of the dynamics which operate in these situations' (p. 10).

In terms of pedagogy, Palfreyman (2014) suggested in a similar vein that 'a key element in an ecological pedagogy for autonomy is to make connections between different aspects of students' lives and to encourage them to seek and make creative, critical use of resources from one domain to aid learning in other domains' (pp. 188-189). The author also posited that 'supporting learners in selecting and deploying these [learners' resources] in a range of contexts' (p. 188) can raise learners' awareness of learning resources available to them as well as ways of learning beyond the classroom.

Palfreyman (2014) also suggested the context and circumstances of language learning involve changes within learners' lifetimes. The notion of changes with time is also an important aspect of forming one's language learning ecology. Figure 2.1

below represents the interrelations among the components of language learning from an ecological perspective. Conceptions of language learning and metacognitive awareness play a central role in operating the language learning processes. Social interaction, agency, affordances and niche, and teachers' beliefs are all interrelated and reinforced by the conceptions and metacognitive awareness of language learning.

**Figure 2.1: Ecological Framework: Interrelated Components of Language Learning**



## 2.2 Language Learning Ecology over Time

Time is one of the main concerns in this study. Language learning takes a long time and often involves changes of circumstance within one's history of language learning. It is therefore important to understand how language learning ecologies are constructed 'in role or setting' throughout the life span rather than for short periods of time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Lemke (2002) claimed:

*Fundamental change in attitudes or habits of reasoning cannot take place on short timescales. Even if short-term events contribute toward such changes, it is only the*

*fact that they are not soon erased, do not quickly fade, and are reinforced by subsequent events which makes for the kind of persistent change we really mean by "learning." It is the longer-term process, including the effects of subsequent events, which determines for us the reality of basic human social development (p. 75).*

The timescale is therefore highly relevant to learning because learners develop their habits of actions or identities across multiple settings in their social world over long timescales (Lemke, 2002).

### **2.2.1 Language learning pathways and careers as individual language learning processes**

Tracing and exploring individual learning experiences, language learning pathways, and careers allows for a deeper understanding of how each person individually perceives and acts upon their own learning experiences within their ecologies of learning over the long term.

Language learning "pathways" and "careers" are similar terms that refer to the learners' language learning development over time. The "pathway" considers 'how engagement develops across different settings, timescales, and networks of support' (Barron, 2010, p. 114) by viewing the development of activities from a historical perspective: past, present, and potential future. The "career" considers 'the unique experiences of individuals and the social and institutional processes involved in language learning in particular contexts of time and place' (Benson, 2011b, p. 546).

#### **2.2.1.1 Language learning pathways and careers**

Pathways focus on the development and sustainability of engagement in learning activities across settings in longer timescales (Barron, 2010). This allows

'researchers to trace connections between learning activities and to characterize how content-related interests originate and evolve over time and across life settings' (Barron, 2010, p. 116) using longitudinal methods. Language learning pathways are also used to describe actual processes and development of language learning from an ecological perspective (van Lier, 2004). They are also used to describe learning experiences as incidents and phases strongly associated with passage of time.

From this point of view, ecologies of learning are 'in a continuous process of development' (Lemke, 2002, p. 71). In other words, a learning ecology is a part of the learners' lifelong learning paralleled to the development of person from the past to the future. Lemke (2002) specified that the 'process of ecosocially-mediated development' (p. 75) can be facilitated by changes in learners' behaviour within a classroom learning context and can be carried beyond the school walls. As Lemke (2002) pointed out earlier, learning is a long-term process which involves changes in the surrounding social environment, rather than a short time event.

Ecological frameworks emphasise language learning as a dynamic phenomenon within human development, and view the relationship between individual life experiences and settings, as well as responses to the changes of circumstances in the long term (Foley & Thompson, 2003).

### ***2.2.1.2 Language learning careers***

Benson (2011b) proposed the term "language learning careers" (hereafter, LLC) and defines it as 'both a process of language learning and an ongoing process of developing an identity as a language learner' (p. 547). For Benson (2011b), language learning is a long-term process throughout a learner's life that is 'liable to be conditioned both by experiences of institutional education and experiences of informal learning' (p. 547). Moreover, the process involves the development of an



identity which 'related to the social category of language learner' (Benson, 2011b, p. 546).

Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000) developed the concept of learning career from adolescents' life histories. The concept assigns focus to identity transformation as a result of the challenges by the changes in perceptions of learning over time, especially in informal contexts. For Bloomer and Hodkinson (2000), the learning career 'refers to the development of dispositions to learning over time' (p. 590). As stated by the authors:

*Learning careers are marked by both continuity and change, although the balance between them may differ markedly from case to case, from time to time, and from situation to situation. For this reason, the notion of transformation appears better suited to describing the development of learning careers than that of change alone, and certainly more appropriate than that of transition (p. 591).*

The language learning career therefore identities development through exposure 'to more diverse forms of social interaction, and to new events and changing circumstances, such as occur during the adolescent years' (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000, p. 594).

Language learning pathways and careers allow us to trace the person's development of their identities as learners and provide insights into the processes involved in language learning across settings over time. In other words, learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom with a wide range of contexts with changes over the long term can facilitate learners' cognitive development to form their LLC.

### ***2.2.1.3 Language learning pathways and careers as individual learning processes***

Language learning pathways also allow us to view language learning as a unique individual process through which learners construct their identities as language learners or users (Benson & Cooker, 2013). Learners' stories about their language learning are used to investigate individual language learning processes (Benson, 2005; Menezes, 2008; Murphey & Carpenter, 2008; Murray, 2008). The term “language learning history” (hereafter, LLH) is widely used to describe learners' experiences of language learning. If we are to clarify the ambiguity, however, LLH is 'the story that is told, whereas a language learning career refers to the storyteller's underlying conception of the events and processes to which the LLH refers' (Benson, 2011a, pp. 547-8). LLC therefore emphasises learners' psychological constructs of their learning careers through their experiences. In this thesis, the term LLC is used to articulate learners' cognitive construction of the person through both in-class and out-of-class learning experiences engaged with other social activities.

A number of studies are employed in LLH with a special focus on learners' out-of-class learning experiences. For example, Murray (2008) used “the application of life history research methods” to collect language learning stories from Japanese adult English learners. His aim was to examine the prominent roles of pop culture such as TV programmes, music, novels and magazines, and movies and their influence on learners' language learning processes. Murray (2008) found that prevalent pop culture is a 'catalyst for their motivation', provides learners 'input for language learning and at the same time knowledge which was crucial for participation in social conversation', and inspires learners 'to develop their own learning strategies' (Murray, 2008, p. 13). The author indicates that learners' stories can provide not only the insights into language learning, but also 'the means to apply this knowledge to

practice' (p. 13). Learners' stories can be used as provisional models of learning strategies in local settings by making them available for other learners to read. Moreover, the stories can be used for pre-service teacher training programmes to encourage teachers to better understand learner motivation, and the content and techniques they use during language learning.

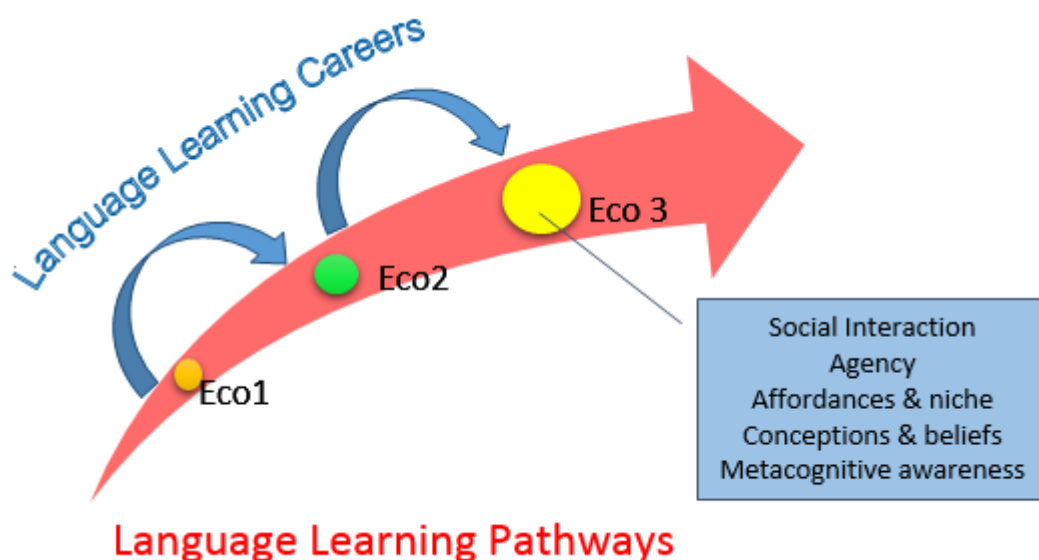
Menezes (2008) explored the complexity of second language acquisition in Brazil using multimedia with visual materials as LLHs. The rationale for this choice was the author's belief that 'pictures and sounds not only illustrate written texts, but also make up a larger network of meaning' (p. 201). Menezes (2008) found an interconnection and mutual influence between in-class activities associated with metalanguage and linguistic knowledge, and out-of-class activities more connected with use of language such as listening to songs and watching movies. The study provided further understanding of learners' learning experiences beyond the classroom as an emergence of variable interactions and social networks as well as 'the individual cognitive and affective factors' (Menezes, 2008, p. 213). Menezes (2011) also examined affordances for out-of-class language learning context from an ecological perspective by collecting LLHs of three learners from Brazil, Finland, and Japan. LLHs in her study show how learners 'strive to find affordances beyond the classroom in order to develop the language and by doing so they demonstrate that they can change their environment and reconstruct their niches' (Menezes, 2011, p. 70).

LLHs provide a wider view of the processes of language learning and learners' development of identity as language learners as they engage in various contexts and settings over the long term, rather than a provisional social event in a specific setting.

Figure 2.2 below represents the language learning pathways and careers that help clarify how learning over time can also involve dramatic changes in the language

learning ecology. As a result of the change in environment, learners can re-form their language learning ecology through the development of LLC. The dramatic changes may occur more than once within their language learning pathways.

**Figure 2.2: Language Learning Pathways and Careers**



### 2.2.2 Study abroad as a change of environment

Study abroad is defined by Kinginger (2009) as 'a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes' (p. 11). Although the duration and purpose may differ, study abroad is an important change in environment for many students within their language learning pathways as it is 'embedded in the context of individual students' lives' (Benson et al., 2013, p. 38).

Benson's (2011a) concept of LLC is an analytical tool to "*periodize*" a person's long-term language learning histories and to subdivide LLC into '*phase, processes, incidents, and critical incidents*' (p. 548, italics in original). As such, study abroad may be understood as a phase in which critical incidents are likely to occur within a person's learning career. Study abroad as an environment change can also greatly

impact learners' constructions of a learning ecology within a pathway of language learning.

In addition, study abroad experiences are usually in an environment where learners are daily immersed in the target language beyond the classroom. As such, study abroad can heighten the importance of out-of-class learning. The potential benefits of study abroad for developing language competence, the dynamics associated with change of environments, and the impact of study abroad on learners' second language identity development have been discussed (Benson et al., 2013; Jackson, 2008; Kinginger, 2011; Stewart, 2010). Through experiences of fitting into unfamiliar cultural practices by using the target language, learners can develop not only linguistic competency, but also socio-pragmatic competence (Arnold & Fonseca-Mora, 2015; Benson et al., 2013). This is defined as 'the ability to accurately interpret and appropriately express social meaning in interaction' and the 'ability to analyse the sociocultural dimensions of social interaction in order to select appropriate forms' (Holmes & Riddiford, 2011, p. 377).

Despite the potential benefits and linguistic progress to result from study abroad experiences, the complexity and individual difference in the gains derived from study abroad are also often identified (Benson, 2012; Cadd, 2015; DeKeyser, 2007; Kinginger, 2009; Macalister, 2015). The extent of authentic interaction outside of school, especially with native speakers, is often identified as an attribute of individual differences (Arnold & Fonseca-Mora, 2015). However, identity-related factors such as age, gender, nationality, and so on are challenges often encountered by learners (Benson, 2012; Kinginger, 2011, 2015). Kinginger (2015) emphasised that educators are therefore responsible for assisting learners to raise their awareness of identity-related challenges by pedagogically integrating language learning with intercultural competence. Individual experiences of the identity-related

challenges and the learning outcomes from study abroad, the impact of learning environment change for reconstructing one's language learning ecology, and how learners conceptualise their own language learning through study abroad experiences should be further examined in relation to individual differences within language learning pathways.

## **2.3 In-class and Out-of-class Language Learning**

Because study abroad involves both in-class and out-of-class learning, the change in the relationship between them may be one of the most important changes for learners. Recent empirical studies investigating the role of out-of-class learning, and teachers' roles for integrating in-class learning with out-of-class learning, are reviewed to identify the research gaps. The importance of the focus on the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning as a new approach to the exploration of learners' holistic language learning environment will also be addressed.

### **2.3.1 Out-of-class Language Learning**

From an ecological perspective, out-of-class learning is regarded as a prominent aspect in the construction of learners' ecology of language learning. It plays an important role in expanding their affordances and forming their language learning pathways. Attention should therefore be given to out-of-class learning in order to better understand what is happening outside the classroom settings. In addition, this focus can reveal how learners actually engage with learning across multiple settings

and, more importantly, what out-of-class learning means to learners. Furthermore, the relationship between out-of-class learning and other aspects of composing a holistic learning environment should be explored to understand the role of out-of-class learning within the environment. Teachers are also considered to be a component of learners' learning ecology. Thus the role of teachers in linking in-class and out-of-class settings, and pedagogical practices in the classroom impact their constructions of an effective learning environment.

The following section discusses the concept of out-of-class language learning and the variables associated with out-of-class activities as well as the integration of in-class and out-of-class settings. In addition, it discusses out-of-class learning in study abroad contexts and learners' perceptions on out-of-class learning and quality out-of-class learning. Empirical studies on out-of-class language learning are used to inform the discussion.

#### ***2.3.1.1 What is Language Learning beyond the Classroom?***

Language learning beyond the classroom is broadly defined by Benson (2011a) as 'everything that classroom language learning is *not* concerned with' (p. 8, italics in original). Inside and outside of the classroom are the two important dimensions for successful second/foreign language learning and 'language teaching has always been seen as a preparation for out-of-class uses of language' (Richards, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, out-of-class learning can be regarded as an extension of in-class based learning and teaching. In other words, both settings are interrelated and integrated as learning environments (Nunan & Richards, 2015).

Language learning can take place in variable contexts, both formal and informal, and social and individual. As a result, out-of-class learning has recently been examined as an important dimension of second language learning and teaching

to foster learner autonomy (Benson & Reinders, 2011; Nunan & Richards, 2015; Richards, 2015). As Benson and Reinders asserted (2011), 'studies of language learning and teaching in settings beyond the classroom are valuable, therefore, because they provide alternative perspectives on the meaning of, and social and cognitive processes involved in, language learning and teaching' (p. 1).

There are increasing opportunities and resources for out-of-class activities due to the development of technology; namely, the internet, multimedia, social networks, and so on (Richards, 2015). Watching a TV series or internet television is an out-of-class learning activities reported as beneficial because learners can enhance linguistic proficiency as well as cultural proficiency. Moreover, it provides extensive exposure to the authentic target language with cultural contexts (Hanf, 2015; Lin & Siyanova-Chanturia, 2015; Webb, 2015).

The integration of in-class and out-of-class settings can help to maximise the potential of out-of-class learning activities. This is because a synergy can be developed when the two settings are integrated; that is, the space of learning is 'jointly constituted by both the teacher and the learners' with possibly common structure of awareness of learning (Tsui, 2004, p. 185). Project-based language learning for example is regarded as a way to connect inside and outside the classroom and make students' language learning more relevant and meaningful (Grau & Legutke, 2015). Grau and Legutke (2015) pointed out that when learners recognise in-class learning as the core learning space to provide them input, 'they themselves begin to bridge the gap between their exposure to English in their free time and the world of school learning' (p. 270).

Bailly (2011) investigated how high school foreign language learners in France learn in out-of-class settings along with their attitudes and practices when learning their chosen language. The author explores the necessary support for students'



independent learning. She identified that schools should provide 'support to the affective (motivation), cognitive (learning skills) and material (learning resources, time and space) dimensions of learning' (Bailly, 2011, p. 129). Teachers' guidance as well as consistent support to monitor students' progress and the use class time to practice specific skills are essential to enhance the efficacy of language learning and to link in-class and out-of-class learning (Webb, 2015).

The out-of-class activity choices tendencies among student teachers in Hong Kong were explored by Hyland (2004). Receptive and private out-of-class activities such as watching TV, listening to radio, reading newspapers are more popular than public activities such as face-to-face conversation as the latter are often associated with negative feelings (Hyland, 2004). Hyland (2004) found that 'the private domain may be a valuable setting for language learning and it is less threatening to both group and personal identity and is also easier for the student to control' (p. 197). However, the author emphasised the importance of further investigation of students' and society's attitudes towards learning beyond the classroom as its meanings for individuals vary within contexts.

The studies above illustrated variable strategies for teachers to integrate in-class and out-of-class learning to increase the potential benefits. However, how such instructional changes influence learners perceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning experiences, and whether or not their learning behaviour changed remain unexplored.

#### ***2.3.1.2 Out-of-class learning in study abroad***

Research of study abroad tends to focus on out-of-class learning as opportunities for learners to engage with a wide range of activities using the target language outside of school. However, students usually experience in-class learning as well. In this

sense, further consideration of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class contexts may help to provide a more holistic examination of the language learning environment.

During study abroad it is generally expected that students will increase their linguistic proficiency through interactions in authentic "real life" situations with native speakers, gain more understanding about the culture, and achieve personal and academic growth (Arnold & Fonseca-Mora, 2015; Cadd, 2015). In Arnold and Fonseca-Mora's (2015) study of Alice, a student from the United States who went abroad to Spain, Alice proactively used the opportunities she had to interact with native speakers. For instance, she communicated with the host family, joined a volunteering program in Spanish society, participated in the tandem conversation and journals exchange. Hence, Alice did not passively remain in a comfort zone with people from the same country. Alice improved not only her language competence, but also extended her knowledge of Spanish culture, and this study-abroad sociolinguistic experience with native speakers 'became part of her life experience' (Arnold & Fonseca-Mora, 2015, p. 227). As Arnold and Fonseca-Mora (2015) pointed out, 'using language in authentic as well as pedagogically and culturally structured contexts outside the classroom can significantly enhance the language-learning process' (p. 228). Therefore, authenticity and pedagogical support outside school are integral to enriching and maximising the advantages of language learning during a study abroad experience.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, study abroad experiences and learner's attitudes towards out-of-class learning vary. Learners' anticipation of the benefits of study abroad as out-of-class learning experiences, the reality of their learning experiences in the study abroad environment, and how they engage with the environment should be examined as individual differences within language learning

pathways. Furthermore, there should be greater attention given to the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning from ecological perspectives.

### ***2.3.1.3 Learners' perceptions of language learning beyond the classroom and quality out-of-class learning***

Chun Lai and colleagues significantly contributed to our understanding of learners' and teachers' perceptions of in-class and out-of-class language learning through their exploration of the relationship between the two contexts as components of a learning ecology (Lai, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Lai & Gu, 2011; Lai, Shum, & Tian, 2014; Lai et al., 2015; Lai, Zhu, et al., 2014). Their study on the use of self-directed technology is an example for bridging in-class and out-of-class settings and for enhancing the effectiveness of language learning by creating wider affordances. Their recent studies inspired me to investigate the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning to determine how languages are learned in this era, and what roles teachers should play to support learners.

