

**The Effect of Applying Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF)  
on the Development of Writing Skills: Perceptions and Engagement of  
Students in a Middle East Context**

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# **The Effect of Applying Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF) on the Development of Writing Skills: Perceptions and Engagement of Students in a Middle East Context**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates and evaluates the effectiveness of Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF) in developing the writing component of foreign language learners' (FLLs') communicative competence in a blended learning (BL) context, as compared to a face-to-face (F2F) context. The FLLs in this study comprised three intact classes from a foundation course at a Saudi university. The three skills addressed consisted of the use of the past tense to describe past events and form wh-questions, as part of grammatical competence, and writing a letter of complaint, as part of sociolinguistic competence.

To evaluate the effectiveness of LCF, a mixed-methods approach was used. The quasi-experimental design was applied by measuring learners' development in the three aforementioned skills. The corresponding test results were then compared with those of a control group. Moreover, the benefits of LCF were examined by gathering the learners' perceptions of the intervention and analysing their engagement with the teacher, peers, tasks and language.

The study revealed that LCF was more effective in the BL than in the F2F context, in terms of developing the learners' skill in forming wh-questions. However, both contexts almost equally developed the learners' skills in using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint. Moreover, interviews with volunteers from the two experimental groups, observing their engagement, and analysing their conversations revealed positive perceptions amongst learners with an intermediate level of English language proficiency. On the other hand, two different factors affected their perceptions of the intervention: language proficiency and the willingness of peers to collaborate. Another factor affecting perceptions of BL was a lack of familiarity with the technology applied. It is therefore recommended to overcome this barrier and thus encourage the use of BL, given its effectiveness for the development of more writing skills in the present study, in comparison to an F2F approach.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my father, my mother, my husband and my son, Nawaf.

Thank you for all the love, patience and care you have shown me throughout this time.

I love you all!



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BL	Blended learning
CALL	Computer-assisted language learning
CLT	Communicative language teaching approach
COLT	Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESP	English for specific purposes
EWL	Engagement with the language
F2F	Face-to-face
FL	Foreign language
FLL	Foreign language learner
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
L1	Mother tongue or first language
LCF	Laurillard's Conversational Framework
MALL	Mobile-assisted language learning
SLA	Second language acquisition
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SCT	Sociocultural theory
TELL	Technology-enhanced Language Learning
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages
TL	Target language
UOK	University of Knowledge
VLE	Virtual learning environment
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development





## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Nature of the Problem

The idea for this study arose from my own experience of teaching English to foreign language learners (FLLs) for three years in Saudi Arabia. This was followed by a period of three years spent designing blended learning (BL) courses at a university, also in Saudi Arabia, which I will call the 'University of Knowledge' (UOK), in order to preserve anonymity. As an English language teacher, I observed that most of the learners in my classes could not communicate effectively and this was worse in the context of writing, despite the fact that they had studied English for nine years at primary, middle and secondary school. It constitutes a phenomenon that has also been confirmed by many other researchers in this and similar contexts (Ali, Hassan, & Hago, 2015; Mohammed, 2015).

There are many possible reasons for students' inability to use language effectively in learning and social situations. According to Canale and Swain (1980), this communication potential may be referred to as 'communicative competence'. Communicative competence is a skill that is characteristic of humans, which enables them to regulate the quality of their communication through personal communicative qualities (Lukyanova, Daneykin, & Daneikina, 2015). It thus describes the development of a need for communication and the human ability to initiate it and produce active and emotionally attentive responses (Strakšienė & Baziukaitė, 2010).

It has been claimed that one of the main reasons for low communicative competence is a lack of opportunity for interaction in the classroom, due to large class sizes, combined with having little exposure to the target language (TL) in daily communication (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Farooq & Javid, 2012; Rabab'ah, 2005; Abbuhl & Mackey, 2008; Laurillard & Manning, 1993). It is moreover aggravated by a generally teacher-centred approach - which may be considered boring for learners, whereby they are alienated from the process of using and developing an appreciation of the language in its natural form, in contrast with the current prescriptive nature of most language classes in the study context. This is because there is a general tendency in foreign language (FL) teaching in Saudi Arabia to focus on activities such as rote learning, characterised by

grammar exercises, translation and drill, with learners merely having to memorise sentence structures. Thus, there may be a need for a teaching approach that moves from a focus on memorisation to an approach where learners can become more active in building their own knowledge, such as through interaction with their teacher and peers in the classroom.

The ability of Saudi students to communicate their ideas effectively in writing has also been investigated in previous literature. In the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the lowest scores achieved by Saudi students tend to be for their writing tasks (Grami, 2010). Furthermore, many teachers of Saudi students complain that their students cannot organise their ideas properly, lack the suitable knowledge to discuss assignment topics and do not have the necessary vocabulary (Al-Mansour, 2015). The reasons for such weaknesses in writing could also be related to the teaching approach generally adopted by teachers in that context. This tends to be ‘top-down’ rather than communicative. As a result, teachers in Saudi Arabia often appear to lack interest when preparing and teaching writing courses, whereby they fail to sufficiently implement technology, or to offer adequate opportunities for writing practice (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Mourssi, 2012; Al-Khairi, 2013; Rajab, 2013).

As a result, there is a need for genuine opportunities for interaction between teachers and students and between the students themselves. The teacher should therefore enable learner-situated learning, drawn from the real world in the form of authentic activities, so that students can interact with their peers and practice using the TL in the classroom (Laurillard & Manning, 1993). Interaction is important for FLLs in that it can reduce the gap between them and their teachers, increase their self-esteem, promote language production, and reduce the negative feelings of low self-esteem characterised by shyness and anxiety, which are associated with the fear of making mistakes. This is propounded by Vygotsky’s theory (1986), whereby it is argued that social interaction does not merely produce cognitive change, since it represents change in itself. This is because students learn through interaction with their peers and the environment, in order to construct their knowledge through such connections (Young, 2011). Such teaching approaches will also help learners to critically solve problems, rather than simply accepting solutions provided from outside, especially by prescriptive teachers and textbooks (Denis & Hubert, 2001; Lantz-Andersson, Vigmo, & Bowen, 2013; Pear

& Crone-Todd, 2002; Saaty, 2015). In terms of writing, interaction can take place through collaborative tasks (Vygotsky, 1978; Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012).

Laurillard (2009) affirms that teachers' use of digital technologies increases learners' opportunities for interaction and offers a wider variety of affordances, as compared to more conventional pedagogic methods, thus increasing students' motivation to produce quality collaborative output. For this reason, Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF) has been adopted in this study to provide learners with different interactive opportunities, as well as presenting teachers with a framework that will enable them to integrate technology into the learning process. LCF is a design framework that can provide learners with a range of diverse tasks. Firstly, students learn by discussing a TL structure (the teaching point) with their teacher. They then practice this target structure in a constructive individual learning task. Next, they learn by discussing and practicing the same target structure with their peers, in order to produce a shared understanding and desired output (Laurillard, 2009). Involving students in peer-explanation can often help learners acquire any necessary communicative language skill or knowledge they may lack (Al-Mohanna, 2011).

LCF has mostly been used with online and BL environments (Mesh, 2010; Neo, Neo, & Lim, 2013). It involves undertaking some tasks at home or at university, other than during classroom time (Adas & Bakir, 2013). The learners' interaction through online tools may thus improve their engagement with the content and with their peers (Morris et al., 2010). It can also encourage them to participate beyond the classroom, as more time is made available for them (Huang, Rauch, & Liaw, 2010; Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2010; Garrison, 2011). The choice of LCF to design this study intervention is also based on Al-Khairy's (2013) findings, as well as on my own experience of assisting teachers in designing BL courses, where teachers appear to lack knowledge of the principles of technology use in their teaching. It should be borne in mind, however, that technology is not a panacea for all the problems of language teaching, but represents another way of affording learners an opportunity to learn a TL in a more communicative manner.

## **1.2 Context of the Study**

In the 1960s, English was introduced as a subject taught to Saudi students at state

secondary level (grades 10–12) (Al-Abdulkader, 1979). Due to the wave of globalisation and modernisation policies in Saudi Arabia in 1970 and with the extensive use of English in the country, English was then introduced to pupils in grade 7, whereby it was integrated into the six subsequent years of schooling, at a rate of four 45-minute sessions per week (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Alshammari, 2015). However, since 2001, it has also been introduced into primary schools, with pupils now starting to learn English in grade 4 at the age of 10 (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

It is now considered essential to prepare Saudi students to use English confidently (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Mahdi, 2015), because it has become the primary global language and is closely linked to the development of Saudi Arabia's industrial, economic, military and education systems. This particular need in teaching therefore points to Saudi nationals having to communicate with the many other nationalities involved in their training (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Therefore, language teachers in Saudi Arabia should be aware of how to develop their students' English language competence and this can be achieved by using more effective pedagogical strategies (Rajab, 2013).

Here, it is important to describe the current learners' context and background, thereby clarifying the potential factors behind their level of language proficiency. The English language proficiency of Saudi learners is indeed relatively low, despite the fact that they study English for nine years at primary, intermediate and secondary school (Mohammed, 2015). Moreover, it must be borne in mind that there are three types of school in Saudi Arabia, each awarding different levels of attention to English language teaching.

The first type of school encompasses the general state sector, where just four English sessions are offered per week, with no focus on developing the learners' collaborative skills. In this type of school, the students regard the teacher as "a leading figure and as the only source of knowledge in the classroom" (Alahmadi, 2009, p.280). Most Saudi students who graduate from this type of secondary school will have a low level of English comprehension and communication skill, although they are supposed to have studied English for nine years (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Al-Mohanna, 2011). This is explained by the nature of English language-learning classrooms in the study context,

where learners have limited opportunities for interaction and where their communicative competence is inevitably affected (Al-Mohanna, 2011). Oraif (2013) concurs with the above observation, emphasising that even when teachers assign equal weight to grammar and communication skills, they fail to apply effective techniques for developing them. The majority of secondary school students in Saudi Arabia attend this type of school, where there are no school fees to pay.

The second type of school falls within the private sector, where English is taught as an actual course, as well as being the medium through which mathematics and sciences are learned. Students who graduate from this type of school will usually have higher English language proficiency than those who graduate from state schools. However, the number of students who graduate from such schools is low, as they require fees to be paid for registration.

The third type of school is in the state sector, but with a system of courses. This type of school was established more recently, with just a few in each city. English is offered in six classes per week, focused on developing learners' collaborative skills. Students who have attended this type of school will usually possess better collaborative skills than those coming from general state-sector schools. Schools that operate according to a system of courses form part of a trial by the Ministry of Education, whereby new teaching methods are being tested on students before generalising them to schools all over the country. It is also important to note that due to the religious and cultural background in Saudi Arabia, male and female students are segregated across the education system. Moreover, in some families, the female members cannot reveal their faces to unrelated males. For this reason, as will be explained in the Methodology Chapter, the learners' engagement in this study was only audio- and not video-recorded.

With regard to the use of technology in Saudi Arabia, a substantial amount of money is currently being invested in developing education on the territory (Farooq & Javid, 2012) and as a nation, Saudi Arabia was reported as the second highest Internet user in the Middle East in 2016 (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>). Therefore, the Saudi education system needs to consider these facts and integrate technology into teaching and learning. To a great extent, it has in fact happened, as most universities are increasingly moving from a traditional teaching approach towards e-learning. E-

learning may simply be defined as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in learning and teaching (Mohammadi, Ghorbani, & Hamidi, 2011; Fryer, Bovee, & Nakao, 2014). The move has been supported by the Ministry of Education, with the establishment of the National Center of E-learning and Distance Learning, which provides training programmes to develop skills amongst faculty staff in the designing of BL and e-learning courses (Farooq & Javid, 2012). Such measures are due to the various benefits of e-learning, such as the fact it is accessible at any time and from anywhere, as well as having the potential to motivate learners towards greater activity and cooperation (Mohammadi et al., 2011). However, there is an overall need to adopt an education system that can develop the skills required by learners in their professional and academic lives (Farooq & Javid, 2012).

### **1.3 Purpose of the Research**

Learning an FL is a complex task and traditional methods do not necessarily help that much when it comes to developing learners' writing skills, especially if the learners are passive in the process (Adas & Bakir, 2013). Teachers therefore need to adopt new teaching methods, so that learners become more active. Interaction is in fact one of the teaching approaches used to develop learners' writing (O'Donnell et al., 1985). In addition, Web-based technology can promote English language learning, especially in the context of reading, writing and possibly speaking and listening (Farooq & Javid, 2012). This is because language learning is both a psychological and social process. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the teaching and learning process incorporates a blend of technology and the real life context of the language development.

The purpose of this study is consequently to trial the use of BL by adapting LCF to develop FLLs' communicative competence. As the term 'communicative competence' is very broad, with many sub-skills implied, three specific skills have been targeted here; drawn from the UOK Foundation Course curriculum and taught according to LCF. The first two sub-skills comprise using the past tense to write passages describing past events, and to ask wh-questions about things which have happened in the past. These were selected as two specific areas of grammatical competence, because, based on my experience of teaching this curriculum to students with similar characteristics, I have found that they are skills which many students struggle with and become confused

about. As a result, they are unable to properly form a sentence or question in the past. For example, learners might insert an auxiliary verb in a sentence, but omit to use one in a past tense question. This difficulty in using the past tense and forming wh-questions in the past has been reported in the literature in relation to FLLs in general, but has not been specifically investigated in relation to Saudi students (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006; Rudin, 1988; Yang & Lyster, 2010). The third writing sub-skill involves writing a letter of complaint, selected as a component of sociolinguistic competence. This skill was chosen, as it is not common for Saudi students to learn how to write a letter of complaint, even in their mother tongue. Moreover, the difficulty experienced by FLLs in writing a letter of complaint has been asserted by many researchers (Boxer & Pickering, 1995; Rowland, 2007). It is worth mentioning here that according to the teachers' request on the UOK Foundation Course, these skills were selected for development, as they were aspects of the curriculum.

Despite all the advantages of LCF (see section 1.1 and for more detail, section 2.3.4), however, it lacks an important element, namely the principles upon which writing tasks can be based, so that learners are motivated to interact with their teacher and peers. Therefore, in this study, I adapted LCF by designing the tasks based on Salmon's (2013) e-tivities. E-tivities lead to tasks being designed with a clear purpose or 'spark', as Salmon calls it, which can be grasped on the first reading and which relates to the learning objectives. Here, there might be clear benefits for the participant, with a distinct role being defined for the teacher, precise timings, and a clear evaluation method at the end. Moreover, LCF was further adapted in this instance by omitting 'the teacher practice cycle', where the teacher is required to adapt a task to meet the learners' at their actual level, helping them reach their potential level. In sociocultural theory (SCT), this is called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (discussed in detail in section 2.3.4.4) and it requires more time to elapse. A further three elements have been incorporated into the intervention design: (1) starting the intervention with a statement of its general aim, followed by specific objectives, (2) starting the intervention tasks with icebreaking activities to help the learners overcome the social barriers between them, and (3) adding a task at the end of the intervention to provide learners with a chance to practice all the competences they have learned, in a single situation.

LCF has therefore been adapted in the present study to propose an intervention aimed at developing learners' communicative competence in both F2F and BL environments. The aim of delivering the intervention in two different contexts is to determine the affordances of both environments, thus evaluating the effectiveness of LCF - whether due to the online tasks or to the interactive and iterative nature of the design.

Regarding the challenge presented by studying large class sizes on Saudi university Foundation Courses, the use of mixed methods offers methodological significance. This development in learners' skills is evaluated with a writing test in the current study, due to the difficulties involved in merely assessing the learners by observing the development in their language skills throughout the intervention. To obtain a broader picture of the intervention's impact on the learners in this study, qualitative data methods have been implemented to discover their views of the intervention; their perceptions being investigated in interviews with six volunteers from each group. These views are triangulated by an observation of their engagement with the intervention, conducted over a half-hour period in each of the first two classes (out of six classes constituting the intervention period). This is due to the fact that low engagement can be an indicator of dissatisfaction and negative perceptions of an intervention (Perie, Moran & Lutkus, 2005). Since it is difficult to observe learners making use of various elements of an intervention while the teaching process is actually underway, an external observer was assigned to observe a group in each class. Furthermore, the external observer's observations have been triangulated through subsequent analysis of the learners' conversations.

#### **1.4 The Research Questions**

1. How does the adapted LCF intervention design affect FLLs' skills pertaining to grammatical and sociolinguistic competences in writing, in F2F and BL environments and in comparison with a non-LCF group?
2. How do the learners perceive and engage with the language and tasks designed, using the adapted LCF?



## 1.5 The Research Objectives

- To develop an adapted LCF, taking into consideration principles of task design.
- To investigate the effects of the adapted LCF on the learners' writing sub-skills in F2F and BL environments, making comparisons with a control group taught using explicit and traditional teaching methods, without iteration, interaction or media.
- To determine the affordances of F2F and BL environments with the adapted LCF.
- To examine the learners' perceptions of the different designs produced, using the adapted LCF in F2F and BL groups.
- To explore how the learners engaged with the teacher, their peers and the language in the two experimental groups.

## 1.6 Rationale for the Study

There is a shortage of studies conducted with the aim of developing learners' communicative competence through an intervention designed using a framework that consists of a combination of teacher-led instruction and discussion with learners; moreover pertaining to a target structure, combined with discussion and practice opportunities with peers, and the use of multiple media, as Suntharesan (2014a) confirms. Therefore, this study aims to develop an intervention that will enable FLLs to develop their skills through iterative learning cycles, whereby they practice aspects of the language with their teacher and peers using LCF.

Many studies in the literature (for example, Mesh, 2010; Elgort, 2011 and Neo et al., 2013) have demonstrated the positive impact of LCF on language-learning outcomes in BL environments. However, the above studies have not endeavoured to develop LCF. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, there is a dearth of studies measuring the impact of LCF in an F2F classroom situation, for the purpose of determining whether the online component, partially or completely applied, is essential to the effectiveness of LCF. Thus, this study is aimed at finding out how the affordances of the two different learning environments, F2F and BL, may affect learners' communicative competence. An F2F environment affords the teacher and peers social presence. This can then be

complemented by media use in the classroom, such as PowerPoint presentations, YouTube and podcasts. In addition, the BL environment may combine the merits of social presence in an abbreviated F2F class, along with easy access to Blackboard and online resources outside the classroom and classroom hours, namely offering 24/7 asynchronous communication on a discussion board or wiki.

Besides this, according to Alamir (2015), there is a dearth of studies on Saudi learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of online interaction with their peers and teachers in L2 learning. In the literature, a few studies are found to focus on analysing learners' engagement with a language, using Svalberg's (2009) engagement with the language (EWL) model and tasks designed using LCF. Thus, this study is intended to fill these gaps in the literature by designing an intervention based on LCF and examining the development in learners' skills, their perceptions of the intervention, and their engagement with the language and associated tasks.

### **1.7 Significance of the Research**

This study has academic and practical significance. From an academic perspective, it is primarily concerned with developing LCF. This has been achieved by basing the task design on Salmon's (2013) e-tivity principles. Secondly, the adapted LCF has been used to design an F2F and BL intervention, in order to determine the effect of the affordances of different learning environments. Thirdly, the adapted LCF has been used here to develop FLLs' communicative competence; while fourthly, the learners' perceptions and engagement with the intervention have been investigated to examine the design from different perspectives. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in Saudi Arabia, or even worldwide, wherever English is taught as an FL. The results of this study are thus expected to help expand the literature and pave the way for further research, in areas such as the use of different methods of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL).

From a practical perspective, the current study will help develop a deeper understanding of the influence of interaction on improving FLLs' writing skills and of how different types of technology can affect learners. It also provides research-based evidence for FL teachers, especially those at UOK, in their integration of the adapted LCF and different

types of technology into their teaching. Moreover, it is aligned with the demands of the new generation, accommodating technology in all aspects of life.

### **1.8 Operational Definitions**

In this study, ‘blended learning’ (BL) refers to learning that involves a combination of distance learning through online learning environments, such as Blackboard and traditional classroom instruction, whereby the teacher and students are all present in the classroom. In other words, BL in this study is in accordance with VanDerLinden’s (2014) definition of “replacing seat time in courses with online activities to achieve learning objectives” (p.75). In this study, 40 minutes of each class were spent in the classroom and 20 minutes were replaced by online tasks. These online tasks could be completed outside the classroom, either in the campus computer labs or at home.

‘Engagement’ is the students’ interaction with the teacher and peers and with the mediating artefacts. In this study, the examination of learners’ engagement includes exploring how students discuss, negotiate and collaborate with their teacher and peers. It also covers how the learners use different mediating artefacts, such as YouTube videos, Podcasts, Blackboard and PowerPoint presentations.

‘Engagement with language’ (EWL) is an essential aspect that the present study aims to explore. This is where the learner uses language as a tool and it becomes a means of cognitive, affective and social engagement (Svalberg, 2009). The affective construct of EWL refers to the learners’ positive orientation towards the intervention and in turn, the language. In addition, it is manifested through the learners’ willingness to collaborate and become independent in their learning. The social construct relates to the learners’ commitment to carry out the tasks with peers. Meanwhile, cognitive engagement entails the learner’s intellectual consciousness while carrying out tasks with peers.

The ‘perceptions of the intervention’ which this study investigates mainly refer to the learners’ own descriptions of what they believe has helped or hindered them from learning in the intervention. It also covers how learners perceive the role of their teacher and peers in their learning, the use of different technologies, and learning through discussion and collaboration.

## 1.9 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into eight chapters, as follows:

- *Chapter One: Introduction*

The current chapter includes an introduction, background to the study, the context, the research rationale, and the research questions and objectives.

- *Chapter Two: Literature Review*

As the name indicates, this chapter covers the literature underpinning the study. It particularly includes: a definition of communicative competence, a description of various design models and how previous studies have developed them; LCF, in a comparison between LCF and other TESOL approaches and BL design models; the development in learners' perceptions and engagement in different studies, and the rationale for adopting SCT. This chapter ends by presenting the knowledge gap and the conceptual framework for the research.

- *Chapter Three: Methodology*

The research design and methods used are presented in this chapter, providing the rationale for the specified design and methods presented. It also contains a description of the data collection procedure, the participants, the intervention designed to develop the learners' skills and data analysis methods applied.

- *Chapter Four: Achievement Test Findings*

This chapter deals with the quantitative data obtained from the students' achievement in the pre- and post-tests, administered to the two experimental groups and the control group.

- *Chapter Five: Interview Findings*

In this chapter, an analysis is presented of the qualitative data obtained from the students' interviews in the experimental groups.

- *Chapter Six: Classroom Engagement Findings*

In this chapter, an analysis of the qualitative data is presented, obtained by observing the students in focus groups in the two experimental groups, as well as from an analysis of these students' conversations.

- *Chapter Seven: Discussion*

This chapter relates the present study findings to those obtained in previous studies. Here, the research questions are addressed according to these findings.

- *Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations*

This chapter contains a summary of this research, its limitations, its implications and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Rapid developments in technology have encouraged language teachers to integrate it into their teaching practice, particularly when striving to enhance the communicative competence of FLLs. For example, technology can be used to substitute some of the classroom time, or extend the learning through interaction with peers and media outside the classroom. Such arrangements may be referred to as ‘blended learning’ (BL). In this study, the use of BL is examined by adapting LCF to develop three writing skills amongst FLLs. These skills involve using the past tense for writing passages, asking wh-questions about things which have happened in the past and writing a letter of complaint. The first two skills, according to the model of communicative competence developed by Canale and Swain (1980), are categorised as grammatical competence, while writing a letter of complaint pertains to sociolinguistic competence.

Learning through collaboration was therefore applied as a major principle for choosing LCF to design this intervention, as it has been found to be effective for developing learners’ communicative competence (Sreehari, 2012; Van Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Abdullah et al., 2013). This study also evaluates the effectiveness of delivering group work tasks in two LCF cycles within the BL intervention, comparing it to a similar intervention in an F2F classroom. In this chapter, four major issues are discussed. These comprise the language-teaching approaches used to develop FLLs’ communicative competence; approaches to e-learning and BL designs; learners’ perceptions of the intervention, and the learners’ engagement with the intervention and the language. The aim of reviewing the literature on these four topics is to provide a rationale for adopting and adapting LCF, in particular, to design the current study intervention, as opposed to other language teaching approaches. There is consequently an investigation of the impact of this intervention and how the learners perceive and engage with it.

The first part of this chapter addresses the language-teaching approaches used in the literature to develop learners’ communicative competence. It begins by defining the terms, ‘competence’ and ‘communicative competence’, as well as presenting the

different models used in the literature. After outlining several communicative competence models, the reasons behind adopting Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence are discussed, as are the relevant language-teaching approaches, including the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and its development into a task-based language-teaching approach (TBLT). The aim of this review is to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches, in order to justify LCF use, as opposed to other approaches.

The second part of this chapter concentrates on approaches that involve e-learning and BL design, as this study aims to develop the communicative competence of FLLs by designing a BL intervention. The reasons for using BL are to study the relationship between increased pressure from students and stakeholders as regards the use of technology and how it is perceived by learners. This is in addition to studying how it develops learners' writing skills, as already proven by many researchers (Jauregi et al., 2012; Blake, 2016; Chun, 2016). This part of the chapter begins with a review of the literature on the use of technology in language learning and focuses on the functions applied to develop learners' communicative competence, especially their writing skills. Next, special attention is given to the BL approach, as it is the focus of the current study. A review is conducted of several e-learning design models, together with a detailed review and evaluation of LCF. This relates to its design principles and theoretical perspectives, based on SCT.

In addition, a review of how the above Framework has been used in different studies is presented. Through this review, there is a discussion of the reasons for choosing LCF, rather than any other language-teaching approach. The section aims to present the importance of BL in language learning and teaching; evaluating several models to show their various limitations and shed light on their contribution to the current study.

The third part of this chapter begins with a review of several studies to show the importance of examining learners' perceptions of their own experience of courses designed using LCF and courses based on collaborative learning, since few studies have investigated learners' perceptions of LCF. Meanwhile, the fourth part of this chapter covers a review of the literature related to learners' engagement with tasks and the language being studied, based on Svalberg's (2009) model of engagement with the

language (EWL). However, the review covers studies focused on these types of engagement in F2F and BL contexts, as there is a dearth of studies aimed at analysing learners' engagement with LCF and languages on a course designed using LCF. However, examining learners' perceptions, as well as their engagement with tasks and a language may be considered as another way of evaluating the effectiveness of LCF from the students' perspective. The two parts of this chapter described above reveal the knowledge gap in the literature on learners' perceptions and engagement with tasks designed using LCF and consequently, with an FL being studied.

Thus, it is clear from the above-mentioned focus of the study that the intervention is based on several frameworks, including Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, LCF and SCT, on which LCF is based. This intervention is expected to develop aspects of learners' communicative competence, highlighting learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the intervention, their engagement with the tasks and their EWL, according to Svalberg's (2009) model of EWL. The current review of the literature is therefore grounded on the above-mentioned theories and the practical studies related to them.

## **2.2 Approaches to Language Teaching**

As mentioned above, this section reviews the language-teaching approaches used in the literature to develop learners' communicative competence. These approaches are evaluated here to develop a rationale for choosing LCF as a basis for designing the present study intervention. The section starts by defining the term, 'competence' and explaining how this has developed through Hymes' (1962) oppositional stance into the definition proposed by Chomsky (1965). The development of this definition by different researchers is outlined, while also presenting its classification into sub-competences for the resulting models. In this way, a rationale is presented for choosing Canale and Swain's (1980) model. The three writing skills forming the focus of this study are subsequently described. This is undertaken after reviewing how various researchers have classified communicative competence in different ways. Finally, the most commonly used language-teaching approaches for the development of communicative competence are reviewed.



The term, ‘competence’ was introduced into modern linguistics by the linguist and cognitive scientist, Noam Chomsky in 1965 (Chomsky, 1965). He defined it as “an idealized capacity”, referring to the speaker’s knowledge of their mother tongue. In addition, Chomsky differentiated this term from ‘performance’, which is defined as the “production of actual utterances” in real situations (as cited in Ayyanathan, Kannammal, & Rekha, 2012). It is clear from this definition that Chomsky was mainly concerned with the ideal speaker-listener possessing grammatical competence, along with intact syntax and semantics (Lukin, 2013; McNamara, 1996).

On the other hand, Hymes (1962) points to limitations in Chomsky’s definition, since the latter focuses exclusively on linguistic competence and ignores social and contextual factors (Spolsky, 1989; Soler & Jorda, 2007; Aldoshina, 2014). Accordingly, Hymes (1962) indicates the evolution of communicative competence theory and defines it as a linguistic term, referring to a speaker’s grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology and phonology, as well as their knowledge of how and when to use language appropriately in a social context. For further clarification, Cazden (2011) and McNamara (1996) explain that communicative competence requires awareness of how language forms function and are used in daily life to deliver ‘performance’, as opposed to merely knowing about them in theory.

In addition to the above, the ‘appropriateness’ included in Hymes’ definition is viewed critically by Cazden (2011), who claims it should also encompass the speaker’s ability to create new contexts through language, rather than just responding within a pre-existing context. This would suggest that FLLs should be competent in their knowledge of language forms, as well as knowing when and how to initiate and apply them contextually.

Many other researchers since Hymes have endeavoured to define the above concept. Strakšienė and Baziukaitė (2010), for example, view communicative competence as the ability to obtain what one is seeking from others in an acceptable manner, but this can vary from one situation to another. Conversely, Agbatogun (2014) defines it as the learner’s ability to comprehend what they are listening to and with whom they are interacting. Therefore, some researchers argue that communicative competence entails obtaining what is needed from others and expressing these needs appropriately, while

others believe that it is the ability to create context and establish suitable usage. This implies that the term ‘communicative competence’, as used in this study, refers to knowledge and skills, which will enable FLLs to communicate effectively by expressing themselves appropriately within their current situation. It also refers to situations initiated under the teacher’s control, through the assignment of contextually relevant and meaningful tasks.

The reason for choosing the above approach relates to the limitations associated with language learners in Saudi Arabia, where most cannot freely create a language context to practice the skills highlighted in this study, due to their limited language proficiency and need to be constantly guided by a teacher while performing language-learning tasks. Following this, classifications of competence drawn from existing research are presented, with a justification for the model selected in the present study.

### **2.2.1 Communicative Competence Models**

To define those skills forming part of communicative competence and which need to be developed, it was necessary to find a model that would appropriately classify the competences covered in the UOK Foundation Course syllabus. Since Hymes’ (1962) definition of the term ‘communicative competence’, many researchers, including Hymes, have classified sub-competences in different models. Although some of these models have been constructed for the purpose of testing, others are more concerned with forming instructional objectives. However, the main difference between them is in the classification of competences. Table 2.1 provides an analysis of the most commonly used models, along with their competences, features and any criticisms they have elicited.

**Table 2.1 Analysis of communicative competence models, their sub-competences, features and points for criticism**

The model	Its competences	Its distinguishing features	Criticisms
Hymes' (1972) Model	<p>The extent to which something:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is formally possible (grammatically acceptable);</li> <li>is feasible (can be implemented in the context of cultural behaviour);</li> <li>is appropriate to a context in an utterance, and</li> <li>can actually be produced in cultural behaviour.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives attention to the effectiveness of sociocultural factors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited to F2F oral communication</li> <li>The term 'appropriate' needs clarification</li> <li>The coherence of the communication is not considered (Williams, 1979).</li> </ul>
Canale & Swain's (1980, 1983) model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grammatical competence is knowledge of the rules of morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexical items, thus enabling the learner to understand and accurately produce utterances.</li> <li>Sociolinguistic competence is the speaker's knowledge and ability to use language effectively in a specific context.</li> <li>Discourse competence refers to the skill of selecting and arranging words and structures to form sentences that are suitable for whole cohesive discourse (Soler &amp; Jorda, 2007).</li> <li>Strategic competence is the mastery of verbal and non-verbal strategies, in order to increase communicative effectiveness and compensate for any breakdowns in communication (Lenchuk &amp; Ahmed, 2013).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Narrows down sociolinguistic competences by separating strategic from sociolinguistic competence.</li> <li>It helps focus attention on the learner and the strategies s/he can use to communicate and learn (Magnan, 2008).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not generate any specifications relating directly to the communicative competence model or communicative language teaching (CLT) (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).</li> <li>Separates discourse from sociolinguistic competence, because, as it is claimed, the connectivity of a text includes its appropriateness (Schachter, 1996).</li> <li>The interaction between the competences is not clear (Mesh, 2010; Piggin, 2012).</li> </ul>
Bachman & Palmer's (1996, 2010) model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisational knowledge consisting of grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge (knowledge of producing and comprehending the relationship between utterances).</li> <li>Pragmatic knowledge consists of illocutionary knowledge (that enables language users to interrupt the relationships between sentences) and sociolinguistic knowledge (that enables language users to create or interrupt language).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explains how different components interact in language use and with the context; this interaction is controlled by strategic competence (Fulcher &amp; Davidson, 2007; Knoch, 2009).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gives more weight to language acquisition than to communicative competence (Ayyanathan et al., 2012).</li> <li>Lacks pedagogical specifications and a description of syllabus design (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995).</li> </ul>

Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic competence</li> <li>• Sociocultural competence (the knowledge of the cultural background to interpret and use language effectively);</li> <li>• Strategic competence;</li> <li>• Discourse competence, and</li> <li>• Actional competence (the ability to render one's speech comprehensible, especially to those from different cultures).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divides the ability to understand speech from sociolinguistic competence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assigns a prominent role to some competences over others.</li> </ul>
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After analysing the above models of communicative competence, Canale and Swain's (1980) model was considered more relevant in the current study and this was due to the following reasons:

- Firstly it considers grammar, which is an important part of the Foundation Course at UOK, to be a major competence, unlike Bachman and Palmer's (1996, 2010) model, which classifies it as a sub-competence of organisational knowledge.
- In addition, it awards the same importance to all the competences, because they are all crucial for successful communication. This is in contrast to Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model, which stresses the importance of actional competence over others.
- It awards distinct attention to the instructional objectives, while also focusing on the learner and the strategies they can use for communication and learning. Moreover, it helps in changing the syllabus design from one arranged on the basis of grammatical rules to a more functional one (Magnan, 2008).
- Finally, it is suitable for the skills that the 'Touchstone' series (used by the Foundation English language course at UOK) aims to develop, although these books do not consider the classification of competences. Classifying the skills into four competences would appear to be preferable in the Foundation curricula, as this could help the teacher focus on developing them communicatively, thus ensuring that the students can use them appropriately in any situation they face, rather than merely providing them with the corresponding theoretical knowledge.

This model is reported as the first to define communicative competence in terms of L2 teaching (Yano, 2002). It was modified by Canale in 1983 by (1) starting to bring the

definition of communicative competence closer to Hymes' definition, (2) "by explaining that the theory of performance was impossible" and as a result, replacing the term 'performance' with 'actual communication' - in the realisation of such knowledge within the limitations of environmental and psychological conditions, such as fatigue, anxiety and deficiencies of memory, and (3) differentiating the sociocultural conditions from the rules of discourse, as the former fall under sociolinguistic competence and the latter, under discourse competence (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p.39).

As mentioned previously, due to accessibility issues, this study focuses on developing just three of the learners' writing skills that form part of two sub-competences in Canale and Swain's (1980) model, via an intervention. Also examined are the learners' perceptions of the intervention, as well as their engagement with the tasks and the FL being taught. The corresponding writing skills consist of using the past tense in description and asking wh-questions about events in the past, as part of grammatical competence. Writing a letter of complaint is also included as an aspect of sociolinguistic competence. The sections that follow contain a review of how various studies have identified communicative competences as a research focus and how the present study identifies the three writing skills mentioned above in relation to the communicative competence model.

### **2.2.2 Identifying Competences in the Existing Research**

Various studies have identified the competences forming their research focus in one of two ways. One group of studies connects skills to the sub-competences of communicative competence models, such as Canale and Swain (1980, 1983), Bachman and Palmer (1996; 2010) and Murcia et al. (1995). There are many researchers who have focused on developing skills that form part of pragmatic competence. Ishihara (2007) has highlighted the importance of developing learners' skills in making an apology, giving a compliment, responding to compliments, making requests, making refusals, and expressing gratitude. Moreover, Soler (2005) has concentrated on skills in making requests. However, another group of studies connects the definition of communicative competence to receptive language skills, namely listening and reading, and productive language skills, consisting of writing and speaking. For example, Zha et al. (2006) define communicative competence in terms of writing, whereas Agbatogun

(2014) defines it in terms of listening and speaking and Thiyagarajan (2014) defines it as both receptive and productive. Nevertheless, in all the above classifications, the researchers are interested in developing learners' ability to use these skills appropriately.

In the present study, the definition of communicative competence is related to the classification of communicative competence into receptive and productive skills, especially in relation to writing. At the same time, these skills are categorised as part of communicative competence, based on Canale and Swain's (1980) model, as mentioned previously. Consequently, grammatical and sociolinguistic competences were selected as skills to be explored in the present context, because they are part of the UOK Foundation Course curriculum, as well as representing essential elements of effective communication. They are in fact important for learners' academic lives, as they will need to write reports, letters, etc. (Bacha, 2002). The next section focuses on how research on the development of these two competences has been addressed in the selected literature.

### **2.2.3 Teaching Approaches Used to Develop Communicative Competence**

It is important to develop the grammatical competence of FLLs who are not exposed to the target language (TL) in their everyday lives. In the literature, there are debates over suitable ways of developing grammar; the best known of these being whether Krashen's view should be adopted, namely whether grammar is acquired through interaction (implicitly and through natural exposure in daily life), or whether grammar rules should be explicitly taught. Explicit instruction could include the use of explanatory hand-outs, with the teacher deductively providing instruction and corrective feedback, or tasks to raise grammar awareness, aimed at guiding the learners' through input as they focus on target structures (Rutherford, 1987; Rose & Kasper, 2001; Yoshimi, 2001; Ishihara, 2007; Mahvelati & Mukundan, 2012; Narita, 2012).

In addition to the above, the audio-lingual method, which concentrates on repetition, drill and the memorisation of grammatical rules, is considered as an explicit deductive teaching method (Gulzhahan, et al., 2013). Various studies show a positive effect of explicit grammar instruction and re-emphasise its importance in developing learners'

recognition and awareness of grammar, in contrast to implicit learning, as reflected in Dekeyser (1994), Fotos and Nassaji (2004), Macaro and Masterman (2006), Scheffler and Cinciala (2011), and Kim (2016). On the other hand, other researchers assert that explicit teaching does not suit all learners, given that it prioritises language accuracy over fluency - or the ability to communicate spontaneously (Green & Hecht, 1992; Sreehari, 2012; Jurković, 2013). This suggests the importance of providing FLLs with opportunities to use the TL in communicative situations that resemble real-life communication. Such a practice would thus be aimed at developing FLLs communication skills.

These contentions explain the shift in the 1970s towards approaches that emphasise the communicative aspect of language, namely the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach (Leung, 2005; Sidek, 2012). CLT is an approach based on theories of communicative competence and language learning. It “proposes that language learning should be done in a meaningful setting with authentic language as the input” (Butler, 2011; Mustapha & Yahaya, 2013, p.790). This means that it not only aims to teach students how to speak English, for example, but also endeavours to ensure that their speech is meaningful and appropriate for the contexts they face, thus enabling them to interact with their teachers and peers via the TL (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012). This kind of interaction, as Banciu and Jireghie (2012) assert, increases learners’ motivation and confidence to communicate. However, CLT focuses on meaning and fluency in communication, which may indeed result in learners being able to communicate, but with low grammatical accuracy (Norris, 2009).

CLT has subsequently been developed by many different researchers, such as Sreehari (2012), who recommends the teacher to focus on productive and receptive skills, rather than on the subject, by providing a variety of activities in the classroom and offering different learning resources. In other words, CLT has been adapted so that it concentrates on language forms as well as on meaning, so as to include both ‘linguistic competence’ and ‘communicative competence’ (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This recent adaptation of CLT can help develop FLLs’ grammatical and communicative competences, as it includes both form and meaning. These components are essential for learners being able to master competence and apply their knowledge appropriately.

The focus on both form and meaning achieved by combining explicit grammar instruction with opportunities for learners to produce and practice these grammatical forms has been found to be effective by many researchers (Fatt, 1991; Snow et al., 2009; Nazari, 2013; Suntharesan, 2013; Dicerbo et al., 2014). The approach has in fact proved to be more effective than implicit learning carried out through interaction with large classes, as found by Ekembe (2014). It is also an approach recommended by many other researchers, such as Ellis (2000; 2002; 2003) and Freeman (2003), as FLLs are more likely to have minimal exposure to the TL and too few opportunities to practice it in the classroom with their teacher and peers (Laurillard & Manning, 1993).

In addition, the CLT approach has been found to be effective for developing sociolinguistic competence, as affirmed by Soler (2005), Takahashi (2001) and Bardovi-Harlig and Vellenga (2012), who found that students who received explicit teaching, combined with opportunities for practice, performed better than those who learned a language implicitly. Therefore, this review of the literature reveals that it is better to develop FLLs' grammatical and sociolinguistic competences through a combination of explicit instruction, opportunities for practice, and communication with their teacher and peers in the classroom.

However, it would seem that tasks should form the basis of language-learning courses to develop communicative language learning under the guidance of a teacher (Cook, 2013). Therefore, a TBLT approach was developed here to fulfil this requirement (Nunan, 2003). TBLT, according to Aliakbari and Jamalvandi's (2010) assumptions, is an offshoot of CLT, but with a focus on providing learners with real-life situations to practice the FL. It is concerned with proposing tasks to enhance the actual use of the TL and improve communicative abilities (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011). The topics and level of difficulty of these tasks should be determined on the basis of the students' level of competence (Ellis, 2003).

The TBLT approach first began as a meaning-based teaching approach (Ellis, 2003). However, Carless (2007) considers this to be a limitation, since even though learners may learn to communicate, a failure to learn and apply grammatical rules will lead to grammar mistakes. Nevertheless, the approach did eventually develop and became both form- and meaning-focused. In this sense, TBLT is considered to be a 'strong' version



of CLT, with the ‘weak’ version of CLT relating solely to meaning, based on the assumption that communicative competence can be systematically taught (Ellis, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Wang, 2013). Thus, the use of TBLT may encourage language learners to focus on both form and meaning by completing tasks aimed at developing their communicative competence and presenting real-life situations.

TBLT is open to interpretation on the part of the researcher involved and there are many versions of it (Bygate, 2015). Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2011) compared three versions of TBLT: Long’s (1985), Skehan’s (1998) and Ellis’ (2003). These emphasise features of tasks where natural contexts are created for language use, as well as an emphasis on form. Moreover, the tasks in these versions consist of three phases, as Ellis (2003) proposes: (1) the ‘pre-task’, where input can be given to familiarise students with the language needed for the task, (2) the ‘on-task’, designed to engage learners in collaborative work through the use of available resources to achieve an outcome, with the teacher being able to support the students at this stage, and (3) the ‘post-task’ phase, where the teacher repeats information or follows up on task performance. Nevertheless, the differences between these versions lie in how this attention to form is achieved. In Long’s approach, attention is given in the corrective feedback; in Skehan’s approach, it is given in the pre-task stage, and in Ellis’s approach, it is given at all three stages of the approach.

Another difference is in the types of task selected. For instance, Skehan favours unfocused tasks (tasks that prepare learners to use language in general communication), emphasising fluency as well as accuracy (Seifollahi & Tamjid, 2012). However, Long and Ellis favour focused tasks, designed to enable learners to use specific linguistic features, together with unfocused tasks (Ellis, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Generally speaking, in TBLT, the teacher tends to concentrate on accuracy and fluency, and endeavours to facilitate and monitor collaboration between learners. Moreover, FLLs need the teacher’s support throughout the stages of a task. This can help develop their understanding of the target structure. It could also be argued that the use of both focused and unfocused tasks will help achieve this, as focused tasks involve target structures and unfocused tasks enable learners to use these structures in the type of general communication that they are likely to face in everyday life.

In order for tasks to be successful, Kumaravadivelu (1991) proposes conditions for them when a TBLT approach is adopted. This means avoiding a mismatch between the teacher's intention underpinning the tasks and the learners' interpretations. This should narrow the gap between them, thus achieving the established learning outcomes. Kumaravadivelu (1991) identifies 10 sources of mismatch. These comprise the following:

- cognitive sources, referring to knowledge of the world;
- linguistic sources, referring to syntactic and semantic knowledge of target structures;
- communicative sources, referring to skills in exchanging information;
- pedagogic sources, referring to perceptions of the learning objectives;
- cultural sources, referring to knowledge of the target culture and the norms for performing the tasks;
- strategic sources, referring to the strategies used by the learners to acquire and use information;
- procedural sources, referring to the pathways used by learners to solve problems;
- evaluative sources, referring to the self-evaluation measures applied by learners to check their own progress;
- instructional sources, referring to the instructions given by the teacher or textbook, and
- attitudinal sources, referring to the learners' attitudes to learning the FL.

However, some of these sources could hinder language learners from achieving the desired learning outcomes and constitute a barrier to them perceiving the effectiveness of these tasks, as described later in section 5.6.

CLT and TBLT approaches have in fact been used by many researchers to develop learners' communicative competence and a positive impact has been reported. Sreehari (2012) carried out large-scale research to investigate the use of CLT in teaching English to undergraduate students in India. The tasks in the corresponding study comprised lecturing by teachers; individual, pair and group tasks; individual and group presentations; role-play, and group discussions. The data were collected from 1500

male and female undergraduates at 35 colleges in India over a three-month period and after training teachers in the use of CLT. The teachers in the above-mentioned colleges were trained to adopt CLT principles in their teaching, as a means of developing learners' skills. The data in Sreehari's (2012) study were then collected via a structured questionnaire and classroom observation.

Sreehari (2012) consequently found that CLT increased most students' willingness to learn English, with approximately 77% of the students stating that CLT allowed them to share their knowledge and personal experiences with their peers. More than 60% of the students also declared that they enjoyed group work and 50% appreciated the teacher's role in facilitating the learning process. Moreover, the majority of the students showed an improvement in their writing skills as a result of thinking and sharing their ideas with fellow group members. These findings could encourage FL teachers to adopt CLT, although there was no examination of the teachers' understanding of CLT as a means of improving students' collaboration and writing skills, or how it could be implemented.

To shed light on the effectiveness of TBLT in developing learners' communicative competence, Suntharesan (2014b) carried out classroom-based research on 50 undergraduate students, divided into experimental and control groups. The students were tested before and after the intervention. The tasks were based on situations that the learners could face in real life, such as renting a flat or buying a train ticket. The above study found that the learners' levels of language proficiency, developed using TBLT, were superior to those of a control group taught using more traditional methods. However, the students in the above study were diffident and complained that they did not have enough ideas to carry out the tasks. They also used their mother tongue, as it made them feel more secure. Moreover, they maintained fluency over accuracy. The corresponding result therefore highlights the importance of focusing on form as well as meaning. This could encourage students to perform a task, but with improvements to both accuracy and fluency, although students' reticence and timidity would need to be overcome, because these tasks depend on comprehension and interaction.

In addition, TBLT was used by Shabani and Ghasemi (2014) to develop learners' communicative competence by stressing on meaning in a quasi-experimental study. The above study focused on 60 students selected on the basis of their TOEFL scores. These

students were assigned to two groups. TBLT was used to teach one of the groups, while the other group was taught using a content-based language teaching approach. The classroom time was divided into three stages, based on the TBLT model. The TOEFL test was then administered to the learners as a post-test and it was found that the learners who had learned through TBLT outdid the other group. It was also found that TBLT encouraged the learners to pay attention to form. This result could be justified by the benefit of planning and reporting stages during a task, which in the above case helped the learners to collaborate and enlist support from fellow group members. The teacher's explicit instruction in the post-task stage could be a further reason for the development in the learners' knowledge. It may consequently be argued that the result would have been even more significant if the teacher's role had been evident throughout the three stages of the task, as more importance would have been given to form.

It may be concluded from the above-mentioned studies, amongst others, that CLT and TBLT could be suitable instructional approaches for L2 and FL teaching (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010; Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2011; Kirkgoz, 2011; Sidek, 2012; Wang, 2013). For instance, they represent a learner-centred teaching approach and offer learners productive input in the TL. Furthermore, they can enhance learners' personal experiences, as an important element of classroom learning, by motivating them and enhancing their communication and interaction. Nevertheless, there have been concerns about implementing CLT and TBLT in the FL classroom, as many researchers have previously expressed (Carless, 2007; Littlewood, 2007; Butler, 2011). First, there is the fear that students will fail to collaborate, or that they will engage in off-task talk and use their first language (L1) in discussion. Secondly, it is hard to manage large classes. Thirdly, there are conceptual limitations related to teachers' perceptions of their role as facilitators and the students' role in collaborative learning. Moreover, there is the danger that a dependence on learners' own linguistic and non-linguistic resources is inappropriate for students with low levels of language proficiency and a lack of linguistic resources (Carless, 2007; Littlewood, 2007; Butler, 2011).

To alleviate such concerns, a teaching approach is required that will clearly identify the roles of the teacher and students, encouraging learners to collaborate and overcome their shyness, as well as to use English in their collaboration. At the same time, this approach should support the advantages of CLT and TBLT, such as promoting a learner-centred

teaching approach; focusing on meaning, as well as on form, accuracy and fluency. This would be aimed at enhancing learners' communicative competence by offering interactive opportunities and suitable input. The current study aims to meet this need by proposing a pedagogical framework that can combine these features. The next section presents a review of technology use in language teaching and learning. BL design models are therefore evaluated, including the one adapted for the present study.

### **2.3 Approaches to E-learning Design**

In the previous section, there was a review of the teaching approaches described in the existing literature to develop learners' communicative competence. Through this review, some of the limitations of these approaches were highlighted, showing the need for a teaching approach that considers the advantages of the above-mentioned approaches, as well as aspects such as the appropriate integration of technology into lesson design; an emphasis on meaning, form, fluency and accuracy; a clear identification of the role of the teacher and student in the learning process, and the removal of barriers between students to encourage collaboration. The integration of technology in this instance was motivated by its use by different researchers to develop FLLs' communicative competence (Zha et al., 2006; Gilmore, 2011; Adas & Bakir, 2013). However, there is a dearth of studies that have investigated the effect of integrating technology into the development of the three writing skills being addressed here as aspects of FLLs' communicative competence. For this reason, e-learning (including BL) design models were reviewed, in order to find a suitable design. These models are presented in subsequent sections of this chapter and justification is given for deciding not to adopt them in this instance.

Finally, a description of LCF is presented, with a review of the existing studies that have already applied it. However, prior to reviewing e-learning design models, it is important to examine the history and effectiveness of implementing computers in language teaching and learning, especially on courses conducted entirely online and more specifically, on BL courses. The aim of this review is to show the impact of online interaction on learners' communicative competence.

### 2.3.1 An Overview of the Use of Technology in Language Teaching

There are a substantial number of published studies describing the important role of technology in language teaching. One of the most commonly used and studied types of technology in this context is the computer. The use of computers in language learning is called computer-assisted language learning (CALL). CALL has helped language teachers to design effective and attractive lessons. It is therefore essential here to review the development of CALL from a pedagogical perspective.

CALL has been analysed and classified by Warschauer and Healey (1998) into three stages, according to the level of technology and pedagogic approach applied: behaviouristic CALL, communicative CALL and integrative CALL. Below, CALL is reviewed, thus shedding light on its possible impact on communicative competence. As a result, several studies are reviewed to highlight the effect of Internet use, particularly forms of online interaction, on the communicative competence of FLLs.

Behaviouristic CALL was most commonly implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, informed by the behaviourist learning model's 'stimulus/response/feedback paradigm' (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). Large-scale instructional platforms were developed and delivered from central computer systems or labs. These included graphics, animation, multimedia and touch-screen input (Salaberry, 2001). This technology relieved teachers from having to repeatedly go over material and give feedback (Davies, Otto & Rüschoff, 2012). The resulting 'restricted CALL language system,' as Bax (2003) referred to it, was based on repetitive language drill exercises, such as text reconstruction, closed questions and minimal interaction with students (p.21). The teaching approaches used with this type of CALL were grammar-translation and audio-lingual and it would suggest that accuracy was prioritised (Bax, 2003). However, it was also a CALL paradigm that was expensive to design and required a high level of technical support (Salaberry, 2001). Moreover, as it provided opportunities for repetition through drill and practice exercises, based on behaviourist theory, it is clear that this type of CALL did not aim to develop either communicative or productive skills in the learner.

The advancements in technology at the end of 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, which

enhanced individual cognitive learning and favoured the CLT approach, prompted the emergence of communicative CALL. In this CALL paradigm, the computer was a language practice tool for tasks, where students could exercise a significant degree of interaction and control. However, students' interaction with their teachers and peers was only possible on limited occasions. This is because the tasks which involved simulation, games and computer-managed communication (CMC) were carried out in labs and many were merely practice exercises to develop learners' grammar and vocabulary (Davies, Otto & Rüschoff, 2012). However, there were some developers who focused on communicative exercises with the aim of developing learners' fluency (Bax, 2003). It is clear that this CALL approach was aimed at developing learners' ability to use language forms in the enhancement of communicative competence, while grammar teaching was implicit. Nevertheless, implicit teaching might not suit all FLLs, as discussed earlier. For this reason, communicative CALL was not considered suitable for developing learners' communicative competence.

With the movement towards social or socio-cognitive views of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, integrative CALL was then developed. It focused on the integration of multimedia and the Internet, namely connecting with e-learning and various skills in the language-learning process. The sociocultural view of language learning, as described by Vygotsky, is part of this paradigm in CALL (Deutschmann & Vu, 2015). The role of SCT in CALL is to provide learners with suitable contexts where they can interact with their teacher and collaborate with their peers, thus scaffolding each other and reaching their potential level in their ZPD (Lamy & Hampel, 2007) (see section 2.3.4.4 for more detail on SCT). Thus, the use of authentic meaningful material in tasks related to real life scenarios can enable the teacher to help FLLs develop general accuracy, fluency and communicative competence, through interaction with teachers and peers.

The recent integration of the Internet into language learning has been reported to have a positive effect on learners. It has the potential to provide access for students to various learning resources, thus enabling them to carry out tasks. These can be accomplished either within or outside the classroom by providing different opportunities for interaction with the teacher and peers in real-life situations (Yang & Chen, 2007; Nowrozi, 2011). This interaction will in turn foster students' motivation and autonomy, as it moves from a teacher-centred to a more learner-centred approach (Nowrozi, 2011;

Sarfraz, Mansoor, & Tariq, 2015). It can also reduce learners' anxiety and develop their willingness to collaborate (Al-Jarf, 2004; Yang & Chen, 2007).

