Task-based authentic learning activities in computer assisted foreign language learning

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

İldeniz Özverir
Abstract

One of the challenges that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners experience is the lack of authentic use of the language. In most cases they are confined to the activities conducted in classrooms and lack opportunities to use and practice the target language outside the school in genuine settings. However, the activities done in class are generally decontextualized and lack real world relevance. As a result of this, while learners may have extensive knowledge about the target language—which is referred to as *know what*—they can scarcely use it for communication in real life—which is referred to as *know how*.

This study suggests that with the advances in pedagogical theory, authentic learning has much to offer in order to situate learning tasks in contexts that close the gap between the classrooms and real life. In so doing, the aim of this research is to provide learners with opportunities to use the target language in the kinds of purposeful and complex ways that it is used in real life.

In order to achieve this aim, characteristics of authentic learning environments were used as guidelines to design an e-learning environment which was based on real world activities. The study sought to investigate: how students engage with and respond to a computer-assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education; how students and teachers view the importance of each of the characteristics of authentic activities; how teachers support and scaffold student learning in a computer-assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities; and the ways in which students achieve foreign language competency through the use of computer assisted task-based authentic activities.

The research was conducted in North Cyprus with pre-university level EFL learners over a period of two semesters. Three teachers and 12 students participated in the
study. A design-based research approach was employed in two iterative cycles in the form of an interpretive, qualitative study. The activity that learners were required to complete was based on a fictitious scenario set in a newspaper office. In this scenario learners assumed the roles of members of the editorial board, and the teachers were the editors of a newsletter. Learners researched topics that were socially important to them and produced articles for the newsletter, with all products written, and all communication spoken in the target language. Later, the two newsletters were published and distributed at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU).

Design-based research was employed in two cycles over two semesters. Data was collected through observations, interviews (both individual and group), work samples and video recordings. Later interviews and videotapes were transcribed for in-depth analysis. Cross-case data analysis was used in order to be able to draw conclusions in terms of the applicability of the findings to other similar settings.

The results indicated that despite the lack of learners’ experience in using computers as part of their formal education, they found it motivating and educational. Basing the learning environment and activity on the characteristics of authentic activities have provided a real purpose to complete the activity, and many opportunities to use the target language in context, as well as to develop relevant skills. Teachers supported and scaffolded learners to direct their attention to the different resources available and to the different components of their articles. This process has provided the opportunity to focus on the author, content, language, audience and process, and thus enabled learners to develop authorship skills, to develop the content of their product, to correct and improve linguistic errors, to address the needs of the audience, and to develop problem solving skills.

A key outcome of the research was the development of a framework for the design of authentic learning environments to be used in the teaching of foreign languages, in the form of 11 design principles. These principles contribute both theoretically and practically to understanding of how students learn languages in authentic and meaningful contexts.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background to the study

English, being the lingua franca of this era, has become a world language that is used widely in areas such as trade, tourism, and education. Like other fields, globalisation has had a profound effect on language education around the world. Now, English is being taught and learned in a number of contexts for different purposes. While some learn English from their parents as their first language (referred to as L1 or mother tongue), others are learning it through more formal instruction as another language (referred to as L2 or the target language).

In contexts where learners are learning English as another language, whether it be English as a Second Language (ESL) (learning English in an English speaking country such as Australia, England, or USA) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (in a non-English speaking country such as Turkey, Cyprus, Japan, or France), it is evident that some learners are disadvantaged. This may be due to economic problems, for example, families being unable to afford to send their children to elite or English-medium schools to receive a good English language education (McKay, 2011).

Another reason for this disadvantage may be inequality in access and exposure to the language in real contexts. Despite the fact that learners in the EFL context may be studying in the same classrooms, and have access to the same facilities, because of their first language, some students are in a more deprived educational position. As an example, a Turkish student studying English in a Turkish speaking society, (e.g., Turkey or North Cyprus), is in a disadvantaged position compared to a non-Turkish speaking student studying in the same context. This is because English is a foreign
language in these two countries and, even though Turkish students are learning English, their use of the English language is confined to the classroom as they use their first language outside of the school context; however, as international students do not know Turkish (the national language of Turkey or North Cyprus is Turkish) whereas, they have the opportunity to use English outside the classroom in order to communicate and survive, because English is generally used as the second language to communicate with tourists and other visitors and is widely spoken in Turkey and Cyprus. In this sense, the international students have many more opportunities to interact in the target language, even if not with the native speakers of the language, and to practice their own developing language skills as they function within the society.

Many teachers and educators have sought to provide learners with better opportunities in language exposure to enable real world relevant use of L2 by engaging students in activities that ensure they learn efficiently and effectively in classroom settings. These activities range from exercises, such as fill-in-the-gaps, multiple choice, and comprehension activities, to more complex activities such as task-based activities. Even though such activities allow learners to practice the target language, they limit learners’ language skills to identifying and reproducing structures by focusing on form. With such a focus, learners are unable to transfer their gained language skills to other contexts as these activities do not equip learners with the necessary language skills for real world relevant use of L2. Thus, there is a need for activities that are authentic in nature in order to close the gap between real world relevant use of L2 and classroom tasks, and that enable the language to be used as a tool.

**Language as a tool**

In many cases, learner choice and reason for learning a foreign language shapes the type of education they receive. This can range from English for Specific Purpose (ESP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), to English for Academic Purposes (EAP). However, it can be argued that programs that prepare learners within an EAP scope, as in the case of this research, are largely falling short, as language skills are being taught in non-authentic, decontextualised ways. Berge, Ramaekers and Pilot (2004) advise that:
If the aim of education is preparation of students for their future work and functioning as academics, then it should include learning to deal with such complex, ill structured and uncertain situations, representing the authentic problems and activities that occur in professional practices. (p. 2)

Larsen-Freeman (2003) argues that how a teacher defines language affects what the teacher does in the classroom. Therefore, she indicates that teachers who reflect on who their students are and why they are taking the class “inform the choice of syllabus units and teaching practices” (p. 49). She provides a list of language educators’ answers to the question “What is Language?” over the last century in chronological order. The transition from a view of language being a means of cultural transmission to understanding language in discourse or whole texts, as it is a holistic entity, is clearly evident over time:

1. Language is a means of cultural transmission.
2. Language is what people use to talk about the things that are important to them, for example, occurrences in their everyday lives.
3. Language is a set of sound (or, in the case of sign language, sign) and sentence patterns that express meaning.
4. Language is a set of rules through which humans can create and understand novel utterances, ones that they have never before articulated or encountered.
5. Language is a means of interaction between and among people.
6. Language is the means for doing something—accomplishing some purpose, for example, agreeing on a plan of action for handling a conflict.
7. Language is a vehicle for communicating meaning and messages.
8. Language is an instrument of power (those who know a language are empowered in a way that those who do not are not).
9. Language is a medium through which one can learn other things.
10. Language is holistic and is therefore best understood as it is manifest in discourse or whole texts. (p. 49)

In this study, language is defined as a tool for communication, as also defined by other researchers, such as Nunan (2004), and its use and meaning changes according to the context of use. In this respect, this study aimed to provide students with a variety of authentic contexts to use the target language in a meaningful way, as a tool for communication, rather than as an “object” (Rutherford, 1987) that can be studied in entities. To be able to address such educational problems, a deeper understanding of the problem area was required, particularly in relation to the problems experienced by language teachers (practitioners) and through reflection on personal experience.

**Personal experience**

Despite the fact that I had formal English training since I was 10 years old, I can say that I started learning English as a foreign language at the age of 17 when I started university. When I look back on my language learning experiences, because of not having any specific aims, I made little effort to learn English during pre-university level education; on the other hand, when I started the English preparatory school at a university in Turkey, I spent a great deal of time learning grammar structures and memorising lists of words.

I clearly remember that I was very happy to receive lists of new words from the teachers to memorise and I was also happy to study grammar structures from books such as *English Grammar in Use* by Raymond Murphy, a popular text at the time. In so doing, I felt that I was learning the target language because when I was asked, I could say and illustrate the information I gained. This type of knowledge in the target language was tangible knowledge for me.

During my education at the preparatory school, I passed the Preliminary English Test (PET), which is an international exam, and I completed the program by passing the Proficiency test. However, despite the fact that I was successful in exams and I could name and illustrate almost all grammar structures, for instance, past perfect and future perfect tenses—names that are hardly known by native speakers—I was unable to give directions in English to the nearest petrol station to a tourist. One significant memory
from my university education is, one day I saw the assistant director coming out of the
director’s office and I asked him if the director was empty, meaning if he was free.
(Both empty and free have the same equivalent in Turkish, which is boş). Hence, while
I was asking the question, I made a direct translation without considering the context
that I was using the word in. So, my knowledge of English was based on memorised
words and grammar structures that I could barely use for real communication.

After university, I became an English teacher. Many friends and students of mine
approached me with the same problem and asked for suggestions to develop their
English further in order to be able to use it for communication. Their typical response
was “my grammar knowledge is at a level that I could write a grammar book but I
cannot communicate in the real world. How can I develop my English to be able to
speak?” When I look back and reflect on my language learning process, I see that I was
able to use L2 for communication after I graduated from university and started using it
in context. So, with this research, I am using my own first-hand experience of language
learning and its deficiencies and seeking to find grounded solutions to the problem.

When I searched the literature for documented experiences and concerns of
practitioners teaching in Turkey or North Cyprus, to my surprise, I found little if any
literature that appeared to address the issue. However, observations and consultations
with other practitioners provided a wide range of anecdotal stories and evidence of the
problems associated with language instruction and learners’ difficulties in using L2 for
real communicative purposes. The consulting practitioners were teachers located in
English preparatory education in Cyprus, and their concerns included:

- Many students are unable to communicate in real situations. They can only
  speak within the framework of the course books.

- Many students cannot go beyond the sentence level even though they are
  expected to write argumentative essays. There is something missing in the
  curriculum which is inhibiting this development.

- The teaching that is done in the classroom does not seem to be assisting
  learners in developing their productive skills. There is too much focus on
  grammar.
• Learners are expected to discuss controversial issues in a proficiency exam, but the types of activities learners are exposed to in the classroom are not suitable for this.

• Learners complain that when they go to their advanced classes they cannot communicate with their professors or other faculty members in English, and therefore feel that their time spent in the English Preparatory School was not efficient.

This evidence appears to coincide with observations made by other researchers and practitioners (as described above). This suggests that in the EFL context, especially in Turkey and North Cyprus, the types of activities that learners need to engage in—and that can bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world—are not consistently considered in the design of the teaching and learning process. If “authentic activities” (Herrington, Oliver & Reeves, 2003) provide ample support for learning, then it is even more important to find a means to design courses for e-learning environments that incorporate such activities.

To further explore the problem area, a consideration of the role of professional experience is also required and this discussion follows in the next section.

Professional experience

There are many researchers in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), such as Clarke (1989) and Taylor (1994), who argue that the use of instructional texts and books in classrooms can be meaningless. However, this is still quite standard practice in some schools, for example, at Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) English preparatory School (EPS). In 2008, EPS applied to become an accredited member of the Evaluation and Accreditation of Quality in Language Services (EAQUALS) to obtain quality assurance through this accrediting body. However, in this assessment, the language classes were diagnosed as lacking in quality and an advisory report was submitted to the administration of the school to take necessary action. In a nutshell, the report highlighted that the teaching practices observed in classrooms were traditional, teacher-centred, and lockstep in approach. Many of the activities were done for the sake of achieving the learning objectives,
which were mainly grammar-focused objectives, rather than incorporating meaningful use of the language. “Students were too often passive listeners, with only a few members of the class actively taking part … [and] sometimes they were not given enough time to formulate answers” (EAQUALS EMU EPS Report, 2008, p. 5).

Following the EAQUALS report, EPS administration designed a series of workshops to establish and maintain learner-centeredness in classrooms. Unfortunately, instead of designing curriculum to be based on constructivist learning activities, it was focused on how to use the existing course books (e.g., *Pathfinder Student’s Book* and *Pathfinder Workbook*) in a more learner-centred way. In an unexpected response, the school administration asked teacher trainers and professional development personnel to prepare workshops on how to use the workbook (which consisted of decontextualised and often meaningless tasks such as fill in the gaps, multiple choice tests, and cross puzzles) in a learner-centred way, which was hardly possible. It was clear that a more holistic response to the problem was required.

It is within this context that the current research, and its related classroom activities, has been designed. This research aimed to design a meaningful contextualised learning activity that would make the learning environment learner-centred and to create meaningful opportunities to use the target language for communication in context.

**Authenticity and language education**

In educational settings, authentic methods are not only desirable, they are essential (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989b). Many different disciplines including TESOL can benefit from this approach. It has been argued that authenticity motivates students (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Warschauer, 2004), provides a bridge between the classroom and real life (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Warschauer, 2004), and also helps learners to use language features in a meaningful manner which, in turn, develops their language skills further (Gilmore, 2007). Authenticity is especially important in foreign language learning environments due to the fact that while second language learners are learning the target language, where it is spoken in its context, foreign language learners are confined to the classroom setting provided by their teacher (Ellis, 1997; Fotos, 1998; Pica, 2005).
Gilmore (2007) notes that scholars use terminology such as genuine, real, or natural as synonyms of authentic and inauthentic, artificial, fake, unreal, or contrived as antonyms in their arguments regarding authenticity. In TESOL, arguments targeting what authenticity is generally focus on the authenticity of the material (as the main argument in FL context), followed by authenticity of tasks, audience, communication, and finally authenticity of the environment (Breen, 1985). Despite the arguments, in many language classrooms there is no authentic learning (see also the argument raised on the deficiencies of the classroom by Long, 1991), which is defined as “learning knowledge and skills in contexts that reflect the way the knowledge will be useful in real life” (Collins, 1988, p. 2). The following paragraphs illustrate the often inauthentic structures of language classes.

Focusing on forms rather than using the target language for communication purposes is one of the major and common problems while learning a foreign language (Long, 1991; Van den Branden, 2006; Willis, 1996). Willis (1996), for example, argues that while a learner is acquiring another language, s/he naturally focuses on meaning; however, “in classrooms, many speaking activities involve students in producing a given form or pattern, or expressing a given function, rather than saying what they feel or want to say” (p. 7).

Van Gorp and Bogaert (2006) suggest that “focus[ing] on linguistic knowledge as a goal in itself, [and] leaving it up to the learner to create or search for opportunities for their functional use” (p. 80) hinders learners from becoming fluent users of the target language, being able to communicate in it, and reaching the desired competence level. Therefore, learners must be given opportunities to be exposed to the authentic use of language if the aim is for them to use the target language like a native speaker, as a tool for communication (Harmer, 2007; Willis, 1996).

Maintaining essential conditions for authentic interaction in the classroom is another problem. In many language classrooms teachers nominate the topic, control the turn-taking to speak and/or to answer the questions, decide how to do the activities, and evaluate the responses of the learners (Van den Branden, 2006; Walsh, 2002; Willis, 1996). This inauthentic structure not only limits the learners’ freedom and creativity, but also reduces the motivation of the learners.
Learners’ interaction with learning resources, for example, texts, in many classes is also inauthentic. Learners are usually given some texts to read followed by comprehension (which are also referred to as display questions) and/or referential questions, such as “in line 20 “it” refers to ....”. Taylor (1994) suggests that the texts commonly produced for language learning for use in classrooms are not authentic due to the fact that the teacher and students would usually know the answer (or easily be able to deduce it) because the material is presented to the learner with a “photographically produced ‘realia’” (Clarke, 1989, p. 79). Taylor (1994) exemplifies his argument by giving this example: “‘What is John doing?’ is not a genuine question, since, assuming the learners have eyes, they can see what John is doing without having to say ‘He is washing the car’” (paragraph 12).

Clarke (1989) exemplifies some tasks from some course books, such as Headway, that are designed to be used along with authentic materials. However, he argues that none of these tasks are authentic since they do not have any relationship with the communicative purpose of the text. When authentic materials are used—electronic or paper-based—the goal should not be answering comprehension or vocabulary questions, but rather there should be a communicative objective (Clarke, 1989; Gilmore, 2007; Swaffar, 1985). The communicative objective may be comparing, informing, persuading, analysing, reporting, or instructing, and that makes the author’s goal and message explicit to the readers. This provides information exchange between the author and the reader.

To exemplify this idea with an example from the real world, while reading newspapers, people do not read to answer comprehension or referential questions but merely to be informed or gather information in areas of interest (Breen, 1985). The knowledge gained from such resources may be used in the future, for example, while producing a text, whether it is an essay, report, or an article, or to purely recall necessary information or details while discussing the topic in social contexts.

When inauthenticity is explored in language education, it is found that the teaching approach being used, and the way that it is employed, play crucial roles. It is argued that form-focused approaches, such as Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) and Grammar Translation Method, hinder teachers from providing learners with opportunities in the classroom to use the language for a genuine purpose and to interact
in a real-life like manner (Van den Branden, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007; Willis, 1996). In contrast, meaning-focused approaches, such as task-based learning (TBL), provide the shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness and help teachers to provide learners with opportunities in the classroom to use the language for genuine purpose and real-life interactions.

Shifting from one approach to another does not automatically address the problem, however. The appropriate implementation of the task in an appropriate environment by basing the teaching and learning process on sound pedagogic principles is crucial. Otherwise, tasks will remain as decontextualised classroom tasks that will not facilitate authentic learning.

**Purpose of the study and the research questions**

Although many scholars in the language domain, for example, David Nunan, Jane Willis, and Rod Ellis, endorse the idea that a language is best learned through task-based language teaching, little is known regarding designing tasks that incorporate characteristics of authentic activities. For this reason, this research aims at enhancing the practice of teaching and learning processes through the development of computer-assisted authentic learning activities. In so doing, it aims to provide students with real-life-like situations where they will need and want to use the target language for a real purpose in context.

This study, therefore, proposed the development of a pedagogy-driven, task-based, authentic learning environment for pre-university level EFL tertiary students to develop both their language and academic skills. With this aim in mind, this research used the characteristics that comprise authentic activities suggested by Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) and is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do students engage with and respond to a computer-assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education?

2. How do students and teachers view the importance of each of the characteristics of authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language education?
3. How do teachers support and scaffold student learning in a computer-assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education?

4. In what ways do students achieve foreign language competency through the use of computer assisted task-based authentic activities?

The theoretical significance of the current study resides in its contribution to the redefinition of authenticity in language teaching and learning. This study contributes to advancing understanding of authenticity in the language domain and thus provides a different perspective to language teaching practice. This new understanding enlightens pedagogical issues regarding the design of real world relevant authentic activities and contributes to enhancing the teaching and learning practice of a foreign language. In this way, the outcome of the research is practically significant for language teachers who would want to develop task-based authentic, engaging, contextualised, meaningful, and collaborative learning activities due to the fact that it provides a research based pedagogy-driven design model that is highly desired by language teachers (a suggestion raised by Colpaert, 2006).

The organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organised in the following manner:

Chapter 2 consists of the literature review. The review begins with a critique on direct versus constructivist teaching approaches and continues by defining which language teaching approach falls into each approach. Then, a review of the effects of schooling on learners’ performance in using the target language effectively outside school is given, followed by a review of meaningful learning. The chapter concludes by reporting the characteristics of authentic learning environments and authentic activities.

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology used in the study. The chapter explains the reasons why design-based research was employed and continues with a brief review of the literature on the approach. The four phase model of design-based research (see Figure 3.1) (Reeves, 2006) is presented, together with a description of the
research design and its conduct. This includes the implementation of the learning environment in two iterations and the data collection and analysis methods. Ethical considerations are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4 describes the design of the web-based learning environment together with the initial design-principles that guided the design and a detailed description of the key task and activities that the learners completed as they studied the course.

Data collected through the two iterative cycles are analysed and findings are presented in Chapters 5-8 with each addressing a research question. Chapter 5 presents how students engaged with and responded to a computer-assisted language learning environment incorporating the characteristics of authentic activities. Chapter 6 reports the students and teachers’ opinion of the importance on each design characteristic. Chapter 7 reports the data analysis regarding how teachers supported and scaffolded student learning throughout the activity in the learning environment; and Chapter 8 describes and illustrates the findings regarding the ways students achieved foreign language competency through the use of computer assisted task-based authentic activities.

Chapter 9 provides a discussion of the research findings and reports the changes made to the initial design principles that guided the study. The chapter concludes with a modified version of characteristics of authentic activities that has the potential to enhance foreign language learning.

Chapter 10 provides a summary of the research, together with implications and limitations of the research and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

Literature review

This chapter describes the literature that forms the basis of this research. Firstly, it gives an overview of traditional teaching approaches and their focus on language teaching and learning. Then, it moves to discuss the weaknesses of traditional language learning, such as knowledge remaining inert. The discussion then continues to review alternative approaches that could address this issue in school contexts. Finally, the discussion describes the types of activities that need to be incorporated into education to close the gap between school education and real-life use to enhance robust knowledge.

Language learning and the assistance dilemma

Controversy about how instructional guidance in education should be provided has engaged many educational researchers (e.g., Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich, & Tenenbaum, 2011; Dean Jr & Kuhn, 2007; Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006; Lee & Anderson, 2013; Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2007). While on one side of the continuum researchers argue that explicit and direct instruction is the optimum method of education (Clark, 2009; Kirschner, 2009; Kirschner et al., 2006; Klahr, 2009; Klahr & Nigam, 2004; Mayer, 2004, 2009; Rosenshine, 2009; Sweller, 2009), on the other side, other researchers argue that learners should be given opportunities to construct knowledge themselves under the guidance of more capable persons (Alfieri et al., 2011; Dean Jr & Kuhn, 2007; Lee & Anderson, 2013; Reeves et al., 2007). This controversy has been referred to as the “assistance dilemma” by Koedinger and Aleven (2007). How much information or assistance should be provided and under what circumstances has not been clearly defined in research to address the assistance
dilemma (Koedinger & Aleven, 2007). Furthermore, it is not clear under what circumstances withholding information is more effective than giving it explicitly, or vice versa.

Educators supporting direct instructional guidance claim that learning is done best through providing direct and explicit instruction. In this method, it is considered that there is only one correct answer to the problem and both the answer and the path are known by the teacher. It is the role and duty of the teacher to provide systematic detailed instructions to learners to achieve the outcome and the learning objectives. Kirschner, Sweller and Clark (2006), for example, argue that direct instructional guidance alters long-term memory and thus learning occurs. Therefore, they argue, minimally guided approaches, such as discovery learning, problem-based learning, inquiry learning, experiential learning, and thus most constructivist approaches, hinder learning and as a result “...most teachers who attempt to implement classroom-based constructivist instruction end up providing students with considerable guidance” (Kirschner et al., 2006, p. 79).

Similarly, Klahr and Nigam (2004) criticize researchers who support constructivist approaches and argue that the knowledge that learners, scientists, and teachers have about science was taught to them, rather than discovered by them. In their study, they investigated the difference between direct instructional guidance and unguided discovery learning. Klahr and Nigam designed a course to teach “control of variables strategy” (CVS) for 112 third and fourth grade students from four different elementary schools. Learners were randomly placed in classes. Discovery learning classes were limited to providing the learning objectives with no scaffolding, coaching, or feedback; on the other hand, learners in direct instructional classes were provided with “...extreme type of direct instruction in which goals, the materials, the examples, the explanations, and the pace or instruction [were] all teacher controlled” (p. 2). The results indicated that students who learned control of variables strategies through direct instructional guidance outperformed the learners who learned through discovery learning in both the initial acquisition of the knowledge and skills and transfer and application of the skills. Therefore, the authors concluded that direct instruction is a more effective instructional approach than discovery learning.
In reaction to Klahr and Nigam’s claims against constructivist learning, Dean and Kuhn (2006) also designed a course to teach CVS and investigated the differences between the three different instructional models: direct instruction, direct instruction together with discovery learning, and unguided discovery learning. In order to replicate the results they compared three groups of 15 fourth-grade students in 12 sessions over 10 weeks working on problems that required the control-of-variables strategy for an effective solution.

The results of their research indicated that, despite the fact that students with direct instructional guidance can show gradual progress over time, learners who have obtained direct instruction along with the opportunity for subsequent engagement and practice perform much better over time. The success of the group without direct instruction was in between. Therefore, they concluded that “direct instruction appears to be neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for robust acquisition or for maintenance over time” (p. 1) and while direct instruction has no long-term advantage, engagement in practice leads to improved performance over time. The findings of Dean and Kuhn (2006) have been replicated by other researchers, such as Brunstein, Betts, and Anderson (2009) who contrasted minimally guided discovery conditions with a variety of instructional conditions in two experiments where students outperformed in the discovery condition than any other instructional condition.

Educators with more constructivist views advocate that “knowledge is not a thing that can be simply transmitted from one person to another” (Chee, 1995, p. 135). Jonassen (2000) criticises the view that “dualist learners believe that knowledge is right or wrong, that teachers and professors have the right knowledge, and that the role of students is to assimilate what the teacher knows. Their absolutist beliefs stress facts and truth” (p. 71), thus implying that the role of the teacher is to transmit the knowledge and the role of the students is to receive it.

The controversy in suggestions regarding direct versus constructivist learning led Alfieri et al. (2011) to conduct two meta-analyses on the issue using a sample of 164 studies by making 580 comparisons. In the first study, they compared the effects of unassisted discovery learning to explicit instruction. In the second, they compared the effects of guided discovery learning conditions to a variety of instructional methods, for example, unassisted discovery and explicit instruction. Their analyses have
revealed that guided discovery learning conditions that consisted of worked examples led to the best learning outcomes; whereas unguided discovery learning conditions did not benefit learning. Hence, enhanced forms of discovery-learning are superior to both unassisted discovery forms and explicit instruction.

The authors advised that “…the construction of explanations or participation in guided discovery is better for learners than being provided with an explanation or explicitly taught how to succeed on a task, in support of constructivist claims” (p. 11). Thus, they concluded that “…teaching practices should employ scaffolded tasks that have support in place as learners attempt to reach some objective, and/or activities that require learners to explain their own ideas” (p. 12).

Although providing learners with direct instruction seems to inhibit knowledge creation, no guidance at all is equally inappropriate. Thus, it is more likely that for gained knowledge and skills to be transferred and applied, educators need to provide learners with opportunities to construct knowledge with the incorporation of scaffolded tasks that provide learners with appropriate guidance as necessary within the learning environment.

**Direct instructional guidance in language education**

Even though there are many researchers in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) who think that direct instruction is the most appropriate approach (as summarised by Ellis, 2009), other researchers have argued strongly that direct instruction is not necessary to learn a language (Nunan, 1995; Willis, 1996) nor does it help language learners to use it effectively.

Nunan (1995), for example, reviewed a number of studies from different TESOL areas (such as early childhood English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and adult ESL/EFL) conducted in various countries between 1982 and 1994 and suggested that instruction on its own does not lead to acquisition. Nunan concluded that “the gap between teaching and learning will be narrowed when learners are given a more active role in three key domains of content, process, and language” (p. 154). Consequently, if the aim is to bridge the gap between learning and acquisition, learning activities should be designed to be learner centred, meaning focused and communicative in ways that have real world relevance (Clarke, 1989;

Meta-analysis of tutored and untutored learners (e.g., Ellis, 1997; Pica, 2005) revealed that “learners are able to acquire linguistic forms without any instructional intervention, [but] they typically do not achieve very high levels of linguistic competence from entirely meaning-centred instruction” (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002, p. 421). For this reason, instruction is necessary to trigger the acquisition process (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1997; Pica, 2005). Ellis (1997) contends that “input is needed, but only to ‘trigger’ the operation of the language acquisition device” (p. 32). There is a need to show students the connection between form, meaning, and use, rather than focusing on form per se as the knowledge of language (Ellis, 2012; Nunan, 2004).

In this regard, researchers distinguished direct instructional guidance from guided instructional guidance in TESOL. On the one hand, direct instructional methods recommend proactive or planned models where the teacher plans and presents the lesson in a way where learners focus on the form of the day. On the other hand, guided instructional methods that use incidental, reactive, or corrective feedback methods (e.g. Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis et al., 2002; Nassaji, 2007) utilise communicative tasks that focus attention on meaning and that attend or correct the needs and errors of students as they arise (Table 2.1 below summarises direct and guided methods of instruction in TESOL).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form-focused (direct) methods</th>
<th>Meaning focused (guided) methods</th>
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<td><strong>Proactive:</strong> The form of the day is planned by the teacher to ensure that form is learned or practiced. If the form is not learned or practiced, the learning activity is not considered successful.</td>
<td><strong>Reactive or corrective feedback:</strong> Possible forms may or may not have been determined prior to the activity. Learners’ errors that arise while completing the activity define what forms will be focused on to be able to complete the activity.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Planned:</strong> The form of the day is determined prior to the activity; however, learners are not explicitly made aware that a specific form is being studied and thus they act as language users rather than language learners.</td>
<td><strong>Incidental:</strong> Forms are not determined prior to the activity. They arise as learners complete the activity. Thus, instead of recycling a single form several times, a variety of forms are addressed based on the demands of the learners to be able to complete the activity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning a language through direct instruction does not necessarily bring the learners to the desired language competency level where they are able to use it for communication. Focus-on-forms approaches (described in the following section) are considered as direct instructional methods in which language structures are studied one by one in isolation through explicit instructions by the teacher. For example, in Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) a grammar structure is presented as the topic of the day, followed by a controlled practice task, usually in the form of a written exercise; and finally learners are expected to produce a spoken or written output.

**Focus-on-Forms**

According to those researchers in TESOL who believe that direct instruction is the most appropriate way to teach a language, syllabuses should be designed in a linear fashion to teach from simple to complex structures “in building-block fashion” (Long, 1991, p. 41). This type of teaching employs “focus-on-forms” (Long, 1991) approaches which are based on behaviouristic theories and are known as traditional approaches (Nunan, 2004). The focus is to teach one item at a time in isolation through explicit instruction of formal knowledge (Wilkins, 1976). In this study, “focus-on-forms” approaches are referred to as form-focused activities aimed at teaching any one aspect of linguistic form at a time (Ellis, 2012).

Three dominant examples of form-focused approaches are the Grammar-Translation Method, Audio Lingual Method, and the PPP method. There is ample research indicating that form-focused approaches cannot adequately account for L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1997) because they have limitations in bringing the learner to the desired competence level to communicate effectively in the language.

Similar to Gagne’s (1992) nine events of instruction, in form-focused activities, as in PPP, teachers (usually) start the lesson with “today we are going to learn” and start presenting the new linguistic form to the students. In the later stages of the lesson, students are expected to form sentences or paragraphs in the instructed form. Lightbown (1985) argues that such language teaching methods are ineffective or even counter-productive due to the fact that while students can form these correct forms in the short term, “later some of these ‘correct’ forms disappear from the learners’ language...” (p. 102). A further explanation of this is provided when Ellis (1997)
questioned the durability of acquisition gained from form-focused instruction. To exemplify this, Ellis refers to research demonstrating that acquisition obtained in this way enables increased usage in forms but the usage is often incorrect and not always retained. This argument indicates that retention, in contrast to Kirschner et al.’s (2006) argument, is not the only indicator of learning. In language education, focusing-on-forms through the direct instructions of a teacher, rather than the functionality of a language, hinders students from using the target language as a tool for functional purposes in the outside world and thus communicate in it (Van Avermaet & Gysen, 2006; Van den Branden, 2006; Willis, 1996). Ellis (2012) argues that, in order for the effect to be lasting, the instruction should be embedded in authentic communicative activities, even after the instruction is over. Thus, even if students succeed in recalling the knowledge (whether it is a linguistic structure or new vocabulary), in the long run, they fall short in using it for functional purposes. This is because new forms are instructed in a decontextualized manner as separate entities. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989a) proposed developing understanding through situated use, which in essence requires social negotiations that are complex in nature rather than, for example, simply seeing the definition and the word in a few examplary sentences, as a learner would do while learning from dictionaries.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) contends that simply knowing a dictionary meaning of a word is not enough for one to “know a word” (p. 36). She illustrates her argument by giving the word *house*. While analysing the form she indicates the importance of knowing the pronunciation sign (/aw/), spelling (“the silent e is noteworthy” she argues) and singular-plural form (house-houses). In order to know the meaning, she says, a dictionary definition would be “construction intended to be used for human habitation” whereas simplified definition for students would be “a place where people live”. Despite the fact that Larsen argues that knowing form and meaning is important, they are not enough for one to be able to use the word *house* properly. It is also necessary for one to be able to distinguish a word from its synonyms in order to use it accurately, such as being able to differentiate the meaning of *house* from *home* or *flat*.

From the discussion above, one can see that form-focused approaches fall short in enhancing long lasting active learning, as the primary focus of such approaches is teaching structures per se. Focusing on forms hinders learners from using language as
a tool for functional purposes which indicates that there is a need for approaches that allows learners to be engaged in the situated use of language to shift their knowledge from the ‘what’ to the ‘how’. This distinction between knowing what and knowing how is explored in more detail below.

The distinction between knowing what and knowing how

The problem raised above is the distinction between knowing what and knowing how (Brown et al., 1989a). Knowing what is known as declarative knowledge. Declarative knowledge is conscious (explicit) knowledge and learners can often verbalise what they know (Bowles, 2011; Rebuschat & Williams 2012; Stalnaker, 2012; ). On the other hand, knowing how is known as procedural knowledge. It is argued that procedural knowledge is unconscious (implicit) knowledge (Rebuschat, 2013).

The example given by Herrington (1997) of a “… driver with a physics degree, attempting to dig the car out of sand instead of partially deflating the tyres…” (p. 11) exemplifies that having knowledge does not always guarantee the ability to use it at the appropriate time to solve a real problem. Learning should be embedded into activities in which learners will need to use knowledge in real life (Brown et al., 1989a; Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In turn, this will enable them to use their knowledge appropriately across various situations. Therefore, while the form-focused approaches can be helpful at low levels (such as Beginners or Elementary) to help students gain the basic structures of the target language (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2006; Ellis, 2012; Nunan, 2004), these approaches are inappropriate for learners who want to master the language.

Form-focused teaching approaches “assume that learners will acquire what they are taught and that, with practice, they will be able to use the structure in communicative situations” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 102); however, in real life know what and know how are two different ingredients to learning that education must address. Students cannot make connections between what they learn in school and appropriate use of that knowledge outside of school. This is discussed in more detail in the Inert knowledge and Knowledge as a product vs. knowledge as a tool, sections of this chapter.

Since the “know how” of language is essential to mastery and being able to use the learned/acquired language outside of school, educators need to consider approaches
that enable learners to use language in contexts that resemble situations they will encounter in real life. This indicates that there is a need to shift the paradigm from focusing-on-forms to meaning.

**Meaning-focused activities in language learning**

In reaction to form-focused instruction, meaning-focused approaches are suggested in language education. Meaning-focused approaches, such as task-based, problem-based, and project-based activities, shift the focus of studying decontextualised linguistic structures or a list of vocabulary items to task completion (Doughty & Long, 2003; Ellis et al., 2002; Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). These types of teaching approaches are referred to as focus-on-form (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Long, 1991) and in contrast to focus-on-forms, where the primary focus of attention is to teach language structures as a target of each lesson, the primary focus of focus-on-form instruction is on meaning. The content of lessons, for example, is biology, history, house decoration, or organising a trip to another country and the main target is task completion (Long, 1991). It directs learners’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons. In this research, focus-on-form activities are referred to as meaning-focused activities.

**Table 2.2: The diversity of focus of attention in focus-on-forms and focus-on-form approaches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus-on-forms</th>
<th>Focus-on-form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Learners can use 's for singular third person in present simple tense</td>
<td>- Can talk about daily routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can use present perfect while talking about past experience</td>
<td>- Can talk about past experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ellis (2012) argues that focus-on-form activities view language as a tool for communicating whereas focus-on-forms approach treats language as an object to be studied and mastered in entities. In this respect, Ellis summarised the difference between these two approaches in the figure below:
Tasks with real world relevance can be as simple as filling in forms with personal details, to solving a complex problem, or developing a project that requires authentic use of language (along with cognitive skills). In focus-on-form, learners should be oriented towards the use of the target language for authentic communication purposes by themselves selecting appropriate vocabulary and linguistic forms as “naturalistic learners” (Ellis, 1997, p. 6) do in “natural environments” (Lightbrown, 1985). In the real world outside the classroom, learning language forms is not linear but emergent and organic (Jenkins, 2012; Larsen-Freeman, 2003) and this research aims at providing the necessary conditions to bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world.

Tasks should be the core units that describe the selection of goals (that one needs language in order to be able to function in society) rather than linguistic structures (Council of Europe, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Van Avermaet & Gysen, 2006) when designing a curriculum. Accordingly, the objectives of the lessons should not be describing what specific language features students gain, for example “the students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Focus on form</th>
<th>Focus on forms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Language-as-tool</td>
<td>Language-as-object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of learning</td>
<td>Incidental</td>
<td>Intentional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary focus of attention</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary focus of attention</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisitional processes</td>
<td>Interspsychological mediation;</td>
<td>Conscious rule-formation; proceduralization;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intrapsychological mediation;</td>
<td>automatization;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>noticing;</td>
<td>monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>noticing-the-gap; modified output.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabus type</td>
<td>Task-based</td>
<td>Structural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target selection</td>
<td>Proactive/reactive</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional processes</td>
<td>Tasks;</td>
<td>Exercises;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>scaffolded production;</td>
<td>consciousness-raising through the provision of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dynamic assessment;</td>
<td>explicit rules;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>input-priming negotiation of meaning;</td>
<td>structured input;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corrective feedback;</td>
<td>controlled production practice; free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consciousness-raising through tasks</td>
<td>corrective feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.1: Focus-on-form versus focus-on-forms (Ellis, 2012, p. 272)
will learn how to use the past continuous and past simple tenses to express an interrupted action” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 114). Instead, the objectives should focus on using the language for an authentic purpose to be able to function in society, as is described in The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001): “can describe plans and arrangements, habits and routines, past activities and personal experiences”. Van Lier (2007) contends that curriculum design should be oriented towards the activities, needs, and emergent purposes of the learner rather than “sequencing the material that is to be ‘covered’” (p. 53). In this respect, the teacher provides the necessary resources and guides learners according to their needs and goals to achieve their objective.

The advantages of meaning-focused activities are numerous. However, the challenge for researchers is to discover how tasks should be designed to create realistic situations that have the potential to impact on the learning of a foreign language and the performance of language learners using (in this case) English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP).

Van den Branden (2006) proposes that there is a distinction between “target tasks” and “classroom tasks” and suggests that:

There should be a close link between the tasks performed by learners in the language classroom and in the outside world. The things learners do with the language in the classroom ... should be related to, or derived from, what the learners are supposed to be able to do with the target language in the real world.... (p. 6)

This argument highlights the importance of bridging the gap between learning at school and in the outside world (in situ) to bring authenticity to the learning activity.

The next section will discuss the differences between learning in and out of school and, in so doing, will go on to suggest ways to bridge this gap by using authentic activities in language teaching.
The culture of schooling and the problem of inert knowledge

Learning in school and out

Schools are formal places used to transfer bodies of knowledge and skills to students and thus, schooling has become a culture in itself. Many formal education systems, for example, the Turkish education system, orients towards the transfer and retention of knowledge that is done in an abstract and decontextualised form (Aksit & Sands, 2006) and not towards use of knowledge as a tool (Herrington et al., 2010).

Many researchers argue that traditional schooling gives learners low-level work consisting of recognition and reproduction of memorized information or practice of isolated skills and do not supply context for functional uses (Aksit & Sands, 2006; Lebow & Wager, 1994). For this reason, students’ primary educational aim becomes passing tests rather than making connections to the world around them (Brown et al., 1989a; The Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990a; Herrington et al., 2010; Perkins, 1999; Pugh & Bergin, 2005). As a result, many students find it difficult to apply their knowledge outside of school (Barron, Clarksville, & Wells, 2013; Clayden et al., 1994; Herrington, Reeves, & Oliver, 2010) and thus knowledge remains inert (Brown et al., 1989a; Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990a; Herrington et al., 2010; Whitehead, 1929). Lebow and Wager (1994) advised that the learning activities that students do in school are different from real-life problem solving activities that actual practitioners do in the real world (see Table 2.3).
Table 2.3: The distinction between problems and activities in school and real life
(Lebow & Wager, 1994, p. 233)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Real life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities involve…</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“textbook examples” and well-structured conditions</td>
<td>ill-formulated problems and ill-structured conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problems are…</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>largely abstract and decontextualized</td>
<td>embedded in a specific and meaningful context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problems…</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack depth, complexity, and duration</td>
<td>have depth, complexity, and duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration…</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competitive relations and individual assessment</td>
<td>cooperative relations and shared consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problems…</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>typically seem artificial with low relevance for students</td>
<td>are perceived as real and worth solving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unal (1969) discussed the problem of schooling being different from real life in the primary education system in Turkey. The author argued that many children could not graduate from primary school and in cases where learners could graduate from primary school, were not any more competent than their parents, who had not attended primary school. This was due to the fact that what learners studied at school was totally different from what they did in real life. Thus, they could not benefit from formal school education in their daily life. Unal recommended that what students studied at school should be related to what they would do in real life, otherwise there was no point attending school. Unfortunately, despite the time that has passed since Unal published his article, the Turkish education system remains the same. Aksit and Sands (2006) summarise some of the problems of the Turkish curriculum and education system as follows:

The main problem often expressed about the national school curriculum is that there is a lot of content and too much emphasis on transmitting it. The stated objectives are narrow in scope and many are at the level of recall. Neither does
the national curriculum give enough room for contemporary teaching strategies. Lessons are mainly teacher-centred and content-driven… Further, assessment of the national curriculum promotes memorisation and reproduction of large amounts of content. ... there are national examinations in the system, giving the curriculum an examination-driven nature... [Objectives] are stated in terms of what teachers are to explain or transfer, not in terms of what students will do or gain. The accumulation of knowledge seems to take precedence over using knowledge through higher level cognitive skills such as application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation... Teachers put a lot of emphasis on explicit teaching of content, and tend to conduct their lessons by explaining… Student growth through knowledge transmission rather than through experience is favoured and students are usually expected to listen and remember what is transmitted. (p. 20)

In order to address the problems in Turkish education system major reforms took place in 2005 and 2006. However, this initiative focused almost exclusively only the implementation phase rather than the Turkish primary curriculum as a whole. Due to the huge scope of content that is expected to be learned by the students, it is “almost implausible for the learner to reflect on the terms, concepts and processes included in the content as required by constructivism” (Özar, 2012, p.122). Hence, Özar (2012) pointed out that when the content is overloaded—as it is in Turkish education system—the teachers typically rush through the material, with some learners left behind not understanding the content.

Van Lier (2007) argued that each learner has a unique character and personality. Learners cannot and should not be treated as homogeneous entities, as educational systems often tend to treat them. “A person does not learn by receiving ‘input’ that is ‘delivered’ via some instructional mechanism, but by picking up information in the environment on the basis of and guided by organismic needs and purposes” (p. 53). However, Van Lier notes that learners are treated in the same way at the same time; they are exposed to the same textbook pages, and tested on the same day in the same way. Instead, he suggests that, in order to be consistent with the argument that each learner is a unique entity who has their own life, aspirations, needs, worries, dreams and identities, learners should be treated as persons in their own right. The author
claims that learners, like any one, should have things to share with others that go beyond the information transferred from the text book at any particular time.

Sfard (1998) argues that the human mind is not a “container to be filled with certain materials and about the learner as becoming an owner of these materials” (p. 5). Learning is about becoming a member of a certain community and, in order to be accepted by the community, one should act according to the community’s norms and use the same language. Therefore, the terms “decontextualised learning” or “stand-alone learner” (Sfard, 1998) become meaningless if they are aimed to equip learners with robust knowledge and appropriate skills that are applied by “just plain folks (jpfs)” (Lave, 1988) in novel contexts. In her analogy, Sfard indicates that “‘participation’ is almost synonymous with ‘taking part’ and ‘being part’, and both of these expressions signalize that learning should be viewed as a process of becoming a part of a greater whole” (p. 6) just like the parts of a human body. Lungs and muscles, for example, cannot function if they are removed from their original context, the human body. Similarly, if knowledge is removed from its original context, it cannot be gained by learners.

However, traditional schooling, according to Resnick (1987b), is based on an individual working on an activity that is isolated from real life but focused on the correct manipulation of symbols. In this regard, Resnick points out that there is no connection between learning in school and the nature of cognitive activity outside school under four propositions. These are:

1. Schooling focuses on the individual’s performance, whereas out-of-school mental work is often socially shared.

2. Schooling aims to foster unaided thought, whereas mental work outside school usually involves cognitive tools.

3. School cultivates symbolic thinking, whereas mental activity outside school engages directly with objects and situations.

4. Schooling aims to teach general skills and knowledge, whereas situation-specific competencies dominate outside. (p. 16)
The above argument asserts that schooling puts emphasis on the development of individual, symbol based learning that aims to teach widely usable skills by ignoring situation-specific learning. This isolates the mental activity practiced outside the school from general skills and knowledge gained in school. As a result, the knowledge acquired remain inert and therefore application of this knowledge in problem solving situations is overlooked (Chee, 1995).

There is much argument that knowledge gained through direct instructional guidance, which is also referred to as *instructivist learning, traditional learning and education* or *teacher-centred learning* (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Herrington & Standen, 2000; Kirschner et al., 2006; Schuh, 2004), may not always be useful in real life as students cannot always make connections between what they learn in school and its use outside of school (e.g. Perkins, 1999; Renkl, Mandl, & Gruber, 1996; Unal, 1969). Consequently, knowledge gained through traditional instructivist education can remain inert and will not always be useful in real life.

The arguments above indicate that traditional instructivist approaches at school do not equip learners with robust knowledge that is used by practitioners in everyday situations. Rather, the learning process results in inactive knowledge that can only be recalled or used in school type activities that were used during the learning process.

The next section will discuss the causes of inert knowledge and its negative effects on language learning.

**Inert knowledge**

Having knowledge and being able to use it are two fundamentally different objectives that indicate that an educational practice has accomplished its aim by equipping learners with required tools, instead of merely facts. However, traditional schooling, and thus many curricula, orient towards the retention and reproduction of knowledge (also referred to as *knowledge reproduction*) that is done in abstract and decontextualised forms (Brown et al., 1989a; Choi & Hannafin, 1995; Herrington et al., 2010). Those students who have good grades in exams are considered to be successful and knowledgeable; however, many students learn concepts in school as abstract entities and make little connection to the outside world (Perkins, 1999). As a
result, knowledge often remains unnoticed, “locked up and inaccessible” (Herrington et al., 2010, p. 4) even in the situations where it is relevant and necessary. Knowledge that remains locked up, that can only be recalled with a direct prompt, and is not transferable to novel contexts, has been defined as “inert knowledge” by Whitehead (1929).

Perkins (1999) suggests that “‘inert knowledge’ sits in the mind’s attic, unpacked only when specifically called for by a quiz or a direct prompt but otherwise gathering dust” (p. 8). He also notes that, even though it is hoped that the majority of gained knowledge at school is aimed to be used actively outside school, it remains inert. Students are unable to make connections between what they have learned in school to the world around them. For example, students learn ideas about society in subjects like history and social sciences but fail to make connections to today’s events. Perkins also supports his argument by giving passive vocabulary knowledge as an example. He indicates that these are the words that people understand but do not use actively and spontaneously. Therefore, this inactive knowledge is only used when people come across them.

Similar to Perkins, the Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt (1990a, 1993a) argue that when people are asked directly, they are able to recall and use the knowledge learned; however, when people experience problems to solve in novel contexts, they fail to spontaneously access the necessary knowledge and use it. Hence, the primary purpose of any instruction should be coping with problems of everyday life rather than enabling learners to answer questions in exams correctly (Renkl et al., 1996).

Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989a) emphasise the importance of the separation between ‘knowing and doing’. Their analogy is that conceptual knowledge is similar to a set of tools and thus they argue that it is very common for a person to have the knowledge but be unable to use it when relevant—which is known as transfer problem (Barnett & Ceci, 2002). Brown et al. points out that people may have old-fashioned pocket knives that include a device for removing stones from horses’ hooves, and be able to talk wisely about horses, hooves, and stones, but they would not know how (or generally would not have the opportunity) to use this device on a horse. Therefore, they endorse the idea that “knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the
activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used” (p. 32). If activity, context, and culture are separated, learning will be decontextualized and knowledge gained will remain inert. Nowhere is this more relevant than in language learning through form-focused direct instructional guidance.

It is very common for language teachers to see their students talking about grammar rules wisely but be unable to use them in communicative activities, much less in unstructured, ill-defined novel contexts outside the classroom. Johnston and Goettsch (2000), for example, argue that there is a difference between understanding (knowing what) and production (knowing how) in language education. For example, in this extract, they report how an ESL teacher articulated the transfer problem:

They oftentimes don’t understand the rules. They just read a rule and go, ‘OK, I’ve read this since I was eleven years old. I have read it a million times back in my country and here.’ And they’re still not using it right. They all know they need to use the third person singular ‘s’ but half the class still doesn’t use it. They use it in the grammar exercises, but they don’t apply it while they are speaking or writing. (p. 456)

Larsen-Freeman (2003) contends that while language learners can cope with the presentation and practice sections of a lesson, they struggle at the production stage which is the more communicative part of a lesson that necessitates transfer of knowledge. She indicates that despite the fact that students understand and thus know a rule, they are not necessarily able to apply it. Hence, their output may be inaccurate or diffluent. The author notes that “students can recall the grammar rules when they are asked to do so but will not use them spontaneously in communication, even when they are relevant” (p. 8), a clear indication of inert knowledge. Therefore, she suggests that if the aim is to help language learners overcome their inert knowledge problem, then grammar should be thought as something people do rather than know (p. 143), a suggestion that aligns well with the construct of authentic and situated learning.

Ellis (1997) puts forward the distinction between knowing and doing. He argues that it is possible for one to have relevant knowledge of the target language but not always be able to use it. He notes that “for example, Wes might be said to know how to make plurals even though he does not always add an -s to a plural noun” (p. 11). In another
example, Ellis notes and exemplifies the transfer problem in language education as follows:

… learners made considerable use of fixed expressions or formulas. Learners may manifest target-like use of a feature in a formula without having acquired the ability to use the feature productively. For example, both J and R acquired the pattern ‘Can I have a _?’ early on, but it took them some time to use ‘can’ in other kinds of sentences. Is it possible to say they had acquired ‘can’ if they could only use it in one fixed expression? Most teachers would say ‘no’. (p. 11)

Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989a) criticize the different ways that schools use dictionaries, math formula, or historical analysis when compared to how practitioners use them. They contend that, even though students may get good grades in exams, which is a typical characteristic of school culture, they may “…not be able to use a domain’s conceptual tools in authentic practice” (p. 34).

**Knowledge as a product vs. knowledge as a tool**

Herrington, Reeves and Oliver (2010) note that students often perceive knowledge per se “as the final product of education rather than a tool to be used dynamically to solve problems” (p. 6). Similarly, Brown et al. (1989a) compared concepts to tools and indicated that concepts are not abstract or self-contained entities. They conclude that concepts and tools are alike as they can both only be understood through use. To put it more explicitly “it is possible to acquire a tool and not be able to use it, just as it is possible for students to acquire a rule, routine, … algorithm [or a linguistic structure] and not be able to use it” (Griffin, 1995, p. 66). Consequently, robust knowledge develops through continual use of knowledge in situ.

While learning a foreign language through a form-focused deductive approach, such as PPP, students are presented with explanations of grammar rules with example sentences. Then, they are expected to form sentences using the new language. While learning passives, for example, students are taught that passives are used when the action is more important than the person who did it. Students are given example sentences such as:
Table 2.4: Transforming sentences from active to passive voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People ate most of the food at the party.</td>
<td>Most of the food was eaten at the party.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to test the transmission of knowledge, students are given sentences in different tenses and are expected to apply changes correctly. However, it is a common mistake for students to produce inappropriate sentences such as ‘my homework was done by me’ as they misleadingly think that the action of having done the homework is more important than the person who did it because, during the instructions section, they were taught so. This indicates that while knowledge transfer from the teacher to the learner can occur in decontextualised learning activities through direct instructional guidance, “learning is in danger of becoming isolated, irrelevant, and marginalised from mainstream real world activity and performance” (Herrington, 1997, p. 4) if learning and the use of knowledge in real world are separated.

