Commitment in Learning Plans – Fostering Learner Autonomy in the Second Language Classroom and Beyond

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Abstract

Students who feel responsible for their learning can develop into autonomous and therefore successful and confident learners who are equipped for lifelong learning. In the attempt to support secondary students to take responsibility for their learning, the literature proposes the use of learning plans which can be described as written agreements on specific learning goals between students and teachers. However, little research has engaged in assessing whether students can feel committed towards, and as a result, take responsibility for their learning plan.

Combining findings from education, educational and organisational psychology, and second language learning, this thesis aims at measuring various forms of commitment that students develop towards their learning plan. Furthermore, it attempts to establish links between student commitment, and other psychological concepts that influence the development of an autonomous learner – student engagement and academic self-efficacy. This thesis further explores a number of socio-economic and background factors that influence students' commitment. Finally, putting emphasis on second language learning, this thesis aims to identify the didactic factors that determine a learning environment of a successful learning plan which promotes learner autonomy.

In this endeavour, this thesis proposes a mixed methods approach, consisting of two studies in the Australian secondary education system. Study one represents an empirical, longitudinal approach using student questionnaires. Study two pursues a qualitative approach in the form of student and teacher interviews.

The findings support the view that students can develop various forms of commitment towards their learning plan and that it is a concept which appears to be linked to students' engagement and their confidence to take on academic tasks. In addition to that, the learning environment will be described within which learning plans promote controlled learner autonomy.

Statement of Authorship

I certify that the research described in this dissertation has not already been submitted for any other degree. I certify that to the best of my knowledge all sources used and any help received in the preparation of this dissertation have been acknowledged.

Susann Schuster

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1. Introduction

> In the old days the student went to school to get what the school had to offer him; now he goes to school to satisfy a definite need for self-development. He is no longer disposed to learn just what the teacher proposes to teach. (Parkhurst, 1922, p. 3)

Helen Parkhurst (1922) was one of the pioneers of educational practitioners and researchers who focused on the overall personal and educational development of the student. Aiming to tailor educational units to the individual rather than to an anticipated homogeneous student group, her *Dalton Plan* represents one of the first learning plans which still finds application in the education system today (Horstkemper, Ludwig, & Schubarth, 2008).

The Dalton Plan and other learning plans that were developed over the past decades promote students as responsible individuals who are aware of their individual strengths, are able to identify learning objectives (Wolff, 2003a), and monitor strategies in their learning (Scharle & Szabó, 2000). Learning plans underpin Parkhurst's *"need for self-development"* which is also evident in the current Australian governmental efforts that strive to educate students to become 'responsible and well informed citizens' (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008; Tsolakis & Cornford, 2010). This attempt is tightly interwoven with the concept of learner autonomy. Learner autonomy can be described as a set of skills that enables students to take responsibility for their learning (Holec & Council of Europe, 1979).

Supporting learner autonomy, learning plans represent one of a range of instruments (such as diaries and portfolios) that have found use in the Australian educational system. While learning plans can vary strongly in name[1] and content, a prototype of a learning plan usually consists of an agreement between the student and the teacher (or at times parents) regarding specific tasks and learning goals. The learning goals are usually to be achieved within a designated period of time.

Although there are a number of research works that describe various types of learning plans (Anderson, Boud, & Sampson, 1996; Horstkemper et al. 2008; Wilson & Cutting, 2001), little research has engaged in determining possible factors which make some learning plans more successful than others in fostering autonomy. One

[1] Other names are, for example: learning contract, learning agreement, personalized learning plan.

of the largest empirical studies that have provided some insight into the usefulness of learning plans was the *IGLU-study* in 2010 (Bos, Dohe, Kowoll, & Schuster, 2010). That study established a direct link between learning plans and learning outcomes in the German education system. However, the study did not identify the characteristics that learning plans need to portray in order to have a positive influence on students' performance and on developing key skills of an autonomous learner.

Other research has focussed on measuring autonomy as an immediate outcome of learning programmes (e.g. Cotterall, 1995; Oxford, 1990) that include instruments such as the learning plan. Problems that arise from such an approach, however, are grounded in the need to define taxonomies of autonomy (Benson, 2010) and the consideration of learning plans as an assessment tool of autonomy (Schmenk & McGarry, 2011).

Viewing the learning plan as an instrument that is developed for students to practise taking and exercising responsibility for learning, the literature claims that students develop a high degree of commitment towards their learning plan (Knowles, 1986). From this point of view, commitment has further been linked to learning achievement (McPherson, 2001) and therefore indirectly to learner autonomy, as it is considered an achievement of life-long learning (e.g. Camilleri & European Centre for Modern Languages, 1999; Carson, 2010; Macaro, 2008). Student commitment thus appears to be a crucial component in the discussion of learning plans that successfully foster learner autonomy. However, there is an apparent need to define the concept of student commitment and to explore its meaning as a factor that underlies the development of learner autonomy. The immediate objective of this thesis is thus to develop a theoretical model of student commitment towards learning plans in the context of learner autonomy, with an emphasis on the second language classroom[2]. Targeting this objective, the first research question is: *1. What are the characteristics of student commitment?*

The characteristics of student commitment alone, however, do not explain whether this concept can influence the development of learner autonomy. Proposing a link between student commitment and the development of learner autonomy, this thesis refrains from assessing learner autonomy as a result of high student commitment.

[2] In this thesis, the term *second language learning* is equally used to the term *foreign language learning*.

Instead, the way that students bond with a learning plan is believed to have a significant influence on other psychological dimensions that play an important role in developing learner autonomy, namely: *student engagement* and *academic self-efficacy* (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Carr, Hagel, & Hellier, 2010; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Multon & Brown, 1991; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2009; Schunk, 1991; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2008a). Engagement is defined broadly as the emotional and behavioural *"actions and practices that students direct towards school and learning" (Wang, Willett, & Eccles, 2011, p. 466)* and self-efficacy as students' confidence to take on new tasks (Bandura, 1997). These two concepts significantly contribute to students' immediate learning outcomes, and they underpin students' ability for life-long learning (Abele & Schurk, 2009). Therefore, student engagement and academic self-efficacy are proposed as crucial outcomes of the work with a learning plan that fosters learner autonomy.

This thesis will therefore pioneer an approach which sets out to link *student commitment* with *student engagement* and *academic self-efficacy* as three underlying components of the development of learner autonomy. Establishing the relationship between the three concepts will be the focus of the second research question which states: *2. Does student commitment impact on student engagement and academic self-efficacy?*

This question elaborates on the proposition that if student commitment is linked to the degree that students engage in their learning and to the level of confidence that they show in taking on new tasks, then it can be argued that student commitment is an essential assessment component of learning plans. From this perspective, student commitment may provide information on whether students perceive their learning plan as an instrument that can be used to practise various degrees of learner autonomy.

Furthermore, the exploration of student commitment needs to take into consideration that there are particular factors that influence its development. Therefore, the third objective of this thesis is to discuss a number of factors that might impact on student commitment. This goal is addressed in the third research question: *3. Which factors have an influence on commitment in learning plans?*

Addressing the third research question, this thesis will firstly explore whether demographic factors such as *age* and *gender* and factors such as *subject liking* or

parental support might have an influence on the way and the degree by which students feel committed towards their learning plan. Secondly, it will be discussed to what extent students should be able to define *learning objectives, learning strategies, learning content* etc. as components of a learning plan to which students feel strongly committed.

Considering the three research questions, the significance of this thesis thus lies within its contribution towards the discussion of learning plans as a particular instrument that can help to foster students' responsibility for their learning. Emphasising its use in the second language classroom, it will map out the benefits and the restrictions of this instrument as a learning programme that encourages 'controlled' learner autonomy. Exploring the ways that students are made aware of and practise taking responsibility for their learning, this thesis discusses the learning plan as a symbol for an environment in which individuals are confronted with *"opposing forces for change and stability, autonomy and control"* (Irie & Stewart, 2012, p. 5). In other words, learning plans can represent systems that are framed by boundaries within which students can exert and practise autonomy to a limited extent. It is a concept which is mirrored in all societies that are marked by social norms (Habermas, 1996).

Addressing these three research questions, this thesis will first establish the theoretical background of two studies that propose empirical, longitudinal and qualitative approaches. The theoretical background of these studies combines research findings from multiple disciplines.

Chapter 2 discusses a model of the ways that learner autonomy is promoted in the Australian secondary education context. This model is based on a literature overview that encompasses learner autonomy from a philosophical, educational, and political perspective (e.g. Benson & Voller, 1997; Cotterall, 1995; Dam, 1995; Holec & Council of Europe, 1981; Lamb & Reinders, 2008; Van Lier, 2007; Little, 2000; Nunan, 1988; Schmenk, 2008; Sinclair, 2000). As part of the discussion of the concept of learner autonomy, and ways to develop skills of an autonomous learner, Chapter 3 will present a number of instruments that support learner autonomy.

Chapter 4 explores the use of learning plans as a particular instrument to foster autonomy. A working definition of a learning plan will be derived on the basis of the seminal work by researchers such as Berte (1975), Knowles (1986), and Anderson,

Boud & Sampson (1996). Furthermore, a theoretical model to implement learning plans in the context of learner autonomy informed by Boud (1995), Winter (2008), and Wolff (2002) will be proposed.

In Chapter 5, I will identify the issues that arise when assessing the usefulness of learning plans in their support of learner autonomy. Suggesting student commitment as an influential factor in the success of a learning plan and as a concept that deepens the understanding of the development of learner autonomy, this thesis develops a model of student commitment that draws upon extensive research from organisational psychology (e.g. Alutto, Hrebiniak, & Ramon, 1973; Beck, 2000; Becker, 1960; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday, 1982; Porter, 1976).

It is proposed that student engagement and academic self-efficacy are two indicators of success in working with a learning plan. A theoretical model that links student *commitment*, *engagement* and *academic self-efficacy* will be developed. Based on this model, the three research questions will be identified, and two studies will be proposed.

Chapter 6 provides the methodological background of the two studies that reflect a mixed-methods approach: the first study is based on an empirical longitudinal approach and the second study on a qualitative approach. The first study aims to identify the characteristics of student commitment and its potential influence on students' engagement and their academic self-efficacy. It further explores a number of socio-economic and background factors that may influence student commitment. A questionnaire was circulated to students from three secondary high schools in Australia. The students completed the questionnaire at three measurement points over the course of approximately one school year.

Analysing the data of this first study, statistical analyses provided information on the characteristics of student commitment. Furthermore, it was measured whether highly committed students were more likely to engage in their learning, and whether they appeared more confident in taking on new challenges. Subsequently, factors that influence student commitment were identified.

The second study, aiming to shed light on the way and degree by which students should be encouraged to exercise skills of an autonomous learner in the second language classroom, was based on interviews. Students and teachers from two schools participated in an interview. The interview questions tapped into the

particular didactic paradigms suggested by Wolff (2002) and Benson (2010) (as discussed in Chapter 4) that describe an environment of high learner autonomy. The questions were coded according to specific didactic paradigms that have been proposed as part of theoretical learner autonomy models.

The findings of the two studies are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. Addressing the three research questions, Chapter 7 discusses the findings of the quantitative study. The findings from the quantitative approach support the theoretical view that students can develop commitment towards their learning plans because they feel that they *want to* (affective), are *obliged to* (continuance), or *should* (normative) fulfil their learning plan. However, it appears characteristic that students' commitment towards their learning plan can change within a few weeks, making it a fluid rather than a stable construct.

Chapter 7 further explores the influence that student commitment appears to have on student engagement and academic self-efficacy (as targeted in research question 2). Analysing the data of the first study, it is proposed that students who are more confident in taking on new tasks may believe more strongly in the method and goals of the learning plan, and vice versa. Furthermore, these students are also more likely to engage in conducting the tasks of the learning plan.

Finally, in Chapter 7, a number of socio-economic and background factors are discussed that appear to influence students' willingness to work with their learning plan as proposed in research question 3.

Suggesting further that there are other aspects that could explain why some students appear more content and willing to work with their learning plan than others, Chapter 8 sets out to identify aspects that make up particularly the second-language learning environment in which a learning plan is set. Analysing data from the qualitative study, it is argued that students can be involved in shaping this environment for which reason the learning plan can support students in taking responsibility for their learning plan. However, it is proposed that students are limited in their ability to determine their learning plan.

Chapter 9 draws inferences based on the findings regarding the three research questions. It aims to develop an amended theoretical model of a learning plan that promotes a moderate level of learner autonomy in the second language classroom.

2. Theoretical Concepts of Learner Autonomy in the Second Language Classroom

The meaning of *learner autonomy* has been explored within the educational context over the past 50 years, and a plethora of theoretical works have been written. Multiple educational conceptions of the *autonomous learner* or *learner autonomy* from the research fields of philosophy and educational psychology have entered the research literature since its first definition in the 1960s. As historical overviews of the literature on learner autonomy have been provided previously by Phil Benson (1997, 2001, 2010), Oxford (2003) and Schmenk (2008b), this chapter draws upon the existing overviews to map out relevant literature on which the study of this thesis is based. Benson (1997), Oxford (2003), and Schmenk (2008) distinguish between multiple conceptions of autonomy as a philosophical, psychological, political, socio-cultural, and behavioural concept. I will, however, combine these views and discuss the conception of learner autonomy under the roof of philosophical, educational, and political point of views. As part of this discussion, I will further try to establish some issues that have unfolded as part of the various attempts to define learner autonomy and propose a working definition from a dominantly psychological point of view. The aim of this chapter is to develop a model that makes working with *learner autonomy* as a theoretical framework feasible, particularly within the secondary education system.

2.1. Philosophical Views of Learner Autonomy

Discussing the term *learner autonomy*, we can argue that humans are autonomous in the sense that they carry out thinking processes individually, whether consciously or subconsciously (Wolff, 2007). This approach is partially based on core beliefs of the constructivist and cognitivist approaches that contribute to understanding learning processes. Both approaches – cognitive and constructive – agree in the view that the learner is no longer considered a blank sheet which needs to be filled with information – as, for example, proposed according to behaviourism – but that s/he is an active learner who brings individually differing knowledge to every learning situation.

The learner develops in a world of existing experiences where s/he tries to make sense of new information (Scott, 1987) and is therefore attributed the function of being an 'autonomous information processing system' (Wolff, 2007). This means the learner organises and carries out cognitive operations, respectively, learning, autonomously. Cognitivists, however, have been criticised for not emphasising that the learner needs to incorporate this new information into a *"coherent conceptual framework"* (Rüschoff, 1999, p. 82) in her/his mind. Proponents of constructivism, on the other hand, respond to this criticism as they distinguish between three complex strategic operational steps of learning known as knowledge intake, its restructuring, and modification which are referred to as: *understanding, remembering*, and *automating information* (Rumelhart & Norman, 1978). These learning processes are based on information processing strategies which can be referred to in more detail as *inferring, elaborating, developing*, and *testing hypotheses* (Wolff, 2007). The processing of information in order to evaluate and integrate it into existing knowledge is based on partially consciously and subconsciously controlled strategies that are often referred to as bottom-up and top-down processes respectively (Spitzer, 1999). Therefore, learning can also be described as the subconscious application of autonomy to acquire new information and to conduct other activities such as *restructuring*, *re-activating* or *re-interpreting* knowledge.

Following these operations, the learner constructs new knowledge by deciphering new information and integrating it into a cognitive map of prior knowledge (Mandl, 2006). As a consequence, the knowledge that learners actively create is not a mere list of impressions and interpretations of information. The closely connected arrangement of information bundles together as knowledge (e.g. Bartlett, 1932; Mandl, 2006; Rumelhart & Norman, 1978). This arrangement is referred to as a scheme concept, which serves to explain how we save and reactivate knowledge.

Cognitive psychologists understand the scheme concept as cognitive construction processes which result in the production of concepts and schemes. The constructed schemes are *"meaningful and conceptually functional representations of the external world"* (Jonassen, 1991, p. 29). The term *meaningful* describes a component of learning which is not inherent in behaviourism or cognitivism. Information is meaningful to the student if s/he can relate and connect this information with already existing knowledge (Spitzer, 1999). Whether information is meaningful to a learner or not depends on whether s/he can somehow relate or connect this information with

existing knowledge. Some studies indicate that learners, who cannot relate to a particular learning content, struggle in their motivation, which hence has a negative impact on the learning processes related to the topic. As individuals, however, differ in their prior experiences and therefore in their existing knowledge, so do learners vary in which information they identify as meaningful.

Furthermore, learning is always socially mediated and requires a social context (Vygotskii & Kozulin, 1986; Bakhtin, 1986; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Little, 2009; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Hence, knowledge acquisition is dependent on the learner's direct interaction with her/his social environment.

As the way and the environment in which new information is gained and processed differs, learners may decipher information differently and subsequently integrate it into individually differing schemes that make up knowledge. As a result, individuals build mental maps based on these experiences and the observations that they make as a result of their interaction with the environment that surrounds them.

However, according to radical constructivists' views, learning is not just subject to constructing knowledge in real circumstances through interacting with our environment; each individual creates her/his own reality (Glasersfeld, 1991; Maturana & Varela, 1992; Watzlawick, 1995). Nevertheless, perceptions of what is 'real' are not subjective in the sense that every individual 'creates' his/her own world. Based on social interactions with other individuals and the drive to be socially integrated with them, the construction of the world occurs in accordance with coinciding perceptions of other individuals. Hence, things that individuals perceive the same way as others, are described as being 'real'.

Therefore, not just reality but also knowledge is the result of negotiation (Groene, 1997). In this view, it resembles the philosophical school of Platonism originating in Plato's work 'Politeia' over 2000 years ago (Rufener & Szlezák, 2011). Plato's cave analogy, in which people are freed after having been raised in chains in a cave, suggests that we need to look behind things that are presented to us, as they are only representations of the 'real'. It elaborates on the different aspects that people attend to in their attempt to understand and operationalise things that they see and experience. Based on their interaction with other individuals, they may have common views on the way that they understand and perceive certain things. However, focusing on different aspects is the reason why humans may also have varying

interpretations of knowledge which ultimately shape reality. As a result, learning represents processes which not only create new experiences in themselves, but also shape very personal representations of the world that people live in. This further leads to differences in each individual's knowledge.

This autonomous way of processing and interpreting information is to some degree acknowledged in the views of Piaget and the School of Geneva. It coincides with constructivists' views that each individual interprets the world around her/him in the way that s/he experiences it (Wadsworth, 1978).

> […] [T]he child, having the same general types of experiences available as everyone else has, constructs what the world is to him. Based on sensory experience (visual, auditory, motor, kinaesthetic), the child evolves schemata. […] (Wadsworth, 1978, p. 35f.)

Therefore, autonomous learning processes are not based on rote learning of information. The learner's environment provides the stimuli and, hence, the required basis for learning. It is through the experience from social interactions with other people paired with the individual's knowledge that they create personal constructs of individual knowledge (Wolff, 2002).

Furthermore, knowledge is not static but it changes as a necessity to accommodate new information and assimilate it with existing information which may require her/him to modify this interpretation of her/his world. This continuing mediation of the learner with her/his environment hence represents a socio-cultural perspective (Donato & MacCormick, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Oxford, 2003; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) on the term *learner autonomy*.

To summarise, discussing learner autonomy from a pragmatic constructivist point of view (Papert, 1999), it describes the innate ability of learners to conduct cognitive processes. This means that learning is an activity which is highly subjective or autonomous. It is mediated by perceptions of the learner's environment but it cannot be conducted by external entities. In addition, learning represents processes that not only create new experiences in themselves, but also shape a very personal representation of the world that people live in. Furthermore, learning is an on-going process as a result of which existing knowledge is expanded and modified.

This chapter discussed five psychological dimensions which are crucial to understanding learning processes, and which are recognised as being part of learner

autonomy conceptions. Using Schmenk's words (2008b), they can be summarised as follows:

- Learning is construction, and it is monitored by the learner.
- Similar to the ideas of pragmatic constructivism, learner autonomy is based on the core principle that learning is a subjective process which is different for every individual.
- Learning strategies are part of every learning process.
- Learning is particularly successful if conducted in social groups.[3]
- Learning can only be influenced to some degree by a teacher. Learner autonomy takes this constructivist element into account. (Schmenk 2008b, p. 87)

Schmenk's (2008b) summary of aspects that define autonomy from a philosophical and cognitive point of view further includes the notion that learner autonomy can be shaped in the educational context. The next section thus contrasts the view of autonomy as an individual and natural ability to process information with its meaning as a set of skills that can be shaped within the educational context.

2.2. Educational Views of Learner Autonomy

While on a philosophical level the term *learner autonomy* can be used to describe cognitive processes that learning is generally based on, it has been further explored as a concept that nestles within educational systems. The concept of learner autonomy was first established within the adult education context (Holec & Council of Europe, 1979; Schwartz, 1973; Silva, 2008) in the 1960s. Set in a social context dominated by *"political turmoil and 'counter-cultures'"* (Gremmo & Riley, 1995; Holec & Council of Europe, 1981 cited in: Benson, 2007, p. 22), a pedagogical shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred learning marked the pathway of the concept of learner autonomy.

While learner autonomy quickly expanded from a 'mainstream' concept applicable across the curriculum to more specific disciplines such as second language learning, it first transcended from a philosophical to an applied concept within adult learning

[3]This thought, which was derived from Vygotsky, has influenced the concept of learner autonomy.

(Benson, 2007). In the context of second language learning, Benson (2007) reflects on a pedagogical movement that endorsed the setting up of self-access centres in the 1990s. According to Allwright (1988) this was a result of wanting to adapt the concept of learner autonomy in the secondary education system. Nowadays, we find that autonomy concepts that differentiate between 'outside-classroom' and 'inside-classroom' practices are not as clear-cut with digital technology in the form of computers, iPads or smart phone's. It has become increasingly the norm that in-classroom teaching is combined with online components that students are encouraged to make use of outside the classroom. Benson (2007) categorises this movement as a third wave of pedagogical approaches to promote learner autonomy.

However, accompanied by the historical development of divergent pedagogical concepts of learner autonomy over the past 50 years, the definition of learner autonomy has ballooned into an umbrella-term that continues to grow and change in content and objectives (Little, 1991, 2009). Authenticity, social mediation, reflection, self-assessment (Wolff, 2003b) and other concepts aggregate under the roof of learner autonomy in the general education context. The term learner autonomy is derived from Greek, with 'auto' meaning 'self' and 'nomos' translated to 'law'. Today there are at times confusing definitions and even contradictory views on what *learner autonomy* means and what its implications are for the learner as well as the design of a pedagogically adequate classroom (e.g. Benson, 2010; Little, 1991; Oxford, 2003; Schmenk, 2008; Sinclair, 2009). For this reason, various interpretations that are applicable in the broader educational, but also in the second language, context shall be depicted.

- *Learner Autonomy as Behaviour*

One of the fundamental differences that appear in the various definitions of learner autonomy – in regards to second language learning as well as across the curriculum – is reflected in the linguistic interpretation of the term. Lending itself to some extent from the philosophical context, it has been proposed that autonomy unfolds in situations in which learners study on their own. The action to study without any guidance calls upon autonomy as a form of behaviour. This behavioural approach of learner autonomy refers to situations in which the learner is able to acquire new skills without any institutional guidelines. Learners study in an environment that is freer of constraints as opposed to the traditional classroom. This behaviouristic approach

developed in search of more learner-oriented teaching methods in second language teaching (e.g. Holec and Council of Europe, 1979; Pintrich, 1995; Benson and Voller, 1997).

In addition to the debate of learner autonomy as an action, new terms have been developed such as *independence*, *language awareness*, *andragogy*, *self-direction or self-directed learning* which are at times used synonymously with learner autonomy (Boud, 1988; Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Dam, 2006; Dickinson, 1977; Hammond & Collins, 1991; Holec & Council of Europe, 1981; Pintrich, 1995; Schunk, 1994). In particular the terms *self-direction* and *self-directed learning* tend to be used as synonyms for *learner autonomy*. In some work, they are used interchangeably (Dickinson, 1977; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990). This is, however, not unproblematic (Dickinson, 1977; Holec & Council of Europe, 1981; Sinclair, 2000a). Theories about learner autonomy, for example, are congruent in refuting behaviour as the defining characteristic of learner autonomy.

One of the main reasons for argumentation builds upon a linguistic approach according to which behaviour refers to *learning as an action* whilst learner autonomy refers to a *characteristic defining a particular type of learner*. Holec (1979) specifies that, although the learner may have the disposition to conduct 'self-directed learning', s/he may not always under all circumstances use this ability to its fullest.

Furthermore, the degree to which the learner engages in self-directed learning differs (e.g. Holec & Council of Europe, 1979; Thanasoulas, 2000). According to Pintrich and De Groot (1990), some students are more successful in self-regulating their studies than others. While some may get distracted during their reading, for example, others might be more aware of the moments when they lack concentration, and hence may react accordingly. Furthermore, students who lack the confidence in facing new challenges in having to process new information often struggle to regulate their motivation to study or to control their learning outcomes.

Based on these observations, the literature suggests three main characteristics which can be defined in a student who self-regulates her/his learning. Firstly, self-regulated learning is based on the learner's strength to control her/his exercises over her/his behaviour, motivation, affect and cognition (Pintrich, 1995). Secondly, students monitor their learning behaviour according to the goal they pursue. Thirdly,

it is the student her/himself who determines her/his actions and measurements to accomplish their learning goals.

> In short, self-regulated learning involves the active, goal-directed, self-control of behaviour, motivation, and cognition for academic tasks by an individual student, (Pintrich, 1995, p. 5).

Self-direction or *self-regulation* therefore can be considered as active behaviour that underlies particular levels of motivation and cognition. This form of behaviour is exerted by an autonomous learner to various degrees and not necessarily at all times. However, in comparison to *learner autonomy*, *self-directed learning* is the active process of learning whereas learner autonomy is the predisposition to self-direct one's learning (Holec & Council of Europe, 1979). Hence, the particular way of learning as behaviour may be implied in the meaning of *autonomous learning*, which can be considered alongside other concepts such as self-directed learning and self-regulation as supportive aspects to learner autonomy. However, they may cause confusion if used alternatively for learner autonomy.

- *Learner Autonomy as Ability, Attitude, and Knowledge – A Psychological Approach*

This view appears to be in line with Benson's (2010) approach. He argues that learner autonomy is less about attributing more freedom to the learner in the sense of less guidance from teachers and more choices with regard to the choice of materials:

> "[…] [A]utonomous learning is not exactly the same thing as freedom from the influence of teachers, institutions, materials and so on, or learning by oneself," (Benson 2010, p. 80).

In addition to distancing himself from a view that ascribes the autonomous learner no need for guidance, his comment includes a further aspect. In fact, Benson's (2010) reflection of the learner autonomy term points towards institutionalised learning as a dimension that needs to be considered in the concept of learner autonomy. Institutionalised learning represents the common learners' environment. In most societies it builds upon a hierarchical structure founded on regulations, norms and values that apply to all individuals within or on the periphery of this system. Therefore, learner autonomy nestles within what can be called socially constrained education systems (Bauman, 1999). From this perspective, the challenge becomes apparent that young individuals carry out learning processes autonomously but they do that as part of strongly constrained social systems.

Within these constraints, Schwartz (1973) was the first to clarify that the autonomous learner has “la capacité à prendre en charge la responsabilité de ses apprentissages de ses propres affaires […] (the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (Holec & Council of Europe, 1979, p. 3)[4]. Although it remains at the core of what defines learner autonomy across the curriculum, it has been criticised for stating the obvious: that the process of learning does not occur unless the learner is receptive to it (Trebbi, 1995). Hence, learner autonomy as an educational concept needs to go beyond its philosophical meaning of an innate cognitive ability to process information. Holec (1981) therefore specified this psychological view[5] of learner autonomy as “the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning” (p. 3). The notion of taking responsibility for one’s actions is a fundamental addition to a behaviouristic definition, as this implies an awareness and sense of affective relationship with one’s work that is not a necessary component of learning processes. In the Luhman context (1989), it describes the ability of learners to direct and to monitor their own learning in a controlled (Thanasoulas, 2000) rather than uncontrolled environment.

Scholars have gone on to define the psychological dimensions of what it means to be “in charge” or “responsible” for one’s learning (Holec & Council of Europe, 1979, p. 3) in the second language context. Little (1991) specifies that the skills of an autonomous learner lie within *“detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action”* (p. 4). He thereby expands on Holec’s concept by emphasising the pragmatic content that underlies the definition of an autonomous learner. In addition to that, Van Lier (1996) highlights that being responsible for one’s learning also implies awareness of one’s learning processes *“as well as lack of learning, so long as adequate opportunities are available in the setting”* (Van Lier, 1996, p. 13).

Leni Dam (1990) added to defining the particular set of skills of an autonomous learner by assigning the learner the ability to set, pursue and monitor learning goals, and choose aims, materials, appropriate learning methods and tasks. On a similar note, Benson generalises these skills by formulating that autonomous students show

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[4] In the literature, Schwartz’ definition has often been cited as an original quote by Holec (1979). However, the definition as cited here was generated by Schwartz (1973) and it was referred to by Holec six years later.

[5] Schmenk (2008) classified aspects that describe the mindset of an autonomous learner as psychological autonomy views.

"control over language learning and teaching processes […] under three main headings – learning management, cognitive processing and the content of learning" (Benson, 2010, p. 24).

In comparison, Macaro (1997) puts a different focus on determining what autonomy in second language learning refers to. He argues that learners can be autonomous with regard to language competence, language learning and the choice and action of materials and exercises relevant to second language learning (Macaro, 1997, pp. 170–172). His model is similar to Littlewood (1997) in that it refers to autonomy in language acquisition, the approach that learners take towards their learning and the personal gradual development.

However, Littlewood (1997) reaches beyond the language learning context and his defined autonomy dimensions stand in vertical relation to each other. The dimension of language acquisition refers to degrees of autonomy that students can achieve with regard to the *"ability to operate independently with the language and use it to communicate personal meanings in real, unpredictable situations"* (Littlewood, 1996, p. 430). In addition, he adds a dimension of personal development or autonomy, as in a broader context, learners gradually develop the *"ability to create [and expand] personal learning contexts"* which reach outside the language classroom (Littlewood, 1996, p. 431).

All models represented here acknowledge that learner autonomy is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to various aspects of information assimilation and processing. Furthermore, these models include levels by which learners may differ from one another in their autonomous skills.

While most models of learner autonomy reflect mainly its cognitive components, Ushioda (1996, cited in: Little, 2009) suggests an additional perspective. She points to the *"affective dimension of [the student's] learning experience"* (Ushioda, 1996, p. 223) according to which a learner is able to use autonomy to one's motivational advantage. This is in accordance with Dickinson's view (1977) who defines learner autonomy as an attitude towards learning.

While the discussed interpretations of the term learner autonomy describe its psychological, cognitive, and attitudinal characteristics, most definitions imply to some extent that they are potential characteristics of an autonomous learner. However, they require some *"[...] 'metacognitive knowledge', or the knowledge about*

learning" (Sinclair, 2000a, p. 185) that learners need to acquire within these constraints of educational systems conceptions.

In order to clarify this point, a student, for example, who tries to memorise new vocabulary but who struggles with this exercise may blame her/his teacher for the type or amount of vocabulary that s/he is required to learn. The learner may not be aware of more efficient mnemonic strategies to use, and therefore blame third parties for her/his frustration rather than reflecting on her/his learning processes, and taking according actions.

- *Learner Autonomy as a Set of Skills*

This view emphasises that an autonomous learner is aware of the learning processes that s/he conducts. However, while it has been voiced that autonomy is an inherent capacity to actively control one's learning (Benson & Voller, 1997), it does not mean that learner autonomy is an inherent skill which some people have and others don't. According to (Nunan, 1997), for example, autonomy is therefore rather a skill that is possessed and executed to some degree. In other words, every learner is capable of developing skills of an autonomous learner, but not everyone succeeds in developing and applying autonomy accordingly. Hence, the learner needs to practice this awareness and acquire associated information processing strategies in a *"systematic, deliberate [or natural] way"* (Holec & Council of Europe, 1979, p. 3).

This widely perpetuated view is also acknowledged by Benson and Voller (2007). They further refer to autonomy in the sense of a set of skills that "[...] *can be learned and applied in self-directed learning"* (p. 2). This means that the learner may obtain *"the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning"* (Benson & Voller, 1997, p. 2). As a prerequisite, a certain *"degree of freedom in learning is required if learners are to develop their autonomy"* (Benson, 2007, p. 22). Benson, however, does not determine exactly what is enough freedom to develop the skills of an autonomous learner in institutional education systems. He underpins, however, that it does not mean independence of the learner but agency on behalf of the learner. This is, that a programme is not being brought upon a student on which s/he has no influence; but that the student actively conducts learning processes (Boud, 1988; Candy, 1991; Knowles, 1975).

Regarding the acquisition of learner autonomy, Nunan's model (1997) provides even more detailed information. He describes five levels of autonomy, namely: *awareness, involvement, interaction, creation* and *transcendence* (Nunan, 1997, p. 195). His model is based on the belief that autonomy can be achieved in the form of sequential learning stages. The level of *awareness* could be defined as the first phase during which learners familiarise themselves with the *"pedagogical goals and content of the materials"*, and identify strategies required to tackle these tasks (Nunan, 1997, p. 195). Furthermore, students are encouraged at this level to learn about different learning styles and to identify the one's that best suit them. At the highest autonomy level, *transcendence*, students are able to apply knowledge that they gain in the classroom in the "world beyond" (p. 195). They therefore become teachers themselves and researchers (p. 195).

However, most scholars acknowledge that in the context of viewing learner autonomy as a set of skills that can be acquired, "[it] is likely to be hard-won and its permanence cannot be guaranteed; and the learner who displays a high degree of autonomy in one area may be non-autonomous in another" (Little, 1991, p. 4).

- *A Working Definition of Learner Autonomy: Combining Philosophical and Educational Views as a Psychological Conception*

Summarising autonomy definitions in the educational context, two main theoretical approaches have to be distinguished that apply in the second language context, but not exclusively. On the one hand, learner autonomy has been interpreted as a behaviouristic concept that implies that the learner self-directs her/his learning in an uncontrolled environment. In this perspective, *learner autonomy* is used simultaneously to *autonomous learning*. From a linguistic point of view, such an approach has, however, been identified as problematic because, in comparison to learner autonomy, the gerund *autonomous learning* refers to behaviour in the form of learner directed actions which imply high levels of self-regulation and self-determination (e.g. Benson, 2010). In contrast to that, learner autonomy refers to a particular set of characteristics of a learner.

Furthermore, the behaviouristic approach appears to put little emphasis on the fact that learning in most societies is conducted within a constraint system which is regulated by norms, values, and rules that are accepted by the majority of each society. While schools as micro-systems (Luhmann, 1989) could potentially be

regarded as sitting outside these systems, institutions, however, not only carry the responsibility to foster academic knowledge acquisition; it is also an enclosed environment in which young learners are also familiarised with the existing regulations that need to be adhered to in order to become responsible and informed citizens of society. Therefore, learner autonomy should be viewed within the constraints of educational systems.

In these constraint contexts, the working definition of learner autonomy pertains to a psychological concept, viewing *learner autonomy* as *a set of characteristics* that define a particular learner. An autonomous learner requires *'knowledge about language learning'* (Sinclair, 2009) in order to take charge of her/his learning. While the learner is capable of processing learning autonomously, this meta-cognitive knowledge about learning and the responsibility for one's decisions concerning learning are, however, not innate to the learner. They firstly require triggering the conscious awareness for the *"cognitive and metacognitive strategies [...] motivation, attitudes"* (Thanasoulas, 2000) that enable learning processes. Learners may differ in their level of awareness (Nunan, 1997), and it is therefore something that needs to be monitored by teachers.

Furthermore, while learning is an autonomous process in itself, there are more and less suitable ways and stages of processing second language input that are not necessarily innate in the learner. Learners require specific cognitive strategies as they learn a second language.[6] In addition to the cognitive strategies, students also need to know that motivation and personal attitudes to learning further influence all learning outcomes. However, firstly this knowledge needs to be acquired and, secondly, it needs to be practised because it is a set of skills that define an autonomous learner. This set of skills ultimately allows the learner to consciously monitor and conduct her/his learning processes.

Hence, considering only the versions and perspectives on learner autonomy from theoretical points is not sufficient. In accordance with Schmenk (2008b), it is also proposed that the practical implications of the concept of learner autonomy, in particular in the second language classroom, need to be considered. This means that

[6] These strategies will be further explored in the following chapters of this thesis.

the set of skills that appears to underlie the concept of learner autonomy needs to be actively trained.

However, acknowledging that learner autonomy needs to be practised, it is important to recognise that, in educational systems that are part of hierarchical social systems, the proposed theoretical concepts of learner autonomy need to result in political recommendations in the form of educational policies and training programmes. Hence, the political bodies play an important role in identifying which theories, and to what extent, they are being put into practice and it is often also examples from the praxis based on which theoretical concepts are generated or modified. However, just as the outcomes of information processes differ between each individual, the interpretation of any theoretical conception is interpreted differently by any entity who reads it. In that respect, it seems quite plausible that like individuals also political bodies create their own reality (Habermas, 1996). The political or scientific bodies create their reality of theoretical concepts of learner autonomy and pass them onto educational institutions.

In educational institutions they are further open to the interpretation of each staff member. Herein lies the challenge of setting the boundaries around the rather abstract concept of learner autonomy. From a constructivist point of view, every individual creates her/his own reality of the theoretical conceptions of learner autonomy, and it is hence a subjective definition. However, as was also suggested in this chapter, perceptions are only then considered reality if the views of a considerable number of people coincide. Accumulating some of these views, this thesis proposes the following working definition of learner autonomy from a psychological point of view: *It is the knowledge about learning, the level of responsibility, and the ways and strategies in which a learner is capable of directing one's learning. Learner autonomy is neither static nor is it applied to the same degree at all times. It is suggested that learner autonomy is a fluid mindset and set of skills, which similar to language acquisition, can be acquired, expanded, modified but also lost to various degrees.*[7]

However, learner autonomy, and hence ways to enhance it, needs to be further discussed as a political concept that each educational institution interprets in its own

[7] Working definitions formulated by the author are written in italics.

way. Focussing on the Australian context and second-language learning in particular, the following section thus integrates the psychological working definition oflearner autonomy within an educational model that is politically defined (Figure 1).

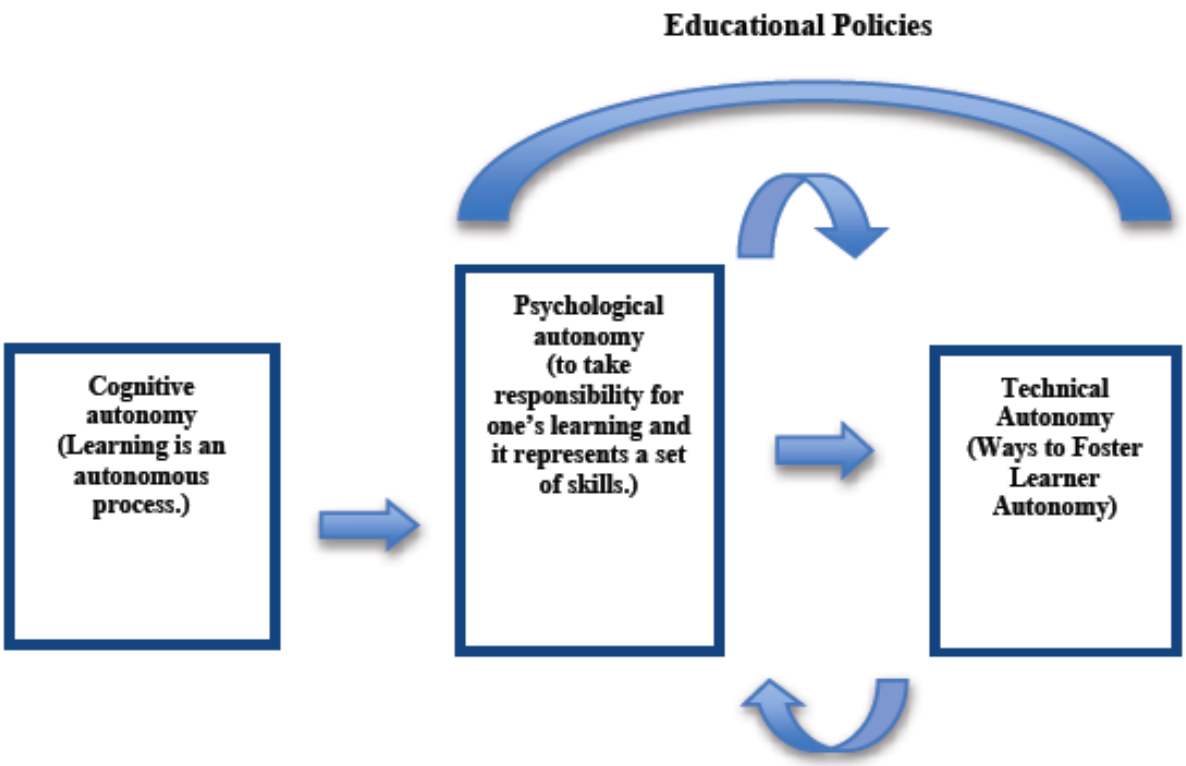

Figure 1: Development of Learner Autonomy under Educational Policies

2.3. Political Conceptions of Learner Autonomy in the Australian Second Language Context

The previous section discussed dominant views and concepts of learner autonomy that spun from Europe across the globe over the past four decades. As a result, a working definition of learner autonomy in the second language context was developed according to a set of characteristics that includes cognitive and metacognitive knowledge about language learning and which enables the learner to take charge of her/his learning. It is, however, evident from the debate on the semantic and pragmatic understanding of learner autonomy in general, and with regard to second language acquisition in particular, that it is further important to

explore the extent by which existing learning programs under political measures encompass these theoretical views.

Looking at learner autonomy from an educational point of view, it is apparent that many Australian schools address learner autonomy as part of their curriculum based on pedagogical and political standards. The majority of Australian secondary schools claim to foster learner autonomy as part of their implemented curriculum (Schuster, 2012). In this regard, all Australian schools provide at least one educational policy that highlights the objective to encourage students *"[…] to take responsibility for their own learning and behaviour […]"* (New South Wales Department of School Education, 1996, p. 5). A list of Australian educational policies which all use Holec's (1981) definition as a descriptor of the 'ideal' and in fact 'autonomous' learner can be found in Appendix A.

That the autonomous learner is able to take responsibility for her/his learning is further proposed as a fundamental aspect of the *National Curriculum*. The two key documents used as precursors in the development of the National Curriculum, named the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008* and *Shape of the Australian Curriculum 2011,* express their support for the development of *"successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens"* (MCEETYA, 2008). Hence, similar to the Australian educational policies and programmes (Appendix A), at the stage when the learner leaves school s/he should exhibit qualities of a 'responsible human' who is equipped with skills of life-long learning. However, the statement above provides a vague profile of the 'ideal' young adult whose development is dependent on a suitable learning environment created by schools.

The *Curriculum Design Paper*, which was published in late 2009 as a guideline towards writing the first two phases of the National Curriculum, provided more detailed information on the capabilities that successful learners need to develop as part of their school education. The relevant key capability is referred to as self-management:

> **Self-management** enables a student to take responsibility for his or her own work and learning. It includes managing one's learning; monitoring, reflecting on and evaluating one's learning; identifying personal characteristics which contribute to or limit effectiveness; planning and undertaking work independently; taking responsibility for one's behaviour and

performance; and learning from successes and failures. (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2009a, p. 14)

These are significant elements of theoretical concepts of learner autonomy that combine cognitive and psychological dimensions, and behavioural aspects of learner autonomy that were discussed in the previous chapter. However, they are represented under the term self-management rather than *learner autonomy* or *autonomous learner*. In addition to that, the aspects covered in the Curriculum Design Paper (ACARA, 2009) restrict the degree of autonomy that students are to gain. Learners shall be encouraged to use personal management skills in the way they deal with their school work and thus the educational content. The definition does not, however, make any reference to propositions of learner autonomy made from a behaviouristic view, meaning that the curriculum does not necessarily promote learning on one's own. This confirms earlier claims by the author that learner autonomy needs to be defined within educational systems that foster learning with the guidance of a teacher. Hence, a future National Curriculum, that is still to be finalised, appears to promote life-long learning with regard to the ways and level of effectiveness that students are expected to manage provided learning contents.

Subsequent to a first phase of designing the National Curriculum in *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English, Mathematics, Science and History* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2009b), aspects of learner autonomy were further carved out in the second language context as part of a second phase of the curriculum development within the document *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* (ACARA, 2011). However, while the characteristics of self-management or learner autonomy are repeated in this document, it primarily focuses on the benefits of second language learning for the individual student and for Australian society in terms of communicative and intercultural capabilities. According to the document, second language learning further promotes *"[…] the ability to negotiate the linguistic and cultural diversity of a globalised world"* (Moellering, forthcoming, p. 16). Furthermore, the paper identifies objectives of second language education while taking into consideration the heterogeneous background of learners that pedagogic concepts for second language education need to consider.

Hence, it appears that greater importance will be given to second language learning in the future as policies are well underway that lift the reputation of second languages

from a level of bonus in the educational profile to a subject that should be a standard component of a holistic education of young Australians. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged that learners differ in their requirements due to their differing pre-existing knowledge of their target knowledge (Spitzer, 1999) and the ways that they approach language learning (Benson & Nunan, 2005; Chamot, 1999; Macaro, 2001; Mandl, 2006). The Shape Paper differentiates between learner groups that have no prior knowledge of the second language, background learners who have had some contact with the language due to their heritage, and native speaker groups who are often fluent in the language and use classes to keep or further their second language skills (ACARA 2011, 21f, compare, Moellering, forthcoming). This distinction is not only important to make in terms of the differences in students' language proficiency, it may also be relevant in future discussions of how to foster learner autonomy. Students with greater language proficiency may be able to make greater decisions regarding their learning and apply cognitive strategies more efficiently than less proficient students. Therefore, the ways and levels of fostering autonomy in the second language classroom might vary.

Furthermore – similar to the policies and programmes provided in Table 1 – earlier papers like the MCEETYA (2008) and the *Shape* Paper (2011) as a precursor of the *National Curriculum* also explicitly promote the autonomous learner. Students are encouraged to "*take responsibility for their learning*" (Holec, 1981, p. 3 cited in: ACARA, Curriculum Design Paper 2009, p. 4) and to possess *metacognitive knowledge about learning* (Sinclair 2000 cited in: ACARA, Curriculum Design Paper 2009, p. 14) by being able to *"monitor[…], reflect on, and evaluate […] one's learning"* (ACARA 2009, p. 14).

However, although the paper contains important objectives that define an autonomous learner in the second language context, it depends on the individual management staff of each school to interpret if and to what degree the awareness for student responsibility and the skills of monitoring, reflecting and evaluating are fostered within learning programmes. Hence, many Australian schools follow their very personal definition of learner autonomy according to a study conducted in 2011 (Schuster, 2012). In that respect, not much has changed compared to the 1970s when Altman (1972) already pointed out: *"The phrase 'individualized second language instruction', means different things for different people"* (p. 7).

This situation may to some degree be the result of an educational policy that supports the autonomous learner as part of a cross-curricular attempt. There appears to be no specific differentiation yet between individual subjects and potentially different conditions that each subject may underlie. Against this background, second language learning rather appears to provide one of many platforms within which the learner can develop autonomous skills and be encouraged to use already acquired autonomous learning skills. However, Australian educational policies appear to lack systematic concepts that target pathways to further autonomy skills in the second language classroom.

At the same time it cannot be postulated that there is no academic culture that supports the autonomous learner within the second language classroom. There are well-documented efforts that explore the capacity of the second language curriculum to contribute to a holistic school concept that supports the autonomous learner in accordance with existing policies on nurturing the 'ideal' young adult for a healthy society. This is so far relatively unproblematic, as approaches of 'learner centred', 'student centred', 'personalised', and 'humanised' teaching appear as the most frequent modifiers of instruction (Altman & Pergamon Institute of English, 1980, p. 1) in second language autonomy concepts as well as in general concepts targeting the whole curriculum. However, due to the reason that there is a lot of room for Australian schools to interpret educational policies, it appears more realistic to explore existing learning programmes within the framework of individual school curricula.

It shall be underlined that this does not mean that definitions of what it means to be an autonomous second language learner are not useful or incorrect. However, considering the circumstance that a second language specific definition of autonomy has not found a clear entrance in current Australian educational policies, it cannot be proposed that schools create second language curricula that take into consideration a national perspective on the contents and ways to foster autonomy skills. I suggest that related learning programmes must be considered as individual attempts of each school to provide their students with the skills that they proclaim to be relevant. Furthermore, at the time of conducting a study that is presented in this thesis, the

Shape Paper for languages had not yet been available to the public[8]. This information and its importance within the curriculum were not available to the schools at the time. Hence, it is proposed that the learning programmes that were investigated as part of this research to support learner autonomy are not considered to be language specific.

However, while second language specific definitions of learner autonomy still require stronger prominence in Australian policies, in the following chapter I will discuss educational programmes within the second language learning classroom that promote learner autonomy as a psychological concept. It is proposed that the heterogeneous co-existence of learners in second language learning can have a positive impact on the development of *responsibility for one's learning* and one's capability to *conduct, monitor, reflect on*, and *evaluate one's learning*.

[8] The *Shape Paper of the Australian Curriculum: Languages* became available in November 2011. The research for this thesis was conducted earlier, between February and December 2011. The learning plans investigated as part of this research had thus been implemented prior to the release of the Shape Paper of Languages.

3. Instruments Fostering Learner Autonomy

As the previous chapter outlined, Australian educational policies concerning second language acquisition include the characteristics of an autonomous learner as important objectives in student education. Also, other countries like Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia, for example, show similar beliefs when it comes to fostering learner autonomy. However, their policies draw only few references from the practical and didactic conclusions of scholars. They provide little guidance to school management how learner autonomy can actively be fostered in the second language classroom. Therefore, learner autonomy has remained a *"minority achievement"* (Little, 2009, p. 151).

However, while educational policies provide little information on how learner autonomy can be realised in the second language classroom, it appears that many schools recognize that autonomy represents a psychological disposition to take responsibility, and it is a set of skills that needs to be acquired. Therefore, schools have introduced a range of instruments that can aid in obtaining the psychological mindset of an autonomous learner (Schuster, 2012). There are numerous works from scholars that discuss the use of various instruments supporting learner autonomy across the curriculum (Bos et al., 2010). These works are mainly based on scholarly observations and individual trials in the classroom (Hui, 2010; Lacey, 2007; Murray, 1999; Nadzrah, 2007).

This chapter will discuss the objectives and limitations of some of the most common instruments that support students in taking responsibility for their learning. They are *portfolios* (Wolff, 2002; David Little, 2002, 2009), *diaries* (Thanasoulas, 2000), and *computers*, used as a medium for mediated language learning (Levy, 1997; Nadzrah, 2007).

The *learning plan* or *learning contract* is another instrument that can be used to foster learner autonomy. In comparison to portfolios, diaries and computer programs, it has the potential to combine all of these instruments as part of its framework. Hence, it is a very complex instrument or *learning system.* Therefore, following a discussion of portfolios, diaries, and computers, the learning plan will be at the centre of discussion in the subsequent chapters.

3.1. Portfolios

One of these products is the portfolio which dominantly finds application in the language classroom, but also across the curriculum. Portfolios have been used since the 1980s (Godinho & Wilson, 2005) and hence have a tradition as an innovative instrument to foster the student's engagement in learning. In an attempt to define portfolios, different definitions have been established, of which a few are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Definitions of Portfolios

(Paulson & Paulson, 1991)	*A purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection* (p. 60).
(Dietz, 1993)	*An envelope of the mind, a collection of essential artefacts, and evidence that represents growth, continuous learning, and the current level of performance and interest of the learner. It is meant to be dynamic and changing as the learner experiences discoveries that lead to new directions and activities* (p. 8).
(Retallick & Groundwater-Smith, 1996)	*A compilation of evidence which demonstrates the acquisition, development and exercise of knowledge and skills in relation to your work practice*. (p. 13)
(Wolf, 2000)	*A structured collection of teacher and student work created across diverse contexts of time, framed by reflection and enriched through collaboration that has its ultimate aim the advancement of teacher and student learning* (p. 13).

In general, portfolios pool several works (an average of five to seven pieces) that have been put together over a period of time as evidence for the students' achievement of their learning goals. The traditional portfolio is usually a folder of

collected works. Some schools have, however, turned towards the use of digital portfolios. Storing works electronically on a USB-stick, CD-Rom or on a specifically created homepage provides a better overview of the individual digital folders to search for particular works or information. This overview simplifies updating processes of the e-portfolio and its complete or partial distribution online or on a disk (Keefe & Jenkins, 2008).

While the traditional portfolio mainly stores text – and visual components, the e-portfolio can furthermore include audio and audio-visual formatted material (Kahtani, 1999). However, in principle, the digital as well as the traditional portfolio can be used to store artefacts such as videos, checklists, journals, interviews, artwork, photos, musical or other voice recordings.

- *Portfolios as an Assessment Tool*

There appears to be overall consensus that *"[...] [p]roblem solving, reasoning, effective written communication, and research skills [...]"* (Keefe & Jenkins, 2008, p. 148) are some of the prominent benefits that the continuous engagement in the portfolio work can exhibit. However, views are more controversial when discussing its usability as an assessment tool (Walther-Thomas & Brownell, 2001). As this proposition has sparked an on-going debate about the benefits and limitations of portfolios as an assessment tool, core arguments of this debate shall be briefly outlined before exploring their use in the context of learner autonomy.

Some researchers emphasise that, in their structure, portfolios follow the national curriculum and set learning objectives. These learning objectives are assessed against several pieces of work created over time. This means that, in opposition to standard tests which usually only assess student performance at one particular point of time, collecting several samples of work regarding a particular topic or skill can be used to draw a more authentic picture of the learner's performance as well as the process of the project assessed (Godinho & Wilson, 2005). The process of creating a set of works not only reflects on the expansion of knowledge or the improvement of particular learning skills, it also documents levels of student engagement in their learning. This provides a more integrated and valid way to gain information about students' achievements (Wolf 1989). In this way, students' portfolios are *"a biography of a work"* (Wolff, 1989, p. 37) which *"allow[s] for a more holistic, inclusive*

assessment of student development to emerge and is only limited by imagination" (Godinho & Wilson, 2005).

However, one of the downsides of assessing traditional or digital portfolios is the intensive labour that it requires. Creating benchmarks, attending teacher training sessions, coordinating tasks with fellow colleagues, consulting individually with students about their work and progress, giving individual feedback and assessing numerous pieces of work including drafts (in writing, for example) are strong arguments for many critics to neglect the work with portfolios (e.g. Brown & Hudson, 1998; Gómez, 2000). Song and August (2002), however, reported that the labour intensive input at the beginning of the work with portfolios eventually leads to more automated handling, with experienced teachers being able to assess a portfolio within 12-15 minutes (Song & August, 2002, p. 56). It cannot be denied, though, that portfolios require a greater logistic effort compared to standard assessments.

Besides time as a challenging factor, assessment benchmarks and criteria are another aspect that has been the basis for much criticism. While the assessment of the quality of portfolios is based on *"knowledge, facts, concepts, and procedures […]"*, some students tend to not know what quality work is (Keefe & Jenkins 2008, p. 148). This can have an impact only on the work quality itself but also on the assessment reliability.

In fact, assessment criteria appear to be the greatest challenge which hinders a broader application of portfolios in the education context, whether at secondary or tertiary institutions. Opponents claim that they do not live up to the statistical measures of objectivity, reliability and validity (Song & August 2002) as the portfolio does not easily translate into a numeric representation which sits most comfortably with the traditional school system (Gómez, 2000). Therefore, specific evaluation criteria to assess the quality of a portfolio is necessary in order to avoid it being analysed in a too subjective way (Hutchings, 1990). Without being standardised, some researchers (Black & William, 1998; Song & August, 2002; William, 1998) even fear that the assessment of portfolios might contradict its original objective as *a "more objective, more fair, and more realistic"* (Williams, 2000, p. 147) instrument. The standardisation of portfolios hence seems to be crucial also in terms of comparability with other schools (Gómez, 2000; Luoma & Tarnanen, 2003; Novak, Herman, & Gearhart, 2006).

Therefore, the exact contents and expectations are to be determined prior to the introduction of portfolios (e.g. Gómez, 2000; O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996; Ryan & Miyasaka, 1995; Wolf, 2000). In this context, certain 'scoring criteria' such *as "scoring guides, rubrics, check lists, or rating scales"* (Gómez, 2000, p. 1) can help students to make procedures and criteria on which the assessment is based, more transparent for the student. If suitable criteria are in place, portfolios can be very reliable, shown by findings of a study by Song and August (2002), who compared results from a portfolio and non-portfolio class. Furthermore, the distribution of the marks in essays collected in portfolio compared to non-portfolio classes was nearly equal, contradicting the argument that the interpretation of portfolios was too vague. Hence, the argument that portfolios cannot live up to the reliability criteria is not clear cut. However, it requires the profound setting of evaluation criteria that is transparent for the teacher and the learner.

- *Portfolios as a Tool to Foster Autonomy*

It has been proposed that students can even be involved in the process of setting criteria and benchmarks that define the quality of a piece of work (Gómez, 2000). By involving students in the assessment process, students not only learn a lot about the expectations that they should and can meet in creating their works, it encourages students to reflect on and formulate achievable learning goals. In this process, students use a high degree of autonomy as they engage in reflective processes about their learning as a preliminary step towards their learning.

While involving students in discussing and formulating assessment criteria is a rather advanced way of using portfolios to foster learner autonomy, students can be further encouraged to reflect on their learning regarding their choice of works. Usually, a lot of student notes, papers, essays, recordings etc. are discarded shortly after they are created. Through creating portfolios, students are, however, required to not only collect all their work but to go through them again and to decide which samples of their work best document their learning progress. This conscious decision is based on reflection processes about the type of works that they produced and the changes that they notice between the different works regarding their language skills such as writing, speaking, listening and their overall knowledge of a topic. As part of this reflection, students may further note differences between different types of strategies that they used in order to complete, for example, various drafts of one piece of work

or different types of works. Hence, students take on responsibility for choosing a set of work and for explaining their content, quality and potentially the strategies they used to come to the finalised products or results.

Students' responsibility can further expand from the choice of the artefacts to be assessed to the type of artefacts or activities that students engage in as they develop their portfolios. Digital portfolios especially may facilitate this level of autonomy. Often, digital portfolios come as a computer program which schools can use to choose between different goals, curricular disciplines and the skills which ought to be developed. This may make it to some degree easier to use for students and teachers than traditional portfolios. As these programs are designed in a way that students can, for example, choose a particular skill in language learning that they want to practise, the program will recommend a number of activities that the student could do, in order to improve this particular skill, for example, in regard to reading, writing, speaking or listening. This requires students to think about the type of skill or topic that they want to work on and create their own digital portfolios based on the recommendation that the computer program gives them. Niguidula (1998) therefore claims that the portfolio fosters the autonomous learner as it supports a successful student-learner oriented school culture in which the learner monitors and records her/his own learning progress.

Despite the positive outlook digital portfolios may inspire, there are several drawbacks in comparison to traditional portfolios which may hamper the use of digital portfolios to foster autonomy skills such as being able to monitor and improve learning by choosing a particular set of activities. The application of digital portfolios requires strong computer literacy (Kahtani, 1999) which especially primary school and lower secondary students cannot assume to have. However, although 79% of the children aged 5 – 14 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009) indicated that they had a computer and internet access at home, and 69% of the schools provide internet access for students, this does not necessarily reflect their ICT literacy. As the *National Assessment Program – ICT Literacy years 6 & 10* discovered, 49% of year 6 students attained the determined proficient standard. On a scale of one to six, the ICT literacy expectation for year 6 students was to achieve level 2.5. Hence, they should have the ability to:

> generate simple general search questions and select the best information source to meet a specific purpose, retrieve information from given electronic sources to answer specific,

> concrete questions, assemble information in a provided simple linear order to create information products, use conventionally recognised software commands to edit and reformat information product. (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2005, p. xv).

In contrast to that, 51%, however, did not reach the set proficiency standard reaching level 2 and below. In comparison with year 10 students, there were expected differences in the proficiency levels. However, similar to year 6 students, 61% achieved or exceeded the proficiency level, showing their ability to:

> generate well targeted searches for electronic information sources and select relevant information from within sources to meet a specific purpose, create information products with simple linear structures and use software commands to edit and reformat information products in ways that demonstrate some consideration of audience and communicative purpose. (MCEETYA, 2005, p. xv)

39% of the year 10 students, however, did not attain the expected standard.

The results indicate that despite the frequent use of the internet to search for information or to communicate with peers, students in year 6 and 10 do not engage as much in the use of applications which *"[...] involve[…] creating, analysing or transforming information"* (MCEETYA 2005, p. xiv). Hence, there is a risk that digital portfolios can fail in their use to encourage students', to choose, conduct, and reflect on the activities that they do online, as they require stronger ICT skills in order to exploit them to their full potential.

Despite the potential challenges that need to be considered when using digital portfolios, in general this instrument can be beneficial in raising students' awareness for their learning and promoting their cognitive and meta-cognitive skills of learning.

- *European Language Portfolio as a Specific Example for the Second Language Classroom*

Recent movements indicate that political institutions are attending to the research findings that discuss the benefits of portfolios, with the introduction of a language portfolio on an international scale. The European Language Portfolio (ELP) has been established by David Little (2002) for the Council of Europe. Its concept highlights two significant innovations in the education system. Firstly, it aims to make language learning more transparent for the learner which hence puts the learner into the centre of attention instead of setting learning and teaching contents as in the past.

Secondly, it symbolises a supportive view of learner autonomy. Hence, the ELP constitutes an instrumental example to support the development of autonomous learners, and it fosters the teacher's professional skills required in an autonomous learning environment.

The ELP consists of three components: a language passport, a language biography and a dossier. The passport is a document designed for adolescents and adults in the form of a standard passport. Teachers may use it if they want to audit the languages and cultural background her/his students possess as well as to inform the teacher about the communicative skills her/his learners can already master. Having completed the passport, teachers are directed to the biography.

The biography consists of two parts. The first part provides an overview of the language learning history as well as biographical facts of the student and his/her current proficiency status in the target language. In the second part, it further accompanies the current learning processes of the target language and the learner's engagement with other cultures related to the target language (Little, 2009). The biography has three main purposes. With the biography at hand, the learner is to be enabled to set her/his own goals and to assess the continuing progress. In this, it *"[...] encourages reflection, sometimes schematic and sometimes narrative, on learning styles, strategies and intercultural experience"* (Little 2009, p. 155).

The dossier serves to provide an overview of the learner's target language proficiency and intercultural experience. It is also used to collect works as a proof of on-going progress (Little, 2009). In addition to that, Little (2009) suggests keeping a journal or logbook as it encourages the learner to focus on form and to remember and memorise learning processes and learning contents. Furthermore, it triggers the transfer of information communicated verbally into a written format.

The portfolio is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001; Little, 2006). Its contents adapt to the different communicative proficiency stages of second language acquisition in three bands: A1, A2 – basic user; B1, B2 – interdependent user; C1, C2 – proficient user (Little, 2009). The portfolio takes into consideration the five capabilities of listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing. The capability which is often just referred to as "speaking" points to the emphasis of a more comprehensive approach to second language learning; one that distinguishes between the receptive and

productive oral capabilities. *Spoken interaction* moreover comprises the view that language learning is not the mere production of utterances in the target language but cooperative communication which combines linguistic qualities with an intercultural understanding of the speakers of the target language.

In addition to that, the ELP targets a motivational aspect crucial for learning. Asking the learner about their current proficiency in the target language ('can do' statements), not only facilitates the identification of learning goals and a comparison between earlier and later second language proficiency. Having to identify what the learner already knows, and hence can do, supports her/his and the teachers' positive awareness of the learner's capabilities, boosting her/his self-esteem and general confidence in her/himself, forming the grounds for developing intrinsic motivation (the personal drive to achieve a specific goal). In order to support the learner in her/his identification of learning goals and the assessment of their continuous learning behaviour and outcomes, the ELP provides a checklist with specific descriptors summarised in a self-assessment grid. Against these descriptors the learner can contrast her/his learning achievements. As the example in Table 2 shows, the descriptors constitute a practical device in assessing the learner's current second language proficiency (Council of Europe, 2001; Council of Europe, 2009).

Table 2: Example Describing Global Reference Compared to Listening Descriptors of Level A2

Listening A2 – Common European Framework of Reference Levels	**Checklist**
Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.	• *I can understand what is said clearly, slowly and directly to me in simple everyday conversation; it is possible to make me understand if the speaker can take the trouble.* • *I can generally identify the topic of discussion around me when people speak slowly and clearly.* • *I can understand phrases, words and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment).* • *I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.* • *I can understand the essential information in short recorded passages dealing with predictable everyday matters which are spoken slowly and clearly.* • *I can identify the main point of TV news items reporting events, accidents etc. when the visual supports the commentary.*

The Council of Europe has published Principles and Guidelines (Council for Cultural Cooperation, 2000; Council of Europe, 2000). In this guide they define the Function of the ELP. Further, the Council of Europe established a Validation Committee which checks and accredits ELP models Europe wide.

- *Summary*

To sum up the arguments raised regarding the benefits and limitations of the use of traditional and digital portfolios, they can on the one hand be considered an alternative assessment tool to standardised tests which measure student performance, learning and attitudinal behaviour over a longer period of time. However, in order to be recognised as a valid instrument, teachers, administrators, and parents need to define a specific criteria catalogue (Gómez, 2000) which defines the quality of a portfolio.

Reaching beyond its one-dimensional function as an assessment tool, portfolios can also provide a framework within which students gain insight into what and how they learn. Hence, learners can acquire metacognitive knowledge about learning that underpins the autonomous learner. In other words, portfolios encourage the learner to think about their learning. Students can reflect on the choice of a number of works that are put together in one portfolio. They may further learn to compare their works and to self-asses which skills they improved and how their learning strategies or their motivation to learning changed between different works. Digital portfolios in particular can help students to learn to make informed choices concerning the type of activities that can help students to improve certain skills. At an advanced level of autonomy, students might even be involved in the discussion of benchmarks against which their portfolios are later assessed.

Therefore, portfolios can foster the development of skills to conduct, monitor, to reflect on, and through these actions, to take responsibility for their learning. These benefits have also been recognised by political bodies like the Council of Europe which tried to advance existing portfolios into one which specifically targets the development of the autonomous learner in the second language context. As a result, the European Language Portfolio was developed (Little, 2002). It provides a specific example of a portfolio which has found strong recognition in the autonomy context.

Furthermore, in their functioning, the European Language Portfolio and other types of portfolios can be used as learning, assessment, and reflection tools as part of learning plans which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.2. Diaries

It has been disclosed that a predictor of academic success is the *"[...] degree to which [students] are able to assume responsibility for their own learning [...]"* (Carter, 2006, p. 116) and can consequently transform this responsibility into conducting their learning consciously (Wolf, 2000). In the process of supporting students to become autonomous learners, hence, enabling them to conduct and monitor their learning processes beyond the classroom, diaries have been an instrument that's use has been discussed frequently in the primary, secondary and tertiary educational literature (Gleaves, Walker, & Grey, 2007). Research across the different age groups has investigated the benefits of diaries in different contexts (Gleaves, Walker, & Grey, 2007). The main results shall be tied together here, suggesting that they, although made in one particular institution, can be for the most part transferred across different age groups.

