Learning Through Vicarious Participation in Online Language Tutorials

Thesis

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Learning through vicarious participation in online language tutorials

Thesis submitted for the award of Doctor of Education (EdD) by CHRISTINE PLEINES

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- Clip art image removed from figure 3
- Address and telephone phone number removed from Appendix C
Abstract

Learning through vicarious participation in online language tutorials

Online environments offer opportunities for interaction and collaboration, which are especially pertinent to distance language learners who have little face-to-face contact with their tutors or peers (Felix, 2005; Levy and Stockwell, 2006; Hampel, 2006, 2014; Balaman and Sert, 2017; Sun, 2018). Although a distinction is usually made between synchronous and asynchronous tools, all online communication can be recorded and subsequently accessed by learners in their own time.

Drawing on the concept of vicarious learning (Bandura, 1965, 1971a, 1971b, 1986; Ohta, 2001; Lee, 2005; Mayes, 2015) and taking account of the roles of input and interaction for language development (Long, 1996; Gass, 1997, 2003; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Ellis, 2015), the present enquiry examines how distance students work with recordings of live online language tutorials and explores perceived benefits for language learning and motivation.

The research is based on a sociocognitive perspective (Batstone, 2010) and an embedded mixed methods research design (Ivankova and Cresswell, 2009). User statistics of live attendance and recording views were analysed in relation to demographic data and assessment results of students on four Open University modules across different languages and levels (n=977). Differences in the use of recordings were identified in relation to learner age, country of residence and live attendance. A thematic analysis of 13 semi-structured interviews revealed that recordings of interactive group tutorials gave learners access to more voices and wider perspectives and allowed them to process input in their own time. Instead of seeing indirect participation as a substitute for live attendance, participants in this enquiry used recordings because they found tutorials central to their learning.

The study gives prominence to the discussion of learning opportunities afforded through vicarious participation, which is relevant to educational practice in online learning settings within and outside higher education.
to my family

*Chris, Franziska, Anna and Timothy*

who make me happy

and to my late parents

*Ilse and Willi Pleines*

who made me who I am
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INTRODUCTION

A project arising from practice and rooted in theory

Focus of the enquiry

This enquiry is concerned with increasing our understanding of how language students work with recordings of online tutorials.

Considering that tutorials are aimed at promoting language learning and cultural understanding through active participation and interactive use of the target language, it is not immediately obvious how learners can benefit from listening to a tutorial in retrospect.

In my study, I explore how listening to recorded tutorials, i.e. vicarious participation in interactive online learning events, may help learners in terms of their motivation and language development by linking the results of a mixed methods study to current theories of language learning. The enquiry takes account of the roles of input and interaction in language learning (Long, 1996; Gass, 1997, 2003; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Ellis, 2015), draws on the concept of learner agency (Bandura, 2001, 2006; Van Lier, 2008; Vitanova et al., 2015) and relates to previous research investigating vicarious participation in different contexts (Bandura, 1965, 1971a, 1971b, 1986; Ohta, 2001; Lee, 2005; Mayes, 2015).

Personal interest and practice context

A doctorate in education is premised on a view that sees multiple links between theory and methodology and between theory and professional practice (The Open University, 2012).
This enquiry, too, went through many stages of reflecting on practice while exploring and extending relevant theoretical approaches and previous findings.

The idea for the enquiry arose from my professional curiosity in the processes involved in second language learning and is linked to my experience of course design at the Open University’s School of Languages and Applied Linguistics. Working in distance education with its many constraints on direct tutor-student and student-student contact triggered my interest in learning through participating in interactions indirectly, especially as research into classroom language learning has long suggested that learners can benefit from observing the interactions around them (Slimani, 1989; Ellis, 1994; Ohta, 2001). I was surprised and intrigued by the idea that sometimes observers may learn more from teacher feedback than direct addressees and remember conversations around corrective feedback at the ‘Second language research forum’ conference in 2005, where the potential advantages of overhearing rather than participating in corrective exchanges were being discussed. A year later, I came across the concept of vicarious learning, in a presentation by Robertson (2006) who talked about the way in which a Chinese teacher interrogated a text from different perspectives while learners were listening (and learning) in silence, which he saw as a challenge to the interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996). These ideas seemed highly relevant to my own distance learning context.

I started considering how to include elements of vicarious learning into our own audio-visual materials, but at the same time opportunities for direct interaction increased with the introduction of a virtual learning environment, which offered spaces for learners to interact at a distance with tutors and peers. Developing materials for this new online environment in the run-up to its cohort-wide implementation in 2009 and studying how students engaged with them became a priority. However, time spent in interaction with tutors was still limited, and opportunities for interacting with peers were not always taken up. For example, module teams and tutors tried hard to engage students in forum
discussions on cultural topics, but typically only 10% of students contributed (Hampel and Pleines, 2013), a figure which is in line with findings elsewhere (Nielsen, 2006). User statistics showed that a much higher percentage of learners simply viewed the discussions, and some tutors reported that their students enjoyed reading the interactions in the forums and felt they were learning from them. At the same time, language modules were introducing synchronous live online tuition, which also became mainstream at our School in 2009. All online tutorials could easily be recorded, and tutors started to make use of this facility. Without us actively producing any ‘vicarious learning materials’, many students at the Open University were now engaged in learning vicariously - through reading forum discussions or listening to recordings of online group tutorials.

A small exploratory study conducted in one tutor group revealed that students appreciated tutorial recordings to which they might “listen intently” (Pleines 2013, p.6). Although some felt like ‘lurkers’ in a session that had already happened, participants also reported different ways of vicarious engagement such as answering the tutor’s questions in silent speech or listening out for questions asked by peers which they might have asked themselves. One student thought she learnt most when others co-constructed dialogues, and one felt that listening to discussions brought out her own ideas - suggesting that learning can indeed be mediated through indirect participation. Another learner said he would have withdrawn from the course had he not been able to connect with his group through recordings.

Since then, the practice of recording tutorials at the Open University has become highly controversial. The controversy is linked to the introduction of a new tutorial strategy which allows access to recordings across many tutor groups, thus making them less private and raising issues related to data protection. In addition, tutors are querying the usefulness of recording small group events (Campbell, 2018). At the same time, students are asking for recordings to be made available (The Open University, 2018b). It is timely to investigate
further what use students make of such recordings and what benefits they perceive; even
more so given the steep increase in online tuition across higher education institutions and
other learning contexts worldwide. At the Open University, the first pilot studies of
synchronous online tuition took place from 1998 onwards (Shield, Hauck and Hewer, 2001).

In the 2017/18 academic year, a total of 21,573 online learning events were being offered
to students across all faculties, and by 2018/19 this number had risen to 24,154.

This enquiry therefore explores the potential of working with recordings of interactive
online language tutorials by investigating which types of learner access recordings and for
what reasons. It attempts to increase our understanding of what learners do when listening
to recordings, what elements in the recordings they find salient, and what benefits they
perceive for their language learning and motivation.

**Thesis structure**

In the six main chapters of my thesis I report on the process of the enquiry and discuss its
findings. The literature review in chapter 1 situates the study within the field, placing it at
the underexplored intersection of research into vicarious learning, online learning and
language learning.

Chapter 2 frames the enquiry within sociocognitive theory with a view of language learning
as an activity which is both cognitive and social. It explains and justifies the embedded
mixed methods research design with semi-structured interviews as the main research
instrument for eliciting student perceptions of how, why and to what end they use tutorial
recordings. An analysis of cohort-wide user statistics in relation to demographic and
assessment data provides contextual information and complements the main findings.

The numerical data, which are analysed in chapter 3 with the help of the statistical
software package SPSS, show that live attenders, older learners and learners who live
outside the UK are more likely to access recordings than their peers, while other learner characteristics such as ethnicity or disability do not relate significantly to recording use.

**Chapter 4** assumes a central role within the thesis. Based on the thematic analysis of 13 semi-structured interviews, which were coded within the qualitative data analysis tool NVivo, I demonstrate how learners report overlapping and complementary benefits of face-to-face, live online and recorded tutorials and explain motivations and barriers for either live attendance or listening in retrospect. Recordings can provide structure and guidance and give students access to more voices and wider perspectives, as well as time to reflect on their learning.

In **chapter 5** I discuss the findings in relation to each of the six research questions linking back to relevant literature and bringing together interview data and results from statistical analysis. I argue that being able to make use of input in their own time may help students achieve deeper learning gains. Both qualitative and quantitative data support the interpretation that students who listen to recordings do so because they find tutorials central to their studies. This is visualized in figure 1 in which the size of each word reflects its frequency within the interview data. Although based on learner contributions only, the illustration must be seen as a representation of the meaning co-constructed by interviewer and participants.

![Figure 1: Word cloud produced from participant contributions showing the word ‘tutorial’ at the centre](image-url)
When reporting the findings from this study, I will demonstrate that the central role vicarious learners assign to tutorials is evidenced in terms of the frequency and strength of the argument brought forward by all 13 participants in the qualitative interviews and also in terms of results based on learner analytics showing that live attendance is the strongest predictor of vicarious attendance.

The final chapter, chapter 6, discusses the relevance of the study for theory and practice as well as its limitations. In terms of practice, the research will feed into ongoing and highly polarized discussions at the Open University. It is also applicable to many other learning contexts where learners can benefit from extended opportunities for accessing tutorial interaction online. In terms of theory, following Schulze and Smith’s (2015) call that second language researchers should strive towards a joint analysis of cognitive and social processes, a study of vicarious participation brings together different aspects of language learning and may open areas for further research.
CHAPTER 1

Literature review

The first chapter will focus on reviewing the complex literature which has informed this enquiry. It provides an overview of up-to-date findings in relevant fields located within the subject areas of psychology, education and applied linguistics, making links, exploring overlaps and identifying the gap which this enquiry aims to address. Concepts which are fundamental to the study, notably the concept of vicarious learning itself, will be explained in depth. The chapter starts with a short section outlining the scope of the literature review providing information about what is included, why and in what order.
1.1 Scope

The enquiry into vicarious participation in online language tutorials, which is the subject of this thesis, is located at the intersection of three large research areas within the fields of psychology, education and applied linguistics: vicarious learning, online learning and language learning. The literature review aims to cover aspects from these three areas and will explore their overlaps. Relevance to the study is the guiding principle in selecting the literature to be reviewed (Maxwell 2006).

![Diagram of intersecting research areas]

Figure 2: Intersecting research areas

The concept of vicarious learning is central to this enquiry - its definition and origins in psychology as well as research into vicarious learning in education will be reviewed in some depth. Studies discussing the experience and learning outcomes of working with recorded tutorial dialogue are particularly informative. The very wide field of online learning will be discussed more selectively and mostly in relation to its intersections with the other two areas. This includes exploring vicarious learning opportunities in online environments and covering relevant aspects related to online language learning located within the fields of...
CALL (computer-assisted language learning) and CMC (computer-mediated communication) research. Recent enquiries into the practice of providing lecturecasts at face-to-face universities and into new forms of informal language learning, for example through Massive open online courses (L-Moocs), will also be summarized briefly. The initial parts of the literature review will include references to language learning where appropriate, for example, when introducing the concept of agency which arises from the discussion of vicarious learning but is also increasingly studied in relation to language learners.

Next, specific aspects of research into second language learning will be discussed in more detail. Theories that look at the roles of input and interaction for language development are highly pertinent to an enquiry into indirect participation in tutorials. These theories will inform the research in terms of how learners work with interactive input, what is salient to them, and which linguistic benefits they might derive from listening to interactions in tutorial recordings. Research into motivation and affect in language learning is pertinent to research question 6 [⇒2.2], and recent research into older language learners is relevant because the study uncovered a relationship between age and use of recordings [⇒3.3].

Finally, the chapter will focus on research at the interface of language learning and vicarious learning, which provides some of the fundamental ideas that motivated this enquiry. So far, studies on vicarious language learning have mostly been carried out in classroom contexts, although there is also some literature on indirect participation in online environments, for example in written forums. There are no studies as yet which look at language learners’ vicarious participation in spoken tutorial interactions online.

1.2 The concept of vicarious learning

Introducing the concept

Providing records of learning experiences which other learners can also learn from is an
attractive proposition in distance education where learner access to direct, synchronous participation in learning dialogue may be limited. Lee (2005) defines vicarious learning as arising “in situations where a learning experience is witnessed and reacted to as a learning experience by another learner” (p. 1958, italics added). It is distinct from observational learning, which might consist of merely being exposed to expert performance of a task. The concept goes back to Albert Bandura (1965, 1971a) who refers to an extensive number of experiments in which participants’ behaviour is influenced indirectly by observing others receive positive or negative reinforcement. According to Bandura (1971a, p. 230), vicarious reinforcement occurs if a change in the observer’s behaviour is “a function of witnessing the consequences accompanying the performances of others”. While one might reasonably expect the effectiveness of vicarious reinforcement to be lower than direct reinforcement, studies have shown variable results over the years (Bandura, 1971a). In some experiments, direct participation proves to be an advantage, but, in others, observers surpass performers. This may be because participants who are absorbed in the task of creating, selecting and enacting responses are slower to process the reinforcement provided, leading Bandura (1971a) to the conclusion that although overt performance helps in some tasks and may be necessary to sustain motivation over time, it can also sometimes be a hindrance.

The potential for vicarious learning to occur critically depends on whether interaction and overt performance are essential for developing understanding, and any theory of vicarious learning must confront “strong constructivist intuitions that learning is fundamentally an outcome of activity and participation.” (Lee 2005, p.1959). Constructivist learning theories go back to the ideas of Piaget (1896-1980), Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Dewey (1859-1952) and have been influential in education since the early 1980s. The psychological belief that learning involves knowledge construction rather than knowledge transmission has implications for education, as learners are seen as active participants in the learning
process who should set their own objectives and engage in experiential learning tasks (Rüschoff and Ritter, 2001; Kanselaar, 2002; Felix, 2005). The related concept of constructionism puts a stronger focus on jointly produced artefacts rather than the process of knowledge construction. For cognitive constructivists the focus is on the individual within the group and cognition occurs in the head of the individual whereas socio-constructivists assign a more central role to learning in interaction with a tutor or with peers and see social learning as preceding individual cognition. Discourse, for example in the form of classroom interaction, is a tool which mediates cognitive development and a pre-requisite for acquiring higher-order thinking skills (Sullivan Pallincsar, 1998; Felix, 2005).

Some of the research into vicarious learning refers to constructivist or socio-constructivist principles, sometimes to support the argument that direct participation is superior to vicarious learning processes. Schober and Clark (1989), for example, found that direct participants learnt more from a problem-solving task than observers and have argued that the social experience of sharing knowledge in conversation plays a vital role in the cognitive process of understanding complex tasks. However, Lee (2005, p. 1960) points out that in the task investigated by Schober and Clark, overhearers, although outperformed by participants, did also learn and made considerable progress. This, he concludes, “is all that needs to be established for vicarious learning to have value”.

Lee (2005) further describes how classroom students can learn through questions raised by others and cites the common practice of master classes in music and design, where a teacher teaches one student to the benefit of many others. There are also providers of language learning who rely on this principle, including the award-winning podcast series ‘Coffee break languages’ (Radiolingua, 2016/2019). Although the radiolingua platform has recently become more complex and now offers a range of resources for language learning, the original ‘coffee break’ podcasts featuring short lessons, each with a teacher and a
student, are still its hallmark format. The company used to advertise with the slogan that you learn because each programme includes “a learner just like you, so you won’t feel out of your depth” (Radiolingua, 2016). ‘Vaughan TV’, a Spanish TV channel dedicated to English language instruction, also offers programmes based on vicarious learning (Vaughan Systems, 2019).

Research indicates that listening to tutor-student dialogue allows for deep processing of content and lends itself to vicarious learning because of its exploratory nature and the salience of feedback (Craig et al., 2000; Lee, 2005). McKendree et al. (1998) suggest that actual participants may sometimes be disadvantaged due to the high cognitive processing load involved in keeping the dialogue going. This is relevant to language learning contexts where participants in conversation often have to muster all their attentional resources to formulate contributions in the target language, while vicarious participants can give more attention to the interactions they are witnessing. Lee (2005, 2010) believes that, far from being passive observers, vicarious learners identify and empathise with interactants and are highly active at both a cognitive and affective level.

**The agentic perspective**

Vicarious participation involves cognitive engagement with social experiences. It is based on the view that human functioning is socially mediated, albeit indirectly, and that learning is both cognitive and social. This is at the heart of Bandura’s social cognitive theory, in which he expands on earlier versions of social learning theory and his idea of vicarious learning through social modelling (Bandura, 1971b). Social cognitive theory rejects a duality between human agency and social structure (Bandura, 2006). The self is shaped in transactional experiences with the environment. People create social systems, and these systems, in turn, organize and influence people’s lives. They do not just undergo experiences, but, as agents of their own experiences, proactively influence their selected goals and desired outcomes. In this agentic perspective, the human mind is seen as
generative, creative, proactive and reflective. The agentic perspective was proposed in opposition to previous behaviourist theories, in which participants were considered to be merely reacting to stimuli and all human behaviour pre-determined by biological constraints. Conversely, vicarious responses, as evidenced in the experiments discussed by Bandura (1971a), are the result of an agentic mind.

In later publications, Bandura (2001, 2006) lists four properties of human agency: intentionality, forethought, self-regulation and self-reflectiveness. Intentions centre on plans of action and thereby constitute a temporal extension of agency. They are unlikely to be fully specified from the outset as we cannot foresee the future, but they can nevertheless be informed by forethought as people who set goals for themselves may engage in anticipating possible consequences of their actions and select activities that are likely to produce desired outcomes. Future events can be represented cognitively in the present and thus act as current motivators, while observing events in an environment with similar conditions as anticipated will inform foresightful behaviour. Planning and foresight need to be accompanied by self-regulation, i.e. the motivation to see through the intended actions through self-monitoring and corrective self-reactions. Finally, self-reflectiveness, according to Bandura, is a further core feature of human agency involving the metacognitive activity of judging the correctness of predictive and operative thinking against the effects of one’s own or others’ behaviours or beliefs. In this agentive process from forming and realizing intentions to retrospection and reflection, self-efficacy plays a crucial role: unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act, or to persevere in the face of difficulties.

Increasingly, agency is regarded as a central construct in language learning (Vitanova et al., 2015). Building on previous definitions of the concept, van Lier (2008) describes the main characteristics of agency related to language learning as including the learner’s ability to self-regulate, the socially mediated nature of the sociocultural context and an awareness of
one’s responsibility for one’s own acts. In language learning contexts, too, relationships between structure and agency have been discussed extensively, as reported by Block (2015). Mercer (2011) recognizes the reciprocal relationship of human creativity and control on the one hand and social structure and environment on the other; in Bandura’s (2001, p. 1) terms people are “producers as well as products of social systems”.

Importantly, agency does not always imply active participation as individuals choose to exercise their agency through participation and action and indeed through “deliberate non-participation” (Mercer 2012, p. 42). My own study investigates learners who are part of a social system, namely their peer group and tutorial cluster, and who exhibit agency by learning through indirect participation. However, as observers, they cannot shape the event through their participation or contribute to its “collective intentionality” (Bandura 2006, p. 164).

Bandura (2006), in fact, distinguishes between three different modes of agency: individual agency, proxy agency and social agency, which all blend in everyday life. Both individual and proxy agency are relevant concepts in terms of this study: people may exercise agency themselves or they may exercise agency through others who act on their behalf. Sometimes proxy agency can be a precursor to social agency, also in the context of language learning where communication through a more fluent ‘spokesperson’ may precede a learner’s own engagement.

**Peripheral participation**

While the theoretical approaches reported above make a clear link between the social environment and the thoughts and actions of individuals, Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice, goes beyond the idea of social mediation of cognition. Here, all learning is conceptualized as participation in social activity. In this view, learning is not a choice but an inevitable, life-sustaining pursuit which happens through the “lived experience of our participation in the world” (Wenger, 1998, p.3). But, again, the definition
of participation is not restricted to direct engagement in specific activities with specific people. Engagement with the world is seen as social as it is mediated through socially-constructed tools, even though it may not obviously involve interactions with others. For example, for Wenger, doing homework is a social activity characterised by mutual engagement of student, teacher and peers and mediated through learning materials and the specific homework task. The student draws on her own knowledge and needs to be able to connect meaningfully to the knowledge of others. Lave and Wenger (1991) also coined the term ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, describing a situation in which newcomers initially engage with a community through observing the practices and interactions of their colleagues. For example, discipline-specific language in a subject is often acquired vicariously in group contexts (Laurillard, 1993; Lee, 2005).

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation is also referred to in a second language learning context by Kinginger (2011), who describes students in a study abroad context as peripheral participants. How much they learn in this role critically depends on their preparation, motivation and the way they perceive and are perceived by the target language community. The importance of active engagement on the part of vicarious participants will be discussed below \[\Rightarrow 1.3\].

### 1.3 Vicarious learning opportunities in online environments

**Background**

The ground-breaking changes in communications and the new social realities created by online technologies have spawned a renewed interest in research into theories of learning. In language learning contexts, the role of online environments in facilitating language development through a range of affordances has been the subject of much recent research from different theoretical perspectives and practice contexts (Warschauer, 1998; Doughty

Some researchers see the web as a vehicle for constructivist or socio-constructivist approaches to language learning (Felix, 2002, 2005), and detailed studies relate, for example, to task design (Hampel 2006), spoken interaction (Stickler et al., 2007), the tutor role (Comas Quinn, de los Arcos and Mardomingo, 2012), and the concept of social presence (Hauck and Warnecke, 2012). Balaman and Sert (2017) demonstrate the development of interactional competence in online environments through using carefully designed information gap tasks, and Sun (2018) describes how learners and teachers co-configure online learning spaces.

More generally, Bandura (2006) emphasizes the central role of learner agency with regard to navigating the overwhelming possibilities offered in a ‘cyberworld’, which has enabled people to exercise greater personal control over their own learning. Learners in online environments are not recipients of information but seek out and create their own learning opportunities. The internet with its array of tools and resources requires personal enablement for its effective use. In terms of interactive tools, a difference is often made between synchronous and asynchronous communication, but synchronous communication, too, can be made available asynchronously after the event, for learners to use independently of place and time. It may be “individuals with a sense of personal and collective efficacy who voice their views and participate in social and political activities” in online environments (Bandura 2006, p. 177), but, while web 2.0 technology brings opportunities for direct participation, it also offers a new perspective on vicarious learning.

**Learning through observing tutor-student dialogue online**

In the 1990s, a group of researchers from different subject areas including science and health education, conducted studies investigating whether it was possible to capture online dialogue and make it accessible to students who did not have the chance to participate (discussed in Mayes, 2015). Their aim was to put tutor-student discussion at the centre of
student experience, and their research was premised on an expectation that learners not only can learn from observing other learners but will actively want to do so. By offering a learner’s perspective on the subject, which is notoriously difficult for an expert to achieve, vicarious learning materials engage listeners who are at the same level of understanding (Chi et al., 2001; Mayes, 2015). Mayes and Fowler (1999) propose three types of ‘courseware’ to ensure opportunities for conceptualization (‘primary courseware’: lecturecasts), construction (‘secondary courseware’: interactive tools), and dialogue (‘tertiary courseware’: recorded tutorial dialogue).

After finding that some tutorial dialogue was lacking in depth and seemed less suitable for re-use, researchers tried to create resources that were particularly suited to vicarious learning by experimenting with task-directed discussions, a method originally developed for guided discussion in classes for learners of English as a second language. Structured dialogue between students and a tutor were recorded and subsequently used as a resource for other students. Accessing these resources led to learning gains, deeper processing of the content and incorporation of observed question types into subsequent interactions (Craig et al., 2000; Mayes, 2015). Listening to deep questioning in dialogue was more effective than observing the same questions incorporated into a monologue. This was evidenced by the fact that students in the dialogue condition wrote more in a free recall task and asked more deep-level reasoning questions than students in the monologue condition who asked shallower questions, which required only short answers (Craig et al., 2000). Nevertheless, some researchers suggest that it is possible to enhance the effectiveness of monologic resources by including different perspectives (Tree and Mayer, 2008).

Overall, studies investigating direct participation as well as access to monologic or interactive tutorial resources paint a complex picture of the respective benefits of different learning modes. While results point to some advantages of direct participation and learner
activity, the learning effects of observing tutorial dialogue online are also well documented (Chi, Roy and Hausmann, 2009; Mayes, 2015).

*Learner engagement,*

Similar to Kinginger’s observation that participants’ motivated behaviour contributes to how much they learn from peripheral participation in study abroad contexts [→1.2], studies based on online resources, too, have suggested that variability in the effectiveness of vicarious learning may be related to engagement on the part of the vicarious learner. Chi, Roy and Hausmann (2009) investigated vicarious participation in science tutorials from a socio-cultural perspective and found that collaborative viewing of a tutorial achieved the same learning results as participating, while, for lone observers, results were not as good. They did find, however, that more active observers learned more, which led them to suggest that the discrepancy in the literature on the learning effectiveness of vicarious participation may arise from how “active/constructive/interactive an observer is” (Chi, Roy and Hausmann, 2009, p. 318). To test this idea, they repeated Schober and Clark’s (1989) experiment on either overhearing or participating in dialogue related to completing a complex task but added a task condition where overhearers were themselves asked to explain how to solve the problem. In this condition, the advantage for direct participation disappeared. Based on these findings, some researchers recommend collaborative viewing to enhance the effectiveness of vicarious participation by adding an element of live interaction (Chi, Roy and Hausmann, 2009; Muldner, Lam and Chi, 2014).

An interesting attempt to engage learners more fully with vicarious learning resources was described by Rabold et al. (2008) who led a successful project getting students to edit, re-upload and share tutorial recordings using a purpose-built tool they called ‘YouTute’. Students realized the benefits of the tool for learning and revision and appreciated the opportunities of listening to more than one tutor and of observing different students’ contributions. The authors are clear that their aim in developing ‘YouTute’ was not to
replace the experience of live tutorials and direct contact but to increase the value of tutorials “by capturing what is usually ephemeral and allowing students to process the material to support their learning” (Rabold et al., 2008, p. 13). The project addresses the issue that it is still not clear which kinds of dialogue are most conducive for vicarious learning (Lee, 2010) by letting students decide for themselves. It would have been helpful if the authors had also described the kinds of edits the students made as this could have moved the field forward in terms of determining what good vicarious learning materials should look like.

In my own study, it will be relevant to explore what learners actually do when accessing tutorial recordings, to what extent they are actively engaged while listening and what elements of the recordings are salient to them.

**Attitudes to direct and indirect interaction**

Much research into vicarious participation in online environments is, at least partly, efficiency-driven and motivated by the potential scalability of vicarious resources in contexts of restricted tutor-student contact (Mayes, 2015). Beyth-Marom, Saporta and Caspi (2005) introduced a costly satellite-based system where classroom learners interacted with a remote tutor. In subsequent years, recordings of these tutorials were sent home to students, and a survey was conducted with both groups of participants. The authors found that preferences in relation to tutorial mode were dependent on learning habit inclinations, i.e. whether students had stronger views about the benefits of interaction or expressed the need for autonomy and control over learning materials. Although most participants in both conditions agreed with statements such as “the presence of other students in class increases my motivation” or “other students are important to me from a learning perspective” (Beyth-Marom, Saporta and Caspi, p. 254), overall, the authors report little appreciation for interaction, which they see as discrepant from socio-constructivist theories of learning and tentatively ascribe to students’ past
experience of a more lecture-like tutoring style. Student preference for studying from home meant that, given a choice, only 32% of respondents preferred the (more expensive) classroom mode. Of course, the classroom with remote tutor was also a somewhat unusual set-up and may need to be compared to a face-to-face tutor-led session in terms of its perceived attractiveness for learners. The study described below, for example, refers to a clear learner preference for face-to-face events.

Wong (2012, 2013) investigated student attitudes and impact on learning outcomes of five different tuition modes in an accountancy course: face-to-face lectures, face-to-face tutorials, lecturecasts, synchronous tutorials in an online classroom, and recordings of these tutorials. The online tutorials were conducted in Elluminate, an audio-graphic voice conferencing system, which includes whiteboards, speaking and text chat facilities. The author found that students’ academic performance improved after lecturecasts and recorded tutorials had been made available. In terms of attitude, students clearly preferred face-to-face provision, followed by lecturecasts. Online tutorials and recordings came last. From this, Wong (2012) concludes, in line with constructionist accounts of learning, that students need to be actively participating to benefit from a learning event. However, the data do not seem to support this conclusion as students did not prefer tutorials over lectures, listening to lecturecasts was more popular than active participation in Elluminate, and there was very little difference in student preference for attending online tutorials synchronously or vicariously. The results are of interest to my own study also because the same online conferencing system (Elluminate) was used at the Open University until recently, and the Adobe Connect software used currently has similar functionalities and ‘classroom’ feel.

There is also a substantial body of research into asynchronous forum discussions, which are a part of online or blended courses in many subjects including languages (Chun, 1994; Warschauer, 1996; Salmon, 2011).
In forums, vicarious participation through reading the discussions tends to be very much higher than live participation (Nielsen, 2006), and the phenomenon of ‘lurking’ has been discussed widely (Nonnecke and Preece, 2001; Levy and Stockwell, 2006; Bax and Pegrum, 2009; Salmon 2011). Although the word itself has negative connotations and lurking is sometimes described as an undesirable, even harmful, practice in online contexts, there is a need for a more nuanced understanding (Bax and Pegrum, 2009). Bax and Pegrum (2009) refer to the potential benefits of lurking in forums in terms of enabling learning through reflection and observation, and they identify practical, social/cultural and linguistic/discursive reasons for non-participation. Levy and Stockwell (2006) believe that, in forums related to language learning, lack of confidence or competence in the language is often a reason for not contributing actively. Mostly, the idea that lurking in an online forum is an undesirable activity is now rejected by researchers in this area who prefer the terms ‘browsers’ or ‘passive engagers’. Salmon (2000, 2011) sees browsing as a possible first stage before more active involvement. Smith and Smith (2014), who investigated a cohort of students in an Open University science module, call on institutions to recognize passive engagement as a valid way of learning.

**Lecture capture**

It is also relevant to this enquiry into recorded tutorials to refer to the introduction of lecture capture at universities in the UK and many other countries and to the rapidly emerging research associated with this practice. Many higher education institutions now offer lecturecasts and some experiment with synchronous online teaching, but, so far, the use of lecture capture and its effect on live attendance and attainment have been studied with conflicting and, overall, inconclusive findings.

Studies often refer to specific course programmes making little reference to the wider context, and there are few in-depth accounts which might help explain the variation in the largely quantitative results. A good review of theoretical and empirical explanations of the
potential usefulness of lecture capture is included in an article by Owston, Lupshenyuk and Wideman (2011) from York University in Toronto/Canada, for example, that information accessed through different media may lead to deeper learning and that students may benefit because lecture capture increases their satisfaction and enjoyment with the course, lessens anxiety and gives them more control over their learning. When investigating relationships between live attendance, access to recordings and course result at their own institution, the authors found that it is mostly low-achieving students who benefit from lecture capture. At the University of Birmingham/UK, Leadbeater et al. (2013) showed that students made extensive use of recorded lectures without, however, any demonstrable effect on their attainment and a danger that a small proportion of students are becoming overly reliant on the availability of recordings.

Often, students are more in favour of recorded lectures than faculty (Nordmann and McGeorge, 2018). A recent study by Edwards and Clinton (2019) warning of the pitfalls of lecturecasts, which, according to the authors, had led to a decline in attendance and attainment, was reported in the press prior to its publication and became the subject of intense controversial discussion on social media (Mollick, 2018; Robinson, 2018). By contrast, Nordmann et al. (2019) found recording use to be a positive predictor of attainment and particularly helpful to first-year international students for whom English is a second language. Clearly, more qualitative studies are needed to investigate the reasons behind these contradictory results, which mostly relate to recordings of lecture-style presentations made available to students online. There is little critical discussion of the instructivist approach to learning in higher education, or of how to embed new technologies in a more informed and strategic way taking account of pedagogical as well as technological advances (Salmon, 2005). Mayes’ and Fowler’s (1999) article in which they describe lecturecasts as a first step before engaging learners more deeply seems more forward-thinking than much of the current discussion around lecture capture.
There are also some authors who do continue to explore different formats of learning events. Danielson et al. (2014) found no support for the view that lecture capture negatively affects attainment and further conclude that students are more likely to watch straight lectures than more interactive sessions. The interactivity in the latter, however, was not captured, and only the lecturer’s input was available to hear in retrospect. Hudson and Luska (2013) experimented with a mix of recorded sessions and content which was only presented live and found positive effects of a blended delivery which, they suggest, caters for different learning styles.

**A culture change in higher education?**

While the literature on lecturecasts is divided in terms of the effectiveness of the practice, and the concept of vicarious learning is largely absent from this body of research, the studies into accessing recorded tutorial *dialogue* cited earlier in this section provide clear evidence that students can learn vicariously (Lee, 2005). However, some types of interaction may be more suitable for viewing in retrospect than others and criteria for good vicarious learning materials are still needed (Lee, 2010).

