SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: EXPLORING SELF-VIEWS AMONG FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN A MEXICAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This research assessed students' self-perception of communicative competence in EFL in a Mexican university. I argued there was a gap in the knowledge available in the field at the tertiary education level in Mexico that needed filling because of the impact that self-perception has on individuals' decisions to act, in this case, to engage in communication acts in the foreign language. The objectives guiding my research were: first, to address the information gap; second, to test the scale created for this study (CCQ); and third, to explore influences on students' self-perceptions in this context.

Self-perception and its cognitive (efficacy) and affective (confidence) elements were proposed as the aspects of the self-concept to be addressed. Evidence supported identifying Language Identity, Attribution Theory, and Ideal and Ought-to Self Theory as emerging frameworks to understand students' self-perceptions. Willingness to communicate was also related to this research. A mixed methods approach was followed: A quantitative survey (CCQ) assessed self-perception for a sample of first year university students (n=372); PCA was conducted on the scale and reliability was established (Cronbach alpha .950). Descriptive statistics of background variables displayed the characteristics of the sample. Independent samples t-tests explored differences between self-perception and two-group variables, while one-way between groups ANOVA was applied to variables with three or more groups. Effect size (eta square) helped determine the strength of the relationships found. Two focus group sessions (n=5) comprised the qualitative component of the inquiry (investigated with exploratory thematic analysis), designed to explore influences sustaining participants' self-perceptions and concepts about English in the era of globalisation.

CCQ analysis provided an overall mean score (M=2.98), suggesting a moderately positive self-perception among the sample. Contrastingly, qualitative data revealed that participants' self-perceptions, constructed from social and personal influences, were constantly short of the communicatively competent ideal and ought-to selves. The analysis suggested complex interrelationships between self-confidence and self-efficacy were behind consistently fragile self-perceptions of communicative competence in EFL in this setting. The tension between the data (highlighted by the complementary use of mixed methods of data collection), and the contextual and methodological limitations are discussed. The implications of the investigation include both macro and micro levels of analysis. Further recommendations include longitudinal studies and individual interviews to collect richer data about participants' personal experiences in EFL.

The contributions to knowledge are: First, the inquiry addressed the knowledge gap about students' self-perceptions of communicative competence at university in the EFL context. Second, a new context-specific scale measuring self-perception (CCQ) was developed and validated for the university setting. Third, I offer a theoretical model relating self-perception, self-efficacy, and self-confidence, and a proposition of the influence of the theories identified on the social context and the self. In conclusion, university students' self-perceptions of communicative competence were analysed and the outcome showed an overall picture of moderately positive self-perception among the cohort. Further analysis revealed a contrasting story of very low perceptions among individual students and the influences shaping self-perceptions were explored.

“They are able who think they are able”

Virgil

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Preface

This preface is intended to introduce my position about the use of the masculine forms to refer to the learner or a learner. I conceive learners as either male or female individuals, equal in capacity and importance and of no higher or lower hierarchy. In this thesis, when I refer to the learner, student, respondent, or participant (unless referring to specific individuals or gender-related discussions), I mean either that female or male individual indistinctively. In the same light, when in my work I use possessive pronouns and determiners pertaining to the learner, student, participant, teacher, or individual, unless otherwise specified, I use the masculine form "his" to maintain consistency throughout my thesis.

I have chosen to do this although I am aware of the potential disadvantages in running with the established tradition of using the masculine form to encompass males and females; for example, my choice may be upsetting to some readers since it may be perceived as adding to centuries of bias. However, notwithstanding these potential drawbacks, truly I do not believe that the use of such masculine forms makes female students, learners, teachers, respondents, participants or individuals any less valuable. Another reason for my choice is that coming from a background where Spanish is the first language implies that expressions such as *the learner* or *the student* have a specific gender, usually masculine, and I am used to routinely choosing the male forms of pronouns and determiners in formal and academic writing. I know that in English the same expressions are not associated to one gender specifically, so when I use the masculine forms they stand out in my writing. However, even though it is not my intention to disregard the case for eliminating sexism in the academic world, I do not believe that the use of masculine forms of words in the discourse is the core issue at stake.

For instance, the political discourse in Mexico changed in the year 2000 with the election of Vicente Fox to become politically correct and include both genders. The former president and all government institutions started using “mexicanos y mexicanas” (male Mexicans and female Mexicans) in their speeches about everything, and this discursive style has been more or less maintained in the current administration. However, the inclusion of the feminine form in the speech has not changed the manner in which men and women’s roles are perceived by the vast majority of the population, nor how the same political institutions treat women and men. It is because of this that I do not believe that the use of avoidance strategies in English, such as s/he, his/her or his/hers forms makes a significant contribution to this thesis. Equally, by using one gender form to refer to for example, teachers, and another for students, implies that I would be assigning those roles only to those specific genders, which I find more sexist than my own solution. Again, I do not intend to diminish the relevance of addressing the issues pertaining to sexism in academia and generally in education, but I do not think that my use of the masculine forms in this work is central to that more important fight.

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Abbreviations

ALTE	Association of Language Testers of Europe
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
CC	Communicative competence
CCQ	Communicative Competence Questionnaire
CELE	Centro de Lenguas Extranjeras (foreign language centre)
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for languages
COE	Council of Europe
DGET	Dirección General de Educación Tecnológica
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
FL	Foreign language
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey
FLE	Foreign language education
HEI	Higher education institutions
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IIA	Inglés Inicial Avanzado (English 2)
IIM	Inglés Inicial Medio (English 1)
L1	First language
L2	Second language
LEA	Local education authority
MFL	Modern foreign languages
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
PCA	Principal components analysis
PND	Plan Nacional de Desarrollo (Mexican national development plan)
SAMI	Stribling's Attitude and Motivation Inventory
SASFLC	Survey of Attitudes towards the Second and Foreign Language Class
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of education in Mexico)
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLL	Second language learning
TL	Target language
TOEFL	Test of English as a foreign language
TOEFL ITP	Test of English as a foreign language, Institutional testing program
UAT	Universidad Autónoma de Tamaulipas
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México
USA	The United States of America
WTC	Willingness to Communicate
WW II	The Second World War

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis presents the results of an inquiry on university students' self-perceptions of communicative competence in English as a foreign language (EFL) in Mexico. Chapter 1 introduces a personal rationale for this research in the first section. The second section presents the less anecdotal research rationale that serves as a preamble to the description of the EFL educational setting in Mexico in the third section. The fourth section introduces the theoretical framework of this research, namely the study of self-perceptions and why these are important for understanding students at the university level. Communicative competence is defined and briefly discussed in the fifth section, and a deeper discussion of the concept is presented in Chapter 2. In the sixth section I state the problem addressed in this research, as well as the purpose of the study and the research questions. The methodology used in this investigation is highlighted in section seventh and will be revisited in Chapter 4. Finally, section eighth presents the outline of the thesis and closes the chapter.

Identifying a problem: Personal rationale

As an individual and a language teacher I believe that any person has the ability to speak a foreign language. However, it was surprising, frustrating and sad for me to hear students comment they did not feel they could communicate in English with anyone. It made me think that my work was ineffective and that I was letting my students down. Informal conversations with some students further suggested that affective issues were behind those feelings of communicative incompetence in EFL. I thought then I had identified the problem: first year university students perceived they did not have communicative competence because they felt anxious and embarrassed when asked to use English in class.

This led me to start this research hypothesising that certain affective variables, such as high language anxiety, poor motivation and negative attitudes towards the foreign language, were responsible for low or negative self-perceptions of communicative competence amongst first year undergraduate university students. I had developed this hypothesis based on my observations as a language teacher for over 10 years, and as I said, from comments of former students. However, although this hypothesis was not a product of systematic data collection, it was compatible with previous research findings (Kitano, 2001; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004; Cubukcu, 2008; Dewaele, Petrides & Furnham, 2008). Thus, I set out to design a study to measure language anxiety, attitude towards the target language, and intrinsic motivation among students in one school of the university where I worked. I chose to adapt previously designed scales from other researchers in order to allow for replicability of that pilot study, which is summarised in Chapter 4.

It may also be relevant to point out that it was not until after I had conducted and analysed the pilot study and found surprisingly *unsurprising* levels of anxiety, motivation, and attitudes towards the foreign language, that I realised I had been acting upon unconfirmed assumptions. The most important assumption I had made was that university students had a negative or low self-perception of their ability to use EFL for communication, but this could not be ascertained from the results of the pilot study. Fortunately, the data analysis of that pilot allowed me to refine the research questions in the main investigation to ask how students actually perceived their own communicative competences in EFL and these questions became the focus of the present thesis.

While working on my revised research questions, I contemplated the feasibility of going beyond identifying individual self-perceptions and onto gaining insights about participants' influences behind those self-perceptions. In this case, gathering data from students' own voices would give more credibility to my research, and so I needed to incorporate methods

of data collection that promoted participants' discussion. It was then that I decided to include a qualitative component in my design that facilitated the inquiry of students' individual perceptions and the influence the social context had on them (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). The addition of a qualitative component added a naturalistic inquiry approach aimed to "uncover meanings and perceptions on the part of the people participating in the research, viewing these understandings against the backdrop of the people's overall worldview or culture" (Crotty, 1998 p. 7), and I thought it would give me more rounded understanding of the phenomenon investigated.

It was in this convoluted manner that the present thesis originated, and it was the purpose of this personal rationale to bring this to the reader's attention. However, there are more impersonal and pedagogically related reasons to undertake this type of investigation. The following section emphasises the benefits that a study of university students' self-perceptions can bring to the learning process as a whole, and particularly to understanding the foreign language learner. The following rationale also becomes the preamble to a description of the Mexican educational setting.

Rationale for the research

The importance of studying self-perceptions

I agree with Schunk and Pajares (2005) who centre the interest on the self of educational research on "the assumption that individuals' perceptions of themselves and their capabilities are vital forces in their success or failure in achievement settings" (p. 85). This is a strong foundation for the need to address the information gap I argue for in this thesis. The current position of educational policy is to foster individuals' academic achievement (Elliot & Dweck, 2005) and to demonstrate this by comparisons of individual performance to international standards in order to be competitive (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c).

Pintrich and Schunk (1996) refer to self-perception of competence in education as students' self-judgments of their abilities for achieving tasks and they point out the need to consider self-perceptions of competence carefully because of their association to individuals' academic self-concept. The study of self-perceptions becomes central to the fostering of achievement in this context (Elias & Loomis, 2002; Aronson & Steele, 2005), and to research in the language learning field (Lackaye & Margalit, 2006; Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2007; Fryer & Elliot, 2008; Wigfield, Hoa & Klauda, 2008; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

As a language teacher, I am particularly interested in fostering the construction of positive self-perceptions of communicative competence in EFL classes as I am convinced with Pintrich and Schunk that positive perceptions weigh heavily on students' self-concepts and are obviously central to students' language development. Also, since the early 1990s, the focus of EFL educational policy in Mexico has been achieving communicative competence (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993) to address the needs facing individuals in view of globalisation and the signing of trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA: NAFTA Secretariat, 1992). This thesis is not about trade agreements, but the impact of this agreement signed by Mexico, Canada and the United States (U.S.A.) on the competences demanded of Mexican professionals and workers alike has been felt in the education setting in the country. Globalisation and the signing of NAFTA and other agreements opened possibilities of jobs abroad, and speaking English became in most instances the means to gain access to such opportunities (García Landa & Terborg, 2002).

Educational policy at the tertiary level has adapted to propose the assessment of communicative skills at the end of university programmes as shown by the current national education programme (PND) that proposes: "to encourage teaching at least one other language (generally English) as part of the curricula and recommend its inclusion as a matriculation requirement for higher education" (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c p.

45, my translation). Plenty of university EFL programmes follow this policy and require their students to demonstrate specific standards of communicative competence (Ibarra Colado, 2001; García Landa & Terborg, 2002; van Els, 2002). The standards universities require students to demonstrate usually refer to external and objective assessments obtained from international tests (Leal Gutiérrez, 2006; UAT, 2007). Self-perceived communicative competence in a foreign language, however, is a personal construct more closely related to self theories and specifically to the self-concept (Campbell, 1990; Wheeler & Suls, 2005; Finkel & Vohs, 2006), which is beyond the scope of any instructional provision and, as such, requires to be investigated on its own. Furthermore, I argue that students' self-perceptions of communicative competence have not been sufficiently investigated in the Mexican educational setting, as the following section discusses.

A knowledge gap in the study of self-perceptions in the context

The field of foreign language learning and teaching has been widely researched since early on in the twentieth century in the world (Lantolf, 2001), and since the 1970s in Mexico (El Colegio de México, 2008). However, in Mexico, the foci of research on students' perceptions has only recently centred on perceptions about other cultures (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998; Ryan, 1998a), or about aspects of classroom interaction (Ramírez R. & Moreno Glockner, 2007) and educational technology (Chávez, 2002b; RECALE, 2006). I believe there is a gap in the available knowledge about how students perceive their own communicative competences at the level of tertiary education programmes. Also, the particular influences on students' constructs of self-perceptions have not been investigated with regularity in the same context. I argue that addressing this information gap is crucial to understanding the university student and helping him achieve the communicative objectives of EFL study. To address the information gap, this investigation explores learners' self-perceptions of communicative competence as expressed by students in one cohort of

university, as well as the underlying influences on the constructions of those self-perceptions.

At this point in my thesis, I think it is relevant in this introduction to provide a description of the Mexican EFL educational setting and its relevance to university students so that the reader obtains some insight into its characteristics and demands on EFL students. Also, the following sections in this chapter introduce the study of self-perceptions among students at the tertiary level of education, and the concept of communicative competence that I have mentioned earlier.

The context of EFL in Mexico

The education setting in Mexico: Focus on the learner's processes

Mexico implemented a school reform in 1972 emphasising student-centred approaches in primary education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007b), but it was not until the late 1990s when secondary and tertiary educational contexts started following the propositions of that reform (Tatto, Schmelkes, Guevara & Tapia, 2007). However, the focus of the educational objectives at all levels has slowly shifted to include the learner as the central element in the pedagogical process, as the description of the current educational programme for tertiary stage education in the country suggests (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c). According to Mexico's educational authority (SEP), investing in opportunities to perceive the learner as a whole individual appears to be the best manner to eventually be in the position to include him fully in the pedagogical process (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c).

Part of that investment involves understanding the learner, his self-perceptions and personal objectives, and the issues that make him an efficacious, competent and engaged participant

in the pedagogical process (Blanche & Merino, 1989; Rivers, 2001). This investment is especially relevant in the foreign language class because learning another language implies the learner puts himself out there under the scrutiny of others in a vulnerable position each time he communicates using that foreign language (Kramsch, 1998). The investment in the learner means also to sponsor research on this field, and this section of the chapter summarises salient investigations in foreign language education (FLE) conducted in the country or among Mexicans abroad. I attempt to provide a context in which to place my own work intended as a bridge to address what I think of as an existent gap in researching student self-perceptions at the university level. Understanding the learner implies, then, considering him an expert provider of information about his own views and perceptions, which leads to the last sections in this introduction, where a discussion of self related issues and of the definition of communicative competence ensues. However, a description of Mexico's educational system serves here to understand the context for this investigation.

Principles underlying Mexico's educational system

Mexican policy conceives education as a means of socio-economic progress and well being (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993, 2007c). Educational provision has been guaranteed since the 20th century in the Mexican Constitution, which states "all individuals have the right to receive education" (Gobierno Mexicano, 1917, my translation). Further analysis reveals the complex sociological bases that comprise the definition of education: education aims to develop all human faculties harmoniously "fostering devotion to the Nation" (Gobierno Mexicano, 1917, my translation), and at the same time raising awareness among Mexicans about their responsibilities as international citizens. Education is seen as determinant in the integration of all peoples in one nation in which the resulting social balance and equality will be the engine to move the country forward into the global arena (Gobierno Mexicano, 1917).

At the individual level, education is an instrument of social mobility when conceived as democratic, national (in other words inclusive), and aimed to improve human conviviality (Gobierno Mexicano, 1917). The Constitution also stated that the federal government retained control of strategic areas such as primary education and teacher training programmes by determining their national curricula, and to do so, the national ministry for education, Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), was created in 1921 (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007b). SEP's authority and responsibilities will be discussed in the following section.

Mexico's ministry of education (SEP)

SEP determines policy and allots resources to institutions, departments, and schools that provide primary and pedagogic education; SEP also regulates the foundations, operations, and certifications of higher education institutions in the country. There is an educational infrastructure outlined in the general education law, which lays the foundation for SEP's operations. The general education law defines the national education system, the purposes, functions, and funding of education, and the rights and responsibilities of all participants (pupils, students, teachers, educational authorities and staff). The law also lists plans and programmes, methods and materials and defines the three educational levels in the system: primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993).

SEP is represented in each state by a local education authority (LEA), headed by the state governor or a ruling body created for this purpose, which is organised in educational districts and sectors. Sector education authorities are responsible for individual groups of schools within cities or city councils and have been assigned federal funding to assist in their work. LEAs produce intra-state guidelines and have the authority to create, promote, and allocate

funds to local programmes that address their particular socio-educational needs. The next diagram shows the hierarchical organisation of SEP, LEAs and schools (Figure 1).

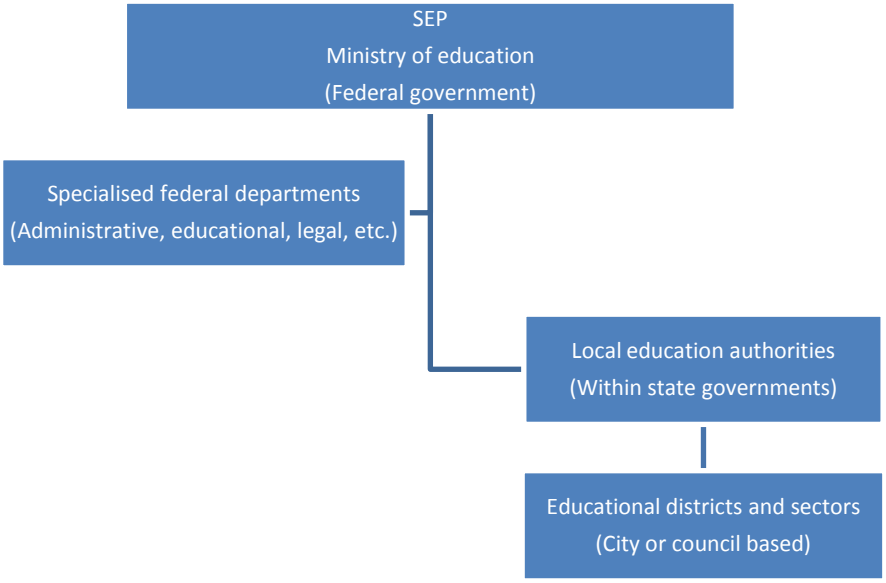

Figure 1: Structure of the Ministry of education (SEP), Mexico

Educational policy is described in the national development plan (PND) decreed by each president, which implies modifications to national policy every six years. The current Plan for 2007-2012 described the national educational programme updating the national curriculum for all educational levels (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c). The sequence of the educational levels is discussed in the following section highlighting the position of EFL education.

Positioning EFL education

Formal education as a social interaction of students and teachers in a classroom setting is the focus of this study. Table 1 below displays the structure of the formal education system in Mexico, which is analysed in more detail in the following paragraphs. The type and length of foreign language education provision in each level is indicated in the bottom row in Table 1.

Table 1: Educational levels in Mexico (adapted from Stribling, 1999)

Mexican formal education system					
Educational sequence	1 Primary			2 Secondary	3 Tertiary
School levels used in Mexico	Pre-school	Elementary	Junior high school	High school	College, university, technological degrees, teacher-training
Required	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory	Non-mandatory	Non-mandatory
Length	12 years			2-3 years	Variable
Age level	3 years old (minimum)	6 (minimum) to 12 years old	12 to 15 years old	15 to 17 or 18 years old	17 years old onwards
Gender	Co-ed or mixed	Co-ed or mixed	Co-ed or mixed	Co-ed or mixed	Co-ed or mixed
Entrance requirement	None	None	National exam	Primary education certificate	Secondary education certificate
Term duration	Aug-July	Aug-July	Aug-July	Variable	Variable
Exit	Age	Course requirements	Course requirements	Course requirements	Course requirements
Type (public or private)	Public or private	Public or private	Public or private	Public or private	Public or private
Curricula	General pre-school	National Curriculum	National Curriculum	General and specialised courses	General and specialised courses
Foreign Language teaching	Optional	Optional (recommended since 4th year)	Compulsory 3 years (EFL)	Mandatory varied number of terms (English and / or other FL)	Optional (recommended as matriculation requirement)

Primary education

Primary education consists of twelve years of instruction and is the only mandatory part of the educational sequence; it covers three years of pre-school—minimum age three, six years of elementary school—minimum age six, and three years of junior high school—usually 12, but entry ages vary from junior high school onwards. LEA district monitors are responsible for supervising the implementation of the national curriculum in every school (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993). Public schools in Mexico are co-educational and entry requirements are minimal in preschool and elementary schools. The national entrance exam for junior high school is used as a predictor of achievement and a tool for class organisation more than as an entry selector.

Pre-school's general curriculum aims to develop sensory-motor and social skills amongst children; elementary school and junior high school have each their own national curricula (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b). After pre-school, national policy dictates that children must be enrolled in elementary school during the year when they reach seven years

of age. Elementary school matriculation requires obtaining the elementary school certificate (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b). Junior high school fosters the development of specific-task skills and the matriculation requirements include the junior high school certificate that indicates pupils have completed the sequence and are ready to leave school or enrol in secondary education (pupils who reach 16 years of age are referred to adult education services). Matriculation certificates provide overall numerical evaluations of student achievement in each subject (passing marks range from six to 10 in a one to 10 scale).

EFL is mandatorily taught in junior high schools during primary education in Mexico; however, since 1993, SEP has recommended that LEAs introduce EFL instruction into elementary schools as well. This recommendation aims for pupils of an earlier age to develop language skills and to facilitate the foreign language instruction provided in junior high school. Moreover, the junior high school curriculum modified its goals to develop the ability of attaining communicative competence in the foreign language among pupils, instead of the focus on learning and teaching grammar and repetition drills that existed in the sector until 1993 (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993; van Els, 2002). To assess EFL communicative competence at all school levels, SEP encourages the use of international standards, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. However, there is as yet no official standard requirement, and SEP only recommends the use of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' Global Scale descriptors (CEFR: Council of Europe, 2001 p. 24) as attainment comparisons. Currently, the junior high school EFL curriculum assigns 90 to 100 hours per year to English instruction, meaning a maximum of 300 hours at the end of the primary education sequence (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006a). According to CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), learners who complete 300 hours of instruction would have a Basic User (A2 Waystage, see Appendix A) level of communicative language competence in EFL (Council of Europe, 2001; Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b). Unfortunately, it is

not possible to ensure the quality of and conditions in which foreign language instruction takes place in the sector (Davies, 2007), and thus the A2 comparative standard is rarely achieved.

Perhaps the characteristics of the EFL classroom in Mexico are partly responsible for this situation. Very frequently, English students are placed into large and mixed ability classes (López Gopar, Stakhnevich, León García & Morales Santiago, 2006; Canagarajah, 2007); schools are frequently understaffed, and teachers' and pupils' motivations do not usually match (Johnson, 2004; Méndez García & Sercu, 2005; Davies, 2007). Also, according to a report about the impact of the change in policy of 1993 (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006d), by the end of 2001 pupils were far from achieving the communicative objectives of the programme. The impact of the mismatch between purposes and objectives of FLE and the reality of instruction in the sector is directly felt by the pupils when they reach secondary education. Particularly for participants in the present research, their opportunities to receive FL instruction were limited to those during junior high school, which were seen as too distant to be of use at their level of studies in university (see Appendices B and C). Furthermore, not all participants could recall their EFL instruction during secondary education, partly because the characteristics of this educational level vary greatly as discussed in the next section.

Secondary education

The demands of secondary education do not always permit to provide FLE and when they do, the instructional sequence varies according to several aspects: for example, type of school and resources. Secondary education refers to two to three years of instruction in general or specialised high schools. This level is non-mandatory so age at entry varies depending on the personal circumstances of the students, although students are generally

aged 15. Duration of studies varies between general and specialised high schools, but school terms usually begin late in the summer and last from approximately three to six months.

General high schools are privately owned and as such as beyond the scope of this thesis, suffice to say about them that this type of school offers instruction in core subjects such as Spanish, Mathematics, Science, and History as preparation for further study in tertiary education. Specialised high schools, which are public and funded by the government also offer core subjects, but they add specialised instruction in industrial, maritime, or agricultural technology (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006c) to their curricula aiming for students to achieve sufficient qualifications for competitive employment in the national industry. Specialised high schools were originally leaver levels of education, however, since 1994, educational policy allows students who finish their specialised secondary education studies to opt for continuing to the tertiary level (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007b). Students who comply with secondary education receive a certificate that shows holistic numerical course marks of achievement.

Foreign language provision in secondary education when existing varies greatly. For example, specialised high schools aim to provide an EFL programme dictated by SEP, which has no continuity with the EFL programme from primary education. As a result, EFL programmes at this level often seem repetitive of what was provided before (Clemente & Higgins, 2008). However, in the last two decades there has been a renewed interest in linking EFL programmes all the way up to tertiary education shown in the educational reforms undertaken in all sectors (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2007a, 2007c). Since 2004 the purpose of the EFL curricula in secondary education is to allow students to "express themselves in English using the foreign language as an instrument for students' personal, academic, and cultural development that will permit them to access higher education and be outstanding in the professional environment" (Secretaría

de Educación Pública, 2006c, my translation). Unfortunately, the emphasis of this study does not provide evidence as to whether students have indeed developed personally, academically, or culturally as a result of their EFL instruction during high school, or about their standings in a professional environment.