The distinction between knowledge about and knowing a language is described in more depth in the next section.

**Having knowledge about a language versus knowing a language**

There are many language learners who can talk about the structures, functions, and rules of the target language wisely; however, when learners are in authentic situations and it is relevant to use these structures, functions, and rules to communicate, they are often unable to use them and manage using the language as a tool to communicate (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

Harmer (2007), for example, emphasises the inadequate structure of form-focused language teaching methods and argues that even though today the Grammar Translation Method is not practised as a method, many language learners make translations in their heads at various stages. Harmer argues that one can learn a lot about a foreign language through making translations to one’s own mother tongue; however, this type of learning approach “…stops students from getting the kind of natural input that will help them acquire language (since they are always looking at L1 equivalents), and it fails to give them opportunities to activate their language.
knowledge” (p. 49). The author concludes that making translations can only teach people about language rather than helping them to be able to effectively communicate with it – having a language.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) argues that though a person may know grammar structures does not mean that they can use them accurately. Thus, she points out that there are three essential dimensions of language in communication. These are: meaning, use, and form. The author illustrated the importance of context by asking a high school English teacher to analyse the English possessive in ‘Diane’s book’ using form, meaning, and use dimensions by taking how it is formed?, what does it mean? and when/why is it used?. The first part of the answer was about the teacher’s knowledge of the form:

Let’s see. The form of the English possessive is “s”, although with more than one possessor, it could be “s” or just ‘ ’, like with “Chris’ pen.” In any case, it is attached to the possessor. Its pronunciation can also vary, of course, depending on the sound that precedes it. Here it is pronounced as a /z/. And, oh yes, regarding its syntax, the possessor precedes the possession–here, the book. (p. 39)

The second part of the answer indicated how use and meaning is socially constructed and context-dependent, and the ability of the teacher in differentiating different uses of the same form:

Its meaning is obvious, isn’t it? It means ownership. Diane owns the book. Wait a minute. I can see that “Diane’s book” is ambiguous. Diane could be the author of the book, and so I can say “Diane’s book” about a book I possessed that you wrote. I suppose, then, that the “’s” can show authorship as well. As for its use, it is used when I want to show ownership or authorship, I guess. (p. 39)

In sum, one can know about a language by naming and illustrating linguistic structures; however, if one cannot use the target language in real life for real communication, and can only identify the structures in school type activities, then it cannot be said that the
person has the language. Table 2.5 below summarises the difference between knowing a language and having a language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowing a language</th>
<th>Having a language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student can:</td>
<td>The student can:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• name and illustrate linguistic structures</td>
<td>• use the target language to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• answer questions in school type activities, for example, fill in the gaps, multiple choice tests, matching exercises, rewrite exercises, and referential questions</td>
<td>• respond to the original communication purpose of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can use the structure if specifically asked</td>
<td>• can use a variety of linguistic structures in a variety of contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following section moves on to describe how constructivist approaches can assist learners in having a language.

**Constructivism**

Many theorists ground their arguments in constructivism and two epistemological theorists: Piaget and Vygotsky. While Piaget’s research focused on cognitive constructivist theories, Vygotsky focused on social constructivist theories. Vygotsky argued that children have the potential for learning—”zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). When children have mental and physical potential, they can gain relevant knowledge under the guidance of or collaboration with a more capable peer or adult in a social context. What is learned as a skill or knowledge is determined in the social context by the individual and later can be used while solving problems. Vygotsky (1978) argued that the zone of proximal development, in contrast to actual development, refers to development that has not yet matured but it is in the process of maturation. Here, learning and development consist of a variety of abilities that go beyond single skill development to the ability to be able to function in different contexts and, since it is in the process of development, it is more often than not, beyond the learner’s skills to mature alone. Adult guidance or a more capable peer’s help is necessary. This process “involves a kind of “scaffolding” process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976, p. 90).
One essential element of a constructivist approach is learning by doing. It is believed that learners construct their own meaning by actively engaging in authentic activity in a meaningful context (Howland et al., 2011). However, unlike scientific learning, a language cannot be learned by doing. Despite the fact that it is argued that language is a tool, it is not a tangible tool that can be learned hands-on. It can only be learned by using it in context—learning by using. Therefore, any constructivist language learning activity must provide opportunities for learners to use the target language in context and develop a rich repertoire of linguistic and functional knowledge through learning by using. This constituent element is the opportunity that EFL learners lack in contrast to ESL learners. With the provision of this opportunity, the gap between ESL and EFL environments will be bridged and the opportunities for language acquisition to occur in the EFL context will increase.

Some models of constructivist approaches include situated learning or situated cognition (Brown et al., 1989a), cognitive apprenticeship (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989), anchored instruction (Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990a), legitimate peripheral participation (Jean Lave & Wenger, 1991) and authentic learning (Herrington & Oliver, 2000; Herrington et al., 2010). The key objective of these theories is to provide learners with opportunities to learn in situ and overcome the inert knowledge problem. Here, the aim is to enable students to deal with everyday problems and situations by using their knowledge like a tool, as experts do (Brown et al., 1989a; Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990a; Herrington et al., 2010; Lebow & Wager, 1994; Pea & Gomez, 1992b). Hence, the primary purpose of instruction is coping with problems of everyday life rather than enabling learners to answer questions in exams (Cram, Hedberg, Gosper, & Dick, 2011; Renkl et al., 1996).

Despite the fact that these models differ in principle, the consensus is that learning is situated and knowledge is constructed in a social environment through collaborative meaningful authentic activity.

Jonassen (1999) argues that constructivist learning environments can be constructed to support question, issue, case, project, or problem-based learning. All of these learning activities differ in depth of complexity, however, they all serve “... the same
assumption about active, constructive, and authentic learning” (p. 219). Jonassen elaborates this by claiming that methods based on a constructivist philosophy:

- have unstated goals and constraints,
- possess multiple solutions, solution paths, or no solutions at all,
- possess multiple criteria for evaluating solutions,
- present uncertainty about which concepts, rules, and principles are necessary for the solution or how they are organised,
- offer no general rules or principles for describing or predicting the outcome of most cases, and
- require learners to make judgements about the problem and to defend their judgements by expressing personal opinions or beliefs. (p. 219)

Jonassen (1999) concludes that, unlike instructivist learning where learners reproduce what they are taught, constructivist learning approaches engage conceptual and strategic thinking (p. 236).

**Instructivist versus constructivist learning approaches**

Instructivist and constructivist learning approaches constitute poles on a continuum rather than a dichotomy. It has been argued that most traditional school work is not authentic, and activities are only relevant within the context of the classroom (Strobel, Wang, Weber & Dyehouse, 2013) where most tasks are well-structured focusing on knowledge transmission (Jonassen, 1997). Constructivists argue that learning and thinking are situated in social contexts, where learning is done collaboratively through authentic activities that support learners to achieve higher levels of thinking, knowledge and skills (Gulbrandsen, Walsh, Fulton, Azulai, & Tong, 2015; Van Bommel, Kwakman, & Boshuizen, 2012). Based on the literature review and the discussion in this chapter, Table 2.6 below summarises the key differences between instructivist and constructivist approaches:
Table 2.6: The differences between instructivist and constructivist teaching approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructivist</th>
<th>Constructivist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure of activities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constructivist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- well-defined</td>
<td>- ill-defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- well-structured</td>
<td>- ill-structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- short tasks (completed within hours)</td>
<td>- takes sustained period of time (takes days or weeks to complete)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- artificial</td>
<td>- real world relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method of instruction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constructivist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- direct instructions</td>
<td>- discovery learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- knowledge reproduction</td>
<td>- learning by doing (project, problem, task, or activity based learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- individual learning</td>
<td>- collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- repetition</td>
<td>- coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- drill and practice</td>
<td>- scaffolding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teacher centred</td>
<td>- modelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- linear – from easy to difficult</td>
<td>- learner centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rule based</td>
<td>- unstructured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge development</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constructivist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- transmitted</td>
<td>- constructed in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reproduced</td>
<td>- embedded in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- abstract</td>
<td>- complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- simplified</td>
<td>- diversity of outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- one correct answer</td>
<td>- diversity in meaning making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- school type (symbolic thinking)</td>
<td>- reflects the way that it will be used in real life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- leads to inert knowledge</td>
<td>- active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- real world relevant</td>
<td>- distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skill development</strong></td>
<td><strong>Constructivist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- school type</td>
<td>- real life type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- focus on one skill</td>
<td>- integrated skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fosters lower order skills</td>
<td>- problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- domain specific</td>
<td>- reflects external world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- real life type</td>
<td>- fosters higher order skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of the teacher</th>
<th><strong>Constructivist</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- expert</td>
<td>- co-learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- transmitter</td>
<td>- collaborator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- responsible for determining and covering the items in the curriculum</td>
<td>- facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- instructor</td>
<td>- guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- instructor</td>
<td>- coaching &amp; scaffolding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of the learner</th>
<th><strong>Constructivist</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- passive receiver</td>
<td>- active learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- reproducer of knowledge</td>
<td>- collaborator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- active learner</td>
<td>- inquirer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- directs his/her own learning process</td>
<td>- teacher (peer support - scaffolding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- meaning maker (knowledge)</td>
<td>- meaning maker (knowledge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructivist</td>
<td>Constructivist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td><strong>producer</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• transmitted knowledge</td>
<td>• performance (e.g. participation, taking on responsibilities, giving presentations, peer support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• memorised facts</td>
<td>• products (e.g. portfolios, posters, videos, brochures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• orients towards the expected outcome (how far the student reached the predetermined ends)</td>
<td>• orients towards the diversity of outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• focus on individual performance</td>
<td>• holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• peer assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity types</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• puzzles</td>
<td>• Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fill in the gaps</td>
<td>• Project based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• matching</td>
<td>• Task-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• multiple choice</td>
<td>• Activity-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• referential questions</td>
<td>• Inquiry-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Case-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Case-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Experiential learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 2.6 above, the instructivist approach is mainly teacher directed and well-structured where direct instructions are given that mainly lead to knowledge reproduction. Willis (1996), for example, points out that in language classrooms students produce a given form or pattern, or express a given function, rather than saying what they feel or want to say. Van den Branden (2006) contends that in many language classrooms teachers nominate the topic, control the turn-taking to speak and answer questions, decide how to do the activities, and evaluate the responses of the learners. Walsh (2002) summarised the features of discourse in EFL classrooms and indicated teacher centeredness and the instructivist structure as follows:

1. Teachers largely control the topic of discussion.
2. Teachers often control both content and procedure.
3. Teachers usually control who may participate and when.
4. Students take their cues from teachers.
5. Role relationships between teachers and learners are unequal.
6. Teachers are responsible for managing the interaction which occurs.
7. Teachers talk most of the time.

8. Teachers modify their talk to learners.

9. Learners rarely modify their talk to teachers.

10. Teachers ask questions (to which they know the answers) most of the time. (p. 4)

Constructivist approaches, on the other hand, involve ill-defined structures, learning by doing, and pedagogy that reflects the way knowledge will be used in real life.

Although the method of instruction in constructivist approaches is primarily based on problem solving, this does not mean that no instruction at all is given, but this is a frequent misunderstanding of the approach, particularly as it relates to language education.

**The place of instruction in authentic activities in language education**

Research involving the role and place of instruction in language education has largely focused on whether and to what extent instruction has any effect on gaining a foreign or second language. In this regard, some studies have compared tutored learners to untutored learners (e.g., Ellis, 1997; Pica, 2005), some have focused on comparing focus-on-form to focus-on-forms (e.g., Laufer, 2006), while other studies have focused on comparing direct instruction (e.g., PPP) with enquiry-based approaches (such as task-based, problem-based, and project-based) (e.g. Beretta & Davies, 1985; De La Fuente, 2002). Despite the fact that some researchers argue that there is no need for direct instruction in order for one to learn a language (e.g., Nunan, 1995), most agree it is almost impossible for adult learners in EFL contexts to gain a language without instruction.

In EFL contexts, lack of exposure to the target language outside the classroom is one of the major reasons for not being able to gain a foreign language without instruction. Especially if the person is aiming at higher education and there is a limited time to develop relevant language skills along with academic skills (as it is in this research context), instruction gains more importance (see Long, 1983, 1985, 1991 for how
instruction speeds up the rate of learning). Moreover, in situations like the one in this research, where learners have years of experience in learning English, appropriate instructional guidance can eliminate fossilised interlanguage grammars; nonetheless, using direct instructional guidance exclusively through form-focused activities may result in largely inert knowledge of the language rather than robust and usable knowledge.

Gaining robust knowledge is described in more depth in the next section.

**Meaningful learning and engagement**

English is being taught as a foreign language in K-12 schools and universities in North Cyprus. However, in many cases (as in K-12 education) schools do not have any curricula regarding teaching English. The contents pages of course books (for example, New Headway, Success or Pathfinder) are used as the curriculum and the only target for the students is to pass exams. Sometimes K-12 children are given external exams such as KET (Key English Test) and PET (Preliminary English Test) and university students are given the Proficiency, IELTS, or TOEFL tests. Students’ success in these tests is accepted as proof of knowledge. However, despite the fact that these students know how to take tests and be successful in them, they cannot use the language for communication in the real world environment.

With this in mind, the aim of education should be to help learners gain problem solving skills rather than simply transmitting book bound knowledge that is followed by testing the retention of the transmitted knowledge (Moursund, 2003).

When education systems orient towards completing standardised tests or memorised information, knowledge and skills gained at school remain detached from everyday experience. In this regard, in order to make learning more meaningful to the learner, educational technology can provide constructivist learning environments where it is used as a tool to learn with rather than learn from. When these conditions are met, knowledge construction occurs rather than reproduction (Howland et al., 2011).

Another downfall of course book centred education is that if students are led to read textbook chapters in order to complete fact-based worksheets, they would conclude
that social studies is useful only for locating facts and that the purpose of reading is to answer questions. To overcome such misperceptions, learners need to address real problems and relate history and citizenship to everyday life. This will enable them to become more motivated as reading will be seen as a skill worth expending the required effort (Parsons & Ward, 2011).

Clayden, Desforges, Mills and Rawson (1994) give an example from mathematics. They argue that while most 12-year-old students can solve decontextualised equations such as ‘225÷15’, they find it difficult to solve word problems such as “if a gardener has 225 bulbs to set equally in 15 beds how many bulbs will there be in each bed?” (p. 165). However, Herrington et al. (2010) criticise the form of many such word problems and argue that this type of question does not necessarily make sense to the learner—thus learners see no reason to engage in such an activity. The authors contend that word problems often lack critical elements of meaningful and realistic problem solving and conclude that authentic activities must reflect the cognitive authenticity that would provide opportunities for learners to think and act as an expert would in everyday practice.

Meaningful activities go beyond merely contextualising learning. Meaningful activities also provide motivational factors that effectively engage learners in the learning process (Belland, Kim & Hannafin, 2013). Woolf and Quinn (2009) suggest that “…the higher the value the learner places on a learning activity, the greater the engagement and persistence in learning” (p. 27). The authors also advise that “situated learning environments need to be broad enough for learning activities to be sufficiently flexible so that all learners can pursue activities that are personally meaningful to them” (p. 27).

Jonassen (2000) suggests that students may not take well-structured activities seriously. Students enjoy challenges appropriate to their ZPD (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2011). While too demanding tasks will frustrate them, too easy activities will bore them; however, it is not possible to turn a boring task into an interesting one just by adding a few interesting details (Mayer, 1998, p. 57). Jonassen points out that teenagers do not like to be told what to do. They like to choose their own path. In well-defined problems there is only one path to the solution; however, ill-
defined activities consist of multiple paths and complex outcomes where there is no right or wrong path (Herrington et al., 2010; Jonassen, 2000).

Apart from these external factors, intrinsic motivation is also crucial. This affects the amount of time and effort that a learner spends on solving a problem (Abuhamedeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2011). In this regard, Jonassen (2000) raises the importance of self-confidence and notes that if students believe that they are able to solve the problem, they “think harder and process material more deeply … if [they] do not believe in their ability to solve problems, they will … not exert sufficient cognitive effort and therefore not succeed” (p. 71).

The Council of Europe (2001) argues that learners choose to use their mother tongue and suggests that learners should “accept the use of the target language rather than the easier and more natural mother tongue to carry out meaning-focused tasks” (p. 157). In so doing, learners actively get involved in meaningful communication where they “comprehend, negotiate and express meaning in order to achieve a communicative goal” (p. 158). Further, Herrington et al. (2003) notes that learners can be given realistic roles in authentic activities. If they accept the scenario and their roles and carry out the activity accordingly, their engagement increases and thus knowledge construction is enhanced. However, the authors point out that learners may feel frustrated in the early weeks of engagement and thus more support is needed to help students engage in the intentional learning processes.

To sum up, authentic activities are meaningful and engaging if they have depth, complexity, and duration relevant to the level of learners and if they are worth solving for the learners. While designing an authentic activity, it is suggested to take the following elements from the perspective of the learners into consideration: a) why is this problem worth solving? b) for what realistic purpose? c) in which particular situation? and d) what is my role in solving this problem? In this respect, Herrington and Oliver (2000) have proposed a pedagogical approach for the appropriate implementation of authentic learning, described in more detail below.
**Principles of authentic learning environments**

Authentic learning environments provide opportunities to the learner to observe, employ, and explore expert strategies in context (Collins et al., 1989), in collaboration with more capable people, and to develop knowledge and skills in context that will be useful in real life (Belland, 2014; Collins, 1988). In order to guide teachers to design authentic learning environments, Herrington and Oliver (2000) outlined nine critical characteristics of authentic learning environments:

1. Provide authentic contexts that reflect the way the knowledge will be used in real life
2. Provide authentic activities
3. Provide access to expert performances and the modelling of processes
4. Provide multiple roles and perspectives
5. Support collaborative construction of knowledge
6. Promote reflection to enable abstractions to be formed
7. Promote articulation to enable tacit knowledge to be made explicit
8. Provide coaching and scaffolding by the teacher at critical times
9. Provide for authentic assessment of learning within the tasks. (p. 25)

Further research by this team of researchers focussed more specifically on the second characteristic: designing authentic activities, and it is this that has particular relevance in foreign language learning environments.

The following section will give information about each of the characteristics of authentic activities along with a brief literature review and design guidelines for each characteristic.
## Characteristics of authentic activities

Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) suggested a number of characteristics to be considered for the successful design of an authentic activity. Table 2.7 below lists the characteristics and illustrates some of the supportive research:

**Table 2.7: Critical characteristics of authentic activities by Herrington et al. (2003)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of authentic activities (Herrington, Oliver and Reeves, 2003)</th>
<th>Supporter researchers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Authentic activities have real world relevance</td>
<td>Clarke (1989); Doughty and Long (2003); Felix (2002); Huckin (1988); Jonassen (1999); Jordan (1997); Moursund (2003); Nunan (2004); Willis and Willis (2007);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Authentic activities are ill-defined, requiring students to define the tasks and sub-tasks needed to complete the activity</td>
<td>Berge et al. (2004); Cram et al. (2011); Huckin (1988); Jonassen (2000); Kitchener (1983); Moursund (2003); Schrooten (2006); Weiss (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Authentic activities comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over a sustained period of time</td>
<td>Breen (1985, 1987); Huckin (1988); Kitchener (1983); Laurier (2000); Moursund (2003); Schrooten (2006); Van den Branden (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources</td>
<td>Breen (1985); Kitchener (1983); Schrooten (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate</td>
<td>Ellis (1997); Felix (2002); Henderson, Huang, Grant and Henderson (2009); Hou (2011); Jonassen (1999); Long (2003); Schrooten (2006); Van den Branden (2006); Wong et al. (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect</td>
<td>Doughty and Williams (1998); Ellis (1997); Howland et al. (2011); Kramsch (1993); Nunan (1995, 2004); Schrooten (2006); Willis and Willis (2007); Wong et al. (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Authentic activities can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain specific outcomes</td>
<td>Lombardi (2007); Wong et al. (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment</td>
<td>Choi and Hannafin (1995); Cumming and Maxwell (1999); Felix (2000, 2002, 2005); Frey et al. (2012); Herrington and Herrington (2006); Laurier (2000); Reeves (2006); Van den Branden (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Authentic activities yield polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else</td>
<td>Felix (2002); Schrooten (2006); Cho, Lee, and Jonassen (2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following section briefly describes each characteristic.

### Critical characteristics of authentic activities

1. **Authentic activities have real world relevance**

One of the key characteristics of authentic activities is having real world relevance (Herrington et al., 2003). In many cases, school activities are decontextualised from the real world activity that requires the use of knowledge and skill. For example, problems in mathematics set in the context of filling or maintaining a swimming pool. Students may be given problems, such as:

   A swimming pool is 15ft by 30ft and an average of 5ft in depth. It takes 25 minutes longer to fill than to drain the pool. If it can be drained at a rate of 15 ft³/mins faster than it can be filled, what is the drainage rate?

Many learners cannot relate the knowledge or solution to their life unless, perhaps, they work for a pool company after school. Designing the task in such a way to reflect real world activities is essential so that the learner can relate what is being learned to his/her own context and therefore sees a purpose for learning and internalising the taught knowledge. This suggests that learning activities at school must provide learners the opportunity to make connections to the world around them and be able to actively use the knowledge in the real world environment.

In contrast to the pool problem, a calorie problem can provide a similar learning experience and provide necessary conditions for learners to relate taught knowledge outside the school:

   Collect and collate information about the eating habit of people in your society and provide suggestions for how to have healthier eating habits and life styles.
The task above is similar to the pool problem in a number of ways. The learners must use their mathematics knowledge to calculate the difference between calories taken and burnt and to find out what is going to happen after a certain amount of time. The calorie problem requires learners to consider the task from different perspectives, for example, the people’s sex, age, weight, daily physical activity, and the calories taken per day. While considering these, the learner calculates the calories taken in and calories burnt by physical activity. In this regard, the learner calculates what is going to happen to one’s body if taken calories are more than the burnt calories.

Such activities not only resemble real world relevance, in the sense that learners can relate to their personal lives, but they also do not prescribe to the learners the route they need to follow in accomplishing the task.

2. Authentic activities are ill-defined, requiring students to define the tasks and sub-tasks needed to complete the activity

Activities in the real world are not well-defined to individuals. They are complex and the end result is not known at the beginning of the activity. The term ill-defined does not suggest that the activity should be “badly defined or badly described” (Herrington, n.d.) to the learner but that the solution or pathway is not obvious. In this respect, while well-structured problems have “absolutely correct and knowable” solutions, ill-structured problems may have “conflicting assumptions, evidence, and opinion that may lead to different solutions” (Kitchener 1983, 223). In other words, “the ill-structured nature of instructional design problems means that not only are there multiple paths towards a ‘solution’, but that there are multiple interpretations and solutions as well” (Bennett, Harper, & Hedberg, 2002).

There is an effective procedure for solving well-structured problems. Kitchener (1983) defines the characteristics of well-structured problems under two strands: “a) there is only one correct, final solution, and b) the solution is guaranteed by using a specific procedure” (p. 224). Many of the form-focused, school type activities in language education are well-structured and have only one correct answer. For example, a gap that comes after “to” requires a verb and after “for” requires a noun: I am here to …watch…. a film. / I am here for …watching…a film.
Well-defined activities can be illustrated as multiple choice tests, fill in the gap activities, reading comprehension, matching activities, and product writing. In Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) environments, popular programs such as Hot Potatoes provide the opportunity to develop these types of activities easily. Well-defined or well-structured problems, where alternative arguments or new evidence are not required, do not foster higher order thinking skills. In contrast, ill-defined complex tasks require students to make judgements and communicate personal opinions or beliefs about the problem (Berge et al., 2004) and thus enhances the development of higher order skills (Jonassen, 2000).

Jonassen (2000) synthesized the characteristics of well-structured and ill-structured problems as shown in Table 2.8:

Table 2.8: Characteristics of well-structured and ill-structured problems (Jonassen, 2000, p. 67)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well-structured activities</th>
<th>Ill-structured activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Present all elements of the problem to the learners</td>
<td>• Possess problem elements that are unknown or not known with any degree of confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Require the application of a limited number of regular and well-structured rules and principles that are organized in predictive and prescriptive ways</td>
<td>• Possess multiple solutions, solution paths, or no solutions at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have knowable, comprehensible solutions where the relationship between decision choices and all problem states is known or probabilistic</td>
<td>• Possess multiple criteria for evaluating solutions, so there is uncertainty about which concepts, rules, and principles are necessary for the solution and how they are organized</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Often require learners to make judgments and express personal opinions or beliefs about the problem, so ill-structured problems are uniquely human interpersonal activities</td>
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Moreover, if one aims to scaffold students to develop within their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and further, then instructional designs must provide appropriate challenges to learners so that they can push the limits of their abilities to higher levels (Berge et al., 2004). Undoubtedly, ill-defined activities will provide relevant challenges to the learner and, together with the scaffolding and coaching of the teacher and others, they will facilitate the development of skills and knowledge (Belland, 2014). Nonetheless, the difficulty level of activities will influence students’ motivation. While complex, demanding activities may cause frustration, extremely easy, simple-response activities will bore learners. Therefore, while considering and designing the level of complexity, difficulty, and ill-structuredness of an activity, the
zone of proximal development of learners must be taken into consideration (Alfieri, Brooks, Aldrich, & Tenenbaum, 2011) and motivational scaffolding must be provided (Belland et al., 2013). Indeed, any authentic learning activity must take learners’ prior knowledge into account (Berge et al., 2004; Jonassen, 2000; Weiss, 2003).

The advantages of using ill-defined activities in educational environments are numerous. Cho and Jonassen (2002), for instance, showed that communication patterns in teams differed when solving well-structured and ill-structured problems and that groups solving ill-structured problems produce more extensive arguments in support of their solutions (cf., Berge et al., 2004). Berge and colleagues contend that ill-defined activities lead to the production of sound arguments in group discussions where learners argue to justify decisions and solutions. These arguments suggest that ill-defined activities can provide the necessary conditions for meaningful extensive use of the target language in context.

3. Authentic activities comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over a sustained period of time

Everyday problems are complex and dynamic (Herrington et al., 2003) and the fact that factors and aspects of an activity change over time must be taken into consideration (Jonassen, 2000). Such conditions require learners to spend mental and interactional effort over a sustained period of time while defining tasks and subtasks, and using and developing a variety of knowledge and skills.

Complexity and the time spent on activities have significant positive effects on students’ development (Berge et al., 2004). Such activities would normally be undertaken over weeks rather than minutes or hours. Throughout an activity, learners need a sufficient amount of time to go through a questioning process such as: Why am I doing this? How am I going to do it? Who am I targeting? What (else) do I need to do? Where will I do it? and What is this activity aiming to teaching me? and make decisions accordingly in order to deal with complex tasks. Besides meeting the demands of an authentic activity, this type of questioning gives the learner ownership of the problem solving process through the decision-making that is often denied when teachers provide step-by-step procedures and instructions. It makes the activity authentic and educational for the learner by enabling learners to gain higher order thinking skills (Moursund, 2003) in comparison to, for example, product writing.
where ideas are brainstormed in class and the activity is completed within one or two hours. The knowledge and skills gathered through complex tasks can help to increase retention and develop students’ abilities to analyse and solve novel problems.

4. **Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources**

Constructivist environments provide the opportunity for learners to create their own meaning rather than achieving pre-determined ends (Herrington et al., 2003). In constructivist learning environments, students have the opportunity to research the selected topic in detail from different perspectives and orient towards questions like *why, how, what, who,* and *where* and construct their own meaning. An authentic learning activity requires learners to communicate ideas and meaning and meta-communicate about the language and about problems and solutions when learning the language (Breen, 1985). In this regard, providing opportunities for students to examine the task from different perspectives, such as the expectations of the audience, developing authorship skills, focusing on content, meaning, form, function (how language and its forms functions in context), and process, will create the necessary conditions for learners to construct robust knowledge (Raimes, 1991). During this process, using a variety of resources will expose learners to the different uses of the target language and will facilitate the language acquisition process.

Ellis (2012) argues that focusing on different perspectives, for example, negotiation of meaning, negotiation of form, focus-on-form, uptake, modified output, and awareness of weaknesses, urges learners to modify their output and this, in turn, creates conditions for acquisition to occur.

English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) learners are also expected to develop skills in data collection, data interpretation, giving presentations, computer literacy, collaboration, and participation in discussions. Thus, while designing a learning activity, the development of sub skills must also be taken into consideration. This can be achieved by orienting students to examine the task from different perspectives using a variety of resources.

5. **Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate**

Collaboration is a constituent element of authentic learning. As pointed out by Petraglia (1998), knowledge can be “situated in social activities … [and thus] students
should be encouraged to work with others” (p. 54). Collaboration cultivates collectivism and collaborative work rather than individualism and provides the opportunity to achieve complex goals (Henderson, Huang, Grant & Henderson, 2009). For this reason, this constituent element provides the necessary conditions for social constructivism as it is integral to the task, both within the course and real world (Herrington, Oliver & Reeves, 2003).

Having students engage in collaborative learning activities has a number of benefits. For example, when collaboration is coupled with reflection and articulation it provides the opportunity for self and peer assessment (Belland, 2014; Frey, Schmitt & Allen, 2012). Learners’ assessing their own progress and skills in comparison to their peers “assists them in identifying their relative strengths and weaknesses to improve their own learning” (Petraglia, 1998, p. 55) and provides the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences with their peers. Moreover, Howland, Jonassen and Marra (2011) argue that writing in collaboration can facilitate positive relationships among students that increase participation, lead to the use of more sources, and increase varied points of view.

6. **Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect**

Authentic activities provide the opportunity for individuals to reflect on their learning processes. Through reflection, students can better develop higher order skills, such as critical thinking, reasoning, decision making, and problem solving (Herrington & Oliver, 2000). This critical inquiry can be at a metacognitive level or epistemic cognitive level.

Jonassen (2000) describes metacognition as “the awareness of how one learns, the ability to judge the difficulty of a task, the monitoring of understanding, the use of information to achieve a goal, and the assessment of learning progress” (p. 70)–all processes that require reflections. Reflection on learning to learn will not only help individuals to understand their learning habits and how they learn but, when it is done collaboratively, will also allow them to learn new strategies from their peers and further develop their cognitive skills. This aligns well with Vygotskian social constructivist theories and scaffolding. When learners’ reflection on their learning and problem solving processes is accessible to others, less capable learners will compare their abilities and learn from their peers.
In epistemic cognition, individuals “interpret the nature of a problem and … define the limits of any strategy to solving it” (Kitchener, 1983, p. 226). Epistemic cognition gives learners the opportunity to articulate alternative paths towards a solution and determine which path to follow collectively. Since ill-defined problems do not have one correct answer, the path that the participants choose will take them to a solution that is better than the other available solutions. Thus, learners should be encouraged to reflect on the learning strategies that they used throughout the activity and also on alternative pathways and solutions to the problem at hand. Larsen-Freeman (2003) argues that in SLA noticing is used interchangeably with awareness, consciousness, detection, and attention. Language awareness can be reached via student reflection and articulation on both the processes and the structures learned throughout the activity. Because this process can make gained knowledge and skills explicit to the learners, concerns about authentic activities may be replaced by satisfaction and confidence in their ability to make meaning.

7. Authentic activities can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain specific outcomes

Authentic activities enable gained knowledge and skills to be extended beyond a specific discipline, which encourages “students to adopt diverse roles and think in interdisciplinary terms” (Lombardi, 2007, p. 3). This, in turn, provides conditions and opportunities to develop essential skills and sub-skills. Learners studying in EGAP programs also need to develop skills that go beyond pure language skills. Some of these skills are critical thinking, computer literacy, and data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting. Form-focused language teaching methods, for example PPP, focus on transferring language knowledge and do not provide opportunities to develop relevant sub-skills that will help students in their academic life. Thus, authentic activities provide optimal opportunities for the knowledge and skills gained to be integrated and applied across disciplines, which leads beyond domain specific outcomes.

8. Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment

Authentic assessment means that assessment is seamlessly integrated with a major task “in a manner that reflects real world assessment, rather than separate artificial assessment removed from the nature of the task” (Herrington et al., 2003, p. 4). Information transfer, or lower order learning of facts, can easily be tested because there
may be only one correct answer. Traditional tests are oriented to test students’ level of knowledge reproduction through short-answer questions (Moursund, 2003). Reeves (2006) has noted that “instructors tend to focus their assessment strategies on what is easy to measure rather than on what is important” (p. 294), and Choi and Hannafin (1995) point out that, in traditional learning environments, “skills are taught in the manner measured on tests rather than how they are used in everyday contexts” (p. 63). This is also reflected in the language domain. Standardised tests such as Proficiency, TOEFL, and IELTS, focus on knowledge what is easy to test and that is detached from its everyday context. On the other hand, authentic activities in authentic learning environments do not have a right or wrong answer and sometimes only have a solution that reflects the best-known practice at the time.

Choi and Hannafin (1995) contend that assessment in authentic activities:

…places emphasis on flexibility in higher-level thinking skills rather than recollection of a formal body of knowledge.... Assessments stimulate students to think, to react to new situations, to review and revise work, to evaluate their own and others’ work, and to communicate results in verbal and visual ways.... They cause learners to invoke knowledge as a tool to manipulate and interpret novel circumstances, not simply to verify those previously encountered. (p. 64)

Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to adopt roles similar to those awaiting them in real-life settings. Therefore, unlike more instructivist learning environments that assess the extent of knowledge transmission from teacher to student and the extent of a student’s recall of knowledge within a given time limit, assessment in authentic activities orients towards assessing higher-order thinking skills of students (Herrington et al., 2010), portfolios, performances, and contributions to the problem solving processes that go beyond classroom practice. Assessment is authentic if it “mirror[s] some reality outside of the classroom” (Frey et al., 2012, p. 5). It is most unlikely for anyone in real life to be paid to fill out multiple choice tests (Frey et al., 2012). Generally people are paid to address problems in context and they maintain their jobs through performance and contribution to the problem solving process.
Portfolios enable students to monitor their progress and thus give them the ability to direct their own learning processes. Portfolios reflect the entire body of work and achievements of students. Materials in portfolios can be paper-based or electronic. In the language learning domain, for instance, the Council of Europe (2001), in their document titled Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (see Appendix 1 for a summary of CEFR) has formulated “can do statements” that can be used to indicate areas that the learner has achieved mastery over and their ability in using the target language. Ellis (1997) argues that “the main way of investigating L2 acquisition is by collecting and describing samples of learner language” (p. 15). This argument aligns well with Frey et al.’s (2012) statement about authentic assessment: “one characteristic of authentic assessment is that students must provide a defence of their work” (p. 5). Authentic assessment can be easily guided by the CEFR “can do statements”. Students can audio or video record their presentations and include them in their portfolios; students can include a copy of their chat logs and copies of written work as such essays, reports, and letters.

9. **Authentic activities create polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else**

Authentic activities not only allow for the practice of knowledge gained in class but they also result in “polished products valuable in their own right” (Herrington et al., 2003, p. 63). Authentic activities fundamentally encourage students to orient towards creating their own message and meaning in their own way rather than reaching pre-set ends. In other words, in authentic activities learners communicate their own meaning suitable to the objectives of the activity without using structures that the teacher had in mind prior to the activity, as it is in form-focused activities. However, form-focused approaches target teaching linguistic items one by one, and once one structure is learned, learning is directed to the next item on the list. For example, once the students learn to form sentences in simple present tense, this must mean that they are ready to form sentences in simple past tense. If not, the targeted structure must be recycled to make sure that it was *learned*.

In this regard, the learning event in authentic learning becomes an opportunity for the learners to use their repertoire of L2 knowledge in context and to achieve communication of their own meaning. The activity is completed with a product that is
polished and professional that can be shared with an authentic audience for an authentic purpose.

**10. Authentic activities allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome**

Real world relevant problems have ill-defined structures and do not have a distinct, clear solution that can be anticipated at the beginning of an activity. Thus, “authentic activities allow a range and diversity of outcomes open to multiple solutions of an original nature, rather than a single correct response obtained by the application of rules and procedure” (Herrington et al., 2003, p. 48). In order to attain a solution, learners need to spend mental and interactional effort over a sustained period of time and employ a variety of decision-making procedures while defining and completing tasks and sub tasks that lead learners to attain diverse solutions.

**Conclusion**

A critical reading of the main theorists in education, as described in the literature review above, reveals that school-type activities such as fill-in-the-gaps, multiple choice, or comprehension questions that focus on forms in the EFL context, inhibits learners from gaining robust knowledge that can be transferred to real-life. Confining language use and exposure to the language classroom disadvantages learners who need to acquire a skill that can be used in real-life situations. This study attempts to address this problem (described in detail in Chapter 1) by using the model of authentic activities as a starting point to identify design principles that can guide the development of a pedagogical solution.

The following chapter describes the methodology that was used to guide this research.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Overview

This chapter describes the methodology and inquiry process used throughout the study. First, it gives a rationale for the use of design-based research as the research approach of this study and how it aligns with the goals of this research. It then describes how the approach was employed, including detailed information on data collection methods, how the data were analysed, and ethical issues.

Rationale for the research approach

In 2006, Reeves strongly criticized Bernard et al. (2004), a study that examined student achievement in distance education courses in comparison to traditional classroom instruction. Reeves (2006) argued that this study was an example of many such published comparative studies where results may be statistically significant but fall short in providing practitioners with guidelines to develop effective learning environments.

The situation in TESOL is similar. Leading journals in the field such as CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), CALICO (Computer-Assisted Language Instruction Consortium), and ReCALL (The Journal of the European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning) often feature studies that give information only on the relative success or failure of an electronic learning environment (whether online, stand alone, CD, or networked) in achieving learning outcomes. Some articles focus only on the technology itself by providing information on which specific program or web-based site, such as Facebook or wikis, was used to achieve the
learning outcome (Reeves & McKenney, 2013). Passig and Schwartz (2007) is an example of a study where face-to-face writing instruction was compared to online instruction while focusing solely on the use of a program called MS Groove. Similarly, a recent issue of CALICO (May, 2012) was devoted to Web 2.0 technologies related to language learning.

A detailed meta-analysis of similar comparative studies in TESOL was completed by Ellis (2012). Ellis argues that comparative studies tend to view teachers as “actors rather than as authors” (p. 52). In this regard, the sole role of the teacher is to implement the teaching method as it has been prescribed by theorists. Teachers are “expected to perform the ‘script’ dictated by the method rather than write their own script” (p. 52). However, Ellis argues that not only did the majority of these comparative studies show no significant difference, but also that there is no best method that can be implemented in all contexts to give the same result. Ellis concludes that teachers themselves must be the authors of their own teaching methods, drawing on principles and techniques appropriate to their own specific contexts for guidance.

Instead of conducting research that compares delivery methods, or testing the success or failure of software in practice, there is an urgent need to develop context-appropriate design principles and test these principles in practice while solving real educational problems (Reeves & McKenney, 2013). Any educational environment without sound pedagogical principles is arguably condemned to failure and thus any research on educational technology that has been designed without considering sound pedagogical principles may misguide practitioners. Therefore, instead of conducting simple comparative studies, researchers should aim at researching, developing, and refining design principles to be able to make the most of educational technology in practice (Reeves, 2000). Moreover, the design principles that arise from robust research can help practitioner teachers (as well as researchers) to develop effective electronic learning environments based on high quality pre-tested pedagogic principles.

The purpose of this research is not to compare face-to-face teaching to CALL or one e-learning environment to another in order to prove that one works better than the other. As argued by Reeves (1999), the emphasis should be on how to improve learning outcomes rather than to prove that one method works better than another. As such, this
research seeks to explore how foreign language learners and teachers conceptualise a pedagogy-driven, task-based, authentic learning activity in an interactive web-based learning environment in a blended fashion. In so doing, it refines existing design principles (provided in Table 2.7) to best address the problem at hand. With this research, both researchers and practitioners are provided with an adapted model (see Table 9.1) that would function well in similar contexts or can be used as a starting point to define and redefine principles suitable to their context.

One way of achieving this target is to employ design-based research (DBR) (Bell, 2004; Joseph, 2004; Sandoval & Bell, 2004; The Design-Based Collective, 2003; Wang & Hannafin, 2005), also referred to as design experiments (Brown, 1992), development research (Van den Akker, 1999), design research (Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczye, 2004; Edelson, 2002; Reeves, 2006), and educational design research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012). While each of these suggested models has a slight difference in focus, their underlying goals and approaches are similar (Wang & Hannafin, 2005).

**Research approach**

Design-based research (DBR) addresses educational problems in context and, in so doing, aims at both refining theory and enhancing practice while providing opportunities for professional development. Reeves (2006) argues that design-based research “integrates the development of solutions to practical problems in learning environments with the identification of reusable design principles” (p. 52). In this manner, Collins et al. (2004) argue that design-based research was developed to address issues in education such as:

- addressing theoretical questions about the nature of learning in context
- studying of learning phenomena in the real world rather than the laboratory
- going beyond narrow measures of learning, and
- deriving research findings from formative evaluation.
The distinction between DBR and other types of research approaches includes its recognition as “socially responsible research”, as noted by Reeves (2000). Reeves argues that many educational technologists focus on either basic or applied research. According to Reeves, researchers who focus on basic research give their attention to “extending fundamental understanding within a scientific field” and those who focus on applied research give their attention on “solving problems that confront an individual, a group, or a society at large” (p. 20). However, DBR offers sustained development and innovation in education (Bell, 2004) by both addressing real world problems and allowing for the refinement of a set of principles that can guide researchers and practitioners.

A number of researchers, for example, Reeves, Herrington and Oliver (2005); Reeves (2000); The Design-Based Collective (2003); and Wang and Hannafin (2005), have suggested a number of characteristics that identify DBR. Among these, the characteristics suggested by Reeves, Herrington and Oliver (2005) have guided this research. These characteristics are:

- A focus on broad-based, complex problems critical to higher education,
- The integration of known and hypothetical design principles with technological affordances to render plausible solutions to these complex problems,
- Rigorous and reflective inquiry to test and refine innovative learning environments as well as to reveal new design principles,
- Long-term engagement involving continual refinement of protocols and questions,
- Intensive collaboration among researchers and practitioners, and
- A commitment to theory construction and explanation while solving real-world problems. (p. 103)

Along with the characteristics themselves, it is crucial to know how these characteristics are best put into practice to be able to achieve the intended outcome.
This research used the model comprising four phases of DBR suggested by Reeves (2006) (see Figure 3.1 below) in two iterative cycles of enquiry.

![Diagram showing four phases of Design-Based Research (DBR): Phase 1: Analysis of practical problems by researchers and practitioners in collaboration; Phase 2: Development of solutions informed by existing design principles and technological innovations; Phase 3: Iterative cycles of testing and refinement of solutions in practice; Phase 4: Reflection to produce "design principles" and enhance solution implementation.]

According to Reeves (2006), **Phase 1** is used to identify real-world problems that are significant in educational settings, where solving these problems would increase the quality of education. While defining the problems, researchers use their own experience (if they are the practitioners), consult with other practitioners who may encounter the same or similar problems, and conduct an extensive literature review to explore the nature of the problem area.

After the determination of the problems, in **Phase 2** the literature is reviewed more purposefully to investigate how other researchers have addressed similar or parallel problems and to determine existing design principles that relate to the problem area. Based on both the literature review and consultations with practitioners in Phase 1, researchers can select existing design principles or combinations of them, or they can generate a new framework of draft principles to address the target problem. A proposed solution, or educational ‘intervention’, is then designed and developed as a learning environment, ready for implementation in Phase 3.

Once the theoretical framework is set, in **Phase 3** the learning intervention is created and the learning environment is put into practice. This is a testing and refinement process that is done in iterative cycles until the desired goal is achieved. By the end of this phase, the researchers' fine tune the research, for example they edit the design principles or make changes to the learning environment and conduct the cycle again. The second iterative cycle included 1 participant teacher and 4 students. During the second cycle, the researchers may need to go back to an earlier phase to redefine the
learning problem, refine the design principles, or retest the solutions in practice. Data is collected and analysed in this phase to address research questions guiding the research.

In the final **Phase 4**, researchers reflect on their analysis of data, and share their experiences and the outcome of their research in the form of refined design principles that can guide future educational practice. In this way, they contribute to both theory and practice.

**Appropriate research methods used in DBR**

A researcher pursuing a design-based research approach can use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods of inquiry (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington, & Okely, 2006; Reeves, 2000). This research employed qualitative research methods, principally because they enable researchers to draw meaningful explanations of events (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as they occur in natural settings (Kervin et al., 2006). These methods are appropriate to this study as it is based on the understanding of how students and teachers view task-based authentic learning in foreign language education in its natural setting. Kervin, et al. (2006), for example, argue that:

> Qualitative research ... is an approach that seeks to make sense of social phenomena as they occur in natural settings. Rather than setting up a carefully controlled environment ..., qualitative researchers may seek to understand what children feel about listening to music while they undertake classroom tasks or what images they see as they listen to different styles of music. (p. 37)

Thus, considering the research aim and the natural setting of language learning, qualitative research methods were considered appropriate to collect the data required to address the research questions.

Moreover, the research was based on the understanding of group actions and interactions (student-student, student-teacher, and student-computer program) that have arisen from the implementation of principles of authentic activities in blended-learning environments, and such understanding requires the interpretation of the researcher. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that “... interpretation comes via the
understanding of group actions and interactions. In both cases there is an inevitable ‘interpretation’ of meanings made both by the social actors and by the researcher” (p. 8). Therefore, in order to be able to draw meaningful explanations from the research, an interpretivist role has been engaged using qualitative research methods. However, engaging an interpretivist role should not necessarily be considered as having “interpretivist goals” (Reeve, 2000, p. 23). This research had principally “development goals” by having “... dual objectives of the developing creative approaches to solving human teaching, learning, and performance problems [in foreign language education] while at the same time [refining and adapting] a body of design principles that can guide future development efforts” (Reeves, 2000, p. 23).

Qualitative methods were also considered appropriate for the research because “words refer to a larger audience than numbers” (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 37). Miles and Huberman (1994) note that “words, especially organised into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader ... than pages of summarised numbers” (p. 1). Therefore, by using qualitative methods, it may be possible to reach a wider audience, namely the practitioners and teachers who would be in a position to implement the findings.

The section above summarised the rationale behind the choice of the research approach and method. However, it is also critical to mention that the selection of approach and method aligns with social constructivism and the nature of the theoretical frameworks of authentic learning and authentic activities used in this study. The next section describes the research methodology, including how the phases of DBR were enacted and how the research was conducted.

**Methodology**

**Phase 1: Analysis of problem area**

The first phase of the study comprised the identification and exploration of the problem area. The problems were identified through discussions and consultations with practitioners together with the researcher’s personal and professional experience, both as a student who studied English as a Foreign Language (EFL), a teacher of the
same context, and a developer of electronic environments for learning a foreign language (as described in Chapter 1).

Through both personal reflection and discussions with other practitioners and researchers, it became clear that there is a mismatch between what is being taught at school and what learners do with the language in real world, as students’ language learning remains at the sentence levels with respect to producing grammatically correct sentences rather than using the target language as a tool for communication. Clearly, something was missing or wrong in the pedagogical approach, as learners were expected to complete activities that are not typically performed in the real world. However, colleagues were unable to suggest clear alternative ways of shifting learners’ inert knowledge to robust knowledge so that learners could use language more effectively.

An extensive literature review was also conducted in Phase 1 (as presented in Chapter 2). The literature included a key report submitted to the administration of the school where the research was conducted. The report was written on behalf of an accrediting body, the European Association for Quality Language Services (EAQUALS), who visited the school (where the study was conducted) and observed lessons. In their report, it was explicitly mentioned that learners needed more opportunities to use the language realistically for better learning outcomes.

Using this information, the researcher was able to more clearly identify the issues related to language learning, particularly those related to lack of real world exposure to language use in real situations.

**Phase 2: Development of solution**

Based on the identified problems, a more intensive literature review was conducted to find possible solutions that other researchers may have suggested in overcoming the problem. In this sense, a search for an existing solution for the problem was undertaken, either one that was directly relevant to the problem area or one that was in a similar or related area.

No single solution or appropriate framework was identified in the literature review. However, Herrington, Oliver and Reeves’ (2003) framework on the critical
characteristics of authentic activities in higher education was found initially as the
most valuable to address the problem at hand. Although not specific to TESOL
learning environments per se, its generic design principles were considered a useful
starting point for the investigation. Thus, during the second phase of the DBR cycle,
the learning environment was designed based on the theoretical framework suggested
by Herrington et al. (2003), provided in Table 2.7, ready to be implemented in Phase 3.

The learning environment (described in detail in Chapter 4) was based on a scenario
consisting of a major task, publishing journal, and sub tasks, for example, producing
posters and videos. According to the scenario, the class was the editorial board of the
City Newsletter where the teacher was the Editor and the learners were the journalists.
As the major task, learners were required to conduct research and collect data on a
problem that had social significance and to propose a possible solution that would be
published as an article in the newsletter (Appendix 2). The subtasks were intended to
inform the audience further on the background of the issue or to create awareness
about other aspects of the issue, for example, a video on drink driving and its possible
consequences.

Moodle (https://moodle.org/) was used as the platform to design the online component
of the learning activity. It was a suitable platform for the learning environment as,
among other features, it provided the facility to design a graphical interface by using
animation makers such as Adobe Flash®, enabled students to participate in
asynchronous and synchronous chats, and provided file sharing functionality.
Moreover, as it is a free platform, using Moodle reduced the expenses associated with
designing the e-learning environment.

The characteristics of authentic learning environments were used as guiding
pedagogical principles to overcome the problems argued in Chapters 1 and 2. How
each characteristic guided the design of the learning environment is described in
Chapter 4 in detail. The following section affords information about the procedures
related to the implementation of the learning environment of the learning theory.

**Phase 3: Iterative cycles of implementation and refinement**
The third phase of the study was used to test the theoretical framework with the design artefact in practice and to collect the data required to address the research questions. In other words, this phase conducted “rigorous and reflective inquiry to test and refine” the innovative multimedia learning environment as well as to test and modify the existing principles and “define new design principles” (Reeves, 2000, p. 26). The methodology used to investigate the proposed solution is described in detail below.

**Research context**

This research focused on pre-university level English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) students in an EFL context. For this reason, it was appropriate for the research to be conducted at the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) English Preparatory School (EPS), which is an English medium university in North Cyprus. Students who apply to study at EMU need to provide documentation of their English language proficiency level, that is, students must accomplish a band of 500 in TOEFL and 5 in IELTS or they are required to pass the Proficiency Test given at EPS. Those students who are below the required level study at EPS until they reach the proficiency level.

EPS prepares students for academic life by giving them competency in the target language, English, and required academic skills. The program is intensive and while the school offers courses in A1, A2, and B1 levels (Council of Europe, 2001), successful students can study up to two courses in any one academic year.

Figure 3.2 illustrates the course alignment of EPS according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (The Council of Europe, 2001). In this respect, the first course, EPS101, is designed for beginner level students and targets the can do statements (The Council of Europe, 2001) indicated in A1 and A2 levels. The second course is EPS102 and it focuses on A2 and A2+. EPS103 consists of A2+ and B1 and EPS104 focuses on B1 and B1+ can do statements.
Students who complete EPS103 level have the right to take the Proficiency Test. Success in this examination, scoring 60% or more, enables them to go into the mainstream instruction program in the departments of their chosen field of study. Students who score below 60% go to their departments conditionally, in which case their score in the Proficiency Test determines how many hours of English support courses they take a week.