When considering these findings, it is relevant to note again that vicarious learning researchers believe the construction of knowledge through tutorial dialogue involving deep questions to be more conducive to learning than monologic presentations (Mayes, 2015). Vicarious learners, who engage actively, learn more, and different learning contexts will need different answers to the question of how to move from vicarious to direct participation. Lee (2010) sees the alignment of the cognitive processes of vicarious and direct comprehenders as a social process based on an emphatic response to the participating students.

Although there is some indication that student preference is for accessing *expert* performance (Lee, 2005; Wong, 2013), deeper learning seems to take place when watching
peers who are also still learning (Craig et al. 2000; Lee 2005). Lee (2005) found that observing students who are struggling results in better learning than observing more proficient performances. However, St.John et al. (2014) point out that any student who does not want to be recorded can request that no recording is made and would be justified in querying whether students will want to be observed ‘struggling’ in the interest of learning gains for their peers. Similarly, Muldner, Lam and Chi (2014) draw attention to the fact that verbal or written tutor feedback is usually confidential. At the same time, they highlight the potential of such feedback for vicarious learning, which they believe to be underused in higher education. They call for a culture change, based on the view that learners who appreciate the value of vicarious resources may be willing to share their own learning experiences with others, suggesting Massive open online courses (Moocs) as an ideal environment to initiate such a move. Their suggestion is based on the belief that learning dialogue between tutors and peers needs to become scalable and be put back at the centre of education as it is moving increasingly online.

The issue of lack of dialogue is, of course, highly pertinent to Moocs for language learning (L-Moocs), which have attracted huge numbers of learners in recent years. Participants in these courses work their way through scaffolded learning resources and engage in written discussions; they may also submit voice recordings to practice their pronunciation or access online platforms such as Google hangouts to interact with peers (Bárcena, Read and Martin-Monje, 2014; Beaven, Codreanu and Creuzé, 2014; Sokolik, 2014; Bárkányi 2018). Offering vicarious participation in structured tutor-student interaction as suggested by Muldner, Lam and Chi (2014) could be an obvious next step.
1.4 The roles of input and interaction in language learning

Rationale

Language learning differs from the study of other subjects because the means through which students communicate in class is also their prime object of study, and because the development of linguistic competence in a second language involves cognitive processes that are distinct from other learning experiences. University language courses do, of course, include the development of conceptual knowledge and understanding which may be related to language structure, cultural content or academic practice and they address questions regarding the completion of assignments. The main focus of many language tutorials in distance study, however, is to provide opportunities for interaction in the target language. Typically, participants are given many opportunities to use the language they are learning to communicate with their tutor and peers, express their views, talk about their experiences, practice specific linguistic structures and, through structured activities, are pushed to use language that goes beyond their current level of proficiency.

Before looking at the potential benefits and challenges of vicarious participation specifically for language learners, it is therefore relevant to consider the roles that input and interaction are thought to play in language development.

Cognitive interactionist theories

According to Mitchell, Myles and Marsden (2013, p. 161) there is “mounting evidence” for the different ways in which interaction aids learning. So-called interactionist approaches (Long, 1996; Gass 1997, 2003) developed in response to Krashen’s (1981, 1984) input hypothesis which states that, if a learner is motivated to attend to input and not hindered by language anxiety, the exposure to comprehensible input at a level just above a learner’s current proficiency (i+1) is sufficient for language development to occur. This theory was put in question when it was found that students in immersion programmes developed
native-like understanding but their grammatical and socio-linguistic competence lagged behind, leading Swain (1995) to propose that learners needed to engage in ‘pushed’ output in order to learn. According to Gass’s (1997, p.1) interactionist model, input – still seen as the “single most important concept in language learning” - needs to be comprehended in order to become intake, which can be integrated into the learner’s interlanguage system and may lead to (modified) output as the overt manifestation that learning, or uptake, has occurred. This process is mediated in a number of ways, notably through negotiation of meaning in interaction.

While cognitive interactionist theory is consistent within its own assumptions (Ellis 2010b), its foundations have been criticized by socially oriented researchers for not giving sufficient consideration to the learning context and to social factors of language use (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Block, 2003; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Using quantitative methods to predict how learners will benefit from instructional tasks can be deceptive as shown by Slimani-Rolls (2005) who queries the predictive value of quantifying the relationship between task type, negotiation of meaning and learning outcomes. She shows that more instances of meaning negotiation do not necessarily mean higher quality of communication and that variation in students’ communication patterns may be due to individual differences between learners whose complex motivations are affected by social, affective and cognitive factors. Learner interviews reveal that knowing when to feign understanding rather than requesting clarification and prioritizing personal relationships over potential small learning gains may be as important in the classroom as in genuine target language contexts (Slimani-Rolls, 2005).

However, in those instances where negotiation of meaning in interaction does lead to meaningfully modified input, this is likely to be ‘noticed’, a central concept in cognitive theories of language learning which is highly relevant to this study and therefore explained in more detail below.
Mirroring the theoretical advances made by vicarious learning researchers, Schmidt (1990), in his seminal paper, refers to the decline of behaviourist theories and the recognition of the role of consciousness in learning. Although learners may perceive input subconsciously, Schmidt sees ‘noticing’ as a necessary condition for language learning to occur, referring to Kihlstrom’s (1974, cited in Schmidt, 1990) model of memory whereby information is passed from the short-term store to the long-term store through rehearsal. Consciousness is the experiential manifestation of a limited capacity central processor, which is slow, mostly serial rather than parallel, and effortful. Schmidt later contends that “the question of whether all learning from input requires attention remains problematic” (Schmidt 2001, p. 29) and acknowledges the role of both implicit and explicit processes, but nevertheless re-emphasizes the central importance of attention for language learning. Previously, Schmidt and Frota (1987) had shown strong evidence for a close connection between noticing and emergence in production. While ‘noticing’ relates to learners consciously attending to features in the input, the related concept of ‘noticing-the-gap’ refers to learners who perceive a difference between their own deviant output and the input they are exposed to. Both are related to learning gains.

The likelihood of noticing a linguistic item increases with its frequency and perceptual salience, and researchers have established different ways in which salience can be strengthened to facilitate noticing, for example, through input enhancement, corrective feedback or task repetition, as summarized by Ögeyik (2018). ‘Teacher talk’ is a form of input enhancement which is used frequently by tutors in online language tutorials. It is characterized by slower speech rate and redundancy, i.e. the repetitive use of target vocabulary or linguistic structures and has been shown to have a positive effect on both noticing and uptake (Ellis and Shintani, 2014; Ellis, 2015). The different types of implicit or explicit corrective feedback such as recasts or prompts have also been the subject of extensive research. A meta-analysis conducted by Lyster and Saito (2010) showed that
prompts, which elicit modified output, are more effective than recasts, but there is also
evidence that effectiveness depends not so much on the type of feedback but on how
prepared learners are to perceive it as corrective. One study showed that, in a grammar
class, recasts worked well because they were interpreted as corrections and consciously
attended to by the students (Ellis & Shintani, 2014).

Overall, cognitive factors which may be relevant to how well students can learn from
interaction include memory capacity, analytic ability, powers of attention and learner age
(Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2013).

Connectionist accounts of language learning

In a study which explores learner exposure to interactive input, it is also pertinent to refer
to connectionist accounts of language development, especially as they “have
characteristics [...] which allow the cognitive and social aspects of language use and
acquisition to be tied much more closely together than previously” (Atkinson 2002, p. 530).
Usage-based approaches recognize the impact of usage on the cognitive representation of
the language and are concerned with word frequency and co-occurrence in a language
how words go together rather than making a distinction between individual lexical items on
the one hand and grammatical structure on the other, and language learning is primarily
based on a learner’s exposure to language in use (Ellis and Wulff, 2015). Constructions are
form-function pairings, which can include an array of different types of word combinations.
In first language acquisition, children will frequently pick up a whole unanalysed phrase and
reproduce it, and in adult first-language speakers, too, fluency stems from accessing
sequences of words or ‘lexical chunks’, which make up a substantial part of our linguistic
repertoire (Tomasello, 2003). The use of pre-fabricated phrases by second language
learners is associated with better fluency and more native-like expression, but adult
learners master chunks with mixed success, leading Skehan (1998) to propose that learners
may differ along two dimensions in their approach: highly analytical vs. less analytical and highly memory-oriented vs. less memory-oriented.

**Input- vs output-based theories**

Research into the relative advantages of production- and comprehension-based modes of instruction is highly relevant to this enquiry into vicarious participation, which is concerned with the question to what extent input on the one hand and learner output on the other contribute to learning.

Recently, there has been growing evidence in support of skill acquisition theory with its strong focus on language practice and the notions of skill-specificity and transfer. Appropriate processing suggesting that explicit instruction followed by extensive practice will lead to learning gains (DeKeyser, 2015, 2017). However, the theory has little to say about other observed phenomena in second language learning such as the need for input, incidental learning and findings related to predictability or variability in language development, which are better explained by input-focused enquiries.

Interestingly, Tsang (1996) showed that participants in an extensive reading programme improved their writing skills more than their peers who spent the same amount of time in writing classes, suggesting that sometimes input will lead to more learning than learner output and productive practice. Saito and Hanzawa (2018) found that gain scores in oral proficiency were linked to the number of content-based classes learners had attended and concluded that students could attain successful L2 speech learning in foreign language contexts by intentionally increasing the amount of L2 input they receive.

Van Patten’s input processing model (Van Patten and Sanz, 1996; Van Patten, 2015) includes highly specific concepts and operationalizations which have been queried by more output-focused resarchers (DeKeyser et al., 2002), but there is continued support for its main ideas, for example, that learners have limited processing capacity and that they will
process meaning before form, at least from intermediate level upwards (Rast, 2011). The
strong claim that learners cannot process meaning and form simultaneously was rejected
by Morgan-Short et al. (2018), who showed that making learners focus on some simple
grammatical structures did not impact on their comprehension, but evidence was less clear
with regard to more complex structures.

Ellis (2001, 2018) showed that engaging learners in nonreciprocal, i.e. input-based tasks
lead to learning gains. Erlam and Ellis (2018) replicated their own previous research into
input-based teaching for beginner learners and demonstrated clear improvements in
receptive knowledge as well as an effect on productive knowledge of vocabulary but not
grammar. They note that the teacher involved in this study preferred her own production-
based approach, which reflects current practice in many language classrooms. Previously,
Ellis and Shintani (2014) had suggested that there is a production bias in language teaching
and that, contrary to claims made by skill acquisition theorists, language teachers are over-
emphasizing the importance of learner output.

It is worth bearing in mind that recent studies supporting skill acquisition theory as well as
those related to input-based teaching often measure very specific short-term learning
gains, and that there is still much to be done to develop our understanding of how such
different approaches will affect language learning over long periods of time.

Interaction in social theories of language learning

Above, I described interaction as a central concept within cognitive approaches to second
language acquisition, but interaction is even more central to social theories of language
learning, where language development is perceived to take place not through but in
interaction (Ellis & Shintani, 2014), and both meaning and social context are jointly
constructed between participants. Failing to participate will affect development and is
sometimes seen as an act of resistance by the learner (Block, 2003). Input is contextually
constructed and is therefore both linguistic and non-linguistic and, importantly, includes the use of gesture for mediating communicative content (Block, 2003; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Ellis, 2015). Development takes place with the help of scaffolding provided by an interlocutor, and cognitive change occurs through co-construction (Sullivan Palincsar, 1998; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). What has been learned through other-regulation, is subsequently internalized and thus available for self-regulated use; for example, in imitation learning, a learner appropriates the words of another and can then make them their own, thereby extending their competence. These ideas are based on Vygotsky (1978) who sees social speech, private speech and inner speech as a continuum, and internalization as the movement from the social to the individual. Learners learn within their zone of proximal development (ZPD) which arises in interaction between expert and novice or, alternatively, in collaboration between peers. Importantly, the use of private speech and inner speech mediate learning, and intrapersonal as well as interpersonal interaction plays a role in language development - a highly relevant idea to a study of vicarious learning which operates at the interface of the intra- and interpersonal. It must be noted that Vygotsky’s own work was marked by shifts in orientation and he has since been interpreted in different ways which do not necessarily reflect his original intentions (Daniels, 2005). Nevertheless, concepts such as the ZPD and the inner-private-social speech continuum have been highly influential and continue to inform researchers who move beyond earlier understandings. Swain (2006) points out that ‘languaging’, a term she uses to describe language use as a cognitive tool to mediate thinking, can occur both in social talk and in private speech. Rehearsal, too, is at the same time private and social, being directed at hypothetical others, without involving any actual interpersonal exchange.

As in cognitive second language acquisition research, there are also socio-culturally oriented researchers who are critical of what they see as a lack of awareness for
interactions that are not obviously social. As early as 1988, Saville Troike (pp. 568-569) commented on

“a tendency in the second language learning field to equate overt production with active learning, and lack of overt production with passivity and disengagement [...] The more obvious character of socially interactive speech and the difficulties of observing intrapersonal speech, have led to an unconscious assumption that nothing of significance was happening unless learners were talking to others.”

Input and interaction in recorded tutorials

For the purpose of this enquiry into indirect participation in recorded tutorials, it will be of interest to explore to what extent the processes described here can support vicarious language learning by participants who, in their recorded tutorial, will be exposed to multimodal input which may be interactionally modified and include teacher talk, learner contributions, corrective feedback (spoken and via text chat), collaborative building of dialogue, co-construction of knowledge, for example through question-and-answer sequences, as well as various types of scaffolded activity.

1.5 Motivation, affect and age in language learning

Motivation

Almost two decades ago, Larsen-Freeman (2001) observed that motivation “is multi-faceted and no theory has yet managed to represent its complexity”, an assessment which still holds true today. MacIntyre and Blackie (2012, p. 541) refer to the variety of motivational theories which allow researchers to study “this complex phenomenon” from many different angles. The construct of motivation itself is difficult to define, partly because it comprises several subordinate constructs including motivational orientation: the
reasons for wanting to learn the language; behavioural motivation: the effort a learner makes to learn the L2 and attributional motivation: the effect that the learner’s evaluation of their progress has on subsequent learning behaviour (Ellis, 2015). Binary descriptors, such as integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972) or intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Noels et al., 2000), are still useful in educational contexts but have also been superseded by more complex models, the most influential being Dörnyei’s motivational-self system (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015), which, however, has been shown to apply better in some contexts than others (Ellis, 2015). Nevertheless, the idea that learners need a vision “to ‘see’ themselves as potentially competent L2 users, to become excited about the value of knowing a foreign language, and, subsequently, to take action” (Dörnyei and Kubanova 2014, p.2) chimes with anyone who has worked with the highly motivated cohorts of mature learners we see in part-time distance learning. However, distance learning courses also suffer from considerable attrition rates, but Dörnyei and Kubanova (ibid.) believe that “demotivation is not inevitable, as many people are ready to invest effort in difficult tasks, when they have a clear vision of where the process can take them”. Of course, it is not necessarily the overall motivational orientation, but could also be an interest in the task itself or the love of the subject, which encourages action rather than the idea of a better future self. This view is supported by McIntyre (2002, p.63) who sees a close link between emotion and motivation and suggests that statements such as “I love learning the French language” are indicative of high intrinsic motivation.

Motivation of part-time distance learners is likely to be affected by conflicting priorities between study, family, work and social obligations (Kember, 1999; Roval, 2003) and learners must find an ‘accommodation zone’ (Sataporn and Lamb, 2005) between the programme requirements and the rest of their lives. Hurd (2006, 2008) suggests that the effect of affective variables such as motivation and anxiety on language learners may be
intensified in an independent context for two reasons. Firstly, distance learners are more likely to experience feelings of isolation as the absence of a tutor and other students may promote low self-efficacy and fear of failure. When learners are uncertain about their effectiveness as a learner and about their own abilities in comparison with their peers, this may lead to increased anxiety and demotivation. Secondly, distance learners have a high capacity for modification and change, which could trigger feelings of insecurity but could equally be enabling. Students in independent settings have considerable autonomy over their study routines and may have opportunities to select and sequence study resources in a way that suits them best. The concept of agency which was discussed previously [↩1.2] is highly relevant here as “learners have a great deal to do with the outcome of the [learning] process” (Larsen-Freeman, 2001), and it is their motivated behaviour which will ultimately determine the success of their studies.

Ellis (2001) compared metaphorical constructions of language learners by researchers on the one hand and by learners on the other. Researchers, depending on their orientation, saw learners as containers, builders, or problem-solvers, with little acknowledgement of their affective states, whereas the adult learners saw themselves as problem-solvers, but equally as sufferers, strugglers, workers and travellers, i.e.

“sentient beings who experienced fear, frustration and sometimes personal gratification as they struggled to learn German. They saw themselves as travellers along a journey, coping with the affective and cognitive problems that confronted them. The journey was mapped out for them, but they are the ones that must make it and, in this respect, they were the agents of their own learning.” (Ellis 2001, p. 83)
**Affect**

The discussion of motivation in the previous paragraphs already referred to affective factors as motivation and emotions in language learning are closely linked. Cognition and affect, too, are often considered to be interdependent constructs, which cannot be studied in isolation (Hurd, 2008). Breen (2001, p.118) acknowledges research into human cognition “wherein processes such as attention, memory and the construction of knowledge are rarely discussed without reference to the fact that such processes are permeated with emotion or affect. Anxiety, fear, arousal, avoidance, empathy, motivation, self-esteem etc. will be present in various degrees in interactions.”

In language learning, the most influential studies of affect are those by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) and Horwitz (2001) who discuss the concept of language anxiety, which they see as the result of adult learners not being fully in control of the language and lacking the linguistic means to express themselves in a way which adequately reflects their identity and depth of thought. A distinction has also been made between input anxiety, processing anxiety and output anxiety (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley, 2000). These constructs are measured by statements such as “I get flustered unless [the target language] is spoken very slowly and deliberately” (input anxiety) or “I may know the proper [target language] word, but when I am nervous it just won’t come out” (output anxiety) (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley, 2000, pp. 95/97). Language anxiety is common among language learners, it is believed to have an adverse effect on self-efficacy (Mills, 2014) and has been shown to be a predictor for language achievement, thus exemplifying the interlinked nature of cognition and emotion (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley, 2000). Horwitz (2001), however, also points out that it is not always easy to determine the factors which influence learning and/or performance and
that it may be more interesting to study the experience of second language learning and seek to understand the frustration and discomfort some learners feel rather than trying to predict success.

Language anxiety specifically in synchronous online environments has been studied with mixed results (discussed in de los Arcos, Coleman and Hampel, 2009). Hampel (2003, 2006) found that the perceived anonymity of the online setting led to increased anxiety and lower motivation. Online learners experienced a loss of embodiment, feeling they were communicating in a void without eye contact, gesture and other paralinguistic features, as well as sometimes suffering from ‘technostress’ (de los Arcos, Coleman and Hampel, 2009). Conversely, and under the right conditions, the relative anonymity of the online setting may also alleviate anxiety and make it easier for learners to speak freely (Rosell-Aguilar, 2005). Recently, Bárkányi (2018) showed that language anxiety contributed to learners’ unwillingness to post spoken samples in a language MOOC.

**Age**

Age is relevant to this study of mature adult learners especially in light of the fact that the data show a relationship between age and recording use and that the 13 interview participants are aged 40-72, which will be discussed in more detail in later chapters [⇒ 3.3] [⇒ 4.1] [⇒ 5.1]. Age effects in younger learners have been studied extensively to determine any ‘critical period’ effects, but it is now thought to be more likely that there is an age-related linear decline in the ability to learn a second language rather than a critical or sensitive period (Lenet *et al*., 2011). Until recently, there was relatively little research about language learning in older adults, but interest in this area of research is increasing (Kliesch *et al*., 2018; Pfenninger and Singleton, 2017; Pfenninger and Polz, 2018; Singleton and Pfenninger, 2019). Over the years, studies have shown deficits that occur with cognitive aging such as decreases in simultaneous processing, storage capacity, processing speed and inhibitory control (discussed by Pfenninger and Singleton, 2017). According to
Schleppegrell (1987) hearing loss affects many people as they age and can affect a person’s ability to understand speech, especially in the presence of background noise. Seright (1985), too, found that, in adult L2 learners, rate of achievement in aural comprehension decreased with increasing age. Predictably, Stine and Wingfield (1987) found a decrease in recall by older learners as a function of increasing speech rate, but, interestingly, they also found that the differences were reduced under conditions of optimum linguistic redundancy. More recent research is trying to get away from a deficit view of the older learner. Pfenninger and Singleton (2017) found that older adults were better at incidental rather than rule-based learning and conclude that more explicit grammar teaching is not conducive to learning in higher age groups. Bellingham, Benson and Nunan (2005) acknowledge that memory and poor pronunciation are disadvantages for older learners, but also list several advantages such as general world knowledge, previous language knowledge, self-discipline and time. Ware et al. (2017) emphasize the fact that many older students return to the classroom with excitement and high motivation levels. These findings are all highly pertinent to this enquiry here.

1.6 Language learning through vicarious participation

Silent engagers

The potential for vicarious learning in different subject areas as well as the relevance of input and interaction for language learning were described earlier, and this final section will look at research which investigates how language learning could be mediated through vicarious rather than direct participation in target language interactions.

Although there is relatively little research on vicarious language learning, the idea that observing interaction can support language development without overt participation is not new. Slimani (1989) found that listeners in an English class learnt more from tutor-student
interactions than direct participants, and aspects topicalized by other students resulted in better uptake than those topicalized by the teacher. Breen (2001) maintains that it is unclear to what extent overt participation contributes to language learning and summarizes research which suggests that non-participating or low-participating learners recall as much or more from lessons as high participators. Ellis and Shintani (2014) argue that, whilst advice to teachers is to make students talk as much as possible, research has shown that many silent learners are high achievers (Czerwionka, 2009) and that there is little evidence that learners who participate extensively are better learners. Chowdhury (2005, p. 81) believes that “some learners may wish to be quiet and listen in order to learn”. This view had previously been expressed by Reiss (1985) who describes the good language learner as an individual who is actively engaged even when silent and who engages in oral rehearsal by mentally answering questions. It is echoed also in Saville Troike’s (1988, p.568) description of ‘inner-directed learners’.

Fernández-Dobao (2016) investigated classroom learners who triggered, contributed to, solved or observed LREs (language-related episodes) and found that the LREs were beneficial to all groups, and that apparently silent learners were, in fact, active participants in the interaction. She refers to previous research by Storch (2008) showing that multiple repetition and engagement with a target item facilitates its retention, and suggests that small group work is more conducive to learning than pair work because it allows learners to disengage from overt conversation: “A private space can thus emerge, a space in which the silent learner, through subvocal private speech, can repeat, manipulate and internalize the vocabulary afforded by the interaction.” (Fernández Dobao, p. 55).

Robertson (2006) observed language classrooms in China and found that language learners did make progress in English despite a lack of classroom interaction. He suggests that the teacher, by taking on two roles and discussing a text from two perspectives, helped learners participate vicariously and process the dialogue internally as a form of inner
speech. This reflects the previously mentioned findings by Tree and Mayer (2008) [→1.3] who propose that it is possible for one single speaker to present different perspectives as a ‘dialogue’, thus creating a resource for vicarious learning.

**Ohta’s study**

The most extensive study into vicarious learning experiences in a language classroom was carried out by Ohta (2001) who recorded seven classroom learners of Japanese throughout their study year and conducted a detailed analysis of the language they produced in overt or covert contributions, as well as the language they were exposed to as either auditors or overhearers. Each participant carried their own microphone during selected lessons, which were additionally video- or audio-recorded and attended by a researcher who made detailed notes. Several criteria were used to distinguish covert from overt contributions including lower speech volume and the apparent self-directedness of the utterance. Such a study does, of course, pose many challenges and, unsurprisingly, there were some technical problems with recordings and an unspecified number of utterances which were not classifiable. Presumably, there were also some which were not sufficiently audible to be transcribed. In her analysis of identifiable covert responses, Ohta harnesses Vygotskian concepts of private speech and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to explain how learners use speech not only for social interaction but also as a cognitive tool, and how they work collaboratively to scaffold each other’s performance. Similarly, Swain (2000) describes how learners learn through ‘vertical constructions’, building on the utterances of others.

Based on her data, Ohta (2001) sees covert learner activity as a centrepiece of the learning process. The seemingly silent classroom learner is neither passive nor disengaged, but actively involved in collaboration. Through the process of projection, the listener participates in interactions and often stays “one step ahead of the speaker” (Ohta 2001, p.87). “Unencumbered by the demands of production” (Ohta, 2001, p. 79) he has more
attentional resources at his disposal and is more likely to notice and repair errors than a
live participant. From her longitudinal data, the author concludes that immediate uptake is
not always necessary for feedback to be effective, and that absence of overt response does
not indicate a lack of learner attention. While the occurrence of errors provides an
opportunity for language analysis, Ohta (2001) also demonstrates that correct use of a
linguistic structure can have corrective value to overhearers who compare the input with
their own deviant representations.

According to Vygotsky (1978) children learn through rehearsal in (audible) private speech,
which later becomes (inaudible) inner speech, although, in cognitively demanding
situations, adults, too, may resort to private speech. In language learning contexts, learners
may use private speech in order to prolong their exposure to new input or use either inner
or private speech for responding vicariously, a process by which learners in a classroom
setting formulate their own answers to a question a teacher has addressed to someone
else. Ohta’s (2001) learners are highly interactive, working at the interface of the individual
and the social setting, and sometimes make use of private speech, without necessarily
recalling that they have done so in retrospect. While it is a strength of the study that it
focusses on observable learner behaviour, it does, of course, also raise interesting
questions about the unobservable silent processes that are likely to occur. Within her small
group of learners, Ohta identifies large individual differences in the use of self-directed
speech, but we cannot know to what extent these are due to the fact that some learners
produce low level speech that the microphone can pick up while others make similar but
voiceless contributions. The author acknowledges that low participant numbers and effect
of task make it impossible to draw clear conclusions, for example, regarding proficiency
level or development over time, i.e. whether learners might move from audible to
inaudible self-directed speech as they get more proficient in the language.
Lantolf & Thorne (2006) echo Ohta’s (2001) view that the uncoupling of language from immediate interpersonal social consequences may be particularly powerful for language learning by suggesting that off-line processing through silent rehearsal may be beneficial for internalization. They cite Ohta’s (2001) study as well as work by Centeno-Cortés (2003, discussed in Lantolf and Thorne, 2006) who found that internalization was the most frequent function of learner self-talk. Sometimes Ohta (2001) uses the term ‘self-directed speech’ in preference to private/inner speech to describe learners who are not obviously engaging in conversation with others. Other researchers, too, have made a break with Vygotskian terminology when referring to learners who are talking to themselves, which they may do audibly, barely audibly or silently. Fernández Dobao (2016) uses the term ‘silent speech’ as well as ‘subvocal private speech’. Levy (2015) uses ‘audible self-directed speech’.

In Ohta’s (2001) study both direct and vicarious participation were embedded in context; ‘other persons’ in this case included the classroom teacher and peers. With Wong Fillmore (1989, cited in Ohta 2001, p.4) Ohta believes that “levels of learning are dependent on the level of learner participation in the learning activities around them.” Learners’ ZPDs are created collaboratively, but, interestingly, in a later publication Ohta (2005) suggests that social activity may not be necessary for learning to occur. If adults can learn from using L2 material outside of interaction with another person and operate in a self-managed fashion, this may be because the mechanisms of the ZPD have been internalized over the course of development (Ohta, 2005). In this view, literate adults are able to manage the ZPD for themselves as they seek and obtain assistance from a variety of sources. In her 2010 paper, Ohta suggests that adult learners work within their ZPDs by harnessing mediational tools before, during and after social interaction because the interactions themselves offer limited opportunities for learning.
Similarly, Poehner (2008) reports how learners can appropriate mediation and develop full self-regulation when attempting complex tasks. This may explain why Muldner, Lam and Chi (2014) found learning gains through vicarious participation in university students whereas younger school students were less able to learn vicariously.

**Potential for vicarious language learning**

The concept of agency was previously cited as a central concept in language learning, and Ohta (2001) describes her learners as purposefully pursuing their learning goals. Even during teacher-centred lessons they were student-centred in their activity, developing their language skills by drawing on the interactive environment of the setting in which language was used. With regard to my study of vicarious participation in online language tutorials, the research summarized here suggests that tutorial recordings have substantial potential for language learning, but benefits will depend crucially on learner engagement as well as on the types of interactions they witness. Eventually, for any learning gains to become evident, learners will need to seek out opportunities for direct participation.

### 1.7 Research questions

The literature I reviewed in this chapter suggests ways in which language learners may learn vicariously through indirect participation and serves to inform the enquiry from different angles. Relevant studies include those which led to the development of the concept of vicarious learning, as well as those which further explore the concept within education in face-to-face and online contexts. Importantly, they include research into the processes of instructed language learning, taking account of motivational aspects as well as findings specifically related to online and distance language learning environments.

As shown in figure 2 [☞1.1], the current study is situated at the cross-section of these different fields, bringing together the areas of vicarious learning, online learning and
language learning. Previous research which is also located at this same cross-section is related to language learners’ indirect participation in written forums (Levy and Stockwell, 2006). There are no studies yet which explore indirect participation in spoken online learning events. This is the gap I aim to address by exploring language students’ use of tutorial recordings in their learning.

Building on the findings from literature as well as on the practice context in which the enquiry is located, I developed the following six research questions.

1. Who accesses recorded online group tutorials for language learning?

A similar question is often asked in the lecture capture literature where relationships between lecture capture and student attainment are explored extensively (Owston, Lupsenhuyk and Wideman, 2011; Leadbeater et al. 2013; Edwards and Clinton, 2019). At the Open University, too, there is an interest in who accesses the recordings that are being offered, for example, in terms of whether recording users are mostly students who also attend live or whether they form a group which is separate from live attenders. The question also builds on previously reported differences in learning preferences in demographic groups such as younger and older learners (Stine and Wingfield, 1987; Pfenninger and Singleton 2017).

2. Why do learners access tutorial recordings?

While studies on lecture capture are predominantly quantitative and report mixed results, which are difficult to explain without further qualitative research, my study aims to arrive at a fuller picture in terms of students’ motivations when accessing tutorial recordings. The question is linked to previous investigations into distance language learners and the challenges they face in managing their time to accommodate their studies (Kember, 1999; Rovai, 2003; Sataporn and Lamb, 2005; Hurd, 2006, 2008). It also relates to research questions 5 and 6 which explore the perceived benefits of recording use.
3. What do learners do while listening to recorded language tutorials?

Studies into vicarious learning in educational contexts suggest that what learners do when accessing vicarious resources influences how much they benefit (Chi, Roy and Hausmann, 2009; Muldner, Lam and Chi, 2014). The concept of learner agency positions the learner as the most important actor in the learning process (Bandura, 2006; Van Lier, 2008; Vitanova et al. 2015). It is therefore relevant to find out what learners do when listening to recordings.

4. Which elements of the recordings are salient to learners?

Elements in the recorded tutorial which get noticed are more likely to lead to learning (Schmidt, 2001), and it is relevant to explore how learners perceive the input they are exposed to, for example, whether they draw on language used in discussions, report learning from errors, or refer to specific types of input enhancement (Ögeyik, 2018) or visual support. Lee (2010) states that criteria for good vicarious learning materials are still needed, and saliency to learners could be an aspect which feeds into the development of such criteria. The question is also linked to internal discussions of whether to provide monologic or interactive recorded resources to students (Barnes and St.John, 2017).

5. What are the perceived benefits for language learning?

Classroom studies such as Amy Ohta’s (2001) suggest that language learners draw on the interactions around them to support their learning, but online learners are not immersed in live interaction in the same way. In contrast to classroom learners, the vicarious participants investigated in this study are normally working on their own while retrospectively accessing the, arguably, disembodied environment of the online classroom (Hampel 2006). It is therefore highly pertinent to explore whether learners in this context do perceive benefits to their language learning or describe any of the processes previously identified by Ohta (2001).
6. What affective or motivational benefits do learners report?

Lee (2005) points to the importance of processes of alignment and empathic response in vicarious learning, while Hurd (2006, 2008) discusses affective challenges in distance learning contexts. Increasingly, researchers are recognizing the close links between cognitive, social and emotional aspects in language learning (Ellis 2001, 2015; Dörnyei, 2005, 2015; de los Arcos, Coleman and Hampel, 2009). My own exploratory study pointed to motivational benefits of tutorial recordings in terms of helping learners feel connected (Pleines, 2013), and I have therefore included a question on perceived motivation and affective benefits in the present enquiry.

In the next chapter I will describe how I aim to investigate these questions.
My professional practice context in distance education encouraged me to explore innovative approaches to providing experiences of target language interaction. It also presented me with a conundrum: Tutors record some tutorials and students ask for such recordings to be made available. At the same time, the learning outcomes of small group tutorials are normally predicated upon the event being synchronous and interactive.