EFL programmes in secondary education aim to allocate from approximately 270 to 350 hours during the three to four years of school (again an equivalent to CEFR's A2 Waystage level), but there is no comparative standard assessment of specific abilities at their completion. However, since 2008 the government has promoted the certification of knowledge of and aptitude in foreign languages. SEP published a report (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008b) establishing rules for this certification; in that report, the intention to encourage students in secondary education to demonstrate their foreign language ability by means of submitting to internationally recognised assessment standards is clear. The same report (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008b) describes foreign language ability in bands from level zero (named *no user*) to level 10 (named *native user*) and each band lists comparative standardised tests (such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language—TOEFL; and International English Language Testing System—IELTS) corresponding to each level (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008a). The rules published also aim to encourage individuals to voluntarily take the assessment and certification of foreign language skills as a means to familiarise themselves with the notion of certification (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008b). Although certification is non-mandatory, it is a positive step towards encouraging secondary level pupils to demonstrate their qualifications independently of whether they choose to pursue higher education studies or not. Also, certifications at this level are, perhaps, the path to making pupils aware of their own communicative competences in EFL, which may be useful later on if enrolled in university programmes.

Tertiary education

Tertiary education is also non-mandatory and includes varied types of higher education institutions (HEIs) such as traditional universities, institutes of technology, and teacher training colleges. Different types of HEIs have specific educational purposes, sources of funding and government involvement (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007b). Traditional public universities have independent governing bodies, but are funded by the federal government and follow federal policy because "federal policies have historically been the most important influence on the rules in use under which higher education institutions operate" (Richardson Jr., 2004 p. 4). Institutes of technology are specialised institutions also federally funded that offer strategic science and technology-related programmes; the difference is that their curricula are determined by a sub-directorate (DGET) of SEP by means of national needs assessments. Applicants to tertiary education HEIs are usually 17 or 18 years old, but there is no top age restriction; the entry requirement is to hold a valid certificate of secondary education studies. Teacher training colleges are also considered specialised HEIs; they offer bachelor degrees in areas of teaching, which are determined by the national curriculum for primary and secondary education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007b). Teacher training education programmes were established in the early 1900s (Tatto et al., 2007) and have been offered nationwide by *Escuela Normal* (Gobierno Mexicano, 1917); in contrast to the entry requirements of other types of schools, teacher trainer applicants must be at least 16 years old and just hold a valid primary education certificate.

EFL provision in tertiary education in Mexico is also varied and at the same time, its outcomes are extremely different individually and across institutions. Matriculation requirements or use of comparative standards is also not homogenised, but still it has been suggested that the inability to communicate using a foreign language may prove to be an obstacle for university students to graduate or to obtain jobs and promotions (Johnson, 1997;

Russell, 2003). Thus, SEP is determined to encourage the inclusion of English as a foreign language in the curricula of HEIs, and promote the use of internationally recognised comparative standards as matriculation requirements of all programmes offered (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c). Similarly to the recommendations for secondary education, the purpose is to "encourage students in higher education institutions to develop abilities and competences that contribute to facilitating their development in different areas of their lives" (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c p. 45, my translation). Tertiary education then becomes the ultimate link of the educational system on which SEP lays the responsibility to develop interculturally able graduates who are also aware of the weight of their contributions to the development of the country in the globalised world (Richardson Jr., 2004).

The problem is that the government's recommendation about EFL matriculation requirements for undergraduate degrees in the present context adds to the pressure that students already feel to become competent and competitive graduates in their fields (Johnson, 1997). Also, as long as HEIs design their own EFL programmes without consideration of the previous educational phases, the students' perception that they are starting their EFL education from zero even at this late stage in their education remains (Clemente & Higgins, 2008; Davies, 2008). Moreover, in spite of the latest recommendation concerning certifications, there is no "systematic assessment in higher education to measure the academic achievement of students" (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007a) in EFL education. That is, even though SEP has published a list of international EFL tests acknowledged at the tertiary educational level such as TOEFL and IELTS (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008a), each HEI decides for itself what to do. HEIs can choose to adopt international standards to assess students' command of EFL or to create their own institutional assessment instruments (Dunne, 2007), depending on their particular characteristics. So to understand the HEI in which I conducted this research the characteristics of the university setting are described as follows.

Characteristics of the EFL university setting

In the state of Tamaulipas in Mexico, where this study is situated, all students who have been admitted as first year undergraduates at the public university enrol in EFL classes for one year. Each university school from the six campuses over the state determines its EFL programme, as well as the content of the courses provided, the acceptable teaching practices, and the textbooks and other materials used. The underlying assumption for this practice is that each school's intake of students has different characteristics, comes from varied backgrounds, and exhibits different language needs (Leal Gutiérrez, 2006).

There is no observable link with the EFL instruction provided in earlier phases of education or within schools in the same university. However, some characteristics of the EFL instruction provided at the university are shared across schools:

- First year students enrol in *Inglés Inicial Medio* (English 1) in the first term and in *Inglés Inicial Avanzado* (English 2) in the second term
- Students receive four hours of EFL instruction per week adding up to approximately 60 hours per term
- Classes are usually large—no less than 20 and usually more than 30 students per class
- Classes usually group students of mixed abilities in EFL
- Academic achievement is measured at the end of each term by means of a numerical mark in a one to 10 scale (each school decides what comprises this mark)

Teaching practices, course content and materials vary within each school, campus, and throughout the university. Sometimes, faculty agree on content and materials and the whole school follows the same programme with similar objectives and learning and teaching

approaches; at other times individual teachers follow their own training and advice on what to teach and how to do so.

In terms of EFL, the university attempts to follow the government's recommendations by requesting that all students enrolled since 2006 demonstrate a score in TOEFL's Institutional Testing Program (ITP) equivalent to Basic User (Council of Europe, 2001) command of the foreign language by the time they conclude their regular courses of study (Leal Gutiérrez, 2006). However, the university procedures require that students take the TOEFL ITP test for matriculation purposes until they are in their last year of study, which means that at least one year may have passed between the last EFL course taken and the time of the matriculation assessment. Although these requirements are now widely known by university students, and due to the time lapse between completion of EFL instruction and TOEFL ITP assessment, it was unclear whether students would be ready to comply with the requirement when the first cohort graduated in 2009. As an example of the underlying cultural characteristics of the setting, it is now possible to say that catastrophe was avoided by moving the EFL matriculation requirement one year forward. That is, the students graduating in the cohort of 2009 did not have to take the TOEFL ITP test; students in the cohort graduating in 2010 will have to fulfil with this matriculation requirement—perhaps.

I argue in this thesis that it is unclear how first year students' perceptions of communicative competence, based on notions of self-efficacy (cognitive ability) and self-confidence (affective element), are affecting EFL development in the context of this university. I believe that this information holds relevance when making decisions about EFL programmes and outcomes, both at the individual and the institutional levels; and as such, there is a gap in the knowledge that this thesis aims to address. The following sub-section presents a discussion of research conducted during approximately the past two decades in Mexico, which focuses

on university students' perceptions of external issues, and supports my argument of a gap in the study of self-perceptions of communicative competence at this level.

A review of FLE research in Mexico

A review of research in the field since the last decade is pertinent because it is approximately the start of HEIs' governing bodies showing interest on learner centred issues, modernisation of curricula and programmes, implementation of language learning technologies, and new approaches to foreign language teaching. To begin with, an analysis of the situation of foreign language learning and teaching research in the country from 2000 to 2005 (Ramírez R. & Moreno Glockner, 2007) summarised findings that somehow reveal the nation's position. The analysis covered 264 published papers or dissertations on foreign language learning and teaching; a very large proportion of the works were undergraduate dissertations from teacher training programmes (Ramírez R. & Moreno Glockner, 2007), and it was found that "little attention is paid to other topics such as values, culture, or ethical issues" (p. 42). Those findings indicate that most work has centred on classroom interaction or student learning issues (Ramírez R. & Moreno Glockner, 2007).

On the other hand, since approximately 2005, academic bodies have been formed to investigate language learning and teaching issues and this has developed interest in topics beyond the language classroom setting, such as applied linguistics, language teaching methodology and technology, language teaching translation and interpretation, and language and culture (RECALE, 2006). Studies at the tertiary education level in recent years have emphasised the need to create network supporting systems for students learning EFL in higher education institutions (Chávez, 2002a, 2002b). Another line of research discusses critical pedagogies reflected in varied aspects of language use and language education, for example, the dominance of English in the scientific arena (Hamel, 2007) or the ownership of

the FL through the use of accents (Cline & Necochea, 2006; Cortez Román, 2006; Clemente, 2007a; Clemente & Higgins, 2008).

The northern (close to the U.S.) and southern (very poor and marginalised) geographic areas in Mexico vary greatly in terms of socio-cultural baggage and exhibit particular linguistic characteristics which may be why studies about the position and use of English as a foreign language are so socially relevant there. But in central areas of the country where English dominance is not as strong an issue, more often studies have covered general FLE centred topics from less critical perspectives. A macro-level analysis reveals that studies concerning classroom learner-teacher interactions and improving the learning process seem to be favoured among teacher-researchers and other investigators of HEIs influencing institutions in central areas of the country (see Camps, 2003; Cundale, 2004; Don, 2004; Dietrich, 2007, for examples of these studies). On the other hand, researchers from HEIs in the marginalised and highly multicultural southern regions of the country (particularly the works of Cortez Román, 2006; Lethaby, 2006; Clemente, 2007b; Mugford & Sughru, 2007, among others) appear to have opted for conducting studies with critical pedagogy frameworks. A further line of research is fostered by the characteristics of the northern region of Mexico where the influence of American culture is increased by daily border interaction (Ortega, 2003; Rees, 2003; Rocha Erkaya, 2005).

It is worth noting again that the available and accessible literature about FLE, self-perceptions, and in the Mexican context, is limited to a certain degree. A survey of Lingmex (El Colegio de México, 2008), a national electronic bibliographic database which lists works in language and linguistics from the past 30 years, showed vast lacunas in the resources allotted to or the interest placed in researching students' perceptions and the topic of self-perceptions seemed to be greatly ignored. Having said that it is necessary to point out that there are studies on students' perceptions in the Mexican context or among Mexicans in

mainstream research, but these studies have not centred on the topic of communicative competence. The following analysis of works of individual researchers in universities (Morín Lam, 2003; Gutiérrez Estrada & Cortez Román, 2006; Mora Pablo & Teague, 2007) and of members of research bodies (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998; Gómez de Mas, 1998; Ryan, 1998a, 1998b; Mallén Estebaranz, 2007) represents some of the most relevant studies in this field.

Morín Lam's research (2003) centred on students' self-assessments of learning in a literature class. The study included 43 participants who were trained on how to self-assess and were given full responsibility and autonomy in their assessments. The relevance of this study lies in the exercise of self-assessment, which was found accurate and informative of students' learning. As such, the benefit of asking students as the main sources of accurate data is highlighted here. On the other hand, this study focuses on reflections about classroom interactions that are products of university instruction and not of knowledge gained from previous education as is the aim of my research. Another study, by Gutiérrez Estrada and Cortez Román (2006) focused on the *perceptions* of four postgraduate Mexican students in universities in the U.S.

The researchers argued that "international graduate students (nonnative English speakers) are able to develop multiple identities in order to function in their new and challenging cultural worlds" (Gutiérrez Estrada & Cortez Román, 2006 p. 19). This study is very close to the focus of the present inquiry because of its interest on postgraduates' self-perceptions of mastery of the FL. However, the participants are Mexican students in a very peculiar situation: postgraduate study abroad. The setting is quite relevant, but it is not equal to the setting in a Mexican university. Also the aim was to obtain detailed individual views about participants' lives whereas in my research the first objective was to explore the general views of students as members of a specific university cohort and then as unique

representatives of such cohort. Clearly, to speak English is not just a distant option for the participants in Gutiérrez Estrada and Cortez Román's research, but rather a matter of integration, interaction, and survival both domestic and academic. The distance to the language as a means for every day interaction, which I will discuss further in Chapter 2, is different than in my own investigation, making the setting different as well and supporting my argument of the knowledge gap about the Mexican context.

The following study is also very close to my own research in that it aimed to "compare and contrast *students*' and teachers' *ideas regarding reasons for studying English as a foreign language*" (Mora Pablo & Teague, 2007 p. 65, my emphasis) in a university setting. However, the focus of the inquiry was only the reasons for studying EFL, and not the self-perceptions students had of their communication abilities. The use of mixed methods in the inquiry was similar to my own research and in the same manner produced different types of data for analysis: questionnaires gave researchers a general view of students' reasons and purposes and observation helped complement that overview. Apart from the individual efforts of researchers, the work of teachers and academics from the foreign language centre (CELE) of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) is salient to this review. CELE's department for applied linguistics has a line of research about students' and teachers' perceptions of language and culture in the English class (Mallén Estebaranz, 2007), and it is clear that the members of the department follow this line. For example, Mallén Estebaranz (2007) explored the perceptions of 12 students and three teachers about the role of the English class in the development of intercultural communicative competence; her thesis is based on Byram's (1997) definition of the term. The report follows on from a previous study carried out by her colleagues at CELE to which she added focus group discussions with teachers (Chasán, Mallén, & Ryan, 1998 cited in Mallén Estebaranz, 2007). Her conclusions indicated that both groups are aware of the importance of intercultural

communicative communication, but that teachers believe they include culture in their classes, while students are not sure when cultural aspects are being addressed in class.

In works conducted a decade earlier, Canuto and Gómez de Mas (1998) reported on "a comparison of the perceptions that Mexican and Quebecois students have about the other country, the identity of its inhabitants and the language they speak" (p. 65). They administered a questionnaire to 120 French students in Mexico and 60 Spanish students in Quebec; the researchers concluded that students in both countries claim to know a little about the other country. Gómez de Mas (1998) presented her work with Mexican students' perceptions about the United States and its people. She focused on data of French, German and English students in a research project from 1994 and from 1996 as an exploration of collateral results from the main study. Her findings revealed that either directly or indirectly, Mexican students in both samples admitted to have more negative perceptions of American people than positive ones (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998). However, the researcher concluded that the results are indicative rather than generalisable of Mexican students' perceptions about people in the United States.

About the same time, Ryan (1998a, 1998b) presented her work on students' socio-cultural perceptions; one of her articles refers to a study of Spanish students in a rural university in the United States (Ryan, 1998b). Ryan investigated if students learning Spanish in Pennsylvania had similar interests and attitudes to those of students of English in Mexico City. Ryan used ethnographic techniques of inquiry in her study, and concluded that "the specific interests of Spanish and English students vary in general, but tend to differ most in interest in political concerns" (p. 114). The other report reviewed (Ryan, 1998a) discussed collateral data from 1994, other studies from Ryan's colleagues, and refers back to her own research (Ryan, 1998b). My interest on this set of studies from members of CELE is based on the fact that these works referred to investigations of students' perceptions, but in all

cases the analysis of perceptions was directed towards other groups (teachers, other students, other cultures), instead of focusing on the self. The study closest to my research objectives was a follow up by Mallén Estebaranz (2007) focusing on the students' perceptions about the role of English class in the construction of intercultural communicative competence, but the inquiry centred on the contrasting perceptions of teachers and students more than on students' self-perceptions.

As the previous review may illustrate, foreign language learning research on students' self-perceptions is not frequent among recent research in the Mexican university context. Although the studies above are interesting examples of investigations of the learner and his learning process and environment, I believe it is necessary to turn to the student and start exploring his perceptions about himself and address the existing knowledge gap (Johnson, 1997; Garcíadiego Ramos, 2002). After all, university settings in Mexico are changing and adapting to become more holistic environments where the student is perceived as a whole learner, and where the study of students' self-perceptions and ideas is enlightening of the learning process and informative of the teaching setting.

Although Tamaulipas is a state that borders with the U.S.A., Tampico campus where this investigation took place, is closer to other states in the central region of the country, thus the context of the present research is less orientated to critical pedagogies and border studies and closer to mainstream HEIs in central Mexico. Even though the present review does not pretend to be exhaustive of all research conducted in the country, there appear to be some favoured lines of research. It seems that for a number of years (Ramírez R. & Moreno Glockner, 2007; El Colegio de México, 2008) the focus of research on mainstream institutions in central Mexico has been on teacher training, the pedagogical process, and particular emphasis has been given to classroom interaction investigations, but there is little information about investigations of students' self-perceptions. But why is the study of

students' self-perceptions relevant? The following section presents the argument about the focus of my inquiry and then connects it to the Mexican educational context.

Aspects of the self: Self-perceptions

The focus on the individual learner has prompted the need to explore the learning process and its output as experienced by the learner, sometimes emphasising differences, other times exploring similarities; in all cases, aiming to gain a clearer picture of how the learner feels and fits in that process. The study of self-perceptions touches on very complex phenomena within self theories, but these are beyond the scope of this thesis. However, some aspects of the self-concept were the focus of my inquiry and in order to understand the position of self-perceptions among other self-constructs, I created a diagram (described in Chapter 3) showing the interrelationship of the social constructs relevant to this research. The self-concept (Campbell, 1990; Pajares & Schunk, 2001), as discussed in Chapter 3, serves as the umbrella term including self-confidence (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986b, 1997), and self-perception (MacIntyre, Noels & Clément, 1997; Crozier, 2001).

Moreover, this research revealed some of the influence of the social context (Cooley, 1964; Hall, 1995) in which students have developed and with which they still interact during the construction of self-perceptions. The notions of identity and social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995) also appeared to be relevant to self-perception construction, as were the concepts of the *ideal* and *ought-to* selves (Dörnyei, 2001a, 2003, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Student self-perception can also be related to attribution theory in as much as it is built upon concepts of personal and social causal attribution (Weiner, 1992; Schunk, 2008). The relevance that understanding the learner and his attributions for success and failure is highlighted by Williams and Burden (1997) in the following lines:

> The area of learners' conceptions of themselves has been investigated in a number of different ways. …little work has been carried out from a … perspective that begins with the actual thoughts and feelings of the participants. A promising alternative approach to this area is provided by attribution theory, which is directly concerned with the ways in which individuals make personal sense of successes and failures in their lives (p. 194).

Another concept identified from the discussion of the participants indicates that students' self-perceptions were linked to their own willingness to communicate (WTC: MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998), which is the aim of communication behaviours and is derived from an underlying communicative competence. But why are negative self-perceptions not encouraging of the learning process? Let us look at this issue now.

Investigating self-perceptions among university students

The Mexican educational system gives EFL instruction to pupils at a good age, for a considerable amount of time, and under the propositions of a modern and communicative setting. However, in reality pupils, students and teachers have frequently to fend for themselves with the few resources they are given. I think it is relevant to note that from their first experiences with EFL instruction during junior high school study, pupils construct not only their cognitive baggage, that is, what they know about the foreign language; but they also construct their meta-cognitive and affective responses towards the language and the learning experiences (Bialystok, 1990; Mori, 1999; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005). These constructs are further weighed by the social expectations associated with foreign language learning (Williams & Burden, 1997; Lynch, Klee & Tedick, 2001) to which each learner responds. This added baggage carries on influencing students' self-perceptions of their own efficacy as language users either positively or negatively (see for example Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Wang, 2005; Cao & Philp, 2006; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007).

As such, by the time they reach tertiary education, learners' cognitive and meta-cognitive variables in relation to foreign language learning may result in biased self-perceptions of communicative competence (Johnson, 1997). Thus, university students who have received EFL instruction in primary and secondary education may not feel competent in communication in the FL even if they actually are (Johnson, 1997). Furthermore, since inability to successfully comply with EFL requirements at the tertiary level may influence students' determination to continue their studies (Johnson, 1997) it becomes relevant to investigate the manner in which university students assess their abilities in terms of the EFL matriculation requirement they are expected to fulfil, namely communicative competence. A definition of communicative competence is provided in the following section in this chapter and a more detailed discussion of why communicative competence as defined in my thesis is still relevant to the setting in presented in Chapter 2.

Communicative competence

Since educational approaches shifted their focus from the teacher to the learner during the past century, conceptualisations of competence have also been modified. Competence in a second or foreign language changed from being viewed as constrained isolated features, such as ability to translate texts accurately or having accurate pronunciation of fossilised drilled expressions, to more creative exchanges of meaningful, authentic, and relevant information in socio-culturally influenced contexts (Hymes, 1972; Breen & Candlin, 1980; Canale & Swain, 1980; Kelly, 1981; Johnstone, 1989; Widdowson, 1989). Even to this day the concept undergoes adaptations to accommodate the clear specialisation of terms such as social communicative competence (Bakx et al., 2006), communicative language ability (Littlemore & Low, 2006), symbolic competence (Kramsch, 2006), and communicative collaboration (Tucker, 2006). Other adapted terms include issues related to intercultural understanding

(Alptekin, 2002), language awareness (Sinor, 2002), and others derived from the growing needs of a globalised world.

However, for the context of the educational setting where my research is conducted, language communicative competence can be defined as the knowledge of the target language (TL) and ability to use it during interactions with other language speakers (Hymes, 1972), and in negotiating meaning with international settings (Holmes, 1989; Hornberger, 1989; Savignon, 2002; Leung, 2005; Kenning, 2006; Lee, 2006; Steinhart, 2006). In this definition, to be competent in the TL means not only to know its rules and grammar, but also to be able to put it into practice ensuring the transmission of the intended message, that is, ensuring communication occurs. In view of the objectives of the EFL curriculum, the social context expects communication in the TL to occur not confined to one particular setting, but rather in an international arena. Communication in this international context becomes essential and so communicative competence is very much viewed as a necessary ability in the globalised world. However, it may be argued that communicative competence as defined in my thesis is out of date (Lee, 2006; Tucker, 2006), so my discussion of communicative competence in Chapter 2 focuses on the relevance of this definition to EFL instruction in Mexico to this day.

After having described the educational setting in the country, introduced my argument in favour of exploring students' self-perceptions, and defined briefly the concept of communicative competence in the previous three sections, it is pertinent to enunciate the problem and indicate the purpose of this study and the research questions addressed in this research.

Stating the problem

Perceptions of self-efficacy play an important role in overall success or achievement of human enterprise (Bandura, 1997). In so far as communicative competence in a foreign language is a human endeavour, it is suggested that learners' self-perceptions of communicative competence have an influence on the outcomes of their agency in language speech acts. On the other hand, speaking a foreign language is not only a cognitive phenomenon, but it also involves an affective aspect where an individual's self-concept is at risk (Swann Jr., Chang-Schneider & Larsen McClarty, 2007). It has been posited that a positive perception of self-efficacy and self-confidence helps learners have more opportunities to become involved in communication events and succeed, while a negative or bad self-perception decreases those opportunities (McCroskey and Richmond, 1991).

Success in foreign language speech events and in learning can be measured in different terms; for example, success in learning may mean achievement of specific standards or completion of courses. Thus, a negative perception of self-efficacy and self-confidence may mean underachievement in any of those terms. In higher education underachievement of an academic standard means that the student is prevented from doing something, either continuing his education, or even graduating. However, achievement of a standard or success depends on varied aspects as mentioned before. In the EFL class, the manner in which students perceive themselves as FL speakers can be determinant of their chances to achieve the standards required by university courses and their determination to continue learning and practising the FL. On the other hand, success in foreign language speech acts may mean to convey the message to an audience in a discussion, to acquire goods or exchange services, among millions of other possibilities.

Chapter 4 describes the methodological decisions for this research and the manner in which the study was implemented. My focus of attention in this investigation was students who

were enrolled in their first year in university programmes in the Mexican context and on their self-perceptions of ability to communicate in English at that particular time in their lives. I chose first year university students because of two reasons: first, I have usually taught EFL to first year university students for the past 12 years and I am interested in exploring how communicative competence in English poses challenges to those students' self-perceptions. Second, university students seem aware of social and cultural expectations surrounding them and it was relevant to explore how students' self-perceptions were built and the influences of those socio-cultural views and expectations. Speaking as a teacher, this information is helpful to adapt EFL programmes and objectives, teaching styles and practices to students' needs; at another level, this investigation illuminates the influence of learners' attributional influences on their constructions of self-concepts and identities in a context where EFL communicative competence has been highly regarded in the past few decades (Cortez Román, 2006).

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this research was to address the knowledge gap about undergraduate students' self-perceptions of communicative competence in English. It was also intended to explore the manner in which participants regard English and the influences on their views at the beginning of their studies in university. Foreign language teachers may benefit from this information by using it to guide their teaching practices to address the relevant issues uncovered and collaborate with learners during classroom and other student-teacher interactions. Indirectly speaking, the present investigation has practical implications for EFL learning and teaching practices in higher education beyond the local context in the state of Tamaulipas. Particularly, other similar tertiary education contexts, where the aim of their EFL programmes is for their students to achieve competence in communication, may benefit from comparing the findings of this exploration of students' self-perceptions.

Research questions

The main questions stated for this investigation are:

1. How do first year university students perceive their own communicative competence (in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence) as EFL users?
2. What issues influence students' self-perceptions of communicative competence?
3. From where do those issues derive?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the following issues were also explored:

- How do learners cope with negative or / and positive self-perceptions?
- What do students think they can or should do to change their enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones?
- What do students think universities could or should do to help them to change enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones?

I decided to address the questions to a sample of first year undergraduates from programmes of different disciplines such as health sciences, social sciences, engineering, and arts and humanities enrolled in public university in the state of Tamaulipas. The choice of this particular university was motivated by my inside knowledge of the context as an EFL teacher and teacher trainer, and at the same time by the access to students of varied disciplines that my position as a member of the teaching community granted.