Due to multiple learning purposes, they are often used in combination with portfolios, and similarly to portfolios, they are often included in the work with learning plans. The overall structure of diaries is similar to portfolios. They are usually written accounts (sometimes oral) which may be employed by students and teachers to reflect on learning or teaching methods. Accountable for all subjects and courses, diaries give an insight into the personal reflection of students' learning processes, as Carter emphasises:

> The diaries provide rich, qualitative, longitudinal data that enable us to see how the students' concept of themselves [...] and how the process of becoming autonomous is actualized in each case (Carter, 2006, p. 116).

This is a unique situation in which the addressee of the communication is the writer her/himself rather than an interlocutor. Therefore, diary writing is very authentic as it encourages pondering about one's emotions connected to one's individual learning approach taken at the time of the diary entry (Gleaves et al., 2007).

Dealing with the emotional and motivational state of the learner can further be an opportunity for the teacher to learn more about her/his students but also the student

about her/himself. Having the time and the security of being the addresser and addressee in one, the learner can reflect on her/his learning experiences. Often writing about one's learning experiences helps the learner to discover reasons for the positive or negative learning experiences they have had. I shall briefly outline some of the benefits from a teacher's perspective before discussing how diaries can foster autonomy skills.

Allwright and Bailey (1991), for example, state that anxiety is a factor which may cause negative learning experiences and hence hamper the learning progress. When a learner agrees to submit her/his diary, the teacher may hence learn more about the hopes and anxieties of her/his learners than by asking direct questions. In fact, there are reports that diaries provide information about anxiety, self-esteem, competition in the classroom and intrinsic motivation of the learner (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Bailey, 1983) . Based on this information, the teacher might find that s/he needs to change her/his teaching behaviour, encourage students more or apply structural changes in the classroom in order to improve the learning environment.

In contrast to that, Parkinson, Benson, & Jenkins (2003) criticise the interpretation of diary entries as they may be the grounds for teachers/researchers imitating psychologists which may even have a negative impact on the learners (Parkinson et al., 2003, p. 47). In their view, this is due to many studies' weak design, causing them to fail the criteria of validity and resulting in misleading interpretations of the data. In addition to that, they indicate another source for receiving particular information. They point towards the possibility of receiving data reflecting 'normative responses' (p. 49) from the learners as they might provide information to the teacher/researcher who is in search of particular features. Therefore, the validity of the information is questionable. However, in the conclusion of their own study they mitigate their strong position, having received similar results to Bailey (1983). In the view of Cohen and Manion (2011, 274 – 275), it would be fatal to expect 'the truth' from evaluating diaries, but that it is very likely that learners will provide 'a' truth (Bailey, 2006, p. 61).

Therefore, although the view (Parkinson et al. 2003) has its merits, it can be suggested that if the majority of a teacher's class 'signalises' signs of stress and anxiety issues or other factors which could hamper the learner's learning outcome, it may be worthwhile to investigate its degree and nature further without necessarily assuming it to be the fundament for a publication. Diaries are neither just a platform

for the diarist to note down her/his personal (learning) experiences or exclusively an instrument for task-based second language learning. It is after all – and every diarist is aware of this – a medium to express thoughts which one wants to share or simply to 'get of one's chest', but which one finds easier to write about than to say out loud. It lies in the recipient's (teacher, researcher etc.) hands to interpret the fine line between issues that the learner deals with her/himself perfectly well or where there is potential to give advice.

While the diary can be a source for the teacher to better understand student motivation and behavioural attitudes, diaries are also used to encourage students in using conscious learning strategies such as critical thinking, argumentative writing and investigative skills (Gleaves et al. 2007). While other methods such as essay writing or task-based discussions may aid the strategies, diaries trigger a range of *"[...] cognitive, social, and affective processes [...]*" (Woodfield & Lazarus, 1998, p. 315) and their fostering a set of skills. It serves, for example, as a method to engage children in creative writing, a process in which the learner defines her/his own topic to write about. Calkins (1986) suggests that human beings have an innate desire to analyse their experiences and that *"by articulating [them], we reclaim it for ourselves"* (p. 3).

Moreover, with regard to second language learning, diaries can be considered a medium to support 'metatalk' (Swain, 2000; Swain, Cook, & Seidlhofer, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1995 cited in: Simard & Wong, 2004) to acquire a target language by using it in multiple ways such as reflecting on the learning progress of the target language, its linguistic and pragmatic particularities (Simard & Wong, 2004) or as a communicative motive to express personal experiences and emotional states. In this respect, learners may become more aware of the processes of second language learning (Schmidt & Frota, 1986; Warden, Lapkin, Swain, & Hart, 1995; Woodfield & Lazarus, 1998), the challenges they encounter during their journey as second language learners and possibly ways and strategies of how to overcome these hurdles (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Bailey & Ochsner, 1983).

In terms of dynamics, diaries trigger a hermeneutic learning cycle, as using them to engage the learner in writing for the purpose of second language acquisition encourages the learner to reflect on her/his learning progress, exploring the reasons for overcoming or struggling with challenges language learning entails. This leads to

the developing hypothesis about how to tackle these issues which ultimately extends the knowledge of the target language.

The suggestion, however, that a diary is a useful assessment tool of the student's learning progress is controversial. Thornbury (1991) argues that diaries foster *"the ability to make accurate and critical judgements on the quality of their ideas"* (cited in: Gleaves et al., 2007 p. 632). This quality of diaries is, however, more attributed to prospective diaries. Compared to retrospective diaries they allow *"more insightful observation and comment"* (Gleaves et al., 2007, p. 632).

Bailey (1990), on the other hand, argues that her findings show the tendency that more successful language learners reflect more critically on their learning progress than weaker learners. She expresses her fear that diaries may even widen the gap between stronger and weaker language learners. However, her study does not mention the intervention making students aware of cognitive and affective strategies.

In the attempt to counteract expressed concerns that diary writing alone does not trigger cognitive or metalinguistic reflection and to make diary writing more feasible for second language learning, Carter (2006) suggests a number of points to students when keeping a diary (for further reading see Carter, 2006, p. 155). These guidelines are supposed to relieve students from pressure. In that sense they provide mental support for students to regard diary writing as a chance to understand their learning rather than a burden.

However, as a preliminary step before using diaries, Simard and Wong (2004) suggest a form of tutoring students in order to increase the ability to reflect on one's learning progress. Apart from the controversial views on the use of diaries to reflect on learning processes or to foster learning strategies, research indicates two more critical aspects which require consideration. Experience has shown that diaries are often handed in incomplete or include mistakes indicating lack of time spent on the entries (Fleet & Blandford, 2005). Furthermore, paper-based diaries impose a limit on their portability. For students and for teachers the size and weight of portfolios may become a burden when carrying them around frequently.

As a solution to that problem, computer-based diaries are available. However, they are still used less than the paper-based one's (Fleet & Blandford, 2005). Possible reasons are that teachers cannot always provide a computer for each student if the

diaries are to be accessed in the classroom, nor may all students have, especially in lower secondary education, sufficient computer literacy skills.

While traditional tests hold the pole position in assessing students' learning outcomes, their ability to digitalise and rank the students' knowledge in a specific subject has been criticised in many ways, with arguments ranging from inappropriate question types, time issues having negative effects on the learner's performance, to the debate about the distribution model of the bell curve (Black & William, 1998; Krampen, 1987; Ryan & Miyasaka, 1995). Foremost, research findings indicate that learners often struggle when leaving school, as they have not acquired what seem to be the most fundamental skills for lifelong learning. Efforts, however, to attribute more autonomy to the learner have been dreaded in case they plunge classrooms into chaos rather than into a more engaging learning environment.

Although individuals have the inborn desire to be autonomous, autonomy is a skill which has to be acquired (Nunan, 2000). As part of this scaffolding process to develop into an autonomous learner, portfolios and diaries represent well-established instruments which can support this process. However, the application of such innovative instruments is often limited, with one major reason being that they are not assessable under the current educational policy agendas.

Although many teachers show a general interest in the use of these instruments, they frequently express their concern that their teaching methods have to comply with these set standards (Lambirth & Goouch, 2006). Indeed, little has been said about the perspectives of such instruments to live up to the curriculum standards. The issue is, however, addressed with the development and implementation of the European Language Portfolio which has been conceived in accordance with the commonly accepted European Framework of Languages.

Yet, considering the amount of time and resources which the comprehensive adaptation of a learner autonomy supportive concept - like portfolios, diaries or learning plans - requires, many schools seem to flinch from investing in these instruments. As a consequence, it is the learner who gets crushed in an education system where political regulations seem to leave less and less room for innovative teaching concepts to unfold and to prove their effectiveness as judgment that precedes tests.

3.3. Computers in the Context of CALL and CMC

Another instrument which pools a network of different activities is the computer. Working with computer programs or the internet is not new to the teaching world and a number of works have engaged in analysing the potential of computers as part of the classroom work or even as self-learning centres (Jones, 2001). Some of these works focused on the scope of computer use in the autonomous classroom. Due to its increasing significance in teaching, a short overview of the benefits of computers within an autonomous classroom shall represent another perspective on engaging students in taking charge of their own learning.

Following the historical development of *Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)*, Warschauer & Healey (1998) distinguished between behaviouristic, communicative and integrative CALL. From a very general view, in second language acquisition, behaviouristic CALL, which originally was based on pedagogic concepts from the 1950s to the 1970s, involves drill, vocabulary and grammar training (Barson & Debski, 1996).

Communicative CALL in its historical sense was first advocated by John Underwood in 1984. According to his view, communicative CALL emphasises the use of the second language rather than the drill. Grammar is to be taught implicitly through the computer programs rather than explicitly and it encourages the learner to formulate spontaneous utterances rather than specifically practiced phrases or structures (Underwood, 1984, p. 52).

Integrative CALL applications comprise *"multimedia, hypermedia and interactive technologies promoting the integration of skills (CD-ROMs)"* (Blin, 2004, p. 380). In addition, applications of the internet such as email or chat discussions or web authoring and collaborative projects are assigned integrative functions.

The three pedagogic ways in which CALL can be used differ in their potential for the autonomous learner. While communicative and integrative CALL assigns the learner more flexibility in their learning, according to Benson (2001), even behaviouristic computer programs show some potential for the autonomous learner as the learner can exercise control over her/his pace of learning and over the mode as to whether to receive instruction, to practise her/himself or to choose a testing mode.

However, communicative and integrative CALL tools offer a broader range of autonomous engagement. Communicative applications which include, for example, text reconstruction programs, speaking and writing simulations or other forms of linguistic interaction with the tool allow the user to choose and hence to control her/his own preferred path, to create and amend her/his own texts or to interpret others' (Benson, 2001). These individualised operations foster the development of metacognitive skills and metalinguistic awareness. Benson (2001), however, points out that programs which involve text production or interpretation as well as simulations require the capability of the learner to reflect on their learning paths and the actual learning process. Otherwise, the program has to be equipped with an application which requires the learner to think about their linguistic skills and progress. In this way, communicative computer applications or technologies do not differ significantly to paper-based writing forms such as diary entries, and similar challenges must be confronted.

One of the advantages of integrative compared to communicative CALL is the use of CD-ROMs and even more so the internet as they offer the learner a number of materials to choose from. With increasing access to the internet, students are more independent in their time limit and to some extent in the choice of their engagement with the program (Blin, 2004, p. 380, cites instructional, practice or testing mode). This allocates the learner even greater control over when and which application to access and how to use it.

Furthermore, computer programs and the internet sometimes allow for independent learning without the assistance of the teacher. Alone or in a group, the learners can define their research content, "*formulate research questions and devise plans to answer them"* (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000, p. 176). This is not possible with a ready designed vocabulary or grammar programs. In addition, the internet provides a large fund of publications, presentations or web sites (Blin, 2004) to choose from in order to work on particular tasks.

However, these activities call for different autonomy strategies to interpret tasks and the available or chosen material (Blin, 2004). There are controversial views as to how CALL can assist in developing these strategies (e.g. Blin, 2004; Hubbard, 2004; Ritter, Kallenbach, & Pankhurst, 1999).

Some proponents of CALL assign these programs tutoring functions (Levy, 1997, p. 178). Although this view has been contested by some researchers such as Wolff (1999) who does not believe that the computer can have a place as a tutor in modern language learning (p. 448 ff.), most researchers agree that the computer can be a valuable addition in a learner-centred classroom. Researchers such as Ritter et al. (1999) or Hubbard and Bradin Siskin (2004) have contributed to exploring the potential of CALL tools as tutoring systems. They distinguish between

> the tutor role [in which] the computer evaluates the learner, controls the learning process, and temporarily substitutes for the human teacher [and] [...] the tool role [in which] the computer does not evaluate [...] (Hubbard & Bradin Siskin, 2004, p. 448).

On the other hand, views on merging the functions have emerged. They contribute to a more beneficial use of tools such as portfolios and diaries requiring autonomous skills. Ritter, Kallenbach, and Pankhurst (1999), for example, propose that computers can exercise a tutoring function which assists the learner to move through a second language learning program called *English Coach Multimedia* (for more see: Ritter, Kallenbach, & Pankhurst, 1999).

They suggest a tutor who acts as a 'trouble-shooter' when the learner calls her/him or when the path the learner is using does not seem appropriate. However, Ritter et al. (1999) distinguish between an indoctrinating and a supportive source leaving the learner enough room to make her/his own decision. They propose a tutoring system which *"gradually frees the learners from the guidance they might need at the outset of their learning, or if concerned, at least in part, with 'learning how to learn'"* (Ritter et al., 1999, p. 116).

According to their proposition, in a simplistic way, the computer is used as a tool by following certain activities. In a more complex perspective, the computer program combines its tool function with a tutor in the form of automated feedback accompanying the steps the learner takes throughout the program. As a result, the learner acquires a number of strategies as part of a guided process. The strategies entitle the learner to

- evaluate their own learning progress
- be open to and respond to feedback
- engage in revision cycles based on their achievements in the computer software
- encounter and evaluate the use of different learning activities
- access different tools such as dictionaries or reference grammars

- set realistic goals. (Ritter et al. 1999, p. 116).

In terms of supporting learner autonomy, this approach builds upon two main perspectives. By embracing the computer technology, proponents of CALL combine the advances of the internet and information technology with the concept of learner autonomy (Blin, 2004). With regard to the earlier discussed challenges of electronic portfolios, for example, the theory of computer assisted language learning adds electronic literacy (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000) to the set of skills pooled under the umbrella term of learner autonomy.

Assisting the learner to gradually detect, explore, evaluate and create computer software and online resources, portfolios can be enriched the with products of individual and collaborative projects which can also serve as the trigger of communicative exchanges (Blin, 2004). As such, the program is further distancing itself from a behaviourist approach and leaning towards a cognitive/constructivist perspective which gives the learner options but leaves her/him the choice as to whether to accept the tutor's proposal or to follow personal preferences.

However, a computer program has communicative limits as it can only respond according to its programmed 'knowledge'. It does not replace human interactions as the learner is granted in an exchange with a teacher. Therefore, the functionality of CALL as communication and reflection enhancer remains a challenge. Furthermore, while computer programs offer a broad range of activities to practice oral communication, it cannot imitate 'real life' conversations. The variety of linguistic forms and speech patterns are yet too complex to be entirely programmed as to respond accordingly to all utterances a learner might come up with. Learners underpin that computer assisted learning programs have a downside by expressing their need to practice oral communication in real situations as part of student interaction as, for example, Toyoda (2001) pointed out.

Although CALL cannot replace human interaction, it can enhance it. Egbert (1999), for example, suggests using computer programs as part of group work. Students of the learner group are assigned different roles. The computer then can either supplement learning, for example, to look up specific information to solve a particular task which is required to be communicated within the group (tool function) – or the computer can enhance the use of correct language forms accompanied with feedback on the required forms and further advice, i.e. for complementing exercises

(tutoring function). In both cases the computer as part of group work serves as a meta-tool, as the learners are encouraged to exchange and discuss information whether as a result of a tool or tutoring function.

Even if the computer does not provide satisfying answers, it can trigger the urge in the learner to communicate their dissatisfaction and search for help (Bradin Siskin, 1999, p. 161). However, students do not necessarily naturally involve themselves in discussions with one another (Galloway & O'Brien, 1998). Hence, the autonomy in formulating questions, comments or criticism regarding the computer program as a tool, and particular activities or topics, needs to be enhanced by the teacher. Therefore, the "interdependency" between teacher and learner is not diminished (Jone's, 2001). S/he can assist with questions and recommend further steps in the learning process. This ensures *"that CALL is an integral rather than separate component of the total program of instruction and that the teachers are likewise an integral part of the CALL laboratory [...]"* (Robinson, 1989, p. 132).

The discussions within the CALL literature show that the various applications and programs, which CALL encompasses, foster different types of individual autonomous skills to various degrees. In other words, due to the multi-layered nature of CALL which comprises different activities, functions, and which differs in character and content (Levy, 1997 citing Chapelle, 1994). CALL cannot be described as one particular tool, nor do the individual tools equally support learner autonomy. Different tools and artefacts of CALL foster different aspects of learner autonomy but not necessarily all theoretical components of autonomy fall into the cluster of CALL (Blin, 2004).

- *Fostering Autonomy through Computer-mediated Communication*

In the context of computer assisted language learning, with a rapid advancement of technology, the internet has become a strongly frequented and researched space as part of second language education. Although CALL makes references to the use of the internet, it is particularly in the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC) that the internet has been explored as a medium to foster second language acquisition through communication with human beings rather than with the computer (Kern & Warschauer, 2000). Besides its potential to foster second language learning, computer-mediated communication has been hailed in the field of intercultural

competence and of learner autonomy. I shall, however, limit the discussion of the use of CMC to its promotion as an enhancer of learner autonomy in second language learning. Furthermore, although it is acknowledged that technical ability is a prerequisite as well as an outcome of computer-mediated communication, the focus here will be placed upon its pedagogical implications.

In the earlier phases of CMC and similar to communicative CALL, second language acquisition has been mitigated through synchronous communication. Against the background of a strong communicative approach to second language learning in the 1990s, synchronous communication refers to the learner's *"dialogic interaction in the form of open-ended questions for discussions,"* (Moellering & Levy, 2012, p. 1). It enables students to talk with speakers within, but more commonly with native speakers outside, the classroom in what has been named a "transnational-classroom" (Moellering & Levy, 2012, p. 1). The use of verbal communication in 'real time' was dominantly investigated as a way to encourage learners to use language autonomously and independently of the teacher. At the same time, it promoted *autonomy as language competence* (Macaro, 1997) as the virtual space served to enforce that learners naturally use the target language to the extent that they are able instead of following pre-scripted dialogues or speech utterances. By actively practising existing language skills and listening to the partner's utterances, the learner might also encounter and therefore expand her/his language skills.

Fostering autonomy by using and expanding second language skills are also characteristics of asynchronous communication. Forms of learning that have evolved in this context are, for example, *'email tandems', 'network-based language teaching/learning', [and] 'telecollaboration'"* (Moellering & Levy, 2012, p. 1). In comparison to synchronous communication, it has become a more preferred pedagogic framework as it perpetuates communication that is recorded or saved. Therefore, it has also been described as *"conversation in slow motion"* (Beauvois, 1992, p. 455). The advantage is that learners can access their written or oral conversations again which is the reason that learners are more encouraged to reflect on their writing and speaking, become aware of and correct grammatical errors and have more time to think about the direction of their speech acts or written contributions. Students therefore also practice *autonomy of language learning* as they are encouraged to conduct "self-initiated error correction" (Kleppin, 2010);

meaning that they identify their own mistakes and search for resources such as dictionaries, grammatical explanations etc. to correct them.

Learners may further identify mistakes in their partner's conversations or come across expressions and grammatical phenomena that they may be unfamiliar with which they may discuss with their partners. Hence, learners acquire cognitive and meta-cognitive learning strategies by identifying and discussing errors or unknown speech acts. Furthermore, they learn to make and are in control of their choices and actions (Macaro, 1997), which they use to decide about topics or in which direction to lead and to exploit conversations.

- *Summary*

Second language learning, which is based on specifically designed computer programs or on virtual communication through various platforms via the internet, can equally be combined with elements of learner autonomy. In both integrative pedagogical concepts of CALL and CMC, learners have the freedom to work autonomously. This does not make the teacher's role redundant but it changes her/his and the students' responsibilities that they have within the language classroom. Teachers are often attributed functions of the mediator in this context (Jone's, 2001) whereas students are more in charge of the way that they conduct their learning. However, *"all learners need to be prepared and supported on the path to greater autonomy by teachers"* (Sheerin, 1997, p. 63).

3.4. Learning Plans

Diaries, portfolios and computers as platforms for in-class and virtual classroom learning which foster learner autonomy are not only discussed in the literature but they also find wide application in the Australian educational context. An empirical study in the secondary education sector revealed that all of the stated instruments are commonly used in the secondary education sector (Schuster, 2011).

In addition, most schools also named *learning plans* as a further tool to support learner autonomy. Eighty-eight percent of the schools involved in that study claimed that they used learning plans (Schuster, 2011). In very general terms, learning plans can be understood as written agreements on particular learning goals and learning

outcomes which are determined between the teacher, student, and, at times, the parents. Learning plans, which are often also named *learning contracts,* vary strongly in their content and structure. They can be specifically tailored towards individual student needs as learning goals or sometimes behavioural goals, towards the time frame of each plan, and the materials to be used can be recorded for each student. Due to their potential to provide an individual learning program for each student, they are commonly used and promoted with students with particular learning needs or disabilities (Gonski et al., 2011).

However, learning plans have also found entrance into secondary education. In comparison to diaries, portfolios and computer programs, they appear to present the most preferred instrument that assists students to develop the skills of an autonomous learner (Schuster, 2011), for which reason this thesis will focus on the use learning plans as an instrument fostering learner autonomy. Learning plans in the secondary context vary strongly in their content as well is in their degree of learner autonomy. Learning plans can provide a platform for a very 'basic' autonomy level, with students, for example, being encouraged to reflect on various tasks that have been designated by the teacher. Learning plans at a very advanced level require the learner to formulate their own learning goals and the materials and approach that they will use in order to achieve them. This high level of autonomy is, however, documented in the tertiary education system rather than in the secondary system.

Due to their potential to foster learner autonomy to various degrees and their framework which can accommodate the use of portfolios, diaries and computers (Harris, 1995), learning plans will be at the centre of this thesis to analyse which aspects condition their efficient use in the context of learner autonomy in the second language classroom. Their objectives, definitions, and operationalisation will be discussed in the next chapter.

4. Learning Plans as an Instrument to Foster Learner Autonomy

4.1. Objectives and Conceptions of Learning Plans: Varying Degrees of Autonomy

The use of a learning plan can enable the learner to acquire skills of an autonomous learner without having to necessarily learn entirely autonomously or independently (Anderson et al., 1996). Although it can be implemented as a framework which stages learning with only little assistance from the teacher, this full degree of autonomy is only rarely promoted in secondary education (Horstkemper et al., 2008; Schuster, 2012). Focusing on autonomous skills that learning plans can foster, many benefits that have been noted in the tertiary context (e.g. Gilbert, 1976) translate into secondary learning.

On the one hand a learning plan personalises learning as it provides the *"one-to-one human interaction [as an] opportunity to adapt flexibility to individual needs"* (Gilbert, 1976, p. 31). The content of the learning plan allows it to be tailored to students' needs as it can be based on individual students' prior knowledge of a certain topic or on students' abilities and cognitive skills. In this respect, the content of the learning plan can reflect individual or group interests. Therefore, learning plans can be particularly suitable to learner groups that display heterogeneity (Anderson et al., 1996; Winter, 2008).

The learning plan can also accommodate different learning styles and time frames that students require. As students vary in "*their readiness […] to take more responsibility for their learning"* (Stephenson, 1993, p. 4), learning plans can be altered in their functionality and the degree of autonomy that students are required to possess in order to successfully tackle their tasks. Although *"most contracts fulfil more than one purpose"* (Šliogerienė, 2006, p. 111), contracts vary in the number and type of purposes that they can fulfil. This is particularly important in the secondary education system as there is an identified risk that students can feel overwhelmed by frameworks that target many goals that students would need to monitor. In particular, in accordance with Lacey's (2007) view on the introduction to autonomy, younger students who are newly introduced to the concept of learning plans may only be able to manage a very limited set of functions of a learning plan.

For example, with regard to academic tasks, they can be varied from closed to more open tasks. Lower degrees of autonomy can be practised by having to complete very specific tasks that contain exact instructions, number of activities to be completed, and information on the product that is supposed to be provided. Tasks that require a high degree of autonomy may be projects which have a set topic and set learning outcomes but in which students have more choices of how to achieve these learning outcomes. Products might be portfolios, live or audio/video-presentations, protocols, reports etc.

The complexity of learning goals that can be defined as part of the learning plan has furthermore an influence on the time span within which tasks need to be completed. While highly structured learning goals can be achieved potentially during one lesson, bigger projects may require a few sessions that last several months (Berte, 1975). However, the length of one learning plan should not exceed one or two months maximum as high school students may not be able to manage large projects that require long-term planning[9].

In addition, Winter (2008) suggests that academic tasks can even incorporate workload that stretches beyond the classroom including external learning centres, museums, archives, and outdoor areas such as parks, forests etc. or even companies. Hence, learning plans are highly flexible with regard to the place in which they are implemented.

Regardless of the length and the number of outcomes that a learning plan can entail, negotiation and reflection are two key functions that every plan should underlie. In order to have greater value than a standard assignment, typical learning plans are based on negotiation. Negotiation implies that both parties, students and teachers, discuss their roles and responsibilities in this contracting environment. Furthermore, depending on the student's academic background, predispositions for learning and prior knowledge in the particular subject or topic, both parties need to agree on the objectives of the learning plan. This communicative approach to learning is crucial in order for the learner to develop commitment towards her/his learning plan. (Anderson et al., 1996, p. 4) emphasise:

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[9] Prof. David Boud said this in an informal interview with the author in 2009 at the University of Technology, Sydney.

> It is important that the learner feels ownership of the contract and any suggestion that he or she is merely agreeing to do things suggested or imposed by the adviser should, of course, be avoided. (p. 4)

In addition to discussing the objectives, students and teachers should also reflect on the progress that students make with their learning plans, and, if required, amendments to the plan need to be negotiated.

In terms of reflection, the learning plan has an additional advantage over usual teaching practices. As part of common teaching approaches, assignments or tests are dominantly used in order to determine whether students have achieved particular learning goals over a certain period of time and with regard to specific skills and subject content. However, these standard forms of assessment test the students' performance at a particular point of time. Time constraints, anxiety (Helmke & Weinert, 1997) or personal problems at home or with friends may hamper student performance and lead to situations in which students do not perform at their best at a particular time.

In addition to that, these assessments are used at the end of a learning cycle. Especially for lower achieving students this has the disadvantage that any problems or slower progress in learning are often not picked up on before the actual assessment. The learning plan, however, provides *"a formal framework for structuring learning activities"* (Anderson, Boud, & Sampson, 1995, p. 11). Hence, students are more encouraged to already reflect during the learning phase rather than at the end.

Furthermore, teachers can track how their students are performing as they are progressing with their learning plan and intervene if they encounter that the student encounters difficulties with her/his learning. Hence, teachers get the *"opportunity to assist and observe the intellectual growth and development of students over time"* (Gilbert, 1976, p. 31) and on time.

Negotiation and reflection are probably two of the key factors of efficacious learning plans that contribute to developing responsibility for a learning plan. A third factor could be considered the social ability to collaborate with other students on a project. In these aspects, (Knowles, 1994) sees the major benefits *"for developing the lifelong learning attitude for professionals"* (p. 45).

All in all, internal differentiation can be achieved with learning plans in terms of the following dimensions:

- Content
- Interests
- Complexity of Learning goals
- Learning styles
- Cognitive skills
- Time
- Place
- Negotiation
- Reflection.

Comparing these dimensions that relate to a variety of different learning plans, strong similarities with conceptions of an autonomous learning environment are apparent. Learning plans can attribute to create an autonomous learning environment and to foster autonomous learning skills. Furthermore, the didactic dimensions as proposed by Wolff (2002) (see 5.2.) can be used as components to design a range of learning plans that foster learner autonomy to various degrees.

4.2. Defining Learning Plans in the Organisation School

Defining learning plans is not a straightforward matter. Not only are there multiple names that can be used to refer to generic forms of a learning plan, they can also differ widely in content, setting, and frequency by which they are used or as a supplement to classroom teachings. This chapter aims to first explore the genesis of the term *learning plan* and then to present a number of different learning plans as they can be found in current educational systems in Australia. This discussion will draw upon information that is available from Australian educational departments, school reports and websites, as well as concepts proposed in the educational literature. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the objectives and functioning of typical learning plans.

Learning plans have found a very limited entry in the literature on primary (e.g. National School Public Relations Association, 1971), and secondary education (e.g. McGarrell, 1996; Šliogerienė, 2006; Wilson & Cutting, 2001). Learning plans have,

however, been commonly discussed in the tertiary context (Anderson et al., 1996; Berte, 1975; Boud, 1988; Buzzell & Roman, 1981; Gilbert, 1976; Goodman, 2011; Hammond & Collins, 1991; Harris, 1995; Knowles, 1975; Lane, 1988; O'Donnell & Caffarella, 1990; Schwarzer, Kahn, & Smart, 2000; Stephenson, 1993). This thesis will mainly draw upon this information and analyse its relevance for the secondary education sector.

Following the literature, it is problematic to define the term 'learning plan'. Two main issues can be identified. Firstly, there appears to be no consensus in the literature on the terminology. It is rather an umbrella term that hosts more than 11 different lexical entries. Table 3 provides an overview of the collected terms used in a similar or identical context of learning plans.

Table 3: Other Terms for 'Learning Plan' partially taken from Bildungsforschung Band 21: Bildungs- und Erziehungskontrakte als Instrumente von Schulentwicklung, 2007

learning contract/contract learning
learning plan
personalised programmes
personalising/personalised learning
individual pupil targets
performance targets
individualised educational program
self-directed learning
behavio(u)ral contract
functional behavio(u)r assessment
learner managed learning
study plans
performance agreements
self-development plans
individual education plan

Secondly, the conception of a learning plan also differs with regard to its semantic association. As the term performance targets, for example, indicates, some forms of the learning plan focus exclusively on the learning outcome, while others such as self-directed learning, contract learning or personalising/personalised learning or contract learning emphasise the learner's behaviour in a contracting environment.

Others again, such as individualised educational program or personalised programmes hint at a framework that embeds specific views on the learning environment, characteristics of the learner, as well as the activity of learning processes.

Study plans, *personal learning plan*, *learning plans*, or *learning contracts* indicate that specific agreements on academic goals are fundamental to the program.

While today conceptions of a *learning plan* appear in the literature under numerous terms, it dates back to a philosophical approach promoted by John Dewey in 1916 as he was one of the first educational researchers to believe in the student's self-realisation (Knowles, 1986). His beliefs were based on the development of humans according to the standards of democracy. However, his approach was not intended to be transferred to the school curriculum as it was not believed that secondary students would be mature enough to be able to work successfully with a learning plan. Contracting principles in the educational context became first evident in the early 1920s (Dressel & Thompson, 1973) as part of theoretical conceptions of independent study. Dressel and Thompson (1973) define independent study as *"the student's self-directed pursuit of academic competence in as autonomous a manner as he is able to exercise at any particular time"* (p. 1). The concept of independent study has significant similarities with later conceptions of learner autonomy, as the authors portray the independent student to have:

> motivation, curiosity, a sense of self-sufficiency and self-direction, ability to think critically and creatively, awareness of resources, and some ability to use them. (Dressel & Thompson, 1973, p. 7)

The conception named *learning contract*, however, first found application in American tertiary education at the beginning of the 1950s (Dewey, 1997). Individual forms of learning contracts or contract learning were implemented as didactic methods in seminars in tertiary education. Learning plans were also used as sources for lecturers to document their work in reports including references. Until 1975, the new student centred approaches were, however, not theoretically embedded. Bilorusky and Butler (1975) were likely to be the first researchers to develop the theoretical grounds for learning contracts. They distinguish between four contracting models focusing on the individual development but also on the development of the individual in the context of society. However, the four models refer to curricular structures at universities rather than individual contracts as part of everyday learning. The first two

models called ‘performance model’ and ‘closed contract model’ differ in the degree of autonomy that students have in selecting courses, and faculty advisors. They do not reflect a contracting system that can be used as a framework for everyday learning.

The third and fourth models, which are named, *open contract model* and *experimenting community model* foster skills of learner autonomy as they are relevant for this thesis. The open contract model *“assumes that individualized learning is a continuing process requiring sustained student initiative”* (Bilorusky & Butler, 1975, p. 149). It is based on the moral social contract stages by Kohlberg (1971, 1983) and Loevinger & Wessler (1970) according to which students are responsible for thinking self-critically and evaluating one’s learning, making choices, being aware of their motivation to learn, and determining the length of learning activities (Bilorusky, 1975, p. 149).

However, only the fourth model fully realises individual learner-teacher agreements that, according to the authors, are suitable for mature age students only. In this experimenting community, the students’ autonomy level is likened to Kohlberg’s development of *“conscience or principle orientation”* (Bilorusky, 1975, p. 151). Learning is considered to be a concept of ‘script improvisation’. Students are introduced to various theories. However, it is, its application to solve problems that the theories are continuously tested. Hence, rather than just learning a particular paradigm, learners are required to question the logic between script and improvisation, or, in other words, to test their theories.

The four models describe the theoretical grounds for analysing contract learning on a curricular level. However, the literature commonly cites Knowles (1986) as one of the pioneers to introduce the idea of learning contracts to the actual student classroom as a framework to support individualised learning on an everyday basis. Originally, learning contracts were only realised in the tertiary classroom as students from the secondary education system were not thought to be mature enough to take responsibility within a contracting model.

The perception, however, that only older students can profit from contract learning shifted with Weyers (2005) claiming that moral understanding of children already develops at primary school age. In support of this view, Monika Weingartz (1991) addresses learning contracts in references to the concept of an autonomous learner. In addition to that, although Smith (1983, p. 198) does not directly link learning plans

to the development of learner autonomy, he relates levels of student motivation and commitment to the use of learning plans. He suggests that *"[…] motivation and commitment are likely to be higher [towards a learning plan] than with traditional learning and assessment methods, (Smith, 1983)"* (cited in: Anderson et al., 1996, p. 10).

In line with these anticipated benefits, most theoretical models for learning plans were transferred from, tertiary into the secondary education sector. As a general definition, Anderson et al., (1996) proposes that:

> A learning contract is a document used to assist in the planning of a learning project. It is a written agreement negotiated between a learner and a teacher, lecturer or staff adviser that a particular activity will be undertaken in order to achieve a specific learning goal or goals. (p. 2)

The difference between common teaching practices and the learning plan is based on the

> need to shift from doing what [students] are told to do, to taking the initiative and making suggestions to take the initiative for their learning, search out information sources, and incorporate a mentor's suggestions into a project. (Knowles, 1994, p. 42)

According to Knowles (1994), these are fundamental key components of tertiary education that are often used to describe the successful university or college student. Categorised as benefits of learning plans, it is these capabilities that critics point out to be lacking in many university or college students. Numerous public concerns state that high schools fail to prepare their students sufficiently for university (McInnis & James, 2000; Finnie & Qiu, 2009; Jansen & Van der Meer, 2011; McInnis & James, 1994, 2004; Van der Meer, 2004, 2006). The need to take the initiative and to make suggestions is also crucial in university education. Students are no longer told what to learn, time frames for the completion of often bigger academic tasks become longer, and during class students are expected to be able to take notes based on mainly verbal communication. Hence, when students enter the university they are already required to be autonomous, and it can therefore be argued that learning plans may be instruments that could foster exactly these capabilities at high school level.

Numerous secondary schools worldwide have recognised that learning plans can be suitable for younger learners (e.g. Brugger-Paggi, Caldwell, Gottmann, & Graf, 2008;

Schuster 2012). Amongst educators who use a particular learning instrument to enhance students' capabilities to work more independently, various forms of learning plans are implemented in particular subjects but also across the curriculum. In opposition to the concerns expressed by some pedagogues that providing students with more freedom could lead to anarchy in the classroom where students do not take their work seriously, Rogers (1983) points out:

> [C]ontracts provide a sort of transitional experience between complete freedom to learn whatever is of interest and learning that is relatively free, but that is within the limits of some institutional demand or course requirement (p. 140).

His statement underpins the autonomy of the school and the teacher to tease out a learning plan whose content is on the one hand tailored to the student's need but on the other hand is embedded in a framework that prevents students from feeling left alone or free to do anything or nothing in terms of course work.

Exploring the literature, it becomes evident that there appear to be almost no limits to the creativity of tertiary institutions in terms of the design of learning plans or similar concepts (e.g. Stephenson, 1993; Anderson et al. 1996; Brown 1992; Harris 1995; Berte, 1975; McGarrell 1996; Schwarzer et al. 2000). However, according to Anderson et al. (1996, p. 4), a typical learning plan contains the following sections:

- the learning objectives or goals of the project
- the strategies and resources available to achieve these objectives
- the evidence which will be produced to indicate the objectives have been achieved
- the criteria which will be used to asses this evidence.

Winter (2008) summarises similar criteria that learning plans are based on. In addition to Anderson et el. (1996), he adds the dimension of *time frame* within which certain tasks need to be completed. In particular for the schooling context, this appears to be a further crucial component that students need to come to an agreement with their teachers or mentors.

While these and further criteria can be applied in the secondary education system, very few sources explore the use of learning plans or contracts with a specific emphasis on secondary education. It can be concluded that either learning plans are of little importance in high-schools or few practical concepts have been reported in the literature. According to the majority of schools which indicated that they use learning plans in the Australian context (Schuster, 2012) and the current political policies (e.g. South Australian Future SACE Office 2012), the latter provide limited

information on the form and content of learning plans in secondary education. Many of the learning plans provided were designed to assist students with disabilities. However, some examples are available that can be used across the curriculum with all students. Taking into consideration learning plans in secondary teaching from an international perspective, more templates of learning plans are available.

On the following pages are three examples of what a learning plan can look like in the secondary education system.

Learning Plan 1: *Learning Contract* (Arends & Kilcher, 2010, p. 123)

Name:	Date:

Topic: _____

Goals: _____

_____

Activities and resources:

Assessment: I will show what I have learned by:

Checkpoints:

Completion date: _____

Student: _____ Teacher: _____

Learning Plan 2: *Science Fiction – Literature Contract* (Wilson & Cutting, 2001, p. 24)

SCIENCE FICTION
Literature Contract

I Tracey Ho agree to complete the following work to the best of my ability and submit it by the due date 28 / 9 / 2002

- Read at least one science fiction book.
  Title: Bright Star by Gary Crew
  Title: Pen Friend from Another Planet by Philip Curtis
- Attend a reading conference.
  Date: 2 / 9 / 2002
- Complete [2] activities from FINDING OUT
  Make a glossary of keywords
  Create a character profile
- Complete [1] activity from SORTING OUT
  Write a back cover blurb for the book
- Complete [2] activities from SPEAKING OUT
  Set up a classroom or corridor display
  Write a review for the school magazine

Signed Tracey Ho 12 / 8 / 2002 (student)

Signed J.N. Ho 13 / 8 / 2002 (parent)

Signed K.Vandestadt 12 / 8 / 2002 (teacher)

Learning Plan 3: *Duluth Plan in Language Arts* (National School Public Relations Association, 1971, p. 59)

Content Classification

e.g. Imaginative use of language

Poetry

Haiku

Purpose

To encourage the students to express themselves in carefully considered words.

Criterion Performance

Given any item of experience (music, literature, film, an observed event, a recollection), the student will be able to make a personal response in the form of an original haiku.

Sample Test Situation

Here are some topics about which you may want to write haiku. Choose one and write a haiku.

Sun shining on water

Wind sweeping through the grass

Crash of thunder

Rain splashing against window

Taxonomy Category

Cognitive

Intervention

Resources

A. Teacher-led presentation

4.3. Implementing Learning Plans

Drawing upon the autonomy models by Little (1997), Littlewood (1996; 1997), and Macaro (1997) (see Chapter 2), autonomy can be exerted with regard to different entities such as language competence, learning competences, or even towards a person. In this line, I further suggest that learning plans can be used as a platform to exert and foster autonomy skills.

However, there are two further aspects which not only unite these models and general conceptions of *learner autonomy* but are fundamental to the successful implementation of learning plans. Firstly, learners can develop – and hence also lose – the ability to conduct their own learning as a result of cognitive processes triggered the learning content (Little, 1991, p. 1). Secondly, the learner has to be accommodated in an environment which encourages student-centred learning.

In that respect, the literature differentiates between two objectives that educational concepts supporting the autonomous learner may focus on. Classifying the prospects into a narrow and broader view on learner autonomy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) from a narrow perspective on learner autonomy, learning plans can be used to support students in developing metacognitive skills of learning. Learning plans can focus on helping students to reflect on their learning processes, for example, by including categories in which students are required to self-assess their work or to provide reflective comments on the way they approached various activities or questions, about the choice of learning materials or about the products that they created in the course of their work (Anderson et al. 1996).

From a broader perspective, learning plans can foster autonomy in the sense of liberating the learner (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 133). According to the broader view, in opposition to instructed learning, the learner is urged to work more independently. Hence, learning plans can be implemented with different autonomy conceptions in mind.

According to both views, however, – whether greater emphasis is put on meta-cognitive skills or on independent learning – fostering learner autonomy triggers pedagogical implications that place the learner in the centre of her/his learning rather than the teacher. This means that the learner's individual needs should be assessed. In fact, according to Nunan (1988):

> […] [It] could be argued that no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centred unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account. (p. 177)

These needs can be defined as a number of variables which are inherent in a learner-centred teaching approach. They can be further translated into a set of milestones that need to be targeted in the course of using a learning plan in the classroom. In accordance with Winter's (2008, p. 52) and Boud's (1995, pp. 17ff) models, a set of milestones of a learning plan can be collated that reflect the existing research on learning plans as a holistic learning framework in opposition to a plain contract. Combining the milestones in the context of learning plans in Figure 2, I propose an amended model which reflects the views and perspectives that are documented in the literature on realising learner autonomy. It further includes Wolff's (2002) didactic paradigms of learner autonomy that underlie a learning plan. While it remains to be explored to what extent these didactic paradigms need to be realised in order to create an environment that fosters autonomy, Wolff's (2002) paradigms present specific measurements in moving from a traditional to an autonomous classroom.

The proposed model that describes the implementation processes of a learning plan can be divided into seven phases (Figure 2)[10]. The individual phases can be described as follows:

[10] The word *phase* is abbreviated to P1, P2 etc. in Figure 2.

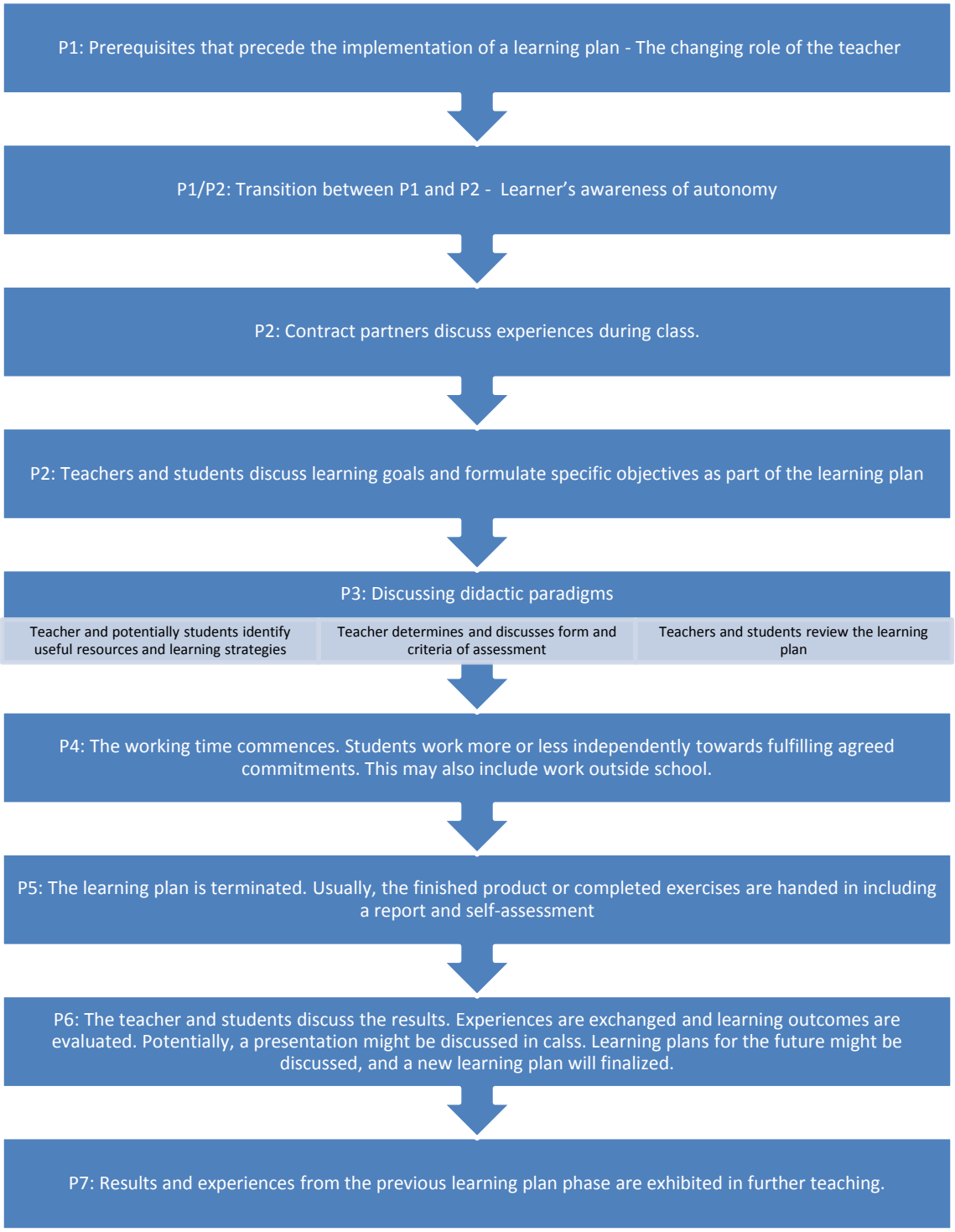

Figure 2: Milestones and Traits of Learning Plans in Reference to Winter (2008) and Boud (1995)

- *P1 Prerequisites That Precede the Implementation of a Learning Plan: The Changing Role of the Teacher*

While there is a growing focus on learner-centred learning environments (Benson & Huang, 2008), models that aim to operationalise the contents of learner autonomy need to operate on two levels – the student and teacher level. The debate in favour of more learner autonomy in the classroom has led from individual (Montessori, 1964; Parkhurst, 1922) to political initiatives. As such, the European Council, for example, engaged in the development of the European Language Portfolio (Little, 2009) which supports the shift from the perspective of the teacher in their traditional role as the 'guard' and 'missionary' of knowledge to the teacher as a 'counsellor', 'helper', 'facilitator', 'knower', 'mentor', 'adviser' or 'consultant' (Riley, 1997) of the learner. All the attributed roles to the teacher which support learner autonomy imply the common demand addressing the teacher to *"stop teaching students"* (Sturtridge, 1997, p. 71).

In this context, Little (1995) further elevated the importance of the relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy. He claims that autonomous teachers have always existed and were referred to as the successful teachers, meaning that they strive to make students understand and consequently take on responsibility for their learning through the *"nature of pedagogical dialogue"* (Little, 1995, p. 178). Part of the students' responsibility would involve the capability to define their own learning objectives and the associated aspects of choosing appropriate learning materials and of self-assessing their learning progress within a framework defined by *"age, educational background and target language competence of the learners"* (Little, 1995, p. 179).

The assumption, however, that an environment which supports learner autonomy presupposes a teacher who exhibits autonomous qualities is not without its difficulties (Graves & Vye, 2012). Wenden (1995), Riley (1997), Benson and Huang (2008) raise their concerns about the ad hoc transition to the new teacher role. Although teachers are just as able to become autonomous as learners, the adaptation of a different learner-focussed role from the teaching perspective is equally problematic (Benson & Huang, 2008). Based on the literature, three main aspects can be identified which may cause confusion or even frustration amongst learners and teachers when trying to introduce a less restricted teacher role in the classroom. As freely as the different

terms for the teacher role in an autonomous classroom (guide, counsellor, mentor, adviser etc.) are used, the difficulty seems to be their translation into practice. Sheerin (1997) points to the *"great skill and sensitivity"* (p. 64) that a teacher needs to have in her/his learner supportive role. It remains difficult to define precisely the difference between too little and too much guidance. Offering solutions to this problem, Sturtridge (1997), O'Dell (1997), Sheerin (1997), and Kohonen (1992) suggest the development of teacher training programmes which assist teachers in their professional growth and the shift towards more learner-oriented teaching.

The second problem which becomes evident in the discussions about enforcing learner autonomy in the classroom is a more fundamental one, in the sense that the adaption of a different teacher role is connected to a misleading interpretation of learner autonomy. In a study of secondary students in a computer-based learning environment at a Malaysian girls-school, Abu Bakar Nadzrah (2007) concluded that *"teachers were not fully prepared to let the students work totally without guidance"* (p. 5). Teachers interviewed as part of the research further indicated that they felt it was necessary to give the students a topic instead of allowing the students to choose a topic themselves. In this respect, the teachers pointed out that they were concerned about students losing 'track' (Nadzrah, 2007, p. 4) and the fear of failing to complete the syllabus the students would be tested about. The students confirmed the latter argument, stating their concern to achieve high grades and therefore depend on the teacher to give them directions. Further, they preferred to be taught by a teacher because of her/his accessibility for support and assistance to answer questions (Nadzrah, 2007, p. 4).

As the answers given by the teachers and learners indicate, there are different interpretations of learner autonomy causing confusion in the practical adaption of the theoretical concept of learner autonomy by equalising it with autodidactic learning.

Supporting students to become autonomous learners does, however, not suggest leaving the students work completely without any guidance (Little, 2009). Following this thesis' adopted definition of learner autonomy, Nunan (1988) rather emphasises the *"collaboration between teachers and learners"* (cited in: Carter, 2006, p. 19). Further, developing learner autonomy seems to be highly limited if the students are mainly driven by knowing that the topics provided to them will be assessed by a third party (the teacher or an official institution). The misconception of learner autonomy

by the teacher may explain why practical excursions into environments which assumingly support learner autonomy may be rejected. As (Dam, 2003) puts it, learner autonomy first has to develop in the teacher in order to be successfully planted in the classroom.

- *Transition between P1 and P2: Learner's Awareness of Autonomy*

After the teacher has understood and realised the changes of her/his role in a learning environment that makes use of learning plans as a tool to foster autonomy, the contract partners can discuss their experiences of the more traditional teaching during class. Starting points of discussion can be particular learning contents that were covered in the past or the way that students perceived the traditional teaching methods that they are used to. While teachers may have clear ideas of the differences between their former style of teaching and the way they want to teach with the help of a learning plan, students may at first not automatically articulate a need for greater autonomy in their learning nor will they be aware of the responsibility that they should have in this new environment. Theoretical frameworks by researchers such as Little 1991; Nunan 1997; Scharle & Szabó 2000; Dam 2003; Silva 2008, and Carter (2006) draw upon the gap between the teacher's knowledge of learner autonomy and the students' need to develop responsibility for their learning and to apply specific strategies in their learning process.

In a guide aiming to develop learner autonomy, Scharle and Szabó (2000) therefore argue in favour of raising awareness in the learner, emphasising the conscious examination of autonomy as one of the core principles to be addressed in the shift of responsibility towards the learner. In their point of view, the phase of raising awareness[11] aims at investigating past experiences of learners in their subject such as second language learning. Their view ties in with Dam's claim, that in order to adapt to a new system, the learner has to learn about the differences between learning in a more learner oriented as opposed to a traditional environment (Dam, 2003). By collecting information through questionnaires and interviews with the learners, the teacher can thereby find out about attitudes learners have towards their

[11] Scharle and Szabó (2000) suggest three phases during which teachers can gradually lead their students towards becoming more autonomous. Similar to that, Nunan (1988) proposes that the classroom should be adaptable to the different levels of learners' autonomy.

subject. This may also contribute to a better understanding of the learner group. The teacher can gather information on the classroom atmosphere, on-going rivalry or mutual support amongst students.

Scharle and Szabó (2000) furthermore consider that already existing learning techniques and learning styles of the learners may vary significantly between individuals. The teacher might not always be aware of these differences. Furthermore, the students may not presume any differences from one another. The teacher's assumption, however, that particular learning techniques and learning styles might be better or more efficacious than others can only be confirmed or rejected based on observations of students' learning progress. Trying different learning techniques and learning styles may be further fruitful to raising awareness for the concept of learner autonomy. Students' feedback regarding their employed learning styles can help to evaluate the learning performance of the students.

The motivation and self-monitoring abilities of the students are two additional factors that Scharle and Szabó (2000) discuss in relation to raising awareness. Motivation is not just crucial for the temporary learning performance but for lifelong learning. Getting students interested and keen to learn is the overall driving factor which needs to be addressed in the phases of raising awareness. Rather than underlining the deficits of students and pointing out skills that students do not possess yet, it is clear that emphasising the knowledge students already have, showing them that they have the tools to take on new tasks, confirms and motivates students in their learning. In addition to that, students and even teachers have to be reminded that one learns for oneself and not just for the sake of marks. However, as the interview statements in the example of Nadzrah's study (2007) convey, often the concern about marks dominates the learning experience. Keeping track of one's own learning progress enforces the students' reflection upon their learning behaviour. By authorising the students to continuously monitor their learning, they become more aware of their own reflections than relying on a marking system. However, the awareness for autonomy and the reflection processes that this entails need to be triggered in conversations between students and learners before the implementation of any learning instrument such as the learning plan. Raising learner's awareness for autonomy can therefore be considered a transitional phase that is part of the early discussions about a learning plan. This level of awareness is crucial in order to design the learning plan in correspondence with the students.

- *P3 Discussing Didactic Paradigms*

Understanding the unique role of an autonomous teacher in introducing the students to the concept of learner autonomy is one major milestone towards learner autonomy. Following the teacher's awareness of her/his role and the students' awareness of the characteristics of learner autonomy, the discussion of the meaning of autonomy with students and the identification of a learning plan as a move towards individualising learning, in phase 3 a number of didactic paradigms need to be determined. In accordance with Boud (1995) and Winter (2008), Wolff (2002) defines the didactic paradigms of *the learning contents, the learning objectives, learning strategies,* and *learning assessment*. They correspond to the general conceptions of institutionalised teaching and learning in the classroom and are fundamental for defining the objectives of learner autonomy (compare Wolff, 2007, p. 38). Wolff (2002) further defines another two paradigms that he refers to as *learning context* and *social forms of learning.* In comparison to Boud (1995) and Winter (2008), Wolff (2002) depicts a learning environment in which students will take a high degree of responsibility, whereas the other two authors provide a more restricted view on the degree of autonomy to be exerted by students.

Learning Context

The learning context is a result of the co-operation between the learner and the teacher. In the traditional schooling system, the usual practice is that the teacher has the authority in the classroom. This is not necessarily a negative judgment but an observation. The particular power-distance relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987) between student and teacher represents a hierarchical microcosm within our social system (Luhmann, 1989). Within this system we interact with smaller social systems such as official institutions, our workplace, and our home as well as with individuals such as our friends, our boss or teacher. Our interactions are governed by hierarchical laws, whether of a juridical or communicative nature in speech and behavioural acts (Bauman, 1999).

Within these social constraints, the society hence raises the expectation that the school educates its students to become *"successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens"* (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). As self-reliant,

democratic individuals, even young citizens are expected to reflect and to express personal belief regarding public occurrences, systemic structures and changes. The upbringing in a more or less rigid school system, however, contradicts these attempted goals. In fact, in this respect Emmanuel Kant emphasised the human's upbringing as a self-reliant and democratic individual who 'has the courage to use one's own understanding'.

There seems to be, however, rather little room for developing critical thinking. Fixed hierarchical structures are given within which the learners are to act as the 'patients' who receive education and to behave in accordance with the dictated regulations. Supporters of an autonomous learning theory therefore demand a stronger initiative from both organisational sides – the school as well as the teacher and the students – towards defining learning contents and setting learning objectives which are more applicable in the relevant learning contexts within and outside the school. Wolff calls it a *learning laboratory* in which the learning context simulates real life situations (Wolff, 2004). Learning is less based on textbook learning, and the context stimulates the natural development of conversation within topics that are relevant to the students in real life situations. These features of an autonomous approach require a certain flexible framework for which traditional teaching methods such as a frontal teaching approach may not account for. The learning plan could provide such a flexibe framework which may still be governed by set regulations but within which students explore new learning contents in their own way and in their own time compared to traditional teaching approaches.

Learning Contents

In the traditional classroom, the teacher and the curriculum usually define the didactic concepts. This, however, contradicts the constructivist paradigm and neurobiological findings (e.g. LeDoux, 2001; Arnold, 2002; Pinel, 2007) according to which learning processes are linked to recent subjective experience. This means that learning contents which the learner cannot connect with any prior experience or knowledge are difficult for the learner to embed in her/his current knowledge. In this respect, Wolff argues in favour of learning contents to be used in a less structured way exploiting their full complexity, allowing the individual to connect new information with

already existing information. As an example, Wolff proposes to integrate content subjects in second language learning. By working on content subjects such as Geography or History, the learning content replaces the fictional often one-dimensional and stereotypical topics (e.g. my life, my friends, my school day etc.) with real content.

Another advantage of using more complex content subjects is the range of subordinated topics they provide. Students can choose a subtopic without feeling overwhelmed by an unlimited range of contents. In this respect, Wolff emphasises the need for authentic material, which relates to the specific learning content instead of being fixated on a textbook. Learners should be entitled to bring their own material which in a traditional classroom is rarely the case. However, the school needs to accommodate for these needs. Planning lessons which provide such flexibility in the choice of learning materials requires the investment of more time than following textbook instructions. The school would have to include the time factor in the calculation of its teaching budgets. In addition to that, the school should provide a range of resources for the students' perusal. This as a potential for experienced students (Boud, 1995; Winter 2008). Although they highlight the importance of choosing learning resources as part of the implementation phases of a learning plan, they put the main responsibility of selecting materials on the teacher rather than the student.

Learning Objectives

Within the constructivist paradigm, students seem to be more efficient in their learning if they define their own learning objectives. This process , however, depends on two factors. Firstly, depending on their level of autonomy[12], identifying the specific goals may vary. While Wolff (2002) claims that students should be involved in defining their own learning objectives, the students' ability to do so depends on their cognitive skills and stage of their psychological development. Advanced autonomous learners with a higher language competence may be able to precisely define linguistic goals in second language learning. Learners, on the other

[12] Littlewood suggests that some learners are more autonomous than others. For further reading, see Littlewood (1996).

hand, who are not very familiar with the concept of learner autonomy yet, may start by identifying interests leading them to search for information concerning a particular topic. Therefore, Boud (1995) and Winter (2008) recommend that students are assisted by their teachers to define learning goals.

Secondly, learning objectives form a symbiosis with the learning content. This means that, if the learning contents are not relevant to the learner, s/he will not be able to define appropriate learning objectives that s/he will want to pursue. Wanting to achieve the learning goals puts the emphasis once again on the intrinsic motivation; the willingness to engage in one's learning.

Learning Strategies

Being able to define one's learning contents and learning objectives within a stimulating learning context, which makes knowledge gain relevant to the learner's life, implies the ability and freedom to assess the most efficient ways to attain new information. Strategic knowledge is hence just as crucial in the concept of learner autonomy as it is in a general educational perspective. Boud (1995) and Winter (2008) as well as Wolff (2004) therefore argue that learning strategies are essential in the context of learning plans. They are part of the knowledge that students should have about their learning and are therefore a key component in conducting and monitoring processes.

With regard to learner autonomy, and in particular in second language learning, scholars have argued in favour of a differentiation between learning and communication strategies (e.g. Oxford 1989; Littlewood 1996; De Florio-Hansen 2003). The latter refers to strategies applied in the use of the target language (Cohen & Doerney, 2002). Communication strategies are often discussed as part of the didactic method of communicative language learning called the 'communicative approach'. In the attempt to elaborate learning strategies as part of learner autonomy as a general educational concept, they are allocated a rather minor position in this framework despite their importance for learner autonomy in second language learning. In this attempt, a more general approach applying across the curriculum is taken to define and to differentiate different learning strategies. It focuses on *"the accurate use of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies to control the language*

learning process and the learning environment is the hallmark of self-directed learning" (Rivers, 2001, p. 287).

According to (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), learning strategies are *"the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain information"* (1). De Florio-Hansen (2003) extended this definition by defining learning strategies as *"any specific actions or behaviour a student engages in, most often consciously, to improve his or her own learning"* (p. 43).

In addition, Oxford (1990) provided a definition including more detail about the functioning of the strategies, emphasising that *"[...] [they] are operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information"* (p. 8). Similar to Oxford's definition but focusing on neurological processes, strategies in a neurobiological view are the mechanisms applied in order to decipher impulses, process them as information and to embed it in existing knowledge (Pinel, 2007).

Learning strategies have been investigated in an attempt to examine the 'good language learner' since the 1970s (Cohen & Doerney, 2002, p. 178). In the educational context, there is a large amount of literature which has researched learning strategies in all key learning areas[13] (Artelt, 2005; Cohen & Doerney, 2002; Dave & Unesco Institute for Education. Germany (West)., 1988; Griffiths, 2008; Macaro, 2001; Mandl, 2006; Nisbet, 1986; Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; O'Neil, 1978; Scharle & Szabó, 2000; Schmeck, 1988). At this stage, there is no entire consensus on the complete list and classification of learning strategies. However, it seems more beneficial for this framework to discuss a number of strategies in order to emphasise the importance of strategies in general in the context of learner autonomy.

The literature mainly distinguishes *cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective* and *social strategies* (Chamot, 1987; Oxford, 1990). Making the list of strategies more comprehensive, Oxford additionally included memory strategies and compensation strategies in her network of learning strategies (Oxford, 1990, p. 14).

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[13] The key learning areas in most curriculums worldwide are Arts, Health and Physical Education, Native Language, Second Languages (in English speaking countries, often, LOTE – Languages other than English), 'Mathematics', 'Science', 'Studies of Society and Environment' and 'Technology'.

Direct and Indirect Learning Strategies

The listed strategies can be further categorised into *explicit or direct* and *implicit or indirect* learning strategies. Learners use direct strategies in actively processing new information. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, serve to manage, monitor, and to evaluate all processes linked to learning. Therefore, the classification of learning strategies into two major classes seems legitimate; yet, they are not independent of one another. Direct strategies may be more assessable in their handling of new knowledge, but Oxford (1990) ascribes the indirect learning strategies functions which support the way and the degree of efficiency according to which new information may be accessed. Regarding general learning processes, indirect strategies serve to 'focus', 'organise', 'guide', 'check', 'correct', 'coach' or 'encourage' their progress (Oxford 1990, p. 15).

"Operat[ing] directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning" (Cook, 1993, pp. 114–115), memory, cognitive and compensation strategies fall into the group of explicit or direct strategies (Oxford, 1990, p. 16).

Cognitive Strategies

Many different cognitive strategies have been identified, especially in the language learning context. However, a few examples shall suffice at this point to provide a general overview of a range of strategies. Learners use cognitive strategies, for example, when repeating information or imitating other's speech (Oxford, 1990). Further, they involve resourcing such as accessing dictionaries or other materials. Note-taking is another cognitive strategy as well as questioning a third party, i.e. the teacher or parents, for the clarification or elaboration of information. It also refers to the action of applying knowledge gained in different situations or contexts (Cook, 1993).

Memory Strategies

Memory strategies are applied to remember or to store new information such as words, phrases and data in the present knowledge. Grouping information in mental

mind maps, or using imagery or sounds, are tools which help to create mental links. Reviewing information repeatedly or employing specific haptic movements which are supportive of kinaesthetic learners are additional memory strategies (Oxford, 1990).

Compensation Strategies

Compensation strategies such as guessing, using synonyms (Oxford, 1990, p. 37) or paraphrases, are often pointed out in the language learning as helping to produce or understand language despite the second language limitations. However, compensation strategies represent useful learning strategies across the curriculum to understand new and often complex information.

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive learning strategies are a set of indirect learning strategies which refer to *"all facts learners acquire about their own cognitive processes as they are applied and used to gain knowledge and acquire skills in varied situations"* (Wenden, 1991, p. 34). There is evidence that being aware and being able to control metacognitive strategies has a positive impact on learning processes and hence learning outcomes (Palmer & Goetz, 1988). Learners strive to command metacognitive strategies by centring, arranging, planning and evaluating their learning (Oxford, 1990, p. 136).

Setting goals and objectives, planning tasks, searching for a task purpose and seeking for opportunities to practise or test new hypothesis are further metacognitive strategies which are particularly essential to become an autonomous learner. They require a high degree of self-direction and are hence often encountered by students as very challenging and even overwhelming to acquire.

One of the biggest challenges in acquiring metacognitive strategies is the realistic evaluation of the learner's errors (Oxford, 1990). Some students struggle to determine the reasons for failing to achieve certain tasks or goals for various reasons. The failure of other metacognitive strategies such as too high or sometimes to low goal settings, lacking to plan or evaluate learning processes are only some causes which explain setbacks in the process of acquiring metacognitive strategies

and hence, in the learning outcome. However, making errors is necessary in order to reconsider the behaviour taken towards the expected learning outcome.

Social Strategies

Autonomous learning neither separates the learner from other learners nor from the teacher. Enabling the student to make conscious choices about the contents, goals and procedures s/he wants to engage in at the same time requires the student to employ particular social strategies which help the student to be a successful learner, i.e. in gaining communicative competence, but, in a broad sense, in achieving learning goals. Communicating and co-operating with third parties such as teachers and fellow students are two important tools in order to get information, explanations, support or guidance (Oxford, 1990). Hence, being able to ask questions, and to co-operate and empathise with third parties can be profitable for the individual learner. Further, it can be suggested that social learning strategies are necessary to create networks within which learner autonomy can only flourish. Social strategies may hence be ascribed an even stronger signification than in traditional teaching.

Affective Strategies

Affective strategies relate to emotional and motivational processes affecting one's learning (LeDoux, 2001). They serve to develop the self-confidence and perseverance needed for learners to involve themselves actively in their learning (Wolff, 2003a). Therefore, the affective side of learning strategies is one of the prominent influences determining success or failure of learning prospects. Regarding learner autonomy, affective strategies influence the degree by which a learner takes charge of her/his own learning. Positive emotions and attitudes can trigger strong motivation to take responsibility for one's learning and respectively may effectuate one's autonomy (Oxford, 1990). Self-esteem and anxiety likewise are linked to affective strategies; they can enforce but also block the learner's motivation (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, it is essential for the learner to be aware of her/his emotions and attitudes, to monitor and subsequently to control them.