**Researcher’s role**

The researcher did not assume the role of a participant teacher in the course of the study and thus was not in any contact with the learners while implementing the learning environment. Kervin et al. (2006) identified five different possible roles that a researcher can be engaged in while observing (see Figure 3.3).

These roles range from being a non-participant to full participant. Throughout this research, while observing the participants, the identity of the researcher was known to...
the participants and the role of the researcher was one of limited interaction (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 85). The researcher interacted with the participants only if clarification on any technical aspects of the web-based program was required.

**Selection of participants**

A theoretical or purposive sampling approach was used for selecting the participants. This approach facilitated the identification of information-rich cases and enabled the researcher to study a case in-depth (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 1990). In this research, it was also believed that, since the accessible population represents the target population, the participants of this research would generally reflect how other students or teachers might respond to the activity if they had been involved in a similar task.

**Participant teachers' roles**

Three practitioner teachers and their classes participated in the research, two for the first cycle and one for the second cycle. The selection of the participant teachers and students were made, not only on theoretical grounds, but also to some extent on practical grounds in order to fit in with the practical timetabling requirements of the School.

During the use of the program in the computer laboratory, in both cycles, each teacher’s primary role was as a facilitator and students consulted them if they required further assistance. For example, the teachers helped students to locate resources, such as sample reports, or provided guidance on using tools such as online concordance so learners could see the different uses of the language they were learning. In addition to these roles, teachers also wrote initial questions on the discussion forums to enable learners to maintain meaningful discussions and develop relevant knowledge and skills. Teachers observed the progress of the students throughout the activity and provided scaffolding and feedback where necessary and appropriate. Support and scaffolding are reported and discussed in-depth in Chapter 7.

**Student participants**

Class teachers used the learning environment as part of their education curriculum. However, due to the large number of students in each class (the average class sizes at EPS range from 20 to 24), not all students in each class were involved in the research
process, although all completed the activities. During the first cycle, six students (three students from each class), and during the second cycle, four students, were asked to participate in in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The participant students were selected on the recommendation of the class teachers, as they were thought to be information-rich cases representing the target population (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 1990).

**Consent of the participants**

Participation in this research was voluntary. All participants (teachers and students) were given information about the study (see Appendices 3 and 4) and their written consent was gathered (see Appendices 5 and 6) before the research started. The consent form informed the participants about the research and its objectives and how their participation would be kept confidential. It was clearly mentioned to the participants that they had the right to refuse to participate, that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time, and that they had the right to withdraw any data they had contributed. It was also explained to the participants that their participation or refusal to participate, or their withdrawal of consent (and data), would not affect their treatment in any way or their relationship with EMUEPS.

**Ethical review**

Ethical approval to conduct the research was sought from Murdoch University. Following the completion of the required procedures, this study was approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number 2012/028). Further ethical approval from EMU was not formally required; nonetheless, the school administration was informed in writing and written permission was given to conduct the study at the institution (see Appendix 7).

**Procedure**

Both cycles were designed to last for six weeks. The first cycle commenced in the eleventh week of the semester and the second cycle commenced in the tenth week. However, because one week in the second cycle was affected by a religious holiday, it lasted for seven weeks. The project was administered as a substitute to the normal semester project and was initiated with teachers’ informing students in their
classrooms that they would do a different project than the other classes of the same level. All students in three classes completed the activity even though not all of them were interviewed.

The project was implemented in the computer laboratory of the Student Self Study Centre (SSSC). Each class had a scheduled class hour each week in the SSSC and learners were expected to study at their own pace according to their needs by using the paper-based and electronic resources available at the centre. In the first week of the activity, teachers gave learners information about the activity. Teachers mainly focused on informing learners about their roles and demonstrating the use of the program. While demonstrating the program, learners were informed about the links on the home page (see Figure 4.2) and what each page was about, for example, that they had the opportunity to access information about the key dates of activities on the calendar. They were neither given information about the content of the tasks on the agenda nor the content of the resources, as they were expected to read, understand, and respond accordingly in the target language. Moreover, learners were told that they could ask any questions to their teacher or classmates by using the discussion forums; however, only the target language was permitted to be used.

On the first day, learners were informed that they could work in pairs or groups of three; however, due to some personal reasons (e.g., one student preferred to work individually because of religious beliefs and his article was about a religious event—zakat), a few learners preferred to work individually and teachers did not interfere with the learners’ decision. After learners were formally introduced to the activity and the learning environment, and groups were formed, the activity commenced.

During the following weeks, learners were expected to complete the contributory or sub-tasks required (such as participating in online discussions) and the major task of writing an article for the newsletter. The research activity was completed upon the publication of the newsletter and the learners’ presenting their findings in class. Following the completion of the activity, interviews were conducted and each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted within a week at a mutual time that best suited both the participants and the researcher.
The same procedures were employed in both cycles. However, based on the outcome of the first cycle, the learning environment was refined between iterations (details are provided in Chapter 5). However, no changes were made to the design principles until the end of the study due to the fact that it was aimed to obtain consistency in the outcome. This has helped to achieve dependability in research (see dependability below in the trustworthiness in data analysis). New design principles are reflected in Chapter 9 at the end of the research process.

Once the ethics approval was obtained and the research was put into practice, it was time to collect data. Data was collected through observations, teacher journals, interviews (both individual and focus group), and analysis of work samples. Procedures followed for each is described below.

**Observations**

During the observation process, the researcher walked around the room, observed the students, and took handwritten notes. In order to prevent any data loss, during both iterations, two video cameras were used to record two pairs of students’ voices and the screen of the computer they were using. This data was later transcribed by the researcher for analysis. Additional notes and reflections were added in relation to relevant insights, such as discussions with teachers after class.

**Teacher journals**

The participant teachers were asked to keep a journal of detailed notes and anecdotal records on the support and scaffolding provided to students during the study. All three teacher journals were kept in hand written form. These were collected and also used for analysis.

**Interviews**

Following the completion of the task (i.e., writing articles, publishing them in the newsletter, and presenting the findings to the class) students and teachers were interviewed. While the teachers were interviewed individually, students were interviewed both individually and in groups. An in-depth interview is a useful data collection technique as the researcher has control over the questions asked. There were also times when the participants could not be observed, such as while students were
collecting data outside the school to be used in their articles, or while the participant teacher was facilitating the use of the program. Thus, interviews provided the opportunity to gather valuable data about these situations that were not able to be observed.

Interviews were semi-structured to allow informants to freely articulate their opinions and enable the interviewer to probe the answers to obtain additional information (Kervin et al., 2006). While individual interviews were used to obtain student’s personal opinions, group discussions were used to raise a genuine discussion among learners in order to obtain diverse opinions and allow discussions on group-initiated concerns (Mertens, 2005).

In order to help participants feel at ease, the individual interviews took place in a quiet standard office at EPS and group interviews were conducted in the meeting room of the school. McMillan and Schumacher (1984) suggest that “to provide honest answers to questions, the respondent must feel comfortable with the interviewer” (p. 154). To facilitate this, interviews started with an explanation of the purpose of the interview to establish a friendly and comfortable relationship with the researcher and to inform learners of the purpose of the interview.

**Interview questions**

Qualitative interviewing aims at gathering information about how participants view their world (Patton, 2002). In this regard, Patton (2002) and Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) suggest a number of interview question types that can be used during an interview. *Experience and behaviour, opinion and values, feeling, and demographic* are the main interview question types that were used in this study. Each is described below:

- **Experience and behaviour questions** target information about the behaviours, experiences, or activities that the respondent is doing or did but can or could not be observed by the researcher. For example: Have you ever used any web-based program in your course?
- **Opinion and values questions** can uncover what the participants think about the topic. Answers to these questions reveal the respondent’s goals, beliefs, attitudes,
or values (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) about the topic or issue. For example: What were the strengths of the web-site?

- Feeling questions aim at finding out how the respondent feels about the topic or issue. Feeling questions should not be confused with opinion questions. While opinion questions ask the respondent’s opinion about the topic or issue, feeling questions elicit how the respondent feels about the topic or issue. For example: How did you feel about taking on the role of a journalist with a complex task to complete?

- The use of demographic questions elicits background information about the participant being interviewed. Such questions can be about the participant’s name, age, occupation, education, and the like.

The interview questions that were used in the study with the targeted participant (S for student and T for teacher), together with a rationale for the use of each question, are given in Table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1: The interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Exp.</td>
<td>2 Opin.</td>
<td>3 Feel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information that you provide will be used for research purposes (my PhD) and the purpose of this interview is to get some information that will help designers of web-based learning environments to design more effectively. As someone who has experience in EFL, you are in a good position to describe your experience and how you found it. [Statement on right to withdraw].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interviewer asks the participant his/her name, years of experience etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever used any e-learning environments for your own education? If so, which programs or sites?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever used any e-learning environments in your course? If so, which programs or sites?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Type of question</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you think of the web-based learning environment on learning a foreign language?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td>Question seeks opinion on the overall concept of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you think of the activity on developing academic skills?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td>Question seeks opinion on whether this program is a good way to develop academic skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of the web-based learning environment and pattern of use.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you were working with the web-based learning environment, how did you find what you were looking for?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Practice questions to encourage the respondent to review the program before offering more detailed opinion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What strategies did you develop?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the strengths of the environment?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Presupposition questions (i.e. the questions assume the web-based learning environment has strengths and weaknesses, and can thus elicit useful information).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the weaknesses of the environment?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What else do you want to see in the web-based learning environment?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Presupposition question (i.e. the question assumes that the web-based learning environment has missing information).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How effective do you think the environment is?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Opinion question which seeks summary comments and reinforcement of previous answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you learned from this environment?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open-ended, opinion question on the students’ assessment of learning rather than a knowledge question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the things you really liked about the web-based learning environment?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling questions which aim at finding out the respondent’s emotional response to the web-based learning environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the things you disliked about the web-based learning environment?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you had the power to change the learning environment, what would you make different?</td>
<td>1 Exp. 2 Opin 3 Feel 4 Dem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Opinion question which seeks recommendations for change or improvements to the learning environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Type of question</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a colleague of yours was about to use the environment for the first time, what advice would you give?</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Projective question which asks the respondent to take on the role of 'expert'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions on authentic activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transition statement to move onto the discussion of each of the critical elements of authentic activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have been talking about your experiences with the web-based learning environment in general. I would like now to ask your opinion on some of the specific features of the activity.</td>
<td></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities have real world relevance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about taking on the role of a journalist with a complex task to complete? Did you feel like a real staff of the city newsletter?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Opin</td>
<td>Feeling questions to elicit emotional response to the activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about taking on the role of an editor of the city newsletter with a complex mission to publish articles? Did you feel like a real editor?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feel</td>
<td>Feeling questions to elicit emotional response to the activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you think of the activity you were given to do within the environment?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>Open-ended opinion question on the activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities are ill-defined, requiring students to define the tasks and sub-tasks needed to complete the activity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you go about completing the activity? What tasks did you do to complete it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Questions aim at eliciting information on how the complex task was broken up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you think that the activity was too demanding or easy for students to complete?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Question seeks opinion whether the difficulty level of the activity is appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over a sustained period of time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you find the time allocated to complete the activity? Too long? Too short?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Question seeks opinion whether sustained thinking is possible within time allocated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity required you to consider it from a number of different perspectives. For example, the mayor, readers of the newsletter and the editor. How did you feel about this task?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling question to determine how the student will respond to the requirement of examining the activity from different perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Type of question</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity required you to consider it from a number of different perspectives: the editor of the city newsletter and EFL teacher perspectives. How did you feel about this task?</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>S T</td>
<td>Feeling question to determine how the teacher will respond to the requirement of examining the activity from different perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you approach the task?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Experience question to seek strategies the respondent may use in examining the resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the strengths of examining the resource from multiple perspectives?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>Presupposition questions to elicit the respondent’s opinion on the approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the weaknesses?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the last few weeks you have worked with a partner to complete the activity. How have you felt about this arrangement?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>Feeling question on whether the respondent enjoys working as part of a team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the last few weeks you have worked with your students in the web-based learning environment and thus your role shifted from being the instructor to a facilitator. How have you felt about this change in your role?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>Feeling question on whether the respondent enjoys working as part of a team rather than being sole authority (teacher).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What role did you have in your group?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Experience question which seeks information on whether students share roles or have individual roles to complete the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the advantages of working in pairs?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>Presupposition questions to elicit the respondent’s opinion on working in pairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the disadvantages?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the last few weeks students collaborated to complete the activity. What were the advantages? What were the disadvantages?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presupposition questions to elicit the respondent’s opinion on working in pairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the learning environment enable you to reflect on your learning as you completed the activity?</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ ✓</td>
<td>Presupposition question to obtain information on whether students reflect on the issues as they use the learning environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Type of question</td>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did your partner help you to reflect on your learning?</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Exp.</td>
<td>2 Opin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did reflection contribute to the development of knowledge and skills?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did the presentation of your findings to the class help your learning?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Authentic activities can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain specific outcomes.

| We have been discussing the characteristics of authentic activities. |
| How did you feel about using them in foreign language education? |
|                         |                  | 1 Exp. | 2 Opin | 3 Feel | 4 Dem | S | T | Feeling question on how the respondent feels about using the characteristics of authentic activities in language education. |
| How did the characteristics of authentic activities help students develop relevant knowledge and skills? |
| How did the characteristics of authentic activities help you develop relevant knowledge and skills? |

Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment.

<p>| How did you feel about presenting your ideas to the editor of the newsletter as if you were the journalist of the newsletter? |
| How did you feel about students' presenting their ideas to the editor of the newsletter as if you were the editor and students were your staff? |
| What were the strengths of presenting your product/findings? | What were the weaknesses? | 1 Exp. | 2 Opin | 3 Feel | 4 Dem | S | T | Feeling question on how respondents feel about the assessment requirements. |
| Feeling question on how respondent feels about the assessment requirements. |
| Presumption question to elicit the respondent's opinion on the approach. |
| Presumption question to elicit the respondent's opinion on the approach. |
| Presumption questions to elicit the respondent's opinion on the assessment method. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What were the strengths of students' presenting their product/findings?</td>
<td>Exp.</td>
<td>2 Opin</td>
<td>3 Feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the weaknesses?</td>
<td></td>
<td>4 Dem</td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authentic activities yield polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about preparing a product that will be used by the city newsletter?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the strengths of using the target language in an authentic context for an authentic purpose to learn it?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the weaknesses?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel about giving students a meaning focused activity?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authentic activities allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The activity allowed students to come up with their own findings and suggestions. How did you feel about this?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the strengths of working on an open-ended activity?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What were the weaknesses?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Closing comments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have been very helpful. Do you have any other thoughts or feelings that you want to mention?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>✓</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All interviews were transcribed by the researcher for analysis.

**Work samples**

During the data collection process, the work samples of students—which include products of learning such as presentations in class, participation in online discussions, and the final published articles—were collected and used for analysis.
Presentations were videotaped which provided the opportunity to assess the presenters’ skills and the abilities of the other students in the position of responsive listeners, for example, whether they could ask questions for clarification, provide constructive criticism, and participate in discussions. Online discussions and final drafts were collected in print form.

**Data analysis**

Observations, notes, and interviews revealed a considerable amount of data to be analysed to answer the research questions. Data included both relevant and irrelevant data to address the research questions. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that the data that appears in field notes and/or transcriptions may be reduced and that this process should not be regarded as quantitative reduction but as “... a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that ‘final’ conclusions can be drawn and verified” (p. 11).

Coding, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), was used to sort and organise data. Coding was based initially on *a priori* categories based on the key areas of investigation, for example, an authentic design principle such as *real world relevance*. After preliminary coding of documents was transcribed (using highlighting and margin notes), a Microsoft® Excel spread sheet was created for each area of investigation. On the vertical left column participants’ names were written and on the top horizontal row the emerging themes, according to the aspect being investigated, were recorded. Then each participant’s relevant comments were copied and pasted from the transcriptions. This method provided the opportunity to identify emerging themes and refine them according to the data revealed. Using Excel sheets not only helped to reduce data by excluding irrelevant data, but also helped to organise relevant data according to the category being investigated and facilitated the process of analysis. Table 3.2 illustrates how data was organised within the spread sheet.
### Table 3.2: Organising data for analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY: Real world relevance</th>
<th>THEME 1: Awareness as motivation</th>
<th>THEME 2: Motivation promotes engagement</th>
<th>THEME 3: Real purpose for learning</th>
<th>THEME 4: etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student: Toprak</strong></td>
<td>Personally because we were not told I didn't feel it... I thought that what I wrote would be taken into consideration by someone and really good things are presented as solutions and thought someone could use it would read it</td>
<td>One calamity is much better than one thousand advices, and this is like the things I experience while learning. For example, it's related to this. I researched about the topic ‘drinking alcohol and driving’ and this is how I learned and it's very exciting. When I research and learn it has benefits for me, I learn and make use of the information I learned</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student: Doğukan</strong></td>
<td>If we learned this earlier it would have been different and better things would have been produced</td>
<td>I wish we had known this before because the outcome would have been much better</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student: Yıldız</strong></td>
<td>I wasn’t aware…if you could have made us aware I think it would have been more exciting to write…we weren’t aware. I personally wasn’t. I don’t think anyone was. My real purpose was to get a high score</td>
<td>We memorized. We all know grammar if you ask me but grammar is the simplest part. They used to give us the vocabulary and we used them in sentences. We put sentences in the correct order but now it has changed. Now we need to collect information, translate them into English then form sentences and as a result paragraphs are formed</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student: ...</strong></td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once data was organised into themes, further analysis was conducted to address each research question. Chapters 5–8 provide further information on this analysis, together with the results and findings organised according to each research question.

**Trustworthiness of the data analysis**

While interpreting data, there is a possibility for researchers to influence the process via their own biases and values (Kervin et al., 2006; Northcote, 2012). In order to prevent this and maintain trustworthiness in analysis, Guba (1981) proposes four criteria that were taken into consideration. These are **credibility**, **transferability**, **dependability**, and **confirmability**.
dependability, and confirmability. How each suggestion was attained throughout the research is briefly explained below.

Credibility refers to drawing a clear and true picture of the study. In order to achieve this, Chapter 1 provides information about the problem targeted; Chapter 2 reports what the literature says about the nature of the problem and the possible solutions; Chapter 3 provides information about the research context, approach, and methods employed; Chapter 4 describes the e-learning environment; Chapters 5 to 8 report the outcome of the research; and Chapter 9 provides the limitations of the study along with a brief summary of each research question.

Transferability refers to how detailed the explanation of the research context is, to enable the reader to gauge whether the findings can be applied to other similar settings. With respect to this, sufficient contextual information about the research is provided, e.g., the place that the research was conducted, the number of participants, participants’ English level and their experience of using technology for educational purposes, and the duration of the study. This information was provided, along with research limitations (see Chapter 9 suggestions for future research and the final word), to enable readers assess the transferability of this research to their context.

Dependability refers to reporting the study in detail so that “if the work repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). The dependability of this study is indicated through the detailed report of the study, the use of design-based research, and conducting the research in two iterative cycles in the same context with similar participants that achieved similar results.

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the researcher. In order to achieve confirmability, researchers rely on pure data to reflect findings rather than relying on their predispositions. Shenton (2004) argues that “the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (p. 72) and continues to advise triangulation of findings in order to reduce the effect of investigator bias. This research used triangulation of findings by collecting and analysing data through observations,
teacher journals, interviews (both individual and focus group), video recordings, analysis of work samples, and reported participant opinion or work where appropriate. This was intended to reduce investigator bias.

**Phase 4: Reflection to produce design principles**

In the final phase of the study, after completion of the iterative data collection and analysis processes, results were discussed in terms of the extent to which the study provided solutions to the identified problems, along with practical suggestions on guiding principles for the implementation of the characteristics of authentic activities in an EFL context. For example, one of the characteristics suggest that a learning activity should provide the opportunity to examine the task from different perspectives, and this study concluded that focusing on authorship skills, content, form, audience, and process can provide opportunities for learners to develop relevant skills. This final phase, which has resulted in refined design principles, is described in more detail in Chapter 9.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described the research methods applied throughout the study. The following chapter describes the learning environment that was designed according to the draft characteristics of authentic activities (based on Herrington et al., 2003) and implemented in two iterative cycles of enquiry.
CHAPTER 4

Description of the learning environment

Overview

Following the literature review and the development of guiding principles, next it was appropriate to design the learning environment and the activity that would incorporate the principles of authentic learning and activities, while at the same time addressing educational needs and problems in practice.

Conceptualisation of the learning environment

The researcher has collaborated with and contributed to a number of e-learning projects at the English Preparatory School (EPS). As one of only two teachers at the EPS with formal education and research experience in educational technology (out of 148 teachers), he had always been critical of the e-learning resources that were made available for learners at the Student’s Self Study Centre (SSSC). Most of these sources were form-focused and the activities did not have real world relevance to reflect the way that the target language is used in context. With such activities, learners were most likely to develop knowledge about the target language which would remain as inert knowledge.

On one occasion, three web-based commercial products were given to the researcher to evaluate and to write a report on, analysing which would best suit the needs of EPS by the director of the school. Within the report, he recommended that Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) had all the necessary expertise and equipment to develop their own learning environment which would not only provide the learning resources most suitable to the needs of the students, but would also provide the
opportunity for research and professional development. Consequently, the researcher was asked to write a feasibility report which was approved by the EPS Council. This approval enabled the development of a customised, in-house web-based learning environment for teaching English that could be based on the principles of authentic learning and tasks.

In the following section, the description of this learning environment is discussed in detail.

**The learning environment: @Famagusta**

The course material and syllabus used at EPS are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). Thus, any e-learning program to be implemented at EPS needed to align with CEFR. To achieve this, it was decided that the walled city of Famagusta would be used as a metaphor (Figure 4.1) in which different buildings or areas of the city; for example, a sports centre, a shopping mall, a restaurant, a tourism agency, and the city newsletter, would provide the opportunity to learn and practice different language features in context, as described in the “can do” statements of CEFR.

![Figure 4.1: The home page of the learning environment](image)

The City Newsletter was chosen for this research and its description is given below.
The design team

The design team was assembled by the school director during the council meeting. The researcher (who had a Masters degree in information and communication technologies (ICT) in education) and a senior instructor (who also had an MA in ICT in education) were appointed as instructional designers. A member of the school council was appointed as the council link to inform the council of the progress of the team. The head of the curriculum team was appointed as the team link responsible for the alignment of the learning environment with the syllabus and the student counsellor was appointed to give suggestions from the learner’s point of view.

In order to lower costs and make it easy for the team to develop the learning environment, it was decided to use Moodle as the platform. This open-source platform was already being used by the Distance Education Institute (DEI) of the university. As such, technical support was requested from them and the institute organised a server and installed Moodle on it. The Director of the institute appointed two Masters students (who had graduated from the computer engineering department and were working as research assistants at the DEI) to help the design team with technical issues; however, soon it was discovered that the students had little knowledge of Moodle and thus, were unwilling to participate. Unfortunately, when further replacements were also unsuccessful, the collaboration with the DEI was terminated. For this reason, the researcher had to quickly develop technical knowledge on Moodle to create pages, links, and electronic materials himself.

In order to design graphics, it was decided to request help from the students of the interior architecture department who created the homepage (Figure 4.1). The remainder of the City Newsletter was designed and developed by the researcher.

The City Newsletter

The City Newsletter was designed to be used as a prototype of the learning environment and was designed based on the characteristics of authentic learning environments, as suggested by Herrington and Oliver (2000). How each characteristic was applied is described in detail below. By following the link to the City Newsletter,
learners see the office of the Editor (Figure 4.2). This office was developed using Adobe Flash.

In this office there is the Editor’s desk, a calendar on the wall, and a door.

**The desk**

The desk consists of clickable items such as example articles, newsletters, resources to use, online sources, take notes, the Editor’s agenda, and the assessment.

![The City Newsletter Editor's Office](image)

**Figure 4.2: The City Newsletter Editor’s Office**

**Example articles**

Example articles were provided on the website, comprised of former students’ compositions (Figure 4.3). In the first cycle only three examples were provided. Two of these examples (*Mothers Should Work* and *Living with Your Family*) were short compositions consisting of a single paragraph. The other composition was longer, consisting of four paragraphs. The short paragraphs were used because this style was expected from the learners by the school. However, a longer composition was also provided with the aim of providing learners with better examples and to enable them to improve their writing.
In the second cycle, the number of example compositions was increased to seven. For this cycle, products of four students from the first cycle were added. By doing this, learners had the opportunity to see how an article looks when published in a newsletter and had the opportunity to analyse the features of an article used by other students in the electronic environment. After clicking on a composition name, a new window would open and learners could access an interactive composition (as seen in Figure 4.4). These interactive compositions gave the learners the opportunity to examine each part and feature of a composition and on the left and the right sides of the articles there were links. By moving the cursor over these links, users could highlight the key areas of the composition so that they could be informed of each part and feature. On the left side of the articles, the names of each paragraph were given: introduction, body, and conclusion. Thus, by moving the mouse cursor over these links, learners could easily see which paragraph was which.
Figure 4.4: An example interactive essay

On the right side, learners were provided with links to analyse the features of an essay as models. Some of these features were: general statement, your view, essay outline, thesis statement, supporting ideas, examples, linkers, sequencers, sources, and summary of ideas. Through these links, as seen in Figure 4.5, learners could analyse essays and discover how to write.

Figure 4.5: An example essay highlighting the thesis statement
Essays were made interactive using Adobe Dreamviewer.

**Newsletters**

Under the newsletter link, learners were provided with example newsletters (see Figure 4.6). In total, there were three newsletters in the first cycle and five in the second. Of these newsletters in the second cycle, one was web-based and the other four were paper-based in Portable Document Format (PDF). One of the paper-based newsletters was the university’s, and gave information about current research being conducted. The other two were made by the school’s journalism club and the last newsletter was the one produced by students in the first cycle.

![Figure 4.6: A screen clip of links to sample newsletters page](image)

These newsletters were given as models for students to analyse to produce similar products. Learners could choose to produce their newsletter electronically or in a paper-based format.

**Resources to use**

In this activity, learners were expected to use external sources to support their opinions or to give factual information about their proposal. In order to facilitate learning how to find resources learners were supplied with sources such as scanned newspaper articles and web-based articles.
Figure 4.7 is a screen clip from the first cycle. The links on the left are online sources for learners to gain information about issues related to the lack of water sources in the world. The image on the left is linked to a newspaper article that is about the project that will bring water from Turkey to Cyprus in pipes.

![Figure 4.7: A screen clip of Resources to Use from the first cycle](image)

Figure 4.8 illustrates the sources provided to learners in the second cycle.

![Figure 4.8: A screen clip of Resources to Use from the second cycle](image)
The sources provided to learners were optional and thus learners were allowed to find their own sources to complete the activity.

**Online sources**

The Internet has a lot of useful, as well as a great deal of inappropriate, sources and tools. It is important for learners to be able to distinguish between the two and benefit from the ones that are useful for the task in hand. On this page (Figure 4.9) some useful sources and tools were provided for them as a starting point for their research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay writing</th>
<th>Dictionary &amp; Thesaurus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using Sources To Support Your Ideas</td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation tips</td>
<td>- Different types of plagiarism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How to give a presentation</td>
<td>- Avoiding plagiarism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Presentation A</td>
<td>Concordancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Image of online sources]</td>
<td>Concordancers can be used to see the use of a word in different sentences. For example, open the concordancer and write in &quot;however&quot;, choose &quot;Brown (1 million wds)&quot; and then click on &quot;get concordance&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Office Newsletter Templates</td>
<td>Microsoft Office Brochure Templates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4.9:** A screen clip of Online Sources

These are provided to assist learners with the types of skills they will require to accomplish their tasks. Resources such as *using sources to support your ideas* and *presentation tips* are also linked to the online discussions to provide learners with the opportunity to discuss important elements and how they can benefit from them in their tasks. Each is described below.
Essay writing

This is a highly academic source giving instructions on how to write effective essays. The sources are provided by the University of New South Wales (2011) and users can find a variety of useful information such as the basics of essay writing and researching a topic. This was provided to enable learners to develop their knowledge further, if required.

Using sources to support your ideas

Using external sources was an essential part of the activity. However, learners studying at EPS generally do not have knowledge about how to use them. For this reason, a simple page was developed to enlighten learners about how to use external sources (see Figure 4.10).

Using Sources To Support Your Ideas

While writing your essays you can use external sources to support your ideas or to give numerical data. External sources are other articles, books, interviews, questionnaires, reports, newspapers, newsletters, etc. The aim of using external resources is to support your ideas or to illustrate your arguments. Study the examples below.

Examples:
- Research done by Ministry of Tourism in 2012 reported that 80% of tourists think that Cyprus is an expensive country...
- One of the ways of fighting cancer is to take an aspirin a day. Cancer Association (http://ecancer.org/cepmlp/6/248) indicates that aspirin reduces the risk of cancer in older people...
- In my opinion theft can be reduced by providing more job opportunities because according to police records 70% of theft is done by unemployed people...

This source included three examples to illustrate how they could use external sources to support their ideas. It was designed to be very basic in order to make it easy for the learners to understand.

Presentation tips

Upon completion of writing their articles, learners were expected to present their findings or proposal to the Editorial Board of the newsletter. For this reason, they had to develop presentation skills. In order to assist learners in developing the relevant skills, they were provided with an external wiki page on “How to Do a Presentation in Class” (wikiHow, 2011) (Figure 4.11). On this page users find practical information about giving presentations.
Below the link to ‘presentation tips’ two presentation videos were provided. Presentation A (Figure 4.12) showed a student sitting during the presentation and reading from his notes. This video represents a weak presentation that did not follow the suggested tips on giving effective presentations.
Presentation B (Figure 4.13) represents an effective presentation that demonstrates many of the tips.

These sources on giving effective presentations were the source of one of the discussion topics that are described below.

**Dictionary and Thesaurus**

Learners were provided with an online dictionary (see Figure 4.14 below) that could also be used as a thesaurus.
The aim of providing an online dictionary was to help learners learn new words that they encountered while using the online discussion forums.

**Plagiarism**

It is very common for learners to gather information from the Internet and use them as if they were their own words. Even though they know this is not correct, they do not necessarily know the term *plagiarism*. Therefore, learners were provided with information that made them aware of plagiarism and its consequences.

In the *Using sources to support your ideas* examples, learners were provided with information regarding how to avoid plagiarism.

**Concordancer**

Using unfamiliar words is a challenge for language learners. This challenge can be facilitated if learners are guided to use concordancer programs (Figure 4.15). A concordancer helps learners read an unfamiliar word in different contexts.
For example, if a learner does not know the word ‘however’ and wants to see example sentences, the word ‘however’ is typed in the search area, then a corpus is chosen. When the search is completed the learner is given a number of sentences consisting of the word searched (see Figure 4.16).

By using a concordancer, learners can develop a larger vocabulary in a shorter time (Cobb, 1999). With this aim in mind, a link to a concordancer was given for the use of the learners.

**Templates**

Learners were expected to produce products to either support their presentations or publish their articles. For example, it was suggested that learners produce posters, brochures, or PowerPoint files for their presentations and a newsletter to be able to share their articles with their peers. Nonetheless, producing professional looking products would be beyond their skills and time consuming. In order to facilitate this process and reduce the work load, learners were provided with links to Microsoft’s template page.

**Take notes**

As a learning platform, Moodle provides many facilities and one of these facilities is that it enables users to take notes. However, one of the consequences of the first cycle was that learners did not know about this facility. Therefore, during the second cycle, learners were provided with a link to this facility from the Editor’s Office and informed of its existence (Figure 4.17).
It was expected that this opportunity would help to facilitate learning as learners could take notes while studying and later refer to these notes to study or practice. For example, they could keep a record of the new words or new structures that they encountered while studying that could later be printed for further use.

**Editor’s agenda**

An agenda (Figure 4.18) was developed in order to inform the learners, in an authentic way, about the tasks that they were required to do. The agenda was made of an Adobe Flash file that was freely available on the internet.
The program allowed users to flip pages as if they were using a paper-based agenda and the graphics were designed to emulate an agenda. The topics of the agenda were changed in the second cycle, based on the suggestions of the participants in the first. This is explained in detail in Chapter 5. Below are topics users were given in the first and the second cycles.

**First Cycle**

The current research employed a design-based research approach (as described in Chapter 3) that required the researcher to conduct research in iterative cycles (Reeves, 2006). For this reason, this research was conducted in two cycles. In order to make the work of the learners original, each cycle had different topics to research and different sources were provided.

In the first cycle, learners were given five topics on the Editor’s agenda and they were verbally told that they could also investigate a topic of their choice that was not listed on the agenda. However, in order to investigate a topic of their choice, learners were required to obtain their class teacher’s approval. The topics available were: entertainment problem in Famagusta, water problem in Cyprus, the negative effects of
electronic games on children, teenagers’ taking up the habit of smoking, and traffic accidents.

**Topic 1: Entertainment problem in Famagusta**

North Cyprus is a very small country with a population of about 280,000 people. Consequently, Famagusta, where EMU is located, is also a small city with a population of 40,000 people. People visiting Cyprus often complain that there are not enough entertainment venues to visit. This is also a problem for international students who come from big cities and study at EMU. Because of this problem, some students either transfer to another university (generally in Turkey) or leave the university altogether.

This problem was considered to be an authentic topic for students as they face it in their first year of study in North Cyprus. In order to make this task real world relevant, a mission was given to them by the Mayor of the city and the duty of the journalists was to find out the types of entertainment people are looking for in the city (see Figure 4.19 below). In order to complete this task, learners were expected to gather students’ or tourists’ opinions and provide the Mayor with suggestions.

*Figure 4.19: Editor’s agenda topic 1, pages 2 and 3*
Topic 2: Water problem in Cyprus

Cyprus is a small island located in the Mediterranean. Because of its geographical characteristics, water resources are short and the water which is available on the island is hard. Some cities, for instance Famagusta, are using recycled sea water but this water is both salty and hard and not cost effective. In order to solve this problem, there have been several attempts to import water from Turkey in a various ways. For example, water was put in large balloons that were pulled by ships; however, these attempts ended in failure.

In 2011, a project known as the project of the century, was launched with the aim of bringing water from Turkey in pipes; however, it is still not certain that the project will be a success. As such, in this scenario, the Mayor of the city asks journalists for help to raise awareness among the city residents of the water shortage and suggest ways to prevent wasting water (see Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21).

![Figure 4.20: Editor's agenda pages 4 and 5, the first half of topic 2](image)

This problem also affects students. Researching such a topic and publishing the outcome in an article in a newsletter that would be distributed on-campus would make
students more aware of the water problem in Cyprus, what is being done to solve it, and how they could contribute to saving water.

Topic 3: Effects of electronic games on children

Nowadays, some people use electronic games almost unconsciously. Some parents, for example, use electronic games as a baby sitter to be able to keep their children calm and, as a result, some children have become addicted to these games. However, the dispute on the effects of electronic games on children is still ongoing. This task (see Figure 4.21 for the task) aimed to involve learners in this dispute and be a part of a social discussion. Their target audience were parents and their aim was to make them aware of the possible negative effects of children’s extensive use of electronic games.

Topic 4: Smoking

Although the negative effects of smoking on health are well known, some young people still take up the habit of smoking. In respect to the learners’ role as journalists, they were required to research the reasons why younger generations take up the habit of smoking (Figure 4.22). The dual aim in this task is to firstly make learners aware of the reasons why one may take up the habit of smoking, so that they can protect
themselves or help their peers in such situations, and secondly to make society aware of the causes of smoking.

Unlike school tasks, such as “Smoking has negative effects on health. Discuss”, which have no specific audience or reasons for why people should research the topic. As such, this task was made real world relevant by asking learners to investigate reasons why young people start smoking, despite full knowledge of its negative effects on health. Learners were also encouraged to provide suggestion on how readers could take precautions to solve their problems and stay away from smoking. Thus, learners had the aim of pointing out the reasons for smoking and informing the younger generations on the ways they can protect themselves.

**Topic 5: Accidents**

Traffic accidents have become the ‘gangrene’ of many societies. Preventable traffic accidents, especially those caused by drink-driving, are arguably the worst. Once again with respect to the learners’ journalist role, they were given this topic (see Figure 4.23 for the task), which is of concern for many societies, to write an article to be part of the debate.
In order to make the audience authentic for learners, and make the task real world relevant, they were told to write their opinion about traffic accidents resulting from drink driving and to provide suggestions on what people should do if they take alcohol before driving. Moreover, they were required to produce artefacts, for example posters, videos, or leaflets, that could be used to educate people on the issue.

**Second Cycle**

Some of the learners’ products from the first cycle were provided as models for learners to use in the second cycle. As a result, and in order to prevent duplication of articles, new topics were given to the second cycle learners. The following section describes the Editor’s Agenda used in the second cycle.

**Introduction: Message from the editor**

In the second cycle, it was decided that it would be made explicit that learners could investigate a topic of their choice (details of reasons are given in Chapter 5). In this respect, the teacher in the position of Editor wrote a message in his agenda to the journalists to clearly express this (Figure 4.24). However, as it was important to target
a specific audience and their expectations, in his note the Editor warned journalists to be careful with these issues and to produce their artefacts accordingly.

Dear Journalists,

You are not limited to write articles about the topics in this agenda. You can choose your own topic. For example, your topic can be about organising a trip to an exotic place, studying abroad, opening a new department at EMU, buying a new car, sponsoring a school and so forth. While writing your article, think about the articles you read in your life and enjoy reading. Therefore, while writing your article, please consider the following questions:

- What problem / activity / event am I focusing on?
- Who are my target readers?
- What are my readers’ expectations?
- How can I meet these expectations?

It is important that you write your article clearly and persuasive by mentioning the reasons for your suggestions.

I wish you all the best and if you have any questions, you can ask me in our meeting room.

Editor, City Newsletter

Figure 4.24: Editor’s agenda pages 2 and 3 message from the Editor

**Topic 1: Healthy eating habits**

Poor eating habits are one of the daily problems in students’ lives. Generally, learners neither know how to cook or about healthy eating. Consequently, many of the learners eat a lot of unhealthy food.

With this task (Figure 4.25) there was an aim to help learners gain awareness of healthy eating habits and to share their knowledge with their peers through publishing their findings in the newsletter. This would also help them discover restaurants that provided home-style healthy food.
Dear journalists,

The young generation of today do not have a healthy diet because of the busy lifestyle and demands of the modern life. For example, many people travel far distance to work, need to work extra hours to keep their jobs or are studying and don’t find much time. Therefore, it is very important to raise awareness among young people to improve their eating habits to prevent many illnesses from occurring. So, you are asked to write an article to raise awareness among young people about the dangers of having an unhealthy diet for our health and also provide suggestions on how to improve their eating habits.

Figure 4.25: Editor's agenda pages 4 and 5 topic 1

Unlike the other tasks that were given by other people, such as the Mayor or the Vice Rector, this task was directly given by the Editor.

**Topic 2: Student clubs**

According to the scenario in this task, the Editor gives a mission to the journalists (Figure 4.26) based on a letter (Figure 4.27) he received from the vice rector responsible for student services and social-cultural activities.
In her letter, the vice rector gives general information about the university and indicates that, besides the academic development, social development of learners is also important (written consent of the vice rector was gathered for this activity and she signed the letter herself). In this respect, she pointed out that, despite the fact that there are many clubs available for learners, they are willing to open more clubs based on learners’ opinions and suggestions.
Dear [Name],
The Editor of City Newsletter,

Eastern Mediterranean University is an international and multicultural university accommodating students from more than 65 different countries. Our university aims at peak of educational quality and in this regard international memberships and accreditations are crucial for us. For this reason we have become a full member of European Universities Association (EUA - http://www.eua.be) and have gathered accreditations such as ABET and ASIIN.

Besides educational quality and obtaining international accreditations, social development of our students is also extremely important for us. We think that our graduates should not only be experts in the areas of their studies but they should also be social people enjoying their free time while attending a variety of social and cultural activities. While these help individuals develop socially, we hope that it will help them to have better career opportunities.

Although we have a variety of student clubs available at the Social and Cultural Activities Centre, we think that by considering our current students' opinions and suggestions, we can provide better opportunities for them to have quality free time. For this reason, we as the Social and Cultural Activities Centre are kindly asking your editorial board to collaborate with us and propose new student clubs. It is important that the editorial board clearly and persuasively explain the reasons why we should have that particular student club so that we consider their proposal seriously.

Thank you for your collaboration and good luck with your work.

03/11/2012

Figure 4.27: Editor’s agenda topic 2, the letter from the vice rector of student services and social-cultural activities
Therefore, in this task, the journalists were required to research and suggest new clubs to be opened at EMU.

**Topic 3: Sports**

The last topic on the Editor’s agenda was about sports (Figure 4.28). The topic was contextualised by indicating what specialists say about the importance of sports and how sports keep people healthy; on the other hand, people find excuses for not doing sports.

In this task, the Editor writes to the journalists that the director of the sports centre at EMU wants the Editorial Board to write about this issue and suggest to readers a sport that they will enjoy doing while socialising.
None of the topics given above targeted the teacher as the sole audience of the products. Each topic had its own genuine audience with an aim of solving a social problem. In order to achieve this, learners were required to produce an article to be published in the newsletter which would be accompanied with another product such as a video, poster, or brochure to further inform or educate the target audience. While in most traditional writing activities in class, learners focus on learning and practising new language features, in this activity they focused on meaning to discuss a social problem by giving information on what other people say on the issue, what their opinions are, and possible solutions or suggestions for improvement or better outcomes.

**Assessment**

The assessment link was provided to inform students of the assessment breakdown. The information on assessment (Appendix 8) shows the different components and how they contribute to the total grade, making it transparent for learners.
Calendar

An image of a calendar was placed on the wall of the Editor’s room and linked to the electronic calendar of Moodle. Users following this link could be informed about the activities and deadlines.

Staff meeting room

The discussion forum was named the *staff meeting room* (Figure 4.30) to simulate realism. It represented the social constructivist element of the learning environment where learners shared their ideas, provided feedback to their peers, and constructed knowledge collaboratively.

![Image of discussion forum links]

*Figure 4.30: A screen clip of the links of the discussion forums*

In order to have productive and useful discussions, teachers provided some guiding tasks to be completed. The tasks and their objectives are given below.

Chat room

The chat room was provided to enable learners to initiate any discussions they wanted. Therefore, in this chat room, learners were not given any guiding questions but were free to share or discuss any topic they wanted.
What is your topic?

In this room, learners were asked to indicate their partner’s name and the topic that they would be working on. By giving this task, it was aimed to help students pair up and select a topic at the beginning of the activity.

Examining essays

Examining essays were used to enable learners to discuss the elements of an essay and construct knowledge. In this respect, learners were provided with links to an ‘introduction paragraph’, ‘body paragraph’, and ‘conclusion paragraph’ which had its own guiding questions:

Examine the introduction paragraphs and discuss
- What are the elements of an introduction paragraph?
- What is the role of each element in the introduction?

Look at the body paragraphs and discuss
- What are the elements of a body paragraph?
- Why is it necessary to include them in the body of an essay?

Examine the conclusion paragraphs and discuss
- What do we include in the conclusion paragraph?
- Why is this important?

Group members

In this activity, learners were allowed to choose their partner. As a result of this, in order to prevent any delays in getting the learners to pair up, it was decided to ask them to write the name of their partner. In so doing, pairs would be formed in a timely manner and learners’ attention would be directed to the discussion board at the beginning of the activity. This worked well and it also served as an initial practice for those who had not used a discussion forum like this before.

Using a source

One of the objectives of the activity was to teach learners to use external sources to support their argument, illustrate a situation, or give factual information. Accordingly, learners were provided with the following questions to initiate meaningful, productive
discussion to discover how a source can be used. This discussion was linked to the ‘using sources to support your ideas’ page where users were provided with basic instructions accompanied with some example sentences.

Write your ideas about the following questions:
- What is a source?
- What is the role of a source?
- Do you think it is useful?

**Topic source ideas**

Following the discussion on ‘using a source’ on the ‘topic source ideas’ discussion forum, learners were asked to read a source from the ‘resources to use’ page and then give their opinion about how they could exploit the source to have sound arguments in their essays. This task was targeted to help learners reflect on how they would use a source and enable them to learn from each other. Moreover, if there were any inappropriate suggestions regarding the way to use a source, peers or teachers could provide the necessary guidance and scaffolding so that learners could change their approach. The guiding questions on this forum were:

After you read a source from ‘Resources to use’, answer the following questions:
- What is the title of the source?
- What are some of the ideas in the source?
- Was the information in the source useful or not useful? Why?
- How can this information help you while writing your composition?

**Projects and presentations**

This forum was initiated to enable learners to ask questions about the products they were expected to produce. On this forum learners were informed that, during their presentations, they were not only expected to give information about the findings of their research but also to reflect on what they had learned in terms of the target language and to articulate the process they went through. Therefore, this forum provided an opportunity to ask any questions that they might have had prior to their presentations. The guiding questions were:

Now that we are coming to the end of the project, you will be designing your artefact (webpage, poster, brochure, powerpoint etc.) and doing a presentation.
While designing your artefact (webpage, poster, brochure, powerpoint etc.) don’t forget to go to the ‘Editor’s Agenda’ and check what you should include.

In your presentation you should also talk about the following:

- What did you learn about your topic?
- How did you get this information?
- Do you think this project was beneficial?
- If you were to do this project again, what suggestions do you have for your friends?

If you have any questions about your artefact or presentation, please write them below under the correct topic.

**Giving a presentation**

This task was designed to guide learners to study the ‘presentation tips’ and then, by comparing the two presentations, develop effective presentation skills. In this respect, learners were given three different discussion forums. In the first forum, learners were told to read the presentation tips and then choose three tips that are the most important for them and comment on why they are important (Figure 4.31).

![Figure 4.31: A screen clip of instructions of ‘giving a presentation’](image)

The next two forums each had a video and, after watching them, learners were expected to comment on the following questions (Figure 4.32):
Forums like these provided the opportunity for learners to construct knowledge collaboratively rather than passively listening to the teacher. Learners discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the two presentations by linking them to the *presentation tips* and developed relevant knowledge and skills themselves.

**Your opinions**

This forum was used to allow learners to reflect on the activity in general and to provide constructive criticism that could be used as a guide for further development. In view of that, first they were informed about the goal of the forum and then they were given the following guiding questions to answer:

- What do you think about the project?
- In what ways do you think it was useful?
- What was most beneficial?
- What do you think needs to be improved?
Improving your essays

The final discussions were initiated with the purpose of enabling learners to collaboratively develop their articles and experience further. In this task (Figure 4.33) teachers posted learners’ final drafts on the forum and asked them to give constructive feedback on a minimum of three essays.

**Figure 4.33:** A screen clip of the guiding questions in ‘improving your essays’

In order to direct learners’ attention, they were asked to give feedback on four themes: essay components, language use, organisation, and audience. In so doing, elements of a social constructivist learning environment were attained.

**Authentic learning**

This research was based on the principles of authentic learning environments, as suggested by Herrington and Oliver (2000) and authentic activities suggested by Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003). The application of the characteristics of authentic learning environments is described below in order to illustrate how each element of authentic learning has been instantiated in the design of the learning environment.
**Authentic context**

In order to provide an overall authentic context, learning was embedded in a scenario. In this scenario, learners were the journalists and the teacher was the Editor of the newsletter. For each topic, learners were given reasons, for example, “many experts such as doctors and dieticians highlight the importance of sports and its role in reducing health risks”, and informed about the problem, for example, “despite these warnings that sports keep us healthy and fit, they still don’t have a big role in our lives”, and its causes, for example “most of the time we complain that we don’t have time to do any sports or it’s not enjoyable”. Thus, unlike a school task where learners are given a situation that lacks contextual information and are asked to discuss, for example “should attendance made compulsory? Discuss”, in this activity learners were given tasks that made the context real world relevant, meaningful, and clear.

**Authentic activities**

The tasks students were given mirrored the kinds of tasks people do in similar situations in the real world. That is:

**Real world relevance:** Learners were expected to do what journalists do in their real lives. They were expected to collect data, analyse, and report. Moreover, throughout this process, and before they published their work, they were expected to show their drafts to the Editor and the Editorial Board to gain feedback and constructive criticism.

**Ill-defined:** The activity was presented to the learners as an ill-defined problem where they were expected to find their way out in order to reach an acceptable outcome. In this respect they were not told which sub tasks they should do, or in which order, however, they were expected to research and find out all the necessary steps and sub-steps to be able to complete the activity.

**Complex:** The activity was complex and could not be completed within a few class hours or days. Learners had to develop knowledge in L2 and other sub-skills, such as giving presentations and interviewing people, that needed time to go perform and develop.
Different perspectives: Throughout the activity, learners were required to consider the activity from different perspectives. For example, their responsibilities to the Editorial Board by giving feedback on their peers’ work, meeting the expectations of the Editor and the audience, providing convincing proposals, and producing artefacts that could guide people in finding solutions to their problems. Moreover, while considering the activity from different perspectives they had to use a variety of resources, for example, newspaper articles, online articles, websites, human resources and alike, so that they could develop content rich products.

Leading beyond domain specific outcomes: The products that students were expected to produce were similar to those found in similar real world situations, rather than products produced for language learning purposes. Therefore, the products that students produced had communicative purpose by arguing the reasons for or against, for example, taking up the smoking habit, the effects of drink driving and what can be done if one had alcohol before driving, student clubs that could be opened at EMU, the water shortage problem and its solution in North Cyprus, and sports that can be done to have fun and stay healthy.

Polished products: Learners had the opportunity to revise their work several times by receiving feedback from their teacher (the Editor of the newsletter) and their peers (the Editorial Board of the newsletter). This provided the opportunity to have real world like refined end products that could be used as publishable articles, videos, or posters that could be beneficial for the targeted audience.

Diversity of outcome: Despite the fact that some learners worked on the same topics, they used different sources and provided different solutions. For example, one student and his partner suggested opening a club on motor sports, others suggested opening a nature club, and another and her partner suggested opening an international kitchen club. Thus, unlike classroom tasks where ideas are brainstormed and students produce similar products to each other, this activity allowed for “competing solutions and diversity of outcome” (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2003).
Expert performances and the modelling of processes

Online learning environments provide optimum opportunities to give learners access to expert performances that can be used as models to develop relevant knowledge and skills. In this respect, learners were provided with a variety of interactive essays, presentations, and newsletters that could be used as models to achieve the targeted outcome.

Multiple roles and perspectives

Participants had to deal with multiple responsibilities. Teachers, for example, were assigned roles of being Editors and EFL teachers and learners were assigned the roles of being journalists and language learners. With respect to their roles, they had to consider the activity from different perspectives. For example, the teachers had to consider the activity from language teaching perspectives, meet the needs of language learners, consider the activity from an Editor’s perspective, and provide feedback and guidance to enable learners to produce appropriate products; learners had to consider the activity from content, reader, author, and product perspectives to be able to develop relevant skills and produce acceptable products.

Collaboration

Collaboration in this activity was three fold. Firstly, learners were encouraged to work in pairs so that they could scaffold and guide each other to meet the demands of the activity. Secondly, there was teacher-student collaboration in which the teacher scaffolded and guided learners at critical times when learners could not achieve a task or use a language feature without external help. Thirdly, there was a whole class collaboration where learners reflected on their own and their peers’ learning and products. This enabled them to compare their knowledge and experience to their peers’ and benefit from each other’s experiences.

Reflection

Learners were provided with a variety of opportunities to reflect on their learning process. At the end of their presentations in the face-to-face environment, learners were asked to reflect on the process they went through in order to complete the activity and the knowledge and skills they gained during this process. This was used to enable
them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work by comparing their products, knowledge, and experiences to that of their peers’.

**Articulation**

The online learning environment embedded tasks that provided learners with the opportunity to express their opinions regarding their friends’ work and negotiate their views on how to approach the task in their project groups. Moreover, at the end of their presentations in the face-to-face environment, learners were asked to give reasoning on their choice of path regarding the process they went through in order to complete the activity.