Lai (2014) investigated learners' perceptions of both in-class and out-of-class learning experiences, and how they construct their learning capacity by connecting their learning experiences in the two contexts. The author conducted individual interviews with undergraduate foreign language learners in Hong Kong. Lai (2014) found the participants reported 'in-class learning was a major component of their language learning ecology' (p. 6) and although it involves passive learning, in-class learning can provide them 'the basics of the language' (p. 8). In contrast, learners perceived out-of-class learning as fun, and as helping them to understand how the language is used. Also it 'helped them to maintain motivation and interest in learning' (Lai, 2014, p. 8).

The Lai's (2014) research also showed that learners use out-of-class activities to bridge in-class and out-of-class contexts. This was accomplished by using a computer application for creating a further discussion place about topics and issues they encountered in class. Some participants expressed that 'their out-of-class learning experiences gave additional purpose to their in-class learning and helped them to persevere in learning the language' (Lai, 2014, p. 12). Although it was a rather small-scale study, the research shows that participants 'perceive in-class and out-of-class learning contexts as affording different learning opportunities and functions' (p. 17) and that their learning experiences enrich their learning ecology.

Given that learners engage with a wide range of activities outside the classroom, Lai et al. (2014) further examined the characteristics associated with their "good" learning outcomes and grades and the relationship between the quality of out-of-class learning activities and learning outcomes; 'end-of-semester exam grade; confidence in learning English; and enjoyment in learning English' (p. 10). They also attempted to identify the sources that may influence the quality. Lai et al. (2014) found that when in-class learning is more form-focused instruction; for example, 'grammar exercises, reviewing the textbooks, taking remedial tutorial classes' (p. 9), learners tend to engage more in meaning-focused out-of-class activities; e.g., 'reading novels in English, online chatting, and so on' (p. 9). This is done in order to maintain a balance of two different types of learning inside and outside of the classroom, as well as seek for a diversity of learning experiences.

## **2.4 Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature related to three important areas of this study. Firstly, ecology of language learning is a significant theme in the examination of

important components of language learning. Examples of previous research that employed the ecological framework were identified and discussed. Secondly, the language learning pathways and careers addressed drew attention to concerns about the way environmental change in the learning pathway impact attention to time for language learning and learners' cognitive development over time. Finally, in-class and out-of-class learning focusing on the need for their integration was raised as a critical component in this study.

The variable empirical investigations of language learning beyond the classroom show the potential for it to be an effective tool to encourage learners to engage with resources available in the environment and to have wider affordances within the environment. However, very little empirical research has been carried out on the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning from ecological perspective. Similarly, in-class and out-of-class learning experiences have not been explored from ecological perspective in the context of study abroad.

This study attempts to fill these gaps by exploring learner's conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning, how the conceptions might be changed when the learning environment shifts in learners' language learning pathways, and how their conceptions influence individual variations in out-of-class activities. In addition, learner's cognitive development within the process of reconstructing their learning ecologies, such as learners' agency, affordances, and metacognitive awareness of their own learning are explored.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

The primary aims of this research were to explore the holistic language learning environment for Asian students in a study abroad context in order to provide a more comprehensive view of constructing individual ecologies of language learning. The study addresses two research questions:

1. What are learners' conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in their home country and in Australia?
2. How do the learners' conceptions change as a result of the impact of the change of environment?

This chapter introduces the methodological approach and research design selected to explore the research questions. First, an outline of the key methodological approaches employed in this research is provided; namely narrative inquiry and the use of multiple sources of data. The research setting is then described and details of the research participants' backgrounds are provided. The data collection procedures and instruments: student individual semi-structured in-depth interviews (Morris, 2015), student diaries, classroom observations, and teacher individual semi-structured interviews, are explained. Finally, the methods used for analysing data and the data analysis procedure are described.

### **3.1 Methodological Approach**

This research employs ethnographic, socio-cultural, and ecological approaches by using narrative inquiry as qualitative research. According to Holiday (2010) '[t]he basic aim of qualitative research is to get to the bottom of what is going on in all

aspects of social behaviour' (p. 99). Learners' thoughts and reflections on their learning and their social behaviour are examined through their stories of past and current learning experiences. The data collection tools follow Holliday's (2010) suggestions for qualitative research; that is, interviews, class observation, and diaries are used 'to get to the bottom of the issues implicit in the research questions' (p. 99).

Section 3.1.1 illustrates the main approach to this research; namely, narrative inquiry using multiple sources of data for the purpose of triangulation.

### **3.1.1 Narrative inquiry**

Mishler (1986) points out that narrative inquiry is based on an assumption that 'telling stories is a significant way for individuals to give meaning to and express their understandings of their experiences' (p. 75). Webster and Mertova (2007) also describe narrative inquiry as 'human stories of experience...[that] provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories' (p. 1). As narratives are interconnected with and embedded in human experiences, narrative inquiry allows us to recognise 'one's understanding of people and events changes' (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, they allow us to seek 'some understanding of patterns that cohere among individuals and the aspects of lived experience that differentiate' (Josselson, 2007, p. 10).

Narrative inquiry fits in with this research as it enables the researcher to observe change in participants' conceptions of their language learning from retrospective data, reflecting their learning experiences in home country as well as their learning experiences in study abroad. In addition, although all data were collected for the study purpose, narrative inquiry as qualitative research benefits the

participants' language learning and teaching by reflecting on their experiences. As a result, we 'see the participant in our studies as engaging with us on a journey of discovery about their language learning experiences, rather than seeing them as subjects to be studied' (Barkhuizen, 2013, p. 44).

Narrative inquiry has been employed as a powerful tool to investigate depth of language learning and teaching in recent years (Barkhuizen, 2008; Canagarajah, 2012; Coffey, 2010; Gao, 2010; Kalaja, Menezes, & Barcelos, 2008). The approaches to, and instruments for, the investigation vary in narrative inquiry according to the focus of research. For example, in an investigation of the construction and development of second language identity as a part of the learner's language learning process and outcomes in the study abroad context, Benson et al. (2013) used narrative inquiry as both a method of data analysis and a form of presenting findings. Narrative inquiry enabled the researchers to observe commonality among participants as well as individual differences in outcomes of study abroad experiences. This research adapted the approaches used by Benson et al. (2013) as both studies have a similar research purpose: to explore both commonalities and individual differences through learners' language learning experiences.

### **3.1.2 Multiple sources of data collection**

Multiple sources of data tend to be used more recently in narrative inquiry to avoid the possibility of untrustworthiness and unreliability in the study conclusions such as may occur using a single source of data (Benson, 2014). Examples include: Trang et al. (2012), who investigated foreign language anxiety among university students in Vietnam. The authors used student and teacher questionnaires, student



autobiographies, and interviews with both students and teachers to collect data; Ortaçtepe (2013), who explored the identity reconstruction of a Turkish doctoral student in the United States by collecting data from autobiographies, journal entries, and semi-structured interviews; and Kim (2011), who examined second language learning motivation in two Korean adult immigrants in Canada. In a longitudinal study, the authors used monthly semi-structured interviews, language-learning autobiographies, stimulated recall tasks, and classroom observations to collect data. By using multiple sources of data, 'the insights from one source can be tested in analysis of others or through different approaches to data collection and analysis' (Benson, 2014, p. 158). In this research, three data sources are used: interviews, diaries, and class observations, to triangulate the collected data.

Triangulation is a common approach in qualitative research to claim data validity through the use of multiple data sources (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Cohen et al. (2000) describes triangulation as an 'attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint' (p. 112). Although qualitative researchers believe triangulation can improve data validity and reliability (Silverman, 2000), Webster and Mertova (2007) argue the necessity of establishing new ways of viewing and claiming validity and reliability for narrative research. As narrative inquiry is concerned with 'individual truths than generalizable and repeatable events' (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 89), the traditional definition of validity and reliability may not apply to narrative research. For Polkinghorne (1988), validity refers to the strength and trustworthiness of the data as well as the ease of access to the data, while reliability refers to 'dependability' (p. 176) for narrative inquiry.

Participant interviews were the main source of data in this study. The use of observations and diaries as two sources of data however enabled the results to be

considered from different standpoints. Diaries provided prompt accounts of the participants' actions, and allowed access to their vivid thoughts; whereas during interview the participants may sometimes reflect on only their ideal patterns of action. Class observations were performed only by this researcher and involved critical observations of the classroom situations to compare with the stories told by the participants.

The three data collection instruments enabled the analysis of language learning in a study abroad context and to view it from different perspectives. The themes to emerge from each set of data were matched and compared. In addition, the data from participant diaries and classroom observations were compared to the interview data to make the findings to emerge from the interpretation of the data more trustworthy. This research therefore sought a meaningful, faithful, and authentic analysis of data from multiple sources using triangulation, rather than searching for consequences or generalizable truths.

### **3.2 Setting**

The study was set in the Macquarie University English Language Centre (hereafter, ELC) located in Sydney, Australia. ELC was founded by the Australian Government in 1990. More than 1,000 students graduate from the Centre every year. ELC 'offer[s] a wide range of English language programs including General English, Academic English, Study Tours, TESOL Teacher Training, and professional English courses', and 'also provide[s] discipline-specific preparation programs for future university students' (University's website, 2015). Students 'can choose to study in an English program specialised in Business, Accounting and Economics (BAE), Human Sciences, Arts and Science (HAS) or Education and Translating & Interpreting

(ED/TIPP)' (University's website, 2015). The courses at ELC prepare students for study at University. Academic study skills as well as English language skills are taught by highly experienced teaching staff. Students derive from many countries around the world. However, the ELC appears to be a popular destination among Asian students.

### **3.3 Participants**

The research participants were recruited using advertisements that introduced the purposes of the study, and the procedures and activities during the study period. The study participants are 10 international students who are newly arrived in Australia and studying English at ELC. All participants were undertaking the 10-week BAE course as preparation to undertake a university degree. Two participants were preparing for an undergraduate Bachelor's degree, and eight were preparing for a Master's degree. All participants are aged in their early 20s apart from Nicky (late teens) and Tu (late 20s). Nine participants were from mainland China and one was from Vietnam. There were four male and six female participants. As a result, it needs to be acknowledged that the study reflects Asian students' (mainly Chinese) experiences because of the similarity of their background education in their home country.

The participants were studying at ELC in the afternoon from 1:00 pm to 5:15 pm, from Monday to Friday. Following the recruitment of teacher participants through the academic department at ELC, an email was sent to the successful volunteers that explained the aims of the research and the activities they would be involved in during the 10-week project period. The teacher participants were involved in the recruitment of student participants from their classes. Potential student participants who were

interested in the project were contacted via email for scheduling of the first interview (Details of ethical issues are explained later in this chapter.)

Table 3.1 below shows the student participants' background information and their accommodation status during their study at ELC. The participants presented with a variety of accommodations. Only one student lived on campus, two lived with their relatives located a distance from the university, two had home stay accommodation registered by the ELC, and the other five participants lived in shared accommodation with either with friends or with strangers nearby the university. The participants' names shown in this these are pseudonyms.

**Table 3.1: Student Participants' Background Information and Accommodation Status**

Name	Gender	Status	Ethnic Group	Accommodation status
Alex	Male	Pre-MA	Chinese	House share with other people (single nationality)
Sue	Female	Pre-UG	Chinese	University's accommodation on campus
Tu	Female	Pre-MA	Vietnamese	House share with other people (mixed nationality)
Nicky	Female	Pre-UG	Chinese	Home stay with other students (mixed nationality)
Amy	Female	Pre-MA	Chinese	Live with relatives at their house
Alison	Female	Pre-MA	Chinese	Live with relatives at their house
Natalie	Female	Pre-MA	Chinese	House share with other people (single nationality)
Eddy	Male	Pre-MA	Chinese	Home stay with other students (single nationality)
Lucas	Male	Pre-MA	Chinese	House share with other people (mixed nationality)
Mike	Male	Pre-MA	Chinese	House share with other people (single nationality)

\*MA- Master's degree, UG- Undergraduate degree

Teacher participants comprise one male and three females who teach the student participants at ELC. The four teachers meet the students 2-3 times a week as they teach two different classes over the week.

### **3.4 Ethical Issues**

In accordance with the ethical guidelines issued by Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee, participants' privacy and research confidentiality were respected throughout the research process (Appendix A). Initial contact with the Head of ELC Academic Programs was made via my supervisor to gain permission to conduct research with ELC students and teachers. Following permission, teacher recruitment was undertaken with the assistance of the Head of ELC Academic Programs. She provided the advertisement (Appendix B-1) when enabled the researcher to avoid approaching participants directly. Four teacher participants were contacted by email to explain who I am, the aim of the research, the activities involved (interviews and class observations), and to request their assistance to recruit student participants from their classes. The teachers were assured there were no risks involved in participating in the project and that all observations of their teaching would remain confidential.

The recruitment of student participants was undertaken by the teachers who put up advertisements in their classes (Appendix B-2) that explained the study, its activities, and the period of participation. This researcher also introduced herself to the classes and explained the research process to the students. This was on the advice from the teachers who suggested that seeing the researcher may help the students to decide whether or not to participate. Participants were assured that participation or non-participation would not affect their evaluation in their course. In addition, they were informed that participation was on a voluntary basis. The classroom teachers then provided the names of the students who volunteered to participate. The successful participants were then contacted via email to again explain in detail what their participation involved and to arrange the first interview.

Signed consent was obtained from all participants on the first day of face-to-face meetings; that is, the first interview for students and before class observations from teachers. The participants were provided with copies of Consent Forms (Appendix C-1 & 2). They were assured that any information or personal details gathered during the study was confidential, that no individual would be identified in the study, and that they could withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

### 3.5 Data Collection

This section presents the instruments used for the data collection. The purposes of each instrument and also the steps in the process of the data collection are provided. Table 3.2 below shows the brief sequence of the procedure. Student interviews were conducted three times with a two-week span in between. The process of compiling diary entries using an online chat-room was introduced to the participant at the very beginning of the data collection period. This was to enable them to create a small online learning community to share their experiences and thoughts. They were also encouraged to communicate in that space freely throughout the project period. Class observations were conducted at the early stages of the project only. Teacher interviews were conducted towards the end of the study period.

**Table 3.2: Data Collection Timeline**

	<b>Student interview</b>	<b>Student diaries</b>	<b>Class observation</b>	<b>Teacher interview</b>
Week 1-2	√	√	√	
Week 3-4		√		
Week 5-6	√	√		
Week 7-8		√		√
Week 9-10	√	√		

The following section provides details of each data collection method including its purpose and details of its procedures.

### **3.5.1 Student Interview**

'The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1).

Interviewing can therefore be 'most suitable to be used for accessing personal perspectives on language learning and teaching in situated contexts' (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 16). Because the focus of the present study is on students' conceptions of language learning student interviews comprised the main part of the data. In this research, face-to-face semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected to allow participants 'flexible and free flowing interaction' and to express their experience and story in their own ways (Morris, 2015, p. 3). Because interviews have the strength of drawing out people's feelings and thoughts in the past which we cannot observe visually, changes in their conceptions and reflections over time were captured.

The first student interviews were conducted soon after their arrival in Australia. The students were interviewed three times with a two-week span between interviews. Their English learning history, the conceptions of in-class and out-of-class learning in different settings, and reflections of their own language learning were elicited in the interviews. Conducting the interviews in three stages enabled the students' changes of conceptions of learning English and their behaviours in the new learning environment over the ten-week period to be observed. In addition, the semi-structured interview format allowed for "on-the-line interpretation" to be maintained

and for Kvale's "Six Steps of Analysis" (1996, pp. 188-190, italics in original) to be adapted for the interview and subsequent in-depth analysis.

- 1) '... when *subjects describe* their lived world during the interview'
- 2) '... the *subjects themselves discover* new relationships during the interview, see new meanings in what they experience and do'
- 3) '... the *interviewer, during the interview, condenses and interprets* the meaning of what the interviewee describes, and "sends" the meaning back'
- 4) '... the *transcribed interview is interpreted by the interviewer*, either alone or with other researchers'
- 5) '... *are-interview*. When the researcher has analyzed and interpreted the completed interviews, he or she may give the interpretations back to the subjects. ..."self-correcting" interview/
- 6) '... to extend the continuum of description and interpretation to include *action*, in that subjects begin to act from new insights they have gained during their interview'.

Each interview was approximately 30-45 minutes duration and all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Details of the focus at each interview are as follows:

- **Interview 1:** The first interview focused on past experiences of learning English in both in-class and out-of-class settings in their home country. It covered such aspects as what the classroom was like, what was learnt in-class and out-of-class, and what kind of activities were engaged in during their free time with English. Therefore it was autobiographic, retrospective information. The participants described their learning experiences since starting to learn English, and reflected on their own life experiences. Because all the participants are from Asian countries, they experienced relatively similar types of in-class learning environments, particularly in relation to the number of students in the classroom and an exam-focused curriculum. Participants were also asked about their background including general questions about their home town and their family in order to learn more about them. At the end of the interview the participants were told that the next interview topic would be about their current learning experiences in Australia.



- **Interview 2:** The second interview focused on the students' current learning experiences in Australia; that is, their impression of the learning styles, learning environment, and cultural differences (with some introspective account). Students compared their new learning experience with past learning experiences in their home country. They also talked about both their satisfaction and concerns about their current situation, and how they were trying to adjust to the new environment. The participants were asked about their accommodation status (e.g., home stay), how they travel to school every day, and their out-of-class activities in order to understand their daily learning environment. Analysis of the interview transcriptions commenced after the second interview to identify the major issues to have emerged during the interviews. The data were also examined to determine if the interviews were on a track to answer the research questions, and the final follow-up interview was prepared accordingly.

- **Interview 3:** The third interview focused on changes in the students' conceptions of in-class and out-of-class learning since their arrival in Australia and their conceptions of the *relationship* between inside and outside the classroom learning, and the change of learning ecology. How learners adjust their learning styles to fit into the new environment and create a new learning ecology was elicited in the interview. The third interview was conducted towards the end of the students' ten-week course. As a result, the students were better able to reflect on their learning experiences and describe their conceptions of learning English at different times and in different settings. An attempt was also made to '*condense and interpret* the meaning of what the interviewee describes, and to "send" the meaning back' (Kvale, 1996, p. 189, *italics in original*) in order to confirm my interpretation.

### 3.5.2 Student Diaries

Barkhuizen et al. (2014) point out that the usefulness of diary data for researchers is 'to explore and understand affective factors, learning strategies, and the learners' own perceptions of their language learning through information that is recorded while learners are actually engaged in the process of learning' (p. 35). The reason for using diary entries in this research was to collect introspective accounts of the participants' current learning experiences and to record their reflections of life in Australia throughout the project period.

The participants were requested to write a short diary entry twice or three times a week over ten weeks. They could write about what they learned in class or after class, what they did/achieved using English, or any events they encounter. As previously mentioned, an online chat-room was initially used as the space for students to write their diary entry, and to share their ideas on the topics that unfold in the chat-room. Although the aim was to create a small community among the student participants, due to the participants' unfamiliarity with using this type of resource and giving them a sense of "extra work", only Lucas, Amy, and Sue participated in the online chat-room at the beginning of the study. Amy mentioned that "it was a bit complicated" (in informal conversation).

The online chat-room was later transformed to a group email site where participants could share their diary entries. Email format was selected because all the participants commonly used this platform for communication. A suggestion was made to the participants to attach a photo with comments. Seven participants included a photo with comments and wrote entries into their diaries more regularly. Although three students did not participate in the diary writing activity, this approach enabled observations of the types of activities engaged in outside of school by those who did participate. It also allowed for observations of what the participants were currently

working on (as they are all in the same course), their social events, and their emotional reflections on life in Australia. In addition, the email platform enabled this researcher to contact the participants at least once a week.