In conclusion, in the traditional classroom little attention has been granted to the explicit and implicit learning strategies. However, in the process of becoming an autonomous learner, learning strategies represent an important set of soft skills (Wolff, 2004). At the same time, they seem to be hard to tackle for learners if the learners are not given the right amount of freedom to monitor their own learning processes and guidance. Making the learner aware of the different learning strategies is hence a necessary step in shifting responsibility to the learner. Studies suggest that learning strategies are devices which are part of the equipment that the learner needs in the gradual process of taking on responsibility for her/his own learning (e.g. Boud, 1988; Oxford, 1990; Scharle & Szabó, 2000). The teacher hence is attributed an important role in supporting the student in this process. However, instead of directing the students by telling them which steps to take next, the teacher's functions become more facilitating. The teacher can only suggest to and assist students in practising learning strategies. Any intention to impose learning strategies on the learner must fail as this would be just as unrealistic as to control someone's mind. The successful co-operation between the student and teacher, however, eventually entitles the learner to make her/his own choices regarding a range of different strategies.

Self-Assessment

A further component to be presented in the context of implementing learning plans is the variable self-assessment. Self-assessment is often discussed in the context of self-regulation or self-directed learning (e.g. Wenden, 1995; Boud, 1995; Paris & Byrnes 1989). In these works, self-assessment is considered a monitoring strategy of the learner's work attitude and behaviour and her/his approaches towards a specific learning goal.

However, while the component of self-assessment may be ascribed to the set of characteristics describing self-regulation, the grounds on which it evolves are more complex. Therefore, the discussion of self-assessment as a pillar of the construct of learner autonomy needs to be preceded by the analysis of the functions of self-assessment and the circumstances under which the construct of self-assessment emerged. Its existence can be traced back to the traditional classroom which depends on a *"mechanism to control students"* (Boud, 1995, p. 35). Its strongest

reason for existence being a necessary extrinsic trigger to enforce the student's learning attitude, assessment, however, has been in the crossfire of worried parents, pedagogues and researchers for centuries (Boud, 1995; Lillard, 2005; Parkhurst, 1922). The main controversial aspects arise from conforming to performance standards, poorly constructed tests, the erroneous attempt to test individual learning outcomes with tests created for homogenous learning groups, to marking systems which categorise students into high- and under-achieving students.

As a result of the on-going debates about fairer and more encouraging assessment forms, the concept of self-assessment has emerged. The grounds for this argument lie in the seemingly simple but crucial understanding that the learner her/himself has to be aware of her/his own approaches to learning. Hence, basing observations and strategies to improve one's learning attitude and progress on the view of the student and not entirely on the teacher (bottom-up) represents a key concept in the assessment discussion as well as in the construct of learner autonomy. This has been recognised by educational institutions and educational researchers, and the literature reports about several attempts to support learning results by employing different forms of self-assessment. In Europe, for example, a portfolio[14] (Little, 2002) which is designed for the disciplines of second language learning represents an approach towards modifying the learning environment to become more flexible and learner-oriented.

Although, self-assessment may not replace top-down (from teacher to student) directed external assessments, it may, however, be argued that assessment and self-assessment can co-exist. Against the background of learner autonomy, this approach yet again highlights the necessity of a mutual understanding between the learner and the teacher of their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, identifying self-assessment as a variable of learner autonomy is not sufficient. It would indeed feed arguments by critics that students cannot assess their work themselves, claiming that students throughout secondary school (some even do not relate it to age) may not be mature or self-critical enough to be able to define the success or failure and the reasons for their learning outcomes (discussed for example in: Lacey, 2007; Nadzrah, 2007). The expressed fears unveil a particular concern. As a Confucian

[14] European portfolios were discussed in Chapter 3.

saying goes: We must learn to walk before we can run. Knowing about one's responsibilities does not automatically enable the learner to live up to them. This means assessing one's learning outcomes may embody fewer challenges than assessing someone else's learning outcomes. The learners have to acquire the means to assess their learning progress.

As students are often not used to assessing their own learning performance, self-assessment is a challenge which, however, needs to be overcome for several reasons. Self-assessment not only terminates one stage of learning, it also represents a learning process itself as well, as it introduces the initial phase of a new learning process. Without being entitled to and capable of identifying the reasons for each learning outcome, neither may a learning goal may be determined nor may modifications be made to one's learning approach to improve or reassure one's learning performance. It would be like refusing to profit from our history.

Considering the often rigid school curricular and the history of teaching didactics, it is, however, not surprising that self-assessment is often the last or not achieved step in the process of becoming an autonomous learner. Teachers are under significant pressure from higher authorities to reach certain learning standards, or they fear to lose a powerful instrument over students by *"[…] elevating the status of the student to one of assessor and judge of quality in the same way as the lecturer*" (Bone & Hinett, 2002). The latter point raises the question as to whether it is a human trait to defend the crack of the whip over enduring communication.

Social Forms

Although social forms are a paradigm which are usually not for students to define, they require consideration in a learning environment that aims to individualise learning. Wolff (2002) recommends suitable social forms in which constructive learning can unfold. The three main social forms are frontal, pair- and group learning. Frontal learning continues to be the most common form in which traditional classroom teachings take place. As part of this social form, dominant communicative actions take place between the teacher and the student. The teacher explains learning contents, addresses questions to the entire class and delegates learning tasks which students then usually do by themselves.

In pair-learning, students work on particular tasks with a classmate, and the students are encouraged to help each other prior to contacting the teacher for questions.

Group-learning refers to a number of students greater than two who explore academic tasks together. Sometimes, team leaders are nominated to co-ordinate activities within the group, and results are presented on a group rather than individual basis. The teacher acts rather as a mediator and intervenes if the learning progress may falter or if questions arise.

With regard to fostering students' sense of responsibility, however, Wolff (2002) perpetuates the view that frontal learning is the least suitable social form as the teacher continues to facilitate learning on her/his terms. Students who dominantly work on their own and who learn in situations in which the teacher functions as the communicator therefore strongly rely on the directions from the teacher and receive immediate feedback regarding their performance. They may therefore be less challenged to reflect on their learning, the way that they approach academic tasks, and to develop a sense of responsibility for their work which is orchestrated by the teacher in the first place.

While Wolff (2002), however, is in favour of the social form of group learning in order to enhance learner autonomy, he says little about the risks of group learning for the autonomous learner. Taking into account Nunan's (1997) proposition that learners may be able to operate at different levels as autonomous learners, group work can become problematic if some students of the same group are more prepared to and capable of taking responsibility for their learning than others (e.g. Pica & Doughty, 1985). The objectives and limitations of a group work approach will be further discussed in chapter 8 in which students' and teachers' views regarding social forms will be discussed.

- *P4 – P7 Working Phase, Assessment and Revision*

Having specified the content of the didactic paradigms that underlie the learning plan, students commence their work on their learning plan. Once the work is completed, the finished products undergo assessment by the teacher. Wolff (2002), Winter (2008), and Boud (1995) perpetuate a view that self-assessment should also be part of the evaluation process of the finished products. This is a crucial reflective step towards analysing what went well during the work with the learning plan, which

challenges the students came across and how can they be addressed in a new learning plan. Based on these findings and the assessment of the products, a new learning plan can be formulated.

- *Conclusion*

Combining Boud's (1995), Winter's (2008), and Wolff's (2002) didactic approaches to autonomy, seven implementation phases of a learning plan can be proposed as an operational model to implement a learning plan. A distinction can be made between two levels that underpin autonomy in the classroom. Level one, which does not explicitly appear in either Boud's (1995) or Winter's (2008) implementation phases of a learning plan, includes the cognitive dimensions of *student – teacher roles* and *the learner's awareness of autonomy*. The word 'cognitive' here reflects on the mental predispositions towards learning that need to change in a learner-centred environment.

As the learning plan requires a more flexible structure as opposed to traditional teaching (Knowles, 1986; Knowles, 1998), student – teacher roles take different shapes with students taking on more responsibility for their learning and teachers becoming the facilitator. This, however, requires students' awareness of the implications in an environment that demands a lot of autonomy.

Level two contains Winter's (2008) and Boud's (1995) milestone's that are to be taken in the course of implementing a learning plan. In addition to this model, Wolff (2002) identified a number of didactic paradigms that he describes as the pillars of a classroom that fosters autonomy. From a theoretical point of view, the design of learning plans goes hand in hand with establishing an environment that fosters autonomy. One of the predicaments for that is the focus on a flexible use of *social forms* like group or pair work. According to Wolff (2002), students should be strongly involved in defining the didactic paradigms of the *learner context, learner content*, and the *learning objectives*. Autonomous learners in his view are aware and capable of monitoring and using various *learning strategies*. In addition, the evaluation of created products is partially based on students' *self-assessment*.

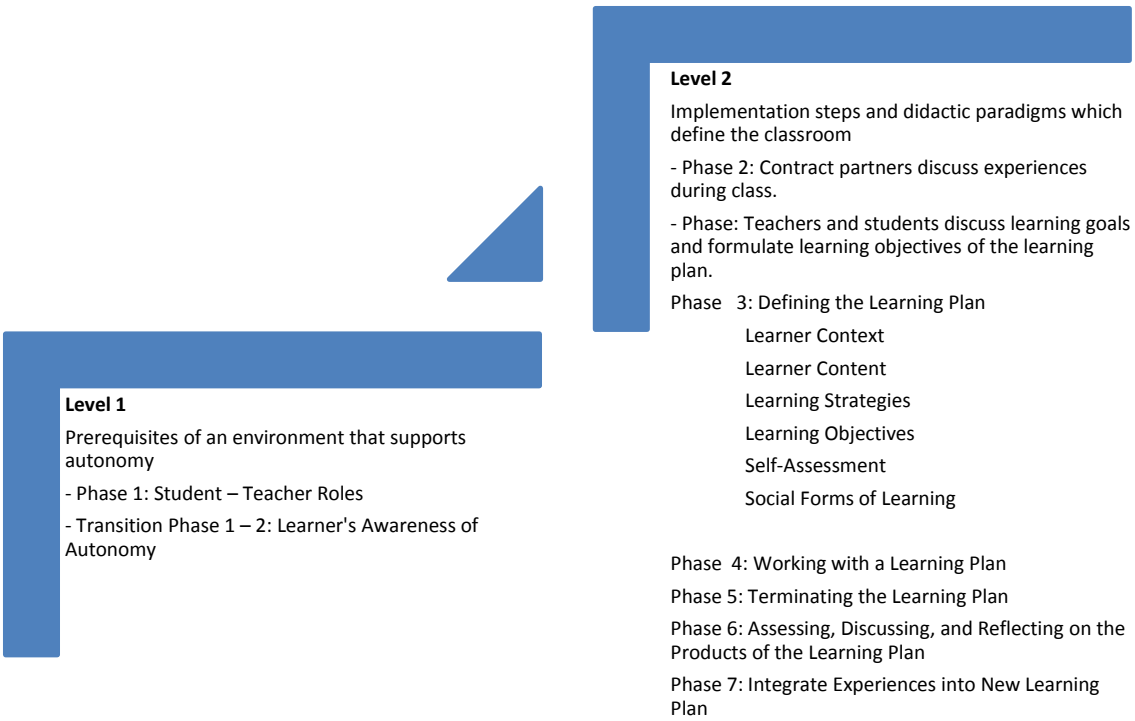

Figure 3: Development Stages of Autonomy

4.4. Summary

From the discussion of portfolios, diaries, learning plans, and computers as instruments, it is apparent that research has engaged to convert theoretical concepts of learner autonomy into praxis. Diaries and digital portfolios are often used in second language acquisition as accompanying tools to monitor and assess the learning progress (Levy, 1997).

In more recent years, in the context of computer assisted learning (CALL), the internet has been explored as a platform for computer-mediated communication (CMC) for second language purposes. It has been established that online communication practices between learners within and outside the classroom can enhance second language learning by supporting characteristics of the autonomous learner and vice versa.

In addition to enhancing critical reflection on the learning progress and learner engagement as promoted by diaries and portfolios, computer-mediated learning further encourages learners to make choices; to virtually discuss; and to think about learning strategies with exchange partners for example. At the same time, these reflection and directive processes are conducted in the target language, for which reason CMC also promotes autonomy as language competence (Macaro, 1997).

Hence, the tools of portfolios, diaries, and the computer encourage the learner to work to a certain degree autonomously. However, at closer inspection of these instruments, it has also been noted that within a one-dimensional view the instruments remain nothing more than a different form of exercise platform or assessment tool. Working autonomously does not necessarily lead to the development of autonomy skills. If the learner, for example, does not have the ability to critically reflect on her/his learning progress, to her/him a diary will remain not much more than a piece of paper on which to rephrase the events of the previous learning session. The learner may not deduce different learning strategies to improve her/his learning from her/his learning results. It goes to show that the degree of usability of these instruments supporting learner autonomy depends on the applicability by the learner. As a result, weaker learners may be disadvantaged as they may not possess required particular reflective strategies (Oxford, 1990).

In order to exploit the entire supportive content of these tools as platforms for autonomy development, the learning plan was further discussed as a scaffolding tool to foster autonomy in praxis. In order to be implemented as a holistic learning device which functions as a system rather than a plain contract, seven milestones were identified based on the work by Boud (1995), Winter (2008), and Wolff (2002). They need to be targeted in the course of using a learning plan in the classroom. These steps represent a comprehensive way to establish a learning plan that focuses on negotiation between students and teachers. It further provides a clear structure to both parties to which they commit.

As a prior step towards implementing a learning plan, a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the learner is required. In this newly established relationship between the teacher and the learner, the teacher is, however, not to be deprived of her/his authority but reassured of it in the form of a supporter, counsellor and guide in the interest of both – the learner and the teacher.

Students further need to be made aware of the benefits of the learning plan and the learning goals regarding second language learning. This requires specific task setting before commencing the work with a learning plan. In this process, with the assistance from their teachers, learners are required to actively make use of and discuss autonomy skills that are evident in the didactic paradigms of learning contents, learning objectives, learning context, learning strategies, social forms and self-assessment. To what extent students can define these paradigms and therefore exercise the principle of genuine choice (Esch, 1996) depends on the teacher's interpretation, promotion, and support of the students to work with a learning plan. There is hence a need to specify how these didactic paradigms should be ideally interpreted and implemented in a learning plan so that students positively perceive learning plans as a framework that enhances autonomy skills.

Furthermore, the presented implementation model is mainly based on theoretical concepts. It lacks an empirical foundation which links the anticipated benefits to develop autonomy with students' perception of a learning plan. The following chapters will aim to establish such an empirical bridge to combine theoretical measurements of learning plans with outcomes in praxis. In this context, I will investigate which factors impact on learners' perception of learning plans. Furthermore, I will aim to analyse how the six defined didactic paradigms of the learning plan should be implemented as part of a learning plan that allows for autonomy and scaffolds the latter at the same time.

5. Assessing Learning Plans That Foster Learner Autonomy

The previous chapters provided an overview of various theoretical conceptions of and ways to facilitate learner autonomy. Based on a literature review and empirical findings from a study conducted with high schools in Australia (Schuster, 2012), it became apparent that various definitions of learner autonomy and other related terms have found entrance into the praxis. Reflecting these findings, a model of autonomy and a definition have been proposed. The working definition that this thesis focuses on learner autonomy as a psychological concept which refers to the knowledge about learning which enables one to conduct, monitor, and assess learning processes. Furthermore, learner autonomy demands a high level of responsibility for the decisions and choices that the learner makes as part of all learning processes. However, knowledge about learning and the skills to conduct learning are not inherent in the learner, but the learner has the cognitive and psychological predisposition to develop feelings of responsibility for her/his learning, and autonomy skills to conduct, monitor and assess her/his learning progress. As a result, diaries, portfolios, computers, and learning plans have been described as ways to support the autonomous learner, particularly in the second language classroom.

Emphasis has been put on the use of learning plans which can accommodate diaries, portfolios, and computers in their frameworks. Having discussed existing theories on how learning plans should be implemented in the context of learner autonomy, the circumstance that formal learning in most societies occurs in a "*testing society*" (Broadfoot, 2005 in: Paran, 2010, p. 1) ultimately culminates in attempts to measure the impact of learning plans on learner autonomy. Leading from a discussion of current general perspectives on ways to assess learner autonomy as depicted in the literature, I will propose an alternative approach to assessing learning plans that foster autonomy. Introducing the psychological concepts of *student commitment*, *engagement*, and *academic self-efficacy*, I suggest a theoretical model that explores the interrelationship between the three concepts that indirectly underpin the development of learner autonomy as part of the learning plan. Firstly, this chapter will outline the theoretical background that frames the investigation of my research. Secondly, I will outline the questions relating to the proposed model.

5.1. Key Issues of Assessing Learning Plans in the Context of Learner Autonomy

Based on the view that learner autonomy comprises knowledge (Sinclair, 2000b) about learning and appropriate skills to conduct and control learning (Benson, 2010), research has engaged in a debate on whether and how to assess this knowledge and these skills. Similarly, this discussion also needs to expand to instruments or learning programmes which support the development of learner autonomy such as the learning plan. Applying the main arguments about assessment raised in the context of learner autonomy to the use of learning plans, it appears that measuring the impact of learning plans is a challenge. Two main arguments provided by Benson (2010) about the assessment of learner autonomy are also relevant to the potential assessment of learning plans.

Firstly, there is a danger that, rather than assessing autonomy, what is measured is the degree of independence from the teacher (Benson, 2010). However, this is more useful to do in the context of autonomous learning which defines particular behaviour related to learning that is conducted independently from the teacher (see 2.2). Assessing the ability to exert autonomy and therefore to control one's learning is a different agenda. Secondly, Benson (2010) critiques that most attempts undertaken to measure autonomy by producing taxonomies and scales in the field of self-directed learning (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy 1991; Knowles, 1975, Confessore & Park, 2004, Guglielmino, 1977) measure different constructs which are not necessarily linked to autonomy. In accordance with Bonham (1991), Benson notes, for example, that Candy's (1991) measurement of more than 100 competencies is somewhat associated with autonomy but that *"being able to organise data, having a taste for learning, being amiable and peace-loving, being emotionally stable, objective and impartial and so on"* are attitudes that are not necessarily related to autonomy (Benson, 2010, p. 82).

However, while Benson's argumentation (2010) is justified (as he highlights the limitations of similar assessment approaches of autonomy), I suggest that the approaches to identify taxonomies of and to measure autonomy are also important in the assessment of any learning programme. From one point of view, testing outcomes of a learning programme is an important milestone of the implementation process in order to identify whether it fulfils the purpose that it has been designed for

(Benson, 2001; O'Leary, 2007). In the context of learning plans, this means that their functionality could be tested by defining taxonomies of autonomy. Benson (2010) has attempted that to a certain degree by identifying that students' ability to control their learning would need to be assessed. However, there is *"little evidence to suggest that autonomy consists of any particular combination of these behaviours"* (Benson, 2001, p. 51).

From another point of view, measuring autonomy that is developed under a learning plan could turn the latter into an assessment tool (Schmenk & McGarry, 2011) as its targeted potential to foster the responsibility for learning may again be confused with measuring to what extent students study autonomously. In comparison to measuring, for example, second language competence, autonomy as a skill cannot be assessed like a task response which is evaluated as performance (also referred to as summative assessment[15] (Harlen, 2006). Learning plans should help to 'self-initiate' learner autonomy (O'Leary, 2007) which students may willingly choose to exercise in certain situations or not (Benson, 2010). However, assessment forms need to avoid autonomy being measured by behaviour, as students might imitate certain behavioural traits which they think that the teacher considers to reflect skills of autonomy (Breen & Mann, 1997).

Furthermore, while the discussion of autonomy assessment certainly has its place, outcome oriented assessment attempts are limited in their overall benefits. Gaining information about the achievements of learning programmes may be useful for target assessment. However, more importantly, this knowledge about students' learning achievements or learning process can be used for intervention purposes. In the context of *Assessment for Learning*[16], Boud (1995) and Ramsden (2003) proclaim that assessment through *"grade, rank, and/or feedback […] can also be used to improve students' approach to learning through shaping how students view the curriculum,"* (in: O'Leary, 2007, p. 3). In the context of learning plans, for example, Candy's (1991) proposed a measure to assess organisational skills or Oxford's

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[15] "*Summative assessment serves an evaluative purpose when the performance of groups of students is used to report on the work of a class, a teacher, a school or another part of an educational system"* (Harlen 2006, p. 103). Summative assessment is also known as *Assessment of Learning*.

[16] Formative assessment *"promotes learning by using evidence about what students have reached, in relation to the goals of their learning, to plan the next steps in their learning and know how to take them"* (Harlen, 2006, p. 104).

(1990) suggestion to assess learning strategies can be used to help identify learning objectives and ways to target them.

In addition to knowing students' preferred learning techniques and the way they conduct learning, learners' attitudes towards their learning plan or any other learning programme could be further explored for intervention purposes. Particularly teachers need to understand the way that students perceive their learning plan in order to assure the quality of the work produced as part of its framework, which is essentially the improvement of learners' competence, such as in language learning, and the enhancement of autonomy. Cotterall (1995) for example states that learners' beliefs are likely to influence the development of autonomy, while Ushioda (1996) discusses the link between autonomy and student motivation. These and similar works are crucial to the research field of autonomy as they identify aspects such as students' beliefs (Cotterall, 1995) or students' preferred approaches to learning (Oxford, 1990).

Based on insights into learners' behaviour and attitudes, teachers can design interventional learning programmes or activities that 'manipulate' learners' common behaviour or attitudes. This can help students to detect more efficient approaches or strategies to learning which ultimately fosters students' learning and autonomy skills. Cotterall's (1995), Oxford's (1990), and other researchers' work who discuss and developed tools in the context of *assessment for learning*, aim to diagnose students' abilities and needs that impact on their learning outcomes such as the development of autonomy skills. A learning programme, e.g. the learning plan, serves as a vehicle to implement activities that can accommodate these needs. In addition to that, students not only act upon these activities, they can be involved in the development process of the learning plan, as suggested by Wolff (2004) (see 4.3).

> [B]y participating in the process of diagnosing his needs, formulating his objectives, identifying resources, choosing strategies, and evaluating his accomplishments, the learner develops a sense of ownership of (and commitment to) the plan. (Knowles, 1986, p. 213)

The literature hence anticipates that students are partially involved in assessment measures by engaging in all processes, from diagnosing their needs to evaluating their achievements; it is also claimed that learners develop a sense of commitment towards or bond with their learning plan. Smith (1983) further prioritises learning plans over traditional learning as they help students develop higher motivation and commitment towards their learning plan as opposed to traditional learning. McPherson (2001) goes as far as to link commitment directly to learning

achievement. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that commitment to a learning plan, which is a framework of autonomy, may similarly be an important aspect to:

1. understand why particular learning goals set in the learning plan have been achieved; and
2. assess whether a learning plan is effective in enhancing autonomy.

However, it appears that there is no empirical evidence which defines and measures students' commitment that students develop towards their learning plan. Neither current formative nor summative attempts to assess learning programmes integrate the measurement of commitment as a precursor to academic achievement and ultimately to develop autonomy.

As a preliminary step towards measuring student commitment, the following section sets out to develop a working definition of student commitment that is embedded in a complex theoretical model. It draws upon extensive research on commitment in the context of organisational psychology (Alutto et al., 1973; Beck, 2000; Becker, 1960; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday et al., 1982; Porter, 1976) which can be translated into the educational context.

5.2. A Student Commitment Model

Our society balances the freedom to pursue our own destiny within a set of rigid laws within which our personalities may unfold. This means that, while (most) individuals are free to make choices, we are constantly reminded of the limits of our rights. Quite naturally, we speak about every-day commitments which oblige us to provide for our partner and family or to fulfil work-tasks. The Oxford dictionary elaborates on these daily promises or agreements that represent a traditional norm in most societies. Therein, commitment is described as *"a promise to do something or to behave in a particular way; a promise to support somebody/something; the fact of committing yourself [...] [or] the willingness to work hard and give your energy and time to a job or an activity*." A third interpretation describes commitment as *"a thing that you have promised or agreed to do, or that you have to do"*. One may also be committed to something *"in order to achieve something.*

5.2.1. Organisational Commitment Definitions and the Distinction from Identification

The philosophical and social dimension of commitment has long become established within societies. Research has since taken interest in exploring the concept of commitment in the field of organisational psychology. In this domain, it has a more than 40 year research tradition. Various definitions have entered the literature in organisational psychology investigating employees' behaviour in their workplace (Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Becker, 1960; Buchanan, 1974; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974), and different perspectives of commitment have been identified. In order to define the concept of commitment in the educational context, an overview of the theoretical and methodological accomplishments made in the context of organisational psychology shall be a starting point to develop a working definition that is applicable in the educational sector.

Adopted by Buchanan (1974), Porter and Lawler (1968) proposed a complex definition of organisational commitment in the very early stages of research. He depicted commitment as the *"willingness of an employee to exert high levels of effort on behalf of the organisation, a strong desire to stay with the organisation, and an acceptance of its major goals and values"* (cited in: Buchanan, 1974, p. 533).

Embracing the dimensions of engagement and identification, Sheldon (1971) considered 'commitment' to be the employee's agreement with the organisation's goals followed by the intention to contribute to achieving these goals.

Kantor (1968) on the other hand did not explicitly mention the congruence of the employee's and the organisation's goals. He focussed on the aspects of willingness to engage and to be loyal to the organisation. Equally to that, in a later study Cohen and Kirchmeyer (1995) state that commitment *"has been defined as an individual's dedication and loyalty to an organization,"* (Cohen & Kirchmeyer, 1995, p. 474). Thus, he ascribes commitment two dimensions: the dimension of engagement and the desire to stay with the organisation.

Emphasising solely the dimension of engagement, (Brown, 1969; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1972; Mowday, Steers, Porter, 1979) compared commitment with the *"strength of involvement one has with the organization"* (Kacmar, Carlson, & Brymer, 1999, p. 976).

While Hrebiniak and Allutto (1973) do not underpin the aspect of involvement or engagement as part of their definition, they emphasise desire of the employee to remain with the organisation despite incentives such as pay rises, status, professional freedom, and greater friendliness from colleagues offered by competing organisations.

In addition, Reichers' definition (1985) furthers these definitions by pointing out that commitment cannot be described as a static relationship that the employee has with her/his organisation. In his view, "*commitment is a process of identification with the goals of the organization's multiple constituencies. These constituencies may include top management, customers, unions and/or the public at large"* (Reichers, 1985, p. 465).

Looking at the different dimensions that the given definitions embrace, a lack of consensus on one definition becomes evident. In an attempt to provide a more holistic definition of commitment which combines the aspects touched upon in the previous definitions, Meyer and Allen (1991) accumulate differing conceptions of commitment adding the dimension of continuance to the definition. They state that it

> [...] is a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue membership in the organization (p. 67*).*

This compromise view has been maintained widely in the literature and has formed the basis for recent research efforts (e.g. Battistelli, Mariani, & Bellò, 2006; Pratt & Rosa, 2003; WeiBo, Kaur, & Jun, 2010).

Based on the definitions provided, three aspects can be determined by which people identify themselves with a certain organisation:

> 1) acceptance of the goals and values of the organization
> 2) will to engage in this organization
> 3) preference to stay with the organization (Mowday et al., 1982, p. 27).

Thus, the continuing objectives behind the investigation of the concept of commitment are twofold. The investigation exceeds the exploration of the behaviour of employees and attempts to make predictions of employees' long-term relationship with their company including employee turnover, productivity, and absenteeism (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

5.2.2. Parallels between Organisational and Student Commitment

Focussing on the factors that determine employees' long-term relationship with their company, Meyer and Allen (1997) agree with (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982) in the view that people who are not committed to an entity (e.g. their organisation) feel alienated towards the latter. That is a destructive attribute which hampers the workforce. As a result:

> If [employees] become less committed to organizations, employees may channel their commitment in other directions (e.g. industry, careers, hobbies, volunteer groups)" (Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 5).

While this is a scenario describing organisational relationships, parallels to the schooling system are apparent. Employees as well as students are both bound to their organisations or courses of actions. While students have to go to school by law and require a school qualification for their further careers, employees need to finance their living.

Although hierarchies in an organisation appear more rigid, there are similar structures in a school. Employees have supervisors and managers to direct and monitor project teams. Students, on the other hand, have teachers who have various supervising, mentoring, disciplinary and of course teaching functions. In both forms of organisations, members are not entirely free in their decision-making. In fact, from infant age to adulthood humans are taught to live within certain boundaries. They may differ in their nature and intensity between individuals, but rules and boundaries make up societies (Luhmann, 1989).

However, one of the major differences between students at a school and employees at an organisation is the degree by which freedom of choice can be exerted. Some employees who feel more bound to their companies due to social or personal constraints may have fewer options of leaving their current employer than others. Yet, in both cases, employees *"[…] may start to evaluate their own skills and experience in terms of their marketability outside the organization, rather than by their implications for their current or future jobs in the organization"* (Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 6). Students on the other hand, have altogether little or no choice than to stay with their school. Only in extreme cases such as due to home movement, having become the victim of crime or the students' own behaviour which leads to exclusion from her/his school, can students change classes or schools.

The reasons and consequences for finding themselves ‘trapped’ in a micro-cosmos which does not meet their needs are manifold. Students tend to distance themselves from their work which results for example in disruptive behaviour, in a lack of concentration during class, missing homework or absence from school (Cummins, 1988; Doyle, 1986). All of the accounted behaviours can result in academic underperformance (Natriello & McDill, 1986). The reasons students can feel alienated from their work, and in many cases, from their school, range from personal work attitudes, the influence from competitive or bullying classmates, and distraction through friends to family difficulties.

- *Behavioural Commitment*

The fact that students have little choice in terms of changing the school, if there are aspects they strongly disagree with, underpins that students are somewhat behaviourally committed towards their school and the activities that are expected of them to be completed. This type of responsibility for a student’s commitment towards an action or course of action can be called *behavioural commitment*. Having derived from the organisational context, behavioural commitment refers to *“the process by which individuals become locked into a certain organization and how they deal with this problem”* (Mowday, 1982, p. 26, cited in: Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 9). In the educational context, this could be interpreted as the obligation to stay with their school or their class. Hence, once students are in a particular school, they are ‘locked in’ the courses of actions that the school expects them to do. They are thus committed to a ‘course of action’.

Behavioural commitment in the organisational and in the educational context is, however, not necessarily a negative force, meaning that there are other reasons than obligation for which students and employees pursue activities that they are asked to do. From a behavioural perspective, an individual may experience commitment towards a specific action or course of action in opposition to the whole organisation as an entity. In the organisational context, Salancik (1977) suggests that individuals develop strong commitment due to their own acting which is based on one’s volition. Kiesler (1971) elaborated that employees who are committed to remain at their organisation behave accordingly with their positive view of their organisation. Reasons for employees’ coinciding view with their behaviour are, for example, to

avoid *"cognitive dissonance or to maintain positive self-perception (e.g. as being 'in control' and doing what one 'wants to do')"* (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972, p. 556).

It can be suggested that a similar background for behavioural commitment can be described for students. As students are required to complete tasks, do homework, pay attention during class and study for tests, they might develop a sense of commitment towards their work as they realise that this is their responsibility. Behavioural commitment is hence a psychological state that employees and students develop in order to explain or justify a continuous course of action retrospectively (Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972). Proponents of this approach hence intend to determine conditions influencing commitment towards a course of action rather than to the organisation.

- *Attitudinal Commitment*

Commitment towards behaviour in the form of a course of action often influences the relationship with the organisation, and therefore also the school, as well. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) suggest that committed behaviour can result in a commitment attitude. Reichers (1985) elaborated this view by describing the reciprocity between attitudinal and behavioural commitment. He points out that one's attitude can lead to a behaviour which in turn enhances commitment attitude: *"Whenever people act, their actions may become binding if those actions occur in a context of high choice, high irreversibility, and high visibility"* (Weick, 1995, p. 7).

From an educational point of view this theoretical approach perpetuates that the type of school-related actions that students conduct can reinforce a feeling of attitudinal commitment towards their school. An example for this phenomenon is a school's sports culture. Students who play sports for their school and take part in competitions against other schools or display their skills and competence in public often enter a strong bond with their school (Marsh & Perry, 2005). Some students feel committed towards their training because they might have strong feelings of pride or honour to be representing their school. They may even identify themselves with their school. Hence, the commitment towards training can lead towards thinking about a relationship with the school. This process can result in *"[…] a mind set in which individuals consider the extent to which their own values and goals are congruent*

with those of the organization" (Mowday, 1982, p. 26, cited in: Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 9) which is in this case the school.

This directionality of commitment, which can but does not have to result from behaviour, has been defined as *attitudinal commitment* in the organisational literature. Concerning attitudinal commitment, organisational definitions commonly refer to the relationship between the employee and her/his organisation. In the educational context, attitudinal commitment thus describes the relationship between students and their school.

- *Commitment towards the Learning Plan as a Particular Entity*

However, commitment also has the capacity to function as an agent, for example, with regard to other entities such as units or teams (Gautam, 2002). Thus, the scope of commitment research is not limited to organisations. In fact, organisations represent only one particular entity to which individuals can develop forms and degrees of commitment. The notion of commitment also applies in other social institutions such as families, and political or cultural groups (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

It can therefore be postulated that students also can develop commitment towards different entities. These entities can be, for example, the students' class that may be considered a team of classmates, a group of friends within the school, the student's teacher etc. Furthermore, it is suggested that students can also be committed towards entities such as learning programmes like the learning plan as the student enters an agreement to work within this framework and to complete the tasks that are part of it. Regarding the entity of a learning plan, I suggest that it can trigger behavioural as well as attitudinal commitment. Behavioural commitment defines the student's awareness that s/he needs to fulfil the tasks that are designed as part of the learning plan. If the student realises the use of these tasks and her/his general learning within the framework of the learning plan, the student may further develop attitudinal commitment towards the learning plan – representing a form of respect for its particular structure and design as well as a sense of responsibility for its completion.

In addition, commitment is often not one-dimensional, meaning that an individual may not only develop commitment to one particular entity. In fact, it seems quite natural that individuals can be committed to several entities. To a certain extent, an

employee can, for example, be committed to her/his company and her/his family by varying nature and degrees (Becker, 1960). Translating this idea into an educational perspective, students may, for example, develop commitment towards their learning plan and their school. They can also be committed towards particular actions or activities as a result of commitment towards their parents.

- *Components of Commitment*

Adding to the argument that students may not only be committed towards various entities but that they also may be committed towards various entities, it can further be suggested that students can develop commitment for different reasons. This is a crucial notion that has been extensively researched in organisational psychology (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Becker, 1960; Hall, Schneider, & Nygren, 1970; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Kanter, 1968; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993; Mowday, 1982; Reichers, 1985; Wiener, 1982) and can be incorporated in educational views. As can be inferred from the previous discussion of behavioural and attitudinal commitment, employees as well as students can be obliged and therefore committed towards a particular course of action as requested by their organisations with which they work. It was discussed in this chapter that students have fewer options of deciding in which school they want to learn or when to leave the school. In contrast to that, employees have more personal authority to make conscious decisions about the organisation they want to work for. However, their choices may also be limited by external factors such as job availability, pay rates, distance from home etc. They are referred to as ‘side bets’ in organisational terms (Becker, 1960).

Once students and employees are ‘locked into’ their organisation or school respectively, they are required to follow a particular course of action. However, from a philosophical perspective on autonomy, students as well as employees may conduct these actions in various ways, put varying amounts of effort into their work or even refuse to follow these actions. These working or learning processes are based on everyday choices that we make (Spitzer, 1999).

In order to clarify this point of view, I shall provide a brief example: a student who decides to read a book chapter for the next class makes the decision to engage in a learning process regarding the content and the context of the chapter. In contrast to

that, if the learner refuses to read the chapter, s/he makes the decision not to engage in this particular learning process.

There is an ample amount of everyday scenarios in which the learner makes decisions about their learning. Many of them are subconscious as they can even reflect in the concentration levels that a student attributes to her/his work. While these are natural decisions that are linked to emotions (Spitzer, 1999), the awareness and ability to make conscious decisions are skills which need to be acquired (Nunan, 1997).

The reasons for making a positive or negative decision further vary. Students may decide to read the chapter because they might be genuinely interested in the content of the chapter. Another reason could be that the students' decision is based on prior experiences in that s/he knows of the negative consequences that it will have for the learner if s/he does not read the chapter.

A young learner may make all these decisions without being aware of her/his freedom of choice. As small as this freedom may appear, every decision that a learner makes consciously or subconsciously leads to consequences for future learning experiences. Hence, being in charge of one's learning or other activities starts as early as in childhood.

While school based decisions may seem reasonably small, the decision whether an employee of an organisation decides to take or quit a particular job, fulfil or put off a certain task or to work after hours or not are similar. Hence, it is arguable as to whether students can be in charge of their learning. From a constructivist point of view, this is a truism as learning is a highly subjective process (Wolff, 2004) for which reason information as such cannot be 'taught'. However, the incentives for pursuing learning activities or keeping up work with an organisation vary.

In the schooling context, students may, for example, stay with their school, or, as relevant in this thesis, a learning plan, because they want to. Reasons for that may be that the student perceives the tasks as useful or enjoys learning in the particular environment that the school creates. The attachment that the student develops based on reasons of personal agreement with the school or with the school's course of action can be called *affective commitment*.

Originating in the theoretical grounds of attitudinal organisational commitment, Buchanan (1974) defined the dimension of affective commitment as *"a partisan, affective attachment to the goals and values of the organization, to one's role in relation to goals and values, and to the organization for its own sake, apart from its purely instrumental worth"* (Buchanan, 1974, p. 533). Translating this definition into a student context, this means that the learner is affectively attached towards her/his school or learning plan as s/he realises the personal value of the learning goals that the school or the learning plan entail.

On a more general note, a student's or employee's affective orientation can be equalised with *"the attachment of an individual's fund of affectivity and emotion to the group"* (Kanter,, 1968, p. 507). In other words, the employee or the student want to continue working for her/his company or school due to her/his own volition. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (1982) describe affective commitment as: *"The relative strength of an individual's identification with an involvement in a particular organization."* (p. 27)

Similarly to that, Hall, Schneider, and Nygren (1970) claim that being affectively committed to an organisation follows *"the process by which the goals of the organization and those of the individual become increasingly integrated or congruent"* (p. 176 f.). For students this means that they become attached to their school or other entities such as a learning plan because they adopt the values and learning goals of the latter as their own.

It could further be argued that long-term agreement with the way that learning is enhanced in the school or as part of a learning plan can lead to *"an attitude or an orientation towards the organization [here: the school] which links or attaches the identity of the person to the organization*" (Sheldon, 1971, p. 143). This definition of affective commitment is, however, problematic as it requires the definition of 'identity'. Instead, it is proposed that only certain aspects of a student's and employee's identity are congruent with the goals and actions of their school or organisation[17].

[17] Although Gautam et al. (2004) confirmed a strong correlation between affective commitment and organisational identification as evident in the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), unshared variance results in studies by Mael and Tetrick (1992); Gautam et al. (2004); and Riketta (2005) allow a conclusion which distinguishes between identification and commitment. Thus, it is crucial to investigate organisational commitment and identification on different accounts.

While students might be committed towards their school, learning programmes such as the learning plan, or particular projects only, students may also conduct learning because they are obliged to. Employees can be in a similar situation, as the goals and actions of the organisation or other entities do not always and under all circumstances coincide with the employee's views. Other – external and internal – factors may thus lead to or enforce commitment.

A high cost scenario, for example, is characteristic for behavioural but also attitudinal commitment, also named *continuance commitment*[18] (e.g. Bateman & Strasser, 1984; Buchanan, 1974; Hrebiniak & Alutto, 1972; Reichers, 1985). The costs scenario first suggested by Becker (1960) leads to commitment based on "*a side bet [that] links extraneous interest with a consistent line of activity […]*" (p. 32). In the organisational context, these interests are usually lower income, longer commuting distance to work or the loss of friends when changing companies (Kanter, 1968). For students, side bets that differ from their personal agreement could be, for example, the fear of negative assessment results, negative feedback from teachers or parents or fear of detention.

In the student's as well as in the employee's case, *continuance commitment* evolves on the grounds of highly limited alternative choices or high costs. While employees, "*feel[…] compelled to commit to the organization because the monetary, social, psychological, and other costs associated with leaving are high.* (Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993, p. 903), learners commit to their school or learning plan in order to avoid negative outcomes such as low marks or complaints from parents and teachers. Students and employees who commit towards actions or organisations for these reasons develop higher commitment in exchange with rewards and inducements that their organisation offers.

A third component of commitment that has been identified in organisational psychology is referred to as *normative commitment*. Normative commitment (Marsh & Mannari, 1977; Meyer et al., 1993; Wiener, 1982; Wiener & Gechman, 1977) refers to obligations experienced due to social conventions which are part of one's upbringing, for example, in an educational system or in the parental household. In Wiener's and Gechman's (1977) definition, these examples of social norms comprise

[18] The term continuance commitment shall be used to distinguish between the components of a multidimensional construct and the early school of behavioural commitment.

"socially accepted behaviours that exceed formal and/or normative expectations" (Wiener & Gechman, 1977, p. 48). In a later definition, social norms or conventions represent *"the totality of internalized normative pressures to act in a way, which meets organizational goals and interests"* (Wiener, 1982, p. 421).

The definitions indicate that socially accepted behaviour is based on pressures which, once internalised, form the basis for developing a form of commitment that abides by social standards represented by organisations.

Considering organisations as part of the social system with its universal regulations, *"the committed employee considers it morally right to stay in the company regardless of how much status enhancement or satisfaction the firm gives him or her over the years"* (Marsh & Mannari, 1977, p. 59). In other words, employees with high normative commitment stay with their company for reasons of internalised norms and morals. Likewise, decisions to leave are, for example, made dependent on the opinion of close family members such as wife or husband. Other scenarios include the feeling of moral obligation to not let the company and the company community down, even in situations of better personal opportunities.

Applying these views on normative commitment in the educational context, students' attachment to their school or their learning plan can also be dominated by norms and values that they are taught as part of their upbringing. Hence, students might experience a normative obligation to complete the tasks of a learning plan. Aspects of normative commitment can be linked to feelings of guilt, shame or fear to disappoint their parents or guardians as students perceive them as their role models. These norms reflect expectations of the learner's, and future citizens', society. They include characteristics such as being reliable, taking responsibility of their actions, or to show respect to authorities such as the teacher. Students thus may develop a strong sense of wanting to please close members of their society such as their parents by adhering to the norms and regulations that they are taught.

5.2.3. A Student Commitment Model

Based on the research that has been conducted in organisational psychology and having drawn parallels between the organisational and the educational context, two main perspectives that need to be considered in a working definition of student

commitment can be distinguished. In reference to organisational commitment, on the one hand, students can develop varying relationships towards various entities such as their school as a type of organisation, a particular group within the school such as a sports or music club etc. This particular relationship is referred to as *attitudinal commitment* as it describes attitudes that students have towards the goals, pathways, as well as the members of the school such as fellow students and teachers.

Attitudinal commitment may (but not necessarily) develop as a result of a course of action that students conduct as part of their school work. Students can feel committed towards actions or certain 'behaviours' required at school, ranging from particular types of exercises to overall learning activities that are part of learning programs including a learning plan. Their attachment develops based on particular training or specific activities as part of an educational program. Activities can range from training in subjects such as sports, music, art etc. to particular projects or exercises within subjects across the curriculum. This attachment to a course of action is referred to as *behavioural commitment*.

While it is possible to theoretically distinguish between students' attitudinal and behavioural commitment, this thesis considers commitment as an attachment towards multiple entities. From a general perspective, it is proposed that: *Student commitment describes students' fluctuating relationships towards their school, particular learning programs or actions*.[19] Students can therefore be committed towards a learning plan as a particular entity of a learning program. It is further suggested that: *Student commitment is a three-dimensional concept which consists of affective, normative, and continuance commitment components* (Figure 4).

With regard to the learning plan, which is of central interest in this thesis, affective commitment represents student relationships that describe feelings of wanting to fulfil the learning plan. These feelings of personal agreement with the learning plan are based on strong accordance of personal expectations and views with institutionalised expectations and views determined in the learning plan. These views concern, for example, learning goals, learning content, learning support etc..

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[19] Working definitions developed by the author of this thesis are written in italics.

Figure 4: Commitment Components According to Meyer and Allen (1991, 1993, 1997)

Continuance commitment, on the other hand, represents feelings of obligation. It is based on a strong impact of external forces on which the student has little or no influence. This influence is perceived as unwanted but non-negotiable. It is evident in, for example, student marks, report to parents, feedback from teachers, lack of options, embarrassment.

Appearing to involve feelings of *wanting to* and *having to* complete a learning plan, normative commitment represents a feeling of moral responsibility. *Normative commitment is driven by a strong influence of values and norms that have been internalized at home within the family. These influences include fundamental norms that are shared by members of a society. Normative thinking can involve characteristics of endurance* – never give up, complete your learning plan*; respect for other people* – respect your teacher*; reliability* – always do your best.

- Motivational Aspects of Commitment

The three identified components of commitment – affective, continuance and normative commitment – cover differing motivational aspects within the individual. The nature and the degree by which an individual feels bound to her/his organisation has significant consequences with regard to their work engagement, performance and, in the organisational context, subsequently also the prediction of staff turnover (Jaros et al., 1993).

It can therefore be suggested that commitment is linked to motivational settings that determine to what extent individuals engage in actions within the organisation or other entities (Ammon, 2006; Banks, 1997). Affective, continuance and normative

commitment can be classified as components which are based on intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Although this discussion originates in the organisational research field, the meaning and consequences of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have also been explored in educational research (e.g. Combs, 1982; Doerney, 2001; Malone & Lepper, 1987; Purkey & Schmidt, 1987; Purkey & Stanley, 1991). For this reason, information that is available from the organisational literature can be tied in with educational views in order to link the newly established concept of student commitment with motivational concepts. The links between commitment and motivation shall here be described specifically in regards to the learning plan. However, motivation and commitment can likewise be directed at other entities such as the school, school groups, activities etc.

As suggested as part of the established working definition, affective commitment describes the voluntary attachment to an entity such as the school or a learning programme like the learning plan. Its nature is determined by strong congruence between the student's perspectives and her/his school's actions, strategies and values. Hence, students who are affectively committed towards their learning plan want to continue to work with it for personal reasons, and they are thus intrinsically motivated.

In this respect, the organisational literature provides study findings which conclude that the higher the correlation between the employees' personal preferences and the conception of their organisation, the more motivated are employees. High affective commitment is thus correlated with an increase of work engagement (Van Dick, Wagner, & Gautam, 2002) and lower turnover (e.g. Angle & Perry, 1981; Battistelli et al., 2006; Shore, 1989).

Having identified the similarities between employees and students, it can therefore be inferred that the higher students' commitment towards their learning plan, the higher their motivation to work with it. While the educational literature does not as yet report about links between students' commitment and their engagement (rather than turnover), multiple studies have linked student motivation with engagement (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Christenson et al., 2012; Doerney, 2001; Hicks, 2008; Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009). Therefore, a similar correlation between student commitment and engagement can be suggested and will be investigated within this thesis.

In contrast to affective commitment, continuance commitment, which is incorporated in high cost scenarios such as lower income or the lack of opportunities, for example, seems to be linked to extrinsic motivational factors in the organisational field. Translating these high cost scenarios into the student's world, this means that students who show strong continuance commitment continue working with their learning plan not because they want to but because they have to. Factors such as bad marks, embarrassment in front of classmates, fear of bad reports from teachers etc. can therefore be described as extrinsic motivations. Similar to the organisational context, warding fears for lower academic/work performance due to extrinsic motivation, continuance commitment is the least preferable component to be triggered in a student or an employee (Perry et al., 2009; Vance, 2006).

It is further proposed that normative commitment triggers a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In contrast to the nature of continuance commitment, normative commitment anchors in learnt internalised social norms and morals rather than in external factors. Normative commitment is thus more preferable than strong continuance commitment, but it does not exceed affective commitment. Predictions have been tested that individuals with high normative commitment are less likely to leave their organisations than individuals with high continuance commitment (Jaros et al., 1993). In the case of the student environment, as discussed, turnover is not a common option for students. However, other factors that are normally linked to individuals leaving an organisation and in this case, giving up the learning plan, such as student engagement, can be assessed to confirm whether students behave and feel in a similar way to employees with strong normative commitment.

Knowing whether students want to, have to or feel they should work with their learning plan can help to identify reasons for particular learning attitudes within their class. Affective, normative, and continuance commitment components that underlie intrinsic and extrinsic motivational triggers can be distinguished from engagement (Ferrer, 2005). Student commitment may influence their engagement and their overall academic performance and vice versa. Furthermore, understanding the student's reasons for working with a learning plan serves as a starting point to determine factors which could increase the student's intrinsic motivation and lower extrinsic motivation. Overall, knowing whether, to what extent, and most importantly, why students work with their learning plan are crucial factors to assess the success of a learning plan. Especially in the context of learner autonomy, it is important to

assess whether the way that the learning plan allows for more autonomy of the student compared to traditional teaching is also perceived as a stimulating learning environment as this may have far reaching consequences on other psychological dimensions that impact on students' learning and therefore also the development of autonomy.

Two of these dimensions are academic self-efficacy and student engagement. Both concepts have been shown to be linked to students' overall performance concerning their learning (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Lent, Brown, & Larkin, 1986; Multon & Brown, 1991; Schunk, 1991; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). Moreover, particularly students' academic self-efficacy may influence students' life-long learning (Kurbanoglu, 2003; Ponton, Derrick, Hall, Rhea, & Carr, 2005; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992) and this thesis proposes that it is an elementary component that impacts on the development of students' responsibility for their learning. In the following sub-section, the definitions of academic self-efficacy and student engagement and the way they are used in this thesis shall be provided. Subsequently, a model that links student commitment, academic self-efficacy, and engagement in regards to their impact on learning plans will be proposed that raises three research questions that will be the centre of research for this thesis.

5.3. Defining the Concepts of Academic Self-efficacy and Student Engagement as Indicators of Learning Plan Outcomes

5.3.1. Defining Academic Self-efficacy

Any discussion of the concept of academic self-efficacy indisputably relates to Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977). The theory explores the effects of human personal expectation on behaviour. It links psychological disposition and behavioural consequences. In other words, depending on how self-confident people are with regard to their actions, the preconception of their abilities impacts on their actions (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1991; Weiner, 1992). Hence, *"[a] person who believes in being able to cause an event can conduct a more active and self-determined life course"* (Schwarzer, 1992a, p. 163) as s/he possesses more control over her/his actions.

According to Bandura (1983, 1995), high self-efficacy leads to people taking on greater challenges. This is linked to better endurance even if high self-efficacious people experience setbacks, and they are more likely to *"maintain commitment to their goals"* (Bandura, 1986, p. 38).

Over the past 30 years, the concept of self-efficacy has been researched in a broad range of academic disciplines such as *"clinical, […] social, developmental, health, and personality psychology*" (Bandura, 1997; Maddux & Meier, 1995; Schwarzer, 1992b; Schwarzer, 1994 cited in: Conner & Norman, 1996, p. 355). It has further branched into the sub-concept of academic self-efficacy in the educational context. Particularly in the primary and secondary schooling context academic self-efficacy refers to students' self-confidence (Bandura, 1997). It describes:

> "an individual's belief (conviction) that they can successfully achieve at a designated level on an academic task or attain a specific academic goal achieve at a designated level in a specific academic subject area" (McGrew, 2007).

Students who believe in themselves and in their abilities find it easier to face more demanding academic tasks. Academic self-efficacy studies referring to students in all educational levels conclude that self-efficacious students put more effort and more time into their work than students with low academic self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1986; Multon & Brown, 1991). Hence, with regard to the school environment, it is recognised as a key variable in predicting engagement, and school achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003).

Although strong academic self-efficacy has shown to be an indirect factor which distinguishes between successful and underperforming students (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2008b), warning voices have been raised over the circumstances under which academic self-efficacy develops. In his work *Motivation, Engagement and Educational Performance*, Elliott et al. (2005) presents a number of studies that show that academic self-efficacy and performance are not always positively correlated. Due to various social factors that cannot be discussed here, children can overestimate their abilities. Origins of these overestimations have been traced back to teachers' and parents' unreflected and inflated comments[20] (for further reading see Elliott, Hufton, Willis, & Illushin, 2005). Emphasis has therefore to be

[20] It is unknown to the researcher whether findings for similar studies are available in the Australian context.

placed upon appropriate assessment of student work rather than exaggerated appraisal. In this attempt, learning plans can be holistic learning programmes as part of which students as well as teachers are encouraged to reflect on learning progresses at a realistic measure. Following a learning plan can assist students in monitoring and reflecting upon their learning progress in the sense that they can track if and to what extent they fulfil the tasks of the learning plan (Jarvis, Holford, & Griffin, 2003). Based on the completion of the learning plan, students can receive acknowledgement from teachers and parents. They can further learn to acknowledge the value of their own work. By fulfilling generally smaller tasks as part of a learning plan, students may experience more moments of success than as part of more streamlined classroom learning which ultimately fosters a balanced academic self-efficacy.

Furthermore, referring research conducted in a broader context (Bandura, 1997; Jerusalem & Satow, 1999; Schwarzer, 1994) to the use of learning plans, it can be hypothesised that students who connect positive experiences with their learning plan by having completed tasks before may be more psychologically prepared to take on new academic challenges that are part of the plan or even outside its framework. The question, however, arises as to whether students who portray greater commitment towards their learning plan are also more confident to take on new academic challenges that students may face aiming to achieve the goals of their learning plan or to work with it in general. This thesis therefore proposes a study of which one aspect focuses on establishing the link between academic self-efficacy and commitment in the context of learning plans in the second language classroom. Another aspect of this study aims to extend this theoretical relationship by the dimension of engagement. Research has linked academic self-efficacy and student engagement in regards to their influence on learning outcomes, including learner autonomy (Tilfarlioglu & Ciftci, 2011; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). As a fundamental propeller of learning, it is proposed that student engagement might form a reciprocal relationship with student commitment. The next sub-section introduces the concept of engagement that may be part of a model that can be used to assess the usefulness of a learning plan.

5.3.2. Defining the Concept of Engagement

Engagement is a complex construct that has left many traces, in the literature in which it is often referred to as part of a motivation model (e.g. Carr, Hagel, and Hellier, 2010; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2008; Li & Lerner, 2011; Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990; Vance, 2006). Opinions, however, on what conceptions of engagement entail are diverse (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008).

Since a first review by Mosher and MacGowan in 1985, school engagement today is considered a multidimensional construct (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Overall, the definitions[21] of the engagement construct as well as the ways to measure it provide a lot of room for debate amongst psychologists and educational researchers (Appleton et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2011) which shall , however, not be further discussed in this thesis. Many researchers , however, agree that the concept of engagement consists of the three components of *behaviour*, *emotion*, and *cognition* (Fredricks et al., 2004; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2008b; Wang et al., 2011).

Behavioural engagement refers to *"actions and practices that students direct towards school and learning"* (Wang et al., 2011, p. 466). According to Wang et al. (2011), students are usually identified to portray high behavioural engagement if they conduct themselves well. This means, for example, that they regularly attend class on time and complete their homework. The model further advocates that students are involved in their learning and participate in activities outside class.

Emotional engagement incorporates the view that students feel somewhat connected to their school (Finn, 1989; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Wang et al., 2011). Furthermore, it refers to *"emotional states, such as 'enthusiasm, interest, and enjoyment'* (Skinner et al., 2008b, p. 495). Cognitive engagement *"refers to a student's self-regulated and strategic approach to learning in which students use metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their cognition*" (Wang, 2011, p. 466).

Exploring engagement in more detail, Niemiec and Ryan (1995) further propose a theoretical framework that aims to clarify the functioning of student engagement. The

[21] For a comprehensive list of definitions, see Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong (2008, p. 371).

self-determination model (SDT) analyses additional factors which interact with student engagement. Niemic and Ryan suggest that *"every person across cultures requires the fulfilment of fundamental needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness"* (Appleton et al., 2008, p. 378). Their autonomy definition implies that *"students are autonomous when they willingly devote time and energy to their studies"* (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009, p. 135). While autonomy in a narrow sense commonly refers to a sense of 'self-doing' (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), the term *autonomy* in this thesis refers to knowledge and skills that enable students to take responsibility for their learning. While these skills can operate based on intrinsic motivation, the definition also acknowledges the skills to be somewhat underlying to actions that students take in situations where they work on tasks that are not entirely voluntary.

In addition to that, it can be argued that the three factors of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are precursors of engagement, but they do not necessarily describe engagement itself. Factors such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness as in Niemiec's and Ryan's (2009) work are therefore treated as components of a more comprehensive engagement theory that this thesis does not intend to cover.

Therefore, in this thesis, the working definition of engagement limits itself to the factors of *behavioural* and *emotional engagement* as defined by Skinner and Belmont (1993):

> Student engagement is the sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by positive emotional tone (vs. disaffection). (p. 572)

Often linked in the literature with academic self-efficacy, behavioural and emotional engagement, some studies have identified that – despite some controversies – they have an impact on learning outcomes (Lent et al., 1986; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). As such, in the context of learner autonomy, the ability to take responsibility for one's learning (Holec & Council of Europe, 1981) can be considered a particular outcome of the use of a learning plan. However, this ability comprises the notion of students getting involved in their work. As Skinner et al. claim, *"even if youth stay emotionally attached or physically present in school, unless they become engaged with learning opportunities, their academic careers cannot be considered a success"* (Skinner et al., 2008a, p. 494). Students who remain rather passive regarding their coursework are unlikely to reflect on their learning processes and the requirements

that they need to improve or maintain in their learning capacities and outcomes (Daly, Shin, Thakral, Selders, & Vera, 2008; Li & Lerner, 2011; Skinner et al., 1990). As a consequence, lacking to reflect their actual work, passive students are less likely to develop any form of responsibility for their learning.

Furthermore, it is proposed that it is not sufficient for students to agree with the goals of their learning plan or to regularly attend class. In accordance with Skinner's et al.'s (2008a) proposition, feelings of emotional attachment need to be converted into psychological and physical engagement of the students. With this challenge in mind, the relationship between commitment, engagement, and academic self-efficacy remains unknown, which triggers three research questions that will be discussed in the following sub-section.

5.4. The Research Questions

Aiming to assess the impact that learning plans have on students and contributing to the understanding of learner autonomy as a concept that is fostered through the use of learning plans, the literature review enabled the proposition of a model that links *student commitment, academic self-efficacy*, and *student engagement*. Taking into consideration the psychological dimensions of academic self-efficacy and student engagement as essential factors that predict students' outcomes, including the development into an autonomous learner (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Carr et al., 2010; Daly et al., 2008; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Lent et al., 1986; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Multon & Brown, 1991; Perry et al., 2009; Schunk, 1991; Skinner et al., 2008a; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner et al., 1990; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990), it is proposed that the way that students bond with their learning plans is a further component that forms a reciprocal relationship with the two latter concepts. Understanding which reasons, and to what extent students bond with their learning plan not only provides an indication of how students will behave towards their learning plan and the activities that are part of it; student commitment can further provide an insight into the reasoning behind students' emotional and behavioural state that they develop as a result of the work with their learning plan. It is suggested that students' commitment to their learning plan may also be reflected in their psychological and physical engagement in their learning.

Furthermore, students' confidence to take on new tasks might be an additional component to engagement that is linked to the successful completion of a learning plan. This means that students who portray strong confidence in taking on new tasks might also show higher affective commitment towards their learning plan compared to students who shy away from new tasks.

Ultimately, students who feel strong affective commitment towards their learning plan, who engage in their learning and who are confident in facing new challenges develop a strong sense of responsibility for their learning which is an essential component of learner autonomy.

However, while the literature describes that learning plans promote students' commitment towards their learning plan (Smith, 1983), in a first step this thesis attempted to define student commitment as a three-dimensional concept consisting of affective, normative, and continuance commitment components. However, it remains to be seen whether this theoretical proposition that was derived from organisational psychology (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer et al., 1993; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Porter et al., 1974, p. 197; Reichers, 1985) holds true in the educational context. Therefore, the first research question aims to explore the characteristics of student commitment:

What are the characteristics of student commitment in regards to learning plans?

It is proposed that students can develop various forms of commitment towards their learning plan. Although it is apparent that students and employees act in very different settings, it is suggested that students can develop similar feelings of commitment towards their learning plan as employees towards their work tasks, working contract or their company. The first objective of this thesis is hence to explore whether similar forms of commitment that have been identified within the organisational domain can be found amongst young learners towards learning plans.

Knowing to what extent students are committed towards their learning plan may provide an insight into understanding learners' attitudes towards their learning plan. However, it does not itself answer the question of whether student commitment could be considered a decisive factor in fostering learner autonomy. While student marks are an often used indicator of a 'successful' learning instrument, this thesis refrains from establishing such a link for three reasons. Firstly, student marks are highly controversial in their reliability to objectively assess student performance (Krampen,

1987), and, secondly, students with higher marks are not necessarily better autonomous learners (Sinclair, 2000a). Thirdly, student marks are usually used as a performance indicator that separates between high and low achieving students. It is, however, not the aim of this research to distinguish between the academic performance of students.

This thesis attempts to provide an insight into students' perception of their learning plan and how this may impact on their psychological and behavioural state to take on learning as it can be measured with academic self-efficacy and student engagement. In addition to that, this thesis proposes that students' confidence in their ability to take on new tasks and the level of psychological and behavioural engagement in their learning are fundamental precursors to all learning outcomes, including the development into an autonomous learner.

Therefore, the second research question aims to explore whether student commitment can impact on student engagement and academic self-efficacy:

> 2. *Does student commitment impact on student engagement and academic self-efficacy?*

I will aim to establish a model that links commitment to student engagement and their academic self-efficacy as two predictors of academic achievement (Figure 5).

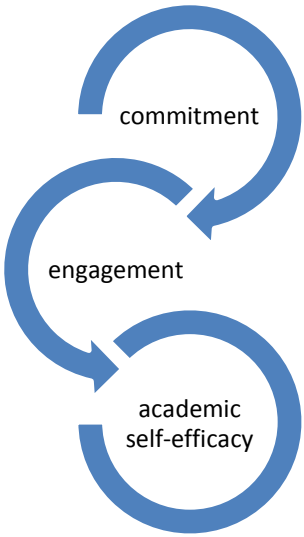

Figure 5: The Triangle of Commitment, Engagement, and Self-efficacy as Indicators of Efficiency

In the course of investigating student commitment as an influential factor of students' engagement and their academic self-efficacy, this thesis will further explore a number

of factors that influence students' commitment towards their learning plan. Therefore, the third research question is:

3. *Which factors have an influence on commitment in learning plans?*

In order to answer this question, a number of demographic factors such as age, and gender will be investigated, as well as aspects that provide information on the learning environment of students and the support they receive from parents. Furthermore, in this context, this thesis will explore to what extent students need to be involved in defining the didactic paradigms that were identified by Wolff (2002) (see 4.3) in order for students to become committed towards their learning plan. It is the objective to re-define the didactic paradigms described in the autonomy context, and to identify additional one's, that foster students' commitment towards their learning plan. Furthermore, other factors ought to be identified that define the framework of a learning plan.

In a nutshell, I propose a model that describes the triangular relationship between positive *commitment*, *engagement, and academic self-efficacy*. It is anticipated that the three psychological concepts underlie successful learning processes (Bandura, 1986) as a result of the work with a learning plan. Therefore, they are considered beneficial outcomes of the latter. Their symbiosis may create the underlying foundation to completing a learning plan that fosters autonomy (Figure 6); and their analysis could help to assess whether a learning plan might be successful or not. Hence, the three psychological concepts should be part of the assessment of a learning plan in addition to formative student assessments and assessments of autonomy.

While this thesis does not argue to abolish assessment, it is this triangle of the three psychological conceptions – *commitment, engagement, and academic self-efficacy* – that help to describe the relationship that students form with their learning plan. They are suggested to be key factors in understanding students' performance, and in determining the learning plan's impact on learner autonomy.

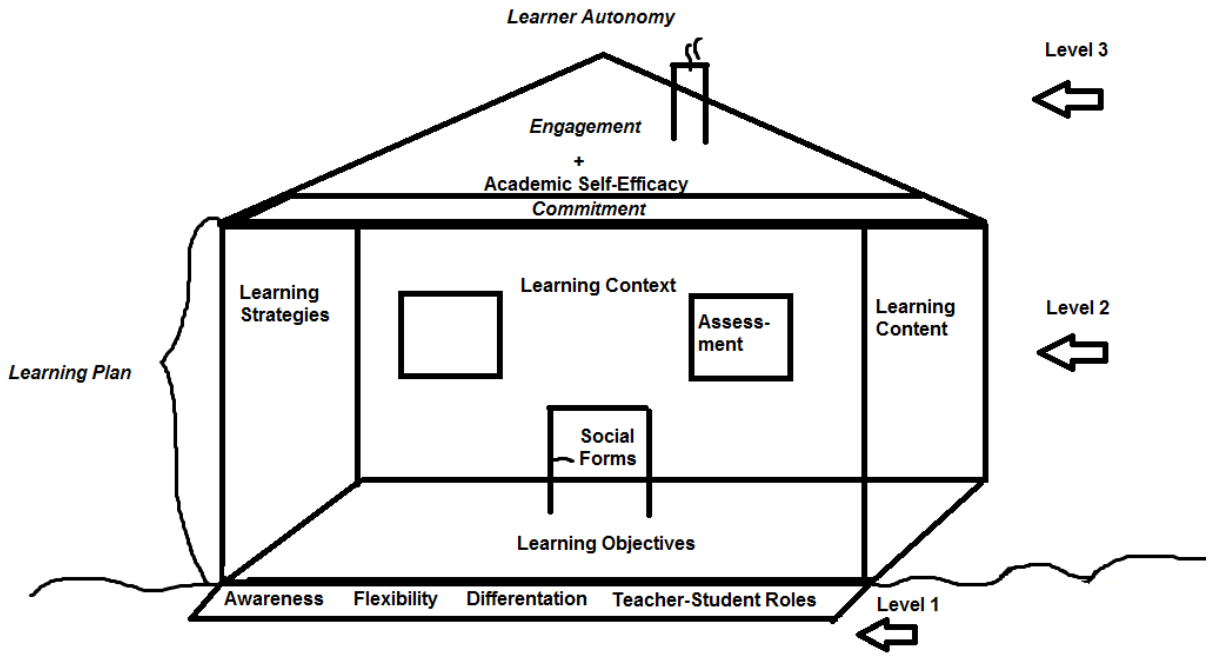

Figure 6: A Model Defining the Framework of a Learning Plan that Fosters Learner Autonomy

Although this thesis cannot provide a comprehensive investigation of all components and their link to learning plans in secondary education, this thesis further claims that the didactic paradigms as proposed by Wolff (2002) are important pillars of a learning plan framework. However, it remains to be determined to what extent students need to be involved in defining the didactic paradigms of *learning content, learning context, learning strategies, learning objectives, social forms*, and *assessment* in order for students to become committed towards their learning plans and develop as autonomous learners. As part of this investigation, it is presumed that further aspects might be identified that underlie a learning plan that fosters learner autonomy.

I hope to set a foundation in order to establish a systemic way to explore the characteristics of student commitment towards their learning plan and whether student commitment influences students' engagement and their academic self-efficacy. Special emphasis will be put on exploring these factors in the context of learning plans in second language learning as it can enable differentiated learning (Boud, 1995; Knowles, 1986).

In the following chapter the methodology of a study will be described that aims to answer the three established research questions.