A review of the literature pointed to possible ways in which language learners may learn vicariously through indirect participation. It also uncovered a gap: Although online language learning has increased dramatically in the past decades and recordings of online events can easily be provided, there is a lack of research into vicarious participation in language classrooms online.

In this chapter, I will describe in detail how I went about designing a study which investigates how distance learners listen to recorded tutorials and what benefits they perceive. The chapter aims to demonstrate the fit between the overall theoretical perspective, research design and methods and discusses the suitability of the design to answer six research questions. It will describe the context in which the enquiry took place and explain the detailed decision-making that preceded the collection of qualitative and quantitative data respectively. It will also refer to the ethical framework that is needed for any enquiry involving student data and participation.
2.1 Theoretical perspective

**Ontological premises**

It is the aim of this study to increase our understanding of learner experience rather than contribute to a body of factual knowledge (Stickler and Hampel, 2015). This approach to the investigation is based on the premise that students are not a homogeneous group and that their experience of the educational context, and, specifically, of listening to recorded tutorials, is likely to differ. In order to investigate independent learners studying on their own, I assume a relativist ontological position that places thought and agency within the individuals whose experiences I seek to explore (Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Glăveanu, 2011). At the same time, the idea that learning is mediated through social interaction is central to the enquiry. I propose that students who listen to recorded tutorials are by no means passive receivers of information but instead exercise agency and control while participating indirectly in the social interactions of their tutor and peers. The question of how students experience their role in the online classroom, and to what extent vicarious rather than actual participation can mediate language learning, is at the heart of this study.

**Sociocognitivism**

The underlying philosophy described above is compatible with a view of language learning as both a cognitive and socially mediated activity (Ohta, 2001; Block, 2003; Batstone, 2010; Dufva and Aro, 2014) and consistent with the sociocognitive perspective which underpins my research. Different interpretations of this broad theoretical framework and the way in which it applies to this study of vicarious learners will be discussed below.

The broadest interpretations of sociocognitivism in relation to language learning encompass any approach that addresses both cognitive and social aspects of learning, including socio-constructivist and sociocultural theories. Ohta (2001), for example, uses a largely sociocultural framework which she labels ‘sociocognitive’, and Ellis (2015, p. 213)
describes sociocultural theory as “socio-cognitive in nature”. A more fine-grained interpretation makes a distinction between the more ecological outlook of socioculturalism and the more person-centred focus of sociocognitivism (Glăveanu, 2011).

While some strands of sociocognitivism emphasize the indivisibility of language learning in a ‘mindbodyworld’ (Atkinson 2002, 2014), Batstone’s (2010) approach of analytic sociocognitivism acknowledges the interaction of social and cognitive factors in language learning, but also the possibility of studying them either jointly or separately. He sees sociocognitivism as a way of bridging the cognitive/social divisions in second language learning research which, he suggests, will avoid confronting language teachers with a pendulum that swings from one extreme to the other, and thereby also addresses the theory-practice divide. From a sociocognitive perspective, neither language use nor language learning can be understood fully without recognizing that they have both a social and a cognitive dimension and that these two interacting dimensions are present in every language classroom.

Importantly, Batstone (2010) adds that, while few would disagree with this statement, there is substantial disagreement regarding the relative importance of cognitive and social aspects for second language researchers. In cognitive approaches, any social interaction, including the negotiation of meaning or form, merely serves as input, which, through cognitive processing, may lead to learning. The contrasting view is that cognition is distributed and subsumed by the social. Learning is presumed to take place in social interaction, and the study of individual cognition loses its relevance (Wagner, 2004). While these theoretical frameworks are linked to different research methodologies and continue to be considered incommensurable by some members of either community, sociocognitive researchers strive for a more balanced consideration of cognitive and social factors in language learning.
An investigation into the sociocognitive concept of vicarious learning, which, by its very nature, involves cognitive processing of a social event, lends itself to such an approach. In psychology, vicarious learning processes were the starting point for Bandura (2001, 2006) to develop his social cognitive theory and fed into the agentive perspective described in chapter 1 [1.2]. In language learning research, both cognitive and sociocultural approaches assign a central role to interaction, but also recognize the value of indirect participation and covert learner activity for language development [1.4], which is pertinent to this study of vicarious participation.

Batstone’s aim of bridging the cognitive/social divide is strongly echoed by Toth (2010) and Toth and Davin (2016) who situate their sociocognitive approach in between cognitive and sociocultural theories and suggest that there is a ‘sociocognitive imperative’ for language pedagogy. Their argument is that, in terms of how we should teach and learn languages, there is much common ground between cognitive and social approaches, for example that “maximal learning only comes through substantive, meaningful engagement with that which is already familiar” (Toth and Davin, 2016, p.150). Overall, however, the classroom contexts these authors describe are highly teacher centred, and their view that teachers’ actions “have a greater impact on learning than those of the learner actors” (p.148) is not applicable in independent language learning settings and at odds with an agentive perspective of the learner.

But other researchers, too, are describing synergies between findings from different approaches, for example Swain (2010) refers to languaging [1.6] as an activity which has been shown to support learning in both cognitive psychology and sociocultural research. She refers to previous studies on self-explaining (Chi et al., 2001) which fed into the body of research on vicarious learning [1.3] and are relevant to this enquiry. Philp and Mackey (2010) suggest that the interaction approach might be a potential forum to combine some of the different perspectives that are emerging from the field, for example, by investigating
how the attention we pay to language will depend on the social context. Ellis (2010b) reasonably believes that, while social factors may influence the extent to which cognitive mechanisms are engaged, it can be argued that they do not alter the nature of the processes themselves.

Ohta (2001), in her detailed study of covert learner activity, aims to show that in language learning the social and the cognitive interpenetrate one another. She employs Vygotskian notions of scaffolding, the ZPD, inner and private speech while also focusing on learner attention, noticing and corrective feedback [⇒ 1.4]. Although she makes no reference to Bandura, his concept of vicarious learning and the notion of the highly agentic learner pervade her work. Both Ohta and Bandura also offer a similar understanding of learning through assisted performance within a learner’s ZPD. Although Bandura (2006, p. 170) does not use such Vygotskian terminology, he clearly describes learning as a process of scaffolded social interaction.

“Parents also set challenges for their infants just beyond the infants’ existing competencies. They adjust their level of assistance as infants pass through phases of skill acquisition but gradually withdrawing aid as infants become more competent in mastering tasks on their own.”

Second language motivation researchers do make direct links between Bandura’s social cognitive theory and language learning. Mills (2014) refers to the critical importance of developing the self-efficacy beliefs of language learners to ensure that they feel competent and have confidence in their ability to acquire a foreign language. She also suggests that a shift in focus has taken place in foreign language research from an interest in learning strategies to the more process-oriented concept of self-regulation.

In this study of vicarious learners online, I aim to build on these synergies. The idea of language learning by drawing on the affordances of the learning environment and the
interactions we witness (Ohta, 2001), the relevance of interpersonal and intrapersonal speech (Dufva and Aro, 2014), the essential role of learner agency and self-efficacy beliefs for study success (Bandura, 2006) as well as the sociocognitive construct of alignment (Lee, 2005; Atkinson, 2014) will be fundamental concepts to harness.

This enquiry

My enquiry aims to increase our understanding of vicarious learning processes in online environments. It seeks to explore who works with tutorial recordings how, why and to what perceived benefit. Bandura (1997) believes that what people think, believe and feel will affect how they behave and stresses the importance of capturing how experiences are perceived and interpreted. While this requires methods which bring out the learner perspective, it is also relevant to this enquiry to establish more generally whether there are links between learner characteristics and vicarious participation online. These intentions have informed the research design.

2.2 Research design

Overall framework

I investigate six research questions, which have arisen from the practice context, are informed by the literature and reflect the theoretical focus on learner experience. They are listed again here.

1. Who accesses recorded online group tutorials for language learning?
2. Why do learners access tutorial recordings?
3. What do learners do while listening to recorded language tutorials?
4. Which elements of the recordings are salient to learners?
5. What are the perceived benefits for language learning?
6. What affective or motivational benefits do learners report?
To explore these questions in line with the overall perspective presented in the previous section, I used a qualitative framework with embedded quantitative elements resulting in an embedded mixed methods design (Ivankova & Cresswell, 2009) in a naturalistic higher education setting. I made no experimental modification to participants’ usual study mode or content. In that respect my enquiry meets Rossman and Rallis’ (2003, p. 9) expectation that “qualitative researchers go to the people instead of extricating them from their everyday worlds”. Denzin and Lincoln (2008, p. 4), too, define qualitative research as “studying things in their natural setting attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”.

As part of this design, I am using two main research instruments:

- Semi-structured interviews lend themselves to exploring student motivations and perceptions and therefore address research questions 2-5.
- Demographic and assessment data analysed in conjunction with user-analytics lend themselves to addressing research question 1, while the interview data can add further explanatory depth to the findings.

The process of the enquiry as well as the purpose, strengths and weaknesses of the data collection instruments and analytical procedures will be discussed throughout this chapter.

**Initial study**

Prior to the main enquiry, an initial study was conducted in one Spanish level 2 module to pilot qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews and subsequent thematic analysis. It was the aim of the initial study to allow for reflection on the suitability of the instrument and refinement of the process. As I had previously used a similar interview schedule in my exploratory study (Pleines, 2013), the interview stage had already been through one such iteration of refinement and generally worked well. Despite conducting only two interviews, some interesting insights could be drawn from the data, although of course, no conclusions can be reached from such a small sample. Importantly,
the opportunity to try out coding and thematic analysis with a limited data set helped me when working with the much larger volume of data in the main study. Findings from the initial study led me to drop one research question, which had shown too much overlap with other questions, and to make amendments to the interview guide. The experience of setting up the initial study also informed the process of sample selection for the main study, as will be explained below.

**Main study**

The main study itself involved collecting several types of data, which I subsume here under the terms ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ although this distinction will be discussed critically later. First, I will briefly describe the different data which form part of this study and explain what purpose they serve within the research design.

The study is centred around a set of qualitative data derived from conducting and transcribing 13 semi-structured interviews with students from four undergraduate modules across three levels and three different languages. The aim of collecting interview data was to explore learner experiences, perceptions and motivations (Richards, 2009) in relation to the six research questions and to draw out common themes through thematic analysis.

In addition, population statistics, assessment data and user analytics of the same four modules are used to provide much broader information on the use of tutorial recordings across levels and languages, which may be generalisable beyond the populations studied. The quantitative data provide answers to research question 1 (“Who accesses recorded online group tutorials for language learning?”) and give a second perspective on aspects that are explored through thematic analysis. For example, interview data reveal assessment preparation to be an important reason for listening to recordings, while statistical data show relationships between access to recordings and assessment results.

Table 1 provides an overview of the research design.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of data</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>QUALITATIVE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Semi-structured interviews, fully transcribed, 35-55 minutes in length | 13 participants from four undergraduate modules across three levels and three languages in the 2017-18 academic year | Thematic analysis | • Explore participants’ experiences, perceptions and motivations in relation to the research questions  
• Draw out common themes |

| **QUANTITATIVE** | | | |
| Demographic data relating to  
  • Gender  
  • Age  
  • Ethnicity  
  • Education  
  • Occupation  
  • Study motivation  
  • Disability | Entire populations of the same four module cohorts (n=977) | Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis | • Contextualise the study  
• Inform research question 1 (Who accesses recorded online group tutorials for language learning?)  
• Complement findings on aspects arising from thematic analysis  
• Increase generalisability of some findings |
| Assessment data relating to  
  • Assignment grades  
  • Module outcome | | | |
| User analytic data relating to  
  • Attendance at face-to-face tutorials  
  • Attendance at live online tutorials  
  • Access to tutorial recordings | | | |

Table 1: Research design
2.3 Research context

Before moving on to describe the research instruments and decisions in more detail, it may be helpful to provide information about the educational setting within which the enquiry was carried out and which is also my workplace.

The Open University’s School of Languages and Applied Linguistics currently offers 15 undergraduate modules in languages - not counting modules taught in English such as the introductory Language and Culture course or English for Academic purposes. All students are encouraged to register for a qualification although some just study on a module-by-module basis. Many language students are registered either for the ‘BA Language Studies’, for which they need two languages or one language plus English linguistics, or for an ‘Open Degree’, which can include modules from many different subject areas.

Language modules cover a demanding curriculum including the development of linguistic, academic, professional and digital skills as well as cultural knowledge and understanding. Students start with a module that matches their prior knowledge of the language but need to cover modules at Levels 2 and 3 to achieve a degree. The designation as level 1, 2 or 3 refers to the academic level of study and is equivalent to first-, second- and third-year study at a traditional university. This is shown in the module codes: L1xx are level 1 modules, L2xx are level 2 modules and L3xx modules are at level 3. In languages, the different levels are also associated with differences in linguistic difficulty in terms of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as shown in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic level</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language level</td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Upper Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEFR exit level</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modules (in 2017/18)</td>
<td>French (L192) German (L193) Spanish (L194) Italian (L195) Chinese (L197)</td>
<td>French (L112) German (L113) Spanish (L116) Italian (L150)</td>
<td>French (L211) German (L203) Spanish (L204)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study hours/week</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>14-16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Language modules at the Open University
Modules start in October and end in June. Cohort sizes vary, but typically include several hundred students, mostly mature adult learners who study part-time alongside work and family commitments. The mode of study is very different from traditional university study. Students are spread across the UK and just under 10% live in other European countries. All students are supported by a tutor and their modules are presented online with interactive study materials as well as access to forums and online rooms for interaction with tutors and peers. Students also receive printed books and other resources. The modules are highly structured, students are expected to follow a weekly study calendar, register for scheduled online or face-to-face tutorials and submit assignments at regular intervals, for which they receive detailed feedback. This system of supported distance learning was described by Hurd (2006) while the role of technology in distance language learning in the Open University context was critically discussed by Hampel and de los Arcos (2013).

It is relevant to note that to achieve a pass grade for their module and obtain credit towards a degree, students must submit their assignments and attend any end-of-module assessment, while all other module activity – including attendance at tutorials – is optional.

Tutorials are generally small group events with a focus on interaction and participation. A typical tutorial will include six to eight participants, although numbers can range from just one attendee to over twenty. Some tutorials are face-to-face, but most are held in online classrooms using Adobe connect audio-graphics voice conferencing software; the screenshot below shows a tutorial from which the names of the students, usually visible in the ‘attendees’ window, have been deleted. The tutor uses PowerPoint slides and a pointer as well as the ‘notes’ feature for additional explanations. Students, too, can place symbols on the whiteboard or write, and they may take part in polls or use emoticons. They speak by turning on their microphones and are using text chat. If they turn on their webcam, their image appears in a video window, but this feature is rarely used in language tutorials.
Some online tutorials, like this one, are recorded and made available to students via their online room pages, but most are not. Playing the recording gives access to all visual and oral activity in the classroom although it is also possible to edit the recording before making it live, for example by anonymizing participants, removing the text chat or deleting passages from the audio track. The number of tutorials and tutorial recordings on individual modules and the use students make of them will be discussed in chapter 3 [3.1].

2.4 Sampling

Following the brief outline of language study at the Open University, I will now explain how I went about setting up my enquiry in this specific educational context. After the early stages of developing the project, applying for ethics permissions, reviewing the literature, and testing research instruments, the selection of an appropriate sample for the main
study was a priority. Sample selection took place at two levels: I selected the modules to be investigated and then recruited interview participants from these modules. This type of design has been described as ‘nested’ (Gray 2014) as the qualitative sample is nested within the quantitative one.

At the first stage of sampling, I identified modules at intermediate level and above as offering the optimal amount of tutorial interaction to study indirect participation. Typically, students at these levels can communicate about a range of subjects but are not entirely fluent. Tutorials include interactive class discussions on personal and, increasingly, cultural topics, consolidation of vocabulary and grammar, and assessment preparation. I selected four modules which cover three different linguistic levels (CEFR B1, B2, C1) and three languages (French, German, Spanish) to ensure a broad coverage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic level</th>
<th>Language level</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Upper Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEFR exit level</td>
<td>French (L192)</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German (L193)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modules (in 2017/18)</td>
<td>Spanish (L194)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italian (L195)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese (L197)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>French (L112)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German (L113)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish (L116)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italian (L150)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>French (L211)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German (L203)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish (L204)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>French (L310)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>German (L313)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish (L314)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study hours/week</td>
<td>7-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>14-16</td>
<td>14-16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 3 indicates, I selected two modules at level 1, and only one each at levels 2 and 3. I was originally intending to investigate only 3 modules but, when conducting the initial study, it proved difficult to find participants for interviews and it seemed safer to extend the participant base by including the two largest level 1 modules (French and Spanish) in the study. As a result, I was able to recruit enough interview participants and collected quantitative data for four instead of three modules, thus increasing the robustness of numerical findings. When analysing the data, I mostly worked across levels but, occasionally, report findings by level where I found relevant differences between them.
As a lecturer at the Open University, I also needed to consider potential conflicts between my researcher role and my role as module team member or module chair. In 2017/18 I was not involved in the selected modules in any capacity other than as researcher for this study; I did not know the students in these modules, nor did they know me. Further aspects of insider research will be discussed again later in this chapter.

The second stage of sampling involved finding participants who agreed to take part in 45-minute online interviews. The sample I arrived at can be described as both purposive and self-selected as will be explained below.

For the initial study, I had contacted students not knowing whether they might have watched recordings or not, which resulted in a low response rate. For the main study, I purposely sought out students who, according to viewing records, had accessed recordings. Such purposive sampling is common in qualitative studies where researchers rely on participants to provide rich data (Shawer, 2010) and seek insights into practices within a specific context (Gray, 2014). The purposively selected sample may not be typical for the whole cohort or provide easily generalisable answers, but Schofield (1989) proposes that generalisability can also relate to what “could be”, i.e. studying specific examples will give an indication of what could be possible also for the wider cohort, provided the conditions are right. Findings can also help with generating theory, which is applicable beyond the immediate context (Hammersley 1996, 2013), for example, in this case, establishing whether vicarious participation in interactive events has any potential for language learning.

By January, i.e. half-way through the academic year, 196 (20%) out of the 977 students on the four modules had accessed at least one recording of an interactive tutorial. I sent a list of their personal identifiers (PI numbers) to the student statistics team, who returned a reduced sample of 102 students for me to contact, following the Open University’s rules on
how often each student can be approached for research purposes. I emailed the students individually and had 16 positive responses. Three respondents did not get back when I tried to arrange interview dates. I interviewed 13 students who were self-selected and are not distributed neatly by module.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L112 (French)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L116 (Spanish)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L203 (German)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L314 (Spanish)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Interview participants by module

Each, however, made very meaningful contributions to the study. I will be further discussing the issue of the representativeness of the sample when presenting the data in chapter 4 [\ref{4.1}].

2.5 Qualitative data production

*Fit for purpose*

Semi-structured interviews are the main data source for this enquiry, which is consistent with the emphasis of the study on subjective experience and on a view of learning that is centred on the ways in which individuals make sense of their learning experiences. It follows a tradition of research that rejects the idea that simple causal relationships can be established in education (Hammersley, 1997) due to the multicausality inherent in open systems, which cannot be carefully controlled (Tikly, 2015). Although learning in terms of knowledge acquisition is sometimes studied under experimental conditions, “when learning is conceptualized as participation or construction it can neither be observed directly nor quantified very easily as the emphasis is on subjective processes rather than objective products” (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010, p. 180). Interviews can provide otherwise inaccessible data and can help to achieve a deep understanding of people’s thoughts, perceptions and opinions. Mercer (2012), in her definition of agency, points out that agency is not only concerned with what is observable but also involves non-visible
behaviour. She further suggests that personal and socially constructed agency exert a significant influence on the control learners have over their own learning and, ultimately, on the levels of attainment in another language, which makes the collection of interview data highly relevant for gaining insights into language learning. Similarly, Boud (1995, p. 15) observes that it is foremost the learners’ decisions about what “they will and will not do” which determine their learning outcomes.

Alternative methods

While semi-structured interviews are a well-established technique in social sciences and in applied linguistics research (Talmy and Richards, 2010) and may be used as main research instrument (Gray, 2014) as they are here, there are other qualitative methods that have been used successfully to investigate the experience of distance language learners, for example, learner diaries and ‘think aloud’ protocols (Hurd, 2008) or White’s (1999) ‘yoked subject’ technique. I decided to use the interview format for two main reasons.

Firstly, retrospective interviews allow students to experience the learning event, i.e. listening to the recording, without having to deal with the researcher’s demands at the same time, which could potentially distort their experience. In Vygotskian theory, speech is seen as a cognitive tool, which means that what participants say in think-aloud-designs may not so much reflect but mediate their thinking. As a result, relationships between thinking and speech in think-aloud designs are seen as problematic by some researchers such as Smagorinsky (1998). Secondly, in two-way spoken communication, participants can elaborate more easily, and points can be followed up more immediately by the researcher. This was important to me as the semi-structured interview format allows for probing, elaboration and aspects brought to the discussion by the participant. With Talmy and Richards (2010, p.2), I have come to see interviews not so much as instruments to “mine the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of self-disclosing respondents”, but as socially
situated speech events in which interviewer and interviewee make meaning and co-construct knowledge.

To some extent, my interviews resemble the ‘language experience’ interviews, which Polat (2013) used in conjunction with test results. She interviewed her participants about how they experienced their French lessons moving from more general to more specific questions. The qualitative interviews in this enquiry, too, start with a more global view of participants’ experiences as distance language learners before homing in on their detailed motivations and perceptions related to tutorials and tutorial recordings. Interviews took place in April and May towards the end of the 2017/18 academic year because it was important to me to capture both the big picture of what role recordings had played for participants over the course of the year, as well as more fine-grained information when I encouraged them to report on a recording they accessed recently. I informed them prior to the interview that I would be asking about an example of a recording they had listened to, and all came prepared with a specific recording in mind. Some participants accessed the notes they had made at the time.

Research quality: issues related to validity and reliability

It is also important to consider that the very characteristics that make the interview such an attractive research instrument are also its drawback, and that there are issues around reflexivity and memory, which can affect the reliability of the data gathered and which must be seen as limitations of the research. Rightly, all introspective methods “have had a long and contentious history in psychological research” (Smagorinsky, 1998, p. 157). To improve the internal validity of the instrument, I have closely tied the interview guide (Appendix A) to the six research questions and considered the decisions that needed to be made prior to interviewing, for example, regarding the appropriate distance or intimacy created between interviewer and participant (King, 1996). While interviewing, I tried to keep the focus on the other person and employed active listening techniques such as...
summarizing or recasting information to check my understanding (King, 1996; Rouane, 2005). Afterwards, I produced full transcriptions for analysis and have attached some extracts in Appendix B, as recommended by Mann (2010). At the pilot stage, I found that transcripts made it easier to remain true to the essence of the conversation in order to provide “thick descriptions” (Ercikan and Roth, 2006, p. 15) which explore student perception. Transcripts also help to ensure that contributions are always seen in the context of the two-way conversation (Mann, 2010). In order to improve my own understanding of the practices related to tutorial recordings and gain a different perspective on some of the aspects covered in interviews, I accessed a wide range of additional resources, which will be listed in chapter 4 [↩4.1].

Threats to validity can also arise at the stage of data analysis, and it is essential to be aware that research is never a neutral undertaking, and that any data can be interpreted in different ways. After coding the two pilot interviews by hand, I decided to use qualitative data analysis software to explore interview data systematically following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework for thematic analysis. This involved a combination of deductive and inductive approaches (Gray, 2014; Tikly, 2015). The fact that the study is framed by a literature review and conversations follow a semi-structured interview guide means that some thematic organisation was present a priori and fed into the analysis. At the same time, close reading of the interviews revealed additional aspects, which were incorporated into an overall framework during the highly iterative process of data analysis. The drawbacks of thematic analysis, as opposed to discourse analysis, are discussed in the Open University’s research methods handbook (The Open University, 2001), for example, that actual talk and meaning making can get lost early in the process. Moss et al. (2007) stress the importance for qualitative researchers of spending substantial amounts of time in ‘fieldwork’: reading, categorizing, re-reading and re-analysing their material to arrive at
meaningful results. I used recordings and full transcripts and went back to the original data many times to interrogate my interpretations.

In this thesis, I aim to be transparent in reporting the decisions I made along the way and will give further consideration to the validity of the methods used in the final chapter [↩6.1]. Data derived from interviews through thematic analysis help us explore the understandings and experiences of other people, and the significance of the meanings they generate (Hammersley, 2013; Gray, 2014). Their strength as a research instrument is to give voice to learners.

2.6 Mixing methods: embedding a quantitative element

Quantitative data collection

As explained earlier [↩2.1], I also collected and analysed numerical data and make links between statistical results and the thematic analysis of interviews when reporting findings for this study in chapter 5. Specifically, I obtained student-level demographic and assessment data, which was extracted for me by the Open University’s student statistics team. I also asked for permissions which allowed me to access user-analytic data from the four module websites, where I extracted attendance records and recording views. A sample of the original attendance and viewing records as available from the modules’ websites is shown in Appendix D.

I discussed the reliability of these data with the online rooms team and cross-checked downloaded attendance records against the tutorial booking information sheets generated by the tutorial booking system. In previous years, there had been discussions about whether user analytic data was 100% accurate, with tutors reporting that sometimes the system failed to record all attendances reliably. The online rooms team pointed out that the occasional failure to record an attendance was restricted to infrequent cases where
students joined a tutorial more than 20 minutes before its scheduled start and confirmed that otherwise attendance data are accurate, and that tutors are now advised not to open the rooms so early to students. When comparing different sources of information, I found that the tutorial booking records matched the downloaded user-analytics, and cross-checks between actual attendance in the room and students who were recorded as having attended also revealed no discrepancy. I concluded that the data were sufficiently trustworthy to be analysed.

To compare different variables such as assessment results and recording views, I then uploaded the demographic and assessment data into an SPSS file and added the data derived from user-analytics. At a later stage, I also added information about attendance at face-to-face tutorials. In my quantitative analysis, I use descriptive and inferential statistical procedures within SPSS, which will be described in more detail in the following chapter [COPY 3.2].

*Purpose of including a quantitative element*

Mixing methods in social sciences, education and specifically in applied linguistics has been discussed extensively. Hashemi (2012, p. 209) examined current practices and believes that mixed methods research has “great potential” in applied linguistics. Teddlie and Tashakorri (2009) advocate pragmatism, while Riazi (2016) points out that mixing methods need not be just pragmatic or eclectic, but that a pluralistic conceptualisation of research problems, for example, combining cognitive and social aspects of learning, calls for an innovative mixed methods design. In my study, the main purpose of quantitative data is to complement and extend the interview data rather than serve as triangulation (Gray, 2014) or represent a fully integrated innovative design (Riazi 2016). Ivankova and Cresswell (2009) describe the embedded design as one where there is one predominant methodology, for example qualitative, into which quantitative elements have been embedded to answer some sub-questions to the main research questions. In this study,
quantitative data are used to answer specific aspects of the first research question (“Who accesses online group tutorials for language learning?”). Relevant sub-questions, for example, “Do men and women differ in their use of recordings?” are used as organizing principles when reporting on the quantitative data analysis [3.3]. My belief that both qualitative and quantitative methods can be harnessed within the same study and need not be seen as incompatible is further supported by a number of researchers, as explained below.

Twining et al. (2017) prefer the terms ‘numerical’ and ‘non-numerical’ over ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ to indicate that an essentially qualitative design can nevertheless contain numerical instruments. Hammersley (1996, 2013) and Moss et al. (2009) go further in deconstructing the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy by showing how qualitative data are often quantified, for example, where speech data are categorized and labelled as occurring ‘frequently’ or ‘rarely’, and how the collection and analysis of quantitative data depends on qualitative judgements. Such overlap is evident in the enquiry described here, which includes qualitative and quantitative procedures at all stages of the investigation. Hammersley (1996, 2013) further describes the complementary use of different types of data and implications for the generalisability of findings, which are relevant to this study and will be discussed in the final chapter [6.1]. Ultimately, if we believe that there is no one objectively verifiable truth, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, but that there are many ways of improving our understanding, approaching a question from different perspectives is likely to add depth to an enquiry.

2.7 Ethical considerations

Researchers rely heavily on the goodwill of their respondents and need to take ethical concerns seriously. Gray (2014) lists areas for consideration such as ensuring informed
consent and respecting privacy, the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) provide comprehensive advice to educational researchers regarding the conduct of their studies, and the Open University has procedures in place which ensure that all research within the institution is carried out responsibly and ethically.

Prior to conducting my enquiry, I applied for approval by the Student Research Project Panel, which was granted with reference SRPP 2016/101 for the initial study and then extended to cover the main study in the following year. The panel not only checked the actual study proposal but also the interview guide and the participant invitation email to which they made some amendments in line with University policy. The email served to invite students to take part in the study and to inform them of the purpose of the research. It is attached as Appendix C. Some of the information was re-iterated at the start of each interview, for example, I explained that participants could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants also signed and returned a written consent form.

I had also informed staff tutors of my project and posted messages in the tutor forums of the four modules I studied to make tutors aware that I was conducting a study, which included contacting students as well as downloading viewing and attendance records from the tutorial rooms pages. I emailed one tutor from each language personally to gain permission to watch their tutorial recordings myself, and only accessed recordings after they had emailed their consent.

After conducting the research, it was important to safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of responses and to devise appropriate methods for recording and retaining data. From the transcription stage, all participants’ names were replaced by a pseudonym which they had either chosen themselves or indicated that they were happy for me to choose. The actual interviews took place in an online room, similar to the room in which students attended tutorials but which had been specially set up for me with high privacy.
settings to conduct research interviews. The recordings are held on the room page, accessible only to me and the IT administrator. They will be deleted once the project has come to an end. All other data are held on my private laptop with fingerprint lock, and any documents which identify students by name or PI number are additionally password-protected.

Ethical issues can also arise when the researcher, like me, is an insider to the institution where the enquiry is being conducted. According to Justine Mercer (2007, p.13)

“insiders, on the one hand, often enjoy freer access, stronger rapport and a deeper, more readily-available frame of shared reference with which to interpret the data they collect; on the other hand, however, they have to contend with their own pre-conceptions, and those their informants have formed about them as a result of their shared history.”

Previously, I indicated that I did not have any role conflicts within the four modules I was researching, nor was I known to any of the participants [↩2.4]. However, they still saw me as a representative of the Open University, and, of course, I brought my own perceptions of Open University study to the interviews. Overall, I think that shared knowledge and understandings were helpful in establishing rapport and in moving the conversation beyond mere description more quickly. Occasionally, participants tried to make suggestions for improvement in their modules and were hoping for me to pass these on. I did not interrupt such suggestions, but always brought the conversation back to the interview guide and, in some cases, explained my role as research student again at the end of the interview. When discussing the contested concept of ‘objectivity’, Hammersley (2013) suggests that objectivity should not be seen as a matter of value disconnection but in terms of evaluative appropriateness. According to this view, biases can arise from a researcher’s other identities, and this issue should be addressed by making sure that only the
considerations relevant to the task are taken into account. In the context of my interview study, this means that, as an Open University academic, module team member or module chair, I would, of course, have been very interested in any suggestions for improvement to our modules; but, as a researcher, I needed to keep the focus on the research questions I was investigating. Framing the conversation within the interview guide, which was, in turn, related to the research questions, keeping the focus on the participant, and being aware of reflexivity when analysing the data were all important when trying to guard against bias. King (1996) believes that reflexivity can be an asset, and that examining how the researcher is part of the data can bring out the voices of the participants more clearly. Hammersley (2013, p.13), too, acknowledges that any understanding of others’ perspectives will necessarily be filtered through the researcher’s own distinctive view of the world, and that research cannot operate without reliance upon “personal or socio-cultural capabilities and motivations”. He also believes that it is nevertheless important to avoid threats to validity which stem from the assumptions and preferences of the researcher and from other commitments not directly related to the project at hand.
CHAPTER 3

Quantitative data analysis

This chapter moves on from outlining the ideas that motivated this enquiry, the discussion of existing literature and explanation of the research methodology to looking at some of the data which were produced. The focus here is on quantitative analysis, not because the numerical data came first or are more important, which is not the case in this concurrent and predominantly qualitative research design, but because the statistical information can help provide context and will act as a framework for looking at the much more in-depth interview data which will be the focus of the next chapter. To start with, I will set the scene by presenting some descriptive statistics related to the modules under investigation, their student cohorts, the number of tutorials and tutorial recordings learners could access as part of their studies, and what use they made of these opportunities in 2017-18. I will then describe the process of quantitative data analysis and explore relationships between learner analytic data, demographics and assessment results.
3.1 Setting the scene

Demographics

Table 5 below gives a rough indication of the nature of the student population in the four modules scrutinised in this study, in terms of demographic variables as well as study motivation. Many characteristics are common to Open University language modules in general: around two thirds of students are female, the median age is just over 35, and fewer than half of the students are in full-time work; others are working part-time, on a voluntary basis, as homemakers or have retired or do not disclose their status. Although career objectives contribute to study motivation, most language students do not choose their module predominantly for career purposes. Students on language modules score higher on socio-economic group (SEG) and prior educational attainment measures than other Open University undergraduates and many have previous higher education qualifications, including postgraduate study. At the other end of the spectrum, there are also some students without or with only limited A-level study. In terms of ethnicity, students on language modules are very predominantly white, which is equally true when looking at university-wide figures (The Open University, 2018a). Around one in five students on the investigated modules has a disability marker, which, again, is in line with other language modules and with the Open University’s overall figure of 19.5% of the student population in 2018. A small proportion of students live outside the UK, mostly in the Republic of Ireland or other EU countries. The description non-UK refers to place of residence not to nationality.
### Table 5: Module demographics

*Socio-economic group refers to UK students only (i.e. the real figure, including non-UK students, is likely to be higher)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Gender % female</th>
<th>Age &lt;35</th>
<th>35-55</th>
<th>&gt;55</th>
<th>Ethnicity % white</th>
<th>Disability %</th>
<th>Non-UK %</th>
<th>SEG* % high</th>
<th>Previous education &lt; 2 A-levels</th>
<th>A-levels</th>
<th>HE qual.</th>
<th>Work % full-time</th>
<th>Study motivation Mostly career</th>
<th>Mostly equal</th>
<th>Mostly personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All (n=977)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>85%+</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L112 (n=329)</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>89%+</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>L116 (n=362)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>84%+</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 1 Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L202 (n=100)</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>80%+</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>L314 (n=186)</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>83%+</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The overview shows the diversity of the module populations in terms of age, educational background, employment status and study motivation. It also reveals some statistically significant variation between modules, for example in terms of gender distribution, which is most unbalanced in French. Modules at levels 2 and 3 have fewer students with low prior educational attainment than those at level 1. Overall, however, the information in table 5 demonstrates that the four modules are fundamentally similar with respect to the demographics of their cohorts. This is relevant when considering the statistical analyses in the next section, which are mostly carried out across all four populations.