Finding answers to the research questions prompted an investigation covering both cross-disciplinary and individual levels. A cross-disciplinary study addressed the first research question with a questionnaire about students' self-perceptions of communicative competence

in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence (CCQ: López González, 2006). The questionnaire was administered early on in students' university lives so that participants' self-perceptions were not tinted by university experiences. At the individual level, the second and third research questions were posed to participants so that they expressed their ideas from their own voices in focus group session discussions. In further exploration of the main research questions, secondary questions four, five, and six were addressed during the interactive discussion in these focus group sessions.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 is this introduction, the rationale and a brief description of the context and theoretical bases for the study: self-perceptions and communicative competence. This is followed by an introduction of the statement of the problem, the research questions, and the purpose of this research. I attempt to guide the reader's attention to the gap in the knowledge about students' self-perceptions of communicative competence by presenting a review of recent research in the field at university level in Mexico. This chapter serves to point out the questions to be addressed and the structure of the whole thesis, but also allows for my personal rationale to be presented briefly. Chapter 1 also points the discussion towards why communicative competence, particularly in English, is the subject of this inquiry.

Chapter 2 discusses the global context where my study takes place and the importance of communicative competence as the subject of inquiry for this thesis. Contextual information covers the position of English as a global language for international interaction in the era of globalisation and the Mexican position towards English in this context. Communicative competence is further discussed in this chapter and the pertinence of the definition used in my thesis to the current educational setting in Mexico is highlighted. The contextualising

information presented in this chapter opens the floors to the theoretical underpinnings of my thesis, which are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework for my research; a review of self-constructs, beginning with the diagram of interrelationships among self-constructs and interactions with the social context, opens the chapter. However, to get a clear picture of the construction of self-perceptions, it is important to identify not only the origins of the inquiry, but also the emerging themes from the data. I decided therefore to organise my review of literature into two sections. First, a section discusses the theoretical framework where self-constructs are the focus of this investigation. Then a second section presents the theories identified from rich data gathered from participants' discussions. Issues related to possible selves theory, identity and social identity, and attribution theory, which arose from the data analysis are discussed. Willingness to communicate (WTC) has been discussed also in light of the findings associated to this model for communication behaviours.

The methodology and research design are part of Chapter 4. I discuss the epistemological and ontological bases that guided my research and choice of methods. Contributions of an earlier pilot study are highlighted in one section in this chapter. Chapter 4 also contains a section describing the manner in which the research questions were made operational and another section discussing the ethical implications of the study. Further details about the rationale for the methods, types of data needed, procedures to collect those data, sampling procedures and the treatment of quantitative and qualitative data are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the analyses conducted on the data. The discussion focuses on assessing the reliability of the CCQ, which was specifically designed for the study and as such, required to be assessed by statistical means. A second section presents a

picture of the sample by introducing descriptive statistics obtained from univariate analysis. The next section displays the statistically significant associations found between the CCQ scores and other background variables investigated. The qualitative data are presented in a section apart, where the data gathered during the focus group sessions are interpreted.

Chapter 6 integrates the discussion of findings and presents some implications derived from this research. The limitations found at different levels of the research are also identified. This chapter also includes a personal reflection associating the rationale for this research with the research process itself.

Chapter 7 closes this thesis summarising the conclusions drawn from my research, highlighting the original contributions of this thesis, and suggesting recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Context of the Study

This chapter introduces the contextual issues surrounding my research. I have described the Mexican educational system in the previous introductory chapter and Chapter 2 opens with a discussion of the position of English in relation to global communication. This discussion is important to understand why communicative competence in English is relevant to institutions and university students in Mexico. In the second section, the role of forms for comparative standards of communicative competences is analysed focusing on English as a foreign language (EFL) and its assessment by CEFR guidelines (Council of Europe, 2001). A third section critiques the Mexican educational system described in Chapter 1 and the policy that surround English learning and teaching practices nowadays in order to understand the background where my study was set. Section three emphasises why, even though communicative competence is in fact a feasible objective for the national curricula, the mismatch between objectives, policies and practices make it difficult to achieve. The fourth section provides a deeper discussion of the concept of communicative competence and highlights the centrality to the setting of communicative competence as defined in this thesis. Finally, a summary of the information presented closes Chapter 2.

A need for global communication and comparative standards

English language education in Mexico is analysed in relation to its place and significance within communication (Savignon, 2002; Kenning, 2006; Schulz, 2006), and in the context of the globalised world (Nunan, 2003; Block, 2004; Lin & Martin, 2005; Van Parijs, 2007) in this chapter. English and its impact as a global language (Crystal, 1997; Bassnett, 2002; Tatto et al., 2007) are also discussed, mainly from critical perspectives of researchers and practitioners (Cortez Román, 2006; Lethaby, 2006; Clemente, 2007a; Clemente & Higgins,

2008), as well as from the context of the current Mexican legislation (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993, 2006b, 2007c).

I discuss the particular relevance of EFL as an international means of communication (Ammon, 2007; Hamel, 2007) and the legitimisation of the use of international standards as indicators of learning achievement (Tatto, 2007). An example of this is the recommendation of the Mexican government (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b) to follow international foreign language guidelines such as the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001) as comparative standards for matriculation requirements and definitions of competence.

English, global communication, and comparative standards

The significance of English for global communication

Global communication in the era of globalisation has different significance according to people's points of view (Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh, 2006). From a humanistic stance, the potential loss of national languages (and cultures) in order to adopt a lingua franca that associates with a global society is something deplorable (Hansen, 2002), but at the same time, global communication can be viewed as a positive challenge in as much as one single language can lend voice to previously unheard cultures (Sorensen, 2002). From a socio-economic point of view, "globalisation reinforces international trade and communication, providing the conditions for increased mobility of populations" (Hansen, 2002 p. 7); provided that the mobility of populations is regarded as proactive or desirable, globalisation is then understood in a positive light.

Taking a purely communicative point of view, the opportunity to use one language such as English to share and exchange information is also positive (Pattison, 1987; Hills & McLaren, 1988; van Els, 2002) for several areas of influence, such as science (Maxwell, 2004). Nunan

(2003) claims that “English is currently the undisputed language of science and technology, and scientific journals in many countries are now switching from the vernacular to English” (p. 590). However, this situation is not perceived as positive by Ammon (2007) and Hamel (2007), who discuss in their papers the use of English as a type of lingua franca in terms of a form of linguistic imperialism. Nonetheless, I believe that the positive outcomes, such as the spread of information derived from the use of one language, exceed the risks of perceiving some sort of imperialistic aim in the use of English by far (Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Van Parijs, 2007). In fact, Block (2004) acknowledges Pennycook (1994, 2006) and Canagarajah (2006, 2007, 2008) for recognising that “the spread of English as altogether too complicated to be considered benign or evil” (Block, 2004 p. 76). Even more, from intercultural communication and sociolinguistic positions, the use of one language has been a bridge across cultures and peoples resulting in both positive and negative outcomes (Byram & Grundy, 2002; Sercu, 2005; Canagarajah, 2006). In light of these arguments, and from my position as a language teacher, I acknowledge that globalisation is a reality of our times, and as such, global communication (by means of English) offers an opportunity for understanding people and cultures that have been brought closer in the global world.

Another aspect for the case in favour of using one language is the characteristics of mobility that a global world offers and implies. Because of the possibility to work in international settings, modern professionals in increasingly competitive work forces (Nunan, 2003) regard the ability to communicate in English as an added value to the development of their careers (van Els, 2002; Vázquez Cedeño et al., 2003). This view was supported with evidence from the present study, when participants expressed the feeling that English is central to becoming fully competitive professionals and that it is competence in using this language that sets them apart from other job seeking candidates (see transcript in Appendix B). Foreign language communicative competence, particularly in English, is associated with more employment options for individuals (Matsuda, 2003; Lin & Martin, 2005), considering that the changing

needs of international commerce and enterprise require to employ individuals able to negotiate in globalised settings (García Landa & Terborg, 2002). Such a situation, where employment depends greatly on competitiveness and competences, makes the need to use English for global communication a tangible reality for professionals and other workers in modern Mexico (Clemente & Higgins, 2008). The weight of this reality was identified by participants when they expressed that candidates have to demonstrate communicative competence in English to prospective employers to obtain a *good job* (see Appendix B for a full transcript).

Moreover, the possibility of international mobility provided by globalisation and international trade agreements, such as the NAFTA, signed by Canada, the U.S. and Mexico (NAFTA Secretariat, 1992), opened more and different job opportunities than those available in the immediate surroundings in the country (García Landa & Terborg, 2002). García Landa and Terborg (2002) also emphasised that in terms of language, although Spanish, English and French are official languages for trade among these North American nations, in practice, business interactions are more frequent in English than in the other languages. Furthermore, taking a macro-economic position, the Delors Report summarises that "…knowledge of an international language may be indispensable to acquire the newest scientific and technological knowledge that would help a country to reach modern levels of economic development" (Delors 1996 p. 142 cited in García Landa & Terborg, 2002 p. 5, my translation). In the light of the recommendations of the Delors Report, being communicatively competent in a foreign language is not only seen as a determinant to access all types of resources for the development of a country (Vázquez Cedeño et al., 2003) at the macro-economic level, but also at the micro-economic level this skill is "…the means to accumulate various forms of linguistic and cultural capital that [individuals] hope can be converted into economic capital" (Clemente & Higgins, 2008 p. 33).

Good communication abilities have been viewed as an important tool for success in the workforce since the last decades in the twentieth century (Lunt, 1982; Pattison, 1987; Hills & McLaren, 1988; Brieger & Comfort, 1992). More recently, not only good communication but also sensitive negotiation abilities have become a personal asset for an individual's search for better jobs (Ibarra Colado, 2001). However, languages are valued according to geo-political and social areas of influence (Dörnyei et al., 2006), so it can be said that different regions or social groups will regard different foreign languages as the *desired* one. It appears that in the era of globalisation, English has become the desired language for communication (García Landa & Terborg, 2002; van Els, 2002; Vázquez Cedeño et al., 2003).

Social and geo-political influence of English

At the beginning of the 20th century, English, French and German were equally regarded in Europe (Ammon, 2007). Particularly in Denmark, "the most spoken languages among the élites were French and German" (Sorensen, 2002 p. 25) until before World War II (WW II). After the World Wars and the establishment of the U.S.A. as an international economic power, the balance shifted towards English (Ammon, 2007). In Latin America, the most predominant foreign languages have been English, French and Portuguese, but English has become dominant in the last decade (García Landa & Terborg, 2002) in this region.

The use of one language for global communication may be of great help in encouraging collaboration and exchange among nations (Lin & Martin, 2005; Ammon, 2007; Van Parijs, 2007), and facilitating social and geographical mobility among individuals in the age of globalisation. The characteristics of English and its socio-political influence make it a good option as a sort of lingua franca for exchanges among individuals of different mother tongues (Affricano, 2005; Canagarajah, 2006; Dörnyei et al., 2006). Although Ammon

(2007) does not agree that English can be regarded exactly as a lingua franca because there are native English-speaking nations, the fact remains that English is a language that allows its users to make it their own, resulting precisely in debates about linguistic ownership (Widdowson, 1994; Norton, 1997) and nativism versus non-nativism (Higgins, 2003; Kiely, 2006). There is however, the fear that cultures that use one global (foreign) language will be lost, along with their languages; but Kramsch (1998, 2000) claims that fear is unjustified since "many cultures have survived even though their language has virtually disappeared … others have survived because they were part of an oral tradition kept up within an isolated community, … or because their members learned the dominant language, a fact that ironically enabled them to keep their own" (1998 p. 69). Moreover, van Els (2002) suggests that "any culture or subculture can be expressed in different languages" (p. 109, my translation), and supports the case for ownership of English in that "the more global languages are spoken by people of more diverse linguistic origins, the more possibilities are that those non-native speakers will own the global languages" (van Els, 2002 p. 109, my translation). Taking this perspective, speakers in the global age may be more open to adopt the foreign language (Van Parijs, 2007) when they can appropriate it (Leung, 2005; Liang, 2005; Lethaby, 2006), shaping the language into an instrument to facilitate their communication (Alptekin, 2002; Ryan & Sercu, 2005; Kenning, 2006).

English with an accent

Appropriated new versions of global languages such as *world Englishes* (Matsuda, 2003; Cline & Necochea, 2006) are disputing positions in the FL learning and teaching field. The concept of *world Englishes* refers to variations of English as adopted by its speakers in EFL or ESL contexts. For example, Dörnyei (2006) and his colleagues refer to *Euro-English*, which is "an educated European English variety used by Continental European business people and other professional administrators to communicate together" (Strevens, 1992 cited

in Dörnyei et al., 2006 p. 8). However, a somewhat different position about the concept of *English with an accent* (Pennycook, 2001; Clemente et al., 2006; López Gopar & Khan, 2007) is being supported among critical and postmodern pedagogies as a reaction to the linguistic imperialism discussed above.

Contrary to the cosmopolitan associations that the term *world Englishes* evokes, the expression *English with an accent* has been used early in a derogatory manner to refer to sub-standard variations of English found among minority groups in English speaking communities (Lippi-Green, 1997). But more recently, Canagarajah (2008) has defined accent in a positive light: "accent also refers to the emphasis one gives a language, the twists and shifts one gives the structure to represent oneself. Accent is therefore ethos—one's own voice, one's identity" (p. xi). Clemente and Higgins (2008) propose that language learners in Mexico perform English with a *postcolonial accent*, which they define as "how these students learn, appropriate, modify, and redefine their use of English as a series of multilingual social and cultural performances" (p. 9). When Clemente and Higgins use the word *performance*, they are getting away from the dualism of competence versus performance and from the derogatory associations of the earlier use of the term *accent*, as Canagarajah (2008) stresses:

> Performance in English means that *you* speak the language and not let the language speak you. This means that you exercise your agency to populate the language with your values, meaning, and intentions. Performance therefore means gaining voice in a language by appropriating its forms and conventions for your purposes. To gain voice is to stamp the language with your identity. It often means that you must go against the grains of the language to reshape it to your expectations (pp. x-xi, his emphasis).

As long as English is a human language, its native and non-native users and cultures in fact tint it with their own voices (Zhang, 2005; Narvaez Trejo, 2006; Sughrua, 2006). It is sometimes possible to identify the background of a speaker because of his *accent*, that is, by the manner in which he communicates using English, but in the present context, accent is not only the phonological variation a speaker gives to a language, but rather as Canagarajah

(2008) proposes, accent is an expression of identity. While native speakers of English give the language their own particular accents, non-native speakers have the advantage of giving it their accents and identities gained through their own individual and socio-cultural linguistic experiences (Kramsch, 1998; Canagarajah, 2007). In this sense, monolingual English speakers may lack the intercultural communication strategies that multilingual or bilingual speakers possess (Bassnett, 2002; Canagarajah, 2006) and that they use to negotiate their interactions with other non-native speakers. During these interactions, all speakers bring their own accents—and backgrounds—to the fore, reinforcing the idea that English "is becoming associated with a global culture" (Dörnyei et al., 2006 p. 9).

However, speaking English with an accent may be a prerogative of individuals who perceive they can speak English in the first place. Even though the discussion nowadays focuses on showing individuals' accent and in expressing their voices in their foreign language speech, there is a view shared by participants in this investigation that English has social connotations of propriety and of higher ranking. That is, if one speaks English one is perceived as above others, and in order to show that one speaks English, one must speak properly and *sound well*. What *sound well* means exactly is a blurred construct, but its weight on an individual's self-perceptions of ability and his perception of others' is clear. This approach to speaking English may hold individuals back and prevent them from taking employment opportunities involving the foreign or second language because they have an accent (see the comments of Mateo in Appendix B). Also, other participants referred to English as something *pretty* that has to be spoken *correctly*. For these students, non-native speakers of English like them have to avoid showing a strong accent in their speech otherwise their accent is perceived as lack of ability and need for more formal learning. So speaking English with an accent is not always seen as a demonstration of ownership of the foreign language but rather as a lack of proficiency, and this position may be present in other contexts as well.

In the case of Mexico, all native cultures were conquered by the Spanish in the 15th century and from then on the use of their languages was limited to intra-cultural exchanges; Spanish became the dominant and unifying language while the native languages became local community dialects. Even so, as Kramsch (1998) and van Els (2002) suggested, Mexicans appropriated and accented their use of Spanish making it particular and identifying of the nation. English is not at that level in Mexico because it is not the language for daily and local interaction. English for Mexico signifies access to that other world brought closer by globalisation (Crystal, 1997; Affricano, 2005).

English is viewed as a global language that allows individuals to become members—however temporarily—of the global culture. Partly because of a strong historical American influence (Clemente & Higgins, 2008) and the socio-economic and political impact of regional trade agreements such as NAFTA, ability to communicate in English is socially perceived as strongly desirable to gain access to the international arena (Ibarra Colado, 2001; García Landa & Terborg, 2002; Russell, 2003). This view has been adopted by a growing number of people and institutions (García Landa & Terborg, 2002; Davies, 2008) turning English into what Spanish was for the conquered peoples: a means of social mobility and added value to individuals' professional, academic, and interpersonal resources (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998; Garcíadiego Ramos, 2002). In this modern context, English can be individually appropriated and accented during informal—and out of school—interactions, but communicative competence in the language still needs to be demonstrated objectively for academic and employment purposes.

The need for formal assessment of skills

Each individual has a self-perception of his communicative abilities and skills in the foreign language. These self-perceptions are construed from several comparisons with peers, personal ideals, or even the view of the ideal English speaker held by each person's community—this will be more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3. However, this informal self-assessment is not enough to gain access to better academic and employment opportunities, which are usually granted to individuals who demonstrate that their communicative abilities and skills have been objectively assessed. As a nation, Mexico decided to turn to other countries' experiences in intercultural exchange to follow their lead towards a certification of English foreign language skills (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b, 2008b). At the time, the frequent international mobility of nationals of European countries at the end of the 20th century prompted the European Union to make efforts to set language competence standards to facilitate individuals' communication exchanges. Those efforts eventually derived in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), which was selected as the comparative standard to assess foreign language communicative competence in Mexico (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008a). The following section of this chapter will discuss the fundamental principles and purposes of the Framework.

Comparing standards: Common European Framework of Reference

The Council of Europe (COE) was the designated institution to assess, among other regional issues, the linguistic needs of their nationals when involved in international exchanges in that continent. Its aim was to achieve unity and adopt common action in the cultural field and this objective prompted the need to find guidelines to assist member countries in understanding and valuing their different modern languages as a means to reach the desired unity (Council of Europe, 2001). Among other tasks, the COE intended to promote collaboration to foster a

European system of information by adhering to three basic principles regarding modern languages. These principles are:

- That the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed, and that a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding;
- That it is only through a better knowledge of European modern languages that it will be possible to facilitate communication and interaction among Europeans of different mother tongues in order to promote European mobility, mutual understanding and co-operation, and overcome prejudice and discrimination;
- That member states, when adopting or developing national policies in the field of modern language learning and teaching, may achieve greater convergence at the European level by means of appropriate arrangements for ongoing co-operation and co-ordination of policies (Council of Europe, 2001 p. 2).

The principles can be interpreted in the following proposals. For example, member countries are encouraged to find ways of reaching common ground instead of holding different standpoints. A common system of information for Europe could be achieved once this common ground had been set up. To achieve this objective, the COE's Committee of Ministers required member governments to support the development of language standards that would integrate not only the linguistic aspect, but also the cultural, social and psychological aspects of language learning and teaching (Council of Europe, 2001). This emphasis was supported on the premise that individuals from each member country would have different uses of modern foreign languages (MFL); some would use them as tourists and short term visitors, others as students, others as seasonal workers, and others as permanent immigrants. The purposes of the language standards defined by the COE matched the purposes that Mexican educational authorities established for FLE in the most recent reform (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1993), supporting the decision to use the information from Europe to inform the national policy. The roles of individuals would determine the language needs they would have and the situations facing them would indicate the degree of ability needed (Trim, 1980). The COE determined that there was a need for a collaborative project to determine guidelines about uses and degrees of ability, and the

outcome of this project was the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) published in 2001.

The CEFR lists different dimensions of language learning, teaching and use; it also provides standards of skills to identify degrees of competence in those dimensions. The framework also serves as the basis for designing MFL programmes and textbooks and for describing levels of assessment for researchers and practitioners of the member countries of the COE—and in Mexico (Council of Europe, 2001). These actions are intended to support the main purpose of the Council of Europe regarding European modern languages, that is, to "avert the dangers that might result from the marginalisation of those lacking the skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe" (Council of Europe, 2001 p. 4). Learning MFLs is then seen as an instrument to encourage independence of thought and civil responsibility, as well as a means of social and geographical mobility (Council of Europe, 2001), and Mexico (as discussed above) shares this view regarding particularly the English language (García Landa & Terborg, 2002).

The CEFR is based on the concept of plurilingualism that implies that foreign languages help the user/learner build new knowledge of the world by drawing upon his language competence and linguistic ability. Plurilingualism implies that the learner can recall knowledge from one language to help him to operate effectively in a different language context and it contributes to the use of the speaker's language communicative competence (linguistic, socio-linguistic, and pragmatic abilities) to achieve effective communication (Council of Europe, 2001). In this sense, the framework supports the notions of appropriation, ownership, and accent that non-native users bring to global languages as discussed earlier in this chapter. Comparatively, although Mexico has one official language for all social interactions, plurilingualism endorses the current attitude that sees all vernacular subcultures and dialects as equally valuable and where varied linguistic

backgrounds favourably colour speakers' communication when involved in second and foreign language speech acts (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007c).

It is relevant to note that the framework is not contextually bound, rather it is applicable to any linguistic and cultural context within the realm of the MFLs (Council of Europe, 2001). For this reason, language level descriptors have been enunciated considering language users' needs and purposes in communication in varied practical situations and can be detailed as much as required. The CEFR's (Council of Europe, 2001) adaptability to the needs of the specific educational systems of any country (because it is a multi-purpose, flexible, open, dynamic, user-friendly, non-dogmatic language framework) make its application throughout Europe highly encouraged.

However, Europe is not the only region that requires its nationals to be able to demonstrate certain levels of communicative competence in foreign languages, as we have discussed in section one in this chapter. I have emphasised that globalisation encourages speakers of different mother tongues to communicate in one global language during intercultural exchanges. Educational systems in particular promote the assessment of the language skills acquired. Furthermore, to ensure that the language skills acquired are sufficient for the varied individual roles a person will play, it is important that the skills are comparable among speakers of varied languages and cultures. This need for objective comparative standards to assess EFL competences and the adaptable characteristics of the CEFR are some of the reasons why Mexico adopted the framework's Global Scale descriptors (Appendix A) to use as EFL language skill descriptors for several educational levels in the country (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b, 2008a). The adoption of the framework has been a smooth process in theory, but in practice, the characteristics of the educational setting in Mexico, the attitudes of language teachers and even the influences of the teachers' union leaders have made this process more complex and less fruitful. In light of this comment, it is pertinent to

turn now to a critique of the Mexican educational system, described in Chapter 1, to understand why this investigation holds relevance.

A critique of the Mexican educational system and EFL practices

It is interesting to note that as FL educational policy in the country started adapting to the requirements of the globalised community, learning and teaching practices appeared to accommodate the demands of the modern language classroom (van Els, 2002; Tatto et al., 2007). Applying critical pedagogies (Johnson, 2004; Clemente et al., 2006); focusing on the needs of particular learner groups (Johnson, 1997); including information technology in the language class (Chávez, 2002a, 2002b; Rossetti Santamaría, 2005); and taking innovative didactic approaches (Kajee, 2005; Witten et al., 2007) are some illustrations of the adaptation undertaken. Let us not forget that nowadays the objective of FLE programmes throughout Mexico is to develop communicative competence—ability to use the target language for communication as well as acquiring grammatical knowledge of it (Davies, 2007; Tatto et al., 2007; Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008b). Furthermore, higher education FL programmes have been following a communicative approach to learning and teaching since almost a decade ago (Ibarra Colado, 2001; Russell, 2003; Witten et al., 2007), intending to produce communicatively competent students when they graduate from university.

So, in this context where EFL instruction is regarded as essential to individual and social development, it would appear that pupils and students in Mexico have many opportunities to develop competitive foreign language communicative skills and abilities, but this objective has not been achieved (García Landa & Terborg, 2002). What is the problem with this idyllic setting? There are in fact several serious problems, some of them about the structure of the system, others related to the mismatching aims and outcomes of the educational

programmes, but others, which in my view are the most difficult to overcome, relate to the perceptions and attitudes of learners and teachers (Tatto et al., 2007). It is not the purpose of this thesis to find solutions to address the problems of foreign language education in Mexico, but it is the aim of this research to point out the issues that highlighted the need for an investigation of undergraduate university students' self-perceptions of communicative competence. Some of those issues lie in the characteristics of early foreign language educational experiences of the participants in the study described in Chapter 1.

First of all, the structure of the FLE system does not easily support that pupils and students are placed according to their own linguistic skills and abilities. The characteristic massiveness of the matriculation at all levels due to the principles of no exclusion listed in the Constitution of Mexico is one central influence in that continued lack of differentiation (Davies, 2007). But beyond the fact that pupils are not usually assessed individually before they are placed in the corresponding FLE sequence, it is more important to understand the impact of the setting on their perceptions of learning EFL. In fact, the setting makes learning EFL become a chore, a class to take where no one is going to pay close attention to you because there are so many others around. Besides, it does not make a difference whether you are good at the language or not, the point of the class is to pass with as high a mark as possible.