6. Methodological Framework: Two Studies Investigating Student Commitment towards Learning Plans

Proposing that student commitment is a multi-dimensional concept that forms an interrelationship with student engagement and students' academic self-efficacy – because commitment is a key concept that helps to understand students' perception of a learning plan – this chapter discusses the methodological framework of two studies that investigate these hypotheses.

The first section of this chapter summarises the research questions that have evolved from the discussion of the learning plan as a particular instrument to support the autonomous learner and ways to assess learning plans in their potential to foster learner autonomy.

In order to answer the research questions, a quantitative and a qualitative study is proposed for which an overview of the methodology is outlined in the second section.

The third section of this chapter elaborates on the methodology by providing more detailed information on the subjects that were targeted in the two studies, the set-up of the studies and the methods of analysis that were used to answer the three research questions.

The final section discusses the development of the instruments that were used in order to gain the data relevant to answering the research questions.

6.1. Summarising the Research Questions

Having discussed that learning plans can be implemented as a framework that fosters learner autonomy by increasing student commitment and responsibility for their learning plan (Wilson & Cutting, 2001), commitment can be considered a crucial outcome of the learning plan. However, based on an overview of assessment approaches, it became apparent that the concept of commitment has not been explored extensively in the educational context, and its measurement has not been attempted in order to assess the usefulness of a learning plan to promote autonomy. Using research findings from organisational psychology and having identified parallels between the organisational and the schooling context, a working definition of student commitment was developed. In general terms, it defines student commitment as students' fluctuating relationships with their school, and particular

learning programs or actions (p. 102). Against the background of this definition, the first research question aims to identify the characteristics of student commitment.

Studies in organisational psychology further suggest that commitment is linked to outcomes such as engagement, turnover, or job satisfaction (Brooke, Russell and Price 1988). As engagement is often discussed as a fundamental aspect of learning outcomes in education that include the development of autonomy (e.g. Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell 1990; Skinner & Belmont 1993; Natriello & McDill 1986; Perry, Liu, & Pabian 2009), the second research question explores a potential link between student commitment and engagement. In addition, the second research question also investigates whether committed, and therefore potentially engaged, students become more confident overall in taking on new academic tasks. The previous chapter therefore provided the theoretical background of the concepts of engagement and academic self-efficacy as important outcomes but also as drivers of the use of learning plans that foster autonomy.

Finally, targeting learning plans that foster autonomy, Wolff (2002), Benson (2010), and Winter (2008) argue that a particular environment needs to be created that allows for autonomy in order to enhance students' responsibility for their learning. However, it remains to be explored how the didactic paradigms that were dominantly proposed by Wolff (2002) have to be defined in order for students to become committed towards instruments such as a learning plan. Furthermore, there may be other factors which influence students' commitment towards their learning plan and thus may have an indirect impact on students' engagement and their academic self-efficacy. The third research question will thus investigate which factors have an influence on student commitment towards a learning plan.

Summarising the research questions, they investigate the following:

1. What are the characteristics of student commitment in regards to learning plans?
2. Does student commitment impact on student engagement and academic self-efficacy?
3. Which factors have an influence on commitment in learning plans?

Based on these three research questions which explore the characteristics of commitment, the concept's relationship with student engagement and academic self-efficacy, and factors that influence commitment, this thesis presents two studies. The

methodological background of these studies will be elaborated in the following section.

6.2. Proposing a Mixed Methods Approach

In chapter 4, I suggested a framework of a learning plan that encourages students to take responsibility for their learning. According to Wolff (2002), such a framework needs to foster autonomy within 6 paradigms:

- Learning context
- Learning contents
- Learning objectives
- Learning strategies
- Self-Assessment
- Social Forms.

Wolff (2002) proposed that students are able to and should strongly be involved in defining these paradigms (see chapter 4). However, although Wolf (2002) has attempted to interpret these paradigms, the literature does not indicate that they have been evaluated in a practical context taking into account the views of teachers and students who essentially work with learning plans that aim to foster learner autonomy.

In order to evaluate how and to what extent students can take responsibility for their learning, learning plans that have been successfully been implemented in the secondary language context need to be first identified. This led to the question of what can be classified as a successful learning plan. In chapter 5, I therefore argued that the success of a learning plan can be partially assessed by understanding how and to what degree students become committed towards their learning plan. Subsequently, I proposed a theoretical framework that describes commitment in the educational context. Aiming to test this theoretical student commitment model, I suggest a pioneer study to measure student commitment.

In this attempt, I will follow research approaches that emerged in the field of organisational psychology (e.g. Mowday et al., 1979; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, & Sincich, 1993). In organisational psychology, dominantly quantitative approaches have successfully underpinned that commitment is a

psychological concept that can be reliably measured. While there is a plethora of questionnaires that measure different forms of commitment (e.g. Mowday et al., 1979; Ashforth & Mael 1989; Balfour & Wechsle 1996), I will derive the student commitment questionnaire from Meyer's and Allen's commitment questionnaire (1997, see 6.4.2.) as it is the most empirically tested questionnaire and as Meyer and Allen's definition (1991) represents the underlying framework of the student commitment definition that I proposed in the previous chapter.

The development of a student questionnaire and its testing as part of a quantitative approach has four advantages over a qualitative approach. Firstly, while a qualitative approach may be used to explore the meaning of commitment for students and teachers, it does not allow for any generalisation (Stake, 1995) as to whether commitment is a psychological concept that students develop in general when working with a learning plan. Aiming to show that commitment is a psychological concept that cannot only be measured in the organisational sector but also in the secondary education sector, a quantitative approach seems to be appropriate.

Secondly, in the long-term, a student commitment questionnaire could assist teachers to identify how and to what degree their student groups[22] are committed towards their learning plan, and therefore facilitate intervention measures if feelings of moral obligation and pressure from outside (such as marks or pressure from teachers) dominate over students' feelings of understanding and wanting to work with their learning plan.

Thirdly, measuring student commitment alone does not prove that it is somewhat linked to beneficial outcomes of the work with a learning plan such as high student engagement and academic self-efficacy as proposed in my theoretical model (see chapter 5). Such links can be best explored by applying a quantitative approach (Leech, 2008).

Finally, measuring student commitment will further assist in identifying student groups who enjoy working with their learning plan (evident in affective commitment). It is these learning plans that will be at the centre of a second study.

[22] I propose that the student commitment questionnaire (SCQ) should be used anonymously to identify commitment of student groups rather than the individual.

Proposing that students take responsibility for their learing plan if they feel strongly committed towards it, the framework of such a learning plan will be investigated in a second study. In this second study, the theoretical framework for a learning plan, which includes Wolff's paradigms (2002) as suggested chapter 4, can finally be assessed. For this study, a case study as a qualitative approach is preferred in the form of interviews with teachers and students as it has two descriptive and explanatory goals (Stake, 1995). The interviews will assist to

1. clarify which didactic paradigms need to be considered when developing a learning plan, and
2. to explore how these didactic paradigms need to be interpreted.

The advantage of the interviews is that they may reveal a very different interpretation to how Wolff (2002) interpreted the didactic paradigms of a learning environment that fosters learner autonomy. Furthermore, additional didactic paradigms might be revealed that need to be included in the theoretical model to foster learner autonomy that cannot be gained via other instruments such as a questionnaire.

In summary, the three research questions require a mixed methods approach consisting of a quantitative and qualitative approach (Van Lier, 2011). The quantitative approach, in the form of questionnaires, will facilitate the validation of a student commitment questionnaire to explore whether the concept of commitment exists in the educational context. Furthermore, employing a quantitative method will assist in establishing links between commitment, engagement, and academic self-efficacy which are considered as fundamental outcomes of the work with a learning plan that is supposed to foster learner autonomy.

Having identified student groups that enjoy working with their learning plan, a second study will be conducted which aims to test a theoretical model that describes the environment of a learning plan that fosters learner autonomy. Based on a qualitative approach, via interviews, it is anticipated that the proposed didactic paradigms of this model may need to be confirmed, rejected or expanded. Furthermore, the student and teacher views conveyed in the interviews will assist to explore how these paradigms need to be interpreted in order for students to develop a strong sense of commitment for, and engagement in their learning plan, and to increase their academic self-efficay.

6.3. Methodology in a Nutshell

The research questions were targeted in the form of a mixed methods approach (Van Lier, 2011) combining a longitudinal quantitative and a qualitative approach (Figure 7). The data of the longitudinal quantitative part, presented in study 1, was collected at three measurement points[23]. The measurement points were spread over approximately one school year. Measurement point 1 was in March/April 2011, measurement point 2 in August/September 2011, and measurement point 3 in December 2011. Participants for this study were students from three secondary high schools in urban areas of New South Wales and South Australia.

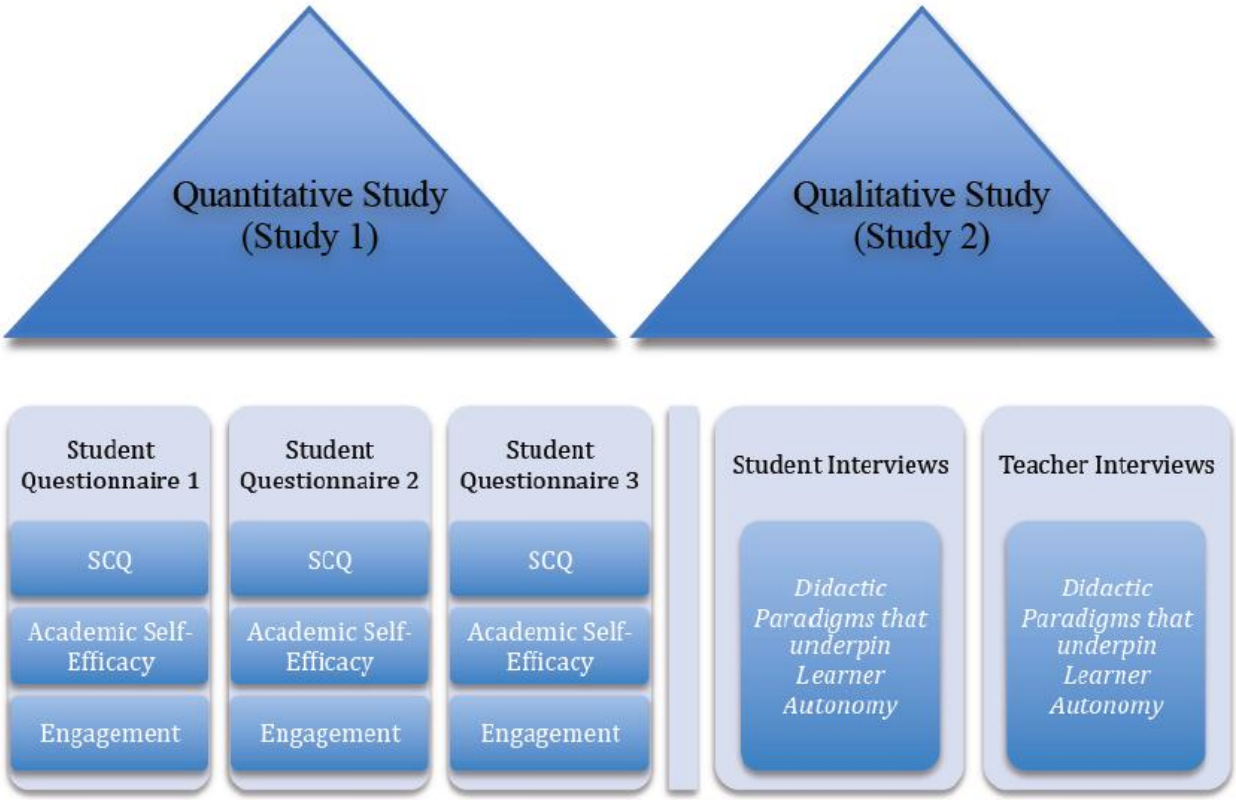

Figure 7: Methodology

Each questionnaire consisted of three sections:

1. Student Commitment Questions (SCQ)
2. Academic Self-efficacy Questions
3. Engagement Questions and Items targeting influencing factors on commitment.

[23] Throughout the thesis, the term *measurement point* will be equally used with *time* 1, 2, 3. Time will be mostly be used in the figures and tables to shorten the description.

The qualitative study (study 2) was conducted in December 2011 shortly after the completion of the final questionnaire. Student and teacher interviews were conducted with selected students who had participated in the quantitative study (study 1) and teachers of these schools who had implemented learning plans.

The questions enquired about the way that the learning plan was implemented. They were coded according to Wolff's (2002) and Benson's (2010) didactic paradigms (discussed in Chapter 4) underpinning an environment that fosters learner autonomy. Hence, it was to be investigated whether schools whose students portray strong personal commitment towards their learning plan implement their learning plan in a way that allows for and demands a lot of responsibility on behalf of the students. Students reported about their perception of how the learning plan was implemented whereas teachers provided their perspective on its implementation.

6.4. Methodological Background of the Quantitative and Qualitative Studies

In this section of the chapter, the methodological background of the two studies is explained in greater detail. It describes the criteria of the subjects that were chosen for the quantitative and qualitative studies and provide information on the demographic background of the subjects who participated in the questionnaires and the interviews.

Furthermore, the subchapters provide information on the development of the instruments that were used in the quantitative and the qualitative studies. Firstly, the generation of the questionnaire is discussed. It comprises questions on student commitment, academic self-efficacy, engagement, and a number of other relevant factors. Secondly, the development of the student- and teacher interview questions is described.

The final sub-section describes the set-up of the studies and the methods of analysis of the data.

6.4.1. Subjects

- *Criteria for Defining the Subjects in the Quantitative and Qualitative Study*

This research addressed particular types of schools for which reason this sub-section outlines the criteria that underlay the search of suitable subjects.

The requirements for a school's participation had few limitations as the research attempted to approach a wide range of schools with different forms of learning plans. The following criteria were designated:

Firstly, schools were suitable if they had a form of a learning plan already implemented. The main reason for this restriction lay within the time frame of three years for this project. As the implementation process of learning plans is very complex and can take several months of preparation before its introduction, it was necessary that the schools already had some experience in working with a learning plan. This prerequisite allowed for better control of the three points of measurement at which the questionnaire was to be tested in the schools.

Secondly, participating students had to be between 14 and 20 years old[24]. Although some educational researchers argue that even children at the age of 10 develop a feeling of responsibility (Weyers, 2009), this is highly debated in the educational sector. This may be a main reason why many educational projects that were identified with regard to learning with a learning plan in Australia address secondary high-school students (e.g. SACE – Personal Learning Plan, 2012).

Thirdly, the schools' learning plans had to be based on a formal agreement on learning goals between student and teacher (and potentially parents/guardians) (Anderson et al., 1996).

Fourthly, there was a restriction to the type of schools that were favourable for this study. It was an intention of this project to include public as well as private schools with a secondary high-school stream. This did not include special schools for children

[24] Age differences were included as a factor of potential variances in answers as part of the method of analysis.

with special needs, as special evaluation methodologies would have been required which do not form the core of this research.

Finally, for the quantitative study, a cross-curricular approach was chosen to measure and identify the characteristics of student commitment that students can develop in general towards their learning plan. This was due to the background that learning plans in the Australian context are dominantly created for the whole curriculum rather than for the second language classroom in particular. Therefore, for this study, all schools were invited to participate in the quantitative study which had a written learning plan in place that was communicated with the students.

For the qualitative study that investigated how didactic paradigms should be defined in order to encourage students' commitment, only the schools that used a learning plan in the second language classroom were invited to further participate in interviews.

Suitable schools to participate in the quantitative and qualitative studies were identified by entries in the research literature on learning plans, based on the search of entries on school websites and based on listings of supportive schools listed by the educational departments of Australia. Due to the requirement to acquire research approvals from individual educational departments for each Australian state and territory for potential research, approvals were obtained for New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Victoria[25].

- *The Recruited Subjects in the Quantitative Study (Study 1)*

Overall, three schools agreed to participate in this research. They had the following profile:

- School 1: - private girls
  - learning plan used in French and German
- School 2: - public mixed school
  - learning plan used in Central Studies and Mathematics/ Abstract Thinking
- School 3: - public mixed school
  - learning plan used in German.

[25] Research Approvals and Ethics Approval are attached in the Appendix.

All three schools are located in urban areas of Sydney and Adelaide. Both public schools use a similar learning plan, whereas the private school uses a different type of learning plan. According to information provided by the federal government of Australia, the three schools show differences in the Index of Community and Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSA). This was considered in the method of analysis (see 6.2.3).

In total, 358 students filled in the first survey. The sample can be approximately divided 50% to the public school and 50% to the private school system.

For the second measurement point[26], the same schools were asked to participate as at the first measurement point[27]. A total number of n=258 students filled in the questionnaire a second time[28] four months later.

A total number of n=289 (Table 4) students filled in their third commitment questionnaire approximately three months after the second data collection had been completed. Due to the similar participant number, data sets are most comparable between measurement points 2 and 3.

Table 4: Participant Number – Time 1, 2, 3

		school			
		1	2	3	Total
		Count	Count	Count	Count
Time	1	147	191	20	358
Time	2	116	122	20	258
Time	3	120	149	20	289

Considering the gender distribution at the three measurement points (Figure 8), there are twice as many girls compared to boys. This distribution is the result of having one girls' school participating in the study. As there is a strong debate about the variance

[26] In this thesis, the word *measurement point* is used synonymously with *time* as the latter word was preferred in the figures and tables as it contains fewer letters.

[27] While the same student groups were asked to participate, it cannot be guaranteed that the exact same students participated as the surveys were anonymous.

[28] The reason for the discrepancy between the first and second measurement point could be that was a voluntary project that students were not obliged to partake in. It is anticipated that a smaller number of students who completed the first questionnaire were also willing to fill in the questionnaire at the second measurement point.

between boys' and girls' views and preferences with regard to the schooling environment, it cannot be excluded that girls' views may dominate the results of the two studies.

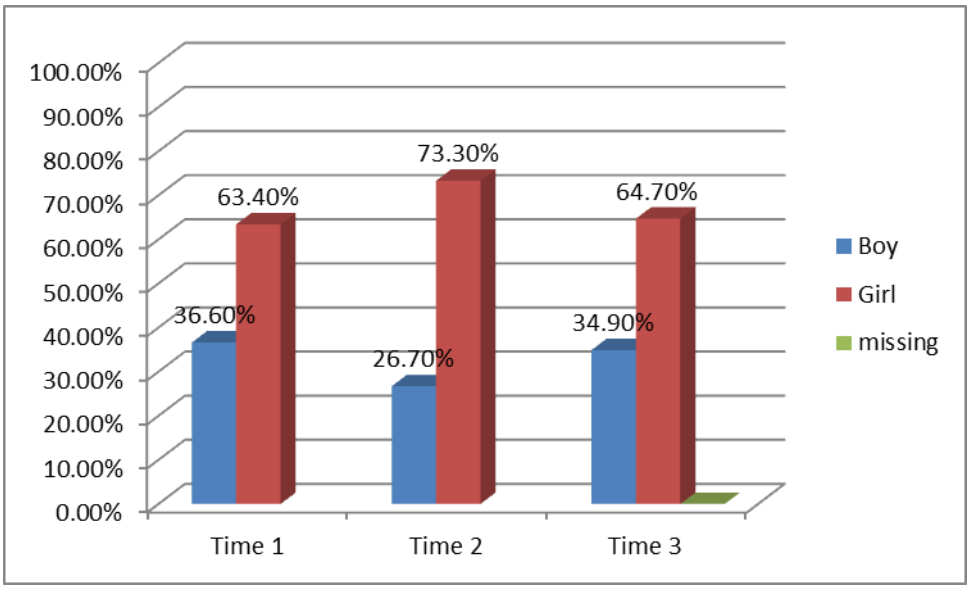

Figure 8: Gender Distribution Time 1, 2, 3

Regarding students' age, at measurement point 1, the majority of students were in year 10 (n=135, 38%) and between 15 and 16 years old (Figure 9). The second biggest group represent students in year 11 (n=87, 24%), followed by students in year 8 (n=69, 19%) and year 12 (n=57, 16%). The smallest group are students in year 9 (n=10%).

Participants at measurement points 2 portrayed a similar distribution in age. However, there were more year 9 students (78%) compared to the first measurement point (Figure 9). Year 10 students remained the strongest participant group. However, more students of year 12 participated at measurement points 2 but none at measurement point 3.

At measurement point 3, the distribution of participants by age groups underwent some changes. More students from year 8 with an approximate age of 13 to 14 years of age increased by 10% compared to measurement point 2. For participants in year 9 and 10, no significant changes occurred. However, the number of year 11 students increased by 7% from measurement point 2 and in the group of mature high school students replaced some of the year 12 students. Year 12 students were excluded from participating at this measurement point as they had strong time constraints as they prepared for their HSC exams.

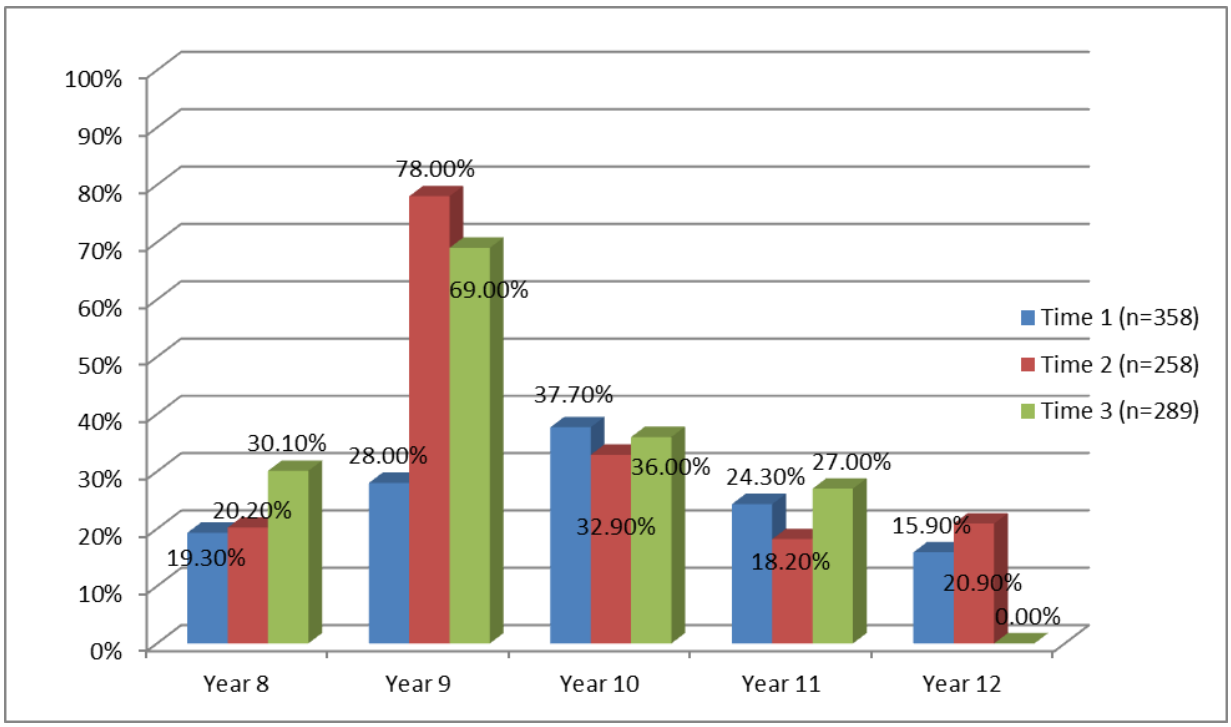

Figure 9: Participants' Age by Year

Concerning the areas in which students work with a learning plan, at all three measurement points, two major groups can be identified. One group worked with the learning plan in the second languages of French and German. Another group worked with the learning plan in Mathematics and Science.

In a more detailed analysis, at measurement point 1, 43.6% of the 358 students evaluated their learning plan with regard to the subject of Central Studies (Figure 10). The second biggest group, comprising answers from one-third of the students (28.8%) represented French learners who work with a form of a learning plan, followed by 17.9% who learn German and use a learning plan. The smallest group of the sample comprises Mathematics and Abstract Thinking students (8.1%).

This distribution did not change significantly at the second point of measurement. The majority of the students completed their questionnaire for the subject Central Studies (31.4%) followed by French (28.8%), (Figure 10). As representatives for Central Studies were approximately 12% fewer than at the first measurement point, nearly two-thirds of the answers can be equally attributed to the two subjects. Students who work with a learning plan in German represented a slightly higher percentage compared to the first measurement point (24.4%, up from 17.9%). A smaller number of mathematics students completed their second questionnaire (5%).

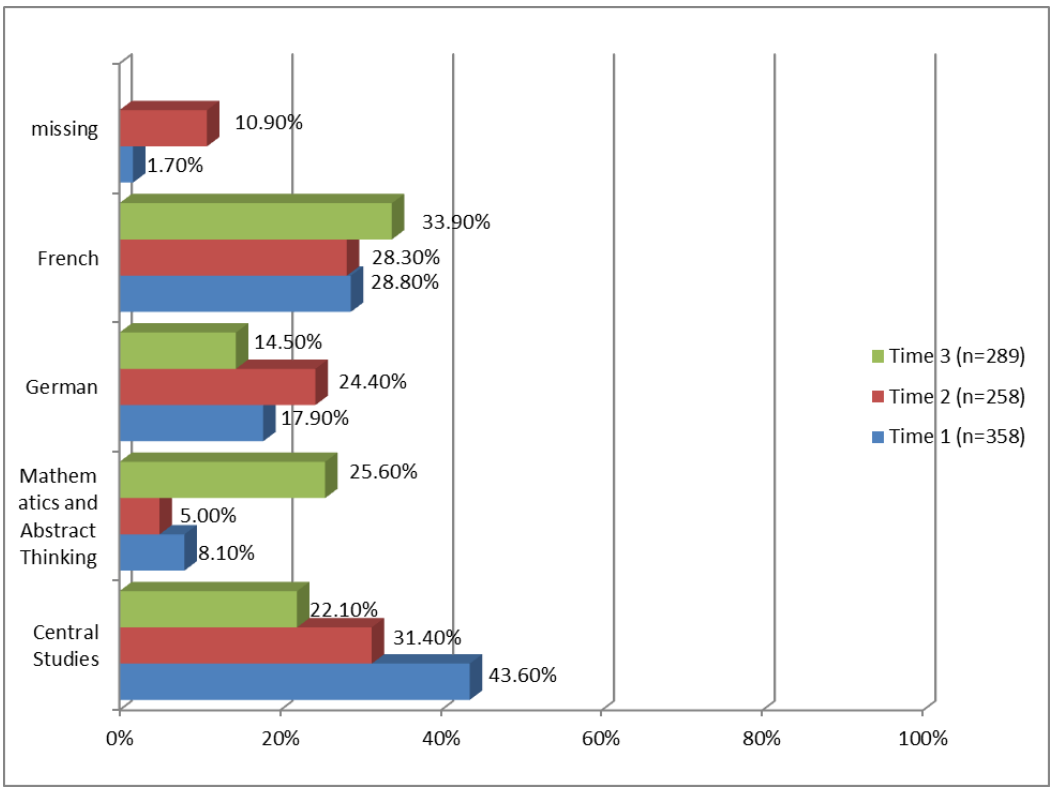

Figure 10: Subjects in which Learning Plans Are Used - Time 1, 2, 3

At the third measurement point, the same subjects participated. The number of students who use their learning plan in Central Studies increased by 10% while the number of students from Mathematics and Abstract Thinking, who completed the questionnaire, shrank drastically to 5% from 25.6% compared with the second measurement point. In respect of second languages, French representatives remained approximately one-third of respondents and the number of participants from German increased by 10% compared to the second measurement point.

- *The Recruited Subjects in the Qualitative Study (Study 2)*

The focus of the qualitative study, in form of interviews, was placed on the set-up of learning plans to support learner autonomy in second languages. Putting emphasis on learner autonomy in the second language classroom, of the three schools that participated in the quantitative study, school 1 and 3 were approached to participate in the follow-up interview. The interviews were created for students and teachers as it was anticipated that students would have differing views from their teachers on some of the aspects to be covered.

Attempting to keep administration levels for teachers and the time factor at a minimum, three students and two teachers from school 1 and 3 were searched for to participate in the interviews.

The acquisition of the participants was based on availability (Daniel, 2011). Concerning the teachers' sample, the headmaster was approached to enquire about the availability of two teachers from each school to participate in the interviews. In the form of a snow-ball system (Goodman, 1961) the teachers asked within their language classes if any students were willing to partake in the interviews. It was required that students had participated in the longitudinal study prior to the interviews. Teachers and students, as well as parents, were further provided with information sheets and consent forms that contain more details about the purpose, the regulations and the set-up of the interviews.

From school 1, two students with one student from each subject agreed to participate in this follow-up project.[29] In school 3, three students agreed to the interview. However, as only one teacher of a year nine-class that had also participated in the empirical study was familiar with the learning plan, no other teachers were involved in the interviews from this school.

6.4.2. Development of the Instruments

With the methodology of the quantitative and qualitative analyses that address the three research questions in mind, this section discusses in more detail the development of the questionnaires used at three measurement points and the student and teacher interview questions.

- *The Student Questionnaire*

The student questionnaire, which was used for the quantitative study (study 1), consists of three main sections:

1. *Student Commitment Questionnaire* (SCQ)
2. *Academic Self-efficacy Questionnaire*

[29] A third student fell ill on the day of the interview and was therefore not part of the study.

3. A set of questions enquiring about student engagement and various other factors that could have an impact on student commitment.

The following sections will elaborate in detail the development of the three parts of the questionnaire.

Subsequently, the development of the interview questions will be described, which were developed for the second study in order to gain an insight into the extent by which autonomy should be enhanced in order for students to feel affectively committed towards their learning plan.

Development of the Student Commitment Questions

While there is little empirical research which investigated the commitment concept in the educational context, a number of methods and instruments to measure various commitment concepts were tested over the past 40 years in the organisational context (Angle & Perry 1981; Mayer & Schoorman 1992; Meyer & Allen 1991; O'Reilly & Chatman 1986; Wiener & Vardi 1980 cited in: Culpepper, 2000). During these years, a number of methods have been suggested which aim to operationalise commitment as a three-dimensional concept.[30] An overview is presented in the table below (by Gautam, 2002; Table 5).

Table 5

Researcher's Commitment Theory	**Characteristics**
Etzioni (1975)	- Moral, calculative, and alienative commitment
Mowday et al. (1979)	- Organisational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ)
Ashforth and Mael (1989)	- Cognitive, affective, and evaluative identification in organisation
Meyer and Allen (1991)	- Affective, continuance, and normative commitment
Jaros, Jermier, Koehler, and Sincich 1993	- Operationalisation of affective, continuance, and moral commitment

[30] There are a number of models that assess commitment as a uni-, two-and four-dimensional concept (Dunham, Grube, & Castaeda, 1994; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; and Morrow, 1993) which however does not reflect the developed definition of student commitment in this thesis.

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986)	- Compliance, identification, and internalisation
Balfour and Wechsler (1996)	- Organisational Commitment Scale (OCS) - Measures three components of organisational commitment: identification, exchange, and affiliation
Virtanen (2000)	- Obligation, utilities, and emotions

However, most empirical testing has been done of Meyer's and Allen's model (Meyer & Allen, 1997) so their model shall be used as a guideline to develop a similar instrument in the educational context. In the analysis of a model that could be translated into the educational context, Meyer's and Allen's (1990, 1991) three-component commitment model appears to be suitable for a number of reasons. Firstly, students have different reasons for engaging in differing degrees in their learning. This is quite plausible since not every student learns because s/he finds her/his tasks interesting and challenging. As pointed out earlier, some students may study because they have to, others because they feel they should engage in their learning. On the grounds of different motivational facets that underlie learner's engagement in her/his learning, it can be assumed that students may also show differing forms and degrees of commitment towards their learning just as employees do towards their organisations or their actions.

While Meyer's and Allen's scales (1991) can be used in the organisational world, they cannot directly be transferred into the education system. Fundamental changes had to be made to their scales (Figure 11). This section shall thus elaborate on the individual changes of the original items to meet the criteria of a commitment questionnaire applicable in the school environment. It will consider problematic aspects of Meyer's and Allen's revised scale (1997) such as independence of the individual scales, best model fit measures, and deficiencies as discussed in the literature by McGee & Ford (1987); Mathieu & Zajac (1990); Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf (1994); Dunham, Grube, & Castaeda (1994); Magazine, Williams, & Williams (1996); Meyer & Allen (1997); Beyer, Hannah, & Milton (2000); Virtanen (2000); and Culpepper (2000).

In opposition to Meyer's and Allen's commitment questionnaire, and adopted by other investigators of Meyer's and Allen's commitment model (Culpepper, 2000) a five-point variable response format was chosen for this study. The type of Likert scale

with five anchors (strongly agree to strongly disagree) was preferred as it was anticipated that especially younger students would find it difficult to make minimal distinctions between individual anchors on larger scales such as the seven-point variables used in the original and revised questionnaires.

	Student Commitment Questionnaire	
	Commitment in Learning Plans	**Commitment in Organizations as in Meyer and Allen 1991**
	Affective Commitment	
Item 1: Happiness	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my school-time working with the learning plan.	1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.
Item 2: Responsibilty	I really feel that I am responsible for my learning plan.	2. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
Item 3: Loyalty	I do not feel that the plan makes me feel that I am in the same situation as my classmates.	3. I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization.
Item 4: Usefulness	I feel that the plan is useful.	4. I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization .
Item 5: Meaning	Fulfilling the tasks of the learning plan means a lot to me.	5. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
Item 6: Understanding	I understand why I am working with this plan.	6. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.
	Continuance Commitment	
Item 7: Trouble	I would get into too much trouble if I complained about the plan.	7. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
Item 8: Force	I just have to work with the learning plan although I do not want to.	8. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization right now.
Item 9: Lack of Options	I have no other option but to accept the plan.	9. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.
Item 10: Punishment	I only do the tasks of the plan because I do not want to be punished.	10. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
Item 11: Enjoyment and Force	I enjoy working with the plan just as much as I feel that I have to work with it.	11. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.
Item 12: Embarrass-ment	I only try to fulfil the learning plan because I do not want to look stupid in front of my classmates.	12. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here.
	-	13. If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere.
	Normative Commitment	
Item 13: Conscience	I would feel bad if I did not fulfil the learning plan.	14. I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer.
Item 14: Self	I still enjoy working with the learning plan, even if my classmates complain about it.	15. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.
Item 15: Persistence	Even if the tasks sometimes seem hard to do, I do not feel it would be right to give up.	16. I would feel guilty if I left my organization now.
Item 16: Guilt	I would feel guilty if I did not do my best to fulfil the plan.	17. This organization deserves my loyalty.
Item 17: Reasonability	I would not give up trying to fulfil the plan because I understand why I am learning with it.	18. I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.
Item 18: Duty to Teacher / Parents	I feel I owe it to my parents/teachers to fulfil the plan.	19. I owe a great deal to my organization.

Figure 11: Organisational Commitment Questionnaire vs. Student Commitment Questionnaire

Furthermore, while the development of the student commitment questionnaire (SCQ) is based on Meyer's and Allen's commitment model (1997), it required adaptation due to the different entities they referred to. While the commitment questionnaire (CQ) has been established to measure commitment towards the entity of an organisation, the study refrained from attempting to measure commitment towards the organisation *school*. Although it would be beneficial to measure students' commitment towards their schools, this research aims at exploring the relationship that students develop towards their learning plan, and to what extent the instrument might have supportive effects on the concept of learner autonomy. Therefore,

students' direct perception of their learning plans seems more useful in pursuing this intention rather than their commitment to their school as a general entity.
In addition to that, students' commitment to their learning plan may be related to the nature and degree by which they feel committed to their school. Hence, varying forms and degrees of school commitment may be a consequence of students' perception of their learning plans. Determining the link between school – and learning plan, commitment may be useful to investigate in future research. In this thesis, however, the focus shall remain on measuring commitment forms and degrees towards the entity of learning plans.

The change in the entity the commitment questionnaire addresses represents one reason a student commitment questionnaire (SCQ) was required to undergo changes in its formulation. While items 1, 11 and 18 – underwent changes in wording, others required amendment for various reasons.

Another reason which accounted for a number of changes or the deletion of certain items from Meyer's and Allen's questionnaire lies in the differing environment that students find themselves in compared to employees. While some scenarios are applicable to students, others are rather irrelevant or non-existent for students.

For example, item 7 in the revised questionnaire from Meyer and Allen, refers to a lack of opportunities considering a change of organisation. Following critical reviews of Meyer's and Allen's instrument (Culpepper, 2002), the student questionnaire put stronger emphasis on personal sacrifices, interpreting them as several forms of negative consequences when the learning plan is not completed.

In the schooling context, giving up the learning plan would require the student to leave the school. However, as discussed earlier, this is a very unlikely option for a student, who is highly dependent on the parents'/guardians' permission. Thus, the scale of continuance commitment refrains from making numerous hints to the lack of opportunities. Instead, more applicable scenarios underpinning continuance commitment are drawn, and it is limited to six instead of seven items[31]. The expression of potential dissatisfaction with the learning plan, as complaining or passive withdrawal from the work with the learning plan, was anticipated as a potential outcome from disagreement rather than the choice to leave the school.

[31] Item 13 from Meyer's and Allen's questionnaire was not translated into the SCQ.

Similar to that, items 8, 9, and 11 in the student questionnaire do not contain the notion of a possible desire to quit working with the learning plan, and a simplification was adopted in paraphrasing feelings of entrapment. A plausible scenario hence refers to suffering from general forms of *"punishment"* in item 10 of the student questionnaire. In addition, item 12 targeted the intimidation of the learner as a positive face threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987) which represents a form of psychological punishment.

Different scenarios also had to be taken into account for students' normative commitment. Item 14 relates to the sense of the student's learned value to persist in their learning goals despite a possible temptation to rebel against them when fellow students do (Natriello & McDill, 1986). Hence, the notion of being loyal to one's organisation from the commitment questionnaire was replaced by the norm of perseverance that is also represented in item 15 of the SCQ. However, the notion of loyalty is represented in items 16 and 18.

A third reason for modifying the organisational commitment questionnaire relates to the students' understanding of the scale items. As the questionnaire should be suitable to 12–18 year olds, the scenarios have to be fairly precise. Abstract concepts are likely to confuse students and hence to skew results. Omitting the indication of general scenarios, item 13 of the SCQ describes the feeling of obligation to the learning plan. Furthermore, the negation of its corresponding item 14 in the organisation questionnaire was changed to a positive formulation in order to avoid any confusion in reading. Item 17 of the SCQ was the result of a similar modification as it describes the acknowledgment of the good intentions behind the learning goals regardless of whether the plan matches the students' personal goals or not.

While some items were changed in their formulation for reasons of reference, applicability or complexity, distinguishing between the reasons of modification is not as straight forward for other items. For example, item 2 of the commitment questionnaire measured the identification of the employee with the organisation's problems. While a similar scenario may be plausible in reference to the organisation school, a learning plan does not entail similar problems. However, the notion of 'are my own' is interpreted as a form of the employee's perception of responsibility and identification. This notion can be transferred into the schooling context, where the learner may feel responsible for the learning plan and thus with the tasks and problems that arise from it.

Fitting the same categorisation, items 3, 4, and 6 describe the direct relationship with the 'learning plan'. Following that, the scenarios had to be suited to the representation of affective commitment. As a result, the items describe students' belonging to the class as a group, their identification with the learning goals of the learning plan, and the consent to working with the learning plan as its goals are clear to the learner. Furthermore, as personal attachment implies emotions towards humans, it develops rather to an organisation than a learning plan. Therefore, the connotation of item 5 refers to the satisfaction that students may get out of the successful completion of their learning plan.

In total, the student commitment questionnaire (SCQ) contained three scales that measure students' affective, normative and continuance commitment. Each scale contained six items that require ranking on a five-point Likert scale as suggested by Meyer and Allen (1990, 1991, 1997).

Development of the Revised Student Commitment Questions

After testing the first Student Commitment Questionnaire, the instrument was revised according to the findings of the measurement point (see Chapter 7). The item *Enjoyment and Force* was deleted from the model as it was too imprecise. Furthermore, considering that the first factor analysis had showed that some items loaded on a different dimension than predicted (see p. 151ff.) further alterations were made. The affective item *Loyalty*, for example, loaded much stronger on the normative scale according to the factor analysis. Despite its lower total item correlation, the item was included in the normative scale for a second measurement point as it did not reduce the overall reliability of the scale.

Hence, the reviewed model comprised seven affective, five continuance and six normative commitment items (Figure 12). In addition to the movement of some items into different scales, some of the items were rephrased in order to create more specific scenarios that are relevant to students. The *Force* item was renamed *Pressure* as it describes more adequately the situation in which students find themselves. The *Punishment* item was rephrased and named *Bad Marks* as an incentive to fulfil the learning plan. The specification aimed to make it clearer to students what punishment might be involved in not completing the learning plan. Similar to that, the normative item *Self* was named *Duty to Teachers* at the second

measurement point. The content of the item remained unchanged. Finally, due to its dual belonging to the affective and normative scale, the variable *Reasonability* was replaced with a new variable referring to feelings of obligation to teachers and parents.

	Revised Student Commitment Questionnaire
	Commitment in Learning Plans
	Affective Commitment
Item 1: Happiness	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my school-time working with the learning plan.
Item 2: Responsibilty	I really feel that I am responsible for my learning plan.
Item 3: Usefulness	I feel that the plan is useful.
Item 4: Meaning	Fulfilling the tasks of the learning plan means a lot to me.
Item 5: Understanding	I understand why I am working with this plan.
Item 6: Enjoyment	I enjoy completing the tasks of the tasks of the learning plan.
Item 7: Group Pressure	I would enjoy working with the learning plan no matter what my classmates think about it.
	Continuance Commitment
Item 8: Trouble	I would get into too much trouble if I complained about the plan.
Item 9: Force	I only follow the learning plan because of the pressure from my teachers.
Item 10: Lack of Options	I have no other option but to accept the plan.
Item 11: Punishment	I only do the tasks of the plan because I do not want to get bad marks.
Item 12: Embarrass-ment	I only try to fulfil the learning plan because I do not want to look stupid in front of my classmates.
	-
	Normative Commitment
Item 13: Conscience	I would feel bad if I did not fulfil the learning plan.
Item 14: Loyalty	The plan makes me feel that it bring me and my classmates closer together as a group.
Item 15: Persistence	Even if the tasks sometimes seem hard to do, I do not feel it would be right to give up.
Item 16: Guilt	I would feel guilty if I did not do my best to fulfil the plan.
Item 17: Duty to Teacher	I would not give up trying to fulfil the plan because I don't want to disappoint my teacher.
Item 18: Duty to Parents	I feel I owe it to my parents/teachers to fulfil the plan.

Figure 12: Revised Student Commitment Questionnaire (SCQ)

Academic Self-efficacy Questions

For the measurement of academic self-efficacy, a shortened version[32] of a uni-dimensional scale by Jerusalem and Satow (1999) with six items was chosen. Internal consistency scores lie between α=0.69 and α=0.7 (Jerusalem et al., 2009, p. 17). As the instrument had never been tested in the English speaking context, no English version was available. Therefore, the items were translated for the purpose of this study (Figure 13; for the validation see Appendix B).

The answering scheme uses the same Likert scale format with anchors between 1 (I strongly agree) and 4 (I strongly disagree) as proposed by Jerusalem and Satow (1999, 2009).

After the first measurement, the academic self-efficacy was changed slightly in wording (Figure 13). As some students were not familiar with blackboards due to technological advancement as described in item 3, this reference was replaced by more general wording. In addition, item 4 underwent some stylistic changes.

Item 1	I can solve difficult tasks in class when I try hard.
Item 2	I find it easy to understand new class material.
Item 3	When I have to solve a difficult task in front of the class, I am confident that I can do it.
Item 4	When I miss class due to illness, I can still get good marks.
Item 5	Even when the teachers doubts my abilities, I am confident that I get good marks.
Item 6	I am confident that I can get good results, even if I get one bad mark.

Figure 13: Revised Academic Self-efficacy Questionnaire

Development of Engagement Items

Aiming to explore potential links between the commitment construct and engagement as a factor which underlies student learning outcomes, various approaches to measuring engagement were considered for this study. As the components of engagement are recognised to stand in a somewhat dynamic relationship (Wang,

[32] Jerusalem and Satow (1999) first created a seven-item scale to measure students' self-efficacy to put emphasis on the academic environment. The internal consistency of this scale consistently scores between α=0.7 and α=0.73.

2011) towards each other, there is a plethora of empirical studies proposing varying approaches to measure the engagement concept. Some researchers propose a uni-dimensional scale (e.g. Daly et al., 2008; You & Sharkey, 2009; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2009), and others two to three dimensions (e.g. Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2008b) to assess student engagement. A four-dimensional model has been investigated by Appleton et al. (2006).

However, despite their at times controversial methods, empirical findings from all four methodological perspectives have confirmed a link between student engagement and academic achievement (Appleton et al., 2008; Connell, Halpem-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995; Fredricks et al., 2004; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Skinner et al., 2008b; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Skinner et al., 1990, 1990). It appears that *"students who are more engaged in school have better academic performance"* (Wang et al., 2011, p. 466). Hence, all components of engagement are to some degree relevant for the level of performance that students show during class and in assignments.

Following Skinner's model (Skinner et al., 2008b), *behavioural* and *emotional engagement* represent two of the most significant engagement components that are related to academic student performance. Their model further investigates the components of *disaffected behavio[u]r and disaffected emotion;* that is, *the "absence of engagement, including the absence of effort or persistence"* (Skinner et al., 2008b, p. 495). Their comprehensive study also takes into account a number of other constructs as part of the motivational model such as factors of perceived control (Skinner et al. 1998), autonomy orientations (Ryan & Cornell, 1989), and goal orientation (e.g. Dweck, 1986; Eliott, 1999; Nicholls, 1984) for example. However, the number of questions forming the engagement vs. disaffection questionnaire amounts to 27, which were considered uneconomic for an already extensive questionnaire.

Furthermore, Skinner et al. (2008) explore teachers' views of student engagement which are assessed in the form of a teacher version of the engagement vs. disaffection the questionnaire with a similar number of questions. While these and further constructs from motivational theories are relevant for a holistic conceptualisation of engagement, this thesis only focuses on the positive mental and physical engagement components. They aim to provide a first indication of whether aspects of engagement might be linked to the proposed student commitment questionnaire.

Limiting the impact of this study on the participants, at the first measurement point only the learning plan specific engagement item was included in the questionnaire. It tapped into the amount of effort that students put into their work with a learning plan Figure 14.

How much will you work to fulfil your learning plan?

I will do my best ----------

I will work just as I much as I have to -------

I will work quite a bit----------

I don't really bother ----------

Figure 14: Engagement Question for Time 1

For the two consecutive measurement points, two additional behavioural engagement items from Skinner's et al. (2008) questionnaire were used that enquired about participation in general class proceedings (**Error! Reference source not ound.**). They examine the behavioural engagement that students of this study portray in and outside the classroom and whether they are linked to affective, normative, and continuance commitment.

In addition to the behavioural engagement factor that was already tested at measurement point one, another item was included that enquired about the degree of participation in class.

Furthermore, attitude and attention items from Skinner's et al. (2008) emotional engagement scale were added to a modified questionnaire (see Appendix A). Students were asked how they normally perceived the subject content taught, whether they would often feel bored or usually interested in the subject. The attention item described whether students usually paid great attention during class or felt that they were often absent in their mind regarding new things that were dealt with in class.

For all items a four point Likert scale was used. Due to a normal distribution of the data, the values were considered as scale values (Leech, 2008).

Psychological Engagement

Attitude: When we have been working on something in French (or other second language), I have been feeling…

bored all the time
bored some of the time
interested most of the time
interested all of the time

Attention: I have been paying attention in the French (or other second language) class…

not at all
not very much
quite a bit
very much

Behavioural Engagement

Participation: When I've been in the French (or other second language) class, I have been participating in class discussions.

not at all
not very much
quite a bit
very much

Active Engagement: How much have you been trying to achieve your goals under your learning plan?

I have been doing my best.
I have been working just as much as I have had to.
I have been working quite a bit.
I haven't really been bothering.

Figure 15: Engagement Items

Development of Background Items

In addition to the third part of the questionnaire, a number of socio-economic and other background items were developed in order to investigate their potential influence on student commitment.

As demographic factors such as *age*, *gender*, and *language background* have often shown to be significantly related to learning outcomes (e.g. Coley, 2001; Demie, 2001; Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2010; Gibbs, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2008; Mullis, Martin, Fierros, Goldberg, & Stemler, 2010), they may also be crucial in understanding student commitment as a psychological concept. In addition, other factors that describe general learner attitudes towards a

learning plan and that are relevant to classroom settings might contribute to a deeper insight on how students bond with their learning plan. This knowledge might be essential in predicting and understanding students' performance across the curriculum, and what is of particular interest to this thesis, in second language learning.

With the theoretical proposition in mind, which identifies affective commitment as the most favourable mindset towards the work with a learning plan, and thus crucial for the development of autonomy, this investigation explores whether demographic and learning background factors are linked to affective commitment.

While there are many factors that are likely to influence student commitment, they were too numerous to include them in the questionnaire. Eleven items were formulated as part of the questionnaire that students completed at three different measurement points (Figure 16). The factors describe the demographic and learning background of the students, as they include parts of the social background of the students as classroom related factors that are likely to influence the relationship that students form with their learning plan. All items but item *subject difficulty* and *parental support* were included at three measurement points. The latter two items were added to the questionnaire in studies 2 and 3. They were included at a later stage, as it became apparent that it is important to differentiate between the degree by which students enjoy their subject and the level of difficulty of the subject.

Furthermore, it was anticipated that variances in answers on affective commitment could also be reflected in the degree by which parents provide 'physical' help to their children (parental help) and the degree by which parents encourage their children to fulfil their learning plan (parental support).

The answering profile for each item varied. Items *school, gender, year, English*, and *subject* are treated as numeric values. Items *subject difficulty, subject liking, learning plan outcome, parental support, parental help*, and *learning plan preference* are treated as scale values, as the answers provided can be attributed to a Likert scale format with levels 1 to 4.

1. I am a ....

boy ☐

girl ☐

2. I am in year ...

7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐

3. I am .... years old.

11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐
18 ☐ 19 ☐

4. At home, I mostly speak ... – more than 1 answer allowed

English	☐	Arabic	☐	Serbian	☐
Japanese	☐	Greek	☐	Spanish	☐
Cantonese	☐	Vietnamese	☐	German	☐
Mandarin	☐	Italian	☐	French	☐

Other: _____

5. I am doing this questionnaire for the subject ... (TICK ONE ONLY!)

French ☐

Mandarin ☐

German ☐

Latin ☐

6. I find this subject (see above) ...

very hard ☐

rather hard ☐

rather easy ☐

very easy ☐

7. I enjoy learning this subject (see above) …

not at all

not very much ☐

quite a bit ☐

very much ☐

8. I find the learning plan …

not good at all _____ ☐

not so good _____ ☐

quite good _____ ☐

very good _____ ☐

9. How much do you think will you learn through the work with your learning plan? I think I will learn ...

a lot. _____ ☐

quite a bit _____ ☐

rather little. _____ ☐

nothing. _____ ☐

10. Do you think that learning with a learning plan is better than to learn without it?

I think that the learning plan ...

is not better at all. _____

not so much better. _____ ☐

is quite a bit better. _____ ☐

is definitely better. _____ ☐

11. Do you think your parents/guardians will help you to work with the learning plan? They...

absolutely will. _____

will help me a little. _____ ☐

will not really help me. _____ ☐

will not help me at all. _____ ☐

Figure 16: demographic and other relevant factors influencing commitment

The factors concerning students' expectations regarding their general attitudes and outcomes of the work with the learning plan were altered at each of the three measurement points. While in the first questionnaire expectations were formulated in the future tense, in the second and third questionnaire the tense was changed to present perfect tense (e.g.: *I have been enjoying…*). The retrospective perspective on the learners' attitudes was used for comparisons as to whether students' anticipations had an influence on the commitment that they developed over the course of the school year (see Appendix A for all three questionnaires).

- *Development of the Student and Teacher Interview Questions*

Two main qualitative methodologies were taken into consideration in order to define didactic paradigms that can be used to describe the learning environment of a learning plan that promotes learner autonomy. Follow up email conversations between the researcher and the participants were considered for the second measurement point as they could help to identify factors that are beneficial for a learning plan (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Opposing this approach was the fact that students of minor age were subjects of this research. In order to protect students' anonymity and to limit the time participation in this study would require, email contact was not an option. Therefore, this methodology was dismissed.

Instead of email interviews, structured online interviews with a pre-determined fixed set of questions appeared to be more suitable for this study (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). The number of questions was restricted in order to limit the interview time to 15 minutes for students and 30 minutes for teachers.[33] The interviews were recorded via an integrated function of the 'Adobe Connect' System. The recordings could have been amended, depending on potential requests by the participants. Hence, parts of the interview content could be deleted or re-recorded if required.

Two sets of interview questions were generated in order to account for the different situations that teachers find themselves in within the classroom compared to students (see Appendix A for list of interview questions). The questions attempted to

[33] It was assumed that teachers would provide more detailed answers than the students. Therefore, differing length of interviews despite similar number of questions were anticipated.

reflect on the different perspectives from both participant groups. Hence, one set of questions was created for the student cohort and one for the teacher cohort. Although both question sets were created based on the same coding system, students' questions differed to some extent in content from teachers' questions as some scenarios were more relevant to one group than to the other[34].

The interview questions were generated to explore the framework of the particular learning plans that encourage students to take responsibility for their learning as part of their second language education. The content of the interview questions was specifically generated in reference to Wolff's model (2002). They aimed at obtaining a better insight into the learning plans and to explore to what extent theoretical conceptions are represented in these plans. Hence, the interview questions were coded according to the dimensions of *learning objectives*, *learning context, learning strategies, self-assessment, learning content* and *social forms of learning*. In addition, they covered the dimension of *awareness* as noted by Benson (2010) because it appears that teachers' and learners' awareness of autonomy are a key factor for a successful learning programme.

A minimum of one question tapped on each dimension. It was anticipated that the answers could not be strictly allocated to one category per question. Most questions targeted answers that could reflect on two or more dimensions. Hence, it was anticipated that the answers were to be categorised according to the tested dimensions, or classified as part of multiple dimensions.

All in all, more closed questions were generated for students to limit the complexity of the question content for students and to retrieve answers also from potentially shy students who may not be able to provide eloquent answers (Lapan et al., 2012). In total, 17 questions and 11 sub-questions were created for the teacher interviews. The student questionnaire contains 21 questions and 3 sub-questions.

6.4.3. Set-up of the Studies and Participation Guidelines

In order to accommodate for the busy schedule of the schools, two options to participate in the longitudinal study[35] (study 1) were offered. Schools were given the

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[34] For the complete list of questions, see Appendix A.

[35] Longitudinal study refers to 3 measurement points that are equally used as 3 times.

choice whether to have their students complete the questionnaires during our outside class. However, schools decided to run the surveys in the classroom in order to guarantee the highest participation rates possible. Schools were further able to choose between a paper and an online-based questionnaire. Due to the high technological profile of one public school, they preferred to conduct an online survey. The two other schools decided on a paper format in which case the students filled in the questionnaire on paper and one student from each class collected all questionnaires, and sealed the envelope before returning it to their teacher. All participants filled in their paper or online questionnaire during class which guaranteed greater participation numbers compared to filling them in at home.

Within one week after the third completion of the questionnaire, the interviews were conducted as part of study 2. All participants were asked in addition to their signed agreement forms before the interview for confirmation of active agreement. Participants were re-informed of their right to withdraw from the project during or after the interview, and that those parts they wanted to have deleted from the recordings would be withdrawn upon the participant's request. None of the participants , however, made use of these rights. Hence, all recordings were used for the purposes of identifying factors that contribute to Wolff's model or that represent different aspects of an efficient learning programme.

As a tool to conduct the interviews, the internet platform called 'Adobe Connect' was chosen. The system enables the creation of an internet link to an online portal which could only be accessed by the researcher and the participants. The link was to be sent to the corresponding teachers at the school and distributed to the students. The internet portal was to be linked to a timer that would only allow access for a designated period of time, and access to the portal had to be granted by the researcher. This meant that students and teachers required a computer with internet access and a head-set. The interviews resembled phone calls in their nature as participants were to communicate with the researcher via the head-set only. Students and teachers likewise were able to enter the created portal by using a self-created nickname rather than using their real names. Furthermore, no cameras were to be used in order to avoid visual contact with the researcher. This way anonymity of students and teachers was guaranteed. The participants and the researcher then were to communicate via a head-set similar to a phone call.

The interviews were set up so that teachers were first interviewed. Upon termination of the interviews, the student interviews followed. The arrangement of the interviews in this order ensured that prospective technical difficulties could be overcome before the interviews with the students. During the interview, students and teachers were able to see all the questions in front of them in the online portal as 'Adobe Connect' has a feature in which documents can be uploaded and shared amongst participants of the portal. Hence, students and teachers were able to follow the questions in writing as the researcher was reading them out to them at the same time. This way, participants were able to read the questions in case of any technical disturbance and to process them better than if only heard. All participants were native speakers of English. Therefore, no difficulties in understanding questions from a linguistic point of view need to be addressed.

6.4.4. Methods of Analysis

The data gained from the quantitative and qualitative studies, in order to answer the three research questions, required different methods of analysis. In the following section, the individual methodologies of analysis are presented for the three research questions.

- *Analysis of the Quantitative Data*

For the purpose of identifying the characteristics of student commitment, as targeted in research question 1, factor analyses, validity, and reliability tests for the student commitment questionnaire (SCQ) at the three measurement points were conducted[36]. Based on this method of analysing the data, it was explored whether student commitment consists of three dimensions (affective, normative, and continuance commitment). For this analysis, all three schools were considered as one sample for each measurement point. Survey answers were excluded if they were univariate or multivariate outliers indicating that answers reflected extreme values (Leech, 2008) or if the time in which they filled in the survey was significantly shorter than the average filling time.

[36] Buehner (2004) considers a sample size of n=200 to be adequate. Further studies with greater test groups are however recommended.

Following the exploration of student commitment as a three-dimensional concept, the development of student commitment is described on a school by school basis. This is due to the differing socio-economic background of the students at each school (see 6.3.1), the area for which the learning plan was evaluated, and most importantly because schools differed in the type of learning plan that they have in place. The means for each of the commitment scales (affective, normative, continuance items) were calculated for each school[37] and compared according to the three measurement points.

Investigating further whether the data underpins that student commitment can influence student engagement and academic self-efficacy (as proposed in research question 2), two methods of analysis were chosen. The method of analysis is presented first for academic self-efficacy, followed by engagement.

For the investigation of academic self-efficacy, in a first step, the development of academic self-efficacy was observed over three measurement points. The overall mean was calculated based on answers of six items with an answering scheme in the form of a Likert scale from 1 (I strongly agree) to 4 (I strongly disagree). However, the discussion of the development of students' academic self-efficacy will be conducted for each school individually. Although this methodology leads to weaker grounds for a generalisation of the development potential of this psychological concept, it provides an insight into the development of students' academic self-efficacy in each case sample.

In a second step, exploring whether students' commitment is generally linked to academic self-efficacy, Pearson correlations between the two concepts were calculated at three measurement points. Providing a first indicator of a potential link between academic self-efficacy and student commitment, these calculations were conducted based on all schools as one sample.

Following the Pearson correlations, it was explored whether affective, normative, and continuance commitment have an influence on students' academic self-efficacy. The factors of school and time (measurement point) were included as fixed factors in the multivariate analysis.

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[37] As the surveys were conducted anonymously, means only represent group rather than individual findings.

In order to explore the relationship between student commitment and engagement, a different methodology of analysis compared to academic self-efficacy was used. Other than in Skinner's et al.'s (2008) work, the engagement items used in the questionnaires of this study were not be considered as part of one scale, as less than five items were used (Leech, 2008). The means were calculated for the individual engagement items, and ANOVA calculations to identify changes of behavioural and psychological engagement were conducted for each school over the three measurement points. Findings are thus formulated in a descriptive manner.

Aiming to elaborate on the links between engagement and student commitment, the second part of the data analysis was based on Pearson correlations and multivariate analyses. For these calculations, all answers were considered as part of one sample. First, it was tested whether the commitment levels had an influence on students' attention and attitude as part of behavioural engagement. The procedure was repeated for the psychological dimensions of participation and engagement. As it was anticipated that school type and time could be significant factors by which students' answers will vary, they were included as fixed factors in the multivariate calculations.

In order to answer the third research question, the data gained from the quantitative and the qualitative studies was required. Focussing on the analysis of the quantitative data in this sub-section, a number of demographic and general factors regarding the learner's background and learning environment, were analysed regarding their influence on student commitment.

A Pearson correlation was conducted between the demographic and other factors and affective commitment for the whole sample. Where specific implications can be drawn for the second language classroom, this is discussed in the findings.

Following the establishment of general links between various demographic and other factors and affective commitment, general linear modelling was further used to explore the influence of various factors on student commitment. Links between

affective commitment and the factors *time*, *year, subject type, school*[38]*, subject liking, subject difficulty, parental help and parental support* were investigated[39].

- *Analysis of the Qualitative Data*

The data from the qualitative study, in the form of interviews, was interpreted in order to deepen the understanding the circumstances under which students develop greater affective commitment towards their learning plan. In addition to demographic and other background factors that can help to explain why some students develop higher affective commitment towards their learning plan than others, the qualitative data aimed to investigate the environment in which learning plans are embedded in the second language classroom that encourage students' affective commitment. For this purpose, Wolff's (2002) and Benson's (2010) proposed didactic paradigms were coded into interview questions and posed to teachers and students from classes who showed a great personal belief in their learning plan.

All interviews were transcribed and analysed in NVIVO, a software for qualitative analysis. Students' and teachers' answers were clustered according to the didactic paradigms of *Learning Content, Learning Objectives, Learning Strategies, Social Forms, Self-Assessment*, and *Learning Context* in reference to Wolff's (2002) and Benson's (2010) model and compared with the researchers' interpretation. Answers that did not fit the description of any of the proposed didactic paradigms but appeared to reflect common students' and teachers' views were grouped and discussed as additional didactic paradigms.

In order to facilitate reading and highlighting differing answers between students and teachers, the discussion of the findings was created in a comparative analysis. Quotes from students and teachers are used to underpin an analysis of the criteria that define an environment specific to the second language classroom in which a learning plan is implemented to foster learner autonomy and the limitations of such an attempt.

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[38] The factor *school* was considered as a fixed variable that may explain the different degrees of students' affective commitment at the three measurement points.

[39] As the answering anchors are in an opposite order in the questionnaire, in order to avoid that students might habitually answer questions due to acquiescence bias (e.g. Furr 2011), answers for *LPpreference* and *LPoutcome* were recoded.

7. Findings of the Quantitative Study

This chapter aims to shed light on the three research questions based on the findings from the quantitative study. Exploring the characteristics of student commitment as proposed in research question 1, it discusses commitment as a three-dimensional and fluctuant concept. Targeting research question 2, this chapter further elaborates on student commitment as a potential factor that influences the degree to which students engage in their learning and their confidence or level of self-efficacy to take on new tasks. Finally, a number of socio-demographic and background factors are suggested to play a role in students' development of affective commitment towards their learning plan that provide some insight into research question 3.

7.1. The Characteristics of Student Commitment

The first research question of this thesis pursued the aim to investigate the characteristics of commitment that students develop based on the specific learning plan they work with. This section explores this question in three parts.

Having established a model and definition of student commitment which describes it as a concept that consists of three components – affective, normative, and continuance commitment – a student commitment questionnaire (SCQ) was developed. Based on a statistical evaluation of the questionnaire, the first part of this chapter discusses whether student commitment is a three-dimensional concept and whether the SCQ can be considered a reliable instrument to assess students' commitment towards their learning plan.

The second part of this chapter describes the relationship that students built towards their learning plan in each school, and the third part of this chapter explores whether student commitment is a stable or a fluctuant concept that can change within a short period of time.

7.1.1. Student Commitment: A Measurable Three-dimensional Concept

Prior to exploring whether student commitment has a three-dimensional structure, the definitions will be briefly reiterated for clarity.

The affective commitment scale attempts to define how much students are willing to work with their learning plan. The normative commitment scale measures to what extent norms and values, which had been internalised based on parental or guardian education, influenced the students' views of the learning plans. In contrast to the first two scales, the continuance commitment scale determines to what degree students feel that they are obliged to fulfil the learning plan with little or no personal influence.

Exploring whether student commitment can be defined as a three-dimensional concept, the following two subsections discuss the findings of the factor analyses, reliability and internal consistency examinations.

- *SCQ – Factor Analysis Indicating Three Dimensions*

Following principal axis factoring of the 18 determined commitment items, three dimensions were extracted (Table 6) for the data collected at measurement point one[40]. The three factors explain approximately 58% of the variance of the answers (Table 6). Hence, this is a strong indicator that, similar to the organisational models, various components of student commitment can also be assumed in the educational context. This suggests that students may bond with their learning plans due to affective, normative and continuance commitment.

Based on an extraction of three factors, the principal axis factoring showed that five out of six continuance items load on the same dimension (Table 7)[41]. Item 17 conEnjoyandForce, however, loaded on a different dimension indicating that the formulation of the item statement did not test on the anticipated continuance commitment scale.

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[40] Some of the results of this study have been presented at the EDULEARN11 conference in Barcelona, Spain, in 2011 and were published in parts in the conference proceedings (Schuster, 2011a).

[41] The vertical circles in the figure indicate the clustering of items on one dimension. The horizontal circles around individual items highlight problematic items that do not fit the hypothesized model.

Table 6: Time 1 - Principal Axis Factoring

Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.338	46.323	46.323	7.994	44.409	44.409	4.396	24.424	24.424
2	2.221	12.339	58.662	1.715	9.527	53.935	3.353	18.625	43.049
3	1.105	6.137	64.799	.654	3.631	57.566	2.613	14.517	57.566
4	.860	4.780	69.579						
5	…	…	…						

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Table 7: Time 1 – Rotated Factor Matrix - Principal Axis Factoring

Rotated Factor Matrix[a]

	Factor		
	1	2	3
affUsefulness	.811	.306	-.321
affHappiness	.805		
affMeaning	.684	.395	-.335
conEnjoyandForce	.673	.325	
normSelf	.667	.383	-.356
affUnderstanding	.633	.348	
affResponsibility	.479	.426	
normGuilt		.797	
normPersistence	.374	.706	
normConscience		.658	
normReasonability	.534	.565	
normDutytoParents	.382	.554	
affLoyalty		.479	
conPunishment			.726
conLackOfOption			.683
conForce	-.519		.657
conTrouble			.539
conEmbarrassment			.443

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

The differentiation between affective and normative commitment appeared to be more problematic compared to the continuance scale. Normative item 8 called *Self*, which refers to student's persistence to work with their learning plan regardless of complaints from classmates, was moved to the affective commitment scale and re-named *group pressure*. In addition to that, continuance item 17, that enquired whether students' sense of obligation to complete the learning plan was higher than

their personal agreement with the plan, also appeared to be a stronger indicator for affective commitment rather than continuance commitment (Schuster, 2011). Affective item 2, which addressed student responsibility for their plan loaded just as strongly on the normative dimension. Finally, item 3, which addressed loyalty amongst students, appears to underpin normative rather than continuance commitment. This means that loyalty is a rather stronger representative component of internalised norms than a perceived external obligation. The factoring analysis therefore indicated that anticipations of loadings for the 18 commitment items were only partially met.