Therefore, email was a good virtual communication tool to interact without pressure and establish a rapport with the participants. The example diary entries as extracts in this thesis are in the original form. Because the use of pictures is not included in the consent, the pictures shared by the participants are not shown in this thesis.

### **3.5.3 Class Observation**

Four classes were observed during the first stage of this research, subject to the consent of the classroom teachers. To avoid putting pressure on the teachers and students, each class was observed for only 30-45 minutes. The purpose of observing the classroom practices was primarily to gain a better understanding of participants' learning environment inside the classroom. As such, there were three areas of focus: 1) what the participants were currently learning in class (topics, assignment, projects, etc.); 2) the participants' attitudes (e.g., positive/receptive) to the learning environment and the classroom atmosphere; and 3) the teachers' teaching approach. This enabled both the researcher and participants (students and teachers) to have a common understanding of the general classroom environment to talk about during interviews. Field notes were taken according to the observation points mentioned above, and the notes were used as observational data. No video-recording, audio-recording, or photography was undertaken. Although the class observations were brief they nonetheless provided rich data on the classroom atmosphere, features of each class, and students' attitude in class.

### **3.5.4 Teacher Interview**

Interviews were conducted towards the end of the 10-week course with four teachers. The interview questions focused on their perceptions of the role of out-of-class language learning activities in their students' learning. The teachers were also asked if they used or attempted to use any strategies or methods to bridge in-class and out-of-class learning activities, and for their observations of the students' attitudes towards learning English.

Teachers are influential figures in students' learning (Oxford, 2001) and teachers' beliefs are a part of a learner's learning ecology. Teachers' perceptions of learning English as a second/foreign language as well as their beliefs about teaching can greatly influence the construction of learners' learning environments. Although this study focused mainly on learners, how teachers' instructional approach in the classroom and their perceptions of out-of-class language learning influences the students' conceptions of language learning will be discussed by matching the analysis of the findings and teachers interviews.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

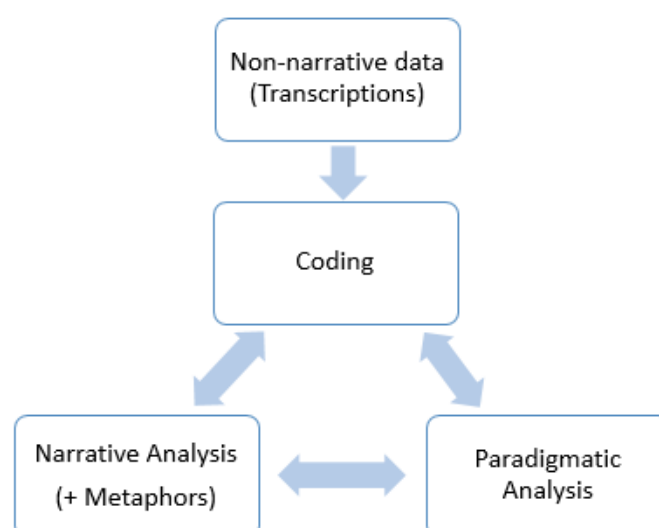
Methods for data analysis in this study were determined by the aims of the study. For the purpose of exploring participants' autobiographic stories of their language learning histories, narrative inquiry was employed as qualitative analysis.

Polkinghorne's (1995) concepts: "narrative analysis" and "paradigmatic analysis of narrative" were used as narrative inquiry methods of data analysis. Narrative analysis allows us to sequentially organise collected non-narrative data into a structured

learner's story (Benson, 2013). Paradigmatic analysis of narrative allows us to 'locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). Both approaches were used in this study to highlight the individual differences in the variations of language learning pathways and the common elements of learning environment change to impact the language learning processes.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the brief stages of data analysis. The collected interview data was firstly transcribed verbatim. All the collected data including student diaries, verbatim transcripts, and classroom observation notes were then coded according to the themes identified in the literature review. This was undertaken to clarify the focus of the study within the data. Some themes emerged during the coding process. Individual narratives were created by the researcher by transforming the coded data into a form of story. In this way, narrative analysis was performed to systematically analyse and organise the highlighted areas of focus. Both narrative analysis and coded data were used for the paradigmatic analysis to indicate commonalities among the participants as evidenced in the data. The details of each stage and method are illustrated below:

**Figure 3.1: Data Analysis Procedure**



First, thematic analysis of content is used to analyse the collected data.

Following a close reading of the collected written texts, themes associated with the research questions were identified and coded manually. Oxford's (2001) concept-driven coding procedure was adopted to elicit from the interview responses and the literature review for the key components of a language learning ecology framework. However, some themes emerged through reading the interview transcriptions. The themes represent participants' distinct ideas and thoughts about their experiences and are the key to revealing the nature of their language learning pathways.

Secondary themes (e.g., exam-focused, independent, communication skills, usefulness, etc.) were later placed into categories: identity, learning strategies, social interactions, metacognitive awareness, etc., before being sorted into four contexts: 1) in-class learning in home country; 2) out-of-class learning in home country; 3) in-class learning in Australia; and 4) out-of-class learning in Australia. This coding process facilitated a better understanding of both commonalities among participants and individual differences. The process also helped to structure individual narratives for the narrative analysis.

After identifying the themes and coding the written texts, the interview transcriptions were transformed into individual narratives. Because narratives were constructed according to the themes, and the focus of the narratives were associated with the research questions, narrative analysis provided a method of analysis for further understanding of individual's language learning pathways. Individual differences and commonalities in the patterns of the change in learners' conceptions of learning emerged from the narratives.

### 3.6.1 Narrative analysis

Participants' language learning experiences as lived stories (Barkhuizen et al., 2014), or the (auto)biographical narratives (Benson, 2005, p. 18) were analysed by writing narratives as a method (Benson, 2013). Through the process of writing individual narratives, this researcher was able to understand not only the content, but also the form and context of their stories. As Coffey (2010) identifies, 'the emphasis on individuals telling their life as a story implies that these stories are selective and so construct specific narratives' (p. 121). Therefore, more attention was paid to the structure of narratives (Barkhuizen et al., 2014).

Because the stories of the participants are located across settings and time, when the data was examined and the individuals' life stories were produced, 'three dimensions: characters in interaction, time, and place' (Barkhuizen, 2008) were kept in mind to make the context of each story coherent. Barkhuizen's (2008, p. 232) three dimensions are the:

1. participants in the story - their own experiences and their interactions with others
2. time during which the story takes place, including its temporal connections to history and the future
3. physical settings or places in which the story is located

The thematic focus was on participants' social interactions and development of metacognitive awareness through study abroad experiences. Identifying themes such as social structures, reflection, and awareness of their language learning opportunities allowed for the discovery of unique individual pathways of language learning as well as patterns in the pathways and careers. The participants' "small stories" (Bamberg, 2004, 2007; Georgakopoulou, 2006, 2007) reflecting their learning experiences and the cognitive development in their awareness of the learning environment through interviews were interpreted into short stories of their language learning pathways and then described as patterns. The coded themes enabled the

researcher to analyse in more systematic ways through narrative analysis and view individual language learning as a unique pathway. Metaphors were included in the narratives as participants' individual expressions toward their conceptions and images of their language learning were depicted in the interviews.

Narrative analysis also helped to identify commonalities among participants as a phenomenon of the impact of environmental change. Paradigmatic analysis was performed after the narrative analysis to illustrate the particular phenomenon using both coded data and narratives from the narrative analysis.

### **3.6.2 Paradigmatic analysis of narratives**

'Paradigmatic analysis is an examination of the data to identify particulars as instances of general notions or concepts' (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). As mentioned earlier, this study aimed to examine the impact of study abroad as a change of learners' learning environment and its effect on the construction of ecologies of language learning. Therefore, an effort was made to discover the particular occurrences by finding rather general concepts within the data, and then by exploring the relationships among the notions (Polkinghorne, 1995). The data were thematically analysed through triangulation 'to pinpoint and explain inconsistencies between narratives and historic events, or between content and form' (Pavlenko, 2007, p. 169). This approach allowed for an investigation of the change of participants' conceptions of learning English at different time and in different contexts. It also supported the investigation of its relationship to their surrounding environment as a phenomenon, as well as the key component of the development of their LLC. Even though variations exist in individual learning experiences and how learners conceive those events, the effect of environment change on language learners may



demonstrate a tendency or a pattern to guide understanding of what is happening or what may happen when learners shift to a new learning context.

## Chapter 4. Findings

An analysis of data gathered from multiple sources is presented in this chapter to address the research questions posed in Chapter 3 (i.e., RQ1 – What are learners' conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in their home country and in Australia?; and RQ2 – How do the learners' conceptions change as a result of the impact of the change of environment?).

Participants' conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in their home country and changes in new environment were identified through narrative analysis. Individual narratives clarify that participants have their own unique pathways even though they have similar educational backgrounds and are in a similar environment at the university. Through narrative analysis certain patterns of conception change and learner behaviour emerged which enabled the ten participants to be grouped into three broad types.

In Section 4.1 the collective narratives of participants' language learning pathways will be illustrated as three broad types. Particular attention is given to the changes in their conceptions of language learning and their actions as influenced by the change. (Longer individual narratives are included in Appendix D.) The three patterns of language learning pathways are to describe (1) learners' conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in their home country and (2) their conceptions of this relationship in a study abroad context (Australia); and to document (3) how the changes in conceptions occurred through learning experiences during the ten weeks.

Section 4.2 includes the findings from the thematic analysis, focusing on the changes in conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning. The coded themes for thematic analysis allowed the researcher to overview a phenomenon of language learning among the participants by indicating

commonalities rather than focusing on individual differences. The thematic analysis facilitated the identification of the more generalizable ideas about how the changes occur within the process. The integration of in-class and out-of-class learning as well as the development of metacognitive awareness as significant factors which influenced the process of the change will be discussed.

#### **4.1 Patterns of Language Learning Pathways: Collective Narratives**

Each collective narrative has the following structure: (1) brief introduction of the participants; (2) their conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in their home country with examples of learning activities; (3) their conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in Australia with example activities; (4) how the conceptions changed in Australia with example activities and behaviours; and the narratives include (5) their use of metaphors to compare their language learning environments following the change in their conceptions.

Because the participants are all from Asian countries with similar educational backgrounds they brought similar conceptions from their home environments. In other words, they all had similar starting points from their home countries. The main differences in the three patterns are therefore the degree to which their conceptions changed throughout the study period.

The degree and rate of their conceptions change are demonstrated by grouping them into three patterns of language learning pathways. This grouping is related to: (1) the degree of the conception change; (2) the features of their behaviours and actions; and (3) the breadth of affordances in the given environment. Below is a summary of each pattern.

- **Decisive Change:** An earlier change in conception can be seen and actions were taken rather quickly. The rich amount of social interaction outside the classroom and wider affordances in the environment can be seen.
- **Gradual Change:** A more gradual change in conceptions can be seen, and actions were taken later. Social interactions outside the classroom as well as affordances are limited, although they may widen.
- **Minimal Change:** Minimal conception change can be seen. Social interactions outside the classroom as well as the affordances for learning are minimal. Few actions were taken although the potential for more learning opportunities was apparent to the participants.

#### 4.1.1 Decisive Change Pathway

**Decisive Change (3 participants):** Conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning have decisively changed as participants identified the potential for learning in the new environment and made sense of it at an early stage. As a result, they exposed themselves to out-of-class learning through socially mediated interactions and created a wider affordance in their learning environment in their own way. There are more "small stories" to tell from daily language learning experiences.

Alex and Sue are from mainland China. Tu is a Vietnamese student who spent two years in Switzerland studying her first Master's degree. Alex and Tu have work experience in their home country. Sue spent the last five years in Kenya at a British international high school.

Alex conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China as two completely different contexts: learning English in-class was “for passing exam” and outside of school was only for entertainment. Sue did not pay attention to out-of-class learning because learning English in more formal classes after school were for passing the exams. Tu thought only homework was out-of-class learning and that was just enough for passing the exams at school. For all three participants, in-class learning was just as a subject, focusing on grammar, and it had nothing to do with their lives. Alex and Sue thought that the learning environment in China was very competitive. As a result, they felt great pressure and thought it’s like a job, and that they had a responsibility to study, and passing exams was the goal of learning English both inside and outside the classroom. Tu also said that learning English was “a subject like other subjects, history, math” in that she had to remember vocabulary and sentence structures every day even though she did not need to use them in her daily life.

*It looks like something that I have to remember every day for nothing. I don’t use it, but I have to remember. We just study something like signals, this word means this, structure like this, that’s it. (Tu)*

Out-of-class, Alex liked to watch American or English movies for entertainment because he wanted to relax after school. He also wanted to “learn something interesting” and he thought it is “helpful for studying English”. He enjoyed Western culture and learned collocations and slang expressions through watching films. However, he did not have the opportunity to use the English he picked up from movies both in-class and out-of-class. He was “forbidden” to use informal words in class and thought “it is useless to learn English in China”. He tried to have a foreign friend in China, but it did not work out.

Sue and Tu were not great fans of such entertainment. Homework and extra formal classes after school were their out-of-class learning. Three participants did not

find a connection between the in-class and out-of-class contexts in their home countries because they had few opportunities to use English outside of the classroom. Actually, in-class learning as a subject for passing exams was their only purpose for learning English.

When Alex, Sue and Tu first arrived in Australia they all took a few weeks to adjust. They spent their time observing the new learning environment, thinking about what they should do to get the best out of the environment, and trying out the things around them. They then had a change in their conceptions of language learning and took decisive actions (which were adventurous to some extent) at this early stage. Their conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning became more integrated as they found that both are to “use and practice English” after finding opportunities to use and practise English in both contexts:

*I think the connection could be like how English will help both in life and in class. Yeah, useful... it's like a cycle. (Sue)*

*I think it's useless to learn English in China. Because most people they learn English but never use English in the rest of their lives, but in Australia, I need to use it, I need to make friends with the language, with this language. (Alex)*

For these participants, in-class and out-of-class learning have become the connected space for practicing and using English through greater communication with others. From such experiences, learning English in both contexts became “useful”. Learning and using English made Sue feel that English is “a part of life”. As for Tu, due to her commitment to make an “English only environment”, she had the approach that “whatever I talk, wherever I go, whenever in a day, all of this is English, so English in Australia is my life”. For Alex, an environment full of opportunities to learn and use English means “Everywhere is learning. More sources, more people, more teachers, they are all my teachers”.

During the initial learning stage in Australia, Alex thought that he “should go outside more to catch every opportunity to use English” and “practice English with native speakers”. Apart from going to the shopping centre or library, he joined a local football/soccer club and started skateboarding. He met a lot of local people to communicate with through such activities. For Sue, it was not so difficult to expose herself to the English environment from the beginning as she thought that “English is a tool to talk with people, share my opinions, share my experience”, and that was how she spent her high school in Kenya. Sue joined a bible study group and participated in seasonal events held at her place of accommodation. Because there are a lot of local students there, it was fortunate for her to have such a natural environment where she can join in social activities. Sue’s struggle at the early stage was more about getting along with Chinese friends at ELC. Tu was at first shocked that authentic Australian culture was not like she imagined before coming abroad. She was also disappointed that most of her classmates were Chinese. Her action after observing her surrounding environment was to strictly prohibit herself to use her first language and to try to make her life an English only environment.

*I force myself use English, think in English, talk to people as much as possible. In Australia, I have an environment I have a chance to use it, so I have to use it. (Tu)*

Tu was determined to make the most of her study abroad experience to improve her English proficiency while developing her knowledge in her field because she could not improve her English to a great extent in Switzerland. She eagerly pushed herself to talk to people including her teachers, classmates, and people she met at restaurants or shops. Tu then gradually expanded her opportunities to use English.

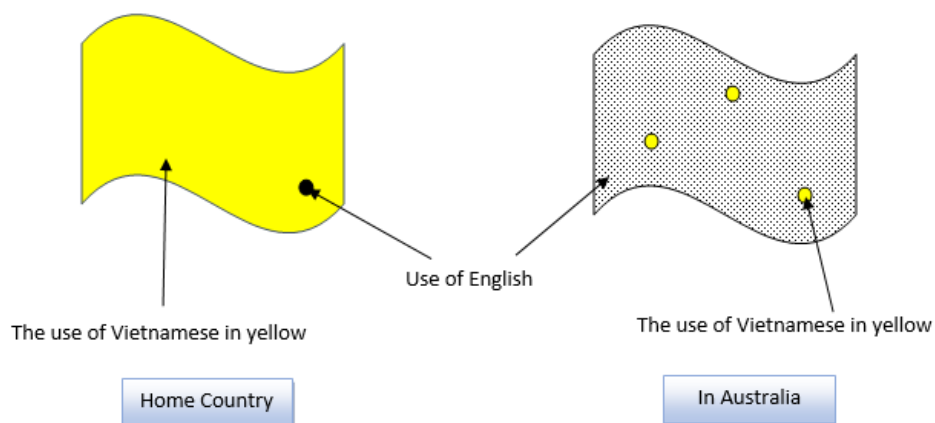
*We are here ... from different places in the world ... see each other ... share wonderful moment together ... for a reason... (Tu’s diary)*

In-class learning at ELC also encouraged the participants to learn academic English for university preparation as well as English for daily life. This included tips to live in Australia or useful words and phrases to use daily outside of school. In-class learning in Australia was also an opportunity to practice English with teachers face-to-face and be able to “use” English during group discussions and presentations in class.

Sue and Tu described their views of the two different language learning environments (in home countries and in Australia). Figure 4.1 is a visual representation of their views of the two learning environments. Tu described her language learning environments in Vietnam and in Australia using contrasting colours in posters to show the amount the two languages were used (Figure 4.1).

*In Vietnam, English was just a dot, like uh ability to speak English, and sometimes you cannot see it, too small. But in Australia it's different, maybe Vietnamese, yellow one you cannot see, it's just a few, in a whole picture you have black one (English), it's completely different.*

**Figure 4.1: The Contrast of the Use of Two Languages**



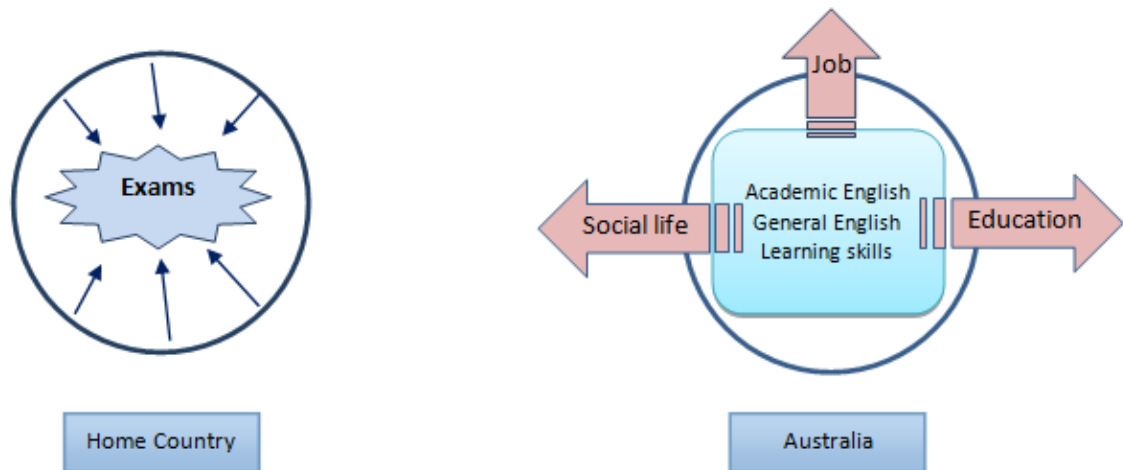
Sue described learning English as beneficial for her future expectations to study a degree program at the next level as well as for her career. She believed that social interactions enabled her to expand her capacity to use English (Figure 4.2).