Actually, the issue of marking is another problem related to the mismatch of aims and outcomes of FLE sequences. The objectives of programmes list becoming competent in communication in the target language, but the means to represent competence is numbers from six to 10. As long as teachers are required to provide holistic numerical marks as representations of pupils and students' overall achievements in the language class it will not be possible to determine what communicative abilities and skills the learner has developed (Davies, 2007). That is, how can a number on a scale (zero to 10) represent the particularities

of an individual's competence in foreign language? The educational policy may refer to the CEFR as the aimed matriculation standard, but the structure of the education system still cannot accommodate such outcomes. On the other hand, why communicative competence? What is the merit of such an objective of FLE in the country?

FLE has been part of the national curriculum for over 50 years (Davies, 2007), but it was not until late in the 20th century that communication in the foreign language became salient. The educational reform of 1993 implied that attention shifted from structure and translation, to concentrate more heavily on communication (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b). it was then when the EFL national curriculum for primary education was revised and updated and teaching practices were orientated to follow a communicative curriculum (Tatto et al., 2007). Unfortunately, the expectations were not met as a nationwide exploratory study of the state of teaching practices showed. By 2002, teachers had not adhered to or emphasised the communicative curriculum and this was considered a determining factor for the ineffectiveness of the reformed programmes (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006d).

Although globalisation fosters the use of English for communication, achieving communicative competence in English still seems a distant goal for language learners in a mostly monolingual setting such as Mexico. Mexicans as a group communicate in Spanish and use Spanish to share views, interact, trade, work, pray, play, joke, and in most cases, educate in their everyday lives. So apart from the fact that English is perceived as the means to gain access to the global world (as discussed in previous sections) why should communicative competence in English be important to language learners in Mexico? Take for example the indigenous peoples who speak native dialects as their first languages; their need to speak Spanish is central to their lives—although there are many cases of individuals who still go through life without learning Spanish. Moreover, the need to develop communicative abilities such as negotiation and interpretation with speakers of Spanish is

also clear because the livelihoods of their communities depend on these interactions. However, unless the same livelihoods are dependent on speaking English (Clemente, 2007a; López Gopar & Khan, 2007; Clemente & Higgins, 2008)—like those of indigenous groups living in touristic areas of Mexico—English is not a language used every day.

I have already established that I disagree with the position that argues language attrition may be the impact that using a global language has; in fact, I have stated my belief in the benefits gained from using English as a means for global communication. However, I see the concerns I have presented here connected to those of critical studies conducted in the south of the country, particularly in the state of Oaxaca (Clemente, 2004; Clemente et al., 2006; Clemente, 2007a; Clemente, 2007b; López Gopar & Khan, 2007; Clemente & Higgins, 2008), where demographic and linguistic differences create a case of their own, and also to borderland issues in the northern border with the United States (Cline & Necochea, 2006). Nonetheless, although English is still a means to gain economic capital to most individuals, used when needed instead of an element of cultural capital, practised for personal growth (Clemente, 2007a), I believe that the aim of EFL educational programmes is a realistic one. I mean, this existing distance to the language, a distance to English-speaking cultures and intercultural interaction, is a reality because integration to those cultures is not a priority of the language learners. So, the aim of many Mexican EFL programmes (communicative competence as defined in Chapter 1and more in detail in this chapter), is relevant to students in the Mexican university setting, even if in fact they become participants in the global world as discussed in section one.

The problem is not the relevance of the aim of FLE programmes in the country; the problem is how achievable this aim is in the context of the current educational setting. Educational policy supports communicative approaches to learning and teaching, but the setting and the teachers' practices do not follow policy. The question that arises is what *do* students think? If

the educational setting requires them to demonstrate communicative competence in terms of taking tests and obtaining minimum scores, can they do it even in spite of the teacher? How do they feel if this is not the case? How do students who have completed—at least in paper—two sequences of EFL instruction before reaching university age perceive themselves and perceive English?

As I have said elsewhere in this thesis, my personal experience in conversation with university undergraduates indicated that, in many cases, students do not perceive themselves as competent in communication in English. I have also admitted that I began this research under the assumption that self-perceptions of university students' communicative competence were overall negative. Fortunately, before blindly putting the weight of the blame entirely on the system or the teachers, the need for an investigation became obvious to me. I thought it was necessary to conduct an investigation to ask real students what they believed and perceived. Apart from the benefit of understanding learners better, investigating self-perceptions of communicative competence among first year university students was helpful to see how the FLE system had served the learners and the purposes of foreign language learning. And so, the objective of communicative competence as understood in the setting and as used in this thesis, becomes a realistic but hard to achieve goal. To better understand the concept, the following section discusses communicative competence and its centrality to the Mexican foreign language education system.

Communicative competence in language learning

Research on the uses of languages and the purposes of learning and teaching second and foreign languages has derived conceptualisations of competence from varying positions since the early 1970s. For example, the field of sociolinguistics produced the term *communicative competence* (Hymes, 1972). Communicative competence is defined as both

knowledge of the language and ability to use it appropriately in authentic socio-cultural setting situations (Hymes, 1972). This definition has become widely applied in the field of applied linguistics and second and foreign language education since then (Savignon, 1972; Swaffar, 2006). However, communicative competence has also been so broadly applied that there has been confusion as to what a communicative curriculum (Breen & Candlin, 1980) originally implied (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrel, 1997; Leung, 2005; Swaffar, 2006).

Hymes discussed the theoretical underpinnings of communicative competence, for example, that rules of grammar are useless without rules of use because language is a social means for interaction; also that communicative competence does not support the separation of linguistic competence and speech performance proposed by Chomsky in his Universal Grammar from the 60s (Canale & Swain, 1980; Newmeyer, 1982; Cook, 1985, 1991, 1994). Canale and Swain (1980) agreed with Hymes to a certain extent, but they emphasised grammatical use of the language since for them "grammatical competence is an essential component of communicative competence" (p. 5). Thus, even though native speakers of a language focus on use during normal conversation, grammar cannot be separated from use. Hymes (1972) challenged Chomsky's linguistic theory on the basis that it ignored socio-cultural features present in each person's language interactions in communication; in fact, Hymes was in favour of developing a theory that considered the influence of the social group surrounding the individual. He stressed that the differentiation between linguistic competence and linguistic performance presented an "image … of an abstract, isolated individual, almost an unmotivated cognitive mechanism, not, except incidentally, a person in a social world" (Hymes, 1972 p. 272). He proposed a socio-culturally aware theory of linguistics that:

> …can deal with a heterogeneous speech community, differential competence, the constitutive role of sociocultural features—that can take into account such phenomena as …, socio-economic differences, multilingual mastery, relativity of competence in [languages], etc., expressive values, socially determined perception, contextual styles and shared norms for the evaluation of variables (Hymes, 1972 p. 277).

A single linguistic theory that covers those aspects is to this day very difficult to devise, but what is important of Hymes's proposition is to understand that individuals engaged in linguistic communication have to be viewed as more than simple deliverers of grammatical utterances. Individuals are visualised as acquiring knowledge not only about grammar, but also about socially determined appropriateness of use in a variety of speech acts while they develop as members of speech communities both in the first and second language. Canale and Swain (1980) proposed that communicative competence covered grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences and that it "is observable indirectly in actual communicative performance" (p. 29), since they explicitly separate performance from competence and consider performance as actual use of the language.

Theoretically speaking, communicative competence is assessed in terms of judgments at two main levels (Widdowson, 1989): *linguistic grammaticality* (knowledge of the correct rules of the language) and *acceptability* of language including social norms of interaction, appropriate address, etc., in sum, *ability to use the language*. Widdowson has argued that it is necessary to make a clear distinction between *use* of the language (communicating through it) and *usage* (constituted by basic grammar) (1979, cited in Kelly, 1981 p. 169) to focus language programmes better. Linguistic grammaticality and acceptability of use are assessed against four parameters of communication defined by Hymes (1972) as follows:

1. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
2. Whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails (p. 281, his emphasis).

In Hymes's (1972) view, knowledge is a part of competence as much as ability to use that knowledge is; also, ability includes non-cognitive aspects such as socio-cultural features, motivation, affect, etc. In this light, *performance* becomes a larger concept subsuming one's communicative competence and the competence of others under the characteristics of

interaction in particular events. Canale and Swain (1980) emphasised that language learning must cover language that is actually used by native speakers. So, as long as one's speech is possible (follows the grammatical rules); feasible within the repertoire of communication means of the individual; appropriate to the social context where interaction is expected; and, in fact done among speakers of the target language, one is communicatively competent. Although it may sound simple, being in the position to actually engage all these resources in a timely manner is not easy to the foreign language learner, and this is part of the reason why communicative competence is still a realistic goal of EFL programmes.

Problems with the communicative curriculum

Breen and Candlin (1980) early on formulated a communicative curriculum to "define the nature of communicative language teaching" (p. 89). Their curriculum covered three areas: purposes (including communication, demands on the learner and learner's contribution), methodology (classroom process, content and teacher/learner roles) and evaluation (both of learner and curriculum). This curriculum considered that communication is interpersonal, subject to variation, and that it requires negotiating to exchange meaning. Breen and Candlin (1980) defined a very detailed curriculum, but they recognised that there cannot be one unique communicative curriculum because "any curriculum is a personal and social arena. A communicative curriculum in particular,…highlights a communicative process whereby the interrelating curriculum components are themselves open to negotiation and change" (p. 106). They also stressed that a communicative curriculum should accommodate change in language use and grammar because of time.

Although the communicative competence approach and the communicative curriculum have been very useful in changing perspectives about learning and teaching, Celce-Murcia and her colleagues (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrel, 1998), among

other theorists and practitioners (Bachman, 1990; McNamara, 1995), suggest that all teaching methods and approaches follow a cyclical development, and that the time has come to reassess the strengths and weaknesses of the communicative approach (Savignon, 2002; Sinor, 2002; Smith, 2002; Littlemore & Low, 2006; Rifkin, 2006). Some of the problems with communicative curricula are that the linguistic content and the pedagogical treatment of forms (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997) are not clear because there are no "firm linguistic guidelines" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997). Another area of criticism has been the lack of sufficient precision in the testing methods used in a communicative curriculum (Savignon, 2002). Additionally, Leung (2005) argues that the implementation of communicative competence has "produced abstracted contexts and idealized social rules of use based on (English language) native-speakerness" (p. 119). Leung emphasises that communicative competence has not considered the dynamic nature of the English language (like that of most languages) and that it is necessary to "attend to both the standard and local Englishes, and to tune in to both established and emergent forms and norms of use" (p. 139). This position envisions constructs such as World Englishes as the response to the need to account for a communicative competence that includes the local uses and variations of language across peoples in its socio-cultural component.

Why communicative competence is still relevant now

In the last decade or so, the need for redefinition of communicative competence had theorists and empiricists (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997; Kenning, 2006; Lee, 2006) emphasising what were the objectives of the communicative curriculum in the modern times (Celce-Murcia et al., 1998; Thornbury, 1998). The Modern Language Journal has dedicated a volume to this discussion (Rifkin, 2006; Schulz, 2006; Steinhart, 2006; Tucker, 2006). As a result of that ongoing debate, new orientations have been developed, for example, *intercultural competence* (Byram & Fleming, 1998; Ryan & Sercu, 2005; Convery, 2007) and

intercultural communication (Byram, 2002; Byram & Grundy, 2002; Wendt, 2002) that emphasise the understanding of local cultural rules to be better able to negotiate during interactions with members of that target culture. The focus of *intercultural sensitivity* (Olson & Kroeger, 2001) is an awareness of the differences in the cultures interacting, in order to show appreciation for those differences. *Symbolic competence* (Kramsch, 1998, 2002, 2006) adds the understanding of the pragmatic meaning of symbols to the semantic constructions in a language. These constructs are especially relevant in the globalised world since their common ground is an interest in relating language learning to aspects of local cultural awareness among individuals learning a foreign language.

However, the present discussion considers the influence of socio-cultural (idealised perhaps) elements proposed by Dell Hymes (1972) is still relevant to this day. In this research, communicative competence is defined as knowledge of the language and ability to use it appropriately in authentic settings, which is the objective of EFL educational plans and curricula in Mexico (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2007c, 2008b). Communicative competence as defined by Hymes has particular relevance to the definition of objectives for EFL programmes at the tertiary education level in Mexico (Garcíadiego Ramos, 2002; Leal Gutiérrez, 2006; Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2007a; Clemente & Higgins, 2008). The implementation of the communicative competence approach in the praxis in Mexico does not prioritise grammar over language use; instead, both elements are emphasised in order for learners to become fully competent speakers and in order to respond to the learners' communication needs (Canale & Swain, 1980). In contrast, for example, the focus on intercultural understanding is still a rarity more than a norm among the needs of learners in the context. Taking for instance the critical pedagogies fostering the notion of English with an accent; accentuating English is a means to encourage learners to use the language, by appropriating it, but it is also a means to react to a view of nativism, which is considered imposing under critical perspectives. Still, English with an accent is not a

communication need for learners, but rather a choice to represent the self and show his affiliation. So the aim of most EFL programmes is the understanding of the language and its uses among target environments that though authentic, do not necessarily account for variant dialects or sub-cultures. The educational context of this research (as described in Chapter 1) positions target language cultures in this light, as heterogeneous settings from which the language use of the predominant majority is the desirable goal. The language of the predominant majority is thus the objective and achieving knowledge of it and ability to use it for communication with native speakers is the purpose of most EFL programmes.

Summary

This chapter has presented the situation of foreign languages, and particularly of English as a foreign language, as seen in the light of the globalised world and in relation to the Mexican context. I have discussed some academic views about the English language: English as a global language, English with an accent, English as a foreign language, World Englishes. My discussion highlighted that English has become the desired FL for educational policy makers, employers, and learners since the last quarter of the 20th century in Mexico. This chapter has also emphasised that in language learning and teaching, communicative competence is the aim for pupils and students, and that educational policy recommends assessing EFL communicative competence against international standards as a matriculation requirement at the end of tertiary education study. In my critique of the Mexican educational system, I stressed that EFL instruction is not standardised across educational levels and regions and its frequency and quality cannot be guaranteed in the country as of yet.

In the last section in this chapter, I presented my reasons for focusing on communicative competence and not on other assessments of communication ability in EFL. Although I agree with the view that English is the current language for global communication, and it is

perceived as such in Mexico, learners in the country may also perceive a distance between their every day actual communication needs and their mostly hypothetical gain from being communicatively competent in English. This discussion intended to stress the importance of exploring university students' self-perceptions due to my argument of a knowledge gap in the field. The next chapter presents a review of theories which are the focus of this thesis: self-views; particular attention is given to self-perceptions and their construction. Other themes that emerged during this investigation are presented also in Chapter 3 in a separate section and these emerging themes are linked to the main discussion.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

Chapter 3 presents a discussion of several aspects of theories of self that are central to this exploratory study of students' self-perceptions of communicative competence. During their involvement in this research participants were asked to reflect not only on the self-efficacy and self-confidence they had on their language cognitive and communicative abilities, but also on the constructions of such self-perceptions. Issues related to participants' stable self-concepts and those of their social environments became apparent in that reflective exercise and some existing theoretical frameworks are proposed to understand them.

Consequently, without attempting to simplify theories and perspectives, the first section of this chapter focuses on aspects of self contextualising and connecting self-perceptions (Riding, 2001), self-confidence (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), which are the focus of this research. The second section discusses themes emerging from the data analysis, such as ideal self theory (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) in the language learning context, and identity and social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2002). Attribution theory (Weiner, 1986) is discussed also in the second section since data about participants' self-perceptions were found to have been shaped by personal and social attributions. The concept and model of willingness to communicate (WTC: MacIntyre et al., 1998) is introduced here to connect the present investigation to communication orientations. The last section in this chapter summarises the theoretical underpinnings and the emerging frameworks discussed and provides a link to the methodological discussion in Chapter 4.

Theoretical framework for this research

Exploring the Self: Perceptions, images and concepts

The focus of this inquiry on aspects of the self is supported by an emphasis on considering the client (or learner) as a whole (Rogers, 1980; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Maslow, 1999), and on paying "attention to [learners'] inner experience, to internal processes, and to self-beliefs" (Pajares & Schunk, 2001 p. 239). This interest on self-beliefs helps contextualise the study of individuals' self-perceptions in psychology and education. Moreover, both social cognitive (Bandura, 1997; Dweck & Molden, 2005) and humanistic approaches (Rogers, 1980; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) place the onus on the learner to become an active participant making sense of the input provided and so becoming an evolving, independent and self-sufficient person:

> Individuals have within themselves vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concepts, basic attitudes, and self-directed behaviour; these resources can be tapped if a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided (Rogers, 1980 p. 115).

However, the focus of inquiry in this research was individuals' already construed self-perceptions. Although self-theories are not new, achievement settings, such as academic ones, are interested in the study of self-perceptions because "individuals' perceptions of themselves and their capabilities are vital forces in their success or failure" (Schunk & Pajares, 2005 p. 85). So, in the present research, a process of reflection on one's self-concept, identification of meanings and adjudication of influences and attributions is necessary to achieve the objective of exploring university students' self-perceptions. On the other hand, it has been suggested (Williams & Burden, 1997) that the positive regard of significant others, such as teachers, peers and parents is determinant of the learner's conceptualisation of the self and his surrounding reality. In this light, it is relevant to this research to understand learners as whole but interacting individuals who rely on self-views and the views of their significant others and their social groups to make sense of or confirm

their self-perceptions, and the following subsections will discuss self-perceptions and their relationship to aspirations, to self-images and to the self-concept.

Aspirations: The self and learners' needs

Objectively speaking, being communicatively competent in English is not usually a matter of life or death for individuals, but it has become a factor for comparison and competition among peers at the professional level in the globalised world, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. As such, communicative competence is a desirable asset to which university students—and professionals—can aspire. Moreover, the discussions in Chapters 1 and 2 has pointed out that HEIs are increasingly demanding that their students demonstrate minimum standards in EFL communicative competence as matriculation requirements. Therefore, is communicative competence a reasonable human aspiration in view of the demands of the global world? Or is it purely an academic and matriculation requirement to fulfil with a score against a recognised standard? It seems that in the current state of things in university in Mexico it is both. Beyond that, whether he aspires to communicate in English or has to prove to the school that he does, the learner's self-perception of competence is coloured by other underlying self-concepts the learner has (Campbell, 1990; Margerison, 2001; Swann Jr. et al., 2007), and in turn this self-perception sways his possibilities of achieving the objective.

The link between self-perceptions and academic achievement has been thoroughly investigated in social psychology (Elliot & Dweck, 2005; Lackaye & Margalit, 2006; Mills et al., 2007; Wigfield et al., 2008), but I am particularly interested in the connection of self-perception to human aspiration. In order to understand this connection, Maslow's hierarchical needs, particularly the higher level needs, become central to this study. In his work Maslow (1999) listed a structural series of needs he classified hierarchically as *deficiency or maintenance* needs and *being* needs (see Figure 2). Maslow proposed that

deficiency needs (basic physiological, safety and security, interpersonal closeness, and self-esteem) relate to a person's psychological and biological well being—which have to be satisfied before attention can be placed on being needs. Being needs are higher in Maslow's hierarchy and relate to the fulfilment of abstract endeavours or aspirations such as cognition, beauty, and self-actualisation. Deficiency or maintenance needs are general and shared by different people—such as the need for food or shelter—but being needs are defined individually and can be relevant to only one person.

Maslow's ideas imply that individuals have positive levels of regard for their selves before aiming for higher level needs, leading to the realisation of one's full potentials or *self-actualisation*; also that the aspirations are socially acceptable. Rogers (1980) agreed with Maslow that the model is necessarily hierarchical and tends always towards achieving higher positively regarded needs. Rogers (1980) added that "it is clear that the actualizing tendency is selective and *directional*—a constructive tendency" (p. 121, my emphasis).

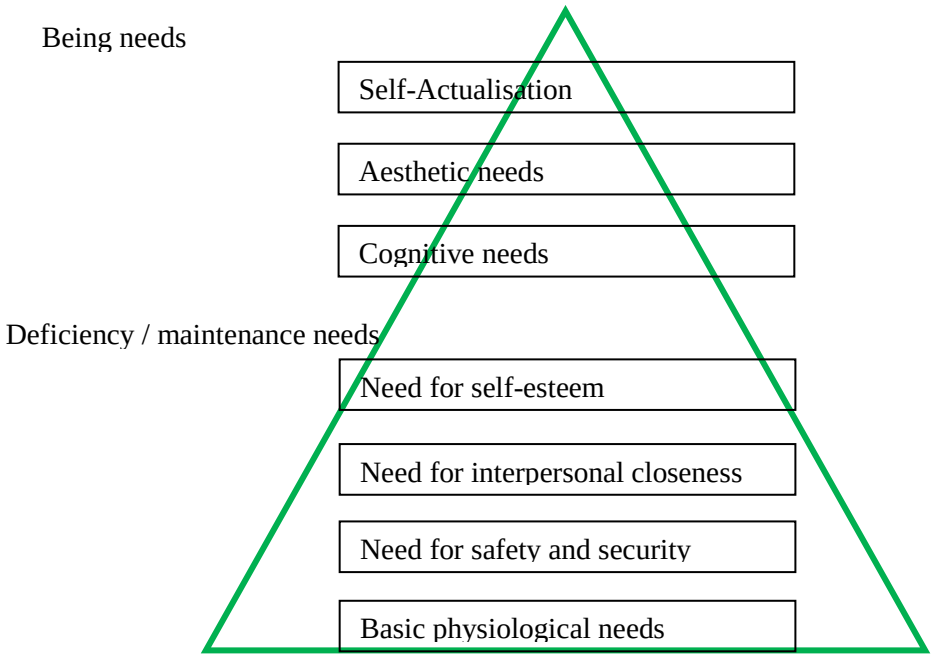

Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (adapted from Maslow, 1999)

Koltko-Rivera (2006) highlighted the fact that Maslow re-structured his pyramid and added an even higher need (self-transcendence) above self-actualisation. Self-transcendence is not so easy to achieve because of the greater abstraction and altruism needed to both aspire to and achieve it. It is notable (Koltko-Rivera, 2006) that only those permanently committed to the greater good of humankind can aim to achieve this higher level need, and I believe that this, together with the term *self-transcendence,* mean the self is left behind in seeking the greater good, which is beyond the scope of the focus and setting for this research. It seems more pertinent to analyse Maslow's fixed hierarchical structure since I agree with Williams and Burden (1997) that "it might be more helpful to view [the needs] as constantly interacting in a less static, more dynamic way" (p. 34). That is, even individuals who have not achieved all maintenance needs can aspire to and be inspired by achieving being needs. So, at the time of this study, the focus of this discussion on Maslow's hierarchy of needs still centres on the self as the subject of aspirations.

In sum, the important contribution of Maslow's work (1987) to this research is the idea that the individual has aspirations and aims to achieve, which may help in his self-perceptions (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and goal-setting decisions in the short and long run. This focus on human aspiration highlights other particular areas, namely self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986b, 1997), and self-confidence (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983; Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994) as central to my investigation. These constructs are discussed in association with the self-concept as follows.

Self-concept

Defining self-concept seems to be difficult given the overlap among the most frequently discussed constructs. Schunk and Pajares (2005) point out that "no single theorist is credited with formulating the construct of self-concept and outlining its basic tenets" (p. 88). For

instance, American sociologist Charles Cooley wrote a book in 1902 where he related *I* to the social group (1964); Cooley compared self-concept to an image of the self as seen through a looking glass; in other words, that image is formed by individuals' own perceptions of how others perceive them. Cooley (1908) further reinforced this metaphor with empirical research on the linguistic development of children. In spite of appearing to be a very convoluted idea (the self as self-perceived through others' perceived perceptions), it points to an interesting thought: self-concept is constructed both from our own and others' perceptions and also from our emotional reactions to those perceptions. Contrastingly, a later but still classic definition by Combs (1962) says that self-concept is: "what an individual believes he is" (p. 62). Combs's definition implies that it is not important whether an individual's beliefs match his behaviour or what others think of him. Comb's self-concept is then defined and validated only by that one individual. However, as Williams and Burden (1997) put it: "one's self-concept is partly determined by one's social relationships" (p. 97); considering these contrasting positions, it is obvious that defining one's self-concept is indeed a complex endeavour. For my part, I am convinced that as long as the individual values the social group surrounding him, he takes the group's views into account when defining his self-concept (Dweck & Molden, 2005), even if it is solely to define what he is not in terms of that social context.

As I stated above, definitions of self-concept can be very vague and in many cases overlap with other self-constructs and this is sometimes viewed as a positive feature. Campbell (1990) for instance, proposes that the self's emotional component (self-esteem) and knowledge component (self-concept) combine in the definition of self-concept; this combination "may play a critical role both in the structure of the self-concept and in its interface with external information" (p. 539). Campbell subsumes self-concept and self-esteem under the term *self*, but at the same time differentiates the assessments concerning each (emotion versus cognition). Williams and Burden (1997, 1999) combine perceptions,

identity and conceptions under an umbrella term: "*self-concept* is a global term referring to the amalgamation of all of our perceptions and conceptions about ourselves which give rise to our sense of personal identity" (1997 p. 97, emphasis: the authors). How personal identity differs from self-concept is not clear, though.

Rayner (2001) and Dweck and Molden (2005) suggested that the self is a construct subject to change according to the environment, and it requires interventions, modelling and reinforcement in order to be built. I find their propositions convincing since I believe that individuals mature as whole systems not only physically, but also cognitively and emotionally, although this maturation is not equally smooth and paced for all individuals across cultures. But before discussing how self-concept changes, it is still unclear how it is construed; because of the complexity of the concepts under study, several strategies are suggested in order to provide more clarity in the understanding of self-constructs. Swann Jr., Chang-Schneider, and Larsen McClarty (2007) proposed to reassess and subsume our definitions of the self-constructs because of "the predictive utility of self-views builds on treating self-esteem and self-concepts as members of a common self-view category. …both self-esteem and self-concepts refer to thoughts and feelings about the self" (p. 86). However, in doing this, one has to carefully consider which constructs are indeed comparable and which cannot be used indistinctively (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). For example, *perceptions* have been equivalent to *views* and *beliefs* in theoretical and empirical research.