Improvements of the commitment questionnaire were, however, achieved at the second measurement point. Following principal axis factoring, three dimensions indicated better predictions of the total variance of answers with 66.7% compared to 57.6% at the first measurement point (Table 8).

Table 8: Time 2 - Total Variance

Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Factor	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.849	43.608	43.608	7.534	41.857	41.857	5.307	29.484	29.484
2	3.037	16.873	60.481	2.546	14.144	56.001	3.058	16.987	46.471
3	1.127	6.262	66.744	.766	4.257	60.257	2.481	13.786	**60.257**
4	.831	4.614	71.358						
5	…	…	…						

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Furthermore, all commitment items loaded on the predicted dimensions (see circles and descriptors in Table 9). Only the newly created *Loyalty* item loaded slightly higher on the affective commitment scale than on the normative commitment scale. In addition, the *Persistence* item also showed similar belonging to the affective commitment dimension. However, if deleted from their current dimension, this would weaken the reliability results of the normative scale (see Appendix B). Therefore, the items remained part of the normative scale and were tested again at a third measurement point to verify their functioning.

Table 9: Time 2 - Rotated Factor Matrix - Principal Axis Factoring

Rotated Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor		
	1	2	3
affHappiness	.868	.155	-.161
affResponsibility	.634	.441	-.106
affUsefulness	.920	.198	-.160
affUnderstanding	.729	.284	-.140
affMeaning	.745	.399	-.200
affenjoyment	.763	.341	-.279
affgrouppressure	.795	.277	-.258
conTrouble	-.127		.582
conForce	-.269		.781
conLackofOption			. 679
conPunishment	-.278		.681
conEmbarrassment		.243	.493
normConscience	.282	.682	.162
normLoyalty	.514	.410	-.111
normPersistence	.526	.544	
normGuilt	.238	.785	
normDutytoTeachers	.228	.650	.140
normDutytoParents	.327	.567	.174

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Time = 2

b. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

As the revised questionnaire at measurement point 2 had showed significant improvements, for measurement point 3 the questionnaire remained unchanged as critical results such as similar fit of the normative persistence item and poor internal fit of the continuance item of embarrassment were not distinct enough to make a clear decision whether to remove or change the items. Rather than modifying the questionnaire again, the same questionnaire as at measurement point 2 was re-used to test its suitability and to address potential issues of the questionnaire. Similar to measurement point 1 and 2, a factor analysis at measurement point 3 confirmed the existence of three dimensions that measure different forms of commitment (Table 10).

Table 10: Time 3 - Total Variance

Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.243	45.793	45.793	7.954	44.188	44.188	5.603	31.129	31.129
2	2.970	16.497	62.290	2.521	14.003	58.191	3.727	20.708	51.837
3	1.268	7.045	69.335	.903	5.016	63.207	2.047	11.370	**63.207**
4	.868	4.825	74.160						
5	…	…	…						

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Considering the rotated factor matrix analysis, it is evident that all affective items represent one dimension (Table 11). All designated normative items loaded on a second dimension and also all continuance items formed a separate dimension. The normative *Persistence* item portrayed a more distinct fit into the normative scale compared to the previous studies. The critical loyalty item showed a better fit at the third measurement point. However, it loaded to a similar degree on the affective as well as on the normative scale.

This result suggests that it is not clear cut whether the influence of classmates on the students' perception of their personal learning plan can be described as an internalised norm or an internal belief. The *Embarrassment* item continued to be fairly weak. Therefore, it cannot be clearly said whether it fits the scale as it clearly describes a different aspect of obligation towards a learning plan compared to lack of option and punishment. However, its deletion would not improve the internal reliability of the continuance commitment scale (see Appendix B). Therefore, it can be argued that it explores a different reason for which students may feel obliged to fulfil their personal learning plan. In that respect it provides a better insight into the reasoning behind students' engagement in their personal learning plan.

Table 11: Time 3 - Rotated Factor Matrix

Rotated Factor Matrix[a]

	Factor		
	1	2	3
affHappiness	.895	.215	
affUsefulness	.895	.293	-.117
affgrouppressure	.847	.273	
affenjoyment	.822	.373	-.101
affMeaning	.787	.449	
affUnderstanding	.735	.281	-.143
affResponsibility	.582	.427	
normLoyalty	.517	.473	
normGuilt	.318	.824	
normConscience	.224	.771	
normDutytoTeachers	.166	.766	.180
normDutytoParents	.284	.616	.131
normPersistence	.438	.613	
conForce	-.256		.758
conTrouble	.145		.634
conLackofOption	-.330		.607
conPunishment	-.420		.593
conEmbarrassment	.151	.259	.470

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

- *Reliability and Internal Consistency*

Following the factor analysis, the internal consistency of the items and a reliability analysis for the three scales was conducted at the three measurement point (Table 12). Supporting the factor analysis at measurement point 1, reliability measures indicated an overall better fit with the five problematic items assigned to other scales than originally assumed.

Table 12: Time 1 - Reliability Results for Commitment Scales

	Reliability of rotated scales
Affective Commitment α=	0.92
Normative Commitment α=	0.84
Continuance Commitment α=	0.78

Internal consistency overall for the model were satisfactory. Internal consistency for the affective commitment scale achieved an excellent value of α=0.92. The normative commitment scale continued to show good internal consistency of α=0.84. The reliability of the continuance scale displayed modest internal consistency with α=0.78 following the deletion of item 17. The item was perceived to test an affective as well as a continuance dimension by stating*: I enjoy working with the plan just as much as I feel that I have to work with it.* Containing a notion of volition and obligation, it was not specific enough and was therefore excluded from the scale.

Reclassifying items also led to a better distinction between the affective and normative scale. While first results indicated a very high correlation coefficient of .80, scales were more independent following a factor analysis (0.69). Correlation between the two latter scales and continuance commitment remained consistently low (Schuster, 2011) (see Appendix B).

Concerning the internal correlation of the items for the individual commitment scales, despite a reassignment of the item *Loyalty* to the normative scale, it did not show a suitable fit (0.385). Similar to that, item *Embarrassment* did not correlate sufficiently high with the remaining continuance item (0.387).

Table 13: Time 1 – Item-Total Correlation

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
affHappiness	12.53	28.114	**.823**	.721	.899
affResponsibility	13.47	35.966	**.611**	.404	.925
affUsefulness	12.76	28.379	**.884**	.794	.888
affUnderstanding	12.96	32.156	**.744**	.574	.909
affMeaning	12.43	30.092	**.825**	.689	.897
normSelf	12.41	31.211	**.764**	.609	.906

Item-Total Statistics

normConscience	13.33	21.133	**.557**	.359	.827
affLoyalty	13.22	23.600	***.385***	.168	.856
normPersistence	13.86	20.143	**.741**	.599	.791
normGuilt	13.54	19.233	**.757**	.593	.786
normReasonability	13.60	20.376	**.674**	.524	.804
normDutytoParents	13.50	20.756	**.612**	.389	.816

Item-Total Statistics

conTrouble	12.27	15.377	**.478**	.238	.764
conForce	12.54	12.511	**.664**	.458	.700
conLackofOption	12.91	13.617	**.581**	.398	.731
conPunishment	12.28	13.402	**.673**	.455	.699
conEmbarrassment	11.64	16.626	***.387***	.190	.788

Having received first results in favour of a three-dimensional model to measure affective, normative and continuance commitment following Meyer's and Allen's (1993) work in the research field of organisational psychology, two further tests were conducted throughout the school year.

With adjustments made to the SCQ for the second measurement point, reliability results increased to α=0.95. The normative commitment scale continued to show good internal consistency with α=0.85. Changes that were made to the continuance commitment scale proved to increase internal consistency to α=0.79.

Table 14: Time 2 – Reliability Results for Commitment Scales

	Reliability
Affective Commitment α=	0.95
Normative Commitment α=	0.85
Continuance Commitment α=	0.79

Table 15 also depicts that most items showed acceptable to excellent scale fit for each scale. Only the continuance item describing the function of embarrassment as a driver to fulfil the learning plan showed poor scale fit. Due to its positive contribution to the overall reliability of the scale, it was monitored at a third measurement point.

Table 15: Time 2 – Item-Total Correlation

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
affHappiness	15.31	48.559	**.850**	.793	.939
affResponsibility	15.99	56.341	**.730**	.559	.949
affUsefulness	15.47	49.277	**.911**	.850	.933
affUnderstanding	15.66	52.889	**.770**	.620	.945
affMeaning	15.09	52.090	**.838**	.736	.940
affenjoyment	14.99	51.783	**.850**	.747	.939
affgrouppressure	15.21	50.687	**.854**	.745	.938

Item-Total Statistics

normConscience	13.82	21.107	**.677**	.505	.815
normLoyalty	13.35	22.658	**.532**	.305	.843
normPersistence	14.23	21.865	**.643**	.433	.822
normGuilt	13.92	20.648	**.710**	.547	.808
normDutytoTeachers	14.00	22.184	**.640**	.450	.823
normDutytoParents	13.96	21.712	**.594**	.412	.831

Item-Total Statistics

conTrouble	11.88	15.107	**.516**	.313	.769
conForce	11.96	13.447	**.718**	.525	.701
conLackofOption	12.56	14.185	**.568**	.373	.753
conPunishment	12.43	14.042	**.628**	.410	.732
conEmbarrassment	11.35	16.423	**.426**	.228	.793

At the third and final measurement point, the internal consistency of the affective, normative and continuance commitment scales continued to show acceptable to excellent results. While the continuance commitment scale portrayed a slightly lower reliability value of α=0.76, the affective and normative commitment scales achieved slightly higher reliability values with α=0.95 and α=0.88 (Appendix B).

Table 16: Time 3 – Reliability Results for Commitment Scales

	Reliability
Affective Commitment α=	0.95
Normative Commitment α=	0.88
Continuance Commitment α=	0.76

As desired, repeated reliability testing and factor analysis indicated that the amended commitment scales represent a better fit compared to the first model. Findings from measurement points 2 and 3 support that the changes of the original questionnaire improved the model. While future modifications to the model such as redesigning

may be required, the overall findings underpin Meyer's and Allen's (1991, 1993, 1997) suggestion that commitment is a three-dimensional concept which is also evident in the schooling environment.

Table 17: Time 3 – Item-Total Correlation

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
affHappiness	16.40	55.761	**.887**	.835	.942
affResponsibility	17.05	64.499	**.695**	.542	.956
affUsefulness	16.56	56.610	**.920**	.871	.938
affUnderstanding	16.87	61.100	**.790**	.664	.949
affMeaning	16.23	59.560	**.854**	.771	.944
affenjoyment	16.23	59.105	**.858**	.790	.944
affgrouppressure	16.36	58.278	**.869**	.792	.943

Item-Total Statistics[a]

normConscience	14.27	26.768	**.711**	.580	.860
normLoyalty	13.91	28.525	**.592**	.363	.879
normPersistence	14.73	27.596	**.682**	.492	.865
normGuilt	14.35	25.492	**.809**	.680	.843
normDutytoTeachers	14.46	27.119	**.722**	.565	.858
normDutytoParents	14.52	27.302	**.649**	.476	.870

Item-Total Statistics

conTrouble	11.61	14.286	**.502**	.299	.730
conForce	11.73	12.779	**.668**	.471	.669
conLackofOption	12.33	13.872	**.553**	.428	.713
conPunishment	12.27	13.762	**.578**	.413	.704
conEmbarrassment	11.25	15.460	**.368**	.202	.775

- *Summary*

Over three measurement points[42] an instrument was developed that aimed to measure students' commitment towards various forms of learning plans as a crucial element to foster learner autonomy. It was further used to explore whether commitment is a multi-dimensional concept.

The findings overall confirmed the anticipation, in accordance with Meyer's and Allen's (1990, 1993, 1997) approach to commitment, that it is a three-dimensional

[42] Measurement points correspond to study 1, 2, 3.

concept. However, similarities between the organisational and educational commitment concept further stretch to types of commitment components. At all three measurement points, internal reliability values of the three commitment scales allow for the proposition that students can develop levels of affective, normative, and continuance commitment. This means that students can feel committed towards their learning plan based on personal agreement, internalised norms, or obligations commanded by third parties.

While the reliability values ranged between average and very good reliability, some questionnaire items needed to be re-addressed as they loaded on a different scale to the one that had been determined in the original design. Therefore, the instrument was amended before the second measurement point. Changes included the deletion of one affective commitment item, specifying some item formulations, and shifting items to a different scale based on the factor analysis. The second and third measurements showed improved overall reliability, smaller inter-scale correlations, and better item loading on the targeted scales.

Hence, overall the student commitment questionnaire (SCQ) represents a confident starting point in the quantitative exploration of student commitment towards learning plans that foster learner autonomy. In the following sub-sections the data will be used to describe to what extent students felt that they wanted to, should or had to work with their learning plan and whether their commitment changed within a set time-frame.

7.1.2. Student Commitment: Paths of Development

The representation of the means of the three commitment components at measurement point 1 demonstrates that the individual sample groups clearly differ from one another (see p. 165, Figure 17, item *usefulness*). It appears that students in school 1 were convinced that the goals of their learning plan matched their own beliefs in what it should pursue. They displayed greater internal belief in the learning plan as a system rather than seeing it as an instrument that was forced upon them (see p. 164, Figure 16, *Continuance Mean*). In other words, students dominantly worked with the learning plan because they generally agreed with its goals and its concept. However, students were aware to a small degree that they have to comply with the regulations of the learning plan. Nevertheless, this is not perceived in a

strong negative sense, but it rather contributes to a balanced perception of this learning system.

Students in school 3 also depicted high levels of affective commitment although they showed that external pressures influenced their views on their learning plan more in comparison to their fellow students in school 1.

Students in school 2, however, appeared to be fairly critical of their learning plan. Also, normative beliefs contributed less to their work with the learning plan than feelings of obligation. These differences in students' views lead to the question why they vary so much. In an attempt to explore this question, the next section of this thesis will thus further explore the individual answers that students provided for each item of the three commitment scales.

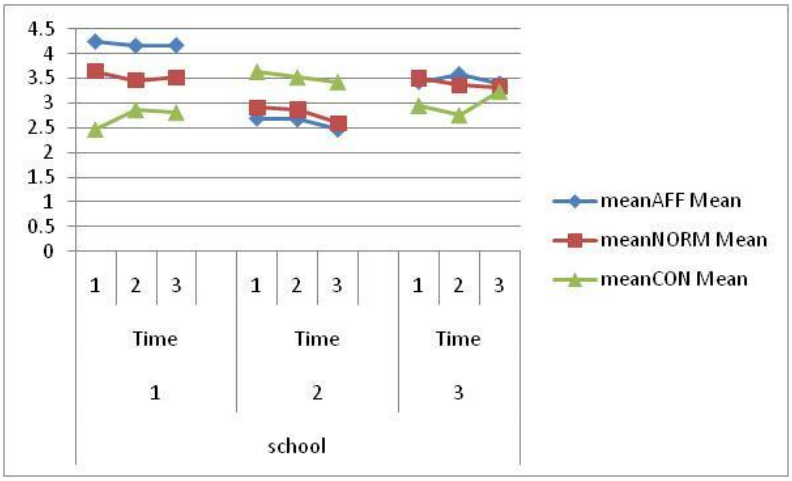

Figure 16: Commitment Means by School and Time

- *Affective Commitment by School*

<u>*School 1*</u>

Considering the individual mean for each item, it was apparent that the values for school 1 ranked higher for all affective items compared to the other two schools (Figure 17[43]). Students felt very happy to work with their learning plan. This was for various reasons. They fully understood the reasoning behind the concept of their learning plan (m=4.32), and they therefore found that the learning plan was very useful (m=4.56). Furthermore, it 'meant a lot' to the students to complete the tasks under their learning plan (m=4.01). For the completion of their tasks, students felt

[43] The figure contains the original item *norm self* was changed *group pressure* for measurement 2 and 3.

responsible (m=4.57). Results were slightly lower with regard to feelings in the case if another classmate complained about having to complete a task (m=3.88). Hence, the views of fellow students may have had some impact on the individual's views. Students further expressed that their volition to complete tasks was just as high as the obligation to complete them (m=3.83). Furthermore, they also wanted to complete the learning plan to please their teacher (m=3.88).

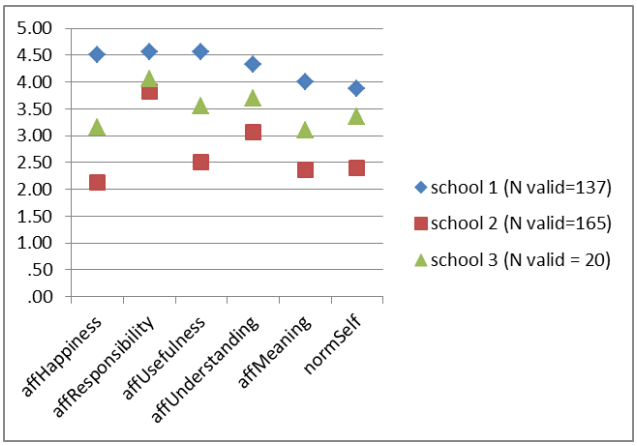

Figure 17: Individual Affective Commitment Items – School 1, 2 and 3

The individual means therefore explain the high affective overall commitment (m=4.2) of students, as they indicate that students enjoyed working according to their learning plan at that time and were mainly driven by personal belief in it.

School 2

The responses that students provided from school 2 contrasted with the views of school 1 students. Having had less than a year since the introduction of their learning plan compared to students in school 1 with decades of experience, the participant group of school 2 had developed a very different relationship to their learning plan compared to students in school 1. For nearly all affective items, students appeared to be much more critical of their learning plan than students in school 1. Students generally disagreed with the idea of spending the rest of their school-time with a learning plan (m=2.13).

Potential issues included that the average student was not sure if s/he fully understood the reasoning behind working with the plan. This might explain why the majority of students negated the usefulness of the plan (m=2.5) and why fulfilling the aims of the plan was of little personal meaning to them (m=2.4). Concluding from the circumstance that students felt responsible (m=3.8) for their plan despite only

medium degree of understanding of the learning plan (m=3.06), their affective commitment could potentially be increased if they had a stronger affiliation with the plan.

Overall, in contrast to school 1, students in school 2 displayed considerably lower affective commitment (m=2.7). The value for normative commitment was similar to their affective commitment (m=2.9). The data suggests that students in school 2 appeared to be rather critical of their learning plan. This was also reflected in the higher continuance commitment compared to school 1 (m=3.6).

School 3

The data for school 3 shows that students were not fully convinced of their learning plan, but they also did not portray strong negative feelings towards it. Students were to some degree 'happy' to work with their learning plan (m=3.2), as they overall seemed to understand the concept of the learning plan (m= 3.7). They expressed uncertainty as to how much they felt that completing the tasks of the learning plan was of personal benefit (m=3.1). Students showed , however, slightly stronger bonding with their teacher (m=3.4) which indicates that, although they still needed to further bond with their learning plan, they trusted their teacher to offer a suitable learning programme. However, students overall believed that their learning plan is useful (m=3.6), and they believed that it is their responsibility (m=4.1) to fulfil the tasks of the learning plan.

In summary, students in school 3 portrayed medium to high affective commitment (m=3.4) and similar normative commitment (m=3.5) (Table 19). In comparison to these component values, students' continuance commitment had a medium value with m=3. Hence, on average students in school 3 were optimistic with regard to their learning plan as they were clearly in favour of their learning plan for personal and normative reasons. Feelings of external pressure were significantly less dominant than the personal belief in the learning plan.

- *Continuance Commitment by School*

School 1

Overall, students in school 1 showed much lower continuance commitment at the first measurement point than affective commitment (Figure 18: m=2.5). This indicates that

students' volition to work with the learning plan is greater than feelings of obligation to work with it. Their positive views on the learning plan outweigh negative perceptions. Although students agreed somewhat that they have to accept the learning plan as it is (m=1.5), they generally negated the statement that forms of punishment (such as low marks) were the only reasons for following the learning plan (m=1.2).

Furthermore, students tended to disagree with the statement that they could not express criticism about the system of the learning plan (m=1.2). Students did not dominantly work with their learning plan against their preference (m=1.1).

Finally, feelings of fear to embarrass themselves in front of other students seem to be less important than any other continuance factor (m=0.9).

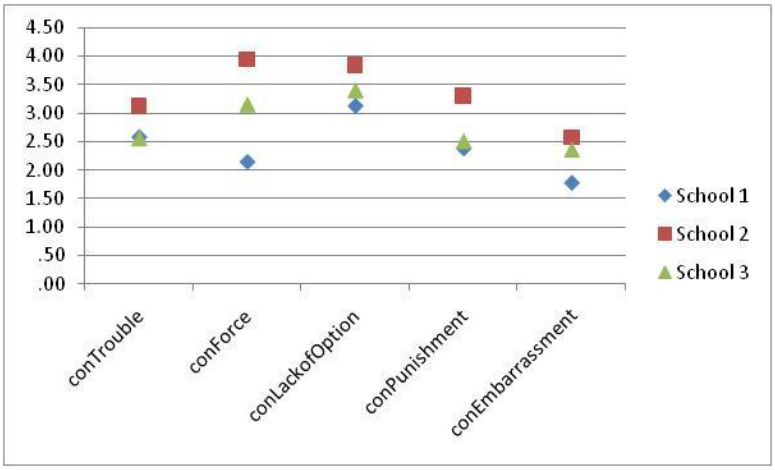

Figure 18: Individual Continuance Commitment Items - School 1, 2 and 3

School 2

In students from school 2, feelings of obligation appeared to be dominant. This motivation is evident considering the continuance scale items (Figure 18). Apart from the item of embarrassment, the values for the individual continuance items were all significantly higher for school 2 compared to school 1 and 3.

Students expressed that they were working with their learning plan despite not wanting to (m=3.9). Similarly, they felt a daunting lack of options (m=3.9). The two latter feelings appeared to be prominent in the students' thinking. Students were only to some degree afraid of some form of punishment if they did not fulfil their learning plan (m=3.3). Students were further not quite sure whether complaining about their learning plan could get them into trouble, but they saw some potential in it (m=3.1).

Although the continuance values for school 2 were higher than for the other two schools, they were moderate. Findings indicate that the discontentment of students dominated student views more than extreme levels of fear. In this respect there was great potential that student views could change if they were, for example, to understand the goals of the learning plan better, and if students were to develop greater belief in the values of the learning.

School 3

Considering the individual continuance items for school 3 (Figure 18), the view is underpinned that students' personal belief in the learning plan needs to be fostered, but that they did not feel obliged or threatened by forms of punishment (m=2.5). Students doubted that issuing concerns about the content of the learning plan would have direct negative consequences for the students (m=2.6). Although the students in school 3 acknowledged that to a certain extent they had little choice but to work with the learning plan (m=3.4), and that they had to work with their learning plan even if they did not like it (m=3.2), there appeared to be a climate of communication within the classroom to discuss potential issues and questions. This view is supported by the low value for students' fear to embarrass themselves in front of their classmates if they did not fulfil their learning plan (m=2.4).

- *Normative Commitment by School*

Regarding students' internalised norms and values that they acquired at home, the results at measurement point 1 did not differ quite as strongly as with regard to affective and continuance commitment. That is why the component of normative commitment can be analysed for all three schools.

In comparing affective and normative commitment, normative beliefs are believed to have a smaller and yet still significant impact on the way that students view their learning plan. At the time of the measurement, students fulfilled their learning plan to some extent because they felt that they should comply with the tasks due to internalised norms and values. Students of all three schools attributed roughly the same importance to feelings of bad conscience if they did not fulfil their learning plan (Figure 19). They were fairly unsure whether any negative views held by fellow classmates would have a negative impact on their personal views. The data indicates that it cannot be ruled out that students are likely to be influenced by their

classmates. If they complained about their learning plan, positive thinking students may be more primed to change their view too. This may be due to peer pressure (Wentzel, 2005).

Of similar degree of importance was the item on guilt. While students in school 2 appeared to find that other factors contributed to their sceptical view of the learning plan than their own performance, participants in school 1 and 3 considered that they would feel guilty to some or even to a great extent if they did not complete their learning plan.

More importantly, however, than aspects of *Bad Conscience*, *Loyalty* and *Guilt* was the item of *Persistence*. This item referred to students feeling that they ought to finish something that they have started. This is an often taught norm that stretches persistence in pursuing challenges. There appears to be a great discrepancy between school 2 (m=3.2) and the other two schools (school 1: m=4.2; school 3: m=4.0) in this regard. Similar interpretations can be proposed for the aspects of reasonability and the duty to parents (Figure 19).

For four out of six items, students in school 2 were rather unsure as to whether they hold themselves accountable for their actions with regard to the learning plan based on norms and values that they acquired at home (m=3.1). This underpins that students in school 2 mainly lacked confidence in their learning plan at the first measurement point. Students were less inclined at that stage compared to fellow students in the other two schools to take responsibility for their learning with their learning plan. They put stronger emphasis on the fact that they have no other option than to work with the learning plan despite not fully understanding what the benefits of this learning plan were.

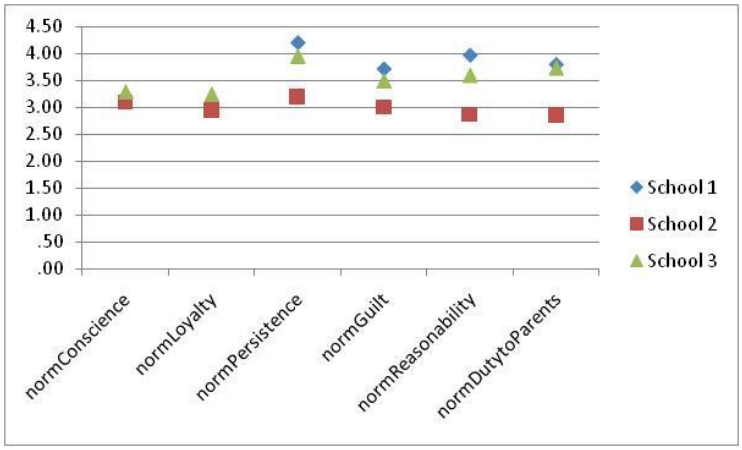

Figure 19: Individual Normative Commitment Items – School 1, 2 and 3

7.1.3. Student Commitment: A Fluctuating Concept

- *Development of Affective Commitment*

Over the three points of measurement, it became evident that affective student commitment in school 1 and 2 changed significantly ($p \leq 0.05$, see Appendix B). In terms of the characteristics of commitment, this finding supports the view that commitment may be a fluctuant rather than a static concept. However, with regard to school 2, results are not as reliable, as homogeneity for the sample cannot be assumed ($p=0.17$). In school 3, students' affective commitment did not change significantly over time ($p=0.501$). It cannot be excluded that this may, however, be due to the small number of participants in this group which was well below 30.

School 1

Looking at the individual means of affective commitment at each point of time, it can be postulated that students in school 1 developed significantly lower affective commitment towards their learning plan over time as values at measurement point 1 and 3 differed significantly. No changes occurred, however, between measurement point 2 and 3 (see Appendix B).

This leaves potentially two explanations. As the affective commitment of the participant group remains high despite lower values, students' positive views on their learning plan at the beginning of the first term may have reduced once the term had started to progress as students were facing everyday challenges and an increasing work load. Another view may be that students tend to overestimate situations and attitudes (Elliott et al. 2005). Hence, the first measurement may represent an overly positive view on the learning plan which became more realistic at the second and third measurement point. However, further investigation into these theories was outside the scope of this study.

School 2

Views of students of school 2 also underwent significant changes in the course of the year (see Appendix C). The development pattern differed, however, from school 1. While student views between measurement point one and two did not differ significantly, in comparison to measurement point 3, students had a more pessimistic outlook on the learning plan towards the end of the year. Results between

measurement point 1 and 2 (p=0.7) and 2 and 3 (p=0.8) do not indicate any significant shifts. However, overall, students' personal belief in the learning plan sank throughout the year. Between measurement point 1 and 3 a significant decline (p=0.01) in affective commitment occurred. While the data shows a disparity within the group (for which reason the data has to be interpreted carefully), the cause for the difference within the group requires further investigation, which shall be explored in the next chapters.

School 3

No significant changes in student views can be reported for school 3 (p≥0.05, Appendix C). While this may be due to the small participant numbers of n=20, the data suggests a small decline in affective student commitment. Students remained fairly stable in their understanding and happiness to work with the learning plan; however, teachers should identify if there may be factors that may lead to further declining affective commitment.

- *Comparing Affective, Normative and Continuance Components*

Having identified that the students' personal volition to work with their learning plan changed over the year for school 1 and 2, the development of normative and continuance commitment will also be analysed. According to this data, it can be suggested that the three commitment forms may change independently from one another. This is evident when looking at participant group from school 1 and 2.

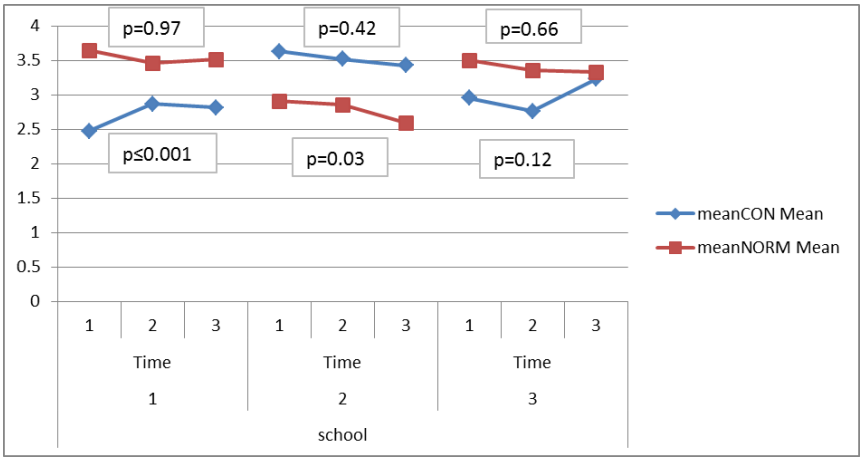

Figure 20: Development of Normative and Continuance Commitment * School * Time

In school 1, continuance commitment rose significantly between measurement point 1 and 3 as the students' affective commitment sank. Between measurement point 2

and 3, students' feelings of external pressure to complete their learning plan remained stable.

Although unconfirmed, students showed a similar development in their thinking in school 3. According to the data, students felt greater pressure on themselves to complete the learning plan while their personal belief sank slightly. However, the findings with regard to this sample cannot be conclusive due to the small sample number in school 3.

Students' attitude in school 2, however, shows a different development. While their affective commitment sank over the year, this did not have any impact on students' continuance commitment. Hence, while students became overall unhappier to be working with their learning plan, they did not feel that there was increasing pressure exerted upon them. Pressure in terms of bad marks, problems with teachers and parents, in case of failure to complete the learning plan, did not increase according to the students. Hence, students would continue to work with the learning plan in a state of indifference towards their learning plan.

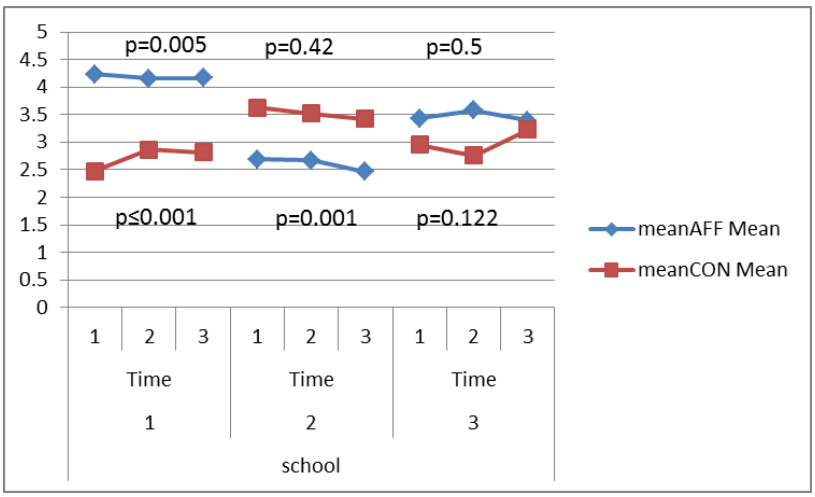

Figure 21: Development of Continuance and Affective Commitment * School * Time

Furthermore, considering the results for the normative commitment means, they show similar development patterns as affective commitment. Although normative commitment overall did not change significantly according to school 1, its mean decreased simultaneously with affective commitment. The same can be observed for school 2. With a declining affective commitment, feelings of obligation due to internal norms declined too. For the sample from school 3, this observation is only contradicted in the observation of time 1 and 2. While the affective commitment mean is higher at measurement point 2 compared to the first, students indicated lower

normative commitment. In contrast to that, students' affective and normative views declined between measurement point 2 and 3.

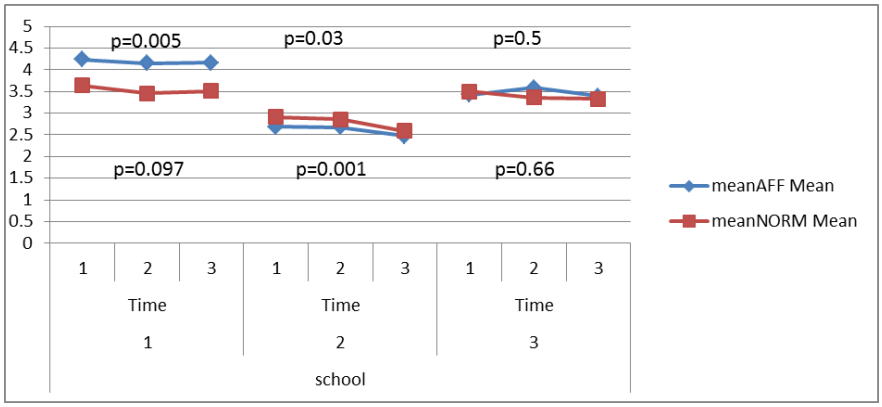

Figure 22: Development of Affective and Normative Commitment * School * Time

- *Discussion of Commitment Development*

With a seemingly parallel development of affective and normative commitment, the question arises as to how this phenomenon can be interpreted. In order to explore the development of commitment further, the content of the items that underlie normative and affective commitment should be reconsidered. With the factor analysis of the affective and normative scales in mind, it was observed that some of the normative items also loaded on the affective scale and vice versa (compare Chapter 7). The *Loyalty* item, which enquired about the influence of peers on personal views, loaded at all measurement points equally strongly on the affective and the normative scale. Furthermore, the item *Responsibility*, which defined the extent to which students feel responsible for their learning plan, also triggered fairly high values on the normative scale as well as on the affective scale (Table 18).

Table 18: Fluctuant Loading of Responsibility Item

Responsibility	**Affective Commitment Loading**	**Normative Commitment Loading**
Time 1	0.479	0.426
Time 2	0.582	0.427
Time 3	0.634	0.441

In addition, students' persistence in continuing to work with their learning plan despite upcoming challenges was not a distinctive item on the normative scale but had some relevance on the affective dimension.

On the one hand, it can be argued that these items either need to be made more specific or replaced by items that are more distinctive for the individual scales. On the other hand, the factor analysis showed that these items contribute to higher internal consistency of the corresponding scales (see p. 158ff.) In other words, together with other items on the affective and on the normative scale respectively, these items contribute to measuring the same concept.

Looking at the meaning of affective and normative commitment items, another interpretation seems to be more appropriate. In respect of three exemplary items of loyalty, responsibility and persistence, it can be suggested that norms that are taught at home are internalised to an extent that they are no longer considered as a form of obligation. Over time, an individual may adopt these indoctrinated beliefs as personal beliefs and values that they fully support. At the example of persistence, this change of commitment component can be illustrated. Students may consider parental advice that one should never give up but complete tasks that were placed upon them as an obligation that they may find difficult to consent to. If certain tasks are difficult to complete and/or other more preferred occupations are tempting such as meeting friends after school, surfing in social networks etc., then completing an academic task may trigger feelings of normative obligation. However, if there is a personal value that can be seen behind completing the task that dominates other potential distractions, then completing a task may be seen as a personal challenge that is considered worth working for.

Based on the item of responsibility, students may experience feelings of pride or other feelings of positive self-evaluation when they take on responsibility for their work. In this case, students evaluate their work with a learning plan as a personal goal that represents affective commitment. However, students may also approach their work with a learning plan based on parental advice that their child is responsible for their school work and its outcomes. Hence, while the students accept that they are agents of their academic outcomes, which is often provided in forms of marks and feedback, they may not assign to it any personal positive attributions such as pride and feelings of achievement.

The two examples illustrate that normative values can be congruent with affective beliefs and vice versa. In that respect normative and affective commitment are

fluctuating constructs that can change over a short period of time (see p. 175, table 18).

Commitment that is based on feelings of obligation also appears to be a non-stable construct that can change within shorter periods of time. As seen in the three samples over three periods of time, commitment that is based on obligation may increase if the personal belief in one's learning plan decreases. Students whose personal belief in the learning plan sank over the course of the year formed a stronger obligation relationship with the learning plan. Data from school 1 supports this interpretation.

However, this is not necessarily always the case as the sample of school 2 demonstrates. Although students showed less support for their learning plan, they did not automatically develop greater commitment based on obligation; in fact, their continuance commitment sank too. In one respect, this underpins the differentiation between normative and continuance commitment. In another respect, the results highlight that a cause–consequence relationship between the two commitment forms should not be anticipated without caution. The findings provide reason to suggest that all three commitment components should be explored individually before making any inferences on the relationship that students form with their learning plan and which potential issues students might be facing.

Table 19: Development of Commitment – Time 1, 2 and 3

				meanAFF	meanNORM	meanCON
				Mean	Mean	Mean
School	1	Time	1	4.2358	3.6423	2.4747
			2	4.1523	3.4572	2.8655
			3	4.1631	3.5143	2.8144
	2	Time	1	2.6915	2.9085	3.6308
			2	2.6740	2.8571	3.5209
			3	2.4680	2.5910	3.4246
	3	Time	1	3.4286	3.4983	2.9500
			2	3.5833	3.3567	2.7600
			3	3.3917	3.3250	3.2300

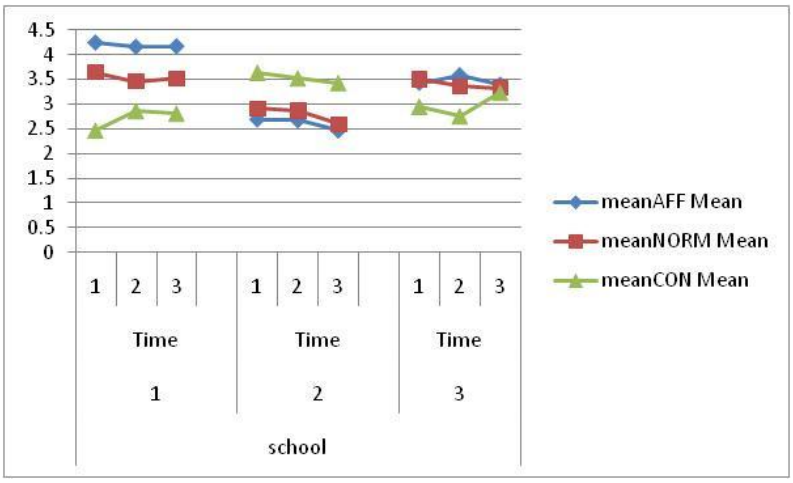

Figure 23: Development of Commitment – Time 1, 2 and 3

7.2. Exploring the Link between Student Commitment, Academic Self-efficacy, and Student Engagement

Having seen that students can be committed towards their learning plan because they feel that they want to work with it, feel that they should or have to work with their learning plan, the second research question of this thesis addresses the potential relationship between commitment and the psychological concepts of academic self-efficacy and student engagement that may impact students' academic work. Academic self-efficacy and student engagement are factors that research has shown to be crucial for students' academic performance (Abele & Schurk, 2009; Bandura, 2004). Exploring the relationship of the two concepts with commitment, this chapter is divided into two main sections.

Proposing that Jerusalem's et al. (2009) shortened version of the academic self-efficacy scale can be used in its translated English version, the first sub-section discusses the development of academic self-efficacy in order to observe whether its development differs from the development of commitment. Furthermore, this sub-section identifies links between the way that students bond with their learning plan and their confidence to take on new academic tasks.

The second sub-section follows the same structural pattern as section one, highlighting the development of student engagement and the discussion of a potential link between students' commitment towards their learning plan and their

engagement in completing tasks as part of the learning plan and general classroom teachings.

7.2.1. The Link between Commitment and Academic Self-efficacy

Prior to conducting this part of the study, it was suggested that students who portray high affective commitment might portray higher academic self-efficacy and vice versa. In other words, students who strongly believe in the use of their learning plan and understand its concept might also portray high confidence in their own abilities to achieve the tasks of the learning plan. This may indirectly influence students' performance across the curriculum. Emphasis in this section will, however, be placed on the impact that the relationship between students' affective commitment and academic self-efficacy might have on their performance in second language learning.

Furthermore, it was anticipated that students' academic self-efficacy might be more stable than the development of affective, continuance, and normative commitment. The reason for this anticipation is based on Bandura's (1977) proposition that once self-efficacy has been established, it is a stable concept which only changes over longer periods of time. This stability was also expected to occur for academic self-efficacy. It was hypothesised that in comparison to academic self-efficacy, the student commitment components were more susceptible to change. A change in attitude was believed to be dependent on aspects such as the type of activities or topics to be covered in class. While one week the student might show great support of her or his learning plan, this may not necessarily be the same in the next week due to different tasks that learner may not show the same interest for or exceed the learner's perceived levels of difficulty. Consequently, this might have a negative impact on the perception of the learning plan altogether although in fact it reflects on the particular tasks that are to be fulfilled.

While a significant change in students' academic self-efficacy cannot be recorded for this study, it was investigated whether there is a link between the degree of contentment that students showed towards their work with a learning plan and the level of confidence in taking on new tasks. As displayed in Figure 25, for school 2 and 3 similar movements of affective commitment and academic self-efficacy were observed. As students became unhappier to be working with a learning plan their overall belief in taking on new tasks sank, whereas the affective commitment mean

rose with increasing self-efficacy means and vice versa. While no cause and consequence relationship can be suggested at this point as no intervention could be suggested (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990), the development of the two psychological dimensions for the samples of school 2 and 3 is , however, striking.

In opposition to that, this parallel development of affective commitment and academic self-efficacy cannot be confirmed for school 1. Participants' academic self-efficacy at the second measurement point remained approximately the same although their personal belief in their learning plan was lower (Figure 25). While students' academic self-efficacy then continued to drop slightly, their affective commitment increased.

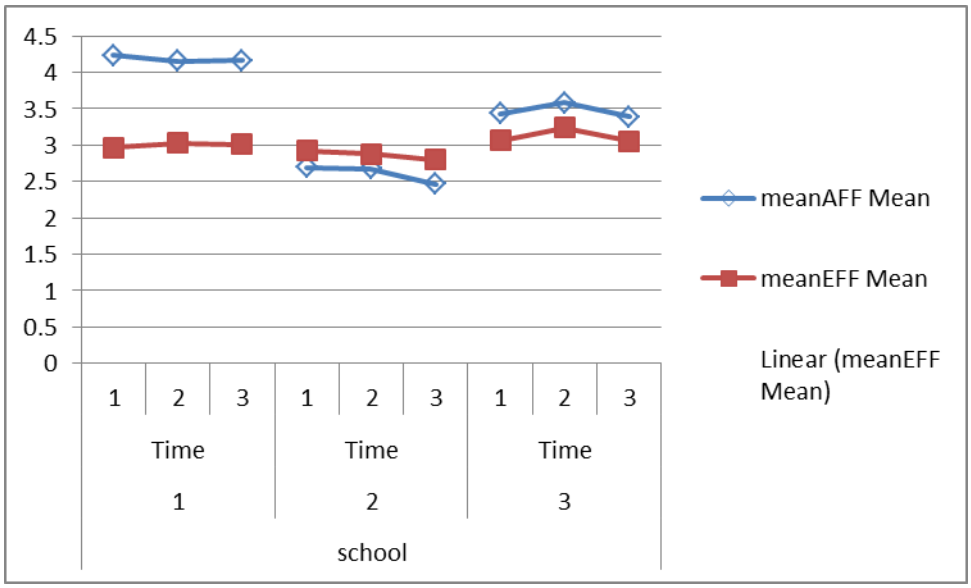

Figure 24: Change of Academic Self-Efficacy compared to Affective Commitment (School 1, 2, 3)

However, remembering that the academic self-efficacy did not show any significant changes while affective commitment dropped significantly over time, it can be assumed that there may be a form of benchmark of low affective commitment to be achieved in order to have any impact on academic self-efficacy. This means that, as students' relationship towards their learning plan seem more prone to change quite quickly, this does not necessarily trigger similar changes in academic self-efficacy. Although students may continue to remain confident in their skills despite sinking personal belief in their learning plan, a small significant relationship between academic self-efficacy and affective commitment was determined ($p \leq 0.001$, Figure 25). Hence, students' personal belief in their learning plan is linked to their confidence that they show in taking on new challenges in class. This finding contributes to the earlier assumption that there might be a degree of affective

commitment under or above which students' academic self-efficacy may decrease or increase respectively.

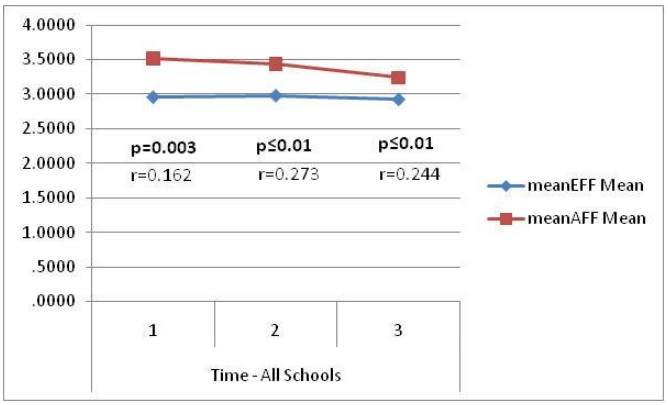

Figure 25: Development of Academic Self-efficacy and Affective Commitment – Time 1, 2 and 3

In terms of directionality, it also needs to be considered that academic self-efficacy as such may also increase or decrease with affective commitment. In other words, students who are in general more confident to face new challenges may show greater affective commitment towards their learning plan. As no control group was available for this study, it can only be stated that understanding students' views with regard to their learning plan can be crucial as it is linked to the degree of confidence with which they handle tasks in and outside the classroom and vice versa. In addition to that, the data provides some evidence that students' degree of affective commitment can significantly impact ($p \leq 0.001$, Appendix C) upon their academic self-efficacy. Taking into consideration *school* as an additional factor, the assumption that the latter can significantly explain participants' answers regarding their behaviour and psychological relationship towards their learning plan is also strengthened ($p=0.018$). Hence, while belief in the concept and the benefits of their learning plan may also translate into higher confidence levels to take on new tasks, there are other factors that underlie the factor *School* which influence the latter.

Furthermore, referring this information to the language classroom, it can be concluded that students of the German and French classroom samples who enjoy working with their learning plan are more likely to have higher academic self-efficacy and vice versa. Hence, it is proposed that both concepts form a relationship of interdependency. In the language classroom this means that students who enjoy working with their learning plan are more likely to achieve the set tasks and hence might achieve higher second language learning outcomes. This experience fosters the confidence in their abilities to take on new language learning tasks which results

in higher academic self-efficacy. Conversely, students who portray high academic self-efficacy might be more open to complete language acquisition tasks that are part of their learning plan as they are confident that they will be able to fulfil these tasks.

- *The Link between Normative / Continuance Student Commitment and Academic Self-efficacy*

As students' academic self-efficacy is related to their affective commitment that they show towards their learning plan, tests explored whether students' confidence in new tasks is also linked to the degree of normative obligations (normative commitment) and external pressure (continuance commitment).

Looking at the results at the individual measurement points, it is evident that normative commitment and academic-self efficacy are significantly linked at all three measurement points ($p \leq 0.05$, Appendix C). Hence, with regard to normative commitment, it can be proposed that students who commit to their learning plan because they feel that they should be completing it, following social norms and values that they have internalised, also indicate higher academic self-efficacy than students who commit to their learning plan for reasons of external pressure such as fear of bad marks, embarrassment or the lack of options (see Figure 26 for mean of efficacy and mean of normative commitment).

For continuance commitment a small relationship with academic self-efficacy can only be identified for measurement point 2 ($r=-0.178$, $p=0.08$, Appendix C). The findings based on measurement point 2 suggest that students who strongly believe that they are in a situation where they feel mainly obliged to work with their learning plan may also display less confidence in terms of their skills when new challenges arise.

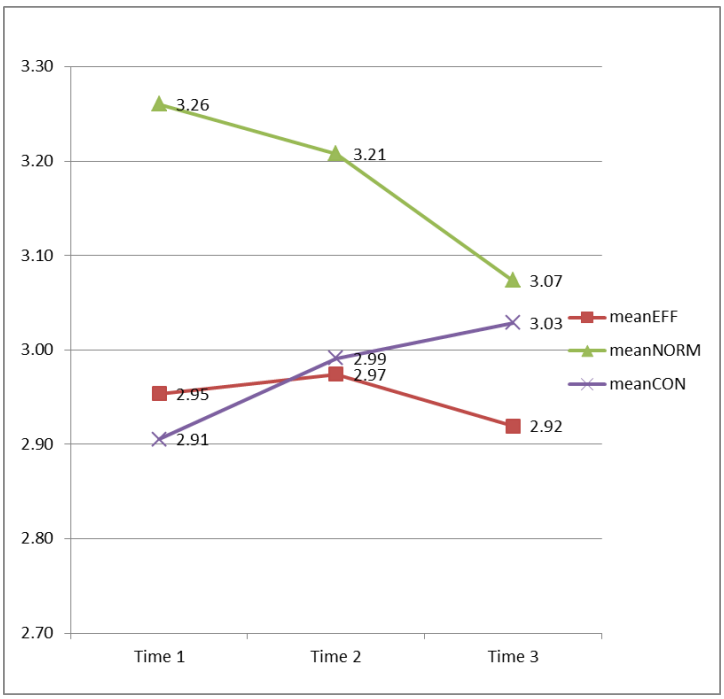

Figure 26: Development of Academic Self-efficacy in Comparison to Normative and Continuance Commitment

Exploring whether normative and continuance commitment components significantly influence students' academic self-efficacy, students' norms and values appear to have a very small but significant influence on their self-efficacy (r between 0.134 and 0.161, $p \leq 0.05$, Appendix C). Continuance commitment, however, fails to make any predictions of students' academic self-efficacy. Based on the fact that correlation coefficients between academic self-efficacy and continuance commitment are significant ($p=0.038$, Appendix C), it could be proposed that it is rather the degree of students' confidence in their abilities that influences their commitment towards their learning plan. Another proposition could be that there is certain threshold of high continuance commitment that needs to be exceeded in order to have any significant impact on students' academic self-efficacy. In other words, only students who only complete their learning plan because they are working based on external incentives such as marks or verbal appraisal/punishment may in the long term also portray less belief in their abilities.

However, further research would have to be conducted with a larger number of participants from samples of a similar population in order to draw any clearer inferences as to whether the degree by which students might feel pressured to work with their learning plan has an impact on their confidence to achieve set tasks and vice versa.

- *Summary*

In this section, the underlying research question investigated the relationship between students' academic self-efficacy and their commitment towards their learning plan. It was hypothesised that students who portray strong affective commitment towards their learning plan may also be more confident in taking on new tasks and be therefore, overall be more successful learners.

This study has brought forward evidence that students of the German class in school 3 overall have stronger confidence in their ability to complete the tasks of their learning plan than their peers in the Mathematics and General Studies classes in school 2. While these students show overall good levels of academic self-efficacy, they also score lower results than the students in the French and German classes in school 1. These findings coincide with significantly lower levels in affective commitment as described in the previous chapters.

However, compared to student commitment, it appears that academic self-efficacy might be a more stable concept. While academic and normative commitment changed significantly over a period of time, students' academic self-efficacy overall did not change significantly over the three measurement points. Hence, it could be proposed that there is a certain threshold which needs to be exceeded in order for academic self-efficacy to change.

In the search of factors which determine this threshold, it has been analysed whether the commitment components can influence students' confidence in their learning abilities. Based on the data, it seems that students' levels of affective commitment can significantly influence their self-efficacy. Hence, students who develop a relationship with their learning plan as their student views strongly correlate with the goals of the learning plan are more confident to take on new challenges. While internalised norms within students may also have some impact on their academic self-efficacy, the values are more dominated by affective commitment. Furthermore, continuance commitment does not appear to be relevant factor which aids to understand students' level of academic self-efficacy at this point of research.

Relating this information to the language classroom, understanding how students respond to their learning plan, may be useful in order to analyse students' confidence to work on new tasks. Hence, students who voluntarily work with their learning plan

are more likely to succeed in their tasks. Thus, they become more confident in taking on new language tasks. At the same time, this knowledge can also aid in identifying students who might be at risk to complete their tasks which may hamper the learning progress of their second language.

However, the data also suggests that language teachers do not necessarily need to be too concerned if their students have phases when they are more critical towards their learning plan. The levels of the commitment components can change quite drastically over short periods of time. While this may show in the students' overall performance in the language classroom, this does not automatically translate into decreasing overall confidence in their abilities. However, if teachers notice that students continuously fail to understand the structure and the goals of the learning plan, the learning instrument might lose its function as a tool to foster autonomy as students do not recognise the choices that are available to them.

Furthermore, while academic self-efficacy is a rather stable concept, there is an increased risk that students with persistently low levels of affective commitment may in the long term also be less confident in their abilities. Monitoring students' commitment can therefore assist to identify students at risk.

7.2.2. The Link between Student Commitment and Student Engagement

- *The Development of Behavioural and Psychological Engagement*

Considering the levels of active engagement in their learning plan at all three measurement points, students in school 1 and 3 appeared to show stronger engagement than their peers in school 2 (Figure 27). This observation is similar to findings of affective commitment. However, with regard to in-class participation, at the third measurement point, students from school 3 participated more during class than at measurement point 2.

With regard to the development of the students' active engagement and their participation, further differences between the schools are apparent. The most significant differences in the levels of active engagement and participation can be reported for school 2. Over the course of the year, students put less effort into completing their learning plan. However, while they appeared sceptical of their learning plan, which was also evident in their affective commitment levels (see 7.1),

this had little impact on their participation in class. In fact, students claim that they participated even more in class at the third measurement point.

In school 1, significant changes of behavioural engagement can only be reported for the item of active engagement in their learning plan. Although a small decline in levels of classroom participation can be noted for the participants of French and German, they are not strong enough to confirm this observation.

Similar findings can be reported for school 3. Potentially due to the small number of students (n=20) for each measurement point, no significant changes can be reported for their active engagement and participation in the German classroom.

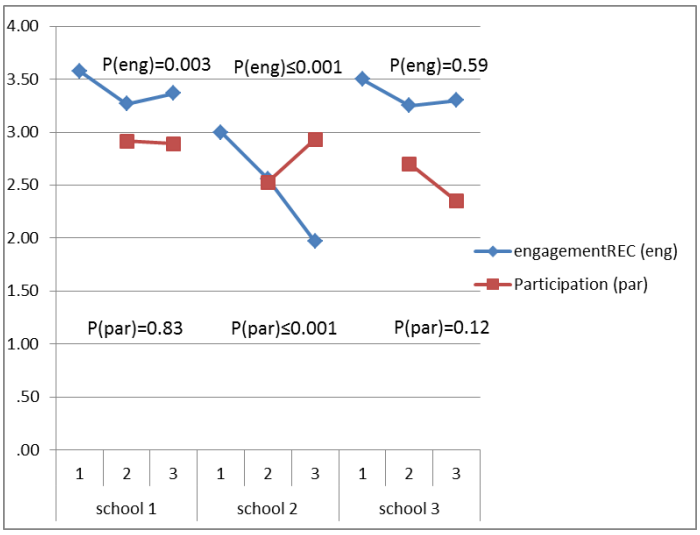

Figure 27: Development of Behavioural Engagement – Time 1, 2, 3

In terms of the psychological engagement that students portray at measurement point 2 and 3, students' attitude and attention appear to have decreased slightly. However, significant differences of both items between time 2 and 3 can only be reported for school 2. In school 1, significant changes (p=0.035, Figure 28) can be recorded for the change of students' attention levels between measurement point 2 and 3. Although attitude and attention levels also appear to have decreased within the same timeframe, this cannot be confirmed (p=0.23, and p=0.28 respectively).

However, with regard to the degree of interest in their subject, students in school 2 show a significant increase (p≤0.01, Figure 28) between measurement point 2 and 3. Although the reasons behind this finding are unknown at this stage, students' participation levels do not reflect in their attention levels. One explanation might be that students in the Mathematics and General Studies classes have been finding the tasks as such quite interesting but disliked the overall actual classes.

In the language classes there is no similar controversy as in the Mathematics and General Studies classes. Students' degree of interest in the actual subject grew or sank proportionally to their attention levels and vice versa.

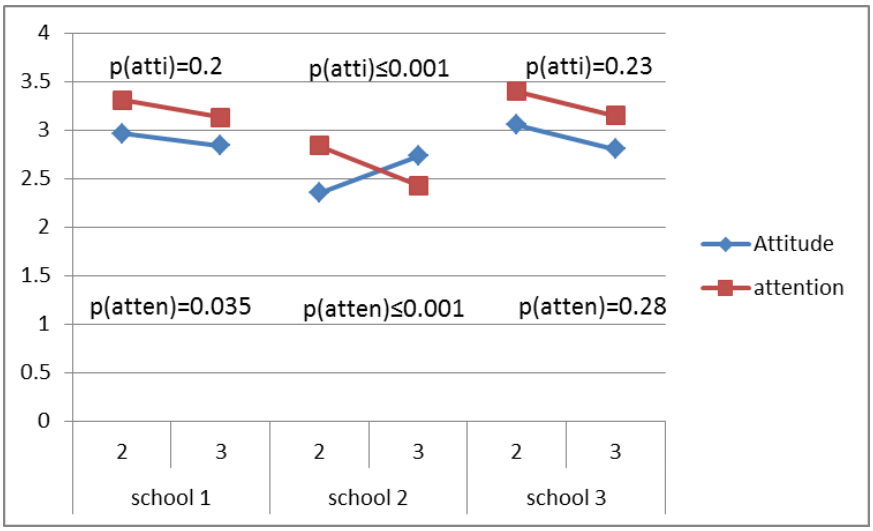

Figure 28: Development of Psychological Engagement - Time 2, 3

- *The Link between Behavioural Engagement and Student Commitment*

Although this study does not claim to provide a comprehensive analysis of engagement in the classroom, a first correlation calculation shows that there is a weak but significant link ($p \leq 0.01$, Appendix C) between the amount of effort that students put into their work and the bond that shapes their commitment towards their learning plan (Figure 29). Further examinations partially confirm this initial finding. Following a multiple linear regression, results suggest that students who strongly and actively engage in their work differ significantly in the degree of affective commitment from their peers with low active engagement (see Appendix C). Students who believe that they have been doing their best to fulfil the tasks of their learning plan portray high affective commitment. This means that there seems to be a direct link between the degree to which students are willing to comply with their learning plan and the degree to which they will engage in their work. From a teacher's perspective this is important, as understanding to what extent and why students are committed to their work may allow conclusions as to why some students put more effort into their work than others. Conversely, students who say that they do their best to fulfil their tasks are more likely to believe in the goals and content of their learning plan than students who lack effort.

Regarding the level of participation in class, findings are less affirmative. Although small significant correlations can be reported for the degree of participation in class and the degree of students' affective ($r=0.144$, $p=0.02$, Appendix C) and normative ($r=0.123$, $p=0.08$) commitment towards their learning plan, it is not apparent from this study that students necessarily participate less during class as a result of external pressure to work with their learning plan ($p=0.73$).

Furthermore, higher normative commitment is also significantly linked to higher active engagement ($r=0.438$, $p\leq0.01$, Appendix C). This appears to confirm that, on the one hand, normative and affective commitment are linked. On the other, hand they differ in the aspects by which students feel bound to their learning plan. It further shows that fulfilling tasks of a learning plan based on feelings of moral obligation can in fact also have a positive impact on the active engagement that students show in class. This highlights an earlier made suggestion that moral obligations are internalised and may eventually be considered as personal beliefs rather than external pressure that is exerted on individuals.

Finally, continuance commitment results are not as straight forward. The significance factor of $p=0.06$ approaches the minimal value of $p=0.05$, but only tendencies can be reported at this point. While there is a significant link between students' feelings of obligation and less amount of effort that they put into fulfilling their learning plan ($p\leq0.001$), it does not mean that students who portray some degree of continuance commitment necessarily engage less in their work. This finding supports the argument that there is a benchmark of feelings of obligation that as long as it is not exceeded does not result in lower engagement. It may in fact even encourage students to put effort into their work.

Overall, the results for the commitment scales regarding their ability to partially predict the amount of effort that students put into their work need to be considered carefully. The analysis revealed that the commitment results differ significantly by *School* and *Time* ($p\leq0.01$). Hence, the school type alone has an influence on the findings concerning a relationship between the investigated factors.

Furthermore, the results also differ depending on the measurement point. On a school by school and time by time level, the values for the predictability of the commitment scales may differ.

On the one hand, these results indicate that there are other factors involved that affect the behavioural engagement of students other than the forms and degrees of student commitment. On the other hand, greater participant numbers of comparable school types are required in order to confirm present findings.

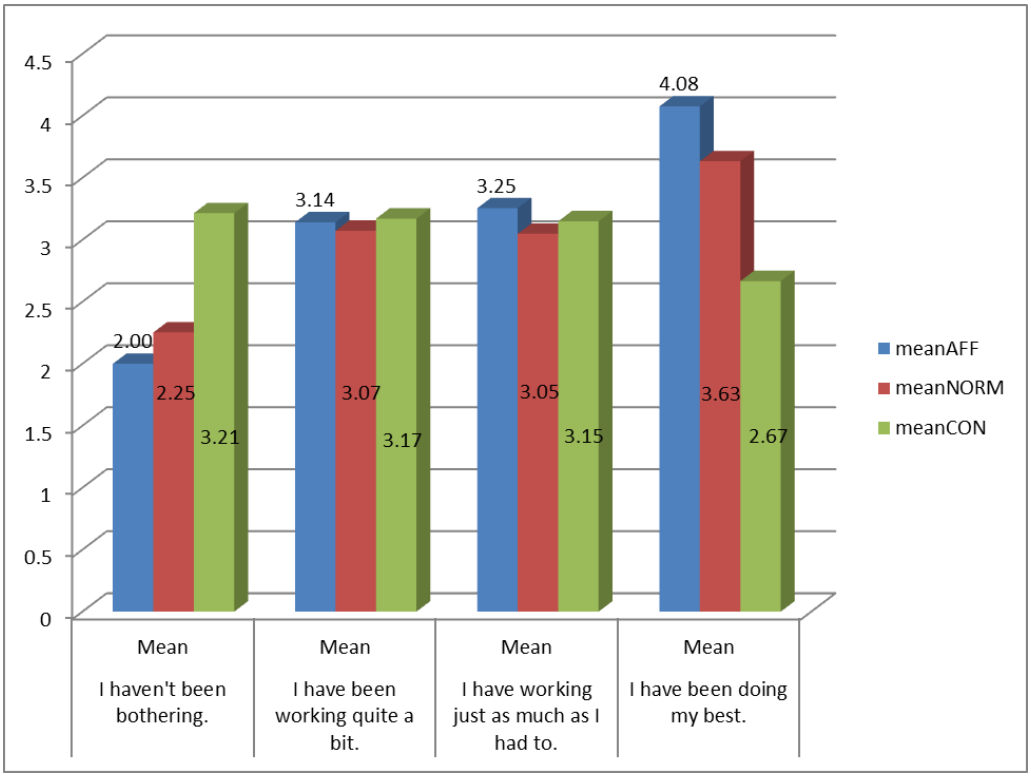

Figure 29: Commitment*Active Engagement – Measurement Points combined

This view is also confirmed in a multivariate analysis. While the data confirms a significant link between commitment and behavioural engagement, the interaction of the factors ‘school’ and ‘time’ significantly influences students’ answers with regard to their participation in class and engagement in their learning plan ($p \leq 0.05$).

Commitment components, on the other hand, appear to influence students’ engagement and participation to a certain extent. While it cannot be confirmed that the degree to which students voluntarily work with their learning plan impacts upon their participation during class, it appears to significantly influence student engagement ($p \leq 0.001$). However, neither students’ normative commitment nor continuance commitment as tested as part of this project significantly explain students’ levels of participation and engagement.

- *The Link between Psychological Engagement and Student Commitment*

The first calculation aimed to identify whether the degree of interest that students show in class is somewhat related to the type of relationship that students form with their learning plan. It was anticipated that students who are generally interested in the subject content would show higher affective commitment towards their learning plan. Conversely, students who show greater boredom in class would be more likely to dismiss their learning plan.

The data containing all schools and students at all points of measurement suggests that understanding students' attitude in class is crucial when wanting to understand affective commitment. The attitude and attention items are significantly linked to affective, normative and continuance commitment ($p \leq 0.02$).

In a further analysis, it becomes evident that the commitment components have varying degrees of influence on students' attitude and attention. It appears that students' level of normative commitment is a significant factor in explaining the degree of the attitude that they show also in class. It can be suggested that students who feel strongly influenced by the norms that they acquired at home are more likely to show more interest in classroom activities. However, affective and continuance commitment components do not appear to have any significant impact on students' attitude levels during class ($p \geq 0.05$). As anticipated, *school* and *time* further significantly explain variances of students' attitude. Hence, it seems that students' attitudes may differ over the course of the year and the type of school that students attend.

The level of attention paid during class may also be influenced by the relationship that students form with their learning plan as part of that subject. Students who feel that they should work with their learning plan because they do not want to upset authority figures such as their parents or teachers are more likely to pay attention during class ($p=0.011$). On the other hand, students whose reasons for working with their learning plan are not dominantly composed of feelings of external pressure (such as bad marks) pay greater attention during class ($p=0.034$). Conversely, this finding supports Skinner's et al.'s (2008) proposition that students develop feelings of disaffection if they are mainly driven by feelings of having to comply with regulations without personal agreement. *School* and *time* are again factors that underpin differing levels of students' attitude and attention ($p \leq 0.031$, Appendix C). As the factor *school*

can reflect the students' socio-economic economic background, management of the school, school curricula or the different types of learning plans, these and other factors appear to play significant roles in the psychological behaviour of students.

- *Summary*

The research question that formed the centre of this section's investigation addressed the development of students' behavioural and psychological engagement. As only four items according to Skinner's et al.'s (2008) engagement questionnaire could be included; calculations for each individual item were conducted.