An alternative term has in fact emerged for this use of technology in language learning, i.e. technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), which provides an accurate description of the use of technology to enhance the learning process, rather than simply assisting it (Davies, Otto, & Rüschoff, 2012). The implementation of technology and the Internet in particular includes the presentation of learning material and use of online communication tools. This can be achieved exclusively or partially online, as in the case of a BL course. Various studies have examined the effectiveness of online interaction for learners' writing skills, as an aspect of their communicative competence in both contexts. Below is a review of some of these studies, which have concentrated on developing learners' communicative competence through online interaction.

Zha et al. (2006) carried out a study to find out the effectiveness of online explanation tasks for improving learners' communicative competence. In this study, 28 K-12 ESL learners were engaged in online discussions, with the aim of developing their communicative competence. The outcomes were compared with those produced in individual online tasks. The above students were drawn from six different schools and so there were no F2F classes. Each group comprised 3-4 students from different schools. The students' online contributions were analysed and it was found that they had performed more collaboratively than they had in the individual tasks. Moreover, their use of the TL for social interaction and personal expression had increased. However, there was little evidence to prove that the online discussion tasks had enhanced their communicative competence. This could have been due to limited opportunities to practice the language, given that the online discussion tasks only comprised three tasks over six weeks.

In addition to the above, Qing-Quan (2009) conducted a comparative experimental study, examining the effectiveness of online collaborative learning for enhancing learners' writing skills, in comparison with a control group taught writing skills using traditional teacher-led methods. A comparison of the post-test scores achieved by the two groups revealed that developing learners' writing skills through collaborative online learning was more beneficial than the traditional method, since the learners



outperformed the control group. The development in the learners' skills could be explained as the result of an increase in their independence in learning through the available resources and support in the online environment.

This Literature Review has revealed a dearth of studies analysing the use of online interaction to develop learners' writing skills as part of communicative competence. Nevertheless, the findings from the above studies suggest that using online tools to carry out language tasks can help develop learners' communicative competence while they are practising online interaction tasks; although their definitions of communicative competence differ from the one applied in the present study. This would suggest that online interaction enables a teacher to design tasks that offer a range of situations through access to different resources. In these tasks, the students may become motivated to use appropriate language for given situations. In the light of this, what is explained next is the use of recent technology in language learning.

### ***2.3.1.1 The Use of Mobile Technology in Language Learning***

One of the most recent technologies used in language teaching and learning is the mobile phone. This is called mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and it involves the use of personal mobile devices to share ideas and information, as well as to access information and communication 'apps' at any time and from any place (Pettit & Kukulska-Hulme, 2007). Mobile phones can be used in language learning for different purposes, such as giving instructions and guidance, motivating students, peer-scaffolding, directing attention, and translation (Kukulska-Hulme, 2016). Moreover, it can improve language learning, as it provides an opportunity for continuity of learning outside the classroom setting (Kukulska-Hulme, 2013).

MALL comprises two types of learning, formal and informal (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2008). The informal use of mobile phones in language learning refers to their use for activities designed without such mobile phone use being specified in advance, in the aims and objectives of the tasks assigned (Kukulska-Hulme, Traxler & Pettit, 2007). Informal language learning consists of a learner-centred approach that can enhance learners' willingness to communicate, as well as promoting their autonomy (Díaz-Vera, 2012; Pérez Cavana & Edwards, 2014). However, the formal use of mobile phones

gives learners permission to use them, but within ways that have been planned by the teacher.

Alternatively, in order to further understand the strategies for using mobile devices in language learning, Kukulska-Hulme (2010) proposed three models: the ‘specified activity model’, based on delivering the learning material to the learners’ mobile devices, in order to emphasise individual learning – although the teacher’s role in this is not emphasised and it is the learners’ responsibility to move between in-class and out of the classroom activity. Secondly, the ‘proposed activity model’ provides the learners with helpful activities, which are not compulsory for them to complete – here, the learners can propose the activity involved. Finally, the ‘learner-driven activity model’ is a self-initiating model for the use of mobile learning.

Learners’ attitudes and perceptions as regards using mobile devices for language learning have been investigated by many researchers (Fazeena, Hewagamage, & Ekanayake, 2012; Viberg & Grönlund, 2013). In the first of these above-mentioned studies, the learners were satisfied with the practice opportunity offered by mobile devices and in the second, the learners were happy with the opportunity to personalise their learning and access authentic material. This points to the significance of using mobile devices to develop learners’ attitudes and perceptions and provide them with practice opportunities. As a result, language teachers are also encouraged to use mobile devices in the learning process, through the different models mentioned above, in order to motivate learners and develop their skills. After briefly reviewing the use of the Internet and mobile phones in language learning in the following section, there will also be a review of those studies that have aimed to develop FLLs’ communicative competence on BL courses.

### **2.3.2 Blended Learning (BL) in Language Teaching and Learning: Benefits and Challenges**

As mentioned earlier, the use of technology to carry out tasks - particularly online learning environments - either as a replacement for certain classroom activities or to enhance the learning process, is called blended learning (BL). The use of BL to develop language learners’ writing has been investigated in the literature and so, in this section,

a review of the use of BL for developing learners' communicative competence is undertaken. Special attention is subsequently given to the impact of the discussion board and wikis on the learners in the present study, as these are the online tools used in the intervention.

Several studies have investigated the effectiveness of BL for enhancing writing skills,- this also being addressed in the current study as part of FLLs' communicative competence. For example, Adas and Bakir (2013) undertook classroom-based research to explore the effectiveness of BL in improving learners' ability to write a paragraph. The above study contained 30 students in an experimental group, taught using BL, and a group of 30 students taught using traditional F2F methods. The learners were tested before and after the intervention and their scores were compared to those of a control group. The students completed three main tasks at home. These were based on material posted by the teacher: an error analysis of a paragraph, writing a paragraph on a topic, and writing comments on a picture. The above study revealed that the learners in the BL group outdid the control group, as their ability to write a coherent and cohesive paragraph improved. Moreover, the BL environment seems to have enabled the students to scaffold each other, thus rendering the process of learning English more interesting. At the same time, the learners developed autonomous control over their skills acquisition, due to the fact that they were able to set their own study goals and complete exercises outside the classroom. The above study also points to the importance of group work in online tasks, although the number of online tasks was limited. Therefore, the findings would have had more significance with a greater number of tasks.

The quasi-experimental study by Gilmore (2011) sheds light on the importance of authentic material in online tasks to benefit learners' communicative competence. In the above study, classroom-based longitudinal research investigated the effectiveness of authentic online materials for learners, in comparison with group learning via a textbook. The students had nine formal teaching hours, with only three of these being transferred online as authentic online materials for the experimental group, over a period of 10 months. The online material included documentaries, films, Web pages and reality shows. The study tested 62 students in their second year of studying English as a main subject at university, before and after the intervention. It was found that the learners in the experimental group outdid those in the control group in all four

communicative competences. This would suggest that authentic materials are important for designing the online part of an intervention. However, the small sample size and non-randomised selection of that sample make it difficult to generalise these findings.

The above-mentioned studies support what was noted when reviewing studies on exclusively online courses, namely that online interaction can help develop learners' communicative competence. They show that these online courses enable teachers to design authentic tasks, which appear to encourage learners to collaborate. The results also indicate that BL can provide learners with a flexible and organised learning environment, wherein they can engage with online content via audio- and video sessions, as well as submitting their assignments or online contributions in an organised way. This organised environment has the potential to improve students' writing skills, as it can provide them with an opportunity to stay in touch with their teacher and peers through collaborative learning, both in the classroom and online, while at the same time enhancing their autonomous behaviour. Two of the popular tools used for online interaction and collaboration are wikis and discussion boards. Various studies have examined the effect of these tools on language learners' writing skills, which will be explained in the following section.

### ***2.3.2.1 The Use of Wikis and Discussion Boards in Language Learning***

Among the different media used to promote online peer-collaboration, wikis are currently receiving increased attention (Lee & Wang, 2013). The features of a wiki are, in particular, editing, revising and tracking drafts to make them suitable for scaffolding in writing (Lamb, 2004; Parker & Chao, 2007). They also afford an extension to collaborative interaction and scaffolding in the classroom, which can in turn help develop students' writing (Aydın & Yıldız, 2014). Wikis enable learners to exchange and request feedback from each other, as well as obtaining feedback on their progress, provided through their teacher's limited interference (Dymoke & Hughes, 2009; Kessler, 2009). Various studies have investigated the effect of collaboration between learners using wikis on their English language understanding and performance, particularly with regard to their writing skills, as reviewed in the next section.

To understand the possible effect of collaborative learning on learners' writing skills through wikis, Aydın and Yıldız (2014) conducted a study on their use in enhancing writing skills through collaboration. 34 FLLs of intermediate proficiency were asked to complete three wiki tasks that involved arguing, informing and decision-making. The intervention lasted for seven weeks. The wiki pages were then analysed and the learners given a questionnaire to complete. The learners were also interviewed after the intervention to investigate their perceptions of the experience. The analysis revealed that collaborative writing on a wiki led learners to use accurate grammatical structures more frequently. The analysis also revealed that there was more editing of meaning than form and more peer-correction than self-correction. Thus, the wiki enabled the learners to scaffold each other to produce the target output, which they then edited by correcting errors in both form and meaning. However, the effectiveness of a wiki for improving learners' writing would become more evident, if the results achieved by an experimental group could be compared with those of a control group.

To shed more light on the type of group work learners can complete using wikis, Bradley et al. (2010) conducted case study research. Their study investigated the effectiveness of wikis for FLL collaboration and learning on a seven-week advanced English for specific purposes (ESP) course in an engineering department. The course sought to develop learners' skills in transforming style, namely the use of informal–formal language, argumentation and critical writing. 54 students interacted by contributing to wikis, out of which 25 wiki pages were analysed. From these 25 groups, five groups were found to have posted their contributions without collaborating or cooperating with others. A further five groups had cooperated by dividing the work amongst themselves. The remaining groups had collaborated to construct target knowledge. Out of the active groups, 19 had engaged in giving feedback, ranging from 8-37 updates on the wiki pages. In addition, this collaboration enabled the learners to practice their writing and revise their assignments several times, thus producing more thoroughly edited work. Therefore, collaboration appears to be the preferred type of group work on wikis, as learners can scaffold each other, as well as reflecting on their own performance. This is consequently helpful for improving language skills. However, it should be considered when designing collaborative tasks that some students may not collaborate and the teacher should therefore find a way of urging them to do so.

From the studies reviewed, it would seem that collaboration through wikis can develop learners' grammatical accuracy, because writing is practiced. Moreover, features of wikis can affect the quality of learners' writing by enabling learners to focus more on their writing and improve the frequency and quality of their participation. This can be realised through the production of more revisions of a text, whereby peers' posts are evaluated and expanded, due to the asynchronous nature of the tools (Elola & Oskoz, 2010). This process also provides learners with more time to think before sending their contributions (Elgort, Toland, & Smith, 2008; Mak & Coniam, 2008; Bradley et al., 2010).

Another asynchronous tool that has received attention in the literature is the discussion forum. Many studies have examined the use of this tool in developing FLLs' writing. Some studies have found it effective for improving learners' language skills. To illustrate this, Fitze (2006) conducted a study comparing F2F and online discussions, whereby the learners explained different concepts to each other. These discussions were collected from two intact classes, containing 13 and 14 students, respectively. Each discussion lasted 20 minutes and the remaining classroom time was for individual tasks. The above intervention lasted for four weeks and in the final analysis, the learners' discussions revealed an increase in the students' use of new words in the online discussion, as compared with the F2F discussion. This was because the online participants were more interactive and had more control over the discussion, given that they had more time allocated to it. Nevertheless, the limited number of students in the groups may have been one reason for the learners' enthusiastic collaboration. As a consequence, the findings from the above study cannot be generalised. Consideration should also be given to issues of confidence and familiarity between students, with regard to them expressing themselves, as compared with the impact of F2F communication. Also relevant was the matter of peer-relations.

However, another group of studies points to the limitations of using such online communication tools. It has been reported that BL has no effect on students' positive learning achievement, since no significant differences have emerged between learners studying in a BL mode and those in an F2F mode (Jonassen, Campbell, & Davidson, 1994; Ehermann, 1999; Carroll & Hsu, 2003). Moreover, other researchers have found that wikis do not have any effect on developing collaboration between students (Judd,

Kennedy, & Cropper, 2010; Wang & Lee, 2013). The above researchers claim that BL can improve access to information, rather than actually improving learning outcomes. Their argument is that the absence of a teacher and peers in an F2F environment cannot be compensated for through access to online learning resources. Neither can it be replaced by the online presence of the teacher and peers. Moreover, Delialioglu and Yildirim (2007) are of the opinion that the literature does not provide much evidence on whether BL is more effective than F2F or exclusively online learning. In addition, the above researchers fail to mention how the tasks in their studies were designed, since it may simply have been the tasks themselves that failed to encourage collaborative learning. Therefore, a design model is required that offers TESOL features and enables the teacher to elicit online interaction, based on principles that will encourage collaborative learning. There does indeed seem to be some evidence of the effects of TESOL and BL approaches on learners' communicative competence.

What is expanded upon in the following section is a review of certain e-learning design models, displaying their strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, the reasons for choosing LCF are also discussed.

### **2.3.3 A Review of E-learning Design Models**

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, one may suppose that using technology to enhance FLLs' communicative competence through access to various online resources could benefit the learning process and consequently, the learning outcomes. The reason for this is that online interaction should include negotiation with peers, answering their questions and sharing ideas. Thus, it offers an opportunity for knowledge construction, rather than simply posting material without interaction (Woo & Reeves, 2007; Saaty, 2015).

However, before deciding on an appropriate e-learning design, a review of models was carried out. It is considered more advantageous to find a model that will enable teachers to make use of the positive features of the language teaching approaches reviewed in section 2.2.3, as well as features of technology implementation for language teaching, reviewed above. These language approaches potentially enable students to communicate appropriately within the contexts they encounter, to interact with their teacher and peers

using the TL, and to focus on form as well as on meaning. Moreover, they can provide a variety of activities in the classroom through authentic tasks. In this context, the teacher plays the key role of instructing and scaffolding.

The use of technology can motivate students to learn, collaborate and provide authentic input, which will also encourage them to scaffold each other (Kovacic et al., 2007; Gilmore, 2011; Mohammadi et al., 2011; Aydın & Yıldız, 2014). The following section portrays three e-learning models used to design online and blended courses. Some of these models have been used to design language-learning courses, with a positive impact on learners' language skills. They are subsequently reviewed and evaluated, with a detailed description of the model chosen for this current study. The details of the task design principles associated with one of the models are subsequently described, along with a review of those studies that have adopted these design principles.

Firstly, Mayes' (1995) Conceptualisation Cycle was examined, with its three stages of learning. In Mayes' Conceptualisation Cycle, the learners are exposed to other people's ideas or concepts. They then apply new concepts in meaningful tasks, before performing and testing new ideas during conversations with teachers and peers. However, this model does not appropriately integrate the different forms of technology for each step, even though technology has been demonstrated as an effective element in language learning, as mentioned earlier. Moreover, the above model provides few opportunities for interaction and collaboration. When it does, they are mainly limited to teacher-learner interaction, given the importance of interaction for FLLs, since it enables them to construct their knowledge through negotiating, arguing and collaborating with others (Saaty, 2015).

Secondly, Gilly Salmon's e-Moderating Model (2004) was reviewed. This is an online interactive model in five stages. It was originally designed to help teachers integrate technology into teaching and learning, whereby the kind of e-tivities to be designed for each stage can be selected. It is aimed at developing learners' skills, so that they can learn through collaboration. In brief, the model consists of five stages: in the first stage, 'access and motivation', the learners are guided by their teacher to access the online learning environment. Moreover, they are encouraged to participate throughout the learning process. In the second stage, 'online socialisation', the students start to



establish their identities within their groups and begin interacting. In the third stage, ‘information exchange’, interaction takes place, as the learners exchange information. Here, the teacher needs to plan the learning process based on the learning objectives. In the fourth stage, ‘knowledge construction’, participants start to construct their knowledge by working collaboratively. Finally, in the last stage, ‘development’, individual reflection is promoted to achieve the learning outcomes. The learners can also review their learning during these four stages.

Salmon’s (2004) Model is useful for learners who are newly enrolled in online learning, because it specifies a stage where participants are exposed to the online environment. Another positive aspect of Salmon’s Model is that it has a ‘motivation’ stage, whereby learners are encouraged to get to know each other using icebreaker activities as a means of dissolving the rigid relationships between them. This model has been used to satisfactory effect in language learning, as demonstrated by Abdullah et al. (2013) (see section 2.3.4.5).

However, Salmon’s (2004) Model does not allow space for the teacher’s instruction, despite the fact that this is essential in FL teaching. Furthermore, it starts with a task being assigned to learners. This is not necessarily a good introduction to a teaching session in the study context, as the learners may not yet have the ability to communicate effectively (Foster-Jones & Foster, 2011). In addition, as Moule (2007) reports, it ignores certain learning theories and principles and fails to consider different learning styles. This is confirmed by other researchers (Lisewski & Joyce, 2003). The above Model requires students to interact with one or two peers during the first stage, with the number of students involved in this interaction being increased in the second. However, this model cannot be applied in the case of the present research, due to the limited time allocated for the study.

In Salmon’s (2004) Model, the term ‘e-tivity’ is introduced and defined as an online activity based on interaction between learners through written contributions. This interaction is led by an e-moderator, leading to an engaging, motivating and purposeful activity. The components of e-tivities are: (1) a task title, (2) a purpose, ‘spark’, or piece of information which will stimulate or challenge the learner, (3) the teacher’s invitation, consisting of instructions for the participants, (4) an online activity that includes

individual contributions, (5) an interactive element, such as responding to the participation of others, (6) feedback from the teacher, and (7) a brief of what is coming next (Salmon, 2013).

With regard to e-tivities, previous studies have reported their usefulness for designing learning tasks (Kovacic, Bubas, & Zlatovic, 2007; Sidhu & Embi, 2010; Salmon, 2013; Wright, 2014). These activities have consequently been known to motivate learners to learn and collaborate, thus improving the quality of the online learning, assisting and complementing F2F teaching, and enhancing learners' satisfaction. This is the result of their consistency and the ease with which they may be understood (Wright, 2014). E-tivities can help language learners to achieve learning objectives and thus develop their language skills, as Sidhu and Embi (2010) confirm. E-tivities can also improve learners' perceptions of tasks, as found by Kovacic et al. (2007). Although Salmon (2013) originally introduced these design principles for collaborative online tasks, it was decided that e-tivities would be used in the present study to design individual, collaborative F2F and collaborative online tasks in LCF, when designing the tasks in the study intervention (see section 3.10.1).

Recently, investigators have examined the effectiveness of e-tivities for designing asynchronous online tasks. Rogerson-Revell (2015) carried out action research to evaluate the effectiveness of e-tivities for distance learning, thereby assessing distance learners on a Master's programme for Applied Linguistics and on a TESOL programme. These learners took two modules, with four e-tivities apiece and each e-tivity lasting for four weeks. After the intervention, the learners were interviewed and they revealed that the e-tivities had provided them with constructive feedback and support from their tutor. It had also encouraged some of them to interact and collaborate with their peers, or else to study more. Moreover, it had kept them constantly engaged. However, although a long period of e-tivity could suit distance learners, who usually work full time, it might not suit full-time FLLs, who need to accomplish tasks to receive feedback from their teacher.

To shed light on the use of e-tivities applying asynchronous communication tools, Kovacic et al. (2007) carried out a study to evaluate the use of e-tivities for designing wikis on an ESP course. The students were assigned various e-tivities, such as online

debates, role-play and problem-solving tasks. The study sample included 85 first-year students and 28 second-year students at university. These students evaluated the use of e-tivities by filling out a survey. The results of this study indicate that the wikis were useful and interesting. Moreover, the students revealed that the use of e-tivities encouraged them to engage with the topic on which the tasks were based. The students also engaged with their peers to collaborate and it inspired their creativity on the wiki pages. Collectively, the above studies indicate that using e-tivities to design online tasks can encourage students to collaborate, in order to accomplish tasks. This is because e-tivities can clarify the purpose of the tasks and enable students to receive feedback from the teacher, as the role of the teacher and learner is defined in the tasks.

Thus, from a review of the available models in the literature, it is clear that Salmon's (2004) Model lacks a definite role for the teacher. This role is however essential for FLLs who need guidance and scaffolding while they are learning a language. Moreover, the two Models reviewed do not provide learners with an opportunity to practice individual tasks that will enable them to assess themselves. Therefore, a different design model is required.

#### **2.3.4 Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF)**

It would seem that Laurillard was motivated to design the Conversational Framework in much the same way as a language teacher seeks to create a learning design. Laurillard developed LCF based on, (1) research into students' learning aimed at enhancing their achievement; (2) "[a] combination of the theoretical perspectives of conversation theory, constructivism and reflective practice", as will be explained later, and (3) the provision of a framework that will get the best from technology (Laurillard, 2008, p.140). The concerns and theories addressed in this Framework, as explained later, suggest that it can provide learners with opportunities to construct their learning through conversation. Moreover, I believed it would correspond to their needs.

The framework is based on the concept that teaching is not merely an action imposed on students, but rather a means of mediating their learning to achieve academic learning aims by iteratively and interactively discussing and practicing the target structure (Laurillard, 1999). The iterative dialogue between the teacher and the learner can

subsequently reveal to the teacher the learner's level, so that the focus can be on developing it (Laurillard, 2002). This dialogue, as well as peers' dialogue can help learners reflect and interpret their learning (Laurillard, 2002). The Framework is based on Pask's (1976) theory, along with essential features of various other learning theories, such as instructionism, constructionism and SCT (Laurillard, 2009; Fotouhi-Ghazvini, Earnshaw, Robison, Moeini, & Excell, 2011). Pask's (1976) 'learning as conversation' theory has been explained by Scott (2001) as a concept that includes conversations between the teacher and learner and between the learners themselves. However, according to Pask, conversation is not merely knowledge exchange, but also a process of "becoming informed about each other's 'informings'" (Sharples, 2005, p.3). The difference between Pask's theory and LCF is that in the former, the exchange of knowledge is purely for the sake of informing the other party in a conversation, while in the latter, it pertains to knowledge exchange for the sake of constructing new knowledge.

Instructionism is a theory that depends on the teacher presenting a target structure, followed by the learner attempting to perform a task to achieve an intended goal. In this theory, the focus is on the final product delivered to the students, mainly via the teacher and without any form of peer-collaboration (Jonassen, 2004). On the other hand, constructionism is a theory that includes learner-centred educational practices; it focuses on the learning process and learning gained through collaboration (Johnson, 2009). In other words, it is derived from Piaget (1995) and Papert's (1991) theories, which emphasise the importance of constructing a model as a feature of learning, thus making use of the modelling properties of technology.

Finally, LCF is based on SCT, derived from Vygotsky (1986). It particularly concerns the role of the teacher and peer-collaboration in learning (Laurillard, 2009) (see section 2.3.4.4 for more detail). In the present study, the design of the intervention is based on LCF and mainly in terms of SCT to develop learners' communicative competence. This involves indirect instruction from the teacher, rather than the direct presentation of the target structure, which is supported by Laurillard. However, in addition to SCT, Laurillard adds concepts such as scaffolding from teachers and peers, as well as mediation.

LCF consists of four levels and the main two are discursive, whereby discussion and negotiation of theory and concepts can take place between the teacher and learner (Lee, 2006). There is also an experiential level, where the learners practice, process, adapt and reflect on information (Neo et al., 2013). The other two levels, falling between the main levels, are adaptation and reflection (Laurillard & McAndrew, 2002; Plaisted & Irvine, 2006). On these levels, the learners adapt what they have discussed and learned in order to perform a task. After completing this task and receiving feedback, they then reflect on their learning, modify their concepts and actions, and generalise what they have learned. The teacher consequently adapts a task based on discussion with the learners at the beginning of the lesson and at the end, reflects on the design in the light of what has taken place (Hutchings et al., 2007; Laurillard, 2008; Laurillard, 2009; Fotouhi-Ghazvini et al., 2011). Laurillard (2013) thereby classifies the Framework into six cycles, as follows (see Figure 2.1):

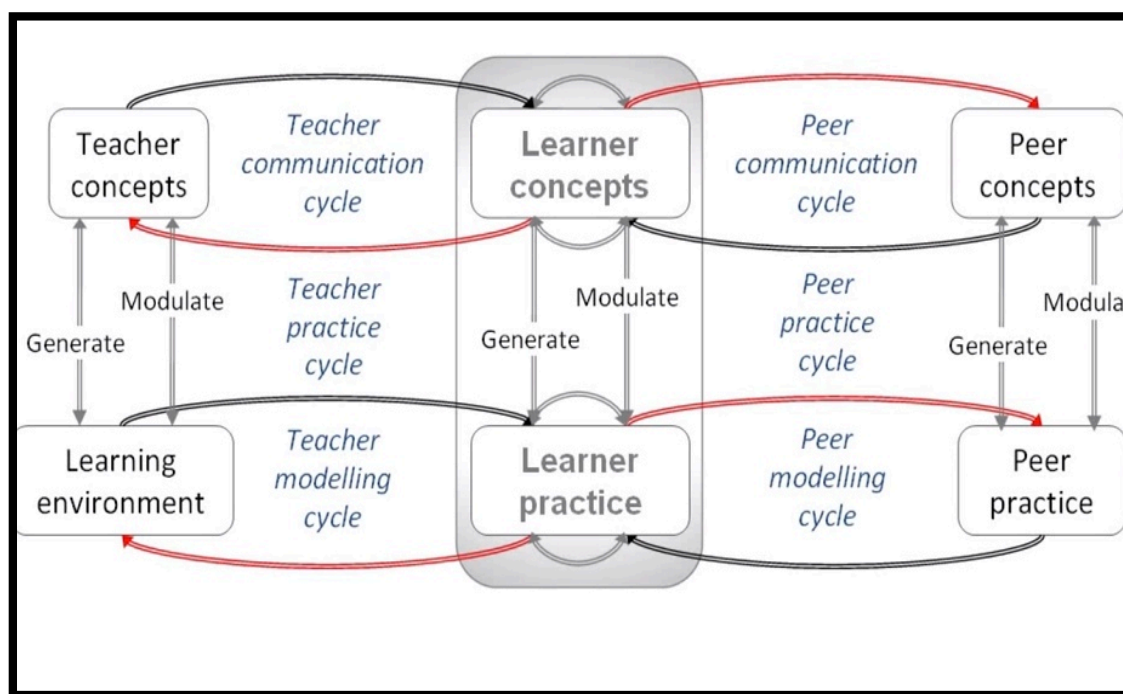
1. **The teacher-communication cycle:** In this cycle, the teacher aligns the lesson's goals, based on the learners' previous experiences. Target structures are learned in an iterative cycle moving between the teacher and the learner. For instance, the teacher starts by explaining target structures through language and other forms of presentation. The learners' deep understanding is then tested by communicating with them, so that they can reflect on their experiences. Next, the teacher re-explains the target structures using examples to show similarities and contrast between cases, before learners make another attempt to present the information. This is a form of scaffolding for learners (Allen & Mills, 2014). In this cycle, the teacher actively explores the learners' thinking by asking about relationships between target structures, examples and the contrast between things, in order to develop these target structures.

It could be suggested that the teacher discusses concepts with learners, rather than merely presenting them, since this approach to knowledge construction facilitates understanding. Moreover, this cycle depends on students actively discussing target structures with the teacher. Thus, students need to be familiar with each other and not shy about making mistakes before participating in this discussion. Moreover, they should be informed of what they are meant to learn in the lesson, before entering into discussion. This can be achieved by stating the

learning objectives to them and commencing with relevant icebreaker activities. Nevertheless, it is clear that LCF best suits teachers with more teaching experience, rather than newly qualified teachers, as it depends heavily on the teacher's experience in aligning the goals of the lesson.

2. **The teacher-practice cycle:** In this cycle, which could also be called the 'task design cycle', the teacher should design a task appropriate for the learners' level, so as to help them reach their potential ZPD. This would follow a discussion with them, in order to encourage them to practice their knowledge and share it with others. It would mean that the teacher should have time to design the task, whether in the same session or for delivery to the learners in a later session. However, although the teacher is responsible for designing the tasks, LCF does not provide any details on how these should be formulated.
3. **The teacher-modelling cycle:** In this cycle, the teacher creates a modelling environment for the learners, where they can practice what they have learned by performing a task individually. This cycle may also be referred to as the 'individual practice cycle'. The teacher provides feedback and a model to enable the learners to modify (modulate) their concepts and practice.
4. **The peer-communication cycle:** This is the cycle that could be referred to as the 'peer-explanation cycle', whereby the learners modify their concepts by explaining them to their peers. In this cycle, the teacher asks the students to recount (to the teacher) what they have discussed in groups, so that their progress can be evaluated. The aim is not merely to ensure that the learners note structures, since noting alone does not guarantee learning. It therefore endeavours to raise their awareness, as affirmed by Ishihara (2007) and Narita (2012).
5. **The peer-practice cycle:** This is the cycle that could be called the 'peer-output practice cycle', where the learners collaborate with their peers to produce output, which can be shared by others and evaluated by the teacher.

6. **The peer-modelling cycle:** This is the ‘students’ reflection cycle’, where the learners may modify their practice after receiving feedback from the teacher on their collaborative output.



**Figure 2.1 Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF) (Laurillard, 2013, p.92)**

It may be assumed from the above Figure that LCF can facilitate a smooth shift from teacher- to learner-guided tasks. This can be achieved by providing learners with opportunities to discuss the relevant target structures with their teacher, combined with them being offered opportunities to produce and practice target structures on both a theoretical and practical level (Laurillard & Manning, 1993; Ohta, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Laurillard, 2009; Lin & Samuel, 2013). If adapted in the design for a language-learning lesson to develop FLLs' communicative competence, LCF has the potential to provide learners with: the teacher's instruction; individual tasks - where there is self-assessment of understanding based on a teacher-student discussion, peer-explanation, and collaborative practice to produce output, applied to the target structure discussed with the teacher and peers. This can take place through tasks that resemble real-life contexts. LCF will enable learners to receive the teacher's support throughout an intervention. It can provide learners with an iterative learning cycle, whereby they practice their competences with their teacher and peers. Moreover, it can share some common ground with CLT and TBLT, namely encouraging learners to focus on form,

meaning, accuracy and fluency, while also encouraging them to collaborate.

On the other hand, LCF has been criticised by Heinze, Procter and Scott (2007) as being a complicated framework, difficult to apply and only workable with students who will do everything required from them. This is due to the fact that LCF requires the performance of many tasks related to the same target structure, in order to suit the iterative nature of the framework. It also requires a high level of teacher-student engagement. For this reason, it might be considered boring and laborious by many students and teachers alike.

An advantage of LCF is that it classifies media into different types, thus affording the practitioner the chance to choose suitable media to meet a lesson's objectives. Media and technology are not viewed as transmitters, but Laurillard has classified them into four types, based on her classification of teaching strategies (Laurillard, 1993; Laurillard, 2013). The first type consists of narrative media, which is a non-interactive way of presenting media, such as through graphics, audio-recordings and films. Laurillard claims that teachers can use these types of media to design their teaching, thereby providing encouragement through in-text self-assessment questions. On the other hand, students may lack interest in these types of media, as they do not incorporate the latest technology favoured by the new generations. The second type of media is therefore interactive. This represents open media that can be controlled by students and which includes hypermedia and websites. However, this type of media requires a high level of support.

Alternatively, the third type of media is adaptive. It is computer-based and changes its status based on users' actions, such as in educational games and simulation, with automatic feedback. In contrast, the fourth type of media is communicative. It provides the teacher and students with a medium for discussion, such as online discussion forums and wikis. Through this classification, it may be claimed that LCF can provide a teacher or course designer with a means of aligning technology with the lesson objectives, throughout the different cycles of the Framework. It also supports the various teaching methods used in higher education, such as learning through acquisition (from lectures and books), learning through practice (via tasks), learning through discussion (in scenarios), and learning through discovery (on fieldtrips and through practical



application).

#### ***2.3.4.1 Task Design in Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF)***

This section presents a further analysis of the Framework in terms of task design. Laurillard (2008) suggests several steps for ensuring the effectiveness of each task in the learning process. These should contain: (1) a task goal; (2) a suitable working environment for learners to practice their actions; (3) meaningful feedback for learners, relating to their actions and the task goal; (4) an opportunity for learners to revise and improve their actions, and (5) encouragement for learners to adapt and reflect, in the light of their experience. Nevertheless, although it is important to follow these steps, they still do not constitute practical steps for designing tasks. Moreover, in 2009, Laurillard proposed a checklist of questions for learning activities, intended to ensure that they suit the different cycles of the Framework (see Table 2.2, below).

**Table 2.2 A Checklist of Questions for the Learning Activities in Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF) (Laurillard, 2009, p.19)**

Do the activities motivate students to:
1. access explanations and presentations of the theory, ideas or concepts?
2. ask questions about their understanding of the theory, etc. by providing the opportunity for answers from the teacher, or their peers?
3. offer their own ideas and conceptual understanding, by providing comments on them from the teacher, or their peers?
4. use their theoretical understanding to achieve a clear task or goal by adapting their actions in the light of their understanding, or in response to comments or feedback?
5. repeat practice, by providing feedback on actions that enable them to improve performance?
6. repeat practice, by enabling them to share their trial actions with peers, for comparison and comment?
7. reflect on the experience of the goal-action-feedback cycle, by offering repeated practice aimed at achieving the task goal?
8. discuss and debate their ideas with other learners?
9. reflect on their experience, by having to articulate or produce their ideas, reports, designs, performances, etc. for presentation to their peers?
10. reflect on their experience, by having to articulate or produce their ideas, reports, designs, performances, etc. for presentation to their teachers?

However, these criteria are connected with the Framework itself and do not show how the tasks should be formulated. Therefore, in the current study, LCF was adapted using Salmon's (2004) e-tivities in the task design as part of the intervention, explained in section 3.10.1. E-tivities were specifically chosen, rather than any other task design

principles, due to the effectiveness they have demonstrated in the literature on language learning (reviewed earlier in section 2.3.3).

What accentuates the possible positive impact of Salmon's (2004) task design principles for e-tivities are the two factors considered essential by Ainley, Pratt and Hansen (2006). Although these were originally identified for mathematics tasks, they can also be applied to language learning. Firstly, it is important for the learner to know the 'purpose' of the tasks, as this will ensure a meaningful outcome. Secondly the learner should be aware of the 'utility' of the tasks. This not only means knowing how to carry out a task, but also relates to constructing meaning in the process (Ainley et al., 2006). These two factors are essential for meaningful and effective tasks, wherein learners can construct knowledge. Building on the above, it would seem that this current study is one of the first to examine tasks in an intervention designed using LCF (2013) and Salmon's (2004) e-tivities.

#### ***2.3.4.2 Empirical Studies Applying Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF)***

A large and growing body of literature has investigated the effects of LCF in online teaching or BL courses. LCF has been used as a framework for examining what media can offer teaching and learning. Fotouhi-Ghazvini et al. (2011) used the Framework to design a game aimed at developing learners' reporting skills, cognitive processes and achievement. In the above study, LCF was applied to the designing of educational games. These games gave learners opportunities to converse with real and virtual characters throughout each game, while also analysing, comparing, discussing and collaborating. LCF was used, as it combines different modes of learning, where learners can interact with experts as well as peers. The above study found that the students' reporting skills, cognitive processes and achievement were positively developed. However, the implementation of LCF as a design or media-evaluation framework was not adequately explained. The similarities of Fotouhi-Ghazvini et al. (2011) to the present study therefore merely consist of a pre- and post-test to investigate the development of students' knowledge.

LCF was also used as a design framework in the following studies reviewed. Preliminary work on the effectiveness of the second version of LCF was carried out by

Mesh (2010) to measure the effectiveness of constructive collaboration for enhancing language skills on a blended course at the University of Siena. The aforementioned university offers English courses for professional adults, with active student engagement. These English lessons were delivered over nine weeks, with one hour per week in the classroom (focusing on listening and speaking skills) and two hours online (focusing on reading and writing skills). The students collaborated through asynchronous activities, such as forums, wikis, blogs and chat, for synchronous communication, which extended the classroom conversation. The online activities were intended to prepare for the F2F class.

The intervention was evaluated twice: first in 2007 by distributing a questionnaire to 55 students, and then in 2009, with a questionnaire administered to 61 students. The above study found that those learners who actively participated, whether in the classroom or online, made progress in all four language skills. A high percentage of the students were satisfied with the unit, many finding it interesting, as it provided them with opportunities to develop their communicative competence. Moreover, it was found that the students used more complex language in the online discussion than they did in the F2F discussion. It may therefore be argued that the development in the learners' speaking and listening skills was due to the BL design of the online lessons, which had prepared them for the speaking and listening activities in the classroom.

However, many difficulties were also encountered by the students in the above study, relating to the lack of time for speaking practice and increased workload, since they were also at work during the day. These issues reduced their satisfaction. The study nevertheless concluded that wikis could be considered as an excellent tool for collaborative writing in L2 and may be used at all language levels. Furthermore, work by Mesh (2010) corresponds to aspects of the present study, in that it integrates a design principle other than LCF, where the lesson's objectives are stated. However, the present study examines learners' perceptions of an intervention using semi-structured interviews, unlike Mesh (2010), who used a questionnaire.

In order to more fully comprehend the effectiveness of LCF in developing learners' comprehension, Neo et al. (2013) adapted LCF to investigate the effects of interaction and communication between students and teachers, when attempting to develop

students' understanding through a course design. The course in question lasted for 14 weeks, with F2F lectures and asynchronous online activities being offered. These implemented multimedia and collaborative activities via blogs, thus promoting collaboration as a means of accomplishing a project. The above authors measured students' perceptions of a course design. The aim of this was to enable students to create an interactive multimedia magazine website.

The above study showed that the learners experienced deep and meaningful learning through peer-explanation and output practice. However, Neo et al. (2013) point out that in this Framework, the teacher still plays a central role in the learning process by transferring and creating knowledge. The learners were in fact found to favour the presence of the teacher in the classroom, because they needed continuous feedback. Moreover, the use of online blogs and discussion forums encouraged them to communicate and construct deep learning, while reducing stress in their relationships, as they were not physically in the classroom. However, the above study would have been more convincing, if the researchers had measured the learners' understanding via another objective data collection method, rather than merely asking them to fill out a questionnaire. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the abovementioned research, however, it would appear that both Mesh (2010) and Neo et al. (2013) were able to motivate learners, increasing their interest in a course and encouraging them to work collaboratively by adopting LCF in the designs for their courses.

In order to shed light on learners' perceptions of the characteristics of LCF, namely a variety of teaching approaches and different opportunities for self-learning and reflection, Elgort (2011) adopted the Framework in case study research. The objective of this was to propose an approach to managing complexity for 20 students on a blended Applied Linguistics and part-time TESOL Master's programme at a university in New Zealand. It was thereby claimed that dialogic learning was based on LCF, although no further details were provided. Nevertheless, the study found that the learners were satisfied with the individualisation that emerged through the use of learning objectives to help them focus on how to learn. They had a positive perception of the role of the teacher as facilitator and were happy to accept the media used, such as the podcast and phone app. The course also raised the students' confidence in using new technologies, despite the fact they were not expert. Moreover, most of them thought that

the course had affected their attitude to CALL. Half of them were also happy with the autonomy afforded by the course, even though the other half were not so happy, as it entailed extra reading. However, it was clear that CALL provided the learners with a collaborative learning environment, as they engaged in their own learning and reflected critically upon it.

The studies reviewed above show the positive effects of LCF. Conversely, Heinze et al.'s (2007) action research reported insignificant results for the use of LCF in BL. Their study sought a practical pedagogical theory to encourage part-time students to study information technology (IT) on a BL course. By interviewing the students about their experiences of an intervention designed using LCF, the students declared that they appreciated using a discussion board and F2F discussion to generalise feedback. However, they also felt that the time allocated for the lesson was insufficient for the activities. Moreover, they did not perceive any difference between a lesson designed using LCF and other types of lesson. Similarly, the staff involved considered LCF to be a complicated framework, difficult to apply and only effective with compliant and motivated students. Moreover, the above researchers claimed that LCF had some drawbacks, such as a dependence on the willingness of students and staff and the ability of students to participate in dialogue. They found that it also demands negotiation between the students and the teacher and is limited in application to online group-based learning. The study ultimately implied that LCF is a useful starting point for BL, but needs amendment and enrichment for more widespread application. Some of the reasons for these insignificant findings were a lack of opportunities to reflect and the students' interest in gaining marks rather than skills, as the researchers confirmed. Moreover, the teacher in the first cycle of the lessons took on a lesser role than expected; instead of discussing the target structures with the learners, the students were given exercises and assisted with and a re-explanation of the target structures, as required.

In a similar way to Heinze et al. (2007), the current study examines learners' perceptions of the intervention designed using semi-structured interviews. In the light of the literature, LCF is consequently used in two different ways. The first involves examining a framework for the effectiveness of media utilised in the teaching process (Fotouhi-Ghazvini et al., 2011). The second involved using it as a framework for

designing BL (Heinze et al., 2007; Mesh, 2010; Elgort, 2011; Neo et al., 2013). Collectively, much of the current literature on LCF pays particular attention to its effectiveness in online and BL environments. This is due to the fact that it is an e-learning design framework, concerned with integrating technology into learning.

Notwithstanding the above, there is a dearth of studies analysing the use of LCF to design F2F learning units, although there is a large volume of published studies describing the positive results of using LCF to design learning units in general. The originality of the current study therefore lies in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of LCF and examining whether its effectiveness is due to the integration of online learning tools, or to its iterative features. There are a few studies, such as one by Mesh (2010), which have involved the adoption of LCF for the development of learners' writing skills. However, unlike the current study, these skills were not considered as an aspect of their communicative competence.

#### ***2.3.4.3 Underpinning Theory***

As mentioned previously, the design of the intervention in this study is based on LCF, which is in turn based on SCT. SCT, derived from social constructivism and knowledge construction through joint activities and learning, is achieved through participation in cultural and social practices (Lamy & Hampel, 2007). This view grew out of idea put forward by Vygotsky (1978), who believed that knowledge is afforded by a community of social customs and discourse, rather than being individually constructed (Edwards, 2005). In this theory, learning takes place if it is facilitated and mediated by more advanced individuals, such as more capable peers and teachers (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Overall, 2007; Woo & Reeves, 2007; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013).

Although Laurillard describes her Framework as a mix of SCT, instructionism and constructionism, as mentioned previously, the current intervention design considers only SCT (see details on the intervention in section 3.10.1). For this study, the pedagogy is based on SCT via LCF. The reasons for such a theoretical assumption are explained in detail below. Firstly, in LCF, the teacher should not unilaterally introduce the target structure to the learners, but rather discuss it with them, based on their previous knowledge. This is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) view that the direct

instruction of concepts is fruitless and results only in the “mindless learning of words”, i.e. the risk of an FLL memorising words without understanding them, as there is no application of the concept (Vygotsky, 1978, p.170).

Secondly, in LCF, after building their knowledge through the teacher’s discussion of target structures, learners carry out an individual task to practice what they have discussed with the teacher. They can then collaborate with each other for further explanation and practice. This is in line with SCT, in that it emphasises the importance of interaction and how socialisation and language acquisition are inseparable from their interactive grammatical context (Ohta, 1995). Therefore, according to this theory, learners must negotiate meaning and engage with more capable peers to construct their learning (Ohta, 1995; Etxebarria, Garay, & Romero, 2012). However, it is in any case essential for FLLs to collaborate with their peers, regardless of their level (Mesh, 2010; Abdullah et al., 2013; Suntharesan, 2013).

Some concepts of the above theory support this investigation into the effectiveness of adapting LCF in the development of FLLs’ writing skills, as part of their communicative competence. These comprise ZPD, scaffolding, mediation, and private and collaborative dialogue, later referred to as ‘languageing’, which is explained below.

#### ***2.3.4.4 Sociocultural Theory (SCT) Concepts Adopted in this Research***

##### ***(1) The Learners’ Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).***

Learning a language pertains to cognitive development and takes place through social interaction with a teacher and more advanced peers. It is then internalised during the autonomous performance of a new task (Vygotsky, 1986; Ellis, 2000; Turuk, 2008; Sah, 2014). This corresponds to Vygotsky (1978), who emphasised that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: First, on the social level between people (interpsychological), and later, on an individual level within the child (intrapsychological)” (p.57). In other words, a learner’s interaction with a teacher and more advanced peers can help them reach their potential ZPD.

ZPD is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). It refers to the cognitive gap that exists between what an individual can do alone and what they can do through collaboration (assistance) with more skilful peers (Gibbons, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978; Radford & Roth, 2010; Lantolf & Poehner, 2011). Reaching this level of ZPD will enable the learner to perform similar tasks independently and to acquire skills for future use.

In addition, ZPD can be enhanced through teacher-student interaction, serving inter-mental functions (the upper limit of ZPD), and student-student interaction that serves intra-mental functions (the lower limit of ZPD) (Lantolf, 2012). However, Vygotsky does not clarify how this concept can be applied; he leaves it to the teacher to determine how the learners can move from one level to another (Shayer, 2003). Many researchers since Vygotsky have considered the use of peer-collaboration as a means of enabling students to receive and provide assistance, thus enhancing their ZPD; it is not only restricted to the expert-novice relationship (Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000). Moreover, it has also been emphasised by Van Lier (2014), who describes four resources for knowledge construction in ZPD. These involve receiving assistance from more advanced peers, interaction with equal peers, interaction with less capable peers and inner resources, such as experience, knowledge and memory. These types of resources for knowledge construction can be provided for FLLs through supportive intervention (Lantolf & Poehner, 2011).

In this study, in order to develop learners’ grammatical and sociolinguistic competences, ZPD involves grammatical knowledge, applicable to writing a passage describing events in the past and asking wh-questions about past events, as well as the sociolinguistic competence of writing a letter of complaint. The plan here is to determine the learners’ ZPD during the learner-teacher interaction during the first LCF cycle, so that the tasks can be adjusted if needed. After determining the learners’ level, the teacher and peers can assist them to reach the upper limit of their ZPD, in order to be able to apply these skills without assistance.



The guidance and assistance for learners to reach their potential ZPD was termed ‘scaffolding’ by Wood et al. (1976). The concepts of ZPD and scaffolding originally related to adult-child interaction, but were later extended to teacher-student interaction in the classroom by Cazden (1979; as cited in Smit, AA van Eerde, & Bakker, 2012). However, scaffolding must be based on learners’ needs, in order to ensure that suitable support is provided at the right level and at the right time (Pata, Sarapuu, & Lehtinen, 2005; Van de Pol & Elbers, 2013). Moreover, scaffolding can be provided by more skilful peers, who will lead the novice to achieve more than he currently can in a new situation, when learning a new skill (Gibbons, 2006). This is also possible with peers of the same level, as they can still explain things to each other, clarify points, ask questions and repeat things (Sah, 2014), whether in their L1 or the TL (Van Lier, 1988). It can also be provided by the teacher’s ‘interactional scaffolding’, as in providing either ‘content feedback’ to correct meaning, or ‘correcting feedback’ to correct form (Cancino, 2015). However, it is important to bear in mind that not all the actions of a teacher in the classroom may be classified as scaffolding. Wood et al. (1976) identify specific actions in this regard, for example drawing the novice’s attention to the task; limiting the task’s demands; calling the novice’s attention to critical features of the task; maintaining the learner’s motivation; reducing the novice’s stress, and demonstrating preferred processes for achieving goals.

In the present study, scaffolding is provided in different forms. For instance, in the ‘teacher communication cycle’, the scaffolding includes answering students’ questions, giving examples and hints, and clarifying and reformulating the learners’ utterances. In the ‘teacher practice cycle’, this theory comes into play when the teacher sets a task, as it is a source of development, rather than merely a practice task. The students thus engage in self-learning as a result of the task. In the peer-explanation and peer-output practice tasks, the peer-scaffolding takes place through an explanation of the concepts and output practice, in order to complete these two tasks using the learners’ L1 and TL. The teacher should also scaffold the learners while they work on tasks with peers and after they accomplish them.

Nevertheless, the SCT notion of ZPD differs from Krashen’s (1985)  $i+1$ . Krashen’s (1985)  $i+1$  represents a view of human learning and knowledge acquisition, where input is received at a slightly higher level than the one where the learner is currently at. The

learner will then acquire language through input alone, which lies beyond his or her current level ( $i+1$ ) and even if there is interaction, it will be unrelated to this language acquisition (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998). In other words, Krashen's notion does not assign interaction a role in developing language acquisition; whereas in Vygotsky's ZPD, learners actively participate in interaction with their teacher and peers to construct knowledge (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998). Therefore, Krashen views the mind and language as vehicles for transmitting meaning to listeners, while Vygotsky views mental activities as the result of interaction between natural, historical and cultural factors.

## *(2) Mediation*

Another theme from Vygotsky's work is the notion of mediation. The mediation of artefacts refers to the use of auxiliary objects or tools that mediate all human activities (Sah, 2014; Deutschmann & Vu, 2015). Artefacts include material tools, such as writing implements, diagrams, presentation programmes, virtual learning environments (VLEs) and language, as primary mediators (Gibbons, 2006). These artefacts can be used by the teacher and peers, not only to enable learners to plan and review their actions, but also to mediate other mental activities related to internal dialogue and to establish a relationship with the world (Vygotsky, 1986; Lantolf, 2000; Gibbons, 2006; Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013; Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2015). Digital artefacts can provide language learners with even more input and opportunities for practice and output (Thorne, 2008).

Mediation enables the learner to become an active agent in his or her own knowledge development, while at the same time emphasising the importance of contextual factors of development using available tools (Daniels, 2010). In this study, the mediating artefacts used to help the learners construct their knowledge are language (L1 and TL), a unit hand-out, computers, a PowerPoint presentation, podcasts, video clips, mobile 'apps' and a whiteboard. The tasks themselves are considered as mediating tools, since they provoke individual and collaborative work (Appel & Lantolf, 1994). Moreover, in the BL unit, an online component of the intervention consisting of the discussion board and wiki tasks is provided for the students. The appropriate use of mediating tools by the teacher and peers to facilitate knowledge acquisition can enable the learner to construct knowledge and enhance their potential ZPD.

The use of language as a mediation tool can take the form of ‘*linguaging*’. This term was first introduced by Swain (2006) and it represents learners consulting others on how to solve problems in their own language through ‘*verbalisation*’. This is in fact their private speech (when the speaker addresses himself in a low voice or whispers without making eye contact while learning a language). It is also called self-mediation (Lantolf, 2000; Swain et al., 2015) and can even take place through collaborative peer-dialogue, where language is used as a tool to mediate thinking and internalise new knowledge (Swain, 2010; Suzuki, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2013; Swain et al., 2015). Referred to as social mediation, it consists of the teachers’ role in language learning, through facilitating and constructing dialogue between themselves and their students, as well as the role of peers as effective mediators for developing each other’s understanding and language acquisition (Lantolf, 2000; Gibbons, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2013; Sah, 2014). Through these types of mediation, language develops alongside the emergence of speaking skills, out of an interpersonal social function and towards an intrapersonal function and the self, in order to mediate mental performance, whereby speech becomes inner speech (Appel & Lantolf, 1994).

Linguaging serves as a kind of self-checking and support from peers, focused on linguistic knowledge construction. This involves the use of language to solve a problem pertaining to the use of words or sentence structure (Swain, 2006; Swain et al., 2015). Swain introduced the term ‘*linguaging*’, “based on Vygotsky’s claim that language is one of the most important symbolic systems we have at our disposal in the development and mediation of voluntary actions” (Swain et al., 2015, p.41). Meanwhile, Lantolf (2012) declares that linguaging focuses more on the form of the language than on its meaning, but Swain (2000) asserts that this interaction should focus learners’ attention on meaning as well as on their own language use. It can also enable them to identify any issues faced in their language use (Swain, 2006; Suzuki, 2012). Although linguaging may be rejected by some students, as they are unaccustomed to it, the teacher can make it more appealing by assigning activities that will ensure the learners talk about their language issues (Swain et al., 2015).

Language proficiency is another major factor affecting the type and amount of linguaging that occurs (Suzuki & Itagaki, 2009). In other words, having students with different language abilities, interests and backgrounds can affect their performance of

tasks (Verma, 2011). As many researchers have found, learners with a higher level of proficiency will be able to engage with language more deeply than their less proficient peers (Suzuki & Itagaki, 2009; Yu & Lee, 2016). However, it has been suggested that in order to overcome the differences in learners' language proficiency or ability, the best way is to involve them in active learning (Verma, 2011). Languageing may be more important on writing courses as it requires double the amount of attention and conscious work from the learner to select and use words correctly (Vygotsky, 1986). This will occur while students socially construct meaning when drafting and revising their written compositions. In LCF, languageing can take place in peer-explanation and output-practice cycles. The aim of such languageing is to scaffold learners, so that they achieve the upper limit of their ZPD and thus develop their writing skills.

#### ***2.3.4.5 Empirical Studies Applying Sociocultural Theory (SCT)***

There are many published studies describing the effectiveness of SCT for developing learners' language skills. Several studies have been carried out to shed light on the teacher's role in this theory. This has been done in conjunction with studying the effectiveness of scaffolding within teacher-learner and learner-learner interaction in the classroom, as well as in online learning environments. This has been undertaken to improve learners' language skills.

To determine the effects of interaction in learning and the teacher's role, Ohta (1995) conducted a study to investigate the impact of pair work and the teacher's role in language development. The above author claims that in the classroom, the role of the teacher as expert is associated with control by the teacher. However, the teacher can be expert in controlling and orchestrating effective language learning strategies, without assuming power and control over the interactive learning process. The corresponding study analysed pair work between two Japanese students in an intermediate language class at a US university. It was found that the learners' collaborative interaction increased their language accuracy. Moreover, the study concluded that the teacher's role in these collaborative tasks changed from one of full control, to one of providing assistance. Thus, in the light of SCT, the teacher's role in collaborative work is to facilitate the learners' work.

The work of Van Compernelle and Williams (2012) sheds light on the effects of instructional conversation on learners' ZPD in terms of French language learners' sociolinguistic understanding. Instructional conversation is conversation structured by the teacher to promote learning and encourage knowledge construction. It is based on Vygotsky's ZPD, with a special focus on teacher-student interaction. The above authors carried out a diagnostic writing test and three one-hour chat tasks to be accomplished by the students themselves, in order to determine their ZPD. This was followed by language awareness tasks, where the learners were asked to analyse various kinds of spoken and written discourse. An analysis of the learners' interactions and responses to tasks provided evidence that teaching within a learner's ZPD can lead to deeper learning and an understanding of language variation in sociolinguistics. This adds to the understanding of the teacher's role as a facilitator, in the light of SCT. Teaching should therefore be delivered within the learners' ZPD.