Gabillon (2004) found that the term *beliefs*—referring to self-perceptions—has been used in different fields; in the same work she stressed that the "distinctions between different perspectives and conceptualisations seem to overlap at some points in the literature, and some terms (although defined differently) appear to be used interchangeably" (2004 p. 235). Gabillon's review revealed that social psychological and socio-cultural theories have used the terms *social representations* and *attitudes*, while in second and foreign language learning

the terms used go from *metacognitive knowledge* and *self-beliefs*, to *attributions*. More than becoming a simple case of different terms naming the same construct, the problem lies in the inaccurate manner in which each construct is defined. Mercer (2008) warns us that "in particular, three key self-constructs—*self-esteem*, *self-concept*, and *self-efficacy*—are often referred to inconsistently or even inaccurately" (p. 182, her emphasis), and makes a call for clear differentiations of the terms.

It appears that clearly defining the self-concept depends on the level of specificity applied and what aspects theorists subsume in the construct; for example, only biological components, only cognitive ones, or only emotional ones, or combinations of these (Swann Jr. et al., 2007). As such, theories of self are plenty and a full discussion of them is beyond the scale of this thesis. However, Williams and Burden (1997) are convincing in proposing to focus any inquiry on specific aspects of the self-concept to make the task manageable:

> The multifaceted nature of the self-concept has led many researchers to focus on specific aspects of it, such as *self-image* (the particular view that we have of ourselves), *self-esteem* (the evaluative feelings associated with our self-image), and *self-efficacy* (our beliefs about our capabilities in certain areas or related to certain tasks) (p. 97, emphasis: the authors).

So, self-concept consists of thoughts and feelings about the self (Swann Jr. et al., 2007), and the self—or *I* (Cooley, 1964)—reacts to the thoughts or feelings of others (Dweck & Molden, 2005), or to the views from the environment (Rayner, 2001). As such, self-concept changes over time just like the self, others, and/or the environment's views change; Figure 3 displays these relationships graphically.

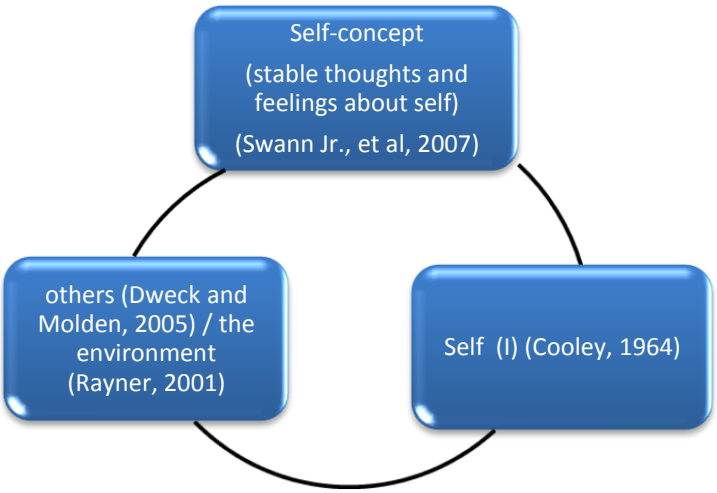

Figure 3: Self-concept

The complexity of self-concept and its interrelationship with and influence on the self and the environment, is clear. A visualisation of the constructs in Figure 3 enables the researcher to see a dynamic quality proposed by Dweck and Molden (2005):

> The fact that self-theories can be induced experimentally and altered through interventions suggests a dynamic view of these theory-based motivational systems. Although… self-theories can be relatively stable over long periods of time… they are knowledge structures and, as such, their accessibility can be changed by powerful situations and interventions (p. 137).

In this dynamism, change means evolving into a new self or, as Rogers (1980) claimed: "to perceive a new aspect of oneself is the first step toward changing the concept of oneself. …Once the self-concept changes, behavior changes to match the freshly perceived self" (p. 155). It may take time to change one's self-concept, but it seems possible to do so. Additionally, it is also possible to speculate that self-concept is particular to specific domains, or as Pajares and Schunk (2001) contended, that perceptions of self can vary in different dimensions, situations, and tasks. Their use of the term perceptions instead of self-concept implies that, although still representing the same constructs, self-perception is more dynamic and refers to the particular dimensions assessed by the individual (Figure 4).

Practical strategies for the analysis of self-views such as the one proposed by Williams and Burden (1997), discussed above are important because the analysis of the self-concept in terms of some of its aspects also encourages more specificity in the foci of inquiries (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Rayner, 2001; Truxillo, Seitz & Bauer, 2008), leading to better research. Following this position, the specific and more dynamic dimension of self-concept on which this research focused was *self-perception* of communicative competence, so self-perception is discussed in the following subsection.

Self-perception

Self-perception is used in this thesis meaning what Pajares and Schunk's work (2001) implied: a dynamic construct of the self that affects specific domains and changes faster than self-concept (Figure 4).

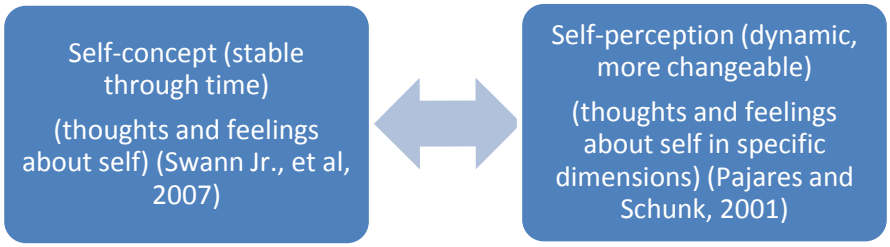

Figure 4: Self-perception as an interactive element of self-concept

I have synthesised the construct of self-perception as an individual's way of understanding himself in his environment (based on definitions from Erikson, 1963; Cooley, 1964; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Deci & Flaste, 1995). In the present investigation, the individual understands himself in the dimension of communicative competence in English, one specific

aspect of the academic self-concept. Self-perception is characterised by subjectivity, a frequent mismatch between actual and perceived self (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci & Moller, 2005), and a dependence on social relationships that gives self-perception fragility. An example of the effects of dependence on social relationships is for instance, Crozier (2001) who explored how shyness influenced the construction of British children's *self-perceptions* between the ages of four and five; in that study, self-perceptions construed in early childhood associated with reticence behaviours exhibited later during university life. But self-perception does not only affect one's behaviour, it permeates to all dimensions of one's life. For instance, Aronson and Steele (2005) highlighted that: "how a student construes the way he or she is viewed and treated by others matters a lot … these perceptions can exert a profound influence on … a student's academic self-concept" (p. 437).

Self-perception of competence is defined by Harter as "students' self-evaluative judgments about their ability to accomplish certain tasks" (1985, cited in Pintrich & Schunk, 1996 p. 7). This definition entails the understanding that those tasks belong to specific dimensions, and that competence in one at one time does not guarantee competence in all other dimensions and at any other given times. For example, a student at university may have a self-perception of competence in math, science, or foreign language, while at the same time he perceives himself as not equally competent in the other two dimensions. Learners' self-perceptions of competence may be attributable to their earlier learning experiences during their educational stages, that is, the student may attribute his competence in one dimension to learning occurred during high school or even before. On the other hand, from a language learning perspective, Gabillon (2004) warned that "attributing learners' beliefs solely to their L2 learning experience…would be inadequate" (p. 252). Therefore, an analysis of influences outside the learning context on learners' self-perceptions of competence is pertinent due to the impact of identifying other interventions (Dweck & Molden, 2005).

In view of this, it becomes relevant to explore students' self-perceptions of communicative competence to understand the standing points from which students address their academic and non-academic aspirations. Furthermore, it is important to investigate the influence of the social context (Margerison, 2001) and other elements that may be involved, such as affective variables. The relevance of affect in language learning has been extensively documented; Higgins (1987) published an article addressing discrepancies between objective performance measures and subjective (self) assessments; at the time, Higgins proposed that the affective element was central to those differing findings. In language education, there is plenty of research conducted in the past two decades (Blanche & Merino, 1989) on the weight of misconstruction of self-perception (sometimes simply referred to as *perceptions*, *beliefs*, *attitudes*, etc.). Even more, the centrality of affective elements and considerations has been emphasised in researched aimed to understanding the learner (Young, 1991; Ganschow et al., 1994; MacIntyre, 1999; Sparks & Ganschow, 1999). For instance, Horwitz and Young (1991) reflected on the implications that language anxiety has on learners' outcomes and motivation to continue studying.

In fact, my interest in the study of self-perception has been strongly influenced by seminal works associating self-perception and affective variables such as anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Horwitz, 1988; Phillips, 1992; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; MacIntyre et al., 1997). Horwitz (1988) especially appealed to my interest in understanding my EFL students (first year undergraduates) and in doing my best as a teacher to help them achieve communicative competence in English. I agree with Horwitz (1988) when she recommended that learner beliefs should not be ignored and that "if certain beliefs can be an impediment to successful language learning, the question must be raised about the best ways to modify them" (p. 292). She also pointed out that the "affective consequences of these beliefs must be considered" (Horwitz, 1988 p. 292) because the inaccuracy of those beliefs contributes to raising anxiety levels during language learning. Horwitz's position then supports that self-

perceptions may be modified by means of interventions, and that attention must be placed on learners' affect before, during, and after intervention.

MacIntyre and his associates (MacIntyre et al., 1997) suggested it is "unlikely that the mismatch between the subjective perception of competence and the objective indices results simply from "error" in predicting one's language ability. Rather, two biases may be operating in the L2 learning situation" (p. 269). These biases refer to better (self-enhancement) or worse (self-derogation), in both cases unrealistic, self-perceptions. MacIntyre and associates (MacIntyre et al., 1997) concluded that self-enhancement more probably encourages the learner to continue putting effort into learning, whereas self-derogation would probably hinder his learning process. So, there are affective elements at work in constructing self-perception, and it is important to address them when attempting to modify hindering learner behaviours.

As mentioned earlier in this section, another perspective is the influence of the mismatch between self- and others' (usually teachers') perceptions, such as reported by Schulz (2001), Levine (2003) and Jernigan (2004) in their works in the U.S.A. In New Zealand, Griffiths and Parr (2001) explored learners and teachers' *perceptions* about learners' use of language learning strategies. In one stage of the study learners assessed their *self-perceptions* about using strategies by responding to the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL: Oxford, 1990), while teachers' *beliefs* about strategy use among students were assessed with a new questionnaire (ILLS: Griffiths & Parr, 2001). The study highlighted teachers believed their students had limited awareness of learning strategies and so use these infrequently, which did not match the students' results. Other studies also in the last decade or so have investigated the impact of mismatch between teachers' and learners' perceptions (Noels, Clément & Pelletier, 1999). Thus, the study of self-perceptions of competence at a given time is central to language learning, but it is more important to the understanding of the

learner as self because in the end, “competence… becomes part of the self-concept, part of what people measure themselves by, and part of what other people esteem them for” (Dweck & Molden, 2005 p. 122).

The pertinence of this research is clear when comparing the foci of some research in international contexts summarised above, to the summary of research in the field in the Mexican context (discussed in Chapter 1), where the gap in the study of self-perceptions of competence is salient. In Chapter 1 I have referred to learners’ self-perceptions of communicative competence as understood by learners’ concepts of self-efficacy and self-confidence. Self-efficacy and self-confidence are continuously interacting within the individual and with the social context to build the individual’s self-perception in a particular dimension, and their interaction is represented in a diagram in the following sub-section. To further understand how self-perception, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986b, 1997), and self-confidence (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983) interact, it is time to turn to a discussion of these dimensional constructs.

Self-efficacy and self-confidence: Shaping self-perceptions

For this research, self-efficacy and self-confidence refer respectively to cognition and emotions in the dimension investigated (communicative competence in EFL) and represent the two characteristics (thoughts and feelings) of self-concept displayed in Figure 3. By exploring students’ self-efficacy and self-confidence, it is possible to address the question of how university students perceive their own English communicative competences. Self-efficacy is a construct about cognitive elements (sometimes called beliefs) of self-perception in a particular dimension as presented in Figure 5 below. The same diagram presents self-confidence as knowledge plus lack of anxiety referring to the emotional content of this dimensional construct. I am convinced that both self-efficacy and self-confidence act

together to shape an individual's dynamic self-perception (Clément et al., 1994; Dörnyei, 2001a) and as such have been investigated in this research. Self-confidence determines attitudes and effort towards the TL situation (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983) by comprising both certainty in the knowledge about the TL and feelings of sufficiency in using it—or at least, not excessive debilitating anxiety.

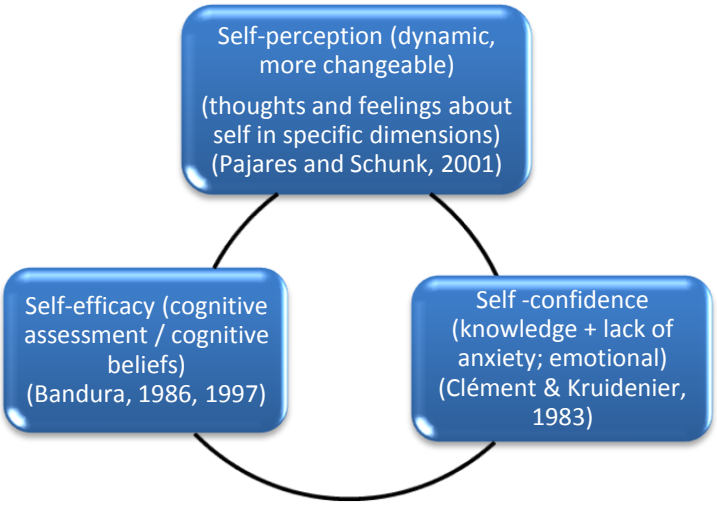

Figure 5: Self-perception; cognitive (self-efficacy) and affective (self-confidence) assessment

So self-confidence refers to feeling no doubts when using the TL because there is enough knowledge to get us by in specific tasks. Feeling no doubts can be expressed in many ways; for example, just by agreeing to engage in a communicative event in EFL the person is exhibiting that required assuredness. But how can we separate the feeling of assuredness from the certainty in the knowledge, or from the self-efficacy belief? Even though in the diagram of interrelations and interactions shown above (Figure 5) self-efficacy and self-confidence are separate, these constructs interact very closely to inform and shape self-perception. In fact, self-confidence implies satisfaction with the level of proficiency in the TL that is very similar to self-efficacy, but while self-confidence is *emotional* satisfaction, self-efficacy refers to satisfaction with the *cognitive* resources one has.

This research operationalised self-confidence in terms of feelings of assuredness about one's communicative abilities (see Chapter Five for details). Thus, this review highlights the definition of self-confidence as lack of nervousness or debilitating anxiety in using the TL, which is closely related to self-efficacy. The rest of this section discusses self-efficacy in more detail.

A social cognitive theory of self-efficacy

Albert Bandura has developed a social cognitive theory of self-efficacy since the 1960s. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I refer to the body of his work written since the 1980s (for example Bandura, 1986b; Bandura, 1989, 1991; and Bandura, 1997) as central to my inquiry. Also, recent studies of self-efficacy in the field of language learning and teaching (for example Wang, 2005; Goker, 2006; Graham, 2007; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Mills et al., 2007), support this discussion.

Bandura (1997) defined efficacy as "the exercise of human agency through people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired effects by their actions" (p. vii). Achievement covers different aspects of life: "cognitive, social and behavioral subskills… into integrated courses of action …[which] serve innumerable purposes" (Bandura, 1986b p. 391), and Bandura recommends measuring self-efficacy in terms of relevant domains and situations. It is necessary to exercise a reflective process to construe self-efficacy by making sense of experiences, exploring and evaluating self-perceptions, and deciding to alter thoughts and behaviour, and the emotional weight associated with this process. It is suggested that the chosen courses of action and skills depend on a belief in success *prior* to the individual's engagement in the behaviour (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Ozer & Bandura, 1990; Cervone, Kopp, Schaumann & Scott, 1994). In terms of the present investigation, if university students have low or negative self-perceptions of communicative competence, their self-efficacy

assessments make them unlikely to engage in foreign language speech acts (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford, 2003; Wang, 2005). According to Bandura (1997), “unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act” (pp. 2-3).

In foreign language use, individuals engage in communicative language acts more often if they perceive they can understand the language and also be understood. That efficacy belief can determine how the person applies cognitive, meta-cognitive, affective and psychological resources needed as Bandura (1997) also suggested:

> Such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (p. 3).

Perceptions of self-efficacy—and self-confidence are fundamental for individuals to achieve their goals of becoming successful language users. It is important to remember that both self-confidence and self-efficacy perceptions are very specific. Self-efficacy constructs vary by gender (Pajares, 2002), and age, as studies about children (Wang, 2005; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007), adolescents (Pajares & Urdan, 2006; Chan & Lam, 2008), and young adults and adults (Fields, 2005; Goker, 2006; Mills et al., 2007; Truxillo et al., 2008) suggest. Also, self-efficacy constructs assess diverse dimensions of human action (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña & Schwarzer, 2005), and similarly to self-concept, self-efficacy constructs may be stable throughout time unless changes occur in the self-aspect being assessed (Bandura & Locke, 2003; Graham, 2007; Pajares, 2008). Self-confidence on the contrary, is a more volatile construct that depends on very subtle aspects of human interaction.

Self-efficacy expectations differ from outcome expectations in that self-efficacy expectations mean the individual believes (expects) he can achieve a goal (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Outcome expectations include what the achievement of such a goal will produce, which is

independent of the individual's belief in his achievement (Bandura, 1986b). For example, in the EFL learning context, a self-efficacy expectation is that a learner believes he can use the foreign language, or pass a test, or order food at a counter, while an outcome expectation is what the learner obtains or gains from speaking English, regardless of whether he can or not. Outcome expectations relate to the fulfilment of varied aspirations such as goal achievement, social recognition, financial improvement, better job opportunities, self-satisfaction, and so on, and can be observed immediately—at the food counter the individual gets food—or in the future. Outcome expectations were strong influences in the present exploration of students' self-perceptions, while self-efficacy expectations were low and also strongly influenced participants' responses in this inquiry (see Chapter 6).

Additionally, in the same way individuals' perceptions of self-confidence and self-efficacy determine their personal choices and actions, these decisions result in effects on the surrounding social context that eventually produce new social views affecting the same individuals. That is, following Cooley's looking glass metaphor (Cooley, 1964), external or social pressure (the environment) and internal or self-pressure (personal issues and behaviours) are essential in the reciprocal interaction between the self and the social context (Bandura, 1997). It is true that individuals shape their own assessments of self-efficacy and self-confidence and outline the kinds of interactions with the social group in which they are willing to engage to negotiate, react, and develop collective efficacy (Krueger & Dickson, 1994). However, it is also true that what the social collective holds as valuable in terms of abilities will sway individuals' assessments. So, self-perception in a particular dimension—including self-efficacy beliefs and self-confidence—is construed individually by continuously comparing the influences of the internal pressures against those of the social group pressures, similarly to the manner in which self-concept is construed. The struggle of the social and personal pressures combining to create an individual's self-perceptions for each dimension is represented in the following diagram in Figure 6.

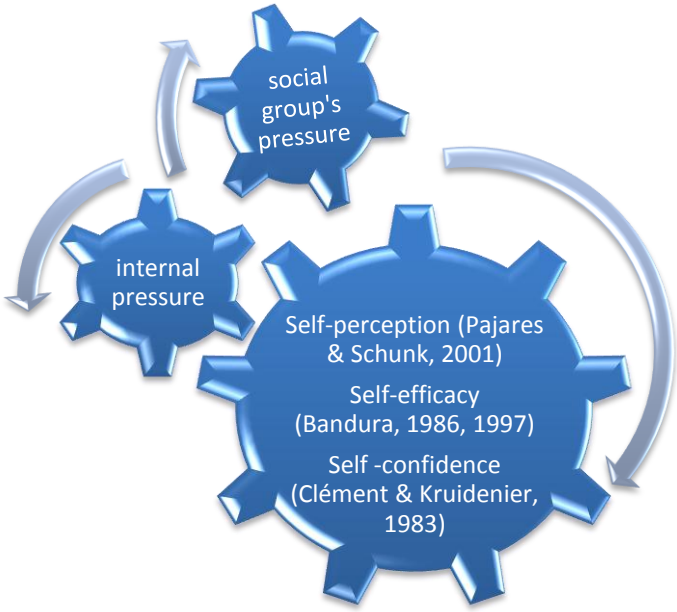

Figure 6: Internal and external pressures affecting self-perception construction

Bringing this discussion to the field of language education in Mexico, it is important to understand the setting. For instance, where the social pressure values speaking English with a native-like pronunciation (Clemente & Higgins, 2008, see Chapter 2), a person whose efficacy in pronunciation of English is not at that level will feel not confident in that particular linguistic aspect. This assessment as inefficacious in pronunciation is also affected by the individual's self-influence as discussed below.

Self-influence as determinant of perceived self-efficacy and self-confidence

Perceived self-efficacy is shaped, either positively or negatively, by self-influence, among other issues such as social persuasion and somatic and emotional states (Bandura, 1986b, 1989, 1997; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). A person's self-perceptions of efficacy are swayed by reflection on the self (actual or imaginary) and the situations confronted. When a person visualises desired self-efficacy outcomes, there is a reflective process which is "…strongly colored by preconceptions of oneself and others" (Bandura,

1986b p. 6), and by levels of confidence. In choosing what actions to take, individuals measure their preconceptions of ability to the skills and resources to determine how good or bad they believe they are in a particular dimension. This outcome is the individual's self-influence (Bandura, 1986a; Bandura & Locke, 2003; Fields, 2005), which informs the feelings of self-confidence that the individual will experience for that particular dimension. When individuals face similar future situations, their self-influence will weigh self-perceptions of efficacy to make decisions about how to act. Individuals can then choose to engage in an activity and repeat past actions and strategies when outcomes are acceptable; or they can choose to change them (if outcomes are unacceptable). On the other hand, individuals may decide to completely avoid engaging in activities—if their self-perceptions are such that no action taken will achieve the desired outcome (Bandura, 1986a, 1986b; Allwright, 1998). Self-influence sways individuals' self-perceptions and appears to be a determinant for people's agency as was the case with participants in this research. Participants' self-perceptions of communicative competence in English were such that they consistently avoided engaging in EFL speech acts, even when these were available in their environments.

Although it is reasonable to accurately assess one's self-efficacy, accurate assessments may not always result in accomplishing a task or in exhibiting desired behaviours. In these cases, Bandura (1986b) proposed that "the efficacy judgments that are the most functional are probably those that slightly exceed what one can do at any given time" (p. 394); this means that the self-confidence the individual exhibits plays a significant role in reaching actual achievement. Williams and Burden (1997) suggested that "learners with high self-efficacy may well perform better on achievement tasks than some apparently more capable peers" (p. 129). Although they do not make claims about how individuals' self-confidence is swayed, Williams and Burden agree with Bandura in that higher self-efficacy beliefs result in higher functionality in the tasks at hand. I would add that self-confident learners (learners who may

not feel as anxious or stressed by the EFL speech event) may feel they can do better on achievement. Even if this claim is not always supported by empirical data (Horwitz, 1988; Horwitz & Young, 1991), self-confidence is central to the person's self-assessment of ability and to his decision to persevere in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001a; Dörnyei et al., 2006). In the EFL learning dimension, exercising self-influence translates in terms of determining how functional the learner measures his language skills and linguistic resources and strategies leading to increasing the learner's self-perceptions of cognitive efficacy (Elias & Loomis, 2002; Vrugt & Koenis, 2002) and emotional self-confidence (Wang, 2005; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Mills et al., 2007).

However, as I have discussed in this thesis, foreign language learning is not a purely cognitive domain; language learning involves emotional responses from the learner towards the teacher, the teaching content, and the culture behind that content (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Arnold & Brown, 1999; Dörnyei, 2001b). These emotional responses are part of the construct of self-confidence. Furthermore, beyond the language classroom, an individual needs to feel self-confident in order to express his ideas in a foreign language during everyday situations and an understanding of the influence of confidence in language learning is important. Arnold and Brown (1999) indicated that "the affective side of learning is not in opposition to the cognitive side. … Neither the cognitive nor the affective has the last word, and, indeed, neither can be separated from the other" (p. 1). It is in this coexistence of the cognitive with the affective elements of the self that self-efficacy and self-confidence contribute to building students' self-perceptions (refer to Figure 6). Moreover, the coexistence of cognitive, affective, and individual and social expectations (Cervone et al., 1994) helps in the construction of judgmental selves that assess us in terms of our aspirations and our realities: one's actual and imaginary selves.

Theoretical framework and focus of this research

In sum, this investigation is framed by the understanding of aspects of self theories as discussed above. Since communicative competence in English is one particular dimension of human knowledge, the focus of my research was investigating the cognitive (self-efficacy) and affective (self-confidence) elements comprising individuals' self-perceptions in that domain. However, the research questions stated in Chapter 1 pointed to not only devising a means to investigate what kinds of self-perceptions students had among a single cohort in university, but also to exploring the social and personal pressures that affected the construction of self-perceptions identified. This focus in a temporal dimension is highlighted with red coloured shapes in Figure 7 below. Self-perception of communicative competence, my main research focus, is represented as a component of the broader and more stable self-concept; the red arrows coming out of the social group and personal influence elements represent my interest in exploring the influences that shape self-perception in this dimension.