In opposition to the concept of students' academic self-efficacy, the degree to which students mentally and physically engage in their learning can change within a rather short period of time. This interpretation is supported by significant changes of students' active engagement over three measurement points for school 1. Furthermore, participants in school 2 showed significantly differing levels regarding all four engagement items, i.e. engagement, participation, attention, and attitude. Only in the German class in school 3 did students show stable engagement levels. Hence, it seems that a range of factors influence whether students pay attention in class, find that their subject is interesting, participate in class and make an effort to fulfil the tasks of their learning plan.

Subsequently, the question whether students' commitment levels directly influence the overall engagement that they show towards their learning plan and classroom learning was explored. According to the data, it is proposed that affective, normative, and continuance commitment components are significantly linked to students' behavioural and psychological engagement. Only the link between continuance commitment and the degree by which students overall participate in class could not be confirmed at this stage. Hence, on an overall basis, the levels to which students *agree* with their learning plan, feel that they *should* complete it or feel *pressured* into it are correlated.

However, looking at these links in more detail, explanations are not as straight forward. While the commitment components can provide better insight into the way that students feel bound to their learning plan, an influence of commitment on engagement could only be confirmed for normative commitment on the psychological dimensions of attitude and attention. Furthermore, higher continuance levels could

explain a lack of attention in class to a certain degree. Finally, students who believe strongly in the usefulness of their learning plan and hence enjoy working with it also tend to show higher active engagement in class.

Moreover, it needs to be pointed out that the included factors of school and time may further explain variances of students' levels of behavioural and psychological engagement. Two explanations for this finding are proposed. On the one hand, based on the fact that the participating schools have differing types of learning plans in different subjects in place, the factor *school* might influence students' answers because students were shown to have contradictory views on them. Furthermore, the socio-economic background of participants, differences in school management and school curricula might further impact on the degree by which students feel committed towards their learning plan and engage in class. Future studies would require the inclusion of a control group in order to analyse whether learning plans could be an instrument to foster students' interest in their subject

On the other hand, the way that the engagement items attitude, attention, and participation are formulated they reflect on engagement in the classroom rather than the learning plan per se. Only the active engagement item clearly reflected the amount of effort that students put into completing their learning plan. Therefore, the findings may suggest that the ways that students feel about their learning plans do not necessarily impact upon their engagement in the classroom. Future research could include engagement items that address the entity of the learning plan directly to identify whether the way that students commit towards their learning plan affects their psychological and behavioural engagement in it. That affective commitment significantly influences the degree by which students attempt to fulfil their learning plan is a first indicator to underpin this hypothesis.

7.3. Factors Influencing Affective Commitment

The previous chapter served to provide a descriptive analysis of the general findings on students' commitment towards their learning plan. While the data suggests that there is a link between the individual commitment components, they do not necessarily unfold proportionally towards each other. However, overall the data from the three measurement points underpin the theoretical assumption that students can

bond with their learning plan based on personal agreement, external pressure or internalised norms with the programme.

In this chapter, this thesis further aims to explore a number of factors that might be related to and may even contribute to predictions of student commitment.

7.3.1. Links between Demographic and Background Factors and Affective Student Commitment

According to the first analysis, significant relationships ($p \leq 0.05$, see Appendix C) are found for all investigated factors. This means at first sight it appears that to some extent students who do not dominantly speak English at home may be more likely to portray stronger affective commitment towards their learning plan than students who always speak English at home. This can, however, be only a tendency, as the actual correlation value is very low ($r=-0.07$, $p=0.058$). In addition, the group of participants with a native speaking background is disproportionately bigger than the non-native speaking group. Sixty-four participants were non-native speakers and 812 participants were native speakers of English (see Appendix C). This uneven representation of native and non-native speakers may skew results, and tests with equal groups of participants with a similar language background would have to be compared in order to draw any clearer conclusions.

Furthermore, the year that students are in, and therefore their age, appears to be related to a small extent to the degree of affective commitment that students show ($r=-0.289$, $p \leq 0.01$). The *subject difficulty* itself, *parental support* and *parental help* show small correlations with affective commitment ($p \leq 0.07$). *Gender* ($r=0.45$, $p \leq 0.01$) and *Subject Liking* ($r=0.4$, $p \leq 0.01$) seem to be more important factors as a medium correlation between the two factors and affective commitment is depicted (see Appendix C).

The most important factors according to the correlation analysis are the belief in the personal learning plan (*LP Outcome*: $r=0.75$, $p \leq 0.01$) and the degree of preference that students assign their learning plan (*LP Preference*: $r=-0.7$, $p \leq 0.01$). This means whether students think that they will learn a lot by working with a learning plan and whether they prefer it over other learning programmes are aspects that are strongly linked to the degree by which they willingly work with their learning plan.

- *Factors Predicting Affective Commitment*

However, while there appear to be links between affective commitment and the aforementioned *demographic and language background* factors, these calculations do not allow predictions of affective commitment; it needs to be considered that some of the relationships can be in fact effects of underlying factors or interactions between factors that may render other factors less important than others. Therefore, in the second analysis, the interaction between these factors and their effect on affective commitment shall be discussed.

The data suggests that the views of students considering their learning plan differ depending on the school that they attend. With an observed power of 0.998, the school type predicts affective commitment by 34% (see Appendix C). At first sight, the type of subject and ($p=0.003$) and the combination of school with language speaking background ($p=0.003$) appear to allow predictions on the degree of affective commitment that students might display. However, overall, the *school* factor dominates the three factors of *gender*, *subject* and *English language background* in its ability to predict students' affective commitment.

This finding has two implications. It justifies earlier propositions that school internal developments of student commitment should be analysed on a *school* by *school* basis (compare 7.1). This is underpinned by the observation that aspects of *gender* and *subject* appear not to be important in combination with the type of school that students ($p \geq 0.05$) attend.

In addition to that, whether students have an English speaking background is only a relevant factor in combination with the school that students attend ($p=0.003$).

- *Language Background*

Based on an individual school analysis, contradictory findings can be reported in terms of the impact that students' language background has on their affective commitment (Appendix C). While in school 1 and 3 it does not seem to be make a difference whether students are native or non-native speakers of English (Figure 30), in school 2, a significant difference in affective commitment by native vs. non-native speakers ($p=0.02$) is evident. With $n=374$, this sample group is much bigger than $n=59$ in school 3 and may therefore be a more reliable sample than school 3. School

2, on the other hand, which represented n=377 of the total sample, has only two students with non-native English speaking background. Therefore, it is also not representative for this analysis.

Therefore, based on the findings from school 2, it cannot be excluded that the language background might cause a difference in the way that students perceive their learning plan. In this sample, students with English as a non-native language portrayed higher affective commitment (m=3.04) compared to their classmates with native-English (m=2.49).

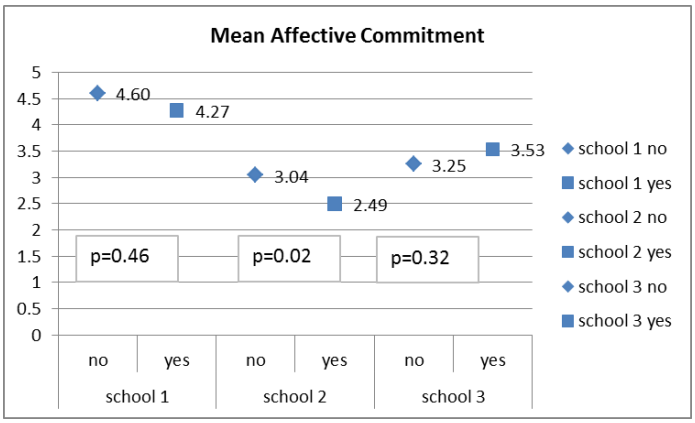

Figure 30: Affective Commitment*Native-vs.-Non-Native Speakers – School 1, 2, 3

However, with regard to the number of languages that students speak on a native level (Figure 31), no significant differences can be identified (p≥0.05, Appendix C). Hence, confirming reports proposed by (Bos et al., 2010), according to the sample from school 3, second language speakers of English seem to profit more from the use of a learning plan while native-speakers, whether mono- or multilingual, do not significantly differ from one another in the degree of affective commitment that they show towards their learning plan.

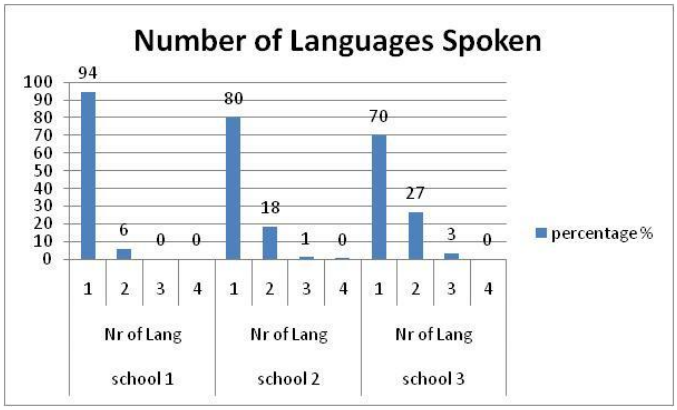

Figure 31: Number of Language Spoken per School

- *Subject and Subject Liking*

That the framework of a learning plan influences its perception rather than the language background is further evident when comparing students' affective commitment and their subject. There are significantly more students who feel that they like to work with their learning plan in French and German rather than in Mathematics and Central Studies ($p \leq 0.005$, Appendix C). That the degree by which students enjoy their subject can also reflect in their affect commitment towards their learning plan is evident from a univariate analysis. Considering the different schools as a fixed factor according to which answers can vary, differences in subject liking are significant ($p \leq 0.005$, Figure 32). It is, however, likely that these differences also reflect on the learning plan that is implemented in the individual school. This is evident from an analysis treating the samples of each school on an individual basis. These findings show in particular that, students in school 2 who enjoy their subject are also more likely to be supporters of their learning plan ($p \leq 0.005$, see Appendix C). For school 1 and 3 no significant variances between subject liking and affective commitment can be identified ($p=0.11$, and $p=0.93$ see Appendix C).

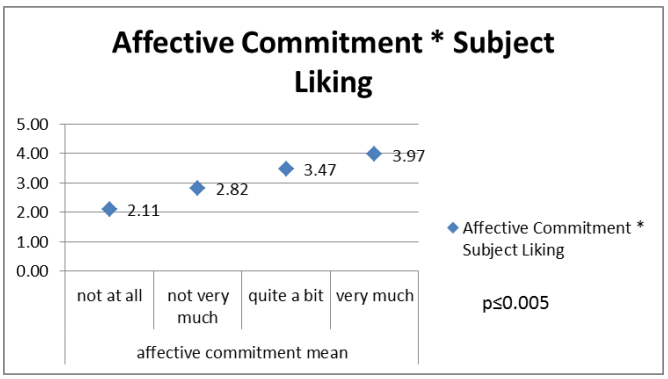

Figure 32: Affective Commitment by Subject Liking

Therefore, findings are inconclusive as to whether the subject or other factors, which determine the implementation of the learning plan, cause differing degrees of affective commitment of the students.

7.3.2. Factors Influencing Affective Commitment: Case Samples from German and French

While the socio-economic factors cannot be altered, the factors that define the context in which learning plans are implemented could further the understanding of the ways that students bond with their learning plan.

All schools can support their students in working with their learning plan to the extent that they willingly fulfil its tasks. The question should therefore not be which school to send a child (where they are more likely to like the learning plan offered) but how to support schools introducing or improving their learning plan that fosters student commitment regardless of the school type. The following calculations therefore distinguish between the individual schools to identify potential factors that may play a role in determining students' affective commitment towards a learning plan. Furthermore, as the essential focus of this thesis is on second language teaching, factors that influence student commitment will be analysed with regard to schools 1 and 3 where students filled in their survey regarding French and German.

- *Factors Influencing Affective Commitment in German and French in a Private Girls' School*

In a first approach, all factors that were part of the survey were tested for their degree of influence on affective commitment. The data suggests that whether students study French or German had no significant bearing on the degree by which students felt

that they want to fulfil their learning plan. Hence, it appears that the learning plan is implemented in a similar way in both subjects, and that teachers do not seem to differ in their teaching in a way that impacts on student views concerning their learning plan (see Appendix C).

Furthermore, students' affective commitment also did not seem to differ significantly depending on how hard a subject is ($p=0.33$) or how much they like it ($p=0.54$). However, it appears that students' affective commitment may vary depending on their age or the year that they are in ($p=0.012$).

Students in year 8 portray significantly lower affective commitment compared to students in year 10 and year 12. An upwards trend in their willingness to work with their learning plan as they are getting older is apparent (Figure 33). For all three investigated age groups, in the middle of the year, students showed lower affective commitment in their learning plan. In year 8 and 10, students expressed more positive views about the goals and content of the learning plan towards the end of the school year. No anticipations can be reported for year 12 as they finished their final exams before the final measurement point. This shows that students may become more attached to their work with a learning plan as a result of maturing and potentially better understanding of the plan.

Furthermore, the degree by which students receive active help from their parents in their work with their learning plan may influence students' affective commitment to some extent ($p=0.0042$). However, for this particular case sample, it does not appear to be sufficient if parents verbally encourage their children to work with their learning plan as no significant impact of parental support ($p\geq0.05$) was identified. Larger participant groups with a similar socio-economic background are required to underpin this finding.

The factor of belief in the outcomes of the learning plan seems to be more important. According to the data, students who believe in the learning effect of their plan are more personally committed towards their learning plan ($p\leq0.01$). However, in contrast to this finding, there is no sufficient indication in the data which supports the assumption that students' preference of the learning plan is reflected in their affective commitment.

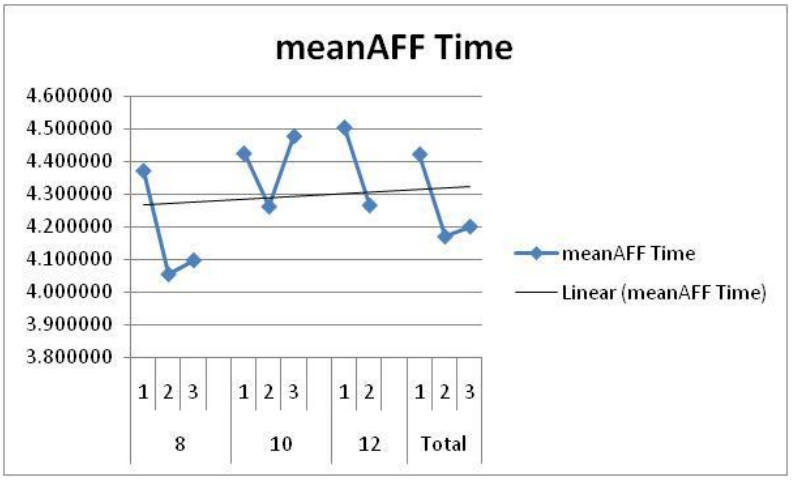

Figure 33: Development of Affective Commitment by Year – Private Girls School

All in all, for female students in a private setting, factors such as the *belief in the outcomes of the learning plan* and *parental help* are factors that contribute to the degree by which students feel bound towards their learning plan in German and in French. *Age* is a further factor that needs to be considered when evaluating the functioning of learning plans in the second language environment. With greater understanding of the goals and the framework of the learning plan, students tend to develop a more positive relationship with their learning plan in the course of years.

- *Factors Influencing Affective Commitment in German and French in a Public School*

Having identified four main factors that influence students' affective commitment in the second language context at a private school, the sample of school 3 shall be analysed in the following. First and foremost, it needs to be pointed out that this is a critical attempt as the sample group is only 60 for all three measurement points. Therefore, only tentative findings can be formulated for a case study.

As in school 1, comparable factors were considered to explore students' affective commitment. Despite the small sample size, similar factors appear to play a role in understanding the relationship of students with their learning plan.

For this case sample, only the *preference of the learning plan* seems to provide an indication on the degree of affective commitment that students might show

(p=0.007)[44]. All other factors show no significant impact on students' affective commitment in this case sample. However, these findings are only small indications due to the sample size and the reasoning that other demographic factors such as different year groups and subjects could not be monitored throughout this research project. It is likely that results may vary if data was available for these factors.

Hence, although both schools differ strongly in their socio-economic setting, the type of learning plans that they have implemented, and differences in school management, there are some factors which seem to explain students' affective commitment better than others. In both schools, the level of active help that students receive from their parents in completing academic tasks under the learning plan is a potential factor in increasing the students' willingness to work with their learning plan. Furthermore, students who receive help from their parents may also be influenced in the degree of their preference for the learning plan. This means that students who have some form of communication with their parents about the tasks of the learning plan are more likely to prefer this learning programme over others. This confidence in the learning plan appears to be crucial in fostering students' willing commitment towards their learning plan.

Although the same factor could not be investigated in school 3, students' age may be another important aspect to consider when introducing or modifying learning plans. Older students within the same sample seem to show a better understanding of their learning plan and sub-sequentially also feel more positively committed towards their learning plan than younger students. This does not, however, mean that younger students cannot be committed towards their learning plan as the levels of commitment for students in year eight were still fairly high.

[44] *Gender*, *subject, subject difficulty* and *subject liking* are not further discussed as they are not significant factors for this sample.

8. Findings of the Qualitative Study

The findings in chapter 7 provided some support of the hypothesis that student commitment – developed towards a learning plan – is linked to student engagement and academic self-efficacy. In other words, students who enjoy working with their learning plan and who are strong supporters of the latter are more likely to engage in their learning and potentially develop greater confidence to take on new tasks.

Considering engagement as a fundamental prerequisite of all learning, I further proposed that students' engagement and their commitment to their learning plan further influence students in becoming autonomous learners. Thus, committed students may not only engage more in their learning plans but also develop a greater sense of responsibility for their learning.

Furthermore, activities that are conducted as part of the learning plan can enhance autonomous skills such as defining one's learning goals and monitoring one's learning progress to achieve these goals (see chapter 2). However, I suggest that students are more likely to develop these and other skills of an autonomous learner if they are willing to work with their learning plan in the first place.

Having clarified the role of student commitment in developing responsibility for one's learning, research question 3 enquires about the factors that influence students' commitment. As part of a quantitative study, chapter 7 identified a number of socio-economic and other background factors which appear to influence whether students want to (affective), have to (continuance) or feel that they should (normative) work with their learning plan.In addition to these indicators, in subchapter 4.3, I proposed that the environment in which a learning plan is set, further influences students' commitment towards their learning plan. In this context, I presented Wolff's (2002) six didactic paradigms of an environment that fosters learner autonomy and which should also promote student commitment as a prerequisite for learner autonomy (see 8.1). While they can be used to describe the set-up of a learning plan which is run by teachers Wolff (2002) claims that students need to be involved in shaping this environment. Thus, investigating his proposition to have students fully determine these established didactic paradigms, a second study in the form of student and teacher interviews was conducted. This chapter describes the findings of this second study with two objectives in mind. Firstly, I will compare Wolff's (2002) interpretation

of his proposed paradigms with the views of students and teachers of schools 1 and 3 in which students feel positively committed towards their learning plan. Secondly, this chapter proposed two additional paradigms that need to be considered in the process of creating an environment for a learning plan with which students want to work.

8.1. Defining Didactic Paradigms of Learning Plans in the Second Language Classroom

In Chapter 4, six didactic paradigms by Wolff (2002) were presented that in his view determine an environment that promotes the autonomous learner. While they will not be discussed again here in detail, they shall be briefly reiterated. According to Wolff (2002), in an ideal learning environment, the autonomous learner is capable to set and monitor her/his own learning goals. In the light of this or these learning goals, s/he is able to allocate and assess suitable learning contents and resources such as books, video material, online resources etc. The autonomous learner is aware and knows how to apply particular learning strategies in accordance with the individual learning goal that is to be tackled. In that, the autonomous student is capable of monitoring and assessing the personal learning progress. In other words, s/he has realistic expectations of the goals s/he can achieve and whether the progress s/he is making is sufficient and for which reasons the progress has been satisfactory or not.

Hence, according to Wolff's model (2002) learner autonomy can be considered an achievement if learners possess extensive planning, monitoring and assessment skills of learning processes. Students portray these skills and capabilities with regard to six didactic dimensions that can be summarised as:

1. Learning Content
2. Learning Objectives
3. Learning Strategies
4. Social Forms
5. Self-Assessment
6. Learning Context.

As much as Wolff's model appears to demand what can be considered an ideal of an autonomous student, it also requires freedom of autonomy for and from teachers.

The main view expressed is that the teacher gives up the grip of control to a certain extent. The more students are supposed to make their own decisions on the learning goals they set, the materials they choose and the content they engage in, the more the teacher has to let go of her/his expectations of what her/his students are to learn and which pathways they choose. This is underpinned by giving up the rather rigid social form of frontal learning. Wolff's model puts emphasis on providing an environment for students in which they learn in pairs or groups rather than of their own in interaction with the teacher. The model thus provides a distinctive and complex view on the concept of learner autonomy. At the same time it demands strong restructuring of the common classroom.

A learning plan is one of the instruments that can theoretically be set up according to Wolff's (2002) didactic paradigms, as it is largely variable in its setting and shape. It is suggested that, depending on how these didactic paradigms are determined within the setting of a learning plan, students can develop a strong sense of commitment towards it. Aiming to explore how these didactic paradigms are interpreted in schools whose students showed strong affective commitment towards their learning plan, I will contrast Wolff's didactic paradigms with the way that these paradigms are realised in schools 1 and 3 in the context of second language learning.

In addition to Wolff's (2002) dimensions, the following three didactic paradigms that were extracted based on the student and teacher responses in the interviews will be discussed:

7. Awareness (also identified by Benson (2010)
8. Differentiation
9. Flexibility.

8.1.1. Learning Content

Initially, all students who participated in the interviews were very eloquent in their answers. Concerns that interviews could break down due to fear on behalf of students to answer questions or due to misunderstandings, were unfounded. Concerning the formulation of closed answers, students needed little encouragement to provide more elaborate answers than 'yes' and 'no'. They appeared keen to talk and some even proud to talk about their learning plan.

Teachers as well as students recognise a number of benefits in the learning plan. One of the benefits that teachers and students point out is that the students know which contents and goals the learning plan covers over a designated period of time. In school 1, the programme implies that teachers provide their students with an overview of the content of the topics and goals to be covered in French and German over a whole term. Assignments that are intended to guarantee that students keep on track with their work are distributed on a weekly basis. In school 3, students receive a similar overview for a whole term. However, no weekly assignments as such are in place. However, emphasis is placed on individual exercises that need to be completed during the lesson or as homework. The class is run more individually with students in the same class working on their own or in pairs on different contents or aspects of a particular content. The teacher takes more the function of a facilitator who attends to the individual needs and questions of students rather than the whole class. However, class instructions are considered to be necessary.

Views regarding the two different learning plans are congruent to the extent that "it enables one to do long-term planning in detail incorporating the more intensive use of internet resources and electronic board resources" as one teacher highlights.

In addition to that, one teacher claimed that:

> While planning it is possible to look at the class with individual needs or look at the class as group, and therefore they [the students] will be better prepared, and because the plp[45] is presented to the students as a whole it means it is a more complete time planning.

In contrast to Wolff's model, however, students as well as teachers do not indicate that the responsibility lies in the students' hands to define the learning content. While one interviewed teacher agreed that students can propose particular subjects that they are interested in, it does not seem to be a common practice. Teachers indicate that providing an overview about the contents – such as which grammar topics will be covered, themes and various other topics that will be treated in class – is important. Their learning plan does not, however, envisage letting students decide upon their own topics. Students on the other hand did not issue any complaints against that procedure. There appears to be an expectation that subject contents in German and French are decided upon by the teaching and management staff of their school.

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[45] Plp stands for *Personal Learning Plan*, a specific type of a learning plan (lp) implemented across the state of South Australia.

From the students' answers it becomes evident that they do not question their teachers' choice of learning contents but that they clearly see their responsibility in completing set tasks rather than defining them:

> **Student 1:** Well I just follow the tasks that we have to do and I do like to complete all of them because I think it is necessary to complete all of them.
>
> **Student 2:** In my opinion, I would say that the plp is a plan that the teachers would give you at the beginning of the term of the semester that sets out all our work in advance so that we can work at it at our own pace.
>
> **Student 3:** You can decide I think a little on what you are assigned to do. But usually it is pretty straight forward on what you are supposed to do.

A similar view is taken by the teachers. One interviewed teacher stated that while students cannot determine the learning content as such, they are welcome to express interest in certain topics. Teachers likewise admit that *"it doesn't happen a lot that girls [or boys] suddenly express an interest in something that goes beyond the boundaries of what [they] are doing but it does happen."* In the case that students express particular interest in a topic or theme, one teacher described her approach to these kinds of enquiries:

> […] I will direct them. I will say: that is good. I will direct them to certain websites. We have computers in our room. I can say: "Maybe you can look up *Spiegel*[46]." Or I might have some resource material. I have some resources in my room. Some girls take an interest in short stories and I have an anthology of short stories in my room and I will say: "You can do that. That's extra." That sort of dialogue would be part of the study.

By 'study' the teacher refers to a particular type of lesson during which students can go to their classroom and work individually or in groups on their assignments or other course work. Students are encouraged to discuss questions with their teachers who are present in the classroom. While not every school has the capacities or resources to offer such a special program for students, the teacher's statement indicates that students who are interested in certain topics can approach their teacher and receive further information or advice from the teacher.

This particular statement also underpins at the same time that it seems rather rare that students' ideas are included in the syllabus. Whether this is due to the very limited occasions that students come up with their own ideas or whether in general

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[46] *Spiegel* is a monthly German journal that presents current political, economic and social affairs.

there is little encouragement to students to suggest subject content to be included in the syllabus was not clarified during the interviews.

Based on the responses there seems, however, to be a clear designation of responsibility between students and teachers. Students acknowledge that teachers have the expertise to design the subject content, and it is questionable if students would have the capability or the desire to take on a more executive role.

At the same time it should be asked whether the definition of autonomous learners need to include the skill of being able to determine their own learning contents. The question to be raised is whether the expertise that teachers develop in years of teacher training can or should be developed by considerably younger learners. Considering that the development into an autonomous learner is a gradual process, it can be suggested that expecting students to determine their own learning content is overwhelming and not an appropriate skill requirement for a successful learner.

Furthermore, compared to most other subjects, in second language learning there is a great danger that asking students to determine their own learning contents would cause frustration amongst students. Comparing, for example, subjects such as History or Geography with learning a second language, the subject contents trigger different cognitive activities within students. It might be feasible for some students to work on topics such as the French Revolution while other students work on the American War of Independence. While a linear progression of historical events is usually recommended, as historical events are often somehow interconnected or at times even the cause or consequence of another historical event, to a certain extent they can be treated as separate entities.

Dealing with any historical data requires reading and analytical skills as well as mnemo-strategies. In opposition to that, learning a second language is based on gradual understanding, starting with basic to complex grammatical structures. A basic vocabulary of the most commonly used words is required in order to produce any meaningful verbal communication. Based on the individual level of language skills in the target language, there are more suitable topics than others. To put it quite drastically, students with beginner level of French who portray an interest in reading, for example, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, would find it very frustrating without the adequate pedagogical preparation. It is likely that students are overstrained if they

were expected to decide which learning contents might be appropriate for their level of language skills.

What seems to be of greater importance than being able to define their own learning contents is that the contents are made available to students. There is a feeling of appreciation amongst the students who participated in the interview that a clear structure of subject contents represents the interests of the students. Rather than just being passive recipients of new information, the information is shared with them, which includes a right to discuss their views on the content. Students and teachers seem to be of similar views regarding this matter. While teachers point out that the syllabus of the subject needs to be met, students do not claim any rights in determining the syllabus but want to be informed about it as it helps them to understand why certain expectations and tasks are being set in the class. When asked whether they can contribute to determining the learning content, one student responded:

> Uhm, I am not sure if we had a choice because we were getting assessed on all of them. So I am not sure if there was much of a decision about it.

Another student confirmed this impression:

> Well, […] I just follow the tasks that we have to do and I do like to complete all of them because I think it is necessary to complete all of them.

However, when asked whether there are aspects that should be changed in that respect, both students denied that they would want to change the way that the learning plan was set up:

> **Student A:** I like the PLP and I think it works quite well and I am not sure if there is anything that I would like to change about it. I think it is all pretty good.

> **Student B:** I don't think I would change it because I believe it is a good way to learn because you […] you work by yourself but […] some tasks you do work with somebody else and it is just a good way to learn.

Hence, it appears that while defining the learning content does not occur to the students, they focus more on the social forms and the speed in which they can approach the given tasks.

8.1.2. Learning Objectives

Similar to the learning content, the learning plan is used to set out particular learning objectives so that students know within which time frame certain topics will be covered and to what degree they will have expanded their language skills over the school term. However, like the learning content, teachers are reluctant to let their students determine their learning objectives. One teacher explained that the curriculum is to some degree assessment driven in order to certify that their curriculum follows national or international standards.

> We have different testing[s]; ACER testing, for example, so certain categories from the outside, curriculum, mainly curriculum driven have to be attached to it. [sic] […] There is not a policy as such. However, we have to provide parents and students with an assessment plan within the first two weeks and we need – depending on the year level […] – to have a minimum of assessment. And of course then if you go to year 11, 12, you would have to adhere to SACE curriculum […].

Hence, teachers and schools in general are under external pressure to perform according to national and international academic standards (Dimmock, 2012). Regardless of critical voices who argue the usefulness or adequate design and content of such tests, these challenges need to be acknowledged. They are part of management operations at schools and therefore influence everyday teaching practices. In this regard, learning plans may limit the flexibility for students to define their own learning objectives.

There seems to be, however, an even more prominent factor which may lead to the question whether designing one's learning goals is a crucial skill to distinguish between autonomous and dependent learners. As one teacher argued, learning a second language differs from most other subjects in the type of learning skills that it requires and the way that learners need to address the learning content and the learning goals. While most other subjects are based on acquiring knowledge in which language is a tool to decipher and to communicate information, language is the result of learning processes in second language acquisition. This means the acquisition of a language requires direct and indirect learning strategies or meta-strategies and different thinking processes compared to other subjects.

One teacher compares the acquisition of a second language to building a house. Only if students have a certain foundation in the target language are they able to

proceed. For example, it does not make sense for students wanting to learn to create relative clauses in German if they do not yet know the basic word order. Similar to the learning content, there are certain grammatical phenomena that students need to understand first before they can move on to more complex linguistic structures. Underpinning this argument, one interviewed teacher used the metaphor of bricklaying as to build a fundament to a solid building: *"It is sort of a lock step. Language learning is building blocks. Each week, each fortnight, you add another brick to the structure."* Hence, students are likely to be overwhelmed to detect which type of learning goals are appropriate to be set based on their prior knowledge and which time frame they should anticipate to achieve these goals.

Critics opposing this argument may suggest that people who immerse themselves in learning a second language in a target country can also learn it. In fact, this is probably the most authentic and autonomous way in which a learner can acquire a second language. However, while there are many studies that confirm such findings and maybe one has made a similar experience oneself, learning a target language in the country where it is spoken is based on personal observation within the country and through verbal and non-verbal communication with native speakers of the target language. This means that learners are able to decipher information based on the feedback that they receive from native speakers and based on the observations of the learner of actions and emotions that follow utterings between speakers of the target language.

For example, a learner of French will understand that something with her/his pronunciation was wrong when she asks for a quiz [kwiz] at a toyshop and instead receives great laughter from the shop assistant who understood the equivalent of 'cuisse' [kɥis] (thigh). It is, however, assumed that the shop assistant will explain to the learner the phonetic error that triggered the humorous moment. Hence, the learning environment for a learner in the country of the target language is quite a different one from the classroom. Therefore, it can be quite tedious for the learner to decide upon the learning objectives for her/himself as, particularly with regard to grammar, they may not be aware of the prior knowledge that is required to acquire certain grammatical structures. At times, error correction further needs to be monitored and possibly initiated by the teacher or more advanced learners (Kleppin, 2010). Hence, the classroom is an artificial environment in which the learner does have all components for natural learning processes.

However, the common situation is that while teachers are aware of the small steps in which they believe that their students will expand their second language knowledge, students are often unaware of the reasoning that lies behind this gradual approach. The learning plan provides a platform to integrate the learning in these decisive processes.

One teacher in school 1 explained that the learning plan implemented at her school used to set out learning goals for a month. In recent years this was changed to one week. Students are now required to fulfil certain tasks within a week to reach specifically defined learning goals. In this context, she points out that the learning plan is used across the curriculum but that teachers and school management have recognised that the learning plan in the second language classroom requires a different framework compared to other subjects.

While it is of no interest to this thesis to do a comparative analysis of different learning plans in different subjects, it is important to note that language subjects require a learning plan that accommodates the different learning contents and processes in order to acquire a language. In that respect the sample school has tested over many years how complex learning plans can be for students in order to make a gradual progress in their language learning.

Hence, with regard to the weekly assignments that are part of the learning plan, smaller learning goals are set as opposed to monthly assignments. This has two advantages. Firstly, learning objectives are formulated more precisely as they cover smaller portions of learning contents. One student who was interviewed in this study agrees that there is only limited choice when it comes to defining learning objectives:

> Well, usually there is [sic] the requirements and the task sheet that goes with it and so if I have fulfilled everything that is on the task sheet, I consider it done.

Another teacher suggests that she consults with her teacher about the completed task. The student further reveals that her personal learning plan (PLP) contains a clear outline of the learning objectives:

> I know that I have done [them] because I double check with the teacher and I just like read over the PLP to see like that I have completed everything I need to.

Hence, given the way that the learning plans in the two sample schools are implemented, students do not come to class

> "[…] with their own objectives because they are not informed in any meaningful way of the objectives of the 'official' curriculum, either at the macro programme level, or at the micro level of the individual lesson" (Nunan 1989b, p. 183).

Secondly, the learning plan guarantees that students can achieve their learning objectives within a short period of time. Students, however, who fall behind are identified earlier and interventions can be put in place to support students to fulfil the set learning goals. Considering that school terms only cover a time span of three or four months, missing learning goals that are set for one month can have a drastic impact on the students' learning progress and performance as it makes it much more difficult for the student to pick up on learning content that their peers may have already tackled one month earlier.

Another advantage that the learning plan bears is that setting and monitoring the achievement of learning goals enables teachers and students to engage in a discussion about the actual learning progress. Regardless of whether they achieved their learning goals, students at both schools are challenged to discuss their learning progress. High achieving students receive confirmation of their positive progress. Students who struggle to fulfil their learning goals are required to discuss their problems with the teacher. Depending on the school, students can consult with the teacher in or outside the classroom why certain goals were not achieved.

> [This learning plan] is wonderful for fostering dialogue, whether it is in the target language or In English, between teacher and student. The dialogue can take various twists and turns depending on the student. It enables you in the study to actually pitch the interaction with each student at his or her own need so you can individualise your interactions with your students much more.

Hence, the student receives the individual attention that s/he needs in order to comprehend her/his learning processes and strategies.

8.1.3. Learning Strategies

Understanding the types and values of learning strategies is described as a crucial asset of an autonomous learner according to Wolff's model (Chamot 1999; Artelt 2005; De Florio-Hansen 2003; Macaro 2001, 2002). In the first part of this thesis, a number of learning strategies such as mnemo strategies or compensation strategies were briefly illustrated. Successful second language learners are more efficacious in applying learning strategies than other students.

For example, learning vocabulary is partially based on mnemo strategies. One common way to acquire new vocabulary is to create a list of new words, but there are various ways to memorise them. Some students might just look at them and try to remember them. Others might say them out loud. Hearing the words as well as pronouncing them may be useful for the students to save them in their mental network of vocabulary. Other students may write them over and over again as they might find that this enables them to memorise new vocabulary. There are far more approaches to learning vocabulary than the few examples provided (Artelt, 2005; Chamot, 1999; De Florio-Hansen, 2003; Macaro, 2001; Mandl, 2006) and often students carry them out subconsciously. While testing different ways to achieve their learning goals it is often quite a natural process. The intention of one of the interview questions was therefore to see if students are aware of different learning strategies and to what extent they believe that they monitor the use of their learning strategies. Hence, it was to be explored to what extent students possessed metacognitive concepts. According to Brown (1987), *"a learner can be said to understand a particular cognitive activity if he or she can use it appropriately and discuss its use"* (p. 65). However, none of the interviewed students was able to provide any example of a learning strategy that they used. One student said*: "I don't know. I guess I just find out how I am gonna do it and then I just work on it slowly."*

> **Student 2:** I usually approach work all the same, just get it done as soon as possible and to the extent of my ability.
>
> **Student 3:** I think mostly for me it is just listening well and working diligently.

The students' statements thus reveal that there is a certain lack of understanding of particular metacognitive concepts. However, it cannot be excluded that students may use cognitive concepts in the form of learning strategies efficaciously without being aware of it.

In contrast to the students' views, according to teachers, they strongly believe that they put emphasis on learning strategies. The emphasis in terms of strategies seems to be , however, rather on social or indirect learning strategies than direct learning strategies. One of the prominent strategies that all interviewed teachers referred to was the ability of time management. While time management is indeed a key skill for

successfully completing any task, little was said about direct learning strategies. The following quotes of two teachers from different schools highlight the focus on time management as a learning strategy:

> **Teacher A:** […] [W]hen we are looking at time management, some students, who have learning difficulties often not diagnosed or assessed, they often also have poor time management. And it is really important to observe that as early as possible with a learning plan which gives me this opportunity because I have more time and there are reasons for poor time management. Often, it is not a matter of laziness. Often there are a number of reasons, some of them external, home situation or learning difficulties, fears where students use the strategy of not adhering to time management that was given. And you can do that, but of course, being in a school and within the system there is the struggle with the assessment. You have to reach the assessment even though you can have altered assessment, alternative assessment. I do talk to them (the students).

> **Teacher B:** As the year progresses I have to say particularly conscious in this fourth term and in the lead up to the exams, that is probable [t]hen we give them more strategies – and maybe I should give them earlier on – , it may be related to timing, it might be related to the dictionary or not.

For both teachers the first thing that comes to mind when they were asked about the use and teaching of learning strategies is time management. The teachers' answers reflect to some extent on the students' inability to state any particular learning strategies. Time management appears to be a more dominant factor that can hamper the learning success in the second language classroom rather than poor direct learning strategies.

However, according to Teacher B, learning strategies are more emphasised with exams approaching during or at the end of each term. As exams are marked and are therefore of more importance to students and teachers likewise, teachers tend to highlight particular strategies in order to tackle crucial exam tasks. The statement did not clarify whether the strategies taught focus on the overall learning progress in the second language or whether they are task-related strategies to achieve higher marks.

That greater focus might be on strategies with exams approaching can be concluded from the teacher's personal reflection that learning strategies should be taught earlier as well. In accordance with the teacher's statement, from a neurological point of view, being aware and able to monitor learning strategies that are appropriate to

tackle distinctive language skills – that is reading, listening, writing, speaking – is a key factor of a successful autonomous language learner. While the interviews only captured snippets of teachers' and students' views, learning strategies seem to be often treated as an indirect asset that is assumed to be acquired and applied naturally by learners as they are practicing grammatical phenomena or learning new vocabulary. At the same time, learning strategies underlie every learning process. The students interviewed, however, seem to be unaware of their value. This does not mean that they don't know any strategies (Birbaumer & Schmidt, 2005). In order to solve problems – whether it is learning new words or using a particular tense in the language – neurological processes are triggered that allows learners to test out various theories in order to achieve their learning goal. Some may be more efficacious than others, but, while learners differ in the type of learning strategies that works best for them, it would be important for them to understand their subconscious choices better.

One concept to support the use of learning strategies is peer learning.

> Evatt and Boyle [for example] have shown how students can help each other with their learning through formally established peer tutoring schemes on otherwise traditional programmes (Stephenson 1998, p. 137)[47].

Offering students study sessions supplementing the usual language lessons, school 1 creates a rare environment which has several benefits. With regard to the acquisition of learning strategies, one of the teaching staff elaborated that students in year 11 or 12 often provide support to younger students.

> Sometimes they may help each other out. They are allowed to go to peer tutoring where older students have sessions after school. We got kids in year 11 and 12 who are very good language students. They are giving peer tutoring to year eight students in German saying […] I have problems with that structure in German and they [older students] will help you.

While older students with good language skills are able to assist younger peers with tasks that they might struggle with, this also provides an opportunity to discuss how older peers achieved the learning goals that the younger students are still facing. At this point, the programme could integrate teaching or the exchange of learning strategies in a form that encourages older students to explain grammatical structures to the younger students. They could also specify how they were able to manage to

[47] Although this statement was made within the tertiary education sector, peer tutoring is also proposed in secondary education (e.g. Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Van Lier, 1991)

understand them themselves. In order for the programme to include the training of learning skills as part of peer tutoring, these skills have to be actively taught in the language classroom. Herein lies a potential improvement of language teaching programmes as they are implemented in secondary schools. Under the overall goal to support life-long learning, students need to be equipped with knowledge on the various learning strategies when no advice from other people is available. This is considered a task of the language educational programmes that still finds little acknowledgement in praxis.

8.1.4. Social Forms of Learning

Many teacher-training programs engender the use of different social forms of learning in the classroom. There is common consensus in the literature and amongst practitioners that particularly in second language acquisition lessons have to be learner rather than teacher – centred (Furst 1981; Fogarty and Bellanca 1993; Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock 2001; Gillies 2007; Schwartz and Pollishuke 1991; Gardner 2004; Lambert 1997; Lambert and McCombs 1998; Fogarty and Bellanca 1993; Gibbs and Oxford Centre for Staff Development. 1994; Menck 2000; Louis Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007; Nunan 1988; 1995; 1989b; 1992; Boud and Feletti 1997; Wood and Jone's 1998).

However, teachers often highlight the challenges of using other social forms than frontal teaching (Fisher & Frey, 2008). Considering the teacher as facilitator who retreats to the background during second language classes, this is an expectation that many schools struggle with to embed in daily teaching routines. In addition to common concerns for discipline and the efficacious use of the time, it is argued that especially early language learners are more dependent on the teacher due to very limited skills and abilities in the target language. Teachers are concerned that there is a greater risk for this group of second language learners to acquire new information such as grammatical structures, vocabulary, and correct pronunciation of new words if the teacher does not take the active lead in the classroom.

Overall, for the majority of students, second language learning requires the use of distinctive learning strategies and thinking approaches to tackle a new challenge that students may be unfamiliar with as they differ compared to other subjects for example. That students do not necessarily prefer learning with classmates as

opposed to frontal teaching becomes evident in the answers that students provided during the interview: "*You work by yourself. It is just a good way to learn"* was one student's answer.

All students interviewed said that they preferred to work on their own in order to complete tasks of the learning plan. While they agreed that working in groups or pairs from time to time was also enjoyable, they did not seem to be aware of any particular benefits from group work compared to frontal teaching. Teachers expressed similar views. Although they admit that they do group work or partner work from time to time, they did not believe that working in these formations of learning was appropriate in every circumstance.

> **Teacher A**: I will tend to say to girls in a study […]: You can see that you have this task in the assignment. You can do that in pairs. And then I will come and listen. That might be a role play. You can see that you have got this task. You can do it in a small group, perhaps three or four. And I will come and listen. […] [A]nd they might also say that they have got a reading task and ask: "?" And I will say: "You need to do that individually." It is usually stated on the assignment and then they will be reinforced in the study.

> **Teacher B**: It varies. But I think that they have that flexibility […]. Some students will come to study and just squiver themselves [sic] and beaver away on their own or you might have to call them up and tell them: "Can I have a look at what you are doing." I will tend to say to girls in a study, you can see that you have this task in the assignment. "You can do that in pairs." And then I will come and listen. That might be a role play. "You can see that you have got this task. You can do it in a small group. Perhaps three or four." And I will come and listen. And they might also say that they have got a reading task and can we do that together and I will say that you need to do that individually. It is usually stated on the assignment and then they'll be reinforced in the study.

Based on the teacher's statement, it can be distinguished between social forms within the classroom and outside the classroom in study periods or concerning other assignment related work. According to the statement above, students are informed about the type of social form that is recommended or requested for particular assignment tasks. There is an awareness that some assignments or forms of homework can be done in other social forms than individually.

While this says little about the type of social forms that students engage in during the language lessons, students' answers further provide some insight into the classroom teachings.

> **Student A:** I usually work on my own unless the task means that I need to have a partner or a group. But I do ask for help from friends if I need it.
>
> **Student B**: Well, with certain tasks we work in groups but we usually work by ourselves, but if we need help we ask each other or the teacher.
>
> **Student C**: I can work on my own just fine. I can work with a group just fine. I can work with a partner just fine. It depends on the task.

Hence, there appears to be less reflection on the students' side as to which social forms might be suitable in which learning contexts and to target which learning objectives. Student A's and B's responses underline that collaborative work is not dominantly part of their perception. Only student C provides some indication of his ability to work on his own but also in a group if the task requires it. Hence, to some extent, there might be a risk that *"mismatches between teachers' and learners' expectations"* (Nunan 1989b, p. 179) can arise. "*While teachers seem to accept the value of communicatively oriented activities, the learners surveyed place greater value on 'traditional' learning activities"* (Nunan 1989b, p. 179).

On the one hand, the way that teachers and students view frontal teaching may be explained by the social constraints that they are used to. From the beginning of their educational career the majority of students are accustomed to learn in a social form of frontal learning. Considering that the interviewed students were already in secondary high school between the age of 14 and 17 years, they have been under the influence of teachers' views for a number of years. Students have thus adapted to the way that learning is conducted in the classroom, and other concepts are rather foreign to them. Having found a way to acquire the knowledge that is expected of them over the course of every term, there is little reason for them to assume that other social forms of learning could be beneficial.

On the other hand, students' answers also indicate that they prefer working on their own as it allows them to learn at their own pace. They do not have to negotiate ways to find a solution to a particular problem which may entail confrontation with other

students. In addition, students working on their own present results as their own work rather than having to present results in a group. While it is less problematic if all students involved in the same work have contributed a fairly equal amount to their work, it is not uncommon that students complain about other students who do not participate in the group work as much as others or become passive as their classmates solve the tasks for them (Abdullah, Embi, & Nordin, 2011). This leads to conflicts within the group which students anticipate being a danger for the achievement of given learning goals. In addition to that, students are tempted to have problems with time management and to lose focus on the actual tasks that they are supposed to fulfil:

> Some girls; it takes them a lot of time to actually use their studies constructively; to explain to them that this is not a free period. They might be there and their best friends and that they don't see them any other time. Some of them do complain about time.

While these are plausible reasons to limit group and partner work, facing these kinds of problems can, however, be of great value to students and may engender skills of an autonomous learner. Despite the fact that working in pairs or groups may not come naturally to students, they can get used to it if they receive guidelines and support (Gibbs & Oxford Centre for Staff Development, 1994; Gillies, 2007).

Furthermore, having to face conflicts with fellow students can foster communicative skills such as dealing with and providing constructive criticism, negotiation and debating skills. In the job environment after school, these are key social skills that schools should provide the basis for. In addition, it can be anticipated that students who do not receive immediate answers from their teachers when they have questions or have a problem but who are encouraged to acquire skills of problem solving are more successful life-long learners as they have established ways to retrieve information independently. Being able to work independently is of equal importance in the job environment that students enter after school.

A different case of stepping away from teacher – centred learning was described by another teacher during the interviews. She has been using the learning plan as a guide that sets out tasks and learning goals that students tackle individually in the classroom. Other than having a class formation in which the whole class listens to the teacher and in which communication mainly occurs between the teacher and the student, the learning plan is implemented in her classroom in a way that students work on their tasks individually and tasks may be differentiated according to their

individual needs. She acknowledges at the same time, that despite a changed role for the teacher into the role of a facilitator, instruction is still necessary but that it coexists with individual and group work.

> Personally, I could see the risk […] that instructive learning would become less if that is seen as a negative. However, the teacher role changes to being more the facilitator than the lecturer. It wouldn't really be a negative. Other than in my area in languages there must be some instruction, not just individual work or group work. There must be some whole class instructive teaching as well. So, didactics would change.

However, all in all, she confirms that individual and group work that is based on learning plans has a number of benefits for teachers and students:

> One of the main changes I have felt, and the benefits for the students and teachers is, the opportunity is greater for one-on-one group intention by the teacher to individuals or to groups while the rest of the class is occupied in a meaningful way which often – with others plans for lessons – is rather difficult. Because, you either give the students busy work or they are not occupied or you don't give individual teams, groups or members of the class tasks your attention because of behavioural management. But because all students could work on their own pace and were motivated, the plan seems to just motivate them to really go ahead and finish it, finish what they have, finish the task ahead. There is less distraction, more time freed for the teacher to work and attend to students individually.

The focus that is put on the student's individual needs appears to be one of the most important benefits of the learning plan that was highlighted by all participants of the interview. With regard to the use of the learning plan as a framework within the classroom, it seems to provide a way to facilitate a crossing between social forms of frontal, individual as well as group learning. However, according to the interviews, there is still a tendency to shy away from group work on students' and teachers' side.

8.1.5. Self-assessment

Probably one of the most difficult aspects of fostering the autonomous learner in the second language classroom is the idea of self-assessment. As discussed earlier in this thesis, students are likely to over-estimate or under-estimate their achievements and their skills. Leaving aside the factor of cultural expectations and values that may contribute to misleading analyses of students' performance and skills, there has been an ample amount of research in the field of developing instruments to assess academic performance (Helmke & Weinert, 1997; Krampen, 1987). The term 'self-assessment' stipulates that the autonomous learner is capable of reflecting on her/his

own performance in a realistic manner. This is that students' expectations and personal views reflect their actual work. This expectation is problematic in two ways. Firstly, self-assessment and assessment by third parties through teachers' marking schemes form a symbiosis. Students' ability to evaluate their own skills is strongly influenced by external judgments (Bandura, 1986). As an example, a student who receives a good mark or positive comments from her/his teacher or parents believes in the achievement of personal learning goals because s/he has the affirmation for it. Hence, in most educational systems, the assessment of students' skills is expected to be conducted in an objective way that tests the expected learning outcomes. These tests are equal for all students within the same cohort.

However, the literature repeatedly highlights that many assessment forms do not fulfil these criteria (Brodowski, Herwig, & Wernicke, 2005; Helmke & Weinert, 1997; Krampen, 1987). Providing marks or other forms of feedback on academic performance is often coloured with personal impressions of the teacher rather than objective criteria. While it is not the intention of this thesis to discuss or identify assessment tasks and academic standards that meet criteria of effectiveness, it emphasises that the work with learning plans triggers a similar demand for assessment frameworks as common teaching practices. Thus, on the one hand students are influenced by external assessment feedback. On the other hand, while there are proponents of external assessment, external feedback is crucial to students as it provides a benchmark that students can use as an orientation for evaluating their own achievements. That students rely on external assessment benchmarks, and that marks do not necessarily have an undermining effect, is evident from their own commentary. Asked whether they believe that marks or other forms of assessments are necessary, all students agreed.

> **Student 1**: I believe it is good […]. It […] motivates you and it shows that they [students] do have to do it and do not get laid off and if they don't get a bad mark like receive another form of punishment they might believe they can do it again and they might not do it.
>
> **Student 2:** I think it is just a very good and efficient way for the marking to work.
>
> **Student 3:** Well, I think it would be a good way of motivating students because bad marks are usually bad, so if something bad happens to you [this] encourage[s] students to achieve and complete the personal learning plan.

The three students were very honest in evaluating their behaviour. Their views indicate that they would not put as much effort into their work unless it was assessed. They consider marks as an indicator of motivation to fulfil the tasks under the learning plan. According to their views, it appears that self-assessment alone could be problematic as it would not encourage students to fulfil required tasks. Similar views were portrayed by all other students who were interviewed as part of this study. When further asked if students would like to see changes in the emphasis that is put on assessments, none of them agreed:

> **Student 1**: I like the PLP and I think it works quite well and I am not sure if there is anything that I would like to change about it. I think it is all pretty good.

It needs to be pointed out at this point that the age group of the students interviewed reflects a group of students who have been socialised for years in education systems that thrive on assessment. If that had not been the case from an early age onwards, the views may be quite different. However, acknowledging that students who are in secondary education are used to a system of assessment, they seem to have adapted to it and to effectively use it as benchmarks for developing self-assessment skills. Hence, students who are high achievers develop confidence levels in their work. This means students use these marks as a social guideline to compare themselves with their class- or schoolmates. If the average of a mark for a test was a B and the student achieved this mark, it indicates to the student that s/he performs on average compared to her/his classmates. Furthermore, the mark B also entails assessment values that certify the student that s/he only makes minor mistakes in using the newly learned skills. Therefore, not only would abolishing forms of external assessment not be a feasible suggestion due to the political and social boundaries that are in place in most societies including the Australian context, it would also prove to be problematic for students themselves as they need external assessments as a benchmark for evaluating their skills and performance.

Comparing student assessment with work performance in companies, certain parallels can be drawn. Every employee in a company needs to comply with certain standards. Whether it is the secretary who needs to complete particular data so it can be used for processing by other employees, the consultant who is required to show a set of minimum billable hours to clients in a designated period of time or the CEO of a company whose value for the company is measured based on the profit they

generate, performance seems to be measurable in our society. Despite knowledge about the commitment forms that employees as well as students develop based on their work in certain organisations or with regard to students' learning plans, assessment seems to be inevitable.

However, as the interviewed teachers stress, while external pressure in the form of assessment is used as a tool to motivate students to take their tasks seriously, students need to develop the ability to reflect on these 'hard figures' in the form of marks or the verbal and oral feedback provided by teachers. As all interviewed teachers emphasise, the challenges for teachers do not only lie within developing holistic and objective assessment tasks and marking schemes. Students can only develop skills of self-assessment in a stimulating environment in which they are encouraged to reflect on and to communicate their achievements.

One teacher describes that the learning plan enables the creation of such an environment as she has *"time to talk to [the students] individually [and] in groups".* She acknowledges that in particular in secondary education students are encouraged to *"ask […] questions, lots of questions".* While at this school of the interviewed teacher there is only time for communication with the teacher during class or during arranged appointments, the teacher highlights that, due to the structure of the learning plan in her class, there is more time for the teacher to attend to the students individually as less frontal instruction is given compared to common teaching concepts. This means students not only work more independently from the teacher, the teacher can use this freed time to discuss learning outcomes individually with her students. This challenges students to reflect on their achievements, to learn to formulate their views and to express disappointment or disagreement with provided assessment results.

In a different school, students are particularly encouraged to develop self-assessment skills during study periods in which there is no instruction. In addition to that, tutoring groups may also provide a framework as part of which students discuss their learning outcomes with fellow students and with their teachers.

While there are alternate ways to foster the development of self-assessment skills, the two differing examples show that, depending on the funding available in schools, learning plans in particular can facilitate that students can evaluate and communicate their own learning progress. In comparison to school 1, school B encourages

students to discuss their learning outcomes during study periods. While students can seek advice from older students who act as tutors in their designated second language, teachers use these periods to discuss positive as well as unsatisfactory results. A scenario could be described as follows:

> They [the students] hand in their work and then it's corrected. Well, and when I say it is corrected […] it is corrected to the extent that their errors are indicated, and we often have a short-hand which will indicate to the girls the type of errors that they make but we won't necessarily correct their work – we will just indicate that it's a structural thing or that is a spelling error or it is a tense. And the girls have to correct the work. That's a thing that is almost unique to the [learning plan]. But when they hand in their piece of work, that is not the end of the story. It is corrected. The aim is to get back to them as quickly as possible and when they come and can't do their corrections on their own, they will sit with you. And go through that piece of writing, but there is a follow-up. There is a definite follow-up.

On the one hand, this testimony contains information about the type of assessment that is conducted in German. Students are encouraged to think about the type of errors that they made during the assignment, offering them the solutions. Externally initiated self-correction provides the students with information about the place where mistakes occurred. The students, however, are required to understand the source and the type of error by themselves and to correct it. Hence, there is less emphasis on the number of mistakes as the assessments are not marked, but students are made aware of the areas in the language that they excel in and which they need to improve. The assignments based on the learning plan can therefore trigger a mix of external and self-assessment.

Another way of stimulating self-assessment through the work with learning plans is to provide assignments that represent a mix of external marking and self-assessment. Marking assignments that are prepared directly as part of a learning plan have multiple advantages, mainly for the teacher. They serve as guarantees that students take their work seriously as the marks obtained in these assignments count towards term marks that are relevant to students. Furthermore, if the marking schemes represent an objective and reliable indicator of students' actual knowledge or performance to be tested, teachers as well as students will know whether they have succeeded in achieving the anticipated learning goals or not. In addition to that, students receive detailed feedback and need to provide their own feedback to the teacher why they believe that certain learning goals were met or what reasons could have contributed to failing to achieve these learning goals.

Self-assessment is an aspect which students value to a certain extend. The interviewed students find it useful that they know which tasks they need to complete in advance. Asked if there were benchmarks or other indicators that would help students to identify their working progress, the aspect of having an overview of the tasks that were completed and tasks that still needed to be completed seems to play an important role as a precursor of self-assessment.

> **Student 1:** I keep my personal learning plan close by [to] usually [know] what I am learning in German and I tick off something that I have got. If there is something that isn't checked, I just work on completing it.

Thus, even before students receive a mark, they are able to evaluate to a certain extent the status of their work. They can confirm for themselves which exercises and tasks they have completed. This provides them with some confidence that they have achieved specific learning goals before their work is assessed. As a consequence, the students' comments appeared to portray a level of self-confidence in their abilities to complete required tasks which is an additional factor to motivate their engagement in working with the personal learning plan:

> **Student 1:** I think I am pretty confident because I know like I achieve all of them and I put my best into each check, into each of the tasks, and yeah, I think I do pretty well.

Hence, knowing that they have achieved the set learning goals fills students with contentment and pride. It can be suggested that fulfilling a learning plan triggers stronger feelings of self-confidence and contentment over time. As the students trust that once they have completed a set of exercises and tasks that were designed by teachers with a particular learning goal in mind, they can look back at their learning plan which contains an overview of all the completed tasks. Most students who learn a language receive individual tasks and exercises on a day-by-day basis. They may not always know why they have been doing the exercise. Even if they know the purpose of the exercise, they do not know if that was sufficient to achieve the intended learning goal. Students are thus more reliant on their teacher to inform them after which set of tasks or exercises they should have acquired specific language skills. Students, however, generally do not make these forms of enquiries, and they therefore are more likely to not fully understand the progress of their own learning.

A further step to self-assessment was detected based on teachers' commentary with regard to the work with learning plans. In addition to feedback regarding their overall results that students rely on, students need to be challenged to think about the diligence that they put into their work. This may not necessarily be evident from test results but from assignments that require longer-term preparation and that display more information about the students' approach to their work rather than the outcome as such. Other than in the common learning environment, students who work with a learning plan are subject to work on a consistent basis. This means that because students know in advance what they have to work on and that the process of assessing the outcome is usually the same, students may develop specific habits that are outcome oriented rather than content oriented.

That assignments and tests that are marked trigger similar tactics is evident, but the consistency of working with learning plans may entail greater potential of outcome oriented results with little effort. A teacher described in the interview that despite or because of the consistency of working according to a designed plan, some students follow their tasks nearly robot-like: *"I think one of the dangers, because it is so consistent with the girls [and boys], and just do things to get things ticked off. There are some [students] where you will actually have [that] because it is happening all the time."* In these circumstances the teacher informs the student about this detached behaviour: *"You did the tasks but you just did them in a very functionate [sic] way. Think about what you are doing. And sometimes I will challenge their thinking processes."* The commentary indicates that there is awareness on the teacher's side that students need to receive feedback regarding their work. The teacher's feedback to the student reaches beyond providing information about the outcome itself. It also includes details about the approach that the student took towards fulfilling these tasks. Students' approaches are challenged if teachers believe that the students have not fulfilled their tasks to their best ability. In this instance, the teacher is aware that students' motivation towards their learning plan can increase and decrease. Therefore, students need to be continuously encouraged in their work.

In this respect, parallels can again be drawn to corporate work. Employees in various departments, for example, often have a set of tasks to fulfil within a certain period of time. While there are no marks at the end of the day to be earned, there is a contract that legally binds employees to the company to fulfil tasks to a high standard. This usually means that the employee's performance may have consequences of

continuing employment, promotion and therefore effects on the salary. Reports that are written, databanks that are created, sales strategies that are used – these are activities that employees often need to present and justify in front of their managers or team leaders. Having submitted their work or anticipated strategies to these higher parties triggers a feeling of satisfaction and self-confidence of having met the set expectations.

However, the external assessment provided by managers and team leaders is crucial for the self-assessment of the employees. What needs to be considered is that the type of feedback that students are given may be much more crucial to students than to employees who have reached a higher level of psychological development. Employees' self-awareness and self-confidence in their skills are more stable concepts than students' feelings of self-awareness and self-confidence. Students are thus more vulnerable to the feedback that they receive regarding their work. The implications of drawing the parallel between students and employees therefore do not entail creating environments that are found in the corporate world.

However, there appear to be a number of psychological processes that stretch from learner autonomy supported in education systems to life-long learning and work. As the illustration below visualises, it can be proposed that self-assessment can be triggered before and after the actual assessment.

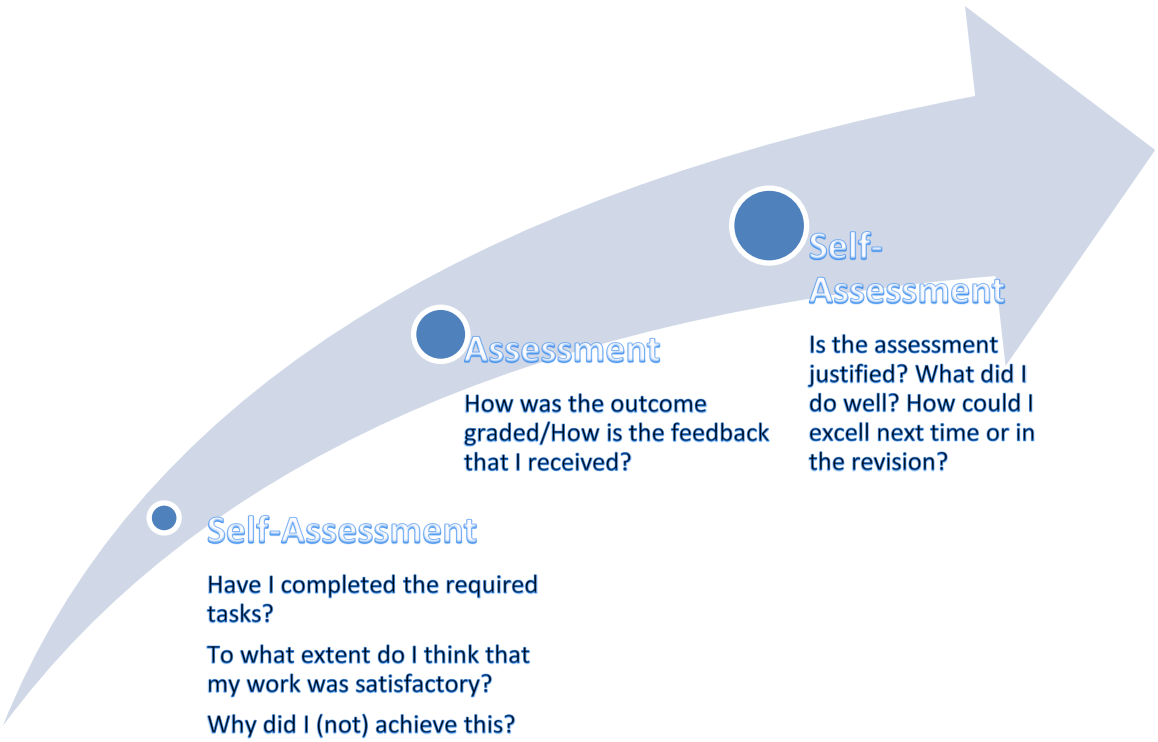

Figure 34: Symbiosis of Self-assessment and Assessment

Both processes are to some degree dependent on one another, as self-assessment processes may need to be fostered amongst students through assessment procedures.

As the statements from the teachers underpin, assessments do not necessarily need to be marked. However, as students have confirmed themselves during the interviews, there appears to be a need for some form of assessment or feedback by third parties that reflects on the learning outcomes as well as on the approach that was taken to achieve these outcomes. The combination of assessment in the form of marking schemes or verbal and oral feedback, further has the advantage that high as well as low achieving students receive differentiated feedback on their work. The students in this interview all revealed that they are high achieving students:

> **Student 1:** Yes, I am relatively confident that I can finish the goals. I find German pretty easy and I really like doing German.
>
> **Student 2:** I think I am pretty good. I never got less than an A.

Arguing that external assessment is important for students' development of self-assessment skills and that students themselves agree with the use of marking tools,

these findings have limitations considering that the students interviewed do not struggle with their subjects. Ultimately, students who do not find learning a language easy and who may struggle to fulfil the required learning goals, may only see that they are underachievers compared to their classmates.

Studies have found that lack in self-confidence, however, can steepen the spiral to underperformance (Marsh & Yeung, 1998). For students with similar issues, content-oriented feedback is therefore essential. While performance may not be up to average levels yet, teachers can indicate to students in which areas the students may have shown diligence in their work that may not show effects in the outcomes yet but most likely will in the future. In addition to that, teachers need to encourage their students to question their work and in particular bad work with regard to areas of improvement and areas that students have already picked up in but need to put further effort into. This is the strategy that teachers from both schools of this study seem to pursue. Whether it is face-to-face conversations with the teacher during a study period or during class, students receive individual feedback in addition to their marks, and they are further required to think about their own achievements and the approach that they take towards their own learning. None of the schools go so far as to use methods of self-assessment only; they use them in addition to the teacher's feedback or marking systems. Based on the parallels to the working environment, the psychological development phase that students find themselves in and the views from teachers and students, this thesis does suggest that self-assessment tools are sufficient in triggering reflective processes regarding the performance of students.

All in all, being able to self-assess one's work performance defines the autonomous learner to a great extent. However, based on the international findings discussed in the literature and students' and teachers' statements in the interviews, it appears that assessment can foster skills of self-assessment given continuous and constructive feedback to students (Farmer & Eastcott, 1995; Boud, 1995; Chen & Garbe, 2011; Gleaves et al., 2007; Harris, 1995). Students further need to be encouraged to involve themselves in communicative acts about their performance as students themselves may take a rather passive role and continue to rely on formal assessment.

8.1.6. Learning Context

The dimension of learning context is a complex term. It combines a number of aspects that could be summarised as descriptors of the student's learning environment. In this thesis, the term of learning context shall cover perspectives on learning material and social behaviour amongst learners.

The dynamic between students is probably one of the most important but also most difficult aspects that needs to be taken into account when discussing the efficacy of any learning programme. If there are individual students or whole student groups that do not get along with each other, this can have an impact on the type of activities and social forms that are employed by the teacher. Failing to acknowledge problematic dynamics in the classroom can hamper overall learning outcomes as students may mock one another due to differing views and perceptions. One of the advantages of using a learning plan is that it can be used with various social forms and can accommodate differentiating tasks for learner groups and individuals. Hence, the work with learning plans in particular can differ depending on the way that students interact with each other. Learning plans can be used within the normal teaching time or outside the classroom. Students can further work on a learning plan on their own, in groups or pairs depending on the level of collaboration that they are capable of:

> **Teacher 1:** Some classes work more collaboratively than others or they will naturally divide into small groups. Sometimes when I am doing pair work or small group exercises, I will break up these little groups and that can be a bit of a struggle at times […]. So that can be difficult.