**Tutorial provision and use of recordings**

To understand the experiences and perceptions of participants in this study and make sense of data related to tutorial attendance and recording views in the four modules, it is of interest to explain the tutorial strategy. The tutorial strategy governs the provision of tutorials and is different for each level of study. As outlined previously, language modules at the Open University cater for cohorts of several hundred students, but tutorials are intended as small group events with a focus on interaction and participation. While responsibility for curriculum and materials design lies with Open University academics based in Milton Keynes, student support and tutorials are provided by associate lecturers (ALs)/tutors who are located across the UK.

Each student who registers on a module is allocated to a specific tutor group: the student’s own tutor will mark their assignments and be available for them by phone, email or online forum if they need additional help or advice. The tutor will also run an initial online ‘Meet your tutor’ session specifically for students in their group. Although efforts are made to allocate students to a tutor who lives near them, this is not always possible, and the smaller the student numbers on a module, the more likely it is that tutors are thinly spread across the country. This means that face-to-face events are difficult to get to for some students. In any case, after the first ‘Meet your tutor’ event, tutorials are offered across tutor groups,
either module-wide or, in the case of large modules, in several clusters. This system sounds (and is) rather complicated, but all that is relevant here is that students have access to tutorials offered by six to twelve different tutors including their own.

Table 6 shows details of the tutorial provision in the four modules in the 2017/18 academic year. It also shows the availability of tutorial recordings and the proportion of students who made use of live tuition and of recordings respectively. Here is a brief explanation of the categories.

Students on the module: This refers to the number of students who were enrolled on the module in 2017/18.

Tutor groups: This refers to the number of tutor groups the students were split into. The number of tutor groups is similar to the number of different tutors teaching on the module, but may not be the same, because some tutors have two groups. For example, in module L116 there were 22 tutor groups taught by 20 different tutors.

Distinct types of tutorials offered across the year: The tutorial strategy determines which distinct learning events are offered to students at each level. For example, for each level 1 module, a total of 16 distinct learning events were offered, each with a different descriptive title, such as “Unit 1 practice and TMA preparation” or “Grammar workshop 3”.

There were some events listed within the tutorial strategy of the modules, which I excluded from this enquiry. These were information sessions run by the module team rather than learning events provided by tutors.

Total number of face-to-face/online tutorials: Each distinct learning event is run multiple times depending on student numbers on the module. For example, in L203, there were 10 different types of tutorial and a total of 58 face-to-face or online sessions, meaning that, on average, each type of tutorial was offered six times. To illustrate this further, “Unit 2 practice” was run seven times: as a face-to-face event in Glasgow, Belfast and Crawley and
four times online in different time slots. Five different tutors were involved, running one or two sessions each.

**Students who attended at least one tutorial:** The number of students - also expressed in brackets as a proportion of the module population - who attended at least one live tutorial, either face-to-face or online. The figures provided here relate to confirmed attendances, the real percentage may be up to 2 percentage points higher overall as there are some missing data in face-to-face attendance records.

Students are usually encouraged to register for live attendance at one tutorial of each type, but, as tutorial attendance is entirely optional and students can choose freely which tutorials to go to, some may attend multiple events of the same type while just under half of all students, as is evident from the figures here, never attend any tutorials at all.

**Available recordings of online tutorials:** Some of the online tutorials are recorded and made available for students to view in retrospect. The decision whether a tutorial is recorded or not used to lie with the tutor but is increasingly governed by module-wide ‘recording strategies’, which in 2017/18 were not yet at all consistent.

**Recording views:** Instances when a student accesses a recording. All access to recordings is captured by user analytics which show which student accessed which recorded tutorial and how often. Only the time when the link was accessed is recorded, but not the length of time the student spent listening. This means that ‘views’ also include instances where a student selected the link by mistake, and there may be multiple ‘views’ because a student kept losing their internet connection while listening and had to reconnect.
The figures indicate that the number of recordings available varies considerably between modules and this variation is reflected to some extent in the number of ‘views’ - instances when a student accesses a recording, however briefly. On the other hand, the proportion of students who make use of recordings appears to be unrelated to the number of recordings available, i.e. fewer recordings does not mean fewer students listening. At levels 2 and 3 a higher proportion of the module population (41%, 43%) make use of recordings than at level 1 (22%, 19%). In the 2017/18 academic year, access to recordings differed from level to level, as explained in the next paragraph.

Table 6: Tutorials and tutorial recordings by module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODULE</th>
<th>L112</th>
<th>L116</th>
<th>L203</th>
<th>L314</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students on the module</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor groups</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinct types of tutorials offered across the year</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of face-to-face tutorials</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of online tutorials</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who attended at least one tutorial (expressed as percentage of module population)</td>
<td>198 (60%)</td>
<td>190 (52%)</td>
<td>56 (56%)</td>
<td>87 (47%)</td>
<td>531 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available recordings of online tutorials (expressed as percentage of online tutorials)</td>
<td>51 (33%)</td>
<td>23 (14%)</td>
<td>6 (16%)</td>
<td>16 (23%)</td>
<td>96 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording views</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>1448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who accessed at least one recorded tutorial (expressed as percentage of module population)</td>
<td>74 (22%)</td>
<td>68 (19%)</td>
<td>41 (41%)</td>
<td>80 (43%)</td>
<td>263 (27%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The level 1 modules were each split into two clusters and individual students had access to recordings made within their cluster (i.e. around half of the recordings available within the module overall). To find the link to a recording, students had to navigate to the individual online room of the tutor who had made the recording available. In the French module L112, tutors were generally encouraged to record, but not all of them did and no specific policy was communicated to students. Usually several recordings were available for each type of tutorial, but students did not always know where to find them. John (L112), for example, “wasn’t aware until recently that they were available to be listened to”. (All participants’ names have been replaced by pseudonyms.) In the Spanish module L116, a policy was in place whereby one recording was made available for each type of learning.
event per cluster. This was a more systematic approach, which captured all the distinct types of tutorial, and students were informed in advance which tutorials were recorded, but it also meant fewer recordings overall.

At levels 2 and 3 recordings were more visible and more easily accessible to students. Tutorials were held in module-wide rooms, and on selecting the room page, students saw the links to all tutorial recordings that had been made available throughout the year. In module L203 only one tutor recorded her online tutorials and provided a total of six recordings – all listed on the same tutorial room page, which also served as entry point to live tutorials for the entire module cohort.

In module L314, several tutors made recordings and three different types of recording were available:

1. recordings of full interactive tutorials
2. recordings of lecture-style TMA guidance sessions with live attendance and opportunities for questions
3. TMA guidance podcasts recorded by a tutor on her own.

I counted the first two types as ‘recorded tutorials’. They were listed as events in the tutorial booking system and included live student participation.

The very different approaches outlined here highlight the lack of a coherent recording policy at the School at the time and reflect the widely different views held on the subject. Links between this study and institutional practice will be discussed in chapter 6 \[\text{6.3}\], while issues related to the accessibility of recordings will be explored during qualitative data analysis \[\text{4.3}\]. Although it seems likely that ease of access played a role in student use of recordings, there are also aspects related to the purpose and usefulness of recordings at different levels, which will be discussed.
3.2 Process and statistical methods

Overall, just over a quarter of language students on the four modules investigated here make use of tutorial recordings in their study. In the following sections, I seek to explore who those students are, and whether there are any personal characteristics or circumstances which make it more likely that students will include viewing recordings in their study routine. The focus will first be on demographics, then I shall explore relationships between assessment and recording use, and finally compare live attendance with the use of recorded tutorials. I used the statistics package SPSS to conduct the analyses and have created a file within SPSS which includes data from three sources: the demographic and assessment data sent to me as an Excel file by the student statistics team, user analytic data, which I downloaded from the module’s websites and data on attendance at face-to-face tutorials which were extracted from a server. The tables in this section were produced in Word based on SPSS output. An example of raw output is attached as Appendix E. I used crosstabulations in SPSS for simple comparisons which can be tested for statistical significance using a Pearson chi-square test. This procedure serves to establish whether there is a relationship between categorical variables (Pallant, 2001), for example, gender (male/female) and recording use (yes/no). Occasionally, I used independent sample t-tests or one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare mean scores, for example, the mean number of recordings viewed by students, or differences in mean assessment grades. I also made some use of partial correlation to explore how different variables interrelate. The paragraphs below are organized in terms of the questions asked of the data.
3.3 Demographic characteristics and use of recordings

Is there a difference in recording use by gender?

No, but there is when considering the number of recordings viewed.

A crosstabulation carried out within SPSS shows recording use by gender as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Men (n=322)</th>
<th>Women (n=655)</th>
<th>All (n=977)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Recording use by gender

While the percentage of women who view recordings is slightly higher in this sample, this difference is not statistically significant (chi-square=2.686, df=1, p=0.101). There is, however, a small, but significant effect regarding the mean number of tutorials watched.

When considering only the students who do watch recordings and comparing mean values for women and men, women watched 3.1 tutorials and men watched 2.2 (Independent samples t-test, t=−2.554, F(6.642), df262, p=0.011). Taken together, these two results, i.e. the similar percentage of women who access recordings and the statistically significant higher mean number of recordings watched, allow the conclusion that there is a higher engagement with tutorial recordings by female students compared to their male peers.

When investigating the strength of engagement with recordings, I use the measure of ‘number of tutorials accessed’ in preference to ‘recording views’, as it gives a better sense of what use students made of the available recordings. Both measures are, however, highly correlated (Pearson r=.833, n=263, p<0.001). A correlation of .5 and above is usually considered to be strong (Pallant, 2001), i.e. the r value of .833 here indicates a very high similarity between the two measures. On average, students who accessed tutorial recordings during their modules watched 2.9 different sessions (min=1; max=19; median=2). In terms of number of views, the mean value per vicarious learner was 5.1 (min=1; max=37; median=3).
Is there a difference in recording use by age?

Yes.

The previous section gave an overview of the distribution of age groups within the modules, which I had reduced to three broad categories. For this analysis, I am using all five age groups as provided by the Open University’s statistics team. Table 8 shows that recording use goes up with age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>&lt;25 (n=231)</th>
<th>26-35 (n=233)</th>
<th>36-45 (n=180)</th>
<th>46-55 (n=173)</th>
<th>&gt;55 (n=160)</th>
<th>All (n=977)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>80.5%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>54.4%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there is no difference in the two youngest age groups, for students aged 35 and over recording use increases incrementally with almost half of all students in the highest age bracket using recordings. This result is highly significant showing a clear linear trend (chi-square=42.392, df=4, p<0.001; chi-square linear trend=35.667, df=1, p<0.001). The figures refer to the proportion of students in each age group who do or do not use recordings, while an investigation of the mean number of recordings which viewers accessed also shows an upward trend across age groups. Older learners are more likely to access recordings than younger learners, and among the students who do use recordings, older learners will view more recordings on average as shown in Figure 4 (One way ANOVA, weighted linear trend, F(1,259)=6.903, p=0.009). As explained in the previous paragraph, the mean number of different recordings accessed by vicarious learners overall is 2.9. It rises to 3.3 in the 56+ age group.
In order to explore further whether this relationship is actually related to age and not simply to the fact that older people are more likely to be retired and have more time for their studies, I conducted some further analyses. The following tables are based on the 884 students who provided information about their employment status.

Table 9 excludes all learners who indicated that their employment status was 'retired'. It still shows a highly significant linear effect of recording use by age group (chi-square=22.312, df=4, p<0.001; chi-square linear trend=19.152, df=1, p<0.001).

Table 9: Recording use by age (excluding retired students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>&lt; 25 (n=193)</th>
<th>26-35 (n=223)</th>
<th>36-45 (n=169)</th>
<th>46-55 (n=147)</th>
<th>&gt;55 (n=84)</th>
<th>All (n=816)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>80.7%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 includes only learners who gave their employment status as 'in full-time work'. It also shows a significant result and a clear linear trend. Older students in full-time work are more likely to listen to recordings than younger students in full-time work (chi-
Recording use in the highest age group is just as high for students in full-time work as for the cohort overall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>&lt; 25 (n=74)</th>
<th>26-35 (n=132)</th>
<th>36-45 (n=94)</th>
<th>46-55 (n=77)</th>
<th>&gt;55 (n=28)</th>
<th>All (n=405)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Recording use by age (students in full-time employment only)

It is worth noting that an investigation of age and live attendance also yields a highly significant result showing that older students not only engage more with recordings, but they are also more likely to be live attenders (chi-square=93.673, df=4, p<0.001, chi-square linear trend 83.960, df=1, p<0.001). To probe this further, I decided to conduct a partial correlation, a procedure which can be used to determine whether an effect persists after controlling for possible confounding variables. For example, it is conceivable that older learners are more likely to attend live and that live attenders sometimes listen back to their tutorials, and therefore the higher use of recordings by older learners is entirely due to their higher live attendance. However, even after controlling for live attendance, the relationship between age and use of recordings remains highly significant (r=.127, df=962, p<0.001). It is an independent effect.

3  Is there a difference in recording use by ethnicity?

No.

The Open University collects information about ethnicity using the categories ‘white’, ‘Asian’, ‘mixed’, ‘black’ and ‘other’. As evident in Table 5 [3.1], 91% percent of the module populations are white, leaving very small percentages in the other categories, which were therefore summarized to allow for statistical analysis. However, no differences were found in terms of recording use and ethnicity (chi-square=0.976, df=1, p=0.323). Only
934/977 students were included in this analysis, as the others did not declare their ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Non-white (n=84)</th>
<th>White (n=850)</th>
<th>All (n=934)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: Recording use by ethnicity

4 Is recording use related to disability?

No, not in a statistically significant way based on this sample.

The Open University attracts a high number of students with disabilities. As shown earlier, students who declared a disability account for almost 20% of the student population, which is also the case in the four modules studied here. These students will normally discuss any additional requirements with an advisor and may be offered adjustments to their study material as well as suitable arrangements allowing them to complete assessments. Anecdotally, it is students with disabilities who often ask for recordings to be provided, and even before the introduction of online tuition, face-to-face events were sometimes being recorded for their benefit. This variable is therefore explored in more detail below.

A simple binary crosstabulation of students with a disability marker and students who watch recordings shows a slightly higher use of recordings by disabled students, which is not statistically significant (chi-square=2.049, df=1, p=0.152).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Disability marker (n=190)</th>
<th>No disability marker (n=787)</th>
<th>All (n=977)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Recording use by disability

A comparison of the mean number of recordings accessed by students with or without a disability marker also shows no significant difference. Students with a disability, who watched recordings, accessed 3.0 tutorials on average as opposed to 2.8 watched by students without a disability (t=-0.529, df=262, p=0.597 [equal variances assumed];
Levene’s test for Equality of Variances, F=0.003, p=0.960). In order to investigate further, I made a distinction between normal and high recording use, as my first impression from looking at recording logs was that a small number of students with disabilities make exceptionally heavy use of recordings. I therefore distinguished between students who accessed 6+ recorded tutorials (the top 10% of recording users) and those who accessed 1-5 recordings. This further analysis also fails to reveal that engagement by students with a disability marker is significantly different from engagement by the rest of the study cohort (chi-square=2.719, df=2, p=0.259).

Is recording use related to Non-UK residence?

Yes.

Non-UK students are more likely to view recordings than students who are resident in the UK. This result is statistically significant at the 0.05 level (chi-square=5.016, df=1, p=0.025).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>UK (n=894)</th>
<th>Non-UK (n=83)</th>
<th>All (n=977)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>37.3%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>62.7%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Recording use by residence

The effect can be shown across all age groups and is not simply due to non-UK students being older than UK students (which they are not). Of course, non-UK students differ from their peers in that they cannot access any face-to-face tutorials. A crosstabulation of residence and live attendance at online events shows that 59% of non-UK students have attended at least one live online tutorial as opposed to 51% overall, a difference which does not reach statistical significance in this small subgroup (chi-square=2.481, df=1, p=0.115). A tentative interpretation might be that non-UK students rely slightly more heavily on the provision of online tutorials, which is shown most clearly in their use of recordings.
6 Is there a difference in recording use by socioeconomic group?

No.

There are very few students in the ‘low’ category for this measure, and there is no significant difference in recording use between categories (chi-square 0.307, df=1, p=0.580). Socioeconomic group data are available only for students with a UK address.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socioeconomic group</th>
<th>High (n=833)</th>
<th>Low (n=61)</th>
<th>All (n=894)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Recording use by socioeconomic group

7 Is recording use related to prior educational attainment?

No.

827/977 students provided information about their educational background when joining the Open University; very many came with higher education qualifications. Figures relating to prior educational attainment and recording views show a small upwards trend with more educated students in this sample being slightly more likely to use recordings, but this is not statistically significant (chi-square=3.193, df=2, p=0.203; chi-square linear trend=3.178, df=1; p=0.075).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>&lt;2 A-levels (n=206)</th>
<th>A-levels (n=254)</th>
<th>Higher ed. (n=367)</th>
<th>All (n=827)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>74.8%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: Recording use by education

8 Is recording use related to occupational status?

Yes, but not after taking age into account.

As explained above, 884/977 students provided information about their occupational status, indicating whether they are in full-time or part-time employment, looking after home and family, retired, or not in paid work for other reasons, which applies to job-seekers, volunteers, or those on long-term sick leave. The crosstabulation of occupational
status and recording views shows a highly significant result (chi-square=18.512, df=4, p=0.001), which is, however, exclusively related to the high proportion of retired students using recordings, almost all of whom are coming from the highest age group. I showed previously that it is age group and not occupational status which is linked to recording use. There is no difference in the proportion of students who listen to recordings whether they are in full-time or part-time work, looking after the family or out of paid employment for other reasons. In fact, percentages for recording use by those in either full-time or part-time employment are exactly the same.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational status</th>
<th>F/time (n=405)</th>
<th>P/time (n=243)</th>
<th>Home (n=68)</th>
<th>Retired (n=68)</th>
<th>No work other (n=100)</th>
<th>All (n=884)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>73.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16: Recording use by occupational status

In terms of the mean number of recordings students listen to, there is possibly a slight difference: Of the students who do access recordings, those in full-time employment listen to an average of 2.5 tutorials whereas those not in full-time employment listen to 3.1, a difference which only narrowly fails to reach statistical significance (t=-1.885, df=244, p=0.061 [equal variances assumed]; Levene’s test for equality of variances, F=1.968, p=0.162).

9 Is recording use related to study motivation?

No.

659/977 students declared their study motivation as being mostly career, mostly personal development or both equally. The slightly higher recording use by non-career-oriented students in this sample is not statistically significant (chi-square=1.214, df=2, p=0.454).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study motivation</th>
<th>Mostly career (n=86)</th>
<th>Both equally (n=338)</th>
<th>Mostly personal (n=235)</th>
<th>All (n=659)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>68.3%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: Recording use by study motivation
3.4 Assessment results and use of recordings

Modules and grading

The interview data, which will be explored in the next chapter [4.3], demonstrate that students put in much effort to gain good grades in their assignments and, for some, recordings play an important role in their assessment preparation. The numerical data in this study cannot show any causal relationship between viewing recordings and study success. It can only indicate to what extent subgroups of the student population, for example those who pass, fail or gain a distinction, are more or less likely to use recordings in their studies.

To start with, 2017-18 assessment results will be shown for each module. Like the tutorial strategy, the assessment strategy is agreed by module level which means that L112 and L116 follow the same strategy, but L203 and L314 follow strategies which are different from the level 1 modules and from each other.

At level 1, students complete four tutor-marked assignments (TMAs), which are marked out of 100, and their weighted averages serve as the basis for determining the course result. Marking at the Open University is based on the full range of marks from 0 to 100; normally an overall mark of 85+ will gain a distinction and a mark of 40+ will gain a pass.

Table 18 shows course result and average TMA grade in level 1 French (L112) and Spanish (L116). Course result is reported for all students on the module including those who withdrew. TMA average only takes account of students who submitted at least one assignment. To show the overall mean grade across all assignments which were submitted, non-submitted assignments are treated as missing values not as zero. The standard deviation (SD) is provided in square brackets.
Table 18: Course result and average grades at level 1

Table 19 shows the same information for modules L203 and L314. For these modules, students submitted five assignments and, additionally, completed an end-of-module assessment: a written examination at level 2, and a written project and viva at level 3, which contributes substantially to the course outcome. At levels 2 and 3, a distinction is also called a grade 1 pass, and the other pass grades are divided into grade 2 pass (normally 70+), grade 3 pass (normally 55+) and grade 4 pass (normally 40+).

Table 19: Course result and average grades at levels 2 and 3

It is worth noting the relatively high proportion of distinctions. Module teams in languages at the Open University are often asked to justify the distinction rate on their courses, usually well above the 10% mark set as a guideline by the university. The reason provided is mostly that language modules include students who are overqualified in terms of their linguistic competence. Although all assignments require students to demonstrate appropriate academic skills and engagement with course content, students who are first
language speakers or come with a higher level of proficiency than required usually find it easy to achieve good grades.

In the following paragraphs I will relate these assessment results to students’ use of recorded tutorials.

**Access to recordings and mean assignment grades**

Table 20 shows mean assignment grades and access to recordings. The mean grade for tutor-marked assessments is higher for students who use recordings than for those who do not. As explained earlier, this does not imply causality. With the exception of level 3 Spanish (L314), the differences are not significant at individual module level, but they become significant when considered across all module populations (t=-2.681, df=873, \(p=0.005\) [equal variances not assumed]; Levene’s test for Equality of Variances, F=7.173, \(p=0.008\)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean TMA grade</th>
<th>L112 (n=303)</th>
<th>L116 (n=319)</th>
<th>L203 (n=90)</th>
<th>L314 (n=163)</th>
<th>All (n=875)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>83.1</td>
<td>81.0 [SD 11.26]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view rec.</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>78.5 [SD 12.99]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module (all)</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>79.3 [SD 12.55]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Recording use and mean assignment grade

**Access to recordings and course result**

The tables below show recording use by course result. Before running this analysis, the different types of fail grades, which only included a small number of students each, were pooled and classified simply as ‘fail’, and the categories ‘withdrawn’ and ‘postponed’ were summarized as ‘not completed’.

In the level 1 modules (L112, L116) students with a pass grade are most likely to have accessed recordings, followed by students with a distinction. Students with a fail grade are least likely to have watched recordings (chi-square=11.095, df=3, \(p=0.011\); chi-square linear trend=6.946, df=1, \(p=0.008\)).
Course result | Distinction (n=214) | Pass 1 (n=279) | Fail (n=59) | Not completed (n=139) | All (n=691) 
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- 
Viewed recordings | 22.4% (48) | 24.7% (69) | 11.9% (7) | 12.9% (18) | 20.5% (142) 
Did not view recordings | 77.6% (166) | 75.3% (210) | 88.1% (52) | 87.1% (121) | 79.5% (549) 

Table 21: Recording use and course result at level 1

Showing both percentages and absolute numbers (in brackets) within each cell allows for looking at the information in different ways. When asking the question how many students within the ‘viewed recording’ group are likely to achieve a particular course result, we find that 84.4% of students who watched at least one recording at level 1 complete and pass their module with either a distinction or pass grade as opposed to 68.5% of students who did not watch any recordings. This can be seen by looking at the rows: in the top row - students who viewed recordings - 117 (48+69) out of a total of 142 students passed the module; in the bottom row - students who did not view recordings - 376 out of 549 passed.

At levels 2 and 3, the result is more highly significant and more clearly directional. The higher the course result, the more likely students are to have viewed recordings (chi-square=19.746, df=5, p=0.001; linear trend=17.950, df=1, p<0.001).

| Course result | Dist. (n=51) | Pass 2 (n=89) | Pass 3 (n=51) | Pass 4 (n=17) | Fail (n=27) | N/c (n=51) | All (n=286) 
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- 
Viewed recordings | 58.8% (30) | 49.4% (44) | 43.1% (22) | 41.2% (7) | 18.5% (5) | 25.5% (13) | 42.3% (121) 
Did not view rec. | 41.2% (21) | 50.6% (45) | 56.9% (29) | 58.8% (10) | 81.5% (22) | 74.5% (38) | 57.7% (165) 

Table 22: Recording use and course result at levels 2 and 3

Looked at differently, we find that of the students who viewed recordings (top row), 74/121, i.e. 61.2% achieved one of the two highest results (distinction or pass 2) as opposed to 66/165, i.e. 48.9% of students who did not watch any recordings. When analysed at individual module level, the results show the same trend and are statistically significant for L314, but not for L203 which has a smaller cohort of students. Overall,
recording use seems to be linked to better assignment grades and course outcome, but so is live attendance. This interrelationship will be discussed below.

*Links between live attendance, vicarious attendance and study success*

The two measures course result and assignment grade, which were discussed in the previous paragraphs, are highly correlated, as better TMA grades will lead to better course results. Here, I will use the measure of mean TMA grade to explore how study success in terms of grades is linked to live attendance and recording use respectively.

Table 23 shows the link between recording use and TMA grades of students who did or did not attend live. There are 875 students who have completed at least one TMA, 864 of whom have reliable live attendance records.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean tutor-marked assignment (TMA) grade</th>
<th>Statistically significant?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students (n=875)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who accessed recordings</td>
<td>81.0 [SD 11.26]</td>
<td>yes (p=0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who did not access recordings</td>
<td>78.5 [SD 13.0]</td>
<td>(t=-2.681, df=873)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Live attenders (n=500)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who accessed recordings (196)</td>
<td>81.4 [SD 11.27]</td>
<td>no (p=0.200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who did not access recordings</td>
<td>80.0 [SD 12.31]</td>
<td>(t=-1.283, df=498)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-live attenders (n=364)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who accessed recordings (57)</td>
<td>79.5 [SD 11.22]</td>
<td>no (p=0.212)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who did not access recordings</td>
<td>77.1 [SD 13.57]</td>
<td>(t=-1.249, df=362)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23: Recording use and grades (interrelationship with live attendance)

Table 24 below goes on to show the link between live attendance and TMA grades of students who did or did not access recordings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean tutor-marked assignment (TMA) grade</th>
<th>Statistically significant?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students (n=864)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who attended live (500)</td>
<td>80.5 [SD 11.91]</td>
<td>yes (p=0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who did not attend live (364)</td>
<td>77.5 [SD 13.25]</td>
<td>(t=-3.491, df=862)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recording users (n=253)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who attended live (196)</td>
<td>81.4 [SD 11.27]</td>
<td>no (p=0.277)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who did not attend live (57)</td>
<td>79.5 [SD 11.22]</td>
<td>(t=-1.089, df=251)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-recording users (n=611)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who attended live (304)</td>
<td>80.0 [SD 12.31]</td>
<td>yes (p=0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who did not attend live (307)</td>
<td>77.1 [SD 13.57]</td>
<td>(t=-2.700, df=609)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24: Live attendance and grades (interrelationship with recording use)
Although both recording use and live attendance are similarly linked to slightly higher assignment grades, the effects are stronger for live attendance (table 24). The higher numbers of live attenders do, of course, make it more likely that these small differences reach statistical significance. However, a further comparison through partial correlation also shows that, when taking account of live attendance, the link between recording use and assignment grades ceases to be significant. As shown in figure 5 below there is no independent effect for recording use in terms of higher assignment grades.

The illustration indicates a highly significant correlation between recording use and live attendance. It further indicates less strong but still highly significant correlations between live attendance and grades and between recording use and grades. However, after partialling out the effect of live attendance, the correlation between recording use and mean tutor-marked assignment grade is no longer significant (p=0.081). In contrast, the correlation between live attendance and mean tutor-marked assignment grade remains significant at the 0.05 level even after partialling out recording use. The initial finding that there is a link between recording use and TMA grades is therefore due to the correlations between recording use and live attendance and between live attendance and grades.

None of the findings in this section on assessment establish any causal links.
3.5 Live attendance and use of recordings

The final part of this section on quantitative data analysis will focus on investigating further how live attendance and recording views are related. It might be reasonable to assume that students who cannot or do not want to attend live will turn to recordings instead and that students therefore fall into two groups: those who attend live and those who access recordings, perhaps with a small overlap, because some are doing both. On the other hand, it is also conceivable that the same students who attend live tutorials will also access recordings. As is already evident from the correlations discussed in the final paragraph of the previous section [3.4], the data point strongly to the latter scenario: students who attend live are more likely to view recordings. More detailed figures are shown here, first by individual module and then overall. Student numbers add up to 964 rather than 977, because face-to-face attendance records contain some missing values where students registered for an event, but tutors failed to record their actual attendance or non-attendance. These cases were excluded from the analysis.

(L112: chi-square 9.160, df=1, p=0.002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 French (L112)</th>
<th>Attended live (n=198)</th>
<th>Did not attend live (n=129)</th>
<th>All (n=327)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>28.3% (56)</td>
<td>14.3% (18)</td>
<td>22.6% (74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>71.7% (142)</td>
<td>86.0% (111)</td>
<td>77.4% (253)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25: Recording use and live attendance in module L112

(L116: chi-square=25.562, df=1, p<0.001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 Spanish (L116)</th>
<th>Attended live (n=190)</th>
<th>Did not attend live (n=170)</th>
<th>All (n=360)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>28.4% (54)</td>
<td>7.6% (13)</td>
<td>18.6% (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>71.6% (136)</td>
<td>92.4% (157)</td>
<td>81.4% (293)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26: Recording use and live attendance in module L116

(L203: chi-square=18.690, df=1, p<0.001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 2 German (L203)</th>
<th>Attended live (n=56)</th>
<th>Did not attend live (n=38)</th>
<th>All (n=94)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>60.7% (34)</td>
<td>15.8% (6)</td>
<td>42.6% (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>39.3% (22)</td>
<td>84.2% (32)</td>
<td>57.4% (54)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 27: Recording use and live attendance in module L203
(L314: chi-square=24.146, df=1, p<0.001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Level 3 Spanish (L314)</strong></th>
<th>Attended live (n=87)</th>
<th>Did not attend live (n=96)</th>
<th>All (n=183)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>62.9% (54)</td>
<td>26% (25)</td>
<td>43.2% (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>37.1% (33)</td>
<td>74% (71)</td>
<td>56.8% (104)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28: Recording use and live attendance in module L314

(All: chi-square=63.887, df=1, p<0.001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Four modules</strong></th>
<th>Attended live (n=531)</th>
<th>Did not attend live (n=433)</th>
<th>All (n=964)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viewed recordings</td>
<td>37.3% (198)</td>
<td>14.3% (62)</td>
<td>27% (260)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not view recordings</td>
<td>62.7% (333)</td>
<td>85.7% (371)</td>
<td>73% (704)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 29: Recording use and live attendance in across four modules

Again, looking at the question in the opposite way and asking how many students who viewed recordings also attended live, we can see from row 1 (‘viewed recordings’) that 198 out of 260 students who viewed recordings also attended live, i.e. 76% of recording users are also live attenders while the remainder, i.e. 24%, are not.