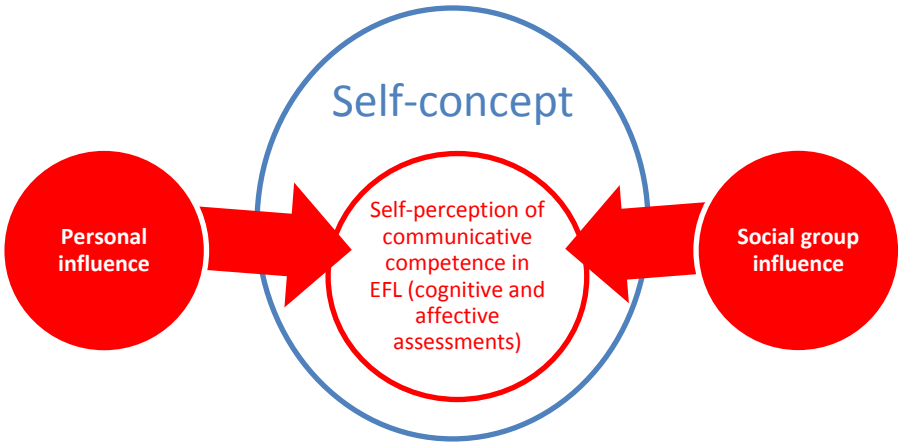

Figure 7: Self-perception of communicative competence in EFL, personal and social group influences

The depth of my research implied that, to understand the learner better, I assessed the collective self-perception of the members of the student cohort in my sample, and then listened to voices from that cohort telling about the pressures that coloured individual self-perception. In this exploratory study I listened to student voices and interpreted what they were saying in terms of what I call emerging themes; that is, I tried to name the pressures and influences building self-perceptions. The emerging themes may be used as frameworks for further research eventually, but in the meantime they serve as backgrounds on which to base the discussion (Chapter 6) of the data provided by participants in this study. The second section of this chapter now turns to those theories emerging from the data interpretation.

Emerging frameworks: themes derived from the data

Aspirations: Ideal and ought-to selves

Possible selves, particularly what is known as ideal and ought-to selves (Dörnyei, 2005) were relevant to this investigation as they appeared to influence students' self-perception assessments and as they reflected the social views participants regarded highly. Dörnyei (2005) explained that the focus of personality psychology has adapted to accept the dynamic nature of the self as a system, and "as a result, recent dynamic representations of the self-system place the self right at the heart of motivation and action, creating an intriguing interface between personality and motivational psychology" (p. 98). One of these intriguing interfaces is the concept of *possible selves* (see, for example Dörnyei, 2001a; Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei et al., 2006; and especially Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) that is credited to the work of Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius (1986). Possible selves were defined as "the ideal selves that we would very much like to become. They are also the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming" (Markus & Nurius, 1986 p. 954). Most important to this research is that according to Markus and Nurius (1986), "an individual's repertoire of

possible selves can be viewed as the cognitive manifestation of enduring goals, *aspirations*, motives, fears, and threats" (p. 954, my emphasis).

Possible selves refer to future and past self-concepts, which closely link to current self-perceptions, but are different yet. Still, possible selves have a certain realism to the individual in that they represent what he hopes for (aspires to become), fears or fantasises. Markus and Nurius (1986) also emphasised that possible selves are personal constructs, which are influenced by social comparisons:

> An individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of *possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular sociocultural and historical context* and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences. Possible selves thus *have the potential to reveal* the inventive and constructive nature of the self but they also reflect *the extent to which the self is socially determined and constrained* (p. 954, my emphasis).

This investigation revealed some of the images of possible selves that participants have in terms of communicatively competent professionals and, in those images the weight of the social group is evident, as discussed in Chapter 6. In the meantime, I introduce two constructs that Dörnyei (2005) also adopted and adapted, namely *ideal self* and *ought-to self* (Higgins, 1987) and that became salient to this research too.

The ideal and ought-to selves derive from one's aspirations and hopes, those of significant others, and the social group's influence in a similar manner to the possible selves. Also, possible, ideal and ought-to selves are temporal constructs that may change in different stages of a person's life, or they can appear or disappear as the person interacts with the social environment. However, while possible selves refer to positive or negative images, both the ideal and ought-to selves refer only to the positive or constructive norms and aspirations of the individual and the collective. That is, the ideal self refers to the positive features one would like to have, and the ought-to self refers to the positive features one (or someone influential on one's view) perceives he is expected to have. Although there is

plenty of room for debate (Dörnyei, 2005; MacIntyre, MacKinnon & Clément, 2009) when discussing ideal self theory, I am convinced that it is a relevant framework to make meaning of some of the data gathered in this investigation because comments of participants referred to the *competitive university graduate* and to future images each had (refer to Appendices B and C).

The ideal and ought-to self constructs refer to future expectations and aspirations, which are different for each person because not all people regard these in the same light. For example, retaking the discussion about Maslow's hierarchy of needs, someone whose aspirations have not overcome the maintenance level may not have a fully developed ideal self, but his ought-to self may be a central directive in his life. On the other hand, someone who aspires to self-actualisation may view the attainment of his well developed ideal self as the only focus of his endeavours. At this point it is important to remember that self constructs are not only temporal, but they are also individually and culturally influenced. Furthermore, having a developed ideal self system does not mean ideals will be met (MacIntyre et al., 2009).

In terms of communicative competence, being able to use English for communication must be incorporated into the ideal and ought-to selves, in order for the individual to engage in any exercise orientated to practising or improving his competence in this domain. If the person does not perceive communicative competence as ideal or required, such as the matriculation EFL assessment expected of competitive university students, for instance, it is possible for the individual not to develop an ideal self about it. On the other hand, even if the individual has developed an ideal and ought-to self system about communicative competence, the weight of current self-perceptions may keep him continuously short of his ideal and ought-to selves, resulting in effects such as the ones found in this research. For example, some effects observed among participants are feelings of hopelessness, frustration,

and concern about competence in communication in the foreign language, discussed in Chapter 6.

The constructs of the ideal self and the ought-to self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009b) are related to self theories and were incorporated into the diagram showing the focus of this research (Figure 7) since this theme could be interpreted from the data gathered. Ideal and ought-to selves are linked to both the social group and the self in as much as they relate to what the social group regards as aims or aspirations for each of its members, and as long as the individual also values and accepts those aims. However, what the social group or context considers ideal and ought-to selves sometimes may not be accepted by the person; in other cases individuals regard possible selves as desirable but unattainable. In yet other situations, ideal and ought-to selves are viewed as achievable only through consistent and continuous effort and time and therefore individuals distance themselves from the social group's expectations. Whatever the reason, as long as the individual considers he does not match his ideal constructs, ideal and ought-to selves do not become part of his self-concept, and remain apart as an aspiration. This was the case in this research and so, the ideal and ought-to selves theory has been incorporated into this discussion of possible frameworks for understanding the data gathered.

Also, ideal and ought-to selves theory has been added to the diagram showing the focus of my investigation since it was one of the emerging themes interpreted. However, this theory has not been explicitly investigated during the course of this research and its role in building self-perception is yet unclear. The resulting model is displayed in a new diagram (Figure 8) where ideal and ought-to selves were incorporated in a red dashed-lined oval, separate from self-perception and the larger self-concept. The red dash line circling both the social group influence and the personal influence represents the dependence of ideal and ought-to selves theory on these individual's influences.

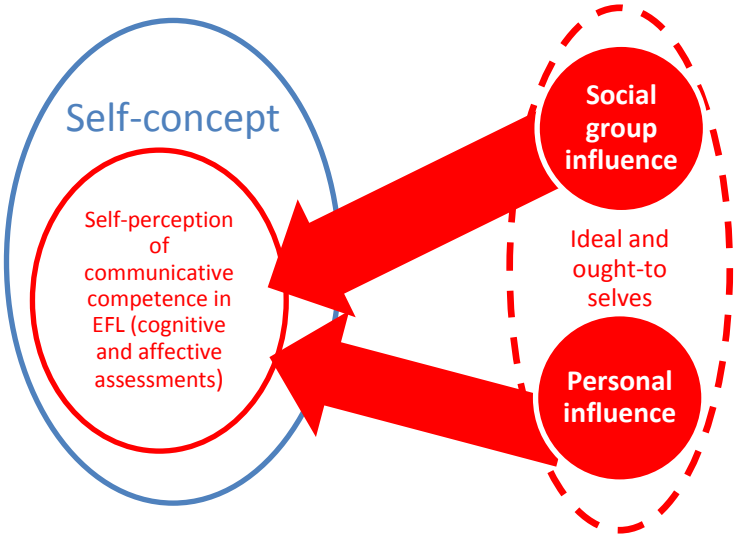

Figure 8: Role of ideal and ought-to self theory in this research

Let us turn towards another theme that emerged from this data driven research, namely the concept of identity of the language learner.

Identity and social identity in language learning

Although in this decade substantial research on identity has been conducted in second language settings (Gutiérrez Estrada & Cortez Román, 2006; Rubenfeld et al., 2006; Block, 2007; McInerney, 2008; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), the notions of identity and social identity in language learning are applicable to the EFL context. Bonny Norton has been the champion of identity research in this field, from her work in bilingual contexts in Canada (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2002) and South Africa (Norton Peirce, 1989). Norton (2000) defines identity in the language context as referring to:

> How a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future… I foreground the role of language as constitutive of and constituted by a language learner's identity…language is not conceived of as a neutral medium of communication, but is understood with reference to its social meaning (p. 5).

From that definition we can draw another connection to individuals' self-perceptions in that they are an understanding of the individual and his world as well. Also, a link to the possible selves and ideal and ought-to selves theories is perceivable if one reads between the lines of those *possibilities for the future*. But the most important element of Norton's definition is by far the manner in which she understands the relationship of the individual and his language: language has social meanings, and these meanings are transferred through language to one's identity. From a cultural perspective, Kramsch (1998) takes a similar position when she states that:

> It is widely believed that there is a natural connection between the language spoken by members of a social group and that group's identity. By their accent, their vocabulary, their discourse patterns, speakers identify themselves and are identified as members of this or that speech and discourse community. From this membership they draw personal strength and pride, as well as a sense of social importance and historical continuity from using the same language as the group they belong to (pp. 65-66).

The difficulty that Kramsch sees is how to identify which group one belongs to. She emphasises that language gives a person a culture, but the same person may have more than one language and associate with more than one culture—as is the case of bilinguals around the world (Holme, 2002; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005). So which identity does he take? For Kramsch (1998), the learner will use the language that helps him identify with the culture he needs at the moment, for example by using language crossings. That is, identity is not conceived as a fixed, but rather as a construct of multiple possibilities, which can be accessed according to the needs and contexts of the person.

We have discussed in Chapter 2 that the choice of English as a global language has meanings of imperialism for some (Cortez Román, 2006; López Gopar & Khan, 2007); however, for the participants in this research, English meant a window to new and better opportunities in a distant future (refer to Chapter 5, and Appendices B and C). Contrastingly, in contexts where language learners are in close daily contact with TL speakers, power becomes an issue. Opportunities for interaction with the TL culture in these contexts are assumed to be frequent

and common, but they are in reality controlled by the senior participants, that is, those who have claims of nativism or experience in or with the TL culture (Norton Peirce, 1995). For instance, Norton (Norton, 2000) illustrates this with a case from her research; Saliha is a newcomer to the community and Madame Rivest is her employer and daily point of contact with the TL and culture. Norton suggests that Madame Rivest has control over Saliha's valued symbolic (the target language) and material resources (meaning the wages received). This control is exerted in a manner that makes it virtually impossible to overcome: Madame Rivest only communicates the absolutely necessary for work with Saliha. Norton argues that in this example, Madame Rivest controls the access that Saliha may have to the culture by controlling the linguistic interactions they have. This is possible, according to Norton, because of the power Madame Rivest has over Saliha's wages.

But even in FL contexts where close daily contact with the TL culture is not possible, identity is present and individuals exhibit their identities much in the manner that Kramsch suggests, that is according to their needs. For instance, take film fans in Mexico; if they are watching a foreign film not produced in Spanish (and the film is not dubbed into Spanish), they will probably listen to the sound in the original language. The reactions they have to the language spoken (laughter, surprise, etc.) identify them as individuals who understand that foreign language, making them participants of a special temporary culture of film fans who understand a particular FL. The act of reacting to the language heard identifies these film fans and sets them apart from the larger group in the cinema who cannot understand the FL. This type of situation in EFL contexts and the power issues found in second language cultures support what Norton (2001) and her colleague Toohey (Norton & Toohey, 2002) call investment and imagined communities.

Investment (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) is seen as a complex social and historical relationship between the language learner and the TL. It is a mixed feeling of desire to

practise the TL but at the same time express one's own self and his position in that group. Investment can be expressed by FL learners when they appropriate English and give it their accent (as discussed in Chapter 2); it can also be expressed when people like Saliha accept Madame Rivest's control of her access to the TL because she sees her control of material resources as more important. When people have a strong investment in the language, their decisions about it are measured differently than when the relationship is not real, that is, when there is an imagined community to access. Norton (2001) developed the concept of imagined communities from the meanings that becoming a fluent speaker of the TL have for different people. The characteristic of this concept is that all meanings are based on unreal situations; in other words, individuals envision, or imagine the TL community that makes them want to belong.

These images are construed from personal past experiences and factual knowledge about the imagined community. The importance of imagined communities lies in that, if one connects these imaginary communities to the ideal self system described in the previous section, both constructs imply judgments about what one aspires to become in terms of language speaking. As I have stated above, these constructs are pertinent to the present research since some of the data expressed by participants may be understood under their premises, but it is important to remember that empirical data were not collected about these emerging constructs during this exploration.

As we have seen, the study of the influences building self-perception is a complex task not only because it is a subjective one, but also because of the close connection these themes have. Among the emerging themes presented in these two subsections, we have discussed the influence of ideal and ought-to self theory, as well as the link to personal and social identity. The influences and connections of the social group, the individual's assessments, and these theories do not have clear cut lines showing where one ends and the next begins; instead, the

theories appear as blurred touches of one to another as they integrate the self-perception of a person (see Figure 9). Moreover, individuals' self-perceptions are further associated with value laden judgments that have their roots in attributions about success and failure among a social group. The next subsection will discuss what these attributions are and how they appear to influence an individual's self-perception.

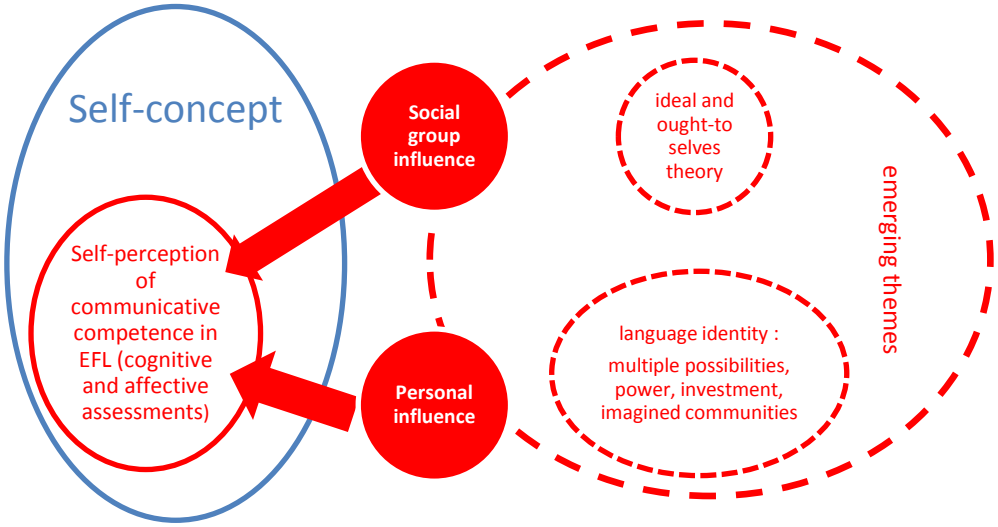

Figure 9: Language identity

Attribution theory

Attribution theory is relevant to my research since one of its main premises is that "[man] wants to know why an event has occurred—to what source, motive, or state it may be ascribed" (Weiner, 1972 p. 312). In my research I intended to explore not only self-perceptions of communicative competence of university students, but also the influences associated to those students' self-perceptions. The quantitative data yielded by the questionnaire of self-perceptions of communicative competence were further explored to qualitatively identify some of the attributions that participants gave to their self-assessments.

Although Fritz Heider (1958) has been acknowledged as the founder of attribution theory by Bernard Weiner (1972, 1992), Weiner has been recognised as its main (Dörnyei, 2005) or at least most notable proponent (Williams & Burden, 1997). Weiner (1972, 1992) suggested that individuals decide to perform a task because of the judgments of success or failure they make, which affect individuals' expectations for future performance. Once individuals decide to become involved in performing a task, Weiner (1992) identified four causal attributions for success or failure at that task: effort, ability, task difficulty, and luck. Also, later research has established that the outcomes of performance can be attributable to intrinsic motivation, interest, teacher competence, mood, and influence of others (Williams & Burden, 1999; Noels, 2001, 2003). Weiner's attributes were discussed by participants in this research, while most of the later attributes (except for the influence of significant others and teacher competence) were not discussed equally. Attribution theory has been included among the emerging themes in the theoretical focus diagram as seen in Figure 10.

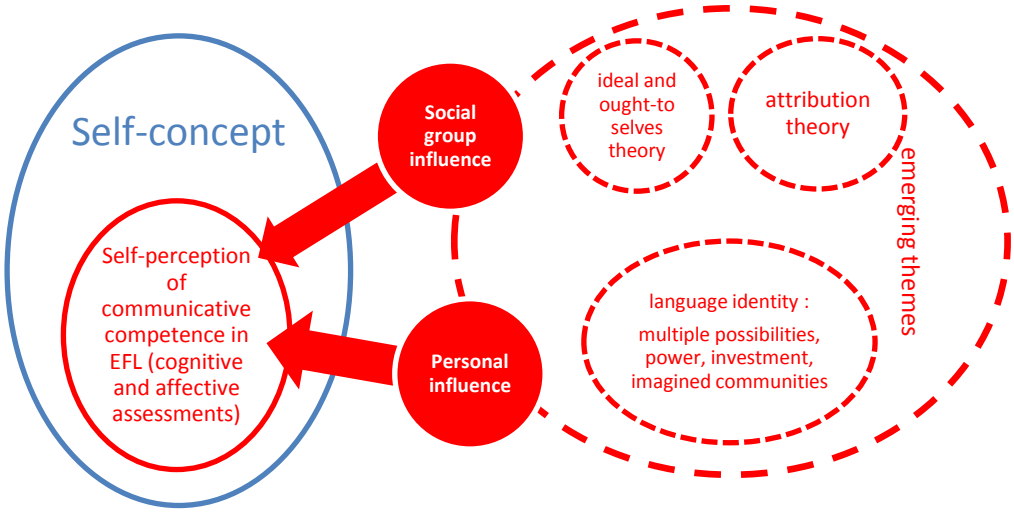

Figure 10: Attribution theory

Causal attributions were discussed by Weiner (1972) in his earlier work in a two-dimensional model considering locus of causality—internal or external position to the

learner—and stability—the potential modification of attributes over time. Later on, another dimension was added to the model: control. Causal attributions could be further labelled as controllable or uncontrollable by the learner (Weiner, 1986). If the individual perceives attributions as controllable, and that there is high probability of achievement, he will assign them judgments of success. On the contrary, if attributions are perceived as uncontrollable, and probability of achievement is reduced, the learner will assign judgments of failure in this domain. In any case, the causal attributions that an individual possesses seem to be influential in the field of learning a second or foreign language (Williams & Burden, 1997; Noels, 2001, 2003; Jernigan, 2004; Dörnyei, 2005; Schunk, 2008). In order to have a clearer view of how the three dimensions of causal attributions for success and failure (locus of causality, control and stability) work together, I designed Table 2 adapting it from Weiner's (1972) earlier work.

Table 2: Causal attributions for success and failure (adapted from Weiner, 1972)

	Control Controllable / Uncontrollable	
	Locus of causality Internal / External	
Stability Stable Unstable	Ability	Task difficulty
	Effort	Luck

Some authors have proposed that success-oriented students have a good balance of effort applied to the task, appropriate use of strategies and ability in the FL (Williams & Burden, 1997, 1999); that is to say that successful students attribute the outcomes of their interactions to their own ability and effort more often than to luck or difficulty of the tasks at hand. Constructing learners' attributions for success seems to require a complex balance between self-perceptions of competence, neutral external influences and favourable social contexts (Weiner, 1972; Williams & Burden, 1999). However, it is relevant to note that most causal

attributions are context-specific and task-specific; for instance, language learners will assess the outcomes of their involvement in a foreign language situation according to the event and the task required. Let us say, for instance, that someone considers luck a success attribute because they do not prepare but still get good grades in exams; or someone thinks the communication task is very easy and that is why he could manage it. For different tasks or domains, or for different conditions, learners may have different attributions.

An example of context-specific causal attributions is a qualitative study with undergraduate and graduate students in an American university (Tse, 2000). Tse found evidence linking teacher or classroom environment to students' attributions of success. On the other hand, failure was also attributed among other things to the teacher and the teaching method, and the student composition of the courses. Tse (2000) suggests that "the attribution of student success and failure to teacher-student interactions and classroom atmosphere should raise our collective consciousness as a field regarding how our actions as instructors have a long-term impact on student attitudes toward FL study" (p. 82). Attributions are closely linked to the perceptions of self that individuals have. Just as attributions of success are constructed, Weiner (1972, 1992) proposed that repeated failure (or perception of lack of control or success) may influence individuals to create negative perceptions of themselves in those tasks or contexts, and thus link these negative self-perceptions to attributions of failure. However, there is a line of thought (Dörnyei, 2001a; Graham, 2004, 2007) that suggests that encouraging students to become more flexible and adaptive in their assignation of attributions may lead to better outcomes since attributing failure to other issues than ability could lead students to not give up on their challenging tasks.

The intricacy of the connection between self-perception and causal attributions seems to play a relevant role in foreign language learning and teaching (as the works of Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Dörnyei et al., 2006; and Masgoret, 2006, among others suggest). As discussed above,

Tse's study showed that participants assessed their capabilities in the foreign language class, and attributed some of their success and failure to the teacher and the environment surrounding them in the classroom. In that research, participants may not have increased their self-perception of competence since their assessments for both success and failure depended on elements beyond their control. On the contrary, assessments rendering positive outcomes within the individual's control provide the basis for developing self-efficacy and self-confidence beliefs, leading to self-perception of competence, because success is conceived as possible within one's inventory of resources. Moreover, Ema Ushioda (1996) indicated that the aim is that all learners (and particularly language learners) "attribute positive outcomes to personal ability, and negative outcomes to temporary shortcomings that can be remedied" (p. 13). Weiner (2005) determined that ability and effort put into the task are the ideal combination of attributes for success that result in confidence in one's self-perceived competence.

Since the goal of language learning is to achieve some level of competence in a FL, it is in the benefit of each learner, and of the whole language class, to have students who can attribute their success to their own ability and effort. It is important that the behaviours that students associate with success in the language class are achievable within their own resources so that students continue their endeavours to learn. Attribution theory is then another emerging theme on which the influences on self-perception shown by participants in this research can be examined and discussed. The last of the theoretical constructs emerging from the data is the concept of willingness to communicate (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991; MacIntyre et al., 1998), which is described in the following subsection.

Willingness to communicate

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is expressed as the decision of the learner to engage in specific communicative acts with specific interlocutors in the TL. The concept was developed by McCroskey and Richmond (1991) in the context of communication theory. WTC implies the convergence of several elements for individuals to decide they are ready for such engagement in communication at the state level, that is, they are ready for interaction in particular communication situations. McCroskey and Richmond (1991) warned that WTC is determined in terms of how the individual perceives his competence rather than of what the accurate assessment of competence is. This argument accounts for the number of learners with limited communication repertoires who perceive themselves as competent and thus will show a high WTC; on the other hand, those learners with objectively assessed high competence who perceive themselves as incompetent will very likely show a low WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998). WTC is relevant to this research as an emerging theme, that is, the qualitative data obtained from participants suggested that there was some relationship between self-perception of communicative competence and WTC. Particularly, the participants' unwillingness to communicate in English even in hypothetical situations appeared to be related to low self-perceptions of communicative competence in a manner that requires further investigation (Chapter 5).

MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1998) developed a model that applies to second and foreign language learning and comprises different individual affective-cognitive and social context variables to explain their relationship in the process that learners go through in order to express WTC. The pyramidal model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998) contains six layers which will be described here from bottom (Layer VI) to top (Layer I) of the pyramidal shape (Figure 11). Empirical investigations of the model (Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004; Cao & Philp, 2006; Liu & Jackson, 2008) have been conducted in FL contexts resulting in evidence of the applicability of WTC to these settings. This supports

the proposition of the WTC model as an emerging theme in this inquiry. However, the placement of all WTC elements in a hierarchy suggests a static or fixed process going from level to level until the individual achieves communication. It may be that this process is a hierarchical one, but the construction of the necessary underlying self-confidence and self-efficacy is a dynamic process where all elements interact in unconstrained manners with one another as I have proposed in the diagrams in the previous subsections (refer from Figure 5 to Figure 10). Nonetheless, the WTC model is a relevant theme described below.