**Coaching and scaffolding**

The teachers were expected to perform the role of coaching and scaffolding. Instead of giving learners direct instructions to gain the targeted knowledge and skills, they provided learners with resources and relevant guiding questions to achieve tasks and skills. The example essays and presentation tips that were followed by guiding questions on the discussion forum are two such examples. Moreover, the teachers guided learners in the situations that students were unable to complete the tasks. For example, while producing the newsletters and correcting language mistakes. (Examples on coaching and scaffolding are illustrated in Research Question 2 in detail in Chapters 5 and 7.)

**Authentic assessment**

ALTE’s ‘can do’ statements were used as a guide for assessment. In order to inform learners about the assessment procedures, learners’ were given a handout (Appendix 8). The assessment procedures assessed the abilities of learners, for example ‘can ask for clarification’, rather than the usage of language features, for example ‘can use ‘s for singular third person in present tense’. While doing this, a holistic approach was employed and thus students’ articles were also assessed. With this assessment criterion, it was aimed to help learners be effective performers of the acquired knowledge and skills rather than reproducers of the knowledge.
Summary
The online learning environment was designed to provide opportunities for social constructivism to occur in EFL context. In order to do this, the learning environment was designed based on the characteristics of authentic learning (Herrington & Oliver, 2000) that incorporated an authentic activity based on the characteristics of authentic activities (Herrington et al., 2003). These characteristics were put into practice in the scenario of a newsletter where the teachers were the editors and learners were the journalists. Authentic learning was promoted by providing learners with models of expert performances and analysing these according to the guiding questions of the teachers.

Conclusion
The learning environment aimed at building a community of practice where language learners peripherally participated in the use of the target language and their participation increased as they immersed themselves in the activity under the guidance of their teacher. At the beginning of the activity, learners gave information about what they would do, then they investigated sources to develop targeted knowledge and skills, and in the later stages they gave feedback to their peers for further development. This has provided many opportunities to use the target language in context for a purpose and in return provided significant opportunities to learn and practice the target skills. Findings are reported in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

The following chapter reports the data collection and analysis of the Research Question 1.
CHAPTER 5

Engagement with the computer assisted language learning environment:
Addressing Research Question 1

The integration of technology in education, in both Turkey and North Cyprus, is relatively new. While its potential is becoming recognised in many schools, relatively little is known about how to implement it into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context by incorporating design features that promote effective learning.

This chapter addresses the first research question provided in Chapter 1. As described in Chapter 4, the newly designed learning environment was implemented in two cycles. This chapter focuses on findings of both the first and second cycles of implementation. In both cycles, students were observed and videorecorded, open-ended interviews (both individual and focus group) were conducted, work samples and assessment results were collected, and teachers’ journals were gathered. This whole process provided rich data to enable the researcher to answer the research questions.

Research question 1:

How do students engage with and respond to a computer assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education?

Framework and method of analysis

Data was collected from interviews with students and participant teachers, observative transcripts taken during the use of the learning environment, teacher journals, and other documentary evidence and was analysed in accordance to techniques and
qualitative analysis recommended by Miles and Huberman’s (1994) three-step process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was completed by coding the data, as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), in order to sort and organise data into themes to be able to draw final conclusions.

**Analysis of data**

A ‘cross-case’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994) data analysis was employed while examining the interview transcripts of 10 students and three teachers (six students and two teachers during the first cycle, and four students and one teacher during the second cycle), students’ talk as they engaged in the learning environment, and observations of students and teachers while using the learning environment. As a result of the data analysis, certain themes emerged and these emerging themes began to highlight how learners engaged with and responded to the learning environment, based on the characteristics of authentic tasks. Each of these themes – *History of use of technology in education; From resistance to technology as a motivational tool; Interface; Navigation;* and *Resources’ role in developing language skills* – is discussed in detail below.

**History of use of technology in education**

The majority of current teachers at English Preparatory School (EPS) have not been formally educated to develop relevant knowledge and skills in terms of designing, developing, and implementing meaningful e-learning environments. However, some of the teachers have found ways of developing these pedagogical skills. These include:

- searching academic publications and applying relevant strategies in the field (requires lifelong learning skills and autonomy)
- taking part in professional development courses so that they can develop relevant knowledge and skills, and
- continuing higher education, such as masters and doctoral or philosophy programs, and developing their knowledge systematically.

The types of software that teachers usually focus on are the freely available software that have been widely discussed in academic publications and that do not require
technical skills. These include software that provide the opportunity for synchronous communication (such as Skype, ICQ, or MSN Live Messenger), asynchronous communication (such as wikis or blogs), both communication opportunities and file sharing (such as Edmodo https://www.edmodo.com/, Ning http://www.ning.com/ or Nicenet http://www.nicenet.org/), software that provide the opportunity to develop tests and quizzes, (for example Hot Potatoes software http://www.halfbakedsoftware.com/), and Moodle (https://moodle.org/) which is a platform that can be used for a variety of purposes (but requires a server and technical people to perform the installation and maintenance and provide some software specific skills).

A brief history of the participants is provided in the section below.

**Participants’ history of technology in education**

This section provides information about the participant teachers and students’ profiles related to their previous use of technology for educational purposes.

**Teachers’ technology use**

One of the key aims of the research approach (design-based research) chosen for this research is finding solutions to critical problems in higher education (Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2005). The aim of this research was to provide learners with collaborative, engaging, and meaningful learning activities that would give them the opportunity to use the target language (English) for an authentic purpose, as it is in real life. To be able to collect rich data, three experienced teachers were approached. Two teachers, Irem and Ceyda (all participants’ names were replaced with pseudonyms), were approached for the first cycle as both their classes were scheduled to use the Students’ Self Study Centre (SSSC) at the same time. Since the online language learning environment was to be used in the SSSC with both classes, employing the project in both classes was inevitable. However, during the second cycle only one teacher, Caner, was approached. It was intended to collect data not only from an experienced teacher’s point of view but also from a teacher who had experience in curricular issues. It is noteworthy to mention that all three teachers had experience in implementing technology into their teaching approach.
İrem was a 40 year old female teacher and had been teaching English for 18 years. She started using technology in her education and teaching practice with an in-service professional development course. During the professional development course she used Nicenet as part of a course requirement for her own education and later she used Ning and Edmodo in her teaching practice. During the semester the research was conducted, İrem was enrolled by distance in a Master of Arts (MA) program in the United Kingdom and was using WebCT as a part of the education system.

Ceyda was a 35 year old female teacher and had been teaching English for 15 years. She started using technology as part of her teaching by taking part in a pilot project in 1999 that aimed to provide learners with a wider range of sources. For this purpose, a software program called WinWIDA Authoring Suite (a package which contains exercises typical to traditional Computer Assisted Language Learning or CALL) was used. Following this, she started preparing online sources using Half-baked software HotPotatoes and moved onto designing online materials again as a voluntary member of the pilot project. She completed her MA program by distance in Australia and used WebCT as the learning management system for the course. She has also used free platforms such as Nicenet, Blackboard, Ning, Edmodo, and other social networks such as Facebook for educational purposes. Ceyda has also been an active member of the online support team since 2008 and, since then, has been integrating technology into education using learning management platforms such as Moodle. Both İrem and Ceyda used DAÜSEM Online (which is the Turkish abbreviation of Eastern Mediterranean University Continuing Education Centre Online) as this was the requirement of Eastern Mediterranean University English Preparatory School (EMUEPS). DAÜSEM Online was developed by the staff of EPS and provides in-house traditional language exercises on Moodle.
During the second cycle, the participant teacher, Caner, was a 39 year old male EFL teacher with over 15 years’ experience. Throughout his profession, he has worked in the curriculum team which has required him to evaluate learning resources (such as course books) and to design learning materials, tests, and tasks. Like İrem and Ceyda, Caner is also competent in using and integrating educational technology into his teaching and mentioned that, on his own initiation, used Ning and Edmodo as part of his teaching practice when these two programs were freely available. Caner also used DAÜSEM Online resources on Moodle as this was a requirement of the school.

### Table 5.1: Summary of the participant teachers’ experience in interactive multimedia use in education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
<th>Programs used for her own education</th>
<th>Programs used in teaching practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>İrem</td>
<td>EFL Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>WebCT Nicenet</td>
<td>Edmodo Ning HotPotatoes Moodle DAÜSEM Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceyda</td>
<td>EFL Teacher</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>WebCT</td>
<td>WinWIDA HotPotatoes Nicenet Blackboard Ning Edmodo Moodle Facebook DAÜSEM Online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the first cycle, Caner was a project group member of 103 level (Pre-intermediate / Intermediate level). The project group was responsible for designing a task that would give the learners the opportunity to use the target language in a productive way. There are, however, two major differences between the two tasks designed by the project group and the researcher. The first difference is that the activity designed by the researcher is based on a set of principles (Herrington, Oliver,
that can guide the teachers to replicate real life activities in class; whereas, the task designed by the project group was not based on any specific model or principles. Therefore, based on his past experience, Caner was an information-rich resource who could assist in achieving the objectives of this research. It was hoped that he could use his knowledge to assess the efficacy of the learning environment to better guide the research and design with respects to assisting learners’ foreign language competency.

Another difference between the two tasks was that the project group’s design was dependent on face-to-face support whereas the researcher’s activity was based on blended learning. Many of the teachers at EMUEPS are not technology competent and, for this reason, they might either be fascinated by the technology itself, which could result in a positive response or, due to the lack of technological skills, could result in a negative response. In either case, the researcher would not be able to gather unbiased responses. By integrating İrem, Ceyda, and Caner, who all had experience in educational technology, into this research process, the researcher aimed to implement the e-learning environment and gather robust and unbiased data that could address the research questions.

**Students’ technology use**

As mentioned above, relatively few teachers in the Turkish education system have a formal educational background in using technology in education and, largely for this reason, none of the participant students had the opportunity to use computers in their K-12 or university education before coming to EMUEPS. Nevertheless, some students indicated that they had used some stand-alone programs before coming to EMUEPS and others mentioned that they had used interactive multimedia programs for their language education at EMUEPS. It was to the researcher’s surprise that all interactive multimedia and web-based programs used (see Table 5.3 below) were solely for language education purposes and not for any other subject.

**Before coming to EMUEPS**

Of the student participants in the study, one reported that she had used language learning CDs named *British School* for 3-4 weeks. The CDs were issued by a Turkish newspaper to readers who had collected a certain amount of coupons; however,
because she did not personally benefit from these CDs, she stopped using them. Similarly, another student mentioned a variety of programs that she had used, including Oxford CDs issued by a newspaper and free websites featuring educational games. Other students indicated that they had not used any interactive multimedia or web-based learning programs for their education before coming to EMUEPS.

**At EMUEPS**

All students studying at EMUEPS are normally provided with a number of opportunities to benefit from interactive multimedia and web-based materials. In order to accomplish this, the Student’s Self Study Centre (SSSC) was established where students are provided with computers and web access, electronic resources such as CDs and stand-alone programs (for example, WinWIDA), paper-based resources, books, and online resources to use for their education.

Moreover, the school’s academic staff develop in-house paper-based and electronic materials for the students’ use in this centre. The materials are mainly comprised of traditional language exercises, such as multiple choice tests, fill in the gaps, matching exercises, and reading comprehension activities. The electronic activities were developed using Half-Baked software to develop web-based activities. In this regard, web-based activities were collected under a portal referred to as DAÜSEM Online and offered to the EMUEPS students free of charge.

In order to facilitate the use of these sources, every class typically has one hour a week in the SSSC and students are expected to study at their own pace according to their need. During the SSSC hour, teachers become facilitators and guide students according to their individual needs.

For the student participants in both iterations of the study, the use of electronic resources varied according to the choice of the student. While some students reported that they had not used any of the electronic sources provided to them at EMUEPS, others mentioned they used only DAÜSEM Online. Some advised that they used both of the course book CDs and DAÜSEM Online. However, none of the students used the educational CDs available in the centre, such as The Grammar Rom, Live City, or Parts of Speech for their language education. Table 5.3 summarises the participant
students’ years of experience in learning English as a foreign language and use of Interactive Multimedia (IMM) in education.

Table 5.3: Summary of participant students’ years of experience in language learning and use of IMM in education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student participants from the first cycle</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>First or Second University</th>
<th>Years of experience in learning English</th>
<th>Use of technology in education before coming to EMUEPS</th>
<th>Use of technology at EMUEPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nick Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>First or Second University</td>
<td>Years of experience in learning English</td>
<td>Using at school</td>
<td>Personal use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahra</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Second (graduated from a two year program - radio and TV)</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4 and also studied English at her first university</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deniz</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toprak</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Second (graduated from a two year program - computer programing)</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4, studied English at his first university, and has been taking private courses since 2005</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doğukan</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Second (graduated from a two year program – not mentioned)</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4 and also studied English at his first university</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yıldız</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emre</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student participants from the second cycle</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>First or Second University</td>
<td>Years of experience in learning English</td>
<td>Use of technology in education before coming to EMUEPS</td>
<td>Use of technology at EMUEPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ela</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meryem</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4</td>
<td>Only educational CDs for English lessons</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burak</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4</td>
<td>Only educational CDs for English lessons</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duygu</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>In K-12 since year 4</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students’ history of technology use for educational purposes prior to the use of the learning environment was limited. Since the learning environment was designed for relative novices, extensive computer experience was not a prerequisite for use but it
was important to determine that students had some experience of learning in a computer-based learning environment. During the observations, while students were using the learning environment, it was observed that their limited experience was adequate for the task and did not appear to impede their effective use of the learning environment. More information and evidence collected through the interviews are provided below.

**Navigation**

As described in Chapter 4, the interface, and thus the navigation of the City Newsletter, was designed to reflect the real context of an editor’s office. In this respect, all links were placed on the editor’s desk and provided for the selection of the users. In order to differentiate clickable items from non-clickable items, three aids were provided: on mouse over, a ding sound could be heard, a red rectangle appeared around the selected item, and text in the form of a tooltip appeared under the selected area informing the user about the function of that link (e.g., Online Resources, Staff Meeting Room, or Editor’s Agenda).

Generally, learners reported a positive attitude, indicating that, while at first navigation was confusing and difficult, as they explored and interacted with the learning environment they quickly developed knowledge of how it works:

I went over it in detail. When we first entered the site I went over every single object and clicked on them to see what was there. (Interview with Sahra)

I didn’t experience a lot of difficulty. It was good. Even when I had uploaded my draft, there was a link on the first page for the draft. I thought it was quite easy. (Interview with Deniz)

Another student indicated that she developed strategies for navigation through trial and error:

I navigated by searching. I looked at everything one by one. I used the strategy trial and error. (Interview with Duygu)

A few students found the interface straightforward and logical. For example, Yıldız was very confident about the navigation:
It was pretty useful. You can find what you are looking for easily. (Interview with Yıldız)

During the interviews, one of the learners’ responses to the question ‘How did you find what you were looking for?’ was that he followed the breadcrumbs at the bottom and top of the pages (which are automatically formed by Moodle) as he found using the Editor’s Office confusing. He went on to suggest that a list of links would help to provide more guidance:

For example, if there were some indication on the left or right that there are links like other sites instead of thinking what’s going to pop up now. For example, I expected something to pop up when I went over the drawers with the mouse; however, nothing happened. It was deceiving because I thought there’s nothing here too but there was. There are some pop up actions on some but nothing on others … it’s a bit confusing. (Interview with Toprak)

This suggestion contradicts the situated nature of the design. Authentic activities are based on scenarios that reflect the way that knowledge and problem solving skills are used in real world. For this reason, the design of the activity was based on the scenario of an editorial board of a newsletter that publishes articles on social issues. In respect to this, the online environment further supported with a graphical design that represents an editor’s office and face-to-face environment was further supported by giving learners badges. These enabled the designer to give the learners the feeling of being a member of an editorial board (more information about the use of the badges is given in the following section). Basing the design of the learning environment on textual links would not help to give the intended feeling thus this suggestion was disregarded by the researcher and not considered a flaw of the design.

Figure 5.1 below shows the links that are available on each page including the topic pages of the discussion forum.

Figure 5.1: Links provided to navigate from one page to another
Another student indicated that navigation was difficult at some points and caused frustration:

The weakness of the design was navigating in the discussion forums. You enter but you can’t always go back. When you want to go back you always get a message. I think if there was a back button at the bottom it would be better. (Interview with Burak)

This suggestion was also disregarded because not only were there breadcrumbs at the bottom of the page which enable the user to navigate among the discussion forum pages, but also learners were able to use the browser’s back buttons in order to go to the previous pages.

Figure 5.2 below illustrates the breadcrumbs available by the platform to enable navigation among the discussion boards.

![Figure 5.2: Breadcrumbs created by Moodle](image)

Since weaknesses in navigation were largely due to the students’ lack of experience, and not related to the learning environment, it was considered preferable to address this issue through further learning support in navigation, rather than eliminating the design element.

During the observations and interviews of the first cycle, it was discovered that another element of the program that caused difficulties with navigation was related to the use of the calendar. The calendar was provided to inform the learners about upcoming events and deadlines. The main reason for difficulty appeared to be that, after entering the Editor’s Office, the calendar was not visible or readily accessible. Users mainly used only those links provided within the Editor’s Office, so the calendar was often overlooked. In order to overcome this, students suggested placing a link to the calendar from the Editor’s Office to enable its use.

A similar problem was experienced with the links to the discussion forum that were on the same page as the calendar, under the title ‘Topic outline’ (see Figure 5.3). The difference between the Staff Meeting Room and the ‘Topic outline’ was that the discussions in the staff meeting room were initiated by the class teacher whereas in the
‘Social Forum’ (see Figure 5.3) students had the opportunity to start their own topic to share ideas and queries amongst each other about the project. They were also able to attach files of a maximum 8MB in size that they might wish to share with their peers or within their groups. Once again, learners suggested that a link to the social forum be placed into the ‘Staff Meeting Room’ for easy access.

![Figure 5.3: The calendar and the social forum in the first cycle](image)

At the beginning of the activity some students were observed staring at the screen and waiting for something else to appear or happen. Meanwhile, they were observing what other students were doing in the SSSC or listening to guidance provided by the class teacher. Once they realised that moving the mouse on the screen creates some action, they all started moving their mouse cursor and reading the tooltip that appeared beneath each link. At first, for some students, this navigation system caused some feelings of confusion.

According to the suggestions received from the participants in the first cycle, names were written on the clickable items in order to facilitate better navigation and an image of a calendar was placed into the interface design of the Editor’s Office and linked to the calendar feature of the platform (see Figure 5.4). The social forum was also placed into the Staff Meeting Room, to ease navigation in the second cycle. As a result, confusion was eliminated. This was reflected in the positive remarks on the navigation of the learning environment in the second cycle.
Thus, learners reported a positive regard for the navigation of the learning environment:

> It was designed accordingly. For example; the door takes you to the discussions when you click on it. You have put these types of links. You have put bridges. Through this we can find what we are looking for by recalling what the objects refer to, like you think where is what I am looking for and you remember. (Interview with Meryem)

As they worked with the learning environment, the means of navigation employed by the students was found to be reasonably easy and effortless. Students had little difficulty finding what they were looking for and they were usually able to return to the main interface quickly and efficiently.

**From resistance to technology as a motivational tool**

As noted in Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003), students’ first reaction to authentic activities can be one of resistance. The authors argue that learners may have difficulties in accepting a real life scenario and its implicit roles and thus have difficulty engaging with the activity accordingly. Nonetheless, the authors note that once learners begin to accept the scenario and their roles, their engagement increases.
This phenomena was experienced in this study. At first, some students found it strange to learn a language through the use of interactive multimedia to create a newsletter. However, after a certain amount of time, all of the students began to accept the authentic nature of the task and eventually agreed that it was a good way of learning a foreign language.

In the first cycle, one student pointed out that resistance to the learning environment was based on prejudice in respect to its difference to the main project activities and pedagogical approach being employed in the school:

> At the beginning, when I was first introduced to the program I was prejudiced. While others [students in other classes] were doing a normal project [traditional type of activity using pencil and paper], we were expected to do it on the Internet. (Interview with Sahra)

Another student indicated that the novelty of the approach caused worries about the effectiveness of a learning environment that was not commonly used:

> Because it was new nobody knew about it. Nobody had done it before. We don’t know much and we started with worries. We expected something completely paper based. It was difficult at the beginning. (Interview with Deniz)

One of the members of a pair that was videotaped during the class hour expressed the view that uncertainty of how to proceed was the main reason for resistance in using the learning environment:

> We met there for the first time, what I mean is that we were introduced to the site. We didn’t know what to do and it was a little confusing so we were looking at our friends besides us to see how they entered and what they did... At first we didn’t do anything. We didn’t like it. (Interview with Doğukan)

The same student also indicated that if a task is not graded then, again, the student will resist doing the task:

> Grading is everything for us. There is no other meaning for it. (Interview with Doğukan)
During the second cycle, in order to overcome the problem of resistance and increase motivation, it was decided to create badges that would have the learner’s name and “City Newsletter, Journalist” written on them to promote the learner role. The distribution of badges indicated that learners were able to attain to the “willing suspension of disbelief”, as argued by Herrington et al. (2003), to accept their roles.

Learners were also given the Newsletter prepared by the first research group to show them what their final product as ‘journalists’ would look like.

One of the learners, Ela, provides an excellent example of the transformation from feelings of resistance and annoyance to those of excitement and high motivation. Ela explained that once one of her teachers, who was not taking part in this project and forgot that her teaching partner, Caner had volunteered to do so, had introduced the paper-based project task to the class, she immediately started the task by collecting sources and data to complete the first task. Ela felt disappointed after Caner introduced this project to the class feeling that she had wasted her time and energy. In all fairness her teacher assured her that, if she wanted, she could still proceed with the project that she had started and she would be assessed like other learners in other class. Moreover, she was informed that she would not be penalised for working on that project. However, once all the students were given their roles, their badges, and were introduced to the learning environment, Ela decided to complete the research activity as she said that these tasks were more meaningful and interesting, with a real purpose and audience, when compared to the EPS project.

When discussing the reasons for resistance to using the learning environment, students’ mentioned that, as they used the site, their motivation to complete the activity increased. In general, they categorised the motivational qualities of the learning environment into eight aspects: (1) taking on the role of a journalist and creating a real newsletter to share with their peers, (2) the freedom to access the learning environment from anywhere at any time, (3) arousing their curiosity, (4) being provided with the opportunity to express their opinions, (5) the interactivity and ability for meaningful resource and idea sharing for an authentic purpose, (6) the need to use the foreign language as a communication tool, (7) being able to develop topic related knowledge and vocabulary, and (8) that it was fun. These are explained in more detail below.
First, most of the students found their role as a ‘journalist’ motivating, especially when it came to designing the ‘City Newsletter’:

Because I am studying Journalism, this project and role was very suitable for me and it motivated me, especially taking on an active role while designing our project newsletter. (Interview with Sahra)

Secondly, many students mentioned that being able to work anywhere, anytime was motivating as it gave them the freedom to submit tasks at a later or more convenient time and from any locale, including outside of the country:

Due to it being on the internet everyone can access it… from home, work. (Interview with Toprak)

It was very beneficial for me that our homework could be submitted online because I was in Turkey at the time. If I had to hand in my homework on paper I would have to hand it in early or I wouldn’t be able to hand it in at all because I wouldn’t be here. Because it was like this it was very relaxing. We can find internet everywhere. We can go anywhere and do our homework. We can also get information from our teacher straight away. We can reach our teacher through the internet. I think it has many advantages. (Interview with Yildiz)

Also, when learners are not ready to do a task, participate in a discussion, or learn in a scheduled class hour, such an environment provided them with the opportunity to work at any time or place, at their own pace.

Thirdly, curiosity was an indication of motivation:

Students definitely learn without being bored because this has been designed to raise curiosity. Students become interested and are curious to do things here. (Interview with Ela)

Fourthly, one student indicated that the opportunity to express his opinions was a motivational factor:

Here we were given the opportunity to express our opinions. This was good. (Interview with Burak)
Being interactive, the learning environment allowed for meaningful resource and idea sharing for authentic purpose. This was observed, by the participant teacher, to be the fifth motivating aspect:

The other one is it makes it interactive and it carries the interaction outside the class so that students can keep in contact online they may exchange materials, ideas, sources and they share their work with each other. It makes it more enjoyable and it gives them motivation I guess because knowing that they will share what they have done with their friends [and] their teacher on our platform it is more meaningful and more authentic let’s say and more motivating for some students. That’s my experience my observation and some feedback from students they say they found it more enjoyable more interesting. (Interview with Caner)

Another student commented that the learning environment prompted a greater usage of the foreign language for communication purposes. This is the sixth motivational factor:

As I said it had this effect on English: because we saw everything in English in the site after a while we started to use English more because we are unable to use a word of Turkish in this site. Therefore, we had to do our homework and answer our teacher’s questions in English and after a while this would help remember things. As a result it was helping our English develop. (Interview with Sahra)

The seventh aspect of motivation indicated by students was that the learning environment was assisting their language development:

To do the tasks we needed grammar. With our hard work it developed. (Interview with Meryem)

For example writing, I believe my writing ability has improved. Before, I used to write but now I can write faster...It has also contributed to our vocabulary knowledge. (Interview with Burak)

My vocabulary developed dramatically. So has my grammar. For example, before when I used to talk I would say ‘I am a badminton’ instead of ‘I play badminton’. My reading has improved. (Interview with Duygu)

Many students also indicated that their language improved as they developed topic related knowledge by engaging with the learning environment:
Not only did we consider our topic but we also considered our friends’ topics, we touched on a variety of topics from health to international topics. As a result we read about our topics and our friends’ topics and opinions...this help develop our knowledge. (Interview with Meryem)

The eighth aspect of motivation was the fact that the students found the learning environment to be ‘fun’ and an alternative to the classic use of course books and taking notes:

About this topic it is good and it is like both fun and you do it. I think this is the entertaining way of learning. (Interview with Emre)

To be honest, it is boring to learn from books as you just read and read and it just doesn’t finish. But when it is on the web, it is different. (Interview with Doğukan)

This shows that students’ initial resistance to using technology transformed as they used the learning environment, instead becoming a motivation tool. Thus, even though learners were reluctant to interact with the learning environment, once they were acquainted with their roles and were given a real problem to solve, and shared their solution in the form of a real product with a real audience, they all indicated positive remarks.

**User interface**

The user interface of the learning environment was designed to reflect the real life context of an editor’s room. The design and development of the interface was described in detail in Chapter 4. A democratic design, in which learners decide which elements to use in which order, was preferred over a prescriptive design (Schwier & Misanchuk, 1993) where learners are given an order in which to use the sources, as it was complementary to the characteristics of authentic tasks (Herrington, et al., 2003) and constructivist learning environments upon which the learning environment was modelled. Such an interface required a metaphor to be used. The Editor’s Office was chosen as the metaphor as it was related to the role and task that learners were to engage with (Erickson, 1991).

Students indicated that, because they were not acquainted with such a metaphor-based interface, initially they felt a little confused:
It was confusing at first because I hadn’t seen such a design before. (Interview with Sahra)

At first the image made it difficult to use because once I moved the mouse cursor to see what was active then there were objects that weren’t active, so I was a little confused. (Interview with Toprak)

Lack of exposure to learning environments with metaphor-based interface design also seemed to cause some delay in using the learning environment:

When I first entered the learning environment I just stared at the screen waiting for something to happen, this was because of inexperience of course. (Interview with Sahra)

Trial and error was another system used by learners to become acquainted with the interface and to begin interacting with the learning environment:

But after I started moving the mouse cursor around, I realised that it was active. (Interview with Sahra)

Even though, initially, many students experienced difficulty due to confusion and lack of exposure to such learning environments, they also admitted that once they started interacting with the interface they found it useful and appropriate to the task:

At first it was confusing but once you use it you learn from it. (Interview with Doğukan)

… but the more I used it the more I found it appropriate to the task. This style is very nice. (Interview with Sahra)

In spite of the unfamiliarity of the interface, there were also some students who found it useful from the very beginning:

It was very useful. You can find what you’re looking for easily. (Interview with Yıldız)

The democratic nature of the interface design and the use of a metaphor were regarded as a positive element:
When I first entered the site the design, it makes you very happy and I really liked that. It made me positive, because you don’t see things in lists which make it boring for students. I really liked this design, the table, different objects being clickable.

(Interview with Meryem)

Students also linked their positive views of the interface to the distribution of the badges which introduced them to their roles as ‘journalists’ during the orientation of the project:

The office environment, because the badges you distributed to us at the beginning gave us that feeling. This site has turned into a really nice design. (Interview with Meryem)

Another student also indicated that the design contributed to the acceptance of their role of a ‘journalist’:

The design makes you feel like a real journalist. (Interview with Ela)

Generally, students were able to use the interface effectively and indicated its appropriateness and contribution to the authenticity of the environment which, once again, supports the notion of ‘willing suspension of disbelief’. It was a matter of becoming acquainted with the interface and once students used it they adapted very quickly. The only feature that the students participated in in the first cycle thought could be improved was the link profile which provided the opportunity to take notes while studying. In this respect, in the second cycle a link was added to the Editor’s Office to facilitate this feature. A lack of knowledge regarding the use of the blog function in their profiles is an issue that needs to be considered; however, it did not affect the use of the learning environment. Nonetheless, being comfortable and generally knowing what to do should not be misinterpreted as the sole indicator of success of the design. Learners also needed to reflect on their roles and the learning sources throughout their interaction with the learning environment in order to adapt to the immersion required to operate in the environment and to complete the task.

The role of resources in developing language skills

Van Lier’s (2007) argument that “a person does not learn by receiving ‘input’ that is ‘delivered’ via some instructional mechanism, but by picking up information in the
environment on the basis of and guided by organismic needs and purposes” (p. 53) was namely supported by the discussion forum and the example essays in the learning environment.

Resources, such as the example essays, sample newsletters, links to external sources, sample presentations, and the discussions that took place on the discussion forum, were all present in the learning environment to provide learners with the necessary support and guidance in the development of their language skills. Thus, the teachers, rather than instructing learners on all the information and skills needed in a step-by-step approach, guided learners to benefit from the resources according to their needs through fruitful discussions and reflections.

Many of the students indicated how *modelling* peer work assisted in developing their language skills:

I would look at what my friends had written as I didn’t know what to write and our teacher would tell me to examine what my friends wrote and to write something similar. I learned a lot from them because I really didn’t know what to write… I could see what my friends had written and I could get support from them. (Interview with Deniz)

Our teacher asked questions on the forum and we answered there, as a result I could also see what my friends wrote, to be honest I would check how my friends answered and work out what I needed to do exactly. (Interview with Yıldız)

My ability to use English has really developed. I would read my friends posts and this would help me correct my grammar mistakes. (Interview with Duygu)

Warschauer (2005) argues that engaging in computer-mediated communication (CMC) empowers the necessary conditions for social learning to occur. According to the author, CMC helps students learn from example–observing how others use linguistic chunks and “how they refine their writing for, and with input from, an authentic audience” (p. 3).

One student compared the opportunity for modelling, provided by the discussion forum, with the way students engage in language production in the traditional classroom setting:
Staff Meeting Room, I seriously liked it because I could always go there and have a look at what the teacher wants, how my friends answered the questions, what I did right and what I did wrong, how the sentences were formed…as I said in class, the teacher understands us so we don’t think about what we are going to say but here you must pass the message on and if you don’t know how to do it, you can take a look at how your friends have done it and get an idea. If their teacher has written an example while writing the question you can get an idea from that or you can look at how the question is written to get an idea. It helps develop your grammar. Of course you support it with vocabulary. (Interview with Sahra)

Through this, it can be seen that learners lacking the confidence to share their knowledge of the foreign language, due to weak language ability—or those simply lacking knowledge of how to approach the task—took advantage of their ability to model their peer’s posts.

Modelling, as a method for instruction, was the provision of the example essays resource that incorporated essays written by former students. It was observed that the students who spent a lot of time using these resources were able to develop the targeted knowledge and skills.

A significant comment made by Deniz indicated that, after using example essays and analysing the genre, she developed more in-depth knowledge of writing essays:

For instance I didn’t know how to write an essay like this before. It would be simpler and just writing for the sake of writing it. I learned what I needed to do here. With our teachers’ help we learned why we were doing things and there were example essays which helped us with the topic and I thought it was very useful … I really think I can write an essay now … before I never used paragraphing, or a thesis statement nor a conclusion statement, I would just write a simple draft with ideas following each other but now I use linkers for example. (Interview with Deniz)

It is worthwhile mentioning that this student received a full grade in the writing section of her final examination, attributing her success in a comment to her teacher, to the sample essays in the learning environment and the activity she completed.

Another student commented that:
I also learned how to write an essay. How to start a paragraph, first we give information, then we give examples in the development part, and lastly we give our own opinion. (Interview with Duygu)

However, despite the benefits of having example essays, the number of example essays was thought to be insufficient by many of the students:

There could have been more examples. (Interview with Sahra)

Students must have authentic communication that goes beyond sentences written in textbooks that stand on student’s desks (Van Lier, 2007). In order to raise meaningful discussion between learners, and to create a social constructivist learning environment, Ceyda and Caner placed their students’ final compositions on the forum, with their consent. This enabled learners to focus on giving suggestions for the further development of the content. This not only helped students to use their peers’ products as models for learning, but also provided them with input for further development. In order to initiate the discussion for each essay, the teachers posted:

Choose at least 3 essays (not your essay) and discuss how we can develop it further. Think about:

1. Essay Components:
   Does the essay have the necessary elements - introduction, body, conclusion?

2. Language Use:
   Is the language understandable?
   Does it give the correct message?

3. Organisation:
   Are the ideas in a logical order?
   What can we use to make our ideas easier to follow?

4. Audience:
   Does the writer address the expectations of the audience (municipality, parents, teenagers ...)?

Give your suggestions on how to make the essays better...

It was evident from student responses that they developed communicative skills by beginning their responses with a positive remark about the content, for example:

I think it is good essay it is understandable and it gave correct message. (Response by Yıldız)
I like this topic because the topic is mentioning water. (Response by Emre)

I liked your topic. It’s fantastic. (Response by Mert)

I liked your project and the way you present your project because I felt something different in your project and I think you chose the best one. Perfect 😊. (Response by Efe)

Following the positive opening remark, learners provided their opinions on areas which were difficult to understand or needed improvement:

…this topic has got a few difficult words. However, essay is easy and limited. Writer usually tell us similar sentences. Because of this I don’t like it. (Response by Emre)

…it doesn’t have enough idea to solve this problem. Explanation about negative effect is necessary for me. (Response by Yıldız)

I liked your presentation very much … but you have some grammar mistakes but I know you can do better thanks for project. (Response by Okan)

Learners mainly concluded their responses with suggestions on how to improve the content of the composition in relation to the area which they indicated required improvement:

In my opinion after explain we should give idea to help parents. (Response by Yıldız)

Alternatively, if writer had told about limiting alcohol or how an alcoholic can stop drinking alcohol, topic would have been beneficial. (Response by Emre)

…just one thing that I want to say you could make a research about cyprus area and you could share with us…Is it available to do this sport in cyrus? If yes where do you want to design. Of course these are not a biiniig missing but if you could it would be more clear 😊 You did great job guys!!! (Response by Ela)

The two-way communication shows that the discussion forum was used successfully to create meaningful communication among its users “that go beyond the sentences or pronouncements proffered by the textbook that lies open on the same page at the same time on every desk” (Van Lier, 2007, p. 47).
It was observed that the use of the target language for communication helped students to develop relevant skills and the ideas shared on the forum provided the necessary conditions to construct knowledge collectively. This is evident from the student posts listed above and provided below:

Students having discussion topics like the last topic about student essays, for example; we needed to write what we thought was wrong, how the organisation was...these types of things. These were very good. Because students can see both his/her weaknesses and also develops the skill to tell others and also gains self-confidence in recognising mistakes and at the beginning you can’t do this. (Interview with Ela)

Students’ responses on the forum illustrated that the opportunity to receive feedback on their essays was positive as it made them feel proud of their work:

After I finished my project, I went back and read the responses about it...I felt proud of myself, and it boosted my self-confidence...99% of the comments were positive.

(Interview with Burak)

The comments on Burak’s work below illustrate the types of positive and constructive feedback he received from his peers that helped him to feel proud of his work. As a result, he appeared to gain a great deal of confidence:

This is the essay by [writes the names of the author students] on Gymkhana, an interesting motor sport. Please have a look and evaluate in the 4 aspects (Essay Components, Language Use, Organisation, and Audience).

Please write your comments and evaluation as a reply to this message.

Thank you. (Initiative post by Caner)

Dear … [writes the names of the author students]
I think you have chosen a good topic. It was very good and i like this sport. Your language is understandable in project and your grammer and tenses are very good 😁 Your ideas in a logical order and thanks for presentation. (Response by Aras)

As Van Lier (2007) pointed out, the students have learned by “picking up information in the environment” depending on their needs and by engaging in discussions on the discussion forum and referring to the example essays. This enabled learners to
construct knowledge collectively. Thus, the social constructivist nature of the learning environment once again assisted learners in developing their language skills by enabling them to:

1) analyse what language features are used by others while asking and answering questions,
2) analyse their own mistakes,
3) learn from their peers in the subject matter and develop their knowledge, and
4) develop accuracy in the target language.

Discussion

In order to answer Research Question 1, How do students engage with and respond to a computer assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education?, a computer assisted language learning environment for the EFL context was designed to incorporate the characteristics of authentic tasks as defined in the literature.

In both the iterative cycles, the analysis of the transcripts and careful viewing of the videos suggested that, because learners had not been familiar with this type of language learning environment, initially they showed resistance in using it. However, as students engaged with the learning environment they found the computer assisted language learning environment motivating and endorsed this in eight aspects. They enjoyed: (1) taking on the role of a journalist and creating a real newsletter to share with their peers, (2) the freedom to access the learning environment from anywhere at any time, (3) arousing their curiosity, (4) being provided with the opportunity to express their opinions, (5) the interactivity and ability for meaningful resource and idea sharing for an authentic purpose, (6) the need to use the foreign language as a communication tool, (7) being able to develop topic related knowledge and vocabulary, and (8) that it was fun.

Students’ overall response to the metaphor-based interface was positive and they found it quite appropriate for the context of the project as it complemented their roles and made them feel like real journalists. This was evident despite, at the beginning,
students indicating that they found this design confusing due to a lack of exposure to such learning environments.

Despite initial confusion, students’ inexperience did not appear to affect the use of the simple navigation devices in the learning environment. They were able to freely navigate the resources to access media elements, even though their prior experience of interactive multimedia use was very limited. Despite the objection to a lack of clear links separate from the interface, learners were able to navigate through the environment by recalling what the objects referred to and by developing strategies such as trial and error. Thus, the suggestion to provide a list of links was not considered as this would contradict with the nature of constructivism.

Engaging in discussions, analysing example essays written by peers, and the opportunity to model peer work were significant features of the discussion forum as ways of developing the learners’ skills.

Despite participants’ comments on the strengths of the learning environment such as motivation, the appropriateness of the design to support the roles of the students, and the ease of navigation in respect to the interface design, participants in the first cycle made significant comment on the deficiencies of navigation design. The participants’ main criticisms were related to features such as the blog and calendar that were available in the learning environment but were not linked to the metaphorical interface. Thus, learners commented that these ‘missing’ components, if they had been linked appropriately, would have enabled them to benefit more from the learning environment. The social forum was not linked to the Staff Meeting Room, where the instructor initiated discussions were located, as it was a forum for student initiation and was instead located on the first page. Despite this, learners did not make use of this forum and indicated that if there was a link to it in the Staff Meeting Room, like all the other forums, they would have made use of it. Despite the fact that the researcher took this suggestion on board and made necessary adjustments, second cycle learners still did not make use of the social forum linked to the Staff Meeting Room.

Even though these weaknesses did not hinder the use of the learning environment, appropriate action was taken in the second cycle to avoid confusion and to promote use
of the profile section’s blog feature, the calendar, and to promote the use of the social forum.

**Conclusion**

These findings suggest that the students’ engagement with the computer assisted language learning environment, which incorporated the characteristics of authentic tasks, was successful in providing guidelines for the development and implementation of the foreign language learning environment during the second iterative cycle. This is despite the fact that none of the students had used electronic learning environments as part of their formal education before coming to EMUEPS (see Table 5.3). Generally, students found the tasks and environment motivating, the tasks provided learners with real-life purpose and, with its metaphor-based design, they generally found the learning environment easy to navigate.

It was also evident that students could integrate the learning environment into their education system successfully and benefit from its use. Throughout the activity, learners navigated with ease and used resources to develop relevant knowledge and to create a collaborative learning environment with the use of the discussion forums.

In the next chapter, student and teacher opinion, about the importance of each of the characteristics of the authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language education, is analysed.
CHAPTER 6

Characteristics of authentic activities: 
Addressing Research Question 2

In the literature review in Chapter 2, the importance of authenticity in education is described in terms of contextualising learning in an activity that is meaningful to the learners and that incorporates characteristics of authentic activities. In this respect, the guiding principles of authentic activities suggested by Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) were initially found as the most relevant framework to use for the development of the learning environment (described in Chapter 4-Description of the learning environment).

In this chapter, participants’ opinions about the importance of each characteristic has been gathered and analysed.

Research question 2:

*How do students and teachers view the importance of each of the characteristics of authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language education?*

**Framework and method of analysis**

In order to answer Research Question 2, participants were interviewed (see Table 3.1 for interview questions) and later these interviews were transcribed for analysis. Due to the language skills of the participant learners, the interview questions were translated into Turkish with the aim of enabling learners to best understand the question and reflect their opinions. That data was then translated into English. Data collected in two iterative cycles from interviews with students and participant teachers, teacher journals, and other documentary evidence were analysed in accordance with Miles and
Huberman’s (1994) three step process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was completed by coding the data, as described by Miles and Huberman, in order to sort and organise data to be able to draw final conclusions.

**Analysis of data**

A ‘cross-case’ data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was employed to examine: 1) the interview transcripts of ten students and three teachers (six students and two teachers during the first cycle, and 4 students and 1 teacher during the second cycle), 2) observations of students and teachers while using the learning environment and, 3) teacher journals. From the analysis, emerging themes began to highlight how participants viewed the importance of each of the characteristics of authentic activities in the learning environment. The themes differed for each of the characteristics, each of which are discussed in detail in the sections below.

**Authentic activities have real world relevance**

The learning environment provided real world relevance in four dimensions: 1) a realistic scenario that was comprised of issues relevant to students’ lives; 2) realistic roles that complemented the scenario—students as journalists and the teacher as the editor of the newsletter; 3) realistic outcomes—the production of a group newsletter to be distributed on campus; and 4) serving a real audience in relation to the issues—the Mayor of Famagusta, parents, local citizens, the vice rector, and young people like themselves. The themes that emerged shed light on how both the teachers and students perceived the concept of authentic activities having real world relevance. Each of these themes – *Awareness as motivation, Motivation promotes engagement, Real purpose for learning,* and *Gaining robust knowledge* – is discussed in more detail below.

**Awareness as motivation**

Awareness of the scenario, the specified roles, the final product, and the audience served played a crucial role in the way students approached the task as a whole. For example, some students in the first cycle were either absent on the day that the activity was presented to the class or they could not understand the teacher’s instructions which were in the target language. Thus, they indicated that not being aware of these
attributes affected their attitude towards the task and how this affected the product they produced:

Personally because we were not told I didn’t feel it… I thought that what I wrote would be taken into consideration by someone and really good things are presented as solutions and thought someone make use of it would read it. (Interview with Toprak)

…if we learned this earlier it would have been different and better things would have been produced. (Interview with Doğukan)

I wasn’t aware…if you could have made us aware I think it would have been more exciting to write…we weren’t aware. I personally wasn’t. I don’t think anyone was. My real purpose was to get a high score. (Interview with Yıldız)

During the second cycle, in order to overcome the problem of awareness, participants were given badges (as described in Chapter 5). Thus, students in the second cycle reported that being aware of their roles resulted in motivation that gave a sensation of enjoyment and, in turn, motivation:

Of course…what we needed to do was explained to us at the beginning and our aim to improve things was there. And to be able to do this we needed to be good journalists to learn what the people wanted. I think this was explained very clearly. As I said, it is related to my department as I am studying journalism it was very useful project for me. (Interview with Sahra)

It brings colour to education and learning becomes different. (Interview with Ela)

One student mentioned that her role made her feel important:

I felt more important like a real journalist trying to solve social problems. (Interview with Deniz)

Other students indicated that the role gave them responsibility and value:

I was aware that I had a responsibility…the feeling of our thoughts being valued is a good thing. (Interview with Burak)
While preparing our artefacts I felt like a real journalist. I felt as though I had a big responsibility. And we did the best that we could like a journalist. (Interview with Duygu)

One of the participant teachers commented that, even though she was aware of her role, at times she found it difficult but none the less she went on to indicate that it gave them energy:

Well, it was interesting. It was something new for me it was new for the students so it gave us all energy. It was something that we haven’t tried before and it was really nice. We took on different roles and we liked it. Times I have to admit that although I had the role of the editor I took on the role of the teacher. Yeah I have to admit that but still it was good … at times I did. It was difficult to (the interviewer: switch) yeah it was difficult but when I could that it was good. (Interview with İrem)

The other two participant teachers also found their roles difficult; however, they both indicated that it complemented the task:

…actually I liked that role because it gave all of us a purpose and it gave us a reason to read the articles or the products of the students that they produced. So it also fitted with the idea that they were going to produce newsletter at the end of the activity as a published project so being an editor was a difficult task… (Interview with Ceyda)

…it makes sense. I mean the teacher should be the ideal person for to be the editor. Because I edited their drafts so and what made it meaningful authentic …. So what do editors do? They edit drafts and they suggest revisions corrections and etc. and the journalists let’s say do their editions revise their drafts and they use their final products. That’s what I did. So I enjoyed it. (Interview with Caner)

**Motivation promotes engagement**

One of the aims of providing real world relevance is to provide learners with realistic situations to use the language for an authentic purpose while targeting an authentic audience. This, in turn, motivates the students to push their limits and produce better products and achieve better learning outcomes. This was reflected in the following comment by Deniz:
While writing I tried to include more knowledge and seriousness … yes this was clear (meaning their roles). While writing you write more seriously and pay more attention to accuracy because everyone will read it and you have the aim of showing your ability. (Interview with Deniz)

One student indicated regret for not being aware of the scenario, roles, and other elements:

I wish we had known this before because the outcome would have been much better. (Interview with Doğukan)

This endorses the idea that real world relevant activities motivate students to take learning activities more seriously.

**Real purpose for learning**

Traditional school activities focus on the recognition and reproduction of memorised information or practice of isolated skills and do not supply context for real world relevant use. Traditional school activities are often those that people do not do in real life, such as multiple choice tests, fill in the gaps, or matching exercises. However, in real life, people are expected to solve problems in context. One of the students compared traditional school activities to authentic activities in the sense that authentic activities bring real world relevance to the classroom and make the activity more meaningful as there is a purpose for using the language:

We memorized. We all know grammar if you ask me but grammar is the simplest part. They used to give us the vocabulary and we used them in sentences. We put sentences in the correct order but now it has changed. Now we need to collect information, translate them into English then form sentences and as a result paragraphs are formed. (Interview with Yıldız)

One of the participant teachers also mentioned that real world relevance was motivating:

I liked the idea that it’s real world relevant. And it gives the students that motivation that they have a real reason to do something and at the end of the day having to produce polished products for a real purpose and real audience. (Interview with Ceyda)
Toprak used a Turkish-Islamic proverb to explain that, regardless of the amount of advice (or instructions) that one receives, a person learns best by experiencing the consequences of an activity that they do:

“One calamity is much better than one thousand advices”, and this is like the things I experience while learning. For example, it’s related to this. I researched about the topic ‘drinking alcohol and driving’ and this is how I learned and it’s very exciting. When I research and learn it has benefits for me, I learn and make use of the information I learned. (Interview with Toprak)

Gaining robust knowledge

As argued in Chapter 2, inert knowledge is described as the passive knowledge that students develop through traditional school type activities that cannot be used actively outside school (Herrington et al., 2010). In foreign language education, students learn structures such as future perfect tense or past perfect tense that they never have the opportunity to use in daily conversations. As a result, while they can recognise these structures in exams and give correct answers, they are hardly able to have a natural conversation in the real world.

The problem of inert knowledge was clearly mentioned and criticised by Sahra:

We need to move away from the school type activities like 2x2 equals 4 and move onto different things. As I said, I have been studying for 8 months here and I can’t have a 2 minute conversation in English with anyone not even my teacher. We have completed four course books and we have only learned subject+verb+object. We haven’t learned anything else. (Interview with Sahra)

In traditional educational settings, students’ knowledge is tested and recognised according to the retention and reproduction of knowledge that was delivered via some instructional mechanism (Van Lier, 2007). Students’ success in exams is favoured positively and students who get good grades are treated as successful individuals. However, in foreign language education, despite the fact that many students pass the Proficiency Test and being study in their subject area departments, they struggle to be successful in their departments. This is mainly caused by a lack of ability when using the language for communicative purposes. Sahra went on to exemplify this situation by talking about her friends studying in their departments:
We got 40 points from here, 10 points from the midterm, 15 from the final, we passed with 65 and we passed to our departments but we can’t talk and on the first day of class the teacher is explaining things and we are just looking as we don’t understand a word. (Interview with Sahra)

A student compared authentic activities to school type activities and emphasised his positive feelings towards using an authentic activity as a part of his language education:

We are learning from books. Books have scenarios like a meteor is coming and questions like - Will it hit the earth? Will earth be destroyed? Is it going to explode? What’s going to happen? This was in our books last semester for example. Here we studied ‘going to’ and ‘will’ through this but there is no need to teach something imaginary. If it were something from our lives, and everyone gave examples from their experiences…for example, if it were like that. (Interview with Toprak)

In order to overcome the problem at hand, Sahra suggested that:

At high school we used the New English File series and we completed the four levels, it might be a beneficial book but I don’t use fill in the gap type activities in daily life. Or I won’t read a text and answer multiple choice questions in my daily life. I think the school should abandon book oriented education and look at life because in real life we will not use these. (Interview with Sahra)

Authentic activities help learners to develop problem solving skills that they will have to encounter in real life. Toprak exemplified this through an analogy of the relationship between a sparrow and a hawk:

A person experiences the information it is then that the information is absorbed. For example, that if there are no sparrows, hawks cannot develop hunting skills; and if there are no hawks, sparrows cannot develop self-defending skills. So, if a human experiences something him/herself then it will enable life-long learning and s/he will never forget. Secondly, this becomes personal experience and then use the experience later as it won’t be knowledge gained from someone else. (Interview with Toprak)

The aim of education should be to give learners problem solving skills rather than answering decontextualized questions (Moursund, 2003). DAÜSEM Online was one
of the e-learning sources provided to students to use at EMUEPS. The environment was developed by EPS teachers using Half-Baked software and thus the activities include matching, multiple choice test, fill in the gap activities and alike. In order to promote the use of this source it was made a part of the assessment breakdown and learners who completed the tasks could get up to 5 points (which accounts for 5% of the assessment). However, despite the fact that some learners completed and collected some points from it, according to the students the environment had not contributed to their development.

Sahra and Doğukan mentioned that they had developed strategies to answer the questions without learning anything. Sahra mentioned that she copied questions and answers and pasted them to Google Translate. Then, based on the translation, she selected the appropriate answer among the options. Doğukan mentioned that Google Chrome (web browser) allows users to open two different user accounts at the same time on one computer enabling him to open another student’s account (a student who had completed the activities) and, by viewing the correct answers from his friend’s account, answer the questions on his account.

The situation above indicates the importance of the nature of the activity completed within a learning environment. While decontextualized exercises may allow students to pass exams, they do not contribute to the learners’ development. On the other hand, while authentic activities are complex and ill-defined, they cannot be completed if the student is not truly engaged in the activity. Thus, they help learners to develop robust knowledge, such as problem solving skills, that will be helpful to them throughout their lives.