The relationship between live attendance and access to recordings also extends to the *strength* of engagement with different tutorial modes. Students who attend more live online tutorials are also likely to listen to more recordings, as shown in the scatterplot below, which includes all students who attended live online at least once and listened to a recording at least once. The regression line describes how the variables (live online attendances/no. of recordings viewed) behave in relation to each other. Each circle represents one or several students, the circles in the bottom row represent students with one live online attendance.
3.6 Brief summary of the quantitative data analysis

The statistics provided in this section demonstrate that some features are related to recording use while others are not, or, at least, not at a demonstrable level given the sample size in this study. Two independent demographic factors which are positively related to the use of tutorial recordings are age and residence outside the UK. In addition, students who do well in their module are more likely to listen to recordings than those who fail or get low grades, but this is due to the interrelationship between live attendance, recording use and study success. Recording use is strongly linked to live attendance: students who attend live are much more likely to access recordings than those who do not.

The quantitative findings from this section will be explored further in chapter 5 [⇒5.1], where they will be discussed in relation to the qualitative data derived from interviews.
CHAPTER 4

Qualitative data analysis

While chapter 3 provided a bigger view of the module populations and their use of tutorial recordings overall, this chapter focuses on the detailed thematic analysis of interviews in which participants talk about the use of tutorial recordings as part of their language study at the Open University. The data highlight the central importance of tutorials for language learning and suggest complementary benefits of offering a mix of different tutorial modes. Where live attendance supports language learning through direct interaction, recordings may extend and deepen learning opportunities at a time that benefits the individual learner.
4.1 Thirteen participants

Qualitative data were produced by conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 students towards the end of the academic year between April and June 2018. The choice of method and its role within the overall research design was previously explained in chapter 2 [2.2], and this section will extend some of this information while also providing more detail about the participants. Twelve interviews took place in an online room and one was conducted over the phone, because the participant (Kate) wanted to be interviewed during the daytime at work where she could not use the online rooms due to her employer’s firewalls. All 13 interviews were recorded and fully transcribed, and anonymized transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis tool. To enhance my own understanding of the role tutorial recordings play within the modules and gather further contextual information, I also

✓ listened to recorded tutorials in the three languages
✓ observed some of my interview participants in live interaction
✓ joined the OU student Facebook group to read discussions around tutorial recordings (Brown, 2017)
✓ accessed a student consultation strand in the languages qualification forum where students were asked about their expectations of tutorials (The Open University, 2019)
✓ accessed tutor forums to read about tutor views (The Open University, 2018c; tutor forums within individual modules)
✓ checked access logs and demographic data specifically related to the participants
✓ watched an extract from a recorded tutorial with one of the participants (Josh) and talked to him about it immediately afterwards

The information I gathered through these sources serves to strengthen my findings in different ways. Some of the content provided in interviews is confirmed by other sources,
for example where participants tell me how many recordings they accessed in the course of the year, which I was able to corroborate by accessing viewing records. One participant talks about how confidently she contributes in live sessions, which is confirmed by observations. The outcome of forum consultations or postings on Facebook will be considered alongside my own analysis, and I will refer to them mostly when discussing the relevance of my findings in chapter 6 [6.3]. The additional sources also provide some discrepant cases and highlight different perspectives on the issues I am investigating. For example, I will refer to tutor views [6.3] and to the reasons why students, other than my participants, may choose not to listen to tutorial recordings [4.3].

This chapter, however, is predominantly concerned with the actions, views, perceptions and motivations of 13 individuals who used tutorial recordings as part of their study. The scatterplot, which was included at the end of the quantitative data analysis, makes a good link to the qualitative analysis presented here. This version of the graph still shows the same correlation between number of live online attendances and number of recordings viewed, but the regression line has been omitted and, instead, names of interview participants have been inserted next to the circles which represent the individuals within the scatterplot. Two participants (Hilda and Celia) are represented by the same circle in the bottom line.
As is evident from the figure, the interview participants include some of the outliers. While these students are clearly not typical, they are likely to be able to report meaningfully on their extensive use of tutorials and tutorial recordings. Other participants are more in line with the typical attendance and viewing patterns of those students who do engage with tutorials and their recordings. All have attended at least one live tutorial as well as listening to recordings. Table 30 repeats the information on how many tutorial recordings each participant accessed in 2017-18 in their respective module and provides some further detail, which should be seen in the light of the cohort-wide data presented earlier. While I numbered the interviews in chronological order and use these numbers in the naming conventions for transcripts (from ‘01_L314_Clare’ to ‘13_L112_Betty’), the table lists students by module, which makes the information more comparable. Throughout this thesis, I will refer to participants exclusively by their pseudonym.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym (Module)</th>
<th>Recordings</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>(Non)-UK</th>
<th>Occupation status</th>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>TMA Ø</th>
<th>Course Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Betty (L112 French)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John (L112 French)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura (L112 French)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Non-UK</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary (L112 French)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine (L116 Spanish)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>retired</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy (L116 Spanish)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>retired</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kornelia (L203 German)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celia (L314 Spanish)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Non-UK</td>
<td>other</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Pass 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clare (L314 Spanish)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>home/fam.</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda (L314 Spanish)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>retired</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Pass 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh (L314 Spanish)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Pass 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate (L314 Spanish)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Pass 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rae (L314 Spanish)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Pass 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30: List of interview participants

Qualitative studies often work with purposely selected samples of participants [↩2.4] who are known to enable the exploration of a particular behaviour (Gray, 2014), in this case the use of tutorial recordings. These participants are not necessarily typical representatives of their cohorts, but by reporting their diverse experiences of attending vicariously each of them contributes to the aim of the study, which is to increase our understanding of who may benefit from listening to tutorial recordings, why and how. Each participant brings their own perspective, and between them they discuss many different aspects. The strength of their arguments, how aspects were coded, and how often the coded information recurs within the data set will be explored in this chapter [↩4.3].

It is nevertheless useful to be aware of potential biases within the interview sample. Statistically, the sample is biased in terms of age and employment status, i.e. the group of participants differs in this respect from the overall cohort and from the other recording users across the four modules. With an average age of 56, the participants illustrate, in a somewhat exaggerated way, the tendency for recording viewers to be older than the general cohort, and the younger age groups are missing from the sample entirely.

Participants in full-time employment are also underrepresented, which needs to be borne in mind when considering the findings.
The sample is not biased in any other respect when compared to other recording users within the cohort. For example, participants’ mean overall tutor-marked assignment score at 83.4 is slightly higher than that of other students who view recordings, but this difference is not statistically significant (t=-0.769, df=253, p=0.442), and the wide range of individual TMA mean scores between 58 and 98 show considerable differences in attainment between the 13 individuals who participated in the study. All participants achieved at least a Pass or a Pass 2, which is typical for those who view recordings. Similarly, although there appears to be a gender bias, there is no statistically significant difference between interview participants and other recording users in terms of gender distribution (chi-square=1.215, df=1, p=0.27). There is no difference between my interview sample and the main cohort with regard to UK-residence or disability.

4.2 Process of thematic analysis

To analyse the data, I used thematic analysis following the approach outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006) and employing a combination of deductive and inductive procedures (Gray, 2014; Tikly, 2015). The fact that the study is framed by a literature review, and that interviews are guided by a semi-structured interview schedule, means that some thematic organisation was present a priori and fed into the analysis. Conversely, initial codes were derived inductively through close reading and hand-written annotations on the transcripts. Subsequently, I organized codes under several headings which provided an initial thematic organization. The actual coding was done in NVivo, a software programme for qualitative data analysis. I revised the codes several times, for example, when I found that some categories overlapped too much or that items remained unaccounted for. As advised by Braun and Clarke (2006), I coded inclusively, including some of the conversational context with each coded item, to ensure that the full contextualized meaning of the utterance did not get lost in the process.
Re-assembling the data within their codes allowed for a new way of reading and facilitated a detailed mapping of points made within a code or thematic area. Each code includes contributions from at least three participants, and the majority cover 11+ contributors. The full list of codes in NVivo is shown in Appendix F; an example of further mapping and detailed analysis is provided in Appendix G. The list of codes also shows the initially generated thematic areas of ‘language study’, ‘tutorials’, ‘input and active listening’, and ‘direct and indirect participation’, which were a helpful way of combining different codes and a stepping stone in the analytical process. However, to some extent they still reflect the interview schedule, and they do not take account of thematic aspects arising within different codes. The area of ‘language study’ provides useful background rather than being a key theme for this enquiry. ‘Tutorials’ on the other hand is a theme which stands out in terms of its significance for the research as well as its prevalence across the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). ‘Structure and guidance’ is an additional aspect which kept re-occurring within different codes related to language study or tutorials, and the concept of ‘time’ was highly prevalent throughout.

After studying the coded interview material and mapping many different aspects and their relationships, I would like to suggest that the reasons why participants find recordings important are fundamentally related to the central role they confer upon tutorials and can be further summarized by three sub-themes: ‘structure and guidance’, ‘input for learning’, ‘time and timings’.

![Diagram: Centrality of tutorials for language study](image)

**Figure 8:** One main theme and three sub-themes
How these themes interlink and how they are supported by the data will be explained below.

4.3 Main theme: Centrality of tutorials for language study

How important do you find tutorials?

There is one thing on which all participants agree: they consider tutorials to be an integral part of their modules and central to their learning.

How important do you find tutorials?

1. “I think they are essential. I think they are essential. One, because we are distance learning, and and two you’re distance learning with a language, you know it’s quite quite difficult learning a language when you’re not sitting in a classroom and interacting with your fellow students all the time. I think tutorials are essential.” (Clare, L314)

2. “They’re essential. Because it’s a language course, you really need it.” (Rae, L314).

3. “I think it’s really important. Why — you know I, I don’t see the point in doing the course if you’re not engaging with the tutor and the other students.” (Kate, L314)

4. “Very important. Because it gives you, it gives you know when you’re with your peers and you doing the actual speaking and listening that is the greatest advantage.” (Wendy, L116)

5. Very important! Without them, there wouldn’t be any contact at all, would there? I mean it’s an essential part of the whole learning process.” (Rosemary, L112).

6. “Paramount. If you want to get good marks in your assignments you have to attend them.” (Celia, L314).

7. “I just go to each and every tutorial [...] I think it’s crucial, it really is.” (Laura, L112)

8. “For me, they are an essential part of my studies.” (Kornelia, L203).

9. “Very important [...] because you need to know your tutor [...] that’s the only way.” (Hilda, L314).

10. “Very important, especially when it’s about like an assignment or something.” (Josh, L314)

11. “All the face-to-face ones, I’ve been to all of them. And I think they are absolutely brilliant. [...] I find them inspiring when you meet other students.” (John, L112)

12. “I find it very helpful [to go to tutorials]. Particularly, as I had difficulty finding anyone I could do Spanish conversation with, it reinforced a lot of the things which were in modules, and I did find them very useful.” (Catherine, L112)

13. “Extremely important. [...] I do feel I get an awful lot from them.” (Betty, L112)

Figure 9: “How important do you find tutorials?” – Answers from 13 participants

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This is put into perspective by the statistical finding that 76% of vicarious learners are also live attenders, which means that, although a quarter of listeners never attend live, they do, overall, show an engagement with tutorials which is well above average. The 13 participants echo the main finding from the small initial study last year, when both participants used the words “really really” exactly once during their interview - to emphasize the importance of tutorials. Participants in the current study use a wider range of language and give different reasons as illustrated in figure 9 above, but, again, each one of them finds tutorials essential to their learning.

It is relevant to point out again here that this is by no means an obvious finding. Participants for this study were selected because they make use of recordings, not because they appreciate live tutorials. Just under half of all students on Open University language modules never attend any tutorials at all. It would be reasonable to assume that listening to recordings is an attractive option mostly for students who are not convinced of the value of tutorials. By contrast, the data suggest that students who use recordings are often highly appreciative of the value of tutorials for distance language learners.

**The overall picture: a mix is best**

All interview participants engaged in live tutorials during the 17/18 academic year and almost all were regular live attenders [11]. They used recordings as an additional resource to support their learning in the following ways: A small number of participants used recordings exclusively to re-listen to sessions they had already attended live [2], some used recordings exclusively to access sessions they had not attended live [5], and almost half of them used recordings both to re-listen and to access additional sessions [6].

These students are clear that a mix of different tuition modes best meets their needs: Laura (L112) believes “there are massive advantages of attending live”, but also sees many advantages to recordings and would find it helpful if there was a well-organized bank of
recorded sessions available to students on each module. Kate (L314) feels it would be “a great shame” if face-to-face tutorials were discontinued because she thinks “the ideal thing is having a mix, having a mix of online and recorded as well”. For Rae (L314), a strong user of both live and recorded tutorials, “ultimately the best thing is to attend and then listen as well.”

An analysis of contributions across the 13 interviews reveals a long list of perceived benefits of tutorials as well as participants’ assessment of the relative merits of face-to-face, live online and recorded sessions. Figure 10 aims to give a rough overview of benefits and drawbacks of different tuition modes, but, of course, the boundaries are fuzzy. For example, ‘feeling connected’ is mostly a feature of live tutorials, but some students do also feel connected when listening to recordings as will be discussed later [4.3.1 5.6].

![Figure 10: Overlapping benefits of face-to-face, live online and recorded tutorials](image)

Structuring learning, assessment guidance, listening, cultural learning, language practice and increased study motivation happen in all three tutorial modes, while other elements are exclusive to one or two. I will comment here on two aspects of interest that arise from the
Some participants [6] comment on the difference between ‘natural’ face-to-face communication when “you are there, you are in the conversation” (Betty, L112) and the “stilted” (Catherine, L112) communication in online rooms where the audio sometimes lags, and video is not normally used at all, so attendees cannot see each other. John (L112) observes that, in face-to-face tutorials, the tutor notices when students do not understand but not in the online rooms, a view which is supported by the literature, for example, Ellis (2015) summarizes research which shows that communication in online rooms is harder, and that tutors are less aware of communication problems. The difference affects participants’ enjoyment of their tutorials.

Overall, it is good to see that students who find tutorials so crucial for their study also tend to find them enjoyable. Enjoyment is mentioned as a strong motivator, it is a factor for live attendance for many [8] but not all participants and plays out in different ways in different tutorial modes. Face-to-face tutorials are valued highly, for example, by John (L112): “The face-to-face are brilliant I can’t fault them”. Participants also enjoy live online sessions, but enjoyment can be lessened by technical problems, and some students report feelings of anxiety specifically in live online tutorials [5]. Kate (L314) “[forces herself] to go to the online ones”. Rosemary (L112) says she “[gets] stressed when going onto a tutorial” and describes how she sits there “with a gin and tonic or a glass of wine to relax”.

Sometimes students “enjoy the recorded ones more” (Josh, L314) than live sessions because they feel less under pressure, although the majority [8] express a clear preference for live attendance. Some participants [4] report that, if interaction is slow, this can make recordings less enjoyable to listen to, which is more often the case at level 1, but not exclusively. While attendees in a live session can influence the event, in a recording “you can’t change it, if it’s a very hard work, slow session you listen to, it will always be a very
slow session, because you’re just a bystander and you just listen to it” (Hilda, L314). Of course, learners can take control over a recording by winding forwards and backwards and selecting passages that are relevant, and most participants do use recordings in this way [11]. Importantly, participants in this enquiry take encouragement from both live and recorded tutorials which is likely to influence their overall motivation. When asked directly, whether listening to recordings has an effect on their motivation to study, the answer is a straight ‘no’ for a couple of participants [2], but for most it is ‘yes’ [7]. Interestingly, two participants turn the question around, which supports the central claim of this study that highly engaged individuals are more likely to use recordings than those who put little effort into their studies. “Listening to recordings shows that we are motivated.” (Kate, L314).

Motivators and barriers to live attendance

In the following paragraphs I will try to expand on some of the information provided in figure 10 and look again at motivators and barriers to live attendance before exploring the specific benefits that tutorial recordings bring to the mix. An analysis of reasons why live attendance is important to students reveals the following motivators

➢ Interacting in the target language [8]

➢ Meeting tutor and peers / participating jointly [7]

➢ Enjoyment [8, but strength of enjoyment varies]

➢ Opportunity for asking questions [3]

➢ Scheduled event, part of the course [2]

Participants comment on the lack of interaction in their distance study environment [6], and they are clear about the need to communicate in the target language in real time. They also talk about the pleasure of being with others. Clare (L314) describes the benefits of joint knowledge construction:
“You’re participating, erm, the other students are participating, you’re taking a theme and are growing it and exploring it between you, you got combined brains added to it.”

The fact that the tutorial is a scheduled event is linked to the idea of being with others in the same place at the same time and is also seen as a useful structuring device for independent learners. However, the schedules, even if made with learners’ needs in mind, will never suit everybody all the time. Although almost all participants are strong live attenders [11], most do occasionally miss a session they would have liked to go to [10].

Barriers to live attendance are often related to the timing of tutorials, which conflicts with family circumstances (social obligations, caring responsibilities), work commitments, or with tutorials on other modules. Health/fitness (e.g. feeling too tired in the evenings) and technological issues such as bad internet connections may also be related to time. A further potential barrier is lack of confidence or anxiety, which is reported by several participants [5], but only one is deterred from participating in live events by it.

In addition, a small number of students [3] query the legitimacy of their participation in a tutorial for two reasons: Kornelia, a speaker of German as a first language in module L203, feels that perhaps she should not be there because she knows the language already, although she reports benefits in terms of structuring her studies, connecting with her tutor and other students and cultural learning. Others are unsure about attending tutorials with a tutor who is not their own. This is an issue for students who knew the Open University a few years back when tutorials were exclusive to tutor groups. The newer students seem happy to attend any tutorial of their choice and talk openly about trying to find the tutors that suit them best.
Motivators and barriers to accessing recordings

There are direct and indirect motivators for accessing recordings. The barriers to live attendance listed above function as indirect motivators for accessing recordings as evidenced in this contribution by Betty (L112) who battles with various health issues:

“The evening tutorials I booked onto quite a few and several I had to cancel this time round because I was just far too exhausted, so I was using the recordings more than anything.”

There are also direct motivators for accessing recordings. These are

➢ Listening to different voices and perspectives [8]
➢ Consolidation and reflection [8]

Students can also listen to different voices and perspectives through attending several live tutorials; Rosemary, for example, does this extensively. But, more commonly, students, like Josh (L314), will attend one tutorial on each topic, perhaps with their own tutor, and then access recordings by other tutors for additional input and to widen their perspective.

“Whenever [...] in the forums, some of the lecturers say, oh, I put the recording in the thing, I always listen to them. Because it’s interesting to hear, one, from a different lecturer and, two, from different students. It’s usually, they use the same power point process, slides, obviously they give a different angle on them, and the students are contributing as well.”

The second motivator, ‘consolidation and reflection’, is almost exclusively mentioned in relation to recorded tutorials, which offer the opportunity to study in your own time. Rae (L314) always re-listens to the tutorials she has attended and describes how recordings can contribute to her learning.
“If you listen again, you’ve got an idea what the tutorial was about, but you’re consolidating your knowledge, and, you know, you can go into more detail. […] I personally would listen to everybody’s tutorial if they recorded them.”

She continues to provide further reasons why

“because, obviously, it gives you experience with different speakers, different phrases, different intonation, […] so from the point of view of how little experience, practice we get speaking, and listening, to me it’s essential, because it’s the only chance we get to hear people at a high level, you know model, modelled. As well as our own attempts to do it.”

The contributions show how motivators for accessing recordings are strongly related to participants’ endeavour to find suitable input and learn from it. This will be discussed under the subtheme of ‘input for learning’ below [4.3.2].

There are also barriers to listening to recordings. These are related to issues of availability and accessibility. Most learning events are not recorded, and several participants mention that they would like more recordings [4], or that their own tutor doesn’t record [3]. Clare (L314), for example, thinks it is “a shame” that not more recordings are available, and, Laura (L112), too, regrets that “some tutorials have not been recorded, because sometimes there are excellent tutorials that are lost.” Some others [4] mention access issues, for example, recordings in Adobe connect rooms cannot be accessed on a tablet or mobile phone, and, occasionally, recordings disappear when changing browsers. On the level 1 modules, not everybody was aware of the availability of recordings, links were difficult to locate on the website, and Laura comments that she would have liked to know in advance which tutorials would be available for re-listening.

Time is an important factor why students listen to recordings, but it can also be a barrier. Accessing recordings in addition to live attendance is time consuming - a point made, for
example, by Rosemary (L116). When considering the wider cohort, the majority of students do not make use of recorded tutorials, which may be because they lack the time or simply because they do not think it would be useful – both arguments were brought forward in a recent student consultation by contributors who had never listened to recordings (The Open University, 2019). There are even a few participants in this study of recording users [2] who find recordings “not terribly helpful” (Catherine, L112) and “could have done without them” (Rosemary, L112). The same two students nevertheless mention benefits they derived from listening, which will be discussed later [⇒4.3.2].

There was also at least one contributor to the consultation (The Open University, 2019) who seemed unclear what was meant by ‘tutorial recording’. This and the fact that some of the very engaged participants in this study had trouble finding recordings may be an indication that others in the wider cohort may also have been unaware of the resources available to them, and that flagging up recordings and improving their accessibility might increase their use.

**Thematic map**

Figure 11 aims to illustrate the information which was provided here and links together the main theme and three sub-themes, which will be explored throughout this chapter [⇒4.3.1 ⇒4.3.2 ⇒4.3.3]. It shows that for participants in this study, who are independent learners at a distance university with limited opportunities for interaction but a high volume of material to get through and assignments to complete, tutorials are central. Both tutorial recordings and live sessions serve to provide structure and guidance. Interaction is the strongest motivator for live attendance, while recordings give access to a wider range of voices and perspectives and provide opportunities for consolidation and reflection allowing learners to engage with input in a way that supports their learning. Distance learners balance many different commitments; they need to ensure that they spend their time well and that the timing of tutorials fits in with their personal needs.
Figure 11: Thematic map showing motivators and barriers for engagement with tutorials
4.3.1 First subtheme: Structure and guidance

After discussing the main theme and presenting an overview of how subthemes interrelate with motivators and barriers to accessing recordings, I will now explore each subtheme in turn.

The need for structure and guidance and the vital role of tutorials in providing such structure and guidance is evident in all 13 interviews. Both live tutorials and recordings can help guide students. Participants use the word ‘structure’ with different meanings and in different contexts. They select Open University study because it offers a structured experience. They appreciate the well-structured materials and the structured learning experience in tutorials. As linguists, they express an interest in the structure of the language.

“I’m one who thinks that you need a good grammatical base to learn a language [...]. So, Open University is a very structured course in that respect, so I decided to do that.” (Hilda, L314)

“What I gain from listening to the tutor is a structured and methodical approach to the subject.” (Kornelia, L203)

I am focussing here on three aspects and their relation to recorded tutorials: structuring learning, assessment guidance and being part of a structured learning environment.

![Structure and guidance diagram]

Figure 12: Aspects related to the subtheme ‘Structure and guidance’
Structuring learning

Several participants repeatedly mention the large amount of material which they need to process to succeed in their modules [4], for example, Kate (L314) loves studying but finds “the volume is something I am struggling with”, a comment made frequently by language students at the Open University. Nevertheless, she would appreciate “more tutorials, and more opportunities to talk in that structured way.” Tutorials are not seen as extra work but as an opportunity to practise and digest material. Investing time in tutorials helps students cope with their workload. For Kornelia (L203) attending tutorials is “an additional tool just to structure my studies throughout the year”.

Recordings, too, fulfil this role of guiding students through the module. When asked what she finds most useful in a recorded session, Kate (L314) responds that it gives her “a sort of guidance as to what I should be thinking about, the structures, the grammatical structures, the vocabulary, the context for the language.” Although tutorial recordings are described as “an additional resource” (Kornelia, L203), which can be “very time consuming” (Rosemary, L112), participants also acknowledge that recorded tutorials are not just another thing to listen to. Kornelia (L203) provides an explanation why this particular additional resource can help to structure learning in a demanding distance study module.

“It condenses to an extent as well, because there is such a wealth of material to be read and to be looked at and to be practised and it’s just, it almost summarizes it, the subject, and helps [...] bring the focus back again, have it in a digestible and manageable chunk of information.”

Assessment guidance

Students also specifically seek the guidance provided in live and recorded tutorials to find out how to complete their assignments, or to gather additional information for their projects.
A couple of participants comment on the potential ambiguity of the assessment tasks [2], an issue all tutors and module teams at the Open University are acutely aware of. Assignment tasks go to hundreds of students who largely study on their own, and are marked simultaneously by 10, 20, or more tutors. However clearly the instructions are worded, there is always room for interpretation and possible misunderstandings. Participants emphasize the need to listen to tutorials to ensure they are “giving their tutor exactly what they are looking for” (Celia, L314). She learned from a bad experience in U214, an English module.

“I got caught out not attending a tutorial, for U214 a couple of years ago, and I didn’t answer the question properly and got a 46, which was by far my worst mark in any assignment, so I learned a lesson. I learned a lesson to make sure I attend or at least listen to every tutorial.”

Laura (L112), too, thinks that “because [of] the material, there is so much of it” it is crucial to get guidance what content and language to include to achieve excellent grades. Tutorial recordings serve the purpose of providing assessment guidance well, and many participants explicitly mention the use of recordings for assessment preparation [9]. Recordings allow them to access the information as and when they are doing their assignments and to take detailed notes.

Students on the level 3 module describe the dedicated assessment guidance sessions [3], which they find very useful to listen to. Even though, in a recording, they cannot ask their own questions, they report benefitting vicariously from the questions asked by their peers which offer a learner’s perspective.

Assessment is linked to the two direct motivators for accessing recordings: ‘consolidation and reflection’ is important for assessment preparation at all levels. Listening to ‘different voices and perspectives’ is especially relevant at level 3. At the time of the interviews, level
3 students were preparing for their End-of-module assignment (EMA) which consists of an extended essay and a viva with a tutor who is not their own allocated tutor. Participants are therefore keen to listen to different lecturers to check their understanding of different Spanish accents, get used to tutors’ voices and “just to get a feel for the phrasing and the intonation” (Rae, L314). They are also interested in getting a wide range of opinions from other students to help with the content and language of their own argumentation in the written task and in the viva, which is a cause of worry. Rae (L314) is quite typical for level 3 students in that she can speak about a wide range of topics but makes “an enormous number of mistakes”. “I’ve got my EMA coming up” she says, “which worries me”. While module result at level 1 does not count towards the degree classification, it does at levels 2 and 3. Many level 3 students are close to completion of their studies, often after many years of part-time learning, and the grades they get for their final modules are important to them. When comparing the contributions by the six level 1 participants (modules L112 and L116) with the six level 3 participants (module L314), it is unsurprising that the topic of assessment is more prevalent in conversations with students at Level 3.

![Figure 13: Talking about assessment at level 1 and level 3](image)
Being part of a structured learning environment

Distance study can be lonely, and tutorials provide the experience of being part of a structured learning environment, as well as a feeling of being connected to tutor and peers. Participants have different opinions on the extent to which recordings can play a role in this.

As discussed above, tutorials are usually well-structured events which help students orient themselves. In this sense, both live and recorded sessions are contributing to students feeling part of a joint endeavour guided by the tutor. However, not all participants report unequivocally that they feel part of a group of peers when listening to a recording: some do not [4], some do [5], and some are ambivalent [4]. Even so, they may show an empathic response to their peers. Josh (L314) says he does not really feel part of the group when listening, but he talks about his peers as “students like me” and feels he was “afterwards there”. Other participants, too, demonstrate an interest in their fellow students, their reasons for learning the language, their backgrounds and opinions.

John (L112) believes he may feel more part of the group in a recording than when attending live online, suggesting that perhaps vicarious engagement mediates his learning more than direct interaction. In a live event, he is embarrassed about his level of fluency and reluctant to contribute.

“Yes, I would [feel part of the group] if you listen to it, but not so much if you’re attending, because I think you tend to keep quiet if you’re a bit frightened of making a mistake or not as quite as fluent as the other students.” (John, L112)

Betty (L112) believes recordings help people like her, who cannot always attend, not to feel isolated.
“For me, it’s so I don’t feel that I’m learning all by myself, although I actually am, as such, I’m still part of a group. […] Otherwise I think or I imagine people who don’t attend tutorials would probably feel very much cut off from everyone else.”

Participants may feel part of their module even if not of the group of students who happen to attend the same tutorial. “Do I feel part of 112? Yes!” (Laura, L112). They also position themselves in comparison to their peers both in live tutorials and in recordings which gives them “a sense of where your grasp of the language fits in, but not only that, your grasp of the subject” (Kate, L314).

In chapter 1 I refer to the ‘coffee break’ language podcasts, which are based on the principle of vicarious participation and used to claim that “you learn because each podcast features a learner just like you” (Radiolingua, 2016) [☞1.3]. It is striking that participants, including Josh (cited above) and Wendy (L116) use similar language to confirm their legitimacy as direct or vicarious participants in their module tutorials.

“It is heartening, you know that other people make mistakes too. And I’ve done it for a long time, you always get someone who is really good, and you get someone who is maybe a little worse than me, makes me feel a little bit better, and you get somebody just like me.”

Listening to tutorials can help make students aware that they are not on their own and helps them position themselves within their module cohorts.

In summary, this subsection discussed how tutorials and their recordings can provide structure and guidance, for example, by supporting students in finding their way through the module materials and guiding them as to what to focus on for their assignments. Tutorials are social events which punctuate distance study, and both live and vicarious
participation can contribute to learners’ perceptions of themselves as independent learners who are nevertheless part of a social structure.

4.3.2 Second subtheme: Input for learning

Tutorial recordings provide aural input in terms of tutor talk, learner talk and target language interactions. They include discussions of cultural content, language explanations, and scaffolded activities to engage learners. Many activities are visually supported by PowerPoint slides, tutors will use the text chat and sometimes the notes feature to provide written support, and students will ask questions in writing as well as orally. The idea that recorded tutorials differ fundamentally from other resources in terms of the guidance they can offer was discussed in the previous section. But, of course, tutorials are also the only resource which includes genuine interaction directly relevant to the learners which is “obviously pertinent to what you are studying” (Josh, L314). Wendy (L116) thinks the tutorials are “very very true to life and it is good to hear the other students”, and Kate (L314), too, appreciates the real interaction in recordings as opposed to other audio-visual resources.

“It’s different because you’re hearing somebody, it’s different because it’s a real person that’s recorded it who is talking and you’ve got the, kind of, in-the-moment feeling around it, which is probably closer to what you get in the street than you would…. [...] it gives you that sort of sense of serendipity.”

As shown in the thematic map in figure 11 [4.3], participants go to recordings to listen more extensively as well as to study material in more depth. I will be discussing below what kinds of input listeners are seeking out, how they work with it, and whether the interviews provide any indication to what extent the linguistic input from recorded tutorials is being
noticed and may facilitate language development, and, eventually, even make language available for active use.

Figure 14: Aspects related to the subtheme ‘Input for learning’

Seeking out input at the right level

As predicted by the vicarious learning literature (Lee, 2005), most participants tend to seek out expert performance over learner language [11] and turn to the tutors in the first instance to listen to language which they know to be “absolutely correct” (Wendy, L116). Rosemary (L112) and Hilda (L314) think it is less useful to listen to students who are not fluent, while Celia (L314) worries about listening to learner errors and Kate (L314) is not convinced of the benefit of practising language without being corrected.

However, the data also suggest that learners are good at finding just the right input from tutors or students which serves their language learning needs. Laura (L112) studies level 1 French despite being fluent in the language, because she believes in “overlearning”. She seeks out tutors who have French as a first language and reports many benefits from listening to their pronunciation, intonation, phrases they use and sentence construction. Less confident students such as Wendy (L116) and John (L112) prefer tutors who have English as their first language and speak more slowly, because they find their language more accessible: “[This tutor] suits me to the ground, really. At my level” (John, L112).
Where tutors or fluent fellow students use an unhelpfully fast delivery, several participants describe this with the phrase ‘rattling on’ [3]. By contrast, they find it helpful when tutors adapt their language to students’ needs, and a few participants explicitly refer to characteristics of teacher talk [2], such as slower speech or redundancy, which makes features salient to listeners. A couple of students make strong claims that their understanding improved during the year through extensive listening [2]. Rae (L314) found students were speaking too fast in her first tutorials, but now feels she learns from them. Rosemary (L112) believes her comprehension improved by listening to different tutors in live sessions and recordings. Like Rae, it took her some time to appreciate the other students and their different accents, but now she does.

For many participants the visual input is vital [8], being able to look at the PowerPoints tends to be more important to them than having a recording. This is made explicit by a couple of participants [2], while others emphasize that it is the slides with the added information in the recordings which help them learn [3].

“But the slides you can just look at, but then you think, oh yes, but she said that in addition to what was on the slide and that was quite useful, so in this respect, I think that sticks in my mind. Because the slides are just sort of there really, they are just a helping hand really, but I think it’s the additional explanations by the tutor. [...] And that’s the reason why you listen to the recording.” (Hilda, L314)

Interestingly, Laura (L112) mentions that sometimes other learners are better at providing explanations at the right level than the tutor.