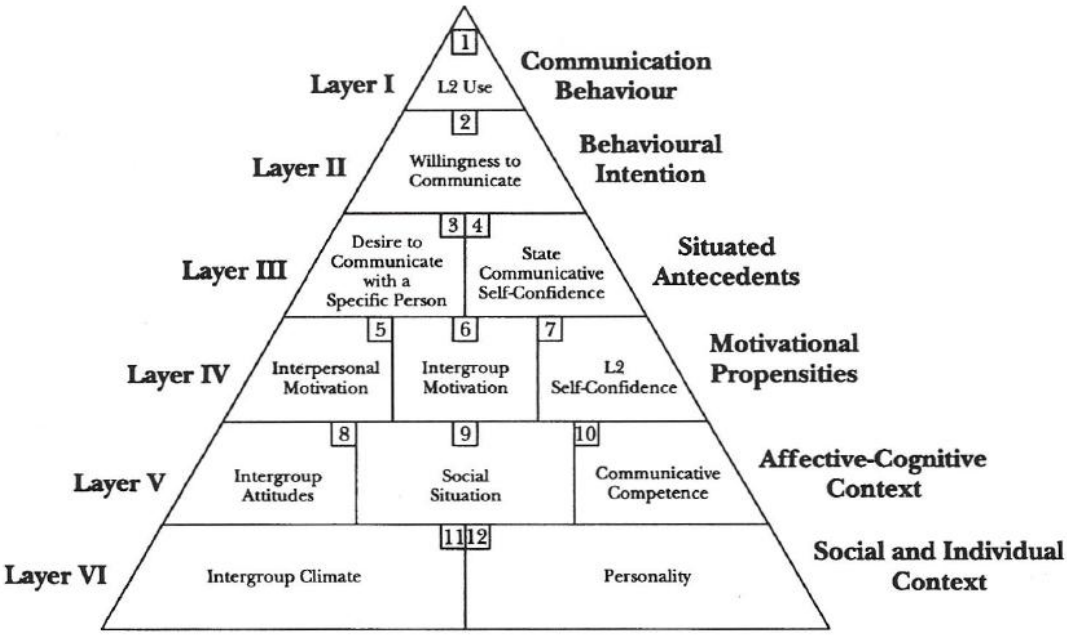

Figure 11: Willingness to Communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998 p. 547).

Starting at the bottom, Layer VI (MacIntyre et al., 1998) positions the social and individual contexts that comprise the intergroup and genetic influences set prior to the learner's birth and in which the role of the learner is more that of a recipient. As MacIntyre and his colleagues (1998) said, "[they] regard the intergroup context and the personality of the learner as variables that set the stage for L2 communication, but that are less directly involved in determining a learner's WTC at a given time" (p. 558). However, for the purposes of my research, the fact that this layer contains those types of variables is important: this layer positions some of the elements that I have called the social group and

personal influences, such as structural characteristics of the group, which affect one's self-perception. On the other hand, intergroup climate includes several specific elements that were not easily observable in the FL context where my research took place, such as attitudes and values regarding the community of the TL and motivation in L2 settings. Moreover, personality is also a variable that was beyond the scope of this inquiry and as such, the core of Layer VI is broader than the aim of this thesis.

Layer V, on the contrary, includes the learner's affective and cognitive context; the intergroup attitudes, social situation and communicative competence possessed by the individual, which are the focus of the present study. Intergroup attitudes and social situation in Layer V are interlinked to the communicative competence of the learner, and this link gives the learner a sense of control (perhaps self-perception) about where he stands towards the FL, without actually engaging in communicative situations. In my research intergroup attitudes could be interpreted as the regard participants had for EFL and its speakers, instead of integrativeness and fear of assimilation, for example. The social situation in this layer, however, is very closely focused on the final goal of achieving communication, as MacIntyre and his colleagues (1998) indicated "the social situation is a composite category describing a social encounter in a particular setting" (p. 553). At this level, each particular setting requires the use of limited variations with congruent speech acts, and that specificity is not at the core of this inquiry. Also in this layer, communicative competence is defined in terms of five competencies (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997), linguistic, discourse, actional, sociocultural, and strategic competences, which differ from the definition applied in this thesis. So, despite these differences, Layer V can be used to understand the position of the data gathered in this research because it includes the subjective assessments derived from an individual's self-perception, which was central to this research.

Layer IV covers the motivational propensities of the learner: interpersonal and intergroup motivation and self-confidence. I have applied Clément and Kruidenier's (1983) definition of self-confidence: core knowledge of communicative competence plus lack of anxiety, in my research. However, at this level of the WTC model, self-confidence refers to a general or constant feeling (called trait self-confidence) instead of a momentary emotional reaction to a situation (called state self-confidence). My thesis investigated trait self-confidence as an element influencing self-perception, and so, this layer is relevant. Furthermore, in Layer IV, the interrelation of intergroup motivation (belonging to a group—or identifying with one), interpersonal motivation (roles the actual self plays in that group), and language trait self-confidence reflect a sense of identification or affiliation to a social group and control of one's performance in terms of the group's expectations. The interrelation of the aspects in Layers IV and V suggests that most of the frameworks identified in this research can be addressed around these layers, which makes them central for the purposes of my research.

Up to this point, social and individual contexts, affective-cognitive context, and motivational propensities all weigh on the learner as part of his enduring or long term influences. These influences are part of the learners' more permanent self-concept and also of his dimensional self-perception and will not change much across everyday situations. Contrarily, the top three layers of the pyramid include the more transient contexts or influences which are dependent on specific time and situations leading to communication acts, and which are not the focus of this research. For instance, Layer III positions the situational antecedents for the learner; here is a desire to communicate with a specific person, which arises from motivational propensities, and also a state-level communicative self-confidence—that is, self-confidence in particular tasks and settings and among particular individuals—both being transient and dependent on the particular situation. Self-confidence is distinguishable at this level because its component anxiety and perceived competence are particular to the given situation (MacIntyre et al., 1998). If state anxiety is increased, state perceived competence

will decrease and this balance will also affect the desire to communicate in that particular moment that the person will feel. However, state perceived competence derived from state self-confidence is a different phenomenon to the one central to my investigation.

Also not central to this thesis is Layer II comprising the behavioural intention of the learner, that is, his established willingness to communicate in the particular situation and with the person in question in the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998). At this point, the learner has decided to communicate when the opportunity arises. All the enduring influences discussed before, the social and individual contexts, the affective and cognitive considerations, and the motivational propensities founded in feelings of affiliation and negotiation of control, are put into motion here to make the learner engage in situational communication if there is a chance. The learner's decision to engage in communication leads to Layer I in the pyramidal model: communication behaviour, where the learner is supposed to use all of his linguistic, communication, pragmatic, and cultural repertoire in the foreign language to interact with particular individuals in specific moments in time (MacIntyre, 2007).

As I said in the beginning of this subsection, the WTC model is very comprehensive and appears to fit the situational characteristics of many EFL contexts. Theoretically speaking, WTC integrates the fields of linguistics, language learning and communication, while practically WTC is "the final step in preparing the language learner for communication…in authentic interaction with another individual, given the opportunity"(MacIntyre et al., 1998 p. 558). In other words, the model aims to explain the process an individual undertakes up to the moment he actually communicates using the FL, while the research questions addressed in this investigation refer to exploring self-perception and the influences underlying these, while not engaged in communicative acts. That is, the focus of this research is not on the process to achieve communication at any given time, but on a reflection on the elements weighing the individual's self-perception positively or negatively. Furthermore, empirical

evidence about the applicability of the WTC model to the Mexican context as described in this thesis is not available yet.

In sum, WTC may be used as a theme to further explore the underlying influences behind individuals' self-perception of communicative competence in the Mexican context, but how this is possible remains to be investigated. In the meantime, WTC is included in the diagram of the focus of this research along with the other three themes emerging from the data analysis as shown in Figure 12.

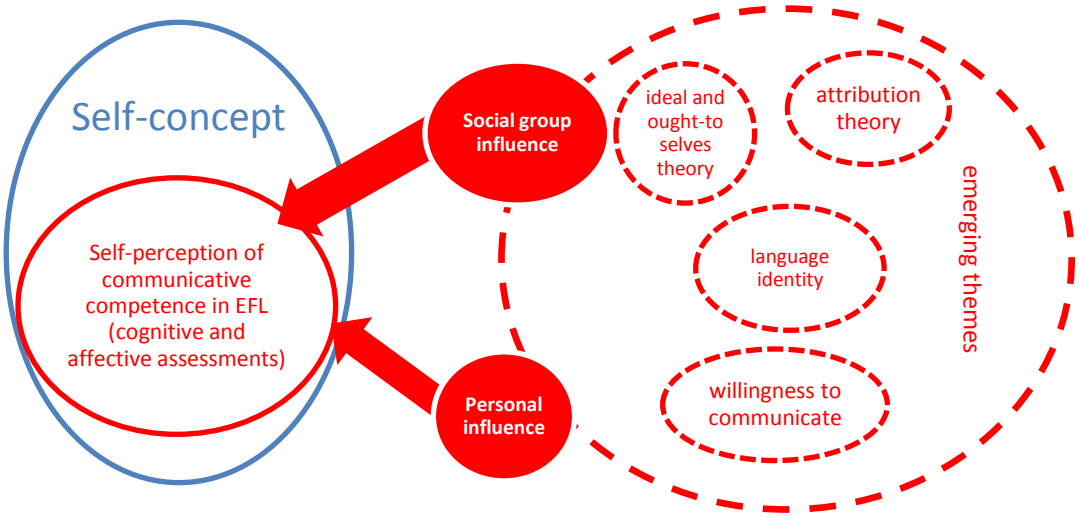

Figure 12: Emerging themes: Influences on self-perception

Summary

Chapter 3 has presented the theoretical underpinnings of this research, both the theories central to the research questions in this investigation and the emerging theories that could be identified from the data analysis conducted. The first section was devoted to a discussion of aspects of self theories that help build one's self-concept. For example, the contribution from Maslow's hierarchy of needs was the idea that the individual has aspirations and aims to achieve, which help in building self-perception. Later on, I pinpointed a working definition

of self-concept after having established that a clear and universal definition may not be possible. That definition included the thoughts and feelings about one's self, as understood from social group and personal influences (see Figure 3) and more importantly, it established self-concept as a large and stable construct covering all dimensions of self. My working definition provided a setting for self-perception, which was defined as the thoughts and feelings about one's self *in a particular dimension*, and which is more dynamic and temporal than the larger self-concept, of which it is part.

Self-perception of communicative competence (defined in Chapter 2) in English and the influences building it were the focus of the present research (see Figure 4). Also, self-efficacy and self-confidence were identified respectively as the cognitive and affective assessments forming self-perception, and which directly receive the influence of the social group and personal assessments (see Figure 5). These were the questions guiding my inquiry into learner's views. In order to address the main research questions stated in Chapter 1: how first year university students perceive their own communicative competence as EFL users (in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence), what are some influences in building students' self-perceptions, and from where those influences derive, I decided to conduct a study including self-perceptions of varied university students. Moreover, in order to gather data that represented those varied students, I decided to explore a cohort of university students from different disciplines, so that a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and self-perceptions were included in this research. Furthermore, in order to reach trustworthiness in this inquiry, rich data were gathered from students' discussions about influences on self-perception. The rationale for these and other decisions regarding my research design are presented in Chapter 4.

However, before turning to Chapter 4 it is relevant to stress that as a result of the decisions I made, there were rich data from students about what construed their social group and

personal influences (Figure 6). These data reflected students' voices from discussion groups and required to be interpreted onto emerging themes. In the second section in this chapter I have described those theories since they may help understand the influences building students' self-perceptions (see Figure 12 displaying the four emerging themes listed in this section). The theories identified namely ideal self and ought-to self, language identity and social identity, attribution, and WTC, may in fact colour the influences of personal and social group assessments affecting self-perception and as such are discussed later on in Chapter 6. However, I decided the focus of the present research was not to empirically test these theories, and so it was not possible to make strong inferences about the nature of their interaction in the context. Nonetheless, these theories were important and had to be discussed in this literature review chapter as part of the theoretical underpinnings of this investigation.

In sum, the theoretical focus of this research (presented in the first section in Chapter 3) was on the investigation of self-perception in the dimension of communicative competence, which revealed other theories that were also discussed in this chapter in the section about emerging themes. This literature review chapter, together with the description of the Mexican educational setting in Chapter 1 and the positioning of English as a prominent global language and the definition of communicative competence presented in Chapter 2 have informed this investigation. I have made methodological decisions to design an inquiry that matched needs of the research and the culture in the setting of the study; these decisions and the philosophical views underlying them are introduced in the following Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore self-perceptions of first year undergraduate university students concerning their communicative competences as users of English as a foreign language. Chapter 4 aims to discuss the methodological choices I made in order to address the research questions presented in the introduction to this thesis. However, methodological choices are informed by an analysis of the context (Chapter 2) and the literature (Chapter 3) about the inquiry, and do not only include deciding which methods and procedures are most appropriate to the research, but also require establishing philosophical positions and explaining personal decisions of the researcher. Thus, this chapter first discusses my personal philosophy towards the role of the researcher, and the rationale for the research choices, which guided the approach taken. That discussion then leads to reviewing the measures and instruments that suited the context of my study, some of the limitations encountered, and how these were addressed. Finally, a discussion of the analyses conducted on the data gathered brings this chapter to a close.

The role of the researcher in social research

Naturalistic approaches and qualitative inquiry stress the need "to retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated… The imposition of external form and structure is resisted, since this reflects the viewpoint of the observer as opposed to that of the actor directly involved" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000 p. 22). Contrary to quantitative research, it is not the aim of qualitative approaches to discuss what the researcher has summarised from his interpretation of the scientific method in an inquiry, but rather to investigate a phenomenon in the most trustworthy manner possible. In fact, Cohen et al (2000) point out that qualitative approaches are characterised by "[the] need to examine situations through the eyes of participants rather than the researcher" (p. 22), among other features. But the researcher is still the interpreter of those data for the rest of the world, so as Miller (2003) puts it, when

interpreting qualitative data, “the main guide to validity is the researchers’ own subjective, intuitive understanding of the situation” (p. 267); if there is limited understanding on the part of the researcher, there may be misinterpretation. It is then important to remember to consider the participant as a whole human being (as discussed in Chapter 3) entitled of human attributes: “we are entities who are capable of monitoring our own performance. Further, because we are aware of this self-monitoring and have the power of speech, we are able to provide commentaries on those performances” (Harré and Secord, 1972 cited in Cohen et al., 2000 pp. 20-21). For naturalistic and qualitative approaches, participants are the main source of data through accounts of their actions and interpretations of the social world. And so it is expected that “the influence of the researcher in structuring, analysing and interpreting the situation is present to a much smaller degree than would be the case with a more traditionally oriented research approach” (Cohen et al., 2000 p. 26).

However, what is more important than whether to call oneself a positivist, naturalist, pragmatist, quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods researcher is the possibility to understand the advantages and disadvantages that different research methodologies inherently convey. That is, to accept that different philosophical perspectives of research require varied methodologies and methods of inquiry, and that social research benefits from the use of this variety of options. In other words, to adhere to an inclusive philosophical perspective that does not constrain one’s choice of methods since the value and relevance of varied types of research inquiries are recognised. Moreover, there is a need for researchers to be informed of the differences in perspectives and movements in the field since this knowledge makes them more able to deal with a variety of methods, tools and techniques that best suit each research. This knowledge also helps professional development of researchers since, in Crotty’s (1998) words, “attending to recognised research designs and their various theoretical underpinnings exercises a formative influence upon us” (p. 14).

As Bazeley (2003) reminds us, having particular research philosophies does not mean we cannot ask different questions utilising varied methods to find their answers; as she explains, "it is now generally agreed that the paradigmatic approach taken by the researcher does not preclude particular types of data or necessarily particular tools for data analysis" (Bazeley, 2003 p. 389). Likewise, it is possible to choose from a variety of methods based on suitability of research purposes:

> If it suits their purposes, any of the theoretical perspectives could make use of any of the methodologies, and any of the methodologies could make use of any of the methods. There are typical strings, to be sure,…, but 'typical' does not mean 'mandatory' (Crotty, 1998 p. 12).

So, is it possible to breach the chasm that differentiates research paradigms and positions? It seems so, if the researcher is clear about his role in each particular project, and the level of abstraction where bridges can be built to link paradigms. In other words, although ontological dichotomies do not allow overlaps, a person's research philosophy may indeed be inclusive with the aim of improving social research.

Inclusive research philosophy: Paradigm or method wars?

Traditionally there has been a very clear distinction between dichotomies for ontological views and epistemological stances in the philosophy of research, particularly in educational research (Pring, 2000b). A researcher has had to indicate a clear ontological position in the positivist-naturalist dichotomy, and in the epistemological objective-subjective dichotomy. One has been supposed to adhere to either one or the other of these philosophical perspectives in order to be considered a rigorous researcher (Pring, 2000a). Researchers' views could not include a position in more than one of the accepted movements at the risk of being considered inconsistent (Newman & Benz, 1998; Pring, 2000a, 2000b; Creswell, 2003; Miller & Brewer, 2003).

Additionally, it was not possible to attempt to use varied methods in one research study, or to consider that different methods could be compatible because of the differences in their underlying philosophical paradigms (Crotty, 1998; Pring, 2000a; Bryman, 2004). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2003) summarised the traditional view about combining research methods: "compatibility between quantitative and qualitative methods is impossible due to the incompatibility of the paradigms underlying the methods. …researchers who combine the two methods are doomed to failure due to the differences in underlying systems" (p. 7). Furthermore, although Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil (2002) proposed a multiple methods approach for research design, they accepted that different methods are impossible to combine because "qualitative and quantitative research methods have grown out of, and still represent, different paradigms" (p. 50).

However, the alleged impossibility of employing qualitative and quantitative methods is centred on the nature of philosophical positions rather than on the nature of the methods per se (Hammersley, 1992; Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2001; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, Clark, Gutmann & Hanson, 2003; Bryman, 2004; Dörnyei, 2007). Philosophical positions may be at war with one another, but this does not mean that methods must be at war as well. At the level of a methodological perspective, the impossibility to combine methods has been questioned not only by Sale and her colleagues (2002) with their multiple methods approach, but also by other works on mixed methods research published since the late 1990s (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Greene & Caracelli, 2003; Maxcy, 2003; Morse, 2003; Newman, Ridenour, Newman & George Mario Paul DeMarco Jr., 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Burke Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). This line of questioning has resulted in an opening in the field for debating the nature of research methods (Hammersley, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Newman & Benz, 1998; Punch, 1998; Creswell, 2003). Consequently, the opening has made it acceptable to create research designs that employ mixed or multiple methods approaches (Newman & Benz, 1998; Pring,

2000b; Sale et al., 2002; Burke Johnson & Turner, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Creswell et al., 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003; Pring, 2004; Allwright, 2005) to the extent that purely quantitative or qualitative use of methods is becoming a rare occurrence in educational and social research (Maxcy, 2003).

Current inclusive perspectives of philosophy of social and educational research acknowledge that a researcher's ontological and epistemological positions are not at war with methodological choices (Pring, 2000a, 2000b; Maxcy, 2003; Pring, 2004, 2007). Researchers are not faced with either / or situations that may restrict the methodological scope of a research project since, as Miller (2003) accurately pointed out, "there is nothing, in principle, that says that the holding of a particular ontological position… commits one to a given methodology" (p. 424). Moreover, Bryman (2004) even argued that although "paradigms are incommensurable, it is by no means clear that quantitative and qualitative research are in fact paradigms" (p. 453). Research philosophy perspectives have thus opened up to accept and include varied choices of methods to investigate the characteristics of human action, which are applicable to this research.

Ontology and epistemology

Social research deals with human action and aims to present an understanding of the social world derived from explorations of reality. What constitutes reality (our ontology of knowledge) and how we know about it (which is our epistemology) are defined by the researcher's philosophy (Newman & Benz, 1998; Miller & Brewer, 2003; Pring, 2004) and here again, we are faced with options. Ontological positions go from the existence of one objective reality beyond human interpretation (created in the mind, based on rationalism and traditional logic), to on the other hand, a social construction of many particular realities (construed by each person) where there is no single or unique truth (Miller & Brewer, 2003;

Pring, 2004 p. 232). Many of the social institutions that surround us and exert influence on our observable behaviours (such as religion and school) posit a *one truth* standpoint, but I believe there are different interpretations of what is true or real (Crotty, 1998 p. 64). I also believe that the researcher's participation in the inquiry (as an observer, data collector, or active participant) influences people's constructions of reality. Furthermore, I agree that people's realities are not constructed exclusively from factual evidence, as positivism would require, but they are also products of unverifiable belief systems (Crotty, 1998 pp. 24-25) sustained by particular cultures at particular times; in this sense my philosophical perspective tends towards a social constructionist stance.

Social constructionist knowledge is not contradictory to a realist but relativist ontological philosophy where "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998 p. 42). Social constructionism implies that humans attempt to understand the social world and that this understanding is not individually constructed (Crotty, 1998; Newman & Benz, 1998; Creswell, 2003). Data gathered under a social constructionist approach provide the foundations for generating theories that will express the views of those participants involved in the construction process, since claims expressed under a social constructionist perspective cannot be "absolute or truly generalisable" (Crotty, 1998 p. 16). Moreover, as Creswell (2003) contended, there can be as many social constructions of as many realities as there are participants sharing views in the inquiry.

Epistemological perspectives imply that we know reality either objectively—as recipients of what is considered real without participating in shaping it, or subjectively—reality is affected by the act of being observed or interpreted and is particular to each person (Creswell, 2003). Keeping in mind that this thesis emphasises the role of the person as central to any inquiry

into his self-perceptions (as mentioned in Chapter 3 and in the first section in this chapter), I argue that reality is subjective, and it is possible for individuals to intervene in the constructions of their realities. These realities are subject to change when the individual, the culture or the social context also change (Crotty, 1998). That is, the study of the social world involves understanding actions of individual human participants with their own feelings, beliefs, and perceptions who do not always conform to either / or situations as I have discussed in Chapter 3. There, I positioned the focus of this inquiry where the influence of the social group and the self affect one's self-perceptions in different dimensions and these in time, are subsumed onto one's self-concept (see Figure 6). Because of this complexity, understanding individual's actions and their subjective accounts of those requires a pragmatic view (Rescher, 2001; James, 2008) to make sense of knowledge and realities emerging (Thorne, 2005).

A pragmatic position towards research

Pragmatism is a highly debated research perspective precisely because of its characteristic flexibility (Rescher, 2001; Maxcy, 2003; Miller & Brewer, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Thorne, 2005; Dörnyei, 2007). According to James (James, 2008), pragmatic knowledge refers to rules for action that makes sense to us. Pragmatists concentrate on observing consequences of actions and finding applications for solutions, and the problem itself is the core of the pragmatic inquiry. Pragmatism does not rely exclusively (Rescher, 2001) on one interpretation of reality (objective or empirical; participating or detaching) or one philosophical system since, as James (2008) claimed: "a pragmatist… turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power" (p. 29). Pragmatism is interested in the results, the consequences of the facts, and not in the

principles arguably governing thought. As such, methodologically speaking, pragmatism allows different methods to be used according to the problem addressed in each inquiry (Newman & Benz, 1998; Maxcy, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003), and fits with an inclusive research philosophy.

According to Creswell (2003) "truth is what works at the time" (p. 12), while James (2008) emphasised that truth "becomes a class- name for all sorts of definite working-values in experience" (p. 36). James and much later Creswell highlighted the temporality associated to truth under a pragmatic view, which allows pragmatic researchers to choose methods appropriate to their particular times and contexts. Furthermore, James and Creswell implied that for similar studies in other periods, other solutions may be viable. As a pragmatist, I believe there are varied solutions to problems and that a person can use as many different solutions as he can find. Moreover, I believe that research can occur in all dimensions of human action from philosophical debate to every day life situations. I approach every day life situations with a pragmatic frame of mind, thinking of what has to be done to achieve the goal or solve the problem facing me. To me it is obvious that my personal perspective would influence my philosophy of research as well (Dörnyei, 2007).

The focus on action of pragmatic thought allows me to believe there is no need to exclude resources if they can provide the solution to a problem. Furthermore, I agree that in choosing only one method, the researcher risks limiting the scope of the study and the number of solutions available (Pring, 2000a, 2000b; Creswell, 2003; Maxcy, 2003; Pring, 2004). Indeed, appropriateness to purpose when choosing research methods has been promoted by researchers and institutions in the last decade or so (Newman & Benz, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003; Gorard, 2004) as a justification to develop mixed or multiple methods approaches to research.

Mixed methods approach to research

As discussed previously in this chapter, choosing mixed or multiple methods in a single study or research programme is supported in part "because all methods of data collection have limitations, [and] the use of multiple methods can neutralize or cancel out some of the disadvantages of certain methods" (Creswell et al., 2003 p. 211). I agree that all methods have limitations and therefore "methods should be mixed in a way that has complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses" (Burke Johnson & Turner, 2003 p. 298) in order to take the best qualities of each method. However, although methods of inquiry can complement each other and enrich research outcomes (Bryman, 2004), at the same time I cannot believe that mixed methods approaches are the panacea to all methodological questions per se (Dörnyei, 2007). Furthermore, as I mentioned in the ontology and epistemology section in this chapter, I do not agree with the incompatibility of quantitative and qualitative research methods (Sale et al., 2002) because I see all research methods as human creations and as such, subject to human manipulation and adaptation. What I believe is that quantitative and qualitative research methods have been defined to have certain characteristics and to serve certain purposes better. As human constructs, both types of research methods can be called upon when those characteristics and purposes are met, either on their own, or in any combination or sequence, to explore or solve a research problem. I think it is the researcher's responsibility but also his right to keep in mind what the possibilities of the different methods are.