One student valued the use of such a learning environment, that provided the opportunity to gain problem solving skills and robust knowledge, and believed schools should teach more than just the basics or facts. In other words, he advised that schools should not only aim at transferring a body of knowledge but also skills that would help learners be successful in real life:

I think that it was very good. I think that its use should continue because they shouldn’t only teach us lessons like Turkish and Mathematics at school. (Interview with Doğukan)
The discussion above demonstrates that authentic activities with real world relevance motivate learners which in turn promotes improvement and assists in gaining robust knowledge.

**Authentic activities are ill-defined, requiring students to define the tasks and sub-tasks needed to complete the activity**

Authentic activities require learners to go through undefined stages. In other words, learners are not prescribed an order in which to complete tasks. They have to choose their own path while defining tasks and sub-tasks to be able to complete the activity and achieve the outcome. The themes that emerged from analysis shed light on how both the teachers and students viewed authentic activities being ill-defined. Each of these themes – *Exploration promoting in-depth learning*, and *Flexibility promoting creativity* – is discussed in detail below.

**Exploration promoting in-depth learning**

The City Newsletter was based on the scenario of publishing articles on daily problems and providing alternative solutions or suggestions to these problems. In this regard, learners were expected to research, collect, and collate information to be able to complete the activity. In this study, learners mentioned that they used a variety of resources while writing the articles, for example, conducting interviews, searching the internet, using books, and reading newspapers:

I searched on the internet and I initially looked at what there is in Cyprus and then I looked at what there is world-wide and I found things I really liked but they were not suitable for Cyprus so I gave up. Later on water zorbs interested me and I liked it. (Interview with Emre)

Firstly, I talked to the residents of Famagusta like shop assistants, the security guard of my dormitory about the water problems. I got a lot of details about where the water comes from, if there is a water purification facility, whether the beach water is purified, where the drinkable water is supplied from for example… I looked for answers to the questions and of course I asked the residence of Famagusta. Later on I learned that there is a water purification facility and I did some research on it from the internet. (Interview with Yildiz)
While completing these sub-tasks, learners indicated how they developed their language skills:

…the internet sites I found were English not Turkish so there were a lot of words I didn’t know so I had to translate to understand it and I got help from the internet, I also used a dictionary and I experienced some problems but in general I understood. (Interview with Emre)

Firstly, I needed to find resources…I needed to search from the internet and other places…I examined what they were, which words they used for example. There were many differences between articles on politics to an article about a traffic accident. There were many clichés and lot of different words. (Interview with Doğukan)

Even though one student indicated that the ill-defined tasks gave a sense of vagueness, it was satisfying:

At first we were just left in emptiness and said choose something and we chose that something. Then we got information about it. We created it from zero and this was satisfying (Interview with Burak).

**Flexibility promoting creativity**

One of the participant teachers saw the nature of the authentic tasks—as ill-defined and as allowing learners to define their own path—as a quality that provided learners with flexibility which, in turn, promoted creativity:

…it looked at the beginning too demanding but then you said this technical characteristic of the task ill-defined, so it gave room and space to define them. So that, provided flexibility let’s say in a positive way. It was demanding but it was demanding in a way it encouraged positively students’ creativity. So when you look at the issue from the other point of view if you strictly define the task what they produce is the just like it’s factory production. When you look at the products of the students in our classroom for example they look more or less the same. This ill-defined characteristic gives creativity imagination for students to I mean it gives flexibility which is nice. (Interview with Caner)

At first, providing learners with the flexibility to approach the tasks as they wished seemed difficult and profound as learners indicated they initially felt directionless.
However, as they continued to pursue the task, this ill-defined nature was perceived as promoting in-depth learning and creativity due to learners’ having the flexibility to approach the task as they wished.

**Authentic activities comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over a sustained period of time**

Closing the gap between real world and classroom tasks is the aim of this research. Therefore, what is argued in this research as an *authentic activity* is different from what is described as *traditional task-based language teaching* (for example the model advised by Willis, 1996; or the task types described by Nunan, 2004, pp. 56-59).

While a traditional school task can be designed to include authentic characteristics such as purpose, communication, and interaction, it may still lack the elements of real-life problem solving activities such as depth, complexity, and duration. Authentic activities are complex and ill-defined tasks that require students to spend mental and interactional effort over a sustained period of time while defining tasks and sub-tasks and using and developing a variety of knowledge and skills to complete the task. A theme that emerged from analysis shed light on how both the teachers and students perceived the concept of authentic activities comprising complex tasks to be investigated over a sustained period of time. The theme – *Sufficient time allocation* – is discussed in detail below.

**Sufficient time allocation**

In both iterative cycles, students were given six weeks to complete the activity (from the day that students were introduced to the learning environment to the last message posted on the discussion forum). During the second cycle this period of time included a religious holiday that lasted about a week. Thus, in total, the activity in the second cycle took about seven weeks. During this time, students were expected to develop skills such as researching, using resources, participating in discussions, writing opinion compositions, and giving presentations.

Students indicated that the time allocation to complete the activity was adequate:

> I think a month (meaning shorter time would be better) … I think it was enough as we started late. (Interview with Doğukan)
I think we had enough time when I come to think of it. When I think of what was expected from us the time frame was normal. (Interview with Yıldız)

I think the time was enough. (Interview with Meryem and Burak)

One student examined the level of difficulty and the skills required to complete the task and pointed out that time allocated for the activity was sufficient:

The time was normal but it could have been shorter as well. ...it wasn’t easy to do the activity but it wasn’t something which we can’t achieve. All we had to do was work on it. (Interview with Sahra)

While the participant teachers agreed that the time allocation was adequate, one of them mentioned the negative effect of having a holiday on students’ progress and attendance:

…it was ok. In fact we had the chance to adjust it. But because there was the Bayram holiday we had a long holiday that was a disadvantage for us because some students started but then we missed few of the students. They didn’t continue. (Interview with İrem)

I think it was just right. I mean too if it were too short, it would have caused them not to do some of them to skip some of the tasks. If it was longer, they would have been bored so it was just fine. (Interview with Ceyda)

I think it was ideal. I mean required some concentrations, some devotion and I found it at the beginning again to confess too limited. I thought the time wouldn’t be enough to complete but amazingly they produced the newsletter. And in that limited time that I thought students completed their drafts, they participated online discussions, and they got feedback from me, and they revised their products and they finished that and they presented. So, it was ok time wise. (Interview with Caner)

Learners mentioned that the complexity of the tasks was well thought out in relation to the time given; thus, it can be concluded that four to six weeks is a sufficient amount of time to complete the activity.
**Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources**

The activity required learners to consider the task from different perspectives while using a variety of resources. This enabled them to develop relevant knowledge in situ. Learners were required to focus on content, form, audience (such as teenagers, Mayor of the city, needs of the citizens, tourists and teenagers, the editor—in the case of this research the teacher—and their peers), and the learning process while using interactive educational resources (such as example essays), authentic resources (such as newspaper and internet articles), their peers’ comments, and products as resources to develop relevant knowledge and skills. The themes that emerged had implications on how both teachers and students perceived the concept of authentic activities as providing learners with the opportunity to examine tasks from different perspectives. Each of these themes – *The process undergone while examining tasks, Promoting authentic communication, and Satisfaction of learning* – is discussed in detail below.

**The process undergone while examining tasks**

Compared to traditional school type tasks, learners went through a more complicated and difficult process in order to attain information, in respect to the procedure experienced when using of a variety of resources. The following comments illustrate the process students went through and thus how they approached the task:

I thought about the different types of entertainment in the world that we do not have and everyone wants to have that type of entertainment here and why should I lie I want to go abroad now. (Interview with Emre)

First, we had to choose our topics - I’m starting from the beginning. This is what I could write about. I am an environmentalist so I chose this topic. Then there was a forum which we had to answer some questions about our topics. I answered this. To be able to answer these questions I had to do a bit of research on the water issue in Famagusta. And as I explained earlier I got information by asking people and researching on the internet for example news sites for information on when the water facilities were built. I looked for such details. I used different sources. I went through news websites from Turkey and also Cypriot ones. Most of the information I was
looking for was in the news websites. Later on I wrote a paragraph with the help of the sources and of course my own opinion. (Interview with Yıldız)

Teachers also made similar comments:

One of the students is intentionally looking for and finding different resources. Because it would not be nice if everyone used the same source (meaning one of her students was searching the internet to find different sources than the ones provided in the learning environment). (A script from İrem’s journal)

It gave the opportunity to see if the resources were appropriate for the task itself rather than just language purposes. (Interview with Ceyda)

**Promoting authentic communication**

The strength of this characteristic is seen as enabling students to focus on developing knowledge in terms of subject content and using this knowledge for an authentic communication purpose. Therefore, this principle provided opportunities that exposed learners to the authentic use of language.

One student’s remark indicated how he valued considering the tasks from different perspectives as it allowed him to use the language with an authentic communicative aim, keeping in mind the skills that he may need in the future:

Maybe one day we will run a company or we will be the manager and maybe we will work with foreign companies and English is a world language. … in the company we will get in front of people we will, as we did here, give presentations and during these years that I am here studying the more I do these type of activities I learn how to design, how present, how to effect the audience it’s something which is worthwhile. (Interview with Doğukan)

Doğukan also indicated that a task that enabled them to consider the issue from multiple perspectives assisted in developing their general knowledge and prompted a change in behaviour on the issue:

Have you or I ever sat down and thought about what people should do about drink driving? You wouldn’t sit at home and think about the fact that people drink alcohol and drive and why they do this. But we did. … our friends are doing the water topic…people didn’t care about it before. People would turn on the tap and just leave
it running...but after this project maybe they will only return to their old habits after a
year and this is their responsibility. But every time they remember they will try to be
careful. I don’t think I will ever drive after I drink alcohol. (Interview with Doğukan)

**Learning satisfaction**

This principle provided the necessary conditions for learners to respond to the original
communicative purpose of the sources (a principle suggested by many TESOL
researchers, e.g., Mishan & Strunz, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007) and
interact (student-resource, student-student, student-teacher, and student-potential
audience) as they would in real life.

This was reflected by a description of feelings that indicated satisfaction and
contentment:

> While considering the elements of an essay or an article and also trying to give
people useful information, I used external resources but I wrote with my own words,
I felt like I was learning and presenting something at the same time. (Interview with
Toprak)

This principle required the participant teachers to also examine the task from
different perspectives. Having to approach the task from different angles was
referred to as being difficult but enjoyable:

> It was a bit difficult but it was good for me. Because as a teacher I mainly focused on
grammar related things, language related things. But as an editor I had to focus on
more on the content so this was good for me. Not focusing on the language all the
time but focusing on the content. More focus on the content that was good.
(Interview with İrem)

Another student indicated that satisfaction of learning came through variety:

> The more variety there is, I think there is more knowledge gained and this is
satisfying. We are learning more. (Interview with Burak)

During the interviews, while students mentioned that examining the task from different
perspectives and using a variety of resources has no weaknesses, one of the students
pointed out the importance of the topic selection and advised that a topic that is beyond students’ knowledge and skills can cause frustration and lead to failure.

It was evident that the students viewed the topics from different perspectives as they aimed to provide their audience with the most appropriate information that was practical, informative, and effective at the same time. This brought a feeling of satisfaction in their learning. Thus, it can be concluded that focusing on the task from different perspectives and using a variety of resources contributed substantially to the development of relevant skills and knowledge and also added authenticity to the task at hand.

**Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate**

The activity was designed to support learning collaboratively in a blended fashion. It was intended to shift the teacher’s role from being the sole authority of the classroom to one of coach and collaborator. In so doing, the learning environment was learner-centred where constructive knowledge development occurred through student-student, student-teacher, and user-computer interactions rather than a knowledge transmission process where the teacher transmits knowledge and learners passively receive it. In this respect, both electronic and classroom environments were used for this purpose. The themes that emerged from analysis illustrated how both the teachers and students perceived authentic tasks as providing the opportunity to collaborate. Each of these themes – Peer support, Collaboration as encouragement, and From knowledge bearer to facilitator – is discussed in detail below.

**Peer support**

In the web-based learning environment, learners were provided with opportunities to use online resources and asynchronous chat opportunities to learn from their peers’ experiences. Students and teachers clearly mentioned how support from peers was evident through the discussion forum tasks:

> They learn from each other and they learn together. They add to each other’s learning. They have the chance to compare what they know, what they think, what others know about the thing (Interview with İrem)
I could see what I had written and then see my friends’ posts and I got support from them. (Interview with Deniz)

The same student also mentioned that peer support had taken place through discussing issues related to resources with peers:

For example, I discussed what is what (referring to the components of an essay from the ‘Example essays’ resource) with my friends and we really enjoyed this because we helped each other understand what our teacher had showed us several times (in her regular lessons). (Interview with Deniz)

Another student remarked that working in pairs assisted in developing their language skills:

Whether it is grammar mistakes or vocabulary mistakes we cannot identify these on our own. But when someone looks at it and when we discuss it, which has happened, contributes to your development and of course there is the motivational aspect because you are working together… (Interview with Doğukan)

Another student indicated that through peer support their knowledge had improved:

We had different ideas. I would say something, he would say something else. He would write and I would say ‘don’t you think if we say it like this it would be better’. As a result we assisted our knowledge to improve. (Interview with Burak)

One of the teachers also indicated that collaborative work assisted in language development:

…they helped each other, and they were producing more understandable written work. (Interview with Ceyda)

In the face to face environment, students collaborated to produce artefacts, for example, a poster, brochure, video, or web page. In order to prepare the artefact, learners were expected to work in pairs or groups that they had initially formed; however, those students who had indicated that they would prefer to work alone were still given the opportunity to come together with other peers whose compositions were on the same topic and work in pairs or groups to produce an artefact collaboratively. The aim of collaborative work was to enable learners to combine the ideas in their
compositions and produce artefacts rich in context. This, in turn, would help students further develop in terms of content, problem solving skills, and language skills.

Those students who worked individually gave no specific reason for their choice; however, one of the students who worked in a pair mentioned the difficulty of the task and commented on the benefits of working with another student:

It wasn’t something that could be done alone…our level is ok but here we are journalists and we are neither studying journalism nor are we journalists ourselves. We are only students. I don’t think that working alone would be beneficial so I think collaboration was necessary. Because if there is no opportunity to discuss then I don’t think the outcome will be as good. (Interview with Doğukan)

Doğukan mentioned that, throughout the task, he shared the work with his partner and stated that, while he mainly focused on the content of the artefact, his partner mainly dealt with the technical issues, such as obtaining a camera, software, and a car.

Figure 6.1: Two scene shots from Doğukan and his partner’s video on drink driving

Figure 6.2 is a slide from Doğukan and his partner’s PowerPoint presentation where they noted down some of the key ideas they presented during their presentation in class.
Collaboration as encouragement

Doğukan continued to point out that collaboration encouraged task and subtask completion that were challenging and otherwise beyond his individual skills:

…shall we do this? Let’s do it straight away. We need a camera, let’s find one. But if I were alone I wouldn’t find a camera and make a video by asking a friend to help me. (Interview with Doğukan)

Although collaboration was regarded as a factor of encouragement, one participant teacher noted that disorganisation could cause an inequality of responsibility among learners:

…if they are not organised, some may be more dominant, some may have to take more responsibility, others won’t … (Interview with İrem)

From knowledge bearer to facilitator

As was noted in Chapter 3, one of the reasons that design-based research was used as the research approach was because, by nature, it is an authentic activity consisting of the characteristics of authentic activities as suggested by Herrington et al. (2003). Design-based research provides an opportunity for the researcher to collaborate with the practitioners to find solutions to real problems in context (Reeves et al., 2005; Reeves, 2006; Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2004). Throughout this research, the participant teachers and the researcher also collaborated in order to solve real world problems critical to education.
Collaboration between the researcher and the participant teachers enabled the teachers to transform their roles from knowledge bearers to knowledge facilitators and collaborators. Focusing-on-forms rather than focusing on meaning was referred to as ‘training’ by one of the participant teachers:

> Well I had to read everything twice at least. Because the first time I really focused on grammar then I had to go back and focus on content. But it was good. It trained me. You see it has to be that way in fact. But because we have grammar focused lessons I have a tendency to focus on grammar more not on language. So this was a good training for me to focus on content as well. (Interview with İrem)

The discussion above raises the idea that working in collaboration has the potential to enrich educational environments. Despite the fact that some students either preferred to work individually or to collaborate for the sake of collaboration, rather than to benefit from doing so, it was evident that collaborative work enabled peer support and training for participant teachers to change their roles from knowledge bearers to facilitators. It was also a means of encouragement to complete tasks with the responsibility of sharing. In this regard, it can be concluded that collaboration has the potential to enhance authentic learning environments.

**Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect**

It is possible to design blended learning environments that urge learners to be more reflective by comparing and contrasting their work and experience to the other students’ in ways that lead to academic growth (Howland et al., 2011). Two themes that emerged from analysis shed light on how both students and teachers view the impact of having the opportunity to reflect. Each of these themes—Peer support, and Contribution to the learning and teaching process—is discussed in detail below.

**Peer support**

Authentic activities are conducive to both learning and communicating. In this respect, learners—by reflecting on their learning process—not only make tacit knowledge explicit but also create models for other learners to compare and self-regulate their own learning process through the sharing of knowledge and experience.

One student exemplified how working with peers helped his learning:
When something is said I mean when we need to add something, correct grammar mistakes or correct vocabulary problems we can’t see these on our own. But when someone else has a look and there were times when we argued over them. Like, that’s not correct or it should be like this but it has helped us a lot. We discussed how we should write things. Even though our level of English is the same we still benefitted from it, maybe not a lot, but when choosing words while getting prepared we learned from each other. (Interview with Doğukan)

During the interviews, İrem indicated that use of an open-ended activity also provided learners with opportunities to compare their products with their peers and see the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Therefore, as the participant teacher indicated, using open-ended activities contribute to social constructivism in education:

I was really enthusiastic to hear about what they found about their topics and I could observe that students were enthusiastic by finding each other’s findings. Although most of the students chose the same topic, like say smoking, they did find similar things but still they were willing, they were excited to hear about if the other students found something different. If they missed anything, they had the chance to compare their findings so they have the reason to listen to each other. (Interview with İrem)

Another student indicated that the presentations assisted reflection:

While presenting we shared how we learned and the process we went through so this helped us see what we learned. (Interview with Burak)

**Contribution to the learning and teaching process**

One participant teacher indicated that reflection supported the learning process through the sharing of experience during the learning process, which was very valuable:

This was the best part I liked. The reflection part it was really nice. Especially I am talking about the part in the end while they were presenting. We asked them to reflect on the process and that was perfect. They did talk about their ideas and they did talk about their learning. What they learned and how they learned. In fact that is what we want to accomplish in our learning process. But neither the students nor us, as teachers are not very good at this, but this task the presentation at the end of their presentations especially gave them the chance to do and I observed that they could do that. So it was very good. They liked it. (Interview with İrem)
The same teacher also noted that reflection contributed to her teaching practice:

I think I will use this in other processes in my teaching. (Interview with İrem)

Another teacher indicated how reflection was an effective way of providing learners with the opportunity to develop knowledge and content:

Students were able to refer back to what they had done. And see how first they started writing and then how they were commenting on each other’s posts and then this was improving in time. And at the end of the course they had to reflect on the whole activity itself, they were able to see their weaknesses and what they have could done differently and how they could develop their language skills and the other skills as well and how they could have may be made use of collaborative work more effectively in order to come up with a better polished product at the end of the semester. (Interview with Ceyda)

The third participant teacher indicated how he believes the opportunity for cognitive activity allows for a better learning environment:

...cognitive activity to reflect on what they have achieved...to use this language through learning so students can sit back and think about what they have done. And then reflect on the procedure so it is linked to students’ internalisation and to question what they have learned. So it helps for a better learning environment. (Interview with Caner)

From the discussion above, it is evident that reflection is viewed as a contributing attribute to both the learning and teaching process by enabling tacit knowledge to be made explicit. It leads to self-regulated learning through, not only reflection on the learning process–both as they are occurring and afterwards–but also through sharing knowledge and experiences with peers.

** Authentic activities can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain specific outcomes

During this research, participants were asked to share both their feelings about using the characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education and also their opinions on how the characteristics helped them to develop relevant knowledge and
skills. In so doing, it was possible to gather data regarding the participants’ opinions and feelings towards the authentic approach used in the study.

Moreover, Long (1991) argues that while focus-on-forms approaches emphasise linguistic knowledge as a goal in itself, the content of lessons are linguistic structures and thus the outcomes of activities are domain specific; on the other hand, content in focus-on-form approaches are biology, mathematics, and automobile repair, the principle focus of which is on meaning, communication and task completion. Learners’ attention is drawn to linguistic items as they arise incidentally in lessons. Therefore, the outcome of focus-on-form activities leads beyond domain specific outcomes. Additionally, focus-on-forms approaches are skill specific activities whereas authentic activities provide the opportunity to develop multiple skills. The theme that emerged from analysis shed light on how learners and teachers perceive authentic activities to be dynamic as they can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and move beyond domain specific outcomes. The theme – Promoting confidence – is discussed in detail below.

**Promoting confidence**

The use of authentic activities was found to be beneficial and educational for most of the learners as they gained confidence using the target language in the future in other contexts:

> I feel that in my daily life I can really talk and attend more formal places...you feel more confident I mean when you go to a foreign country and there is a debate you can contribute. You wouldn’t just sit and be quiet; you would say I can do this because I have done it before. This is the image that’s coming forth. (Interview with Deniz)

> Such an activity helped develop our self-confidence. (Interview with Meryem)

One participant teacher was also positive about using an authentic activity that was based on the characteristics proposed by Herrington et al. (2003) as the basis of her teaching practice:

> I guess these are the areas that needed in all areas of education. It’s not physics or whatever. In language learning they are also necessary I think. Because when
students have a real goal they work more willingly. They have a real goal, they have real audience that motivates them, and they develop the audience awareness that’s something very useful in language learning whether they are speaking or writing. (Interview with İrem)

Doğukan’s remark indicates that the authentic tasks had assisted him to gain skills that he may need in the future:

Maybe one day we will run a company or we will be the manager and maybe we will work with foreign companies and English is a world language. …in the company we will get in front of people we will, as we did here, give presentations and during these years that I am here studying the more I do these type of activities I learn how to design, how present, how to effect the audience it’s something which is worthwhile. (Interview with Doğukan)

One student was not very positive about the use of authentic activities in language education as L1 interfered while approaching the task:

I can’t say they are very useful because as I said I read and spoke in Turkish, and only when I was writing I found it useful. (Interview with Yıldız)

In the case of this research, Yıldız’s comment has been considered as a positive opinion towards the use of authentic activities in education, rather than negative. Specifically, the characteristic under discussion argues that authentic activities “lead beyond domain specific outcomes” and Yıldız’s comment supports this characteristic—she had to do research, analyse it, and then report the findings. The development of these skills is targeted in academic life and is beyond the pure Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) domain.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that providing learners with tasks that help them to gain knowledge and skills that can be used across different disciplines has been fundamentally important. This is because learners have gained confidence and acknowledged that such activities are preparing them for their future, not just for passing school exams.


**Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment**

At first, this research activity was intended to be set as an optional learning task. However, after consulting other practitioner teachers, it was decided that learners would most likely not complete the activity if it was not assessed. Therefore, permission was attained from the school administration to conduct this research task as a fully integrated part of the curriculum by replacing the existing writing and project activities (these are described in detail in Chapter 4).

The themes that emerged from the data illustrate how both the learners and teachers view the seamless integration of assessment into authentic activities. Each theme – *Assessment as external motivation*, and *Assessment promoting critical thinking* – is discussed in detail below.

**Assessment as external motivation**

Participants’ comments justified the initial concern and decision to use assessment as an integral part of the activity. Some learners frankly mentioned that assessment plays a vital role in the importance students gives to a task:

> At the beginning we didn’t take it seriously. Later on when we learned that it will be assessed then we wrote and wrote. If it wasn’t assessed we wouldn’t have done it.
> (Interview with Doğukan)

One of the participant teachers also indicated that assessment was a source of motivation with respect to having a real purpose to present their work in different forms:

> I mean it was nice motivation. You know after spending lots of time after putting so much effort it was enjoyable for them to share what they have done through their presentations. I mean students enjoyed sharing it with their friends because it served for a real purpose I mean it wasn’t just for the sake of doing a presentation because they knew that what they presented would then be integrated in the newsletter so they were more careful with their presentations. They added nice pictures, so that they can use the picture or the content in the next part the newsletter. (Interview with Caner)
Assessment promotes critical thinking

Higher order thinking skills are qualities that need to be promoted in educational contexts in order to make judgements and communicate personal opinions and beliefs about issues (Berge et al., 2004). With this in mind, a participant teacher indicated that the integration of assessment had value because it promoted critical thinking:

I felt the need to be critical, more critical than I used to be. It improved my critical thinking and I could guide my students in that way because I was practising it I guided my students to practice it as well. I was critical about their writings, the product they presented and I encouraged them to be critical about these not in terms of language only but in terms of content as well. So that’s something that we really need in language learning. In all areas of education in fact we have to be critical. (Interview with İrem)

Assessment as an integral part of authentic activities was a source of motivation as it provided purpose for learners to take on and complete the task to the best of their ability. Assessment also promoted the development of higher order thinking skills as individuals needed to critically analyse information and language while accomplishing real world tasks. This was achieved by being aware that the final product—the newsletter—was to be distributed to the school. Therefore, both teachers and learners knew that it was not only going to be formally assessed but that its worth and quality would also be assessed implicitly by an audience. Consequently, critical thinking skills were drawn upon as participants needed to both self-direct their learning and develop their language skills and content to be assessed both formally and informally.

Authentic activities yield polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else

This activity required students to produce polished products valuable in their own right, rather than as preparation for something else. For example, the smoking topic required learners to write an article on the reasons why teenagers take up the habit, despite the fact they are aware of its negative effects on health; and to produce a product, for example, a poster or video, to make the younger generations aware of the negative effects of smoking on health. Learners were interviewed about how they felt when writing for a real audience. Students were positive about producing this sort of
product and did not mention any perceived weaknesses of this task. In light of this, themes that emerged from analysis delineated how authentic activities that yielded polished products were viewed. Each theme that emerged – Encouragement leads to indirect learning, Promoting language use outside the classroom, and Developing critical thinking skills – is described in detail below.

**Encouragement leads to indirect learning**

Doing public presentations and publishing students’ work to an audience wider than their classmates has been described as encouraging and motivating:

> When a student is told to do a task and bring it, who is the student going to give it to of course to the teacher, but when the teacher says prepare this task and you will give it to me and present it to your classmates or even better your work will be published in the Cyprus news is a totally different thing. The more this is increased the better it is. (Interview with Doğukan)

Not only is preparing polished products, as part of an authentic task, motivating but it also enables the indirect development of multiple skills:

> It was really an authentic meaning focused activity which required them to use the language in meaningful context, and it was good for them. They could practice their language they could practice some other skills like presentation skills, academic writing skills, so I think I believe it helped them. (Interview with İrem)

> I felt the need to be more careful. It wasn’t going to be only me reading their products. You know it was going to be published at a newsletter so felt the need to be more careful. (Interview with İrem)

Learners’ excitement when they received the newsletter containing their articles was observed by one of the EPS coordinators. The coordinator was so happy to see this excitement that she took a photo of the learners and sent an email to researcher noting:

> ...at moment of receiving their newsletters :)}) (Email received from one of the coordinators at EPS)
After receiving this email, the researcher contacted the coordinator and talked about her observations. She mentioned that students were excited and happy to see their products published and that she was as well.

**Promoting language use outside the language classroom**

Unlike traditional school type language exercises, where the focus is to find or use correct form, orienting towards providing solutions to real world relevant problems through the creation of polished products has led students to use the target language as a tool for real communication, as it is used outside the school in real life. One student indicated that the opportunity to create polished products further promoted language use as it is used outside the classroom and believed that she would be able to use the language skills she gained through this activity in real life:

> We didn’t just use English in the classroom. It helped us think about things in normal life. I think we will be able to use this in the future in our normal lives. (Interview with Meryem)

**Development of critical thinking skills**

Learners also indicated that while preparing their products, critical thinking skills were developed:
I needed to reorganise the information I had and this forced me to think critically about the information and needs. I feel that this skill has developed. (Interview with Burak)

Producing polished products, which are aimed at a real audience other than the teacher and that are valuable in their own right, has been demonstrated to have an impact on learning as they encourage and motivate learners to undertake the task meaningfully and complete it with a purpose. Producing these products also encourages students to use the target language in their everyday lives, rather than simply communicating with the teacher. This task also developed critical thinking skills as learners needed to consider their content with respect to their audience with the aim of producing a polished final product.

**Authentic activities allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome**

Authentic activities are open-ended activities that allow learners to come up with their own opinions, suggestions, and solutions and thus create their own meaning. In this study, learners were given open-ended problems and were expected to come up with their own suggestions on how to address the problems. Participants were then interviewed to learn how important this characteristic was and what the weaknesses and strengths of it were for learners. The themes which emerged from analysis gave an insight to how both teachers and learners view the concept that authentic activities allow for competing solutions and diversity of outcome. Each theme that emerged – *Motivation through freedom of choice* and *Different perspectives* – is described in detail below.

**Motivation through freedom of choice**

As Jonassen (2000) asserts, young adults like to choose their own path and make decisions autonomously:

> Engaging intentionally, exerting effort, persisting on task, and making choices affect the … effort that learners will make in trying to solve a problem. … Students think harder and process material more deeply when they are interested and believe that they are able to solve the problem. (p. 71)
Learners’ comments confirmed this view by reflecting positive feelings towards this characteristic.

That was really good, I mean, it was the most beneficial thing for me. Everything was left up to us, which ever topic we wanted to research we chose and there were no restrictions. For example, I could have chosen the idea of having a clean new cinema in Famagusta but that’s not what I’m doing. I am looking at it in general and I’m researching about the types of entertainment centres I would like to have established. This was very good because it has something to do with my character. I don’t like being restricted. I like to give my opinion on an issue freely. (Interview with Sahra)

Everyone used their own understanding and creativity. I think this is missing at school and I think this needs to be included at school as well. I think it was beneficial for everyone…it gave us freedom. There were no restrictions. (Interview with Meryem)

Similar to Sahra, Emre mentioned that human beings, in general, have different personalities and want to determine their own path:

Of course people want to do things that they prefer. Everyone’s interests are different and everyone wants to study and live where his or her interests are and this makes people happy. (Interview with Emre)

**Different perspectives**

Some students reported that approaching open-ended activities from different perspectives led to competing solutions and a diversity of outcome:

The different outcomes were the biggest advantage of this. Different ways of thinking and opinions were present. Or it was approached in a different way. This could have been approached from the social, or the departmental aspect. This changed according to people’s ideas or experiences. (Interview with Doğukan)

Open-ended tasks forced us to think because you need to create something. Your creativity and imagination develops. (Interview with Burak)

Two of the participant teachers mentioned that such tasks were not limiting and promoted different outcomes:
In such school type activities students are very limited they can’t use their creativity, they just let’s say followed the procedure. But this one wasn’t like that. They could produce we didn’t limit them in any way. They could approach the task from any perspective they liked. So this helped them to be more creative. And that was good. They need to be creative. (Interview with İrem)

As I said we didn’t restrict them. It was their decision what and how to approach the task and how to present it and how to share it with the actual audience they were aiming for. So it gave or provided us with variety and it didn’t restrict the students from producing their artefacts or just reproducing the same thing over and over again, even if they had the same topic they came out with different products. (Interview with Ceyda)

From the discussion above, it is evident that both learners and teachers view the nature of authentic tasks as allowing for competing solutions and diversity of outcomes as a positive attribute. This is because it provided learners with the freedom to choose how they approached the task which promoted creativity. It also indicated that each learner has their own way of approaching the same issue and tasks, such as the research activities, do not restrict learners but, on the contrary, promote different perspectives.

**Discussion**

In order to answer Research Question 2, *How do students and teachers view the importance of each of the characteristics of authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language education?*, a series of interviews were conducted to get an insight into the views of both the participant learners and teachers.

In both iterative cycles, the analysis of the transcripts highlighted *learning* as the key concept which emerged from the application of authentic characteristics in computer assisted foreign language education. Learners and teachers stated that incorporating the characteristics of authentic activities in this context promoted learning as it provided opportunities to:

- use the target language for a real purpose,
- deal with real world type tasks,
- examine these tasks from different perspectives to not only to succeed in completing the tasks but also develop relevant knowledge and skills,
• reflect on the learning process, and
• use the target language as a tool for communication rather than as an object to be studied.

Furthermore, the research learning environment was compared to a traditional school learning environment and comment was made that the research learning environment assisted in gaining robust knowledge through the promotion of problem-solving skills and authentic communication. It was also noted that the opportunity to explore the tasks in-depth, collaborate with peers, and produce polished products that were valuable in their own right fostered the development of language skills and, in turn, learning.

Motivation was another concept that continually surfaced in respect to the authentic activities having real world relevance with roles that provide unity and complemented the task by being assessed both explicitly and implicitly.

The next chapter addresses Research Question 3 and analyses how teachers supported and scaffolded student learning in a computer assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education.
Overview

In the literature review in Chapter 2, the importance of scaffolding and support in education is described in terms of constructivist approaches that assist in developing the learner’s zone of proximal development while engaging in activities that support discovery learning. In this respect, the learning environment incorporates various opportunities for both learners and teachers to scaffold and support learner language development.

In this chapter, participants’ discussion contributions and engagement in the learning environment and work samples have been gathered and analysed.

Research question 3:

How do teachers support and scaffold student learning in a computer assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education?

Authentic learning is theoretically based on social constructivist philosophies where learners construct their own meaning while developing expertise in context. In this study, the instructional model is based on developing communities of practice where learners are first provided with models of expert performances. Following this, the teacher scaffolds learners through reflection, articulation, and corrective feedback to help them develop within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). Ellis (2012) argues that scaffolding can be “… achieved by means of
demonstration, … leading questions and initiating solutions” (p. 106). In the current research, learners were provided with models of expert performances (in the form of essays, presentations, and newsletters) and guided by leading questions, also known as initiate-respond-follow up (IRF) (Ellis, 2012; Gourlay, 2005; Shih, 1986; Van Lier, 2001), in the discussion forum to achieve the target.

In IRF strategy, the teacher asks learners questions and initiates meaningful discussions that support learners to become critical and autonomous (Van Lier, 2001). This helps learners to not only make tacit knowledge explicit but also to learn from their peers.

In the case of this research, the participant teachers strategically initiated meaningful discussions through asking leading questions that directed learner attention to the different resources available in the learning environment. This provided learners with “situated scenarios” where ideas are discussed further to construct knowledge (Hou, 2011). Since the primary goal of the learning environment was to provide learners with the opportunity to use the target language for an authentic purpose in order to develop skills relevant to their future academic studies, participation in teacher-initiated discussion forums was the primary means of scaffolding.

**Analysis of data**

As in the data analysis of Research Question 1, a cross-case method was employed while examining interview transcripts of 10 students and three teachers (six students and two teachers during the first cycle, and four students and one teacher during the second cycle), students’ talk as they engaged in the learning environment, and observations of students and teachers while using the learning environment. Student interviews were conducted in their first language, Turkish, in order to enable learners to be able to provide more insightful and detailed information. The transcripts were then translated into English for analysis. Along with these, all students’ (33 students from the first cycle and 21 students from the second cycle) and teachers’ contributions to asynchronous discussions, together with student samples of written products, were analysed. Emerging themes highlighted how the teachers supported and scaffolded learners in an e-learning environment. Each of these themes – *Focus on authorship*
skills, Focus on content, Focus on form and Focus on audience – is discussed in detail below.

**Focus on authorship skills**

Process approach is a form of education that focuses on the author/writer and what learners do as they write (White & Arndt, 1991). This includes topic selection, collaboration through sharing ideas among peers, creation, drafting, and re-writing (Raimes, 2003). Together with guiding learners through the writing process, this study, through the learning environment, promoted support and scaffolding in gaining research skills, making use of sources, and the development of presentation skills. The discussion forums were the main source of social interaction that took place in the learning environment. By means of student engagement in the Staff Meeting Room discussions, it was aimed to guide learners in developing their authorship skills in three areas: writing a composition, doing research and using sources, and giving presentations.

**Writing a composition**

As with all writing activities, initially the students were expected to select a topic provided in the Editor’s Agenda or were given the freedom to choose their own topic. Following topic selection, teachers initiated discussion topics on the discussion forum for learners to examine essays that were provided as exemplars.

The ‘Examining Essays’ discussion topic with its three threads – Introduction Paragraph, Body Paragraph, and Conclusion Paragraph – was the first teacher-initiated discussion that was aimed at developing learners’ writing skills. The development of learners’ writing skills was prompted through initiative questions to analyse sample essays and respond to questions written by the teachers. The questions were designed to help students discuss certain elements of each paragraph and, in turn, develop relevant knowledge. In other words, instead of teachers telling students the subject matter, students were expected to explore the elements of each paragraph and articulate why they were important.

Teachers initiated the discussion on the introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs by asking in the first thread ‘Introduction paragraph’:
Examine the introduction paragraphs and discuss:

- What are the elements of an introduction paragraph?
- What is the role of each element in the introduction?

In the second thread ‘Body Paragraph’:

Look at the body paragraphs and discuss:

- What are the elements of the body paragraph?
- Why is it necessary to include them in the body of an essay?

Finally, in the third thread ‘Conclusion Paragraph’:

Examine the conclusions paragraphs and discuss:

- What do we include in the conclusion paragraph?
- Why is this important?

Students’ comments varied. In some cases they preferred to provide general comments about why it is necessary to have such elements:

When people read the introduction which we’ve written, the idea we thought must be understandable by them. That is to say, the introduction has to include elements, which refer the idea understandable. We should inform readers how we think about the topic, then we can use some words such as ‘agree’, ‘disagree’, so on. (Response by Toprak)

Firstly you can start your view and show your opinion advantage or disadvantage. After you write add supporting ideas and don’t forget use the sequencing Linker. You give an example about your topic with example linkers. (Response by Doğukan)

I think introduction paragraph is the most important paragraph of a written thing because when somebody read the introduction he/she has to excite and want to read other paragraphs. (Response by Burak)

In other posts, students used technical terms, such as thesis statement, and pointed out why they are important:

Thesis statement, supporting ideas, sequencing linkers, example and example linkers are the elements of a body paragraph. / They are the topic’s reasons and linkers help to writing us fluently. Examples support our topic’s idea. (Response by Deniz)
Topics have to have got Thesis Statement and Your View. These are important for topics, because if elements of an introduction must have clever, we can use it.

(Response by Emre)

Using the IRF model the teacher’s feedback can be directed to one student or to the whole class. İrem and Caner both preferred to give a holistic response to all the students.

In İrem’s response, for example, it can be seen that she thought the responses of the students did not clearly explain what *general statement* was; therefore, she gave the following feedback to the students:

You all mentioned that general statement is important but generally you didn’t explain what it is. Can you explain what general statement is and give example sentences of how a general statement should be? You can write your example general statements on pollution, sports or healthy eating habits etc if you like. (Response by İrem)

However, none of the students responded to İrem’s message and they continued writing similar responses as above.

Caner, on the other hand, gave a response to the whole class indicating his hope to see these elements in his students’ writing:

Thank you all guys, good responses ...Please do the same when you write your essays ... Thanks all very much. (Response by Caner)

Students’ comments varied from being very basic to detailed explanations. However, when one reads the discussions holistically, it can be seen that the learners managed to discover and verbalise the features of an expected writing style by examining the exemplars written by former students.

Once learners examined the elements of an essay, the teachers directed learners’ attention to collaborate and share their prior knowledge on their chosen topics in the discussion forum ‘Topic group forum’ and a thread was generated for each topic area. Learners were expected to contribute to the thread that corresponded to their chosen topic area, share their ideas and learn other learners’ views on the issue. The main focus in this task was to initiate learner collaboration in order to share and develop
knowledge regarding their topics. How the forum scaffolded knowledge in this regard is discussed further in Focus on content.

Drafting is an essential part of the writing process and is the vital stage where learners are guided and knowledge is scaffolded. Once learners drafted their topic compositions, keeping in mind their aim and audience, they received feedback from the Editor of the newsletter – their teachers. Teacher feedback on the drafts will be discussed in detail in two separate sections – Focus on content and Focus on form. One of the participant teachers, Ceyda, went a step further by initiating the forum ‘Improving your essays’ in which learners were expected to read, comment, and provide feedback and suggestions regarding the content of the compositions. Finally, learners were expected to consider all of the feedback and support provided and rewrite their compositions. The issue of how this forum promoted support and scaffolded learner knowledge is discussed in Focus on content.

**Doing research and using sources**

Using external resources to support one’s argument in an essay is a writing skill that learners need to gain. This component provides the conditions to support one’s argument, enables the writer to be persuasive and to develop sound argument. In this regard, two different discussion forums were initiated – ‘Using a source’ and ‘Topic source ideas’. The first aimed at raising learner awareness about the importance of using sources in academic essays; the second was to ensure that learners used sources that were appropriate for their essay’s argument. This section focuses primarily on the former. The second will be focused on in the section Focus on content.

In order to raise learner awareness on the importance of using sources in academic essays they were given three questions to describe what a source is, what the role of a source is and, finally, if learners thought it was useful to use sources. One student commented on the importance of sources being realistic:

> The source is very important before writing essay or research about something because we need some data…This makes it difficult to progress if sufficient resources. We should have a lot of alternatives and sources when writing essay. The sources must be strong, proven and real that’s why sources’s role is very necessary in essays…Yes of course. The sources is very useful and necessary in essays. We aren’t
able to help from sources, we can’t be successful completely. I think, sources is enough to write essay and useful. (Response by Doğukan)

Others commented that it was important for sources to be accurate:

I think source is very important. because we writing a composition, we must use accurate information. (Response by Sahra)

It can be a place or thing from which something comes or obtained…(provides information). The role of source is very important. If you write down something for presentation or homework you should support your idea or your information with examples. It provides your task more understandable…Of course I think it is the most important think to use source in presentation. It is useful-beneficial. (Response by Ela)

It was observed that one of the students misunderstood the initiative questions and the teacher, İrem, directed him to reconsider his answer according to the initiative questions. İrem noted in her journal that she talked to the student in class and asked why he had not replied to her feedback. The student’s reply was “when I saw the other students’ messages I understood what I was supposed to write and because of my friends’ responses I did not feel the need to write again”.

This case clearly demonstrates the benefit of peer-to-peer scaffolding in an e-learning environment in which learners read other students’ messages to gain knowledge and correct their own mistakes.

Initially, the following student’s consent was not given (and thus he was not interviewed) but, after examining the responses of all students in the discussion forum, his consent was sought and obtained. The discussion between this student and the teacher provided a good example of meaningful discussion on scaffolding learner knowledge with respect to using sources effectively in written work.

The student refers to the importance of using sources:

Source, it meant that, when you researching something, It help us for find out about topic, article etc…It’s too important, becouse if we have a source, we can easly find about what is the topic. It help us for give an information…I think , It’s very
important. When you do not know anything about your work. You can not doing anything, therefore you have to get some help from it. (Response by Mert)

The teacher responds by supporting the learner’s gained knowledge in the use of sources:

Exactly, sources help us find information about a topic that we are researching. Without sources, we may not provide enough details or scientific evidence, etc…Thank you [Mert]…What do the others think?…Looking forward to your ideas and comments. (Follow-up by Caner)

Mert continues by indicating how to make use of sources in one’s own work:

I totally agree with you, but we must choose correct source about our topic, so when we searching something, we should focus on the main idea and we must pick utility things. For example; Our project is about that, School student club and we decided travel club for student therefore we didn’t need a lot of source or example. I only looked forward to one example and wrote something about it for my part. [My partner] did do too. If we searched a lot and depend sources, we couldn’t do anything, I think. In short, Source is very very important but you must do a little make up smile .. I know, It’s bad thing but … (Response by Mert)

Finally, Caner warns Mert in respect to using information in sources carefully and being cautious about plagiarism:

That’s true, you should read the source carefully, select the parts you want to use and use it in your own sentences in your assignment. If you depend on the source completely, or if you use all teh source, with the necessary and unnesscesary parts, it is a lot of work, waste of time, but more importantly, stealing information by copy paste; this is called PLAGIARISM (information theft) and is against the academic rules...Many thanks [Mert]. (Response by Caner)

Using sources to support one’s opinions and ideas is an essential part of doing research. It is evident from the discussions above that the skill to do research was indirectly developing as there was no direct discussion posted on research skills. However, as is also evident from the responses above, learners were giving examples of the necessity of doing research to find appropriate sources. While doing research, as Caner warned his students, there is also the danger of plagiarising. Although this kind
of behaviour can be considered a sign of learners’ searching for sources, reading them, and choosing one that is appropriate, it is crucial to teach the students that one cannot copy and paste somebody else’s words without correctly acknowledging their work.

Contributions to online discussion forums can bring drawbacks as learners can easily plagiarise this material. They have easy access to online resources and can copy and paste information as if it was their opinion. Thus, it is also important to teach learners how to *paraphrase* and use their own words while developing an argument.

The participant teacher, İrem, came across a few students who searched the internet and copied sentences or paragraphs and pasted them onto the discussion forum. İrem chose to not immediately discourage her learners by informing them that they had copied from the internet but rather, initially, chose to give positive feedback; for example, *Good, Very good, Excellent* and *Perfect* (Waring, 2008), regarding the general content. Later, she followed up with warnings that this behaviour was not advisable. It is noteworthy to mention here that there was no explicit guidance on how to overcome the issue of plagiarism, which is a limitation of the learning environment.

**Giving presentations**

Giving effective presentations is an important part of academic life as university education aims to prepare students for life after school in which they are expected to give effective presentations. In this regard, the forum ‘Giving a presentation’ was populated with three threads – ‘Tips on how to give presentations’, ‘Presentation A’ and ‘Presentation B’.

The teachers initiated the thread ‘Tips on how to give presentations’, with the aim of helping learners to develop expertise through discussing the elements of an effective presentation. Learners were provided with a link to a web page where elements of a good presentation were described and they were expected to choose the three elements that they believed were the most important and provide reasons for those choices.

Some students illustrated their opinions by listing each tip in numbers, followed by reasons:

1) daily information about my topic
2) attract attention with pictures
3) speak fluently

They are very important because we have to keep the attention of the students and keep them alert and awake. (Response by Deniz)

Another student responded by choosing three tips she believed were important, but also provided explanations for choosing each tip:

* Do your research.
  It is important for me because I think we haven’t got enough information about our topic. We can’t instruct better.
* Smile at your audience.
  We should smile because positive energy is important.
* Feel confident of your presentation.
  So it will be more effective. (Response by Yıldız)

Some students illustrated the three important tips in context by giving their personal opinions:

I think, the most important thing is “Research” because we can not imagine a presentation without research. A presentation must include lots of informations…other hand, making eye contact is a important thing for a presentation. You should make eye contact with other viewer so as not to present a boring presentation. Also, they rivet their attention on listening to you…Finally, writing note cards on index cards is very helpful for presenters. When they stop talking, they should look their index cards and become relaxed. (Response by Enis)

I think, there are 3 important part. One of them is appeal. the most important is this. second of them, introduction. If you make nice join to introduction, This part is effect to people…thirt of them, final part. Final part ought to very nice. because If people can be facinated at last part, this part is left an impression. (Response by Emre)

Similar to the example above, another student noted that attracting attention, speaking clearly, and using visuals make an effective presentation. His response was:

First of all before you start your presentation its very important to take everyone’s attention…Because if you take attention everyone will listen you more carefully and your presentation will be better…Second thing is your speech, if you talk very nice
and properly and understandable people will listen you better…And last thing is using pictures and if you use power point your presentation will be better I think.

(Response by Saner)

Based on these elements discussed in the forum ‘Tips on how to give a presentation’, learners were provided with another two threads—‘Presentation A’ and ‘Presentation B’—to compare two example presentation videos. One of the videos was based on a presentation where a student sits behind the teacher’s desk and reads from a piece of paper; while in the second the student uses a data projector to project his PowerPoint presentation on a screen and, while giving his presentation, he uses body language and maintains eye contact with his audience.

The following response was made on the video ‘Presentation A’ which was illustrating a weak presentation. The student is criticising the presentation and suggesting ways that would make it better:

I think, it is not effective presentation because his presentation is very poor fluency and he is only reading from paper. There is not eye contact or another way of presentation. If use eye contact, clear fluency and showing picture in the presentation, it can be improved. (Response by Doğukan)

Regarding the second video, the student compared the two presentations but pointed out that, despite the fact that the second video was better than the first one, it could have been better:

This presenter is better than first but it is not enough for presentation. He couldn’t use eye contact because he looked only laptop screen…I think, it was not enough effective for presentation. It should be prepare better and put some picture and there were a lot of words in page of presentation which be boring. (Response by Doğukan)

Once again, teacher scaffolding took place in the form of IRF. The teacher initiated the topic with the starter questions and students responded accordingly. In the following example, it is evident that the teacher (Ceyda) used follow-up comments to get the learner (Selim) to exemplify his opinion and make his point clearer to the readers:
He used to Powerpoint for his presentation. He was very bad performances… I’m not effected this presentation. Because he wasn’t dominate the audience… He was having the necessary equipment. He is still presentation unable. This his own problem. I think he can’t develop. :D (Response by Selim)

Can you give a specific example why this presentation is bad? And, what advice can you give the presenter to improve his presentation? (Response by Ceyda)

He didn’t use to visual show so I think this presentation is bad. It’s not enough… He must use to visual show for develop himself. (Response by Selim)

It is evident from the learner contributions that support and scaffolding provided by their peers and the resources that were available in the learning environment all assisted learners in developing expertise as authors. This was enabled by providing learners’ the opportunity to consider the elements that they believed were important while presenting. This also gave them the opportunity to use the language with an authentic communicative purpose.

**Focus on content**

Focus on content has been referred to as content-based approaches (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Shih, 1986; Snow & Brinton, 1988). Content-based instruction is based primarily on lessons that students are studying in other subjects or on topic-centred modules. “Writing is integrated with reading, listening, and discussion about the core content and about collaborative and independent research growing from the core material” (Shih, 1986, p. 618). When focusing on content, linguistic elements are dealt with as they appear incidentally; however, the main emphasis is on meaning or communication (Long, 1991).

In this study, focus on content refers to how scaffolding has assisted learners to make use of external sources and how to use information gathered from these sources, their teachers, and their peers in order to enrich and shape the content of their compositions. Focus on linguistic elements within the content is discussed in detail in Focus on form. Discussions in the Staff Meeting Room were aimed at guiding learners in developing their knowledge regarding their chosen topics and, in so doing, to enrich the content of their compositions. By means of participation in social interaction, the content of
compositions was developed through sharing prior knowledge, using sources, and considering constructive feedback from peers.

Sharing prior knowledge

Teachers directed learners’ attention to collaborate and share their prior knowledge on their chosen topics in the discussion forum ‘Topic group’ in order to trigger interest and develop critical thinking on the issues around the topics. A thread was generated for each topic area in which learners were expected to contribute to the thread that corresponded to their chosen topic area, share their ideas, and also learn other learners’ views on the issue. An example of a thread for the topic Water is given below:

Write your ideas on the topic of Water. Answer the following questions in your response.

- Are you experiencing any water problems in Famagusta?
- What do you think are the reasons for this problem?
- What can be done to reduce this problem?