Due to the impact that classroom dynamics can have on the teaching style and learning progress, teachers and students were asked how they perceived the climate in their class and if their observations had any influence on the use of their learning plan. All teachers that were interviewed reported that they did not observe their classes before implementing the learning plan as they are generally curriculum-wide learning plans that are expected to be prepared before the beginning of each term:

> **Teacher 1**: I have just written my term one 2012 assignments for year 11. That particular group of girls I haven't taught since year 8. I have to rely on my extensive experience in the writing of that.

Hence, while knowing in detail about the type of learners and the dynamics of the learner group is crucial to choose appropriate materials, exercises and social forms that can accommodate a suitable learning context, varying conditions and learning programmes implemented on staff management level may not always allow teachers to create learning plans based on prior observations. On the contrary, the generic learning plan may have to be adapted and modified depending on the classroom dynamics that teachers observe once the school term has started. One teacher admits that *"to a great extent, as you have different learning abilities and different criteria within each classroom and each year level, you almost cannot compare one year with another year […]. It is quite the dynamics of a classroom is I find extremely important and sets the learning goals, and of course the curriculum and the goals of the school".* The statement shows that there is acknowledgment for the importance of a good classroom environment and that some degree of flexibility is required to respond to the way that students behave with one another. With regard to the two schools where the interviews took place, it appears, however, that students in general are collaborative as well as competitive.

> **Teacher 1**: I try to do a fair bit of both. At times it is more appropriate to be more collaborative which is more what I am about and what our school is about. At times it is competitive. It is both and they are both. In that class, I have one student who really has difficulties to work in teams or groups and who has even refused to work in groups but this person has social and behavioural difficulties. They are both.

The teacher's statement shows that she has a clear understanding of the way her students interact with each other and how to accommodate their needs in the classroom. No indication of problems within the classroom were identified which may be a contributing factor to the overall strong affective commitment that students show towards their learning plan.

> **Student 1:** It is all very supportive.
>
> **Student 2:** I usually work by myself but on some tasks we work together and with partners.
>
> **Student 3:** It varies really. I can work on my own just fine. I can work with a group just fine. I can work with a partner just fine. It depends on the task.

The students appear to know themselves and each other quite well. They have strong views on the conditions under which they work best. This is an additional indicator of their autonomous learning skills, as understanding one's own needs and preferences is a fundamental prerequisite to conduct and monitor one's learning.

Another component of the student's learning context is the learning material. Wolff (2002), for example, claims that autonomous students should be able to decide upon their own type of learning materials that they would choose in order to work on particular tasks and to expand their language skills. That this is a rather unusual requirement is supported by students' and teachers' comments. It appears, that although learning plans provide more freedom to students regarding the approach they take towards fulfilling their work, they are usually not able to determine which learning materials they can use. Teachers of both schools are, however, very open and flexible when it comes to determining learning materials. Both schools use a great variety of learning materials to stimulate students' engagement in their work.

> **Teacher 1**: There are computers in our rooms and they can access them if it is appropriate, if they have a task that requires that, which is not all that often for me. We have data projectors which we can use in our room and I do use that quite often. We have a wonderful little recording device with which we can record speaking and which they then can play it back. We have films. Sometimes, I have not done it as much. Sometimes we video them. They can use magazines. […]

In school 1, a teacher explains that in her second language classes students engage in online and digital learning. They are well equipped with computers in each room. However, students also work with more conventional material such as data projectors and films. For more authentic speaking and listening experience, teachers further use recording devices. This way, students can self-assess their own speaking performance that covers language skills in speaking as well as knowledge in vocabulary and grammar.

In school 3, an innovative approach to the use of learning materials is employed as students study independently from traditional textbooks:

> **Teacher 2:** […] I do not work with textbooks although I do work with certain material, which I alternate and change to suit my needs or student needs. Our students have their own laptops. I use online interactive language programmes. We have electronic boards in our classes installed, in all our language classes. We are pretty much encouraged to use to have a strong

> visual-based language classroom: resources, theatre resources in that sense, the sports resources from pretty much everywhere but not with a permanent text book in front of them. We use CDs, texts, spoken, film.

The focus on technological learning devices is evident from the teacher's statement. The teacher pays particular attention to meeting students' needs in the sense that she tries to stimulate all senses by using learning devices that stimulate visual, audio and kinaesthetic learning abilities. That both schools use a great range of different learning materials that suits different learner types may explain why students do not see any urge to change anything in the way their learning plan is used.

8.1.7. Awareness and Responsibility

As highlighted throughout this thesis, the term 'learner autonomy' implies that students take responsibility for their learning. Researchers appear to agree, however, that this is a gradual process which may take several years (Nunan and Lamb 1996). In one of his latest works on learner autonomy, Benson (2011) argues that taking responsibility for one's learning starts with raising awareness in the classroom of what being responsible for one's actions actually means. His theory stands somewhat in contrast to Wolff's theory (2002) which describes a near ideal form of an autonomous learner whereas Benson describes what can be considered early stages of an autonomous learner. Following the findings from the interviews with students as well as with teachers, an immediate awareness of students' responsibilities cannot be assumed:

> **Student 1**: Well, I just think it is like a plan that the teachers wrote out for us and it has like a series of tasks that we follow. It says what we do in each lesson. And we just like follow it each lesson and we ask the teacher if we need help or we ask questions.

While the student's response indicates that the learning plan is set out clearly, the student's responsibility is limited to completing the tasks. Hence, there is an indirect level of dependency on the teacher to explain exactly to the students what their expectations are and why these expectations are set.

Furthermore, throughout their work with their learning plan, students need to be continuously given the feeling that the actions that they take in order to achieve their

learning goals and the subsequent success or failure is a product of their own labour and efforts. On the one hand, this assists students in developing a sense of achievement, pride and realistic reflection of their work. On the other hand, it prevents that students become passive and doing their classwork without awareness for their actions and thoughts. In the attempt to raise awareness of students' responsibilities for their work, in school 1, students have to hand in their weekly work to be signed off by their teachers. This implies that while teachers give their students one week within which they can choose when to do their tasks, students are held to account for their work. Students who are unable to complete their work are required to discuss the reasons for failing to do so with their teachers. Hence, students need to own up to the actions or passiveness that they have taken towards completing tasks of their learning plan. However, this has little to do with wanting to achieve an effect of embarrassment and putting external pressure on the student. Students are required to reflect on their actions which may be linked to other commitments, academic problems to solve the tasks or distraction by other things that lead to putting the work aside. In case of academic problems, this is an opportunity for students to address these issues and ask for help from their teacher.

One of the most prominent factors that require attention is time management. It is another potential factor that is named by interviewees. Instead of stating insufficient time to fulfil the tasks, students and teachers can mutually discuss ways and strategies to avoid time constraints becoming an issue to meet deadlines. All in all, discussing reasons for compliance or non-compliance with a learning plan can help students to develop a feeling of responsibility for their work.

However, in the learning praxis greater focus has been placed on the expectations that are demanded of students in their work with a learning plan. While looking at one's own performance is crucial in demonstrating responsibility, factors such as learning content, context, and goals also significantly frame the characteristics of an autonomous learner. They include the actual learning goals and linked tasks that students are to fulfil. While teachers and school management have the expertise to create a syllabus in German or French, for example, it may be a potential source of issues. If students are supposed to be autonomous, they need to be given corresponding rights of an autonomous learner. The most important right is to be able to provide an opinion. While this thesis does not claim to change hierarchies within the school environment, responsibility implies reflection and therefore also the

right and the ability to share opinions. School 1, for example, uses surveys with students to analyse students' perceptions of these learning factors:

> We will give them surveys in which the girls are asked about what part of the course they enjoyed most, what areas of difficulty they had, what they felt, if the goals that we had outlined on the assignment were actually clear, whether they had enough information on how they were going to be assessed. I would say that each girl would probably fill in – not every girl and every class will fill in a survey every term – but one term a year. And we read those and we take that on board.

The teacher states that "*some things are quite ridiculous."* It is therefore important to point out to the students what constructive ideas or criticism is. That "*watching films all the time*" is not sufficient to learn a language may be clear for language teachers, but the reasons behind certain exercises or themes that are covered and materials that are used in the classroom need to be explained to students in order to understand their own learning better. Hence, conducting surveys with students has three advantages. Students realise that they have responsibility for their work but that their views are acknowledged. They realise that they are seen as individuals who are taken seriously.

Furthermore, it needs to be communicated to students that there is a time and a place when they can discuss their views. This prevents students questioning every task or expectation during class. Finally, they learn how to express their opinion, and that suggestions that are not constructive make them look naive rather than respectful. In this mutual relationship of respect, students become aware of their responsibilities as well as their rights and how to manage this form of power. Hence, while the majority of schools may be rather critical of suggestions such as allowing students to define their own learning goals, it may be feasible that students can reflect on the syllabus to the extent that they are capable of and are allowed to do so by the school.

Considering the effects of responsibility, it is probably one of the most important factors in becoming an autonomous learner. Depending to some degree on social factors such as norms and the support that students receive at home, some students are quick at developing feelings of responsibility. Others require reminding and stronger guidance from teachers to attribute feelings of responsibility to their work.

Failing to acknowledge any responsibility for one's learning , however, may hamper learning processes.

8.1.8. Differentiation

One of the aspects that became evident in the interview statements by students and teachers was the focus on differentiation. Similar to the other dimensions discussed in this chapter, the aspect of differentiation has generated a lot of discussion (Benson & Nunan, 2005; Bos et al., 2010; Convery, Coyle, & Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, 1993; Demmig, 2003; Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Hurych, 1976; Keim, 1979; Meyer-Willner, 1979; Tomlinson, 2001).

Likewise, in the context of learner autonomy, the aspect of differentiation is considered an essential pedagogical and psychological component. The reason for this assumption is that no student is the same. The concept of learner autonomy in itself is based on differentiation. It entails that individuals are capable to conduct their own learning. Ultimately the concept further implies that every learner possesses different skills and abilities which require different conditions to be met in order to succeed in their work. The autonomous learner is expected to be aware of and make use of his/her personal choices and preferences. Herein lies the key in supporting the autonomous learner as every student has individual preferences under which s/he can perform at their best. At its extreme this would have very challenging implications on educational institutions. Every individual learner's abilities, existing language skills, and learning preferences with regard to environmental, cognitive and psychological dimensions would have to be assessed to create an individual profile for every learner.

While there are only few institutions that try to take on these logistic and management challenges and it would be too problematic to suggest that these criteria could all be fulfilled, this thesis proposes three main dimensions of differentiation in which the work with a learning plan can support the autonomous learner.

Working with a learning plan bears the potential to differentiate exercises concerning the learning goals. In particular in second language learning students can be very heterogeneous in their existing knowledge and cognitive abilities (Helmke & Weinert,

1997). Reasons for that may be students' language background and the language they study at school. Students may also transfer from another school where they picked up learning a second language at a younger age as opposed to what the new school may offer. Another reason may reflect on the ability of students to progress in their learning. As indicated in the interviews, some students find it easier than others to learn a new language. For these reasons, not all students in the same class may be able to work on the same learning goals.

Depending on the learner's observation of the teacher, the learning plan as it is implemented at the two sample schools can be adapted according to the needs of each student. While some students might be working on more difficult exercises, other groups of students might be allocated easier exercises.

Differentiating exercises during normal classroom sessions can be quite difficult as the teacher directs all students at the same time. However, teachers may either provide learning plans with different options for students to choose from or allocate specific exercises that differentiate in level of difficulty.

Although teachers from both sample schools highlighted their intentions to use differentiation as a tool, the statement from one teacher pinpoints that differentiation remains a new but important aspect of learner autonomy in the second language classroom:

> **Teacher 1:** For term 2 I have a clearer idea of specific needs of that group. […] [W]e are making a big thing of writing differentiating tasks. I think that's important in term one where you can't quite gauge the ability level yet but you have a range of tasks; not all the time, there has to be a core body that every girl does. Differentiated tasks, gravitated exercises, different abilities. This is fairly new for us (8, 9 and 10). If we set ourselves a goal of doing modal verbs in German, that we may set alternate tasks that are differentiated levels of tasks of different levels of difficulty: "You should really do option C. Perhaps this is the most demanding one." If a girl who is able will opt for the easier choice. We are starting to do that more and more for our mixed ability groups.

The teacher acknowledges that within her school there has been a shift in second language learning to include differentiated tasks in the learning plan. There is a clear distinction between second languages and other subjects. As the teacher further conveyed in the interview, the system of the learning plan at her school used to be uniform it its concept across the curriculum.

However, the second language teachers identified a need to modify the concept of their learning plan so that it specifically suits the second language learners. As indicated in the interview, differentiation is targeted to the levels of difficulty and the content of tasks. In another school, a similar approach is evident. At the same time, differentiating tasks and difficulty levels remains a challenge in creating an environment that suits the autonomous learner for which the learning plan, however, represents a framework in which differentiation is feasible.

A third dimension of differentiation that is easier to be realisable is the aspect of pace. It appears that the ability to work at one's own pace is the most obvious advantage to teachers and students.

> **Student 1**: I think I work a little bit faster and study more because of the PLP because my class can progress more given that we don't have to wait up for the slow students. I can work at my own pace which is a relatively fast pace.
>
> **Student 2:** It is a different way of learning to the usual regime where teachers teach, but in this you can work at your own pace and learn by yourself. It gives you that independence.
>
> **Teacher 1:** But because all students could work on their own pace and were motivated, the plan seems to motivate them to really go ahead and finish what they have, finish the task ahead.

It is one the key factors in supporting learner autonomy. Given that students differ in their prior knowledge in the language and their cognitive abilities, some students work at a different pace and vary in the way that they approach tasks. The teacher therefore finds him/herself in the situation that s/he has to juggle a heterogeneous learner group in which some students may be disruptive or inattentive because they are bored whereas other students may struggle to keep up with the speed by which tasks should be completed or language phenomena should be understood.

Furthermore, slower students may fall behind their fellow classmates as they may feel embarrassed to convey to their teacher in front of the class that they did not understand certain phenomena or did not finish particular tasks. In addition to that, the pace at which students work not only varies amongst students, it can also vary depending on the type of task or topic that is covered. While some students may have a forte in conjugation, others may have better listening skills. Therefore, students on both sides are disadvantaged if they always need to follow the same

speed as everyone else. At times, they might be bored. At other times, they might struggle, which could also lead to falling behind in other topics as they have not covered the previous one. However, none of these extremes provide the optimal situation in which students could excel.

Furthermore, being able to work at one's own pace with a learning plan within the classroom or in study periods is a dimension that requires the skill of time management. With regard to life-long learning and being equipped for the working environment after school, time management is a key skill that needs to be acquired. Not every learner automatically disposes of good time management skills as teachers in both schools confirm:

> **Teacher 1:** Because they have this independent learning opportunity, they waste time, initially they waste time, they look at it, oh yeah, whatever it is free to do that or not. They have certain deadlines. They have deadlines that are stipulated. They struggle with that. Time management has always been an issue with the students as soon as they get some freedom.
>
> **Teacher 2:** Some girls, it takes them a lot of time to actually use their studies constructively; to explain to them that this is not a free period.

The point that teacher 1 makes is that poor time management is not a consequence of the use of learning plans. Most students show a tendency to waste time and so would most adults in the employment market if their work performance was not monitored. However, teachers can provide some boundaries that assist with time management such as deadlines and providing benchmarks that serve as orientation to check how students are progressing with their work.

Knowing about one's weakness or strength in time management and how to go about it is crucial for autonomous learners. Hence, while the ability to work at one's own pace may include the risk of wasting time, established frameworks around the learning plans that regularly check deadlines and provide support for students who struggle with time management create a flexibility to enable students to be aware of and improve time management skills in the long term.

8.1.9. Flexibility

One of the aspects that none of the theoretical models presented by Little (2009), Littlewood (1997), and Benson (2010) in this thesis discuss in depth is a component that could be described as flexibility. What may be a key to a successful learning plan or in fact any other learning programme is a degree of flexibility towards any determined plan or programme. No matter how well designed a programme might be, there are always unknown external factors that need to be taken into consideration. This does not suggest that teachers need to be the wise women and men to predict all unforeseen circumstances. There is, however, a need to acknowledge that there may be unpredicted factors that force a learning plan or programme to be modified. One teacher suggests:

> I believe that writing a term's worth of work, and the girls have it all set it out there in front of them with goals and the aims and the methods and the assessment clearly set out at the beginning of the term, is terrific. However […] you have to be prepared to say: "This was my progression and the timing of my progression that I set out in this printed document but in fact I have weaker students that I don't anticipate." I have a more mixed ability group of students, and sometimes you might have to take something out of week two and say we will tie it over to week three. Sometimes that doesn't have to do with the nature of the group; it can have to do with an external factor but you didn't realise when you were writing the programme three months ahead that the girls would be involved in a music programme and that you [will] miss lessons, you just have to be prepared to be that bit flexible. You have a written document and that is important but you don't need to be so locked into that document that come hell or high water you won't make adjustments.

The teacher anticipates that the student group may be different from one's expectations. This may make adjustments necessary, for example, to accommodate for heterogeneous groups or school circumstances such as group excursions, and other commitments including sickness that may make the modification of the learning contents and learning goals necessary. While the interviewed teacher restricts the requirement to be flexible mainly to groups that a teacher is not familiar with, most of these circumstances can also apply to groups that a teacher has been teaching for a long time.

As another teacher underpins: *"It is the dynamics of a classroom I find extremely important and sets the learning goals."* The statement elaborates that students'

abilities may vary within the class but also in the way they interact with each other and to what type of exercises they might respond better than other learner groups.

While making changes to a programme may be necessary, unaccountable factors do not represent a sufficient argument to refrain from providing a clear structure to students. Just as much as teachers should be aware that learning programmes are not set in stone, students need to be informed under which circumstances changes may apply. This does not undermine the teacher's professional quality. It raises, however, students' awareness regarding the degree of thought that is put into providing a programme that best suits students and the limits that this planning takes into account.

> **Teacher 1:** I don't say you have to do it very often, but you need to say to the girls [and boys] why you are doing it and how you will rearrange things and for what reasons.

8.2. Conclusion

Having analysed the statements of teachers and students with regard to the implementation of learning plans as an instrument to support learner autonomy, the term can be approached from two perspectives. On the one hand, there are a number of dimensions that, depending on their regulation, can support various degrees of an autonomous learner. On the other hand, the question remains as to which degree of an autonomous learner needs to be fostered. Do students need to be able to be fully independent of their teachers, showing abilities to define their own learning goals, learning contents and learning materials? Hence, do autonomous learners need to learn autonomously?

The objective of this section was to identify and discuss a number of dimensions that can be used to define a learning plan in the second language classroom to which students show strong affective commitment. In that attempt, drawing upon teachers' and student views this chapter has carved out the didactic and psychological limitations in fostering skills of an autonomous learner. Having looked at two learning plans that attempt to foster learner autonomy and that are respected and supported by the student community, the way that these learning plans are implemented seem to represent middle pathways between the requests described in a learner autonomy

model developed by Wolff (2002), Benson's approach (2010), and the presented view of learner autonomy that can be fostered on a practical level in high-schools.

With regard to the six defined dimensions by Wolff (2002), students should be made aware of the implication that their own behaviour has on their own learning. Students should further be encouraged to take a certain degree of responsibility to define and question their learning environment. This means, for example, autonomous learners need to know which learning content can be covered with a certain level of second language skills and why these contents are covered. However, from a student and teaching perspective, it seems to be far-fetched that the level of responsibility that students can take for their learning can reach as far as to be able to decide upon the topics that students want to cover. On the same note, students work well with an overview that contains the learning goals that are to be achieved within a certain period of time. The interviewed students, however, do not indicate the desire nor do they seem to possess the ability or confidence to define their own learning goals. In addition, rather than being asked to suggest their own learning material, heterogeneous learner groups appear to work well with a wide range of materials that range from authentic textbooks to digital media. Neither from the teacher or from the student perspective is there an indication that there is a need to work entirely autonomously in order to become a successful life-long learner, whether this is in the second language or other academic contexts.

The study has underpinned that the two sample schools foster learner autonomy based on limited autonomous learning. Relating back to the beginning of this thesis where the literature review served to differentiate between the two terms, there may not be a theoretical awareness of the two terms but a practical one. The intention of the two schools does not appear to be that students are meant to work independently of their teachers. Teacher instructions are considered a fundamental component of the second language classroom but there is great emphasis on creating a learning environment for students which enables students to learn to their best ability. Firstly, this means that students are taken seriously and considered as individuals with different needs. It does not imply that students study on their own where the teacher is a mediator only and where students can define their own learning goals, choose what they are interested in to study and choose materials that they prefer to work with. These would be activities that define autonomous learning. Teachers, however, facilitate communication with the students. They make them aware that they

acknowledge the different needs of students. They continuously explain to students the concepts that underlie everyday learning in the classroom. This is reflected in the degree of affective commitment that students show towards their learning plan. Teachers raise the awareness within students of what the purpose is of the way second language classes are conducted and students show appreciation for that. While there are definite regulations and limitations regarding the way that second language classes are conducted, teachers show a high degree of flexibility in making modifications to the content and the implementation of the learning plan. In addition to that, they explain to students when changes are required and the reasons for it.

With regard to the ability to monitor one's learning strategies, there appears to be greater awareness on behalf of the teachers than of the students. The study is not conclusive as to whether learning strategies are actively taught in class. Indications from students are that there is little awareness for the different strategies that have varying purposes in second language learning. Students seem to work out suitable approaches to tackling new language phenomena by themselves. In contrast to that, teachers seem to believe in greater awareness of their students in their learning strategies than they actually show. Therefore, the different types of learning strategies need to be addressed stronger in the classroom and students should be encouraged to explore and practice these strategies.

Finally, with regard to assessment, there appears to be mutual engendering of developing self-assessment skills through formal assessment. Students understand that there are boundaries within the classroom that they need to adhere to. They are aware that there is an expectation on them to complete certain tasks and that it is their responsibility to fulfil the tasks to their best ability. Students in fact seem to seek forms of formal assessment as a form of guideline to prove for themselves if and to what extent they have met the academic expectations set by their teachers and the school. However, in order to avoid that students become mechanical in the way they approach their work and that marks become the only reason why students fulfil their work, teachers need to consistently challenge students to reflect on their work. Hence, there is a strong emphasis on the communication between the student and teacher as well as within the respective student community. As part of that communication, students acquire key skills in expressing their opinion but in a realistic manner that matches official standards set within the school.

To sum up, the two sample schools – whose students display strong affective commitment that is linked to higher engagement – do not foster learner autonomy as part of independent learning but rather in a student–teacher community. Both students and teachers dominantly appear to share the same perception regarding the framework of their learning plan. Most questions concerning the content and the method which their learning plan is based on, were answered by both parties in a similar way. This indicates that students understand exactly the goals of their learning plan as it was designed and implemented by their teachers. Hence, there don't seem to be grave misunderstandings between the two parties concerning the expectations that are held for the learning plan. Students are well informed about the concept of their learning plan which is crucial for a successful learning concept. They have adopted it as part of their second language studies.

As a result, the learning plans do not represent as a piece of paper that camouflages traditional secondary language teaching practices. They are implemented as part of a three-dimensional system which incorporates language learning according to nine didactic and psychological pillars that support the autonomous learner rather than autonomous learning. Hence, student awareness for the individual dimensions that generate the framework of the learning plan is continuously raised and students are challenged to develop cognitive and communicative skills to develop responsibility and to reflect on their learning. In that respect, students do not always work autonomously but they acquire the equipment of an autonomous learner that can work autonomously when it is required.

9. Conclusion: Towards a Holistic Model of a Learning Plan That Fosters Learner Autonomy in the Second Language Classroom

This final chapter summarises the findings from the quantitative and qualitative studies that explored student commitment as a component of a successful learning plan, which in turn supports learner autonomy. Based on these findings, a complex model of learning plans is proposed that fosters a moderate view of learner autonomy in the context of second language learning. This means that young learners can take some role in shaping and taking responsibility for their learning.

As the research conducted within the framework of this thesis can be regarded as a pioneering approach to providing a better insight into the concept of learning plans and ways to assess them, this chapter further outlines this thesis's limitations, and raises questions for future research.

Regarding the characteristics of student commitment (explored as part of the first research question), the findings suggest that students can develop varying forms and degrees of responsibility. They can develop strong feelings of *wanting to* (affective), *having to* (continuance), and having *moral obligation to* (normative) complete their learning plan. In addition, it shows characteristics of being a fluid concept that can change within a few weeks of working with a learning plan.

Proposing student commitment as a component of a successful learning plan that fosters learner autonomy, the second research question aimed at identifying whether commitment is linked to the concepts of academic self-efficacy and student engagement that have been shown to underpin the development of learner autonomy. Autonomy was thereby defined as the ability to take responsibility for one's learning (Holec 1983, 2). Furthermore, it was described as a set of abilities that students possess to varying degrees and which can be gained or lost depending on the extent to which it is fostered in the classroom.

While this thesis did not argue that learners who are committed towards their learning plan are necessarily more autonomous learners, it was proposed that a successful learning plan fosters the development of students' responsibility for it and the awareness of and ability to plan, monitor, and assess their learning. In this respect, students' academic self-efficacy and engagement were suggested as dimensions that are linked to learner autonomy as an achievement (e.g. Multon & Brown, 1991;

Schunk, 1991; Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2009; Carr, Hagel, & Hellier, 2010). A theoretical model was thus developed that portrays a relationship between the three psychological concepts of *student commitment*, *academic self-efficacy*, and *student engagement*. This means, in order to take responsibility for their learning and to develop extensive planning, monitoring, and assessment skills, students need to be confident in their academic abilities and to mentally and physically engage in the learning plan and its tasks. Students' confidence and their level of engagement in their learning plan can be further influenced by the type of relationship that they form with their plan. It was, however, anticipated that, to some degree student commitment, academic self-efficacy and engagement form a mutual relationship in which all three components ultimately influence one another.

The findings of an empirical, longitudinal study partially confirmed this proposition. It appears that student commitment somewhat forms a symbiosis with components of academic self-efficacy and student engagement. Hence, students who are more self-efficacious may overall believe more strongly in the method and goals of the learning plan, and vice versa. Furthermore, these students are also more likely to engage in completing the tasks of the learning plan.

However, while all three concepts are linked, findings in terms of their directionality within this triangle (Figure 35) are inconclusive. What is demonstrated is that the degree of affective and normative commitment influences students' academic self-efficacy. In other words, students who strongly believe in the use of their learning plan or who feel morally obliged to complete their learning plan also tend to be more confident in taking on new tasks.

This does, however, not imply that students who complete their learning plans because they realise that are required to are less confident. It appears that there is a threshold within which continuance commitment does not necessarily hamper students' academic self-efficacy. However, further research needs to be conducted to confirm this proposition.

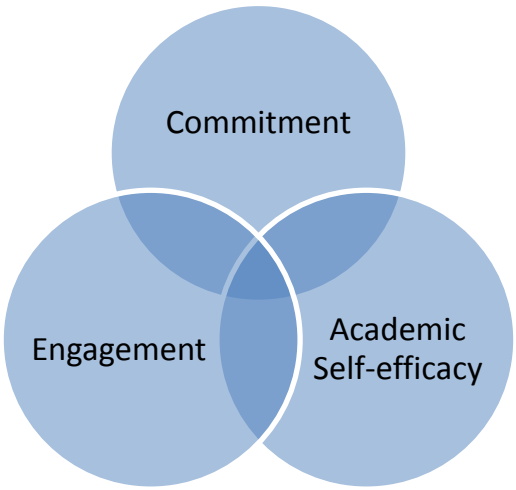

Figure 35: Triangle of Psychological Concepts of Learning

Regarding the influence that students' commitment can have on their mental and physical engagement, it appears that commitment can only provide limited information. The affective, normative, and continuance commitment components appeared to have an influence on some aspects of psychological and behavioural engagement. These relationships can be summarised as follows: Whether students put a lot of effort into completing the tasks of the learning plan can be partially explained with the personal belief in or high affective commitment towards their learning plan. Furthermore, students' internalised norms and values appear to increase students' level of attention during class; it may further reflect on the degree of interest or attitude that they allocate to their subject. Continuance commitment, on the other hand, may be a factor that contributes to lower levels of attention in class.

Considering the influence of student commitment on academic self-efficacy, the characteristics of the two psychological concepts have to be taken into account. Student commitment and academic self-efficacy appear to differ in their level of stability. While student commitment can fluctuate within a few weeks, in accordance with Bandura's view (1976), academic self-efficacy appears to be a more stable concept. This difference is also evident in the influence that commitment can have on students' confidence. While students' confidence does not seem to shift according to the way that they commit towards their learning plan, there seems to be a benchmark of affective commitment which, when reached, may lead to increasing or decreasing academic self-efficacy.

Therefore, monitoring students' commitment on a regular basis might help to identify students who appear at risk of developing a lack of confidence in their abilities.

Furthermore, it can help to explain aspects of lacking engagement in class, particularly with regard to the learning plan.

According to the case samples from school 1 and school 3, demographic and other factors such as *age* and active *help from parents* may be further aspects that are linked to the degree by which students voluntarily work with their learning plan.

In addition, in all calculations, the factor *school* played a significant role that significantly predicts student answers, whether this is with regard to commitment, academic self-efficacy or engagement. It confirms the anticipation that aspects of socio-economic background, school management, and the type of learning plan somewhat determine how students bond and interact with their learning plan.

In addition to exploring the impact of a number of socio-economic and background factors such as *parental support* on student commitment, the third part of the thesis analysed which aspects lead to affective commitment towards a learning plan. As students in schools 1 and 3 portrayed high affective commitment towards their learning plan in the French and German classroom, as well as high engagement and academic self-efficacy levels, interviews were conducted with students and teachers. Based on Wolff's (2002) and Benson's (2010) models of learner autonomy, the suggested didactic dimensions that contribute to learner autonomy were investigated in the way they were realised in these schools.

The interviews revealed that full autonomy as suggested by Wolff (2002) was not supported in the two schools. Students' views suggest that they neither have, nor do they wish to have, the abilities of an autonomous learner as portrayed by Wolff. Hence, a revised model for learner autonomy comprising of nine dimensions (comprising of six dimensions by Wolff (2002), one by Benson (2010) and two based on the interviews) was proposed. They comprise the dimensions of *learning context*, *learning content, learning objectives, learning strategies, assessment*, *social forms, awareness, flexibility,* and *differentiation.*

Returning to the house analogy (Figure 36) that was first proposed in Chapter 5 to illustrate the research questions, it shall be used to visualise how the revised dimensions can be embedded in a triangular autonomy model. Following the analysis of the two case samples from school 1 and 3, this autonomy model is based on two levels which are underlying factors that influence components of commitment, engagement, and academic self-efficacy.

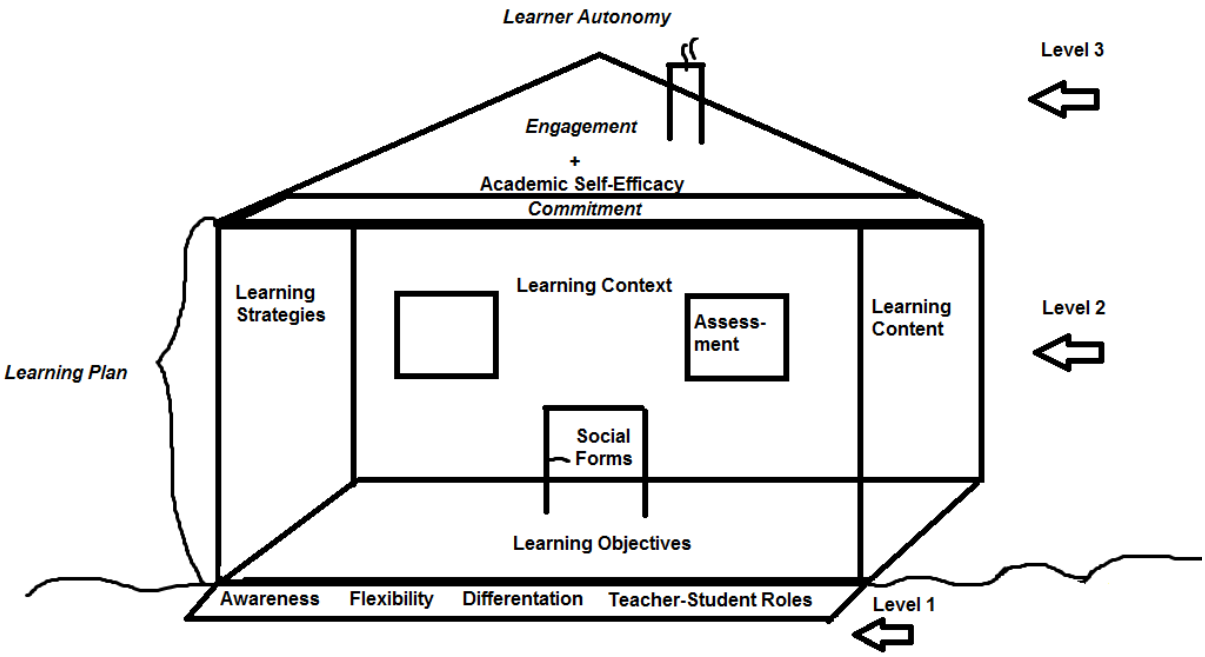

Figure 36: A Revised Model to Foster Learner Autonomy

Similar to the construction of a house, level 1 describes the fundament of the learning plan as a fostering instrument of learner autonomy. The factors of awareness, flexibility, differentiation, and the determination of *teacher – student roles* represent the preconditions that underlie learning plans[48]. Learning plans can vary in shape, content, time frame, parties who sign it (students, teachers, parents) or the forms of assessment that determine its completion status. However, fundamental aspects that are preliminary to a successful implementation of a learning plan are that awareness needs to be created on behalf of the teachers as well as the students (Van Lier, 1996). Before plunging into new teaching and learning instruments such as a learning plan, teachers need to be aware of the implementation process, the tasks, and the challenges that they will potentially face, in particular at the early stages. Furthermore, there appears to be a need to have an agreement on the level of learner autonomy that is targeted. This agreement needs to be reached among the teachers and the school management. Furthermore, students need to be made aware of the changes in the way that learning is promoted, the exact goals and also the specific benefits that working with a learning plan offer to the students. Students should be involved in the implementation process and learn to provide constructive

[48] The plural form of learning plan is preferred as this thesis does not perpetuate a specific model of the learning plan.

input. However, this needs to be overseen by teachers. Therefore, before the implementation process, the teacher and student roles need to be determined. In addition, students need to know and be continuously reminded of their responsibilities and the freedom that this new learning device offers. It is anticipated that the degree of freedom and responsibility that students can take for their learning plan will vary depending on students' age and the level of experience that they develop in their work with the learning plan.

The factors of age, experience, maturity, and the targeted learning and development goals, are further factors by which the learning plan needs to be differentiated. There are a number of other dimensions that can be addressed through differentiation. Activities, determined in the plan, may be differentiated according to preferred learning styles or cognitive abilities. Conversely, particular learning styles can be addressed as a differentiation technique to address certain learning tasks and objectives. The factor of differentiation can further come into play when learner groups or pairs are formed that work on similar learning plans. Furthermore, decisions regarding the use of learning plans may involve operational changes such as the use of team-teaching, which is another form of differentiation. While there are more examples that could come to mind, overall, it needs to be acknowledged that one learning plan will not suit all students in the same way. Students may respond to the learning instrument in different ways, or improvements in managing the use of the learning plans may be envisaged. Hence, smaller or major changes may need to be made accordingly as the plan is being trialled.

As the learning plan is considered a work in progress, flexibility is another crucial component of the foundation of a learning plan. Rigid views of how the system should be implemented and function may not coincide on an operational level. Therefore, teachers and school management need to be able to monitor the way that the learning plan is perceived and a degree of openness is required in order to make appropriate amendments if required. The flexibility factor further highlights the conditions in which a learning plan unfolds. Making use of the house analogy, for a structurally sound foundation, various aspects such as the geology, the location, and the costs of the project need to be assessed. In educational terms this means that the design of the learning plan and the type and level of awareness, flexibility, differentiation, and teacher – student roles vary depending on the type of cohort who

will work with the learning plan and educational facilities including time, funding, and material resources.

Having established the baseline of the learning plan, in the process of designing the learning plan and the didactic modifications that go along with its implementation in the classroom, the didactic paradigms of Wolff's model of learner autonomy (learning objectives, content, context, strategies, social forms and assessment) need to be considered. Following the findings of this thesis, I emphasise that the degree to which students are involved in contributing to each of these factors varies; this depends on students' maturity, their cognitive abilities, their knowledge in the relevant subject(s) and their experience with the learning plan. For example, while students may not be able to define the learning objectives that underlie the learning plan, these objectives need to be clearly communicated with the students. Furthermore, social forms can be rotated depending on the type of learning activities or learning objectives that are determined. While some learning content might be able to be covered well with frontal teaching, the teacher may act as a facilitator for particular activities in which students can work on their own, in pairs or groups. Furthermore, learning objectives or contents that might address interdisciplinary learning might make team-teaching feasible.

In addition, while in some situations, students could be encouraged to provide their own ideas and share their interests regarding the learning content, the teacher remains mainly responsible for defining which curriculum aspects need to be covered.

Regarding the dimension of learning strategies, the findings of the presented study suggest that they need to be targeted as ways to facilitate learning outcomes. They can further be addressed as a learning objective themselves. Learning strategies are essential in order to conduct and monitor one's learning process, and they are therefore a crucial element of learner autonomy. However, it is often only realised subconsciously through the types of activities that are conducted in class. The awareness of the types of learning strategies needs be increased as part of an efficacious learning plan. Furthermore, students need to practise them in order to develop their cognitive abilities to approach different learning contents and tasks at different levels of difficulty.

Finally, the original factor of *self-assessment* as suggested by Wolff (2002) has been modified in this model to *assessment*. Assessing one's own work is a complex and sometimes difficult task. Measuring against national and international standards, learning – although being a highly autonomous process – needs to be assessed in order to identify students' learning progress or potential risks. However, as addressed in the literature, there is a large range of ways to assess learning performance. Essays, portfolios, standardised tests or interviews are just a few examples. More importantly, however, being able to face (in particular, critical) feedback is crucial for life-long learning and the overall development of a responsible adult. This further implies that the autonomous learner is required to develop realistic criteria to assess their own performance. As part of this process, the teacher can trigger appropriate processes of reflection within the student to assess her/his work and to deal with feedback provided by external sources such as the teacher, parent or peer comments, and marks etc. Formal assessment is therefore considered an important part that accompanies the progress of developing the skills to assess one's own work.

Relating to the house analogy, there are many different materials to choose from when building a house, depending on the budget, the purpose, or criteria of sustainability. Sustainability in the work with the learning plan, however, is achieved by determining the discussed didactic dimensions according to students' needs.

As indicated by the ceiling in Figure 36, based on the didactic dimensions of level 2 and the underlying components of level 1, students may develop varying degrees of personal agreement with their learning plan, a sense of moral responsibility and obligation towards their learning plan. As student perceptions differ within their peer group and in comparison to the teacher perceptions, some students may voluntarily work with their learning plan as they understand and believe in the way that the learning plan is conducted, the amount of influence they have on its determination, and its learning objectives. They may additionally feel that they should complete their learning plan because they have learnt norms at home which include not to give up their work even if challenges arise. They may further have a sense of obligation towards their teachers and parents whom they want to make proud or please, as they understand that the learning plan may have benefits that they might not grasp quite yet. There will usually be a sense of sheer obligation to completing the learning plan, as the students are aware that they cannot choose other options of learning or evade

learning altogether. Furthermore, assessments remind students that certain tasks need to be completed regardless of other personal interests that the student might prefer at certain times. These three dimensions of commitment, named affective, normative, and continuance commitment, may vary within short periods of time; further, sometimes comprehending the reasons behind the varying commitment levels might be challenging.

However, monitoring affective, normative, and continuance commitment levels appears to be important as they impact upon different factors of psychological and physical engagement. Furthermore, students' engagement in their learning plan and in class may provide indications to the teacher on the way that students bond with their learning plan. As the amount of engagement that students put into their work often reflects in their learning performance and engagement, student commitment may therefore indirectly have implications on students' academic self-efficacy. Having successfully completed tasks might boost students' confidence in their abilities to take on new challenges, while failing numerous times might in the long term affect their academic self-efficacy.

The delicate inter-relationship between the factors of level 1, level 2, and level 3 are part of a multi-dimensional system that over time can aid students through the work with a learning plan to gain, develop, and maintain responsibility for their own learning. It needs to be, however, pointed out that, against all expectations and careful planning, this is a complex process that at times might work more successfully than at other times. Yet the model can yet aid in identifying potentials and risks of a learning plan that allows for a lot of change.

Finally, based on the findings throughout this thesis, the developed model to foster learner autonomy leads to the question as to whether a theory of learner autonomy should be second language specific. In Chapter 4, it was proposed that theoretical concepts of learner autonomy need to be embedded in educational policies that target specific subjects such as the second language classroom. Although there is little evidence that an efficacious learner autonomy theory is in place in the second language classroom, the qualitative findings suggest that efficacious learning plans follow a learner autonomy theory that is specific to the second language classroom. In support of this argument, teachers from school 1 have confirmed that they modified their learning plan based on the requirements and needs in the second

language context. Findings of this thesis would support such a theory for which it has hoped to lay a foundation in future research.

9.1 Limitations: Food for Thought

This thesis embarked on exploring student commitment as an indicator of students' responsibility for their learning plans. In this context, forms of learning plans are considered a contract-like system that links students to their tasks and that bears some similarities to the contracting system known in the employment environment.

This approach represents a preliminary attempt to explore student commitment as an underlying concept of learner autonomy. While learner autonomy was not intended to be assessed as part of this thesis, links were established between student commitment, student engagement and academic self-efficacy as components that underpin the development of learner autonomy. This assumption was formulated based on the intended functioning of learning plans to engage students in a learning environment in which they have more freedom and are able to make informed choices about their learning – all of which are ultimate aspects of learner autonomy.

Furthermore, in this research, two schools with learning plans to which students appear to feel predominantly affectively committed were identified in the second language sector. The research used these two case samples to further explore a particular learner autonomy model that was developed by Wolff (2002) in the context of second language learning. The aim of this investigation was to analyse to what extent this model has been, or could be, translated into praxis. A qualitative analysis of the data obtained by the two case schools provided the grounds for an amendment and expansion of the existing model.

However, due to the pioneering character and the complexity of this project, there are a number of methodology limitations and further questions that could be targeted in future research. While the developed commitment questionnaire as part of this thesis indicates positive results in terms of the validation process, further tests with larger numbers of participants should be envisaged. In this context, attention should be paid to the correlation coefficient of some of the different scale items (for figures, refer to Appendix C). In its characteristics, similar challenges as reported in the organisational commitment questionnaires may become apparent. Multiple studies in

organisational psychology have explored the existence of one, two, three, and four-dimensional commitment questionnaires (Culpepper, 2000; Gautam, 2002). At this point, based on a factor analysis (compare Chapter 7), it is proposed that a three-dimensional student commitment questionnaire is suitable in order to analyse various commitment forms in the educational context. However, it can be argued that due to the high correlation coefficient between some inter-scale items, fewer than three commitment scales could be assumed. This thesis, however, suggests that although feelings of affective, normative, and continuance commitment may share some characteristics that could therefore partially explain higher correlation coefficients, they can be attributed to three different dimensions. Further research would have to be conducted in order to underpin or challenge this proposition.

Regarding the development of commitment, findings further suggest that commitment overall can change over fairly short periods of time. However, as the conducted analyses took into consideration that the factor *school*, which comprises the type of learning plan that is in use in the individual schools, contributes significantly to differences in answers, the development of commitment was described for each school individually. In contrast to the samples from school 1 and 2, the sample from school 3, however, only contained 20 students at each of the three measurement points. Therefore, the findings for this particular sample are limited in their reliability. Therefore, similar investigations should be repeated with bigger case samples with n>30 (Frank & Althoen, 1994).

In an attempt to explore a number of factors that could be linked to the development of student commitment, various demographic factors such as *age, gender*, and *language background* as well as environmental factors such as psychological *parental support* and active *help* from parents with learning tasks were included in the calculations. As the time of measurement and the school type may be indicators that the samples from the three schools are not part of the same population, findings are partly inconclusive. Hence, while students' monolingual or multilingual language background may have had an impact on their commitment towards a learning plan, the number of participants with multilingual background was too small to suggest more assertive findings. Future research would need to be conducted with greater participant numbers of multi-lingual speakers in order to clarify whether students with multi-lingual backgrounds may be more likely to portray higher affective commitment than their monolingual peers.

Another aspect that this thesis was unable to cover refers to the influence of learning plans on learning outcomes, in particular in the second language classroom. While it appears that learning plans can foster student responsibility for their learning, it could be enquired whether second language learning outcomes increase with the use of a learning plan. Future research designs would have to incorporate a control student group that does not work with a learning plan, compared to a learner group that uses a learning plan. Due to ethical restrictions, this question could not be proposed for this current work.

Finally, the investigations of this project provided little information on the content of the learning plans that are in use at the sample schools. On the one hand, this decision was made in order to guarantee anonymity of the schools, as providing greater detail of the learning plans could have jeopardised anonymity. On the other hand, it is believed that a great variety of learning plans can foster students' voluntary commitment towards their learning plan. Therefore, it was at the core of this thesis to propose a way to monitor the relationships that students form with any type of learning plan. However, the results from the quantitative and the qualitative analyses allow for the assumption that learning plans should be designed for a specific set of subjects. Learning plans in the second language classroom require a different framework from other subjects, as they target different cognitive skills and need to be tailored to the existing knowledge in the second language (and potentially also to different age groups). Hence, future research could contribute to shaping learning plans that are specifically set for the second language classroom. The development of language-specific learning plans should, however, be streamlined with a second language curriculum so as to be developed as part of the National Curriculum in the Australian context. This combined effort could bridge the gap between political, theoretical, and practical attempts to provide a learning environment that helps students to become autonomous learners in and beyond the second language classroom.

To sum up, while findings of this research can only be tentative, they contribute to the development of a comprehensive model of student commitment that provides a deeper insight into the type of relationships that students form with their learning plan. Understanding students' perception of their learning plan is crucial as this essentially determines the way that students interact with their learning plan. However, the findings of this research underpin a view in favour of a learning plan

that is based on a moderate approach to learner autonomy. It perpetuates a view that learner autonomy can be acquired through the work with learning plans. However, this is an individual and gradual process that students go through, and one that is flanked by boundaries of students' cognitive skills and developmental stages as well as by social norms and particularly in the language classroom, also by students' language skills. In this process, student commitment plays an important role. For this reason student commitment can be considered an indicator of a successful learning plan that assists students in becoming autonomous learners.

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Appendix A – All Questionnaires

1. *Educational policies which contain Holec's (1981) definition of learner autonomy*

Name of Policy or Source	**Source (accessed on: July 9, 2012)**
Student Welfare, Good Discipline and Effective Learning – Student Welfare Policy	https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/student_serv/student_welfare/stude_welf/pd02_52_student_welfare.pdf
Queensland	
Multi-Age Learning and Teaching	http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/early_middle/ey_lt_multi-age.pdf
Homework in State Schools	http://education.qld.gov.au/parents/pdf/homeworkpolicy.pdf
Professional Standards for Teachers	http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/pdfs/profstandards.p
South Australia	
School Discipline	http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/docs/documents/1/SchoolDisciplinePolicy.pdf
Sace Leader's Handbook	http://www.senioryears.sa.edu.au/files/links/SACE_Leaders_Handbook_DECD.pdf
Victoria	
Understanding Year 9 Students: Implications for Policy and Practice	http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/publ/UnderstandingYear9_PartB-rpt.pdf
Northern Territory	
2012 Naplan: Teaching Learning and Assessment	http://www.det.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/15776/TeachingLearningAssessmentReading.pdf
Tasmania	
Values Education School Forum Distance Education Tasmania	http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/verve/_resources/Forum_Distance_Education_Tas.pdf

Western Australia	
Principles of Learning, Teaching, and Assessment	http://www.det.wa.edu.au/professionallearning/detcms/professionallearning/professional-learning-website/for-teaching-staff/graduate-teacher/principles-of-learning-teaching-and-assessment.en?page=2&tab=Main
Australian Capital Territory	
High standards in ACT school education: Discussion paper for an ACT School Standards Authority	*http://www.det.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/19648/Schools_Standards_Authority_-_Discussion_Paper_-_Web.pdf*

2. *Commitment Questionnaire*

	Student Commitment Questionnaire	
	Commitment in Learning Plans	**Commitment in Organizations as in Meyer and Allen 1991**
	Affective Commitment	
Item 1: Happiness	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my school-time working with the learning plan.	1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization.
Item 2: Responsibilty	I really feel that I am responsible for my learning plan.	2. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.
Item 3: Loyalty	I do not feel that the plan makes me feel that I am in the same situation as my classmates.	3. I do not feel like "part of the family" at my organization.
Item 4: Usefulness	I feel that the plan is useful.	4. I do not feel "emotionally attached" to this organization .
Item 5: Meaning	Fulfilling the tasks of the learning plan means a lot to me.	5. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
Item 6: Understanding	I understand why I am working with this plan.	6. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.
	Continuance Commitment	
Item 7: Trouble	I would get into too much trouble if I complained about the plan.	7. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to.
Item 8: Force	I just have to work with the learning plan although I do not want to.	8. Too much of my life would be disrupted if I decided I wanted to leave my organization right now.
Item 9: Lack of Options	I have no other option but to accept the plan.	9. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire.
Item 10: Punishment	I only do the tasks of the plan because I do not want to be punished.	10. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization.
Item 11: Enjoyment and Force	I enjoy working with the plan just as much as I feel that I have to work with it.	11. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives.
Item 12: Embarrass-ment	I only try to fulfil the learning plan because I do not want to look stupid in front of my classmates	12. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here.
	-	13. If I had not already put so much of myself into this organization, I might consider working elsewhere.
	Normative Commitment	
Item 13: Conscience	I would feel bad if I did not fulfil the learning plan.	14. I do not feel any obligation to remain with my current employer.
Item 14: Self	I still enjoy working with the learning plan, even if my classmates complain about it.	15. Even if it were to my advantage, I do not feel it would be right to leave my organization now.
Item 15: Persistence	Even if the tasks sometimes seem hard to do, I do not feel it would be right to give up.	16. I would feel guilty if I left my organization now.
Item 16: Guilt	I would feel guilty if I did not do my best to fulfil the plan.	17. This organization deserves my loyalty.
Item 17: Reasonability	I would not give up trying to fulfil the plan because I understand why I am learning with it.	18. I would not leave my organization right now because I have a sense of obligation to the people in it.
Item 18: Duty to Teacher / Parents	I feel I owe it to my parents/teachers to fulfil the plan.	19. I owe a great deal to my organization.

3. *Revised Commitment Questionnaire*

	Revised Student Commitment Questionnaire
	Commitment in Learning Plans
	Affective Commitment
Item 1: Happiness	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my school-time working with the learning plan.
Item 2: Responsibilty	I really feel that I am responsible for my learning plan.
Item 3: Usefulness	I feel that the plan is useful.
Item 4: Meaning	Fulfilling the tasks of the learning plan means a lot to me.
Item 5: Understanding	I understand why I am working with this plan.
Item 6: Enjoyment	I enjoy completing the tasks of the tasks of the learning plan.
Item 7: Group Pressure	I would enjoy working with the learning plan no matter what my classmates think about it.
	Continuance Commitment
Item 8: Trouble	I would get into too much trouble if I complained about the plan.
Item 9: Force	I only follow the learning plan because of the pressure from my teachers.
Item 10: Lack of Options	I have no other option but to accept the plan.
Item 11: Punishment	I only do the tasks of the plan because I do not want to get bad marks.
Item 12: Embarrass-ment	I only try to fulfil the learning plan because I do not want to look stupid in front of my classmates.
	-
	Normative Commitment
Item 13: Conscience	I would feel bad if I did not fulfil the learning plan.
Item 14: Loyalty	The plan makes me feel that it bring me and my classmates closer together as a group.
Item 15: Persistence	Even if the tasks sometimes seem hard to do, I do not feel it would be right to give up.
Item 16: Guilt	I would feel guilty if I did not do my best to fulfil the plan.
Item 17: Duty to Teacher	I would not give up trying to fulfil the plan because I don't want to disappoint my teacher.
Item 18: Duty to Parents	I feel I owe it to my parents/teachers to fulfil the plan.

4. Academic Self-efficacy Questionnaire

by Jerusalem & Satow, 1999 (shortened version)

1. Ich kann auch die schwierigen Aufgaben im Unterricht loesen, wenn ich mich anstrenge.	1. I can also solve the difficult tasks in class when I try hard.
2. Es faellt mir leicht, neuen Unterrichtsstoff zu verstehen.	2. I find it easy to understand new class material.
3. Wenn ich eine schwierige Aufgabe an der Tafel loesen soll, glaube ich, daß ich das schaffen werde.	3. When I have to solve a difficult task on the blackboard, I am confident that I can do it.
4. Selbst wenn ich mal laengere Zeit krank sein sollte, kann ich immer noch gute Leistungen erzielen.	4. Even when I should be ill for some time, I can still get good marks.
5. Auch wenn der Lehrer / die Lehrerin an meinen Faehigkeiten zweifelt, bin ich mir sicher, daß ich gute Leistungen erzielen kann.	5. Even when the teacher doubts my abilities, I am confident that I can get good marks.
6. Ich bin mir sicher, daß ich auch dann noch meine gewünschten Leistungen erreichen kann.	6. I am confident that I can even then get good results if I get one bad mark.

5. Revised Self-efficacy Questionnaire

Item 1	I can also solve the difficult tasks in class when I try hard.
Item 2	I find it easy to understand new class material.
Item 3	When I have to solve a difficult task in front of the class, I am confident that I can do it.
Item 4	When I miss class due to illness, I can still get good marks.
Item 5	Even when the teacher doubts my abilities, I am confident that I get good marks.
Item 6	I am confident that I can even then good results, even if I get one bad mark.

6. Psychological Engagement

Attitude: When we have been working on something in German, I have been feeling...

bored all the time ---------- ☐
bored some of the time ---------- ☐
interested most of the time ---------- ☐
interested all the time ---------- ☐

Attention: I have been paying attention in the German class.

not at all ---------- ☐
not very much ---------- ☐
quite a bit ---------- ☐
very much ---------- ☐

7. Behavioural Engagement

Participation: When I've been in the German class, I have been participating in class discussions.

not at all ----------☐
not very much----------☐
quite a bit----------☐
very much----------☐

Active Engagement: How much have you been trying to achieve your goals under your personal learning plan?

I will do my best ----------☐
I will work just as much as I have to----------☐
I will work quite a bit----------☐
I don't really bother ----------☐

8. Complete Questionnaires

Student Questionnaire 1 (Example)

FILL IN: CLASS and SUBJECT WHERE YOU RECEIVED THIS QUESTIONNAIRE (i.e. 7a, English)

_____

Please Note: This is a voluntary study! If you do not wish to fill in the questions, please let your teacher know and return the questionnaire to her/him. Do not throw the questionnaire in a rubbish bin!

Why is this study important?

The following questions have three goals:

1. They shall show how responsible students feel for their learning plan.
2. They shall help understand why students feel responsible for their learning plan.
3. They shall show whether students feel confident towards new tasks in class.

Instructions

Please, read the instructions carefully.

1. Take as much time as you need. It should take about 20 minutes.

2. Tick the box that you agree with. Please, do not tick in between boxes.

Do: ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ **Don't:** ☐ ✓ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. Tick one box only!

Do: ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ **Don't:** ☑ ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐

4. If you need to change an answer, simply scribble through it and tick the correct box.

Do: ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐

5. Fill in all questions!

PART 1

1. I am a ....

boy ☐

girl ☐

2. I am in year ...

7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐

3. I am .... years old.

11 ☐ 12 ☐ 13 ☐ 14 ☐ 15 ☐ 16 ☐ 17 ☐
18 ☐ 19 ☐

4. At home, I mostly speak ... – more than 1 answer allowed

English	☐	Arabic	☐	Serbian	☐
Japanese	☐	Greek	☐	Spanish	☐
Cantonese	☐	Vietnamese	☐	German	☐
Mandarin	☐	Italian	☐	French	☐

Other: _____

5. I am doing this questionnaire for the subject ... (TICK ONE ONLY!)

French ☐

Mandarin ☐

German ☐

Latin ☐

6. I find this subject (see above) ...

very hard ☐

rather hard ☐

rather easy ☐

very easy ☐

7. I enjoy learning this subject (see above) …

not at all ☐

not very much ☐

quite a bit ☐

very much ☐

8. I find the learning plan …

not good at all ☐
not so good ☐
quite good ☐
very good ☐

9. How much do you think will you learn through the work with your learning plan? I think I will learn ...

a lot. ☐
quite a bit ☐
rather little. ☐
nothing. ☐

10. How much will you work to fulfil your learning plan?

I will do my best. ☐
I will work just as much as I have to. ☐
I will work quite a bit. ☐
I don't really bother. ☐

11. Do you think that learning with a learning plan is better than to learn without it?
I think that the learning plan ...

is not better at all. ☐
not so much better. ☐
is quite a bit better. ☐
is definitely better. ☐

12. Do you think your parents/guardians will help you to work with the learning plan? They...

absolutely will. ☐
will help me a little. ☐
will not really help me. ☐
will not help me at all. ☐

PART 2

	1 = Fully agree	**2** = I rather agree	**3** = I am not sure	**4** = I disagree	**5 =** I strongly disagree
13. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my school-time working with the learning plan.					
14. I really feel that I am responsible for my learning plan.					
15. I do not feel that the learning plan makes me feel that I am in the same situation as my classmates.					
16. I feel that the learning plan is useful.					
17. Fulfilling the tasks of the learning plan means a lot to me.					
18. I understand why I am working with this learning plan.					
19. I would get into too much trouble if I complained about the learning plan.					
20. I just have to work with the learning plan although I do not want to.					
21. I have no other option but to accept the learning plan.					
22. I only do the tasks of the learning plan because I do not want to be punished.					
23. I enjoy working with the plan just as much as I feel that I have to work with it.					
24. I only try to fulfil the learning plan because I do not want to look stupid in front of my classmates.					
25. I would feel bad if I did not fulfil the learning plan.					
26. I still enjoy working with the learning plan, even if my classmates complain about it.					
27. Even if the tasks sometimes seem hard to do, I do not feel it would be right to give up.					
28. I would feel guilty if I did not do my best to fulfil the learning plan.					
29. I would not give up trying to fulfil the learning plan because I understand why I am learning with it.					

PART 3

	1 = I agree	**2** = I rather agree	**3** = I rather disagree	**4** = I strongly disagree
30. I feel I owe it to my parents/teachers to fulfil the learning plan.				
31. I can also solve the difficult tasks in class when I try hard.				
32. I find it easy to understand new class material.				
33. When I have to solve a difficult task on the blackboard, I am confident that I can do it.				
34. Even when I should be ill for some time, I can still get good marks.				
35. When the teacher goes through the learning material faster, I can still get good marks.				
36. Even when the teacher doubts my abilities, I am confident that I can get good marks.				
37. I am confident that I can even then good results if I get one bad mark.				

Please, check that you have filled in all questions!

Student Questionnaire 2 (Example)

Please Note: This is a voluntary study! If you do not wish to fill in the questions, please let your teacher know and return the questionnaire to her/him. Do not throw the questionnaire in a rubbish bin!

Why is this study important?

The following questions have three goals:

1. They shall show how responsible students feel for their learning plan.

2. They shall help understand why students feel responsible for their learning plan.

3. They shall show whether students feel confident towards new tasks in class.

Instructions

Please, read the instructions carefully.

1. Take as much time as you need. It should take about 15 minutes.

2. Tick the box that you agree with. Even though it may be hard to decide sometimes, please, do NOT tick in between boxes.

Do: ☐ ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Don't: ☐ ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. Tick one box only!

Do: ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Don't: ☑ ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐

4. If you need to change an answer, simply scribble through it and tick the correct box.

Do: ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

5. Fill in all questions!

PART 1

1. I am a ....

boy ☐

girl ☐

2. I am in year ...

7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐

3. At home, I mostly speak ... – more than 1 answer allowed

English	☐	Arabic	☐	Serbian	☐
Japanese	☐	Greek	☐	Spanish	☐
Cantonese	☐	Vietnamese	☐	German	☐
Mandarin	☐	Italian	☐	French	☐

Other: _____

PART 2

How have you been feeling for the past 3 weeks until now?

4. I have been finding German...

very hard ☐

rather hard ☐

rather easy ☐

very easy ☐

5. I have been enjoying learning German…

not at all ☐

not very much ☐

quite a bit ☐

very much ☐

6. When we have been working on something in German, I have been feeling bored...

bored all the time ☐
bored some of the time ☐
interested most of the time ☐
interested all the time ☐

7. When I've been in the German class, I have been participating in class discussions.

not at all ☐
not very much ☐
quite a bit ☐
very much ☐

8. I have been paying attention in the German class.

not at all ☐
not very much ☐
quite a bit ☐
very much ☐

9. How much have you been trying to achieve your goals under your learning plan?

I have been doing my best. ☐
I have been working just as much as I had to. ☐
I have been working quite a bit. ☐
I have really been bothering. ☐

10. How much do you think you have been learning through the work under your learning plan?

a lot. ☐
quite a bit ☐
rather little. ☐
nothing. ☐

11. Do you prefer to work under the plan than to work without it? It...

is not better at all. _____ ☐
not so much better. _____ ☐
is quite a bit better. _____ ☐
is definitely better. _____ ☐

12. Have your parents/guardians been encouraging you to fulfil the tasks under the learning plan? (<u>If you didn't</u> need their help for the past 3 weeks: Do you think they would have helped you if you had needed them?) They...

absolutely have been. _____ ☐
have been a little. _____ ☐
have not really been helping me. _____ ☐
have not been helping me at all. _____ ☐

13. Have your parents/guardians been helping you to fulfil tasks under the learning plan, e.g.: giving advice, solving questions? (<u>If you didn't</u> need their help for the past 3 weeks: Do you think they would have helped you if you had needed them?) They...

absolutely have been. _____ ☐
have been a little. _____ ☐
have not really been helping me. _____ ☐
have not been helping me at all. _____ ☐

PART 2

PLEASE NOTE:

1. IF YOU THINK THAT A SITUATION DOES NOT APPLY TO YOU, USE THE SCALE (3 - 5) BELOW TO MARK

YOUR OPINION.

2. SOME QUESTIONS ASK YOU TO IMAGINE A SITUATION: e.g. – IF...

IMAGINE YOU WERE IN THAT SITUATION AND HOW YOU WOULD FEEL. MARK YOUR OPINION ON THE

SCALE BELOW (1-5).

	1 = Fully agree	**2** = I rather agree	**3** = I am not sure	**4** = I disagree	**5 =** I strongly disagree
14. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my school-time working under the learning plan.					
15. I really feel that I am responsible for fulfilling the tasks under my learning plan.					
16. I feel that the learning plan is useful.					
17. I understand why I am working under this learning plan.					
18. Fulfilling the tasks under the learning plan means a lot to me.					
19. I enjoy following the tasks of the learning plan.					
20. I would still enjoy working with the learning plan, no matter what my classmates think about it.					
21. I would get into too much trouble if I complained about the learning plan.					

22. I follow the learning plan because of the pressure from my teachers.					
23. I have no other option but to accept the learning plan.					
24. I only do the tasks under the learning plan because I do not want to get bad marks.					
25. I try to fulfil the tasks according to the learning plan on time because I do not want to look stupid in front of my classmates.					
26. I would feel bad if I did not fulfil the tasks under the learning plan.					
27. The learning plan makes me feel that it brings me and my classmates closer together as a group.					
28. Even if the tasks sometimes seem hard to do, I don't feel that it would be right to give up.					
29. I would feel guilty if I did not do my best to fulfil the learning plan.					
30. I would not give up trying to fulfil the learning plan because I don't want to disappoint my teacher.					
31. I feel I owe it to my parents/teachers to fulfil the learning plan.					

PART 3

	1 = I agree	**2** = I rather agree	**3** = I rather disagree	**4** = I strongly disagree
32. I can also solve the difficult tasks in class when I try hard.				
33. I find it easy to understand new class material.				
34. When I have to solve a difficult task in front of the class, I am confident that I can do it.				
35. Even when I should be ill for some time, I can still get good marks.				
36. When the teacher goes through the learning material faster, I can still get good marks.				
37. Even when the teacher doubts my abilities, I am confident that I can get good marks.				
38. I am confident that I can even then good results if I get one bad mark.				

Please, check that you have filled in all questions!

Student Questionnaire 3 (Example)

Please Note: This is a voluntary study! If you do not wish to fill in the questions, please let your teacher know and return the questionnaire to her/him. Do not throw the questionnaire in a rubbish bin!

Why is this study important?

The following questions have three goals:

1. They shall show how responsible students feel for their learning plan.

2. They shall help understand why students feel responsible for their learning plan.

3. They shall show whether students feel confident towards new tasks in class.

Instructions

Please, read the instructions carefully.

1. Take as much time as you need. It should take about 15 minutes.

2. Tick the box that you agree with. Even though it may be hard to decide sometimes, please, do NOT tick in between boxes.

Do: ☐ ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Don't: ☐ ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

3. Tick one box only!

Do: ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Don't: ☑ ☑ ☐ ☐ ☐

4. If you need to change an answer, simply scribble through it and tick the correct box.

Do: ☑ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

5. Fill in all questions!

PART 1

1. I am a ....

boy ☐

girl ☐

2. I am in year ...

7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐ 12 ☐

3. At home, I mostly speak ... – more than 1 answer allowed

English	☐	Arabic	☐	Serbian	☐
Japanese	☐	Greek	☐	Spanish	☐
Cantonese	☐	Vietnamese	☐	German	☐
Mandarin	☐	Italian	☐	French	☐

Other: _____

PART 2

How have you been feeling for the past 3 weeks until now?

4. I have been finding German...

very hard ☐

rather hard ☐

rather easy ☐

very easy ☐

5. I have been enjoying learning German…

not at all ☐

not very much ☐

quite a bit ☐

very much ☐

6. When we have been working on something in German, I have been feeling...

bored all the time ☐
bored some of the time ☐
interested most of the time ☐
interested all the time ☐

7. When I've been in the German class, I have been participating in class discussions.

not at all ☐
not very much ☐
quite a bit ☐
very much ☐

8. I have been paying attention in the German class.

not at all ☐
not very much ☐
quite a bit ☐
very much ☐

9. How much have you been trying to achieve your goals under your learning plan?

I have been doing my best. ☐
I have been working just as much as I had to. ☐
I have been working quite a bit. ☐
I have really been bothering. ☐

10. How much do you think you have been learning through the work under your learning plan?

a lot. ☐
quite a bit ☐
rather little. ☐
nothing. ☐

11. Do you prefer to work under the plan than to work without it? It...

is not better at all. _____ ☐
not so much better. _____ ☐
is quite a bit better. _____ ☐
is definitely better. _____ ☐

12. Have your parents/guardians been encouraging you to fulfil the tasks under the learning plan? (<u>If you didn't</u> need their help for the past 3 weeks: Do you think they would have helped you if you had needed them?) They...

absolutely have been. _____ ☐
have been a little. _____ ☐
have not really been helping me. _____ ☐
have not been helping me at all. _____ ☐

13. Have your parents/guardians been helping you to fulfil tasks under the learning plan, e.g.: giving advice, solving questions? (<u>If you didn't</u> need their help for the past 3 weeks: Do you think they would have helped you if you had needed them?) They...

absolutely have been. _____ ☐
have been a little. _____ ☐
have not really been helping me. _____ ☐
have not been helping me at all. _____ ☐

PART 2

<u>PLEASE NOTE:</u>

1. IF YOU THINK THAT A SITUATION DOES NOT APPLY TO YOU, USE THE SCALE (3 - 5) BELOW TO MARK

YOUR OPINION.