*The purpose of studying in China was to pass exams, all for exams everything we have done was for exams. But here, it goes to different directions, so it's more like*



*language we're learning proper language in Australia. We learn it and we speak it and more benefit here.*

**Figure 4.2: Learning English for My Future Career**



The participants all expressed that they became more open (in terms of understanding cultural differences), independent (ways of learning), and confident to talk in English as a result of their early learning experiences. Sue expressed that she learned “independent learning” in Australia because she had to manage her learning by herself (focus on her goals, or what to do for extra learning after class etc.) given the different teaching styles in Australia.

The three participants’ stories suggested the increased opportunities to use English in their daily lives both in-class and out-of-class appear to be the key to their change in conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning. The development of their metacognitive awareness of language learning in the new environment led them to change their conceptions decisively. In turn, their affordances expanded through their socially mediated interactions outside of the school, and utilised the learning space. In addition, the connection between in-class

and out-of-class learning appeared to enable them to view their language learning environment differently; as something more meaningful for their lives.

Decisive Change can be a successful learning pathway during study abroad as students notice the potential for language learning in the environment at an early stage and utilise it in their own ways. The key phase in the decisive change to their conceptions would be, from this researcher's interpretation, at the first stage of their study abroad when they critically reflect on their own learning behaviours and actions to respond to the new environment. Previous experiences of environment change in their lives (e.g., study abroad, working experiences) may also be a possible factor making them ready to function in the new environment.

#### 4.1.2 Gradual Change Pathway

**Gradual Change (4 participants):** Conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning gradually change as the students notice the environment change as well as thinking of the potential actions they can take. As a result, they start to seek more possible learning elements outside the classroom and proactively use English both inside and outside of school. Gradual Change can be seen as a more gradual form of the Decisive Change pathway.

The four participants in this group are all female students from mainland China. Nicky is the youngest among the participants and is preparing for her undergraduate degree. Amy, Natalie, and Alison are all in their mid-20s and are aiming to pursue their Master's in Accounting at university.

Like the participants in the Decisive Change pathway, the four participants in this group all conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China as two different contexts. They share conceptions of in-class

learning as exam-focused learning, a subject not language learning, and not useful for daily use, even though their learning experiences may vary. They did not identify any connections – or only minimal connections in terms of basic skills development – between the two contexts as there were no opportunities to use English outside of school. This is suggested in the following extracts:

*...so after class I think English is just uh... a topic for us, it didn't mean anything. It may be like PE lesson for me, after class I will not do anything about sports, so just after class, it means what? (Natalie)*

*It's just like a grammar class. We focus on the tasks and we have to finish in our classes, um... just want to get a high score, so we try our best in class (Alison)*

Amy reflected critically on learning English in class, stating that it was “a necessary subject” to build up basic skills of English. She also thought that it was just completing tasks in class and achieving goals which teachers set for students. As such, Amy did not believe it was useful or important for her “in real English world” now. The other three participants also thought that learning English was not for daily use and they just followed what the teachers said. Natalie learned English in English medium during middle and high school. She recalled that she experienced many fun activities that teachers prepared for students in school (games, movies etc.). However, she did not particularly like the teaching and learning styles at that time (although she realised now that it was a good way to learn English). She also thought it was “one kind of style of subject” and it was “still a task to complete in class”.

Outside of school in China, Nicky, Amy, and Alison liked to watch American TV series for fun, even though they expected to improve their listening skills naturally. Nicky had an African family as neighbours in her home town, but she did not feel comfortable to socialise with them even though she had some opportunities to speak in English with them. Natalie did not like her parents encouraging her to talk to

foreigners in town because, for her, what she learned in school was not for that purpose.

The four girls came to Australia with similar English language learning backgrounds and similar conceptions of learning. Their conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning have integrated gradually to become beneficial and useful in both contexts as they realised the potential to use English outside the classroom more in their daily lives. Although their approaches to learning in action differed, they gradually expanded (more at the final interview) their learning spaces outside the classroom and created connections with in-class learning.

*In classroom is very useful and teach you how to learn native English and give you a lot of right examples, and outside the classroom, it depends on yourself you have to remember them and use them and make something... like become a part of you, become a habit. (Amy)*

*If I learn some sentence and I can use it today and it will encourage me a lot. It will make me feel happy 'wow, it's good!' and I will think about that and tomorrow I will learn one more sentence and I want to use it. So I think environment is very important. It gives us chances to use it, not just to find a foreigner to talk with. (Natalie)*

During the initial learning stage in Australia (first interview), Amy and Alison showed worry about the extent of their first language use in their daily lives as most of their classmates were Chinese. They also lived with their relatives:

*I think the environment is very important and I try hard to forbidden Chinese and just speak English....here, a lot of Chinese classmates and we communicate in Chinese more often. (Amy)*

*I live with my aunt so I don't have the opportunities to buy things by myself, but now I will come here earlier and go to the shopping centre to buy something because I want to create an opportunity to listen to native speaker to speak English. (Alison)*

Amy attempted additional communication practice with her teacher or classmates, especially with one Vietnamese student. Alison gradually expanded her daily activity area. She went to the shopping centre, joined the local gym, and took a bus as this

sometimes allowed her to meet local people and enjoyed a conversation in English with them. Nicky lived in a home-stay setting with other international students. She had a sociable place of accommodation and her curiosity to meet with international student friends who have different backgrounds to her means that she often joined in social activities with them (e.g., eating out, parties). It was exciting for her to talk with them in order to attain wider knowledge and expand her social world through English. This idea emerged from the following extract:

*This Thursday I had dinner with friends. We haven't had such enjoyable dinner and conversation with such lovely people after A4 (previous course). We both spend a beautiful night together. The pic attached is spicy roast fish. 🐟* (Nicky's diary)

Natalie later started to explore the outside environment by herself and talk with people at restaurants or check products in a shop. She talked about her experiences in class with the teacher. Although she believed during high school in China that reading a passage aloud repeatedly was a good strategy to learn English, she now believes that learning English in more natural ways makes her feel happy. This sentiment is evident in the following extracts:

*I need communication to make my life colourful and I need to touch different kind of people and then my life will be happier, not meaningful it's too big, just happier.* (Natalie)

*Yesterday I bought this pair of slippers and the seller said that wearing this pair of slippers in a long period would make my calf slimmer. I hope that.* (Natalie's diary)

In-class learning is also one space where the students can learn and use English as they have opportunities to use English through discussions and presentations in class. Nicky expressed that what she learned in China were mechanical ways to answer questions for exams. She now learns English in order to discuss business related topics and situations, or for presenting her ideas about something in class; English skills she believes she actually *uses* as the following extract revealed:

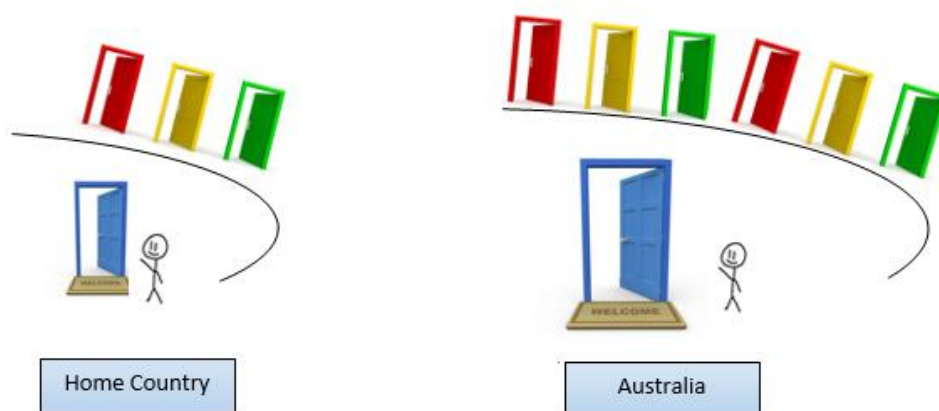
*Here we learn English for our study. We really see it as a language, yes, and we try to solve this problem. But in China, what we tried to solve was not English, just the question.*

The four participants also compared their two language learning environments in using metaphorical expressions. Amy described her language learning environments using a Chinese proverb: "Teachers open the door, but you must enter by yourself"

(Figure 4.3):

*... so a teacher opens the English door for us and we enter, and outside the classroom we can go to different rooms, and explore by ourselves.*

**Figure 4.3: Teachers Open the English Door**



Amy compared the size of the door (meaning the size of her potential to use English proficiently) that teachers in Australia open “a much bigger and taller door” for her. Nicky and Alison described their language learning environments in Australia as having more elements and opportunities to learn English. To them, this makes the learning environment bigger, more colourful and comprehensible, with a clear purpose for learning English as the following extracts revealed:

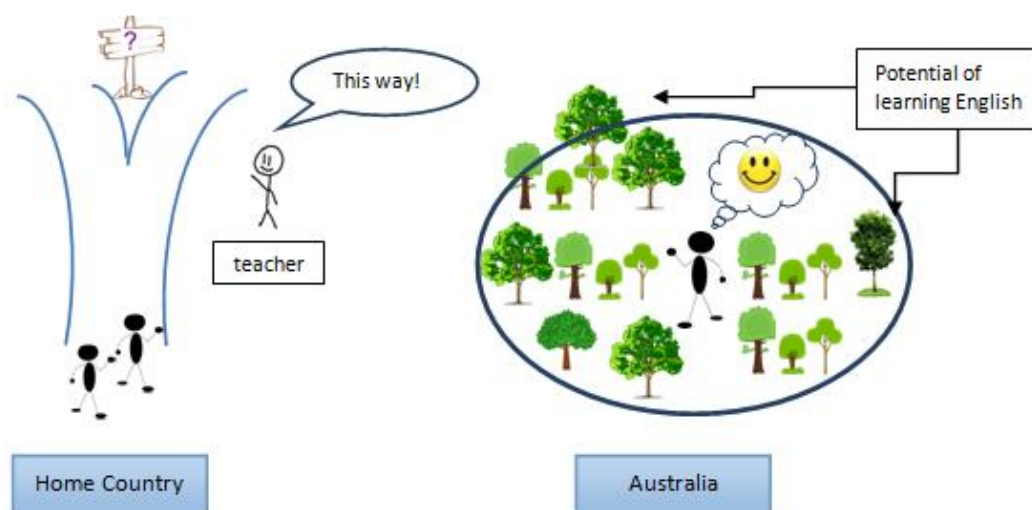
*It's like a practice, you can get involved in a different life, not just every day you study, after study what will we do? I want to have a colourful life. (Nicky)*

*Bigger and comprehensible. Everywhere and every corner you can learn English not just focusing on one place. If you want to improve English, everywhere can have opportunity to improve, depend on the person, if you want. (Alison)*

Natalie used the metaphors of a road and a forest to compare the two learning environments in China and in Australia. In the extract below, she described how she gradually adapted the new learning environment in Australia (Figure 4.4):

*In China, it was just a road, I don't see what is in front of me or my friends, but teacher told us to go. But in Australia, it's like a forest, there are a lot of trees and plants. Those plants are English. See or not see, it's up to you. We simply enjoy the environment at the beginning but later we'll realise those trees and we enjoy more.*

**Figure 4.4: Comparison of "A Road" and "A Forest"**



The change in conception is evident in the participants' self-identity through study abroad experiences as well. All mentioned that they became more independent both as a learner and a person, and more open by meeting people from different countries with different backgrounds. As stated by the participants:

*In Australia, I saw everyone study by themselves, no one tells me what to do, no one cares, and teachers don't care whether you study at home or not. So I should take care of myself. (Natalie)*

*Maybe I will become an independent learner in Australia. Because I think uh in China teacher will tell you answer about the question and you just remember it and when you have the exam you write it, it's ok. But here, you talk everything, teacher thinks ok, don't have correct answer, framework about the answer you can think yourself, the meaning independently they encourage you to have your own idea. (Alison)*

*In China, I just have Chinese friends, but here I have different country friends and different idea from them and uh... I will become an open person, not a very focused on the traditional things. (Alison)*

Amy also expressed the difference in her identity suggesting she had to “build another me” for English.

*It's a Chinese language person I need to plus some English things, but here it's just an empty thing I need to plus all English elements.*

Amy saw herself as a Chinese-based language learner who learned English by picking up the things in which she is interested. In the new environment however she was required to use English language all the time.

The conception changes among the participants on the Gradual Change pathway were more gradual than in the Decisive Change pathway. This is because their behaviour changes occurred later in the period (at the final interview). However, the participants in the Gradual Change group certainly developed their metacognitive awareness by making sense of the change in the surrounding environment. In addition, they changed through the self-accomplishment learning experiences outside of the classroom via their socially mediated interactions. Although the styles and choices of learning in actions outside the classroom were different for each individual, their learning spaces have been expanded in this new environment. In other words, the participants were able to perceive their affordances in the new environment and found their own niche, individually realised the way of utilising the affordances through socially mediated interactions beyond the classroom. The four students did not have prior study abroad experience or working experience prior to



coming to Australia. This may be a possible factor as to why their conception change was more gradual compared to the Decisive Change participants.

#### 4.1.3 Minimal Change Pathway

**Minimal Change (3 participants):** The conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning changed to a minimal degree. The participants appear to be satisfied with what they learn in class and the amount of English language usage inside and outside the classroom. As a result, variations in their actual actions for language learning are few and did not change during the research period. The participants in this group are however aware of their own language learning and have ideas of strategies to improve their English.

Eddy, Lucas, and Mike are all male students from mainland China. They are in their mid-20s and came to Australia to pursue their Master's degree. Eddy lived in home-stay accommodation, Lucas shared a house with local professionals, and Mike lived with other Chinese student friends in Australia. Eddy and Lucas have always been good at English at schools. Mike had poor English language proficiency and he "did not like English and studying language is not my talent".

The participants shared similar conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China as two separated contexts, mainly due to the different purposes of learning English. They did not find a strong connection between the two contexts. In China, learning English in-class was focusing on grammar, not useful for daily life, and everything was for exams. Out-of-class activities such as English movies or games were for entertainment. The participants did not expect there to be a connection because a class is a class after all.

For Lucas, a slight point of connection between the two contexts was that learning in class may build his linguistic knowledge and skills, which would help him to enjoy watching movies. The participants reflected that the Chinese national exam was very important to students in China. However, because it does not have a speaking assessment, they did not see the need to practise speaking. They reluctantly accepted the Chinese exam-focused learning style as it was, but at the same time, they were critical about what it should have been, as revealed in the following extract:

*I didn't enjoy it (learning in class in China). Because I think English is just a language, just a tool for people to communicate, the most important factor is communication. I think I should spend more time to speak to other people, not just writing. (Lucas)*

Eddy thought that teachers' advice on "what's the best approach to study vocabulary, or to understand grammar" can actually connect the two contexts. This is because he believes that he can learn English by himself, and "teachers don't need to tell or explain everything in class".

In terms of out-of-class learning in China, the participants on the Minimal Change pathway all liked to watch movies in English for entertainment without putting focus on the language. They believed they can learn cultural aspects, collocations, and improve their listening and pronunciation while enjoying the movies. Mike sometimes took notes during the movies if he heard useful expressions he wanted to remember. Eddy believed that "the interest is the best teacher" and the interest (e.g., actors, stories) is a very important aspect that keeps him learning English.

After moving to Australia, there has been a minimal degree of change in their conceptions of learning English and minimal change in their behaviours throughout the 10-week study period. They recognised and analytically viewed the differences in their learning environments such as learning styles in class (i.e., more group work and discussion in Australia) and their daily life (i.e. activities are all in English).

However, their conceptions of learning in class was still passing exams to enter the university like in China, although the ways to approach this course is different because the exams are different as revealed below:

*In Australia, it is also a subject. The purpose to join the course is to pass this and enter to the university. I think this is the same in Australia and in China. (Lucas)*

In contrast, in-class and out-of-class learning seems to be partly integrated as the participants realised that English is used for communication in the both contexts. For Eddy, the particular teaching approach also stayed in his mind that supported a connection between learning inside and outside of the classroom. The three participants conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning as keeping touch with English speakers, more communication both inside and outside the classroom with greater value on communication skills. However, the integration of the two contexts was not as significant as for the Decisive Change and Gradual Change groups. In addition, the Minimal Change group still considered learning in-class to be for passing exams or learning academic English in reality. This sentiment was revealed in the extracts below:

*The connection is stronger... you have some after class activities with you, we had an excursion last week, and... I mean environment didn't change both inside and outside classroom yeah, and outside is better maybe. (Eddy)*

*Inside the class mainly focus on academic English but outside the class not, daily life we use general English. But academic English is based on general English, like grammar, tense, they never change. Outside the classroom maybe helpful for my listening and speaking skills. (Lucas)*

Lucas believed that his attitude towards learning English has changed from “passive to receive English” to “active, you have to gain English”. This change has occurred by gradually making sense of his current learning environment. He became more aware of the language use for example as he now watches TV shows by “pay(ing) more attention on the contexts and pronunciation, and sometimes I may say after him or

her". However, his language learning actions outside of school did not change significantly. Mike and Eddy's English learning actions also did not change even though they realised that "you have a lot of opportunities to use English, English is very necessary thing, it do improve my English level, you have to speak, write... in your life you have to use it, ... outside the classroom is you are forced to exposure to the English environment" (Eddy).

For the Minimal Change group, the gap between the ideal study abroad experience and the reality of what they experience is notable. Lucas mentioned his expectation and ideal ways of learning English in Australia at the initial interview, stating; "just talking to local or people who speak English, reading news or any other articles in English, and try to write your opinions". He also wished he could improve his fluency and be able to respond more naturally and quickly without translating what he wants to say from Chinese to English. However, he did not have as many opportunities to meet local people outside of school as he imagined. At both the second and final interview he expressed his disappointment with his learning experiences in Australia:

*Actually my life style is very boring, I just go to school and go home, sometimes I may go to the shopping centre to buy something, only 3 places, so boring I spend most of the time at home to watch TV dramas and TV shows. Maybe after this course I may go travelling around Sydney? Maybe with Eddy? (Lucas)*

Mike also expected to "connect more with native speakers because they are different with us, the way they think and speaking is different" and to have a "different life and experience of different culture" through his study abroad in Australia. In reality, "there is less chance" to have connections with native speakers apart from his class teachers at ELC, and there was no change in his learning behaviour over the 10 weeks.