Many of the learners only contributed their ideas by answering the prompts provided by the teachers and did not have a discussion nor respond to the teacher’s follow-up comments; however, in the following example, one student responded to the teacher’s follow-up questions, and is a good example of how the teacher scaffolded the learner’s knowledge on the issue:

In my opinion, experiencing a very large water problems in Famagusta… There are many reasons for this; water is a vital element for all life forms. No human, animal or plant can live without it…İf Faramağusta will be is fast rainfall, the water might not be the problem in Faramağusta…very little rain is falling here, naturally this is a problem…For the rain is very little so dry land…Some people do not want water in Cyprus…they are worried about this place is too crowded…here is not so good management…For example: 3 days went to the internet did not do anything…2 days went electrician did not do anything. For these reasons, I do not find genuine Cypriot management. (Response by Melih)

Thank you 😊, I agree that water is very important for all living things and yes having little rain water is making the water problem in Cyprus worse…Can you explain how
good management can help reduce the water problem in Cyprus? (Follow-up response by Ceyda)

Hello teacher, a good management: *Maybe treatment plant can be installed, so you can use clean water. *Maybe The water coming from under a sea of Cyprus to from Mersin, an operation can be done quickly and firmly... I do not think that a strict management of cyprus. (Response by Melih)

Even though such participation was not common, all learners were exposed to the information on the forum. Thus, indirect knowledge sharing took place in the form of collaborative support. Scaffolding was also provided, not only by the teacher, but indirectly by other authors (their peers) interested in the same topic as they read one another’s posts.

**Using sources**

As described in the above section *Focus on author*, making use of external sources in order to enrich content is an inevitable part of academic life to make sound arguments. In this respect, the discussion forum ‘Topic Source Ideas’ was populated to provide learners with guidance on how to evaluate a source in accordance with the task requirements. Thus, learners were referred to the resources provided in the learning environment but were not limited to these sources as some learners did their own research and found sources which they believed would assist their argument better. The teacher initiated the discussion with four prompt questions to answer after reading a source from the ‘Resources to use’ section, as illustrated with responses in Tables 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt question</th>
<th>Student response: Seran</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the title of the source?</td>
<td>The title of source is Teens and Smoking Tobacco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Link is here: <a href="http://www.teendrugabuse.us/teensmoking.html">http://www.teendrugabuse.us/teensmoking.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the ideas in the source?</td>
<td>It gives exhaustive information about smoking. For example; some common experiences from teens who smoke. Another ideas are smoking reasons and results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the information in the source useful or not useful? Why?</td>
<td>It is very useful. It provided understood easily. I got more ideas and I remembered some forgotten informations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can this information help you while writing your composition?</td>
<td>It can support my words with investigated informations and experiences. I can get different and new ideas with this information. It help to my composition will be rich.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seran’s responses indicate that the learner was able to evaluate the source and determine whether or not it would support his argument.

Table 7.2: Prompt and student responses indicating how knowledge supports ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt question</th>
<th>Student response: Selim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the title of the source?</td>
<td>Places of Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the ideas in the source?</td>
<td>I think, this source ideas nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the information in the source useful or not useful? Why?</td>
<td>Useful information in the source. Because this source correct information includes. For example; Night Parties are getting more popularity among the youth, people from different races enjoy the night together with their friends in the nightclubs. There are many places of interest in the New York City, the major attraction of entertainment in NYC include nightclubs. This paragraph is true. Because young people most popular place Night Clubs. They are have enjoy and meet new friends in the night club.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can this information help you while writing your composition?</td>
<td>I already know this information but while I’m writing composition its useful me. It will support my ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selim’s responses indicate that, even though the source has not provided him with any new information, the source is still beneficial as it will support his opinions on the issue.

Table 7.3: Prompt and student responses indicating how knowledge supports ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt question</th>
<th>Student response: Emre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the title of the source?</td>
<td>I choosed Different Types of Entertainment topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some of the ideas in the source?</td>
<td>That’s clever and encouraging. Because author wrote part part this topic. I like resource and I think I will write my topic like Different Types of Entertainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the information in the source useful or not useful? Why?</td>
<td>Information in this topic is useful. there are some part and everyone has got chance choose a part. That’s good a thing. For example public entertainment, child entertainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can this information help you while writing your composition?</td>
<td>This information can help me that I can my topic break into pieces like child and public entertainment or water entertainment. Therefore My topic can be clever.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emre’s responses to the discussion indicate that the sources assisted him in dividing his topic into smaller sub-topics.

Thus, it is evident from the responses that scaffolding through the teachers’ initiative questions and learners’ participation in a social environment enabled learners to develop relevant knowledge by examining sources and giving their opinions on how the source assisted enhancement of the composition’s content.
Considering constructive feedback from peers

In enriching the content of compositions, students not only received feedback from their teachers, as the Editors, but also received feedback from one another. This was initiated by one of the participant teachers, Ceyda, who decided to take things a step further by providing her students with the opportunity to peer review each other’s content in respect to their topics. In order for learners to provide such support and scaffolding, Ceyda initiated the ‘Improving your essays’ forum and uploaded students’ work for this purpose. The initiative questions were:

Choose at least 3 essays (not your essay) and discuss how we can develop it further.

Think about:
1. Essay Components:
   Does the essay have the necessary elements - introduction, body, conclusion?
2. Language Use:
   Is the language understandable?
   Does it give the correct message?
3. Organisation:
   Are the ideas in a logical order?
   What can we use to make our ideas easier to follow?
4. Audience:
   Does the writer address the expectations of the audience (municipality, parents, teenagers ...)?
   Give your suggestions on how to make the essays better... (Initiative questions by Ceyda)

Some students gave suggestions on how to improve content:

I think people should be given more information about the effects of alcohol.
(Response by Kaan)

Explanation about negative effect is oughtness for me. (Response by Yildiz)
[Explanation of the negative effects is necessary for me]

While some students provided constructive feedback and gave suggestions for improvement, others were content to indicate, in a positive way, that there was no need for further improvement:
…properly developed and sequenced pattern of information (Response by Umut)

This is the best presentation because water zorbs useful and easy this project can be done the future. (Response by Eren)

The participant teacher also used follow-up questions to guide students to be more explicit while providing suggestions to the author:

She should gives examples from social life. (Response by Umut)

You said that the writer should give examples from social life...can you give an example? (Follow-up by Ceyda)

The children take first education from their mother. if the mothers don’t give the education her children, the children will take first education from tv and streets. if the children take this education from tv and streets, the children won’t be decent. (Response by Umut)

With this type of scaffolding and support, the teacher was able to reach a wider audience as her responses and guidance were read by all students. In contrast to this, feedback written on hardcopies of compositions is only read by the individual learner who has written it. However, the learners were also able to provide each other with support. When the final versions of compositions written by learners were examined, it can be seen that the opportunity to participate in such a discussion, and give and receive support and guidance by peers and the teacher, has in turn assisted in the development of the composition’s content. Based on this outcome, it can be concluded that providing learners with the opportunity to articulate on their practice helped learners to learn from each other and appears to be an effective method in terms of achieving the learning objectives of the learning environment.

Focus on form

Learners in this study, like “naturalistic learners” (Ellis, 1997, p. 6) in “natural environments” (Lightbrown, 1985), selected appropriate linguistic forms and vocabulary themselves as they were oriented towards the use of the target language for authentic communicative purposes. As described above in Focus on content, linguistic elements were dealt with as they appeared incidentally; however, the main focus still remains on meaning or communication. Forms were focal points and scaffolded at two
different levels – *Explicit corrective feedback* in the discussion forums and *Implicit corrective feedback* while editing drafts.

**Explicit corrective feedback**

Corrective feedback has been used as a strategy to scaffold learners’ linguistic mistakes. This strategy was evident during the forum discussions in the learning environment. Even though the learners’ grammar mistakes did not generally affect the message they were trying to convey on the discussion forums, it was important to take these mistakes into account, as learners were going to take the Proficiency Test in order to continue their education in their departments. Thus, the teachers provided learners with feedback on their linguistic mistakes. Ceyda, one of the participant teachers in the first cycle, used corrective feedback extensively while commenting on what the students had said. One could say that Ceyda used the “highly explicit strategy” by providing examples of the correct use of language (Ellis, 2012).

   Source is very important. Because without the source can’t handle subject.  
   Describing topic the person need to source. Source is help us understand to topics.  
   (Response by Selim)

   Yes Sinan you are right. Sources help us understand the topics better. (Corrective feedback provided by Ceyda)

   We must have an idea about a very important source of information…If the source wrong, the result would be a mistake,…I think it is a source of information comes first (Response by Melih)

   I agree with you, we must be careful when choosing sources because if we choose a source with incorrect information then this will result in making a big mistake.  
   (Corrective feedback by Ceyda)

As can be seen from the example above, the participant teacher did not focus on all the mistakes in the student’s response. She preferred to choose one of the ideas in the student’s response and use it correctly as a way of stating agreement with the student’s idea.
Implicit corrective feedback

Drafting written work is an inevitable part of the writing process in any context. In EFL, context drafting is the stage where teachers provide learners with feedback regarding either the content or their linguistic mistakes or even both with the aim to improve accuracy. It is possible for teachers to provide explicit corrective feedback, as exemplified above, or implicit corrective feedback that can include direct and indirect error feedback (Lee, 2004). Providing learners with indirect error feedback on their linguistic writing errors can range from identifying mistakes by underlining (with no codes) or using error codes to identify mistakes (Ferris & Roberts, 2001). During this process, teachers have to make decisions on the type of feedback they would like to give and what they will focus on. In the case of this study, teachers chose to provide learners with indirect error feedback by using error codes that were predefined as a strategy to scaffold learners’ linguistic mistakes.

Below is an example of a student composition in which the teacher has provided feedback using error codes:

![Figure 7.1: An example of teacher feedback to a student composition](http://www.lee-leisure.co.uk/waterzorbs.shrm)
As can be seen from the example above, the participant teacher scaffolded the learner’s linguistic errors by indicating where the mistake was by using a different colour, in this case purple, and underlining the incorrect word or sentence. They also provided an error code to assist the learner when correcting (such as sp for spelling mistake, ww for using wrong word and ? if what the student wrote is not clear to understand). This approach has been adopted due to the reason that, as it is accepted by many researchers who have examined the effects of error feedback, indirect error feedback assists developing students’ progress in accuracy over time (Ferris et al., 2000).

Learners used the corrective feedback provided (with symbols) as a guide to correct their linguistic mistakes and develop the content of their compositions. Thus, learners were able to produce and submit almost error-free compositions as their finals.

**Focus on audience**

Tasks in the learning environment were designed to provide learners with the aim of addressing a real audience. This was crucial, as it gave the text meaning and purposefulness. It was important to provide learners with a real audience to address that was comprised of actual people in the community who ranged from the Mayor of Famagusta, local citizens, and parents, to the Vice Rector for Student Services and Social-Cultural Affairs at EMU to ensure the task was sufficiently motivating. Thus, Ceyda – one of the participant teachers – initiated the forum ‘Improving your essays’ in which learners were expected to provide each other feedback regarding the content of their compositions. One of the focus points of this forum was to provide the opportunity for learners to support and scaffold the content of one another’s compositions in respect to whether or not the writer had addressed audience expectations appropriately.

One of the learners provided scaffolding by giving advice on how to better address the audience’s expectations:

> I think people should be given more information about the effects of alcohol.

(Response by Kaan)

Another two students criticised the example provided and advised the use of an alternative example that was intended to have more influence on the audience:
It is okey but should talk about children’s injuries for example a child parents dead accident than child ‘s life , i think good example and effective. (Response by David) [It is okey but the writer should give information about children’s injuries, for example, when a child’s parents die, what happens to the child’s life? I think this is a good and effective example]

If writer had told about limiting alcohol or how is alcoholer stop the drink alcohol, Topic would have been benefical. [If the writer had given information on how to limit alcohol or how alcoholics can stop drinking, the topic would have been more beneficial] (Response by Emre)

Ceyda also used follow-up questions to the responses that were simple comments about the extent to which the writer had met the expectations of the target audience so that learners could provide support by giving exemplified advice:

Can you help the writer improve the message to reach the target audience? What kind of message do you think would have been useful? (Follow-up by Ceyda)

I can help you think could help.I think it should remove health-related topic.not only to focus on the dangers of drunk driving. (Response by Onur)

From the above discussion it can be seen that giving learners the opportunity to engage in such discussions enabled them to provide each other with guidance through scaffolding and support. Thus, learners gained insight into how to better address their readers’ needs, as their peers provided them with suggestions in respects to the content. In turn, the author of the composition was able to see the readers’ perspective of the issue s/he was addressing before actually publishing the product in the newsletter.

**Discussion**

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the strategy of initiating meaningful discussions—through asking leading questions and directing learner attention to the different resources available and to the different components of their compositions—was the main means of support and scaffolding in the learning environment. Through embedding the elements of scaffolding and support, learners developed their authorship skills, the content of their products, improved their linguistic errors, and
developed content that addressed their audience. With reference to authorship skills, learners focused on elements of a composition, doing research and making use of sources, and how to give effective presentations. Directing learner attention to content enhancement was enabled through providing learners with the opportunity to share prior knowledge regarding their chosen topics, raising awareness on how information in sources could be used, and supporting one another through providing constructive feedback regarding content enrichment. Learners were also supported on linguistic development through both explicit and implicit guidance provided by their teachers that allowed them to investigate how to correct their mistakes and thus developed their knowledge of correct usage. Finally, providing learners with the chance to focus on the audience and to receive feedback on what extent their peers had addressed the audience’s needs allowed learners to develop the content of their compositions through peer support.

Thus, discussions not only provided both learners and teachers with the opportunity to support and scaffold learner knowledge, but also maintained the primary goal of the learning environment, which is to offer learners the opportunity to use the target language for an authentic purpose in order to develop skills relevant to their future academic studies.

Even though learners were provided with many opportunities for scaffolding and support within the learning environment, there was a limitation with respect to the issue of plagiarism. Teachers may have incidentally mentioned to their students that this is not correct but they failed to intentionally guide learners on how to avoid the plagiarism. Thus, this is an issue that needs to be addressed in a revised learning environment.

The next chapter analyses the ways in which students were provided with opportunities to achieve foreign language competency through the use of computer assisted task-based authentic activities with respects to the CEFR B1-Threshold level can do statements.
CHAPTER 8

Achieving competency:
Addressing Research Question 4

After the analysis of: (1) the learners’ interaction with the learning environment, (2) opinions about the characteristics of authentic activities and (3) how scaffolding was employed (described in Chapter 7) was completed, it was time to review and analyse the data collected to answer Research Question 4:

*In what ways do students achieve foreign language competency through the use of computer assisted task-based authentic activities?*

As described in Chapter 3, this research employed a developmental research approach – namely design-based research – in order to improve educational practice. This is in contrast to studies such as Beretta and Davies (1985), De la Fuente (2006), Fernández (2008), Fotos (1994), Hernández (2011), Laufer (2006), and Shintani and Ellis (2010) that sought to prove one teaching approach to be superior to another by employing a comparative approach (Reeves, 1999). For this reason, this chapter – rather than comparing learners’ knowledge in the target language before and after the research cycles to indicate the superior approach – analyses the opportunities that learners had to use the target language for communication from the *can do* statements point of view as described by the Common European Framework for References (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001) (a summary of CEFR is provided in Appendix 1) and by The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) (ALTE, 2002).

This chapter starts by giving information about the task cycle and the assessment criteria for each component of the task - *online discussions* (written interaction), *article* (written production), and *presentation* and *artefact* (spoken production). Then, the
remaining parts of the chapter focus on the analysis of student work in relation to the assessment criteria given in Appendix 8. The chapter thus describes how the learning environment provides opportunities for learners to use the language to achieve competency at the B1–Threshold–level while undertaking the required tasks.

**Task cycle**

The task cycle was predominantly concerned with meaning. Learners were encouraged to reflect their opinions and solutions throughout the task. However, at different stages in the task cycle the focus was also on language and how it functions in context. This especially occurred when learners focused, not only on the content of their message, but also on the kind of language they wanted to use to deliver that message. This, in turn, has provided a number of opportunities for learners to focus on language and develop their language skills. In this way, learning was similar to the process described and summarised by Willis and Willis (2007):

> A focus on language occurs naturally when learners pause in their attempts to process language for meaning and switched to thinking about the language itself. They may stop to search for the right word to express the meaning they want, or to look up in the dictionary a word they are not sure of. Or they may stop to wonder if a sentence they are planning to produce is grammatical, or it can be improved in some way. (p. 113)

This was exactly what the participants did throughout the study. Instead of each teacher isolating particular lexical or grammatical forms at the beginning of the lesson or activity (as in Presentation-Practice-Production–PPP) or having learners’ focus explicitly on these forms at the end, learners took their own initiative and produced “…a far wider repertoire of language to express themselves” (Willis & Willis, 2007, p. 113) independently of the teacher.

**Assessment criteria**

For the holistic rating of learners’ production, the researcher drew on two main sources: (1) the general descriptors provided by the CEFR and (2) the measures developed for the calculation of writing and speaking proficiency by the testing unit at the Eastern Mediterranean University English Preparatory School (EMUEPS) that
were also inspired by the CEFR. Based on these two sources, the criteria used for holistic rating (See Appendix 8) were adapted to the specific tasks learners were presented with.

North (2007) argues that there are three main types of assessment in a typical language programme. These are: placement tests, verification of learning, and assessment of level reached. Verification of learning requires a set of descriptors that are selected as the objectives of a specific module. Weekly objectives are discussed at the beginning of the week and achievements of the objectives are discussed at the end of the week. Following this, “teachers take the feedback into account in planning the following week and in giving advice for individual work in the independent learning centre” (North, 2007, p. 10).

As noted in Chapter 3, the learning activity was assessed based on the CEFR descriptors (can do statements) (Council of Europe, 2001) and thus, neither was it possible nor desirable for learners to show the ability described in these descriptors in a single activity. The aim was to provide learners with as many opportunities as possible to use the target language for meaningful communication. For this reason, during the assessment process, students’ performances in different activities were analysed to find evidence that indicated not only their language ability but also the opportunities they had to use the target language.

In this respect, this research employed a verification of learning approach (North, 2007) to answer Research Question 4. In so doing, it aimed to monitor students’ progress as well as the opportunities that the activity provided to use the target language in context. Thus, student performance will be examined in respect to the learning objectives (can do statements) identified for each of the three components of the learning activity: online discussions (written interaction), article (written production), and presentation and artefact (spoken production).

**Analysis of data**

**Online discussions (written interaction)**

Learner participation in the online discussions was evaluated in terms of relevance of content, stating a clear opinion, and contribution to the development of ideas. In this
respect, the assessment process was guided by seven descriptors from the B1–Threshold–level regarding written interaction. These were: (1) understanding and responding appropriately to the topic; (2) expressing ideas and supporting them with examples; (3) making use of sources to support ideas with reference; (4) contributing for deeper understanding of discussions; (5) showing understanding of others’ posts by commenting on their ideas; (6) asking for clarification; (7) responding to others’ posts and giving clarification.

Learners were expected to show competency in these abilities by taking part in a number of online discussion forums. The aim was to provide learners with as many opportunities as possible to use the target language for meaningful communication and thus be able to guide learners along their journey in developing English language competency in respects to the above mentioned abilities. The next section discusses learners’ contributions to online discussions in respects to the content of the posts, giving opinion, and their ability to contribute to an understanding of the topics being discussed. However, some student posts have been clarified in minor ways to enable better understanding of the message intended to be conveyed.

**Content**

The contents of each post were assessed in all of the can do statements mentioned above, as one could appreciate that every word written in order to communicate any type of information within a scope needs to be relevant to the issue at hand. Yet, the content of the posts were specifically assessed within the scope of the can do statement ‘can understand and respond to the topic appropriately’. For the content of each post, not only was relevancy important but also the language used to convey the message. The following section discusses how learners were able to show understanding and respond appropriately to the online discussion topics.

**Understanding and responding appropriately to the topic**

Understanding and responding to a topic appropriately is one of the essential elements of communication. In this respect, when learners’ posts were analysed it was observed that learners, generally, have responded to all questions appropriately and thus showed a clear understanding of what was asked of them. For example, when learners were
asked to examine the elements of an essay, they indicated the important elements according to the paragraphs.

To illustrate further, the first teacher-initiated discussion topic is provided below, in which learners were prompted to examine sample essays provided in the learning environment. This was done to provide learners with the opportunity to analyse different elements of an essay and discuss the role of these elements to raise awareness of them:

I think introduction paragraph is the most important paragraph of a written thing because when somebody read the introduction he/she has to excite and want to read other paragraphs. (A post by Burak)

The level of detail in the introduction paragraph was suggested by another student:

I think in the introduction paragraph must give general information about the article, not detail ...not too short and not too long ...I think introduction is the most important part of an article. (A post by Seyit)

The importance of the thesis statement was also explained:

Introduction paragraph should have Thesis Statement and Your view. introduction paragraph is provides an introduction and your view is shall deliver an opinion. (A post by Dilek)

It is evident from the learners’ posts that they were able to understand what the task expected of them was. In this case, being able to analyse the components of the example essays and how they function together and to discuss the importance of these elements. Even though learners did not use accurate language at all times in their posts, it can still be concluded that the learners were able to convey their messages.

Opinion

Learners at the B1 level are expected, when asked questions and set tasks, to give their opinion and reasons with supporting examples. To what degree learners were able to do this in the posts was assessed according to the can do statement ‘can express his/her opinions and supports them with examples, can make reference to sources to support opinions’.
Expressing ideas and supporting them with examples

Online discussions have provided opportunity for the learners to use a variety of language structures in their repertoire. Therefore, learners used different structures to complete the subtasks. In this respect, some learners preferred to mention their opinion directly by writing “in my opinion…” or “I think…” and then illustrate their opinion:

In my opinion, an effective introduction is the most important part of an article because people have predictions if they get bored at the start of writing they don't read that book, article or essay anymore. (A post by Meryem)

I think in conclusion paragraph we must tie our topic to finish and reader can understand what did we write about finish of a story etc. (A post by Burak)

In other cases, learners preferred to mention their opinion implicitly. In the following example the student used a superlative to express his idea on the most important element of a body paragraph:

Examples, example linkers, Sequencing Linkers, and Cause/effect Linkers have to be used in the body paragraph. Linkers are the most important thing because the meaning of the paragraph can be followed easily. (A post by Emre)

As can be seen in the posts above, generally, learners also provided examples to support their opinions by referring to the places or information they are talking about.

Making use of sources to support ideas with reference

Using sources to support one’s ideas is one of the challenges in the current research context where learners’ educational backgrounds are taken into consideration. For this reason, learners were provided with resources with the aim of giving them opportunities to talk about the importance of using them, evaluating the content of the source and its relevancy to their research topics, and indicate how they have benefitted from the source.

Some learners indicated why they thought sources are necessary:

Source is a materiel use for our essay or composition…we use it for supporting our idea and if the source is objective our idea will reliable. (A post by Umut)
Another learner indicated that the sources provided for them in the learning environment were inappropriate and found other useful sources through research:

I read the sport and health source generally it is not about my project because mine was Gymkhana (a kind of rally) so this source was not very good for my topic but generally it was useful but i couldn't use :D. (A post by Burak)

In the following example, it is evident that the learner researched and found relevant information about his project that he used during discussion but did not cite (learners gave citations only in their articles):

In my opinion, The most entertainment centre is water zorbs for young people in famagusta. Because Famagusta is island. There are too much water in Famagusta. (A post by Emre)

The examples above show that learners ‘can make use of sources to support their ideas’ and make use of information in the sources for knowledge development. However, it is also evident that learners ‘can make use of sources with no reference’. This was due to the minimal opportunities provided within the learning environment to overcome this problem. Thus, learners were not penalised due to a lack on behalf of both teacher guidance and learning environment. Rather learners tended to simply provide the URL address of the site that they had accessed and used.

**Contribution to understanding**

Since the learning activity’s aim was to provide learners with opportunities to communicate for a real purpose, it can be said that any type of contribution with the aim of communicating information should support understanding of the issues at hand and also allow for a deeper understanding of these discussions.

**Contribution to deeper understanding of discussions**

Learners contributed to discussions for deeper understanding of issues relevant to their topics or, in some cases, for deeper understanding of the task requirement. Learners accomplished this by responding to the teacher-initiated discussions with their initial comments and then in turn to the teacher’s comments.
Responding to the teacher’s comments was beneficial to learners because the teachers’ feedback guided them in focusing or re-focusing their attention on the topic discussed at hand. An example of this took place between Caner, the participant teacher, and his student Mert on using a source. The guiding questions were: (i) What is a source? (ii) What is the role of a source? and (iii) Do you think that a source is useful?

Mert contributed to the discussion by providing his ideas with respects to the guiding questions above:

Source, it meant that, when you researching something, it help us for find out about topic, article etc...It's too important, because if we have a source, we can easily find about what is the topic. It help us for give an information…I think , it's very important. When you do not know anything about your work. You can not doing anything, therefore you have to get some help from it. (A post by Mert)

Caner, the participant teacher, acknowledged Mert’s ideas and invited the other learners to contribute to the discussion Mert has initiated:

Exactly, sources help us find information about a topic that we are researching. Without sources, we may not provide enough details or scientific evidence, etc…Thank you (Mert)…What do the others think? ...Looking forward to your ideas and comments. (Caner’s feedback to Mert’s response)

Mert continues his contributions to the discussion by explaining how he made use of sources:

I totally agree with you, but we must choose correct source about our topic, so when we searching something, we should focus on the main idea and we must pick necessary things. For example; Our project is about that, School student club and we decided travel club for student therefore we didn't need a lot of source or example. I only looked for to one example and wrote something about it for my part. (Doğukan) did it too. If we searched a lot and depend on sources, we couldn't do anything, I think. in short, source is very very important but you must do a little make up 😊 .. I know, it's a bad thing but … (Mert’s response to Caner’s feedback)

Caner responds by warning Mert of the dangers of relying too much on sources:
That's true, you should read the source carefully, select the parts you want to use and use it in your own sentences in your assignment. If you depend on the source completely, or if you use all the source, with the necessary and unnecessary parts, it is a lot of work, waste of time, but more importantly, stealing information by copy paste; this is called PLAGIARISM (information theft) and is against the academic rules...Many thanks (Mert). (Caner’s feedback to Mert’s response)

From the above example, it is evident that a meaningful discussion took place between Caner and his student, Mert, in respect to the use of sources and its benefits. Also, learner’s gained a deeper understanding of the task when the teacher took the opportunity to warn his students about plagiarism.

Caner also promoted learner-to-learner interaction by inviting other learners from his class to contribute to the discussion with the question: “What do the others think?”. However, only Mert responded to his question because the question was placed under his initiated response. Perhaps because of teacher’s question being under Mert’s response, other learners did not feel the need to respond to this question. This suggests that the lack of learner-to-learner contribution to achieve a deeper understanding of the task was one of the weaknesses of the learning environment.

Another example of contribution to the understanding of discussions took place between Emre and Ceyda. In this situation, learners were required to read one of the sources and answer the following questions: (i) What is the title of the source? (ii) What are some of the ideas in the source? (iii) Was the information in the source useful or not useful? Why? and (iv) How can this information help you while writing your composition?

In his research, Emre chose a topic that was not included in the available resources in the learning environment. For this reason, when Emre referred to one of the sources he used in his research, his response did not answer any of the questions above. Thus, it was considered as irrelevant by the teacher. Emre’s response and the teacher’s feedback were:

I think, best title is unlimited entertainment in Cyprus...There isn’t a entertainment areas in cyprus. I determined these areas and I explain it in my presentation...That's
questions are not useful because it's unnecessary…I don't know 😐 (Response by Emre)

Emre, you need to go to the 'Editor's office' and click on 'resources to use' and then choose a source under entertainment and read it. Then answer the questions above about the source you have read. (Feedback by Ceyda)

Based on the feedback that the teacher provided, Emre analysed one of the sources given in the learning environment and gave the following response:

I chose different Types of Entertainment topic…That's clever and encouraging. Because author wrote part this topic. I like resource and I think I will write my topic like Different Types of Entertainment…Information in this topic is useful. There are some part and everyone has got chance choose a part. That's good a thing. For example public entertainment, child entertainment…this information can help me that I can my topic break into pieces like a child and public entertainment or water entertainment. Therefore my topic can be useful. (Response by Emre)

Contributions to online discussions were not free of weaknesses. Many cases were observed where learners ignored the teachers’ feedback and gave no response. Providing a response could have contributed to learners’ further development because it would have assisted learners to consider the issues from new and different perspectives and helped to bring more clarity to the issue.

The teacher’s feedback that was ignored by Emre was about the content of one of the articles written by his peers. The feedback focused on one of the perspectives that learners had to take into consideration while writing their articles—the audience. Responding to this feedback could have helped both Emre and the writer of the composition to better understand the importance of the audience. However, he did not respond. The teacher’s feedback was:

Do you think the writer has addressed the audience? (Feedback by Ceyda)

In another situation, a student commented that a source is not solely a piece of writing but, in fact, anything can be used as a source. However, the teacher found this suggestion unclear and followed up by asking questions to better understand what was being suggested. However, this was ignored by the learner, as shown in this exchange:
Everything can be a source for a person who wants to do something but at this point if beliefs come together with source it happens something very good. (A post by Burak)

Thank you for the comment (Burak). What do you mean exactly by saying that everything can be used as a source? I agree with the last part of your comment that a source can only be useful if you use it to support your ideas/ work and if you combine it well with your work. (Caner’s feedback to Burak’s post)

It is also noteworthy to mention that contributions for deeper understanding of discussions appeared mainly in the interactions between teachers and learners. However, this occurred in a very limited way. That is to say, while some learners responded to their teacher’s comments, others chose not to respond to the teachers’ comments at all. At times, learners also neglected to respond to each other’s comments.

**Showing understanding of others’ posts by commenting on their ideas**

When people exchange ideas in social situations it is important that people show understanding of what other people say. In this respect, a more natural, colloquial talk in written form was observed and recorded on the discussion forum. This natural talk was first in the form of agreement/disagreement of their peers’ opinions by using basic structures such as “I agree with…” and then responding to the original question raised by the teacher:

I agree with …[name of the student] and I can say something about body paragraph too. I think the body paragraph must tell us about main idea or topic and we must understand what is it about and we can think about that article etc. (A post by Burak)

I agree with my friends because i think introduction is the most important part of writing. When you read first introduction paragraph you can understand topic and you can make guess about content. (A post by Duygu)

**Asking for clarification**

Asking for clarification when one is confused is a natural process of understanding. As such, the learning environment incorporated opportunities for learners to ask questions how to tackle a task or when/if they were unclear about an issue. However, learners did
not seem to make use of this feature of the learning environment. Teachers have reported that, in such cases, learners instead approached them and verbally asked for help.

**Responding to others' posts and giving clarification**

Even though, from the discussion above, it is evident that learners have displayed the ability to accomplish the objectives of the activity with the necessary language skills, learners seemed to lack awareness of the importance of responding to others’ posts or providing clarification when an issue had not been dealt with.

**Summary**

As can be seen from the above examples, even though the learners language may not be grammatically correct—nor the choice of words or the spelling in some cases—this did not hinder the message that the learners were trying to convey. Thus, the relevancy of the content showed that learners were able to understand what was expected of them and responded appropriately, express ideas that demonstrated their growing understanding, and support these ideas with examples. Learners also displayed the ability to make use of sources to support their responses.

Nonetheless, the learning activity was not without weaknesses. Online learner-learner interactions and learners responding to the teachers’ follow up comments were observed to be a research limitation as learners rarely responded to the teachers' comments and hardly ever responded to each other’s, other than using “I agree with…” and then restating their ideas. Learners also lacked the ability to ask for clarification when in need and, in some cases, preferred not to contribute at all or would verbally ask the teacher for clarification. Consequently, it can be concluded that, except for a few students, learners in general contributed well to the discussions that individually developed their understanding of the issues; however, there was little to no contribution to the discussions initiated by their peers for deeper understanding of the topics.

Another feature that the learning environment appeared to lack was the provision of support for using reference sources. Opportunities for learners to examine sources from different perspectives and discuss issues, such as why sources may or may not be
of use, were provided along with a link to information about plagiarism. Nevertheless, not providing learners with the opportunity to discuss issues related to plagiarism—its seriousness in academia and how to avoid it—is a shortcoming in the learning environment that needs to be considered.

**Article (written production)**

In academic settings it is expected that learners will produce written outputs. Once we considered the fact that our learners were learning a foreign language in order to move on to their higher education, it became evident that the necessity to focus on written production was inevitable. With this in mind, the learning activity incorporated the task of producing an article for a newsletter in order to support learners in their journey through the production of a realistic and authentic product.

Learners were guided through the different stages of their written product—the article for the newsletter. The articles were to be written in the form of an opinion composition, as this is a requirement of the English proficiency exam that learners will take in order to continue their education in the university faculties.

The overall CEFR can do statement referring to written production—can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his/her field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence—along with the can do statement for reports and essays—can write short, simple essays on topics of interest, can summarize, report and give his/her opinion about accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field with some confidence—has driven the evaluation of the written artefacts that were evaluated in terms of content and linguistic competency, namely vocabulary and grammar. These were driven by eight descriptors (can do statements) from the CEFR B1 level for written production. Learners can: (1) develop an argument with justification; (2) support argument with relevant examples; (3) organise ideas in a logical manner; (4) select appropriate information to address target audience; (5) locate desired information to support idea/s; (6) use information located from sources to support idea/s with reference; (7) use enough vocabulary to express ideas related to topic; (8) use sufficient range of language to express idea/s.
Each of these is described below in more detail, within the broader contexts of content and linguistic competency.

**Content**

The content was analysed in terms of task fulfilment and coherence and unity of the written artefact. As mentioned above, whether something is spoken or written, the content needs to be relevant to the task at hand. In this case, task fulfilment of the learners’ articles was predetermined by the task instructions, that is, to gather information and bring solutions or suggestions for improvement to an issue. For example, one topic was to investigate how the local people of Famagusta make use of water resources and to provide suggestions to the Mayor of Famagusta on how to save water (see Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21 in Chapter 4). The English Preparatory School’s expectation in respects to word limits (200-250 words) was also considered.

Coherence and unity within the articles were analysed in accordance with the elements discussed in the discussion forum on *Examining Essays*, such as the elements of introduction, development/body, and conclusion paragraphs.

Along with the elements of the different paragraphs of an essay, learners were also expected to gather information from different sources such as local citizens, students, the internet, and magazines in order to support their ideas and provide justification with examples. Thus, the way in which compositional elements functioned together with learner’s ideas and examples to form a coherent and unified composition was analysed. Six descriptors that guided the assessment of the content of the compositions were: (1) can develop an argument with justification; (2) can support argument with relevant examples; (3) can organise ideas in a logical manner; (4) can select appropriate information to address target audience; (5) can locate desired information to support idea/s; (6) can use information located from sources to support idea/s with reference.

An example of a student’s written product was analysed below in accordance to the above mentioned descriptors to see whether the learning environment had provided the necessary conditions and opportunities for the learners to accomplish the tasks at the required level.
Emre chose the task of providing suggestions to the Mayor of Famagusta on entertainment for young people (see Figure 8.1) (for further details of the task, see Figure 4.19 in Chapter 4).

Entertainment is good with balloons on the water

In my opinion, Cyprus hasn’t got enough entertainment centres for young people. Famagusta is a student city. Therefore, there isn’t too much entertainment. What is the reason for this situation? Because the government hasn’t got enough time.

I will tell you about my topic. I chose entertainment topic because it is not popular in Cyprus and in Turkey. Maybe one day it can be. You are taken care by instructors into the human hamster ball on water; water zorbs are enjoyable. You have a good time while playing. That’s entertaining. It takes a little time to master but with some practice you will be able to stand and walk - or even dash on water for 50m or more! You can also do tricks, rolls, spins, flips and tumbles. If you play with it for five minutes, you will become exhausted. There is a balloon and person is pulled in balloon. The balloon is inflated and it is controlled by instructors. After you are inside the ball you can start to enjoy the experience. The zorbs are operated on the lake. You don’t need any specialist equipment just a sense of fun.

I haven’t tried it yet. However I want to try it. As I said above, WATER ZORBS are not popular in my country. Apparently it is good and enjoyable but we must try it to learn. Eventually, if it can come to Cyprus. Everybody wonders about it and will try it. So when it comes to Cyprus, it will be very popular with young people.

Resource: [http://www.lee-leisure.co.uk/waterzorbs.shtml](http://www.lee-leisure.co.uk/waterzorbs.shtml)

Figure 8.1: Emre’s composition

When Emre’s composition on entertainment is analysed in respects to the task, it can be seen that this student can:

- develop an argument with justification

This is evident as he has provided reason for why Famagusta does not have enough entertainment venues for young people by indicating the government’s lack of time. He also mentioned that the reason for choosing the water activity is that there is currently nothing similar to it available, illustrating that he is able to:

- support argument with relevant examples
In the composition, Emre has exemplified how he believes the activity is fun by describing it and thus demonstrates that he can:

- organise ideas in a logical manner

The organisation of his ideas is logical, as he initially describes his reason for choosing this topic and then continues to describe the activity in detail. Finally, he concludes with a remark that he has no experience of the activity but predicts it will be popular among young people like him.

The compositional organisation was not only evident in the way Emre conveyed his ideas but also the way in which he organised his composition into paragraphs. This shows that the Examining Essays forum has supported learners to develop knowledge in respect to applying the compositional elements to produce a coherent and unified piece of writing.

Emre has also shown evidence of:

- select appropriate information to address target audience

The information that Emre chose to use about the entertainment type that he described, such as the way the balloon functions in water, was appropriate as he needed to indicate why he believed the activity would be fun and enjoyed by young people in order for the Mayor of Famagusta to finance it. Accordingly, he has also shown his ability to:

- locate desired information to support idea/s

Since Emre was able to describe the activity with information that he located from a source, it can be said that he has demonstrated the ability to locate desired information to support his ideas.

As addressed above in the summary section of online interaction, it is evident that learners felt the need to use information from sources; however, since the learning environment did not provide such support, it was not possible for learners to do this accurately. Nonetheless, learners did not fail to mention the sources that were used at the end of their compositions for reference. This is evident in Emre’s composition as
he provided a link to indicate that he made use of a source to support his ideas. However, his composition lacks in-text referencing so it can be concluded that, he can:

- use information located from sources to support idea/s, but without reference

Since referencing has been identified to be a weakness of the learning environment, learners were not disadvantaged in respects to their overall project assessment. Nevertheless, while the learner may not have cited the information from the source in-text, he did not neglect to provide a link to the website that was the source of his information.

**Linguistic competency (vocabulary and grammar)**

The CEFR is a guiding document that does not prescribe but merely describes how a learner functions as a social agent at the six levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2). The core of the CEFR is a set of communicative language activities and communicative language competences (North, 2007). The communicative competencies are subdivided into linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competencies. For the purpose of Research Question 4, focus will be on linguistic competencies. Linguistic competency is again subdivided into range—general linguistic range and vocabulary range—and control—grammatical accuracy and vocabulary control. The CEFR does not specify which linguistic features or lexical items are characteristic of each level but rather embeds them in can do statements that describe how the learner’s language should function for each level.

One of the propositions of this dissertation was that authentic activities provide the opportunity to use the target language in context as it is used in real life. That is, unlike traditional school type activities that provide limited opportunities to use a rich range of vocabulary and linguistic features, authentic activities that are designed in a blended fashion provide many opportunities. This proposition is expanded below.

**Vocabulary**

CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) suggests a vocabulary span across its levels. The growth in vocabulary range across levels is presented in Table 8.1 and the change in vocabulary control across levels is presented in Table 8.2. However, instead of directly
prescribing what language educators should do, as is common in all areas of language teaching, the CEFR utilises an action-oriented approach where objectives are presented in terms of what learners will be able to do in the target language (Council of Europe, 2001; North, 2007). Therefore, language schools or teachers adapt their teaching according to their needs and targets.

Table 8.1: The vocabulary range (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 112)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary range</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>Has a good command of a very broad lexical repertoire including idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms; shows awareness of connotative levels of meaning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Has a good command of a broad lexical repertoire allowing gaps to be readily overcome with circumlocutions; little obvious searching for expressions or avoidance strategies. Good command of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Has a good range of vocabulary for matters connected to his/her field and most general topics. Can vary formulation to avoid frequent repetition, but lexical gaps can still cause hesitation and circumlocution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Has a sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some circumlocutions on most topics pertinent to his/her everyday life such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Has sufficient vocabulary to conduct routine, everyday transactions involving familiar situations and topics. Has a sufficient vocabulary for the expression of basic communicative needs. Has a sufficient vocabulary for coping with simple survival needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Has a basic vocabulary repertoire of isolated words and phrases related to particular concrete situations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.2: The vocabulary control (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 112)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary control</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>Consistently correct and appropriate use of vocabulary.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Occasional minor slips, but no significant vocabulary errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Lexical accuracy is generally high, though some confusion and incorrect word choice does occur without hindering communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Shows good control of elementary vocabulary but major errors still occur when expressing more complex thoughts or handling unfamiliar topics and situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Can control a narrow repertoire dealing with concrete everyday needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>No descriptor available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to addressing the vocabulary needs of the language learners, studies on ‘how large a vocabulary is needed’ has been conducted by a number of researchers
(e.g., Laufer & Nation, 1995; Nation, 2006; Nation & Waring, 1997; Zahar, Cobb, & Spada, 2001). Nation (2006) studied the vocabulary sizes used in novels, newspapers, graded readers, children’s movies, and unscripted spoken language. His research was based on the fourteen 1000 word-family lists made from the British National Corpus (BNC). For context, word families are group of words that are related to each other. In these families there is a base word, for example - able, followed by the other forms of the base word, for example ability, abler, ablest, ably, abilities, unable, and inability. Nation (2006) concluded that the first 1000 words plus proper nouns cover 78%-81% of written text and around 85% of spoken text. Table 8.3 below summarises the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Number of levels</th>
<th>Approximate written coverage (%)</th>
<th>Approximate spoken coverage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st 1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78–81</td>
<td>81–84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd 1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8–9</td>
<td>5–6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd 1,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3–5</td>
<td>2–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th–5th 1,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5–3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th–9th 1,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.75–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th–14th 1,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper nouns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>1-1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the lists</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a number of reasons, this research is aimed at the first 2000 word level. One of the major reasons was that lists of vocabulary developed for B1 level contained 2000 words (Milton, 2010). Thus, targeting the first 2000 word level would provide the necessary opportunities for learners to learn and practice these words. Another reason is that researchers argue the fundamental importance of the first 2000 words while learning English, and advise that:

If learners do not know the most frequent 2000 or 3000 words in English, they will have severe difficulties in understanding most written and spoken text and it will make it even more difficult to engage actively in written and spoken communication. However, if they do know the first 2000–3000 words, it will get them a fairly long way. (Stæhr, 2008, p. 150)
However, the research conducted by Stæhr (2008) with 88 EFL learners from lower secondary education in Denmark revealed that “400-700 hours of instruction lead to a vocabulary size of less than 2000 words” (p. 150). Consequently, if knowledge of 2000 words is the goal, then more than 700 hours of instruction is needed. This finding aligns well with Milton and Meara (1995) that EFL learners can learn at a rate of 2500 words per year.

There is a wide range of freely available software that can be used to analyse the range of vocabulary used by learners, for example:

- Cobb’s Vocabprofile (http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng/),
- Nation’s Range program with British National Corpus list (http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/paul-nation) or
- Nation’s Range program with GSL/AWL list (http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/about/staff/paul-nation).

For this research, Paul Nation’s “Range program with GSL/AWL list” was used to analyse the range of vocabulary used by learners throughout the activity. Nation (2006) suggests that British National Corpus (BNC) lists are more recent than the General Service List (GSL) and that “the BNC lists cover a very large amount of vocabulary and thus give more detailed estimates of the vocabulary load of texts” (p. 80). However, considering the purpose of the language learners of the current research, it was decided that analysing the range of academic word list (AWL) would give better insights. Therefore, instead of using Nation’s “Range program with British National Corpus list”, “Range program with GSL/AWL” list was preferred.

During the data collection process it was discovered that all learners had read all of the posts on the discussion forums, together with all the articles written by their peers. Consequently, analysing the text and articles used on the discussion forums provided rich data on the vocabulary learners were exposed to in written form to draw conclusions from. In this respect, analyses were conducted in two phases.

Once the target vocabulary was determined and how the range of the vocabulary would be analysed, it was time to analyse the word range used by learners throughout the activity. This was designed to deduce the breadth of the vocabulary learners used.
In order to achieve this aim, for each class all text on the discussion forums, including
the initiative questions written by the teachers and all published articles, were copied
and pasted into an MS Word file and saved as a text (.txt) file to be analysed. All
proper names, Turkish city names, and numerals were removed. Spelling mistakes
were corrected, punctuation was removed, and all contractions were removed, for
example, can’t was changed to cannot. In so doing, the aim was to provide information
on the range of vocabulary that learners read or produced throughout the activity.

*Using a wide range of vocabulary to express ideas related to topic*

The first part of the following section analyses vocabulary used by each class and the
second part analyses one student’s vocabulary usage from each class.

*Ceyda’s class*

Ceyda’s class was exposed to a large number of words. The total number of words
(tokens) used was 15,719. This included 1,745 different word forms (types) of which
938 were from the first 1000 most frequent words, 271 were from the second 1000
most frequent words, 247 were from the third (which is the academic word list) 1000
most frequent words, and 244 were from the fourth 1000 or less frequent word lists.
Consequently, learners were able to practice 1,745 different words in context. From the
1,745 different words practiced, it was also found that 567 words were from different
word families of the first 1000 most frequent words. For example, the use of the
following words: accept, acceptability, acceptable, acceptably, unacceptable,
acceptance, accepted, accepting, accepts, and unacceptably is counted as one word
due to the fact that they are all from the same word family. However, the use of:
accept, acceptability, acceptable, acceptably, unacceptable, acceptance, accepted,
accepting, accepts, unacceptably, achieve, achievable, achieved, achievement,
achievements, achiever, achievers, achieves, and achieving are counted as two
because they are from two different word families.: 197 were from different word
families of the second 1000 most frequent words and 185 were from different word
families of the third (which is the academic word list) 1000 most frequent words.
Those words that were from the fourth 1000 or less frequent words were categorised as
*Not on the list* and thus the number of these words according to the families is
unknown. Accordingly, learners were able to practice more than a total of 949 different words from the different family types.

Table 8.4: The output created by Range program based on the vocabulary used in Ceyda’s class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word list</th>
<th>Tokens/%</th>
<th>Types/%</th>
<th>Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First 1000</td>
<td>13025/82.86</td>
<td>983/56.33</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second 1000</td>
<td>1188/7.56</td>
<td>271/15.53</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third 1000</td>
<td>919/5.85</td>
<td>247/14.15</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the list</td>
<td>587/3.73</td>
<td>244/13.98</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15719</td>
<td>1745</td>
<td>949</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results in Table 8.4 indicate that students had the opportunity to practice almost all of the words from the first 1000 words, a quarter of the second 1000 words and the academic word list, and 244 from the less frequent lists.

İrem’s class

The total number of words that learners in İrem’s class used was 11,621. This included 1,574 different word forms of which 924 were from the first 1000 most frequent word list, 243 were from the second 1000 most frequent word list, and 178 were from the third 1000 most frequent–academic–word list. In total, 229 words were from the lower frequency lists. From the 1,574 different word types, it was also found that 564 words were from different word families of the first 1000 most frequent words. 192 were from different word families of the second 1000 most frequent words. 136 were from different word families of the third (which is the academic word list) 1000 most frequent words and there were 229 words of which families are unknown because they are from the fourth 1000 most frequent or less frequent word list. Accordingly, learners were able to practice more than a total of 892 different words from different family types.

Table 8.5: The output created by Range program based on the vocabulary used in İrem’s class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word list</th>
<th>Tokens/%</th>
<th>Types/%</th>
<th>Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First 1000</td>
<td>9651/83.05</td>
<td>924/58.70</td>
<td>564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second 1000</td>
<td>882/7.59</td>
<td>243/15.44</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third 1000</td>
<td>569/4.90</td>
<td>178/11.31</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the list</td>
<td>519/4.47</td>
<td>229/14.55</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11621</td>
<td>1574</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caner’s class delivered a similar outcome to İrem’s class. The total number of words used was 10,358. The total different types of words was 1,525 of which 857 were from the first 1000, 232 were from the second 1000 and 162 were from the third 1000 most frequent words. 274 words were from the fourth 1000 or less frequent word lists. From the 1,525 different word types, it was also found that 535 words were from different word families of the first 1000 most frequent words. 183 were from different word families of the second 1000 most frequent words. 128 were from different word families of the third (which is the academic word list) 1000 most frequent words and there were 274 words of which families are unknown because they are from the fourth 1000 most frequent or less frequent word list. Accordingly, learners were able to practice more than a total of 846 different words from different family types.

### Table 8.6: The output created by Range program based on the vocabulary used in Caner’s class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word list</th>
<th>Tokens/%</th>
<th>Types/%</th>
<th>Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First 1000</td>
<td>8603/83.06</td>
<td>857/56.20</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second 1000</td>
<td>692/6.68</td>
<td>232/15.21</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third 1000</td>
<td>585/5.65</td>
<td>162/10.62</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in the list</td>
<td>478/4.61</td>
<td>274/17.97</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10358</td>
<td>1525</td>
<td>846</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In comparison to Ceyda and İrem’s classes, Caner’s class used a smaller vocabulary range. However, the results from his class are still promising due to the fact that, in a traditional writing activity, learners produce essays between 250 to 350 words thus, even in the (unlikely) event that they use each word once, they cannot practice more than 350 words in such an essay.

The results provided above show that learners were exposed to a wide range of vocabulary, either by their own use or by reading what was available on the discussion forums in either their peers’ or teachers’ posts. This is significant because research shows that incidental learning through reading has an important place in language education (Waring & Nation, 2004; Zahar et al., 2001) and learners in higher levels (as in B1) can learn new words by meeting the new word fewer times in comparison to learners at lower levels (Zahar et al., 2001). Zahar et al. (2001) argue that learners at higher levels can learn a new word if they are exposed to it as few as two times,
whereas learners at lower levels can learn a new word if they are exposed to it seven times. Consequently, learners’ use of a variety of words (as shown in Tables 8.4, 8.5, and 8.6) has provided opportunities for learners to develop a wide range of vocabulary.

From this perspective, it can be seen that when learners use of vocabulary is analysed, a wide range of words were used about sports. Emre, for example, noted what people can do physically with water zorbs:

> It takes little time to master but with some practice you will be able to stand and walk – or even dash on water for 50m or more! You can also do tricks rolls, spins, flips and tumbles. (A script from Emre’s article)

Learners used a variety of names to indicate the types of entertainment:

> I believe, the council should open more cafes, cinema halls and game centers for students to spend a more productive social life. (A script from Sahra’s article)

Learners used adjectives to make their argument stronger:

> Water is indispensable need for human and no one can live without it. (A script from Yıldız’s article)

> This situation is really painful. (A script from Doğukan’s article)

Learners used adjectives to inform readers about the condition of something:

> The water used in Cyprus is salty and hard… The biggest problem of Cyprus is water shortage. (A script from Melih’s article)

Nouns were used to specify some certain areas related to their topic of research:

> …people use clean water in areas such as, healthcare, manufacturing industry, energy production but water is declining in the world. (A script from Çağlar’s article)

> Based on research results the important variable increasing girls cigarette using is found as mother’s marriage more than once. There was no significant relation between parent’s job, education, income level and young’s cigarette using. (A script from Deniz’s article)
Nouns were also used to contextualise the causes of the problem they were targeting:

I believe water needs to be used carefully for example you should check leakage for in your bathroom and your toilet. (A script from Çağlar’s article)

Young people can start smoking for a curiosity, show or solve their problems but it’s a wrong solution because smoking has a lot of negative effects. (A script from Deniz’s article)

Learners also used a variety of words to talk about the negative effects of the problem they were investigating:

Drink driving has very bad consequences. Every year, lots of people dies due to the use of drunk driving. (A script from Doğukan’s article)

In order to indicate an increase in the problem, relevant vocabulary was used and was coupled with a proper linker to illustrate a cause-effect relationship:

Recently, the number of accidents is increasing day by day in our country.
Consequently, the number of death and injury is increasing. (A script from Enis’ article)

Summary

One of the significant outcomes of this research is the range of vocabulary that learners used or were exposed to. It was found that the activity provided learners with opportunities to use a rich range of vocabulary while completing tasks and subtasks and to practice and learn a wide range of vocabulary incidentally in context. These descriptive statistics generally appear to show that the instrument was useful in terms of providing learners many times with opportunities to be exposed to a rich range of vocabulary.