Abdullah et al. (2013) conducted case study research to examine the effectiveness of learners' collaboration and teacher's guidance in scaffolding online learners, together with its impact on learners' ZPD within an English language course. The above study applied Vygotsky's ZPD theory to scaffold learners using mobile devices on undergraduate language courses. It consequently endeavoured to define how these learners could be assisted during the course. 25 participants were observed using their mobiles for 48 days and there were no F2F classes, as the learning was meant to take place through a blog. The learners were divided into groups of five and encouraged to reply to posts, as well as participating in the production of a video, which was then posted. The learners' skills were developed through the adoption of Gilly Salmon's Five-stage Model, whereby they would exceed their existing ZPD and reach their potential (for a description of this Model, see section 2.3.3). The tutor - the moderator in Salmon's Model - must shift the responsibility for developing the learners' skills to the community and to the learners themselves. The learners will then start to experience scaffolding by forming relationships with other learners.

In Abdullah et al.'s (2013) study, the learners' interaction progressed from one stage to the next in both frequency and quality, as help was sought from the moderator. The above study also emphasised the teacher's role in SCT, combined with changes to the role of peers, as they had to scaffold each other. However, the results could have been

more beneficial if an experimental design had been adopted to compare the performance of the experimental groups with that of a control group.

Likewise, Hanjani and Li (2014) conducted a small-scale study to establish the effectiveness of the teacher's support for learners in enhancing their ZPD through peer-collaboration. The above study tested the impact of collaborative tasks on learners' writing on an L2 essay-writing course. It involved five pairs of L2 learners at an Iranian university. The course consisted of two main phases: preparation and collaboration. In the first phase, lasting six weeks, the focus was on writing skills, such as pre-writing, drafting, revision and structure in academic writing. In the second phase, the students produced three drafts of an argumentative essay during two writing cycles. The course enabled each pair to attend a collaborative revision session, where they worked together on revising their argumentative essays using the teacher's feedback.

By analysing the learners' interaction in the task and their revised drafts, it was evident that there had been different types of negotiation, including scaffolding, which was mutual and beneficial for the partners working on the tasks, regardless of their language level. Most of the time allocated had actually been used for scaffolding. Moreover, progress was evident from the students' writing during these phases. This meant them being able to move within their ZPD. In addition, the study identified certain scaffolding strategies in the learners' interaction, such as repetition; correction; expressing confusion; reading or writing a reminder; giving advice; guessing; defining; confirming requests; presenting options; referencing; responding to a question; using flashback, and giving instructions. However, the teacher's support of learners is essential for enhancing learners' understanding and peer-scaffolding plays a major role in helping learners reach the upper limit of their ZPD.

Further to the above, Lin and Samuel (2013) carried out a case study to find out the types of scaffolding that occur in peer-response sessions and how these affect learners' writing. The above study investigated two groups; the first consisting of three highly proficient students and the second, three students of intermediate proficiency. The learners were observed for five months and then interviewed after each task. Their interaction was also audio-recorded. Analysis of their interaction and interviews demonstrated that they had scaffolded each other by correcting each other's mistakes.

The most widely used types of scaffolding included asking questions, repetition, suggesting, explaining and confirming. Assistance was offered to less capable peers by more capable students in the two groups, which helped the learners understand and internalise grammar rules and increased their vocabulary. It may be concluded from the above study that peer-scaffolding is effective for developing learners' writing skills, particularly when it is provided by more advanced peers, as in the SCT notion of scaffolding.

A more detailed view of the effectiveness of scaffolding for developing learners' writing skills can be seen in Thompson's (2012) study. Its aim was to encourage students who were reluctant to write, using mediated collaborative activities and assistance from their teacher, as defined by Vygotsky. Various methods were implemented to encourage these students to write, for example, about their past experiences. This took place with the help of tasks designed by the teacher and peers, together with other tools, such as dictionaries; social media; search engines; learners' prior experience and knowledge; peer and teacher dialogue and feedback, and physical interaction, namely gestures and gaze. The above study found from an analysis of the learners' interaction and responses to tasks that interactive, collaborative work with peers helped them overcome their reluctance to write. However, the study concluded that the challenge impeding pedagogical practices involved being able to define the role of the teacher in encouraging interaction and collaboration between learners. This finding is in accordance with Vygotsky's emphasis on the teacher's role in guiding collaboration and interaction of this nature.

In order to be able to identify the different types of mediation that can be used by English language learners, Sah (2014) should also be mentioned here. The above author conducted a study investigating the strategies used by Chinese EFL learners, in order to mediate their understanding in peer-interaction activities on an International Business Communication course. The study sample contained three groups, consisting of students with both high and low levels of proficiency. After observing the learners' interaction in classroom activities, it was found that the Chinese learners used many strategies to scaffold and mediate FL learning. For example, they used their L1 to restate the concepts they were attempting to comprehend, along with repetition, elaboration and real life cases. For example, L1 came into use when one of the highly proficient

students tried to define a target structure for her peer, but the latter failed to understand it. Therefore, the more capable student used L1 to facilitate understanding. This shows that mediation via the L1 can be easier than using other techniques, such as audio- and video clips, or PowerPoint presentations. Moreover, learners may be capable of scaffolding each other, thereby helping each other to mediate their understanding.

From previous studies, it is therefore concluded that designs based on SCT provide an opportunity for learners to participate and collaborate in language learning, with potentially positive effects. It could therefore be suggested that a course, whether in the classroom or online, should be both teacher- and learner-centred (Daniels, 2010; Nandi, Hamilton, & Harland, 2012; Raes et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2013). This is because teacher-student interaction, taking the form of initiation by the teacher, responses from the student and feedback from the teacher (IRF), has little value on its own, since the learners' role is limited to merely responding to the teacher's prompts (Ohta, 1995). The IRF approach has been defined by Sinclair and Coulter (1975) as an interactive approach between the teacher and the student, whereby (I) stands for the teacher's initiation, (R) stands for the learner's response, and (F) indicates the teacher's feedback or follow-up (Luk & Lin, 2007). Moreover, the teacher's role in the classroom is to provide tasks that will enable learners to use the language as required outside the classroom. It is also important to include learners in knowledge construction and the learning process, thereby helping them and their peers to collectively explain, correct and practice the target structures.

Aside from the above, SCT emphasises the role of mediation tools, such as languaging, which should be considered in lesson design, together with books, computer tools, and online communication tools. However, there must be sufficient knowledge and clarity over how the technology will be integrated into the intervention design and how the teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions can be appropriately organised. Therefore, a framework is required, where sociocultural aspects, the organisation of the interaction and the integration of technology are considered. LCF was found to be suitable for fulfilling the aims of the current study, whereby a BL approach is trialled, thus combining the positive qualities of the language teaching approaches adopted. These are used to develop the communicative competence reviewed in section 2.2.3, whereby technology is integrated and SCT constructs considered, as reviewed above.



## 2.4 Learners' Perceptions of Different Types of Interaction

The learners' perceptions are defined here as a process in which they can evaluate the impact of intervention components on their writing sub-skills. In other words, it concerns how they reflect and view the effect of discussion with their teacher, individual practice of the same target structure, explanation and output practice with their peers, and the use of different mediating artefacts on their writing sub-skills. The learners' evaluation and view of the intervention is essential in examining the effectiveness of LCF for helping to develop their communicative competence.

A few researchers have examined learners' perceptions of LCF in a BL context (Heinze et al., 2007; Neo et al., 2013), as reviewed in section 2.3.4.2. The learners in the former study had negative perceptions of the intervention, which may relate to roles not being fulfilled as anticipated. However, in the latter study, the students perceived the intervention as positive, since the teacher and peers did in fact perform their expected roles. However, there is a dearth of studies that have examined learners' perceptions of LCF in an F2F context, since it is essentially an e-learning design model. Thus, learners' perceptions in the F2F and BL intervention groups can be compared with studies that have implemented aspects of LCF, such as the teacher's role as facilitator, the role of peers in explanation and output practice, and the use of mediating artefacts.

A number of studies have examined learners' perceptions of collaboration in F2F and BL environments. In the F2F context, most students appear to enjoy the experience of collaboration, as they tend to produce shorter texts with greater grammatical accuracy (Storch, 2005). It has been found that collaboration enhances students' self-confidence and develops their ability to discuss, negotiate and pool their ideas (Shehadeh, 2011). Furthermore, it develops trust and respect between peers, even when they are at different levels of proficiency (Shehadeh, 2011). In addition, it increases their willingness to collaborate and develops their confidence in providing assistance for their peers, as they are less afraid of making mistakes when communicating with them; unlike situations where they communicate with their teacher (Watanabe & Swain, 2008; Sato, 2013). However, these positive perceptions may be specifically related to supportive group members (Storch, 2005; Shehadeh, 2011). This stresses the importance of the willingness of peers to collaborate with others for the success of the

learning process. It also requires the teacher to use reflective strategies in lesson planning; ensuring that students engage in reflection as a means of fostering a productive pedagogic context and taking into consideration the potential for students to become dismissive and impatient with any peers they may be obliged to communicate with.

Another group of researchers have examined learners' perceptions of using online tools for collaboration in a BL context. Lei and Zhenguo (2010) found that 84% of their student sample enjoyed BL and thought it was helpful and conducive to their language learning. Moreover, it extended the learning time beyond the classroom. Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) also concluded that FLLs have positive perceptions of BL and favoured using a wiki to improve their writing skills. Additionally, the students in Elgort et al.'s (2008) study deemed wikis to be useful for arranging and sharing information. They consequently engaged more with the wiki in the application and synthesis of tasks, than they did in evaluation. In fact, Lee and Wang (2013) argue that students who experience successful collaboration with their fellow group members will report that they enjoy participating in a wiki. The use of online tools can enhance students' confidence in their language ability by increasing their opportunities for such interaction. Wikis are especially effective for building students' confidence, because participants can edit their peers' writing, while losing their own fear of receiving comments from others (Dymoke & Hughes, 2009; Kessler, 2009; Al Zumor et al., 2013; Sarfraz et al., 2015). Moreover, the importance of peers' willingness to collaborate increases in the BL context, as the learners cannot see each other. However, this could be a challenge for some students, who may tend to lose patience with slower peers, particularly where these learning structures have already been covered.

Nevertheless, it is not only positive perceptions of collaboration that are connected to the development of writing skills, since learners have been known to experience development in their writing production, without perceiving an intervention positively (McDonough, 2004). There are a variety of possible reasons justifying students' negative perceptions of collaboration in F2F and BL environments. For instance, they may not consider their peers to be helpful to their language learning and so they will prefer to keep their teacher as a useful resource (Mackey, et al., 2001). Such students therefore favour cooperative learning (working individually for a shared goal) over

collaborative learning. As a result, they will seek help when editing grammar mistakes, instead of editing the content themselves (Arnold, Ducate, & Kost, 2012). Moreover, not all students are equally committed to collaborative processes, as some may have personal issues, such as the fear of working with groups that are less motivated to contribute, thus leading to inequality in the development of language skills amongst group members (Dirkx & Smith, 2004; Fredriksson, 2015). However, this is an inevitable development, as there are many variables that can influence the pace of individual learning and understanding of language structures.

Overall, the above studies highlight the need to examine learners' perceptions, as well as taking into account any factors that could affect their perceptions of collaboration in both F2F and BL contexts. These factors are mostly related to the students themselves, who are an essential factor of the learner-centred approach adopted in the present study. The review also shows that several researchers have examined learners' perceptions of LCF using qualitative methods, such as interviews. Qualitative methods enable learners to express their views, thus providing in-depth data; for example, on the dynamics influencing the process of language teaching and learning.

## **2.5 Learners' Engagement with the Tasks and Language**

Engagement has been defined as collaborative dialogue (Storch, 2008). Engagement in this study refers to two aspects: task engagement and engagement with the language (EWL), as mentioned briefly earlier. Task engagement is one of the primary ways of learning in the classroom (Vitiello & Williford, 2016). It is a manifestation of the learner's ability to make use of the available learning resources (Bohlmann & Downer, 2016). Moreover, it is concerned with the ways in which learners perform a task and how they interact with their teacher and peers. The latter is an essential element in SCT for developing learners' communicative competence, as reviewed in section 2.3.4.4. The aim of this engagement is to construct students' knowledge. In addition, learners' engagement with tasks is an indicator of their satisfaction and positive perceptions of an intervention (Perie, Moran, & Lutkus, 2005). Examining this engagement in the current study will serve to reveal how task design and the mediating artefacts incorporated in these tasks affect learning.

One way to improve learners' engagement with academic tasks and fellow learners is to reduce the sense of isolation among them and offer more opportunities for interaction through the use of a VLE (Nie, Armellini, & Rogerson-Revell, 2012; Aydın & Yıldız, 2014). Moreover, it is essential that the tasks connect them to real life by presenting topics related to authentic situations, so that they can discuss their experiences (Szanajda & Chang, 2015). Therefore, task design principles have been considered in the present study and activities have been applied in designing the intervention tasks, in order to motivate the students and induce them to carry out the tasks, as explained in section 3.10.1.

On the other hand, EWL is considered to be the second type of engagement in this study, as the learners use the language as a mediating tool for learning and collaboration. As stated earlier, one manifestation of EWL is through languaging (Svalberg, 2009). This kind of engagement is expected to enhance learners' skills, as it indicates their understanding of language forms and their linguistic awareness (Baralt, Gurzynski-Weiss, & Kim, 2016). In addition, it is the procedure through which the learner uses language as a tool, which will eventually become a means of cognitive, affective and social engagement (Svalberg, 2009).

Svalberg and Askham (2014) reveal that the three constructs of EWL interact and overlap. The affective construct of EWL refers to the learners' positive orientation towards intervention and the language. It is manifested through the learners' willingness to collaborate and become independent in their learning. The social construct refers to learners' 'behavioural readiness to interact' and it may be evident from the learners' interaction and scaffolding of others (Svalberg, 2009, p.246). Cognitive engagement entails an individual's cognitive awareness and how they individually construct their knowledge, even if they remain silent. EWL is essential in language learning, as Svalberg (2009) asserts, since it enables some learners to develop their language skills and fill in gaps in their knowledge, even if they do not actively participate in group discussions.

One of the few studies using Svalberg's (2009) EWL model to analyse language learners' attention to form was carried out by Baralt et al. (2016). In the above study, there were 20 students engaging in classroom interaction and 20 learners interacting

online. The learners' interaction and responses to a questionnaire were subsequently analysed. It was consequently demonstrated that the three types of EWL identified by Svalberg (2009) were more evident in the F2F context than in the online environment. The F2F interaction helped promote the learners' cognitive engagement, as they paid attention to form while carrying out tasks. Moreover, in the F2F context, the learners had a positive attitude towards working with peers and this explained their cognitive engagement. However, the students in the online context demonstrated limited cognitive engagement and were unwilling to engage with their peers, as they did not know them. This should have a significant bearing on current and future research design and interest, as it could impact the realisation of online language teaching and learning strategy. Thus, in the above study, EWL was more prevalent in the F2F context than online. The finding supports Rouhshad and Storch (2016), who discovered that learners were more likely to collaborate in F2F contexts and tended to cooperate more than they did online. For this reason, it is important to break down the social barriers between students before asking them to collaborate, as indicated earlier.

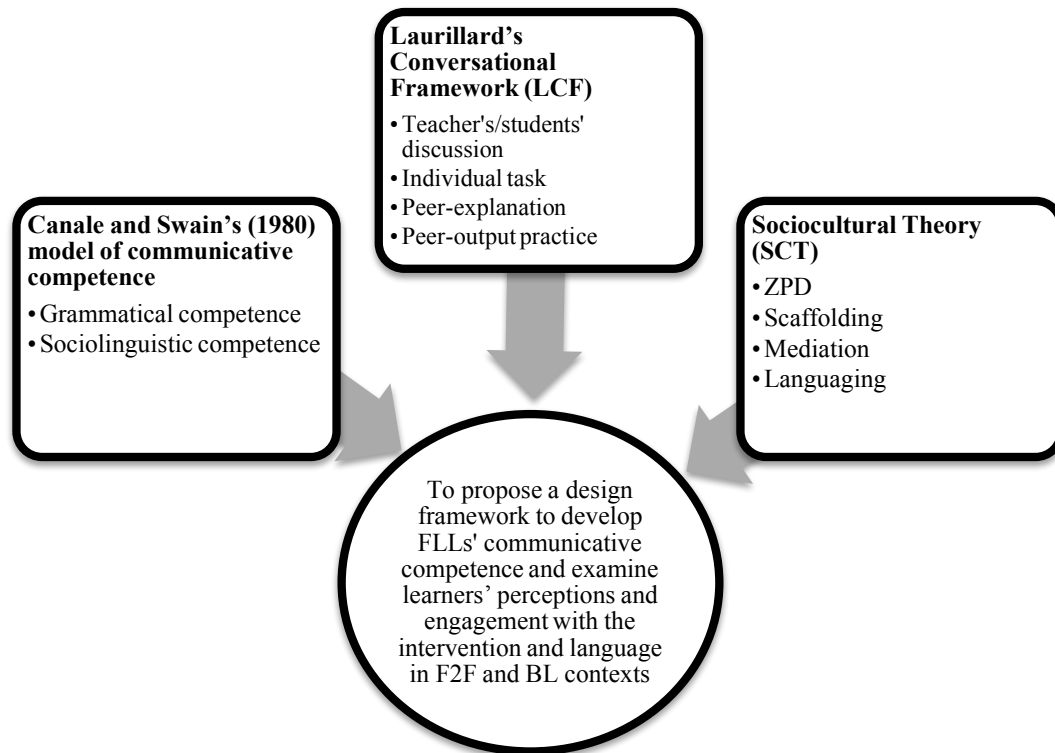
## **2.6 The Conceptual Framework**

From the studies reviewed above, it becomes apparent that LCF can be used to develop an effective learning design to improve FLLs' achievement on an English language course, specifically in relation to their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills and in a BL context (Mesh, 2010). Moreover, the above-mentioned studies reveal development in learners' communicative competence using a TBLT approach (Shabani & Ghasemi, 2014; Suntharesan, 2014b) and using CLT to increase learners' willingness to learn English (Sreehari, 2012). Moreover, BL and particularly online interaction were found to be effective in developing learners' writing skills (Gilmore, 2011; Adas & Bakir, 2013). In addition, discussion with and scaffolding from the teacher, as well as peer-scaffolding were shown to be effective for developing learners' language levels and helped them reach their potential ZPD (Thompson, 2012; Van Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Abdullah et al., 2013; Lin & Samuel, 2013; Hanjani & Li, 2014). However, this leads to further questions about the effectiveness of LCF, which can have positive features of CLT and TBLT, as well as definite roles for the teacher and peers, with regard to developing learners' writing skills as part of their communicative competence and as a means of reaching their potential ZPD.

LCF has not hitherto been used to design F2F courses. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of evidence to support the use of LCF in developing the written communicative competence of FLLs in the classroom. First, the adapted LCF used to design the intervention in the present study is based on SCT. Many studies have valued teacher-learner interaction and learner-learner interaction in developing learners' communicative competence, which are essential features of this theory (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2013; Van de Pol & Elbers, 2013; Agbatogun, 2014; Hanjani & Li, 2014).

Aside from the above, learners' perceptions of an intervention designed using LCF in a BL context have been investigated by Heinze et al. (2007) and Neo et al. (2013), posing other questions about these perceptions of such methods of developing their writing skills as part of their communicative competence. Moreover, although learners' engagement with tasks and language has already been investigated in the literature (Baralt et al., 2016), this has not involved an intervention designed using LCF.

Therefore, the present study examines the impact of LCF on developing FLLs' communicative competence in BL and F2F contexts, so as to compare the effectiveness of the affordances of both environments. The focus of this study is on learners' grammatical and sociolinguistic competences in three writing sub-skills: using the past tense to describe events, asking wh-questions, and writing a letter of complaint. The study also examines learners' perceptions of the intervention applied and their engagement with it and with the language, as Figure 2.2 illustrates, below.



**Figure 2.2 The conceptual framework**

## 2.7 Summary

In this chapter, communicative competence models were reviewed and methods for defining and developing relevant skills described. The reasons for adapting LCF rather than other TESOL and e-learning design approaches were also presented. SCT, the rationale for adopting it and the constructs used were subsequently explained as another aspect of the theoretical framework for this research.

However, the body of literature reviewed above reveals knowledge gaps. Firstly, there has been no previous work done on the ability of LCF to develop FLLs' communicative competence in the context of writing. Secondly, different modes of delivery using LCF to develop FLLs' communicative competence have not been compared. Moreover, there is a dearth of studies that have evaluated LCF in terms of task design principles. Finally, it is not known how university learners in Saudi Arabia will react to the use of LCF to design an F2F learning unit, in comparison with a BL unit, or how they will engage with the language and the tasks.

To bridge these knowledge gaps, the present study's objectives are: (1) to adapt LCF and thus compensate for the absence of task design principles, (2) to investigate the effectiveness of the adapted LCF in the development of FLLs' communicative competence in F2F and blended units, (3) to measure the impact of the intervention on learners' communicative competence, (4) to gather perceptions of LCF, and (5) to examine how the learners' engagement with the tasks, language forms and language structures have developed their skills during the intervention. In the following chapter, the methodology and methods adopted for this study are presented.



## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

The primary purposes of this study are first to investigate the effectiveness BL for developing aspects of FLLs' communicative competence in relation to their writing skills. This BL course has been designed by adapting LCF. Second, this study aims to evaluate LCF, identifying whether its strengths and limitations are due to delivering parts of the intervention in an online learning environment, or whether they could be ascribed to its features, namely iteration and different types of engagement with a teacher, peers and various mediating artefacts. The learners' achievement in the two groups and their perceptions and engagement with the tasks and language are subsequently compared, as well as with a control group. For this purpose, a mixed-methods approach is employed in classroom-based research.

This chapter discusses the methodological considerations relating to the study design; the research paradigm; the research context and participants; the study design and justifications for using mixed methods; the pilot study results; the data collection procedure and analysis, and ethical considerations. Table 3.1, below, provides an overview of the research design, including the methods of data collection and analysis used to answer each research question.

**Table 3.1 The research questions, and methods of data collection and analysis**

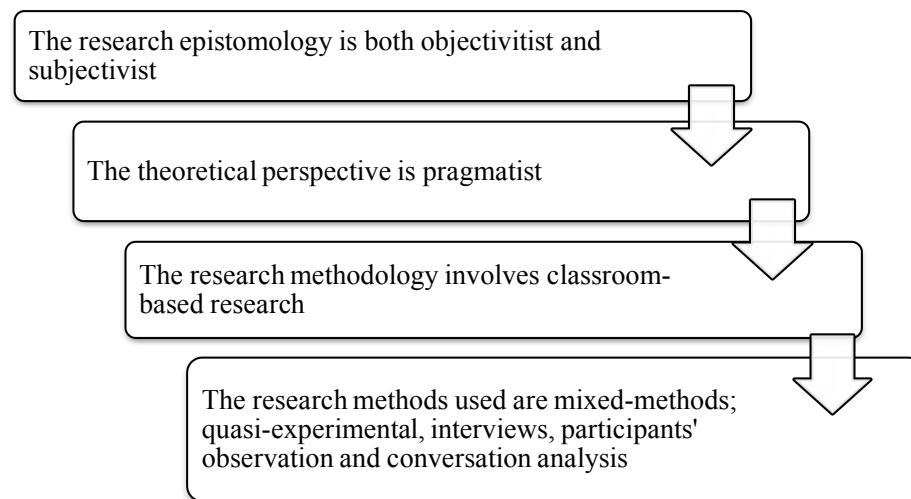
Research Question	Methods of Data Collection	Methods of Data Analysis
How does the adapted LCF intervention design affect FLLs' skills pertaining to grammatical and sociolinguistic competences in writing, in F2F and BL environments and in comparison with a non-LCF group?	Quasi-experimental (pre- and post-tests for the experimental and control groups).	Statistical analysis, using non-parametric tests conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 19.0.
How do the learners perceive and engage with the language and tasks designed, using the adapted LCF?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semi-structured interviews,</li> <li>• The systematic observation scheme, Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) and</li> <li>• Analysis of the learners' conversations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematic analysis,</li> <li>• The COLT analysis system,</li> <li>• Interaction and conversation analysis.</li> </ul>

A quasi-experimental design is thus used to measure the effectiveness of an adapted version of LCF for designing an intervention to develop three writing sub-skills that form part of communicative competence, amongst learners within F2F and BL environments, as compared with a control group taught using a traditional teaching method. This is to determine the environment where LCF can work best. The learners are subsequently interviewed to gather an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of the design from different perspectives. Their engagement with the intervention tasks and language is also observed and their interactions analysed for triangulation.

### **3.2 Elements of the Research Design**

Crotty (1998) identifies four essential elements in the research process. These consist of the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and research methods. Epistemology is defined as the study of how we investigate knowledge or phenomena (Freimuth, 2009). The epistemology of this study combines objective reality and multiple realities. Objective reality can be measured by examining the development of learners' communicative competence using quantitative methods, while multiple realities can be gathered through interviews and by observing students' engagement - as a means of obtaining views on the proposed design (Feilzer, 2010; Gray, 2013).

The theoretical perspective, on the other hand, is the research paradigm. This describes the way in which we look at the world and make sense of it, thus leading to the choice of a suitable methodology (Crotty, 1998; Morrison, 2012) (see section 3.3 The Research Paradigm). The methodology refers to the design strategy behind using certain methods and the link between the choice of these methods and their outcomes, as explained in 3.4 The Research Methodology (Crotty, 1998). Research methods help address and solve research questions. This process is clarified in 3.6 The Study Design (Mixed-methods Research) (Crotty, 1998). The following diagram explains the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and research methods used in this study and these are consequently explained in detail.



**Figure 3.1 Elements of the research design**

### 3.3 The Research Paradigm

As the above Figure shows, representing Crotty's (1998) essential elements in the research process, the research paradigm is explained first, as this will help in choosing the suitable methodology and research methods. The research paradigm covers an understanding, values and techniques common to members of a community, with the appropriate research methods for investigating an issue (Kuhn, 1970). An appropriate research design is required here to examine the effectiveness of an intervention for enhancing learners' communicative competence and to explore their thoughts on the above-mentioned intervention. Therefore, a mixed-methods approach is used. Moreover, this mixed-methods approach is driven by the pragmatic paradigm (Armitage & Keeble-Allen, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

The pragmatic paradigm combines the objectivist approach linked to positivist thinking, whereby a social reality exists that can be investigated through empirical research. This may be achieved using quantitative methods to establish facts, which explain the nature of that reality. However, the pragmatic paradigm also involves an interpretive subjective approach, which prioritises the importance of the participants' experience, rather than external reality. This can be achieved using qualitative methods. In other words, there is an appreciation of the importance of the natural, as well as social world, while endeavouring to understand truth (Robson, 2011). In such research, reality is

therefore considered as a mixture of measurable reality that can evaluate the effects of an intervention, namely on learners' writing skills, forming part of their communicative competence. However, this reality also consists of subjective reality, as it is based on the learners' perceptions of how the intervention has impacted on them (Creswell, 2013).

As a pragmatic researcher, I need to collect data by listening to the learners' interview responses and observing their engagement, in order to ascertain their perceptions, discern their situation and subsequently explain it. This can be achieved by creating relationships with the learners in question to obtain such information from them. Moreover, another data resource selected here is testing, namely of the effectiveness of the intervention for developing the learners' communicative competence, both before and after the intervention and as a means of gathering facts about their level of competence.

The choice of this paradigm is dictated by the importance of the research questions, over the methods used in attempting to answer them, regardless of whether deductive or inductive logic is applied (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). It considers words as well as numbers to be important in identifying the effect of an intervention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Morrison, 2012). Moreover, this particular paradigm is adopted here because, as affirmed by Goldkuhl (2012), it is "concerned with action and change and the interplay between knowledge and action" (p.2). The results of the intervention are consequently intended to have an impact on designing models for BL courses, aimed at developing the skills of FLLs.

Nevertheless, there is a strong debate in the literature on pragmatism. Some researchers believe it is impossible to mix methods, because objectivism is incompatible with realism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith & Heshusius, 1986). On the other hand, others believe that methods and paradigms are independent of each other and it is in fact possible to carry out mixed-methods research (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Creswell & Clark, 2007), as is the case here, where quantitative and qualitative methods are used to answer the current research questions.

In this case, other paradigms were not considered helpful for addressing the research questions, namely identifying the effectiveness of an intervention designed using LCF through objective measurement, and the participants' perceptions and engagement with the intervention. To be more precise, the positivist paradigm is not adopted in isolation, as it would solely involve quantitative methods. In testing the effectiveness of the intervention, it would therefore exclusively use objective measurements (Crotty, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Phillips, McNaught, & Kennedy, 2012; Carey, 2013). On the other hand, neither is interpretivism, which underpins qualitative methods, deemed suitable for use on its own in this instance, because the data are not being collected solely on the basis of participants' opinions and experiences; there is also a need to objectively measure the development brought about by the intervention (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Neuman, 2013).

### **3.4 The Research Methodology**

The research methodology considered suitable for the research paradigm in this study and therefore apt for answering the research questions, is classroom-based research. Classroom-based research is a “systematic process of inquiry consisting of three elements or components: (1) a question, problem or hypothesis, (2) data, and (3) analysis and interpretation” (Nunan, 1992, p.3). This type of research can address substantive issues that deal with the ‘What?’ of research (studying the relationship between language learning and instructional methods) and methodological issues that deal with ‘How?’ (studying the merits of carrying out the experiment in the classroom rather than in naturalistic settings) (Nunan, 2005). The current study particularly deals with the nature of the effects of LCF on the writing sub-skills of FLLs currently studying on a Saudi university foundation course. The study also explores the learners' perceptions of LCF and how they engage with tasks and the TL. In this case, the type of research selected is not intended to generalise the findings, due to the fact that the students are not randomly selected from the population (Van Lier, 1988). This is further explained in section 3.8 The Pilot Study and Modifications.

### **3.5 The Research Context**

This study pertains to a Foundation Course for language learners at a university referred to here as the University of Knowledge (UOK). I have selected this establishment

because it is one of the biggest universities in SA. In the city where it is located, the population consists of different cultures, with different languages even being spoken, as it is the nation's centre of oil production and the largest petroleum companies are based there. In fact, UOK offers 100 bachelor's, Master's and PhD programmes. Currently, there are nearly 30,000 students enrolled; roughly one third of these being female. The College studied is one that offers a one-semester Foundation Course on a twice-yearly basis. It is chosen due to its accessibility, because it is appropriate for research tools to be piloted before their use in a primary study. The study being reported was scheduled for the first and second semesters of the academic year, 2014/2015, in order to suit the current study plan.

English is only taught to FLLs on the above-mentioned Foundation Course and does not necessarily represent the language of learning on a bachelor's degree at UOK. No placement test is conducted at the beginning of the course to stream the students according to ability. Thus, the students are extremely diverse in their English language skills and it is usual to find learners with high and low levels of English in the same class. There is also some variation between teachers in their methods, since some prefer to focus on skills such as writing, while others do not.

The UOK Foundation Course syllabus is based on the 'Touchstone' series (Levels 2 and 3) (McCarthy, McCarten, & Sandiford, 2006). The above authors describe this series as one with four levels to suit both young and adult language learners, thus enabling them to move from beginner to intermediate level. It presents the language in authentic contexts, in order to develop learners' conversation skills in a series of topics. Here, specific skills are developed, such as in the use of grammar, vocabulary, conversation, pronunciation, reading, writing and speaking. According to Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, adopted in this instance, this syllabus focuses on developing grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences. As mentioned earlier, however, only two competences have been selected in this study, due to the limitations of access and time. Moreover, just three writing sub-skills have been chosen to represent these competences, planned for development using LCF. To investigate the effectiveness of LCF from different perspectives, a pragmatic paradigm is applied here, as mentioned earlier. This permits the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research questions, as explained below.

### 3.6 The Study Design (Mixed-methods Research)

In the social sciences, two distinct research methods are commonly acknowledged. The dichotomy between them lies in the type of data used, how this is collected and the philosophy underlying each method. These two main approaches are known as quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods usually reflect positivism and post-positivism, whereby it is considered that absolute true knowledge exists and can be discovered by researchers using scientific methods, through deductive tests (Neuman, 2013). On the other hand, qualitative methods usually reflect an interpretive paradigm, where reality can be explored inductively by observing people and talking to them, in order to discover how they interpret and understand the world. However, quantitative and qualitative methods can also be combined to solve a research problem from the above-mentioned perspectives. Such an approach is referred to as ‘mixed-methods’ and it is associated with a pragmatic paradigm, as explained in section 3.3.

Due to the complexity of the current research problem, there is the danger that using a single approach will lead to a partial or even complete misunderstanding of the topic and so a mixed-methods approach has been selected for this study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). This combines the merits of quantitative and qualitative methods and compensates for the weaknesses of each (Creswell, 2013). It is important to gain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of the LCF design from the perspective of both the researcher and the participants, even though these may be contradictory at times (Arthur, 2012). A quantitative deductive paradigm will enable the researcher to objectively discern the effectiveness of LCF. Meanwhile, a qualitative inductive paradigm will potentially lead to a deeper understanding of the participants’ views (Scott & Usher, 1999; Pring, 2004; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Carey, 2013). Table 3.2 provides a description of each method used in this research, along with its advantages and disadvantages.

**Table 3.2 The main advantages and disadvantages of the research methods used for data collection in this study**

Research Methods	Advantages	Disadvantages
Test (quantitative method)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers the possibility of replicating the experiment to make generalisations.</li> <li>• The researcher is more objective and accurate in measuring results, because different variables are controlled.</li> </ul>	Difficult to understand participants' perceptions and how they engaged.
Interview (qualitative method)	Finds multiple facets of the case.	Difficult to generalise findings; time-consuming in transcription and analysis.
Systematic observation (quantitative method)	Helps gain an external view of the teacher/learner and learner/learner engagement and to find out what has not been mentioned in the interviews, in order to triangulate the findings.	Difficult to observe a large number of students.
Conversation analysis (qualitative method)	Helps to identify how the learners engage with their teacher, peers and the content and to triangulate the observer's findings.	Difficult to analyse all the learners' interactions, facial expressions and body language, as this was only audio-recorded here.

In designing mixed-methods research, prioritising the data to be collected and analysed should take into account the research purposes and questions (Morse, 1991). In this study, the same priority and importance are given to the quantitative and qualitative approaches in the collection and analysis of data. For this reason, a convergent mixed-methods triangulation model is applied, as the quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analysed independently and concurrently (Creswell & Clark, 2007). They are then converged by comparing, contrasting and triangulating the results.

The quasi-experimental part of this study involves two experimental groups and a control group (the definition of the quasi-experimental design is presented in section 3.9). The first experimental group consists of those receiving the intervention entirely in the classroom (referred to as the F2F group), while the second experimental group is comprised of those studying in the classroom, with some online tasks (referred to as the BL group). The control group is taught the same sub-skills, but in a more traditional way (see section 3.10 Instructional Procedures, for further details on the relevant teaching methods). One of the advantages of a quasi-experimental design is that the groups will be mixed ability and from different backgrounds, as explained in section 3.9.



The learners in the two experimental groups are tested before and after the intervention and their results compared with those of the control group. This testing is aimed at measuring development in the learners' communicative competence. As mentioned previously, the competences to be addressed include writing sub-skills, as represented in the following grammatical and sociolinguistic competences: (1) using the past tense to form passages describing events which have happened in the past, (2) asking wh-questions about things which have happened in the past, and (3) making complaints.

Some learners in the experimental groups are also interviewed, in order to examine their perceptions of the effectiveness of the design of the intervention. An interview guide and probes are thus applied by the researcher to help obtain more detail from the interviewees. Due to the fact that using interviews as a data collection tool potentially introduces subjectivity into data transcription and analysis, triangulation is important. Therefore, an external observer notes the engagement of a group of five students from the F2F group with the intervention designed, as well as the engagement of another group of five students from the BL group and using a systematic observation scheme for both groups. Moreover, the learners' conversations in the groups observed are audio-recorded and analysed, in order to triangulate the observation findings, as well as to identify the impact of each component of the intervention on the students (see Table 3.3, below).

**Table 3.3 The study design in the F2F and BL experimental groups and control group**

Group	Pre-test	Teaching method	Post-test	Interviews	Observation	Conversation analysis
F2F Group	√	LCF	√	√	√	√
BL Group	√	LCF	√	√	√	√
Control Group	√	Non-LCF	√	X	X	X

Although the use of mixed methods needs sufficient time and resources for collecting and analysing the data, as Creswell and Clark (2007) point out, it can help in understanding the research problem from different perspectives; with the researcher being able to triangulate the findings for greater validity and explain any unexpected results from just one of the methods (Bryman, 2006; Hammersley, 2008; Bush, 2012). In the present study, triangulation is used to ensure that the participants are consistent in

what they say and do (Gibbs, 2008). It is considered to be a “triangulation of measures”, because multiple measures are used to measure the same phenomenon (Neuman, 2013). In addition, this kind of triangulation is considered to be a triangulation of methods, as Denzin (2001) describes.

### **3.7 The Researcher’s Role**

An important concern in educational research, however, is researcher bias and this is an issue considered in the present study, due to the multiple roles of the teacher-researcher and interviewer, which can possibly influence data collection and interpretation. Due to the unavailability of an English language teacher to teach this intervention, I teach the experimental groups and control group myself. Therefore, to minimise researcher bias, different steps must be taken, such as trying to maintain alternative views when scoring the students’ tests. This can be achieved by deploying two independent raters, as well as myself (see sections 3.11.1 and 3.12.1).

In the interviews, an attempt is made to build a trust relationship with the participants. I (as the interviewer) therefore explain the research aims to them; clarifying that their views of the intervention, whether positive or negative, will not have any effect on their academic achievements on the course. The confidentiality of their data and anonymity of their personal views in the study are also assured. The relationship between the researcher-teacher and the students must be considered, especially as regards the teacher’s role in the interviews. The students are therefore reassured of my role as an ‘honest broker’. The interviews are audio-recorded and the transcriptions validated by a post-graduate researcher, randomly choosing one of the interviews and checking the accuracy of the transcription. The translation is verified in the same way. Furthermore, in all the methods applied in this research, I remain relatively independent as the researcher.

Concerning observation, due to the difficulties involved in me teaching the intervention, while also attempting to observe how the students use elements of it to develop their language skills, an external observer is appointed. Although there are some limitations, as mentioned later, the intention here is to help reduce researcher bias (See section 3.11.3). Moreover, the students’ conversations in the observed group are audio-recorded

for all the classes in the experimental groups, so as to validate the observation. I then transcribe these recordings, before verifying and revising them three weeks later, so they can be analysed.

### **3.8 The Pilot Study and Modifications**

The pilot study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2014/2015, after teaching the intervention to a class of 52 students on the Foundation Course. These participants were likely to resemble those participating in the main study (Carr, 2011). This pilot study was carried out over three weeks for two-hour weekly sessions. Its aim was to identify whether the instruments measured what they were expected to measure (Nissan & Schedl, 2013).

The test constructs in the pilot study consisted of using the past tense to write passages and asking wh-questions. These are elements of grammatical competence. The three writing sub-skills represented sociolinguistic competence: introducing oneself, writing a letter of complaint and responding to a complaint. Two sub-skills were also taught and tested in the pilot study, namely discourse competence, in the use of pronouns and conjunctions. These skills were specifically chosen, as they form part of the UOK Foundation Course curriculum and the teachers concerned were likely to be happy about them being developed, given their significance for the current curriculum and due to the fact that some of the regular classes would be missed. These skills were tested with six integrated questions, as illustrated in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4 Pilot study test questions and constructs**

The question	The constructs assessed
Question 1	3 points about ‘asking wh-questions’
Question 2	a. Using the past tense b. Using pronouns c. Using conjunctions
Question 3	a. Introducing oneself b. Writing a letter of complaint c. Responding to a complaint
Question 4	a. Introducing oneself b. Writing a letter of complaint c. Using the past tense d. Using pronouns e. Using conjunctions
Question 5	a. Using the past tense b. Using pronouns c. Using conjunctions
Question 6	a. Using the past tense b. Using pronouns c. Using conjunctions

Based on the pilot study, it was noted that the time allocated for teaching the intervention was inadequate and the number of corresponding sub-skills needed to be reduced. Therefore, the sub-skills of discourse competence, i.e. using pronouns and conjunctions, and two sub-skills of sociolinguistic competence, i.e. responding to a complaint and introducing oneself, were omitted from the intervention. Moreover, the teaching material was amended, based on the learners’ suggestions in the interview and a reflection form (see Appendix 9: A Reflection Form), used in the pilot study to gather the learners’ opinions of the intervention. This was achieved by reducing the number of video clips, as the students reported that they were bored by watching too many video clips.

The test was piloted during the fourth week to test its validity and reliability. Validity refers to the extent to which an instrument reflects what it is expected to measure (Anderson, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This was correspondingly measured against the content validity, as described in the following paragraph, because it was difficult to assess the construct validity as well as the two types of criterion-related validity, and the predictive concurrent validity. Construct validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures a theoretical trial, with the assurance that the test performance is explained by certain constructs (Alderson, Clapham, & Wall, 1995; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Bryman, 2012). This is called statistical validity, because it can be achieved following a pilot study through factor analysis of the items

included and in order to identify the items related to each construct, in the assumption of the data's normal distribution around the mean (Blaikie, 2003; Hartas, 2010a). However, due to the fact that the students' scores in the pilot test were not normally distributed, factor analysis could not be carried out. Moreover, it is difficult to verify criterion-related validity, which involves comparing learners' scores with those of learners with similar ability. On the other hand, it is difficult to address predictive validity, which compares learners' scores in a test with their scores from another test taken at a different time (Shaw & Weir, 2007).

Therefore, in the current test, only content validity was verified. This is the extent to which a test represents various aspects of specific constructs (Weir, 1990). To determine the content validity of the test used in the present study, two language teachers assessed the relevance, clarity and suitability of each of the test questions and based on their suggestions, the questions were amended (Bryman, 2012). Due to this result, the test was regarded as valid and able to yield trustworthy results and an acceptable interpretation (Chapelle, 1999; Fulcher & Davidson, 2007; Kenyon & McGregor, 2013).

For reasons already defined previously, the test was assessed by two raters besides the researcher, using a scoring scale constructed to match the current study's purpose, as it was difficult to find a suitable one in the literature. However, it was difficult to achieve an acceptable level of validity and reliability and it was also difficult for the raters to grasp the interpretation of the scores. This is because this was the first time this scale had been implemented and several trials were required to amend it, so that a valid and reliable tool could be created. For this reason, East's (2009) scoring scale was eventually adapted to assess development in the learners' communicative competence, as it was deemed to be the most appropriate in this case (see section 3.11.1 for further detail).

The analysis then moved on to examine the reliability of the test items. A perfectly reliable test is one that measures the systematic changes that occur if a test is repeated with the same participants. It is admittedly difficult to achieve a perfectly reliable test, but the causes of unsystematic change can still be reduced (Alderson et al., 1995). In the present study, reliability was ascertained by examining inter-rater reliability, referring to

the consistency of scoring amongst the raters - in this case, two language teachers, trained in using the East's (2009) scale - as well as my own consistency as the researcher in this regard (Carr, 2011). There are in fact many formulae for computing the reliability of data that are not normally distributed, such as correlation coefficients (Sasaki & Hirose, 1999) and Cronbach's alpha (Alderson et al., 1995; Jones, 2013). In this study, reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha. This is because Cronbach's alpha can be used when items have the same level of difficulty and each group of questions is aimed at testing the same construct (Carr, 2011). The following Table illustrates the test of reliability.

**Table 3.5 Reliability of the pilot test**

Competence	Cronbach's alpha
Grammatical competence - wh-questions	.797
Grammatical competence - past tense	.994
Sociolinguistic competence – writing a letter of complaint	.585

In this instance, the Cronbach's alpha showed that the test items for forming wh-questions and applying past tense skills were reliable (over .75). This is based on Gillbert (2004) and Jones' (2013) view that 0.75 can be considered as the ideal reliability coefficient, because it indicates that around three-quarters of the variability is due to ability, while other factors are called errors, e.g. individual factors, namely health, the students' readiness, the rater, or the test content.

However, in the items for the third sub-skill, relating to sociolinguistic competence, the reliability is questionable, but not poor (.585) (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). This could have been due to the questions being unclear, as the number of sentences required for the students' answers was not specified. Based on this result, the sociolinguistic competence questions were amended. Moreover, it is important to consider that the number of items is a key factor in computing Cronbach's alpha in that the greater the number of items included in the analysis, the higher the Cronbach's alpha score obtained (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Here, there were two items dedicated to the skill of writing a letter of complaint, as part of sociolinguistic competence. This could have been another reason for the low reliability score for sociolinguistic competence.

The interview schedule was also piloted in the fourth week, in order to check for clarity and to determine whether any other questions needed to be added. The interview was

piloted with two volunteers. One of the questions was consequently found to be unclear and was therefore amended. The pilot study gave me the chance to develop my interview skills, listening skills, choice of suitable points to probe and indicated how to develop trust in the relationship. This involved explaining to the interviewees the purpose of the interview and their right to ask questions or withdraw, as well as reassuring them that no harm was expected to come to them as a result of the interview.

Lastly, the semi-structured observation was piloted and showed a potential for bias from the observer. The external observer was asked to write about how the group of students she sat with engaged with their teacher, peers and the content. In addition to the incidence of bias, many important aspects intended for observation proved to have been overlooked. Therefore, it was decided to use a systematic observation scheme to focus on the aspects that needed to be observed, in order to be able to answer the research questions. This scheme was piloted before the main data collection, as is explained in section 3.11.3.

### **3.9 The Research Participants**

The study participants exclusively comprise Saudi students, whose first language is Arabic and who are aged between 18 and 20. They are assigned to two experimental groups and a control group; the F2F group consisting of 39 students; the BL group, 38 students, and the control group, 39 students. I was requested to identify these groups as experimental and control groups, with the first group being determined as the F2F group, due to their teacher being on leave for six weeks and these six classes being consequently allocated to me. The second group is therefore designated as the BL group, since their teacher asked me to train her students in the use of Blackboard, so that she could use it with them. The third group is correspondingly designated as the control group.

These students plan to enrol in any one of five departments to obtain their bachelor's degree, namely in the fields of Information Systems Management, Accounting, Marketing, Business Administration and Finance. The three groups under study moreover consist of intact classes; the advantage of this being that the learners are already be accustomed to interacting and engaging with each other, both within the

classroom and outside it at break times. This potentially increases their engagement with their learning in this intervention. In other words, the design ensures the students are studied in a naturalistic educational setting, rather than a laboratory, thus rendering it more suitable for evaluating new programmes (Muijs, 2004).

In addition and due to the study participants comprising intact classes, there is no randomisation in the selection and assignment of students to groups. Moreover, this design is quasi-experimental, as mentioned previously (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Quasi-experimental designs are like experimental designs, in that they test an intervention by comparing conditions before and after implementation and with a control group, as well as exploring a causal relationship between independent and dependent variables. However, such designs differ in the allocation and assignment of persons to groups (Hartas, 2010b). Nevertheless, due to the absence of probability in choosing the participants, generalisation is limited in this study (Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003).

The three groups being studied here therefore exclusively consist of Saudi females. As the study design is quasi-experimental, it is assumed that the groups will be similar to each other, in that the learners are mixed ability. More details on their background are presented in Table 3.6. This Table shows that the participants have attended three types of school, differing in the number of English classes offered and the teaching methods applied (see section 1.2 for more details).

**Table 3.6 The learners' demographic information in the three groups**

Demographic Information	F2F	BL	Control
The number of students in state-sector schools	24	26	31
The number of students in state-sector schools with a courses system	10	7	4
The number of students in private schools	5	5	4

It is especially important here to be aware of the type of school previously attended by the participants in the interviews and observations, in addition to their levels of English language proficiency (the participants' level is determined on the basis of their interview responses and post-test scores, as discussed in sections 5.3 and 7.4). This information is illustrated in Table 3.7. To ensure the students' anonymity, they are



assigned codes, e.g. ST1, ST2, etc. and these are then combined with the group type, e.g. whether F2F or BL. Some of the students observed go on to voluntarily participate in the interviews. These participants are referred to here as ST1F2F, ST4BL and ST6BL.

**Table 3.7 The type of school attended and level of English proficiency amongst the interview and observation participants**

The Participant	Type of Secondary School	Level of English Proficiency
ST1F2F (I) (O)	Private schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST2F2F (I)	Private schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST3F2F (I)	General state-sector schools	Low level of proficiency
ST4F2F (I)	State-sector school, but with a system of courses	Low level of proficiency
ST5F2F (I)	State-sector school, but with a system of courses	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST6F2F (I)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST7F2F (O)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST8F2F (O)	General state-sector schools	Low level of proficiency
ST9F2F (O)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST10F2F (O)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST1BL (I)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST2BL (I)	General state-sector schools	Low level of proficiency
ST3BL (I)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST4BL (I) (O)	State sector school, but with a system of courses	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST5BL (I)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST6BL (I) (O)	General state-sector schools	Low level of proficiency
ST7BL (O)	General state-sector schools	Low level of proficiency
ST8BL (O)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency
ST9BL (O)	General state-sector schools	Low-intermediate level of proficiency

\* (I) refers to the participants in the interview

\* (O) refers to the participants in the observation

### **3.10 Instructional Procedures**

Popova and Edirisingha (2010) assert that it is important for the teacher designing a lesson using LCF to consider the learners' characteristics, as this will lead to a lesson where the learners can better understand and more effectively use the things being taught. However, this is difficult to achieve in the present study, due to the limited time available at the beginning of the academic year, before carrying out the intervention. The current intervention is delivered to two groups: a F2F and BL group. The difference between these groups is that the peer explanation and output-practice tasks are carried out in the classroom for the former, and online for the latter. Meanwhile, the same sub-skills are taught to a control group, but without using LCF, as explained in section 3.10.2.

#### **3.10.1 The Experimental Groups (Teaching Intervention)**

This study proposes a framework that can develop FLLs' writing sub-skills in communicative competence, by adapting LCF. As mentioned previously, LCF is chosen for the intervention design, because it has major features that are in accordance with SCT and have been found to be effective in developing FLLs' communicative competence, as reviewed in section 2.3.4.5. These features are: (1) the availability of different means of scaffolding, such as the teacher's interaction with the learners to explain a target structure; peer-explanation, leading to students explaining target structures to each other, and peer-collaboration, where the target structure is applied, and (2) the availability of different artefacts which enable learners to learn - in this study, these include a PowerPoint presentation, mobile applications (apps), a podcast, and a YouTube video, used in the F2F and BL groups, with Blackboard tools, namely the discussion board and wiki, being implemented for the latter.

The intervention begins with a statement of its general aim, followed by specific outcomes. Due to the fact that the learners in this intervention discuss, collaborate, share and practice, they need to be provided with a list of the types of engagement required from them. These outcomes are linguistic and communicative; referring to the skills the learners are required to demonstrate (Hill & Akroush, 2014). The learners are then asked to divide themselves up into groups of five. This is due to me being unfamiliar with these students and their levels. The groups are thus formed on the basis of learners'

preferences and consist of students with varying English levels. A volunteer group is asked if they mind being audio-recorded during the discussion in all the sessions and having an external observer with them for two of these sessions. Meanwhile, the idea is for the teacher to stand in front of these groups and interact with them; discussing the target structures by using a computer, data projector and the Internet. The teacher initiates the discussion of the target structure by asking the learners a question. Based on their answers, she corrects them or adds more detail. A flowchart of the sequence of teaching and learning in the intervention is also presented to the students and this is intended to stimulate their thinking in the interviews, as explained in section 3.11.2.

Due to the fact that this intervention takes place at the beginning of the academic semester, the learners studied are fresh out of different secondary school. However, this is an intervention based on peer-collaboration and so any social barriers between participants need to be broken down. The intervention therefore begins with ice-breaking activities (see Table 3.8 The ice-breaker activities). This is inspired by Salmon's (2013) concept of ice-breakers at the socialisation stage of her model. Salmon (2013) believes that it is important for learners to get to know and trust each other before starting to exchange knowledge and support each other. This is not only important in the online learning environment, but also in F2F learning.

**Table 3.8 The ice-breaker activities**

<p><b>ICEBREAKER (1)</b>          In your group, introduce yourself using four descriptive words (Salmon, 2004).          You can use your mobile translation application.          The teacher will take part in this activity with all the groups by walking around the groups and chatting with them.</p> <p><b>ICEBREAKER (2) (Salmon, 2004).</b>          Have a chat with your fellow group members by answering these guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you relax?</li> <li>• What's your favourite cartoon character? Why?</li> <li>• Who's the historical figure you most identify with and why?</li> </ul> <p>The teacher will take part in this activity with all the groups by walking around and chatting to them.</p>
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This intervention addresses two competences; each presented in a lesson containing LCF cycles. Laurillard introduces six cycles, as explained in section 2.3.4. These comprise the teacher-communication cycle, the teacher-practice cycle, the teacher-modelling cycle, the peer-communication cycle, the peer-practice cycle and the peer-modelling cycle.

The first lesson covers two sub-skills of grammatical competence, i.e. writing passages using the past tense and writing wh-questions. Two target structures are presented in this lesson, because they are related and also because of the limited time allocated for collecting the data. These are integrated into a single lesson. The **‘teacher-communication cycle’** is the first cycle in this framework. In this study, it begins with a discussion between the teacher and students to explain the target structures to the latter through language and other forms of presentation. The teacher then re-explains the target structures, using examples to show similarities and the contrast between the cases. The teacher asks them questions to scaffold their understanding. Finally, the learners should be able to try and present the information to the teacher by performing a task. In the current study, this cycle is called the ‘teacher’s discussion cycle’. Here, in the first lesson, the media are aligned using a PowerPoint presentation and text material. According to Laurillard’s (1993) classification of media, narrative media is included in this cycle.

The second LCF cycle is the **‘teacher-practice cycle’**, which Laurillard claims the teacher must design as a task based on the learners’ ZPD, determined in the first cycle. The learners’ ZPD can be ascertained by listening to them as they complete tasks. In fact, in this study, it is considered impractical to try and incorporate these two cycles in a single session for this intervention. Thus, the task is designed prior to the session, based on the teacher’s experience. This task will potentially need to be adjusted slightly in the same session, influenced by the teacher’s discussion with the learners during the first cycle, thus leading to the first adaptation of LCF.