2. SOME QUESTIONS ASK YOU TO IMAGINE A SITUATION: e.g. – IF...

IMAGINE YOU WERE IN THAT SITUATION AND HOW YOU WOULD FEEL. MARK YOUR OPINION ON THE

SCALE BELOW (1-5).

	1 = Fully agree	**2** = I rather agree	**3** = I am not sure	**4** = I disagree	**5 =** I strongly disagree
14. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my school-time working under the learning plan.					
15. I really feel that I am responsible for fulfilling the tasks under my learning plan.					
16. I feel that the learning plan is useful.					
17. I understand why I am working under this learning plan.					
18. Fulfilling the tasks under the learning plan means a lot to me.					
19. I enjoy following the tasks of the learning plan.					
20. I would still enjoy working with the learning plan, no matter what my classmates think about it.					
21. I would get into too much trouble if I complained about the learning plan.					

22. I follow the learning plan because of the pressure from my teachers.					
23. I have no other option but to accept the learning plan.					
24. I only do the tasks under the learning plan because I do not want to get bad marks.					
25. I try to fulfil the tasks according to the learning plan on time because I do not want to look stupid in front of my classmates.					
26. I would feel bad if I did not fulfil the tasks under the learning plan.					
27. The learning plan makes me feel that it brings me and my classmates closer together as a group.					
28. Even if the tasks sometimes seem hard to do, I don't feel that it would be right to give up.					
29. I would feel guilty if I did not do my best to fulfil the learning plan.					
30. I would not give up trying to fulfil the plan because I don't want to disappoint my teacher.					
31. I feel I owe it to my parents/teachers to fulfil the learning plan.					

PART 3

	1 = I agree	**2** = I rather agree	**3** = I rather disagree	**4** = I strongly disagree
32. I can also solve the difficult tasks in class when I try hard.				
33. I find it easy to understand new class material.				
34. When I have to solve a difficult task in front of the class, I am confident that I can do it.				
35. Even when I should be ill for some time, I can still get good marks.				
36. When the teacher goes through the learning material faster, I can still get good marks.				
37. Even when the teacher doubts my abilities, I am confident that I can get good marks.				
38. I am confident that I can even then good results if I get one bad mark.				

Please, check that you have filled in all questions!

9. Interview Questions for Students

Abbreviations:

Learning Objectives – LO

Learning Context - LCX

Learning Strategies - LS

Self-Assessment - SE

Learning Content – LC

Social Forms of Learning - SF

1. For how long have you been studying German?
2. For how long have you been working with the Personal Learning Plan[49]? (background)
3. What do you think are the benefits of working with the Personal Learning Plan? (LO regarding task fulfilment, SA, LS, self-efficacy)
4. Can you briefly describe what a Personal Learning Plan is? (understanding)
5. Can you decide about the tasks that you need to fulfil under the PLP? (LO)
6. Are you usually confident that you achieve your personal learning goals? (self-efficacy)
7. Do you receive marks for completing the PLP?
    a. If yes: Do you think that that is a problem?
8. How do you check whether you have achieved the goals of the PLP? (SE)
9. Do you think that the PLP helps you to learn German better?
    a. If yes: Why and How does the PLP help you?
10. Do you often work on your own, with a partner or in groups during German class? (SF)
11. Do you work together on the tasks of the PLP with a partner or in groups? (SF)
12. What do you think is important to you that you feel motivated to complete the tasks in German (under the PLP) ? (LO, LCX, SE, LC)
13. Who encourages you to fulfil your PLP? (LS,SE, motivation)
14. Do you need some tips from your teacher or parents on how to fulfil the tasks of the PLP? (LS, motivation)
15. Can you ask your classmates for help if you struggle with the tasks? (LCX)
16. Do you agree with the way the PLP works? (LCX)
    a. Is there anything you would like to change?
17. Do you know any strategies that you use to fulfil new tasks or learn something new? (LS, awareness)
18. Do you think that you study more because you work with the PLP? (engagement)
19. What happens if you do not fulfil the PLP?
20. Do you think it is necessary to get a bad mark or receive another form of punishment if you do not fulfil the plan?

---

[49] PLP stands for Personal Learning Plan.

21. Do you think that you know more about what you are good at and not so good at since working with the PLP?

10. Interview Questions for Teachers

Abbreviations:

Learning Objectives – LO

Learning Context - LCX

Learning Strategies - LS

Self-Assessment - SE

Learning Content – LC

Social Forms of Learning - SF

1. For how long have you been using the PLP[50] in the language classroom? (experience)
2. Which benefits for students and teachers do you see in the use of PLP in language learning? (LO regarding task fulfilment, SA, LS, students' self-efficacy)
3. Do you see any difficulties or risks in the use of the PLP? (awareness, all categ. + motivation)
4. How do you prepare the work with PLP in the language classroom? (all categ.)
    a. Do you observe your students before you set language learning goals? (awareness, LCX)
    b. What are the categories of the learning plan that you use? (LC)
    c. How do you determine the language learning goals? (LC, LO)
    d. Can your students tell you if they are interested in a particular topic? (LC)
    e. Are your students involved in the process of defining the learning goals? (LO)
    f. What is the usual period of time for reaching the learning goals in a plan? (time)
    g. Based on which factors do you decide on the time limit? (motivation)
    h. How do you assess the students' work defined in the PLP? (SA, assessment through teacher)
5. Do you usually explain to students how the PLP works and why it is useful? (LCX, LS, SA)
6. What type of resources (books, computers, DVDs, music etc.) do students get access to in order to pursue their learning goals? (LCX)
7. Do you prefer students to work on their own, with a partner or in groups during German? (SF)
8. Do your students work on their own, with a partner or in groups on their PLP?
9. What happens if a student approaches you because s/he has a problem reaching the learning goals? (LCX, motivation, SA, LS)
    a. Do you give them tips on how to achieve their learning goals (i.e. time management, monitoring their own learning performance) (LS, SA)

[50] PLP stands for Personal Learning Plan.

   b. Do you explicitly offer your students your assistance if they struggle with completing their tasks, i.e. due to poor time management? (motivation, LCX)

10. Are there any sanctions if a student does not reach the learning goals or refuses the work? (LO, LCX, SE)
11. Do you talk to the students about ways and strategies to tackle the learning goals (i.e. time management, monitoring their own learning performance)? (LS, SA)
12. What is your impression: Do students enjoy working with the PLP?
13. What do students tend to struggle with when trying to complete their tasks? (LCX, motivation, SA, LS, LC, LO)
14. Are students competitive or collaborative? (LCX)
15. How do you check that the student achieved the tasks they were asked to do?
16. How much time did you spend roughly on evaluating the tasks? (time)
17. Do you give your students feedback about their work? (awareness, motivation + all categ.)
    a. If not, why did you not give any feedback? (LCX, motivation)

Appendix B - Factor Analysis and Reliability of Questionnaires

1. Commitment Questionnaire - Factor Analysis – Time 1

Descriptive Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Analysis N
affHappiness	2.87	1.533	299
affResponsibility	1.86	.956	299
affUsefulness	2.64	1.437	299
affUnderstanding	2.40	1.220	299
affMeaning	2.93	1.330	299
conTrouble	3.12	1.162	299
conForce	2.85	1.419	299
conLackofOption	2.51	1.347	299
conPunishment	3.11	1.266	299
conEmbarrassment	3.75	1.077	299
normConscience	2.88	1.260	299
normLoyalty	2.97	1.123	299
normPersistence	2.37	1.158	299
normGuilt	2.68	1.253	299
normDutytoParents	2.74	1.232	299
conEnjoyandForce	2.87	1.191	299
normReasonability	2.64	1.200	299
normDutytoTeachers	2.94	1.295	299

a. Time = 1

Communalities[a]

	Initial	Extraction
affHappiness	.753	.781
affResponsibility	.467	.449
affUsefulness	.820	.855
affUnderstanding	.630	.607
affMeaning	.733	.736
conTrouble	.291	.298
conForce	.699	.720
conLackofOption	.490	.486
conPunishment	.546	.621
conEmbarrassment	.323	.275
normConscience	.443	.451
normLoyalty	.300	.245
normPersistence	.649	.687
normGuilt	.658	.718
normDutytoParents	.445	.454
conEnjoyandForce	.592	.576
normReasonability	.677	.683
normDutytoTeachers	.720	.719

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 1

Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor		
	1	2	3
affHappiness	.823	-.109	.301
affResponsibility	.661	.108	
affUsefulness	.887		.248
affUnderstanding	.770		.117
affMeaning	.851		.107
conTrouble	-.305	.392	.227
conForce	-.731	.428	
conLackofOption	-.422	.456	.316
conPunishment	-.590	.439	.282
conEmbarrassment	-.302	.429	
normConscience	.426	.473	-.213
normLoyalty	.362	.294	-.166
normPersistence	.751	.286	-.204
normGuilt	.671	.455	-.248
normDutytoParents	.565	.367	
conEnjoyandForce	.717		.237
normReasonability	.814	.135	
normDutytoTeachers	.841		

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 1

b. 3 factors extracted. 7 iterations required.

Factor Transformation Matrix[a]

Factor	1	2	3
1	.714	.550	-.434
2	-.068	.670	.739
3	.697	-.498	.515

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Time = 1

2. *Commitment Questionnaire - Reliability – Time 1*

Reliability for Affective Commitment Scale

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	325	90.8
	Excluded[a]	33	9.2
	Total	358	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 1

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.920	.919	6

a. Time = 1

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
affHappiness	2.78	1.539	325
affResponsibility	1.84	.959	325
affUsefulness	2.55	1.432	325
affUnderstanding	2.35	1.218	325
affMeaning	2.88	1.331	325
normDutytoTeachers	2.91	1.292	325

a. Time = 1

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	affHappiness	affResponsibility	affUsefulness	affUnderstanding	affMeaning	normDutytoTeachers
affHappiness	1.000	.526	.831	.631	.733	.716
affResponsibility	.526	1.000	.584	.580	.544	.456
affUsefulness	.831	.584	1.000	.709	.792	.736
affUnderstanding	.631	.580	.709	1.000	.677	.599
affMeaning	.733	.544	.792	.677	1.000	.709
normDutytoTeachers	.716	.456	.736	.599	.709	1.000

a. Time = 1

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.552	1.840	2.908	1.068	1.580	.167	6
Inter-Item Covariances	1.122	.565	1.831	1.265	3.237	.132	6

a. Time = 1

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
15.31	43.914	6.627	6

a. Time = 1

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.702	2.345	2.994	.648	1.276	.051	6
Inter-Item Covariances	.680	.355	.993	.638	2.796	.046	6

a. Time = 1

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
16.21	29.131	5.397	6

a. Time = 1

Reliability for Continuance Commitment

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	330	92.2
	Excluded[a]	28	7.8
	Total	358	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 1

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.780	.776	5

a. Time = 1

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
conTrouble	3.14	1.179	330
conForce	2.87	1.419	330
conLackofOption	2.50	1.344	330
conPunishment	3.12	1.260	330
conEmbarrassment	3.77	1.078	330

a. Time = 1

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	conTrouble	conForce	conLackofOption	conPunishment	conEmbarrassment
conTrouble	1.000	.423	.358	.426	.238
conForce	.423	1.000	.575	.567	.336
conLackofOption	.358	.575	1.000	.528	.223
conPunishment	.426	.567	.528	1.000	.413
conEmbarrassment	.238	.336	.223	.413	1.000

a. Time = 1

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	3.082	2.503	3.770	1.267	1.506	.214	5
Inter-Item Covariances	.661	.303	1.098	.795	3.626	.069	5

a. Time = 1

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
15.41	21.191	4.603	5

a. Time = 1

3. Commitment Questionnaire - Factor Analysis – Time 2

Descriptive Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Analysis N
affHappiness	2.65	1.581	224
affResponsibility	1.97	1.114	224
affUsefulness	2.49	1.442	224
affUnderstanding	2.29	1.347	224
affMeaning	2.87	1.321	224
affenjoyment	2.96	1.322	224
affgrouppressure	2.75	1.405	224
conTrouble	3.17	1.262	224
conForce	3.09	1.271	224
conLackofOption	2.48	1.343	224
conPunishment	2.60	1.280	224
conEmbarrassment	3.69	1.156	224
normConscience	2.83	1.236	224
normLoyalty	3.31	1.220	224
normPersistence	2.42	1.177	224
normGuilt	2.74	1.255	224
normDutytoTeachers	2.66	1.137	224
normDutytoParents	2.69	1.267	224

a. Time = 2

Correlation Matrix[a]

		affHappiness	affResponsibility	affUsefulness	affUnderstanding	affMeaning	affenjoyment	affgrouppressure	conTrouble	conForce	conLackofOption	conPunishment	conEmbarrassment	normConscience	normLoyalty	normPersistence	normGuilt	normDutytoTeachers	normDutytoParents
Correlation	affHappiness	1.000	.610	.871	.662	.727	.762	.808	-.202	-.375	-.175	-.335	-.038	.330	.550	.537	.333	.280	.358
	affResponsibility	.610	1.000	.702	.664	.661	.648	.637	-.114	-.277	-.104	-.263	.017	.504	.466	.575	.501	.402	.473
	affUsefulness	.871	.702	1.000	.756	.798	.790	.818	-.173	-.379	-.183	-.365	-.065	.345	.571	.593	.389	.337	.400
	affUnderstanding	.662	.664	.756	1.000	.667	.681	.677	-.140	-.330	-.138	-.301	-.031	.336	.510	.600	.346	.394	.385
	affMeaning	.727	.661	.798	.667	1.000	.814	.748	-.184	-.332	-.245	-.349	.059	.462	.587	.630	.520	.347	.397
	affenjoyment	.762	.648	.790	.681	.814	1.000	.775	-.214	-.393	-.319	-.400	-.019	.394	.594	.615	.464	.311	.384

Correlation Matrix[a]

	affHappiness	affResponsibility	affUsefulness	affUnderstanding	affMeaning	affenjoyment	affgroupressure	conTroublee	conForce	conLackofOption	conPunishment	conEmbarrassment	normConscience	normLoyalty	normPersistence	normGuilt	normDutytoTeachers	normDutytoParents
affgroupressure	.808	.637	.818	.677	.748	.775	1.000	-.222	-.419	-.250	-.400	-.056	.382	.529	.613	.433	.292	.388
conTroublee	-.202	-.114	-.173	-.140	-.184	-.214	-.222	1.000	.545	.395	.391	.257	.072	-.121	-.072	.025	.167	.172
conForce	-.375	-.277	-.379	-.330	-.332	-.393	-.419	.545	1.000	.569	.562	.404	.049	-.241	-.226	-.050	-.001	-.033
conLackofOption	-.175	-.104	-.183	-.138	-.245	-.319	-.250	.395	.569	1.000	.482	.261	.086	-.165	-.136	-.103	.008	.022
conPunishment	-.335	-.263	-.365	-.301	-.349	-.400	-.400	.391	.562	.482	1.000	.441	.057	-.197	-.185	-.099	.021	.054
conEmbarrassment	-.038	.017	-.065	-.031	.059	-.019	-.056	.257	.404	.261	.441	1.000	.212	.112	.077	.151	.241	.226
normConscience	.330	.504	.345	.336	.462	.394	.382	.072	.049	.086	.057	.212	1.000	.420	.508	.642	.454	.534
normLoyalty	.550	.466	.571	.510	.587	.594	.529	-.121	-.241	-.165	-.197	.112	.420	1.000	.493	.443	.389	.343
normPersistence	.537	.575	.593	.600	.630	.615	.613	-.072	-.226	-.136	-.185	.077	.508	.493	1.000	.571	.480	.407

Correlation Matrix[a]

	affHappiness	affResponsibility	affUsefulness	affUnderstanding	affMeaning	affenjoyment	affgrouppressure	conTrouble	conForce	conLackofOption	conPunishment	conEmbarrassment	normConscience	normLoyalty	normPersistence	normGuilt	normDutytoTeachers	normDutytoParents
normGuilt	.333	.501	.389	.346	.520	.464	.433	.025	-.050	-.103	-.099	.151	.642	.443	.571	1.000	.562	.459
normDutytoTeachers	.280	.402	.337	.394	.347	.311	.292	.167	-.001	.008	.021	.241	.454	.389	.480	.562	1.000	.556
normDutytoParents	.358	.473	.400	.385	.397	.384	.388	.172	-.033	.022	.054	.226	.534	.343	.407	.459	.556	1.000

a. Time = 2

Communalities[a]

	Initial	Extraction
affHappiness	.801	.803
affResponsibility	.626	.608
affUsefulness	.863	.911
affUnderstanding	.656	.632
affMeaning	.769	.754
affenjoyment	.774	.776
affgrouppressure	.765	.775
conTrouble	.368	.364
conForce	.585	.683
conLackofOption	.433	.472
conPunishment	.487	.541
conEmbarrassment	.350	.302
normConscience	.567	.571
normLoyalty	.460	.445
normPersistence	.576	.581
normGuilt	.600	.674
normDutytoTeachers	.507	.495
normDutytoParents	.482	.459

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 2

b. 3 factors extracted. 7 iterations required.

Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor		
	1	2	3
affHappiness	.831	-.114	.315
affResponsibility	.773	.101	
affUsefulness	.896		.316
affUnderstanding	.779		.159
affMeaning	.866		
affenjoyment	.871	-.108	
affgrouppressure	.859	-.125	.146
conTrouble	-.204	.551	.137
conForce	-.430	.669	.225
conLackofOption	-.273	.533	.337
conPunishment	-.393	.603	.149
conEmbarrassment		.545	
normConscience	.540	.479	-.223
normLoyalty	.660		
normPersistence	.734	.172	-.111
normGuilt	.606	.375	-.408
normDutytoTeachers	.485	.448	-.242
normDutytoParents	.515	.425	-.114

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 2

b. 3 factors extracted. 7 iterations required.

Rotated Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor		
	1	2	3
affHappiness	.868	.155	-.161
affResponsibility	.634	.441	-.106
affUsefulness	.920	.198	-.160
affUnderstanding	.729	.284	-.140
affMeaning	.745	.399	-.200
affenjoyment	.763	.341	-.279
affgrouppressure	.795	.277	-.258
conTrouble	-.127		.582
conForce	-.269		.781
conLackofOption			.679
conPunishment	-.278		.681
conEmbarrassment		.243	.493
normConscience	.282	.682	.162
normLoyalty	.514	.410	-.111
normPersistence	.526	.544	
normGuilt	.238	.785	
normDutytoTeachers	.228	.650	.140
normDutytoParents	.327	.567	.174

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Time = 2

b. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Factor Transformation Matrix[a]

Factor	1	2	3
1	.818	.514	-.256
2	-.069	.531	.845
3	.571	-.674	.470

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Time = 2

4. Commitment Questionnaire - Reliability - Time 2

Reliability for Affective Commitment

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	227	88.0
	Excluded[a]	31	12.0
	Total	258	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 2

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.949	.949	7

a. Time = 2

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
affHappiness	2.64	1.577	227
affResponsibility	1.96	1.109	227
affUsefulness	2.48	1.437	227
affUnderstanding	2.29	1.342	227
affMeaning	2.86	1.315	227
affenjoyment	2.96	1.323	227
affgrouppressure	2.74	1.404	227

a. Time = 2

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	affHappiness	affResponsibility	affUsefulness	affUnderstanding	affMeaning	affenjoyment	affgrouppressure
affHappiness	1.000	.610	.869	.664	.727	.764	.810
affResponsibility	.610	1.000	.702	.664	.661	.645	.637
affUsefulness	.869	.702	1.000	.756	.798	.784	.816
affUnderstanding	.664	.664	.756	1.000	.667	.681	.679
affMeaning	.727	.661	.798	.667	1.000	.811	.748
affenjoyment	.764	.645	.784	.681	.811	1.000	.777
affgrouppressure	.810	.637	.816	.679	.748	.777	1.000

a. Time = 2

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.565	1.965	2.965	1.000	1.509	.122	7
Inter-Item Covariances	1.350	.946	1.969	1.023	2.082	.077	7

a. Time = 2

Item-Total Statistics[a]

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
affHappiness	15.31	48.559	.850	.793	.939
affResponsibility	15.99	56.341	.730	.559	.949
affUsefulness	15.47	49.277	.911	.850	.933
affUnderstanding	15.66	52.889	.770	.620	.945
affMeaning	15.09	52.090	.838	.736	.940
affenjoyment	14.99	51.783	.850	.747	.939
affgrouppressure	15.21	50.687	.854	.745	.938

a. Time = 2

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
17.95	69.719	8.350	7

a. Time = 2

Reliability for Normative Commitment

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	224	86.8
	Excluded[a]	34	13.2
	Total	258	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 2

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.849	.849	6

a. Time = 2

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
normConscience	2.83	1.236	224
normLoyalty	3.31	1.220	224
normPersistence	2.42	1.177	224
normGuilt	2.74	1.255	224
normDutytoTeachers	2.66	1.137	224
normDutytoParents	2.69	1.267	224

a. Time = 2

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	normConscience	normLoyalty	normPersistence	normGuilt	normDutytoTeachers	normDutytoParents
normConscience	1.000	.420	.508	.642	.454	.534
normLoyalty	.420	1.000	.493	.443	.389	.343
normPersistence	.508	.493	1.000	.571	.480	.407
normGuilt	.642	.443	.571	1.000	.562	.459
normDutytoTeachers	.454	.389	.480	.562	1.000	.556
normDutytoParents	.534	.343	.407	.459	.556	1.000

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.776	2.424	3.308	.884	1.365	.086	6
Inter-Item Covariances	.715	.530	.997	.466	1.879	.015	6

a. Time = 2

Item-Total Statistics[a]

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
normConscience	13.82	21.107	.677	.505	.815
normLoyalty	13.35	22.658	.532	.305	.843
normPersistence	14.23	21.865	.643	.433	.822
normGuilt	13.92	20.648	.710	.547	.808
normDutytoTeachers	14.00	22.184	.640	.450	.823
normDutytoParents	13.96	21.712	.594	.412	.831

a. Time = 2

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
16.66	30.325	5.507	6

a. Time = 2

Reliability for Continuance Commitment

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	330	92.2
	Excluded[a]	28	7.8
	Total	358	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 1

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.780	.776	5

a. Time = 1

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
conTrouble	3.14	1.179	330
conForce	2.87	1.419	330
conLackofOption	2.50	1.344	330
conPunishment	3.12	1.260	330
conEmbarrassment	3.77	1.078	330

a. Time = 1

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	conTrouble	conForce	conLackofOption	conPunishment	conEmbarrassment
conTrouble	1.000	.423	.358	.426	.238
conForce	.423	1.000	.575	.567	.336
conLackofOption	.358	.575	1.000	.528	.223
conPunishment	.426	.567	.528	1.000	.413
conEmbarrassment	.238	.336	.223	.413	1.000

a. Time = 1

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	3.082	2.503	3.770	1.267	1.506	.214	5
Inter-Item Covariances	.661	.303	1.098	.795	3.626	.069	5

a. Time = 1

Item-Total Statistics[a]

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
conTrouble	12.27	15.377	.478	.238	.764
conForce	12.54	12.511	.664	.458	.700
conLackofOption	12.91	13.617	.581	.398	.731
conPunishment	12.28	13.402	.673	.455	.699
conEmbarrassment	11.64	16.626	.387	.190	.788

a. Time = 1

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
15.41	21.191	4.603	5

a. Time = 1

5. Commitment Questionnaire – Factor Analysis – Time 3

Descriptive Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Analysis N
affHappiness	2.91	1.642	252
affResponsibility	2.24	1.259	252
affUsefulness	2.73	1.523	252
affUnderstanding	2.42	1.388	252
affMeaning	3.07	1.407	252
affenjoyment	3.08	1.429	252
affgrouppressure	2.93	1.477	252
conTrouble	3.18	1.265	252
conForce	3.06	1.302	252
conLackofOption	2.46	1.267	252
conPunishment	2.51	1.245	252
conEmbarrassment	3.55	1.260	252
normConscience	2.98	1.313	252
normLoyalty	3.34	1.269	252
normPersistence	2.51	1.251	252
normGuilt	2.90	1.332	252
normDutytoTeachers	2.79	1.262	252
normDutytoParents	2.73	1.344	252

a. Time = 3

Correlation Matrix[a]

		affHappiness	affResponsibility	affUsefulness	affUnderstanding	affMeaning	affenjoyment	affgrouppressure	conTrouble	conForce	conLackofOption	conPunishment	conEmbarrassment	normConscience	normLoyalty	normPersistence	normGuilt	normDutytoTeachers	normDutytoParents
Correlation	affHappiness	1.000	.622	.901	.713	.789	.808	.843	.091	-.309	-.374	-.419	.165	.341	.535	.519	.466	.312	.395
	affResponsibility	.622	1.000	.672	.683	.645	.599	.576	.085	-.208	-.195	-.297	.056	.480	.461	.576	.518	.395	.424
	affUsefulness	.901	.672	1.000	.783	.813	.836	.854	.061	-.304	-.355	-.432	.141	.428	.580	.577	.534	.351	.406
	affUnderstanding	.713	.683	.783	1.000	.688	.696	.706	.026	-.298	-.310	-.345	.081	.394	.558	.460	.444	.308	.317
	affMeaning	.789	.645	.813	.688	1.000	.859	.786	.152	-.231	-.321	-.335	.227	.527	.631	.633	.614	.437	.512
	affenjoyment	.808	.599	.836	.696	.859	1.000	.827	.089	-.328	-.364	-.375	.226	.455	.635	.581	.572	.387	.453
	affgrouppressure	.843	.576	.854	.706	.786	.827	1.000	.077	-.296	-.307	-.365	.170	.416	.562	.564	.515	.319	.348
	conTrouble	.091	.085	.061	.026	.152	.089	.077	1.000	.449	.320	.277	.392	.101	.063	.132	.122	.221	.233

conForce	-.309	-.208	-.304	-.298	-.231	-.328	-.296	.449	1.000	.572	.538	.295	.031	-.060	-.113	-.112	.075	.015
conLackofOption	-.374	-.195	-.355	-.310	-.321	-.364	-.307	.320	.572	1.000	.579	.150	-.023	-.190	-.139	-.097	-.016	-.082
conPunishment	-.419	-.297	-.432	-.345	-.335	-.375	-.365	.277	.538	.579	1.000	.242	.050	-.228	-.132	-.062	.043	-.068
conEmbarrassment	.165	.056	.141	.081	.227	.226	.170	.392	.295	.150	.242	1.000	.274	.235	.121	.276	.368	.291
normConscience	.341	.480	.428	.394	.527	.455	.416	.101	.031	-.023	.050	.274	1.000	.482	.576	.748	.630	.476
normLoyalty	.535	.461	.580	.558	.631	.635	.562	.063	-.060	-.190	-.228	.235	.482	1.000	.514	.541	.455	.448
normPersistence	.519	.576	.577	.460	.633	.581	.564	.132	-.113	-.139	-.132	.121	.576	.514	1.000	.660	.522	.495
normGuilt	.466	.518	.534	.444	.614	.572	.515	.122	-.112	-.097	-.062	.276	.748	.541	.660	1.000	.655	.586
normDutytoTeachers	.312	.395	.351	.308	.437	.387	.319	.221	.075	-.016	.043	.368	.630	.455	.522	.655	1.000	.639
normDutytoParents	.395	.424	.406	.317	.512	.453	.348	.233	.015	-.082	-.068	.291	.476	.448	.495	.586	.639	1.000

a. Time = 3

Communalities[a]

	Initial	Extraction
affHappiness	.850	.856
affResponsibility	.609	.530
affUsefulness	.884	.900
affUnderstanding	.693	.639
affMeaning	.815	.822
affenjoyment	.832	.825
affgrouppressure	.803	.797
conTrouble	.374	.431
conForce	.546	.640
conLackofOption	.475	.479
conPunishment	.510	.531
conEmbarrassment	.353	.311
normConscience	.647	.654
normLoyalty	.536	.491
normPersistence	.586	.567
normGuilt	.712	.781
normDutytoTeachers	.597	.647
normDutytoParents	.519	.477

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 3

Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor		
	1	2	3
affHappiness	.856	-.210	.281
affResponsibility	.727		
affUsefulness	.903	-.189	.219
affUnderstanding	.770	-.173	.128
affMeaning	.900		.111
affenjoyment	.890	-.115	.139
affgrouppressure	.849	-.153	.229
conTrouble	.106	.522	.383
conForce	-.285	.684	.303
conLackofOption	-.344	.568	.194
conPunishment	-.367	.624	
conEmbarrassment	.227	.475	.184
normConscience	.622	.410	-.315
normLoyalty	.692	.109	
normPersistence	.711	.189	-.161
normGuilt	.736	.347	-.345
normDutytoTeachers	.564	.492	-.294
normDutytoParents	.576	.344	-.166

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 3

b. 3 factors extracted. 7 iterations required.

Factor Transformation Matrix[a]

Factor	1	2	3
1	.806	.584	-.097
2	-.272	.510	.816
3	.526	-.632	.569

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Time = 3

6. *Commitment Questionnaire - Reliability - Time 3*

Reliability for Affective Commitment

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	260	90.0
	Excluded[a]	29	10.0
	Total	289	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 3

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.953	.952	7

a. Time = 3

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
affHappiness	2.89	1.632	260
affResponsibility	2.23	1.252	260
affUsefulness	2.72	1.525	260
affUnderstanding	2.41	1.380	260
affMeaning	3.05	1.405	260
affenjoyment	3.05	1.432	260
affgrouppressure	2.92	1.476	260

a. Time = 3

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	affHappiness	affResponsibility	affUsefulness	affUnderstanding	affMeaning	affenjoyment	affgrouppressure
affHappiness	1.000	.627	.898	.715	.782	.797	.843
affResponsibility	.627	1.000	.677	.685	.636	.585	.578
affUsefulness	.898	.677	1.000	.783	.796	.806	.852
affUnderstanding	.715	.685	.783	1.000	.676	.679	.704
affMeaning	.782	.636	.796	.676	1.000	.849	.782
affenjoyment	.797	.585	.806	.679	.849	1.000	.816
affgrouppressure	.843	.578	.852	.704	.782	.816	1.000

a. Time = 3

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.755	2.231	3.054	.823	1.369	.103	7
Inter-Item Covariances	1.557	1.049	2.235	1.186	2.130	.107	7

a. Time = 3

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
19.28	80.050	8.947	7

a. Time = 3

Reliability for Normative Commitment

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	254	87.9
	Excluded[a]	35	12.1
	Total	289	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 3

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.883	.883	6

a. Time = 3

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
normConscience	2.98	1.316	254
normLoyalty	3.34	1.271	254
normPersistence	2.52	1.257	254
normGuilt	2.90	1.334	254
normDutytoTeachers	2.78	1.259	254
normDutytoParents	2.73	1.339	254

a. Time = 3

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	normConscience	normLoyalty	normPersistence	normGuilt	normDutytoTeachers	normDutytoParents
normConscience	1.000	.466	.555	.728	.627	.470
normLoyalty	.466	1.000	.519	.546	.451	.448
normPersistence	.555	.519	1.000	.664	.513	.493
normGuilt	.728	.546	.664	1.000	.648	.585
normDutytoTeachers	.627	.451	.513	.648	1.000	.638
normDutytoParents	.470	.448	.493	.585	.638	1.000

a. Time = 3

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.875	2.516	3.339	.823	1.327	.077	6
Inter-Item Covariances	.936	.722	1.278	.556	1.771	.025	6

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.875	2.516	3.339	.823	1.327	.077	6
Inter-Item Covariances	.936	.722	1.278	.556	1.771	.025	6

a. Time = 3

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
17.25	38.179	6.179	6

a. Time = 3

Reliability for Continuance Commitment

Case Processing Summary[b]

		N	%
Cases	Valid	259	89.6
	Excluded[a]	30	10.4
	Total	289	100.0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

b. Time = 3

Reliability Statistics[a]

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.763	.762	5

a. Time = 3

Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
conTrouble	3.19	1.266	259
conForce	3.07	1.303	259
conLackofOption	2.47	1.267	259
conPunishment	2.53	1.252	259
conEmbarrassment	3.54	1.261	259

a. Time = 3

Inter-Item Correlation Matrix[a]

	conTrouble	conForce	conLackofOption	conPunishment	conEmbarrassment
conTrouble	1.000	.465	.321	.296	.409
conForce	.465	1.000	.566	.549	.313
conLackofOption	.321	.566	1.000	.574	.156
conPunishment	.296	.549	.574	1.000	.259
conEmbarrassment	.409	.313	.156	.259	1.000

a. Time = 3

Summary Item Statistics[a]

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum / Minimum	Variance	N of Items
Item Means	2.959	2.467	3.544	1.077	1.437	.208	5
Inter-Item Covariances	.632	.249	.934	.686	3.759	.053	5

a. Time = 3

Scale Statistics[a]

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
14.80	20.698	4.550	5

a. Time = 3

7. Academic Self-efficacy Questionnaire – Factor Analysis – Time 1

Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.237	53.957	53.957	2.693	44.890	44.890
2	.711	11.845	65.802			
3	.593	9.882	75.684			
4	.547	9.110	84.793			
5	.533	8.875	93.668			
6	.380	6.332	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

8. Factor Analysis for Academic Self-efficacy – Time 2

Total Variance Explained

	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
Factor	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.144	52.402	52.402	2.594	43.230	43.230
2	.833	13.882	66.284			
3	.733	12.214	78.497			
4	.495	8.253	86.750			
5	.414	6.907	93.657			
6	.381	6.343	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

9. *Factor Analysis for Academic Self-efficacy – Time 3*

Academic Self-efficacy - Factor Matrix - Time 1, 2 and 3

Time 1

Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor
	1
effTry	.567
effConfidence	.693
effNoImpactIllness	.671
effSpeed	.713
effDoubtinSelf	.660
effMarks	.704

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 1

b. 1 factor extracted. 4 iterations required.

Time 2

Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor
	1
effTry	.491
effConfidence	.655
effNoImpactIllness	.688
effSpeed	.726
effDoubtinSelf	.705
effMarks	.652

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 2

b. 1 factor extracted. 5 iterations required.

Time 3

Factor Matrix[a,b]

	Factor
	1
effTry	.603
effConfidence	.769
effNoImpactIllness	.717
effSpeed	.707
effDoubtinSelf	.825
effMarks	.691

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. Time = 3

b. 1 factor extracted. 5 iterations required.

Academic Self-efficacy – Reliability – Time 1, 2 and 3

Reliability Statistics

Time	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
1	.829	.829	6
2	.818	.816	6
3	.865	.865	6

Appendix C

1. The Development of Student Commitment

Development of Commitment – Means for all Schools at 3 Times

				meanAFF	meanNORM	meanCON
				Mean	Mean	Mean
school	1	Time	1	4.2358	3.6423	2.4747
			2	4.1523	3.4572	2.8655
			3	4.1631	3.5143	2.8144
	2	Time	1	2.6915	2.9085	3.6308
			2	2.6740	2.8571	3.5209
			3	2.4680	2.5910	3.4246
	3	Time	1	3.4286	3.4983	2.9500
			2	3.5833	3.3567	2.7600
			3	3.3917	3.3250	3.2300

Development of Commitment – Individual Commitment Items – Time 1

Item Statistics

school		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	affHappiness	4.51	.908	137
	affResponsibility	4.57	.736	137
	affUsefulness	4.56	.736	137
	affUnderstanding	4.32	.857	137
	affMeaning	4.01	.911	137
	conEnjoyandForce	3.83	1.054	137
	normDutytoTeachers	3.88	1.022	137
2	affHappiness	2.13	1.113	165
	affResponsibility	3.82	1.030	165
	affUsefulness	2.50	1.213	165
	affUnderstanding	3.06	1.193	165
	affMeaning	2.37	1.175	165
	conEnjoyandForce	2.65	1.075	165
	normDutytoTeachers	2.41	1.131	165
3	affHappiness	3.15	1.137	20
	affResponsibility	4.05	.605	20
	affUsefulness	3.55	1.276	20
	affUnderstanding	3.70	1.129	20
	affMeaning	3.10	1.252	20
	conEnjoyandForce	3.10	1.071	20
	normDutytoTeachers	3.35	1.089	20

Normative Commitment - Descriptive Statistics

school		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	normConscience	146	1	5	3.18	1.263
	normLoyalty	138	1	5	3.06	1.201
	normPersistence	147	1	5	4.20	.841
	normGuilt	146	1	5	3.71	1.120
	normReasonability	145	1	5	3.97	.960
	normDutytoParents	136	1	5	3.79	1.012
	Valid N (listwise)	126				
2	normConscience	165	1	5	3.10	1.250
	normLoyalty	173	1	5	2.95	1.109
	normPersistence	165	1	5	3.19	1.199
	normGuilt	165	1	5	3.01	1.276
	normReasonability	165	1	5	2.87	1.197
	normDutytoParents	165	1	5	2.86	1.249
	Valid N (listwise)	165				
3	normConscience	20	1	5	3.30	1.031
	normLoyalty	20	2	5	3.25	.851
	normPersistence	20	3	5	3.95	.605
	normGuilt	20	1	5	3.50	1.147
	normReasonability	20	1	5	3.60	.883
	normDutytoParents	19	2	5	3.74	.806
	Valid N (listwise)	19				

Continuance Commitment - Descriptive Statistics

school		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	conTrouble	145	1	5	2.58	1.240
	conForce	144	1	5	2.15	1.251
	conLackofOption	147	1	5	3.12	1.543
	conPunishment	147	1	5	2.38	1.213
	conEmbarrassment	146	1	5	1.78	.921
	Valid N (listwise)	141				
2	conTrouble	169	1	5	3.12	1.068
	conForce	169	1	5	3.94	.998
	conLackofOption	169	1	5	3.85	1.063
	conPunishment	169	1	5	3.31	1.134
	conEmbarrassment	169	1	5	2.57	1.073
	Valid N (listwise)	169				
3	conTrouble	20	1	5	2.55	1.234
	conForce	20	2	5	3.15	1.137
	conLackofOption	20	1	5	3.40	1.314
	conPunishment	20	1	5	2.50	1.318
	conEmbarrassment	20	1	5	2.35	1.089
	Valid N (listwise)	20				

Significance of Commitment Development over Time

ANOVA

school			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	meanAFF	Between Groups	4.277	2	2.138	5.276	**.005**
		Within Groups	153.608	379	.405		
		Total	157.884	381			
	meanNORM	Between Groups	2.398	2	1.199	2.346	.097
		Within Groups	193.666	379	.511		
		Total	196.064	381			
	meanCON	Between Groups	14.028	2	7.014	8.689	**.000**
		Within Groups	305.960	379	.807		
		Total	319.988	381			
2	meanAFF	Between Groups	15.676	2	7.838	7.517	**.001**
		Within Groups	401.467	385	1.043		
		Total	417.143	387			
	meanNORM	Between Groups	7.527	2	3.764	3.602	**.028**
		Within Groups	397.041	380	1.045		
		Total	404.568	382			
	meanCON	Between Groups	1.198	2	.599	.876	.417
		Within Groups	258.988	379	.683		
		Total	260.186	381			
3	meanAFF	Between Groups	1.140	2	.570	.700	.501
		Within Groups	46.389	57	.814		
		Total	47.528	59			
	meanNORM	Between Groups	.341	2	.170	.426	.655
		Within Groups	22.801	57	.400		
		Total	23.142	59			
	meanCON	Between Groups	2.548	2	1.274	2.180	.122
		Within Groups	33.316	57	.584		
		Total	35.864	59			

2. The Development of Academic Self-efficacy

school	Time		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	1	meanEFF	147	1.5000	4.0000	2.969048	.4824823
	2	meanEFF	115	2.0000	4.0000	3.025797	.5283588
	3	meanEFF	120	1.0000	4.0000	3.009722	.6348191
2	1	meanEFF	163	1.0000	4.0000	2.926380	.6591912
	2	meanEFF	113	1.0000	4.0000	2.877581	.6358260
	3	meanEFF	115	1.0000	4.0000	2.801449	.6566854
3	1	meanEFF	20	2.5000	3.6667	3.060000	.3126196
	2	meanEFF	19	2.1667	4.0000	3.236842	.4978838
	3	meanEFF	20	2.0000	4.0000	3.058333	.6028078

3. The Link between Academic Self-efficacy and Student Commitment

ANOVA Table

school			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	meanEFF * Time	Between Groups (Combined)	.228	2	.114	.380	.684
		Within Groups	113.768	379	.300		
		Total	113.996	381			
2	meanEFF * Time	Between Groups (Combined)	1.053	2	.527	1.239	.291
		Within Groups	164.834	388	.425		
		Total	165.887	390			
3	meanEFF * Time	Between Groups (Combined)	.407	2	.203	.861	.428
		Within Groups	13.223	56	.236		
		Total	13.630	58			

Correlation between Academic Self-efficacy and Affective Commitment

Correlations

Time			meanEFF	meanAFF
1	meanEFF	Pearson Correlation	1	.162**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		**.003**
		N	330	330
	meanAFF	Pearson Correlation	.162**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
		N	330	340
2	meanEFF	Pearson Correlation	1	.273**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		**.000**
		N	247	220
	meanAFF	Pearson Correlation	.273**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	220	227
3	meanEFF	Pearson Correlation	1	.244**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		**.000**
		N	255	254
	meanAFF	Pearson Correlation	.244**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
		N	254	263

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Link between Affective Commitment and Academic Self-efficacy by School and Time

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable:meanEFF

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	18.959[a]	9	2.107	6.137	.000	.066	55.231	1.000
Intercept	260.936	1	260.936	760.159	.000	.495	760.159	1.000
meanAFF	11.633	1	11.633	33.889	**.000**	.042	33.889	1.000
school	2.791	2	1.396	4.066	**.018**	.010	8.132	.723
Time	.239	2	.119	.347	.707	.001	.695	.106
school * Time	1.136	4	.284	.827	.508	.004	3.309	.266
Error	266.373	776	.343					
Total	7097.894	786						
Corrected Total	285.332	785						

a. R Squared = .066 (Adjusted R Squared = .056)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

The Link between Normative/Continuance Commitment and Academic Self-efficacy - Time 1, 2 and 3

Correlations

Time			meanEFF
1	meanNORM	Pearson Correlation	0.134
		Sig. (2-tailed)	**.015**
		N	330
	meanCON	Pearson Correlation	-.018
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.747
		N	330
2	meanNORM	Pearson Correlation	.161*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	**.017**
		N	220
	meanCON	Pearson Correlation	-.178**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	**.008**
		N	220
3	meanNORM	Pearson Correlation	.139*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	**.026**
		N	254
	meanCON	Pearson Correlation	-.022
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.727
		N	254

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Link of Normative/Continuance Commitment and Academic Self-efficacy by School and Time

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable:meanEFF

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	11.366[a]	10	1.137	3.215	.000	.040	32.154	.989
Intercept	222.178	1	222.178	628.500	.000	.448	628.500	1.000
meanNORM	3.731	1	3.731	10.555	**.001**	.013	10.555	.901
meanCON	.392	1	.392	1.110	.292	.001	1.110	.183
school	2.329	2	1.164	3.294	**.038**	.008	6.588	.625
Time	.221	2	.110	.312	.732	.001	.624	.100
school * Time	1.752	4	.438	1.239	.293	.006	4.956	.391
Error	273.966	775	.354					
Total	7097.894	786						
Corrected Total	285.332	785						

a. R Squared = .040 (Adjusted R Squared = .027)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

4. The Development of Student Engagement

Behavioural Engagement

Case Processing Summary

		Cases					
		Included		Excluded		Total	
school		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
1	engagementREC * Time	380	99.2%	3	.8%	383	100.0%
	Participation * Time	236	61.6%	147	38.4%	383	100.0%
2	engagementREC * Time	398	86.1%	64	13.9%	462	100.0%
	Participation * Time	224	48.5%	238	51.5%	462	100.0%
3	engagementREC * Time	60	100.0%	0	.0%	60	100.0%
	Participation * Time	40	66.7%	20	33.3%	60	100.0%

Report

school	Time		engagementREC	Participation
1	1	Mean	3.58	
		N	144	
		Std. Deviation	.695	
	2	Mean	3.27	2.91
		N	116	116
		Std. Deviation	.773	.729
	3	Mean	3.37	2.89
		N	120	120
		Std. Deviation	.788	.818
	Total	Mean	3.42	2.90
		N	380	236
		Std. Deviation	.759	.774
2	1	Mean	3.00	
		N	177	
		Std. Deviation	1.034	
	2	Mean	2.56	2.53
		N	93	93
		Std. Deviation	1.068	.788
	3	Mean	1.97	2.93
		N	128	131
		Std. Deviation	.887	.670
	Total	Mean	2.57	2.76
		N	398	224
		Std. Deviation	1.090	.747
3	1	Mean	3.50	
		N	20	
		Std. Deviation	.761	
	2	Mean	3.25	2.70
		N	20	20
		Std. Deviation	.716	.733
	3	Mean	3.30	2.35
		N	20	20
		Std. Deviation	.923	.671
	Total	Mean	3.35	2.53
		N	60	40
		Std. Deviation	.799	.716

ANOVA Table[a,b,c]

school				Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	engagementREC * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	6.563	2	3.282	5.843	**.003**
			Linearity	3.209	1	3.209	5.713	.017
			Deviation from Linearity	3.355	1	3.355	5.973	.015
		Within Groups		211.742	377	.562		
		Total		218.305	379			
	Participation * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	.029	1	.029	.048	.827
		Within Groups		140.730	234	.601		
		Total		140.758	235			
2	engagementREC * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	79.002	2	39.501	39.722	**.000**
			Linearity	78.606	1	78.606	79.046	.000
			Deviation from Linearity	.396	1	.396	.398	.528
		Within Groups		392.800	395	.994		
		Total		471.802	397			
	Participation * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	8.895	1	8.895	17.088	**.000**
		Within Groups		115.564	222	.521		
		Total		124.460	223			
3	engagementREC * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	.700	2	.350	.540	.586
			Linearity	.400	1	.400	.617	.435
			Deviation from Linearity	.300	1	.300	.463	.499
		Within Groups		36.950	57	.648		
		Total		37.650	59			
	Participation * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	1.225	1	1.225	2.483	.123
		Within Groups		18.750	38	.493		
		Total		19.975	39			

a. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Participation * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 1.

b. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Participation * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 2.

c. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Participation * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 3.

Measures of Association

school		R	R Squared	Eta	Eta Squared
1	engagementREC * Time	-.121	.015	.173	.030
	Participation * Time			.014	.000
2	engagementREC * Time	-.408	.167	.409	.167
	Participation * Time			.267	.071
3	engagementREC * Time	-.103	.011	.136	.019
	Participation * Time			.248	.061

Psychological Engagement

Case Processing Summary

		Cases					
		Included		Excluded		Total	
school		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
1	Attitude * Time	236	61.6%	147	38.4%	383	100.0%
	attention * Time	236	61.6%	147	38.4%	383	100.0%
2	Attitude * Time	225	48.7%	237	51.3%	462	100.0%
	attention * Time	222	48.1%	240	51.9%	462	100.0%
3	Attitude * Time	40	66.7%	20	33.3%	60	100.0%
	attention * Time	40	66.7%	20	33.3%	60	100.0%

ANOVA Table[a,b,c,d,e,f]

school				Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Attitude * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	.783	1	.783	1.654	.200
		Within Groups		110.776	234	.473		
		Total		111.559	235			
	attention * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.026	1	2.026	4.475	.035
		Within Groups		105.953	234	.453		
		Total		107.979	235			
2	Attitude * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	7.568	1	7.568	12.644	.000
		Within Groups		133.472	223	.599		
		Total		141.040	224			
	attention * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	9.189	1	9.189	9.807	.002
		Within Groups		206.131	220	.937		
		Total		215.320	221			
3	Attitude * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	.625	1	.625	1.471	.233
		Within Groups		16.150	38	.425		
		Total		16.775	39			
	attention * Time	Between Groups	(Combined)	.625	1	.625	1.227	.275
		Within Groups		19.350	38	.509		
		Total		19.975	39			

a. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Attitude * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 1.

b. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for attention * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 1.

c. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Attitude * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 2.

d. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for attention * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 2.

e. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for Attitude * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 3.

f. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for attention * Time cannot be computed for split: school = 3.

Measures of Association

school		Eta	Eta Squared
1	Attitude * Time	.084	.007
	attention * Time	.137	.019
2	Attitude * Time	.232	.054
	attention * Time	.207	.043
3	Attitude * Time	.193	.037
	attention * Time	.177	.031

5. *The Link between Student Engagement and Student Commitment*

Pearson Correlation between Active Engagement and Commitment

		engagementREC	Participation
engagementREC	Pearson Correlation	1	.159**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		**.000**
	N	819	485
Participation	Pearson Correlation	.159**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	
	N	485	488
meanAFF	Pearson Correlation	.531**	.144**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.002**
	N	794	466
meanNORM	Pearson Correlation	.438**	.123**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.008**
	N	790	462
meanCON	Pearson Correlation	-.229**	-.083
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	.073
	N	788	464

The Link Between Engagement and Commitment

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a]

Dependent Variable:engagementREC

F	df1	df2	Sig.
6.414	8	777	.000

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable:engagementREC

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	293.307[a]	11	26.664	41.101	.000	.369	452.109	1.000
Intercept	75.943	1	75.943	117.060	.000	.131	117.060	1.000
meanAFF	16.423	1	16.423	25.314	.000	.032	25.314	.999
meanNORM	6.783	1	6.783	10.456	.001	.013	10.456	.898
meanCON	2.245	1	2.245	3.460	.063	.004	3.460	.459
school	15.278	2	7.639	11.775	.000	.030	23.550	.994
Time	9.126	2	4.563	7.034	.001	.018	14.068	.928
school * Time	23.772	4	5.943	9.161	.000	.045	36.643	1.000
Error	502.134	774	.649					
Total	8081.000	786						
Corrected Total	795.441	785						

a. R Squared = .369 (Adjusted R Squared = .360)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Report

engagementREC		meanAFF	meanNORM	meanCON
I haven't been bothering.	Mean	1.999058	2.252273	3.213636
	N	91	88	88
	Std. Deviation	.9988878	1.0247860	.9881111
I have been working quite a bit.	Mean	3.139631	3.071505	3.169919
	N	124	124	123
	Std. Deviation	1.0672941	.8674553	.8220013
I have working just as much as I had to.	Mean	3.254147	3.047638	3.148988
	N	248	247	247
	Std. Deviation	1.1297942	.8599240	.8522501
I have been doing my best.	Mean	4.075486	3.633082	2.666212
	N	331	331	330
	Std. Deviation	.8527879	.7229365	.9035068

Total	Mean	3.434815	3.208080	2.957297
	N	794	790	788
	Std. Deviation	1.1924155	.9332291	.9178489

6. *The Link Between Commitment and School*Time on Active Engagement and Participation*

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	Participation	24.458[a]	8	3.057	5.470	.000	.088	43.756	1.000
	engagementREC	191.076[c]	8	23.884	35.627	.000	.387	285.012	1.000
Intercept	Participation	81.213	1	81.213	145.294	.000	.244	145.294	1.000
	engagementREC	55.786	1	55.786	83.212	.000	.156	83.212	1.000
meanAFF	Participation	.677	1	.677	1.212	.272	.003	1.212	.196
	engagementREC	9.251	1	9.251	13.799	**.000**	.030	13.799	.960
meanNORM	Participation	1.099	1	1.099	1.965	.162	.004	1.965	.288
	engagementREC	2.138	1	2.138	3.189	.075	.007	3.189	.429
meanCON	Participation	.615	1	.615	1.100	.295	.002	1.100	.182
	engagementREC	.528	1	.528	.787	.375	.002	.787	.144
school	Participation	3.899	2	1.949	3.488	**.031**	.015	6.975	.651
	engagementREC	23.925	2	11.963	17.844	**.000**	.073	35.687	1.000
Time	Participation	.269	1	.269	.482	.488	.001	.482	.107
	engagementREC	.667	1	.667	.995	.319	.002	.995	.169
school * Time	Participation	9.884	2	4.942	8.842	**.000**	.038	17.684	.971
	engagementREC	11.159	2	5.580	8.323	**.000**	.036	16.646	.962
Error	Participation	252.088	451	.559					
	engagementREC	302.357	451	.670					
Total	Participation	3911.000	460						
	engagementREC	4287.000	460						
Corrected Total	Participation	276.546	459						
	engagementREC	493.433	459						

a. R Squared = .088 (Adjusted R Squared = .072)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

c. R Squared = .387 (Adjusted R Squared = .376)

Pearson Correlation between Commitment and Psychological Engagement Items – Time 1, 2 and 3

		Attitude	attention
meanAFF	Pearson Correlation	.259**	.323**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**
	N	467	465
meanNORM	Pearson Correlation	.226**	.273**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**
	N	463	461
meanCON	Pearson Correlation	-.134**	-.146**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	**.002**	**.001**
	N	465	463

The Link Between Commitment and the Factors Attitude and Attention

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	Attitude	33.334[a]	8	4.167	8.524	.000	.131	68.195	1.000
	attention	62.000[c]	8	7.750	12.299	.000	.179	98.390	1.000
Intercept	Attitude	82.244	1	82.244	168.256	.000	.271	168.256	1.000
	attention	113.829	1	113.829	180.641	.000	.286	180.641	1.000
meanAFF	Attitude	.814	1	.814	1.666	.197	.004	1.666	.251
	attention	.001	1	.001	.001	.975	.000	.001	.050
meanNORM	Attitude	2.095	1	2.095	4.286	**.039**	.009	4.286	.542
	attention	4.127	1	4.127	6.550	**.011**	.014	6.550	.724
meanCON	Attitude	1.323	1	1.323	2.706	.101	.006	2.706	.375
	attention	2.839	1	2.839	4.505	**.034**	.010	4.505	.563
school	Attitude	2.006	2	1.003	2.052	.130	.009	4.103	.422
	attention	11.458	2	5.729	9.092	**.000**	.039	18.183	.975
Time	Attitude	.133	1	.133	.272	.602	.001	.272	.082
	attention	4.377	1	4.377	6.946	**.009**	.015	6.946	.749
school * Time	Attitude	8.493	2	4.247	8.688	**.000**	.037	17.376	.969
	attention	1.855	2	.927	1.472	.231	.006	2.944	.314
Error	Attitude	220.939	452	.489					
	attention	284.824	452	.630					
Total	Attitude	3764.000	461						
	attention	4442.000	461						
Corrected Total	Attitude	254.273	460						
	attention	346.824	460						

a. R Squared = .131 (Adjusted R Squared = .116)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

c. R Squared = .179 (Adjusted R Squared = .164)

7. *Links between Demographic and Background Factors and Affective Student Commitment*

a. *Overall Correlations*

Correlations between Affective Commitment and Background Factors

Correlations

		meanAFF
meanAFF	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	830
school	Pearson Correlation	-.528**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	830
gender	Pearson Correlation	.454**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	830
year	Pearson Correlation	-.289**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	830
English	Pearson Correlation	.066
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.058
	N	830
subject	Pearson Correlation	.388**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	823
difficulty sub	Pearson Correlation	.095**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007
	N	821
subject liking	Pearson Correlation	.414**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	478
LP outcome REC	Pearson Correlation	.753**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	798
Parent support	Pearson Correlation	-.183**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	489
Parent help	Pearson Correlation	-.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	826

LP preference RECODED	Pearson Correlation	-.703**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	828

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

b. The Link Between Language Background on Affective Commitment

Number of Participants - Native vs Non-Native Speakers

English

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	no	64	7.1	7.3	7.3
	yes	812	89.7	92.7	100.0
	Total	876	96.8	100.0	
Missing	System	29	3.2		
Total		905	100.0		

Native-vs.-Non-Native Speakers

Report

meanAFF

school	ID_1	English	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	no outlier	no	4.600000	2	.2828427
		yes	4.274286	375	.6224902
		Total	4.276014	377	.6214555
2	no outlier	no	3.039850	38	1.2403145
		yes	2.493452	336	1.0072420
		Total	2.548969	374	1.0445594
3	no outlier	no	3.248352	13	1.0599952
		Yes	3.532298	46	.8583771
		Total	3.469734	59	.9045552

Case Processing Summary

			Cases					
			Included		Excluded		Total	
school	ID_1		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
1	outlier	meanAFF * English	5	100.0%	0	.0%	5	100.0%
	no outlier	meanAFF * English	377	99.7%	1	.3%	378	100.0%
2	outlier	meanAFF * English	14	100.0%	0	.0%	14	100.0%
	no outlier	meanAFF * English	374	83.5%	74	16.5%	448	100.0%
3	outlier	meanAFF * English	1	100.0%	0	.0%	1	100.0%
	no outlier	meanAFF * English	59	100.0%	0	.0%	59	100.0%

Report

meanAFF

school	ID_1	English	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	outlier	yes	3.091429	5	1.1985365
		Total	3.091429	5	1.1985365
	no outlier	no	4.600000	2	.2828427
		yes	4.274286	375	.6224902
		Total	4.276014	377	.6214555
2	outlier	no	2.642857	4	.4738035
		yes	2.517143	10	1.0242812
		Total	2.553061	14	.8840898
	no outlier	no	3.039850	38	1.2403145
		yes	2.493452	336	1.0072420
		Total	2.548969	374	1.0445594
3	outlier	no	3.200000	1	.
		Total	3.200000	1	.
	no outlier	no	3.248352	13	1.0599952
		yes	3.532298	46	.8583771
		Total	3.469734	59	.9045552

ANOVA Table[a,b,c,d,e,f]

school	ID_1				Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	no outlier	meanAFF * English	Between Groups	(Combined)	.211	1	.211	.546	.460
			Within Groups		145.003	375	.387		
			Total		145.214	376			
2	outlier	meanAFF * English	Between Groups	(Combined)	.045	1	.045	.054	.821
			Within Groups		10.116	12	.843		
			Total		10.161	13			
	no outlier	meanAFF * English	Between Groups	(Combined)	10.192	1	10.192	9.555	.002
			Within Groups		396.790	372	1.067		
			Total		406.982	373			
3	no outlier	meanAFF * English	Between Groups	(Combined)	.817	1	.817	.999	.322
			Within Groups		46.640	57	.818		
			Total		47.457	58			

Measures of Association

school	ID_1		Eta	Eta Squared
1	no outlier	meanAFF * English	.038	.001
2	outlier	meanAFF * English	.067	.004
	no outlier	meanAFF * English	.158	.025
3	no outlier	meanAFF * English	.131	.017

Number of Languages Spoken

Case Processing Summary

			Cases					
			Included		Excluded		Total	
school	ID_1		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
1	outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	5	100.0%	0	.0%	5	100.0%
	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	377	99.7%	1	.3%	378	100.0%
2	outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	14	100.0%	0	.0%	14	100.0%
	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	374	83.5%	74	16.5%	448	100.0%
3	outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	1	100.0%	0	.0%	1	100.0%
	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	59	100.0%	0	.0%	59	100.0%

Report

meanAFF

school	ID_1	TotalLang	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	outlier	1	2.757143	4	1.0818226
		2	4.428571	1	.
		Total	3.091429	5	1.1985365
	no outlier	1	4.276425	356	.6299202
		2	4.269048	21	.4663106
		Total	4.276014	377	.6214555
2	outlier	1	2.410390	11	.8068354
		2	3.714286	2	.4040610
		4	1.800000	1	.
		Total	2.553061	14	.8840898
	no outlier	1	2.537374	297	1.0583319
		2	2.607143	72	1.0190116
		3	2.400000	5	.5749889
		Total	2.548969	374	1.0445594
3	outlier	1	3.200000	1	.
		Total	3.200000	1	.
	no outlier	1	3.494077	41	.8438068
		2	3.530357	16	1.0094502
		3	2.485714	2	1.2929953
		Total	3.469734	59	.9045552

ANOVA Table[a,b,c]

school	ID_1				Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.235	1	2.235	1.910	.261
			Within Groups		3.511	3	1.170		
			Total		5.746	4			
	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	Between Groups	(Combined)	.001	1	.001	.003	.958
			Within Groups		145.213	375	.387		
			Total		145.214	376			
2	outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	Between Groups	(Combined)	3.488	2	1.744	2.875	.099
				Linearity	.000	1	.000	.001	.979
				Deviation from Linearity	3.487	1	3.487	5.749	.035
			Within Groups		6.673	11	.607		
			Total		10.161	13			
	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	Between Groups	(Combined)	.395	2	.197	.180	.835
				Linearity	.098	1	.098	.090	.765
				Deviation from Linearity	.296	1	.296	.270	.603
			Within Groups		406.587	371	1.096		
			Total		406.982	373			
3	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	Between Groups	(Combined)	2.020	2	1.010	1.245	.296
				Linearity	.511	1	.511	.630	.431
				Deviation from Linearity	1.509	1	1.509	1.860	.178
			Within Groups		45.437	56	.811		
			Total		47.457	58			

a. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for meanAFF * TotalLang cannot be computed for split: school = 1, ID_1 = outlier.

b. With fewer than three groups, linearity measures for meanAFF * TotalLang cannot be computed for split: school = 1, ID_1 = no outlier.

c. Fewer than two groups - statistics for meanAFF * TotalLang cannot be computed for split: school = 3, ID_1 = outlier.

Measures of Association

school	ID_1		Eta	Eta Squared	R	R Squared
1	outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	.624	.389		
	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	.003	.000		
2	outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	.586	.343	.007	.000
	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	.031	.001	.016	.000
3	no outlier	meanAFF * TotalLang	.206	.043	-.104	.011

c. Subject Type

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
meanAFF * subject	803	90.7%	82	9.3%	885	100.0%

Report

meanAFF

subject	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Central Studies	3.151583	370	1.2068357
Mathematics and Abstract Thinking	2.239538	99	1.0717508
German	3.963636	165	.8568023
French	4.204565	169	.6106310
Total	3.427611	803	1.1976662

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
meanAFF * subject	Between Groups	(Combined)	317.357	3	105.786	101.464	**.000**
		Linearity	172.735	1	172.735	165.677	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	144.623	2	72.311	69.357	.000
	Within Groups		833.035	799	1.043		
	Total		1150.392	802			

Measures of Association

	R	R Squared	Eta	Eta Squared
meanAFF * subject	.387	.150	.525	.276

d. Subject Liking

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Included		Excluded		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
meanAFF * subjectliking	467	52.8%	418	47.2%	885	100.0%

Report

meanAFF

subjectliking	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
not at all	2.114286	30	1.2393956
not very much	2.823450	106	1.2468895
quite a bit	3.472884	216	1.1617303
very much	3.971429	115	.9412000
Total	3.360967	467	1.2445276

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
meanAFF * subjectliking	Between Groups	(Combined)	122.814	3	40.938	31.646	.000
		Linearity	121.623	1	121.623	94.017	.000
		Deviation from Linearity	1.191	2	.595	.460	.631
	Within Groups		598.949	463	1.294		
	Total		721.764	466			

Measures of Association

	R	R Squared	Eta	Eta Squared
meanAFF * subjectliking	.410	.169	.413	.170

e. The Link Between School Type, Gender, and Language Background – Times 1, 2 and 3 for All Schools

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects[c]

Dependent Variable:meanAFF

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
Corrected Model	605.936[a]	19	31.891	45.347	.000	.524	861.599	1.000
Intercept	633.328	1	633.328	900.548	.000	.535	900.548	1.000
school	19.585	2	9.792	13.924	**.000**	.034	27.848	.998
gender	1.096	1	1.096	1.559	.212	.002	1.559	.239
Time	.533	2	.266	.379	.685	.001	.757	.111
English	1.763	1	1.763	2.507	.114	.003	2.507	.353
subject	9.383	3	3.128	4.447	**.004**	.017	13.341	.878
school * gender	1.105	1	1.105	1.571	.210	.002	1.571	.240
gender * English	.119	1	.119	.169	.681	.000	.169	.070
school * English	8.244	2	4.122	5.861	**.003**	.015	11.722	.874
gender * Time * English	7.986	6	1.331	1.893	.079	.014	11.355	.706
Error	551.364	784	.703					
Total	10571.068	804						
Corrected Total	1157.300	803						

a. R Squared = .524 (Adjusted R Squared = .512)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

c. MULToutliers = no outlier

g. Multiple Factor Combinations in Second Languages – School 1

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable:meanAFF

school	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
1	Corrected Model	24.672[a]	14	1.762	5.516	.000	.274	77.217	1.000
	Intercept	29.368	1	29.368	91.915	.000	.310	91.915	1.000
	parenthelp	1.340	1	1.340	4.194	**.042**	.020	4.194	.531
	parentsupport	.034	1	.034	.106	.745	.001	.106	.062
	LPpref.RECODE	.882	1	.882	2.760	.098	.013	2.760	.380
	LPoutcomeREC	11.416	1	11.416	35.730	**.000**	.148	35.730	1.000
	difficultysub	.303	1	.303	.948	.331	.005	.948	.163
	subjectliking	.121	1	.121	.380	.538	.002	.380	.094
	Time	.353	1	.353	1.105	.294	.005	1.105	.182
	year	2.866	2	1.433	4.485	**.012**	.042	8.970	.763
	subject	.092	1	.092	.289	.591	.001	.289	.083
	Time * year	.529	1	.529	1.656	.200	.008	1.656	.249
	Time * subject	.527	1	.527	1.650	.200	.008	1.650	.248
	year * subject	.039	2	.020	.061	.941	.001	.123	.059
	Time * year * subject	.000	0	.	.	.	.000	.000	.
	Error	65.500	205	.320					
	Total	3951.796	220						
	Corrected Total	90.172	219						

a. R Squared = .274 (Adjusted R Squared = .224)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

c. R Squared = .681 (Adjusted R Squared = .658)

d. R Squared = .811 (Adjusted R Squared = .724)

h. Multiple Factor Combinations in Second Languages – School 3

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable:meanAFF

school	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Noncent. Parameter	Observed Power[b]
3	Corrected Model	19.626[d]	9	2.181	6.709	.003	.858	60.379	.981
	Intercept	1.699	1	1.699	5.226	.045	.343	5.226	.542
	parenthelp	.023	1	.023	.070	.796	.007	.070	.057
	parentsupport	.048	1	.048	.146	.710	.014	.146	.064
	LPpref.RECODE	3.745	1	3.745	11.523	**.007**	.535	11.523	.863
	LPoutcomeREC	.095	1	.095	.293	.600	.028	.293	.078
	difficultysub	.006	1	.006	.019	.893	.002	.019	.052
	subjectliking	.038	1	.038	.116	.740	.012	.116	.061
	gender	.297	1	.297	.915	.361	.084	.915	.140
	English	.808	1	.808	2.486	.146	.199	2.486	.297
	gender * English	.863	1	.863	2.656	.134	.210	2.656	.314
	Error	3.250	10	.325					
	Total	237.857	20						
	Corrected Total	22.877	19						

a. R Squared = .216 (Adjusted R Squared = .194)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Appendices D - E of this thesis has been
removed as they may contain sensitive/confidential
content