“But some students are really helpful, explaining maybe things that are for tutors obvious but for students a little bit less.”
Participants also orient themselves towards learners who use language at a level they can realistically aspire to themselves, which demonstrates their awareness that such input might be most useful to mediate their own learning. For John (L112), who struggles with speaking French, hearing language spoken at a slow pace by other students who “tend to use more simple language” is the most salient feature when listening to a recording. Rosemary (L116) finds it useful to re-listen to six students talking for one minute about a subject, a task she had previously attempted herself without advance preparation. Other students, she believed, had prepared their talk beforehand and she is learning from their answers with a view to improving her own contribution.

“They’d answered these questions really well, and I really had struggled. But I think because they’d done some preparation. [...] So, that’s why I went back onto this tutorial, it’s always something that I want to improve on.”

Modelling answers in different ways to allow students to revise their own work is an important part of distance learning materials and having access to approximations of competent performances by real students could be an effective and motivating way of supporting language development.

Josh (L314) listens to a group of students giving their opinion and pays attention to “how they’re using Spanish. And, it is maybe like checking myself against them, to hear, oh, is my level the same as their level?” Like Rosemary, he finds it helpful to listen to several answers to the same question picking up on the language used, while at the same time reassuring himself that he is not too far behind his peers. Similarly, Clare (L314), who speaks quite fluently, describes how she benefitted from a recorded session in which three highly proficient students were having a discussion around the topic of her end-of-module project, positioning herself as a vicarious participant in the group discussion.
“I realized it was really useful if you wanted to do the EMA question about languages [...] She only had three students who were all, they had a very high level of Spanish. And it was very interactive, they did exercises on using the imperfect subjunctive, they did a lot of discussion about linguistic diversity in the United States, in Peru, in Spain. [...] I felt easily that I could have been part of the group. I could have kept up with them.”

Processing input

Listening to recordings allows learners time for processing input, and more time spent with input is associated with more language learning (Ellis, 2015). Although a few participants in this study [3] listen to recordings “once through as a normal tutorial” (Hilda, L314) almost all will also wind forward and backwards [11] to seek out the parts which are of most interest and/or listen repeatedly. Most take notes [9], which range from noting down a few words to going back and forth many times for extensive written assignment preparation or to transcribe contributions from peers showing how the same question can be answered in different ways.

Like others, John (L112) is aware that repeated exposure may be necessary for new language to ‘stick’: “It is by listening repeatedly that I absorb it.” Live tutorials can be “dense” (Rae, L314) and participants are under pressure to participate, but they are a rich resource to be explored in retrospect. Although participating indirectly, learners are actively engaged with the recorded interactions.

“I think listening, well because I’ve been a teacher, I think listening can be quite active, actually. So I don’t feel passive at all. In fact, I can feel more passive taking part in an online tutorial if I don’t feel I’ve quite got the level of Spanish to cope with it.” (Kate, L314)
Sometimes the interactions in live sessions are not comprehensible to students [4] and they rely on going back to understand more fully. Wendy (L116), thinks that for her “things take a lot longer to sink in”, and in a recording she goes back “to the bits I worry about” and then “sometimes I get it [...] something I didn’t get at the time.” Clare (L314) also uses recordings to “establish understanding [of] what’s being said”. Celia (L314), who believes that listening is her worst skill by far, prefers recordings to live attendance, because she feels she understands little the first time.

“So even when I’m on a live tutorial, I have to go back and listen to the recording of it because I’ve missed, because I’ve maybe not understood the majority of it.”

For her, “it’s like a light going on” when she views a recording and finally understands.

By contrast, Laura (L112) has no troubles understanding, but she also makes best use of the input in recordings to develop her linguistic competence in a highly proactive way, creating her own activities from utterances she heard in recordings.

“Then I try and replace maybe the noun with other nouns and make myself another sentence with the same structure but different words, as is if was a puzzle.“

**Noticing language**

Recordings may result in a deeper understanding of tutorial interactions while also facilitating a focus on the language that is being used. All participants report consciously noticing language in recordings, often with a view to incorporating these features into their own linguistic repertoire. Again, what learners focus their attention on, and what becomes noticed depends on their needs and linguistic competence. Wendy (L116) usually focuses on the use of structures that she is learning about at the time, for example, the different
past tenses in Spanish. For Hilda (L314), too, target linguistic items are made salient through teacher talk in recordings.

“If you listen to it once or twice, it makes it easier to listen to, of course, because you [get] used to the voice and the accent much quicker, because it is a foreign language, ultimately. [...] And I think you notice the points the tutor wants to make specifically, maybe vocabulary, or certain grammar points because, of course, they are mentioned more often.”

Similarly, John (L112), at level 1, notices the subjunctive “because we’ve just been studying it and I tend to listen out for it”, while Clare (L314), at level 3 notices the imperfect subjunctive, which is the subject of an activity in which she participates vicariously by completing the required answers alongside her peers, as reported earlier. Laura (L112) is already familiar with the structures being taught at level 1, but notices language the tutor uses incidentally.

“When tutors talk and they’re just explaining something, they might be explaining a grammar point, but they might be using some other interesting structures which are not mentioned or not [the] purpose of the tutorial. And those I note down.”

Kornelia’s (L203) case is different as she is a first-language speaker, who is not focused on improving her own language competence. Nevertheless, she notices aspects of language her peers are struggling with, thus increasing her own understanding of the language structure, which is of interest to her because she wants to teach German after completing her degree. She also reports learning from others’ cultural experiences.

Interestingly, participants sometimes describe language in terms of discrete linguistic elements and, at other times, more holistically. Hilda, who was previously quoted as finding it important to learn grammatical rules, differentiates between grammar and vocabulary,
while Rae (L314) is not so interested in grammar when accessing tutorials, but notices “phrases, phrases that sound very Spanish”. Listening to Rae in a tutorial reveals that she makes effective contributions but that some of the other attendees are more fluent and use more idiomatic language, which she may be referring to here. Laura, too, listens out for “ways in which words go together”. Recorded tutorials allow students to focus on linguistic chunks that are likely to occur in interactive settings.

Most participants also report noticing their own or others’ errors in live tutorials and in recordings [9] and show insight into how this may help their learning. Wendy (L116) notices the gap between her own deficient rendering of Spanish sounds and the correct pronunciation.

“I maybe I not said the ci correctly. You know you do notice you know yourself you’ve done wrong.”

Rosemary (L112) recognizes that being aware of others’ errors could be an important step in her language development.

“In the end, you’ve learnt something, if you realize that there are mistakes. Because if you don’t realize there are mistakes, you’re not aware of it yourself, are you?”

Catherine (L116), too, believes that errors made by her peers are likely to reflect her own interlanguage and will help her improve.

“We all tend to make, we all, some of us make the same mistakes, and we learn through listening to others, correcting them and moving forward if you see what I mean.”

Betty (L112) sometimes pre-empt the tutor’s corrective feedback when she thinks that something did not “[sound] quite right” and listens out for the correct version
which is being provided. Josh (L314) notices both correct and incorrect use of language in recordings, and, although he tends to “listen, not make notes”, seems to make a mental note of language he finds useful.

“What I do find myself doing though, is listening to the students and thinking, oh yeah, they used that word wrong, or that was that was a good way of saying it.”

Kate (L314) believes that noticing language in recordings can lead to conscious reflection on her own language use, and that her performance is scaffolded by her peers.

“[Noticing errors] that’s a useful skill to identify isn’t it? Because then you can reflect on your own language learning and how you express things. You can also, if you hear somebody saying some[thing], you build on what other people are saying, don’t you too, and you learn, if they’re expressing something in a certain way, you can adopt that and reflect that and frame that back.”

**Participating vicariously**

This subsection has focussed on conditions, which may make it more likely that the interactive input students are exposed to in tutorials benefits their language development. Participants in this study use recordings to identify or seek out input which they perceive to be at the right level given their linguistic competence, and they employ strategies such as listening repeatedly and making notes to help them process what they hear. The added time spent with recordings may lead to more noticing of linguistic structures and useful phrases. Only live attenders can benefit from mediation of input through direct interaction, but most contributors to this enquiry do participate, if vicariously, in the recordings they access [9]. They answer questions in self-directed speech, or note down their own answers while waiting for their peers to reply, in Clare’s (L314) words, they are
“all but participating but not being there”. Hilda and John explain the principle of vicarious participation.

“For example, if the tutor asks the questions, and the tutor [is] then waiting for the participants in the tutorial to answer the question. You will try at the same time [to] answer the question in your head. And then at that point in time [...] one of the tutees will come in and answer that question and you then compare what you thought the [answer] should be with what the tutee’s just answered. You do participate.” (Hilda, L314)

“You’re definitely anticipating answering the question, and you’re thinking frantically to answer the question as if I was in the tutorial. Yes, I don’t listen passively, it’s an active thing.” (John, L112)

Participants not only actively engage with tutor-led activities, but also listen out for questions asked by their peers. Hilda (L314) is sometimes impatient when others ask about things, which, to her, are obvious, but she aligns herself with peers who “are thinking the same way as you do” and ask the questions she would have asked had she attended live. Rosemary (L112), on the other hand, benefits from questions she “wouldn’t have had the confidence to ask and also questions [she]’d not thought of asking” indicating that her understanding is mediated through vicarious dialogue.

Moving from indirect to direct participation

Ultimately, input is of benefit for learning when it leads to language development and becomes available for active use. This study does not document student output and cannot show whether recordings contribute to language learning gains. There are, however, some contributions, which suggest that language picked up in recordings is subsequently used actively, because participants describe highly agentic output-directed behaviours. This
applies, for example, where participants listen extensively and take notes with the intention of making use of language and ideas in their assignments.

“I listened back to what some of the students said, well, answering some of the questions that [the tutor] had proposed on her slides and then went back and typed out all of these questions and then these people’s answers and I printed it off, so it’s now in my file, that I’m accumulating. It’s getting bigger and bigger for my research for my EMA [End-of-module assignment]. So it was really useful.” (Clare, L314)

When asked whether listening to recordings may help even with spontaneous speech, Josh (L314) is perplexed, as is evident from this interview extract.

Interviewer: Hm, yeah. Do you think it improves your speaking skills?
Josh: Speaking skills?
Interviewer: Yeah.
Josh: Erm, listening to the recordings?
Interviewer: Yeah.
Josh: Not really, no!

All participants, including Josh, do, however, report instances of ‘noticing’, ‘consolidating’ and ‘absorbing’ language and, as discussed above, mention picking up on constructions or useful phrases. Clare (L314), after claiming that listening to recordings “obviously doesn’t help with the speaking” explains how noticing a specific structure has led her to use it more herself: “I’m noticing more the use of the subjunctive […] and now I’m trying to use it in my speech and I’m not used to using it so much.”

Level 1 students Betty, Laura and John are aware that they are using recordings to improve their own speech. Interestingly, they are focusing on linguistic chunks which will help them express themselves with more fluency.
“I personally quite like to be able to hear other students just because I can
practise what they’re saying as well, [...] so for me if I hear a response I can
then try and like power it back if you like. Does that make sense?” (Betty,
L112)

“First of all because I listen to the native speakers, I acquire maybe speed in
the speech and the structures of maybe words that go together and going over
them and listening as I pick up from [them], one of my skills is the oral
producing of the language, so first of all is conversation, and tone and music.”
(Laura, L112)

“It’s trying to memorize these structures, erm, to help you speak the language
later on, erm, by copying used, naturally used phrases.” (John, L112)

Rae (L314) attended 25 live sessions and listened to 12 recordings with a preference for
those which were not just focused on assessment, and therefore included more language
and “more discussion around the issues to do with the units”. Her contribution below gives
testimony to the conflicting demands on her attention in live sessions and the progress she
made in the course of the year. Recordings offer opportunities for listening and rehearsal,
which, conceivably, might contribute to moving towards more fluent speech.

“Initially, when I started, I remember thinking I’ve got to try and join in at this
point and sort of would prepare an idea and not listen to anyone else, whereas
I feel now it’s much more important to join in with the discussion.”

Clearly, participants appreciate the live interaction afforded in tutorials, which they see as
necessary to develop their interactive competence. At the same time, they exploit input
from recordings in ways which they perceive to be beneficial for their language learning.
Issues related to accessing and processing input, noticing language, participating vicariously
and making language available for active use will be explored again when discussing findings in chapter 5 [↩5.5].

4.3.3 Third subtheme: Time and timings

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) prevalence in a data set may be determined by frequency of occurrence or by significance. Within the interviews, ‘time’ is a highly prevalent concept in both respects. A word frequency query in NVivo reveals it to be the 6th most frequent stemmed content word with participants making a total of 166 references to time, times, timing or timings. A ‘stemmed’ word search relates to the use of a word stem (lemma), which means it takes account of morphological variation such as plurals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Weighted-Percentage (%)</th>
<th>Similar Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>354</td>
<td>2.48</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>listen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>listen, listened, listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>tutor</td>
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<td>210</td>
<td>1.47</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>recordings</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>record, recorded, recording, recordings, records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timings</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>time, times, timing, timings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15: The most frequent content words across all interviews (participants’ contributions only)

Time and timings are important to participants for several reasons. Time needed for processing input plays a central role for language learning and was discussed briefly in the previous section. Learning may be enhanced by spending more time with input but also by working with input at a time when you can concentrate well. Here I will report on the latter as well as on the more practical aspects of time and timings.

Figure 16: Aspects related to the subtheme ‘Time and timings’
Conflicting commitments and preferences

Students can only benefit from tutorials if they happen at the right time. Barriers to live attendance which affect participants in this study include social commitments, caring responsibilities, work and travel, as well as very serious issues related to major illness and bereavement. Participants who cannot attend live tutorials for any of these reasons rely on recordings to provide the guidance and input they consider to be so essential for their studies. Clashes with tutorials on other modules are another reason why sometimes students cannot attend. This is an issue which may be on the rise as an increasing number of Open University students study two, three or even four modules concurrently, each with a stipulated workload of either 8 or 15 study hours per week. The increase in concurrent study is related to the new fee regime and qualification focus, which means that more Open University students are now aiming to achieve a degree as quickly as possible when previously many were happy to select one module at a time.

Issues related to broadband access at home or at work and personal study schedules also impact on successful attendance at live tutorials. Participants have conflicting preferences about when tutorials should be held. Kate (L314) would like tutorials to be as late as possible in the evening, as she cannot access the online rooms from work because of firewalls. By contrast, John (L112) much prefers daytime slots, because he can access good broadband in the office, but not from home. Both report frustrating experiences with live online sessions.

“If you’ve got a working day in the middle of London, it’s quite a struggle to get back for seven o’clock. If I get back for seven o’clock and there’s a technical problem, you miss half of the tutorial.” (Kate, L314)

“Quite a few of the tutorials are in the evening, online. As I’m at home my broadband is so awful [...] on one occasion I had to leave the room, so to
speak, because the internet connection was so poor that when I was unmuting
my microphone to speak, people thought I hadn’t unmuted it when I had. And
on that occasion I did leave the room.” (John, L112)

Personal study schedules may be equally incompatible. Although the modules run
according to a fixed weekly timetable, most students fall behind at some point, which
makes tutorials less useful and more intimidating. Rae (L314) is not normally anxious at all
unless she “has to wing it” in a tutorial because she has not studied the material yet.
Sometimes assessment preparation tutorials are offered early in the study unit, which she
finds unhelpful. Betty (L112) on the other hand prefers a long run-in time and finds it “very
stressful” if TMA practice is offered too close to the deadline. Tutorials are offered multiple
times to allow for such variation in study preference, but interview data suggest that there
is never going to be an optimal solution which accommodates all needs.

_Time well spent vs. time wasted_

Importantly, distance students need to make effective use of their time. Many participants
report technical issues in live tutorials [7] which they see as a waste of time, for example,
having to leave and re-enter the room several times or spending much time in the tutorial
on sound checks and other preliminaries. This affects their concentration, and even if all
goes well, their attention may be flagging towards the end of a 90-minute evening session.
Study advice to language students often encourages them to map out their individual high
and low concentration times and plan their studies accordingly, for example, watching a
video or doing more routine activities when they cannot concentrate so well, while leaving
the harder tasks to when they are most alert (Eardley, Adams and Nicolson, 2005).
However, tutorials do not necessarily fit in well with such advice, as interactive online
sessions make high demands on attention at a predetermined time, often in the evening.
Wendy (L116) finds that her concentration is affected if too much goes on at the same time
in an online tutorial.
“I think in a tutorial sometimes a couple of people try and speak together or there’s noise in the background and I just think when you listen that time, I’m on my own and I’m concentrating on it I probably get it a bit better.”

Kate (L314), despite being accustomed to online working in her job as a journalist, finds that tutorials stretch her attention span.

“It’s like anything you do on a computer, […] you find, you feel quite exhausted at the end of it.”

In recordings, on the other hand, students can fast forward through irrelevant sections and spend more time on what they want to learn at a time that suits them. Some participants quickly deal with the points they want to find out about, others spend considerably longer processing relevant material. Overall, 11 out of 13 participants mention ‘time’ when listing the benefits of recorded tutorials. Kate (L314) refers to the complementary benefits of live and recorded tutorials.

“The learning from each, it is a different kind of learning, I think, the advantages of the recording you can obviously stop you can go back, you can take your time, you can take notes.”

Kornelia (L203), who has young children, appreciates the flexibility.

“It’s convenient, because I can dip in and out whenever I have the time or I’ve got the quietness to listen to the recording.”

Ultimately, time may be the most important factor determining the study success of distance learners who balance many commitments (Rovai, 2003). Recordings can help them make good use of tutorials in their own time.
4.4 Brief conclusion to the qualitative data analysis

The analysis of interview data revealed that learners who participated in this study are highly motivated and engaged individuals who create their own learning opportunities and report complementary benefits of direct and vicarious participation in languages tutorials. For some, recordings are an additional resource, which is useful at times, for others they are an invaluable tool for processing content, comprehending interactions or feeling connected to their module cohort. Recordings can provide structure and guidance and give access to more voices and wider perspectives. Crucially, they allow participants to seek out and process input in their own time to benefit their learning. Most find recorded tutorials essential for assessment preparation and many make use of the opportunities afforded by recordings for rehearsing and reinforcing the language they have learnt. The extent to which the testimony presented in this section supports an interpretation that recordings can facilitate language learning will be discussed critically in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

Findings and discussion

In the two previous chapters, quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately and yielded very different types of results, derived from statistical procedures on the one hand and thematic analysis of interview data on the other. Quantitative results provided information about which learners were most likely to use recordings in their study, while qualitative findings increased our understanding of learner motivations and experience when vicariously accessing language tutorials. It is the aim of this chapter to bring together these different results to show how they can complement each other and inform the research questions. I will discuss findings in the light of the literature and with reference to both the statistical analyses presented and the learner voices relayed previously. The chapter is organized in terms of the six research questions.
5.1 Who accesses recorded online group tutorials for language learning?

_Students who find tutorials central to their studies_

Both quantitative and qualitative data support the view that recordings are mostly used in addition to live attendance and that it is students who find tutorials central to their studies who will access recordings to support their learning. This finding confirms the results of a previous small-scale study at the Open University (St. John et al., 2014) which equally indicated that listeners are often also live attenders. It contrasts with some of the research into lecture capture at traditional universities which suggests that recording use is linked to a decline in live attendance (Edwards and Clinton, 2019), and that students access recordings instead of attending live.

The Venn diagram in figure 14 below is based on 964 of 977 students in four module cohorts (face-to-face records for a small number of students are missing, as explained in chapter 3 [3.5]). It illustrates information previously provided in table 29 [3.5] showing live attenders and listeners as a proportion of all students on the modules. The diagram shows a substantial overlap between live attenders and listeners while qualitative data strongly support the claim that listeners find tutorials essential in a distance language learning module and are therefore “grateful to have the opportunity” (Wendy, L116) to listen as well as attend live.

In terms of this finding, the results of numerical and non-numerical analysis concur.
Older learners

The participants, who were interviewed for this study, were aged between 40 and 72 and reported their experiences as mature language learners who include tutorial recordings in their study routine. Although learners in the younger age groups also make some use of recordings, statistical analysis shows that recording use goes up with age. Of course, some older learners have more time for study, and they are more likely to be retired, which could explain their increased use of course resources including recordings. However, the significant statistical result is independent of employment status and shows a clear linear trend through all age groups suggesting that there is an effect which is related to age and ageing. Previous research indicates that, in some respects, language learning becomes harder as we get older (Seright, 1985; Stine and Wingfield, 1987; Schleppegrell, 1987; Bellingham, Benson and Nunan, 2005; Lenet et al., 2011). Older learners may need more time for processing and find aural comprehension more difficult, especially when there is background noise which is often unavoidable in the online classroom. In this context, it is relevant to reconsider the following quote by Wendy (L116) [↩4.3.3], who, aged 72, is one
of the oldest participants. She finds herself better able to concentrate when listening to recordings.

“I think in a tutorial sometimes a couple of people try and speak together or there’s noise in the background and I just think when you listen that time, I’m on my own and I’m concentrating on it I probably get it a bit better.” (Wendy L116)

Several interview participants [3] refer to their great difficulties with aural comprehension, others report not understanding at times or struggling with a fast speech delivery, which they call ‘rattling on’. In an experimental study by Lenet et al. (2011) older learners wanted feedback to be presented for longer, while Stine and Wingfield (1987) found that the disadvantage for older participants in a listening task disappeared as redundancy was increased. Under conditions of optimal redundancy, older learners produced more language when recalling listening passages than younger learners. Interview participants in this study, too, refer to learning from teacher talk, but also benefit from the opportunity of listening more than once to a recording, thereby extending the time of exposure.

Kate (L314) reports asking a question in a live session but finding there was not enough time for her to attend to the tutor’s answer fully, which is why she went back to the recording. Of course, this need not be age-related, but it illustrates the processing demands the interactive setting places on participants. The high processing load in live interaction is discussed extensively by vicarious learning researchers (McKendree et al., 1998; Ohta, 2001), and the studies of older learners referred to in this section indicate that age is a factor which may exacerbate the issue.

Recent research also suggests that older learners have advantages over their younger peers in that they can draw on past skills and experience and, as learners, are highly motivated and excited to be students again (Bellingham, Benson and Nunan, 2005; Ware et al., 2017).
This is evident in the interviews; participants invest time and effort into their studies and report high motivation levels. When asked about her strengths and weaknesses, Wendy (L116) exemplifies the points that have been made here:

“`I’m motivated, I’m keen to learn. My weakness is, it’s the same for French as for Spanish, is my listening skills is the weakest.”`

When comparing contributions by the two male participants, Josh (aged 40) being the youngest interviewee and John (aged 72) being joint oldest with Wendy, some interesting differences emerge regarding how each of them uses recorded tutorials. Josh is one the few participants who listens to recordings all the way through without stopping or starting or making notes - accessing a wide range of perspectives is important to him. By contrast, John emphasizes listening repeatedly so that he can absorb what is being discussed. This is an area which warrants further research.

**Non-UK learners**

Quantitative data indicate that non-UK learners are more likely to listen to recordings than their UK-based peers. This affects a small percentage within the overall cohort and is evidenced in the interviews with Celia and Laura. In chapter 3, I tentatively concluded that non-UK students are more heavily reliant on the online provision and that this is reflected in the use of recordings [Ref. 3.3]. Laura explicitly refers to the unavailability of face-to-face tutorials and makes ample opportunity of the online provision instead.

**Women**

Quantitative data point to a slightly higher engagement with recorded tutorials by women, indicating that women who do access recordings will listen to more tutorials than their male peers [Ref. 3.3].
During the qualitative part of the study, I interviewed 13 participants of whom 11 were female. A statistical comparison of the ‘interview’ group with the remaining cohort of recording users revealed no statistically significant difference in terms of gender \(\Rightarrow 4.1\), i.e. statistically, my interview sample was not biased in this respect. It is nevertheless worth bearing in mind that a very large proportion of the qualitative data is based on testimony by women. Of course, the two male students also reported meaningful engagement with tutorial recordings and one of them (Josh) had watched nine recordings which puts him among the highest users. There were no clear indications within the interview data, which would point to qualitative differences in recording use by male or female students.

**Learners with a disability**

Statistically, learners with a disability in the four cohorts are no more likely to access recordings than other learners. It is, of course, possible that the slightly higher recording use by disabled learners shown in table 12 \(\Rightarrow 3.3\) could become statistically significant with an increased sample size, for example by studying more modules, but, given the findings from this study, the effect size is unlikely to be large. The same is true for other demographic features, such as gender or education. The result refutes anecdotal evidence that recordings are of use mostly to students with a disability. This is also apparent from the interview data, which are overwhelmingly based on the testimony of non-disabled participants. Only one person, Betty (L112), talks about her disability. What is worth noting, however, is that, qualitatively, Betty’s contribution stands out, in that, as a sufferer of various conditions including chronic pain and ME, she is more dependent on recordings than any of the others.

“For myself personally, it’s obviously far easier for me to be able to listen to a recording than it is to attend a tutorial of an evening time, because I am just exhausted. So that for me is wonderful, and that’s definitely a huge
advantage for me. [Be]cause I think I would feel a little bit lost if I couldn’t access them.”

**Students who are doing well on their modules**

Quantitative data initially showed higher overall assessment scores and better course outcomes of vicarious attenders. However, this effect disappears when taking account of live attendance indicating that it is live attendance which is linked to study success. This is not a causative finding, i.e. it could be that engaging with tutorials helps students achieve good results or that good students are more likely to attend tutorials.

It is, however, very clear that recording use in this distance learning context is not linked to lower assessment scores as found in some studies on lecture capture (Owston, Lupshenyuk and Wideman, 2011) or that it negatively impacts on student success (Edwards and Clinton, 2019). Qualitative data additionally indicate that students who listen to recordings are working hard to achieve their desired result. Laura (L112) listens to recordings to perfect her scores.

> “I listen to […] mostly grammar recordings […] when I have to do my assignments in order to be sure that I get all the grammar points requested.”

It is worth pointing out that Laura (L112) and Kornelia (L203) are the only interview participants who are clearly overcompetent for their modules, Laura had previously attained CEFR C2 competence in French, and Kornelia is a first-language speaker of German. As discussed previously, Open University language modules tend to have a high contingent of overqualified students [ 3.4], but most of the listeners in this study [11] are neither overqualified nor failing, and many indicate that aspects of the module are difficult for them or that they are occasionally struggling [9]. All of them are working hard to get the best possible result, which includes making good use of tutorial resources. Many of them
are striving not for a distinction but for a good pass. Rae (L314), who was working very hard throughout the academic year and achieved a grade 2 pass subsequent to the interview, demonstrates intentionality and forethought by setting herself a clear goal, which she eventually achieved.

“I set myself a task this year for level 3, and I decided I wanted to get between 70 and 80 as an average at the end of the year if I can. So a grade 2. And that’s where I think my level is, actually.”

5.2 Why do learners access tutorial recordings?

Indirect motivators

The interview data show direct and indirect motivators for accessing recordings. Students will access recordings when they cannot attend live because of conflicting commitments. In addition, face-to-face tutorials may be too difficult to get to and live online attendance may be affected by technological issues. But time is clearly the most important reason why students will turn to recordings instead of attending live, and the difficulties part-time distance students face in accommodating their conflicting obligations are well documented (Kember, 1999; Rovai, 2003; Sataporn and Lamb, 2005).

Kember (1999) describes three coping mechanisms (sacrifice, support and negotiation of arrangements) in four domains (self, work, family and social life), and these are evident in the interviews as participants talk about childcare responsibilities, time for going out with friends, and their precarious work situation, which they do not want to jeopardize. When weighing up priorities, students may consider the importance of live attendance as opposed to listening in retrospect. Assessment guidance delivered in lecture mode is served well by a recording, and students can, in a sense, confer their ‘proxy agency’
(Bandura, 2006) to their peers listening out for questions they might have asked themselves.

**Direct motivators**

There are two direct motivators for accessing recordings, which are related to more extensive exposure on the one hand, and more time for consolidation and reflection on the other. Both are associated with potential learning gains as discussed within the vicarious learning literature (Lee, 2005) and also with specific reference to language learning (Ellis, 2015).

Participants listen to recordings, which they did not attend live, to hear a wider range of voices and opinions. Like Rabold et al.’s (2008) learners they appreciate the variety of perspectives offered by different tutors for learning and revision. Mayes (2015) reports on studies in which access to more perspectives is linked to deeper learning \[\Rightarrow 1.3\]. In a language learning context, Saito and Hanzawa (2018) recently showed that intentionally accessing more input led to increased oral proficiency \[\Rightarrow 1.4\]. Learners in this study are proactive in seeking out input which they see as beneficial for their learning. While they are doubtful about the effect of listening on their spoken competence, they do perceive improvements in terms of comprehending speech and understanding a wider range of accents.

Participants also listen to recordings for consolidation and to study in more depth without the demands of direct interaction (Ohta, 2001). “If there’s a conversation going on, it’s not always easy to be able to take notes as well”, says Betty (L112), “so when I go back, I’ll then refresh my memory”. Time spent with input, task repetition, and frequency of exposure have all been related to language learning gains (Bygate, 2013; Ellis 2015). Recordings give participants the opportunity to process the input for longer and in different ways as will be further explored in the next section.
5.3 What do learners do while listening to recorded language tutorials?

Research into second language learning has moved away from the idea that providing second-language input will automatically lead to acquisition (Schmidt, 1990; Long, 1996; Gass, 1997; Mitchell, Myles and Marsden, 2013; Kramsch, 2015). The conditions which best foster learning are still the subject of much ongoing research (Ellis, 2015), but it is clear that the learners’ own engagement with their environment, their intentions and actions are instrumental in effecting change (Van Lier, 2008). It therefore matters what learners do.

For all participants in this study “listening is an active thing” (John, L112). In Ohta’s (2001, p.4) words learners “draw on the interactive environment of the setting in which language is used”. In Ohta’s case this is the language classroom, here it is the classroom-like environment of the online tutorial room. Vicarious attenders can see a list of participants (sometimes anonymized), the tutor’s PowerPoint presentation, and, possibly, any notes or text chat. They can observe activities such as polling or placing elements onto the whiteboard and they can hear all spoken interaction in the main room. If students are sent to breakout rooms during the live session, there may be blank time in the recording.

Participants who access recorded tutorials in this environment report selecting the sections they want to listen to by winding forwards and backwards or using the viewing pane along the side, which allows them to go straight to a specific slide. They listen, take notes and/or print out the slides or use a ‘snipping tool’ (Kate, L314). The user analytic data give no information about the length of time for which students access recorded tutorials, but participants report varying periods of engagement: briefly going back to check something, listening all the way through, or spending considerably more time to listen repeatedly, and, in some cases, take extensive notes or transcribe relevant extracts. Laura (L112) usually listens for 20 minutes, while Wendy (L116) will spend roughly twice as long as the length of the original session.
Often participants are quite input-focused when accessing recordings, for example when they seek out specific information related to assessment or a course topic, but, at other times, they will engage vicariously with the interactions they are witnessing. Forms of vicarious engagement include taking part in activities by writing out answers or participating through silent speech and listening out for others’ questions. Like Ohta’s (2001) listeners who stay ahead of the conversation through the process of projection, some participants anticipate the tutor’s corrections to utterances they noticed to be erroneous. Catherine (L116) shouts “No, not that word” at her peers who are making mistakes. Literature suggests that vicarious participants who are so actively engaged do indeed learn and may have advantages over direct participants whose attentional resources are taken up by the demands of the interaction (McKendree et al., 1998; Lee, 2005; Mayes, 2015).

5.4 Which elements of the recordings are salient to learners?

Researchers in the field of vicarious learning point out that learners tend to express a preference for accessing expert performance despite strong evidence that you learn more when observing others who are still learning (Lee, 2005). Unsurprisingly, for participants in this study, the combination of visual support and tutor talk is the most salient element of a recorded tutorial. Learners will remember tutor explanations, especially if supported by slides, for example showing grammar points or vocabulary. Kornelia (L203) makes the point that it is slides which show “just the right amount of information”, i.e. which are informative but not overloaded, which draw her attention.

Any assessment-related information also stands out, which is the case especially for students at level 3 as shown previously in figure 12 [↩4.3.1]. At the time of the interviews, these students were strongly focused on their end-of-module assignment and had decided
on the topics for their projects, which meant that any content related to this topic was perceived as highly relevant whereas tutorial content related to other topics was not.

Sometimes tutor input, for example regarding assessment advice, is mediated by student questions and these questions and the answers are also salient to listeners, either because they had similar questions themselves, or, conversely, because they had not thought of them. Although tutors will try to anticipate student questions when explaining assignments, providing another student’s perspective is notoriously difficult to achieve for an expert tutor (Chi, Roy and Hausmann, 2001; Mayes, 2015).