Grammar

Like vocabulary, the CEFR also suggests a grammatical span across the CEFR levels by describing the domain that defines the use of certain semantic functions. For the domain “writing reports and essays” at the B1 level (independent user) a learner—can write short, simple essays on topics of interest, can summarize, report and give his/her opinion about accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine
matters within his/her field with some confidence. Table 8.7 (below) represents to what degree the learner can use the language and is tabulated as grammatical accuracy.

Table 8.7: Grammatical accuracy (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 114)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grammatical accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even while attention is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>otherwise engaged (e.g. in forward planning, in monitoring others’ reactions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical accuracy; errors are rare and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult to spot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good grammatical control. Occasional ‘slips’ or non-systematic errors and minor flaws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in sentence structure may still occur, but they are rare and can often be corrected in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retrospect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows relatively high degree of grammatical control. Does not make mistakes which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lead to misunderstanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates with reasonable accuracy in familiar contexts; generally good control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>though with noticeable mother tongue influence. Errors occur, but it is clear what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/she is trying to express.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses reasonably accurately a repertoire of frequently used ‘routines’ and patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>associated with more predictable situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses some simple structures accurately, but still systematically makes basic mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– for example tends to mix up tenses and forget to mark agreement; nevertheless, it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>usually clear what he/she is trying to say.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patterns in a learnt repertoire.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There have been a number of studies recently (e.g., Forsberg & Bartning, 2010; Kuiken, Vedder, & Gilabert, 2010; Martin, Mustonen, Reiman, & Seilonen, 2010; Salamoura & Saville, 2010) on the degree of linguistic complexity necessary in foreign language writing within the CEFR levels and its assessment. For example, Kuiken, Vedder and Gilabert (2010) studied communicative adequacy and linguistic complexity development in their CALC study. They found that communicative adequacy in foreign language production, and the extent to which the learner is able to complete a task, is influenced by the accuracy and complexity of grammar and vocabulary. However, they also came to the conclusion that, even though learners may have preferred simple structures, this was not interpreted as being less or more communicatively adequate since success in achieving the given task goal is the primary focus of ‘communicative adequacy’ (Pallotti, 2009). It was also indicated that the more learners attempt to use complex language, the less communicatively adequate
the message becomes as it is more likely for learners to display improper use of language. Thus, this in turn hinders the degree to which the task is accomplished.

Alanen, Huhta, and Tarnanen (2010) set up the Cefling project with the aim of describing “the features of language that L2 learners use at various levels of language proficiency defined by the CEFR scales” (p. 21). This was accomplished using a task-based approach by designing a set of communicative tasks and ranking learner performance in accordance to the communicative adequacy of the task at hand and analysing the linguistic features used. The Cefling project highlighted three issues: (1) task design should be done in accordance with a particular level in mind, (2) linguistic performance needs to be grounded in a foreign language construct that can be rated with reliability and validity, and (3) in assessing a learner’s proficiency level, there is a need to rate learners’ performance across a number of tasks with reference to the CEFR proficiency scales. Alanen et al. (2010) also brought attention to the fact that “the assessment of communicative L2 [second or foreign language] performance cannot be wholly separate from the linguistic features such as complexity, fluency, or an increasing accuracy of a given linguistic structure in the same performances” (p. 42).

Martin et al. (2010) took the Cefling project a step further by analysing the use of three structures; local cases (prepositions), and transitive and passive constructions in Finnish language, by developing the DEMfad model. Communicative adequacy and how language knowledge develops still remains important as the project’s fundamental structure is a “usage-based and cognitively oriented view of language learning: acquisition takes place by encountering a growing number of instances of the second language (L2) from which regularities are extracted by use of the general cognitive mechanisms” (p. 58). The results of the study indicate that all three domains—the local use, transitive and passive constructions—are evident at low levels but less frequently as compared to higher levels, and all domains become more diverse as the language proficiency develops. This shows that the way linguistic structures are used differs and changes across CEFR levels. Martin et al. (2010) conclude by discussing the level of frequency and accuracy of use of linguistic structures as a developmental state and that both communicative and structural skills develop step-by-step.
In the case of this research, learners were not assessed to be placed in a particular CEFR level. However, they were expected to develop towards being an ‘Independent User’–B1 level, as this project was only a small component of the course and thus was designed to determine if the foreign language learning environment could provide opportunities for learners to develop their language skills in their journey towards becoming Independent Users of English.

*Using a sufficient range of language to express ideas*

The can do statement referring to language use does not prescribe what syntactic items a learner is required to use but merely indicates that there should be sufficient range and good control with respect to accuracy when conveying a message.

With this in mind, one student’s composition (Emre) was analysed at two levels: syntactic analysis and communicative adequacy for this purpose. For syntactic analysis *UAM CorpusTool* version 2.8.14 (O’Donnell, 2010) that “allows automated and manual annotation of collections of text at multiple annotation layers” (O’Donnell et al., 2014, p. 5) was used. The UAM CorpusTool grammar annotation (see Figure 8.2) was used to analyse grammar at the sentence level for the purpose of this project.
Figure 8.2: The clause features of the grammar scheme generated by UAM CorpusTool
When one analyses Emre’s composition, with respect to using a sufficient range of language to express ideas, it is evident that Emre is clearly able to use different syntactic items as he drew on different grammatical structures appropriate to conveying his message. He also displayed the ability to use more complex structures, such as conditionals and passives, while giving details of the entertainment he believes will be interesting and can attract young people. Even though neither the conditional (1st type) nor the passives were used frequently, the learner chose these structures stating what happens under certain conditions or when focusing on action. He has shown evidence that he has chosen the necessary structures in order to effectively convey his message to his target audience—the Mayor and young people of Famagusta.

It is evident that, in general, Emre preferred to use simple structures, such as present simple when generalising, or giving factual information. However, this does not impede the overall communicative adequacy of the composition as there is a sufficient range of complex sentence and grammar structures present in his composition to cater for the requirement of the B1-Threshold-level. It can also be concluded that he is able to use language with good control. As Kuiken, Vedder, and Gilabert (2010) mentioned, communicative adequacy and to what extent the learner was able to complete the task is influenced by accuracy rather than the complexity of grammar. Accordingly, assessing a sufficient range of grammar use in the overall performance of the written product within the content of the topic area illustrates that Emre can use language with reasonable accuracy for adequate communication.

**Summary**

As discussed in Chapter 7, learners have been provided with opportunities to use the language for a real purpose and develop knowledge on different topics by contributing to a variety of discussion forums and collaborating with peers. Accordingly, the above discussion illustrates that the learning environment has lent itself to exposing learners to an extensive range of vocabulary and grammar which, in turn, has provided learners with a variety of opportunities to develop their language skills.

**Presentation and artefact (Spoken production)**

Speaking is one of the fundamental elements of communication. Accordingly, not only is written production highly valued in academic settings, but so is spoken production.
As mentioned above, our learners were learning English as a foreign language in order to pursue higher education at an English speaking university. As such, it is clear that equal emphasis must be given to both spoken and written production. Alongside the fact that the English Preparatory School’s English proficiency exam requires learners to produce written products, they also need to perform a spoken assessment. Taking this into account, the learning activity incorporated the task of preparing an artefact to be presented in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, a poster, a short video clip, or a brochure.

Even though some learners had written their compositions individually, they were provided with the opportunity to pair up or form groups of three with other classmates who had chosen the same topic while preparing their artefacts and presentations. This was considered a necessary skill, that is, to collaborate effectively and share equal responsibility for the work.

The broad CEFR can do statement referring to spoken production—*can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points*—has driven the evaluation of the presentations that were considered in the terms of content, presentation skills, and collaboration. Eight descriptors from the CEFR B1 level have guided the overall assessment of spoken production: Learners can: (1) select appropriate information to address the target audience; (2) explain the main points relating to the topic with reasonable accuracy; (3) understand and answer most questions asked about topic; (4) ask questions to support further understanding; (5) maintain eye contact to hold attention; (6) speak clearly with little or no hesitation; (7) select appropriate visuals to support topic; (8) collaborate with partner and share work load.

The content of the spoken production was analysed in terms of the information presented in relation to the topic the learner/s had chosen. Once again, as with the content of the written production, the content was pre-set in the task instructions—to gather information and bring a solution or suggestions for improvement to an issue (e.g., investigate how the local people of Famagusta make use of water resources and prepare an artefact to be presented to the Mayor of Famagusta with suggestions on how to save water).
Linguistic and lexical appropriateness and control was assessed in the overall performance of the spoken production. It was expected that the learner would be able to explain a topic area with reasonable accuracy and present well enough to be understood without difficulty. Thus, separate descriptors were not identified.

Receptive skill–listening–was incorporated in the assessment process as not only does a presenter need to be attentive to what the audience is asking and to be able to answer appropriately, but they also need to ask questions to support deeper understanding of the topic being presented.

The four descriptors that guided the assessment of learners’ ability to deliver information in spoken form have been identified as; the speaker can: (1) select appropriate information to address the target audience; (2) explain the main points relating to the topic with reasonable accuracy; (3) understand and answer most questions asked about topic; (4) ask questions to support further understanding.

Alongside the content, presentation skills were also assessed. Presentation skills are abilities that cannot be ignored as they play a crucial role in the overall delivery of the content of the presentation. In order for learners to develop knowledge regarding the skills necessary for presenting, as discussed in Chapter 6, there was a discussion forum titled ‘Giving a presentation’ which included three threads. The first thread entitled ‘Tips on how to give a presentation’ guided learners in discussion on what, in their opinion, makes a presentation effective with reference to the reading provided. In the next two threads learners watched a presentation for each and discussed what skills the presenter used in his/her presentation, whether the presentation was effective or not (providing their reasoning and examples) and, finally, learners provided suggestions on how the presentation could be improved. Thus, after such an informed process, three can do statements were designated for the assessment of the ability of learners’ presentation skills; the presenter can: (1) maintain eye contact to hold attention; (2) speak clearly with little or no hesitation; (3) select appropriate visuals to support topic.

Collaboration was an element that was integrated into the project with the aim of enabling learners to combine their skills and compositional ideas to produce artefacts rich in context, as discussed in Chapter 7. Students collaborated with peers who had done research on the same topic to produce artefacts, for example, a poster, brochure,
video, or web page that were to be used for their presentations. This, in turn, assisted learners to create products that were rich in content and to develop problem solving and language skills. To assess whether the project provided learners with the opportunity to collaborate and how they shared their workload, one descriptor was designated for the purpose of promoting collaborating effectively with peers:

- collaboratively with partner and share workload

To measure whether engaging in such computer assisted, task-based authentic activities provided students with opportunities to develop foreign language competency, learners’ spoken productions were transcribed and analysed in accordance with the above indicated eight descriptors for the overall spoken production.

**Content**

Appropriate selection of information to address a targeted audience is a quality that learners need for any type of production, written or spoken, as it is the information that is conveyed that affects the audience. As such, learners were instructed to:

- select appropriate information to address the target audience

In Emre’s transcribed spoken production it is evident that he chose appropriate information to address the target audience. He needed to provide information as to why he thought his chosen type of entertainment would be best for the young people of Famagusta. In this respect, he chose to describe the activity and to also add an element of excitement by referring to challenges and fun:

Maybe water zorbs can be like competition. As everyone knows students want to every time fun. (A script from Emre’s presentation)

He also mentioned why he believed that Water Zorbs should come to Cyprus:

Cyprus is an island therefore this sport must be in Cyprus. I think water zorbs is suitable for Cyprus because Cyprus has too many students. (A script from Emre’s presentation)
Emre also chose to describe what can be done with water zorbs to show the audience why he believes them to be a good type of entertainment for young people:

Some practice, you will be able to stand and walk even dash for fifty meters or more. You can also do tricks, rolls, spins, flips and tumbles. If you play with it for five minutes, you will definitely be exhausted. (A script from Emre’s presentation)

In spoken production, unlike any other type of production, it is important that the presenter explains his/her topic with reasonable accuracy in-situ to enable the listeners to follow with ease. This is essential as this production type cannot be revisited for understanding. Thus, the following descriptor was designated for this purpose:

- explain the main points relating to the topic with reasonable accuracy

From the overall transcription of Emre’s presentation, it can be seen that the language used is reasonably accurate and the message can be followed with ease.

- understand and answer most questions asked about topic

Emre’s transcribed presentation indicates that he understood the task requirements and responded to them. However, this was not evident with respect to spoken interaction, as none of Emre’s classmates nor his teacher asked him any questions. This may be due to the fact that Emre had fully satisfied the task and there was no need to ask any questions.

- ask questions to support further understanding

Emre also chose not to ask any questions of his listeners to see whether they had understood his presentation or not. There may have been several reasons for this, such as feeling relieved that his presentation was over and wanting to return to his seat as soon as possible. Another reason may be that students did not see the purpose of asking questions themselves, thinking that if their peers had not understood they would have asked. This is an issue that needs be more deeply considered, as asking questions is an element that supports learner understanding and that helps the presenter to see how effectively the message was conveyed.
Presentation skills

As discussed in Chapter 6, the discussion forum on Giving a Presentation was very useful as it provided learners with the opportunity to provide their opinions on what they thought were key elements or characteristics of an effective presentation. Learners were also expected to examine two different example presentations on the discussion forum, discuss their effectiveness and, in turn, provide suggestions for improvement. This raised learner awareness of how to give an effective presentation. For example, one student provided suggestions on how the presenter could improve his presentation skills:

… he is only reading from paper. There is not eye contact or another way of presentation. If use eye contact, clear fluency and showing picture in the presentation, it can be improved. (Response by Doğukan)

Thus, by reading through such comments and contributing to the discussion as a whole, it was evident in Emre’s presentations (as was with many others) that Emre took these suggestions into consideration and displayed the ability to maintain eye contact while doing his presentation. This was also mentioned by the participant teacher, Ceyda, during our informal chat after the presentations. She specifically mentioned that she had seen a change in students’ overall performance and skills, especially in respect to speaking clearly and maintaining eye contact as, prior to this, students tended to read from their notes or slides. Thus, providing learners with the opportunity to discuss these issues—thus raising awareness in this respect—made a difference to their performance.

Once again, learners indicated in their interviews that fluency in speaking is an important quality that affects overall performance:

I think, it is not effective presentation because his presentation is very poor fluency. (Response by Doğukan)

Thus, it can be said that, once again, engaging in such discussions assisted learners to prepare for their performances as they were provided with opportunities to see the effects of poor fluency:

- speak clearly with little or no hesitation
Emre displayed the ability to speak clearly with little hesitation, which may be the reason his peers did not ask any questions. He spoke clearly and comprehensibly and, as such, there is the possibility that his peers did not see the need to ask any questions.

The use of visual aids is an inevitable requirement of a presentation. However, using visuals simply for decoration is not what is intended. Rather, as the descriptor below indicates, the chosen visuals need to support the content of the presentation:

- select appropriate visuals to support topic

Once again, when we consider Doğukan’s response earlier in this section—for the presenter should choose effective pictures in order to improve the presentation—it can be said that Emre’s choice of visuals were appropriate and this was evident from his description of the pictures used. He initially started his presentation with a birds-eye-view of the island and then zoomed in to the university campus that his project was referring to and, finally, to a picture of the water zorbs that were his specific topic:

Firstly space view of Cyprus. A view of Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) campus. A view of water zorbs. My topic is water zorb. Again a photo, a view inside the balloon. Photo looks like a view from Cyprus, especially EMU beach club. (A script from Emre’s presentation)

Emre is referring to the university social facilities and DAU beach club to personalize the event for his peers and to also show that it is possible to have such an activity there.

**Collaboration**

The ability to collaborate and share work load is one that needs to be mastered. Thus, allowing learners to collaborate on such tasks not only helps them in developing skills for their future but also further assists their knowledge and language development. The following descriptor was selected to promote such activity:

- collaborate with partner and share work load
Emre decided to prepare his presentation with two other classmates who had also done research on different types of entertainment for young people. They collaborated while designing their artefact using Prezi (http://www.prezi.com) and chose their pictures and organised their information to have a consistent flow.

**Summary**

When Emre’s overall performance for spoken production is considered, it can be said that displaying the ability to choose appropriate information, explaining the main points with reasonable accuracy, speaking clearly to convey the message, maintaining eye contact with audience, and collaborating with peers, that the learning environment successfully provided learners with opportunities to develop their speaking skills. Although, there is still room for improvement (as Emre did not display any interactional skills through asking any questions to his audience to contribute to their understanding). This tells us that the learning environment should incorporate such elements to further promote learning and mastery.

**Discussion**

It can be concluded that the learning environment was not without weaknesses. In future iterations, the learning environment should promote: more effective referencing to avoid plagiarism, learner-learner interaction, more effective response giving, and seeking clarification to improve written interaction. Referencing was also found to be a weakness in the written production of learners. Again, this was related to the lack of awareness and guidance provided in the learning environment. In terms of the spoken production of learners, it is evident that interaction between the presenter and his/her audience is an issue that may need addressing so the presenter can understand how effective s/he has been in conveying his/her message. This can be achieved by asking a few questions. In this case, since such a quality was not discussed within the learning environment, learners did not see the need and preferred to keep quiet.

Despite the weaknesses of the computer assisted foreign language learning environment, it can still be said that the learning environment promoted learners to interact with each other on various topics through the discussion forum contributions for a real purpose that, in turn, assisted in the development of various language skills.
Learners’ language development was analysed in three components–online discussions (written interaction), article (written production), and presentation and artefact (spoken production).

Contributions to the discussion forums, also referred to as written interaction in the CEFR skills, indicated that learners developed their language skills under three broad sub-headings–content, opinion, and contribution to understanding. The content of the posts indicated that learners understood what was expected of them and responded appropriately. Even though the language that learners used in their posts was not accurate, in most cases this did not hinder understanding of the message conveyed. Expressing and supporting opinion was another attribute learners displayed. Even though, as mentioned above in the first paragraph, learners were not able to cite their sources appropriately, it was still evident that sources and discussions supported knowledge development on issues such as the importance of using a source, how to write an essay and its components, and general issues related to their research topics like the water problem in Cyprus or smoking among teenagers. Learners displayed the ability to contribute to the discussion forums to support further understanding; however, this was very minimal and in most cases was limited to the first contribution to the discussion topic.

The two sub-headings–content and linguistic competency (vocabulary and grammar)–drove the analysis of the articles learners produced. The analysis indicated that the learners’ interaction with the learning environment through discussion forum contributions assisted both content and linguistic development. Within the content of the articles, learners developed an argument appropriate to their chosen task and justified it accordingly, providing examples to support the argument, organising ideas logically, and selecting appropriate information to address the target audience. When the overall student output from the discussion forums were analysed, it is noteworthy to mention that learners were exposed to an extensive amount of vocabulary and language as learners were provided with the opportunity to use the language for a real purpose and develop knowledge on different topics and language competency through the discussion board contributions and collaboration with peers.

Content, presentation skills, and collaboration were all qualities examined within the presentation and artefact (spoken production) component of the task. The content of
the presentations was found to be appropriate as learners were able to provide details of their topic and most learners selected information they found to be interesting to attract the audiences’ attention and to fulfil the task. Learners’ presentation skills indicated that the discussion forum on presentation tips was effective as learners showed utmost care while presenting to maintain eye contact, speak clearly, and select appropriate visuals to support their presentation. Collaboration was an element that was integrated into the presentation to assist learners in developing their knowledge by sharing information on different issues related to the same topic area and to support each other in language development.

**Conclusion**

It can be concluded that, in the minimal time learners interacted with the learning environment, learners have been able to express themselves by using the target language to communicate their messages adequately with a real purpose, whether it is in written or spoken form.

The design-based research approach employed in this study has led to the development of a framework of design principles to contribute to theory, and to enable others to apply the findings of the research. The refinement of the design principles is described in detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 9

Design principles for activity-based language learning

One of the key outcomes of a design-based research approach is the development of design principles that inform both theory and practice. Although some have used different terms to describe this output, such as Plomp (2009) who used the term ‘intervention theory’ (p. 18), McKenney and Reeves (2013) note that the generally accepted term used to describe the ‘prescriptive theoretical understanding’ (p. 34) developed through design-based research is design principles.

A review of the initial draft design principles that were used to guide the design of the activities-based authentic learning environment was conducted as part of the final phase of the research. Additional design principles were added to the framework as a result of the finding, together with an explanation of how those design principles were modified and changed in response to the findings in the two iterations of the research. The additional principles appropriately reflect the more specific aspects of the language learning environment that was the focus of the study.

Thus, this chapter reflects the fourth and final phase of the design-based research process where findings are reviewed and reflected upon to refine design principles, as well as to produce new principles to enhance the solution based on this research context. The chapter begins with a review of each of the original principles, discussing each in relation to the study, followed by the new design principles that emerged from the findings. The refined complete model is then presented, together with a rationale for each element, and reference is made to contributing sources.
Initial design principles

The initial design principles used to guide the learning environment design were adapted from a model of authentic tasks (based on Herrington, et al., 2003) with generic applicability. Chapter 4 provides a full description of how each of these principles was instantiated in aspects of the web-based learning environment. Many of the principles remain as useful guidelines for the kind of activity-based language learning implemented in the study. However, some modifications were made as a result of the findings of the study. These confirmations and changes are described below.

**Authentic activities have real world relevance**

The findings suggest that having *real world relevance* is a crucial element of a learning activity that enables learners to create a link between what they learn at school and how the knowledge is used in real world. In this respect, participants appreciated their roles as Editor or journalist and enjoyed providing real solutions to real problems significant to them. Moreover, participant learners appreciated the fact that the target language was used in this respect for an authentic purpose in authentic context which gave them joy and motivation while, at the same time, learning and developing relevant knowledge and skills. This first principle remains a useful design-principle for activity-based language learning contexts.

**Authentic activities are ill-defined, requiring students to define the tasks and sub-tasks needed to complete the activity**

The learning environment and the activity required learners to go through *ill-defined* stages that were not laid out in any sequential manner by the teacher. This increased the complexity and difficulty level of the activity that students engaged in to reach a solution or conclusion. Because of its *ill-defined* and *complex* nature, it was observed that learners had to spend more mental and interactional effort over a sustained period of time, while defining tasks and subtasks, and while using and developing a variety of knowledge and skills, in order to complete the activity. Thus, the findings indicated that this principle, and the next relating to sustained time and complexity, complemented each other to such an extent that they were usefully merged into one principle.
**Authentic activities comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over a sustained period of time**

This principle was merged with the second principle, as described above, and so was deleted as a principle in its own right in the final framework. As a result of this, the new interpretation of the revised principle is *authentic activities are ill-defined and complex* that require students to spend mental and interactional effort over a period of time, while defining tasks and subtasks and using and developing a variety of knowledge and skills to complete the activity.

**Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources**

The findings suggest that *providing learners the opportunity to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources* brought a number of opportunities to develop expertise. The major perspectives that were focused on while completing the activity were *focus on author, focus on content, focus on form, focus on audience, and focus on process*. Each of these can be used as a sub-guiding principle in similar contexts, as described below:

- **Focus on authorship skills** provided the opportunity for learners to develop skills that they would need while investigating a topic in-depth and collecting, analysing, and reporting data. Moreover, focusing on authorship was also used in this study to develop other sub-skills, such as giving effective presentations.

- **Focus on content** provided learners with the opportunity to enrich the content of their products through collaboration with their peers. The study revealed that learners’ providing each other with constructive criticism on the content of their products gave them the opportunity to see the weaknesses and strengths of their work and produce more convincing products.

- **Focus on form** provided the opportunity to develop linguistic knowledge. In so doing, learning the target language was not overlooked and different structures were studied in context. This also helped the learners to analyse how the target language functions in context.

- **Focus on audience** was a crucial perspective that was taken into consideration while learner’s completed the set activity. It provided the opportunity to refer to an authentic audience by considering possible expectations and thus created authentic communication between the learners and the targeted audience.
Focus on process provided the opportunity for learners to share their experiences with their peers in terms of how they approached the task, what difficulties they experienced, how they completed it, and what knowledge and skills they had developed. This was articulated in students’ presentations in class and provided a crucial opportunity for the learners to develop their metacognitive and problem solving skills further, as they shared their experiences and completed activities with their peers.

This original principle was retained but expanded to incorporate additional perspectives related to language learning.

Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate
Collaboration was another key design feature that facilitated the process. Some learners indicated that if they worked individually, they would not have completed the activity. This was because there were many sub-tasks to complete and some students pointed out the importance of collaboration providing the opportunity for joint problem solving. The findings suggest that learners value peer scaffolding, reflection, and articulation and that such a complex and ill-defined activity was further facilitated by peer collaboration. This original principle was retained.

Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect
Reflection, as another fundamental design feature, provided students with meaningful discussion that enhanced learning and experience. In this respect, learners had opportunities at different stages to reflect on the learning resources, (e.g., interactive essays), problem solving, (e.g., while designing and producing their newsletter), and learning strategies, (e.g., at the end of their presentations in class where they were formally required to reflect on their learning strategies and the processes that they went through while completing the activity). This original principle was retained and, moreover, reflection was used as a guiding principle for self-assessment, which is described below.

Authentic activities can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain specific outcomes
One of the consequences of this research is that it revealed that authentic activities lead beyond domain and skill specific outcomes. This guiding characteristic suggests that the product-oriented nature of the authentic activities led to the creation of
products that comprised of real communication and that focused on multiple skills rather than a single unidimensional response. The learning activity allowed students to produce products that authentically captured real world communication and incorporated reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, along with the further development of grammar and vocabulary knowledge. This principle was modified to *authentic activities lead beyond domain and skill specific outcomes* to specify that the primary focus of authentic activities is task completion that incorporates multi skills (as argued in Chapter 2 *Meaning-focused activities in language learning*).

**Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment**
The learning activity provided learners with opportunities to use the target language in context as it is used in real life. In this respect, *assessment* provided learners with opportunities to gauge what they could do with the target language in real life. Thus, even though the activity was completed both in class and in the online environment, learners were able to reflect on their language skills by referring to *can do* statements and revealing the strengths and weaknesses of their communication skills rather than linguistic knowledge. The findings suggest that the characteristics of *assessment* and *reflection* complement each other and, in situations where they are used together, they have the potential to provide learner centeredness. This principle was also retained.

**Authentic activities yield polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else**
Aiming at *polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else* was another characteristic that was enabled by the activity and its products. The targeted products allowed learners to establish real communication between the audience and themselves and to move away from school-type exercises that only provided practice on source book or teacher-prepared forms. The findings suggest that requiring the submission of polished products is a fundamental characteristic of a learning activity as it focuses importantly on whether learners can use the target language to accomplish target tasks, as well as demonstrating knowledge about the target language. Thus, orienting the learner towards the creation of polished products provided a real world perspective rather than a linguistic perspective. As such, this principle was also retained.
**Authentic activities allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome**

The research activity was *open ended allowing competing solutions and diversity of outcome*. It was observed that having the freedom and the opportunity to use any language structure within their repertoire, or by acquiring new structures to write their stories, learners were able to convey different messages and text styles, even though some students worked on the same topic. It was observed that this was not only a key factor in achieving authentic outcomes, but was also a motivating factor as learners provided genuinely diverse and engaging stories. Accordingly the tenth principle was also retained.

Thus, of the original 10 design principles, six were retained as originally described, two were merged, one was expanded with further descriptors, and one was modified. Additional principles were also derived from the analysis of data and findings and they are described in more detail below.

**Additional design principles**

Two additional design principles were proposed after analysis of the two iterations of the learning environment. As noted by Herrington and Reeves (2011), it is common for design principles to go through several revisions as they are aligned with research findings and this was the case with this study. The two additional principles are described below:

**Authentic activities are conducive to both learning and communicating**

The research study suggests the importance of a characteristic that links learning and practice in context, that is, *authentic activities are conducive to both learning and communicating*. As described in Chapters 1 and 2, the focus of many language classrooms is teaching grammar structures explicitly and practising decontextualized school exercises. However, as is shown in this research, when learning is embedded in real world relevant activities that maintain a communicative purpose and provide opportunities to learn new structures in context, while at the same time practising existing knowledge, learners develop a more robust knowledge that they can use in real settings. The findings suggest that the students appreciated the activity for its conduciveness to learning and because it enabled them to use language as a tool to communicate the message that they wanted to pass on to their audience.
**Authentic activities provide motivational factors**

One important factor that emerged as a key issue for consideration in the study is *motivation*. Sometimes, teachers may believe that learners are intrinsically motivated simply because they are studying at university by their own choice. However, in pre-university level language classrooms learners may not always be motivated due to the fact that the subject area or major that they wish to study, (e.g., economics, science, the arts, etc.) and language learning are two different subjects. Thus, taking motivational factors into consideration and designing a learning activity accordingly is crucial. It was observed in the study that the activity that learners completed provided motivation in many aspects, as described below:

- Giving learners *ownership* of the problem motivated learners in many ways to uncover their own solution. It was observed that learners’ self-determining the problem to research and providing their own solutions gave them ownership over the problem solving process.

- *Targeting an authentic problem and authentic audience* was another important aspect of the activity. It motivated learners to produce better artefacts as close to as their equivalents in the real world.

- *Publishing* student work provided them with motivation in terms of developing more convincing arguments. Publishing students’ work was accomplished by printing the final articles in a newsletter that was later distributed at school and by doing public presentations in class.

- Providing *freedom and control* motivated learners to develop autonomous learning skills. By having freedom and control of their learning activity, learners not only had ownership over the problem, they also had the opportunity to diagnose lack of (language) skills they required to complete the activity. Later, these skills were further developed to achieve the outcomes they sought.

- Providing *authentic roles* was another motivational factor that surfaced throughout the activity. In contrast to short activities that engage learners in artificial roles (such as a learner taking on a role as a receptionist, with another learner calling the reception to ask for an available room, learning the price, and booking it for certain dates), learners performed tasks that lasted over a sustained period of time that required them to complete a variety of sub-tasks relevant to their roles. This was very motivating for learners. Learners commented that being invited to take
the role of a member of an editorial board, and publishing articles for a newsletter as if they were a journalist, encouraged and motivated them to go through the challenging steps towards the completion of the activity.

- Providing a *challenge* which was not beyond the learners’ perceived capacities motivated them as it was more enjoyable than school type exercises.

Thus, it can be concluded that *motivation* is another characteristic that may be considered while designing authentic activities for language learners.

Based on the revisions to the original draft design principles, and the addition of two new principles, a refined framework for language learning was created, as summarised in the next section.

**Characteristics of authentic activities in an EFL context**

Design principles were used to create a web-based learning environment (described in Chapter 4) for EFL learners who were largely deprived of authentic contexts within which to learn the English language. The associated learning activities were implemented and researched in two iterations involving three classes of students. Design principles were reviewed and refined with each iteration.

Table 9:1 below summarises the adapted and refined version of the characteristics of authentic activities in this context. Column 1 lists the initial draft design principles based on Herrington et al. (2003); Column 2 shows the refined design principles that have emerged from the findings of this study; Column 3 describes the rationale for the use of each principle; and Column 4 lists relevant researchers upon whose research each principle is corroborated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original draft design principles (Herrington et al., 2003)</th>
<th>Characteristics revealed as the outcome of this research</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Supporting researchers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities have real world relevance</td>
<td>Authentic activities have real world relevance</td>
<td>Contextualize authentic activities in real world relevant situations where the target language is used for a real purpose for real communication</td>
<td>Clarke (1989); Doughty &amp; Long (2003); Felix (2002); Gorp &amp; Bogaert (2006); Huckin (1988); Schrooten (2006); Van Van den Branden (2006)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authentic activities are ill-defined, requiring students to define the</td>
<td>Authentic activities are complex and ill-defined</td>
<td>Authentic activities are ill-defined complex activities that require students to</td>
<td>Berge et al. (2004); Breen (1985, 1987); Cram et al. (2011);</td>
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<tr>
<td>Original draft design principles (Herrington et al., 2003)</td>
<td>Characteristics revealed as the outcome of this research</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>Supporting researchers</td>
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<tr>
<td>tasks and sub-tasks needed to complete the activity</td>
<td>spend mental and interactional effort over a sustained period of time, while defining tasks and subtasks and using and developing a variety of knowledge and skills to complete the activity</td>
<td>Huckin (1988); Jonassen (1997, 1999, 2000); Kitchener (1983); Laurier (2000); Moursund (2003); Schrooten (2006); Van den Branden (2006); Weiss (2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authentic activities comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over a sustained period of time</td>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources</td>
<td>While dealing with authentic activities in terms of different perspectives focus may be on: form, content, process, audience, authorship skills</td>
<td>Breen (1985); Kitchener (1983); Raimes (1991); Schrooten (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources</td>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate</td>
<td>Provide peer-peer and learner-teacher collaboration</td>
<td>Belland (2014); Ellis (1997); Felix (2002); Henderson, Huang, Grant and Henderson (2009); Jonassen (1999); Long (2003); Nunan (2004); Schrooten (2006); Van den Branden (2006); Willis &amp; Willis (2007); Wong et al. (1995)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate</td>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect</td>
<td>Provide reflections at every stage of the activity on issues such as process, gained knowledge and skills, and the process</td>
<td>Doughty and Williams (1998); Ellis (1997); Howland et al. (2011); Kramsch (1993); Nunan (1995, 2004); Schrooten (2006); Willis &amp; Willis (2007); Wong et al. (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect</td>
<td>Authentic activities lead beyond domain and skill specific outcomes</td>
<td>Authentic activities focus on integrated skills, e.g., listening, reading, writing and speaking, as well as developing knowledge in vocabulary and grammatical forms and the main aim is task completion rather than language learning</td>
<td>Lombardi (2007); Schrooten (2006); Wong et al. (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain specific outcomes</td>
<td>Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment</td>
<td>Assessment should focus on what the learner can do with the target language rather than what the learner know about the target language</td>
<td>Choi and Hannafin (1995); Cumming and Maxwell (1999); Felix (2000, 2002, 2005); Frey et al. (2012); Herrington &amp; Herrington (2006); Laurier (2000); Reeves (2006); Van den Branden (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment</td>
<td>Authentic activities yield polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else</td>
<td>The output of an authentic activity should represent what the learner will need to do with the target language in real world</td>
<td>Felix (2002); Schrooten (2006); Cho, Lee, &amp; Jonassen (2011); Van den Branden (2006)</td>
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</table>
Design principles such as those that emerged from this study can be a powerful catalyst for improving pedagogical approaches in language learning classrooms. But, they cannot simply be accepted without questioning in different contexts. As noted by Anderson (2005) “design-based research does not seek for universal solutions but rather for deep understanding of innovations and the factors that effect improvement in local contexts”. These design principles have refined another model of authentic activities to make the resulting model more appropriate for the language learning context and they are offered as a key outcome of this research as a means to assist language teachers to facilitate learning in authentic contexts.

The next chapter will summarise the findings of the study and provide limitations of the research, together with recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

This thesis has described the process and findings of a design-based research study that investigated the use of authentic activities in facilitating the learning of English as a foreign language with pre-university level adult learners in North Cyprus. This final chapter presents an overview of the study by providing a summary of research, a discussion of findings, and discussing the limitations of the research. The chapter concludes with implications for further research.

**Summary of the research study**

This research principally targeted the limitations that learners of English in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments experience. The literature was reviewed and the characteristics of authentic activities suggested by Herrington, Oliver, and Reeves (2003) were initially found to provide promising draft design principles to guide the design of a solution in the form of an e-learning program of studies. In a second, more targeted and in-depth literature review, each of these characteristics was researched from a language teaching perspective.

A computer assisted foreign language learning environment for pre-service level university students was designed according to the draft characteristics and the program was implemented with the target students. The overall activity was set in the context of a newsletter office where students were members of an editorial board and wrote articles to be published in the newsletter.

A conceptual overview of the study is provided in Table 10.1 below.
Table 10.1: Overview of the research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis of practical problems by</strong></td>
<td><strong>Development of solutions informed by</strong></td>
<td><strong>Iterative cycles of testing and refinement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reflection to produce “design principles” and enhance solution implementation</strong></td>
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<td>researchers and practitioners in collaboration</td>
<td>existing design principles and technological innovations</td>
<td>of solutions in practice</td>
<td>and enhance solution implementation</td>
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<td><strong>Chapters 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chapter 9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem investigation</strong></td>
<td><strong>In depth literature review</strong></td>
<td><strong>Testing of the learning environment in practice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reflections to produce revised design principles and enhance solution implementation</strong></td>
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<td>Investigates the problem in depth based on</td>
<td>Further problem investigation</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<td>• General literature review</td>
<td><strong>Initial theory:</strong> The initial theory that</td>
<td><strong>Data collection:</strong> (Cycles 1 &amp; 2) interviews</td>
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<td>• Reports arguing the causes and effects of</td>
<td>was found useful suggest authentic activities</td>
<td>(individual and focus group), work samples, video recorded data, and observations</td>
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<td>the problem in practice</td>
<td>(Herrington, Oliver and Reeves, 2003):</td>
<td><strong>Participants:</strong> Cycle 1: 2 EFL classes, 2 EFL</td>
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<td>• Practitioner consultation</td>
<td>• have real world relevance</td>
<td>teachers and 6 students (for in depth interviews)</td>
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<td>• Personal experience</td>
<td>• are ill-defined</td>
<td>Cycle two: 1 EFL class, 1 teacher, 4 students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• are complex tasks</td>
<td>(for in depth interviews)</td>
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<td>• provide different perspectives</td>
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<td>domain specific outcomes</td>
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<td>• integrate assessment</td>
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<td>• allow competing solutions and diversity</td>
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<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Designing and refining of the learning</strong></td>
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<td>environment**</td>
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**Methodology**

**Data collection:** (Cycles 1 & 2) interviews (individual and focus group), work samples, video recorded data, and observations

**Participants:**
- Cycle 1: 2 EFL classes, 2 EFL teachers and 6 students (for in depth interviews)
- Cycle two: 1 EFL class, 1 teacher, 4 students (for in depth interviews)

**Method:** Qualitative

**Place:**
Eastern Mediterranean University English Preparatory School, North Cyprus

**Duration:** Total: 2 semesters
Data collection & Implementation: 6 weeks for implementation, observations, video recording and 1 week for interviews (for each cycle)

**Level:** B1 (CEFR)

**Chapters 5-8**

**Analysis of findings:**
- Chapter 5: Interaction with the learning environment
- Chapter 6: Response to the characteristics of authentic activities
- Chapter 7: Support and scaffolding
- Chapter 8: Achieving skills and competency in the target language

**Chapter 10**

Draws conclusion by providing summary of the findings, Implications of the research, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research

Reports new design principles and suggests that the characteristics of authentic activities in EFL:
- have real world relevance
- are complex and ill-defined
- provide different perspectives
- support collaboration
- constitute reflection
- lead beyond domain and skill specific outcomes
- integrate assessment
- yield polished products
- are open ended allowing competing solutions and diversity of outcome
- conducive to both learning and communicating
- provide motivational factors
The study was conducted in two iterative cycles over two semesters where students in two classes used the learning environment in the first implementation and one class in the second. In both iterations, selected students were videotaped as they engaged with the environment and in-depth interviews were conducted with students and teachers. Data collection from both cycles was used to investigate the way the characteristics of authentic activities in the learning environment assisted foreign language students in developing robust knowledge. It also allowed for refinement of the learning environment itself.

**Summary of findings**

The research was guided by four research questions and the findings related to each is described in summary form below.

**Research question 1**

*How do students engage with and respond to a computer assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language education?*

The first research question explored how students interacted with the learning environment. The findings showed that some learners initially resisted using the learning environment and participating in the activity as they were quite different to the types of tasks that they were accustomed to completing at school. However, once learners engaged with the context of the newsletter, and the activity of writing the articles in English, they reported that both the learning environment and the activity were very motivating, and—unlike traditional school type exercises, such as multiple choice tests—they provided them with many opportunities to develop their skills. Learners engaged with their given role as a journalist to create a real newsletter, were able to provide their opinions freely, were able to share meaningful resources and ideas for authentic purposes, used the target language as a communication tool, developed knowledge and skills in the target language, and found it to be fun. Thus, learners reported that the activity was *conducive to both learning and communicating*, a new
design principle that has arisen out of this research and described in detail in Chapter 9.

Students’ response to the metaphor of the newsletter office for the web-based interface was positive as it complemented their roles as journalists. They had very little difficulty navigating within the learning environment and were able to freely access the media elements by recalling which objects referred to which aspect of the environment by developing strategies (such as trial and error) despite their low level or lack of experience in using such an interface (see Table 5.3 for the summary of participant students’ years of experience in language learning and use of IMM in education). Any initial difficulties quickly disappeared after using the learning environment for just a few hours. Learners also reported the fact that analysing sample essays and using peer work as a model were significant features of the learning environment.

These findings suggested that the use of the computer assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities for foreign language learning was a successful model to enhance the development of relevant skills.

**Research question 2**

*How do students and teachers view the importance of each of the characteristics of authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language education?*

In order to answer Research Question 2, it was necessary to interview both learners and teachers to gain insight into their views and beliefs regarding each of the characteristics of the authentic activities. Learners were interviewed in their first language to enable them to express themselves accurately and provide detailed information regarding their experience.

The findings indicated that the characteristics of the authentic activities were mainly perceived as a key aspect of *learning* for both learners and teachers. In this respect, participants appreciated the fact that the target language was used for a real purpose, that they had to deal with real world type problems, that they had to examine the task and the sub-tasks from different perspectives which, in turn, resulted in developing
relevant knowledge and skills, and that they had the opportunity to reflect on their own learning process and use the target language as a communication tool, rather than treating it like an object that can be studied in entities. Participants also reported that being provided with the opportunity to explore tasks in-depth, collaborate with peers, and produce products that were valuable in their own right fostered learning. A new framework of 11 elements of authentic activities in an EFL context emerged from this enquiry (as described in Chapter 9), specifically:

1. Authentic activities have real world relevance
2. Authentic activities are complex and ill-defined
3. Authentic activities provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources
4. Authentic activities provide the opportunity to collaborate
5. Authentic activities provide the opportunity to reflect
6. Authentic activities lead beyond domain and skill specific outcomes
7. Authentic activities are seamlessly integrated with assessment
8. Authentic activities yield polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else
9. Authentic activities are open ended allowing competing solutions and diversity of outcome
10. Authentic activities are conducive to both learning and communicating
11. Authentic activities provide motivational factors

These findings suggested that a learning environment based on the elements of authentic activities assisted learners to gain robust knowledge as it promoted the use of language as a tool for communication.

Research question 3

How do teachers support and scaffold student learning in a computer assisted language learning environment designed to incorporate characteristics of authentic activities in foreign language learning?

The findings related to Research Question 3 were that teachers mainly provided support and scaffolding through initiating meaningful discussions by asking leading
questions. This directed learner attention to the different resources available in the learning environment and activated their ability to discern.

Support and scaffolding helped learners develop authorship skills such as focusing on the elements of a composition, doing research, making use of resources, and giving effective presentations. The findings also indicated that support and scaffolding assisted learners on focusing on content. This enabled content development by knowledge sharing, raising awareness of how to make use of information in sources, and providing constructive peer feedback for content enrichment.

Guidance was also provided for linguistic development in order to develop learner knowledge and use of the target language—focus on form. In order to correct learners’ language mistakes in their articles, teachers used error correction symbols to get the attention of the learners rather than directly indicating what the problem and its solution was.

Focus on audience was another aspect where learners were provided with support and scaffolding. This was aided through peer composition analysis, for which learners provided suggestions on how to better meet the target audience’s expectations. Thus, teachers not only supported learners themselves but also provided the opportunity for peer scaffolding to take place.

Generally, the learning environment successfully provided learners with the necessary support and scaffolding to develop different skills and knowledge. Participation in teacher-initiated discussions also assisted the primary goal of the learning environment— to provide learners with opportunities to use the target language for authentic purposes.

**Research question 4**

*In what ways do students achieve foreign language competency through the use of computer assisted task-based authentic activities?*

In order to answer this question, learner work, contributions to online discussions, and presentations were analysed according to the CEFR B1 level *can do* statements (Council of Europe, 2001) in the criteria (see Appendix 8). The findings suggest that the learning environment promoted learner-learner interaction on various topics.
through the discussion forum contributions for a real purpose. Learners’ contributions show that they were able to express their ideas and opinions on various topics adequately.

Engaging in the learning environment also assisted in exposing learners to an extensive range of vocabulary and language. This was evident in their contributions to online discussions, their written articles, and their presentations. Therefore, learners had multiple opportunities to use the target language in context to close the gap between *know what* and *know how*. Presentation skills also developed as learners were provided with opportunities to analyse and discuss other presentations and make judgments on how to improve spoken abilities.

Consequently, the findings suggest that the learning environment promoted the use of the target language as a tool to convey messages adequately, both in written and spoken form, and developed relevant skills to complete the tasks.

**Implications of the research**

The present study took place in North Cyprus with EFL learners. A design-based research approach was employed and it investigated the use of authentic activities in a computer assisted foreign language learning environment. The following section describes the implications regarding the design of authentic activities in foreign language learning.

**Implications for the design of authentic activities in foreign language learning**

The primary implication for educators and designers of learning environments that incorporate authentic activities for foreign language learning is that new learning theory can inform the instructional design of authentic activities in language education. For implementation in contexts of advanced knowledge acquisition, an instructional design model based on authentic activities is an effective substitute for traditional language learning, as such environments typically place emphasis on learning rather than instruction. In this research, learners used the target language for a real purpose through active participation in discussion forum topics and then transferred their gained knowledge when producing both written and spoken products. The
characteristics of authentic activities may guide foreign language educators to a model grounded on constructivist principles and recent learning theory.

A further implication of the research is the interface design of the environment. An interface design that supports intuitive navigation rather than using text-based lists may seem confusing and cause frustration at times; however, the more complex structure was compelling for many students and supported the nature of authentic investigation of a resource that was much more engaging than a simple list of school-type exercises or problems. Also, a design that mirrors the role the learners are to undertake is preferable to students as it complements their task and can be highly motivating. The following section describes implications regarding the implementation of authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language learning.

Implications for the implementation of authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language learning

The key implication for educators who desire to assist foreign language learners in gaining robust knowledge at school and transferring this knowledge to real life, is that incorporating authentic activities into learning environments can close the gap between language acquired in foreign language learning settings and the real world.

The activities that learners engaged with required authenticity and alignment with the learners’ own context in order for the tasks to have real purpose. There are many advantages to be gained from implementing authentic activities into foreign language education that help to create a social environment for collaborative learning and provide opportunities for scaffolding to support knowledge construction.

In order to promote collaborative learning, activities where learners engage should include meaningful interaction and opportunities to use the target language to communicate for a real purpose. The nature of interaction is not merely to pass on information but rather to promote reflective responses that contribute to the creation of an authentic product, such as an article or story, that is valuable in its own right.

Another implication of the research for foreign language acquisition is the greater range of vocabulary and language that learners can be exposed to. The findings indicate that providing learners with the opportunity to undertake authentic activities
through collaborative learning, and using the language for real communication, can expose learners to an extensive and potentially greater amount of vocabulary and language in both written and spoken production.

**Limitations of the study**

The findings of the study provide strong support for the incorporation of authentic activities in foreign language learning. However, three aspects of the research may have influenced the study in such a way as to reduce confidence in the findings. It is thus the responsibility of researchers or practitioners to judge the applicability of the findings and recommendations to their own contexts with awareness of these limitations.

The process of interviewing students after their engagement with the learning environment may have assisted reflection on the aim of authentic activities. This may have caused learners to consciously synthesise their learning in the same way as questioning does, creating a clear opportunity for ‘reflection-on-action’ (Schon, 1987) and this may have increased their appreciation of such an integration of authentic activities in a web-based learning environment during their learning process. The employment of research interviews may have created a positive ‘researcher effect’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As such, interviews intervene positively in students’ deeper understanding of their own language learning processes.

The second limitation is related to the learners’ positive response in the study. This may be related to their previously quite negative experience of traditional language learning exercises and consequently their experience of difficulty in transmitting knowledge into real world situations. Although none of the students had extensive experience of interactive multimedia or web-based learning before using the learning environment, the newness of the program and learning strategy may have played a part in the students’ positive reports on the learning environment and the incorporation of authentic activities in foreign language learning.

The third limitation is associated with the amount of robust learning that the learning environment has offered. The readers need to consider that each cycle in this study took place in a 7 week period of engagement within a 16 week semester. Thus, the
difficulty in assessing whether the students’ knowledge transferred is clearly an issue. A longer period of time spent within the environment would enable a much more valid appreciation of whether learners are able to bring their gained language skills into real world communication, rather than to meet the requirements of the task.

These limitations do not have a direct impact on the incorporation of authentic activities in foreign language learning. However, the limitations do indicate opportunities for future research and directions for enhancing foreign language learning. The suggestions for further research are described in the next section.

**Suggestions for further research**

The research that has been undertaken for this thesis has highlighted a number of topics on which further research would be beneficial.

One area that needs further investigation is the use of scaffolding in authentic learning environments. As was mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, the Turkish education system is teacher-centred and content-driven where teaching and learning are based on memorisation and reproduction of large amounts of content through direct instructions (Aksit & Sands, 2006). As this customary education system has its own limitations, both on teachers and learners, shifting from one approach to another within a single activity that incorporates characteristics of constructivist learning must be further researched in order to guide teachers in their role. For example, when should teachers provide direct assistance and when should they prompt learning with further questioning? Providing research-based guidelines for teachers regarding how to best provide scaffolding (or guidance) will be beneficial for language learning in such environments.

Another area that needs further investigation is the implementation of authentic activities with lower level students, (e.g., A1 and A2 levels, based on the relevant can do statements of CEFR). B1 level students are at a language level where they can contribute to online discussions; however, A1 level students may have difficulty in participating in online discussions simply because of their minimal language skills at that stage of their learning. Thus, researching the implementation of authentic activities in computer assisted foreign language learning environments with students at low
levels of language ability will provide, not only useful data on its applicability, but also guidelines on how web-based language learning can use authentic characteristics for these learners.

**The final word**

This study has investigated how authentic activities can be implemented in computer assisted foreign language learning environments. It is hoped and indeed believed that the work described here may be of substantial assistance to those who wish to implement engaging and highly motivating authentic activities in language education.


Klahr, D. (2009). To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens. In S. Tobias & T. M. Duffy (Eds.), *Constructivist instruction: Success or failure* (pp. 291-310). New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis.


The Council of Europe created a language policy known as the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR) with the intention of raising awareness of the importance of plurilingualism. Therefore, the need to protect the rich heritage of diverse language and cultures in Europe was adhered to. The policy also aims to convert the language diversity from being a barrier to communication to a source of better and mutual understanding of the European modern languages. To assist in raising the learners’ awareness, the CEFR describes what languages learners need to do to be able to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills are required to be able to act effectively. In this description, language is placed in its cultural context in which it is set. Along with this, the definitions of the levels of proficiency are also defined which allows for learners’ progress to be measured.

The importance of plurilingualism in CEFR

Plurilingualism emphasises the importance of enriching one’s repertoire of different languages and language varieties in varying levels of proficiency and types of competencies. This approach also sees individuals as ‘social agents’ whose experiences of language cannot be separated from the cultural contexts they are in. That is, as an individual’s knowledge of different languages develops so does his/her knowledge of cultures. All these experiences and knowledge are interrelated and contribute to one’s communicative competence in that an individual can flexibly exploit them and make use of different strategies in order to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and with different interlocutors.