The **‘teacher-modelling cycle’** is the third cycle in LCF. This consists of the learners performing an individual task, whereby they are permitted to use mobile phone apps, such as a translation tool and search engines, like Google (following the proposed activity model, as Kukulska-Hulme (2010) calls it - see section 2.3.1.1 for more detail). At the end of the task, the teacher asks two of the learners to write their answers on the whiteboard, subsequently providing them with feedback. While they are writing, the teacher roams around the group, providing feedback for the students. The media used in this cycle includes a podcast. This medium is classified by Laurillard as interactive.

The tasks in this and the coming cycles are designed based on Salmon's (2004) e-activities design principles (see section 2.3.3). These design principles consist of attempts to involve the participants in active learning, in order to achieve the intended learning outcomes. This represents the second adaptation of LCF (see Table 3.9 for these tasks).

The fourth cycle, the '**peer-communication cycle**' is carried out by encouraging the learners to explain to each other the two target structures they have learned in previous cycles, after watching a YouTube video (see 'TASK: LEARN MORE' in Table 3.9). These tasks are considered as being able to raise awareness, as the learners are not expected to produce target structures, but only to understand them, thus demonstrating their cognitive development (Ellis, 1994). From this cycle, the F2F and BL groups start to receive different treatment. For the BL group, the peer-explanation tasks are executed using the discussion board on Blackboard, as well as YouTube. The learners in the BL group have six days to complete the task before receiving the teacher's feedback in the next classroom session. The media integrated are categorised as interactive for the F2F group and interactive and communicative for the BL group.

Next, in the fifth cycle: the '**peer-practice cycle**', the learners collaborate to produce output for the skill acquired (see 'TASK: YOUR EXPERIENCE OF ONLINE SHOPPING' in Table 3.9). The learners are permitted to use mobile phone apps, such as a translator and search engines. In this cycle, a PowerPoint presentation is implemented for the F2F group in collaborative tasks over two lessons, this representing narrative media. For the BL group, however, the tasks are completed on a Blackboard wiki. This type of media is communicative. Finally, in the '**peer-modelling cycle**', observation is not something that can be observed itself, but is investigated by asking the students to evaluate their understanding.

The second lesson is aimed at developing the sub-skill of writing a letter of complaint as a component of sociolinguistic competence. The same steps used for the previously mentioned skills are also implemented here, but some cycles include different types of media. The teacher-communication cycle utilises narrative and interactive types of media, namely a PowerPoint presentation, text material and YouTube video to provide input. In the teacher-modelling cycle, a narrative medium is used, specifically a PowerPoint presentation. In the peer-communication and peer-practice cycles, the

narrative media used are the PowerPoint presentation and communicative media via the explanation tasks in the BL group (see Table 3.9). Thus, in this intervention, three types of media are applied, according to Laurillard's (1993) classification. The two lessons are presented in Table 3.9, below. In this Table, the technology used for each group is presented, as well as the differences between the two experimental groups and the control group.

**Table 3.9 The intervention design in comparison to the control group**

A Description of the Teaching Method	Name of Task as Used in the Study	F2F Group	BL Group	Technology Used	Control Group
<b>Grammatical Sub-skills</b>					
<p>A flowchart of the lesson's teaching and learning sequence is presented to the students.</p> <p>The <b>'teacher-communication cycle'</b>: The teacher starts by presenting a text with sentences in the past and sentences in the present simple. A discussion is held about the differences between the two tenses and the cases where the past tense could be used (Svalberg, 1995). The learners are then presented with sentences containing errors and there is a discussion about these and common errors in general. Finally, the groups of learners attempt to present the information to the teacher by forming some sentences on a specific event from the past. The same procedure is carried out with the learners to develop their ability to ask wh-questions using the past tense.</p>	The teacher's discussion task	In the classroom	In the classroom	A PowerPoint presentation	Direct instruction from the teacher to explain the target structure to the learners who were listening
<p>The <b>'teacher-modelling cycle'</b>: The learners are required to listen to a podcast and write sentences and questions about events from it, using the past tense.</p> <p><b>TASK TITLE: ABOUT A PODCAST (INDIVIDUAL TASK)</b></p> <p>Purpose: This task provides you with an opportunity to practice writing sentences and ask wh-questions about a story you hear in a podcast.</p> <p>Task: Listen to a short story on a podcast. Write on a piece of paper at least three sentences in the past tense and three wh-questions about things you want to know more about concerning the events in the podcast.</p> <p>Response: Write at least three wh-questions and three sentences, applying the past tense rules.</p>	The individual task	In the classroom	In the classroom	A PowerPoint presentation, mobile phones (Google and translation apps) and a podcast	This group did not receive this task

<p>The <b>‘peer-communication cycle’</b>: The learners must discuss in detail how to form sentences and questions in the past after watching a YouTube video, giving further details.</p> <p><b>TASK TITLE: LEARN MORE</b></p> <p>Purpose: This task provides you with an opportunity to learn how to write sentences and questions using different wh-words.</p> <p>Task: With your peers, listen to the YouTube video and summarise from it the rules for writing questions and past tense sentences.</p> <p>Response: Discuss with your peers how to write sentences in the past and ask wh-questions.</p>	The peer-explanation task	In the classroom	On the discussion board in Blackboard	A YouTube video, a PowerPoint presentation and mobile phones (Google and a translation apps) for the F2F group and Blackboard and WhatsApp for the BL group	This group did not receive this task
<p>The <b>‘peer-practice cycle’</b>: The learners are asked to write a passage in the past tense about their experiences of online shopping.</p> <p><b>TASK TITLE: YOUR EXPERIENCE OF ONLINE SHOPPING</b></p> <p>Purpose: This task aims to help you practice using the past tense to describe your experience of online shopping (Salmon, 2004).</p> <p><u>Task</u>: In 200 words describe one of your experiences of online shopping. Use the past tense in your sequence of the events. The following questions will lead you. You can use your mobile applications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who encouraged you to shop online? Give more details.</li> <li>• What did you buy?</li> <li>• What are your reasons for choosing this product rather than anything else?</li> <li>• Were you satisfied with your online shopping experience? Explain.</li> </ul> <p>Each group will present their passage to the other groups and the teacher to obtain feedback.</p> <p><u>Response</u>: Work with your peers to write a text that describes your past experience in online shopping.</p>	The output-practice task	In the classroom	On the Blackboard wiki	A PowerPoint presentation and mobile phones (Google and a translation apps) for the F2F group and Blackboard and WhatsApp for the BL group	The task was given to the learners to do individually, without mentioning the purpose of the task or the expected response (see Table 3.10)

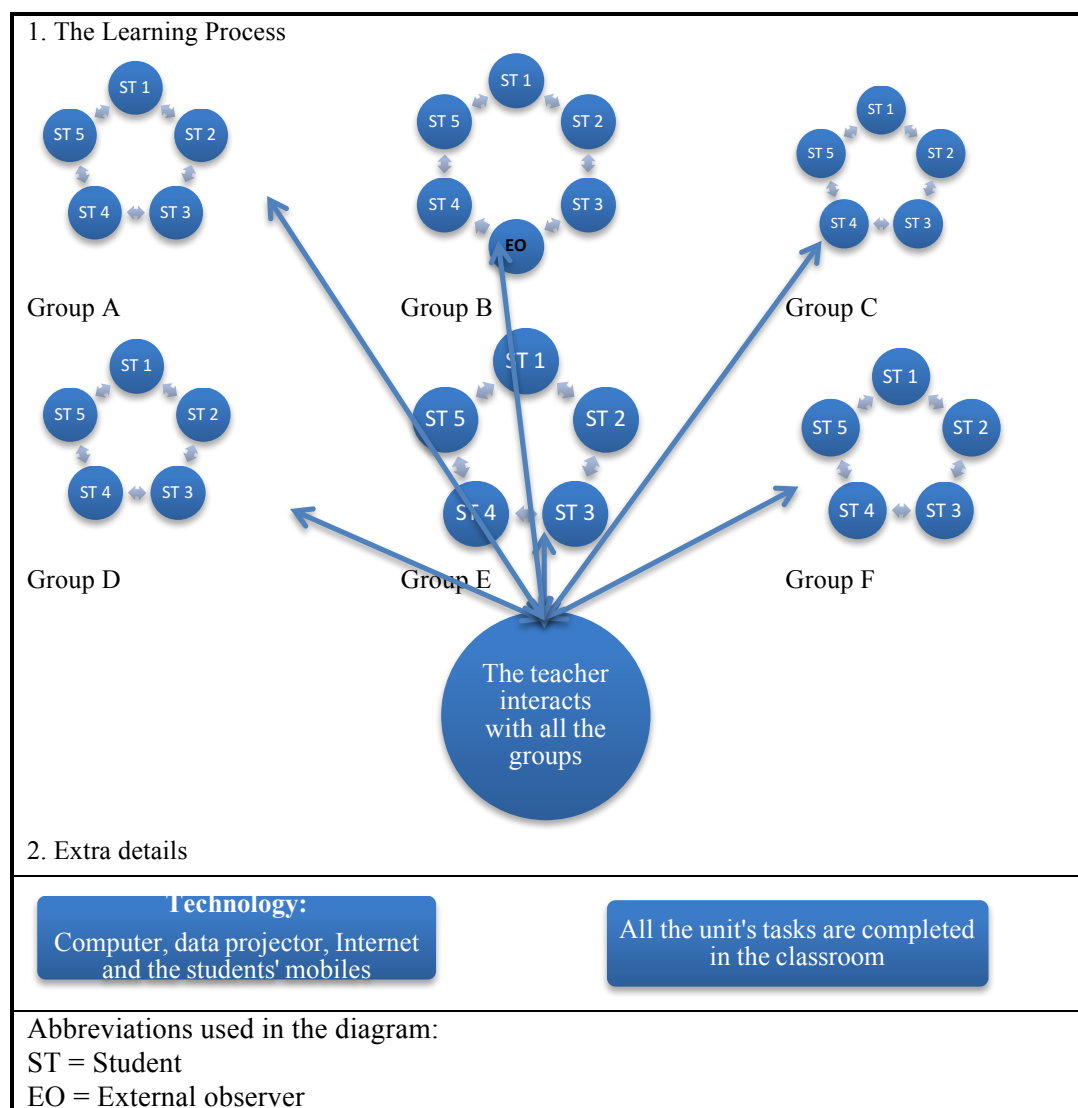


<b>Sub-skill: Writing a letter of Complaint</b>					
<p>A flowchart of the lesson's teaching and learning sequence is presented to the students.</p> <p>The <b>'teacher-communication cycle'</b>: The teacher starts by discussing with the learners the meaning of the word 'complain' and a YouTube video is presented to them on what should be included in a letter of complaint. There is consequently a discussion about this video and common phrases that can be used for making a complaint. The learners are then presented with a letter of complaint that has some errors in it and there is a discussion about these and about common errors in general. Working together, the learners are given the chance to present their interpretations of the meaning and components of the letter by completing a task. The teacher then re-explains the target structures using examples.</p>	The teacher's discussion task	In the classroom	In the classroom	A PowerPoint presentation and YouTube video	Direct instruction from the teacher to explain the target structure to the learners who were listening
<p>The <b>'teacher-modelling cycle'</b>: The learners are required to write a letter of complaint individually to a well-known restaurant manager.</p> <p><b>TASK TITLE: MAKING A COMPLAINT (INDIVIDUAL TASK)</b></p> <p>Purpose: This task aims to provide you with practice in making complaints.</p> <p>Task: Write on a piece of paper how you are going to make a complaint to the manager of MacDonald's about something you did not enjoy on your visit.</p> <p>You can use your mobile applications.</p> <p>Response: Do the task individually by writing your complaint.</p>	The individual task	In the classroom	In the classroom	A PowerPoint presentation and mobile phones (Google and a translation apps)	This group did not receive this task
<p>The <b>'peer-communication cycle'</b>: The learners must discuss the components of the letter of complaint and what should be included in each part of it.</p> <p><b>TASK TITLE: GROUP DISCUSSION</b></p> <p>Purpose: This task aims to raise your awareness of how to introduce someone,</p>	The peer-explanation task	In the classroom	On the Discussion Board in Blackboard	A PowerPoint presentation and mobile phones (Google and a translation apps) for the F2F group, and	This group did not receive this task

<p>make a complaint, and respond to a complaint.</p> <p>Task: Each group must analyse a sample of a letter of complaint. In your group of 5 members, discuss what should be included in each part of the letter.</p> <p>Response: Discuss with your peers how to write a letter of complaint.</p>				Blackboard and WhatsApp for the BL group	
<p>The <b>‘peer-practice cycle’</b>: This is the cycle where the learners collaborate to produce a letter of complaint to be sent to the Dean of the College.</p> <p><b>TASK TITLE: WRITE A LETTER TO THE DEAN</b></p> <p>Purpose: This task aims to enable you to practice what you have learned about making complaints.</p> <p>Task: Work with your group to write to the Dean about things which have happened in the past at your college and which you do not like. The teacher will promise to pass on these real complaints to the Dean.</p> <p>You can use your mobile applications.</p> <p>Response: Work with your peers to write a complaint to the Dean.</p>	The output-practice task	In the classroom	On the Blackboard wiki	A PowerPoint presentation and mobile phones for the F2F group, and Blackboard and WhatsApp for the BL group	The task was given to the learners to do individually, without mentioning the purpose of the task or the expected response

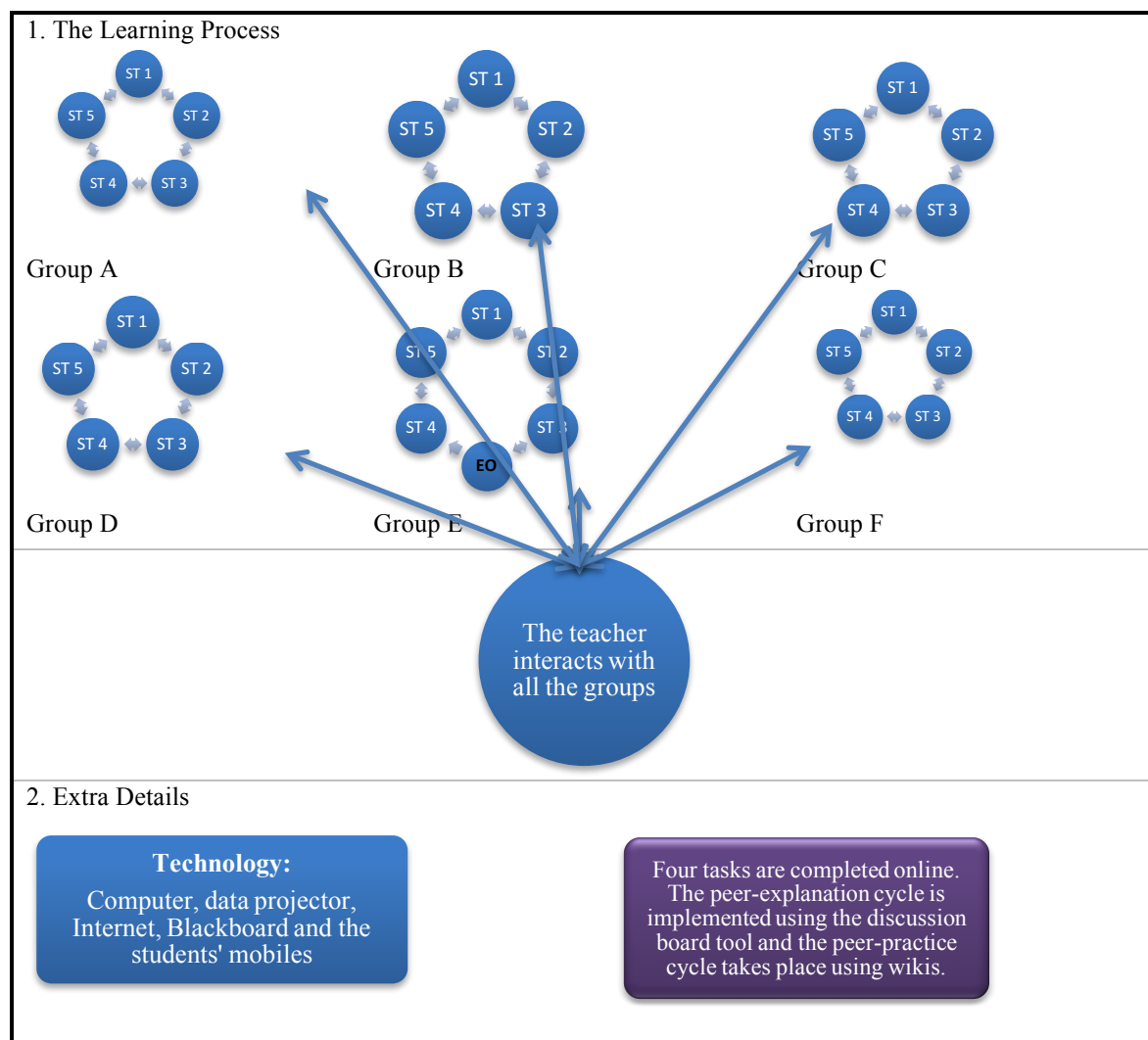
At the end of the intervention, an integrated task provides the learners with a chance to practice all the sub-skills they have learned in a real-life situation. This is because the intervention is aimed at developing different skills to be used in combination with each other in real life situations.

The intervention is divided into six lessons over six weeks and during this time, the two experimental groups receive weekly taught classes. The standard length of each class for the F2F group is 60 minutes and for the BL group, 40 minutes, as some tasks must be undertaken online. The first three classes focus on the past tense and wh-questions. The final three classes are on writing a letter of complaint. In each lesson, there are five cycles of LCF. As mentioned previously in the F2F intervention, all the cycles, including the tasks, are carried out in the classroom (see Figure 3.2, below).



**Figure 3.2 The organisation of the face-to-face (F2F) group in the classroom**

In the BL group intervention, the first two cycles (the teacher's communication and teacher's modelling cycles) take place in the classroom and two cycles (peer-communication, peer-practice and peer-modelling cycles) are carried out by the learners online, using the Blackboard discussion board for the peer-explanation cycle and Blackboard wikis for the peer-practice cycle (see Figure 3.3 The learning process in the blended (BL) experimental group). The students then receive feedback from the teacher in the next class, with the teacher providing them with a copy of the group's answers, along with corrections and explanations. Extra explanations are also provided for each group in the classroom. Moreover, the teacher scaffolds the learners on request, whether in her office or by email. However, due to the limited synchronous tools in UOK's version of Blackboard, explanation is provided asynchronously.



**Figure 3.3 The organisation of the BL group in the classroom**

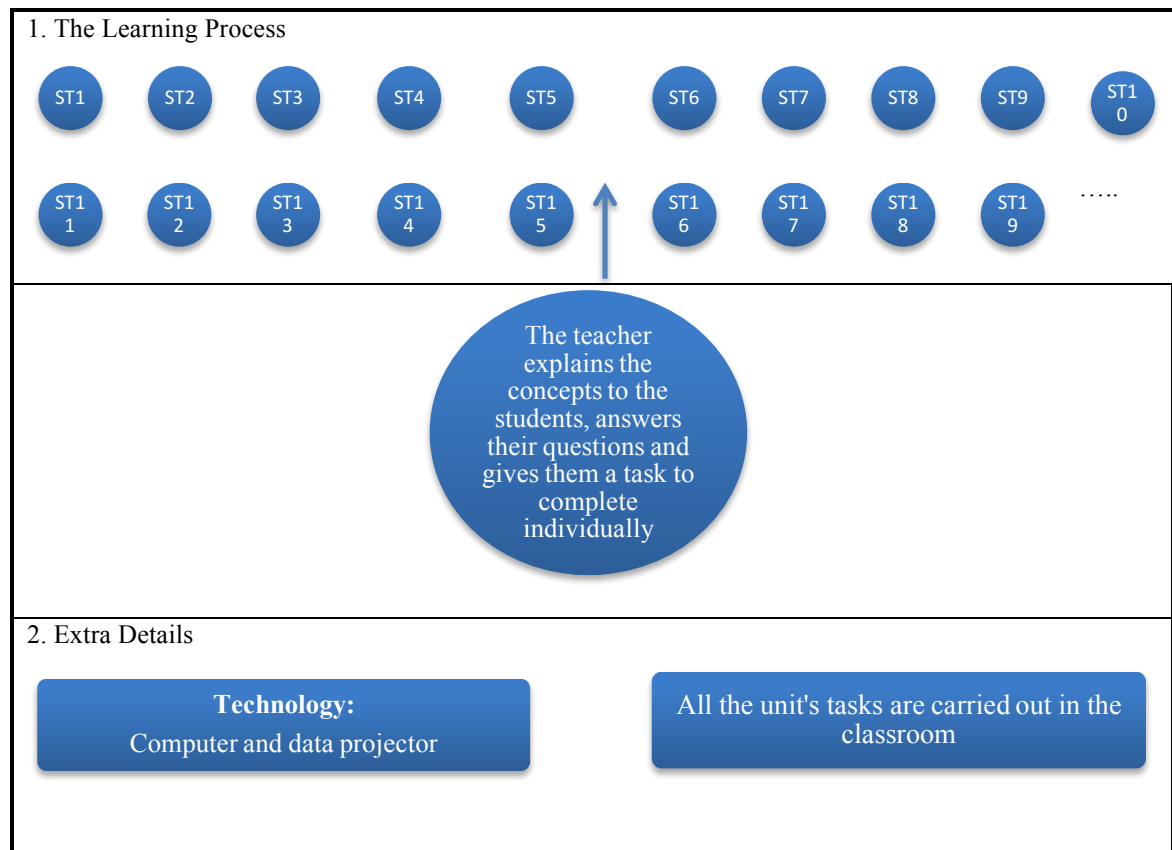
### 3.10.2 The Control Group

The control group is taught the same sub-skills, parallel to the two experimental groups, but the lesson is not designed using LCF. The control group is therefore taught four classes on the same topics that are used with the experimental groups, but via different teaching method, namely with the teacher providing initial explanations from the front, followed by an exercise. This teaching method reflects the usual teaching approach adopted in the study context. Here, the teacher explains the target structures to the learners directly, without discussing them. Moreover, the learners do not receive any additional explanation or output-practice tasks with their peers while learning and neither are there any ice-breaker activities. The teacher then gives the students the chance to ask questions, if there is still anything unclear. Finally, the students are set an individual task, whereby they must apply the target structure they have learned, receiving feedback from the teacher on the two samples they have written on the whiteboard (see Table 3.10, below).

**Table 3.10 An example of a control group task**

<p>In 200 words, describe one of your experiences of online shopping. Use the past tense to describe the sequence of events. The following questions will guide you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who encouraged you to shop online? Give more details.</li> <li>• What did you buy?</li> <li>• What are your reasons for choosing this product rather than anything else?</li> <li>• Were you satisfied with your online shopping experience? Explain.</li> </ul>
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Technology is integrated to a limited extent, as per the English sessions taught in this college. Only the computer and projector are used in the classroom to explain the target structures and present the tasks, but there is no online interaction (see Figure 3.4, below).

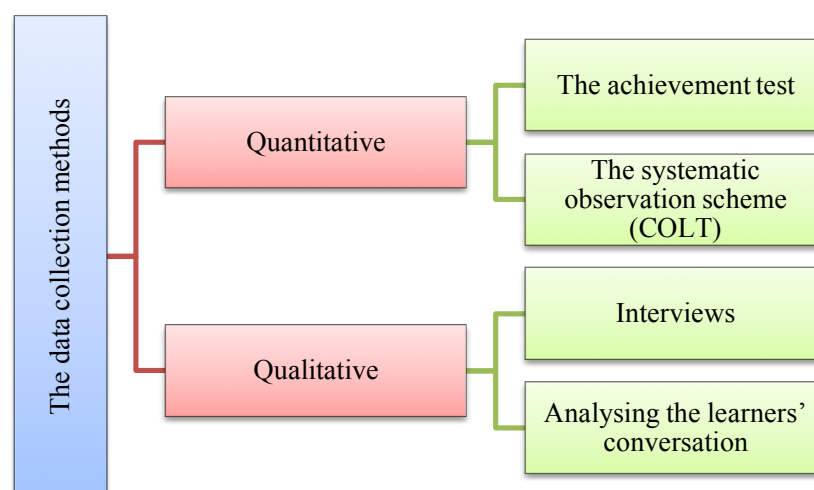


**Figure 3.4 The organisation of the control group in the classroom**

To conclude, the intervention designed for the experimental groups contains primary features of LCF, namely iteration; the teacher's dialogue with the learners to explain a target structure; group explanation; group collaboration to produce output, and the use of technology, in addition to the e-tivities. Meanwhile, the control group is not provided with these features. The following research tools are applied to investigate the impact of LCF on the learners' performance from an objective perspective (through tests), as well as from a more subjective perspective (through interviews, observation and conversation analysis).

### 3.11 Data Collection

During data collection, the effectiveness of the intervention is examined by testing for development in the learners' writing sub-skills. This is done via a written test. Interviews are used to explore the learners' perceptions and engagement, observation is conducted to examine their engagement, and the learners' interaction is analysed for triangulation (see Figure 3.5, below).



**Figure 3.5** The data collection tools

### 3.11.1 The Test

To answer the first research question regarding the effectiveness of the intervention for developing the learners' writing skills, a type of achievement test is administered to the learners in the three groups before and after teaching the intervention, with a time lapse of six weeks between the pre- and post-test (see Appendix 1: The Test). An achievement test is an indicator of a student's capability, progress and understanding of what is being learned in class (Barrette, 2004). Moreover, an appropriate language test should contain a clear definition of the abilities being developed and measured and the means selected to do so, as Table 3.11 illustrates below (Bachman, 1990).

**Table 3.11 Definition of the test constructs**

The Constructs (Competences)	Definitions of the Constructs	The Test Items
Asking wh-questions	This construct tests students' ability to ask wh-questions about statements presented to them in the past tense. This skill forms part of their grammatical competence.	The first question (two statements)
Using the past tense	This construct tests students' ability to write a passage describing events in the past. The item describes a scenario for the students, similar to real life events, whereby they are asked to use the past tense. This test is an integrative and criterion-referenced test and the skill forms part of their grammatical competence.	The fourth question and part of the third question
Writing a letter of complaint	This construct tests students' ability to express their dissatisfaction with certain events, whereby they make a complaint. This skill forms part of their sociolinguistic competence.	The second question and part of the third question

The above-mentioned test is designed to measure three constructs. The first construct, forming wh-questions, is measured with two points in Question 1 (see Appendix 1: The Test). The second construct, using the past tense to write passages, is measured with two questions (Questions 3 and 4), and the third construct, writing a letter of complaint, is also measured with two questions (Questions 2 and 3). From the distribution of the constructs across the questions presented in Table 3.11, it is clear that this type of question is an integrated question, which measures more than one construct, particularly Question 3, as supported by Carr (2011) and Weir (1990) (the raters score this question twice, in order to distinguish between the two competences it measures). This is in contrast to Canale and Swain (1980), who claim that each question should assess just one skill. Moreover, this kind of test has a prominent feature, emphasised by many researchers, whereby it can tap into aspects of communicative competence by means of authentic tasks that reflect real-life situations and which need integrative communicative performance (Canale & Swain, 1980; Weir, 1990).

### *Assessing Constructed Responses*

The thread that clearly runs through the assessment of the constructed response tasks in the test applied here consists of raters' subjectivity in assessment and variation between raters, where assessment is carried out by different raters. This variation may be due to



the different decisions made by individual raters, based on their own academic backgrounds (McNamara, 1996; Fulcher, 2013), work experience and bias (Knoch, 2009). However, to reduce this variation and ensure consistent scoring, a scale may be used. A scoring scale is a systematic description of a student's performance in a test, applied to reduce the raters' subjectivity and to increase the reliability and validity of the test and inter-rater reliability (Wang, Ko, & Choi, 2009; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010; Carr, 2011). The best known types of scoring scale are holistic and analytical scales (Weigle, 2002).

In this study, an analytical scoring scale is implemented, as it applies several sub-scales concerned with specific performance, whereby a specific score is given for student performance in each competence, rather than looking at the overall score provided by a holistic scale when measuring each student's performance (Shaw & Weir, 2007; Knoch, 2009; Carr, 2011). The advantage of this scale includes its capacity to provide detailed information on the test-taker's performance, showing the individual's strengths and weaknesses (Weigle, 2002; Coombe, Folse, & Hubley, 2007). It is also more reliable, because the rater is obliged to rate each aspect of the response separately and accurately (Knoch, 2009). Nevertheless, this scale has some well-known limitations, such as being time-consuming and potentially expensive to administer (Coombe et al., 2007; Knoch, 2009).

East's (2009) scoring scale was eventually adapted to assess development in the learners' communicative competence, as it was deemed to be the most appropriate in this case (see Table 3.12). East (2009) found this scale to be highly reliable, as the scores for each rater were correlated, an inter-rater reliability coefficient was calculated as approaching 0.9 ( $p < .001$ ), and the intra-rater reliability for a subset of 16 scripts also approached 0.9 ( $p < .001$ ). East (2009) indicates that these levels of consistency are above the threshold of .08 suggested by Hatch and Lazaraton (1991) and Hamp-Lyons (1991).

This scoring scale is used by two independent raters, in addition to the researcher to measure a variety of aspects and its inter-rater reliability has been verified in this study and found to be satisfactory, as explained in section 3.8. Here, only two aspects are considered: rhetorical organisation in assessing a letter of complaint, as this skill is

related to how an idea can be appropriately and coherently expressed in a letter (see Appendix 2: Scoring Scale for Writing a Letter of Complaint), and grammatical competence (see Appendix 3: Scoring Scale for Writing a Passage Using the Past Tense; Appendix 4: Scoring Scale for Asking Wh-questions).

**Table 3.12 East's (2009) scoring scale for rhetorical organisation**

The Score	The Interpretation	The Score	The Interpretation
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implications of a task fully understood</li> <li>• Ideas are extremely clearly stated</li> <li>• Extremely well-organised</li> <li>• Very logical sequencing</li> <li>• Very cohesive</li> <li>• Very fluent expression</li> <li>• The writing 'flows'</li> </ul>	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some understanding of the task</li> <li>• Ideas are somewhat confused or disconnected</li> <li>• Lacks logical sequencing</li> <li>• Weak cohesion</li> <li>• Not very fluent</li> <li>• The writing is quite 'choppy'</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task is well understood</li> <li>• Ideas are very clearly stated</li> <li>• Very well-organised</li> <li>• Logical sequencing</li> <li>• Cohesive</li> <li>• Fluent expression</li> <li>• The writing generally 'flows'</li> </ul>	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited understanding of the task</li> <li>• Ideas are confused or disconnected</li> <li>• Very minimal logical sequencing and development</li> <li>• Very weak cohesion</li> <li>• Hardly fluent</li> <li>• The writing is very 'choppy'</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task is understood</li> <li>• Loosely organised, but the main ideas stand out</li> <li>• Mainly logical but some incomplete sequences</li> <li>• Mainly cohesive</li> <li>• Mainly fluent expression</li> <li>• The writing is a little bit 'choppy'</li> </ul>	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very limited understanding of the task</li> <li>• Ideas are very confused or disconnected</li> <li>• Virtually no logical sequencing or development</li> <li>• Virtually no cohesion</li> <li>• Virtually no fluency</li> <li>• The writing is extremely 'choppy'</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task is mostly understood</li> <li>• Loosely organised but the main ideas stand out</li> <li>• Generally logical, but several instances of incomplete sequencing</li> <li>• Satisfactory cohesion</li> <li>• Some fluent expression</li> <li>• The writing is somewhat 'choppy'</li> </ul>	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No rewardable response</li> </ul>

This scale has been adapted to meet the needs of this study by reducing the number of levels from eight to six, through the omission of specific scores (2 and 6 on the original scale of sociolinguistic competence), as well as some of the descriptive phrases

included for other scores, as these are not required to describe the students' writing in the current study and beyond the focus of this intervention. The criteria for writing complex constructions are omitted, as the students are only accustomed to writing simple constructions (see Appendix 2). The grammatical competence scale is first divided into two: one scale for the past tense and another for asking wh-questions. In addition, the same points are omitted from the grammatical competence scoring scales, as they are very close to the other levels (see Appendices 3 and 4).

### **3.11.2 The Interviews**

In order to answer the second research question regarding the learners' perceptions of the intervention, the interview method is applied only to the experimental groups. While conducting the interviews, I present the interviewees with the LCF Figure they have already seen in class, before moving from one cycle to another in the intervention (Figure 2.1). This step is intended to provoke the interviewees to vividly recall the original situation of the learning process in the intervention and it is referred to in the literature on research methods as a 'stimulated recall interview' (Bloom, 1953). Moreover, this is a way of encouraging the learner to focus on the interview topic (Bernard, 2013). Although this method is more effective where video-recording is used, it is difficult to incorporate this in the current study, due to the cultural limitations imposed on filming or photographing female students.

There are three degrees of structure in interviewing: unstructured, semi-structured and structured. In this study, a semi-structured interview is used. This is flexible, pre-determined and somewhat controlled by the interviewer (Wellington, 1996). It is favoured over an unstructured interview here, as the latter is very flexible and guided by the interviewee, thus yielding unpredictable results that are difficult to analyse (Wellington, 1996; Coleman, 2012; Carey, 2013). On the other hand, a structured interview, controlled to the maximum extent by the interviewer and guided by a predetermined framework, has not been selected, as it can lead to predictable results and limits the possibility of the researcher obtaining detailed and in-depth information (Wellington, 1996). Semi-structured interviews, however, allow the researcher to probe where more information is needed. They can therefore help reduce interviewer bias if the interview guide is followed (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

On searching the literature, no interview guide was found for identifying learners' perceptions of the LCF design. The interview questions were written after reviewing the literature, ensuring that each question was linked to the research question and avoiding the inclusion of too many questions, or the use of jargon and acronyms. As far as possible, difficult, ambiguous, sensitive or leading questions must be ruled out in a research interview (Carey, 2013). The initial questions in the current interview schedule are intended to establish background information about the participants. The major themes addressed involve the learners' perceptions of the intervention's effectiveness, including the teacher's instruction, peer-explanation and peer-output practice. An interview guide is correspondingly used (see Appendix 5: Interview Guide), with important questions on features of LCF. Other aspects of the adaptation are investigated through sub-questions and probes to obtain more information (Coleman, 2012).

The interviewees comprise six students from the F2F learning group and six from the BL group. The aim of interviewing students from the two groups is to compare their perceptions of the intervention designed. Moreover, the interviews take place in an F2F setting. This is valuable because an interviewee's facial expressions and body language can help shed light on their words (Coleman, 2012) and such an interview format and setting should allow interviewees to speak more freely in their own words about what is significant for them (Hobson & Townsend, 2010; Carey, 2013). Here, the interview venue is the classroom, where the learning sessions are also held, but where it is quiet place during break times. Privacy is thus ensured, since the classroom is empty at these times, except for the interviewee and myself, the interviewer (King & Horrocks, 2010).

The interviews were scheduled according to the most convenient times for the participants and do not exceed 40 minutes (Wellington, 1996). Moreover, the interviews are audio-recorded to ensure a full record of everything uttered (Wellington, 1996). Although recording has the potential to inhibit interview participants, as Carey (2013) points out, the participants in this instance ultimately prove to be very relaxed and frank in expressing their points of view.

In conducting the interviews, the researcher, topic and purpose of the interview are introduced. The students give their informed consent after their rights are explained to them and I clarify my responsibility to keep their data and views confidential (King &

Horrocks, 2010). Through the interviews, contradictions in the interviewees' answers are subsequently linked and probed to enable reflection and to allow a conclusion to be drawn. During the interviews, I encourage the participants to describe their experiences by showing signs of listening, such as nodding my head and feeding their ideas back to them, while also showing respect for their different opinions (Kvale & Flick, 2007). Repeating some of the participants' statements is one way of a researcher checking for understanding and encouraging interviewees to say more. Russell (2013) calls this the 'echo probe', although it is also sometimes referred to as the 'tell me more' probe (Bernard, 2013).

In addition, the researcher should not express any judgment regarding interview responses, in order to avoid having any impact on their authenticity of these responses (Johnson & Turner, 2003). To minimise the effect of this power, I indirectly ask the participants for their views on the teacher's role in the intervention, namely enquiring about any changes they would suggest or recommend, in case another teacher wished to apply the intervention when teaching a different group of students. The interviewees are also asked whether they would register on such a course if they knew the teacher intended to use the same teaching method.

### **3.11.3 The Observation**

To answer the second research question regarding the learners' engagement in the intervention, non-participant observation is undertaken, but exclusively with the experimental groups (Van Lier, 1988). This is because many researchers suggest that attempting to combine the roles of teacher and observer limits the researcher's ability to observe effectively (Magidson, 2005; Tabach, 2006). Observation helps gain a detailed and rich description of participants' engagement in an intervention and this is not always something which is actually mentioned by the participants themselves in interviews (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Mackey & Gass, 2005). In the present study, observing the learners' engagement in the context, without interfering in their activities, is intended to yield results that will help triangulate learners' perceptions of the design and its effectiveness in their engagement (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000).

Based on the pilot results, I decided to use structured observation to help avoid observer bias and subjectivity, because the semi-structured observation applied in the pilot study revealed biased results (Magidson, 2005; Tabach, 2006). Before choosing the observation scheme, a review of the literature was carried out. It was unnecessary to design a new instrument, since there was already an instrument suitable for meeting the research purpose and comparing results with those of other studies using the same instrument (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This was Allen's (1983) Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme, which is a systematic method of interaction analysis (Walsh, 2006). This scheme was developed by Spada and Fröchlich (1995) when formulating coding conventions and manuals. In the present structured observation, the observer uses COLT with specific categories planned in advance to code observed behaviour, according to the scheme (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Jones & Somekh, 2005).

Nevertheless, the observation in this study has several limitations, such as the fact that learners' body language and facial expressions cannot be recorded and replayed to gain a deeper understanding, given that the participants are only voice-recorded. A complete report of the observer's experience is therefore not possible (Picciano, 2004; Jones & Somekh, 2005; Mackey & Gass, 2005). In addition, there is the chance that participants will perform better when they are being observed (the so-called 'Hawthorne effect'), or could even yield worse outcomes, precisely because they are being observed (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In addition to these drawbacks, the engagement might not be clear, or it may have low interpretive validity, or be time-consuming to analyse (Johnson & Turner, 2003). The use of structured observation has also been criticised, however, due to its predetermined categories, given that these might not actually exist in the observed situation, or might only partially describe it (McIntyre & Macleod, 1986). For this reason, the students' conversations are analysed here according to the groups they were in while being observed. Analysing this interaction will help identify how the learners behave in each LCF cycle.

Having carefully studied COLT, the external observer is requested to observe a class taught by a volunteer teacher, who asks her students to collaborate in accomplishing tasks, in order to familiarise herself with the scheme. She observes a group of four students in the classroom, sitting next to them. I am seated at a slight distance from the

group, so as to avoid increasing their stress levels while they try to learn. On the other hand, I can still hear the learners' interaction. After analysing the external observer's scheme, I advise her to pay attention to the learners' use of content. This might not be a special feature of this trial, but it is an important one in LCF. Likewise, I note that I need to add a column for the number of minutes observed, in order to facilitate the analysis.

Aside from the above, there are some limitations involved in using an external observer. In this case, for example, the observer does not have any background in the application of LCF and this is her first experience of an intervention designed in such a way. The Framework's cycles are defined for her, but there is still the risk she will become confused. Moreover, although she has already practiced using COLT in a pilot trial, there is the risk of her being biased in her coding. For this reason, the data obtained through COLT, describing the learners' engagement, is triangulated through conversation analysis. This is because triangulation can play an important role in qualitative research, as a means of validating observed data using information from another source (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The learners, whose conversations I subsequently analyse are the same as those forming the subject of the observation.

The observation of the F2F and BL groups in the intervention involves five students in each case. The external observer attends two different sessions for about 30 minutes on each occasion, using the scheme. It is clarified for the observer that she is likely to face difficulties carrying out the observation, such as observing engagement that is not recorded, moments of silence, or an absence of collaboration between the students, due to her presence. I advise her to avoid eye contact with the students in such cases, or else to show them she is waiting for them through her presence. Moreover, the learners are informed that the observation is not aimed at evaluating them and the observer does not know their names. They cannot therefore be identified and are free to behave 'normally'.

A modified version of COLT is used here, because it examines various aspects of communicative language teaching (CLT) (Ullmann & Geva, 1985). CLT shares many features with LCF, as discussed in the literature (see section 2.3.4). The scheme is adapted by merging its two parts (i.e. parts A and B, see Spada & Fröhlich, 1995).

These usually extend to two A3 pages, but certain parts have been omitted in this case as they are considered unnecessary for answering the research questions (see Appendix 6: An Example of the External Observation). The scheme is therefore presented as a single landscape page, making it easier for the observer to carry and use. The starting point for the observer is to identify the activity and note the number of minutes observed. This will precisely indicate the amount of time spent on each cycle of the Framework (see Figure 3.6, below).

[illegible]

**Figure 3.6 A sample of the classroom observation scheme**

The components of COLT used for observing the students in the present study are concerned with their engagement with the language and tasks. These components consist of the language used in the interaction, identified as either the target language (coded as TL) or mother tongue (coded as L1). Next, the participants' organization and interaction are described, namely whether teacher-student interaction (T<->S/), group interaction, or individual work. It is intended that the observer describes who is controlling the interaction and task in the *Content Control* column. This has two sub-categories: 'Teacher/Text', which codes the activity led by the teacher, such as explaining, giving feedback, using media to illustrate, or any form of scaffolding, and 'Teacher/Text/Student', where the activity is coded when the teacher gives the learners a task to complete and they have a degree of freedom to compose the text for the task. It is also intended for the observer to quantify the amount of 'teacher talk' in *Teacher's Sustained Speech*. This involves indicating the best examples of 'minimal' teacher talk,



consisting of less than three clauses or sentences, or ‘sustained’ teacher talk, referring to extended speech.

A further description is also required concerning students’ speech. This refers to the frequency of self-initiated, language-producing turns amongst the students. Finally, the type of collaboration occurring between the students, needs to be described under ‘*Incorporation of Student Utterances*’. This consists of four sub-categories, coded as follows: ‘Correction’, where a student corrects an error made by a peer; ‘Comment’, where a student evaluates a comment made by a peer; ‘Expansion’, where a student includes extra information in her comment, and ‘Clarification request’, where a student does not understand something and asks for repetition or explanation. The classification of the coding categories is explained in the analysis of the findings (see Chapter 6).

### **3.12 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of transforming the data from raw data to ‘findings’ (Lofland, et al., 2006). In this study, different quantitative and qualitative approaches are used to collect the data, as mentioned above. These data are then analysed, in order to answer the research questions. The process of analysis applied here is a mixture of inductive and deductive approaches (Lofland et al., 2006). The deductive process for analysing quantitative data begins with a theoretical hypothesis derived from the literature, which is then tested with the research data (Lofland et al., 2006). On the other hand, the inductive process for analysing qualitative data is data-based, whereby theories are derived from the data (Lofland et al., 2006).

#### **3.12.1 Analysis of the Achievement Test**

The quantitative data are analysed using SPSS in this study, with no missing data. In an analysis of the main research tests, the different statistical tests performed here measure the effectiveness of the intervention designed using LCF for developing learners’ writing sub-skills. This process takes place in stages, whereby I initially present descriptive statistics of the participants’ pre- and post-test scores for the F2F, BL and control groups. Inferential statistical tests are then administered to determine the significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores for each group and the differences between the post-test scores for the three groups. The statistic, ‘df’, *p*-value

and effect size are subsequently reported. The statistic refers to the test used, such as a chi-square test, represented by the symbol ( $\chi^2$ ) in a non-parametric test. On the other hand, 'df' refers to the number of times a participant obtains a free component that is not the expected result ( $N-1$ ), where  $N$  is the sample size. Meanwhile, the  $p$ -value is the probability of obtaining a statistic "as large as the one we found if the null hypothesis were true" (Larson-Hall, 2016, p.399). It is in fact the probability value ( $p$ -value), known as the significant value. In other words, if it is .05, it is significant, while if it is .01, it is considered very significant and when it is .001, it is considered highly significant (Bernard, 2013). Finally, 'effect size' is an indicator of the importance and magnitude of effect, because the significance of a result does not necessarily imply that the effect of what is measured is meaningful across different studies (Field, 2013; Larson-Hall, 2016).

Before comparing the groups' performance through inferential statistical tests, I must test the normality of the data, due to the current study's small sample size. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is therefore selected here. This test shows whether the distribution of scores is normal and it involves comparing the sample scores with a normally distributed set of scores (Cramer & Howitt, 2004; Field, 2013). If the result is greater than .05, it means the sample does not significantly deviate from normal distribution and parametric tests can be used. Parametric tests measure what can actually be measured, in order to estimate something that cannot actually be measured (a parameter) (Larson-Hall, 2016). Otherwise, if the data are not normally distributed, non-parametric statistics should be used. As the data are not normally distributed in this instance (see section 4.4), the Wilcoxon test, a non-parametric test, is implemented to determine whether the differences in each group's pre- and post-test ranked scores are significantly different (Cramer & Howitt, 2004).

The same process is used to compare the performance of the groups. The normality of the data is examined, finding that they are not normally distributed, as presented in section 4.5. Therefore, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test may be used to identify the differences between the experimental and control groups in their mean pre- and post-test ranks (Cramer & Howitt, 2004) (see section 4.6). Thus, in order to compare the groups, the differences between the pre- and post-test scores for the F2F and BL groups are contrasted with those of the control group. This is called the 'difference-in-

differences' model and it enables the effect of the intervention to be identified by comparing the differences in learners' performance before and after implementation and with a control group (Dubé et al., 2014). The model is used here to reduce the effect of the pre-test on the learners' performance in the post-test, as the two tests are identical.

### **3.12.2 The Interview Analysis**

The interviews are first transcribed by transferring each participant's spoken answers to Arabic text, written up by hand and then typed in MS Word. I then translate each of these files into English, based on meaning, rather than considering every utterance, which might not be relevant to the interview guide or research question. At the same time, however, the meaning must not be lost during the translation process (Bazeley, 2013). Next, I begin the analysis by reading the transcript many times, before applying thematic analysis to code the raw data, which is a means of exploring categories or codes for features of data (Gibson, 2010; Carey, 2013). Themes are subsequently formed through this process, according to the frequency of features of the participants' speech in relation to the research questions (King & Horrocks, 2010). The coding process is carried out using NVivo.

The above-mentioned type of analysis also involves going back and forth between reading, reflecting, exploring, coding, connecting, reviewing and refining (Bazeley, 2013). In this study, I have adapted the three stages suggested by King and Horrocks (2010) for thematic analysis (see Table 3.13 An example of the coding procedure). Stage One consists of descriptive coding, whereby I read through the transcript, highlight points and write comments. I then define and refine the descriptive codes. Stage Two involves clustering the descriptive codes, interpreting their meanings and applying interpretive codes to all the data. Stage Three then involves drawing out the overarching themes, from which I derive individual themes and construct a diagram to represent the relationship between the themes under analysis (see Figure 5.1, below).

**Table 3.13 An example of the coding procedure**

The Arabic Transcript	The Translated Transcript	Description	Codes	Themes
<p>T: بصورة عامه ما رأيك في طريقة التدريس المتبعة في هذه الوحدة؟</p> <p>ST2BL: في البداية أود أن أوضح لك بأنني بالرغم أنني كنت احقق درجات عالية في مادة اللغة الانجليزية في الثانوي إلا أنني الوضع الآن مختلف لأن أسلوب الدراسة في الثانويه يختلف عن الأسلوب في الجامعة. اشعر بأنني لا افهم كثيرا في المحاضرات التي اخذناها في هذه الوحدة.</p> <p>T: نعود لطريقة التدريس في هذه الوحدة، هل أحببتها أو لا؟ ST2BL: بالرغم من أن الوقت في المحاضرة كان يمر سريعا ولا نشعر بالملل إلا أن معظم الأوقات لم اكن فاهمه للمادة وذلك لعدم معرفتي بمعنى بعض الكلمات المستخدمه في الدرس وفي الشرح والنقاش. كما أن الشرح كان باللغة الانجليزية التي يصعب عليها فهمها.</p>	<p><b>T: In General, what do you think about the teaching method followed in this intervention?</b></p> <p><b>ST2BL:</b> At first, I would like to clarify for you that despite the fact I used to achieve high scores for English as a subject in High School, the situation is different now, because the teaching method at High School differs from university. I feel I cannot understand a lot from the lectures I have attended during this intervention.</p> <p><b>T: Lets go back to the teaching method followed in this intervention, did you like it or not?</b></p> <p><b>ST2BL:</b> Despite the fact the time passed quickly, without any sense of tedium, most of the time I couldn't understand the topic because I lacked knowledge of the meaning of some of the words used in the lesson, illustration and discussion. In addition, the illustration was in English, which was difficult for us to understand.</p>	<p>She feels that her language level was good in secondary school, but she also feels that it changed due to the different teaching method used.</p> <p>It was difficult for her to understand.</p> <p>Although she did not like the intervention and did not understand it, due to her limited vocabulary, she felt the time passed quickly.</p>	<p>A description of her score in secondary school.</p> <p>Not able to understand the info. in the intervention.</p> <p>The teaching method is not boring.</p> <p>She has limited understanding, but the lack of vocabulary hinders her comprehension. She does not like having the explanation in English.</p>	<p>Background information.</p> <p>Not able to understand, due to language proficiency level.</p> <p>Language proficiency level.</p> <p>Language proficiency level.</p>

The themes of the interview analysis are theory-driven, drawing upon SCT, but the wording of the themes is drawn from the data (Boyatzis, 1998). For example, the themes, 'equal attention being given by the teacher to all groups/individuals' and 'peer-relationships' concern the role of the teacher and peers in scaffolding the learners, thus enabling them to reach their potential level of ZPD. However, the wording of the

themes is drawn from the data. This means that the themes in this study are both data- and theory-driven. However, the limitation of this analysis, as Boyatzis (1998) asserts, is its low inter-rater reliability and validity. A remedy for this is to go back and forth over the original Arabic transcript and recordings. A sample of the process is displayed in Table 3.13. Moreover, a post-graduate researcher is asked to review a sample of the translation and coding, as described in section 3.13.

### **3.12.3 Analysis of the Learners' Engagement**

The learners' engagement is observed using the COLT scheme, which is considered as an interaction analysis scheme. Cancino (2015) holds that interaction analysis - for example, in the form of COLT - is the most reliable tool, because it applies a coding system and provides quantitative counts of classroom events. The analysis of the COLT coding in the present study is based on a method suggested by Spada and Fröhlich (1995). After the observer codes the classroom activities lasting 3-5 minutes, I calculate the percentage of time spent on each sub-category under its main category. For example, in the main category, 'Participants' organisation and interaction' there are three sub-categories; teacher/student interaction (T<->S), group interaction and individual work. The observer coded T<->S for 11 minutes and the total observation time was 34 minutes. Therefore, the teacher/student interaction amounts to around 32.35% of the observation time (see Appendix 6: An Example of External Observation). Next, a comparison is made between the first and second visits made by the external observer, in order to examine the learners' development in the features examined. In addition, a comparison is made between the F2F and BL groups, as the observation is carried out for the same tasks in each group and all the tasks are performed in the classroom. The aim of this comparison is to explore the differences between the learners' engagement with the tasks in the F2F and BL contexts.

However, interaction analysis does not necessarily provide a complete picture of what happens in the classroom, due to its pre-determined categories (Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Walsh, 2006). For this reason, another analysis approach is adopted in this study, namely conversation analysis, as explained below.

### 3.12.4 Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis is an empirical inductive approach to discourse analysis that is concerned with searching for why a particular thing happens at a certain time, as opposed to another thing occurring at another time (Boxer & Cohen, 2004). Conversation analysis can be carried out by analysing authentic recorded data that need to be appropriately transcribed. Here, the ‘turn’ is the unit of analysis (Boxer & Cohen, 2004). This approach to analysis is adopted here, as it is not based on pre-determined theories and the classroom interaction cannot be anticipated. It therefore provides an in-depth view of how participants treat each other’s speech from an emic perspective, and how they use the intervention components and language to engage in meaningful interaction, in order to try and understand how they accomplish their tasks (Negretti, 1999; Wong & Waring, 2010). However, the findings from the conversation analysis cannot be generalised, because there are no pre-conceived categories and it cannot be idealised, as affirmed by Walsh (2006).

In this study, the conversation analysis is focused on how conversation develops and is maintained, as well as how ideas are constructed. This is achieved by analysing transcripts (Bazeley, 2013). The conversation analysis therefore looks at aspects such as the number of turns taken (one utterance, with another speaker overlapping), the occurrence of silence – how and why it happens (Boxer, 2004), adjacency pairs (speech organised into a sequence of paired actions, such as questions and answers) (Sidnell, 2010), and the length of pauses (Bazeley, 2013). Conversely, other researchers, such as Schegloff (1993) and Psathas (1995) are opposed to the quantification of conversation, as they claim it limits phenomena. However, in this study, it is the tasks being analysed that are counted, rather than whole classes, in order to gain a more detailed perspective of what is happening in the tasks, as supported by Watanabe (2008).

The analysis of the students’ interactions is concentrated on changes in opinion throughout the conversation and wherever there are contradictions in discussion. Conversation analysis also focuses on learners’ engagement with tasks and language, by examining development in their use of the target language (TL), asking how they make use of the e-tivity principles when performing tasks, determining how they scaffold

each other and make use of the teacher's scaffolding, and identifying how they utilise the selected mediating artefacts (Willis et al., 2009; Bazeley, 2013).

The conversation analysis in this case is carried out using five analytical tools, suggested by Pomerantz and Fehr (1997). These tools involve: (1) eliciting a sequence of importance, (2) characterising the movements in this sequence by clarifying the role of each participant per turn, (3) packaging the actions by explaining how they are shaped or delivered, (4) considering the effect of time and taking turns, in order to understand certain actions, and (5) considering how actions are performed to suggest certain rules or relationships between participants. This enables us to consider both the utterance and the context (Walsh, 2006).

To characterise movement in the interaction (the second tool), an interaction framework has been designed by merging six aspects of the Walsh (2006) Interaction Analysis Framework (for the first six items of the Interaction Analysis Framework, see Table 3.14, below) and five aspects of Kumpulainen and Wray's (2002) Peer-interaction Analysis Framework.