The gap between the participants' expectations and the reality of life while study abroad may also have led to feelings of disappointment and loneliness, as revealed in the following extract:

*I'm the very freshman here, I don't have so many friends, my friends are in China, it's difficult for me to just overcome some difficulties in life, I mean homesick and loneliness sometimes comes to me. (Lucas)*

The Minimal Change group members did not talk about their social life or significant others in their diaries. They mentioned only the assignments and projects they were working on. Participants on the other pathways often wrote about their fun activities with friends outside of school. The minimal social interactions by the Minimal Change group was evidenced in the following extracts:

*I am busy in preparing my presentation which is about financial risk. Is anybody having any ideas? (Lucas' diary)*

*This week we had a feedback for our test 1 so that we need read a lot of pages, which are more than twenty pages. So in this week, reading is the most biggest thing in my after class's time. And I watched a movie which name is Guardians of the Galaxy, which is a movie recomposed from Marvel's comic. This is what I had done in this week after my English class. (Mike's diary)*

In class in Australia, the participants on the Minimal Change pathway thought they learn communication skills and interpersonal skills in class. They also indicated that such skills are useful for their daily life and for their future. Eddy indicated that in-class learning in China was more efficient in terms of linguistic proficiency development in a “more push, more work” environment. He reported in the following extract however that he could develop interpersonal skills in Australia in a more relaxed environment:

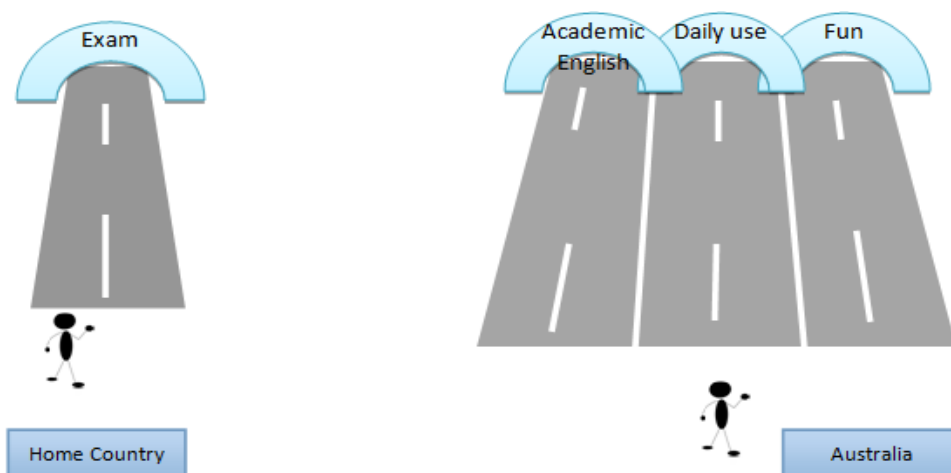
*I think the study mood of China is more efficient, efficient for your improvement of English, but for me study here uh it's good for your development of different aspects, for your team-working ability, communicating ability, these are different with Chinese classes. Yeah, so just for the skills, I think Chinese style is good but for your personal*

*development, this is better for your career in the future. Because in society you need to find people to cooperate with you.*

Lucas and Mike compared and described their language learning environments in China and in Australia using a road metaphor. The following extract from Lucas demonstrates that in Australia, there are more purposes of learning English (Figure 4.5):

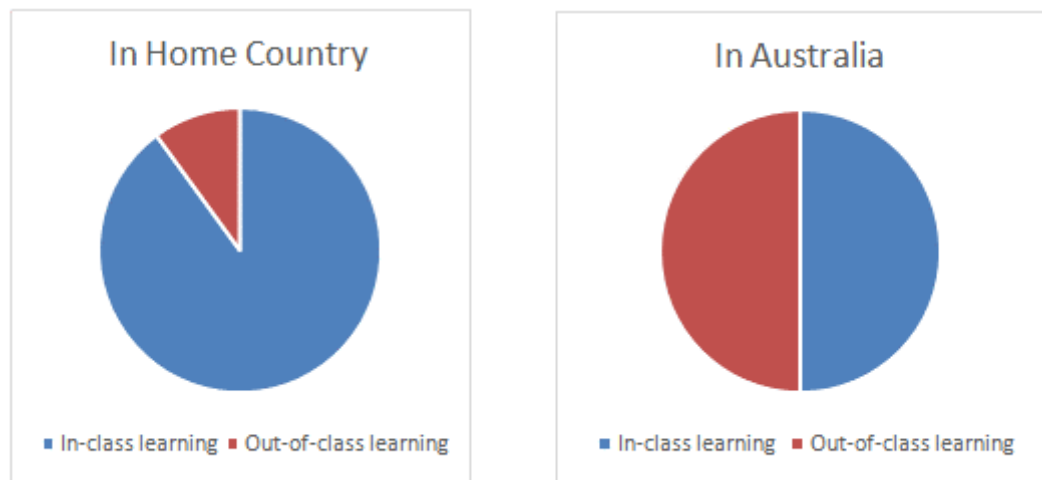
*Learning in class in China, it's just on the way to the final exam. In Macquarie, it's just on the way to university, um not only university but also the daily life, on the way to the university and daily life.*

**Figure 4.5: "Narrow" vs. "Wide" Road**



For Eddy, the difference between the two learning environments is the weight of two contexts. Learning in-class was a dominant part of learning English in China, “maybe only 10% is outside school activities”; whereas in Australia, “both are equally very important” and almost the same value in terms of spaces of learning (Figure 4.6). Lucas also mentions that the space for and time he spends on out-of-class learning has increased.

**Figure 4.6: Comparison of Value and Space of In-class and Out-of-class Learning**



Although the participants' attitudes appear to have changed to be more proactive due to the influence of the different learning environment and teaching styles, their actual language learning actions and their conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning did not change significantly. The integration of the two contexts did not appear clearly although they found some connections between the contexts. Their failure to create opportunities to use English through social interactions outside of school may be the factor most influencing the minimal conception change. In addition, lack of social interactions outside of school may have led the failure to realise a niche within their perceived affordances. The gaps between their expectations of ideal ways of learning English while studying abroad and the difficulties creating such environment were the most significant among the three patterns.

#### **4.1.4 Summary of the patterns of language learning pathways**

The significant differences in the degrees and rates of change over the 10-week period were observed through the collective narratives by grouping the participants into three pathways. The contrasts and commonalities among the three pathways were analysed in terms of (1) relevance of timescales and degree of change by focusing on the notion of “pathways”; and (2) the relationship between types of actions and degree of change by looking at more of individual variations and correlations to cognitive development from ecological perspectives. Also suggested were other additional possible patterns as “invisible” but inferred from the data.

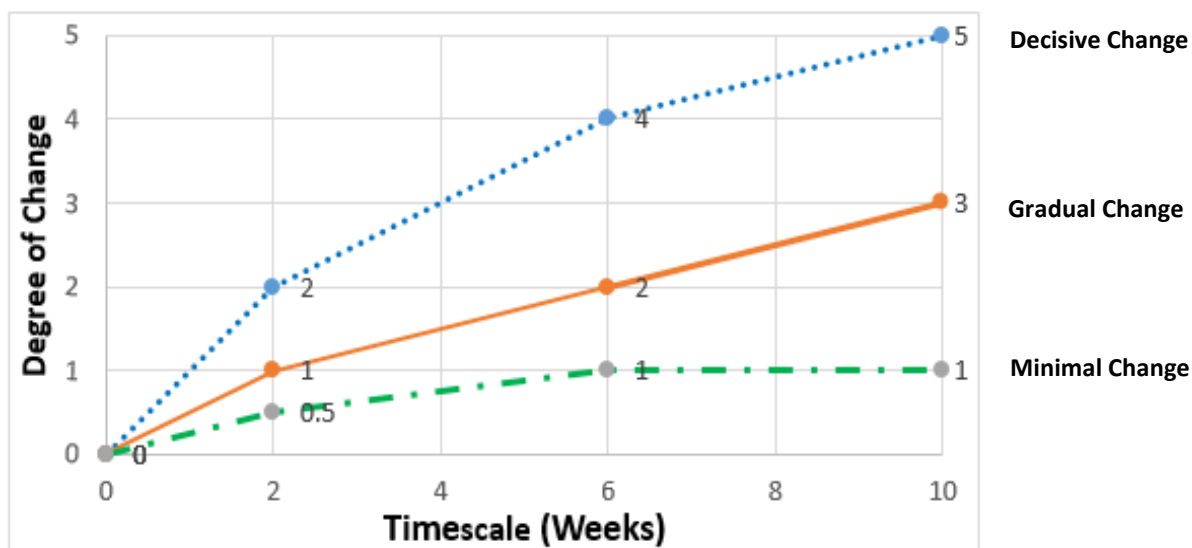
##### ***4.1.4.1 Comparison in timescale and degree of changes***

Understanding study abroad as “a phase” within one’s language learning pathway, one way to identify differences in the changes among the three patterns is to view them in terms of timescale and by contrasting the degree of changes at a point in time within certain duration. Considering the span of the three interviews, the significance of the differences in the rates of change is illustrated in Figure 4.7 below. The timescale (weeks) represents the three interview times during the 10-week study period. The measurement of the degree of change is described from one to five, however, the measurement is my own interpretation based on the narrative analysis.

Zero was considered the starting point for each participant because it is their first time to Australia. Decisive Change shows a change of conception at interview and a significant change at second interview. Gradual Change shows a more gradual change compared to the Decisive Change. The conception change in this pattern is more evident at the last interview. In Minimal Change, Figure 4.7 shows little change in conceptions occurred throughout the 10-week duration.



**Figure 4.7: Degree of Conceptions Change within the Duration**



#### **4.1.4.2 Comparison in actions and degree of changes**

Another way to compare the patterns of conception change is to indicate the commonalities and differences in terms of actual actions associated with agency development and metacognitive awareness. Decisive Change participants may have already been active agents in language learning to a certain extent. They set clear personal goals and expectation for their study abroad experience and took actions to achieve the goals. They enlarged their affordances in the new environment through greater social interactions outside of school. Gradual Change pathway participants were evidenced as the group of learners who gradually developed agency and perceived wider affordances. They took more time compared to the Decisive Change group members to make sense of the study abroad environment and to find opportunities to use English. They may not have expected to have these opportunities prior to coming to Australia. The Gradual Change pathway participants presented as a delayed version of the Decisive Change pathway participants. However, assistance to create opportunities to use English may be of great support

to them. The Minimal Change pathway students did not show significant change in their behaviours and actions, and their affordances seemed to remain the same throughout the project.

Because the Minimal Change pathway participants did not appear to have a particularly low English language proficiency level, it appears that no matter what language proficiency level the student demonstrates, it is not so easy to step forward from “knowing” the potential of the learning environment to “creating” a learning space through socially mediated interactions outside of the classroom. Helping learners to access small learning experiences outside of the classroom may stimulate their metacognitive awareness, or help them to integrate in-class and out-of-class learning to form an effective cycle of language learning.

#### **4.1.4.3 Another possible pattern: “Invisible” pathway**

The participants were recruited for this study via a self-selection process and it is possible they considered participation in the project as another opportunity to practise English outside the classroom. They may also be more motivated than some of their classmates. For these reasons, although three change pathway patterns have been identified, it should be noted that there may be other patterns described by the participants when comparing themselves with other classmates. According to the participants, some students insist that other Chinese students do not speak in English to them in class. Some students also choose to speak Chinese even though others try to use English. Amy criticised those students in the extract below:

*Some classmates told me that it's boring every day. But I think “No!” It's interesting everyday... so I think maybe in the future um in the Master, I can do better than her. You can keep thinking about why I have to come here. You are already here you have to think about, oh I can learn and what next I can do? It's the attitude thing. Look at the future not look back.*

Although it is only an assumption, the students who feel bored with learning in Australia may not expect there to be changes in their language learning, which may be anything at all for language learning itself, or study abroad.

The choice or negotiation for what language they should use in a particular situation and concerns about the amount of first language use appeared to be major challenges for many students. Most Chinese participants mentioned during interviews that they mostly talk in English in class and sometimes use Chinese when they do not understand something. Although it is probably what they intend to do in class, researcher field notes show that “when they are working in groups, students are whispering each other in Chinese”. Because there are some students who rarely use English in class, the participants probably use their first language more than they think. Use of first language in class when the majority of students share the same first language is also one of the challenges teachers must overcome to ensure the creation of an “English only” classroom environment. As revealed by one teacher:

*You know we’re trying to have an English only space, I have a class of 18 Chinese, I know that when they need to explain and then very supportive I think the community or is it culture, Chinese support each other great deal in learning it’s how they function as learners, they don’t function as independent competitive learners, they function far more as supportive group learners, so when somebody’s not understanding someone would just explain in Chinese. (Teacher’s interview: Hana)*

The three language learning pathway patterns demonstrated the variations in the degree of conception change in terms of the relation to the timescale and their actual actions during the study period. This categorisation of the language learning pathways may be useful to identify the potential challenges facing international students, especially students from Asian countries, when study abroad. Although this thesis primarily discusses the language learning patterns from different time and pace dimensions, the tendency towards gender divergence for example emerges as

another significant point in these patterns. Three out of four male students were in the Minimal Change group, and female students were all in the Decisive Change and Gradual Change groups. Viewing the pattern variations helps to understand differences in individual outcomes from study abroad experiences as well as the elements and process of forming one's ecology of language learning.

#### **4.2 The Process of Changing Conceptions of Relationship between In-class and Out-of-class Language Learning**

On the basis of the coded themes and individual narratives, thematic/paradigmatic analysis was employed to examine the commonalities in the processes of conception change in the participants. In this section, (1) the integration of in-class and out-of-class learning, and (2) the development of metacognitive awareness is identified as the prerequisite phenomena associated with the conception change.

In order to identify the learners' conceptions of the *relationship* between in-class and out-of-class learning, their conceptions of learning English in each learning setting were first identified. Subsequently, conceptions of the *relationship* between the two contexts or the *connections* of the two settings were drawn out. Themes describing the conceptions of learning in-class and out-of-class, and the conceptions of the *relationship* between the two contexts were coded and are summarised in Table 4.1 (in home country) and Table 4.2 (in Australia). The themes were categorised into four larger themes: Social Interactions and use of English (S); Metacognitive awareness (A); Identity, thoughts and feelings (I); and (-) indicating absence of the themes (e.g., [-S] means "no social interactions").

In Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below the "efficient" is the only positive aspect in relation to the home country; whereas all themes are positive in all four categories in

Australia. Because the categories are associated with the language learning ecology components reviewed in the literature, students' ecology of language learning appears to be better fulfilled through the necessary components in Australia.

**Table 4.1: Learners' Conceptions of Learning English in Home Countries**

Home Country		
In-class	Out-of-class	Relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exam-focused <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Learn as a subject <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Stressful, under pressure <b>(-I)</b></li> <li>- Practise exam skills <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Learning as a tool to solve problems in exams <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Useless, boring <b>(-I)</b></li> <li>- Efficient <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- Not for life <b>(-S)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interest-based (TV series, movies, songs) <b>(-A)</b></li> <li>- No intention to learn, just for fun <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Formal learning is still for exams <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Mostly homework <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Limited opportunities to use English <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- Weird to speak in English <b>(-I)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Everything was for exams</i> <b>(-S)</b></li> <li>- <i>Totally different content</i> <b>(-A)</b> (academic vs. entertainment)</li> </ul>

**Table 4.2: Learners' Conceptions of Learning English in Australia**

Australia		
In-class	Out-of-class	Relationship
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning language (linguistic) skills (communication skills, politeness) <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- Learning strategies (note-taking, how to read texts) <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- Learning for future study (academic English) <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- Useful, meaningful, be able to use outside the classroom <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- Learn interpersonal skills (teamwork, discussion) <b>(S)</b></li> <li>- Independent <b>(I)</b></li> <li>- Relaxed <b>(I)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Everywhere is a place to learn <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- Practise communication skills <b>(S)</b></li> <li>- Use and practise English through social interactions (e.g., shopping) <b>(S)</b></li> <li>- Interactions with native speakers <b>(S)</b></li> <li>- Happier, exciting <b>(I)</b></li> <li>- More attention to the language use <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- Independent, open-minded <b>(I)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Strong connection by the use of English</i> <b>(S)</b></li> <li>- <i>Teachers' advice and tips of living in Australia are helpful</i> <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- <i>Excursion trip gave a better understanding of the topic in class</i> <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- <i>Online materials can connect in-class and out-of-class learning</i> <b>(A)</b></li> <li>- <i>Both are communicative</i> <b>(S)</b></li> <li>- <i>Both are useful for daily life and for the future</i> <b>(A)(S)</b></li> </ul>

\*Categories

(S)--- Social Interactions, use of English, (A) --- Metacognitive awareness, (I) --- Identity, thoughts and feelings, (-) --- Absence of the identified themes

In Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2, both narratives and themes are used for further analysis by focusing on how the conception change unfolded. Special concern is given to social interactions and use of English (S), and metacognitive awareness (A).

#### **4.2.1 The integration of in-class and out-of-class learning**

The impact of study abroad as an environment change significantly affected participants' conceptions of the *relationship* between inside and outside the classroom learning. This is particularly evident in the Decisive Change and Gradual Change patterns. Participants in these groups conceptualised the two contexts as one integrated learning space with strong connections, largely due to the increased use of English. In addition, there was clear separation between the settings in their home countries, as revealed in the following extract:

*When I consider that English is useful for me, then during the class I will pay more attention, and when I pay more attention to the class I learn more, and after class I get more encouragement from community and from other foreigners and... um I think it's a good cycle and I like this cycle. (Natalie)*

In their home countries the participants felt the two setting were separated or weakly connected as they learned different genres of English and experienced a different purpose for learning and using English. For some participants there was almost no out-of-class learning, it was just an extended part of learning to pass exams. Students did not see a connection between the contexts although basic linguistic knowledge was built in-class and sometimes necessary for enjoying out-of-class activities such as watching a TV series. The lack of opportunity to use English along with the negative reflections on learning in the home country such as “stressful”, “boring”, and “useless” are seen from Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

In Australia, the opportunities to use English in daily life both inside and outside the classroom led the participants to regard the two settings as naturally connected despite the different genres of English being used. Participants' impressions of the learning environment were very positive, described with such terms as "useful", "happy", and "relaxed". The relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning was described by the participants as "a good learning cycle" (Figure 4.8) or as one integrated learning space bonded by the usefulness of learning English in-class, and practical use of English outside of the classroom, and opportunities to use English in both contexts. This conception change can be interpreted as the result of the study abroad experience breaking down the wall between in-class and out-of-class contexts.

**Figure 4.8: A Good Learning Cycle**



Students' "real-life" learning experiences in both the in-class and out-of-class settings motivated them to learn more in both settings to fulfil personal goals. In addition, the ability to challenge themselves to use English outside the classroom could lead the participants to feel happy and with a sense of self-accomplishment. In contrast, like Minimal Change pathway participants appeared to have only limited opportunities to

use English outside of classroom and were not able to fully integrate the two settings. Another reason for the integration of the two settings may be the development of metacognitive awareness. This may be associated with the number of learning experiences outside of the classroom. Whether or not the learners have rich out-of-class learning experiences in their learning environment, and whether or not they can integrate their learning spaces, may vary in terms of the individuals' development of metacognitive awareness.

#### **4.2.2 The development of metacognitive awareness during conception change**

Learner development of metacognitive awareness emerges as a key requisite to conception change during language learning and the construction of ecology of language learning in the new environment. Learning experiences in in-class and out-of-class settings result in learners beginning to realise the differences between the learning environments and to give their learning meaning by using the target language.

It is evident from the patterns of language learning pathways that individual differences in regard to whether or not the environmental differences are noticed can induce metacognitive awareness. The development of metacognitive awareness appears to be a part of the change in conception of language learning, and the rate of conception change can be paralleled to the rate of their development of metacognitive awareness.