Participants’ preference for expert performance is not exclusively focused on the tutor but also on other students who are perceived to be more proficient. Rae (L314) finds that some other students “are very good” and she enjoys listening to them. Clare (L314) was cited previously as vicariously participating in a session with students who “had a very high level of Spanish” and clearly aligns herself with her peers as she could have “kept up with them” and “easily [...] been part of the group” [↩4.3.2]. Rosemary (L112) will make a note of what other students say, “if they answer in a nice, in a good way, and I like the phrase, the turn of phrase what they say”. Sometimes it is not input from tutor or peers, but an engaging activity type which is salient to participants. They mention gap-fill activities and activities involving task repetition, both could be classified as types of input enhancement, which are conducive to noticing (Öneyik, 2018): task repetition because it increases frequency of exposure and gap-fill because it draws attention to features before revealing the answers.

In terms of the linguistic features which are perceived as salient the developmental stage of the language learner plays an important role (Ellis, 2015), as is the case with the different tenses of the subjunctive discussed previously: the present subjunctive gets noticed by level 1 learners, while level 3 learners notice the imperfect subjunctive. Learners may also fall into different types as described by Skehan (1998) in that they have a more analytical or a more holistic, memory-oriented approach to language, which influences what they find
salient in the interactional input in a tutorial. Rae, Laura, Josh, John and Rosemary (cited above) all refer to phrases which they notice because they sound idiomatic, whereas Hilda (L314) has a more atomistic approach: she focuses on grammar structures and is proud of her extensive vocabulary. Despite spending a lot of time in Spain she is not so good at the “silly little things” meaning perhaps that picking up idiomatic phrases does not come naturally to her. Chapter 4 [4.3.2] also referred to John’s (L112) most salient feature being “the other students speaking slowly”, which is very different from the focus on expert performance described above. This will be discussed further in the next section, which looks at perceived benefits for language learning.

5.5 What are the perceived benefits for language learning?

This question is strongly related to the subtheme ‘input for learning’. Participants in this study use recordings to access (interactive) input, which is seen as the major factor for second language development (Gass, 1997). In interactionist theories of language learning comprehensible input can result in ‘comprehended input’ which is the first step that may allow language acquisition to take place (Gass, 1997). Social theories of language learning refer to the process of internalization as language moves from the social to the private domain (Vygotsky, 1978; Poehner & Lantolf, 2014). Learning takes place within the ZPD, a socially constructed cognitive space, where learners can move beyond their current level of competence. Open University module cohorts are typically very diverse not only in terms of age and other personal characteristics, but also in terms of prior attainment in the language. Participants in this study seem to be able to manage their own ZPDs as described by Ohta (2005) and are actively seeking out input which mediates their learning at the right level. Depending on their own stage of linguistic development, participants find salience in input from students speaking slowly, students speaking fluently, tutors who are first-
language speakers and tutors who are not. Two students, Rae (L314) and Rosemary (L112) change their preference in the course of the year as their competence develops. Different aspects of ‘time’ are perceived as the main advantage of listening to recordings, students can listen in their own time, repeatedly, when they can concentrate. The impact of time and frequency of exposure on language learning is well-documented (Ellis, 2015).

Processing constraints on participants in direct interaction have been discussed previously as interaction makes high demands on attention, which may prevent learners from focussing fully on the linguistic input they receive (Ohta, 2001). Although the question of whether language learners can focus on meaning and form at the same time is still being debated (Morgan-Short et al., 2018), there is much evidence supporting the view that there is normally a primacy for meaning and that there are limits to what a learner can attend to in real time (Van Patten, 2015). Repeated listening allows for increased focus on form and can lead to noticing more features in the input. Like Ohta’s (2001) learners, participants in this study notice correct and deviant language, they notice the gap between their own performance and target forms and compare their peers’ output with their own representations. For example, when Josh (L314) describes “checking myself against the others”, this may contribute to noticing and noticing the gap, both potential drivers of language learning (Schmidt, 2001; Ellis, 2015). Mills (2014, p. 8) sees strong links between positioning yourself within a group and self-efficacy beliefs pointing to cognitive and motivational benefits of vicarious participation.

“Vicarious experiences, or the appraisal of abilities in relation to the accomplishments of peers, are an additional source of self-efficacy beliefs. Visualizing the successes of comparable individuals in terms of age, level, and ability can raise a person’s efficacy beliefs by fostering the belief that s/he could also master comparable tasks.”
The potential affective benefits of feeling connected to a group of learners will be discussed further in the next section [∝5.6].

There is some discussion around the usefulness of slow conversation at level 1. Catherine, for example, thinks, it would be more useful to listen to recordings “if we were all more fluent”, and, according to Hilda (L314) a slow tutorial will make boring listening the second time round. However, participants also show insight into how they learn from their peers both by picking up on language they want to appropriate themselves, and by noticing errors and mentally correcting them. Research into peer learning shows interaction between learners who are not fluent to be beneficial rather than detrimental to language development (Reiss, 1985; Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Sato and Ballinger, 2016).

According to Ohta (2010) it is often difficult to retain language provided in interactive contexts, which are ephemeral and may make conflicting demands on the interactants’ processing capacities. She reports how learners “harness mediational tools before, during and after social interaction to guide their own learning processes and outcomes” (Ohta 2010, p.178). Participants in this study engage actively in recorded interactions in writing or silent speech, and the recorded medium allows them to go back, take notes and refer to their course books or dictionaries. Celia (L314) emails her tutor if she has questions after accessing a tutorial, and some participants report incorporating the language that was salient to them into their own productive output. Tutorial recordings provide extended exposure to contextualized interactional language as well as opportunities for rehearsal through vicarious participation. They thereby create conditions which are likely to support language learning.
5.6 What affective or motivational benefits do learners report?

Participants listen to recorded tutorials because they are motivated to learn and report that they are pleased to have the opportunity to do so. Although, as vicarious learners, they may not be exercising social agency (Bandura, 2006), they are still relating to others and their knowledge in a meaningful way (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Vicarious participation allows students to be in control of their learning, and most feel engaged and stimulated when listening although, occasionally, recordings can be boring, for example, when interaction in the online room is slow or when individuals monopolize the discussion. Hilda sometimes gets impatient with her peers, and Celia is intimidated by them because she often cannot understand what they are saying. Apart from her, all participants appreciate the presence of their peers in recordings. They feel most connected when vicariously joining in activities but may feel more like passive observers at other times. Participants differ in their perceived distance from the event. For some it is “as if you were there” (Betty, L112), for others it is “like looking in a shop window” (Kornelia, L203). Some, but not all, participants report feeling part of the group when listening, but even those who do not may show an empathic response to their peers, as described by Lee (2005). Recordings help them connect with their module cohorts.

A further affective benefit which is present in the data is the freedom from pressure and anxiety in recordings. While previous studies of anxiety in live online versus face-to-face contexts report mixed results (de los Arcos, Coleman and Hampel, 2009), participants in this enquiry report anxiety only in live online sessions. Language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001), which may affect learning, arises when adult learners feel out of control, for example because they do not feel they have “quite the level of Spanish to cope with it” (Kate, L314). The construct is described as a composite of communicative apprehension and fear of
negative evaluation (Horwitz, 2001; de los Arcos, Coleman and Hampel, 2009) and both aspects are exemplified in the interview data with reference to tutorial recordings.

Josh (L314) describes the absence of communicative apprehension in recordings.

“You enjoy the recorded ones more if you don’t have the anxiety of having to suddenly think of something to say yourself. I mean you can think of it, but you’ve got more time to think of it.”

John (L112) describes the absence of fear of negative evaluation.

“You’re thinking, but you haven’t got the embarrassment of getting it wrong in front of everybody else.”

In this study, participants (except Celia) are not put off live attendance because of anxiety, but anxiety does play a role in terms of enjoyment. Mostly live attendance is seen as more engaging, but, occasionally, recordings are more enjoyable due to the absence of pressure.

In general, participants take encouragement from both live and recorded tutorials. Recordings can help motivate students to go back to course material, give reassurance that they are studying at the right level and provide role models, which some researchers consider to be an important factor in motivating language learners (Dörnyei and Kubanova, 2014). Others believe emotion to be a better motivator than vision (McIntyre, 2002). Contributions such as “Distance learning with the OU, I love it” (Celia, L314) or “I love the French language” (John, L112) are expressing emotion but also convey a high motivational force.

Sometimes emotional language is used directly for describing the experience of tutorial recordings. Betty (L112) was asked whether she sometimes gets bored when watching.
“Oh goodness no, I do find it very stimulating and interesting. I just love French. I absolutely love it. And I just want to know as much about it as I can. So, I don’t I don’t get bored at all.”

5.7 Further discussion

Based on contributions by 13 participants, this enquiry revealed interesting and meaningful answers to the six research questions posed at the beginning. Of course, a study using retrospective interviews with students who listen to tutorial recordings cannot establish language learning gains, but it can help us understand what learners do, what they consciously notice, whether they themselves perceive any development, and whether their own perceptions of how they learn are mirrored in the literature.

The findings from this enquiry suggest that recordings provide complementary benefits to live interaction by allowing students time for accessing wider perspectives and engaging in deeper processing through repeated exposure, note taking, and rehearsal in vicarious participation. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) suggest that such offline processing may be beneficial for internalization. Ohta (2001), too, sees intrapersonal rehearsal and the uncoupling of language from immediate interpersonal consequences as a powerful tool for learning, and demonstrates uptake of covertly acquired structures in her classroom learners, as does Fernández Dobao (2016).

This enquiry suggests that similar processes may be occurring when listening to recordings of online interactive group tutorials, as learners not only report improved comprehension after extensive exposure, but also notice the use of correct and deviant language by their peers, vicariously engage in activities through silent speech, and self-report transferring language they learnt to their own productive repertoire. This does not show what learners actually did learn and where, but it can help us understand the learning conditions and
opportunities afforded by recorded online group tutorials and what use learners make of them.

Some learners depend more heavily on recordings than others, and some elements, such as slow conversations, are seen as less useful by some participants. Overall, recordings provide a learning environment free from pressure and anxiety, they help make language available for longer and put students in control of their learning, thereby supporting agentive learner behaviour in terms of self-regulation and self-reflection (Bandura, 2006). Importantly, the study addresses the question of who may benefit most from tutorial recordings and harnesses quantitative and qualitative data, indicating that recordings are used more by older learners and those who also attend live. These students use recordings because they find tutorials essential to their studies.
CHAPTER 6

Relevance to theory and practice

After presenting and analysing the data from this study and discussing the findings in relation to six research questions, this final chapter will focus on the relevance of the research to theory and practice. Starting with an exploration of issues related to internal and external validity, the chapter will highlight what impact the enquiry might have, to what extent it contributes to knowledge and how it could help shape policies which are likely to benefit student learning. Consideration will be given to the institutional practice context at the Open University from which the study arose as well as other educational settings such as traditional higher education institutions and online language learning contexts, which have increased so dramatically in recent decades. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study, suggested avenues for further research and a broader view of potential implications.
6.1 Internal and external validity

The question of whether a piece of research has come to meaningful and potentially impactful conclusions within and beyond its study context is related to the enquiry’s internal and external validity. While validity is an important aspect of quantitative research, qualitative researchers are also making use of the concept to evaluate the quality of their studies (Grey, 2014).

**Internal validity**

In this thesis, I have shown links between the overall aim of the study and its execution and demonstrated that the instruments used serve to produce data which answer the research questions. While using two main data sets, one numerical and one non-numerical, I also refer to a wide range of additional sources, which have informed the enquiry.

In relation to the quantitative data, internal validity refers to correlation questions and the conclusions that are being drawn from them. This study has established correlations through appropriate statistical procedures which provide information regarding the likelihood of behavioural patterns. For example, students who attend more live tutorials also access more tutorial recordings and have higher grades than students who do not. The enquiry makes no claims regarding causality, i.e. it does not establish that students get better grades because of engaging with tutorials. Equally, the quantitative data provide no information whether live attendance motivates students to access recordings or whether, conversely, accessing recordings encourages live attendance – it only establishes a link between the two. The interview data give ample testimony to the former interpretation: students appreciate live tutorials and therefore also access recordings. However, there are some sources which suggest that sometimes the latter may also apply; these include Brown (2019) whose ‘student view’ article will be discussed later in this chapter [§6.3] as well as a
participant in the initial study who reported that accessing recordings encouraged her to attend more live tutorials.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness of the data is an important aspect of internal validity as is “striving to ensure that the constructions of the researcher are grounded in the constructions of those being researched” (Grey, 2014). Time spent investigating, analysing, revisiting and querying the findings is essential when dealing with numerical data sets and even more so when working with qualitative data. Mann (2010) believes it is important not to neglect the conversational context in interview studies which are analysed thematically, and to take account of the interview process rather than just presenting the findings. By using three illustrations from this thesis, I would like to demonstrate how I interrogated the transcribed interviews in different ways to address their inherent reflexivity and ensure that my interpretation reflects the experience and perceptions of participants.

![Figure 18: Three illustrations of frequency analysis within NVivo](image)

NVivo will provide numerical information on qualitative data, which helps to make patterns visible, but there is a danger that conversational context is neglected or that detailed coding will lead to a loss of the big picture (Gray, 2014). On the other hand, the software makes it very easy to go back and forth between text queries, coded data and full transcripts, and it is important to look at the data set in different ways to arrive at robust conclusions.
Image A, which visualizes participant contributions only, shows that they talk a lot about tutorials. This is because questions about tutorials and tutorial recordings form a substantial part of the interview. In fact, as interviewer, I use the word more frequently (431 instances) than the students do (365 instances), because I often initiate the discussion and the subsequent turn is unlikely to repeat the full wording of the question.

Interviewer: How important do you find tutorials?
Kornelia: For me, they are an essential part of my studies.

Only a detailed reading of the actual contributions shows that the centrality of tutorials is indeed the most prevalent concept in the data in all respects – frequency counts as well as strength of argument as evidenced in Figure 9 [4.3].

Image B shows the same text search on the most frequent (stemmed) words used by participants, but it is presented differently and gives more precise information on the top-ranked items. I used the illustration in this thesis to introduce the theme of time and timings [4.3.3]. The fact that ‘time’ occurs so frequently within the transcripts is interesting because there are no questions at all in the interview guide related to time. When interviewing, I nevertheless do use the words time(s)/timing(s) a total of 58 times, sometimes related to interview procedure, or to check my understanding.

Interviewer: So can I just check back with you? You said there was one tutorial you couldn’t get to. Was that because of the timings?
Kate: Yes, there was basically, erm, erm, the tutorials were on consecutive nights and I was out of the country.

Participants use time(s)/timing(s) 166 times, with many different meanings. Mention of time and timings in relation to study routines, tutorials and the use of tutorial recordings is often initiated by students as, for example, in the contextualized interview extracts below.
Interviewer: Yeah. What do you reckon are your strengths and weaknesses in terms of language skills?

Hilda: Erm, my strength is probably, I do dedicate an awful lot of time, I will be learning vocabulary and grammar and will be sitting there and learning them and repeating them till I know them.

Interviewer: [...] if you think again about the experience of attending live in person and attending say an interactive tutorial afterwards just by listening to the recording. What do you reckon are the main differences? What are the advantages of one over the other and the disadvantages?

Celia: Erm, the recorded tutorials, erm, I can do any time at my own pace, erm, at my own leisure, erm, which helps me, to, as I just said, erm, establish that I am understanding what’s being said.

Consequently, I constructed ‘time and timings’ as a theme, which is relevant to participants.

Image C shows how NVivo accounts for coded items. “Tutor input” is mentioned in 13 source documents (all 13 participants mention it), and there are 35 references to tutor input in total. “Student input” is mentioned in 12 sources and has 47 references. At first glance, one might conclude that students are more interested in student input than tutor input but going back to the conversational context shows that this is not the case. Most participants’ [11] own first emphasis is on tutor input [⇒ 4.3.2]. It is often me who initiates the discussion of student input and, in response, participants come up with many aspects of how other students contribute to their learning. In the findings to research question 4 (“What elements of the tutorial are salient to learners?”) [⇒ 5.4], I report that most students prioritize tutor input but also perceive many benefits derived from the presence of other students. Interrogating material in different ways and looking for statistical, discursive and thematic relationships between interviewer and participant contributions
while reflecting on conflicting or congruent outcomes is important when establishing the internal validity or trustworthiness of the findings.

In summary, the internal validity of the findings from quantitative and qualitative data rests on the appropriate use of methods which serve the purpose of answering the research questions and on careful consideration of any conclusions or interpretations to ensure that they are supported by the available evidence. In mixed methods research such as this study, our understanding of numerical results may be complemented by qualitative findings which have more explanatory value.

**External validity**

External validity, on the other hand, is related to the question of whether it is possible to generalise from the data or whether they are entirely contingent on the study context. Again, it is interpreted in different ways for different methods.

In this enquiry, I looked at numerical user-analytic data in four modules across three languages and three levels. When assessing generalisability, it is important to be clear from which ‘population’ the sample was drawn (Muijs, 2010), i.e., in my case, the modules at CEFR B1-C1 in French, German and Spanish, but not the beginner’s modules. Within this range of modules, language provision at the School is largely harmonised, which means that other modules at levels 1, 2 and 3 are structured in the same way in terms of study hours, tutorial and assessment strategy and the split between online and offline provision. They are also similar in terms of the type of learning materials, activities, overall pedagogy and in the demographic characteristics of their student cohorts. This means that the statistically significant results which have been found for the four modules are likely to be generalisable to the group of modules from which they were selected. For example, the correlations between higher grades and tutorial attendance and between live attendance and recording use in the modules studied are likely to apply to similar language modules at
the School. In this way, the quantitative data add to the generalisability of the study, as it would not be possible to draw such conclusions from the very small interview sample. The results are unlikely to be generalisable beyond the Open University languages context, given that other educational settings are quite different and that findings coming out of lecturecast studies are showing a mixed and conflicting picture, which is interesting to note in comparison. The significant results related to age and vicarious learning patterns will be discussed when looking at contributions to theory in the next section [\( \rightarrow \text{6.2} \)].

Overall, it is perhaps the qualitative findings in this enquiry which contribute most to our understanding and which may have wider relevance. When assessing the findings of qualitative analysis, it is often the theoretical inferences rather than specific results that are generalisable beyond the immediate study context (Hammersley, 2013). Such findings are likely to be suggestive rather than conclusive and may not so much refer to ‘what is’ but to ‘what could be’? (Schofield, 1989) when taking account of the evidence [\( \rightarrow \text{2.4} \)]. Although contexts differ, it can be helpful to distinguish between more superficial and deeper differences when thinking about the transferability of findings (Gray, 2014). For example, language learners at the Open University adhere to a very different course structure than other online learners, but, at a more fundamental level, both may be equally engaged in developing their linguistic competence through accessing and working with target language input in online environments.

In this study, the central finding that recordings have the potential to add value to live interactive tutorials and offer complementary benefits to learners who make use of different tutorial modes allows us to infer what ‘could be’ possible in many online language learning settings if learners were given these opportunities. Equally, the perceived linguistic and motivational benefits of listening to tutorial recordings need not be entirely contingent on context. It is true that participants who were studying the Spanish level 3 module were seeking out tutorial recordings so that they could listen to tutors who might be their
interlocutor in the end-of-module assignment, and that this motivation is highly specific to an Open University level 3 course. On the other hand, participants report linguistic benefits of listening to different accents which are pertinent to language learners in general. They also report learning from different perspectives, noticing useful language as well as errors and rehearsing language through vicariously participating in online interactions. This enquiry has shown that indirect participation in online second language interactions can generate the kind of learner engagement which is likely to advance their learning.

6.2 Contribution to theory

This enquiry has linked emotional, social and cognitive aspects of language learning and has shown vicarious participants in online interactions to be learners who actively construct a way of learning for themselves based on the resources they have at their disposal – aspects which are central to recent theorizing on what research into language learning needs to achieve (Levy, 2015; Douglas Fir group, 2016). It has taken a person-centred approach (Benson, 2019) which acknowledges the participants in this study as highly motivated adults with complex motivations, anxieties and desires who demonstrate high degrees of intentionality and self-regulation by planning and exerting their agency in various ways to achieve their goals (Bandura, 2006; De Fina, 2015).

Considering that we need to be careful not to transfer results from previous research into face-to-face environments to mediated online learning contexts (Levy, 2015), the strength of the enquiry lies in bringing together research from different areas including psychology, online learning and language learning and highlighting the potential for vicarious learning in synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC). The enquiry portrays successful language learners, who combine live and vicarious attendance to enhance their learning, and establishes links between learner characteristics and vicarious participation.
While both the literature on vicarious learning (Ohta, 2001; Lee, 2005) and that on older learners (Pfenninger and Singleton, 2017) discuss issues around processing capacity and attentional resources, to my knowledge, this is the first time a statistically significant relationship has been established between learner age and vicarious participation. Previous educational research indicates that young adults are more able to learn vicariously than teenagers (Muldner, Lam and Chi, 2014) [↩1.6], but does not make a comparison between younger and older adults. In fact, most studies into vicarious participation have been carried out with younger learners, often in traditional university settings (Ohta, 2001; Rabold et al., 2008; Fernández Dobao, 2016). While the link established here cannot be generalised beyond online language learning with its known challenges for older learners in terms of comprehending speech, it is nevertheless a relevant finding, which adds to our conceptual understanding and may warrant further exploration by researchers into vicarious learning in other contexts.

Of course, the division between contributions to theory on the one hand and practice on the other is also a fluid one. For example, I will suggest below how my enquiry may theorize approaches which are already happening in practice [↩6.5]. Equally, changes to practice should be based on advances in our theoretical understanding of the issues concerned. It is evident that many of the discussions around lecturecasts or tutorial recordings are currently under-theorized, an issue which this enquiry is addressing.

According to Levy (2015) careful interrogation of the student perspective through qualitative research can help improve the alignment between research and educational practice. Kramsch (2015) believes that it is by studying practice that we will advance the theory of language learning. The idea that impact can occur in different ways also connects theory and practice. Reed (2018) distinguishes between different types of impact including impact on understanding and awareness, attitudinal impact and impact on policy. This enquiry may change people’s conceptual understanding and eventually have an impact on
their practice and, more widely, on institutional policy. The former has started to become apparent in my working environment. Discussions around tutorial recordings at the Open University have become increasingly entrenched and are moving towards a very restrictive recording policy, but wherever I have been disseminating my study, colleagues confirm that they had not been aware of the concept of vicarious learning or had not made a connection to their professional practice. In the paragraphs below, I will outline the potential relevance of this research to different educational settings starting with my practice context at the Open University.

6.3 Contribution to practice at the Open University

As described at the beginning of this thesis, this enquiry arose from my work in course design at the Open University’s School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, as well as my interest in language learning more generally. When I conceived the idea, the practice of recording tutorials was new and, as far as I was aware, uncontroversial. It has since become one of the most heatedly discussed topics in the School and while I was working on this enquiry, opportunities for students to participate vicariously in online tutorials became increasingly scarce. I will therefore include a brief history of the situation at the School before suggesting how this enquiry can have an impact based on the changes to awareness and understanding described above [↩ 6.2].

Recording tutorials at the Open University: Background

After online synchronous tuition had become mainstream in 2009 at what was then the ‘Department of Languages’, there were a few years of a relatively naïve approach to tutorial recordings. Tutors felt recordings were either useful or not so useful for their groups and some recorded their sessions while others did not (St.John et al., 2014). Soon,
however, the practice of making recordings of live group tutorials became a subject of intense discussion.

Some tutors were convinced that the practice was not only not beneficial but could be positively harmful in an online language learning context. The arguments centred mostly around the idea that tutorials need to serve live attenders first and foremost and that some students were put off by the fact that tutorials were being recorded. There were other concerns as well, including tutors feeling their property rights might be jeopardized if their tutorials are made public or the recordings might be used for quality control purposes without their consent (The Open University, 2018c). The discussion intensified after the introduction of a new group tuition policy in 2016/17, which meant that tutorials were offered on a module- or cluster-wide basis rather than by tutor group, and tutorial recordings were accessible to large cohorts of students.

At the same time, a Facebook survey (n=907) run by Open University students showed overwhelming support for recording tutorials: 83.3% of the students who responded indicated that they want all tutorials to be recorded and only 0.6% indicated they wanted no tutorials to be recorded (Brown, 2017; The Open University, 2018b). The others wanted recordings to be subject to certain conditions, for example, that only some but not all tutorials are recorded, that there would be time for unrecorded questions, or that recordings would be anonymized. These results cannot necessarily be taken to refer exclusively to small group tutorials, as some Faculties mainly offer more lecture-style sessions. The survey was also criticized on other grounds, for example, that it may have included respondents who are not currently studying. However, the very clear result convinced the then Vice Chancellor that offering more recordings would increase student satisfaction. Disregarding the concerns voiced by tutors, he announced that from the Academic Year 2018/19 onwards all tutorials should be recorded as a service to students. A pedagogic rationale was not provided. This, in turn, prompted an internal position paper
from the tutor moderators’ group, in which the authors suggest that tutorials should be safe havens for students to practise and therefore only summary recordings or lecture-like sessions should be captured (Campbell et al., 2018). A short article was also published in the Associate Lecturer Newsletter ‘Snowball’ (Campbell, 2018).

In the ‘Snowball’ article the author describes her own experience of recording lecture-style tutorials, which may include interactive elements such as anonymous polls or moving elements on the whiteboard. She also makes a convincing case for the value of small group sessions “with opportunities for students to raise questions or test out ideas in a safe space, and to re-assess their understanding following feedback from peers or tutor” (Campbell, 2018) and argues that such tutorials should not be recorded. The fundamental point being made is that, although the university may want to offer recordings to increase student satisfaction rates, the pedagogic argument is against recording small group tutorials.

The student view expressed in the same newsletter also emphasizes the value of interactive group tutorials and describes how a tutor can scaffold group learning through guidance and challenge, and how useful it is to learn from the perspectives of others (Brown, 2018). In contrast to the tutor moderators’ view, however, the student believes that these benefits of interactive tutorials also extend to tutorial recordings. She queries the assumption that students interact less or stay away from tutorials if they are being recorded, suggesting instead that listening to recordings might encourage live attendance. She counters the argument that it may not be useful to listen to a recording by saying “Oh yes, it is!” (Brown, 2019).

Over the past few years, student opinion has also been sought in consultation forums and appears to be divided between those who do believe that some of their peers may stay away if a session is recorded, and those who see recordings as a good learning opportunity
A recent forum consultation on tutorials specifically for students at the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics included a strand where students were asked about their attitudes to recordings (The Open University, 2019). 21 students on second language modules took part in the discussion, of whom 17 gave their view on recorded tutorials. Of these, eleven contributors commented positively on the availability of recordings and mentioned benefits such as practising pronunciation or revision, four contributors expressed indifference, because they had no time or interest in using recordings, although two suggested that screencasts might be useful, one student had a negative opinion thinking that it would be useless to record an event which is meant to be interactive, and one student said she found the question difficult because she would like recordings but did not want her own mistakes broadcast. One further student did not know what was meant by ‘tutorial recordings’. Among tutors, there seems to be roughly a half and half split in languages modules between those who are happy to record and see the benefits and those who are opposed, often very strongly (The Open University, 2018c; module tutor forums; conversations with module chairs and staff tutors). At the time of writing, a further faculty-wide student consultation related exclusively to the issue of recording tutorials was being discussed.

The debates around tutorial recordings are ongoing, although there are now revised guidelines from the University specifying that at least one tutorial of each type should be recorded and at least one tutorial of each type should remain unrecorded (The Open University, 2018d). The guidelines leave it open whether the recorded tutorial should be a full interactive tutorial or a summary tutorial, which does not include students (but would incur additional tutor time and cost). The guidelines additionally state that there may be tutorials which are not suitable for recording.
My enquiry

This enquiry refutes the argument that there are no benefits to recording an event which is aimed at direct participation for language learners. It makes no claim regarding the highly pertinent concern that recording a tutorial may affect the live event.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that sometimes recording does change the experience for live attenders and sometimes it does not. Some tutors report students falling silent when sessions are being recorded, and some of my participants also noticed this [3]. Other tutors believe there is no difference in interactivity when they record. Most of my participants [9] report incidences of interesting interactions in recorded sessions, and the tutorial recordings I accessed all included good student participation. There is no numerical evidence that students choose to stay away from recorded sessions. In module L203 in 2017/18, on average 6.3 students attended the recorded sessions and 5.3 attended the sessions which were not recorded. Interestingly, participants in my study were not bothered by being recorded, but many of them knew of others who were [7]. Previous small-scale research showed that learners appreciate summary recordings, which only include the voice of the tutor (Barnes and St.John, 2017) and may value them more than full recorded tutorials. Some of my participants [4] also comment on the usefulness of summaries and one expresses a strong preference for monologic recordings while others [5] say clearly that they prefer to listen to the full interactive sessions. They never suggest that only summaries should be recorded and, between them, like Brown (2019), report many benefits of listening to their peers.

I believe that my enquiry can have an impact on our practice in the following ways:

- Ensuring that the well-documented benefits of vicarious learning are becoming part of the discussion. There are clear pedagogic arguments in favour of recording small group sessions for language learners.
- Supporting the implementation of the current university guidelines while also influencing their interpretation and feeding into future policy. Having at least one recorded and one unrecorded tutorial of each type, as currently recommended, sets a broad framework which needs to be informed by an understanding of vicarious learning processes. Tutorial summaries, presented only by the tutor, serve a different function and are not a replacement of full interactive recordings.

- Influencing decisions made at School level regarding fine-tuning the university recommendations for the needs of language learners, as explained here in detail.

In the current climate it is likely that only the one required recording will be offered. This enquiry shows that there are good reasons not to clamp down on further recordings, for example, where a tutor, with prior announcement and permission by students, is happy to record. There are benefits to having a range of recordings available as described in the findings from this enquiry, and there is no evidence that the majority of students are against being recorded in their sessions. The enquiry supports the efforts that are being made to provide a more principled approach to recordings, whereby students know in advance which tutorials will be available to view. It raises questions regarding the issue of anonymizing all recordings and taking out the text chat, a practice, which is now often recommended and for which there are good arguments in terms of protecting the anonymity of live attenders. However, there are also considerations related to empathy and feelings of connectedness of the vicarious participants as well as their full engagement with the interactions in the live sessions, which should not be disregarded entirely while there is no strong evidence that anonymity matters to live attenders.
Confirming the recommendation that, where summary recordings are being offered, these should engage listeners in interactive activities such as gap-fills or question-and-answer and include different perspectives, for example, by referring to student questions, or by showing how live attenders have responded to a stimulus in different ways (Chi et al., 2001; Barnes and St.John, 2017).

Most importantly, the enquiry makes a pedagogic case for the value of tutorial recordings and has the potential to move forward a discussion which is torn between a view that recording is pedagogically doubtful (held more often by tutors) and an expectation that recordings should be made available (held more often by students and supported by university management).

6.4 Contribution to practice in higher education

The debate at the Open University is mirrored in higher education institutions in general, as discussions around lecture capture have been erupting across the country (Mollick, 2018; Nordmann and McGeorge, 2018; Edwards and Clinton, 2019; Nordmann et al. 2019). The situation at traditional universities is, however, very different from that at the Open University. The discussion is not centred around small tutorials but large lectures which are often entirely presentation-style. Even if they allow for student questions, these are not normally captured in the lecturecast so the recording will be monologic and offer little opportunity for vicarious participation. The student body at face-to-face universities is also different. Students are much younger, usually in full-time education and have many opportunities to connect with their peers inside and outside the lecture hall. It is nevertheless interesting to note how these very different environments both engender such a similar tutor-student conflict centred around the arguments of what is pedagogically desirable from a lecturer point of view on the one hand and what is perceived to be useful
by students on the other. At the Open University, many tutors are protective of their small-
group sessions but think it would be acceptable to record lectures, but, at other
universities, where only lectures are being recorded, this is causing the same kind of
debate.

I think that this enquiry can inform practice in traditional higher education settings in the
following ways:

- Promoting the theoretical concept of vicarious participation, which is largely absent
  from the literature on lecturecasts.

- Encouraging institutions to consider how lecturecasts can be enhanced by including
  a students’ perspective, for example, ensuring that any questions asked are also
  captured, or, if this is technically difficult, encouraging lecturers to incorporate
  questions into their presentations for the benefit of remote attendees.

- Considering the potential benefits of vicarious learning resources for language
  students. At traditional universities, too, tutor-student dialogue is limited, and it
  could be beneficial to extend these opportunities through making some recordings
  of small-group sessions where this is appropriate.

Later in this chapter [➔6.8], I will be looking more broadly at how studies into vicarious
learning may feed into educational design in higher education.

6.5 Contribution to practice in online language learning

The immediate implications of this study are perhaps greatest for the area of online
language learning outside higher education, which has grown exponentially in the past
decade. Language learners have a wide choice of online sites and apps that they can
harness to improve their linguistic skills. Many of these sites provide training in vocabulary,
phrases and grammar (Memrise, 2019; Duolingo, 2019), others facilitate conversation exchange (Italki, 2019) while Moocs and Spocs (small private online courses) offer structured, educator-led tuition in online environments.