**Table 3.14 The interaction analysis framework, adopted from Walsh (2006) and Kumpulainen and Wray (2002)**

Aspects of Interaction	Definition
Scaffolding	Reformulation or correction of learners' contributions
Content feedback	Giving feedback on the message rather than the form
Form-focused feedback	Giving feedback on the form rather than the message
Seeking clarification	Asking for something to be clarified from the teacher or student's side
Confirmation checks	Ensuring the listener has understood what has been said
Collaboration	Students sharing an activity to make meaning
Confusion	Lack of shared understanding of task
Responsive utterance	Responding to questions
Compositional act	Creating a text
Revision act	Revising a text
Repetition act	Repeating spoken language

### 3.13 The Validity and Reliability of the Study

Verifying validity is a way of ensuring "a true picture of reality" is constructed (Gibbs, 2008 p.94), whereas reliability refers to consistency of judgement among raters or observers and consistency over time, in the case where the event is repeated (Boyatzis, 1998; Weigle, 2002). For the achievement test, validity and reliability have been

examined in the pilot study (see section 3.8). The test's validity has been ensured through the clarity of the items, checking that they are appropriate for the learners' level of writing skill. The reliability of the test has been ensured by assigning two independent raters, trained in the use of the scoring scale, as well as myself, using the scoring scale with the test (Fulcher, 2013), in order to reduce subjectivity.

As far as possible, reliability in quasi-experimental designs should be achieved by maintaining the comparability of the circumstances surrounding the groups under study (in this case, the two experimental groups and one control group) (Tolmie, Muijs, & McAteer, 2011). I have therefore attempted to render the groups comparable, despite the absence of randomisation in the selection and assignment of the students.

Regarding the qualitative data collection tools, some researchers claim that validity and reliability are associated with positivist research, but they are problematic in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bush, 2012). According to the above researchers, qualitative studies should be judged in terms of the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness includes the credibility of data, whereby the data are acceptable to others. It is achieved by ensuring the research is carried out according to good research canons and the triangulation of data (Bryman, 2012).

To ensure the credibility of the interviews, observation and conversation analysis data to be evaluated by the reader, I have adopted strategies suggested by Creswell et al. (2003) towards this end; attempting to maintain accuracy in the data collection through a description of the research setting and events. This is known as descriptive validity. I have also attempted to portray what the participants intended to express, demonstrating their views and explaining how the data were analysed. This is referred to as interpretive validity. I have moreover endeavoured to explain the data in theoretical terms and present an interpretation of the findings, thus ensuring theoretical validity (see sections 3.12.3, 3.12.4 and the interpretations in Chapter Seven). In addition, the data are triangulated, in that the learners' perceptions and description of their engagement with the tasks and language have been observed by an external observer and their interactions analysed.



The description of the current research context and data triangulation will also ensure the internal validity of this study. On the other hand, with regard to external validity (referred to as ‘transferability’ in qualitative research), the results of the research cannot be generalised, as the participants have not been randomly selected. However, ideas have been generated from the present study and could be applied in other studies.

Reliability in qualitative research is called dependability and it refers to the researcher’s accuracy (Merriam, 1988; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Bush, 2012). The confidence the reader will have in the research results is another aspect of the trustworthiness of data (Richards, 2015). For the reader to be able to evaluate the reliability of the interviews, I have used several strategies here, such as explaining my assumptions and the theories behind the study, together with my stance on these; describing the participants and the means used to select them; describing the research process and results; triangulating the interview results to strengthen reliability, and describing how decisions were made (Merriam, 1988).

In addition, I have tried to improve the quality of the recording and coding by confirming the codes (King & Horrocks, 2010). This involves revising the coding process many times to enhance its dependability, as well as giving a sample of the interview transcript to another post-graduate student to see if she would code the passage in the same way (Bazeley, 2013). The sample has thus been coded independently and the result compared with my own and discussed accordingly (King & Horrocks, 2010). This step further increases the validity of the conclusion drawn from the analysis (Bazeley, 2013). Moreover, while conducting the interviews, I have consistently asked direct, clear, straightforward and unbiased questions, giving the interviewees enough time to express their opinions, before feeding their ideas back to them. This is a way the interviewer can check their own understanding of interviewees’ statements, or give interviewees the chance to expand. Sometimes, I have even adopted the approach of reformulating the same question in different ways.

With regard to the observation scheme, it is not easy to achieve reliability in observation, because it is difficult to repeat the experience and reach an agreement amongst the participants regarding what actually happened. In this case, it was also difficult to gather the participants’ views concerning a transcript of the observation, as

the observation was analysed six months after being carried out (Angrosino et al., 2000). However, I took notes to increase the comparability of my own and the observer's perspectives and trained the observer to use the scheme, asking her to observe a session for a volunteer teacher with myself in attendance (Flick, 2002). Moreover, I validated the observer's coding by listening to the recordings and cross-checking her coding.

In order to fulfil the requirements of dependability and credibility for the conversation analysis, I have attempted to include in the transcript all details on the conversation, such as actions, intonation and pauses, as well as a description of the context (Peräkylä, 1997). I have also verified that the transcription is faithful to the original audio-recording (Gibbs, 2008). This also involves second checking all transcripts three weeks later, as suggested by Watanabe (2008), although with cautious interpretation of the findings from the interaction analysis framework, as it is being implemented for the first time and more research is therefore required to check its dependability and credibility.

### **3.14 Ethical Considerations**

Ethics should be considered at all stages of research, starting with the statement of the research problem and extending to the point at which the research findings are generated. The aim of considering research ethics is to keep the participants safe and to build up trust and respect. In turn, this will ensure the trustworthiness of the outcome and its benefits for society (Busher & James, 2012). At the start of the research, the researcher therefore obtained ethical approval for data collection from the University of Leicester and UOK. My familiarity with the gatekeeper at the college where the research would be conducted at UOK made it easier to obtain permission for access, although a formal procedure was still required.

In this study, it was important to obtain the participants' approval by obtaining their informed consent. An informed consent form aims to protect participants' rights by explaining the purpose, procedures and processes of a piece of research (Mackey & Gass, 2005) so that the prospective participant can then make an independent decision, without any pressure to participate (Farrimond, 2012). It also protects participants' privacy by assuring them of the confidentiality of their data. This can be achieved by

keeping their identity anonymous and saving the data in a way whereby it cannot be identified (Warren, 2002; Farrimond, 2012). The informed consent form in the present study is in Arabic, as this is the participants' first language, as recommended by Mackey and Gass (2005) (see Appendices 8.C and 8.D).

In addition to the above, the informed consent form was distributed to the students in the experimental and control groups (see Appendix 8.E). Moreover, due to the fact that the research involves a comparison of two groups, a major problem was considered, namely competition between these groups (Merriam, 1988). To avoid this, I decided to tell the experimental and control groups the purpose of the research, without informing them that other groups would be taught differently. To ensure equality for the control group, access to the intervention media and the tasks would be given to the learners after they had taken the post-test at the end of the intervention. In the informed consent form, different parts of the study are explained, addressing various ethical concerns to the students, as follows:

- The researcher-participant relationship, which is the power relationship between the teacher and the students, is an important concern. The researcher/participants need to have mutual trust in each other, with the research avoiding any harm coming to the participants, but ensuring positive benefits for the participants (Gibbs, 2008). For this, a declaration of the research purpose and procedure is presented for the students in the informed consent form, to be explained to them orally, as recommended by Busher and James (2012).
- In addition, although the groups are intact classes, the students have complete freedom to either participate or exclude themselves from the study and as already explained to them, they have the right to withdraw at any stage of the research. However, the students in the three classes ultimately gave their approval to participate in the research. This is because their participation is not perceived as likely to cause them any harm, even in the control group, as the intervention will also be delivered to them once the research data has been obtained. In addition, participation in the interview and observation is completely voluntary. Nevertheless, no participant in this study chose to end

their participation while it was in progress, or refused to do the test; neither did any of them refuse to participate in the interviews.

- Another ethical concern lies in the participants' privacy. However, they were assured that no one would be able to access their data, which would in any case be discarded after the end of the study. It was moreover explained to them that the researcher would maintain confidentiality in this regard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Ryen, 2011; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Wiles, 2013). Aside from the above, their identities have not been revealed in the interview transcript and a fictitious name is used to represent the university from which the participants were drawn.
- Moreover, due to the nature of the research, there are possible risks, such as the students not being able to understand the intervention easily, as it would not be directly explained by the teacher. Instead, the target structures are to be discussed by their teacher and peers. As a result, the expected benefits of developing their skills and the participants' right to withdraw at any time were clarified to them (Carey, 2013). I have offered the learners in the experimental groups opportunities to receive direct explanations during office hours, after the post-test.
- A special informed consent form was given to those who participated in the observation group and interview, explaining that they would be observed by an external observer and their discussion and the interviews would be recorded (Busher & James, 2012).

### **3.15 Summary**

In alignment with the purposes of this study, classroom-based research is used. This permits the effectiveness of the intervention to be studied and comparisons to be made between the classes, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. A parallel mixed-methods design is employed in this study to collect data, with the intention of investigating the effectiveness of the intervention after its completion. The four instruments implemented consist of the achievement test, interviews, participant

observation and an analysis of the participants' recorded conversations. To enhance the quality and trustworthiness of the qualitative data, the learners' perceptions collected through the interviews have been triangulated by observing the learners and analysing their conversation.

The data obtained are analysed in the three following chapters. The data obtained from the learners' pre- and post-tests are analysed in Chapter Four. The learners' perceptions of the intervention and how they describe their engagement with the teacher, peers and content are analysed in Chapter Five. Finally the learners' engagement, as observed by an external observer, is analysed and the results presented in Chapter Six, alongside an analysis of the same students' audio-recorded conversations.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE ACHIEVEMENT TEST FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses findings drawn from quantitative data, collected through a test to measure the development of learners' writing sub-skills in communicative competence. The test was administered before and after teaching an intervention developed for the study using LCF in face-to-face (F2F) and blended learning (BL) environments, as well as in a control group (the non-LCF group). It consisted of four constructed response questions, designed to measure three writing sub-skills: (1) writing passages to describe events using the past tense, (2) asking wh-questions about things which have happened in the past, and (3) writing a letter of complaint. Pre- and post-tests were administered to 39 students in the BL group, 38 students in the F2F group, and 39 students in the control group. A thorough description of the data analysis process conducted through SPSS is presented in this chapter, while a detailed discussion of the findings in relation to previous studies reviewed in the literature is presented in Chapter Seven.

The analysis is organised here by first presenting the descriptive statistics of the two experimental groups and control group in the pre- and post-tests. The development in the learners' skills in each group, before and after teaching the intervention, was tested using the Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test, as the assumption of normality was violated. A comparison was subsequently made between the groups' performance in the post-test, in order to determine which design was more effective in developing the learners' skills. This comparison was carried out using a difference-in-differences model, specifically to compare the differences between the pre- and post-test scores of each experimental group, with the differences between the pre- and post-test scores of the control group. As the data were not normally distributed, the Mann-Whitney Test was used to draw a comparison between the differences-in-the-differences occurring in the pre- and post-test results produced by the two groups.

## 4.2 Effect Size

Effect size is a key factor in being able to comprehend the importance of the magnitude of effect, because the significance of a result does not necessarily imply that the effect of what is measured is meaningful. Effect size therefore needs to be measured across different studies that have used a variety of measurement scales (Field, 2013; Larson-Hall, 2016). In other words, it tells us about the actual strength of the effect, as the statistical significance is affected by sample size (Tolmie et al., 2011). However, there are different ways of measuring effect size, such as Cohen's 'd' and Pearson's correlation coefficient  $r$  (Field, 2013).

In this study, the effect size of the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-rank and Mann-Whitney Tests was determined by dividing  $z$  (the test statistics) by the square root of the  $n$  (number of the sample) (Field, 2013). To interpret this effect size, Cohen (1992) suggests that  $r = 0.10$  represents a small effect, explaining 1% of the total variance (it indicates that the findings are practically unimportant, even if they are significant). On the other hand, Cohen (ibid.) recommends that  $r = 0.30$  is a medium effect, explaining 9% of the total variance, while  $r = 0.50$  is a large effect, explaining 25% of the total variance (this indicates that the findings are worth trying to understand) (Larson-Hall, 2016).

However, effect size is usually interpreted in the context of the literature (Field, 2013). Based on Cole (2013), the medium effect size of FLLs' written language outcomes is 0.486. Any value above this is considered as a large effect; any value much lower is considered to be a small effect, and any value close to this is considered to be a medium effect. It is this estimate that is adopted here.

## 4.3 Descriptive Statistics of the Pre- and Post-tests

It is important to compare the learners' results in the pre- and post-tests, in order to understand the difference between the three groups, before and after teaching the intervention. Table (4.1) shows the mean values, standard deviations, variance, range, and maximum and minimum values for each construct in the test. It is also important to note here that since the three raters were consistent in their scoring of the pilot study,

the averages of their scores were used in the data analysis, as in Alghamdi and Gillies (2013).



**Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics of the pre- and post-tests**

<b>Groups</b>	<b>The BL Group (n=39)</b>						<b>The F2F Group (n=38)</b>						<b>The Control Group (n=39)</b>					
Descriptive statistics	Pre-test			Post-test			Pre-test			Post-test			Pre-test			Post-test		
Construct	Wh	Past	Compl.	Wh	Past	Compl.	Wh	Past	Compl.	Wh	Past	Compl.	Wh	Past	Compl.	Wh	Past	Compl.
Mean	1.89	.56	.64	2.71	2.31	3.62	2.13	.74	.63	3.32	2.50	3.87	1.41	.49	.34	2.08	1.51	2.64
Std. deviation	1.54	.75	.538	1.49	1.45	1.09	1.41	1.11	.85	1.29	1.72	.99	1.30	.81	.66	.87	1.52	.96
Variance	2.36	.57	.29	2.20	2.11	1.19	2.00	1.23	.73	1.68	2.96	.98	1.69	.66	.43	.76	2.30	.92
Minimum	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Maximum	5.00	3.00	2.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	5.00	4.00

From Table 4.1, it may be understood that the learners' mean values for the post-test were higher than for the pre-test across the three groups and three constructs. The BL learners' scores for forming wh-questions, using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint in the post-test were in the sequence, 2.71, 2.31 and 3.62. These values were higher than the pre-test scores of 1.89, .56 and .64. In the F2F group, the post-test score for forming wh-questions was 3.32, while the score for using the past tense was 2.50, and for writing a letter of complaint, 3.87; these being higher than the pre-test scores of 2.13, .74 and .63, in sequence. The same applies for the control group, where the learners' scores in the three constructs and same sequence were 2.08, 1.51 and 2.64. Moreover, they were higher than their pre-test scores of 1.41, .49 and .34. To determine whether the development in the groups' mean rank in the pre- and post-tests was significant, the Wilcoxon Test was conducted, as the data were not normally distributed (see section 4.4).

From Table 4.1, it may be concluded that the arithmetic mean value for the achievements of the F2F group in the post-test when forming wh-questions amounted to 3.32, which was higher than the arithmetic mean value for the achievements of the BL group in the same task, namely 2.71, whereas the control group achieved 2.08. The arithmetic mean value for the achievements of the F2F group in the post-test task of using the past tense was 2.50. This was clearly higher than the arithmetic mean values achieved by the BL group, namely 2.31 and the control group, who achieved 1.51. Moreover, the arithmetic mean value for the achievements of the F2F group in the post-test, as regards writing a letter of complaint amounted to 3.87, which was clearly higher than the arithmetic mean value for the achievements of the BL group in the same task, namely 3.62. It also surpassed the corresponding achievement of the control group at 2.64. To establish whether the differences between these arithmetic mean values recorded for the groups in the post-test are statistically significant, various statistical tests were carried out (see section 4.6).

#### **4.4 Analysing Each Group's Performance**

To compare each group's pre- and post-test scores, a paired sample T-test would not have been appropriate, as the differences between the mean values in the pre- and post-

tests for each group were not normally distributed. This is indicated in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results shown in Table 4.2 (Field, 2013).

**Table 4.2 Tests of normality for the pre- and post-scores for each construct: Differences between the pre- and post-tests**

The Test Construct	Kolmogorov-Smirnov		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Wh-questions	.130	116	.000
Using the past tense	.152	116	.000
Writing a letter of complaint	.215	116	.000

The students' post-test scores for forming wh-questions registered as:  $D(116) = .130, p < .001$ ; for using the past tense:  $D(116) = .152, p < .001$ , and for writing a letter of complaint:  $D(116) = .215, p < .001$ . These scores were significantly 'not normal'. Thus, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed-rank Test was used.

Tables 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5 present the mean ranks for the pre- and post-tests in each construct, achieved by the students in the F2F, BL and control groups. They show the  $z$  scores converted from the test statistics. They also show the  $P$  value, which is the measure of the strength provided by the sample and the probability of finding an effect that is at least as extreme as the one in the data.

#### 4.4.1 The Face-to-face (F2F) Group

The Wilcoxon Test was used here to measure the significance of the growth in the learners' skills in the F2F group. This involved paralleling the mean ranks of the pre- and post-tests, as Table 4.3 displays.

**Table 4.3 Wilcoxon Test for the differences in the F2F group's pre- and post-test scores**

		Mean Rank	Test Statistics W	z	Sig.
post_Wh_question - pre_Wh_question	Negative Ranks	10.13	447.000	-3.471	.001
	Positive Ranks	18.63			
post_using_past - pre_using_past	Negative Ranks	7.67	473.000	-4.446	.000
	Positive Ranks	16.89			
post_writing a complaint - pre_ writing a complaint	Negative Ranks	.00	66.000	-5.279	.000
	Positive Ranks	18.50			

The above Table compares the pre- and post-test scores of the students in the F2F group across the three skills tested. The results indicate significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores for these three skills. In forming wh-questions, the learners' mean rank of 18.63 was higher than their pre-test mean rank of 10.13 for the same task. This difference was significant as:  $W = 447.000$ ,  $p = .001$ , with a medium effect size of  $r = 0.56$ . In using the past tense, the learners outdid their post-test performance, where the mean rank of 16.89 was higher than the pre-test mean rank of 7.67. This difference was significant as:  $W = 473.000$ ,  $p = .000$ , with a large effect size of  $r = 0.71$ . In making a complaint, the learners excelled in the post-test, where the mean rank of 18.50 was clearly higher than the pre-test mean rank of 0.00 and this difference was significant as:  $W = 66.000$ ,  $p = .000$ , with a large effect size of  $r = 0.85$ .

The above findings indicate that the learners in the F2F group outperformed their pre-test achievements in the post-test, across the three constructs of the test with a medium-large effect size. It implies that in this study, the use of LCF developed FLLs' sub-skills in writing passages using the past tense, forming written wh-questions and writing a letter of complaint, specifically in the F2F group.

#### 4.4.2 The Blended Learning (BL) Group

In order to measure the significance of the development in the learners' skills in the BL group, the Wilcoxon Test was used. This compared the mean ranks of the pre- and post-tests, as Table 4.4 displays.

**Table 4.4 The Wilcoxon Test for the differences between the pre- and post-test scores in the BL group**

		Mean Rank	Test Statistics	Z	Sig.
post_Wh_question - pre_Wh_question	Negative Ranks	11.45	435.000	-2.817	.005
	Positive Ranks	19.77			
post_using_past - pre_using_past	Negative Ranks	.00	469.000	-4.913	.000
	Positive Ranks	16.00			
post_complaining - pre_complaining	Negative Ranks	.00	780.000	5.516	.000
	Positive Ranks	20.00			

The above Table compares the pre- and post-test scores for the students in the BL group, across the three constructs. The results indicate significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores for the three skills. For example, for forming wh-questions,

the learners' mean rank of 19.77 was an improvement on the pre-test mean rank of 11.45 and this difference was significant as:  $W = 435.000$ ,  $p = .005$ , presenting a medium effect size of  $r = 0.45$ . In using the past tense, the learners exceeded their pre-test performance in the post-test, with a mean rank of 16.00, which was clearly higher than the pre-test mean rank of 0.00. This difference was significant as:  $W = 469.000$ ,  $p = .000$  with a large effect size:  $r = 0.78$ . In writing the letter of complaint, the learners greatly outperformed their pre-test achievements in the post-test, with a mean rank of 20.00, as opposed to their pre-test mean rank of 0.00. This difference was also significant as:  $W = 780.000$ ,  $p = .000$ , with large effect size:  $r = 0.88$ .

The above findings indicate that the learners in the BL group outperformed their pre-test achievements in the post-test, across the three constructs of the test and with a more or less medium-large effect size. The implications are that the use of LCF in the BL group developed the FLLs' writing sub-skills in forming wh-questions, using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint, specifically in the BL group.

#### 4.4.3 The Control Group

It was also important, however, to measure the development in the learners' skills in the control group, where the learners had not been taught using LCF. Despite the fact they were exclusively taught via traditional methods involving direct explanation from the teacher and individual tasks, there was nevertheless some indication of development, as Table 4.5 shows, below.

**Table 4.5 The Wilcoxon Test for differences between the control group's pre- and post-test scores**

		Mean Rank	Test Statistics W	Z	Sig.
post_Wh_question - pre_Wh_question	Negative Ranks	15.25	264.000	-2.789	.005
	Positive Ranks	12.57			
post_using_past - pre_using_past	Negative Ranks	7.00	311.000	-4.080	.000
	Positive Ranks	13.52			
post_complaining - pre_complaining	Negative Ranks	3.50	737.000	-5.410	.000
	Positive Ranks	19.93			

It is clear from the above Table that the participants in the control group significantly outperformed their pre-test achievements across the three constructs in the post-test.

The Table shows that for forming wh-questions, the learners' mean rank of 15.25 was higher than their pre-test mean rank of 12.67. This difference was significant as:  $W=246.000$ ,  $p=.005$ , with a medium effect size of  $r=0.45$ . In using the past tense, the learners scored a mean rank of 13.52, which outdid their pre-test mean rank of 7.00. This difference was significant as:  $W=311.000$ ,  $p=.000$ , with a large effect size:  $r=0.65$ . In making a complaint, the learners also outperformed their pre-test achievements in the post-test, with a mean rank of 19.93, while their pre-test mean rank was 3.50. This difference was significant as:  $W=737.000$ ,  $p=.000$  with a large effect size:  $r=0.87$ .

The above figures indicate that the learners in the control group demonstrated similar development to those of the F2F and BL groups and this was significant in the three constructs of the test, with a medium-large effect size. It implies that in this study, the use of LCF in the F2F and BL environments developed three of the learners' writing sub-skills, namely writing passages using the past tense, forming wh-questions and writing a letter of complaint. The same was observed for the control group.

#### 4.5 Testing Normality

To decide on a suitable test for comparing the development in the learners' scores in the three groups, the assumption of normality was examined on the basis of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (Field, 2013), as Table 4.6 shows, below.

**Table 4.6 Tests of normality for the post-test – pre-test scores for each construct**

The Test Construct	Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup>		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Post_Pre Wh-questions	.130	116	.000
Post_Pre Using the past tense	.152	116	.000
Post_Pre Writing a letter of complaint	.215	116	.000

The students' pre- and post-test scores for forming wh-questions amounted to:  $D(116)=.130$ ,  $p < .001$ ; for using the past tense:  $D(116) = .152$ ,  $p < .001$ , and for writing a letter of complaint:  $D(116) = .215$ ,  $p < .001$ . This non-significant result shows that the sample were not normally distributed and so the non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test was used to compare the differences between the pre- and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups.

## 4.6 A Comparison of the F2F, BL and Control Groups' Performance

The differences between the pre- and post-test scores for each group were computed for each construct. A comparison was then made between the learners' performance in the F2F and control group and the learners' performance in the BL and control groups using the Mann-Whitney Test, since the data were not normally distributed, as explained above.

### 4.6.1 The Differences between the Groups in Forming Wh-questions

To examine the effectiveness of LCF on the learners' skill in forming wh-questions, a comparison was made between the F2F and control groups, and the BL and control groups. These differences were examined using the Mann-Whitney Test, as displayed in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7 Mann-Whitney Test for differences-in-difference between the groups in terms of forming wh-questions**

Test Construct	Group	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig.
post_pre_wh - questions	F2F	38	41.92	630.000	-1.156	.248
	Control	39	36.15			
	BL	39	46.08	504.000	-2.638	.008
	Control	39	32.92			

From the above Table, the mean rank for the F2F group (41.92) in forming wh-questions was higher than the mean rank for the control group (36.15), but  $U = 630.000$  and  $p > 0.05$ . This indicates there was no statistical difference between the F2F and control groups in terms of forming wh-questions. The mean rank for the BL group (46.08) in forming wh-questions was higher than the mean rank for the control group (32.92), thus  $U = 504.000$  and  $p < 0.05$ , with a medium effect size of  $r = 0.50$ . It implies that the learners in the BL group outdid the learners in the control group in this specific task, with a medium effect size.

It may therefore be concluded that the learners in the BL group outdid the learners in the control group, with a medium effect size, based on Cole's (2013) assumption of effect size in written language tests. However, the learners in the F2F group did not

perform significantly better than the control group with regard to forming wh-questions. This indicates that LCF had a bigger impact on the learners in the BL group than it did on the F2F group, since the former produced a significant result.

#### 4.6.2 The Differences between the Groups in Terms of Using the Past Tense

The differences between the groups in terms of using the past tense were examined, in order to determine which intervention design was more effective for developing this particular skill amongst the learners, as shown in Table 4.8.

**Table 4.8 Mann-Whitney Test for differences in difference the groups in terms of using the past tense**

Test Construct	Group	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig.
Post_Pre_Using the past tense	F2F	38	44.59	528.500	-2.216	.027
	Control	39	33.55			
	BL	39	45.95	502.000	-2.638	.006
	Control	39	32.00			

From the above Table, the mean rank for the F2F group (44.59) in using the past tense was higher than the mean rank for the control group (33.55), thus  $U = 528.500$  and  $p < 0.05$ , with a medium effect size of  $r = 0.42$ . This shows that the F2F group outdid the control group in this particular task. The mean rank for the BL group (45.95) in using the past tense was higher than the mean rank for the control group (32.00). Thus,  $U = 502.000$  and  $p < 0.05$ , with a medium effect size of  $r = 0.40$ , which demonstrates that the learners in the BL group outdid the learners in the control group.

It may therefore be concluded that the learners in both the F2F and BL groups outdid the learners in the control group, recording a medium effect size, based on Cole's (2013) assumption of effect size. This shows that LCF was effective in developing the learners' skills in the F2F and BL groups with regard to using the past tense, as both sets of learners outdid the control group. However, in order to decide which group performed best, a comparison was made using the Mann-Whitney Test. The Test revealed that the mean rank of the F2F group (38.83) was higher than the mean rank of the BL group (38.8), but  $U = 734.500$  and  $p > 0.05$ , indicating that there was no statistical difference between the BL and F2F groups in terms of using the past tense.



### 4.6.3 The Differences between the Groups in Terms of Writing a Letter of Complaint

As the differences between the groups in terms of writing a letter of complaint were revealed as significant (see Table 4.5), a Mann-Whitney Test was used to discover which intervention design was more effective for developing the learners' skill in this area, as shown in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9 Mann-Whitney Test for differences-in-difference between the groups in terms of writing a letter of complaint**

Test Construct	Group	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig.
Post_Pre_Writing a letter of complaint	F2F	38	47.99	399.500	-3.616	.000
	Control	39	30.24			
	BL	39	46.73	478.500	-2.978	.003
	Control	39	32.27			

With regard to the differences between the groups in terms of writing a letter of complaint, the above Table shows that the mean rank for the F2F group (47.99) in this task was higher than the mean rank for the control group (30.24), and  $U = 399.500$  and  $p < 0.05$ , with a large effect size of  $r = 0.69$ . This indicates that the learners in the F2F group outdid the learners in the control group in the task of writing a letter of complaint. The mean rank for the BL group (46.73) in this task was higher than the mean rank for the control group (32.27), thus  $U = 478.500$  and  $p < 0.05$ , with a medium effect size of  $r = 0.56$ . It indicates that the learners in the BL group outdid the learners in the control group in the task of writing a letter of complaint.

It may be concluded that the learners in both the F2F and BL groups outdid the learners in the control group, with a medium-large effect size, according to Cole (2013) assumption of effect size. However, the learners in the F2F and BL groups were almost equal in their performance, as recorded in the post-test score for writing a letter of complaint, revealed by the Mann-Whitney Test. Here the mean rank of the BL group (35.82) was similar to the mean rank of the F2F group (35.82), and  $U = 617.000$  and  $p > 0.05$ , indicating that there was no statistical difference between the BL and F2F groups in terms of using the past tense.

## 4.7 Summary

The above analysis shows that the learners in the two experimental groups and control group experienced a development in their three writing sub-skills. With regard to the effectiveness of the intervention for the learners' skills in the F2F and BL groups, as compared to the control group, the intervention designed using LCF was found to more effectively develop the learners' skills in using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint in the F2F and BL groups, compared to the control group. The learners in the F2F and BL groups demonstrated almost the same level of development in these skills. A more precise examination of the differences between the F2F and BL groups in relation to effect size would reveal similar results. However, LCF was found to be effective in developing the skills of the learners in the BL group with regard to asking wh-questions, as compared to the control group and with medium effect size. However, it did not appear to be effective for developing this skill in the F2F group.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: INTERVIEW FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

After analysing the effects of LCF on the learners' communicative competence according to their test scores, in this chapter I will interrogate the effectiveness of LCF from the learners' perspective by presenting an analysis of qualitative data on the learners' perceptions of the intervention and their descriptions of their engagement, gathered through semi-structured interviews. The intervention involved the teacher in an important role, discussing each target structure and providing individual or group feedback. This was combined with various tasks, namely individual, peer-explanation and peer-output practice tasks, as well as various types of media, i.e. a PowerPoint presentation, podcast and YouTube videos (see section 3.10.1 for more detail on the intervention). Below, I analyse how each learner engaged with these different elements and explore how their engagement affected their perceptions of the intervention. These perceptions are triangulated through an analysis of their engagements, as presented in Chapter Six.

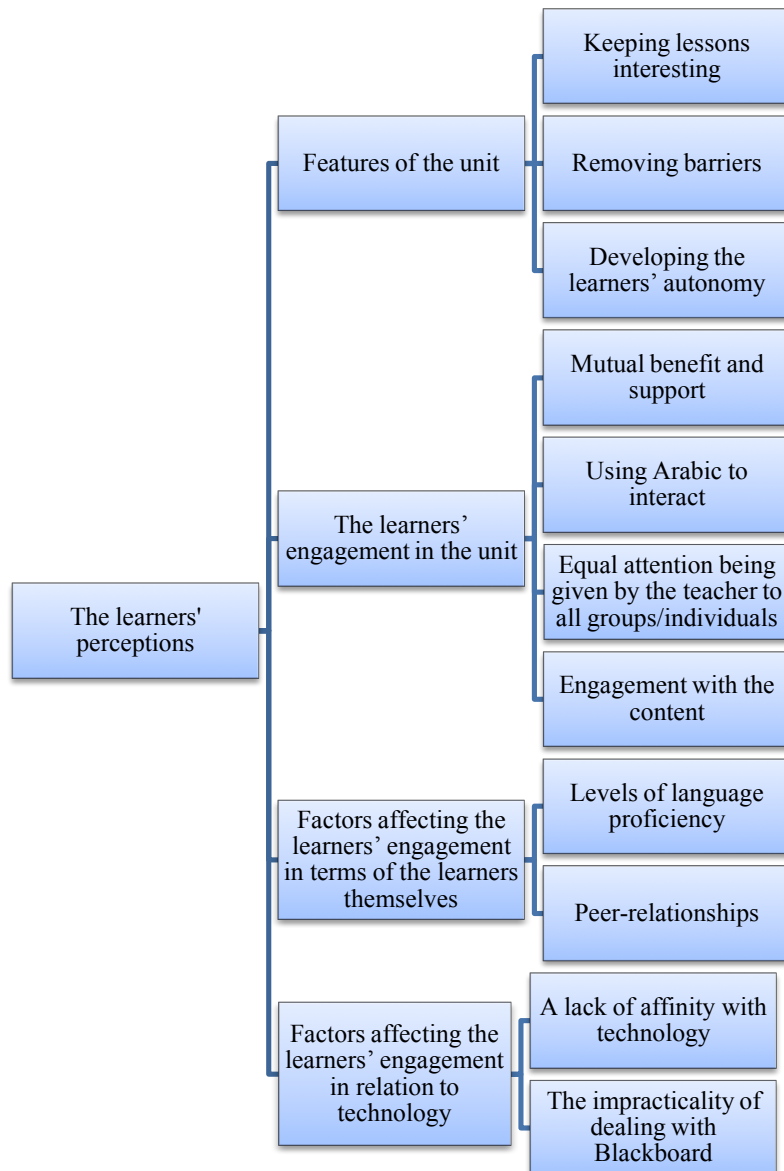
This chapter starts by describing the coding procedure and providing information on the participants. The findings are then organised according to the respective groups. Firstly, the F2F group findings are presented, based on three major themes, with nine emerging themes. Next, the findings of the BL group are outlined, based on four major themes, with 11 emerging themes, whereby comparisons are made with the F2F group.

### **5.2 The Coding Procedure**

Semi-structured interview questions were purposefully designed to gather the participants' in-depth perceptions of the intervention. The interviews were carried out with six volunteers from the F2F group and six from the BL group, as mentioned previously. Before analysing the data, the interviewees were assigned codes, in order to protect their anonymity. These codes indicated the respective student number (ST1, ST2, etc.), as well as the relevant group, i.e. whether F2F or BL. Thus, each code consisted of two elements, for example 'ST1F2F', indicating student number '1' in the F2F group. The students were also assured of the confidentiality of the data gathered

and that they should not expect any harm to come to them for expressing their opinions. Moreover, in order to avoid asking them directly about their views of my role, I asked them for any suggestions they would make to another teacher adopting this teaching method. As a result, the students appeared to be happy to talk frankly in the interviews about aspects of the intervention that they did not enjoy.

The analysis began with a reading of the transcript and initial descriptive coding was carried out. Next, these codes were clustered and re-labelled, becoming more focused. Finally, they were refined into themes to be used for analysis. These themes comprised keeping lessons interesting; removing barriers; developing learners' autonomy; mutual benefit and support; using Arabic to interact; equal attention being given by the teacher to all groups/individuals; engagement with the tasks; levels of language proficiency, and peer-relationships. Two themes were involved in analysing the BL group's responses to the online aspect of the intervention. These included a lack of affinity with technology and the impracticality of dealing with Blackboard. The themes were then grouped into four major categories, which would help answer the second research question to explore the learners' perceptions and engagement. These categories consisted of the features of the intervention, the learners' engagement in the intervention, the factors affecting the learners' engagement - in terms of the learners themselves - and the factors affecting the learners' engagement in relation to technology, as presented in Figure 5.1



**Figure 5.1 The themes and codes of the interview analysis**

These themes and codes are defined in Table 5.1, based on the data provided and in line with the current research aim. The themes emerged inductively from the data, based on concepts in SCT and related to scaffolding, mediating artefacts, languaging and development in learners' ZPD (Boyatzis, 1998) (some of these terms were coined after Vygotsky's death, as discussed in section 2.3.4.4).

**Table 5.1 The Thematic Codes**

Main themes		Sub-themes	Definitions
1	Features of the intervention	Keeping lessons interesting	Identifying different elements that have made the intervention interesting; being an active student.
		Removing barriers	The barriers between the students were removed and they were able to establish a constructive learning atmosphere.
		Development of the learners' autonomy	The state where learners come to rely on themselves when writing.
2	The learners' engagement in the intervention	Equal attention being given by the teacher to all groups/individuals	Impact of the teacher's role in discussion and in scaffolding learners individually or in groups.
		Mutual benefit and support	Impact of peer-explanation and peer-output practice on the learners' understanding and use of these skills.
		Using Arabic to interact	Alternative use of Arabic in peer-explanation and peer-output practice.
		Engagement with the tasks	Practicing the language and using different components in the intervention.
3	Factors affecting learner-learner engagement	Levels of language proficiency	Effect of the learners' language proficiency level on engagement.
		Peer-relationships	Role played by peers, which can affect collaboration between learners.
4	Factors affecting learner-technology engagement	A lack of affinity with technology	The lack of certain skills for learning via Blackboard.
		The impracticality of dealing with Blackboard	Some of the impracticalities arising through the use of Blackboard.

### 5.3 The Participants

Knowledge and consideration of the learners' background is essential for developing a theoretical concept, finding connections between cases, and explaining the wider context of the phenomena on which to base an argument (Bazeley, 2013). For this reason, some questions on the students' background were asked in the interviews.

The interviewees were Arab students and the only FL they had studied so far was English. All except five participants had received their secondary school education in general state-sector schools. ST1F2F and ST2F2F had received their secondary

education in private schools, whereas ST4F2F, ST4BL, and ST5F2F had attended state-sector secondary schools, which had a system of courses.

Due to the fact that the learners had not taken a placement test, it was difficult to identify their level of English language proficiency. Here, I made assumptions about their respective levels, based on their answers to the interview question: ‘How do you rate your English?’ as well as on their post-test scores for this study. On this basis, the level of the interview participants’ English language proficiency was assumed to be low-intermediate, except in the case of ST3F2F, ST4F2F, ST2BL and ST6BL, whose levels were apparently elementary (see Table 3.7 for more details on the participants). A discussion of the F2F group is first presented in section 5.4, with a discussion of the BL group in section 5.5. Finally, this chapter’s findings are summarised in section 5.6.

## **5.4 The Face-to-face (F2F) Learning Group**

The learners’ responses in this group were classified into three major themes: features of the intervention, the learners’ engagement in the intervention, and the factors affecting the learners. The first theme relates to their views on the intervention design and their perceptions of the intervention’s various features. The second theme concerns how the intervention components helped the students engage with their teacher, peers and the tasks. The third displays the factors hindering the learners’ engagement in the intervention.

### **5.4.1 Features of the Intervention**

The first theme concerns the learners’ perceptions of the intervention. It displays various features appreciated by the learners and how these affected their confidence and ability to learn independently.

#### ***5.4.1.1 Keeping Lessons Interesting***

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the sense amongst the interviewees that the intervention was generally interesting and useful, as four out of the six interviewees were positive (ST1F2F, ST4F2F, ST5F2F and ST6F2F). The extracts below show these students’ justifications in this regard:

*Dialogue and interaction are two of the best methods of learning. I think that group work is enjoyable and meaningful. [ST4F2F]*

*It is really a lovely idea to use the language because in our daily lives we don't have much opportunity to speak English. I believe this method should be used to teach the whole curriculum. [ST5F2F]*

As indicated in the learners' responses, they enjoyed the intervention, because it provided them with opportunities to practice their English, both individually and with their peers. In contrast, the teaching methods widely used by foundation course teachers in Saudi universities frequently offer only limited opportunities for interaction (Oraif, 2013). In fact, the more traditional methods applied tend to ignore the students' role in building their own knowledge and so there is a danger they will get bored. However, in this case, when the learners were given the opportunity to interact with their teacher and peers in the process of building knowledge, they found the experience interesting.

#### **5.4.1.2 Removing Barriers**

One of the most interesting things about the intervention was that it broke down different types of barrier, namely social and spatial barriers. These social barriers were removed and so the students felt that their ability to interact with their peers was enhanced, as well as barriers between themselves and their teacher being eliminated. Discussion took place with the teacher, whereby questions were asked and feedback given - whether individually or in groups:

*...[it] broke the routine and was exciting. [ST1F2F]*

The learners felt that the icebreaking activities played a role in breaking down barriers of shyness between them, especially where they did not know each other beforehand:

*It helped to break [down] our shyness, now we don't [feel] shy anymore if we make mistakes. [ST1F2F]*

The participants consequently became acquainted with each other and were therefore able to start forming relationships:



*[The icebreaker activities] had an effective role, since I did not know the students in the group, but after this activity I had a stronger relationship with them and I got to know their personalities. [ST4F2F]*

Through these opportunities for involvement, the students felt freer about asking their teacher and peers for help and were not embarrassed about making mistakes in front of them. The reason for this new sense of ease was that they believed they could learn from their mistakes.

*I asked them [my peers] for help to reach their level. Providing us with assistance and correcting our mistakes as groups enabled us to recognise our mistakes and learn from them. [ST6F2F]*

This contrasted with more traditional teaching methods, where learners tend not to have such a close relationship with their peers.

*The current teaching method differs from the traditional one as it includes discussion with the teacher and the students. [ST5F2F]*

In addition to the above, the intervention broke down spatial barriers. It enabled the students to extend their explanation beyond the classroom, thus developing social skills via discussion at the university, or through social media:

*Our explanation of the rules and the subject lasted even beyond the classroom. [ST6F2F]*

*I have started to use whatever I learn in my conversations at home [ST1F2F]*

This breaking down of social and spatial barriers helped the learners to soften the rigid relationship with their own language learning, as they were normally afraid of using English or even studying it, due to the fact they did not know the basic rules of the language. Barriers were eliminated here as the result of an opportunity to discuss and practice linguistic rules. The consequent interaction and practice increased their self-confidence, unlike traditional learning methods, where they generally had limited opportunities for interaction.

*[Before the intervention] I [felt] unable to write the letter of complaint; maybe due to the lack of vocabulary, or because I haven't learned the writing skills in high school. [ST3F2F]*

*The intervention developed my confidence, despite the fact that most of the explanation was in Arabic, to ensure that all the students in the group could understand. This method provided us with an opportunity to use the English language in the classroom, more than traditional methods would. [ST6F2F]*

#### **5.4.1.3 The Development of Learners' Autonomy**

Teaching English in Saudi Arabia usually involves a teacher-centred approach, particularly due to overcrowded classes (Al-Mohanna, 2010). Nevertheless, in this intervention, the teacher's discussion of the target structures, peer-output practice and use of mediating artefacts provided the learners with a sense of autonomy, as acknowledged by many of the students in the study, such as ST1F2F, who stated:

*It [the intervention] encouraged us to rely on ourselves in [our] writing skills.*

The majority of the students were satisfied with the opportunity for independence provided by the intervention. This autonomy was facilitated in different ways. The first opportunity arose when the students performed individual tasks, after discussing the relevant target structures with their teacher just a few minutes before, rather than in a different session. This autonomy consisted of undertaking tasks independently; making mistakes and then learning from the teacher's feedback. This was appreciated by ST3F2F:

*When undertaking individual activities, surely there will be mistakes and the teacher will make sure to rectify them. This helps me learn from my mistakes and never to fall into the same trap again. [ST3F2F]*

Most of the students were in fact more accustomed to learning a rule and then completing a task in a later revision session or exam, according to the discretion of the teacher. This immediate practice was a new experience for them and they considered it to be an opportunity for self-reliance and self-assessment, which ST6F2F referred to as 'measuring understanding':

*It helps me identify my points of weakness and then discuss these and correct them with the group. After discussing the rule with the teacher, we measure our level of understanding and then learn from our mistakes and discuss the same rule with the group [in the peer-explanation tasks] for more understanding. [ST6F2F]*

*This was our first experience of writing essays independently in English. I learned the writing skills by opening myself up and working with the group, without being reliant on my teacher or brothers' help. [ST1F2F]*

Another opportunity for autonomy was offered by the explicit mention of the purpose of each task and the intervention objectives. This played a guiding role for the learners and represented a means of checking whether they had achieved their intended learning goals. Although one student (ST4F2F) considered this limit her creativity, what actually increased most of the learners' independence here was that they relied on themselves and their fellow group members to accomplish tasks, rather than on their teacher or family members to help them.

*I like the fact the intervention objective was stated and through this, we know what we are going to learn, unlike some other methods where the purpose of the study isn't mentioned and therefore we don't understand. [ST6F2F]*

*I benefit from comparing the intervention objective with the intervention outcome. If the outcome is equal to the objective, it means I have learned. [ST5F2F]*

The learners gained meaningful insights into the relationship between the topics covered in the classroom tasks and the situations that they could potentially face in their daily lives. This encouraged them to engage in the tasks and rehearse the rules with their peers, as well as learning the vocabulary involved. Here are two examples of interviewees' responses, showing the effect of the intervention on their autonomy:

*My language improved, and I started to use English more in my daily life, particularly where the themes of the activities were like my daily life, such as online shopping. [ST6F2F]*

*It provided me with the vocabulary used in daily life because the subjects were relevant to daily life and increased my self-confidence in using them.*

[ST4F2F]

It seemed that two learners who enjoyed this autonomy (ST1F2F and ST4F2F) appreciated this sense of independence sought more time dedicated to it in the classroom; giving them the chance to explain some of the linguistic rules to the rest of the class after a short period of preparation:

*I would also suggest that the students take the initiative to distribute some brochures about certain topics... [and] that in each lecture, a student presents a certain part of the subject, instead of the teacher, by preparing a presentation.* [ST2F2F]

Only one student (ST2F2F) did not enjoy the sense of autonomy created by different aspects of the intervention. She claimed that she preferred to work with others to identify her level and learn. However, despite her claim, she did not appear to enjoy the peer-explanation or peer-output practice tasks either, as will be discussed later. This student did not appear to enjoy the intervention per se and each time, she justified her negative perceptions by citing her low English language level (see section 5.4.3.1).

## **5.4.2 The Learners' Engagement in the Intervention**

The learners' engagement in this intervention started with their engagement with the teacher and was followed by their engagement with their peers, engagement with the tasks and the use of Arabic, their L1.

### **5.4.2.1 Equal Attention Given by the Teacher to all Groups/Individuals (Teacher/Learner Engagement)**

Four out of the six students described the role of the teacher in discussing target structures with the learners as interesting and valuable, since it took into account varying English levels, as opposed to directly transmitting information.

*The teacher was aware of the varying levels of the students and she provided help for them. Moreover, dividing us into groups helped the teacher focus on each group.* [ST5F2F]

The discussion with the teacher helped the students to construct their knowledge, described by ST6F2F as:

*...talking to our minds and our previous knowledge and experiences.*

Moreover, dividing the students into groups enabled the teacher to pay attention to each group, answering their questions as well as leaving space for individual feedback, whenever the learners asked questions or made mistakes. This ensured that the students experienced a kind of privacy when talking about their mistakes in peripheral peer-explanation during the time allocated for the tasks, as reported in the following responses:

*When we were divided into groups, it was easier to ask the teacher the required questions because the teacher would pay attention to each group, answering their questions and providing them with assistance. [ST4F2F]*

*What is good when discussing [the target structure] with the teacher when the students are allocated into groups is the closer proximity to the teacher and the privacy of such discussion. [ST2F2F]*

With the above method, the learners who perceived the teacher's role in scaffolding were positive that their needs were being met. They were able to ask questions and receive feedback, whether in front of the rest of the group, or in private. In addition, they were afforded respect in discussions with the teacher. It is therefore clear from the students' responses that the teacher's role had changed from one of full control, to one where learning was facilitated and assistance provided. This can increase learners' autonomy, as discussed earlier.

#### **5.4.2.2 Mutual Benefit and Support (Peer-engagement)**

The learners in some of the groups supported each other by bridging the gap between what they wanted to say or write and what they were actually able to express with their limited linguistic resources, gaining help from peers while they collaborated.

*Interaction helped us to identify the ideas of others, as we collaborated in writing. [ST4F2FL]*

*Discussing the target structure with my group members [in the peer-explanation tasks] was very supportive as it enabled me to know the rule.*  
[ST5F2FL]

Another benefit of the group work was sharing responsibility for performing a task. This reduced the cognitive load on individuals, as they would accomplish a task by dividing the workload amongst themselves.

*We distribute the task work amongst ourselves and collaborate in providing a suitable answer.* [ST1F2F]

Most of the students enjoyed the peer-explanation and viewed it as a way of further understanding target structures (ST1F2F, ST4F2F, ST5F2F and ST6F2F). This took place by discussing what they had failed to grasp in the discussion with their teacher or their mistakes in the individual tasks.

*It [peer-explanation] helped me understand items that were difficult for me to understand in the first place [through] explanation with my teacher. I was also able to discuss my mistakes in the individual activity with my classmates, get to know their mistakes and avoid falling into [them too].*  
[ST1F2F]

The explanation of the target structures enabled the students to carry out the tasks collaboratively in the output-practice tasks. They adapted what had been discussed with their teacher and peers, in order to write a passage using the past tense, wh-questions and a letter of complaint. The same four students who appreciated the peer-explanation, praised the benefits of teamwork for supporting each other; working together towards an end result free of errors; clarifying issues for those who did not understand, and encouraging other group members to participate. An analysis of the learners' responses indicated that in their collaboration, the learners scaffolded each other by correcting mistakes, asking questions, providing explanations, giving advice and confirming points. This was described by ST4F2F as the most enjoyable and interesting part of the intervention. One of the students (ST6F2F) even deemed it to be more influential for her than the individual tasks.

### 5.4.2.3 Using Arabic in Interaction

The learners used Arabic in their peer-engagement. Four learners in this group mentioned the advantages of using Arabic in their explanation of target structures in the language and output-practice when performing tasks (ST1F2F, ST4F2F, ST5F2F and ST6F2F). In these tasks, they were able to use Arabic to explain anything what had been overlooked by the teacher, in order to be able to grasp the rules more quickly and easily.

*[Arabic] helped me understand items that were difficult for me to understand in the first instance, during discussion with my teacher.*  
[ST1F2F]

The use of L1 in the peer-explanation enabled the learners to grasp the rules at a preliminary stage, before applying these rules to produce output, as required by the collaborative tasks. Without the use of L1, the tasks might not have been accomplished, because its use ensured the task requirements were understood. As most of the English language teachers on the foundation course at UOK do not allow students to use Arabic in the classroom, allowing them to use their L1 in peer-explanation was appreciated. However, L1 use here also helped build social relationships and trust between the students.

*At the beginning, I did not understand the rules fully, but after discussing the rules in Arabic with my colleagues and collaborating with them, I understood them better.* [ST4F2F]

The use of L1 was especially appreciated by those learners who had negative perceptions of some of the intervention's components (i.e. ST2F2F and ST3F2F). They consequently suggested the use of Arabic by the teacher to discuss target structures. The above students all believed that providing explanations in Arabic, or at least highlighting important aspects of the rules in Arabic, would help them understand more easily. These learners even expected their teacher to use Arabic in the discussion, because some school teachers explain English language rules in Arabic. However, this did not take place; rather, the students in this intervention had different opportunities for collaboration using Arabic.

#### 5.4.2.4 Engagement with the Tasks

The third type of learner engagement in this group was the learners' engagement with the tasks. It included various practice opportunities in the intervention and in the use of mediating artefacts. Four out of the six students in this group appreciated the benefits of the individual task, as mentioned in section 5.4.1.3. However, ST2F2F and ST4F2F did not enjoy it, as they claimed that they could learn more through the collaborative tasks.

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the interviewees' appreciation of different opportunities offered in the intervention to practice English in the classroom, as they could not often practice it in their daily lives (ST1F2F, ST4F2F, ST5F2F and ST6F2F). ST5F2F stated:

*The English language practice in the classroom gets me accustomed to speaking English in daily life.*

It is clear from the learners' comments that they were aware of how their language skills would develop through practice. The aim of providing learners with different opportunities for practice, as well as the use of different mediating artefacts, was to develop their skills, reduce their anxiety and develop their confidence. The latter was an important consideration, given that most Saudi English language learners suffer from anxiety and a lack of confidence (Mohammed, 2015). ST6F2F explained that:

*listening to the audio-recording increased my self-confidence to talk and express using the past tense.*

The YouTube videos were one of the mediating artefacts considered beneficial by some of the students, who thought it had helped enhance their understanding and provided them with more detail. The extract below shows a response representing the views of the majority of the students:

*Listening to some YouTube videos helped me in learning more about the grammar details. [ST1F2F]*

It also indicates that the intervention presented information in various ways that helped develop their understanding:



*Some students could understand through video clips, others through the teacher's explanation or by asking their friends. This intervention provided the information with various methods to suit different students. [ST5F2F]*

The participants in this group used other tools, namely mobile applications ('apps') to search for information, learn the meanings of certain words and find out how to spell others. This increased their enthusiasm for learning, as noted by ST5F2F:

*I liked that we used our mobile phones because it reminds us to dictate some vocabulary and translate other vocabulary.*

Through collaboration with their teacher or peers, the learners discovered that they needed certain vocabulary to construct their answers and so they used translation 'apps', as ST4F2F declared:

*Through the discussion, you used vocabulary that increased my curiosity to know its meaning, so I looked it up.*

However, in most of the traditional classes delivered by other teachers, the use of mobile phones is restricted because they are afraid they will take photographs, thus contravening the social restriction on women revealing their faces to men outside the immediate family. Moreover, the students could be distracted from the lesson by using their mobile phones to read or communicate with each other for non-academic matters.

On the other hand, two students (ST3F2F and ST4F2F) found the audio-visual material difficult to understand and work with. There were several possible reasons for this finding. For instance, playing the videos just once in the classroom made it difficult for students to absorb their content. This could also be more generally related to the learners' comprehension and listening skills and whether they had already been introduced to videos or audio-clips in English, growing accustomed to them while still at secondary school or in their everyday lives. The short time allocated for the intervention was a reason cited by all the interviewees (except ST2F2F) for being unable to engage appropriately with the intervention components.

### 5.4.3 Factors Affecting the Learners' Engagement

Different obstacles were reported by the students as hindering their engagement. These were mostly related to their level of language proficiency and to the attitudes and behaviour of other group members, as explained below.

#### 5.4.3.1 Levels of English Language Proficiency

The recognition of the effectiveness of the teacher's new role as a facilitator and the role of peers, as mentioned earlier, seemed to be related to English language level amongst the learners. The FL was a barrier for some of the students and this made it difficult for them to perceive the intervention positively. ST3F2F, for example, did not welcome the teacher's discussion of target structures with the class as a means of learning. This was because she was unable to engage in it, due to her low level of English:

*It was difficult to understand the target structure, as the discussion between you and the other students, who are competent, was conducted in English. My English level is low.* [ST3F2F]

Moreover, ST2F2F failed to engage with the teacher, not only because of her language level, but because she thought that there would be no benefit from it.