Teachers' influence on learners' conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning emerges as a significant factor to stimulate learners' metacognitive awareness. Teachers' intentions to connect students' inside and outside of class learning, and their beliefs about the importance of out-of-class



learning, can lead learners to enhance their metacognitive awareness and their opportunities to learn English in their given environment:

*I think more connection, far more connection than in China. But maybe in class we learn academic things but you just need to listen to the teacher, you'll learn a lot of live English. (Amy)*

#### **4.2.3 Summary**

This chapter identified and discussed the key findings to emerge from the data analysis related to the research questions. This study confirmed that learners' conceptions of language learning, especially conceptions of the *relationship* between in-class and out-of-class learning, can change when they face a change of environment. It also suggested that the development of metacognitive awareness in the learner associated with the degree of conception change and influence over learning behaviours assisted learners to integrate in-class and out-of-class learning over time. In other words, the development of metacognitive awareness is a part of conception change that can mediate the holistic process of constructing a language learning ecology. The next chapter provides further discussion of the mechanism for forming one's ecology of language learning by focusing on the possible changes within a language learning pathway.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

This chapter reflects on the findings in Chapter 4 in the light of the literature review. First, the mechanism for forming a language learning ecology within a change of environment is a suggested interpretation of the two major findings discussed in the previous chapter. The differences in the study abroad outcomes for each participant and the value of investigating learners' study abroad experiences from an ecological perspective are discussed. The need for greater attention to be given to learners' individual learning development over the longer term and for greater focus on the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in a study abroad context, which broadens the scope of the language learning environment are suggested. Because the main focus of the present research was on students, the findings did not much reflect teachers' interview responses. Based on the findings, possible roles for teachers are discussed along with reflections on the teachers' interview responses. The potential support for current and future Asian students who study abroad is also suggested as one of the contributions of the present study.

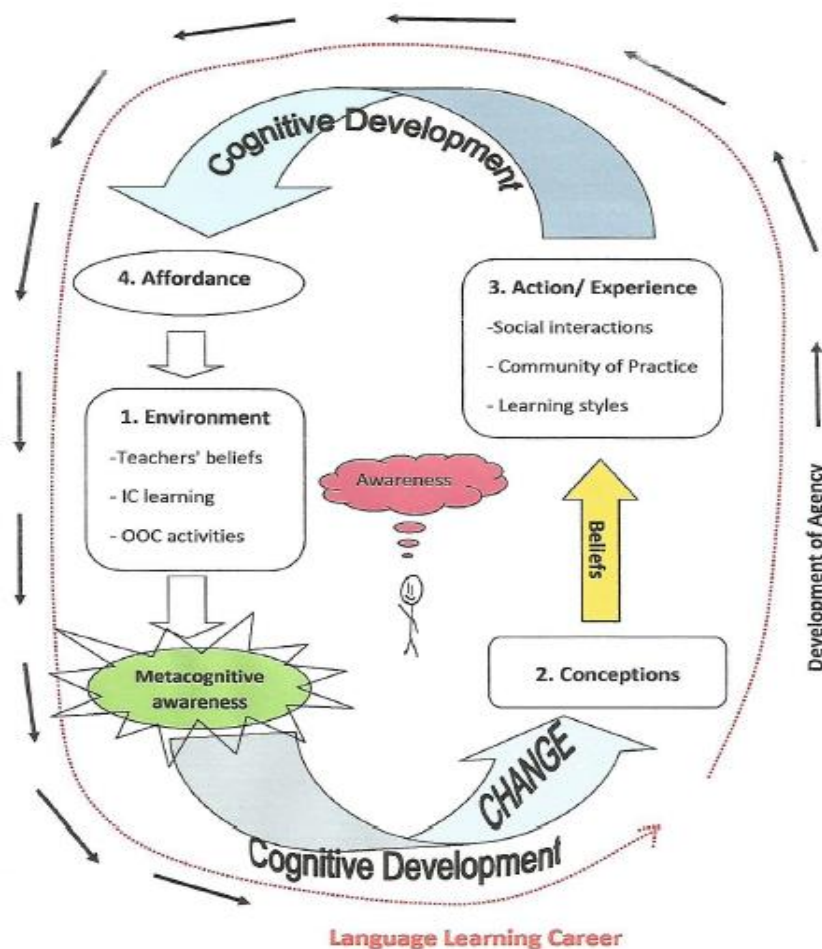
### **5.1 The Process of Forming a Language Learning Ecology**

As seen in previous research by Lai, Yeung & Hu Lai (2015), and Palfreyman (2014) for example, this study confirmed the value of investigating out-of-class learning from an ecological perspective. Examining individual narratives from an ecological perspective allowed this study to identify the variable elements associated with changes in one's language learning pathway. It also enhanced our understanding of how the participants engaged in the process of constructing a language learning ecology in the initial stage of their study abroad experience. The change of language

learning environment as a starting point, what actually happened to the participants socially and cognitively, and how this change influenced their thoughts and actions are illustrated.

The findings of this study suggest metacognitive awareness and learners' agentic learning behaviours are the key success factors that influence other components such as affordances and niche in the process of forming a language learning ecology. Within the process of change, the participants' development of their language learning careers as a change process is also illustrated in Figure 5.1 below. The diagram represents this researcher's view of the four-stage mechanism that forms one's language learning ecology. Each of the stages of change illustrated in Figure 5.1 is discussed in more detail from 5.1.1 (Environment) to 5.1.4 (Affordance) below.

**Figure 5.1: The Process of Forming a Language Learning Ecology**



### **5.1.1 Change 1: Environment change**

A change in conception of one's learning environment may be triggered by a minor change in the environment. Most learners at some point along their long-term language learning pathway will likely experience such a change. The change in learning environment is sometimes obvious such as learning in a different physical location, or change of school and teacher. As addressed in previous research (Benson, 2012; Benson et al., 2013; Kinginger, 2009), this study supports the view that study abroad can significantly impact learners' conceptions of their' learning environment. The new living environment where most social interactions are performed in English such as shopping, eating out, taking a train/bus, or encountering cultural differences represents a great change from their home country where there is almost no use of English outside of school.

### **5.1.2 Change 2: The change of conceptions**

The key issue to emerge from participants' individual narratives is the extent to which they developed their metacognitive awareness of language learning as a result of the change of environment. Cognitive development during the change-phase of study abroad when learners begin to make sense of their learning in the new learning environment is an additional contribution made by this study to study abroad research. When learners become aware of changes in the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning, change in the conception of the learning environment and in their learning actions are evident. The degree of the conception change can therefore be understood as the degree of development in metacognitive awareness.

In other words, the development of metacognitive awareness is a part of the learner's conception change, and conception change is a highly cognitive aspect of the process of forming a language learning ecology. The more learners recognise the learning potential within their environment, the more decisively learners change their conceptions and language learning actions. Compelling evidence also emerged in this study that teachers' beliefs also influence the in-class learning environment, and may connect the in-class and out-of-class learning spaces.

The metacognitive awareness development process is evident in the findings that show learners create "a good cycle of learning", for example. If learners can make sense of the environment change by noticing the potential for language learning outside of the classroom, and integrate the in-class and out-of-class learning spaces by using English in the both contexts, the conception of language learning can become more interactional. For learners who cannot develop their metacognitive awareness during the initial environment change, their conceptions, language learning actions and affordances may remain the same. In such circumstances these learners may not achieve their expected outcomes from the study abroad.

### **5.1.3 Change 3: Actions of language learning**

Conception changes can result in direct changes in the language learning actions of a student, followed by changes to their beliefs about language learning. Such beliefs can lead learners to identify a suitable learning style, and also act upon what they believe language learning means for them. Further, their level of social interaction and participation in communities of practices in informal settings tend to increase.

The patterns of language learning pathways identified in this study highlights that the degree of conception change parallels the changes in action. The Decisive

Change pathway shows learners who took early action to expand their activities outside of the classroom. The Gradual Change pathway shows learners who gradually change in their language learning actions, sometimes late in the period of study. The Minimal Change pathway shows learners who demonstrate only minimal changes in their language learning actions, along with little expansion of their learning spaces. This finding supports the view that beliefs about language learning are emergent and constructed by changes in the environment and other influential factors such as the close relationships between beliefs and learning behaviours (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011; Hosenfeld, 2003). However, from an ecological perspective, the cognitive development to emerge as a change in the conception of one's learning is an additional factor of emergent beliefs. Participants' beliefs, as the findings suggest, can be emergent and changed by the cognitive development during the study period. They can also influence their actions of language learning beyond the classroom contexts.

#### **5.1.4 Change 4: Affordances**

Learners can experience greater language learning beyond the classroom by changing in their language learning actions. Cognitive development is stimulated through such learning experiences to create wider affordances in their environment. Within their affordances, learners become more aware of the language use and the learning opportunities in variable spaces. Learners also realise the target language function (niche) in their environment.

A change of environment can induce a change in one's conception of language learning through the development of one's metacognitive awareness of language learning. The changes encourage the cycle and construction of a language

learning ecology. The cognitive development within the cycle enables learners to develop their agency and then their language learning careers over the long term. In other words, the construction of one's ecology of language learning is highly relevant to learner's cognitive development to support their language learning careers.

## **5.2 Individual Differences in Study Abroad and Challenges for Asian Students**

Previous research on study abroad reports that the outcomes of learning experiences, the struggles and challenges learners encounter during linguistic development, and pragmatic competences vary among individuals (Benson, 2012; Benson et al., 2013; Kinginger, 2009, 2011, 2015). As evidenced in the process of forming one's ecology of language learning, this research supports the conclusion that learners' metacognitive awareness development through socially mediated interactions both inside and outside the classroom is an additional factor that also varies among individuals in a study abroad context. Individual differences in the development of metacognitive awareness may also lead to a change in the individual's conception of language learning.

The focus given to learners' conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning from ecological perspective rather than only out-of-class learning situations in the study abroad context enriches our understanding of the correlations among the components of constructing one's ecology of language learning. Learners develop awareness of their own learning through social interactions. They then begin to develop meaning as to what learning English is within their lives, before becoming independent learners by developing their agency, affordances and niche, and language learning careers. This approach offers a new

insight in study abroad research by establishing the need to view learners' learning environments in a broader way.

As in Lai and Gu's (2011) investigation of the relationships between in-class and out-of-class learning from an ecological perspective, this study also found a link between the two contexts (using technology in her case) to foster learners' independence. Also the enhanced quality of out-of-class learning as a result of using a range of resources is also evident in study abroad contexts. In addition, the process for integrating the two contexts, and how learners conceptualise the relationships between the two contexts to form their ecology of language learning, were revealed in greater detail via narrative inquiry within an ecological framework.

### **5.3 Teachers' Role**

The main contributions of this study are to provide a better understanding of students' real learning experiences while studying abroad in Australia, and to assert the importance of teachers providing the necessary support to their students.

Understanding the language learning process often experienced by Asian students, and what expectations of their study abroad experience can assist teachers to identify the most appropriate approach to support the students and to enhance their class time the most valuable for both learners and teachers.

It emerged during student interviews that learning in-class such as tips for living in Australia (e.g., how to order food at restaurants), face-to-face conversations with teachers, and learning everyday use vocabularies (e.g., names of food, animals, etc.) are the types of connections between in-class and out-of-class learning they found useful. Teachers' intentional support in class such as spending time in class to assist students to be able to be confident in social situations, sharing details about



their culture, or simply chat about what they are interested in are identified in this study as successful teaching strategies to help students link the in-class and out-of-class learning contexts. As one teacher remarked during interview:

*I think if you're positive encouraging and if you...uh if they know that you care and you show that you care, and they have that sort of feeling I think it works in the class. ...you talk to them ask them [...] yes we do quite a lot of structured guided teaching in the class but I think and I always talk to them about what they do what they did in weekend, did they go out, how they spend their time and try encourage them to go out because they have the opportunity, and I think that's important. Sometimes they share a funny story or and it's important to have that time in class you actually listen to them. (Zara)*

The integration of in-class and out-of-class learning can occur in situations such as the teacher and students sharing a learning space. In turn, Tsui's (2004) emphasis on 'the shared space of learning' (p. 170) and the teacher's awareness of learners' learning experiences as a critical success factor for classroom learning, appears to be very important. Taking the time to talk with students also creates social interactions inside of the classroom and the use of English in this way can stimulate students' metacognitive awareness beyond the classroom.

In contrast, a gap also exists between teachers' understandings of their students' out-of-class learning activities and the reality of students' learning experiences in study abroad contexts. All four teachers mentioned that out-of-class learning is invaluable and that they often encourage the students to engage in activities they are interested in outside of the class such as joining a community group. This is because it will assist students to meet more local people and expand the boundary of their out-of-class activities, or find self-study materials (preferably designed for learners) by showing useful links and websites or introducing TV/radio programmes to guide students.

Although the teachers are all aware of students' using their first language too much and of having limited interactions with local people, it is not easy for teachers to

solve such problems during class time: As one teacher stated; “I can’t do it in a very productive way”. It is evident that teachers tend to expect students to demonstrate greater independent learning outside of the classroom at the same time they are trying to find effective ways to encourage them to do so. Although students in the Decisive Change and Gradual Change groups did develop independent learning behaviours and mentioned that they felt they had become more independent, it was difficult for other students to find or create such opportunities outside the classroom to match the teacher’s expectation.

One teacher believed that the current ELC curriculum should be restructured “to give students more independent learning opportunities so they are researching themselves and they are basically defining some of the learning for themselves”. The teacher was concerned for those students who seem to have difficulty in transitioning from their own culture to the Australian culture and who look “switched off” in class.

The teacher stated:

*...it’s an unusual group that won’t do any English at all once they finish the day, they had such an intense four hours and then they have homework and son on. But I think that is a mistake I think we’re making a mistake to think that they will actually make the transition unless we actually guide that in some way or insist on it some way.*

The findings in this study are therefore useful as a catalyst for teachers to think about strategies to assist Asian students, particularly those who find fitting into the new environment difficult. Because the students in this study are relatively successful in making the transition, a better understanding of their experiences would therefore help teachers to assist less successful students such as those identified in the “invisible” pathway pattern. Alternatively, we can assume that all new students have difficulty in transitioning to some extent, especially during the initial stage of study abroad. Facilitating or introducing more opportunities for socially mediated interactions both inside and outside the classroom may present as one way to

support students to realise the potential of out-of-class learning in the study abroad environment.

As Tudor (2003) and Palfreyman (2014) suggested, teachers should acknowledge that the reality of students' learning experiences is complex and diverse. As such, they should think about the type of support learners actually need in particular contexts. A better understanding of the disparity between students' expectations of study abroad and the reality of their experience can help to guide teachers' decision making on the best form of teaching instruction for students. Hence, teacher and institutional support for international students to make use of class time to stimulate learners' metacognitive awareness, to assist students recognise the potential of the learning environment, and to explicitly establish connections between in-class and out-of-class learning is useful to guide students to construct an ecology of language learning.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

This chapter presents the contributions of the present research on the basis of the key findings with reference to the methodological features. The limitations of this research are addressed and suggestions for further research are provided.

### **6.1 Contributions**

Firstly, this research assists teachers to support international students, particularly those from Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Thailand, and so on in a study abroad context. “Behind the scenes” insights were provided in this research of Asian students’ life in a study abroad context; the expectations, thoughts, and feelings they bring with them from their home countries, and the development of their language learning careers.

The participants in this study were all from Asian countries where English is taught as a foreign language. As such, learners who have similar language learning backgrounds may match one of the pathway patterns identified in this study and experience a similar process for constructing their language learning ecology. Therefore, the patterns of the language learning pathways may be used to guide learners to identify suitable language learning styles and to know which out-of-class learning activities can fulfil their personal goals. Furthermore, they support teachers to understand the process of adjustment Asian students go through in the new learning environment while studying abroad.

Teachers in other education contexts may also gain benefit from the findings in this study. In particular, they may be guided on how to stimulate the development of learners’ metacognitive awareness and to identify the teaching practices required

to connect their in-class and out-of-class learning experiences. Such outcomes can assist learners to create an effective language learning cycle in order to generate wider affordances within their ecology of language learning in a particular context.

Secondly, this research contributes to our academic understanding of out-of-class-focused language teaching and learning in a study abroad context. This contribution is made primarily through the employment of the ecology framework to examine the complexities surrounding the variable elements involved in the language learning process. The language learning ecology proved to be a suitable research framework to facilitate an in-depth investigation into the interrelation of components that form students' language learning environments. Changes to the way language learning is conceptualised as part of the learner's development of their metacognitive awareness is a key factor mediating the modifications in learners' beliefs about learning. As such, the change influences learners' language learning actions towards constructing a language learning ecology. This finding contributes to our understanding of the language learning process. In addition, this study contributes a new research approach that pays particular attention to the relationship between in-class and out-of-class language learning using an ecological framework. As such, it provides us with a holistic view of language learning.

The notion of language learning pathways as an analytical tool also assisted in the investigation of the changes in learners' conceptions and behaviours over the longer term. The combination of ecological framework and narrative inquiry enabled this research study to explore the language learning process at the individual level as a dynamic phenomenon that involves cognitive development. This was achieved by closely examining the changes within one's language learning pathway. Even though the study period was only 10 weeks, employing narrative inquiry to explore participants' English language learning histories in their home countries and the initial

stage of their language learning experiences in Australia allowed this study to make explicit the relationship between students' language learning histories and their unique learning experiences as pathways of language learning.

## **6.2 Limitations**

The narrative inquiry and application of the ecological framework as a qualitative approach in this study indicated the interrelationships between the elements for constructing a language learning ecology and the broad patterns of individual language learning pathways. The findings however are specific to the participants and to the contexts involved in this study. The present study is also limited by the duration of data collection. The participants could only be observed for a 10-week period during their initial stage of study abroad. A longer observation period may have revealed more changes or fluctuations in the students' learning experiences while studying abroad. As such, a deeper exploration of the changes from a variety of dimensions (e.g., identity, change with relation to linguistic development, etc.) could have been undertaken. There is also the issue of trustworthiness in relation to participants' stories as retrospective accounts of their learning experiences. As such, this study is limited by the difficulty in gaining strong diary data for triangulation, as well as the fact that only one researcher's interpretation of the data was applied.

## **6.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

It would be of a value if a longitudinal study was conducted in a study abroad context using a similar approach to that employed in this study. For example, following up

participants' progress after the pre-university English course (i.e., while studying a mainstream course at university) would be interesting because the focus of study is not language learning. This is another environmental change and although the students' geographical location is the same, there may be further change to their conceptions of learning English.

In terms of research approach, the attention to the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning as a method for exploring language learning and teaching beyond the classroom should be further examined. To date, its potential as a research approach to understand in-class learning in a study abroad context in particular has been ignored. Although an ecological approach still appears to be a minor framework in the field of applied linguistics since van Lier's (2000) suggestion, it should be assigned greater attention for use as a framework to view the correlations among the elements involved in language learning and teaching.

Moreover, the integration of in-class and out-of-class learning where the development of metacognitive awareness is evident in learning experiences in both settings should be further examined from teachers' perspectives. In order to explore the ways to facilitate learners to integrate the two settings, we should understand more about learner's conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning as well as their learning environment. In turn, an attempt should then be made to find a way to explicitly link the settings by stimulating learners' metacognitive awareness. Pedagogical approaches, types of materials, and activities in particular contexts can be further explored for this purpose.

The concept of construction of a language learning ecology with a focus of learner's agency has been referenced throughout this thesis; however, in what way is a learning ecology 'constructed' as opposed to 'emergent' can be paid more attention in future research. This research also suggests the idea for further development of

the ecological framework that in addition to teacher's beliefs, "learner's beliefs" can be considered as an element which interfere in the language learning ecology.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Official Ethics Approval Letter

Dear Professor Benson,

RE: 'Conceptions of Language Learning Beyond the Classroom: Exploring Language Learning Ecologies and Careers' (Ref No: 5201500243)

Thank you very much for your response. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and approval has been granted, effective 16th April 2015.

This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site: [http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/\\_files\\_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf).