There are considerable implications of plurilingualism for language education and assessment, and therefore, is reflected in CEFR. Therefore, it can be said that achieving the native-speaker-like-mastery of a particular language in isolation is not very significant, since the aim of language education has been shifted to helping learners enrich their repertoire of different languages and language varieties with emphasis on and the value attached to the development and exploitation of a variety of linguistic and communicative abilities.

In short, the CEFR serves as an instrument of and guideline for the planning of language learning programs in terms of their content, objectives and assumptions of previous knowledge and the planning of assessment, and assessment criteria as well as the co-ordination of policies among the member states.

View of learners and learning in CEFR

The CEFR has adopted the ‘action-oriented approach’ in which the learners are viewed as ‘social agents’ who are members of society who perform certain tasks. Whether these tasks are language related or not, they are characterized by the social context in which they are performed. The social context within its specific environment and circumstances requires the use of certain strategies and competencies necessary for the accomplishment of the task.
Therefore, language activities are only meaningful through the task and the social context it is performed in.

In order for a language learner to take part in communicative events effectively, s/he should develop the necessary competences and the ability to utilize the strategies necessary to put these competences into action. Thus, learning involves the development or use of a range of competences to carry out certain tasks and take part in language activities which involve productive and/or receptive processing of oral and/or written texts in a variety of contexts and under various conditions.

Therefore, CEFR describes contexts, tasks, language activities, strategies and texts involved in language use and the general and communicative competencies a learner/user draws on to use the language effectively.

**Common reference levels**

CEFR divides the learning process broadly into three broad successive levels of proficiency as basic (A), independent (B) and proficient (C) users. Each of these levels is divided into two in themselves as higher and lower interpretations of the level and then divided once again to either reflecting the referred specifications or to be stronger except in the breakthrough stage as shown below.

![CEFR successive levels of proficiency](image)

**Content coherence on common reference levels**

Each common reference level requires different functions, notions, grammar and vocabulary to be performed by learners. For the purpose of this project B1 (Threshold) is used and it is exemplified below:

Level B1 (B1.1 - Threshold) – this level is categorised by two main features of language use. The first feature refers to the expected ability of learners as:

- To maintain interaction and get across what you want to, in a range of contexts, for example: generally follow the main points of extended discussion around him/her, provided speech is clearly articulated in standard dialect; give or seek personal views and opinions in an information discussion with friends; express the main point he/she wants to make comprehensibly; exploit a wide range of simple language flexibly to express much of what s/he wants to; maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what s/he would like to; keep going comprehensibly, even though pausing for
grammatical and lexical planning and repair is very evident, especially in longer stretches of free production. (p. 34)

The second feature refers to the ability the learner can cope flexibly with problems in everyday life. For example
cope with less routine situations on public transport; deal with most situations likely to arise when making travel arrangements through an agent or when actually travelling; enter unprepared into conversations on familiar topics; make a complaint; take some initiatives in an interview/consultation (e.g. to bring up a new subject) but is very dependent on the interviewer; ask someone to clarify or elaborate what they have just said. (p. 34)

Level B1 (B1.2 - Strong Threshold) – the same two features continue with additional descriptors which focus on exchange of quantities of information, for example:
take messages communicating enquiries, explaining problems’ provide concrete information required in an interview/consultation (e.g. describing symptoms to a doctor) but does so with limited precision; explain why something is a problem; summarise and give his/her opinion about a short story, article, talk, discussion, interview, or documentary and answer further questions of detail; carry out a prepared interview, checking and confirming information, though s/he may occasionally have to ask for repetition if the other person’s response is rapid or extended; describe how to do something, giving detailed instructions; exchange accumulated factual information on familiar routine and non-routine matters within his/her field with some confidence. (p. 34-35)

Presentation of common reference levels
Since, learners need to become competent to perform in a range of communicative activities their progress should be interpreted both horizontally as well as vertically. That is, progress in language learning is not just a matter of moving up, developing only one kind of performance capability. It also involves developing a range of capabilities and this does not significantly happen at the same pace. In line with this, these levels and scales of language proficiency should not be interpreted as a linear measurement scale like a ruler, due to the fact that as the level of language proficiency goes higher so does the range of activities skills and language involved. In other words, a learner in the Threshold level is expected to “understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters” (p. 26) which is an indicator of this level but at the same is expected to have the ability to accomplish any task from the A2 – Waystage level.

Language Use
The CEFR presents language use within the different descriptors for context, tasks, language activities and strategies.

Context
Context describes the language to be used taking into consideration the domains, situations, themes, conditions and constraints, and the user/learners and interlocutors’ mental context. For the purpose of this paper the domains, situations and themes will be exemplified.

Domains
In many situations domains may overlap and therefore sometimes it is not possible to make clear cut distinction of the domains involved. However, for practical reasons, in CEFR, the contexts in which language activities occur are categorized into four broad domains. These are the personal domain, public domain, occupational domain and educational domain. The
personal domain involves home life with family and friend and individual social practices. The public domain covers contexts in which ordinary social interaction takes place. The occupational domain includes a person’s activities in respect to his/her job. The educational domain entails the learning/training contexts.

The choice of domains depend on their present relevance and future needs for the learners, and is believed to affect the motivation of learners as it determines the choice of situations, purposes, tasks, text and themes.

**Situations**

In each domain, the description of the locations and the times, the institutions or organisations, the persons involved, the objects (animate and inanimate) in the environment; the event, the operations performed by the persons involved and the texts encountered within the situation may help in providing the thorough description of the external situation. However, these descriptions do not deal with the dynamic aspects of interactive situations (e.g. user strategies).

**Themes**

Themes are chosen and organised into sub-themes and specific notions (e.g. location, institution or organization) depending on learners’ communicative needs, motivation, characteristics and resources in the relevant domain. Since, learners’ needs are related to the domains they will be encountering, the themes will differ from one domain to the other.

**Communicative tasks and purposes**

The CEFR provides communicative tasks to help learners be able to handle situations that occur in a variety of domains where they will operate while stressing that ludic (the use of language for playful purposes) and aesthetic (imaginative and artistic) uses of language should not be ignored. In this regard, the preparation of tangible task specifications is crucial for planning, carrying out and reporting on language learning and teaching as it helps practitioners to consider the communicative needs of learners and in turn develop meaningful tasks which learners should be equipped to face. Along with this, learners should in turn be “brought to reflect on their own communicative needs as one aspect of awareness-raising and self-direction” (p. 54).

**Communicative language activities**

For language learners to undertake communicative tasks, they need to engage in communicative language activities that require the processing of written and/or oral texts and need to use communication strategies to increase effectiveness of the action. Communicative language activities refer to production, reception, interaction, mediation and texts (non-verbal communication) strategies are seen as meta-cognitive skills such as pre-planning, execution, monitoring and repair action which learners can utilise in order to address the requirements of the activity effectively.

**Production**

Both speaking and writing activities are part of the productive activities and strategies. In speaking activities the learner produces an oral text, such as giving presentations, speaking spontaneously reading aloud, to be received by an audience. Writing activities can range from completing forms, producing posters, making notes for future reference to writing reports.

**Reception**

Both listening and reading activities make up the receptive activities and strategies and are believed to have an important impact on the learner’s understanding of course content and therefore plays a crucial role in the success of learning. Listening activities include listening to
public announcements for a specific purpose and so on. Reading, also referred to as visual reception, involves reading information for pleasure to get specific information, the gist or for detailed information. Audio-visual receptive activities such as following a text while it is read aloud, watching a film with subtitles, just to name a few.

During the implementation stage of the receptive process, there are four steps: perception, identification, the semantic and cognitive understanding, and interpretation the text. These steps occur and are continually followed and reinterpreted as a consequence of real world knowledge, experiences and reinterpretations.

Interaction

Interaction involves the participation of a minimum of two individuals in an oral and/or written exchange. An oral interaction would involve activities such as casual conversations, formal discussions, interview and practical goal-oriented cooperation. Written interaction involves activities like correspondence (e.g., email), passing and exchanging notes or memos, and participating in synchronous or asynchronous computer conferences.

Mediation

Mediation usually involves activities like (re)formulation (translation, interpretation, paraphrasing, summarizing or recording) of a spoken or written text for a third party who does not have direct access to the actual text itself.

Texts (non-verbal communication)

Texts refer to any piece of oral or written language the learners receive, produce or exchange. Therefore, there would be

no act of communication through language without a text; language activities and processes are all analysed and classified in terms of the relation of the user/learner and any interlocutor(s) to the text whether viewed as a finished product, an artefact, or as an object or as a product in process of elaboration. (p. 93)

The learner’s competencies

In order for learners to carry out tasks and activities they need to refer to a number of competencies developed while undertaking tasks and previous experiences. The CEFR identifies competence as general and communicative language competences.

General Competences

General competences of a learner include declarative knowledge, skills and know-how, existential competence and ability to learn.

Declarative knowledge

Considering the fact that communication depends on a shared knowledge of the world whether it be from experience, education or information sources, the CEFR indicates the close relationship between knowledge of the world, socio-cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness and communicative competence. In other words, it indicates the role knowledge plays in the accomplishment of language activities in a foreign language and how one’s previous knowledge affects the way new knowledge is perceived and in turn how previous knowledge can be changed or restructured.

Skills and know-how

In general, skills and know-how refers to one’s ability to carry out tasks and can be divided into two sub-categories as practical skills which include social, living, vocational and
professional and leisure skills, and intercultural skills which include one’s ability to relate and identify with other cultures and to overcome misunderstandings, conflicts and stereotypes.

**Existential competence**

Existential competence are difficult to define as they are culture related and refer to the impact of one’s attitudes, motivation, values, beliefs, cognitive style and personality types. However, existential competence is included in the CEFR as they are considered to be capable of being acquired or modified in use and through learning.

**Ability to learn**

The ability to learn is a quality which requires one to observe and take part in new experiences and in turn to incorporate new knowledge into existing knowledge and modifying it where necessary. Therefore, ability to learn can be defined as knowing how, or being disposed to discover ‘otherness’. With this, one can see the close connection between ability to learn and existential competence, declarative knowledge and skills and know-how. In other words, depending on the context, the characteristics and previous knowledge of the learner, the development of one’s ability to learn involves knowing how to and this be willing to take initiatives or risks in communication while being aware of the risks of cultural misunderstandings due to culture specific connotations attached to certain topics or manners and being able to exploit a variety of learning resources (e.g., dictionary, computer media or internet). Ability to learn has four components, such as language and communication awareness, general phonetic skills, study skills and heuristic skills.

**Communicative language Competences**

For communicative purposes learners bear their general competences together with more specifically language related communicative competence. Communicative competence in this sense has three components, such as linguistic competences, sociolinguistic competences and pragmatic competences.

**Linguistic competences**

Linguistic competences “attempts to identify and classify the main components of linguistic competence defined as knowledge of, ability to use, the formal resources from which well-formed, meaningful messages may be assembled and formulated” (p. 109). In this sense, linguistic competence has six components, such as lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographical and orthoepic competence.

**Sociolinguistic competences**

Sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the sociocultural conditions of language use. These include the impact of certain social conventions such as linguistic markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expressions of folk-wisdom, register difference, and dialect and accent.

**Pragmatic competences**

Pragmatic competence deals with the knowledge learners have in respects to the principles of which messages are organized, structured and arranged (discourse competences), perform communicative functions (functional competence) and sequenced according to interactional and transactional schemata (design competence).

**Language learning**

The learners’ way of carrying out tasks, activities and processes and the way they build up the competences necessary for communication is defined through learning objectives.
Learning objectives

Learning objectives should reflect the needs of learners and the culture of the “tasks, activities and processes that the learners are required to carry out in order to satisfy those needs, and on the competences and strategies they need to develop in order to do so” (p. 131). To be able to guide learners’ progress, it is valuable to describe their abilities at a series of successive levels, as described above.

ALTE can do statements

The aim of the ‘can do’ project is to develop a set of performance-related scales, describing what learners can actually do in the foreign language. The Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) ‘can do’ statements in their original conception are user-oriented as they are written for self-assessment purposes.

Not only do ALTE can do statements aim to indicate what a language learner should be able to do at a specific level in general terms but they also provide guidelines for specific contexts; social and tourist, work or study, for each level.

For the purpose of this project B1 (Threshold) level or Level 2 according to ALTE will be exemplified below:

ALTE skill level summaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALTE Level</th>
<th>Listening/Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTE Level 2 (CEFR B1)</td>
<td>CAN express opinions on abstract/cultural matters in a limited way or offer advice within a known area, and understand instructions or public announcements.</td>
<td>CAN understand routine information and articles, and the general meaning of nonroutine information within a familiar area.</td>
<td>CAN write letters or make notes on familiar or predictable matters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ALTE social and tourist statements summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALTE Level</th>
<th>Listening/Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTE Level 2 (CEFR B1)</td>
<td>CAN express opinions on abstract/cultural matters in a limited way and pick up nuances of meaning/opinion.</td>
<td>CAN understand factual articles in newspapers, routine letters from hotels and letters expressing personal opinions.</td>
<td>CAN write letters on a limited range of predictable topics related to personal experience and express opinions in predictable language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ALTE work statements summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALTE Level</th>
<th>Listening/Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTE Level 2 (CEFR B1)</td>
<td>CAN offer advice to clients within own job area on simple matters.</td>
<td>CAN understand the general meaning of non-routine letters and theoretical articles within own work area.</td>
<td>CAN make reasonably accurate notes at a meeting or seminar where the subject matter is familiar and predictable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ALTE Study statements summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ALTE Level</th>
<th>Listening/Speaking</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTE Level 2 (CEFR B1)</td>
<td>CAN understand instructions on classes and assignments given by a teacher or lecturer.</td>
<td>CAN understand basic instructions and messages, for example computer library catalogues, with some help.</td>
<td>CAN write down some information at a lecture, if this is more or less dictated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the domain of this project is ‘Study’ at the B1 (Threshold) level or level 2 according to ALTE, a detailed account of what it entails is provided below:

CEF B1 (ALTE 2)

**Concern: Lectures, talks, presentations and demonstrations 1**  
Activity: Following a lecture, talk, presentation or demonstration  
Environment: Lecture hall, classroom, laboratory, etc.  
Language skill: Listening/Speaking

CAN understand the general meaning of a lecture, demonstration or presentation on a familiar or predictable topic, where message is clearly expressed in simple language. (ALTE, p. 85)

**Category C: Study**

Concern: Lectures, talks, presentations and demonstrations 1  
Activity: Following a lecture, talk, presentation or demonstration  
Environment: Lecture hall, classroom, laboratory, etc.  
Language skill: Writing

CAN write down some information at a lecture, if this is more or less dictated (for example further reading matter) or written on the board. (ALTE, p. 86)

CEF B1 (ALTE 2)

**Category C: Study**

Concern: Lectures, talks, presentations and demonstrations 1  
Activity: Following a lecture, talk, presentation or demonstration  
Environment: Lecture hall, classroom, laboratory, etc.  
Language skill: Listening/Speaking

CAN give a short, simple presentation or demonstration on a familiar topic. (ALTE, p. 87)

CEF B1 (ALTE 2)

**Category C: Study**

Concern: Seminars and tutorials  
Activity: Participating in seminars and tutorials  
Environment: Classroom, study  
Language skill: Listening/Speaking

CAN take a limited part in a seminar or tutorial, provided that this is conducted
sympathetically, using simple language. CAN ask for clarification, but this needs to be given sympathetically in order for it to be understood. (ALTE, p. 88)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEF B1 (ALTE 2)</th>
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<td><strong>Concern:</strong> Textbooks, articles, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Activity:</strong> Gathering information</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Environment:</strong> Study, library, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Language skill:</strong> Reading</td>
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CAN understand simple visuals on familiar topics, e.g. a weather map, if not much explanatory text is involved. CAN understand, given sufficient time, most information of a factual nature that (s)he is likely to come across during the course of study. (ALTE, p. 90)

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<td><strong>Language skill:</strong> Writing</td>
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CAN make notes from simple sources that will be of some limited use for essay or revision purposes. (ALTE, p. 91)

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<th>CEF B1 (ALTE 2)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Concern:</strong> Essays</td>
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<td><strong>Activity:</strong> Writing essays</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Environment:</strong> Study, library, examination room etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Language skill:</strong> Writing</td>
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CAN write a simple narrative or description, for example, 'My last holiday', with some inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar. (ALTE, p. 92)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Concern:</strong> Accounts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Activity:</strong> Writing up accounts (e.g. of an experiment)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Environment:</strong> Study, laboratory, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Language skill:</strong> Writing</td>
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CAN write a simple account of an experiment (methods, materials). (ALTE, p. 93)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Activity:</strong> Accessing information (e.g. from a computer database, library, dictionary, etc.)</td>
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<td><strong>Environment:</strong> Library, resource centre, etc.</td>
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<td><strong>Language Skill:</strong> Reading</td>
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<td>Environment: Library, resource centre, etc.</td>
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<td>Language skill: Writing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CAN assess whether a textbook or article is within the required topic area.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CAN understand basic instructions and messages on e.g. computer library catalogues, with some help. (ALTE, p. 94)</td>
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<td>Concern: Management of study</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activity: Making arrangements, e.g. with college staff on deadlines for work to be handed in</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environment: Lecture hall, classroom, study, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Language skill: Listening/Speaking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CAN make simple notes from written sources. (ALTE, p. 95)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Language skill: Reading</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAN understand instructions on classes and assignments given by teacher or lecturer. (ALTE, p. 96)</td>
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<td>Environment: Lecture hall, classroom, study, etc.</td>
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<td>Language skill: Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAN read basic details of arrangements such as lecture, class and exam times, dates and room numbers from classroom boards or notice boards. (ALTE, p. 97)</td>
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<td>Language skill: Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CAN note down times, dates and places given by teachers and lecturers. (ALTE, p. 98)</td>
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Appendix 2

A sample newsletter produced by the students.

Entertainment is good with balloons on the water

In my opinion, Cyprus hasn’t got enough entertainment centres for young people. Famagusta is a student city, therefore, there isn’t too much entertainment. What is the reason for this situation? Because government hasn’t got enough time. I will tell you about my topic. I chose entertainment topic. Because it is not popular in Cyprus and in Turkey. Maybe one day it can be. You are taken care by instructors into the human hamster ball on water; water zorbs are enjoyable. You have a good time while playing. That’s entertaining. It takes a little time to master but with some practice you will be able to stand and walk - or even dash on water for 50€ or more! You can also do tricks like spins, flips and tumbles. If you play with it for five minutes, you will become exhausted. There is a balloon and person is pulled in balloons. The balloon is inflated, and it is controlled by instructors. Once inside the ball you can start to enjoy the experience. The zorbs are operated on the lake. You don’t need any specialist equipment just a sense of fun. I haven’t tried it yet. However, I want to try it. As I said above, WATER ZORBS are not popular in my country. Apparently it is good and enjoyable but we must try it to learn. Eventually, if it can come to Cyprus, I think everybody will wonder about it and will try it. So when it comes to Cyprus, it will be very popular with young people.

EDITORS’ CORNER

We would like to thank Birenz Ozerin for providing us with the opportunity to implement his PhD project in our classes. We have found this project to be very beneficial for our classes and have observed that our students enjoyed working towards a real goal within an authentic activity for a real audience. We would like to express our appreciation to Birenz for his generosity and enthusiasm while working on the project. We are excited to see our students’ enthusiasm while working on their projects. We expired our thanks to Birenz for his generosity and support in the development of this project.

First of all, I would like to thank you all for participating in my PhD project and providing useful data for further development of this project. It was really fun and beneficial for me to see that you enjoyed working on this project, as it can also be seen from this newsletter. Many thanks!
MISSION OF FAMILIES

Children are the most important thing for the world because one day they will control some parts of the world so children must be healthy and clever because they are our future. However, if they play a lot of electronic games they can't think clearly about everything, so families must be careful about their future.

First of all, children want to play games all the time but the kids are playing electronic games longer than before. There are a lot of electronic games and these games are generally unhealthy for their brain and body because when the children play these games, they don't think of other social things and they are looking at the screen for a long time, so their eyes have problems.

Secondly, the electronic games contain a lot of violence because they are killing each other therefore, they can see blood in some electronic games. So, families have great responsibility to keep their children from all the time and when they see some problem they must block the same behaviour. Families must also ask for help from some professional people about children psychology while they are stopping this behaviour.

To sum up the children will be our future so families have to bring up good persons to society so when they decide to bear children must take some help and they mustn't forget this, the children are never guilty.

"I believe, the council should open more cafes, cinema halls and game centers for the students to spend a more productive social life."

Generally, Entertainment is necessary and if our daily program includes some entertainment we can be more active and more vivacious. I think life without entertainment becomes so boring and people may lose their motivation. For instance, in Cyprus, there is not a lot of entertainment but most students, especially students who come from big cities are bored. So, Entertainment is totally important but what is more important is the kind of Entertainment. Unfortunately, some people want to do more exciting entertainment but we have to know entertainments are just for fun and we should not look for danger. As you know, the meaning of entertainment is getting change. Nowadays, jumping from high rocks, taking breath underwater, diving in the ocean and sometimes smoking is common among youth (www.usatoday.com). Although these works are exciting, they are not healthy. Personally, I think spending time with our friends can be the best entertainment, but if we want to control dangerous entertainment, we have to pay attention to two subjects. (articlesnatch.com)

Firstly, we have to advise our friends and prevent them from dangerous works. On the other hand, government has to create more healthy entertainment to motives young people and keep them away from dangerous entertainment. (www.controlingparents.com)

As it can be seen above, although entertainment is important, kind of entertainment is more important. For consequently, if we want to have a perfect life, our daily program has to include enough healthy entertainment.

References:
1. www.articlesnatch.com
2. www.controlingparents.com
3. www.usatoday.com

ENTERTAINMENT IN FAMAGUSTA

I have lived for 6 months in Famagusta. It doesn't have enough entertainment centers. The council needs to work for it. The council can open shopping centers, amusement parks, cinema halls, game center and a bookstore. Students usually live in the center of Famagusta. Students can't find safe, shopping centers, game center but there are a lot of bars and clubs. So, students are going there for entertainment.

I believe, the council should open more cafes, cinema halls and game centers for the students to spend a more productive social life. Clubs and bars don't provide us with cultural activities. However, theaters give us knowledge.

As a result, the council can provide cultural activities to address these open spaces.

References:
Lack of Picnic Areas and Parks

Firstly, there are many picnic areas and parks in Northern Cyprus, even more people want to have a picnic but cannot. People usually go to the coast and flat areas of Famagusta. Picnic areas and parks need to be formed in Famagusta and this will be so much better for people to have fun. Secondly, people are more comfortable during a picnic in Northern Cyprus. This will be so much better for people to have fun. I think everyone should go on a picnic as this shows that people and areas have a major positive effect on people’s lives.

Entertainment

It is very important for young people and tourists. However, Famagusta doesn’t have enough entertainment so I think Famagusta needs a roller coaster because we are a student city and absence of a roller coaster is very unfortunate. Personally, roller coaster is exciting for everyone, furthermore it’s very dangerous. This is a great experience. My advice is that everyone should go on a roller coaster. Believe that if the roller coaster comes to Cyprus, it will be more exciting. The roller coaster has a major contribution to develop the entertainment sector. Interest of the people is great. Moreover, roller coasters must be safe.

The seats must be attached. In 1988, a group of children died in a roller coaster accident because they hadn’t worn seatbelts. So, European countries prohibited roller coasters. After 2000, the country accepted to re-enter practice. Nowadays, England is seeing to have a new leisure roller coasters in the country under 1.5 meters tall. British experts said that roller coasters are necessary because British people love enjoyment and action but the prime minister didn’t allow a roller coaster to be built.

Inside the roller coaster two times with my friend in Istanbul. It was fun for me but my friend cried because he was afraid. This was a great experience for me. My advice is that everyone should go on a roller coaster. A lot of children can scream on the roller coaster. Therefore, if you aren’t afraid, you can go on a roller coaster regularly.

In summer, every country should build a roller coaster because you will enjoy yourself and have a great time.

Now, people living standard continuously improve, the requirement of people change higher and higher on the entertainment. Entertainment to give the audiences the enjoyment of service, performance, or activities. Entertainment provides people sharing more pleasure, entertainment provide the opportunity for create and maintain social relations. Entertainment make people concentrate energy, people attract the attention and entertainment activities. The entertainment is the kind of activities that entertain and engage people. A kind of work that can make people more easily forget of daily life, people want to raise sports activity and enjoy in sport.

Night Parties are getting more popular among the youth, please. More and more young people enjoy the nightlife with their friends in the nightclubs. Nightclubs consists of dance, music and drinks, there are many places. Other places of sports and entertainment include public places of parks where beverages are the main attraction. (Article Source: http://Comedy/entertainment.php)

Entertainment is the means of people’s spiritual rest, too. Most of recreational activities are elaborate design and invention. Every entertainment activities need professional equipment, professional skill, costume, society is recognized as one of the rules of the game, even the special theory, technology and skills. Most entertainment projects need special equipment, special management staff. The management is not just for the public to provide equipment and ensure the equipment are used correctly, to use of the facilities more including, and provide relevant consultation, professional skill guidance and manage. Most of the entertainment facilities are set up near the city.

Compared with the interior, people go to the places of entertainment to eliminate fatigue and rest a lot, of course, free time. Can also see the true face of the city. Common entertainment includes cabaret, disco, bar, amusement park. Cabaret, disco and bar, these are all include activities, small and for construction, building and low cost high return. In these places, the main entertainment of the people is eating between people in a coffee bar, this can improve communication among people. I think they are beneficial for young people. I am in favor of building this kind of entertainment places. And most of the young people like such entertainment places. But amusement parks need some conditions, large space, a lot of money, too many staff, important is this amusement park to have a entrance that can attract enough tourists. This is very difficult.

Entertainment is a way of relaxation. So, entertainment is important in the life of people.
WATER

If people do not use water properly, there will not be enough water for people. There are ways to protect use water. For example, check your plumbing for leaks, leaking toilets and faucets. Use waste water from the bath, washing machines or dish washing in the garden. Turn the facet off while you are brushing your teeth, shaving, washing your hands, and so on. Salt water is the biggest problem in Famagusta. For this, get help from Turkey and new wells can be dug.

We also need clean water for our hair, skin and nails to be healthy. Therefore, continuous reliable water supply is needed. Therefore, water is returned to nature, so we need to be careful while using it.

How to save water and Wikipedia.
http://www.savingwater.com/saveWater

HOW CAN WE CHANGE FROM THE SEA WATER TO DRINKING WATER?

In the first instance water is the most important thing in the world. We living creatures can live without water.

If we speak about Famagusta, this topic is the most important issue. The problem increases because of not enough rain in Famagusta. This is important to keep water but tap water is too salty in Famagusta. For example, in Turkey generally we use tap water for drinking or cooking food but we don’t in Famagusta. Therefore, I want to refer how we can change from the sea water to drinking water. In my opinion Famagusta Municipality should encourage every house to use water treatment system or build big water treatment system and distribute drinkable water.

The description of “Drink-Driving”

Causes of accident, arise from drivers, are of two sort “stimulant” and “narcotic”. After decrease of narcotic, function becomes to decrease, as following list:

1. Firstly psychological effects (stimulant):
   - decrease of shyness and inhibition
   - decrease of fear and control by mind
   - decrease of sensitivity of risky manner
   - increase of high speed careless
   - increase on positive manners being abandoned
   - losing of control
   - not being put limit self to do bad thing
   - losing of obedience to laws
   - inclination of personality that out of balance
   - losing ability to drive

2. Secondly, physical effects (narcotic):
   - exhaustion
   - losing attention
   - losing balance
   - losing muscle control
   - seeing failure
   - hearing failure
   - decrease of work of brain
   - understanding and perception failure
   - delay of reaction
   - not being focus aim

A screen from PowerPoint presentation

This system is used where freshwater resources are insufficient. For example in seaside house in Turkey use this system.

In conclusion, I think this is very useful for Famagusta also this system makes people’s life easy.

Source: http://www.isamartewatertreatment.com/water_saving_systems.html
In the first instance, Water is very important for Cyprus. The water used in Cyprus is salty and hard. Therefore, we don't need to save water in Cyprus. For example using less while taking a shower, turning off the tap when brushing teeth...

In addition to this, the biggest problem of Cyprus is water shortage. To solve this problem, the management should be sincere and serious.

How should it be?

Clean water will be brought from under the sea from Mersin, Turkey to Cyprus. The interception system could follow the studies in Istanbul and Cyprus.

Finally, This Project is very important for Cyprus so the procedures that are required for this Project in Cyprus should be done quickly. If this Project is not completed, it will be disappointing for Cyprus.

I think this Project will finish within 3 years. I believe, We can have a healthier life so Cyprus will definitely have clean water in the future.


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Water is very important for all creatures because it is life for creatures. Water resources are declining every day. So, we need to protect the water resources. I think if we don't take control measures, we will have a lot of problems.

I think there are a lot of water problems in Cyprus. For example, there isn't any drinking water here and water is not clean. The reason is that, municipalities of Cyprus haven't got developed water treatment systems.

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Life & Water

Water is very important for all living creatures on earth. Firstly, we need it for our body. All creatures need water to live on. However, people use clean water in areas such as, healthcare, manufacturing industry, energy production but the water is declining in the world.

To reduce this problem we need to take some precautions.

I believe water needs to be used carefully for example you should check leakage for in your bathroom and your toilet. It is important to have showers because it needs less water, but both needs too much water, for big savings you should use washing machines and dishwashers. Sometimes you have different water problem for example in Famagusta. The water is very salty, so you can't drink it. The water sometimes can lead to skin diseases. The solution to this is to build sufficient treatment centers.

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FAMAGUSTA NEED MORE WATER

Water is indispensable need for human and no one can live without it. Therefore I choose this topic. Also this is the most important problem for us.

First of all, water has been a problem for a long time in the world. Unfortunately people have damaged nature especially trees. In turn it does not rain enough. Environmental problem of the world won't finish so I should explain only Famagusta.

Secondly, Famagusta does not have enough water so sea is refined and used there. There is a water treatment station in Famagusta but it is not enough. There is hard water in Famagusta. Because water is not refined enough so water treatment station should be established better. Another one small water treatment can be made for buildings or building complexes.

Next, a lot of trees should be planted for rain. Everyone should be promoted to plant trees. Perhaps can be procured to rain. Therefore can be made items to collect water.

Finally water is very important for all creatures and Famagusta needs more water. Therefore we should be careful and reduce this problem.

Sources: Mr. K

www.inhaber.com www.m-aque.org www.haberdashery.com

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THE AUTHORS OF THIS WORK: SAVE WATER
Smoking is a very bad habit among young people. They do it because they are in movies, TV programmes, or other media, and they want to be cool like their friends who smoke. It is very harmful to health. Smoking is also a problem for society. It can make addiction. Smoking affects everybody in the same way. People usually prefer to solve their problems with smoking, even if it affects their health. This is not a good idea. Smoking is a very dangerous habit for young people. Young people can start smoking for a variety of reasons, such as the desire to be like their friends or to fit in. Smoking is a very serious and harmful habit that affects health in many ways. Smoking can lead to heart disease, cancer, chronic cough, and other diseases. It is important to understand that smoking is not just a bad habit, but it can be a problem for society. Smoking is on the rise and it is a problem. Because parents don't care what their children do, it is difficult to deal with. They are often afraid to give up smoking, but it is important to do so. They must know it is not good to smoke. There are some ways to stop smoking. You can talk to your doctor, or go to a smoking cessation programme. There are also many support groups and websites that can help you stop smoking. It is important to remember that smoking is a problem for society, and it is important to take action to help stop it.
TEEN SMOKING

Nowadays, teen smoking is a very important problem in Indonesia. Earlier, teenagers are interested in smoking at a young age. Cigarettes are easily available to all, and there are not many health schools. For example, teenagers can buy cigarettes without any determination. Secondly, older people can encourage teenagers to start smoking. For example, they take them to doctors who have inhaled smoking (http://www.familiakindergarten.org/teen-smoking.htm). Thirdly, everyone wants to stop smoking but they don’t know how to do it. For instance, parents should stop smoking near their children. I think one of the reasons for children to start smoking is that they see their parents smoking. Apart from this, there are several good things and reasons to start smoking. For example, smoking is relaxing and good while drinking tea or coffee. If you smoke, you will feel that you are relaxing and healthy. But if you smoke several times a day, it makes you unhappy and tired. I think it is a bad habit to smoke. Therefore, some people support smoking. In conclusion, smoking absolutely negatively affects our health, our money, and many things. Young people should not take an example by smoking people. They have to try to be a healthy person. Strongly believe that cigarettes can give you a lot of money. I am not sure if my uncle is smoking every time. Also, if you started smoking, a few times you need cigarette you need to feel relaxed. I don’t think that I support teen smoking.

TEEN SMOKING

Before I start writing my essay, I want to make all the people around me. I want to tell you that I will not allow smoking if you are a smoker and I will help you with things that you will need. I will be happy. Firstly, I want to say that if you are a smoker, you have to know that you will die younger than all healthy people. I am not sure if you are still smoking. Don’t worry, I will explain you that by smoking you are full of nicotine and other thousands of poisons. And I think that nobody wants their loved ones and everyone part of their body full of poison.

Secondly, cigarettes don’t just give you health harms, it also grows your pocket very big harms, for example, cigarettes give you economic harms, for example, one packet of cigarettes is 5.00 TL in Cyprus, and this is very big amount of money if you are not such a rich person. If you put that 5.00 TL a day to your piggybank, in one month you will get 155 TL and in one year you will get 3000 TL and it is a very big amount of money for you. Think, why don’t you stop and give that money to your relatives?

*never say it’s too late to stop smoking and make whatever you want and get help from doctors or any helping centers*

DRINK DRIVING HAS VERY BAD CONSEQUENCES

Imagine being in a party with a few of your best friends. Everybody is drinking alcohol and spending a fun time. Towards the end of the party, somebody infileted with alcohol and party. Next day, you sit at the wheel with your loved ones. Nobody don’t say must’t do it. That’s why accidents and deaths are inevitable because of drink driving, which is one of the world’s major traffic problems.

Drink driving has very bad consequences. Every year, lots of people die due to the use of drink driving. Also, as they endanger themselves, they endanger to other innocent people lives. As a result, people dying or crippling. This situation is really painful.

In fact, drink driving is psychological problem. Everybody knows that to drive without alcohol. Many educated people are also doing this. It doesn’t matter being a educated.

Although, they can drive. When traffic police catch the drinkers, with penalty which is money and you have to wait 6 months and go psychological therapy to buy back your driving licence.

To sum up, a social problem rather than the traffic because everyday millions of people using the car or motorcycle. We can’t ignore it. As the last word, you never say this is not happening to me because you don’t single in traffic.
Drunk Driving

Recently, the number of accidents is increasing day by day in our country. Consequently, the number of death and injury is increasing. Lots of accidents happen every day. Turkey Driving School Union say that We have had a total of 5,927 people on car tax independence which lasted four years before we have lost 7,500 people with traffic accidents for only one year. www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr www.turkiyehavaciligininmuhafazasi.org.tr

The most important reason of accidents may be drunk driving. It is the most dangerous. A lot of countries have banned drinking and driving.

Drivers who are drunk have weak reflexes because of alcohol so this situation can kill them. Drunk driving can damage driver, other passengers and other people. Therefore, 99% of causes of traffic accidents are drunk driving. http://www.azizsever.com/tr/forntma/forntma-016

For example, a driver who takes a bottle of alcohol at home, a driver who is drunk, and a driver who is under the influence. If you are drinking alcohol, you should not drive your car. You are going with your good friends and you are talking about.

Drink Driving

Car accidents can happen anytime anywhere. In general, about twenty million Americans die in traffic accidents every year. Most of these accidents are caused by drunk drivers. Drivers using cellular phones while driving, and teenagers drive. First, drinking and driving is the leading cause of car accidents.

If you drink a lot of alcohol you will feel more confident. You may take risks you would normally not take.

How alcohol affects driving and similar skills. Driving while intoxicated is dangerous. Because alcohol decreases your concentration and self-confidence but increases your driving performance. In other words, alcohol impairs the decision-making ability of the brain.

Research has found that most of the accidents are caused by inexperienced drivers. For example, young drivers. The best way to reduce the number of traffic accidents is to raise age limit for the younger drivers and to lower age limit for the older ones. Because young drivers tend to be more daring and are unable to avoid a crash when they face an oncoming one. They tend to be more daring after reading a magazine. At alcohol and cause them to lose control of the car. Drink driving will not only affect your own life but may also cause an innocent life to be lost.

The government should encourage the driving school to conduct driving lessons for young drivers for a longer period. This will give them a clear picture about how accidents happen and the safety of others on the roads. Driving that have met with an accident after drink driving should be banned from driving for at least two years and be given driving lessons again. If the government implements these laws, the accident rates will be safer.


Drunk driving is very dangerous. Because any person drunk driving can damage himself, herself and home environments. So alcoholism very harmful for every person. Any person mustn’t drive a car while is alcohol. Drink people shouldn’t be in traffic.

Alcohol is very harmful for all people. At the same time, alcohol is very useful thing for everybody. Especially, traffic accidents will be more in crowded places because of the alcohol. Because traffic is very busy in crowded places. Every time, alcohol impairs a person’s concentration. So the alcohol is a person’s great blame. The alcoholic person’s thinking and decision making ability is impaired. Further alcoholic people are in bluer in very less.

As a result, drunk driving is very dangerous for all people to give up. That is very bad for all people. So a lot of people die in traffic accidents. According to some people are gun. Alcohol and driving have always been dangerous combinations. Knowing the facts about alcohol and driving won’t save lives. Plans a person shouldn’t drink driving in traffic.


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Appendix 3

Student information sheet

Designing Authentic Activities for EFL Students

Student Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

The aim of this letter is to inform you about the purpose of the research being conducted at Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus. The research is being conducted as a part of a Doctor of Philosophy by İldeniz Özverir (Eastern Mediterranean University) under supervision of Prof. Dr. Jan Herrington (Murdoch University, Perth, Australia) and Prof. Dr. Ülker Vancı Osam (Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus).

Purpose of the study

The research aims to develop meaningful authentic e-learning activities in order for learners of English as a Foreign Language to be able to learn English in a realistic and meaningful way. In this regard, you will be asked to learn English in a web-based learning environment. You will use English in a meaningful context for an authentic purpose by participating in an authentic activity in your course. For example, The Mayor of Famagusta has heard that young people are complaining that there aren’t enough entertainment places. Write a letter to him and give your ideas on how to develop entertainment in Famagusta.

If you consent to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the tasks you will be asked to complete. Please make sure that you ask any questions you have, and that all your questions have been answered and you are happy before you agree to participate.

What the study will involve

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the following tasks

- To volunteer for an interview. The interview will be audio recorded. It is estimated that the interview will take approximately 45 minutes.
- To volunteer in a focus group discussion. The focus group discussion will be audio recorded. It is estimated that the focus group discussion will take approximately 50 minutes.
- You will be video-recorded while using the web-based environment to see how you interact with the peer/s in order to complete the activity.
- You will be recorded while presenting your final work (poster, video, webpage, PowerPoint or brochure).
If you volunteer, the data you will provide will help to develop better learning activities for students learning English as a Foreign Language. As mentioned above, data will be collected by interviews, focus group discussion, observations and your work (for instance, posters, videos, letters, reports and/or participations on the discussion forum). Interviews and focus group discussion questions will be about the learning environment, the characteristics of authentic activities and the way that the activity is designed. The interview and focus group discussion will take place in a quiet classroom.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time. Moreover, you will have the right to withdraw any data you had contributed to that point. Your refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect your treatment in anyway, or your relationship with the English Preparatory School or with Eastern Mediterranean University.

If you have any queries about this research, please contact me, İldeniz Özverir, on +90 3xxx (office) or +90 5xxx (mobile) or ildeniz.ozverir@emu.edu.tr. If you have any queries about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof. Dr. Jan Herrington j.herrington@murdoch.edu.au (+618 9xxx) at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia or Prof. Dr. Ülker V. Osam ulker.osam@emu.edu.tr (+90 3xxx) at Eastern Mediterranean University. If you have any queries about ethical issues regarding the research, please contact the Ethics Office of Murdoch University on +618 9360 6677 or ethics@murdoch.edu.au.

If you agree to take part in the research, please complete the consent form.

Thank you for your assistance with this research project.

Sincerely,

İldeniz Özverir

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2012/028). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office (Tel. +618 9360 6677 or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 4

Teacher information sheet

Designing Authentic Activities for EFL Students

Teacher Information Sheet

Dear Participant,

The aim of this letter is to inform you about the purpose of the research being conducted at Eastern Mediterranean University, North Cyprus. The research is being conducted as part of a Doctor of Philosophy by İldeniz Özverir (Eastern Mediterranean University) under supervision of Prof. Dr. Jan Herrington (Murdoch University, Perth, Australia) and Prof. Dr. Ülker Vancı Osam (Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus).

Purpose of the Study

The research aims to develop meaningful authentic e-learning activities in order for learners of English as a Foreign Language to be able to learn English in a realistic and meaningful way. In this regard, a web-based learning environment has been developed where you will have the opportunity to help your students learn the target language in a meaningful context with an authentic purpose by participating in an authentic activity. For example, The Mayor of Famagusta has heard that young people are complaining that there aren’t enough entertainment places. Write a letter to him and give your ideas on how to develop entertainment in Famagusta.

If you consent to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the tasks you will be asked to complete. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree to participate.

What the study will involve

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete the following tasks

- To volunteer for an interview. The interview will be audio recorded.
- You will be asked to keep a journal.
- You will be observed while assisting your students learn in the web-based learning environment.

If you volunteer, the data you will provide will help to develop better learning activities for students learning English as a Foreign Language. As mentioned above, data will be collected through interviews, observations, and teacher journals.
Interviews will last about 45 minutes and questions will be about the learning environment, the characteristics of authentic activities and the way that the activity is designed. The interview will take place in your office. During the implementation process you will be observed for two class hours and the aim of observations is to record how learners are scaffolded and guided while completing the activity. The researcher will take notes during the observations. You will also be expected to keep a journal of your experiences throughout the activity. This may include your feelings, opinion and experience of the activity.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal from the study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from the research at any time. Moreover, you will have the right to withdraw any data you had contributed to that point. Your refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect your treatment in anyway, or your relationship with the English Preparatory School or with Eastern Mediterranean University.

If you have any queries about this research, please contact me, İldeniz Özverir, on +90 3xxx (office) or +90 5xxx (mobile) or ildeniz.ozverir@emu.edu.tr. If you have any queries about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof. Dr. Jan Herrington j.herrington@murdoch.edu.au (+618 9xxx) at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia or Prof. Dr. Ülker V. Osam ulker.osam@emu.edu.tr (+90 3xxx) at Eastern Mediterranean University. If you have any queries about ethical issues regarding the research, please contact the Ethics Office of Murdoch University on +618 9360 6677 or ethics@murdoch.edu.au.

If you agree to take part in the research, please complete the consent form.

Sincerely,

İldeniz Özverir

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2012/028). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office (Tel. +618 9360 6677 or e-mail ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 5

Student consent form

Designing Authentic Activities for EFL Students

Student Consent Form

I have been given information about research on *Designing Authentic Learning Activities for EFL Students* and I understand that my participation is on a voluntary basis and that I can withdraw at any time by withdrawing my participation and any data I have contributed. I also understand that my name will not be revealed in any documents or publications arising from the research.

I understand that the research is for education purposes and if I consent to participate I will be asked to take part in an interview which will last about 45 minutes, and I will be observed and videotaped while using the web-based environment. I understand that the products I have created in the course will also be analysed.

If I have any queries about this research, please contact me, İldeniz Özverir, on +90 3xxx (office) or +90 5xxx (mobile) or ildeniz.ozverir@emu.edu.tr. If I have any queries about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof. Dr. Jan Herrington j.herrington@murdoch.edu.au (+618 9xxx) at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia or Prof. Dr. Ülker V. Osam ulker.osam@emu.edu.tr (+90 3xxx) at Eastern Mediterranean University. If I have any queries about ethical issues regarding the research, please contact the Ethics Office of Murdoch University on +618 9360 6677 or ethics@murdoch.edu.au.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to participate in the research entitled *Designing Authentic Learning Activities for EFL Students* conducted by İldeniz Özverir as it has been described to me in the information sheet and in discussion with the researcher. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for data analysis, and publication of findings in journals and conference proceedings, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Signed

......................................................................................

Name (please print)

Date

......................................................................................

Investigator

I have fully explained to _____________________________ the nature and purpose of the research and the procedures to be employed. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Print Name

Position
Appendix 6

Teacher consent form

Designing Authentic Activities for EFL Students

Teacher Consent Form

I have been given information about research on Designing Authentic Learning Activities for EFL Students and I understand that my participation is on a voluntary basis and that I can withdraw at any time by withdrawing my participation and any data I have contributed. I also understand that my name will not be revealed in any documents or publications arising from the research.

I understand that the research is for education purposes and if I consent to participate I will be asked to take part in an interview which will last about 45 minutes, and I will be observed while facilitating the web-based learning environment. I understand that the teacher journal that I will have created in the course will also be analysed.

If I have any queries about this research, please contact me, İldeniz Örverir, on +90 3xxx (office) or +90 5xxx (mobile) or ildiniz.ozverir@emu.edu.tr. If I have any queries about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof. Dr. Jan Herrington j.herrington@murdoch.edu.au (+61 8 9xxx) at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia or Prof. Dr. Ülker V. Oşam ulker.osam@emu.edu.tr (+90 3xxx) at Eastern Mediterranean University. If I have any queries about ethical issues regarding the research, please contact the Ethics Office of Murdoch University on +61 8 9360 6677 or ethics@murdoch.edu.au.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to participate in the research entitled Designing Authentic Learning Activities for EFL Students conducted by İldeniz Örverir as it has been described to me in the information sheet and in discussion with the researcher. I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for data analysis, and publication of findings in journals and conference proceedings, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Signed................................................................................Date................................................................................

......................................................................................... ....../....../......

Name (please print)

Investigator

I have fully explained to _____________________________ the nature and purpose of the research and the procedures to be employed. I have provided the participant with a copy of the Information Sheet.

Signature of Investigator................................................................................Date

______________________________

Print Name

______________________________

Position
Appendix 7

Research permission form received from EPS administration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eastern Mediterranean University</th>
<th>School of Foreign Languages &amp; English Preparatory School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Request Form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please fill in the form below and attach the necessary documentation (e.g. cover letter, sample questionnaire). NB. All documentation should be error free.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name: İliデンiz Özeri

Contact no: 05338621787  Email: iileniz.ozveri@emu.edu.tr

Institution / Dept: EMUEPS  Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Jan Herrington (Murdoch University, Perth Australia) Prof. Dr. Ülker Vanci Osam EMU

Area of Research: Designing authentic activities for EFL students

Proposed period of research: Spring semester 2012 (two modules)

Research to be carried out in:
- English Preparatory School
- Modern Language Division
- both

Research to be carried out with:
- teachers
- students
- both
- other (please specify)

Level of students:
- beginners
- elementary
- pre-intermediate
- intermediate
- upper-intermediate
- other (please specify)

No. of teachers required: 2 (1 in each module)  No. of students required: 20 (10 students in each module)

Research to be carried out by:
- online questionnaire
- paper based questionnaire
- interview
- classroom observation
- other (please specify) teacher journal

Aim(s) of Research:
- thesis (masters)
- thesis (PhD)
- conference presentation
- other (please specify)

Any other relevant information:

Upon completion of my research, I agree to submit a copy of my findings to the SFLEPS administration and do a presentation if requested. I understand the administration have the right to intervene at any time during my research period and that any further requests on my behalf may not be accepted if I violate the code of conduct and ethics of research.

Date: 25/01/2012  Signature: [Signature]

To be completed by the SFLEPS Administration
- Approved
- Disapproved (reason):

Comments:

Date: 27/1/2012  Signature: [Signature]
Appendix 8

Assessment criteria

Online discussions (Written Interaction)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Content / Opinion / Contribution to understanding</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can understand and respond appropriately to the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can express ideas and support them with examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can make use of sources to support ideas with reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can contribute for deeper understanding of discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can show understanding of other’s posts by commenting on their ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can ask for clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can respond to others’ posts and give clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can understand but respond in a limited way to the topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can express ideas in a limited way and support with inappropriate examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can make use of sources but may be inappropriate with reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can contribute with less understanding of discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can show understanding of other’s posts with limited comments on ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can occasionally ask for clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can respond to others’ posts and give clarification with difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can respond to the topic with no relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can express ideas with difficulty and with no support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can make use of sources with no reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can contribute with no understanding of discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can show no understanding of other’s posts by commenting on their ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can show no effort to ask for clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can show no effort to respond to others’ posts and give clarification</td>
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Article (Written Production)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Content / linguistic competency</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can develop an argument with justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can support argument with relevant examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can organise ideas in a logical manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can select appropriate information to address target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can locate desired information to support idea/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can use information located from sources to support idea/s with reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can use enough vocabulary to express ideas related to topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can use sufficient range of language to express idea/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can develop an argument with limited justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can support argument with inappropriate examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can organise ideas which may not always be in a logical manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can select information which may not address the target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can locate information which may not support idea/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can use information located from sources which may not support idea/s with reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can use some vocabulary to express ideas related to topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can use a range of language to express idea/s with errors without leading to misunderstanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Content / linguistic competency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 0     | - Can develop a limited argument with no justification  
- Can support argument with no examples  
- Can organise ideas in an illogical manner  
- Can select information which does not address the target audience  
- Can locate information which is inappropriate  
- Can use information located from sources to support idea/s with no reference  
- Can use simple vocabulary to express ideas related to topic but choice of words make the message difficult to follow  
- Can use a limited range of language to express idea/s with errors leading to misunderstanding |

### Presentation and artefact (Spoken Production)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1.5   | - Can select appropriate information to address the target audience  
- Can select appropriate visuals to support topic  
- Can explain the main points relating to the topic with reasonable accuracy  
- Can ask questions for further understanding  
- Can understand and answer most questions asked about topic  
- Can maintain eye contact to hold attention  
- Can speak clearly with little or no hesitation  
- Can collaborate with partner and share work load |
| 0.75  | - Can select information that may not address the target audience  
- Can select visuals but not all support topic  
- Can briefly explain main points relating to topic with errors without leading to misunderstanding  
- Can ask referential questions  
- Can occasionally misunderstand questions and answer incorrectly  
- Can occasionally maintain eye contact to hold attention and returns to notes  
- Can speak clearly with some hesitation  
- Can collaborate with partner in a limited way and may not share equal work load |
| 0     | - Can select inappropriate information to address the target audience  
- Can use visuals for mere decoration  
- Can explain main points in a limited manner with errors leading to misunderstanding which is followed with difficulty  
- Can ask questions with no relevance to topic  
- Can misunderstand questions and answer incorrectly  
- Can use little or no eye contact and tends to read from notes  
- Can speak with difficulty  
- Can show no effort to collaborate with partner and share work load |
## Appendix 9

### The number of posts made on the discussion forums

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Topics</th>
<th>Subtitles</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Number of posts</th>
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<td>What is your topic?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>114-01</td>
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<td>Body Paragraph</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conclusion Paragraph</td>
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<td>19</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Introduction Paragraph</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Conclusion Paragraph</td>
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<td>Introduction Paragraph</td>
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<td>Body Paragraph</td>
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<td>Conclusion Paragraph</td>
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<td>Drink Driving Group</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Your ideas on a source for you topic</td>
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<td>103-01</td>
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<td>Projects and Presentations</td>
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<td>Presentation questions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artefact questions</td>
<td>103-01</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation questions</td>
<td>103-01</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>Subtitles</td>
<td>Groups</td>
<td>Number of posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (students commented on what they learned, how they got the information for their projects, if the project was beneficial and the suggestions they would provide other learners that would do the project in the future)</td>
<td></td>
<td>103-01</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving a presentation</td>
<td>Tips on how to give a presentation</td>
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<td>Presentation B</td>
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