*There was an opportunity for interaction with you, but the only problem is the lack of benefit gained from interaction with you or the students.* [ST2F2F]

It is clear from their responses that these two students were unable to engage with their peers in the group. They deemed the variation in language proficiency within the groups to be an obstacle. The same students reported that they had not benefitted from working with higher level students, as these more capable peers did not explain the basics to them. ST2F2F justified her views, saying:

*The intervention would be much better if the students were at good and same levels of English. The low-level students might face some difficulty in understanding some parts of it.*

The learners' low levels of English proficiency, combined with the accent of the speaker on the podcast were other reasons why some of the participants found this

podcast and the YouTube videos difficult to understand. The accent in the podcast was British, but most of the students had more experience of listening to American accents, as they tended to watch American films. For this reason, it was difficult for ST2F2F, ST4F2F and ST5F2F to understand a British accent, which was also confirmed by ST6F2F:

*The podcast had a positive impact and it was useful for me, but I noticed that my colleagues with a low language level had difficulty understanding the clip, because the accent was difficult.*

Level of language proficiency was another reason why ST2F2F did not enjoy the individual task, as she claimed,

*“...it has no effect”.*

On the other hand, the students with a higher level of proficiency (i.e. ST1F2F, ST5F2F and ST6F2F), as well as ST4F2F, whose level was rather low, were able to engage with their teacher and peers while performing tasks and were happy to be in a mixed-ability group. For example, ST6F2F believed that the lower ability students benefited from working with their more advanced peers. However, this could not take place in groups where all the members were of a similar level. ST6F2F even considered this range of levels to be a source of motivation for learning, as she would compare her level with that of her peers and resolve to develop herself. Having a high-level student in the group was also beneficial, according to ST5F2F, due to the important role she played:

*...she [a more proficient student] would divide the work among us if necessary, or explain and translate for us.*

It may therefore be noted that the students benefited from this variation in English levels in the mixed-ability groups, where differences in level were not too big, as they were consequently able to request help from each other or to offer each other assistance.

#### **5.4.3.2 Peer-relationships**

Mentioned above is one particular factor found to be responsible for learners' negative perceptions of the intervention, namely English language proficiency. However, it was interesting to discover another factor: peer-relations in the groups. ST2F2F and ST3F2F

reported that fellow group members were detached and not collaborative. This hindered them from experiencing the effectiveness of peer-interaction for constructing knowledge through peer-explanation and practice tasks. In fact, in ST2F2F's group, the members failed to collaborate, as only three of the students attempted the tasks, while the other two were inattentive. She described the members of her group as caring only about what they could gain for themselves, rather than thinking about helping others. She claimed:

*[T]ension in relationships between the students was observed and it was difficult for a student to confess that she did not understand the grammar.*

Due to this tension and lack of collaboration, these students deemed the teacher's explanations to be more useful when having their mistakes corrected, rather than peer correction, as they did not believe they could learn from their peers.

*It was hard to learn English during the peer-explanation. I think that direct instruction is better, as in the beginning I seek to further understand the target structures and vocabulary and then move forward towards finalising all the activities; in this way, we could then memorise all the grammar that was explained earlier. [ST3F2F]*

These students' situations can be interpreted with regard to their preferred learning styles, combined with their experience of learning up to that point. This is reflected in the case of ST3F2F, who was learning through collaboration for the first time in this intervention, but was unable to engage with her peers. ST2F2F also experienced difficulty in engaging with her fellow group members, which could have been due to her background, as she had just moved to the city. She came from a highly conservative part of the Kingdom, bound by traditions where families tended to live very close to each other. This meant that her peers at school were generally related to her. When she moved to live in another region, she was suddenly surrounded by students at college who were not her relatives.

To sum up, in the previous section, the learners in the F2F group's views on the positive features and benefits of different aspects of the intervention were presented. Moreover, the factors hindering some of them from learning from the intervention were given. Next, the responses of the interviewees from the BL groups were described and a

comparison is made between each group's overall perceptions of the intervention.

## **5.5 The Blended Learning (BL) Group**

The learners' responses in this group were classified into four major themes: features of the intervention, the learners' engagement in the intervention, factors affecting the learners' engagement in relation to technology, and factors affecting the learners' engagement in relation to their attributes.

### **5.5.1 Features of the Intervention**

The learners perceived the intervention as interesting and motivating. They stated that it had affected their self-confidence and enthusiasm for using English positively. The online part of the intervention had also influenced their ability to take control over their learning and become independent, as explained below.

#### ***5.5.1.1 Keeping Lessons Interesting***

One group of students stated that they found the intervention interesting, because they had been encouraged to actively participate (ST1BL, ST3BL, ST4BL, ST5BL and ST6BL). They valued their role in it, whereby they were not just passive recipients of information, but took an active part in building their own understanding, mainly through practice with peers. Here are some of their responses:

*The teaching method was entertaining and exciting. We were not being inactive listeners in the learning process; there was listening and participation and finally, there was some sort of collaboration among the group members.* [ST1BL]

*I feel that the design is fine and simple, unlike the usual method followed in teaching. The interaction makes me feel active all the time. I feel that I can understand better without feeling sleepy and sluggish in the classroom.* [ST3BL]

It is clear from the latter quote that the learners appreciated the simplicity of the design and its role in developing their writing skills in an accessible and interesting way, as well as the role of their peers in developing their understanding. What made it

interesting for them was apparently the fact that it had developed skills that they could use in daily life, as reported by ST6BL:

*I have linked the unit objective with our skills and the usage of these skills in our daily life. I feel that my communication skills improved as well.*

The intervention was motivating and stood out for the students, as stated by ST4BL, because it presented target structures in different ways, thus facilitating engagement with the teacher and peers. The students consequently discussed target structures to gain more understanding of them and practiced them on an individual and team basis.

*This [intervention] helped in consolidating the information, because when I discuss anything in a manner beyond the familiar method followed in teaching, I feel that I understand it more. I benefited a lot from the multiple learning opportunities. [ST4BL]*

#### **5.5.1.2 Removing Barriers**

The interviewees stated that the intervention had helped eliminate barriers between group members. ST3BL reported that the interaction throughout the intervention had developed her ability to express her views, interact with fellow students and overcome her fear of making mistakes, even when she was attempting things for the first time. The icebreaker activities also played a role in this, as confirmed by ST5BL:

*They helped in improving my relationship with other classmates within the group.*

These activities enabled the learners to express themselves freely in an active atmosphere, as ST3BL reported, stating:

*[Before the intervention] our relationships with each other were very rigid. Each student used to work only for herself. I was not very restricted. [In this intervention] I spoke freely when I needed something. These lectures were comfortable and I did not feel sleepy or lazy in them.*

The use of the discussion board and wikis thus overcame the barriers of geographical distance, which could have hindered some of the students from forming effective channels of communication with their peers. The above tools also extended learning

beyond the boundaries of the classroom. As the students reported, the tools played a role in keeping them connected and helping them improve their writing skills, thus fostering mutual understanding.

*The distance was not a barrier for me to understanding what classmates wanted to say. I prefer to do the peer-explanation tasks while we are at home.* [ST1BL]

*In fact the social communication tools helped in breaking the distance factor while using the Blackboard system [sic].* [ST6BL]

*We continued in collaboration to produce output and explanation outside the classroom, through a group that was established by us on WhatsApp to provide for the students who couldn't understand, with illustrations in Arabic.* [ST4BL]

Given that using social media is a favourite pastime amongst Saudi students, as with most students around the world (Al Shlowly, 2014), the current study participants extended their explanation beyond the classroom using a mobile application, namely WhatsApp. They did this without having been expressly requested to. This use of a mobile device may be considered as a learner-driven activity (Kukulska-Hulme, 2010) (see section 2.3.1.1) and it extended their language learning, demonstrating an increase in their enthusiasm for this learning, as noted by the learners themselves. Nevertheless, the development in the BL learners' enthusiasm to learn and use English was not as marked as it was for the F2F group. Only one student (ST1BL) felt that the intervention had changed her in this regard, while the others explained that they were already enthusiastic about learning English before taking the intervention. ST1BL explained this as follows:

*The thing that increased my enthusiasm to learn the language was how easy the writing topics were and the way we can write a paragraph. This was motivation for me to develop myself.*

Breaking down social and spatial barriers and offering various opportunities for practice improved the learners' self-confidence in this group, although this improvement was less significant than what was reported by the learners in the F2F group. Nevertheless,

half the students in the BL group were happy with the development of their confidence (ST1BL, ST4BL and ST5BL). ST4BL asserted this, saying:

*Through peer-explanation I feel confident when I use the rule since I comprehend it completely as well as [being able] to help the others. In general, peer-explanation increased self-confidence.*

### **5.5.1.3 Development of Learners' Autonomy and Control over their Learning**

The students appeared to benefit from different elements of using Blackboard. The feature they most enjoyed was the control they had over their own learning process, as in when and where they learned. This control over their learning seemed to increase their autonomy, as explained in the following paragraphs.

An example of the learners' control could be seen in their autonomy in using the YouTube videos, since they were able to watch them as many times as they wished by replaying and pausing them. Here is a quote illustrating one student's opinions:

*I prefer to use them [the YouTube videos] within Blackboard, because I am then alone at home and ready to listen; ...I can understand and comprehend them through rewinding the required sections. Also, I became able to concentrate, take notes and practice the structure. While in the classroom there may be some noise from students that prevents me from concentrating as well ...they will distract my attention. In addition, I am not able to rewind sections [to listen to them] more than once. [ST3BL]*

This control was extended by some of the students to their learning outside the classroom via the mobile application, WhatsApp. As stated earlier, ST4BL claimed that her group continued the collaboration outside the classroom in this way. The use of a mobile 'app' in language learning combines the merits of the learners' tendency to learn through collaboration, with the modern trend for learning via technology.

This control over learning and the students' active role in discussing and collaborating with peers to construct their understanding had the potential to increase their autonomy. ST1BL valued the fact she was not just listener on her own. She was listening actively and participating with members of her group, as mentioned earlier. It also helped the



students become more self-reliant and to identify what they still needed to understand and gain more knowledge of.

*It gives an opportunity for self-thinking and focusing to complete the assignment [sic]. [ST6BL]*

*It [the intervention] enabled me to depend on myself as well as recognising what I had understood, what I needed to understand, and inquiring about it. [ST4BL]*

It seems that this opportunity for independence was also regarded as an opportunity for self-assessment. The learners' engagement with individual tasks was more positive in the BL group than it was in the F2F group. All the students, except for one, considered these tasks as a chance to undertake a writing task on their own, to ascertain their level of comprehension, to focus on improving it, and to avoid any mistakes:

*It [the individual task] provided me with an opportunity to use the target structures and test my own solution individually. [ST3BL]*

The teacher's discussion of the target structures with the learners gave them the confidence that they could be independent and help other students.

*Through discussion, I feel confident when I use a grammatical rule, since I comprehend it completely [and] I can help the others. In general, discussion increases self-confidence. [ST4BL]*

The principles of e-tivities, namely clarifying the purpose and instructions for tasks, helped the learners identify what they were going to learn and which results from these tasks could be considered interesting. Moreover, they helped the participants identify their goals when performing the tasks and learning from them. This made it easier to carry out the task, as ST1BL and ST3BL reported:

*It [clarifying the purpose and instructions of the tasks] played an illustrative role regarding what we had to do and what we would learn. [ST1BL]*

*Its effect enabled me to recognise the result that would be obtained from learning this lesson [as well as] identifying my goal; besides, I had to*

*produce specific things. Moreover, [I had] to recognise the goal and pursue it... [and] it facilitated my studying. [ST3BL]*

### **5.5.2 The Learners' Engagement in the Intervention**

The learners' engagement in the intervention can be classified as teacher/student engagement through the teacher's scaffolding and discussion; peer-engagement, via mutual benefit and support; the use of Arabic (the L1) to facilitate this engagement; the learners' engagement with the tasks, and their preference for the wiki over the discussion board.

#### **5.5.2.1 Equal Attention Given by the Teacher to all Groups/Individuals (Teacher/Learner Engagement)**

All the students in this group, except for one, valued the teacher's discussion of the target structures, rather than direct explanations from the teacher. They felt that this discussion gradually introduced the target structures to them and developed their thinking skills, as indicated in the following quotes:

*Presenting ideas sequentially by posing questions to the students and the participation of the students in answering, differs from narrating the information... the student may not comprehend the structure through narration. [ST1BL]*

Moreover, the learners considered that having discussions with the teacher developed their social skills, namely listening to others and participating in the discussion:

*The idea is delivered better through discussion because I express my viewpoint by sharing and you listen to me and I listen to you... When we have a discussion, I am obliged to keep silent, so as to listen to the others to figure out their answers. [sic] [ST3BL]*

The teacher's presence in the classroom created a supportive atmosphere for the students, as she immediately corrected their grammar and spelling mistakes in the individual task. The students were divided into groups that were maintained in the online tasks as well as in the classroom. No collaborative tasks were carried out in the classroom, but following the period for completing the online tasks the teacher

scaffolded the learners by providing detailed written feedback, combined with oral explanations for each group. This was also appreciated by the ST1BL and ST3BL:

*It [the teacher's scaffolding] had an effect in correcting some of the misconceptions and our mistakes in the teamwork. [ST1BL]*

During online tasks, the groupings enabled the learners to enjoy some privacy through their proximity to the teacher, while she provided them with feedback after the completion of the online task. Here, she gave each group special feedback on their online performance. This was mentioned by ST5BL and ST4BL:

*Distributing us into groups facilitated this [scaffolding] for us.*

The teacher played a role in scaffolding the learners and encouraged them to complete the online tasks, before giving feedback. ST3BL claimed that she had benefitted from the teacher's follow-up, whereby the students were obliged to participate via Blackboard, as this was the first time they had attempted online tasks:

*I liked the teacher's follow-up for students, which obliged us to participate in completing the activities through Blackboard. Even when I was too lazy to do the tasks on Blackboard, the teacher encouraged me and I knew I had to do them. [ST3BL]*

#### **5.5.2.2 Mutual Benefit and Support (Peer-engagement)**

The students appreciated the development in their writing skills, which resulted from the intervention (ST1BL, ST3BL, ST4BL and ST5BL). This development was achieved through their active role in building their own understanding; mainly through peer-explanation and peer-output practice. Online peer-explanation enabled the students to understand target structures that they found difficult to understand through discussion with their teacher in the classroom; it also enabled them to collaborate on the wikis:

*It [the peer-explanation] played a role in helping me to understand more structures, since the understanding in the classroom was not considerable. But after peer-explanation through [the] Discussion Board, the idea became fully clear [and] I was able to write and use the wiki adequately [sic]. [ST1BL]*

This indicated that these students engaged with their peers, as well as with technology in the online discussion on Blackboard. Another aspect of the learners' engagement in this intervention was through the peer-practice that took place in the BL group, while they completed two wiki tasks on Blackboard. Four out of six students viewed this positively. ST1BL, ST3BL, ST4BL and ST5BL felt that it had developed their social skills, which in turn assisted them in accomplishing the task.

*I liked the teamwork, it enabled us to get to know each other and we grew to understand each other. Also, we were able to accomplish the activities better.* [ST4BL]

Some of the learners believed that peer-output practice had helped develop their writing skills. As ST3BL reported, this method enabled her to remember the rules:

*For the first time in my life I feel I am capable of writing a letter of complaint, unlike in the past, where I learnt to write such a letter, but failed to write it correctly; besides I forgot how after a short time.* [ST3BL]

It would appear that these learners had positive perceptions of the interaction and collaboration that form part of LCF, as they were able to engage more in the learning process. It also helped them better understand the target structures. It is important to note here, however, that the negative perceptions of some of the learners regarding the peer-explanation task could perhaps be explained by the requirement to use the online discussion board, which may not have been clear or easy for them (see section 5.5.4.1 for more details).

### **5.5.2.3 The Use of Arabic for Interaction**

Through the peer-engagement, most of the students used Arabic to explain things to each other. As stated previously, the mobile 'app', WhatsApp empowered the students to use Arabic to explain things to each other outside the classroom (ST1BL and ST4BL). Just like the learners in the F2F group, the students enjoyed this aspect. Indeed, in the BL group, they used mobile 'apps' rather than Blackboard to communicate with each other and discuss things outside the classroom:

*We provide peer-explanation through WhatsApp and then we discuss on Blackboard.* [ST1BL]

The reason for this could be that the online discussion board was an asynchronous communication tool, while WhatsApp communication was in real time. The students were also able to use Arabic in their interactions via the mobile application; indicating that language was a hindrance to their explanation of target structures in Blackboard. ST2BL suggested providing explanations in Arabic, stating:

*Most times, I couldn't understand the topic because I didn't know the meaning of some words used in the peer-explanations. I suggest using Arabic in explanation or to mix [it] with English.*

Moreover, conducting a peer-explanation in Arabic enabled the students to compare their writing skills in their L1 and FL. ST1BL explained:

*I discovered that writing a complaint letter in English was the same as for Arabic.*

#### **5.5.2.4 Engagement with the Tasks**

The learners' engagement with the intervention in this group varied. The individual task was perceived more favourably by the BL group than it was by the F2F group. All the students, except for one, considered it an opportunity for them to ascertain their level of comprehension and focus.

*It provided me with an opportunity to use the structure and test my own solution individually. [ST3BL]*

The use of the YouTube video was also generally appreciated by the students, as it contributed to their understanding, wherever there were details that were unclear and it provided them with extra information, as the following responses show:

*They provided us with an opportunity to comprehend the structures from the clips, when we could not comprehend them from the explanation, which resulted in [us] retaining the information. [ST1BL]*

*They provided us with additional illustration and increased our comprehension regarding some things that I did not always understand from the discussion or the teamwork. [ST4BL]*

With regard to the online output-practice tasks, half the students found that Blackboard provided them with adequate time to think while doing the tasks. It also enabled them to complete the tasks at their convenience:

*At home, there is more time available and it is comfortable to work, rather than the limited time available in the classroom. [ST1BL]*

*It gave me an opportunity to think for myself and focus on completing the assignment and it helped in deepening my understanding of the rules. [ST6BL]*

The use of asynchronous communication tools in Blackboard provided the time lapse required by the learners, as the contributions were available to read and reflect on, before the students posted their own contributions. It would seem that their need for more time to think and communicate was met, as they undertook tasks at home and at times and in places which suited them. This was viewed as useful, since it potentially helped them to think for themselves and to be more critical in their thinking, as ST3BL reported. However, more effort was required to enhance collaboration between the learners.

*[It] needs more effort to coordinate between the students and to encourage them to do the activities. [ST6BL]*

Based on the above analysis of the learners' perceptions of the online peer-explanation and output-practice carried out online, a comparison can be made between the learners' perceptions of the online discussion forums and wikis as online collaboration tools. It was clear that the learners perceived the wiki more favourably than they did the discussion forums, as no student justified her negative perceptions of online collaboration based on the wiki. Through the wikis, the learners in fact scaffolded each other by correcting their peers' mistakes. On the other hand, when not using the wiki, in their F2F communication, the learners explained to each other what they had understood:

*With respect to the wiki, it was clear that every student sent her contribution and corrected the mistakes of the students who had participated previously, so as to obtain a certain result. [ST4BL]*

However, the online discussion forums were perceived less favourably than the wiki. Two students reported that the peer-explanation was not effective for them, given that each student posted her participation without reading or correcting the previous ones (ST2BL and ST6BL).

### **5.5.3 Factors Affecting the Learners' Engagement in Relation to Their Attributes**

The learners reported different factors affecting their engagement with the intervention, which had led them to perceive the intervention negatively. The factors in this part of the study comprised poor levels of English and fellow group members, as described in the following sections.

#### ***5.5.3.1 Levels of Language Proficiency***

Language proficiency levels represented a factor affecting some of the students' perceptions of the intervention. ST6BL declared that she did not enjoy the intervention due to her low level of English language skill and:

*...not all the rules were very clear to my group members and they were unable to explain [them] to me.*

Moreover, although ST2BL and ST4BL declared that the period of the intervention passed quickly, they also stated that they did not understand the rules:

*Despite the time passing quickly without feeling bored, most of the time I couldn't understand the topic because I did not know the meaning of certain words used within the lesson, illustration and discussion. [ST2BL]*

The above-mentioned students reported that they would not recommend this teaching method for all other students, as it might not suit every level. They believed that a more classic teaching approach could prove more helpful for conveying information. For example, it is worth noting here that although ST1BL enjoyed the intervention, she was of the opinion it might not suit students with low English language proficiency, as:

*It does not fit the students with poor levels; rather it makes the students hesitant and [they] exert no effort.*

Similar to the F2F learners' view of variation in English language levels amongst group members, the learners in the BL group varied in some of their opinions. For example, ST4BL was not satisfied with being in a group where there were different language levels; she felt that this variation made the experience boring, as the higher level students would spend their time explaining simple matters to their less able peers, while the lower level students could be reluctant to ask them things for fear of looking foolish or like a weak student:

*I did not like the fact the students' language levels were different. This variation can be boring for students with high levels, when the students with poor levels inquire about simple things. [ST4BL]*

On the other hand, ST1BL, ST3BL and ST5BL did not have a problem with being in mixed-ability groups and their levels of language proficiency were not an obstacle to them engaging with their peers.

Similar to the F2F group, the learners' low levels of English language proficiency and the accents of the podcast speakers were further reasons why some of the BL students rejected the podcast:

*In fact I didn't like it; I personally disliked the listening activities; besides, the dialect was not so clear [sic] [ST5BL]*

### **5.5.3.2 Peer-relationships**

Although some of the interviewees declared that they felt encouraged to practice the rules being taught, ST2BL and ST6BL argued that the intervention was not encouraging for them. The above students, who had been unable to engage with the components of the intervention and thus perceived them negatively, were unwilling to interact with their fellow group members.

While analysing the perceptions of the two students who did not have positive perceptions of the intervention, it was interesting to note that, in addition to low language proficiency (see section 5.5.3.1), these students had issues in their relationship with their peers. For example, ST2BL and ST6BL did not enjoy the intervention, due to non-collaborative fellow group members. Here is a quote from ST2BL's response, revealing an issue in her group that ruined peer-relationships:



*The intervention might be useful if we had collaborative and helpful students within the group. Recently, we encountered a problem with the students in my group, since we were divided and each one joined another group but you did not notice this. They wanted to work alone as they thought our level was poor [and] they did not want to be influenced by this, so they considered their own interests without caring to work as a group, where they would provide us with help and illustrations. [ST2BL]*

Thus, the above group members did not scaffold the student cited above and in the online tasks, there was no collaboration or even coordination, as she reported. For this reason, ST6BL suggested decreasing the amount of teamwork and increasing the number of individual tasks. She also proposed dividing teamwork tasks into sub-tasks and explained that the method used in this intervention enabled some of the students in the group to rely on others. She said:

*In their opinion, the most important thing is to complete the task correctly, regardless of who does it, or whether everybody has contributed to it or not.*

This same issue of non-collaborative group members was faced by ST3BL, who stated a preference for doing the tasks individually on Blackboard. However, the lack of collaboration that ST2BL and ST6BL faced affected the development of their writing skills, as they did not benefit from interaction with their peers.

*The intervention had no apparent effect on me, because the words you used in the illustration were not comprehensible; besides my classmates did not help me or provide me with any illustrations. [ST2BL]*

Some of the interviewees in the same group had different perceptions of the experience. For instance, ST1BL and ST6BL were in the same group, but ST1BL benefited from the peer-explanation and output-practice and had a positive perception of these, while ST6BL held an opposite view. On the other hand, despite the fact that some of the students in this group were unwilling to collaborate, this did not affect ST1BL's learning or perception of the intervention and she worked towards encouraging her peers to engage in the tasks. The experiences of these two students can be explained by their personal attributes. This could indicate that ST1BL was more highly motivated than some of the other students. Although both had received their secondary education

at a state school, ST1BL was trying to develop her language skills in her daily life by watching movies in English with Arabic subtitles, so that she could understand more and more of the language, as she reported.

However, the students proposed a condition for successful collaboration, which did not occur in all the groups. Successful collaboration entails the active involvement of all group members. As ST4BL expressed:

*Collaboration would be fine if the students concentrated and stayed alert during the activity.*

This was echoed by ST5BL, who declared:

*Teamwork usually helps develop outcomes on condition that the group members are interactive and collaborative.*

It is clear from these quotes that it was hard to control the students' engagement and involvement in all the online tasks, which led to the idea of appointing a group leader, proposed by ST4BL. The leader would have a more important role in the BL group than in the F2F group, in terms of coordinating and encouraging peers to accomplish tasks within the time allocated. ST4BL found that collaboration in her group was limited to just three active students. She even created a group on WhatsApp to coordinate the group work and encourage each member to take part in the wikis. She found this easier and more effective, because the students were able to explain issues to each other in Arabic. She described this as follows:

*We established a group on WhatsApp to provide students who couldn't understand with illustrations in Arabic, as well as to distribute the tasks between us, so that we could complete the wiki. [ST4BL]*

#### **5.5.4 Factors Affecting the Learners' Engagement with Technology**

Another group of factors affecting the learners' engagement with the intervention and leading them to perceive it negatively, related to their academic writing skills and affinity with technology.

#### **5.5.4.1 Lack of Affinity with Technology**

Some of the interviewees did not enjoy the intervention due to one very specific reason, namely their inability to use the technology. For this reason, ST4BL considered the teaching method adopted in this intervention as novel but strange. She was unfamiliar with Blackboard and it confounded her. As she once more remarked, addressing the teacher:

*I am not accustomed to using it so I feel it is not useful for me.*

Some of the students (ST2BL, ST3BL and ST4BL) were of the opinion that if the peer-explanations had taken place in the classroom, they would have been more beneficial. This may have been due to the fact that some of the students did not have access to the Internet.

*It [the peer-explanation] would be better if it were held inside the classroom. [ST2BL]*

*The students have different circumstances. Besides this, not everyone possesses a PC or [has access to] the Internet. [ST4BL]*

Discomfort over the Internet, as expressed by ST4BL, was not considered here to be related to any of the anti-religious or anti-cultural elements present on the Web and cited by Saqlain, Al-Qarni and Ghad (2013). However, the lack of affinity with technology in this group was actually a key factor, since two main cycles of the intervention contained four main tasks to be undertaken online, in addition to the use of other technology tools in the classroom. ST2BL and ST6BL did not benefit from the online discussion board, as no interaction took place in their case. They were writing answers without engaging in any discussion or providing any explanation for each other (see 6.3.2.2 for more details on the learners' online interaction).

#### **5.5.4.2 The Impracticality of Dealing with Blackboard**

Some of the students raised matters relating to the impracticality of dealing with Blackboard. For example, there was the risk of a student giving a task to someone else to do for her, or the possibility of copying material directly from the Internet (ST2BL).

ST3BL also highlighted the difficulty of controlling the integrity of students' work or the level of their participation in this regard.

*It is hard to control all the students within the group and force them to participate in the activity. [ST3BL]*

Moreover, the additional time available for completing the task tended to make some of the students lazy, as they had a week to do the wiki. Furthermore, it was difficult to promote understanding without the accompanying facial expressions and body language present in F2F communication. This was a point emphasised by ST3BL and ST4BL. Therefore, they favoured using Blackboard for individual tasks, while preferring to undertake peer-explanation in the classroom.

*The reason [for not accepting the use of Blackboard] may be [due to] the lack of a defined deadline to send the participations. I feel it is difficult to understand those students' participations that are not clear and [where I] need to know more detail from them. In the case of a face-to-face situation, it would be easier to find out these details and what they mean. [ST4BL]*

Thus, better coordination between the students was necessary, as ST6BL suggests, since this was their first attempt at using Blackboard or any other online learning environment. They had not been introduced to online learning in their secondary schools. On the Foundation Course, some of the teachers used Blackboard for limited purposes, enabling their students to download the PowerPoint presentation used in class or to send in their assignments. This means the students may have accessed Blackboard for individual tasks, but not for collaborative work. Moreover, it became clear that the students' academic writing skills needed to be improved.

## 5.6 Summary

This intervention was designed according to LCF, but the learners' interviews revealed both matches and mismatches between the research intentions and the learners' perceptions of some aspects of the design. The participants who viewed the intervention positively corresponded to the research intentions and in this way, they satisfied the theoretical framework designed, as Figure 5.2 illustrates, below.



**Figure 5.2 The theoretical framework for learners' perceptions of the intervention**

The theoretical framework presented in the above Figure above suggests that if the student engaged with the teacher, peers and content, she would have the opportunity to practice the target structure. These practice opportunities can develop learners' skills and confidence. Moreover, where they experience these developments in their skills and confidence, they will express positive perceptions of the intervention.

ST1F2F, ST4F2F, ST5F2F, ST6F2F and ST5BL, who perceived the intervention positively, engaged with their teacher by discussing target structures, as well as with the tasks by completing their individual tasks and later, by practicing in their daily lives what they had learned. They also engaged with their peers in the explanation and practice tasks. These opportunities to rehearse the respective linguistic rules developed the skills the intervention aimed to instil and further increased the students' confidence. ST1BL, ST3BL and ST4BL had some negative perceptions of aspects of the intervention, but still considered that it had made an impact on the development of their skills. On the other hand, ST2F2F, ST3F2F, ST2BL and ST6BL had negative perceptions of many aspects of the intervention.

Where engagement was lacking, the learners perceived the intervention negatively. The experiences of such students did not match the theoretical framework presented in Figure 5.2. The sources of this mismatch were analysed using Kumaravadivelu's (1991) classification of the teacher's intentions and the learners' interpretations of different aspects of teaching (see section 2.2.3 for further details on these sources). Based on the interview analysis presented above, there were three sources of mismatch in this research, as explained below.

The first source of mismatch was cognitive, referring to learners' knowledge and understanding of the world. This was the case with ST2F2F. She declared that she did not have any knowledge of some of the topics pertaining to the tasks, such as online shopping. For this reason, she was unable to engage with the task. Moreover, ST2F2F, ST3F2F and ST2BL considered the level of the teaching material, particularly writing a letter of complaint, to be difficult and complicated. I in contrast had originally thought the students would be familiar with this, as they should have covered it in their secondary school courses.

The second source of mismatch was communicative. This referred to the learners' inability to communicate with their teacher or peers. Interviewees like ST3F2F asserted that they lacked the vocabulary for communicating with their peers. Moreover, ST2BL failed to engage with her teacher and peers, because they did not use Arabic in their explanations.

The third source of mismatch was pedagogic. In this research, the term refers to how the students perceived the aim of the intervention's components. ST4F2F was of the view that stating the objectives of a task limited her creativity, rather than directing her, as the research intended. Moreover, ST2F2F claimed that none of the components of the activities had any impact on her. ST3F2F pointed out that English language rules could be learned by memorising them, rather than by developing understanding and practicing them.

In this chapter, an analysis of the learners' responses to the semi-structured interview was carried out using thematic analysis. This analysis revealed the learners' perceptions of the intervention and aspects of their engagement. In the following chapter, an analysis of the learners' engagements is presented to triangulate the interview findings. It was carried out by analysing the learners' interactions in two groups of five students each: one from the F2F group and another from the BL group, using a systematic observation scheme as well as analysing their conversations.

## CHAPTER SIX: THE ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, an analysis of the learners' engagement with their teacher, peers and the target language is presented by providing details on the quantity and quality of the engagement. This is to triangulate the learners' perceptions and engagement with the interview responses, as presented in Chapter Five. Here, both kinds of data emerged from an analysis of a group of five student volunteers, throughout six one-hour classes in the F2F group, and another group of five student volunteers in the BL group. The learners' interactions in these two groups were audio-recorded. In addition, the learners were observed and the observation was conducted using the systematic observation scheme, 'Communicative orientation of language teaching' (COLT) for two classes only, in order to discern aspects of their engagement. This was undertaken by an external observer, who noted aspects of the engagement (as discussed in section 3.11.3).

COLT was chosen, as it can describe essential features of FL classroom instruction, organisation, interaction and content control. As mentioned previously, COLT merely keeps track of the number of such actions performed by the teacher and learners, based on pre-determined categories, rather than giving a complete picture of what happens in the classroom (Kumaravadivelu, 1999; Walsh, 2006). A conversation analysis approach was therefore adopted with regard to the learners' interaction, in order to reveal how the participants treated each other's speech and engaged with the different components of LCF from an emic perspective, without applying predetermined categories (Markee, 2008; Negretti, 1999; Wong & Waring, 2010). The aim of using these two analytical approaches was to enable me, as the researcher, to understand how the classroom tasks were accomplished and how the learners engaged with their peers and the language.

### 6.2 Analysis of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) Observation Scheme

Due to the fact it was difficult to find a full-time volunteer with a suitable level of English language proficiency to be able to understand the interaction and who would also be available to act as an external observer, the observation was carried out in two

visits to the F2F and BL groups. In the first visit, the observer attended half the first lesson. This part contained icebreaking activities and the teacher's discussion cycle dedicated to the rules for 'using the past tense'. In the second visit, the observer attended the second part of the teacher's discussion cycle on 'forming wh-questions' and the individual task (as explained in section 3.10.1). The external observer coded the teacher and students' behaviour, identified in the scheme as time segments (each segment lasting 3-4 minutes) (see Appendix 6 for a translation of the headings of the observation scheme). As it may be difficult for an observer to listen to the students and code at the same time, the learners' conversations were recorded. To ensure the validity of the coding, I checked the observer's coding by listening to the recordings myself. Moreover, in order to minimise the observer effect, I endeavoured to find a young external observer for the observation, who looked more like a student. I eventually selected a faculty member teaching at the same college, who opted to use the Arabic version of the scheme.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the scheme was adapted by merging its two parts. This was achieved by choosing certain components that would help in answering the second research question. The scheme coded the language used in the interaction either as TL or L1. This was in order to be able to ascertain any development in the students' use of TL, as well as identifying where they used their L1. The participants' organisation and interaction were subsequently coded, to determine how much classroom time consisted of the teacher leading a discussion of target structures, the students managing their own group work, and individual tasks.

The observer also coded who was controlling the interaction in the 'Content Control' column. This was to indicate whether the tasks were led by the teacher in a 'Teacher/Text' category, such as giving feedback, using media to illustrate points, or providing some form of scaffolding; or else whether the teacher had assigned a task to the learners, with a degree of freedom to compose the text of the task in the 'Teacher/Text/Student' category. The scheme also helped identify the amount of 'teacher talk', either as sustained speech, whereby the teacher would play a dominant role, or as minimal speech, as in scaffolding the learners or commenting on their responses – indicating a more active role for the learner.



The scheme also defined the number of times the learners were able to initiate discourse. A final description referred to the students' types of utterance, under 'Incorporation of student utterances' and demonstrated whether they corrected each other's errors; commented on or evaluated a peer's remark; expanded on another person's comment, or asked for repetition or explanation.

In an analysis of the observation data, its elements were grouped into two major target structures: the development of the learners' use of the TL and the teacher's 'content control'. The first theme aimed at gaining an understanding of the development of learners' skills as a result of LCF and it contained the following elements: (1) the TL, indicating the proportion of mother tongue (L1) and TL used; observed purely from the learners' side, as the teacher rarely used L1 when answering a student's question during a peer-explanation task (see section 6.3.1.2), (2) the participants' organisation and interaction, (3) the amount of students' speech, determining whether their utterances were minimal or sustained, (4) the incorporation of student utterance, and (5) the students' initiation of discourse. This part showed how the students engaged with each other and collaborated. The second theme comprised the remaining two elements of the scheme (presented in Table 6.2): content control and the amount of speech from the teacher. This part was aimed at revealing the teacher's role in the intervention.

The above classification of the components of COLT would help triangulate the learners' perceptions of the intervention and their description of their engagement. This triangulation, as presented in Chapter Seven (see 7.3), is classified into the two major types of engagement that took place in the current study. These relate the learners' perceptions of the teacher's role with the second theme of the COLT analysis, namely the teacher's content control and the learners' perceptions of and engagement with the tasks (triangulating learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the intervention for the development of their communicative competence, with the first COLT theme, namely the development of their TL use).

### **6.2.1 Development in the Learners' Use of the Target Language (TL)**

In this study, it is important to discover whether LCF developed the learners' use of the TL. As mentioned previously, five elements of COLT were grouped together under

these themes. Table 6.1, below, shows a comparison between the F2F and BL groups, as regards these various elements of the theme.

**Table 6.1 A COLT comparison between the F2F and BL groups in their use of the target language (TL) and the amount and type of students' utterance**

The Observed Item		F2F		BL	
		1 <sup>st</sup> visit	2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	1 <sup>st</sup> visit	2 <sup>nd</sup> visit
The language used	TL	54.55%	65%	56.25%	57.89%
	L1	45.45%	35%	43.75	42.11%
The participants' organisation and interactions	T<->S	11.76%	22.86%	24.13%	9.57%
	Group	64.71%	40%	65.52%	65.72%
	Individual	23.53%	37.14%	10.35%	25.72%
Amount of students' speech	Minimal	70%	88.89%	71.43%	69.23%
	Sustained	30%	11.11%	28.57%	30.77%
Types of students' utterance	Correction	23.08%	15%	12.5%	14.29%
	Comment	38.46%	40%	43.75%	46.43%
	Expansion	23.07%	25%	12.5%	10.71%
	Clarification request	15.39%	20%	31.25%	28.57%
Discourse initiation		9 times	9 times	7 times	13 times

### 6.2.1.1 The F2F Group

During the first visit to the F2F group, the external observer observed a group of five students for 34 minutes (see Appendix 6, An Example of the External Observation). The observed session contained icebreaking activities and the teacher's discussion of the target structure, 'Using the past tense'. During this period, the teacher interacted either with individuals or with the whole class for 11.76% of the time. The remaining classroom time involved the learners undertaking a collaborative task for about 64.71% of the period and an individual task for 23.53% of the time (see Table 6.1 A Comparison between the F2F and BL groups in their use of the target language (TL) and the amount and type of students' utterance). The observer coded the learners' use of TL as 54.55% of their total utterance, while their use of L1 totalled 45.45%.

The observer noted nine instances of the students initiating speech. The percentage of students' utterance, where they uttered less than three words, amounted to 70%, while they delivered sustained speech in about 30% of their utterances. Out of these utterances, they made comments indicating a positive or negative reaction to 38.46% of their peers' utterances. The second most coded type of utterance involved correction of

group members' mistakes in terms of form or meaning. Peers' responses were expanded by adding information to the utterances. The least common type of utterance involved asking for clarification from fellow group members when something was not clear.

In analysing the above data relating to the learners' engagement during the first visit, it was clear that the learners in this group engaged with their peers more often than they did with their teacher or with their individual work. About half of this engagement was in English, with about 70% being an utterance of just a few words. These words consisted of comments, corrections or elaborations. It is indicated from these percentages and an analysis of the students' recorded verbal expressions that L1 was used for personal introductions and discussing answers, while the answers themselves were given in the TL.

The participants rarely asked for clarification and it seemed as though their engagement was limited during this visit. This could be considered normal, as it was the first class where LCF was used and the students had just met each other, given that it was the beginning of the semester. Moreover, the nature of the tasks completed during this time played a role in the type and length of the utterances, as the students were simultaneously discussing things with their teacher and completing short tasks.

On the second visit, the observer watched the same students for 35 minutes during the teacher's discussion cycle on 'Forming wh-questions' and the individual task. The teacher interacted with individuals or the whole class for 22.86% of the time. At 40% of the allocated period, less time was spent on a collaborative task, compared with the first visit. However, the time spent on the individual task had increased to 37.14%. It was clear that collaboration was the most frequently coded phenomenon, followed by the teacher-led activities and individual tasks. Also on this visit, the learners used the TL more often in peer-explanation (65% of their interaction was in English). This indicated some development in their use of the TL.

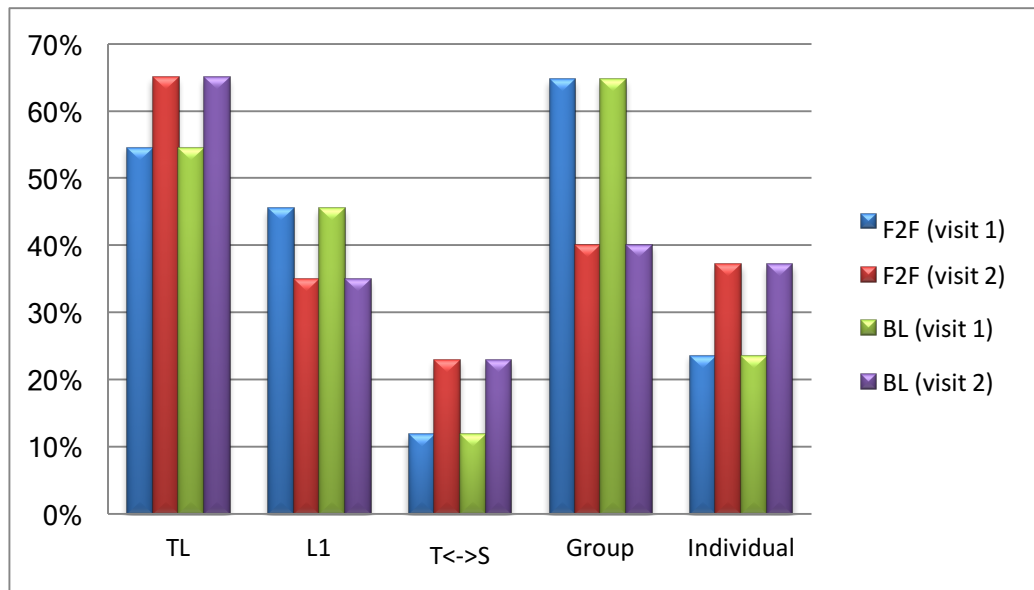
In addition, the percentage of students' minimal utterance had increased to 88.89%, while sustained utterance had decreased to 11.11%. Out of these utterances, comments accounted for 40%. The second most coded type of utterance was expansion, at 25%. The third most frequent type of utterance was a clarification request and the least

common was peer-correction. It is important to note that the amount of speech initiated by the students during the second visit was the same as during the first.

It is clear from the above findings for the second visit that the learners' collaboration decreased as they engaged in individual tasks. However, the teacher's engagement with the students increased, as instructions, feedback and scaffolding were provided for the learners with respect to the individual task. Consequently, their use of the TL increased while engaging with their teacher and peers, and while doing the task. There seems to have been some development in the type of utterance, with the students commenting more on their peers' answers and expanding on them to scaffold others. However, it would also seem that the learners' opportunities for initiating speech remained the same, without any development in the second instance. Further details on the learners' utterances are revealed in the analysis of their interactions, covered later in this chapter.

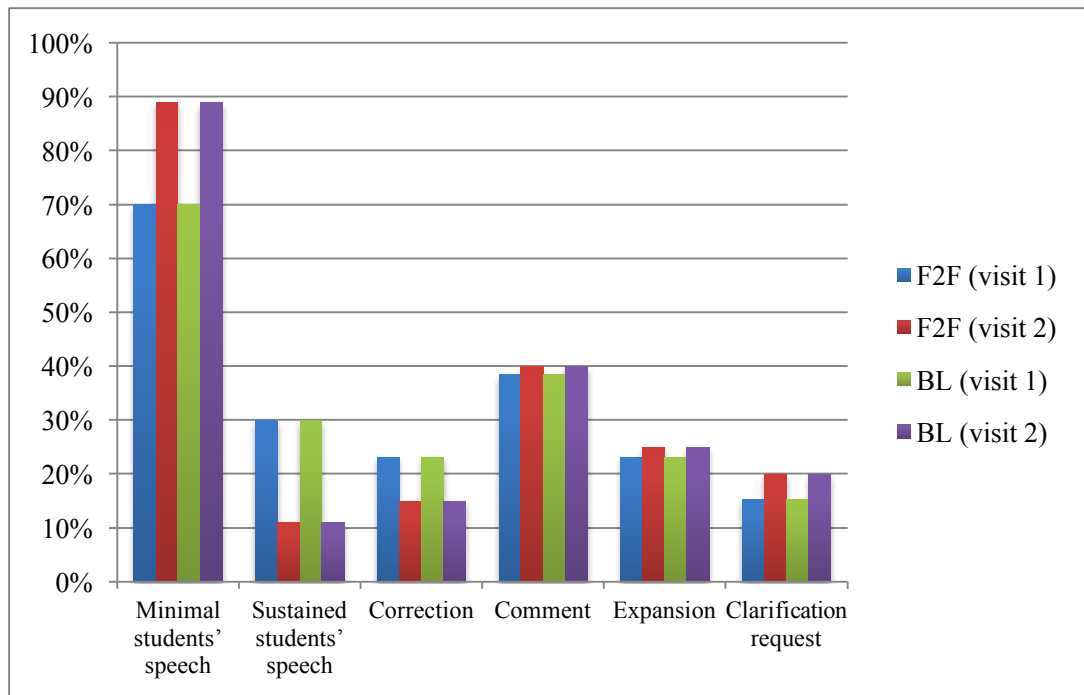
#### ***6.2.1.2 The Blended Learning (BL) Group***

The same observation was conducted for the BL group. It involved observing the same tasks as per the first visit to the F2F group. On the first visit to the BL group, the teacher interacted with the students for 24.13% of the allotted period. The students engaged in group work for 65.52% of the session and in individual work for 10.35% of the time. When the learners spoke, they used the TL to discuss things with their teacher, but during the icebreaking activities, they used both L1 and the TL, with the TL representing 56.25% of their speech and the L1 constituting 43.75% (see Figure 6.1, below to compare these figures with those of the F2F group).



**Figure 6.1 A comparison between the observer's first and second visits to the F2F and BL groups, with regard to their use of L1 and FL and their participation**

The students initiated speech on seven occasions. During this visit, the students' minimal utterance of three words amounted to 71.43%, while they uttered sustained speech for 28.57% of the time. Out of these utterances, they commented on 43.75% of what was said by their peers. They requested clarification for 31.25% of their utterances, corrected their peers' mistakes and elaborated on points, each with a similar percentage of utterance (12.5%) (See Figure 6.2 to compare these figures with those of the F2F group). The same rationale for the learners' minimal and sustained speech in the F2F group could be applied here. However, this was only the first class for the students in this group and so they were not yet familiar with each other or with the tasks.



**Figure 6.2 A comparison between the observer's first and second visits to the F2F and BL groups, in terms of the students' amount of speech and types of utterance delivered**

On analysing the above data on the BL group learners' engagement during the first visit, it became clear that the learners in this group engaged with their peers more often than they did with their teacher and spent more time on this engagement than they did on their individual work. This result was similar to the F2F group's results for the learners' engagement during the first visit. Around 56.25% of this engagement was in English (TL), with about 71.43% being an utterance of just a few words. These words consisted of comments, requests for clarification or corrections of each other's mistakes.

During the second visit, the teacher interacted with the students for 9.57% of the session, with the learners engaging in group work for 65.72% of the time and in individual work for 25.72% of the session. In their engagement, the learners used the TL for 57.89% of their speech and in this respect, their TL use had increased slightly and they used L1 for 42.11%. Moreover, the students initiated speech 13 times and the observer coded comments as the commonest type of utterance (46.43%). This was followed by clarification requests (28.57). Correction (14.29%) and expansion (10.71%) were the third and fourth most frequent type of utterance, respectively.

Due to the nature of the second visit, there was an increase in output-practice and individual work and a decrease in the teacher's engagement with the students. The students' use of the TL had increased slightly, but it was not as developed as in the F2F group. The amount of initiated speech had increased by the second visit and was more marked than in the F2F group. However, the frequency of different types of student utterance was almost identical, with comments being the most frequent and expansion being the least common.

### ***6.2.1.3 Summary of the Analysis Related to the Development in the Learners' Use of the Target Language (TL)***

It may be concluded that the learners in the F2F and BL groups engaged more in collaboration than in the performance of individual tasks or discussion with the teacher. Due to the LCF design, this was to be expected. Nevertheless, the development in the learners was not noted as being dramatic in the above analysis. The reason for this might have been that the observation was carried out in the first two sessions of the intervention, when the learners were still unaccustomed to learning via an intervention designed using LCF.

## **6.2.2 The Teacher's Content Control**

Content control identifies whether the teacher has managed to create a constructive learning environment by explaining target structures to the students, giving them a chance to think and ask questions, and then providing them with responses. What is also important is the amount of participation from the teacher and whether the teacher's utterances are minimal or sustained. The aim of this stage was to ascertain whether the teacher maintained fairly strict control of the participation, or gave the learners space to participate as they wished. Table 6.2, below, shows a comparison between the F2F and BL groups in these various elements of the teacher's content control.

**Table 6.2 A COLT comparison between the F2F and BL groups in terms of the teacher's 'content control' and amount of speech**

The Observed Item		F2F		BL	
		1 <sup>st</sup> visit	2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	1 <sup>st</sup> visit	2 <sup>nd</sup> visit
Content control	Teacher/ Text	11.76%	22.86%	27.59%	8.57%
	Teacher/ Text/Student	88.24%	77.14%	72.41%	91.43%
Amount of teacher's speech	Minimal	40%	46.15%	50%	69.23%
	Sustained	60%	53.85%	50%	30.77%

### **6.2.2.1 The F2F Group**

COLT helps identify whether the teacher's scaffolding is minimal or sustained. On the first visit to the F2F group, the teacher's control of the content was observed as 11.76%, while the teacher/students' joint control of the content amounted to 88.24%. This indicated that the learners were an active part of the intervention in terms of constructing their own learning. The teacher's amount of speech was 40% of minimal utterance, while sustained utterance totalled 60%.

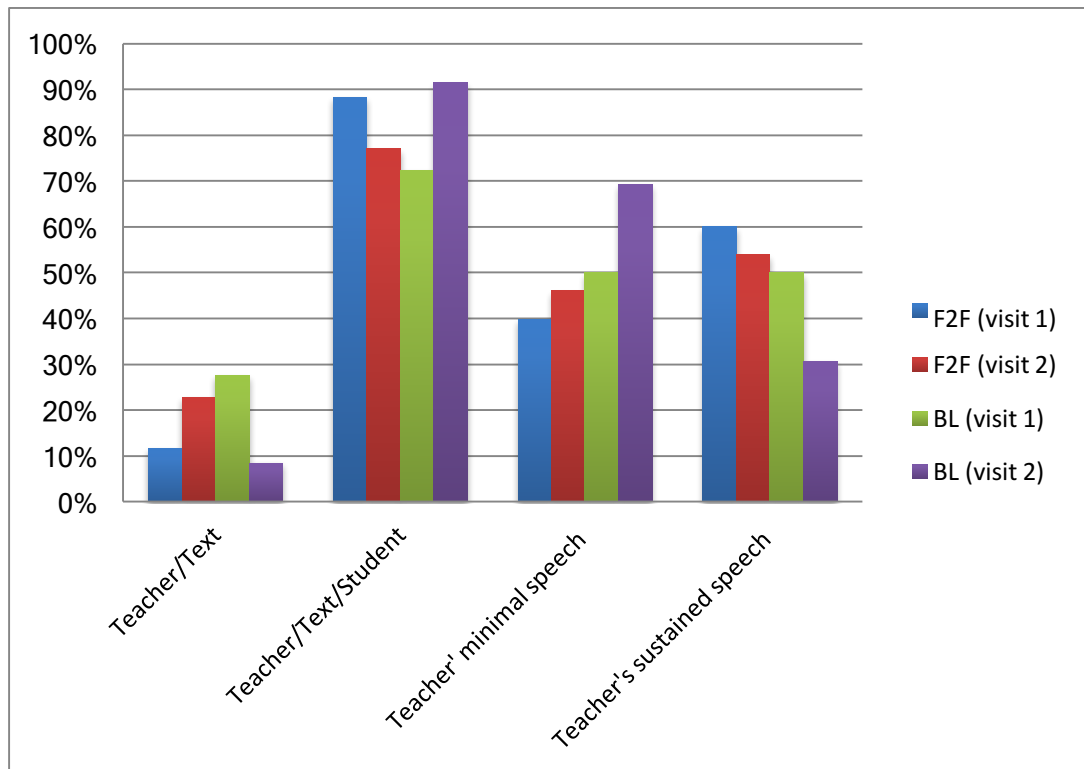
On the second visit, the teacher's control of the content had increased (22.86%) and the teacher/students' joint control over the intervention had decreased (77.14%). The amount of teacher's minimal speech had increased (46.25%) and sustained speech had decreased (53.85). However, this can be justified by the nature of the tasks, as the teacher was discussing with the learners how to form wh-questions. A further explanation for these results could be that there were learners who failed to engage with the design of the intervention or else did not enjoy it.

### **6.2.2.2 The Blended Learning (BL) Group**

On the first visit to the BL group, the teacher's control of the content was 27.59%, while joint control was 72.41%. This showed the important role of the student in controlling their own learning. The teacher's minimal utterance represented 50% of all speech, as did sustained speech. It illustrates the learners' ability to control their learning with the teacher's scaffolding. This result was similar to what was found in the F2F group, although it was lower in the latter. On the second visit, the teacher's control of the content had decreased dramatically to 8.57% and the joint control had increased to 91.42%. This was as expected, because the learners had become more accustomed to



each other and to the teaching methods applied in the intervention. However, it contradicted what had happened in the F2F group, which was unexpected. Moreover, the teacher's minimal utterance had increased to 69.23% and her sustained utterance had drastically decreased to 30.77% (see Figure 6.3 for a comparison between the groups).



**Figure 6.3 A comparison between the teacher's content control and amount of speech in the F2F and BL groups**

#### ***6.2.2.3 Summary of the Teacher's Content Control and Amount of 'Teacher Talk'***

In both groups, the teacher's sole control over the text was less marked than the teacher/students' joint control over it. This is consistent with LCF design, where the teacher needs to have a clear role from the start of implementation; exclusively in terms of monitoring and facilitating group work. However, the BL group's situation was in complete contrast to that of the F2F group, when comparing the first and second visits and in terms of the teacher's control over content. A triangulation of this would involve an analysis of audio-recordings of the class. In order to find a possible explanation for some of the data presented above and to gain an in-depth understanding of how the learners engaged with the teacher and with each other, their conversation was therefore recorded and analysed, as explained below.

### **6.3 Analysis of the Learners' Engagement Using a Conversation Analysis Approach**

The aim of the interactions, whether between the teacher and the students, or between the students themselves, was to enhance their understanding of the three writing skills. However, as can be clearly seen from the above analysis, COLT failed to account for *why* certain verbal acts dominated and a qualitative analysis approach to classroom interaction was adopted (Luk & Lin, 2007, p.39)

The learners' conversations in the six classes were transcribed using the conversation analysis transcription conventions laid down by Atkinson and Heritage (1984). The choice of these conventions was dictated by the need for this study to show overlaps, pauses and interruptions, as well as rising, falling and continuous intonation (see Appendix 8: Transcription Conventions). Pomerantz and Fehr's (1997) Conversation Analysis Framework was adopted in this study, as well as Walsh's (2006) framework as mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, in addition to an analysis of the activities in the interaction (see Table 3.14). To ensure the students' anonymity, the students in the groups were coded with numbers, in the same way that the interviewees were coded.

#### **6.3.1 The F2F Group**

The learners in this group carried out the intervention tasks in the classroom. Here, an analysis of the teacher's discussion, a peer-explanation task and an output-practice task are presented. In the analysis, certain episodes were chosen, as they represented a pattern that recurred in the teacher-student interaction within the classroom.