Moocs

Although providers offering Moocs were slow in introducing languages (Martín-Monje, Bárcena and Ventura, 2013), so-called L-Moocs, i.e. language courses, which aim to develop competence in all language skills, are now available on various platforms. In some L-Moocs participants are encouraged to exchange conversation on Google hangouts or via Skype, while others include synchronous video conferencing (Martín-Monje, Bárcena and Ventura, 2013; Beaven, Codreanu and Creuzé, 2014) [1.3]. However, getting large numbers of students from different time zones to benefit from synchronous events is a challenge, and many Moocs refer students elsewhere to practise their interactive skills. This study suggests that vicarious participation can benefit online language learners, which is highly relevant to courses that are too big to afford much direct participation in synchronous audio or video conferencing. Recording group tutorials with a small group of learners at the right level of competence and publishing the recordings on the Mooc as a learning activity could lead to language learning and motivational benefits for large numbers of listeners.

Given the link between age and recording use found in this study, it is worth noting that Moocs are popular with retired learners who may have more time and sometimes see language learning as a way of keeping mentally active. For example, even the ‘German at work’ courses, recently offered on FutureLearn (The Open University, 2017a) and marketed to young apprentices, nevertheless attracted large numbers of older leisure learners (Clifford et al., 2019).
A different case could be made for so-called Small private online courses or Spocs (Higher Education Academy, 2018) which have sprung up as a response to Moocs, as these cannot cater for the needs of individual learners and suffer from astronomical attrition rates. Spocs offer synchronous tuition on online platforms, and tutorials could easily be recorded and made available to participants. With their focus on small-group tuition and a paying clientele, these courses have some similarities with the tutorials described in this study albeit in a much less structured learning context. In contrast to tutorial recordings at the Open University, which have become controversial partly because they can be accessed by large module populations, access to recordings in Spocs could be restricted to small groups of learners.

Existing providers of vicarious learning

There are also some online providers who already make use of the principles of vicarious participation, notably ‘Coffee break languages’ (Radiolingua, 2016/2019), which has recently been awarded the British podcast award. The programmes benefit from the expertise of experienced language teaching professionals, but, I understand, there is no specific theoretical underpinning (Pentleton, 2016). Similarly, the language learning channel ‘Vaughan TV’ in Spain (Vaughan Systems, 2019) gets its viewers to view live lessons with students, but the benefits of this approach as opposed to purely teacher-led presentations are not explained.

A study such as this one can help to theorize these approaches and feed into considerations of what kinds of activities are most beneficial in programmes already dedicated to vicarious participation.
6.6 Limitations

Like all research, this study has limitations and I am listing some aspects below which need to be taken into account when considering the findings or identifying areas for further research.

Sampling

The study relied on a largely self-selected sample, and it was not possible for me to stratify the sample in any way due to the low response rate.

Although the Open University is careful in not contacting students for research projects too often, any Open University student will receive very many communications from the institution about different subject matters in the course of their studies. As a consequence, the response rate to calls for participants to take part in research is often low. Of course, many students combine work, family and study and, understandably, may not want to invest time in further activities. As it was, my sample only included one student in full-time work, despite the fact that 46% of students in the module cohorts which were investigated for this study work full-time. In addition, the discussions around recorded tutorials meant that overall fewer students in the School had access to recordings. In my research, I was following a qualitative tradition of not interfering in any way with the naturalistic study context (Rossman and Rallis, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008), but there are many qualitative researchers now who, for pragmatic reasons, do make adjustments to facilitate their research without thereby altering the student experience (Gray, 2014). With hindsight, I think I could have been more interventionist in the early stages and, with the permission of staff tutors, worked closely with some tutors on the modules they taught and encouraged them to record their tutorials and recommend the recordings to their students. This may have resulted in more students with access to more recordings and provided me with a broader base from which to draw participants.
Reliability of user-analytic data

The user-analytic data, i.e. access to recordings, attendance at live tutorials and face-to-face attendance records have all been shown in the past not to be 100% reliable [2.6]. I always collected information from different sources and undertook many cross-checks, which were satisfactory, but I cannot exclude the possibility that small numbers of live attendances were not recorded, as discussed in the methodology section, or that some tutorial recordings did not show when downloading data. I previously discussed the missing values in face-to-face records [3.5, 5.1] where I had to remove some students from the analysis as it was unclear whether they had actually attended the sessions they were booked into.

Focus on the perspective of the vicarious learner

Although including additional evidence, this study focused on one perspective in particular: that of students who use tutorial recordings to support their learning. This was the intention of the study but must be considered as a limitation in terms of informing policy and practice in an educational setting which includes many stakeholders. I am suggesting a relevant follow-up study in the next section.

Qualitative data collection through retrospective interviews

Qualitative data were gathered through retrospective interviews, which have limitations as they rely on memory and are subject to reflexivity, and this needs to be borne in mind when considering the findings as has been discussed at different points in this thesis [2.5, 2.7, 6.1]. The study was the first to investigate vicarious language learning in synchronous online classrooms, and interviews were a suitable method for exploring student perception and capturing a wide range of aspects, including practical considerations such as timings, while also increasing our understanding of some of the complex relationships between vicarious participation and language learning, motivation
and affect. Each of these would lend itself to be further explored in future research, and, again, some suggestions are included in the following section [6.7].

6.7 Further research

This enquiry aimed to develop our understanding of how language learners may learn through vicarious participation in recorded tutorials. Given the well-documented learning opportunities afforded by vicarious participation and the rapid increase in synchronous online tuition in languages and other subjects, it is surprising that the topic has not yet been explored more widely. I hope that my enquiry will spark much further research and will describe some possible follow-up studies below.

Investigating language learner experience with tutorial recordings through stimulated recall interviews

My enquiry explored learner use of tutorial recordings and included a question on the perceived benefits of these for language learning. To follow up on the findings it would be pertinent to conduct a study within a sociocognitive paradigm using stimulated recall methodology to further explore which features in recorded language tutorial are most salient and noticed by learners. Ellis (2010b), for example, has been calling for this type of study to move the field forward.

Investigating the use of tutorial recordings by younger and older language learners

The stimulated-recall research described above could be extended by including both younger and older learners to explore differences between the two groups and achieve a better understanding of why recordings are particularly useful to older learners. This would contribute to a very current and active field of research into third-age language learners (Pfenninger and Singleton, 2017; Ware et al., 2017; Kliesch et al., 2018; Singleton and Pfenninger, 2019).
Investigating stakeholders’ beliefs and attitudes towards tutorial recordings

The current enquiry focuses on language learners who use tutorial recordings. In the Open University context, it would be relevant to study the beliefs and attitudes of all stakeholders in tutorial recordings in more depth, including module chairs, staff tutors, tutors, students who make use of the tutorial provision and those who do not. Such a study would further inform internal policy and could also be related to the ongoing discussions in the wider sector.

Investigating use of recordings with second-language speakers in other subject areas

Laurillard (1993) describes how second-language speakers move into the discourse of their discipline through peripheral participation. Nordmann et al. (2019), who investigated lecturecasts in a face-to-face higher education context, found benefits especially for first-year second language speakers. Anecdotally, in my own study, I came across one incident which points in the same direction. When asking Kornelia, a German speaker, whether she ever listened to recordings of tutorials she had also attended live, she said, no, not in her German L203 module, because it is easy for her, but she does in her English linguistics module, because she finds it much harder. Conversely, the Open University tutor moderators (Campbell et al., 2018) suggest that any small group tutorials including second language speakers should not be recorded to allow those students to speak freely without potentially being observed by the whole module cohort. An investigation into whether not just lecturecasts but also recordings of interactive small group tutorials would be helpful to second language speakers in different subject areas and how these students feel about themselves being recorded, would clearly be of interest.

Developing criteria for vicarious learning materials in languages

Lee (2010) states that criteria for good vicarious learning materials are still needed, and this remains the case. My study revealed some aspects which learners find beneficial in recorded tutorials for languages, for example, visually supported tutor explanations or
exposure to a range of ideas and different ways of expressing them. A further study could expose learners to different tutorial elements with a view to creating criteria for good vicarious learning materials. Letting language learners themselves edit recordings as described by Rabold et al. (2008) could also inform the development of such criteria.

**Investigating use of recordings in different online language learning settings**

Above, I suggested that my enquiry has practical implications for online language learning settings more generally, and that, based on Muldner, Lam and Chi’s (2014) call for ‘a culture change’ in education, Moocs and Spocs would be an ideal environment to introduce recordings of small-group tutorials and encourage more learning through vicarious participation. These contexts are, however, different from the highly structured courses at the Open University and would warrant further research into learner experience.

### 6.8 Wider implications

Vicarious participation in online language learning is an under-researched area, which the present enquiry has started to address, and which may gain momentum in years to come, perhaps in ways I am suggesting above or in other ways I have not thought of. In this chapter, I described potential contributions of my study to theory and practice, distinguishing between findings which are clearly context-specific and those which may be applicable to online language learning more generally. However, any study into recording tutorial interaction and into processes of vicarious participation may also have much wider implications for the future of education. Mayes (2015, p. 367) expresses his surprise that promising research into vicarious participation never really “emerge[d] from the laboratory” and remains largely absent from higher education, which he ascribes to a resistance to change and technological innovation within institutions. He recommends looking instead at how vicarious learning occurs in online practice and fostering students’
awareness and curiosity of how existing resources can enhance their learning. This is the approach this study has taken by using the fact that students are accessing tutorial recordings as a starting point [⇒Introduction] and exploring how they may learn from this resource which is at their disposal. At the same time, it has become clear that the resource will only remain at students’ disposal if a case is being made for it and if policies are in place which support its continued use.

It is therefore still relevant to look beyond studying emergent practices and consider how findings from research can be used to influence institutional policy. It is true that higher education has been a sector highly resistant to change but the pace of innovation is accelerating as new technologies are adopted to meet student expectations. Some institutions are at the forefront of developing frameworks which allow for the purposeful integration of online components in the endeavour to develop sustainable environments for student-centred learning based on design-driven approaches and conceptual change (Laurillard, 2013; Salmon 2015; Palikat, 2019). Of course, not all efforts at innovation are genuinely transformative and many pockets of change remain disconnected from established institutional practices or do not address pedagogic needs. Videos made by teachers to address specific learning outcomes may be “sweeping through higher education” (Harrison, 2019, p. 1) but there are concerns that they need to be more engaging and there must be a big question mark over whether such resources constitute an improvement over previous modes of teaching. ‘Flipped classroom’ approaches are based on constructivist learning theories but are sometimes implemented in ways that are overly reliant on PowerPoint slides and static input (Palikat, 2019), and thereby fail to challenge the transmission model of learning. Lack of meaningful extension between face-to-face and online work is an issue that arises where no overall strategy has been formulated, and lecturecasts are a good example of a technological change which has been widely implemented but with little thought of how to incorporate this new resource into overall
educational design and into students’ learning experience in higher education [1.3]. At the same time, pertinent questions are being asked as to which digital pedagogies effectively support learning for undergraduate students and how to ensure the most productive use of educator time as education moves into a new era (Salmon, 2019). Any design framework for blended learning which aims to create effective and engaging learning experiences for large numbers of students will need to include principles related to sharing and openness, learning from peers and the integration of synchronous and asynchronous learning modes. This should involve acknowledging the value of vicarious learning and incorporate opportunities for direct and indirect participation in learning activities which, as this study suggests, may offer complementary benefits to learners and enhance the value of educational activities, for example, by allowing more time for reflection as an essential part of knowledge construction. Tutor-student dialogue which is accessible to more students for longer optimizes the use of the precious resource of tutor time and may help create “a continuous system of engaged learning’” (Mayes 2015, p. 368) - moving beyond the familiar mix of presentation-style lectures and occasional individual feedback for assessment purposes. Indeed, the 'Education 4.0' revolution (Feldmann, 2018; Salmon, 2019) promises the introduction of AI and adaptive learning into higher education accompanied by a decline of lectures and an increase in dialogue between (human) tutors and students. Spaces where students can discuss their ideas and ask their own questions but also listen to others’ questions and ideas will enhance their learning. Even traditional institutions will change provided the circumstances are right (Salmon, 2015), and this time has now come. In the light of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, change within higher education is no longer optional but has become mandatory for the sector to survive (Lau, 2020). As university learning is moving online, the need to design for learning in a way which allows for the meaningful integration of different study elements to support students’ academic development and keep them connected to their community of teachers
and learners is non-negotiable. By increasing our understanding of possible cognitive, social and affective benefits of direct and vicarious participation in online learning, the present study has the potential to feed into such a transformation. Ideas for further research arising directly out my enquiry have been discussed earlier in this chapter [↩6.7] and any findings from such studies may be pertinent to future e-learning design. Of course, the current transformation of educational programmes for online delivery will need to be scrutinized extensively through evaluation, scholarship and research, and new questions are bound to emerge.
CONCLUSION

Learning through the learning experiences of others

While the previous chapter discussed the relevance of the study for theory and practice, including its limitations and possible wider implications, the conclusion will highlight the central idea behind the enquiry and refer back to Mayes’ (2015) observation that, given the opportunity, learners can and will learn from the learning experiences of others \(\Rightarrow 1.3\).

Fundamentally, this enquiry was about how we may learn from actively engaging with the learning experiences of others. Building on extensive previous research on vicarious learning, language learning and online learning, it was the first to investigate to what extent indirect participation can mediate second language development in an online classroom. Through analysing user-data and exploring learner perceptions, the enquiry increased our understanding of which students work with vicarious resources, how and why, thereby opening possibilities for new educational practices and laying the groundwork for future research.

Considerations of contextual contingency and potential generalisability were discussed in relation to the implications of this research for theory and practice. While there are limitations to the enquiry, its strength lies in its explanatory potential in helping us understand the likely benefits of vicarious participation in online language learning contexts. By giving prominence to the pedagogic value of vicarious participation, it contributes to discussions, both locally and nationally, in a climate where student
satisfaction is sometimes pitched against pedagogic concerns. It also feeds into the development potential of language learning provision online, which is likely to continue growing across the globe.

The findings from this enquiry suggest that tutorial recordings help learners learn by giving them access to wider perspectives as well as the time to process input in more depth. Importantly, the study highlights the centrality of tutorials for language learning and the complementary benefits that students derive from accessing different tutorial modes. Far from seeing indirect participation as a substitute for live attendance, the participants in this enquiry use recordings precisely because they find tutorials so central to their studies. Recordings help make the ephemeral interactions in tutorials more permanent (Rabold et al. 2008) and may thereby increase their potential for learning. A student who took part in the initial study for this project expressed it like this: “You think on your feet, then you go back and reflect. I guess that’s how you learn.”

In line with sociocognitive approaches to language learning research (Batstone, 2010; Dufva and Aro, 2014; Atkinson, 2014; Levy, 2015) and based on findings in psychology and education, which highlight the empathetic response of vicarious learners to their peers (Lee, 2005), the enquiry also considered aspects related to affect and motivation of vicarious participants and their relationship to live attenders. Distance students often work in isolation, but tutorials and their recordings offer opportunities to connect with fellow learners. Laura (L112) appreciates listening to other people and hearing their concerns “because […] it helps me studying and seeing that I’m not the only one who might be struggling on this precise point.”

While writing this thesis, I too, realised how dependent I was on learning from ‘students like me’ and would not have got to this stage without reading the work of others who have completed their doctorates before me, many of whom will find their name on the
acknowledgements page. Reading their theses helped me find out what level to work to, how to interpret advice and guidelines and how to put into practice what I knew in theory. I saw writing which showed a depth of reflection I could not aspire to myself, and work which I could identify with and strive towards. One colleague let me see an early draft complete with critical comments, which gave insight into their study not as completed artefact but as thinking in progress. Kozar, Lum and Benson (2017) investigated self-efficacy and vicarious learning in doctoral students who study at a distance, which is often the mode adopted by those pursuing professional doctorates. They ask what distinguishes happy and autonomous students from those who are unhappy and isolated and conclude that learning conditions are most favourable for students who have opportunities to learn vicariously both from academic experts and from their peers. These students are likely to develop stronger self-efficacy by constructing an image of their current self in relation to other doctoral students and by benefiting from aspirational role models. Muldner, Lam and Chi (2014) discuss the delicate balance of confidentiality of tutor-student dialogue on the one hand and its significant learning potential on the other and suggest that we should find ways in higher education to make better use of the latter.

However, as this enquiry is specifically concerned with language learning in online environments, we also need to take account of the advantages and dangers inherent in these new learning spaces, which are blurring the boundaries between space and time, private and public, real and virtual (Thorne, Sauro and Smith, 2015). When turning synchronous interaction into an asynchronous resource for others, we must address valid concerns about privacy in an increasingly online world and ensure that there are spaces for unobserved practice while also making use of the learning opportunities afforded through combining direct and vicarious participation. At a practical level, this will be possible by recording some but not all tutorials and promoting tutor-student and student-student dialogue in private, semi-private and more public online spaces. Increasing our
understanding of how language learners may benefit from listening to interactive events in retrospect is a pre-requisite for making informed choices to achieve this balance, both institution-wide and for each individual as we expect students to take responsibility for their learning.

Bandura (2001, p. 15) criticizes what he sees as the inaccurate equation of self-efficacy with self-centred individualism suggesting instead that a high sense of efficacy often promotes “a pro-social orientation characterized by cooperativeness, helpfulness and sharing”. Such an orientation was clearly present in the 13 engaged and motivated participants in this enquiry who were making extensive use of the resources available to them to ensure their own study success without losing sight of their fellow learners. They reported the perceived benefits of witnessing others’ learning experiences and were equally willing to share their own, seeing the use of recordings and being recorded themselves as two sides of the same coin: “I know the value of it, I don’t mind that at all” (Wendy, L116).

They also generously gave their time to this enquiry. I am very grateful to them.
REFERENCES


203


Mollick, E. [@emollick] (2018) Since this tweet seems to be widely shared, a word of caution on reading too much from this one study. (...) [Twitter]. Available at: https://twitter.com/emollick/status/1007732494823772160 (Accessed: 7 April 2019).


The Open University (2017b) ‘Advantages and disadvantages of recording’, Tutor Moderators OU Live Advanced [online module]. Available at

The Open University (2018a) Facts and figures 2017/18. Available at:


The Open University (2018c) ‘GDPR and tutorial recordings’, AL common room forum 2017-18. Available at:


APPENDICES

The following appendices are included to provide more detail and illustrate the process of the enquiry:

A  Semi-structured interview guide
B  Extracts from transcripts
C  Email message to students
D  Attendance and viewing records
E  Raw SPSS output
F  List of codes in NVivo
G  Analysis of reasons for accessing recordings (code 12)
Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide

RQ 1  Who accesses recorded online group tutorials for language learning?
(+ general background)

- length of study of language
- previous study of other modules at the OU
- strengths and weaknesses in language skills
- self-assessed fluency
- perceived level of difficulty of module materials
- perceived level of language skills in comparison with other students in the tutor group

RQ2  Why do language learners access tutorial recordings?

- attendance at tutorials in general
- use made of recorded tutorials and reasons
- reasons for attendance/non-attendance at recent tutorial
- importance attached to attendance at tutorials
- view of tutorials in terms of being useful/enjoyable

RQ3  What do learners do while listening to recorded language tutorials?

You recently accessed a recorded tutorial. Describe what you did exactly.
If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding
- length of time spent
- skipping sections
- listening to sections more than once
- note taking
- answering vicariously (answering questions in your head, whispering answers, answering out loud)
- speaking along
Is this typical of how you listen to tutorials? What else have you done in the past when listening to tutorials?

RQ4  Which elements of the recordings are salient to learners?

What do you remember most when thinking about the recording? / What did you find most useful?
If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding
- specific activities
- specific visual stimuli
- teacher talk
- specific interactive sequences / question and answer sequences
- contributions from peers
In general, when you listen to recordings of tutorials, what do you find most useful? What do you remember from previous tutorials you listened to?

RQ5 What are the perceived benefits for language learning?

How does listening to tutorials recordings help you with learning the language?
If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding
- language learning gains (what did you learn? is there something you can do now you couldn’t do before?)
- noticing of specific structures, phrases, or vocabulary
- development of strategic competence (study skills for lang. learning, assessment)

RQ6 What affective or motivational benefits do learners report?

Affect
Describe how you felt while working with the tutorial.
If not covered unprompted, elicit information regarding
- group membership: did you feel you were part of the group?
- agency/control: did you feel you were in control of your learning? did you feel actively engaged / or like a more passive observer?
- arousal: did you find the session stimulating/interesting or were you bored?
Is this how you usually feel when accessing recordings?

Motivation
Do you think listening to tutorial recordings has an effect on your motivation to study? (Why/why not?)
Appendix B: Extracts from transcripts

I transcribed all content which was related to the research questions, but summarized conversations at the beginning and end which were not. I used punctuation to fit the intonation of the speakers, included all false starts and repetitions, used *italics* for heavily stressed words and <chevrons> for non-linguistic features which had an impact on the conversation, for example laughter or background noise. I indicated pauses only in the rare cases when there was an unusually long gap within a turn by including the word ‘pause’, also in chevrons. I transcribed fillers using standardized spellings (‘yeah’, ‘erm’) and indicated overlapping speech through *underlining* wherever I thought speakers were genuinely talking over each other.

Overlapping speech and pauses are difficult to determine in online interviews, because often it is the internet connection slowing down or speeding up which causes gaps and overlaps.

**Extract from 01_L314_Clare**

*Interviewer*

And, could you describe, this is a bit of a weird question, could you describe how you felt when you listened, for example, to that tutorial by [tutor’s name], how did you feel while you were listening?

*Clare*

I felt that I’d come across something that was very useful to me, and it was with the students who were speaking, there were only three of them, as I said previously, they weren’t going into breakout rooms, so it was a very, it flowed very well, the whole tutorial. They were doing a lot of speaking, erm. The tutor was clearly impressed with them and their level. And it was, yeah, it was a good one to come across, because it, as I said, it was only the three participants and it flowed well, and useful information.

*Interviewer*

Hm, and did you feel you were part of the group?

*Clare*

Erm, I felt easily that I could have been part of the group. I could have kept up with them and answered questions, and, and had input, and, yeah, as I say, when the tutor, [tutor’s name], when she sort of gave them these exercises to do I was doing them at the same time even though I was listening to the recording, so in that yeah in that respect, yeah, I was, I did feel part of it.

*Interviewer*

So did you feel actively engaged or did you feel more like a passive observer?

*Clare*

Erm yeah. No no no. Definitely an observer. <pause> Sure, I mean was just listening, obviously, I wasn’t participating. I felt less of an observer when I was doing my the exercises whilst they too were doing the exercises and correcting them whilst they were correcting them.
Extract from 04_L116_Wendy

Wendy
I don’t have, I look after two ... I have two daughters I have two grandchildren up the road, I look after them while their mum works, I’ve not long moved, I’ve got a busy life ... What was the question you asked me again?

Interviewer
The question was if you listen no if you listen to a tutorial recording, it’s kind of a listening, you listen and there’s lots of other things you can listen to on the module, there’s lots of audio files and video files and there’s ever so much listening. To what extent do these tutorials differ, how is it different listening to a tutorial recording?

Wendy
Alright. I was going to say, I don’t really have a lot of time to do the extras. I spend my time on doing the book, erm, doing my listening, doing whatever I have to do and to be quite honest the time left I to fit all that the other things in, although I do make the time, erm, I don’t honestly listen to everything. No, I think the the tutorials are very very true to life and it is good to hear the other students.

Interviewer
Okay, why is it good to hear the other students?

Wendy
It makes me feel better about myself, about my Spanish. Nobody is perfect, you know.

Interviewer
Okay, very good.

And when you’re in a tutorial yourself, does it bother you that it’s being recorded?

Wendy
No, not at all. I realize the value of it, I don’t mind that at all.

Interviewer
You may have answered that, but do you think listening to tutorial recordings has an effect on your motivation to study?

Wendy
<pause> I’m motivated enough to listen to the recordings, erm, I I really well I really do it because I want to improve my Spanish and I want to I want to get there.

Extract from 10_L314_Josh

Interviewer
For example, what might, what kind of thing might you note down?

Josh
Erm, say like a vocabulary word or something.

Interviewer
Okay, and do you think you sometimes answer questions in your head when you listen to the recordings?
Josh
Erm, yeah, like the lecturer would ask the people attending a question and then I would think about it myself. Erm what I do find myself doing though is like listening to the students and thinking, like, oh yeah, they used that word wrong, or that was what was a good way of saying it.

Interviewer
Hm, okay, that’s very interesting. And the recordings you listen to are they the same tutorials you’ve already attended live, or different ones, or both?

Josh
No, I’ve never listened to a recording I’ve attended.

Interviewer
Hm, okay. So you attend but then you listen to another recording, also sometimes on the same topic, yeah. So, if there’s a unit 5 tutorial you might attend one live and listen to a recording?

Josh
Yes.

Interviewer
Okay, so why, why do you do that? Why do you then also listen to a recording of a tutorial?

Josh
I suppose just to get another perspective on the tutor, and obviously the students will be different. Maybe there was something I missed in the first one. Erm, but I’ve been in live tutorials where there’s only been a few people whereas if you go to a recording and there’s lots of people, obviously you listen to more like opinions and stuff, which you may have missed in the online one if there was only a few people in it.

Interviewer
So you think the more people there are there, the more you learn?

Josh
I can be, obviously because she asks a question and there’s 20 people, she usually goes to each person to ask their opinion and, yeah.

Interviewer
Hm, okay, and how does that help you if many people are being asked their opinion?

Josh
Erm, may... it’s not really their opinion I’m maybe listening to, it’s like yeah like how they’re using Spanish. And, it is maybe like a checking myself against them, to hear, oh, is my level the same as their level?

---

Extract from 13_L112_Betty

Interviewer
... yeah, very interesting. Okay, when you think about the tutorial, erm, what did you find most useful from it? So you think back to the tutorial you listened to with [tutor’s name], maybe you already partially answered that, what do you remember from it and what did you find most useful?
Betty
It’s the explanation. I have found specifically actually with [tutor’s name] amongst all the other tutors, he seems to go into things I don’t know if it’s in more depth or if he just explains them a little bit more simply. I can’t quite work it out. But whenever I have a tutorial or have a recording that he’s made, things seem to stick in my head a little bit better. And some tutors, perhaps, erm, don’t seem to go into quite so much depth, or to maybe come up with other ways of trying and get these things to stick. Because obviously there are certain rules for the grammar or whatever, and if somebody could come up with maybe a picture to explain things just for those who are visual learners, that would be wonderful, erm.

Interviewer
Okay, and do you remember any bits of the tutorial where there was some interaction between the tutor and the students?

Betty
What was the original question, sorry?

Interviewer
Whether you remember any bits of the tutorial where there was some interaction going on between the tutor and the other students?

Betty
Yes, there was, erm. I think that was the last one I watched. That was, erm, ‘Getting ready for the final TMA’ and [tutor’s name] was explaining what questions could possibly come up in the TMA, just to give us a bit of an idea. Erm, and I was listening to the like answers and trying to make sure that I could answer them. And I was listening to how the students responded and wrote down any words that I didn’t know so that I could then look them up and find out for myself what they were. Erm, yeah.

Interviewer
Yeah, okay, and how do you think that helped you?

Betty
Is is is that okay?

Interviewer
Yeah, that’s okay. How do you think it helped you?

Betty
It helps me because it, it helps me because it helps it stick in my head. I I kind of need to go over things quite regularly otherwise I forget things. Erm, I’m even known to forget my name at times. So, I, you know, I have to constantly repeat things. Erm, and, I mean, having the recording specifically is great because you can just go back to them at any time and watch them and it’s all there again, and it refreshes things in your mind again.
Appendix C: Email message to students

Dear xxx,

I’m a lecturer and a student at the Open University’s School of Languages and Applied Linguistics and I’m writing to you because I would like to find out more about how online tutorials and recordings of online tutorials can help with language learning. Therefore, I’m looking for some volunteers who would be willing to take part in a short interview. The interviews will be held via your online rooms, Skype or by telephone between now and May 2018 at a date and time convenient to you (and which doesn’t clash with your TMAs or other deadlines you are working towards).

I’m interested in hearing from you if you have been listening to recordings of L314 tutorials for example, because you were unable to attend the actual session or to reinforce your learning. It doesn’t matter whether you listened to all of the recording(s) or only to selected extracts. I’d be most grateful if you could send a brief reply to this message - just indicating YES or NO to the questions below.

**Have you been listening to some recorded tutorials on your module? (YES/NO)**

**Would you be willing to take part in a short interview? (YES/NO)**

I will be using the data I collect through interviews of as part of a study within a doctoral research project, and the results may inform future module presentation and production. All data will be treated as confidential, and you are free to withdraw from the study and to request the destruction of any data that have been gathered from you up to the point when they are summarized for analysis.

Your reply by 27 March would be very much appreciated and will help improve the experience of language students in the future.

*With very many thanks for your help, muchas gracias! and kind regards,*

Christine

Christine Pleines
School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, THE OPEN UNIVERSITY
[address and telephone number redacted]

**Endorsement from doctoral supervisor:**

Dear L314 student,

Do please give consideration to this message from Christine Pleines who is researching with me for an EdD at the OU. Christine’s topic is ‘Learning through vicarious participation in online language tutorials’. She writes to you as members of a group which has the opportunity to listen to recorded tutorials. We would be very grateful for your help in carrying out this research.

Dr. Timothy Lewis
Senior Lecturer, School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, The Open University
## Appendix D: Attendance and viewing records

### Tutorial attendance report for one online tutorial room in module L112 (extract)

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Viewing record of one recorded tutorial in module L112

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Total number of views: 14

Download table data as: Comma-separated values (.csv)  Download

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Appendix E: Raw SPSS output

**Crosstabs**

Dataset: C:\12 Ed\E_Main study\3_Student data\WorkingFileV4.sav

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**Viewed_rec2^age2 Crosstabulation**

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**Chi-Square Tests**

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*a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 43.07.
Appendix F: List of codes in NVivo

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Motivations for accessing recordings

- Listening to different tutor’s voices with a view to the EMA (Clare)
- Because they are very dense. I listen again and make notes, usually if it’s something that relates to the assignment (Ceri)
- Listening at a time that suits me (in terms of EMA preparation) (Ricki)
- Listening to large events where you’re not likely to join in anyway (Ricki)
- Getting used to the sound of tutor’s voices, get a feel for their phrasing and intonation (Ricki)
- Going back to earlier ones to revise EMA topic (Ricki)
- Listening to a tutor to check whether you want to go to F2F (Ricki)
- Couldn’t go to the live event (out of the country) so listened to complete online version (Lindsay)
- Went back for clarification (Lindsay)
- Provide a stimulus, get fresh ideas for EMA (Lindsay)
- Guidance as to what I should be thinking about, the structures, the vocabulary, the context (Lindsay)
- Just to hear the language being spoken (Lindsay)
- Going back to the grammar that’s been explained, what’s been said about the subject, what vocabulary’s been used (Lindsay)
- After attending I look at them again, sometimes I misheard bits e.g. when thrown out of the room (Wendy)
- Want to improve my Spanish (Wendy)
- To catch up I missed one because of looking after the children (Wendy)
- Tutorials are points I feel I hadn’t understood, but that were of interest to me (Rosemary)
- It’s always something that I want to improve on, something I want to absorb and go over and over (Rosemary)
- In case by a particular tutor that I like but couldn’t attend (Rosemary)
- To listen to other students talk one minute about the subject (Rosemary)
- More chance to study what the tutor is saying because I can go backwards and forwards and listen and really study. Live tutorials are overwhelming (Celia)
- For listening practice, my biggest problem is listening (Celia)
- For ensuring that the tutor is saying exactly what they’re looking for (Celia)
- Familiarizing myself with accents, for EMA (Celia)
- Mostly grammar recordings, to make sure I include all the grammar points requested (Laura)
- Doing it over because I might have missed something (Laura)
- Listen to recordings of all the tutors I have chosen (Laura)
- When I can’t attend (e.g. timetable or computer not working) (Laura)
- Couldn’t attend own tutors, so listened on recorded one (Cornelia)
- Because of the timings of two tutorials (Cornelia)
- Because of the additional explanation by the tutor, rather than just the slides (Hilary)
- To get another perspective on the tutor and obviously the students will be different (Josh)
- To find out something that the tutor has left out (Josh)
- I’ve been to live ones when there’s only been a few people but then listened to recorded ones where there’s lots of people obviously listen to more opinions (Josh)
- Timings of online tutorials sometimes not convenient (Charlotte)
- To hear the pronunciation and to hear people speaking (John)
- Had to cancel live online sessions because it was far too exhausting, using recordings instead - at a time when I feel alert (Betty)
- If there’s a conversation going on it’s not always easy to be able to take notes as well, so when Fast Back I’ll then refresh in memory (Betty)

1. Studying in more depth, reflecting, consolidating
2. Listening to different voices and perspectives
3. Studying at a good time
4. Guidance