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Professor Phil Benson  
Ms Mayumi Kashiwa

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 16th April 2016  
Progress Report 2 Due: 16th April 2017  
Progress Report 3 Due: 16th April 2018  
Progress Report 4 Due: 16th April 2019  
Final Report Due: 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:  
[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current\\_research\\_staff/human\\_research\\_ethics/application\\_resources](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/application_resources)

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:  
[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current\\_research\\_staff/human\\_research\\_ethics/managing\\_approved\\_research\\_projects](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/managing_approved_research_projects)

5. Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy>

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how\\_to\\_obtain\\_ethics\\_approval/human\\_research\\_ethics/policy](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy)

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anthon, Miller  
Chair  
Faculty of Human Sciences  
Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

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## Appendix B: Recruitment Advertisement

### Appendix B-1: Teacher Participants' Recruitment



## LANGUAGE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

I am a Master of Research student in the Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University. I am recruiting participants who can join my project "Language Learning Beyond the Classroom" from **May to July (3 months)**. The purpose of the study is to discover how language learners engage in out-of-class activities to develop their language proficiency. Furthermore, teachers' roles to support learners will be explored.

### ❖ Requirements

Please join us if you:

- are teaching English to newly arrived international students.
- are interested in how your students develop their English skills through learning beyond the classroom.

### ❖ What's involved

- Interview (once)
- Class observation (twice a month for three months)

- If you have any questions, or want to know more details, please feel free to contact us via email below.
- If you are interested in joining, please contact **Mayumi Kashiwa** (student researcher) directly via email.



#### Contact:

**Mayumi Kashiwa**  
E-mail: [mayumi.kashiwa@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:mayumi.kashiwa@students.mq.edu.au)  
Supervisor: **Prof. Philip Benson**  
E-mail: [philip.benson@mq.edu.au](mailto:philip.benson@mq.edu.au)







### LANGUAGE LEARNING BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

I am a Master of Research student in the Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University. I am recruiting participants to join my project "Language Learning Beyond the Classroom" from **May to July (3 months)**. The purpose of the study is to discover how language learners use out-of-class activities to develop their language proficiency.

#### ❖ Requirements

Please join us if you:

- are over 18 years old.
- just arrived in Australia to study English.
- can communicate in English or Japanese.



#### ❖ What's involved

- 3 interviews (once a month)
- Writing diaries 2-3 times a week and sharing with us
- Class observation



- If you are interested in joining, please email me directly.
- If you have any questions, or want to know more details, please feel free to contact me via email below.

#### Contact:

Mayumi Kashiwa

E-mail: [mayumi.kashiwa@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:mayumi.kashiwa@students.mq.edu.au)



## Appendix C: Consent Forms

### Appendix C-1: Teacher Consent Form

Philip Benson  
Professor of Applied Linguistics

#### Participant Information and Consent Form: Teacher

Name of Project: Language Learning beyond the Classroom

You are invited to participate in a study of Language Learning beyond the Classroom. The purpose of the study is to discover how language learners engage in out-of-class activities to develop their language proficiency. Furthermore, teachers' roles to support learners will be explored.

The study is being conducted by Mayumi Kashiwa in order to meet the requirements of Master of Research Degree under the supervision of Prof. Philip Benson of the Department of Linguistics (contact telephone number: 98508756, email: philip.benson@mq.edu.au)

If you decide to participate, we will interview you about what you think about learners' engagement in out-of-class activities. The interview will be conducted once and will take approximately 30 minutes. The interview conversation will be audio-recorded. I would also like to observe your class twice a month over the three months period to see the students' attitudes in class and the atmosphere of the class. To avoid any potential discomfort associated with being observed, you may offer your preferred time and the length of the class observation. I will not comment on your teaching unless you ask me specifically to do so. There will be no risks in participating in this project and any observations of your teaching will remain confidential to the research team.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Only the chief investigator and student researcher will have access to the data. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request via email (Mayumi Kashiwa, contact email: mayumi.kashiwa@students.mq.edu.au).

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence. Your participation in the study will not affect your employment at MQELC.

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I, *(participant's name)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email [ethics@mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@mq.edu.au)). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S COPY)**

## Appendix C-2: Student Consent Form

Philip Benson  
Professor of Applied Linguistics

### Participant Information and Consent Form: Student

Name of Project: Language Learning beyond the Classroom

You are invited to participate in a study of Language Learning beyond the Classroom. The purpose of the study is to discover how language learners use out-of-class activities to develop their language proficiency.

The study is being conducted by Mayumi Kashiwa in order to meet the requirements of Master of Research Degree under the supervision of Prof. Philip Benson of the Department of Linguistics (contact telephone number: 98508756, email: philip.benson@mq.edu.au)

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to write a short diary two to three times a week and turn it in electronically over the three months period. You will also be asked to be interviewed about your learning experiences before and after coming to Australia and what you think about the differences. The interview will be conducted three times over the three months in your stay in Australia. Each interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes, and the interview conversation will be audio-recorded. Your class will be observed twice a month over the three months period as well to see the atmosphere of your class. There will be no risks involved in participating in this project, and your participation will have no bearing on your results or evaluation in the course at the English Language Centre.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential, except as required by law. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Only the chief investigator and student researcher will have access to the data. A summary of the results of the data can be made available to you on request via email (Mayumi Kashiwa, contact email: mayumi.kashiwa@students.mq.edu.au).

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

---

I, *(participant's name)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Block letters)

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email [ethics@mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@mq.edu.au)). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

**(INVESTIGATOR'S COPY)**

## Appendix D: Individual Narratives

### Appendix D-1: Decisive Change Pathway (3 participants)

#### 1. Alex's story

Alex is from mainland China. He is a big fan of Arsenal football club. He wants to be an enthusiastic person as his Chinese name means so. He has a year of working experience in China. A lesson learnt from his working experience is *“not to be shy”*.

Alex conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China as two completely different contexts. Learning in class in China was focused on passing exams, so his conception of in-class learning is *“learning as a subject”* and *“it had nothing to do with his (our) life”*. He did not really like to study English in class in China as he did not have opportunities to use English both in class and outside of classroom.

*I think it's useless to learn English in China. Because most people they learn English but never use English in the rest of their lives, but in Australia, I need to use it, I need to make friends with the language, with this language.*

Out-of-class, he liked to watch American or English movies for fun and relaxing after class. He thought focusing on everything on book made him bored and he wanted to *“learn something interesting”* and *“helpful for studying English”*. It was very *“cool”* for him to learn different culture, some collocations and slangs in those movies. He once tried some words he picked up in the movies in class, but he was *“forbidden”* by the teacher to speak in that way. Since then, it was boring for Alex and felt *“useless to learn English”*, and passing exams was the only the reason to study English and motivated him to learn in class (with pressure from teachers and parents) even though his teachers

used fun materials such as English songs or videos in class. Alex once tried to have a foreign friend in China, but he realised that the way western people spend free time was different from him, so it did not work out.

Alex came to Australia to obtain a Master's degree in Accounting for his future job. The impact of study abroad for him was "like a fish that has found water" (Chinese proverb). He found potential opportunities of using English outside of school which are more suitable for him, and expanded his daily activity area. He conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in Australia as "*practicing and using English*" in both contexts, in other words, the two contexts are connected by the increased opportunities of using English.

*Everywhere is learning. More sources, more people, more teacher, they are all my teachers.*

After a few weeks of thinking period of what he should do for constructing his life in Australia, Alex started to "*feel more comfortable in Australia*" and he decided to try to go outside more and practice English with native speakers. Because he strongly believes that "*languages are used for communication*", and "*we have to use it not just for reading and writing*", he tried to "*catch every opportunity for practicing his English*". Alex then joined a local football/soccer team and has some local friends to spend time with. He also started to play skateboarding. He meets a lot of local people while he enjoys his hobbies. It was actually easier for him to talk with people in such communities as they have same interests. Alex also shared some stories of learning Australian English (e.g., "pyjamas" vs "sleep wear"), through short conversations with local people both on and off campus.

In-class learning in Australia for him is "*opportunity to practice English with teachers face-to-face*", "*more chances to practice*", and "*useful*" to learn skills for

learning as well as cultural tips and vocabulary for daily life. The topic that teachers sometimes bring in the classroom (e.g., how to order food in a restaurant), which Alex can use outside the school is one of the useful knowledge and practice for him. Also for him, being taught by a native speaker or medium of English was another connection of in-class and out-of-class learning.

Alex found the connection of the two contexts by exploring his environment and create opportunities to communicate with people. The opportunities of using English, especially communicating with native speakers, he has created this rich language learning environment. By the change of the conception, he realised the meaning of learning English, he became more motivated to learn English, and pays more attention to his learning strategies and learning resources outside of school. He had *“no goal”* and he *“was forced to learn English”* in China, but in Australia, he *“do[es] want to learn English and use English much better than before”*. Another change is in his second language identity; he became *“more opened”* and *“more polite”* as he could learn cultural aspects through daily conversation.

## **2. Sue's story**

Sue is from mainland China. She spent last 5 years in Kenya for her high school at international school with British curricula. She describes herself that she is very talkative like a parrot.

Sue's conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China is learning just as a subject. Learning towards passing exam both in-class and out-of-class was all the reason to study English. She conceptualised learning English in China is *“just as a subject, it's not about language”* as classes were focused on exams and she did not learn much about practical use of English. Sue thinks that learning in



China was so competitive and felt that *"it's just like a job, responsibility to study"* to get a good grade, and she did not particularly enjoyed learning English at that time.

Out-of-classroom learning in China was also for passing the exam by taking extra formal learning at private institutions. Sue did not do any other activities with English outside of classroom as her conception of learning English was *"just as a subject"*, there was no fun element, and nothing to do with her daily life. Learning as a subject and to pass the exam were therefore the purpose as well as the connection of the two contexts for her.

In Kenya, the conception of the relationship between in-class out-of-class learning was learning English for survival. The first problem to fit into the new environment in Kenya was her speaking, but she had no choice to speak out, to ask questions to teachers and classmates with her *"limited English from China"* at that time. She reflected her high school learning experience that she had to be brave to talk to people; *"If I don't speak out, nobody will talk to me, so I have to just push myself and participate all events"*. Sue thinks that *"it was a kind of spoon feeding"* in her high school even though it was a British school; students were given homework and told to do extra reading and writing to practice.

Sue learned English through learning in high school subjects and she has started to keep a vocabulary book to build up her capacity of vocabulary as well as use them in her daily school life. Sue discovered this strategy by herself; write unknown vocabulary down and write definition in Chinese by using a dictionary, then write example sentences which she can memorise and use it in different scenarios. It is still useful for her even now as *"so many words are still strange"* to her. She also keeps diaries in English. It was in Chinese at the beginning, but she thought *"it's a chance to improve my writing skills"*, and she tries to do everything in English.

In Kenya, Sue's mother was running a Chinese restaurant, so she practiced her English by helping her mother to talk to the customers. She learned from listening to what they speak, *"tried to speak the same as they speak"*. In this way, building up her communication skills both in-class and out-of-class became the connection of the two contexts. For Sue, face-to-face communication is the best way to improve English and it was how she survive in the English speaking environment. She describes her personality as talkative and likes to share her personal opinions with others, and her personality helped her to survive in the English environment.

Sue moved to Australia to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Finance and Professional Accounting. She chose the on-campus student accommodation. It is not so difficult for her to live in the English speaking environment. Her challenges in Australia are being independent financially and getting along with Chinese friends. Her conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in Australia is "a cycle" of learning and practicing English as she realised the usefulness of the use of English in both contexts. What she learns in class such as grammar, useful skills for learning can help her to improve her daily speaking skills outside the classroom.

*I think the connection could be like how English will help both in life and in class. Yeah, useful... it's like a cycle.*

In-class in Australia for Sue is learning practical use of English as well as learning skills to prepare for the future university life. It is more practical even though it is still a subject to pass the exam at the end of the course. Teachers consider students are mature enough to take responsibility of doing extra practices independently outside of the classroom therefore it is important for her to tell herself *"what is the first goal to be in Australia?"* to make sure her personal goals.

Outside the classroom in Australia for Sue is learning and practising her speaking skills through socialising with her friends in daily life.

*English is a tool, I enjoy learning English. I don't take it's a burden, I can use it to talk with people share my opinions share my experience, so I feel it's worth to learn.*

Just after her arrival in Australia (at the point of the first interview), Sue was worried about speaking too much in her first language as most of her friends at school were the same nationality and she tried to speak with her friends in English, texts each other in English. A good thing for Sue is that she stays at students' accommodation on campus, where both international and local students accommodate, so all people around her speak in English and she can practice English with them. Sue joins in the various events held at her accommodation such as the bible study, tutorial group, Australian holiday celebrations, and people there hold a birthday party for her. Sue is really satisfied with such a friendly atmosphere, multicultural place, and great facilities for studying as well as its safety. She now speaks Chinese with her classmates to have a good relationship with them, and 100% speak in English at her accommodation. Sue has many local friends from her accommodation, and her best friend now is a local student. She emphasises that the importance of being good at English in English speaking country is that she is able to make friends, communicate with others, study academic field, and *"It's like a part of life"*.

There emerge three stages of conception change in Sue's case. She changed her conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning from "just as a subject" to "English for survival" and "a learning cycle". The first conception change seems to have helped her greatly to conceptualise language learning in another learning environment. Sue could naturally expose herself in social interactions outside of classroom, and actively create a wider affordance in Australian context. In more

independent learning environment in Australia, she developed her metacognitive awareness on her language learning.

### 3. Tu's story

Tu is a female Vietnamese student in her later 20s. She has earned her first Master's degree in Switzerland. Tu came to Australia to earn another Master's degree in a different major in order to change the type of her job. She has working experiences in Vietnam before and after her Master's degree in Switzerland.

Tu's conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in Vietnam is *"just as a subject"*. She did not find any connection between in-class and out-of-class learning in Vietnam as she did not really do anything out-of-class except her homework. Her conception of learning English in class was *"a subject like other subjects, history, math, it's not English in use, just English in class"*. The focus of learning in class was on sentence structures and grammar, vocabulary, not enough practice to write a paragraph or an essay nor oral practice. Tu did not like to learn English at school as she thought that *"it looks like something that I have to remember every day for nothing. I don't use it but I have to remember"*. As there is no need to use English in daily life, learning in class was almost everything about learning English. Teachers used Vietnamese in class to explain grammar and sentence structures, they never use English in class. So for her, *"we just study something like signals, this means this, this world means this, structure like this, that's it"* and felt very bored with English classes in Vietnam as Tu did not use English at all. Passing exam was just good enough English proficiency for her.

In Vietnam, there were not many resources to learn English outside of school such as English TV channels or internet until the time Tu started to work. Once she was

able to access to more such resources, she could watch foreign movies and listen to English music, then Tu thought her listening skills got better than before. She also took a short IELTS course in British Council, but it was too short to improve her English to be good enough to be able to get into university in Australia.

In Switzerland, Tu used English only in class and writing up her thesis. Her classmates there were all Vietnamese and Tu used Vietnamese daily and a little of German for having done some shopping in the city. She struggled to write reports and thesis as it was her first time to produce a long written work. However, the content of her work was more important than English accuracy to be assessed in her programme, so Tu could explain her understanding about the problem in business in her subjects orally to her lecturers and she could pass. Although Tu could improve writing skills throughout the programme, communication skills and vocabulary was limited only in her field. There was not much connection between in-class and out-of-class learning apart from spending time for writing up her work, different languages were used for each context.

In Australia, Tu conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning as *“to use English and improve both academic English and English for communication”*. The relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning became a connected learning space for her as all are useful to use in both academic and communication purposes.

*The most different thing is the environment to use English. In Vietnam English is a subject, and people study because they need to study it, they don't need to use it in real life, just study, read something, get scores, that's it. That is a purpose. But now I'm here my purpose is both improve my English and knowledge as much as possible, so I use English every day so I force my brain to think in English, I have never done it before.*

The purpose of learning in class for her is learning academic English, but words, phrases, and collocations she learns in class are also useful to communicate with

people outside of the classroom. Tu believes that she has been able to improve her both general and academic English so far because of this learning environment which English is useful for the both contexts.

When Tu first arrived in Australia, her communication skills were very low; she could not understand what people say and she could not speak what she wanted to say. Tu kept translating Vietnamese into English in her mind word by word before she speaks, and because of her strong Vietnamese accent, people could not understand her. Tu first did not like the classroom environment which was dominant by Chinese students talking in Chinese each other, she was confused with what the authentic Australian culture is seeing a lot of Asian population in her living area.

After spending a hard time at the beginning, Tu determined herself that she will use only English in order to become fluent in English both in speaking and writing. She pushed herself to talk more with her teachers, her classmates, and staff at restaurants or people she meets outside the classroom. Tu even avoids using Vietnamese with Vietnamese friends sometimes.

*I force myself use English, think in English, talk to people as much as possible. I have a chance here and I have to use it.*

A month later, Tu noticed that she can speak more naturally without translating from Vietnamese to English all the time.

*Now, I'm very interested in English, I'm very happy somebody wants to speak in English with me.*

Tu frequently updates her Facebook account, showing memorable pictures with her friends outside school or at her accommodation. She is thankful for her good friends who share time with her, learn together. Tu was able to make a lot of friends as a result of pushing herself to talk to more people. She joins some events held by university or

join community events with her friends. Tu often attends all kinds of workshops held at the ELC for her learning skills development. She likes to join the workshop as she can learn supplemental skills which there is usually not enough time to do all the things in class.

*People say that English is hard but it's not hard, because if you use it, it becomes more easy, but if you don't use it just learn by heart, one day you will forget. ...in Australia I have an environment I have a chance to use it, so I can remember.*

Tu's conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning changed from "just as a subject" to something useful for her life both academic field and for having social network. She emphasises linguistic development, especially speaking fluency and pronunciation. As Tu realised that English is a very important key success factor for her future job and her life from her experiences of studying in Switzerland and working at a bank in Vietnam, she could take an action to pursue herself to use English in all opportunities in her new learning environment.

Tu found that her personality has changed to be more confident to talk in English because of the change of her life style. She forced her to go out to make friends, not to be shy to talk to people whenever she gets a chance in order to improve her English, and then she overcame her shyness and became more friendly and confident. Changing her life style changed her personality and helped to develop her English skills. Tu imagined if she did not change in this way, she would not have accepted to be an interviewee in this project.

## Appendix D-2: Gradual Change Pathway (3 participants)

### 4. Nicky's story

Nicky is from mainland China. She is the youngest participants. She wants to try many new things in Australia to make her life “colourful”. “Partying is a part of life” is what she learned so far.

Nicky’s conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China is learning as “*a subject, not a language learning*”. She did not think that there was a connection between in-class and out-of-class learning in China as she did not learn about the use of English in class, and did not have many opportunities to use English outside of the classroom.

*Here we learn English for our study. We really see it as a language, yes, and we try to solve this problem. But in China, what we tried to solve was not English, just the question.*

Nicky thinks that she learned English as a tool to achieve a higher score, not a tool for communication outside of school. She realised that English she learned in school in China was not so useful for her daily use. Although she practiced a lot about reading exercises, grammar (the tense), how to spell vocabulary, “*but it's not as a language*”. She did not have chance to speak English both in-class and outside of the classroom. Nicky learned same grammar and vocabulary repeatedly throughout her schools and learned only how to answer questions in exams in class. She felt it was wasting her time and boring.

Nicky thinks that her English teachers were not professional with strong Chinese accent therefore many students had a problem with pronunciation. The focus of studying English in class was grammar, and the test scores.