##### ***6.3.1.1 The Teacher's Discussion***

In the teacher's discussion cycle, the teacher discussed the target structures with the learners, instead of dictating information to them. The first step in the conversation analysis framework adopted in this study was to choose a sequence of interactions, as in Episode 1 below, where the teacher discussed the target structure for forming wh-questions.

## EPISODE 1

1	T	now we will learn how to ask a question using which, the sentence is I bought the red box? not the blue one. (0.4) ((the teacher writes the sentence on the board)) ask about the red box?
2	SS	(0.03) which ? box did you buy. which did you buy.
3	T	excellent which ^ box did you buy ((the teacher writes the answer on the board)) who can explain the rule for me. ((T speaks to S)) your answer which did you but misses an essential part that is the noun after 'which'
4	SS	(0.05) if there is did we use the verb in the base form.
5	T	this is correct the verb is in the base form as we used did = but the special case is in using which = in using which we put after it? ((the teacher asks the students))
6	SS	(0.03) verb – no- no- (0.02) noun?
7	T	yes ? (0.03) we said which box that is a noun ((the teacher points to the word box)) the question is formed as which, noun, helping verb, subject, verb (0.15) ((the students are taking notes)) is it clear?
8	SS	yes
9	T	To recap we use which if we want to ask? ((the teacher asks the students))
10	SS	(0.02) if we want to ask about something from a sentence that has two things
11	T	.hhh yah. (0.02) ok now give me examples using which and who
12	SS	(0.15) who did that?
13	T	this is correct, an other example
14	SS	(0.03) I erased the board, the question who did that.

The second step of the analysis framework was to characterise the activities in this Episode, based on the interaction framework in Table 3.14 in section 3.12.4. The teacher provided the learners with form-focused feedback in turns 3 and 13 and scaffolding to reformulate their contributions in turn 5. In turn 9, the students' understanding was checked and a text revised. However, at the beginning of this Episode in turn 2 the learners appeared confused, as they gave more than one answer. The teacher's rising intonation is evident, where she asked the learners questions and attempted to encourage them to participate in the discussion.

The third step involved packaging the actions to show how they were constructed. In the above Episode, the teacher drew upon the learners' previous knowledge, asking them to use the wh-question word, 'Which?'. This was to promote interaction. In turn 2, the students gave two answers. The teacher favoured the second as it demonstrated a particularity of this type of wh-word. The rising intonation in turn 2 reflects where the students replied and showed they were confident. Based on their answers, the teacher explained the target structure to them. The students asked the teacher to confirm their understanding of the form of the verb in the question and the teacher scaffolded them by expanding on the target structures and asking them to contribute to the discussion (see

turns 5 and 6). The student proposed the word, ‘noun’ and interrupted her peer, who seemed to know the answer, as her intonation was high (Liddicoat, 2011). It may be assumed that the student’s knowledge of the answer promoted her confidence. The teacher made a general statement to summarise the rule in turn 7 and then in turn 10, asked the learners to explain the target structure once again, in order to confirm their understanding. Finally, the teacher asked the students to give examples of the use of ‘Which?’ and ‘Who?’, these having been only just explained to them. It is clear here that the teacher’s sustained speech was more than minimal, as the target structure was discussed and the teacher asked many questions to ensure the students had understood it. This finding confirms the observation findings for teacher’s content control (see section 6.2.2) which showed that the learners delivered minimal utterances in their discussion with the teacher, in response to her prompting.

The teacher’s feedback on correct answers took one of two forms: the provision of positive feedback, or simply accepting the answer (Chin, 2006; Rido, Ibrahim, & Nambiar, 2014; Xuerong, 2012). The first type was clear in turn 3, where the teacher praised a student with remarks, such as ‘excellent’, thus affirming the response, before initiating another target structure. The second type occurred in turn 7, where the teacher accepted the answer and moved on to another target structure. The teacher dealt with incorrect responses by evaluating and then correcting them (as in turn 3), rather than reformulating the question.

The fourth step required looking back over the Episode, in order to consider the effect of taking turns. In this part of the teacher’s discussion about forming wh-questions, there were 112 turns, with 45 adjacency pairs and four occurrences of overlapping. With regard to pauses, the longest silence was 15 seconds and this occurred on two different occasions. The first was when the students were taking notes and the second, when the teacher asked them to give an example of a wh-question starting with ‘Which’ or ‘Who’. The other pauses throughout the interactions ranged between 2 and 5 seconds (the indications of pauses, turns and adjacency pairs are explained in the Discussion Chapter). Finally, it is clear that the interaction included comprehensible input and was initiated and managed by the teacher.

After the above-mentioned discussion, the students were given the opportunity to complete an individual task on the same target structure, in order to check their understanding. They received feedback from the teacher and then worked as a group on the peer-discussion task, followed by the output-practice task, as explained below.

### 6.3.1.2 The Peer-explanation Tasks

In this task, the learners were supposed to explain to each other how to write sentences and wh-questions in the past, following a video that re-explained the rules to them. After explaining points to each other, they gave examples as a means of practicing the respective rules. Episode 2, the first step in the conversation analysis framework, shows the transcript of the interaction in the F2F group as they carried out the task. The students used Arabic (their L1) in the peer-explanation, indicated by italics in the transcription.

#### EPISODE 2

- |    |                              |  |
|----|------------------------------|--|
| 1  | ST1F2F                       | <i>did you understand the rule? Is it clear?(0.03) *</i>   |
| 2  | ST7F2F,<br>ST8F2F,<br>ST9F2F | <i>yes.</i>  |
| 3  | ST1F2F                       | <i>let's write example?</i>  |
| 4  | ST8F2F                       | <i>ok .hhh (0.4)</i>   |
| 5  | ST1F2F                       | <i>she asked us to explain to each other and then write example?</i>   |
| 6  | ST8F2F                       | <i>(0.02) does it mean to write sentences and they should be in the past .hhh</i>  |
| 7  | ST1F2F                       | <i>Yah</i>   |
| 8  | ST9F2F                       | <i>[what did</i>   |
| 9  | ST8F2F                       | <i>what did] you eat yesterday (0.03) come on write it?</i>  |
| 10 | ST10F2F                      | <i>do we have to write an answer.</i>  |
| 11 | ST1F2F to T                  | <i>Do we need to write an answer.</i>  |
| 12 | T                            | <i>I want you to explain the rules to each other? explain the rules to each other then you can give examples.</i>  |
| 13 | ST10F2F                      | <i>I will give a sentence? (0.06) He was play a football?</i>  |
| 14 | ST8F2F                       | <i>What?</i>   |
| 15 | ST10F2F                      | <i>He was play a football.</i>   |
| 16 | ST1F2F                       | <i>by this you said a sentence (0.02) and we need to ask a question?</i>   |
| 17 | ST10F2F                      | <i>yes.</i>  |
| 18 | ST1F2F                       | <i>NO? she wants us to know how to write a sentence and a question by telling each other the rule? (0.07) ((She reads the task instructions)) she wants us to know the way of writing (0.05)</i> |
| 19 | ST10F2F                      | <i>Let's complete the task . (0.05) what did you do in the last weekend.</i>   |
| 20 | ST1F2F                       | <i>what did you do at the last weekend? right?</i>   |

The characterisation of the learners' actions - the second step in the conversation analysis framework – started with a confirmation check by ST1F2F, verifying whether the group had understood the rules and asking them to give examples. ST1F2F appeared

to have a great deal of self-confidence, as most of her speech was uttered with rising intonation. In a low voice, ST7F2F, ST8F2F and ST9F2F answered her in the affirmative and the conversation continued. There was confusion in turns 5, 6, 7, 16, 17 and 18; ST1F2F directed her fellow group members by asking them to write examples. She then realised that the task required them to provide each other with explanations before doing so. However, the rest of the group did not pay attention to her final clarification and carried on giving examples, as in turn 9 (a compositional act). They completed the task and wondered if they should write answers to the wh-question.

The actions can be put together as follows. ST1F2F asked the teacher for clarification of the task and the teacher explained that the students were supposed to explain things to each other first, before giving examples. The teacher used the L1 here to clarify matters for the students. Nevertheless, they continued doing the task based on their wrong conception, even when ST1F2F tried to turn their attention back to the task instructions. It therefore seems that some of the students did not make use of the teacher's scaffolding, because they continued giving examples, rather than explaining the target structures, as in turns 19 and 20. However, when the teacher approached this group to find out their answers, ST1F2F and ST10F2F, who seemed to be the most capable members in the group, responded to her as expected.

The students therefore dealt with an error in this task by ignoring it; omitting to correct it and continuing to develop the target structure, even though the error was repeated (see turns 13 and 15). Aside from this, it was clear that the primary language of conversation was the L1 and English (the TL) was only used to write the responses to the task or to read the task instructions. However, when ST1F2F asked the teacher questions, she used the TL.

Pauses and turn-taking were considered in the fourth step of the conversation analysis. There were some short pauses, for example, turns 1, 4, 9 and 16 and this may be considered normal, as the turns shifted. Three long pauses occurred in turns 13, 18 and 19, while the students were thinking of examples. The short pauses may indicate that the learners were engaged with each other while performing the tasks. On the other hand, the two long pauses may indicate that some of the students failed to understand the purpose of the task. Moreover, there were 20 turns with five adjacent pairs and one

question that did not receive a response, namely in turn 10. Finally, there was one overlap (turn 9).

It may thus be concluded that the learners did not engage with each other to perform the above task as expected. However, once ST1F2F and ST10F2F understood the task, they did respond to the teacher as planned. In fact, this might have been the first occasion on which the learners had sat in a group to explain a target structure to each other, after having previously discussed it with their teacher. They were not accustomed to explaining things to each other as a means of providing or obtaining further details, because they had only ever experienced teachers giving them all the information beforehand, which they then simply had to apply. From the analysis of this peer-explanation, it is therefore clear there is a mismatch between the pedagogy applied and the students' interaction.

### 6.3.1.3 Output-practice Tasks

The output-practice task in the second half of the intervention was writing a letter of complaint. The learners were meant to collaborate in writing a letter of complaint to the University Dean about things which had happened in the past and which annoyed them. Two Episodes were elicited to analyse the group's interaction in the F2F classroom, while they were carrying out the task. Below, two episodes are presented for the purpose of the analysis.

#### EPISODE 3

- |    |         |   |
|----|---------|---|
| 1  | ST10F2F | <i>let's write the body.</i>  |
| 2  | ST9F2F  | <i>.hhh yah</i>   |
| 3  | ST1F2F  | <i>what should we choose to start with?(0.03)</i>   |
| 4  | ST10F2F | <i>what do you mean?</i>  |
| 5  | ST1F2F  | <i>'I am sorry to bother you but I want to tell you something' ok = write it 'I am sorry to bother you but I want to tell you something happened last week' (0.04) sorry to bother you but last week I have or I had?</i> |
| 6  | ST9F2F  | <i>I had?</i>   |
| 7  | ST1F2F  | <i>I had a problem. ((in Arabic))</i>   |
| 8  | ST9F2F  | <i>(0.02) it means I have. ((in Arabic))</i>  |
| 9  | ST10F2F | <i>I had ((in Arabic))</i>  |
| 10 | ST9F2F  | <i>ok , (.04) I had a problem last week right , right?</i>  |
| 11 | ST10F2F | <i>yes .hhh</i>   |
| 12 | ST9F2F  | <i>I had a problem with the meal in the restaurant</i>  |
| 13 | ST8F2F  | <i>does the meal mean meal?</i>   |
| 14 | ST7F2F  | <i>yes.</i>   |
| 15 | ST8F2F  | <i>ok we can say the meal (0.3) in the (0.02) cafeteria.</i>  |
| 16 | ST7F2F  | <i>no no I have a better idea</i>   |
| 17 | ST1F2F  | <i>- tell me is the structure of my sentence correct</i>  |
| 18 | ST7F2F  |   |

ST10F2F asked her peers to move from the introductory part of the letter to the main body. As they agreed, collaboration began, with ST1F2F asking about the best way to start this main body. However, ST10F2F did not grasp this. Therefore, ST1F2F explained to her peers what she meant by giving an example (see turns 3 and 5). ST9F2F asked her peers for form-focused scaffolding and they helped her. Next, ST10F2F attempted a sentence and asked her peers if it was correct. ST9F2F confirmed that it was. After that, ST8F2F contributed to the teamwork by completing the sentence with more detail. ST7F2F was keen to check her understanding and did so through her participation, adding detail to the sentence. She then asked if her sentence was correct, but did not receive feedback. The rise in ST1F2F's intonation shows her enthusiasm for the task, as she explained to her peers what she meant in turns 3 and 5.

In this Episode, scaffolding took many forms: correction of the verb tense in the translation, as in turn 10; translation; answering questions, such as confirmation checks, and working together to form a sentence. It is clear that the tasks had broadened the students' knowledge, as they had learned new words through completing them with her peers.

#### EPISODE 4

- |    |         |  |
|----|---------|--|
| 1  | ST9F2F  | <i>these are two issues as required in the task?</i>   |
| 2  | ST8F2F  | <i>(0.4) do you mean these are topics and under them details.</i>  |
| 3  | ST1F2F  | <i>yes, when you say your issue is the cafeteria you should complain and say details?</i>                          |
| 4  | ST10F2F | <i>I didn't get it = what is the complaint that I have to write</i>  |
| 5  | ST9F2F  | <i>two issues we have to make a complaint about , no place to sit in the break and we don't have enough break.</i> |
| 6  | ST10F2F | <i>ok these things we have to determine?</i>   |
| 7  | ST9F2F  | <i>yes.</i>  |
| 8  | ST10F2F | <i>(0.02) ok.</i>  |
| 9  | ST9F2F  | <i>((reads what she has written)) shall we write to take a break or rest?</i>                                      |
| 10 | ST8F2F  | <i>rest might be better.</i>   |
| 11 | ST1F2F  | <i>write a rest between lectures,</i>  |
| 12 | ST9F2F  | <i>to take rest between two lectures</i>   |
|    |         | <i>is this the way we write two?</i>   |
| 13 | ST8F2F  | <i>two means pair yes it is t-w-o.</i>   |

Also in this Episode, the learners demonstrated collaboration, since ST9F2F and ST1F2F explained to ST8F2F and ST10F2F the target structures behind writing a letter of complaint. This is because they were supposed to provide details on the subject of the complaint. Moreover, ST9F2F and ST1F2F explained the task instructions, clarifying that they were supposed to make a complaint about two issues, with ST9F2F giving examples. Although ST10F2F's contributions were limited, she asked for clarification



and scaffolding, as in turns 4 and 6. She wanted to understand how to make these types of complaint. Moreover, as ST9F2F scaffolded her peers, she also asked for assistance, as in turn 9, when looking for a suitable word and its spelling (see turn 12). Both ST1F2F and ST8F2F then provided her with answers.

In this Episode, different types of scaffolding were evident. For example, the learners scaffolded each other in choosing suitable words and the correct spelling. They collaborated to accomplish the task and had a discussion on the target structures, which should have been covered in the peer-explanation task. This gave them the opportunity to comprehend the target structures, in the event that they had failed to understand them from the teacher's and peer- explanations.

There were no long pauses. Concerning turn-taking, there were 108 turns, with five interruptions and three occurrences of overlapping. There were 27 adjacency pairs and one question did not receive a response. However, this failure to obtain a response did not seem to affect the smooth running of the conversation. These facts may illustrate that the students understood the purpose of the task and worked together to accomplish it.

The final step in analysing these Episodes was to consider how the corresponding actions were performed. It is clear from a comparison between the data collected during the peer-explanation, and the data collected during the output-practice tasks that the learners engaged with each other more during the output-practice than they did in the peer-explanation task. Moreover, they had more opportunities to initiate discourse, as they had to collaborate and complete the task. This would indicate that they had understood the task instructions, as all the students participated. To conclude, in this task, the learners helped each other in different ways, such as by translating, giving examples and collaborating to accomplish a task.

### **6.3.2 The Blended Learning (BL) Group**

The learners in this group completed the teacher's discussion cycle and the individual task in the classroom, while the peer-explanation and output-practice tasks were

undertaken online. Here, an analysis of the teacher's discussion and online tasks is presented.

### 6.3.2.1 The Teacher's Discussion

The analysis of the teacher's discussion is based on the conversation analysis framework mentioned above. The discussion with the students concerning writing a letter of complaint began by talking about how to write the main body of the letter, with this main body being written up as an example. A YouTube video was also viewed, explaining how to write a letter and this was followed up with a discussion of the video between the teacher and the whole class. The first part of this cycle, Episode 5, was chosen here to represent the pattern of teacher-student interaction in the classroom.

#### EPISODE 5

- |    |    |   |
|----|----|---|
| 1  | T  | now we move to something different from writing passages and questions using the past tense we will learn how to write a letter of complaint?<br>what is the meaning of complain in Arabic?   |
| 2  | SS | <i>Complain</i>   |
| 3  | T  | the way of teaching will be the same way we used to learn the past tense. we will discuss the target structure after that you will do an individual task and at home you will do two online tasks.<br>(0.5) can you give synonyms of complain   |
| 4  | SS | (0.06) sorry  |
| 5  | T  | I do not mean words that can be used in complaining I want words that have the same meaning of complain?<br>(0.10) for examples criticize   |
| 6  | SS | (0.05) .hhh saying not satisfied  |
| 7  | T  | ok this is right ((the teacher writes the synonyms on the board))   |
| 8  | SS | disagree.   |
| 9  | T  | all these words mean complain. so when you criticize something such as the service in a restaurant you can complain. in writing a letter of complaint there are many parts and the core one is the body? that has the great amount of information today we will start with the body. is it clear? |
| 10 | SS | Yes   |
| 11 | T  | in writing the letter of complaint you should be polite? this is because if you are polite the person you are addressing [will answer<br>will listen]   |
| 12 | SS |   |
| 13 | T  | yes will listen   |

The second step in the conversation analysis framework was to characterise the actions in this Episode. The students were confused in turn 4 and thus gave a wrong answer. In turn 5, the teacher provided the students with feedback on content to explain the meaning of a word. When the students understood what was required from them, they gave a responsive utterance in turn 6. The teacher then used a confirmation check in turn 9.

The third step involved packaging the actions to show how they were constructed or delivered. In the above Episode, the teacher drew upon the learners' previous knowledge; first asking them to translate the word 'complain' and then to give synonyms of the word, as a means of promoting their interaction and understanding. One of the students gave a wrong answer, perhaps failing to understand the meaning of the word 'synonym', because after the teacher explained it, the students gave correct answers. Based on their answers, the teacher then started explaining how to write the letter. This finding triangulates the observation, where the teacher delivered sustained speech, while also introducing the target structure (see section 6.2.2.2).

The fourth step required looking back over the Episode, in order to consider the effect of turn-taking. In this stage - the teacher's discussion on writing a letter of complaint - there were 30 turns with 14 adjacent pairs. There was also one instance of overlapping (turns 11 and 12). With regard to pauses, the longest silence was 10 seconds, where the teacher asked the students a question and they did not reply. The teacher then clarified the question for them. Other pauses were recorded as five and six seconds long, during which time the turns took place. This could indicate that the discussion flowed well between the teacher and the students, since there were no long pauses and only one unanswered question.

Finally, as with the F2F teacher's discussion, it is clear that the interaction between the teacher and learners in this Episode was likely to facilitate learning, as there was comprehensible input, initiated and managed by the teacher. There was also a kind of reflection through the students' answers to the teacher's questions. The teacher's concerns in the discussions included: (1) a pedagogical concern, as she allowed students to share ideas under her control (Johnson, 1995), (2) responses to the learners' ideas and interpretations, (3) responses to linguistic errors in the learners' utterances, (4) encouraging other learners to participate, and (5) maintaining a dual focus on meaning and form (Seedhouse, 1997; Seedhouse, 2004).

After this discussion, the students were given the opportunity to complete an individual task on the target structure for which they had received feedback. They then carried on working as a group on the peer-discussion task, followed by the output-practice task online.

### 6.3.2.2 *The Peer-explanation Task*

The students in this group conducted the peer-explanation online. There were seven groups working on the four online tasks. Screen-shots of the learners' explanations of the first topic are presented, with representations of what also took place in the second task. Here, the students were meant to explain to each other how to write sentences and wh-questions in the past, but were unable to carry out the task as requested.

With reference to the above, most of the students copied and pasted answers from the Internet and posted these as contributions. Moreover, instead of commenting on her peers' posts or giving further explanations, each student subsequently posted almost identical explanations of the same target structure. As a result, the learners failed to correct their peers' errors and ultimately explained things that were unnecessary, such as how to form yes/no questions, how to write negative sentences, and other rules, as can be seen in Figure 6.4, below.

**Examples:**

I visited my uncle last week-

We played football last night-

And write ask Wh-question: Wh + did +S+V+O

**Example:**

when did you study at home yesterday?

What did you draw in the art class yesterday?

Who did you come home last month?

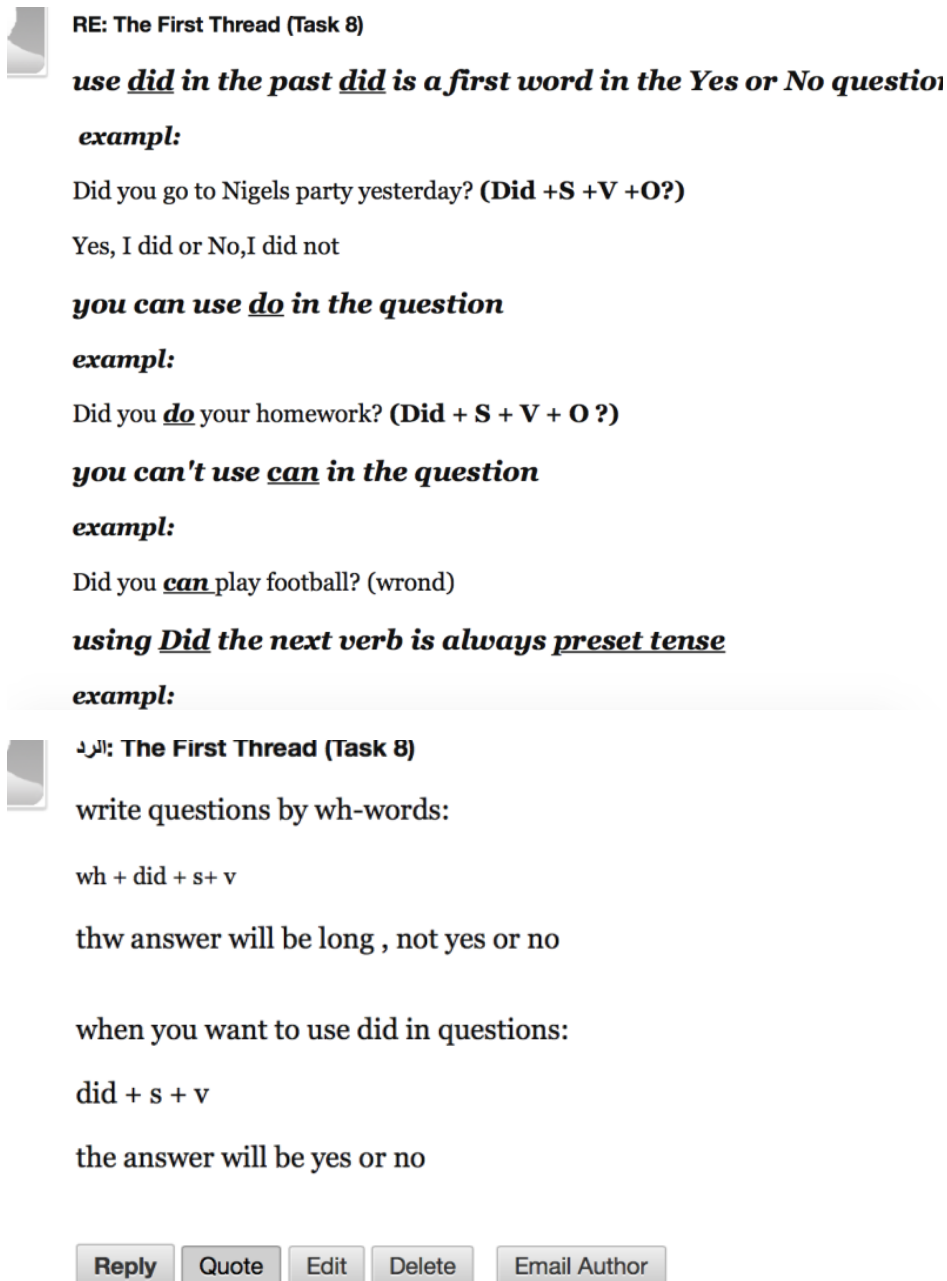
#### **الرد: The First Thread (Task 8)**

Write question by using wh-words .

Some examples :

What did you eat last night ?

When did she sleep last week?



**RE: The First Thread (Task 8)**

***use did in the past did is a first word in the Yes or No question***

***exampl:***

Did you go to Nigels party yesterday? (**Did +S +V +O?**)

Yes, I did or No,I did not

***you can use do in the question***

***exampl:***

Did you do your homework? (**Did + S + V + O ?**)

***you can't use can in the question***

***exampl:***

Did you can play football? (wron)

***using Did the next verb is always preset tense***

***exampl:***

الرد: **The First Thread (Task 8)**

write questions by wh-words:

wh + did + s+ v

thw answer will be long , not yes or no

when you want to use did in questions:

did + s + v

the answer will be yes or no

Reply Quote Edit Delete Email Author

**Figure 6.4 Screen-shots of a group's failure to discuss the formation of wh-questions**

In this group, one student made an error when forming a wh-question and her peers failed to correct it; they were merely copying and pasting similar and other rules that were not required from them.

### **6.3.2.3 Output-practice Tasks**

In the students' output-practice on the wiki, the learners performed better. However, their engagement was limited, as one student would write most of the answer and then the others would add a few words or amend a few errors, as in Figure 6.5, below.

**Task 15. Making complaints**

*Purpose:* This task aims to enable you to practice what you have learned about making complaints.

*Task:* Work with your group to write to the Dean a letter of complaint about things which have happened in the past at your college and which you do not like. The teacher promises you to pass on your real complaint to the Dean.

*Response:* Work with your peers to write a complaint to the Dean.

**6 February 2015**

**Dean of the Faculty of Dammam**

Dear Sir Ahmed,

Complaint of students from the University of Dammam having construction work in their building to the surrounding buildings, which significantly affects the absorption of the lectures, they said. They said they sorry to say this that the problem of the lack of air conditioning in Dammam continuous medallion, which led to the absence of some of the students about some of the lectures as a result of their inability endurance to sit for a long time within the closed halls.

← OK

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Thank you for reading and I am looking forward to resolve.

← OK

**Task 15. Making complaints**

*Purpose:* This task aims to enable you to practice what you have learned about making complaints.

*Task:* Work with your group to write to the Dean a letter of complaint about things which have happened in the past at your college and which you do not like. The teacher promises you to pass on your real complaint to the Dean.

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Thank you for reading and I am we're looking forward to resolve.

Yours faithfully,

← OK

**Figure 6.5 The students' output-practice on the wiki**

The majority of the students in this group posted few words in their contributions. However, in the second wiki, some of the students read their peers' contributions and amended them.

At the end of each group's explanations and the wiki, the teacher printed the students' posts and corrected their errors; with a copy of this corrected version being given to each participant. In addition, the teacher provided each group with brief feedback on their performance. Finally, with the whole class, she discussed common errors found among the groups.

#### ***6.3.2.4 Summary of the Conversation Analysis for Learner Engagement***

The learners in the F2F group engaged well with most of the intervention, as analysed above, demonstrating engagement with the teacher and collaboration amongst peers to produce output, although they did not engage in the explanation task as planned. On the other hand, the learners in the BL group were engaged with the teacher and received feedback on completion of the individual task. Nevertheless, some of the learners were unable to take part in the explanation and online output-practice tasks as anticipated.

## 6.4 Summary

The findings of this chapter reveal the amount of student engagement that took place within a limited observed time, as well as the quality of that engagement. The chapter commenced with quantitative data revealing how the learners' peer-engagement in the F2F and BL groups had increased by the second visit. The analysis of the learners' conversation revealed that the quality of their collaboration was, for the most part, effective for the F2F, with limited engagement in the BL group in the VLE. However, the explanation of the target structures in both groups was not so successful.

In the following chapter, a discussion and interpretation of the data from this and previous chapters is presented. Moreover, an in-depth analysis will be undertaken to address the research questions, aimed at investigating the effectiveness of LCF for communicative competence amongst FLLs.



## CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to propose a framework that can develop FLLs' communicative competence in a BL context, as compared with its adoption in an F2F environment. In its conceptual framework, the study examines the effectiveness of the proposed design in the development of three writing skills, form part of the FLLs' communicative competence. Mixed methods were adopted to explore the intervention from different perspectives. This chapter therefore discusses the findings of the empirical data presented in Chapters Four to Six. These findings are summarised in the following Table.

**Table 7.1 Summary of the key study findings**

<p><b><i>The First Research Question: How does the adapted LCF design affect FLLs' skills pertaining to grammatical and sociolinguistic competences in writing, in F2F and BL environments, and in comparison to a non-LCF group?</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The learners in the F2F, BL and control groups demonstrated development of their writing sub-skills with a medium effect size score, based on Cole's (2013) assumption of effect size.</li> <li>• The learners in both the F2F and BL groups outdid the learners in the control group in using the past tense in description and writing a letter of complaint, with a medium-large effect size score.</li> <li>• The learners in the BL group outdid the learners in the control and F2F groups in forming wh-questions, with a medium effect size score.</li> <li>• The learners in the F2F and BL groups were almost equal in their performance in using the past tense for description and writing a letter of complaint.</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>The Second Research Question: How do the learners perceive and engage with the language and tasks designed, using the adapted LCF?</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of the interviewees viewed the intervention positively. They claimed it was interesting and developed their skills, confidence and autonomy.</li> <li>• The students in the F2F and BL groups enjoyed discussing the target structures with their teacher, instead of receiving direct instruction. They also appreciated her role in scaffolding them.</li> <li>• A few of the students in the F2F group preferred having discussions with</li> </ul>

their teacher to discussing points with their peers.

- Some of the students in both groups considered the peer explanation task as a chance to understand any target structures they had failed to understand through the teacher's discussion.
- In the F2F group, some of the learners failed to engage with their peers when explaining target structures.
- In the F2F group, the learners collaborated with their peers to accomplish the tasks.
- In the BL group, the learners did not collaborate as expected with their peers, when trying to accomplish the tasks online.
- The learners in both groups enjoyed using their mobile phones, whether at the request of the teacher in the classroom, or amongst themselves outside class.
- In both groups, a few of the students did not enjoy the intervention. They disliked having to work with different students of varying levels of proficiency and non-collaborative members.

This discussion will deal in more depth with the two research questions presented above. The first part includes an interpretation of the quantitative data showing the learning gains from the pre- to the post-test. This is in response to the first research question, aimed at identifying the effectiveness of LCF for enhancing learners' writing sub-skills in communicative competence. The second part includes an interpretation of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews with the learners, the conversation analysis and the observation scheme. In this chapter, an attempt is made to tie all these data into a coherent whole, in order to examine how the learners perceived and engaged with LCF, while endeavouring to answer the second research question. The discussion here is related to the theoretical and empirical literature presented in Chapter Two, comparing and examining this study against the results of previous research.

At the end of this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative findings are drawn together to provide a complete picture of the effectiveness of adapting LCF for the development of learners' communicative competence in both F2F and BL contexts. It was ultimately difficult to match the six interviewees' perceptions and the engagement of the five students observed, to the full picture of the F2F and BL groups' achievement scores. Therefore, to make this comparison, the scores achieved by the interviewees and observed students were matched with their individual perceptions and engagement, as

illustrated in section 7.4 on how the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate the effectiveness of LCF.

## **7.2 The Pre- and Post-tests**

LCF was used in this study to develop FLLs' writing skills; these forming part of their communicative competence in BL and F2F contexts. The development in the learners' skills was measured by testing the learners before and after the intervention and comparing their scores with those of a control group.

In the literature, LCF has been used to design blended courses in a range of subjects and this has proved effective, as reviewed in Chapter Two. However, previous research has paid limited attention to investigating the effects of LCF on FLLs. Furthermore, there is a dearth of studies comparing the effectiveness of LCF in BL and F2F environments. Thus, this study appeared to be the right route towards uncovering the possible effects of designing an intervention using LCF on learners' writing skills in BL and F2F environments. In discussing the current study findings, a comparison is made with studies that implement LCF in developing skills in English language and other subjects.

The following sections discuss the impact of LCF on learners' skills in the F2F and BL groups compared to a control group. There are two main sections: the first contrasting the pre- and post-tests results in the experimental and control groups and the second, examining the differences between each of the experimental groups and the control group.

### **7.2.1 Comparing the Pre- and Post-test Results of the Experimental and Control Groups**

The findings, derived from a comparison between the pre- and post-test scores for the research groups using the Wilcoxon Test, show that the learners in both the experimental and control groups improved their results in the post-test for the three writing sub-skills: asking wh-questions, using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint (see section 4.4). This would indicate that the learners in the three groups gained knowledge and their writing skills developed, regardless of the teaching method implemented or the limited duration of intervention, namely six weeks for the

experimental groups and four weeks for the control group (this limitation is discussed in section 8.6).

The results were as expected, to the extent that the exposure of the learners in the experimental and control groups to a teaching pedagogy, whether LCF or a more traditional method, was found to have a positive impact on their writing skills. In the literature, the learners in many studies gained knowledge and improved their pre-test scores in post-tests, after receiving information, whether in experimental or control groups. This has even proved to be the case where the information is delivered in a traditional way, which may not have suited all learning styles, or been especially interesting to the students in question (Shehadeh, 2011; Adas & Bakir, 2013; Khatib & Meihami, 2015; Shafiee, Koosha, & Afghari, 2015). However, the experimental interventions were expected to be more effective than a traditional approach in developing learners' writing skills, particularly where collaborative teaching approaches and technology were adopted, as discussed below.

### **7.2.2 Comparing the Post-test Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups**

LCF was effective in developing the F2F and BL groups' skills in using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint, but was effective only in the BL group for the formation of wh-questions. The similarity in the results achieved by the F2F and BL groups in using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint can be explained by them both having opportunities in the intervention to learn the same target structure although in different ways. These opportunities for practicing such writing skills in different tasks, whether discussing them with a teacher, explaining them to peers, or collaborating to produce output, represent a means of acquiring knowledge and skills development (Mesh, 2010; Elgort, 2011; Neo et al., 2013). This variability in the presentation of the target structure can suit different learning styles. It can also offer learners the opportunity to learn the target structure in one of the intervention cycles, even if they are unable to absorb it in another. For example, they may not have understood the teacher's explanation, as it was in English. However, as the interviewees confirmed, they may have been able to understand explanations provided by their peers in Arabic during the peer-explanation tasks. One of the several ways of learning in this intervention involves collaboration. The development in the learners in the experimental

groups supports Shehadeh's (2011) finding that students who learn collaboratively can achieve significant results, as compared with those who learn individually through general writing development.

Moreover, when the learners in the BL group failed to carry out the tasks as expected, they may still have absorbed the target structures through the teacher's discussion and feedback on the individual task, or in peer-explanations outside the classroom, but not on Blackboard. Therefore, in the experimental groups, even though some of the students failed to engage in all the tasks, the target structure was presented many times in different ways and this enhanced understanding. Thus, it may be suggested that LCF can have a similar impact on learners' skills in using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint, whether the peer-explanation and output-practice tasks take place online or in the classroom.

The differences between the F2F and BL groups in forming wh-questions could perhaps be explained by the learners in the BL group having more time to understand the structure of wh-questions and thereby being able to focus more than the F2F group on their wording. These students outdid those who had experienced a more traditional teaching method in the control group, as already found in many other studies (Al-Jarf, 2004; Alqahtani, 2010). This is due to the fact that BL combines the benefits of an F2F environment with the presence of a teacher and peers, as well as the advantages of e-learning. For example, the students in the current study had the opportunity to rewind the YouTube video used in the peer-explanation task, so that they could try and understand the content of the video. Their learning was then enhanced by the availability and flexibility of asynchronous communication tasks, which could be undertaken anytime and from anywhere (Schuetze, 2008; Van Schaik et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the learners in the control group in the present study had just one opportunity to learn the target structures through the teacher's explanation. This meant that if they missed an opportunity to understand the target structure in the classroom, they would not necessarily have another opportunity to learn and practice it. This might be a reason for their low performance in the post-test.

Nevertheless, this positive effect of using LCF in developing learners' skills in a BL group contradicts Heinze et al. (2007), who reported that the adoption of LCF in a BL environment produced insignificant results. However, in the above study, the students did not reflect on their learning. Moreover, LCF did not prove to be ideal for them, as its success largely depends on the willingness of the teacher and learners to participate in dialogue. However, in Heinze et al.'s study, none of the participants were willing to participate. This is in contrast to the current study, where most of the participants were willing to take part and learn, probably due to their positive attitude towards learning English. It is also in contrast to Ekembe's (2014) conclusion, whereby the learners studied grammatical rules through interactive tasks led by the teacher. They were provided with real-life contexts and required to negotiate meaning. However, in a post-test, they failed to improve on their pre-test results. The absence of a positive impact of collaboration in Ekembe's (2014) study would suggest a variety of reasons, such as a large class size, the presence of non-collaborative group members, and the test being focused on retention rather than on communicative ability, as the tasks involved the learners' ability to exchange knowledge, rather than linguistic ability.

In conclusion, the findings presented here suggest the importance of including different types of tasks in a lesson, in order to develop learners' competence, particularly with regard to sub-skills in writing. The components described comprise the teacher's role in discussing target structures and scaffolding learners; peer-scaffolding, and the use of different mediating artefacts, particularly e-learning resources. To gain an in-depth view of the effectiveness of each of these components from the learners' perspective, there follows a discussion of the interviews, observations and conversation analysis findings.

### **7.3 The Learners' Perceptions and Engagement with the Tasks and Language**

In this part of the chapter, the interview, observation scheme and conversation analysis findings are discussed in response to the second research question, which investigates how the learners perceived and engaged with the language and tasks in the intervention. The purpose of this is to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' views and approaches to engagement. It was expected that everything the F2F and BL groups were asked to do would affect their perceptions, as well as their learning process (Lobaton, 2011) in some way. The discussion starts here with a general

overview, followed by more detailed exploration, based on the different types of engagement facilitated by the intervention.

As mentioned previously (see Chapter 2), no prior research was found on perceptions of LCF in an F2F learning environment; these have rather been investigated on BL courses (Mesh, 2010; Elgort, 2011; Neo et al., 2013). Therefore, the results of the BL group are discussed in relation to other BL studies applying LCF, while the F2F results are discussed in relation to studies that examine learners' perceptions of technology use in language learning and their engagement with the tasks and language (Watanabe & Swain, 2008; Yu & Lee, 2016).

There are several possible reasons why four out of the six interviewees in the F2F and BL groups had positive perceptions of the design and confirmed that their writing sub-skills had benefited from the intervention. These explanations could be related to Ainley et al.'s (2006) conditions for task quality (see section 2.3.4.1 for more details). Firstly, the purposefulness of the tasks would mean that the learners should be able to produce meaningful output. The learners in this study were in fact satisfied with their learning experience, as the tasks seemed to be useful and interesting, perhaps because they were related to real-life situations. The learners were thus motivated to engage with them (Mesh, 2010; Neo et al., 2013). It would therefore seem that since the learners were interested, they could pay attention and focus on the task at hand, as well as on the explanations provided by the teacher and peers. Secondly, this could relate to Ainley et al.'s (2006) assertion that 'utility' is another condition of task quality. The learners' positive perceptions of the intervention included the fact that through interaction with their teacher and peers, they would be active, pay attention, focus on the task and could expect to contribute. Their contributions would involve, for example, evaluating, commenting on the contributions of others, or requesting clarification. In this way the learners actively constructed their knowledge, scaffolded others and were scaffolded themselves. In this case, therefore, they should not only understand the task, but also learn from how it was accomplished.

The discussion below concerns four different areas: the teacher's role, peer explanation tasks, peer-output practice tasks, and mediating artefacts and tasks.

### 7.3.1 The Learners' Perceptions of the Teacher's Role

In this intervention, the teacher had two definite roles. The first was to discuss the target structures with the learners in the first cycle of LCF. The teacher started the discussion of the target structure by asking the learners a question. She then corrected their answers or gave more details. This type of asking, answering and giving more information was adopted in this cycle, so that there was discussion with the learners, instead of the target structures merely being dictated to them (see section 3.10.1).

In an analysis of teacher-learner conversation in the teacher's discussion task for the F2F and BL groups, the number of turns taken and the length of pauses in the discussion indicated that the discussion flowed well and the learners engaged with their teacher. There were an almost equal number of turns taken by the teacher and the students, implying negotiation between them (Lörscher, 1986; Walsh, 2006). Furthermore, the pauses in the discussion lasted for 2-5 seconds, which may be considered normal and acceptable, given that the teacher and students are non-native English speakers (Pica, et al., 1996) and consequently less comfortable with FL production. In addition, the teacher's waiting time for the students to respond and think was a means of increasing their engagement (Walsh & Li, 2013).

It would seem feasible that the learners' positive perceptions of the teacher's role in both experimental groups, when discussing the target structures with them, reveal an appreciation of this as an introductory discussion of their writing skills. This is in contrast to them merely listening to the teacher's explanation, without actively participating in the construction of their own knowledge (Elgort, 2011). It is important for promoting the students' learning perceptions and engagement, as many researchers assert (Goldenberg, 1992; Perie et al., 2005). It also appears to have given the learners space to negotiate with their teacher and a chance to reflect on their learning. In addition, it was found to increase their confidence and encouraged them towards greater independence in their learning, without waiting for their teacher to give direct instruction.

In the teacher's discussion, the amount of teacher talk should be reduced, giving the learners an opportunity to speak, interact and thus practice the TL (Allwright, 1984).



This resembles the teacher's role in the current study, confirmed by the observation and conversation analysis findings. The teacher should ask questions to elicit responses from the students and encourage communication, as emphasised by Rido et al., (2014). It would justify the teacher's control over the text and the tasks in the teacher's discussion cycle for both groups, which was less evident than joint teacher-student control.

The second role of the teacher in the intervention involved scaffolding the learners during the tasks, whether in the classroom or online and providing them with feedback after task completion. This scaffolding and receipt of feedback from the teacher while performing the tasks facilitated the students understanding of the target structure, as Neo et al. (2013) confirm. However, there were variations in the way the teacher scaffolded the learners in the two groups throughout the intervention cycles. For the BL group, the completion of the task took place one week after commencement, at the beginning of the next classroom session. The provision of feedback in the classroom may correspond to the learners' preference for the teacher's presence in the classroom and for technology use to communicate with their peers and the teacher in some cases (Neo et al., 2013).

It is important to note the teacher's role when planning interaction, providing necessary background information, while also encouraging and scaffolding learners to accomplish individual and collaborative tasks, as found in many previous studies (Ohta, 1995; Van Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Kang & Im, 2013). The students in the F2F and BL groups appreciated the teacher scaffolding them throughout the intervention, as a means of assisting them in reaching their potential ZPD (Ohta, 1995; Van Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Abdullah et al., 2013). This role appeared to have a positive impact on their confidence and satisfaction with the intervention, as they were active in the learning process and played a greater part in their own knowledge construction (Neo et al., 2013). The teacher's scaffolding of the learners through peer-explanation and output practice consequently had an impact, as it helped develop their communicative competence in writing – which has already been stated in the literature (Brooks, 1992; Van Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Wang, 2013). The teacher's role in relation to the learning tasks moved from one of full control over the process, to one of assistance. The teacher's discussion and her use of mediating artefacts, such as PowerPoint and

YouTube, thus promoted engagement from the learners with their teacher to build on previous knowledge.

Saaty (2015) emphasised the need for an FL teacher to consider students' various learning styles before scaffolding them. Lessons would then be designed so that they could practice their skills individually and collaboratively, while also asking their teacher questions about the work. In the current intervention, various types of task were set for the learners, in respect of their learning styles. For example, several students considered the teacher's discussion to be more effective than the peer-explanation. They especially favoured their private discussions with the teacher, when the class was divided into small groups, with the teacher scaffolding them individually (Fotouhi-Ghazvini, et al., 2011; Kang & Im, 2013; Neo et al., 2013). This was where the learners in question were too shy to interact and afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers.

It is important for the teacher to adopt a definite role in controlling the learning process and the learners' interaction in the teamwork, to ensure its effectiveness (Hasan, 2006). In the current study, the above findings for the teacher's role in discussing and scaffolding the learners are consistent with LCF design, whereby the teacher needs to establish a clear role from the start of implementation; particularly in terms of monitoring and facilitating group work.

It was essential to observe the types of utterance made by the students, in order to analyse their collaboration in the teacher's discussion cycle. Kaşlioğlu (2003) found comments to be the most frequently coded type of utterance from students, in response to meaning-making tasks and in the current intervention, meaning-making tasks were included in the teacher's discussion cycle. The participants in the F2F and BL groups were keen to evaluate each other's work, adding 'comments' to this effect. However, this does not align with Hanjani and Li (2014), who found 'correction' to be the most frequent type of scaffolding in their study. It would indicate that the current learners preferred to initiate 'repair' for their peers, giving them the chance to repair themselves (Walsh, 2006). Such collaboration can help learners develop their skills and reach their potential ZPD. As assistance, it could consequently help learners understand and internalise grammar rules.

The above findings on the teacher's role in discussing and scaffolding the learners illustrate Vygotsky's (1986) theory of ZPD, which asserts that cognitive development takes place through learners' interaction with their teacher. The latter will use language and other tools to scaffold learners and ideally enable them to reach their potential ZPD, so that they can perform a new task independently (Thompson, 2012; Hanjani & Li, 2014). This interaction with the teacher is considered to be more effective than direct instruction (Vygotsky, 1986). However, such support can also be provided by peers, as in the current intervention (Van Compernelle & Williams, 2012; Kang & Im, 2013), where the learners scaffolded each other in two different types of task, discussed below.

### **7.3.2 The Learners' Perceptions of and Engagement with the Peer-explanation Tasks**

The F2F and BL groups were assigned two peer-explanation tasks. In the F2F group, these were carried out in the classroom and with the BL group, they were carried out online. Although the participants had six days to complete the task on Blackboard, before receiving feedback from the teacher, the Blackboard records showed that most of them only completed the tasks on the last day of this allocated time. To discuss the learners' perceptions and engagement in the peer-explanation tasks, the interview findings and conversation analysis are drawn together here.

The peer-explanation tasks were considered by some interviewees in both groups as a useful alternative for understanding the target structure explained by the teacher. The reason for this was that they had mainly communicated via their L1 in this task and were therefore able to help each other (Antón & Dicamilla, 1999; Hung, 2012), given that their English level did not permit them to understand all the target structures from the outset, when their teacher explained them in English. Research has shown that the use of L1 in FL learning can reduce classroom shock, relieve the stress of the FL classroom and allow learners to compare L1 and TL rules. This is confirmed by many researchers (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Hung, 2012; Alamir, 2015) and may be what happened here.

Carrying out peer-discussion tasks can foster learners' awareness of different structures being used in a range of contexts (Shihara, 2007). In Shihara (2007), tasks were

initiated through examples, in order to consolidate information about the target structure. This resembles the peer-explanation task of writing a letter of complaint in the current study. It would appear that the peer-explanation tasks helped direct the learners' attention to the target structures, as this is a positive feature of the awareness-raising approach adopted for these tasks (Mahvelati & Mukundan, 2012). The students working on this type of task analyse the contextual factors with their peers and then receive explicit feedback from their teacher, with subsequent output practice. It would suggest that raising learners' awareness can improve their understanding of the target structures.

Peer-explanation is referred to in the literature as 'languaging' at an abstract level (Swain, 2006; Swain et al., 2015). The learners' positive perception of peer-explanation may be explained as the potential enhancement of their understanding through them scaffolding each other in activities, using their L1 or other techniques, such as repetition and elaboration (Sah, 2014). Languaging enables learners to mediate the new knowledge acquired, with previous knowledge. In this way, learners can reshape their understanding and enhance their thinking skills, as they practice and apply the new knowledge in tasks and everyday life (Lapkin et al., 2010).

On the other hand, the findings from the interview and conversation analysis conducted with the F2F group learners engaged in the peer-explanation task demonstrate that not all the students were engaged in the task as expected. This might have been due to this being the first occasion for them to sit as a group, explaining a target structure to each other. There were some long pauses, indicating that the learners may have been confused about the task (Heap, 1992). Another possibility is that some of the students rejected languaging (Swain et al., 2015), as they were accustomed to the teacher giving them all the information, for a fairly mechanical application.

In the BL group, the lack of engagement took a different form. Here, the students tended to copy and paste answers without explanation or peer-correction. A possible explanation for this behaviour in the online peer-explanation task was its complexity, as the students were not only called upon to post their online contributions, but also to scaffold their peers, share ideas, collaborate and perform other types of activity, while also constructing their own knowledge. This complexity echoes tasks designed by Delialioglu (2012) and Nor et al. (2012). However, the learners in the above-mentioned

studies were fully engaged in active learning; discussing their needs as well as exploring and collaborating. The limited timeframe of the current research could be a further reason for learners expressing a desire to try out the online environment, as there had not been enough time for them to receive training and they had only undertaken two peer-explanation tasks, whereas the learners in Nor et al.'s (2012) study were more familiar with using a computer and the Internet in this way.

In the current study, it would seem that it was not only difficult for the learners in the BL group to discuss the target structures, but also problematic for them to enter into this discussion online. Therefore, the development in their writing skills cannot be explained as the result of using online tools. A similar situation is found in Mesh (2010), suggesting that an analysis of learners' online contributions will not necessarily mirror their perceptions.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that not all the students performed this task appropriately, their engagement with their teacher, discussion in F2F meetings outside the classroom and the feedback delivered to them by their teacher after the individual and collaborative tasks had been completed, seems to have enabled them to grasp the relevant target structures.

Next, the learners' perceptions of and engagement in the output-practice tasks are discussed. It was expected that raising the learners' awareness in peer-explanation tasks, through talking about the language, would improve their production in the output-practice tasks (Svalberg, 2005).

### **7.3.3 The Learners' Perceptions and Engagement in the Peer-output Practice Tasks**

The F2F and BL groups were assigned peer-output practice tasks. For the F2F group, these were undertaken in the classroom, while for the BL group, they were carried out online and the participants had six days to complete the task on Blackboard, before receiving the teacher's feedback in the classroom at the beginning of the next session.

Collaboration to produce output was favoured by two thirds of the students in the F2F

group, who considered it to be one of the most demonstrably effective aspects of the intervention. They therefore perceived the intervention positively, engaging in the tasks and successfully completing them. It indicated that these students had no problem understanding the instructions during their participation. Like the students in Lin and Samuel (2013) and Hanjani and Li (2014), they helped each other in different ways, such as by translating, giving examples and collaborating on the task. This suggests that through collaboration, the students expended less time and effort, but gained more benefit from peer-support, as also found by Rahimi and Yadollahi (2015). Other researchers (Ohta, 1995; Jafari, 2012; Thompson, 2012; Hanjani & Li, 2014; Dobao, 2016) have also demonstrated that collaboration helps enhance students' understanding, correct their misconceptions and broaden their knowledge and vocabulary, as they acquire new and more detailed information and can perhaps reach their potential ZPD (Abdullah, et al., 2013).

The students' engagement with the tasks and the L2 took different forms, which may be classified as social, affective and cognitive (Svalberg, 2009). They were clearly engaged socially, since they interacted with fellow group members by, for example, asking, correcting, suggesting and answering questions. They also seemed to be affectively engaged, given their willingness to interact with and help others. Finally, they proved to be cognitively engaged, as they paid attention to the learning process and showed evidence of learning in their post-test scores. The three types of engagement are clear in the case of participants ST1F2F, ST8F2F, ST9F2F and ST10F2F, who actively engaged with the tasks. For example, they focused on explaining the task instructions to their fellow group members, giving examples and displaying a willingness to collaborate. Conversely, social and affective engagement was limited in the case of ST7F2F, who was silent most of the time, but keen to check her understanding through questions to confirm her comprehension. Therefore, she may have been cognitively engaged. This contrasts with Dobao's (2016) finding that the silent learner does not engage in languaging, fails to collaborate with peers and consequently does not learn. It indicates that engagement does not necessarily have to be direct or verbal, because even if students fail to engage with their peers, they can still be active listeners and demonstrate this in a test, or else be alert and focused (Svalberg & Askham, 2014), as was the case in the present study.

The positive perceptions of some of the interviewees in the BL group, with regard to their online interaction in the output-practice tasks - particularly the wiki in the present study - was probably due to their enjoyment of using this tool. This contrasts with the perceptions of some of the students with regard to the online discussion. Wikis help promote learners' collaborative and cooperative skills through the presentation of authentic tasks (Kovacic et al., 2007; Aydın & Yıldız, 2014). It would seem that online collaboration in the peer-output tasks helped these particular Saudi students to better understand the target structures being taught and to develop their writing skills. They felt free to express their opinions and comment on the work of others. As a result, meaningful interaction with peers seems to have been elicited, leading to language development (Alahmadi, 2009; Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Alshumaimeri, 2011; Al-Ammary, 2013; Neo et al., 2013).

The e-tivities included in the intervention may have motivated some students to collaborate and perform the output-practice tasks, as has already been found in the literature (Nie et al., 2012; Rogerson-Revell, 2015). These activities clarified the purpose of each task for the learners and gave them a reason to undertake it, which appeared to enhance the learners' satisfaction, as it helped them focus on what they were supposed to learn and measured their learning development (Elgort, 2011). Finally, the task instructions facilitated the learners' performance and further motivated them to collaborate.

In the current study, two students in the F2F group and two from the BL group failed to collaborate with their peers, showing a preference for working individually. There are various possible reasons for this. For example, the learners in question may have felt that they could perform better by learning directly from the teacher and working alone, as found by Elola and Oskoz (2010) and Rahimi and Yadollahi (2015). Similar to other studies (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Alamir, 2015), the above-mentioned students did not believe that they could learn from their peers, whereas they trusted their teacher to have a satisfactory impact on their linguistic accuracy, as was the case in the present study.