*I think their ways of teaching is quite different, Chinese classroom are more crowded and boring, and teacher writes on a big black board, listen and take notes, that's all.*

Out-of-class, Nicky likes to watch American TV series and listen to English music for fun and relaxing. When Nicky watches such TV series, she tries to avoid watching Chinese subtitles, but tries to look at English captions because she thinks this helps her to pick up some words and some sentences which she does not learn in school and sounds more like native speakers like *"it's freaking cool!"*

Nicky thinks now that watching TV also gives her confidence to speak English and makes her to want to use it more. She had an African family as her neighbour in her hometown, so she had some opportunities to use English to communicate with them at their home party. She thought that it was a good chance to use English, however, she did not feel comfortable as it is not a natural social interaction in her home town, and felt afraid of them.

After getting into the undergraduate level in China, Nicky changed her mind and decided to study in Australia. She is now preparing for the entrance to an undergraduate degree in Australia. Meeting people of a diverse nationalities and backgrounds is extremely exciting experience for her. Nicky conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in Australia as more about language use and learning both academic English and English for communication.

Nicky feels relaxed when she learns in class in Australia. *"The learning style is free, teachers allow us to talk more about opinion, and it's okay to interrupt"*. She thinks that she should accept this learning style and feels more willing to speak out in class as she feels the freedom to express herself whether it's right or wrong.

*Here we learn English for our study. We really see it as a language, yes, and we try to solve this problem (business related problems from reading). But in China, what we tried to solve was not English, just the question.*

Nicky lives in home-stay accommodation with two other international students. Her host mother is originally from the same city where she comes from, so she can talk both in Cantonese and English at her place. Nicky likes to spend her free time with international student friends from different countries who study at ELC. She shared fun experiences of having parties with those friends from varieties of countries. Meeting and being friends with people who have different background from her can give her new knowledge, more excitement, and English is the important tool to have such experiences.

*This Thursday I had dinner with friends. We haven't had such enjoyable dinner and conversation with such lovely people after A4 (previous course). We both spend a beautiful night together. The pic attached is spicy roast fish. 😊" (diary).*

Nicky started to keep a vocabulary book with English definitions in Australia to build up her vocabulary. She also started to have knowledge and information from a wider genre, not only her major in University, when she browses some online sources. She also seeks for a chance to join some volunteer activities which she had done in China. It was inspired by her home stay mother as well as she does day-care services. She simply enjoys more living in Australia as her life here is full of excitement and it is "colourful" environment and open living style. *"The environment helps me to study English"*. For her, learning in class, home stay, and socialising with her friends are all connected as her part of learning environment, and she tries to "integrate into this environment". She thinks she can *"absorb more knowledge"* by talking with people with different background.

*It's like a practice, you can get involved in a different life, not just every day you study, after study what will we do? I want to have a colourful life.*

Nicky's conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning has changed like opening up her view of her world. Almost mechanical way of learning English as a tool for examination did not give her colourful life in China, but by learning the use of language, how to communicate with people from different background connected the two learning contexts and this connection allowed her to enjoy her life more.

## **5. Amy's story**

Amy is from mainland China. She has interests in varieties of things and has a "to do list" in her life. She recently attended a fan club meeting of Japanese pop group in Sydney, and her dream is to watch a live Wimbledon tennis match in the future.

Amy's conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China was "*a necessary subject*" to build a basic skills of English; she needed to learn to achieve the goals which teachers set for students, learned "*to achieve things in class*" not for her life. Amy learned a lot of words as well as skills to pass exams in class in China. So she could improve her reading skills mostly, but not much about speaking and writing skills. She critically reflected that she followed her teacher's lead, and learned what the teacher thinks important for her future, but it was not important "*in the real English world*".

Amy's attitude of learning English was largely influenced by her teachers. "*One year, I liked studying English because my English teacher was very good, but second year, it changed to be a very serious teacher, then I hate studying English*". She

reflected herself that she was young and emotional. Amy's "a good teacher" was charming and cared about each student's study process and their personal life as well, while her "a serious teacher" who made her dislike to study English was arrogant and gave students punishment-like tasks.

Amy participated in the "The dubbing a movie scene" as a part of the English Competition in her school. Although she could not get the first place at that time, she found it interesting and an effective way to improve her English skills. Later, she started to make same type of short video clip by dubbing a movie scripts when she has time outside school, and post it online to have some comments from her friends on her work. Out-of-class, Amy also took online IELTS course for several months to prepare for the exam, and she learned a lot about listening and reading, but still not about speaking and writing. She thinks that watching American TV series can help to improve her listening skills and are also fun. She started to watch American TV series just out of curiosity and it was popular among her friends in high school. However, she started to watch them more for learning when she was in university.

In order to learn more from such entertainment, Amy first watches without subtitles or captions, and then she watches it again with both Chinese subtitles and English captions to understand more of both contents and language usages. She also likes to sing English songs and let her friends hear her singing. For her, out-of-class learning is sometimes just for her entertainment, but also "a self-challenge". Amy felt that learning outside the classroom is challenging but feel accomplished and self-achieved when she does especially when she gets positive feedback from her friends.

Amy describes her image of language learning and the connections between in-class and out-of-class learning by telling the teacher's and student' roles from her experiences.

*... so a teacher opens the English door and outside the classroom we can go to different rooms, (a teacher opens) a big door, and small small doors we can go... yeah. Explore by ourselves.*

For example, Amy tried to read a famous novel at home which was used in her class, although it was too difficult to read alone. When her teacher showed a part of a famous movie in class, she downloaded the whole movie to watch it at home. There is often a gap between the teacher's understanding of what students are interested in, however, the use of pop culture in class was always helpful for her to motivate to learn English.

Amy moved to Australia to take Master's degree in Accounting for her future job in China. At the beginning, she continued her learning strategies such as making her video clips, but later, she started to concern more about face-to-face communication skills. She conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in Australia as opportunities to use English both for academic and daily-life purposes. Amy can make use of in-class learning to use outside the classroom. She found a greater connection between in-class and out-of-class learning in Australia from such learning experiences and its usefulness to English use outside the classroom.

*In classroom is very useful and teach you how to learn native English and give you a lot of right examples, and outside the classroom, it depends on yourself you have to remember them and use them and make something... like become a part of you, become a habit.*

Amy was afraid of her pronunciation at the beginning in Australia. After several weeks of learning in class, she feels that she became more confident when she talks to her teacher. She thinks that maybe it because she got used to her learning environment, also her teachers at ELC are very nice, and she has a lot of opportunities to speak English such as discussion, group work in class.

Amy found that ELC online website is helpful to contact with her teachers. Teachers can send her feedback on her writing homework, it can provide some tips

about how to learn English, and so on. In her class, Amy's teacher talks about Australian culture, tips to live better in Australia, introduce some famous places that students can visit on holiday, and she had some excursion trips to the Art Gallery, for example. She describes her teacher in Australia that *"she opens bigger and taller door for me"*.

Amy found that a learning environment is very important as she compares with her friend who studies in less Chinese students stays in Australia. She tries to find more opportunities to use and practice English, for example, talk with her non-Chinese classmates, teachers, and outside the classroom such as Library, the shopping centre, online resources, some fun events in Sydney, and listen to what passengers on a train are talking about. It is also Amy's strong belief that the more she pursues to use English, the more she can improve her English and the more confident and brave, and she becomes a user of English.

Amy thought that out-of-class learning is challenging in Australia, however, it is her driving force to continue to learn English and she is more motivated to learn more about English, such as translation. *"It's interesting every day I learn more things and I think that's useful."* She describes the difference in herself through learning English in Australia that she has to build another herself for English.

*It's a Chinese language person maybe I need to plus some English things, but here it's just an empty thing I need to plus all English elements.*

All the elements surrounding Amy are English; international classmates, shopping, trains, menus at restaurants, library, phone, and so on. This learning environment gave her a perception that she is not a Chinese-based language learner who was picking up something she was interested in, but a full English user who has to function all in English.

## 6. Natalie's story

Natalie is from mainland China. She is a little clumsy as she almost burn down her house by cooking. She talked about her personal growth during her study abroad year, from a girl who used to rely on others' opinions to an independent person away from her family.

Natalie's conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China was "*a subject like other subject*"; focusing on passing exams only and never thought that it is related to what she does in the future or daily life. Natalie did not find any connection between learning in-class and out-of-class and English was always a subject which she does not need to use outside the classroom.

*... so after class I think English is just uh... a topic for us, it didn't mean anything. It may be like PE lesson for me, after class I will not do anything about sports, so just after class it means what?*

Natalie started to learn English when she was in middle school. Her middle school and high school, called "foreign language school" where she spent 6 years, had English focused programmes and average scores of English national exams was always one of the top schools in China. In Natalie's school, students were taught English in English medium, and a lot of games were used in class. She was not a strong student as she did not have any basic knowledge of English when she entered this school, while others had 4-6 years of learning experiences at primary school. Her teacher especially took care of her because she needed to work harder to keep up with other students. She thinks that teachers and parents always guided her learning plans and life plans and she did not have time to think by herself, just obey their rules.

In class, Natalie was not allowed to use Chinese to understand English, no translation, no dictionaries, but only listen and speak repeatedly. She did not fully understand the meaning what she was listening or speaking, but it was their teaching styles and learning strategies in her school. Natalie also recalled that she learned phonetic symbols at the first stage of her learning English.

There was a movie afternoon when students watch a movie and complete some tasks on paper; however, for Natalie, it was a task to be completed in time, rather than learning English with fun. Natalie expressed her high school memory that she had a lot of pressure at school as well as from her parents, and did not enjoy learning English, while other students liked this fun learning environment in her school. Natalie describes that she was a special one and a slow learner.

Although teachers did their best to make English class fun using games, for Natalie, *“it was one kind of styles of subject”*, and it was just a subject because the learning comes with exams from the beginning to the end of the course. Although she had never thought that these learning styles were good, she now thinks that all the learning she had in her schools were beneficial for her. Natalie thinks that her English level was too low to enjoy learning English with such learning styles.

Outside of the classroom, Natalie spent most of her time for doing her homework. Her parents encourage her to talk to foreigners in English in town, but she did not like such encouragement as she thought that things she learned in class were not something for communicating with foreigners outside of class.

Natalie came to Australia to pursue a Master’s degree in Accounting. She reflected on her past learning experiences through experiencing a new learning environment. Then Natalie started to realise the happiness of learning English by using it in her daily life. She conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class



learning in Australia is “a good cycle” of learning and she enjoys her process as well as progress of learning English. What Natalie learns in class both academic English and something in casual conversation, are useful and she can use it outside the classroom. Then if she could do something with English outside of the classroom, or when she understood more what local people said, it motivates her to learn more and work harder in class for this happy feeling.

*When I consider that English is very useful for me, then during the class I will pay more attention, and when I pay more attention to the class I learn more, and after class I get more encouragement from community and from other foreigners and... um I think it's a good cycle and I like this cycle.*

In-class learning in Australia is more skills focused; how to read articles, how to write an academic essay, communication manners in academic field and so on. Although it is a subject to learn, Natalie thinks that it is “*more active and interesting*”, and “*more beneficial*” for her life. She found that teaching styles are quite similar to her Chinese teacher's and realised that the ways she learned English was useful. The big difference for her was “pressure” and independent ways of learning in Australia.

*In Australia, I saw everyone study by themselves, no one tells me what to do, no one cares, and teachers don't care whether you study at home or not. So I should take care of myself.*

Natalie did “Reading aloud” as one of her every-week-homework when she was in high school. She had to practice reading a passage aloud and record it in a tape and send it to her teacher. Even though she did not realise the effectiveness of such task at that time, she later found that repetition of reading or listening one passage can improve her English skills. She now does it when she has time. However, for Natalie, it's not easy to keep doing one thing (independently) without a teacher's supervision.

Natalie compares her language learning experiences in China and Australia and describes by the images. In China it was "a road" which she did not know where it leads her to, but she just followed her teacher. In Australia, on the contrast, it is "a forest". All the green plans are elements of learning English. She did not know what they are at the beginning but gradually become interested in those trees and start to explore the forest, and enjoys the moment of exploring.

Natalie's conceptions of the relationship between in class and out-of-class learning have changed from "a subject" to "a good cycle". It is similar to Sue's case, however, Natalie's degree of conception change as well as the growth of her metacognitive awareness were in a more gradual process and her behaviour also gradually changed to more sociable to use English outside of the classroom. She emphasises that the environment is very important but she cannot depend on the environment. Natalie also noticed that communication skills are important for her happy life.

*I need communication to make my life colourful and I need to touch different kind of people and then my life will be happier, not meaningful it's too big, just happier.*

## Appendix D-3: Minimal Change Pathway (2 participants)

### 7. Eddy's story

Eddy is from mainland China. He critically compares his learning environment and the way of learning English in China and in Australia. In Australia, he chose a home stay as his accommodation as he thought it is a great way to learn more about Australian culture and the way of Australian life.

Eddy's conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China was two separated spaces for different learning purposes. Although he gained a lot of basic linguistic knowledge from learning in-class, for him, *"class is a class"*, nothing was more than that for him.

When Eddy was in primary school a Canadian teacher taught words showed students Harry Potter videos in class. He was interested in such materials but not particularly in English. He started to learn more vocabularies and grammar when he was in middle school. Students were told to memorise 2,500 words in order to succeed in middle school level. In high school, grammar got more difficult. Learning in class was for exams and Eddy felt high pressure as *"everybody was competitors"*. However, he was always good at English among other school subjects.

Out-of-class, Eddy likes to watch English movies because in university time, and learned English through watching movies, reading novels, which he has interests in its stories or roles. *"The interest is the best teacher."* For him, the interest is the most important aspect that keeps him learning English. Eddy took an IELTS course at a well-known private institution in China before studying abroad. He does not like online learning resources as he can stop learning anytime if he loses his interest or attention. Eddy thinks it is difficult to continue to learn online without someone who monitors his

learning. The connection of in-class and out-of-class learning for him was the teacher's advice on good learning resources for out-of-class activities such as TV series, or "what's the best approach to study vocabulary, or to understand grammar". He believes that learning itself occurs in himself;

*Teachers don't need to tell what the vocabulary is, how to read it. English is not like mathematics. (Mathematics,) if you don't follow your teacher, you can't understand what happened. It's important that myself learning English, not English itself. You can learn English by yourself, I think.*

Eddy came to Australia to pursue his Master's degree in Finance as he wants to be a financial consultant in China. He critically analyses at the differences of learning environment, learning styles in China and in Australia, and how he gradually immerses himself in this new environment. Eddy conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in Australia as communication-oriented learning. The relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning became strongly connected by the communicative purpose of learning. He enjoys learning more about communication through working in groups in class, daily communication in his home stay, in shops and restaurants, dentist, and so on.

Eddy's conception of in-class learning in Australia is "*communicative learning with native teachers*". He thinks that the advantage is his improvement of listening and speaking as the teachers are non-Chinese who "*activate*" these skills. He considers his two different learning environments in his home country and in Australia as two different styles according to the purpose of learning English. He thinks that it was more efficient to learn how to pass exams, how to get high scores focusing on linguistic competence in class in China, in contrast, there are more skills development through group discussion, team-work, and presentation in class in Australia, and it is better for future career to

learn more about interpersonal skills. Eddy feels that he works less and students in general become lazy in Australia as teachers do not “push” students to work hard. “*More push, more work*” is sometimes more efficient for him.

Although Eddy had difficulty communicating with people because of the pronunciation and limited vocabulary at the beginning, he gradually gained confidence to talk to people outside of school and home by practicing English in daily conversation with his host family. Through his life experience with English outside of the classroom, he thinks his learning out-of-class is “*keeping touch with English speakers*”. Study abroad experiences have made him realise the importance of communication skills.

Eddy conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning have slightly changed by finding the same purpose of improving his communication skills in the both contexts. He is analytical about his own language learning and effectiveness of developing both linguistic and interpersonal skills through communication. Both in-class and out-of-class learning are equally important for Eddy now while in-class learning was the dominant part of his learning environment in China. Although he recognises the change of the surrounding environment and the function of it, Eddy seems to be satisfied with the current learning environment and his affordances and social interactions remained almost the same throughout the duration.

## **8. Lucas’ story**

Lucas is from mainland China. He likes to learn both English and Japanese. He loves Japanese pop culture. He shares a house near university. Although there are some local people living in the house, as they are all professional people and they are away many hours per day, he does not have chance to talk with them.

Lucas' conception of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning is as a weak connection of learning. For him, the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning in China is one way "*weak connection*"; his linguistic knowledge was built by learning in class and it helps him to comprehend and enjoy watching English movies, however, learning through movies did not help him to develop his English skills further as he did not have opportunities to use English in China both inside and outside of school. As he characteristically said, "*[I watch movies to] stimulate my accent and pronunciation*". Lucas now has a strong belief that a language is a tool for communication and he reflects that he should have spent more time to practice speaking or speak to other people outside the classroom in China.

Lucas' in-class learning was much focused on exam preparation as a subject. He recalled that learning in class in his middle school was much focused on grammar, and in his high school, he practiced a lot about writing essays. He did not enjoy learning English although he was good at it. Lucas likes this "*international language to communicate with people from different countries*", and he thinks learning grammar is very useful for building up his linguistic knowledge.

Out-of-class activities such as watching TV series or movies were just for entertainment for Lucas, not much focus on the language use although he expected that it might be helping to improve his listening skills and understanding Western cultural aspects through such activities.

Lucas came to Australia to pursue his Master's degree in Accounting. Even though he was the most active participant in this project, his conceptions of language learning, his behaviours were not much changed during the project period from my point of view.

Lucas conceptualised the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning as; "*actively use English in both contexts*". The amount of time and spaces used for

learning English outside of the classroom has increased, and he pays more attention to the use of English in the both contexts. In Australia, Lucas found the learning styles in class is quite different from in China; taught in English medium, speak in English in order to express ideas, a lot of discussion in groups, and presentation, for example. However, the purpose of learning in class is actually the same for him; passing the exams although this time he needs to meet the academic requirement and the approach to pass the exam are different.

*In Australia, it is also a subject. The purpose to join the course is to pass this and enter to the university. I think this is the same in Australia and in China..*

The learning style in class in Australia such as group discussion and presentation are also valuable time and place for Lucas to use English with more active manner than he used to be although he personally prefers working individually to working in groups. In his course, online materials are used for students to review the lessons, extra exercises, and homework. He thinks that this type of material can connect in-class and out-of-class learning as it expands his space of learning beyond classroom. Also he can connect with teachers through her feedback online, and it is simply convenient.

Lucas expressed that even though opportunities to use English is everywhere around him in his daily life, he has not had exciting learning experiences like he expected.

*Actually my life style is very boring (in Australia), I just go to school and go home, sometimes I may go to the shopping centre to buy something, only three places, so boring I spend most of the time at home to watch TV dramas and TV shows. Maybe after this course I may go travelling around Sydney.*

Although Lucas does not have much exposure to out-of-class social interaction, he thinks that small talk with a shop staff, listening to a radio, doing online course exercises

at home, are very useful to connect in-class and out-of-class learning. He realised that such everyday opportunities can also help him to improve his English proficiency especially pronunciation, collocations, and expressions to describe in details. Lucas noticed that he became more aware of the language use while he watches movies or listening to a radio. His expectation of his future student life in Australia is having more international friends and travel around Australia.

The relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning seems to be still separated contexts for Lucas; a subject and daily life English. His conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning have not changed much as the purpose of learning in class is still exam-focused for him although he identifies the differences in terms of approach to the exams. However, due to the increase of using English in his daily life, Lucas started to realise the potential of learning English through daily activities outside of the classroom.

Lucas describes the change of his attitude of learning English that he was “a *passive receiver*” in China, but he now “*actively gains*” English skills. Although his awareness of learning opportunities in the environment has been developed, the change in Lucas’ conceptions of the relationship between in-class and out-of-class learning has changed in minimal amount, and his behaviour has not actually changed much either.