Another possible explanation could be related to specific characteristics of the learners and their level of English language proficiency. This would point to heterogeneity

across group members, which could have had a negative effect on their knowledge construction and may even have restricted their activity in the group (Fredriksson, 2015; Khatib & Meihami, 2015). It is moreover in accordance with earlier findings by Watanabe and Swain (2008), which show how perceptions of a partner's level of proficiency will determine the success of the collaboration, namely that acceptance leads to success, but a failure or refusal to acknowledge a collaborative partner's abilities can be a reason for rejection of the activity. However, this finding on the negative effect of mixed ability within groups is in contrast to Irina's (2011) observation that such heterogeneity does not affect performance and in fact, leads to faster analysis among learners. It could ultimately indicate that the students were affected in different ways by the mixed-ability environment.

The negative view of collaboration expressed by two students in the F2F and BL groups and their preference for individual learning can be explained by peer-relationships. The data revealed that the attributes of those peers who were unwilling to collaborate affected their perceptions of the intervention, especially the peer-explanation and output-practice tasks. Some students were unable to engage with their fellow group members, because they did not know them before taking the intervention, or because they were shy and unaccustomed to sharing their knowledge with others. This indicates that although the icebreaker activities were carried out with everyone in the two groups, there were a few group members who did not benefit from them. It is compatible with earlier studies, where familiarity was found to impact the quality of peer-feedback. In the groups where the members were already friends, there was more productive dialogue, facilitating understanding of the learning material for those engaging in it, in comparison with peers who did not know each other (Barron, 2003; Svalberg & Askham, 2014; Yu & Lee, 2016). It would confirm Salmon (2004), who points out that learners need to get to know and trust each other before starting to exchange information.

In the BL group, there would seem to be an absence of authentic collaboration between most of the learners, as they failed to co-author the wiki. They participated merely to fulfil their obligation, even to the point of only contributing at the last minute, without considering real collaboration with fellow group members. This meant that they could not collaborate as planned. Therefore, as in other studies, not all the students



participated fully in their groups (Bradley et al., 2010; Alyousef & Picard, 2011; Elgort, 2011). The opportunity was consequently lost for such students to benefit from their peers' input, or from the extra time given to them to accomplish the tasks, as compared to the F2F group. Moreover, the two interviewees in the BL group, who had negative perceptions of the online tasks, viewed them merely as extra work to do at home. This is consistent with Mesh's (2010) findings, indicating that increased workload can reduce students' satisfaction.

Comparing the learners' collaboration in the peer-output practice in the F2F group with that of the BL group, it is clear that the F2F learners found collaboration in the output-practice tasks to be more beneficial for developing their writing skills. It would imply that the learners in the F2F context had a positive attitude to working with peers to produce output, which explained their cognitive, social and affective engagement. However, the students in the online context were unwilling to engage with their peers. As Heinze et al. (2007) affirm, LCF in the BL context works best with the 'ideal type of student', who is ready to collaborate (p.116). Moreover, it may be assumed that collaboration in real time had a positive impact on the F2F learners, as it was difficult to achieve this type of collaboration in the BL group, since it required advanced technology that was not available on UOK's Blackboard. In real-time tasks, the learners can see each other and interact directly and spontaneously. Moreover, physical presence could be another factor, whereby facial expressions and body language positively impact the capacity to understand others.

Comparing the learners' collaboration in the peer-explanation and output-practice tasks, it is clear that the learners in both the F2F and BL groups collaborated more in the latter. This is probably due to their previous learning experience, as they were unaccustomed to explaining structures to each other. Another possible explanation is that the explanation tasks were not clear for the learners. Whatever the reason, however, despite basing the design on principles of e-tivities (Salmon, 2004), the tasks failed to motivate the learners. This may suggest that e-tivities are more suitable for output-practice than for peer-explanation tasks. On the other hand, the wiki was popular for the learners, as it required collaboration to produce an outcome, either in the form of a letter or passage, while the discussion board encouraged individual output. The following

section discusses learners' perceptions of using different mediating artefacts in the intervention.

#### **7.3.4 The Learners' Perceptions of and Engagement with the Mediating Artefacts and Tasks**

The F2F and BL groups interacted similarly with the same mediating artefacts and tasks, except for the peer-explanation and output tasks, which were carried out online by the learners in the BL group. The two groups were presented with the same PowerPoint presentation, podcast and YouTube videos, and were also permitted to use their mobile phones. The discussion of the learners' engagement with the mediating artefacts and the tasks in the intervention is arranged below around their perceptions of the individual tasks; the practice opportunities offered; their use of Arabic in teamwork; the duration of the intervention, and the use of technology and mobile phones. Furthermore, this part of the chapter also discusses the effect of student engagement on their confidence and autonomy.

The individual task had a positive impact on all the learners in the F2F and BL groups, apart from one. Most of the learners considered the individual tasks assigned after the discussion with the teacher as an opportunity to self-assess what had been discussed. Moreover, the learners in the BL group perceived this task positively, due to the fact it was the only one undertaken in the classroom, with immediate feedback being given. A possible explanation is that the individual task gave the learners an opportunity to develop target structures using their own personal style, with prompt one-to-one feedback, if required.

The learners in both groups appreciated the practice opportunities offered in the intervention. Like any other FLLs, they needed opportunities to practice the FL to reinforce what had been learned (Khan & Itoo, 2012). Moreover, the learners appreciated the license to use their L1 in peer-explanation and output tasks. In the F2F group, the learners used their L1 for oral classroom communication, while completing the tasks, but the learners in the BL group did not use their L1 on Blackboard. This may have been because they considered Blackboard to be an official channel for learning English. However, the BL learners, like the learners in the F2F group, did speak Arabic

in F2F encounters and in less formal communication via WhatsApp, the mobile phone application. This use of a mobile device is in line with Kukulska-Hulme's (2010) learner-driven activity model, in which the learners initiated the use of WhatsApp without it being solicited from them.

The learners claimed that the use of Arabic made it easier for them to understand the target structures being taught; reducing classroom shock, relieving the stress of the FL classroom, and allowing them to compare L1 rules with those of the TL, as also found by Brooks-Lewis (2009). The learners claimed that L1 use helped them scaffold each other, while also ensuring that all the students in the group could understand and express this understanding (Antón & Dicamilla, 1999). The above finding confirms Pennington's (1999) conclusion that the planned use of L1 in learning an FL can increase student participation. It therefore follows that the use of L1 in collaboration may play an effective role in developing learners' cognitive and social engagement. It implies a sociocultural perspective, where L1 is considered as a tool for mediating cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1986; Antón & Dicamilla, 1999; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

However, insufficient time allocated to tasks could be considered a factor in the learners' dissatisfaction with the intervention. In the current study, most of the students in the F2F group were unhappy with the fact that lecture time was so limited. For instance, the time spent in the classroom was one hour a week and in this one-hour session, two to three tasks were carried out. This meant that the average time for each task was between 10 and 16 minutes, during which the learners discussed a target structure, or collaborated and received feedback from the teacher. The result indicates that the F2F group students were unhappy with the time allocated and this mirrors Mesh's (2010) findings that one of the issues negatively affecting students' satisfaction is a lack of time allowed for discussion. However, only a few students were unhappy with this aspect in the BL group, since they potentially had more time to watch the video clips, read and think about the task, but actually completed it on the last day of the time limit.

Some have argued that technology use, whether in F2F or BL environments, can have a positive impact on learners' writing skills (Chiu, et al., 2013; Hidayanto & Setyady,

2014). The use of media, particularly YouTube videos and the iterative nature of the intervention were other factors in the learners acquiring further details of the target structures. The use of technology actually played a role in encouraging peer-output practice and may have helped expand the learners' vocabulary (Kovacic et al., 2007; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2015). It would suggest that combining technology with task design principles, as well as using relevant topics in tasks, inspires communication between students (Lee, 2002; Elgort, 2011; Li, 2013; Ioannou, Brown, & Artino, 2015). As a result, enabling learners to become more active in the learning process has greater potential to increase their confidence.

Studies have found technology use in language teaching to enhance FLLs' autonomy and confidence (Bleimann, 2004; Kessler, 2009; Snodin, 2013; Al Shlowiy, 2014). Opportunities for discussion with teachers and peers, as well as skills practice can increase autonomy and confidence amongst students, especially Saudi students (see sections 5.4.1.3 and 5.5.1.2). For instance, the students in the BL group were able to exercise a degree of autonomy, as they replayed and paused the YouTube video as required. Moreover, it may be argued that different aspects of the current intervention played a role in developing the learners' confidence. The topics covered in the tasks pertained to situations from everyday life, using an approach that identified roles for the teacher and students, thus enabling the learners to construct their knowledge. They actually reported this and demonstrated it in their post-test results.

Mobility in language learning has the potential to enable students to personalise their collaborative learning and increase their social interaction by discussing any issues they face in the learning process; for example, through the use of a mobile phone application (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Troussas, et al., 2014). The students' use of a WhatsApp application also confirms Rambe and Bere's (2013) finding that this tool can offer students the possibility to develop their personal skills, as they become more confident about engaging in language discussion. In the present intervention, the learners felt free to benefit from their mobile phones and appreciated the fact that they were trusted to use them in the classroom. Mobile phones also offer the possibility of extending learning outside the classroom setting (Kukulska-Hulme, 2013). Moreover, the use of translation 'apps' seemed to be advantageous for the learners and led to positive perceptions of the use of mobile phones in learning and in the intervention overall, as

also found by Fazeena et al. (2012); Viberg and Grönlund (2013); Abu-Ghararah (2015), and Nalliveetil and Alenazi (2016).

On the other hand, some technology-related factors may have had a negative impact on students' perceptions in the BL group. Two interviewees, who regarded the intervention positively, claimed that some of their fellow group members did not have Internet access at home. Such students may have been anxious about using a computer, especially Blackboard, due to their fear of facing technical problems and a lack of self-confidence in their self-efficacy in this regard, because it was the first time they had encountered this tool. Moreover, they did not have 24-hour online technical support, even in college, because the help desk was only concerned with technical IT issues, rather than offering specific support for the VLE. These are barriers that could influence Saudi learners' use of an online learning environment (See also Alenezi, et al., 2010).

In previous sections of this chapter, the learners' perceptions of the intervention and engagement with the tasks, mediating artefacts and language were discussed in the light of existing literature and the research context. Next, these discussions are consolidated to build up a clear picture of the effectiveness of LCF from different angles. This is achieved by converging the quantitative and qualitative data.

#### **7.4 Outlining the Effectiveness of Laurillard's Conversational Framework (LCF) based on the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

To develop a clear picture of the effectiveness of LCF for learners, the objective findings for the learners' writing sub-skills and the subjective findings on their perceptions, engagement and conversations were drawn together. It would not have been a reliable result, if detailed qualitative findings from just a few participants were compared with the quantitative findings for all the participants in the F2F and BL groups. Therefore, it was essential to go back to the individual participants' test results, matching them with their perceptions and an analysis of their engagement. Tables 7.2 and 7.3, below, show the pre- and post-test scores for the three writing sub-skills, achieved by the interviewees and observed students. In an analysis of these scores, the learners who scored 2 or less in two sub-skills are considered as having a low level of proficiency. This is because a score of 2 in the scoring scales adapted for this study

indicates confusion and little understanding of the target structure. However, a score of 3 demonstrates understanding of the tasks, despite a certain number of errors (see Appendices 2, 3 and 4).

Through this discussion, various attributes are considered, namely (1) the learners' level of language proficiency, and (2) the willingness of fellow-group members to collaborate. Although educational background and the type of secondary school attended could have been a factor, given that the participants were from different school backgrounds (see Table 3.7 and section 3.9), the sample was too small to discern any pattern.

#### **7.4.1 The Face-to-face (F2F) Group**

Firstly, combining and contrasting the quantitative and qualitative findings for the F2F group revealed the perceptions and engagement of each participant interviewed and observed, in relation to their test scores and attributes. In comparing the interviews and observations with the development in the participants' post-test scores, it was noted that ST1F2F, ST2F2F, ST5F2F, ST6F2F, ST7F2F, ST9F2F and ST10F2F witnessed improvement in the three writing sub-skills, as they made progress in two skills (Table 7.2). It is important to note here that ST1F2F participated in the interview and was a member of the observed group.

**Table 7.2 The test results achieved by the F2F interview and observation participants**

The Participant	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Wh-questions	Past tense	Letter of complaint	Wh-questions	Past tense	Letter of complaint
ST1F2F (I) (O)	3	1	1	3	3	5
ST2F2F (I)	3	0	4	3	2	3
ST3F2F (I)	1	0	1	2	0	3
ST4F2F (I)	2	1	1	3	2	2
ST5F2F (I)	2	0	0	5	3	5
ST6F2F (I)	4	1	2	4	4	5
ST7F2F (O)	2	0	1	3	3	4
ST8F2F (O)	1	0	1	2	1	2
ST9F2F (O)	2	2	1	3	3	4
ST10F2F (O)	1	2	0	3	2	3

\* (I) refers to the participants in the interview

\* (O) refers to the participants in the observation

The three out of six interviewees who achieved high post-test scores perceived the intervention positively (ST1F2F, ST5F2F and ST6F2F). On the other hand, ST2F2F perceived the intervention negatively, despite having achieved high post-test scores. Interestingly, although ST3F2F and ST4F2F both achieved low scores in the post-test, the former perceived the intervention negatively, while the latter perceived it positively. Thus, it cannot simply be assumed that all those who achieved low scores perceived the intervention negatively, neither the learners who achieved high test scores perceived it positively.

It can consequently be deduced that the intervention did not suit all the learners in the F2F group. This is because it cannot simply be presumed that the learners who engaged with their peers cognitively, socially and affectively all achieved high test scores. The participants in the observation, ST1F2F, ST9F2F and ST10F2F achieved high post-test scores and engaged socially, affectively and cognitively with the tasks and the language. On the other hand, ST8F2F demonstrated social and affective engagement with her fellow group members, but her skills did not appear to have developed, given that her post-test scores were low. On the other hand, it cannot simply be assumed that the

learners who failed to engage with their peers did in fact achieve low scores. This is the case with ST7F2F, who demonstrated progress in her post-test score, but did not participate much in the discussion. It would consequently imply that she only engaged cognitively.

Moreover, it is important to note that the unwillingness of other students to collaborate resulted in a negative experience for ST2F2F and ST3F2F. On the other hand, the students who perceived the intervention positively considered that their peers' willingness to collaborate correspondingly resulted in a positive learning experience for them. Another factor to be taken into account here is the learners' level of language proficiency. This proved to be a barrier for ST2F2F and ST3F2F in terms of engaging with their teacher, peers and the tasks. Neither did they enjoy being in a mixed-ability group. On the other hand, ST1F2F, ST4F2F, ST5F2F and ST6F2F, who perceived the intervention positively, engaged with their teacher, peers and the tasks and benefited from the mixed-ability environment.

As ST1F2F was a participant in both the interview and the observation, it is important to triangulate her results. When the conversation data were triangulated with her perceptions in the interviews, it was revealed that she found the intervention interesting and this encouraged her self-reliance in constructing knowledge through collaboration with fellow group members. The conversation data show that she engaged affectively with the language and that she was the leader of her group. This was also reported in the interview. She clearly engaged with her peers by providing explanations and support, giving examples and answering questions. In fact, she engaged both socially and cognitively with the language.

#### **7.4.2 The Blended Learning (BL) Group**

The same analytical process applied to the F2F group data was also followed for the BL group, in order to discover whether similar results would be produced. In comparing the interview and conversation analysis outcomes with the participants' post-test scores, it was noted that ST5BL perceived the intervention positively and ST1BL, ST3BL and ST4BL had positive perceptions of many aspects of the intervention, all producing high post-test scores for the three writing sub-skills, thus indicating development. On the



other hand, ST2BL and ST6BL perceived the intervention negatively, failed to engage with the intervention and achieved low post-test scores. In this regard, the learners in the observation group, ST8BL and ST9BL showed development in their post-test scores, unlike ST7BL (see Table 7.3). It is interesting to note here that two of the students in the observed group were also interviewed, namely ST4BL and ST6BL.

**Table 7.3 The test results for the BL interview and observation participants**

The Participant	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Wh-questions	Past tense	Letter of complaint	Wh-questions	Past tense	Letter of complaint
ST1BL (I)	2	0	1	3	3	4
<b>ST2BL (I)</b>	0	1	0	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
ST3BL (I)	0	0	0	3	<b>2</b>	4
ST4BL (I) (O)	3	2	1	4	3	5
ST5BL (I)	3	0	1	3	3	4
<b>ST6BL (I) (O)</b>	1	0	1	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ST7BL (O)</b>	1	0	1	3	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
ST8BL (O)	1	0	0	3	<b>2</b>	3
ST9BL (O)	2	2	1	3	<b>2</b>	3

\* (I) refers to the participants in the interview

\* (O) refers to the participants in the observation

The negative perceptions of the interviewees, ST2BL and ST6BL can be explained in relation to their low test scores. It was not the case that the students who achieved high post-test scores perceived the intervention positively, as some had negative perceptions of certain aspects of the intervention. However, all those who achieved low scores in the post-test perceived the intervention negatively. This would imply that the intervention did not suit all the students in the BL group. It is nevertheless expected that most of the learners (ST4BL, ST8BL and ST9BL) who engaged with the tasks, language, peers and teacher, learned something and enjoyed the intervention, as corroborated by Mesh (2010). On the other hand, most of the learners who struggled with the tasks and were unable to engage with their peers failed to learn anything and did not enjoy the intervention, as was the case with ST2BL, ST6BL and ST7BL.

Moreover, it is important to note here that the unwillingness of fellow students to collaborate resulted in a negative experience for ST2BL and ST6BL. Conversely, the

students who perceived the intervention positively appreciated their peers' willingness to collaborate, resulting in a positive learning experience for them. The level of English language proficiency was a barrier for ST2BL and ST6BL, with regard to engaging with their teacher, peers and the tasks. These two students, as well as ST4BL did not enjoy being in a mixed-ability group, while ST1BL, ST3BL and ST5FBL, who perceived the intervention positively, enjoyed this experience.

In addition, a possible explanation of learners' negative perceptions of collaboration was that it was conducted online, although many students achieved development in their scores. This was made clear in one student's assertion, where she reported that they had collaborated without using Blackboard. Instead, they had used the mobile phone application, 'WhatsApp' or arranged F2F meetings. It may be concluded by triangulating the learners' perceptions and engagement in the BL group that ST6BL's negative perceptions are related to the lack of social, affective or cognitive engagement, as there was neither collaboration nor significant development in her post-test scores.

From an analysis of learners' perceptions and conversation in parallel with the post-test scores for the F2F and BL groups, the following may be concluded:

- In both groups, no straightforward causal relationship was found between the learners' perceptions and engagement, and the development in their writing skills.
- The learners who found their group members unwilling to collaborate perceived the intervention negatively and the opposite was also true.
- The learners' low level of language proficiency was a factor hindering their engagement with their teacher and peers and thus, their perceptions.

## 7.5 Summary

This chapter is intended to make sense of the quantitative and qualitative findings by considering their implications for the research questions. Overall, the study findings confirm the conceptual framework for the research, namely the adoption and adaptation of LCF (based on SCT) to design an intervention delivered in F2F and BL contexts and aimed at developing learners' communicative competence in writing. It cannot be asserted from the findings that the learners who engaged with their peers perceived the

intervention positively and experienced development in the three writing skills addressed in the current study.

The current study has identified a number of internal and external factors found to have a direct bearing on the impact of LCF on learners. These factors include the learners' level of language proficiency and collaboration between group members. The following chapter summarises the study's conclusion, presenting the research implications, limitations and challenges, while also making recommendations for further study.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the study findings presented in Chapters Four to Six were discussed, in an attempt to explain their significance and to relate them to similar studies in the literature. In this final chapter, a brief presentation of the study and a summary of the main findings are presented, bringing together the quantitative and qualitative results in response to the research questions. This chapter also highlights the research contribution and limitations, while stating the implications of the study. It consequently makes recommendations and suggestions for further research, along with some concluding remarks.

### **8.2 Research Summary**

This study has trialled and evaluated LCF as a design framework in BL and F2F contexts, in order to develop three FLL writing sub-skills: the ability to use the past tense to describe past events, to ask wh-questions about things that have happened in the past, and competence in writing a letter of complaint. The purpose of delivering the same intervention in two different learning contexts was to determine whether the strengths and limitations of LCF were due to parts of the intervention being delivered in an online learning environment, or whether they could be attributed to its inherent features, i.e. iteration and different types of engagement with a teacher, peers and various mediating artefacts. The only difference between these two contexts consisted of the peer-explanation and output-practice tasks being undertaken in the classroom by the F2F group and online by the BL group.

The design of this study intervention rests on four constructs related to sociocultural theory (SCT): the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding, mediation and languaging. The teacher's role in LCF was to scaffold the learners, so that they could reach their potential level of ZPD. Scaffolding was provided not only by the teacher but also by peers. Another essential construct in the SCT approach to language learning is 'languaging', which provides a kind of peer-scaffolding. Different mediating artefacts

then enabled the purpose of the study to be achieved. These consisted of: (1) the teacher using English (the TL) and the students using their L1 for explanations, (2) the PowerPoint presentation, which introduced the tasks to the learners, (3) the YouTube video, providing the learners with more detail for carrying out the peer-explanation task, (4) the podcast, used to enhance the learners' understanding of the individual task, (5) Blackboard, a VLE used by the learners in the BL group for online discussion and collaboration, and (6) the printed material distributed to the students, containing the intervention tasks.

However, LCF does not specify practical steps on how to design tasks so that they will encourage learners to engage with their teacher and peers. Therefore, the tasks in this intervention were designed based on Salmon's (2004) activities. Moreover, they were designed prior the intervention. It was not practically possible for the teacher to design the tasks following discussion with the learners to determine their level, as in the original LCF.

This study used a quasi-experimental design to answer the first research question: *"How does the adapted LCF intervention design affect FLLs' skills pertaining to grammatical and sociolinguistic competences in writing, in F2F and BL environments and in comparison with a non-LCF group?"* To answer this question, the F2F and BL groups were tested before and after the intervention and their results were compared to those of a control group taught the same skills, but using a non-LCF design.

The findings from an analysis of the pre- and post-tests showed development in the learners' three writing sub-skills, which were the focus of the intervention and formed part of the learners' communicative competence. The analysis of the development in the post-test scores revealed significantly more development in the learners' skills pertaining to the use of the past tense and writing a letter of complaint in the F2F and BL groups, than was evident in the control group. Judging by the post-test outcomes, the affordances of the BL environment were almost equivalent to the affordances of the F2F environment for developing the learners' skills in using the past tense in description and writing a letter of complaint. However, the BL group's affordances were more effective than those of the F2F group for developing the learners' wh-

questions in the past. Analysis showed that this was most likely because they had more time to collaborate and explain the target structures to each other.

The current study used qualitative methods to answer the second research question: *“How do the learners perceive and engage with the language and tasks designed, using the adapted LCF?”* In order to answer this question aimed at obtaining an in-depth view of the effectiveness of LCF, the learners’ perceptions of the intervention and their engagement with the tasks and language were examined. Six learners were interviewed from the F2F group and six from the BL group, in order to ascertain how they perceived the intervention, and engaged with the tasks and language. Moreover, a group of five students were observed by an external observer in the F2F group and another group of five students were similarly observed in the BL group. A systematic observation scheme was implemented, with the conversations being analysed and then used to triangulate the other results.

An analysis of the learners’ interview responses, observed behaviour and conversation revealed diverse outcomes. Most of the learners in both groups favoured the teacher leading a discussion to explain the target structure, rather than them receiving direct instruction. They expressed appreciation of her role in scaffolding them during and after completion of the tasks. Some of the students also appreciated the role of their peers in explaining the target structures, as a means of gaining a more detailed understanding, before working collaboratively to produce output. However, there were also certain factors that affected the learners’ perceptions of the intervention. These comprised low levels of language proficiency and the unwillingness of some group members to collaborate. It was also found that the learners did not carry out the peer-explanation tasks as expected, because they were unfamiliar with talking about the language.

In an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative findings of this research, it was noted that the learners’ engagement varied, with three types of learner becoming apparent. Some of the students were fully engaged with their peers: cognitively, affectively and socially. This engagement was meaningful for developing their understanding and mutual assistance. Other students were less willing to collaborate with their peers and there was an absence of cognitive and social engagement, which affected their own as well as their peers’ understanding. A third type of student seemed to have been

cognitively engaged with tasks, as the post-test result indicated learning, but there was no engagement in discussion or teamwork.

### 8.3 Overall Findings and Implications for Teaching

Combining the results of the quantitative and qualitative research methods applied here, the following findings and implications emerge:

- This study findings suggest that Laurillard's (2013) Conversational Framework (LCF) is an effective framework for designing a BL environment, as it proved to be effective for developing three writing sub-skills (forming wh-questions in the past, using the past tense to describe events, and writing a letter of complaint), while the F2F context only developed the last two skills. This suggests that BL could be more appropriate for developing learners' writing skills through LCF. It may be explained by the learners being able to re-play the YouTube videos provided and having more time for collaboration. It would also imply the importance of providing learners with useful resources, which can be accessed anytime and from anywhere. However, language teachers need to train learners in the use of a VLE and develop their collaborative skills.
- From an analysis of the F2F and BL groups' perceptions, it may be concluded that they share similar views on various aspects, such as the effect of the peer-explanation and output-practice tasks, the role of the intervention in removing barriers between the learners, and the development of their autonomy. However, it may also be noted that the learners in the BL group were more satisfied with the teacher's role in the intervention, the individual task, the effectiveness of the YouTube video and the ability to control their learning. Nevertheless, the learners in this group encountered many factors that affected their perceptions. These included an inability to use the technology, a lack of technical support and a lack of Internet access. It may thus be suggested that if these factors were handled appropriately, as in providing access and training, there could be more positive perceptions of LCF.
- LCF was found to best suit learners with at least low-intermediate level English language proficiency and those willing to collaborate; as compared to learners with a lower level of English language proficiency and an unwillingness to

collaborate. Most of the latter kind of student failed to engage with their teacher, peers, tasks or the language. This implies that teachers should encourage those who are unwilling or shy about collaboration towards greater engagement (Svalberg, 2012).

- The students in this study, particularly those with low levels of language proficiency needed special attention from their teacher to scaffold them. Generally, FLLs require different types of scaffolding, whether from their teacher or peers, or through the use of various media. The teacher should therefore move between the groups to enable them to ask questions and receive specific scaffolding in the classroom, as well as being available to answer the learners' questions by email when possible on weekdays.
- All the students, regardless of their language proficiency, enjoyed the range of practice opportunities offered. This indicates the importance of providing different tasks that will enable learners to practice the language individually, with their teacher and with peers. This would accommodate different learning styles and provide additional practice for students with limited exposure to the TL in their everyday lives, thus increasing their confidence in using the TL.
- It was found that the students favoured peer-output practice over peer-explanation tasks, as the former enabled them to produce output, rather than them having to provide verbal explanations for each other. Moreover, peer-output practice can be evaluated by the teacher and peers. This was also found in the BL group, where the learners preferred the wiki to the discussion board. It would indicate that both groups demonstrated a need for practical training in talking about language, as this was a new experience for them.
- The students in one of the BL groups did not stay in their original group, pointing to a need to monitor the students' activities in the classroom and online, thereby noting whether they remain in the groups to which they are assigned.
- A leader is suggested for each group, in order to coordinate their fellow group members and encourage them to accomplish tasks within the time allocated.
- The ice-breaker activities played an important role for some of the students by removing the barriers between any who may have been introduced to each other for the first time. It is important to break down rigid relationships between students, before they endeavour to carry out collaborative tasks. This will



encourage them to overcome their shyness about asking each other questions and making mistakes. However, more time and tasks should be allocated to the learners, especially in the BL group with their classroom activities, so that they can get to know each other. For learners in an F2F context, if the ice-breaker activities have not been effective, regular F2F encounters in the initial tasks can help eliminate barriers between them.

- With regard to the intervention design, it was concluded that the e-tivity design, which included a statement of purpose, instructions and expected responses, helped motivate the students to engage with their teacher and peers in the F2F and BL groups and encouraged them to accomplish their tasks. This shows the importance of clearly stating the purpose of each task for the students in simple language, so that they can participate in these activities.
- The research found that some students, particularly those with a low level of language proficiency, preferred F2F to online collaboration, as it enabled them to interpret facial expressions and body language. Moreover, it may be concluded that all learners should be allowed to use their L1 for the purpose of explanation.
- The use of mobile phone applications in the F2F and BL groups enhanced the students' autonomy and confidence. The learners enjoyed the fact that they had been trusted to use them in the classroom. It is therefore recommended to raise learners' awareness of the benefits of mobile phone use in the classroom, while also ensuring they understand the importance of respecting each other's privacy and taking into account the relevant cultural and religious parameters.

#### **8.4 Contributions of the Current Research**

The current study makes a contextual contribution, since, to the best of my knowledge, it forms part of the very earliest research into the adoption of LCF in Saudi Arabia and the Arab world in general. It could therefore fill a gap in the literature on FL teaching methods and the application of e-learning design frameworks for English language courses. It is also intended to fill a gap in the TELL literature on designing interventions that use technology to provide FLLs with practice opportunities through communication with their teacher and peers.

A knowledge contribution was also made by evaluating LCF to determine its strengths in delivering peer-explanation and output-practice tasks online, as compared to undertaking them in the classroom. Another contribution was made by adapting LCF. This adaptation consisted of omitting the second cycle (the ‘teacher practice cycle’), which was not practicable and basing the task design on Salmon’s (2004) e-tivity design principles.

Finally, the study proposes methodological contributions to the analysis of learners’ conversations and interaction in observed groups. In the conversation analysis method, I merged Pomerantz and Fehr’s (1997) five analytical tools with some aspects of the interaction analysis frameworks developed by Walsh (2006) and Kumpulainen and Wray (2002). The aim of this integration was to help characterise movement in the learners’ interactions (see section 3.12.4).

### **8.5 Implications for Policy**

The findings from the current study could possibly assist policy-makers with the establishment and modification of university foundation courses, as they endeavour to make the relevant decisions. Firstly, it is important for policy-makers to reconsider the English language placement test, as there were extreme differences between the students’ levels of language proficiency in the current study. At one time, this test was used to divide students into groups, based on their English language level, but this has fallen out of use over the last few years.

Secondly, policy-makers should consider the current teaching methods used by some English language teachers on the UOK foundation course. This English course consists of 15 hours per week. It is common practice to dictate the target structure to the students and then give them plenty of time to carry out individual tasks, but this might not be effective in developing learners’ skills. Thus, the policy-makers could trial the use of LCF on foundation courses and train teachers in using this approach. In addition, teachers should give more attention to supporting learning through collaboration. Collaborative skills can increase learners’ autonomy and prepare them to be independent researchers in future.

Thirdly, policy-makers should consider how technology can be implemented in the classroom, as well as how an online learning environment can be used to extend the learning process beyond the boundaries of the classroom, as technology can enable learners to use the TL outside class in individual and collaborative tasks.

With regard to technical infrastructure, although universities in Saudi Arabia have large budgets for implementing technology in education, there are still some college departments that do not have the suitable technical resources for use in the classroom. Moreover, there may be a lack of support for learners in the use of online learning environments. The students revealed in their interviews here that they were afraid of experiencing technical issues at home. Moreover, some may not even have had Internet access at home. Therefore, colleges must provide learners with computer and Internet access in labs kept open for them during the day, as well as in small computer stations distributed throughout the college. The current University could in fact negotiate with companies to offer discounts to learners on computer hardware and supplies, so that the prices of computers, tablets, Internet services, etc. become more affordable for them. It is also recommended to focus on improving learners' skills in using Blackboard during the induction week of the foundation course.

In addition, policy-makers should encourage teachers to adopt constructive learning approaches (not only LCF) and technology, in order to move from teacher-centred to more learner-centred approaches. Learning is not restricted to teachers' explanations within the classroom walls; it is rather a continuous process of engagement, sharing and discussion between the teacher and students and between the students themselves. Universities should therefore consider retaining a financial incentive for teachers to adopt e-learning and BL, although this has been abolished in some Saudi universities. Finally, I would encourage Saudi universities to develop teachers' knowledge and skills in implementing technology and new teaching approaches, by providing them with training in the form of on-site sessions for personnel, or by sending staff to advanced workshops and conferences on the latest technology use in education.

## 8.6 The Research Limitations

The first and most important limitations to consider here are the limitations related to the data collection procedure, as it was difficult for me to gain access to classes at UOK. Moreover, I was not permitted to assign the classes freely to experimental and control groups. In addition, the study was conducted over the course of six weeks, but learners' skills development needs more time than this. Due to the fact that the LCF design adopted comprises iteration for developing competences, a longer time was spent teaching the two experimental groups (six hours) than was dedicated to the control group (four hours only).

Other limitations are associated with the research tools applied. For example, a major limitation in the test was the fact that there were just two items used to measure each construct. Therefore, the students' performance in the test cannot be an indicator of their overall skills. Another important limitation was the test's validity, as only content validity was applied (due to the violation of data normality, it was not possible to use construct validity), conducted by just two experts. Moreover, the insignificant impact of the intervention on the learners' skill in forming wh-questions in the F2F group could be explained by the test being insufficient for measuring this skill, or the intervention itself being ineffective for developing this skill in the F2F context and within the time available.

A further limitation relates to the scoring scales. Although these were valid and reliable, according to East (2009), the discrete point determined for the score of 2 to classify the interview and observation participants into high or low achievers was determined by the scoring descriptors specified by East (2009), explained in section 7.4. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting this section's findings.

Concerning the observation, it would have been preferable to have a more experienced LCF observer. In addition, the results of the observation could have differed, if the observation had been carried out in the peer-explanation and output-practice tasks. Moreover, the interaction analysis framework needs to be validated, as it was specifically designed for the current study. Finally, as the students were enrolled on different bachelor's degree programmes, it was not possible to follow up those who

were interviewed and observed, in order to validate the interpretation of the data (Kvale & Flick, 2007).

Another limitation is associated with the generalisation of the present study's results. It has the following limitations and these were considered when interpreting the findings. For instance, the number of participants in this research was limited (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Sharp et al., 2011) and the study was restricted to an exploration of just three writing sub-skills, forming part of communicative competence. Moreover, the participants were exclusively female, given that the study was carried out in the female section of UOK, where there is gender segregation. There was also bias involved in choosing the participants, since the students in the experimental groups and control group were not chosen randomly. Moreover, the BL in this research was restricted to just four tasks being transferred online. Furthermore, the only VLE adopted at UOK and used by the BL group was Blackboard.

On the other hand, various insights can be drawn from this study for teachers and researchers, who are interested in language teaching in general and in Arab countries in particular. This study context may reflect other foundation courses in many Arab countries, where language learners have differing levels of language proficiency, come from diverse backgrounds and possess varying levels of technology skill. In addition, learners can vary in their readiness for collaboration and may not be accustomed to talking about the language.

The findings of the present study suggest to language teachers on the Foundation Course the importance of providing FLLs with opportunities for interaction with their teacher and peers. This would provide learners with a chance to practice the TL, which could have a positive effect on their confidence in using it. Technology adoption can also help in this respect, with LCF proving to be an e-learning model that can assist language teachers and course designers in technology implementation and the provision of various practice opportunities.

It is also suggested to use Blackboard to carry out online collaboration from home, where students have more time to read and think before contributing to discussion. The use of technology in general can motivate students to learn and participate. The use of

mobile phones in teaching is also recommended, as it can develop learners' autonomy by encouraging them to search for information in the classroom while performing tasks. Some mobile applications (particularly synchronous apps) can be used by learners to enhance their communication; they provide an opportunity for continuing the learning process outside the classroom. However, this implies the importance of raising students' awareness of the cultural boundaries in Arab countries.

Finally, the use of technology in language teaching can represent a rather generalised and even vague process. Therefore, teachers must be guided towards implementing a model or framework, such as LCF, that can facilitate this integration. LCF classifies media so that the practitioner can choose what is most suitable for meeting the relevant learning objectives. However, it is important for teachers to train students in general technology use, before implementing LCF and for those who wish to adopt LCF as a means of developing learners' skills, it is essential for them to enhance learners' collaborative skills and ability to talk about the language itself. Moreover, policy-makers need to ensure learners are provided with access to computers and the Internet at universities and look at how such access can also be facilitated in the home.

### **8.7 The Challenges**

While conducting this research, many challenges presented themselves and some of these are listed below:

- Access - not only access to UOK, but being permitted to take over a number of English language classes from current teachers.
- Finding literature where LCF has been used to teach English, particularly for the development of communicative competence in an F2F context.
- Finding an external observer familiar with LCF and COLT and free to attend all the intervention classes.
- Interviewing all the students observed, as they were often unable to attend interviews, due to their busy schedules.
- Finding a way of determining the level of achievement amongst the interview and observation participants.
- The students' misconceptions of peer-discussion.

- The students' unfamiliarity with Blackboard.
- The students' limited interaction via Blackboard.

### 8.8 Avenues for Further Research

Based on the findings of the current study, further work might be valuable in the field of using technology to teach EFL:

1. The current research was small scale and so a similar study should be conducted using a larger sample of students, including Foundation Year students in other colleges at UOK, as well as at different universities in Saudi Arabia, or even in other countries where English is not the native language. This could help generalise the results.
2. Studies could be conducted to examine the impact of LCF on learners' attitudes towards the English language.
3. Studies could be conducted to develop the learners' academic writing skills and practical aptitude in the use of online communication tools, given that they merely copied and pasted their answers.
4. Studies could be conducted using different types of media and technology, aside from those used in the present research.
5. Studies could be conducted using different mobile 'apps' in language learning.
6. Studies could be conducted in a BL environment, by running the first three cycles online and the last two cycles in the classroom. This would examine the effectiveness of the other online tools in the teacher's communication cycle and individual tasks.
7. Studies could be conducted using LCF to teach grammatical and sociolinguistic competences in relation to other skills, for example, speaking.
8. Studies could be conducted using LCF with target structures that represent discourse and strategic competences.
9. Studies could be conducted using LCF with subjects that are delivered in the learners' L1, in order to focus on examining its impact on skills, rather than on the FL itself.
10. Studies could be conducted to examine teachers' perceptions of the ease or difficulties of designing courses using LCF.

11. Due to the fact that it was impossible for me to teach male students, given the gender segregation at UOK - as in most Saudi universities - the research was conducted exclusively amongst female students. Therefore, parallel research on male Saudi students is recommended, as gender may be a factor affecting learners' collaborative skills and achievement.

## 8.9 Concluding Remarks

In responding to the research problem stated at the beginning of this study, there is a need to develop FLLs' communicative competence in relation to their writing skills. As many researchers have suggested, the BL approach can provide interaction opportunities (see section 1.1) to develop learners' skills. This intervention was consequently designed using LCF for a BL course, as it was felt technology could play a key role in enhancing learners' opportunities for interaction. In order to explore the effectiveness of online interaction in learning, the intervention was also delivered in an F2F environment. The learners subjected to LCF outdid the control group, while the learners in the BL group only outdid the F2F group in the formation of wh-questions. However, the learners' performance was almost equal in each group with regard to using the past tense and writing a letter of complaint. Some of the learners' perceptions of the intervention were positive, as they were able to engage with the teacher, peers and the language, while others perceived the intervention negatively, as they experienced barriers, such as their low level of language proficiency and the behaviour of group members who failed to interact and scaffold them.

Thus, the present study contributes to an understanding of the needs and behaviour of Saudi students, when learning an FL through TELL. It became apparent that these learners require opportunities for practice and benefit from being able to use up-to-date technology and mobile 'apps' for social communication. Moreover, they need to be scaffolded by their teachers and peers during the learning process, so that they can develop communicative competence and optimally benefit from interesting and up-to-date teaching methods, as well as being actively involved in their own learning. Last but not the least, the results of the present study could encourage educators to implement LCF when designing courses to improve student engagement and integrate technology into the learning process.



## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: The Test

#### Instructions:

*You have one and a half hours to answer the following questions. There are 4 questions. Write your answer in the blank space provided below each question. Your answers will be assessed based on the correct application of the rules you have learned and their appropriateness to the task.*

#### 1. Write wh-questions where the underlined words could be the answer in the following sentences:

A. Mozart wrote more than 600 pieces of music.

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B. One autumn evening, Ali and Ahmed went to the theatre. They watched the play, 'Othello', not 'Hamlet'.

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#### 2. You are presenting the students in your department to the head of department. Write a letter of complaint to the head of department about two of the problems faced by the students (the body of the letter of complaint should not be less than 5 sentences).

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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**APPENDIX 2: Scoring Scale for Writing a Letter of Complaint (East, 2009)**

<b>The Score</b>	<b>The Description</b>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implications of a task fully understood</li> <li>• Ideas are very clearly stated</li> <li>• Extremely well-organised</li> <li>• Very logical sequencing</li> <li>• The writing ‘flows’</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task is understood</li> <li>• Loosely organised, but main ideas stand out</li> <li>• Mainly logical but some incomplete sequencing</li> <li>• The writing is a little ‘choppy’</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task is mostly understood</li> <li>• Loosely organised, but main ideas stand out</li> <li>• Generally logical, but several instances of incomplete sequencing</li> <li>• The writing is somewhat ‘choppy’</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some understanding of the task</li> <li>• Ideas are somewhat confused or disconnected</li> <li>• Lacks logical sequencing and development</li> <li>• The writing is rather ‘choppy’</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very limited understanding of the task</li> <li>• Ideas are very confused or disconnected</li> <li>• Virtually no logical sequencing or development</li> <li>• The writing is extremely ‘choppy’</li> </ul>
0	No rewardable response

### APPENDIX 3: Scoring Scale for Writing a Passage Using the Past Tense (East, 2009)

The Score	The Description
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Errors are only of a very minor nature</li> <li>Ideas are very clearly stated</li> <li>Very few errors of verb tense agreement</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple constructions are used accurately</li> <li>Several errors of verb tense agreement, but main ideas stand out</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple constructions are mostly used accurately</li> <li>Several errors of verb tense agreement, but main ideas stand out</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The meaning is somewhat confused or obscured</li> <li>Some very minor mastery of sentence construction rules</li> <li>Mostly dominated by errors of verb tense agreement</li> <li>Communicates, but the meaning is confused or obscured</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtually no mastery of sentence construction rules</li> <li>Almost exclusively dominated by errors of verb tense agreement</li> <li>The meaning is very confused or obscured</li> </ul>
0	No rewardable response

#### APPENDIX 4: Scoring Scale for Asking Wh-questions (East, 2009)

The Score	The Description
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors are only of a very minor nature</li> <li>• Ideas are very clearly stated</li> <li>• Very few errors of verb tense agreement</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Question constructions are used accurately</li> <li>• Several errors of verb tense agreement</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions are mostly used accurately</li> <li>• Several errors of verb tense agreement</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The meaning is somewhat confused or obscured</li> <li>• Some very minor mastery of question construction rules</li> <li>• Mostly dominated by error of verb tense agreement</li> <li>• Communicates, but the meaning is confused or obscured</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtually no mastery of question construction rules</li> <li>• Almost exclusively dominated by errors of verb tense agreement</li> <li>• The meaning is very confused or obscured</li> </ul>
0	No rewardable response

## **APPENDIX 5: Interview Guide**

Interview No:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interviewee Group:

Date of Interview:

Start Time of Interview:

End Time of Interview:

Venue of Interview:

### **Introduction**

This interview is about your perception of the intervention aimed at developing your communicative competence. Remember that your opinion will not affect your grades and your responses will only be used for this research. Moreover, they will be kept confidential. Moreover, I would like you to sign the informed consent to be interviewed, which will show that this interview is recorded and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

### **Questions**

#### **1. Please tell me about yourself:**

Age

Education

Your secondary school type

Your parents' education

Whether you have visited countries where English is a first language

Your use of English in your daily life

Whether you have foreign relatives

#### **2. What did you think about the intervention?**

#### **3. What difficulties and benefits did you encounter when studying this intervention?**

4. How do you think your English will change after studying this intervention?
5. How do you think your interaction with your teacher will affect your understanding and chances of practicing the language?
6. How do you think the interaction with your peers will affect your understanding and chances of practicing the language?
7. How do you think the different types of media will affect your learning?
8. How did the task design affect your understanding and help you in your learning?
9. In terms of the intervention's effectiveness, how do you think the online discussion and wiki will affect your learning, in comparison to the discussion and collaboration taking place in the classroom?
10. What do you recommend for other teachers to change, if they adapt this design?
11. What are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching English using this design?
12. Do you recommend other students to study this intervention? Why?
13. How did the intervention affect your English level and confidence?





**A Translation of the Headings from the Observation Form**

**Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) Observation Scheme**

Lesson .....  
The observed duration .....

Observer.....  
Date.....

Time	Activity or episode	Target language		Participants' organisation and interactions			Content control		Teacher's Sustained speech		Student Discourse initiation	Student's Sustained speech		Incorporation of student utterances			
		L1	TL	T<->S	Group	Individual	Teacher/Text	Teacher/Text/Student	Minimal	Sustained		Minimal	Sustained	Correction	Comment	Expansion	Clarification request

## **APPENDIX 7: Informed Consent Forms**

### **A. Informed Consent Letter for Learners in the Blended Intervention**

You are invited to participate in a research study concerning English language teaching through interaction. This research is being carried out by Abeer Alshwiah from the University of Dammam.

You are kindly requested to participate in this research by taking six lessons, which have been specially designed for the study. You will be assessed before and after taking the course to determine the development in your knowledge. A group of you will be asked if you wish to volunteer to be observed by a colleague of mine and the corresponding classroom interaction will be audio-recorded. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your own studies or results. Your online interaction will be saved for analysis after the end of this experiment. On the other hand, there will be no risk if you decide to participate in this study. In the online activities, where you might miss the teacher's presence, you will be supported by the teacher's feedback in the next classroom session. Finally, you can withdraw your consent at any time.

You will have the option of participating in a recorded interview (at the end of the intervention), in order to discover your perceptions of the lessons. The interview will be in Arabic to ensure you understand the questions and can provide an appropriate response. It is estimated that each interview will not take more than 30 minutes of your valuable time. I assure you that your personal information entered in relation to the tests, classroom and online interaction and interview will not be disclosed and your answers will be kept confidential. I shall give you a summary of my findings once the research is finished and hope that you find it helpful in your English studies.

Thank you for your cooperation.

If you have any questions, my contact details are as follows:

Abeer Alshwiah, e-mail: [aalshwiah@ud.edu.sa](mailto:aalshwiah@ud.edu.sa)

Please print your name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of approval \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Informed Consent Letter for Face-to-face Learners**

You are invited to participate in a research study concerning English language teaching through interaction. This research is being carried out by Abeer Alshwiah from the University of Dammam.

You are kindly requested to participate in this research by taking a unit, which has been specially designed for the study. This will unfold over six and hours, across six weeks. You will be assessed before and after taking the course to determine the development in your knowledge. Your classroom interaction will be recorded and observed by a colleague of mine. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your own studies or results. Neither will there be any risks if you decide to participate in this study. Finally, you can withdraw your consent at any time.

You will have the option of participating in a recorded interview (at the end of the intervention) to discover your perception of the intervention. The interview will be in Arabic to ensure you understand the questions and can provide an appropriate response. It is estimated that it will not take more than 30 minutes of your valuable time to take part in this interview. I assure you that your personal information entered in relation to the tests, classroom interaction and interview will not be disclosed and your answers will be kept confidential. I shall give you a summary of my findings once the research is finished and hope you find it helpful in your English studies.

Thank you for your cooperation.

If you have any questions, my contact details are as follows:

Abeer Alshwiah, e- mail: [aalshwiah@uod.edu.sa](mailto:aalshwiah@uod.edu.sa)

**Please print your name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of approval** \_\_\_\_\_

### C. Arabic Version of the Informed Consent Letter for the Blended Learners

#### نموذج موافقة للمشاركة في بحث

عزيزتي الطالبة،،

أنتي مدعوة للمشاركة في بحث يختص بتدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال إطار تحاوري بإستخدام بعض أدوات الفصول الافتراضية (بلاك بورد). هذه الدراسة من إعداد المحاضرة عبير آل شوية عضو هيئة التدريس في جامعة الدمام.

يرجى منك التكرم في المشاركة في هذا البحث من خلال دراسة جزء من الدرس في الفصل الدراسي ودراسة الجزء الآخر من خلال البلاك بورد. البحث سيقدم درساً لتدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية ومهارات التواصل. سيتم اجراء إختبار قبل دراستكم للدرس وبعده لقياس التطور في تعلمكم. علماً بأن المحادثات خلال الفصل ستكون مسجلة ومراقبة من قبل إحدى الزميلات.

بعد الإنتهاء من دراسة الدرس سيكون هناك مقابلة مع الباحثة لمعرفة مدى تقبلكم عن تصميم الدرس وإستفادتكم منه. علماً بأن المقابلة ستكون مسجلة لأغراض البحث وستكون باللغة العربية ولن تتجاوز الثلاثين دقيقة. أختياريك للمشاركة من عدمها لن يؤثر على دراستك او نتائجك الدراسية. مشاركتك في البحث ستثري نتائجه كما أن بياناتك الشخصية ستكون في سرية تامة ولن يطلع عليها أحد سوى الباحثة. سيتم تزويك بمخلص عن نتائج البحث بعد الإنتهاء منه للإطلاع عليها والتي أطلع بأنها ستعم بالنفع على دراستك وعلى طرق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية.

شكراً لتعاونكم،،

للاستفسار يرجى التواصل مع الباحثة:

عبير آل شوية

Email: [aalshwiah@uod.edu.as](mailto:aalshwiah@uod.edu.as)

يرجى كتابة الاسم في حال الموافقة للمشاركة: \_\_\_\_\_

التوقيع: \_\_\_\_\_

## D. Arabic Version of the Informed Consent Letter for the Face-to-face Learners

### نموذج موافقة للمشاركة في بحث

عزيزتي الطالبة،،

أنتي مدعوة للمشاركة في بحث يختص بتدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال إطار تحاوري بإستخدام بعض أدوات الفصول الافتراضية (بلاك بورد). هذه الدراسة من إعداد المحاضرة عبير آل شوية عضو هيئة التدريس في جامعة الدمام.

يرجى منك التكرم في المشاركة في هذا البحث من خلال دراسة الدرس في الفصل الدراسي بطريقة تفاعلية خلال ستة اسابيع. البحث سيقدم درساً لتدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية ومهارات التواصل. سيتم اجراء إختبار قبل دراستكم للدرس وبعده لقياس التطور في تعلمكم. علماً بأن المحادثات خلال الفصل ستكون مسجلة ومراقبة من قبل إحدى الزميلات.

بعد الإنتهاء من دراسة الدرس سيكون هناك مقابلة مع الباحثة لمعرفة مدى تقبلكم عن تصميم الدرس وإستفادتكم منه. علماً بأن المقابلة ستكون مسجلة لأغراض البحث وستكون باللغة العربية ولن تتجاوز الثلاثين دقيقة. أختياريك للمشاركة من عدمها لن يؤثر على دراستك او نتائجك الدراسية. مشاركتك في البحث ستثري نتائجه كما أن بياناتك الشخصية ستكون في سرية تامة ولن يطلع عليها أحد سوى الباحثة. سيتم تزويك بمخلص عن نتائج البحث بعد الإنتهاء منه للإطلاع عليها والتي أطلع بأنها ستعم بالنفع على دراستك وعلى طرق تدريس القواعد عامة.

شكراً لتعاونكم،،

للاستفسار يرجى التواصل مع الباحثة:

عبير آل شوية

Email: aalshwiah@uod.edu.sa

يرجى كتابة الاسم في حال الموافقة للمشاركة: \_\_\_\_\_

التوقيع: \_\_\_\_\_

**E. Informed Consent Letter for Control Group Learners**

You are invited to participate in a research study concerning English language teaching through interaction. This research is being carried out by Abeer Alshwiah from the University of Dammam.

You are kindly requested to participate in this research by taking a unit, which has been specially designed for the study. This will unfold over four hours, across four weeks. You will be assessed before and after taking the course to determine the development in your knowledge. After that, the same unit will be given to use using another teaching methods. The second unit contains learning through collaboration and using different types of media. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your own studies or results. Neither will there be any risks if you decide to participate in this study. Finally, you can withdraw your consent at any time.

Thank you for your cooperation.

If you have any questions, my contact details are as follows:

Abeer Alshwiah, e- mail: [aalshwiah@uod.edu.sa](mailto:aalshwiah@uod.edu.sa)

**Please print your name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of approval** \_\_\_\_\_

## F. Arabic Version of the Informed Consent Letter for the Control Group Learners

### نموذج موافقة للمشاركة في بحث

عزيزتي الطالبة،،

أنتي مدعوة للمشاركة في بحث يختص بتدريس قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية. هذه الدراسة من إعداد المحاضرة عبير آل شوية عضو هيئة التدريس في جامعة الدمام.

يرجى منك التكرم في المشاركة في هذا البحث من خلال دراسة الوحدة في الفصل الدراسي خلال أربع أسابيع. سيتم إجراء اختبار قبل دراستكم للدرس وبعده لقياس التطور في تعلمكم. بعد ذلك سيتم تقديم الوحدة ذاتها لكن من خلال طريقة تفاعلية جديدة تحتوي على عدد من ال،سائط التعليمية.

شكراً لتعاونكم،،

للاستفسار يرجى التواصل مع الباحثة:

عبير آل شوية

Email: aalshwiah@uod.edu.sa

يرجى كتابة الاسم في حال الموافقة للمشاركة: \_\_\_\_\_

التوقيع: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 8: Transcription Conventions

?	Rising intonation
.	Falling intonation
,	Continuous intonation
.hhh	An in-breath
-	Interruption
[ ]	Overlapping talk
(0.03) or (0.05)	Micro-pause
(( ))	Details of the scene or no-vocal action
=	No interval between utterances
T	The teacher
ST	A student
SS	The students

Note (1): Transcription symbols adopted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984)

Note (2): The words in italics were spoken in Arabic

**APPENDIX 9: A Reflection Form (Used in the Pilot Study)**

	5 Strongly agree	4 Agree	3 Neutral	2 Disagree	1 Strongly disagree
The tasks were interesting					
The tasks were helpful for developing my skills					
The tools were interesting					
The tools were helpful for developing my skills					

Add further comments on the effectiveness of the tasks and tools used, in your opinion

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غير موافق بشدة (١)	غير موافق (٢)	محايد (٣)	موافق (٤)	موافق بشدة (٥)	العبارة
					كانت الأنشطة مسلية
					كانت الأنشطة مفيدة في تطوير المهارة المقصود تعلمها في خلال الأنشطة
					كانت الوسائل التكنولوجية المستخدمة مسلية
					كانت الوسائل التكنولوجية المستخدمة مفيدة

ما رأيك حول فعالية الأنشطة والوسائل التكنولوجية المستخدمة خلال الدرس؟

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