Therefore, I do not think that by choosing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods for one study, a researcher is contradicting himself philosophically (Bryman, 2004). I think that the decision to use particular methods for research should be consciously made. As I have mentioned earlier, researchers should consider the characteristics of the research questions of each study and choose to apply what will work best instead of choosing exclusively the predominant methods in the field. For example, Sale and her colleagues (2002) provided a

solution to the quantitative-qualitative debate based on the use of what they call a multiple methods approach:

> The fact that the approaches are incommensurable does not mean that multiple methods cannot be combined in a single study if it is done for complementary purposes. Each method studies different phenomena. The distinction of phenomena in mixed-methods research is crucial and can be clarified by labelling the phenomenon examined by each method (p. 50).

I agree that it is then the responsibility of the social or educational researcher to seek to understand the questions, issues or phenomena under study clearly, in order to be as unbiased as possible in his selection of appropriate methods, strategies, and instruments. Thus, if a particular method satisfies all research questions, only that method should be used; on the contrary, if some questions need other methods to be employed, this should be accommodated. In any case, the literature in the field cannot prescribe which methods to use or to indicate when to use them in a particular mixed methods inquiry, because as Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003) pointed out, "the mixed methods paradigm is still evolving, [and] the onus is on mixed methods researchers to provide detailed procedural and interpretational information to their readers" (p. 362). The field is still producing vast types and forms of interpretational information and a need to categorise the varied types of output existent is emerging. Thus, choosing mixed methods of inquiry in one research study and accurately documenting the interaction of such methods in the research may be the solution to social inquiries that require this kind of research dynamism.

The previous discussion is intended to sustain the rationale of my thesis, on which I elaborate as follows.

Rationale for the mixed methods approach to the study

Taking a pragmatic position, my research was initiated by a problem I identified: the lack of information about self-perceptions that undergraduate students in a Mexican university had;

the dimension of self-perception I focused on was knowledge and ability to use EFL for communication (as discussed in Chapter 3). The intention guiding my research was to search for information from the students' voices to preserve the integrity of the data (Cohen et al., 2000). I have argued that individuals' accounts reflect the influences of each individual's self-perception, and also of the socially constructed meanings accepted by them (see Chapters 2 and 3), and that with time, these influences become part of the individual's larger self-concept. This argument is relevant since I intended to explore the individual and social influences affecting students' self-perceptions in a particular context and time in university, from the varied realities of a cohort of students majoring in different disciplines.

Considering the characteristics of the university setting (particularly the variety of educational backgrounds in EFL that students had as described in Chapter 1), and in order to describe what self-perceptions of communicative competence in EFL prevailed among first year students at the time, quantitative research was the most appropriate method to start this exploration. Although traditionally it has been suggested that only qualitative research can be exploratory, Punch (1998) argued that " …quantitative research can be used for theory generation (as well as verification), and qualitative research can be used for theory verification (as well as generation)" (pp. 16-17). In this case, exploratory quantitative research worked well to start grasping the realities of individual students' self-perceptions by means of a survey of the cohort (Cohen et al., 2000). Questionnaires were favoured since the cohort of students did not know me and questionnaires also offered respondents the opportunity to complete them without assistance—minimising the researcher effect (de Vaus, 2002; Sale et al., 2002; Bryman, 2004). The idea was to collect data that closely represented participants' self-perceptions of communicative competences as EFL users. Accuracy of the data was important since as Newman and Benz (1998) proposed "any interpretation of data is only as good as the accuracy of those data" (p. 110).

After having data to accurately depict the prevalent self-perceptions of the cohort, my exploratory study aimed to obtain further details of the underlying influences sustaining those self-perceptions, and for this, a survey was not the most suitable option anymore (Bryman, 2004). At that stage, the need to incorporate a qualitative research component became salient. Moreover, my research questions required inquiring whether any underlying influences exposed or revealed were shared by participants. This analysis could be done using individual interviews and then comparing the data looking for similarities, but this implied perhaps more emphasis on the researcher and her effect on the research. I decided instead to use focus groups, a qualitative research instrument that centres on participants' discussion and negotiation of meanings, and which in this research permitted respondents to decide among them whether they shared influences and views. The nature of focus groups and the type of questionnaire I used in this research are discussed later on in the section about research instruments in this chapter, since this rationale is intended to justify the approach taken. In combining the use of a questionnaire and a qualitative component, this research became a mixed methods study, where both elements of the inquiry complemented each other (Bryman, 2004). Following a pragmatic philosophy, I took a mixed methods approach (Creswell et al., 2003; Maxcy, 2003; Newman et al., 2003) to data collection since using both types of methods was appropriate to address the research questions stated in Chapter 1.

However, as I also said in Chapter 1, the questions that originally moved me to undertake this study were different to the research questions that made this final version of the thesis. I call the questions and discussions in this final version *the main study* of my research, and the original and discarded ones *the pilot study*. I think it is time in this rationale to present a summary of the pilot study in order to understand how it helped define the research questions for the main study.

The pilot study: What not to assume

The pilot study aimed to investigate affective variables assumed to be determinant of university students' negative or low self-perceptions of communicative competence. However, the pilot study was based on one assumption: that students' self-perceptions of communicative competence were always negative and below the reality of their abilities. I understood that I had developed such assumption from conversations with former students and from a review of the literature on affective variables to which I refer in this subsection. Pilot study data analysis revealed that the data gathered addressed the pilot's research questions, but the process of operationalisation of these questions did not originate from a sound hypothesis (Cohen et al., 2000), and did not lead to deepen the research.

The questions about affective variables investigated did not provide any links to assess students' stable self-perceptions of communicative competence. Also, the results of the pilot study were not statistically significant, showing there were not clear associations among language anxiety, intrinsic motivation and attitudes towards the TL culture among the participants. Moreover, statistically speaking, it was not possible to establish any association among the three scales implemented in the pilot study. In sum, the affective variables investigated in the pilot may or may not be relevant to self-perceptions of communicative competence among university students, but it was not possible to establish this from the data gathered. Furthermore, the question that was central to me more than the role of affective variables was why students lacked self-confidence in their efficacy in communicative competence in EFL after going through primary and secondary education. When preparing the conclusions of the pilot study I realised the question of how university students perceived their own communicative abilities had never been asked in that investigation. At that stage I decided to orientate my inquiry to actually ask a cohort of university students about their self-perceptions of communicative competence, and that became the main study in this thesis; this pilot study summary is a means to illustrate how the present research came to be.

Pilot study: Lessons taken forward in this thesis

In itself, the pilot study does not have a direct bearing on this main study about university students' self-perceptions of communicative competence. However, the pilot study informed my thinking and helped reshape the main research questions of this thesis. The usefulness of questionnaires as instruments of data collection in this university setting was shown in the participation of most of the students addressed, and the high response rate obtained (97%) suggested that administering the questionnaires during class activities was an effective approach. More important, it became apparent that the main question for the present investigation was how first year undergraduate students perceived their communicative competence. Also, the need to delve deeper into the influences on student self-perceptions in the EFL context seemed pertinent. This new focus orientated the redefinition of the research questions addressed in the main study of my work.

Main study: Addressing the research questions

The purpose of my research was to explore how students in their first year in undergraduate university studies perceived their own communicative competences in EFL, which were defined in terms of students' self-perceptions of efficacy and confidence. I have argued there is a gap in the information available at the university level in the Mexican context on these particular issues (refer to Chapters 1 and 2 for a discussion of this argument) that supported my decision to conduct a cross-sectional exploratory study of students' self-perceptions.

In empirical research the methods for collecting data include experimentation and direct observation, but in the social sciences, that is, in studies involving human beings, it is not common to conduct pure experiments and manipulate the independent variables present in

the phenomenon (Gable & Wolf, 1993; Cohen et al., 2000; de Vaus, 2002). There is indeed a need to identify all the variables of the participants' background to be controlled for and in the case of variables that are not representative of the population it is necessary to either eliminate them or assign them a fixed value. In order to control all the variables present in a phenomenon, it is possible to decide to design a longitudinal or a cross-sectional study; but in the case of this research, I decided to conduct a cross-sectional study as mentioned above. The advantage of cross-sectional studies is that they provide a general picture of the situation at a specific time, but their main disadvantage is the impossibility to include and assess any changes in the setting, or among the participants once the study has concluded (Cohen et al., 2000; de Vaus, 2002). Also, an exploratory study can highlight the ideas, concerns, preferences or as in the case of this research, the perceptions of the participants, but the findings of such a study cannot lead to definitive causal conclusions (Cohen et al., 2000). In fact, in a study such as the present one, my pragmatic philosophy of research and the limitations associated with the constraints of time and resources led to the need to make specific choices in terms of the methodologies that were likely to be more efficient in answering the research questions.

The overall purpose of such a study was to inform research and practice to suggest further lines of research; but a more immediate outcome was to provide data to assist in the understanding of students' assessments of their own linguistic abilities. EFL practitioners and university EFL curriculum and pedagogy policy makers would find these data useful to address the needs of future generations of university undergraduate EFL learners. I defined the research questions (see Table 3) prompted by my personal interest in EFL learning and teaching, from my review of literature, the comments of current and former students, and also from the lessons learned from the pilot study described earlier.

Table 3: Research questions of the study

1. How do first year undergraduate university students perceive their communicative competence (in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence) as EFL users?
2. What issues influence self-perceptions of communicative competence (in the terms stated above)?
3. From where do those issues derive?
Apart from the main questions above, other questions included were: a) How do learners cope with negative or/and positive self-perceptions? b) What do students think they can or should do to change their enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones? c) What do students think universities could or should do to help them to change enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones?

Mixed methods design

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Crotty (1998) does not see a problem with including varied methods in one single study: "we should accept that, whatever research we engage in, it is possible for either qualitative methods or quantitative methods, or both, to serve our purposes" (p. 15). Moreover, maintaining the divide between the use of qualitative and quantitative methods leaves social research open to the risk of "impoverishment of the range of methods deployed to try and solve important social problems" (Gorard, 2004 p. 4). As such, the varied types of research questions in the present study guided my choice of mixed methods of inquiry. For example, my design relied not only on quantitative data, but also on qualitative data to make meaning out of participants' responses, as explained in the rationale. That is, the research question concerning students' self-perceptions was different to the questions about the influential issues in constructing those perceptions. Differentiating the research questions (Sale et al., 2002), helped identify the types of data to be obtained from them and suitable instruments to gather them.

Types of data

There are three main research questions and three indirect or secondary questions in this study; the process of operationalisation of these questions determined the types of data needed to address them:

How do first year undergraduate university students perceive their communicative competence (in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence) as EFL users?

Type of data: quantitative

This question relates to overall self-perceptions of individual students about their abilities to communicate in EFL. The target population included participants from different disciplines in the university and the sample represented that interdisciplinary population. Responses to the CCQ facilitated calculating a composite overall self-perception value for the sample.

What issues influence self-perceptions of communicative competence (in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence)?

Type of data: quantitative and qualitative

This question relates to quantitative and qualitative data because analysis of both background data of the participants and underlying meanings and assumptions from their experiences as EFL learners can provide complementary responses. Background data were gathered by means of a series of quantitative items in the CCQ, which were then compared, contrasted, and statistically analysed to find patterns. Also, the focus group sessions gathered information about influences from past experiences as EFL learners directly from participants' voices, and resulted in "collective judgements" (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001 p. 4), so the focus group technique was the appropriate instrument here.

From where do those issues derive?

Type of data: qualitative

As the nature of my study was exploratory, I decided to leave this question open to students' responses. This was intended to elicit as varied and as many responses as possible from the group of participants. The focus group technique was appropriate for this question because it encouraged the consolidation of the group responses onto meaningful themes for the whole group.

How do learners cope with negative or/and positive self-perceptions?

Type of data: qualitative

Question four was also open-ended and addressed to participants to assess their collective judgements. As with the previous question, the use of the focus group technique was indicated.

What do students think they can or should do to change their enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones?

Type of data: qualitative

This question involved gathering participants' responses and ensuring that those individual responses were assessed against the focus group data to articulate collective meanings.

What do students think universities could or should do to help them to change enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones?

Type of data: qualitative

This question aimed to exploring and recording ideas and suggestions about the expectations of the cognitive and metacognitive support offered by the university. It was intended to

assess how much relevance participants saw in the role that the university plays in constructing their self-perceptions. The focus group sessions were thought to provide responses to this question.

After having identified the types of data required, it is pertinent to identify the targeted participants, the sampling procedures used, and the ethical considerations, to finally associate the data collection process with the research instruments chosen and the relevant data analysis techniques.

Participants, sampling decisions and ethical considerations

Participants

The participants sampled for the study were university students enrolled for the first time (in their first year) in cross-disciplinary undergraduate programmes of study. First year undergraduates were considered more likely to reflect on their educational experiences from primary and secondary education to provide responses than on their progression through university, which was important to this research. Female and male participants were included in the sample, and they had to be at least 16 years old.

As mentioned earlier, the academic and life experiences of participants were assumed to hold great importance or weight in their responses to both the quantitative and the qualitative stages of the study. Since certain schools in the university (such as the School of Music and the School of Nursing) offer programmes of study without academic credit, it was important to emphasise that participants had to have finished the primary and secondary education sequences offered in Mexico and be enrolled in first year tertiary education programmes.

Sampling procedures and access to participants

"The use of mixed methods sampling strategies can greatly strengthen the research design of most studies in the social and behavioral sciences" (Kemper et al., 2003 p. 283). This was true for the present study, so I decided to use stratified random sampling procedures for the quantitative component of this inquiry to compose groups of students from each of the schools represented in the university. The strata were the schools where students were enrolled. In stratified random sampling, there is a proportional representation of different subgroups within a population (Bryman, 2004).

The appropriate sample size (n) is drawn and compared to the population (N), obtaining a sampling fraction (n/N). This fraction yields the number of respondents necessary to maintain the exact proportion for each stratum (Bryman, 2004). Individual participants are then selected through systematic or simple random sampling (Miller & Brewer, 2003; Bryman, 2004). At the time of my study, the population of first year undergraduate students was N=1240 and according to the number of groups available in each school, and to relevant literature (Kemper et al., 2003), a sampling fraction of 30% was sufficient. The sampling fraction derived the number of participants from each school (n) which are summarised in areas of knowledge in the following table (Table 4).

Table 4: Population (N) and sample (n) of first year undergraduates

	N=1240		n=341	
Areas	Frequency	% of total N	Sample	Sample % by Area
Engineering	146	11.8%	49	33.6%
Law and Social Sciences	526	42.4%	184	35.0%
Health Sciences	373	30.1%	50	13.4%
Arts and Humanities	195	15.7%	58	29.8%
Total	1240	100.0%	341	27.5%

Table 4 shows the number of students actually enrolled in each area of knowledge in 2007 (in the column *Frequency*) and the percentage each area represents of the total population (*%*

of total N). Column *Sample* displays the numbers of students in the present sample by area; the last column (*Sample % by Area*) displays the sampling fractions by area. As can be seen, most areas of knowledge had a fair representation in the sample (29% to 35%), except Health Sciences (just over 13%) that was underrepresented. The reason for this low percentage of participants was the impossibility of obtaining access to students in one school in that area of knowledge. In total, 380 questionnaires were distributed and 372 students completed them, yielding a 97.89% response rate. The response rate obtained in my study is very high and it is quite an unusual outcome. One reason for the high response rate was that all students who completed the questionnaires were approached during class activities as the outcome of the pilot study suggested and this meant that, if students chose to complete the questionnaire they could hand it in immediately. A particular note that could be considered a methodological limitation is that classroom teachers were present at the time of the administration process, which may have given students a sense of obligation to complete the CCQ. Also, the higher percentage of respondents compared to the percentages yielded by the sampling procedure is attributable to the fact that when addressing students in their classes in schools in the area of Law and Social Sciences, more students than the numbers anticipated were present and they were willing to complete the questionnaire. I decided not to exclude those volunteers from the study just because I had reached the desirable number of that area since their willingness could signify they were interested in the research and might want to take part in the qualitative study.

For the focus group sessions, purposive sampling, that is "samples in which the researcher uses some criterion or purpose to replace the principle of cancelled random errors" (Kemper et al., 2003 p. 279), was chosen. In other words, the researcher selected participants on the grounds of each individual's qualification to "provide the most information for the questions under study" (Kemper et al., 2003 p. 279). It is pertinent to note that the use of the focus group technique for data collection had some limitations associated with the context. In the

qualitative study, participants were selected from the data obtained from the administration of the CCQ. The CCQ scores yielded three possible groups for focus group segmentation (Morgan, 1997): respondents who obtained low scores, medium scores, or high scores. Over 60 respondents indicated interest in participating in the focus group sessions, thus, three focus group segments, one for each score level were set up. According to Morgan (1997), participants in focus groups should have as similar backgrounds but at the same time as different attitudes towards the topic as possible, so I assigned participants to uniform groups according to their self-perception scores so that the group's underlying reasons and constructions could be explored.

Ethical considerations

Steps were taken to ensure that the implementation of the CCQ and the focus group sessions followed ethical requirements. The guidelines on ethics of BERA (British Educational Research Association, 2004) were followed as closely as possible in the study. Participants' age was estimated to be at least 16 years so, according to BERA's ethical guidelines (2004), it was not necessary to obtain parental consent for their involvement in the research. When students under 16 years old were identified in one area of knowledge their data were excluded from all analyses. The Ethics Committee of the School of Education of the University of Nottingham reviewed and approved the procedures for data collection proposed for this research (see Appendix D).

Although different authors use different labels for categories (Cohen et al., 2000; Bryman, 2004; Dörnyei, 2007), ethics in social research is preoccupied with four main and sometimes overlapping areas: informed consent, confidentiality, deception and harm to participants (Bryman, 2004). This research was conducted considering that no physical harm came to the participants, and in fact "educational research has historically engaged in research that

imposes either minimal or no risk to the participants" (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, cited in Dörnyei, 2007 pp. 64-65). In order to avoid deception and promote giving informed consent, prospective participants received clear information about the purpose of the study and a consent form; if they agreed to take part in the inquiry, they signed the consent form and kept the information sheet as a means to ensure they had all relevant information handy. Confidentiality was ensured since the identities of the participants were protected by changing their names to pseudonyms in the transcripts of the focus group sessions and in all discussions in this thesis. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I avoided social desirability bias effect (Bryman, 2004) because all prospective participants were first year undergraduate students who did not know the researcher as a university professor (I was on study leave at the time) and this measure also helped to reduce the researcher effect.

The research instruments

The discussion of the research context in Mexico and studies with Mexicans abroad that I presented in Chapter 1 revealed three relevant methodological issues. First, the investigation of students' self-perceptions is not a priority among established research bodies in higher education institutions. Second, the methods of data collection used seem to vary according to the research traditions of research bodies or institutions, or according to the interests of individual researchers. Third, the review did not indicate that mixed methods of data collection were more often favoured by researchers in the field. The studies reviewed in Chapter 1 had each implemented a variety of methods, from the quantitative questionnaire, to the qualitative autobiography, but only one study (Mora Pablo & Teague, 2007) included mixed methods to collect data in the same investigation. Additionally, Mora Pablo and Teague (2007) indicated that they used in-class observations as a means to triangulate the responses given by the teachers participating in their research. In the case of the present research, the choice of mixed methods of inquiry is prompted by the interest in exploring the

issue of self-perceptions beyond the scope of the assessments provided by responses to a questionnaire. My implementation of a mixed methods inquiry into individual perceptions is also justifiable in this Mexican university context because there is a methodological gap in the information available, as I have argued elsewhere.

In terms of international research in the field, communicative competence studies have assessed self-efficacy and other affective variables such as anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 1997; Yan & Horwitz, 2008), and foreign language attitudes (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Phillips, 1992), but self-efficacy and communicative competence do not appear to have been addressed together in the same scale. In the case of communicative competence, there are many scales or Can-do lists in the field of FL learning and teaching. Some are based on international standards, for example, the descriptors of the CEFR mentioned in Chapter 2 in this thesis. Also, there are several self-efficacy scales that measure self-efficacy in terms of percentages in varied dimensions. However, the purpose of my study was to measure learners' self-perceptions in the dimension of communicative competence in EFL in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence as discussed in Chapter 3, and the existing scales did not exactly match these and other characteristics of the setting.

Because of the inadequacy to the context of my research of most of the existing scales, I decided to create a new questionnaire to assess university students' self-perceptions of communicative competence. I chose a questionnaire since they are a good means to gather and record the views of large groups of individuals (de Vaus, 2002), and in the Mexican context, they are frequently used and university students are not unfamiliar with the questionnaire form (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998; Ramírez R. & Moreno Glockner, 2007). Additionally, as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, I chose to implement the focus group technique to gather collective meanings of participants as members of a university cohort. The qualitative questions in my design were presented to participants as

prompts during the development of the focus group sessions. The following table (Table 5) helps visualise the relationships between the research questions, the types of data required, and the research instruments selected to gather those data, which are all described in this chapter (Appendix E contains the full version of the CCQ questionnaire used in the main study and Appendix F outlines the focus group session schedule).

Table 5: Research questions, types of data, and instruments used in this research

Research questions	Type of data	Research instrument
Main research questions		
1. How do first year undergraduate university students perceive their communicative competence (in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence) as EFL users?	Quantitative (Calculating overall sample CCQ score)	Communicative competence questionnaire (CCQ) (López González, 2006)
2. What issues influence self-perceptions of communicative competence (in the terms stated above)?	Quantitative (Comparing background questions to CCQ score)	CCQ (López González, 2006)
	Qualitative (Analysing rich data)	Focus group schedule
3. From where do those issues derive?	Qualitative (Analysing rich data)	Focus group schedule
Secondary research questions		
How do learners cope with negative or/and positive self-perceptions?	Qualitative (Analysing rich data)	Focus group schedule
What do students think they can or should do to change their enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones?		
What do students think universities could or should do to help them to change enduring negative self-perceptions and maintain enduring positive ones?		

The communicative competence questionnaire (see Appendix E)

The communicative competence questionnaire was a completely different measurement tool to those used in the pilot study; and was specially created for the main study of my research. First I determined that the structure of the questionnaire would have at least two parts: one part eliciting background data, and a second part requiring participants to assess their communicative competence in terms of their perceptions of self-efficacy and self-

confidence. In the first part I asked respondents to record data about themselves (including school, EFL course, gender, and age) which were independent variables to be explored against the dependent variable representing a score of perception of communicative competence. I also asked questions about respondents' EFL learning experiences and practices up to the time they enrolled in university; these data were also investigated against perceptions of communicative competence to see if they were influences in constructing self-perceptions (as mentioned earlier and shown in Table 5).

The second section of the questionnaire contained a scale measuring communicative competence. The focus of this part of the inquiry was the quantification of each participant's individually and socially constructed self-perception of his ability to communicate in the FL. To achieve this purpose, I decided to construct a Likert-type scale; in which some of the items were intended to measure self-efficacy and some to measure self-confidence, which together made up my working definition of communicative competence. The items in the CCQ scale were adapted from ALTE's Social and Tourist Abilities *Can do* statements (ALTE, 2002b), which are related to empirical studies that helped develop the CEFR of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2001). This specific type of statements require yes / no answers from respondents and was selected as the basis of my scale because the statements cover socio-cultural dimensions of EFL use, but at the same time they "call upon a common core of language proficiency and can be expected to provide a valid point of reference" (ALTE, 2002a p. 24) for students with varying objectives regarding EFL and from different university disciplines. Additionally, comments from former students (both from old personal discussions and the open-ended questions of the pilot questionnaire) assisted me in designing items for the CCQ that were clear to Mexican students of EFL.

The CCQ scale is different to a *Can do* list in that the items in my scale refer to competence in two aspects of distance to the speaker (Kramsch, 1998; Bassnett, 2002; Byram, 2002;

Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005). Some of the items present situations in which the hypothetical social interaction (such as communicating with someone familiar) is closer to the speaker, while other items present settings in which the hypothetical social interaction implies more distance to the speaker (such as chatting with strangers on the phone). On the other hand, the CCQ is different from the *Can do* statements adapted from ALTE because CCQ refers to hypothetical situations or EFL tasks while ALTE statements describe more specific every day activities and circumstances, such as the following two examples:

1) CAN ask effectively for refund or exchange of faulty or unwanted goods

2) CAN bargain for what (s)he wants and reach an agreement (2002a p. 39)

The intention of the differentiation between *Can do* statements and the CCQ is to allow the respondent to make an overall personal assessment to represent his self-perception because mastery is a subjective concept. When assessing mastery, as ALTE recommends: "a definition is required in terms of *how likely* we expect it to be that a person at a certain level can succeed at certain tasks" (ALTE, 2002a p. 6: emphasis the authors). This yields chances of succeeding that are deemed accepted as mastery and lower chances that are not accepted. However, the CCQ does not require respondents to indicate mastery in EFL hypothetical tasks, even subjective ideas of mastery; instead, the CCQ requires respondents to indicate degree of agreement (rating), or acceptance of how accurately the criteria represent them in their own eyes.

Rating scales have been used to represent self-assessments of abilities, so I decided to use a rating scale to measure students' self-perceptions of communicative competence with the CCQ. Also, in Mexico, students are familiar with Likert-type scales with a few numerical responses and provide enough detail for an investigation. I decided to ask participants to make their personal assessments and express them in terms of a one to five scale. Finally, the use of the Likert-type scale also allowed respondents to indicate the degree of confidence

they had in their abilities against other types of responses such as yes / no forms (such as the ALTE statements), which imply unchangeable assessments of abilities. In the case of ALTE statements, their creators did not use scales to express degrees of confidence because they "were not convinced that this would provide more information, or indeed solve the problem of deciding what 'can do' actually means" (ALTE, 2002a p. 23). However, with yes / no answers or rating scales, the onus is on the person answering the questionnaire to decide how he perceives himself at the tasks required.

One more consideration helped me decide to construct the CCQ specifically for Mexican settings: the cultural weight that questionnaire items carry and that changes people's meanings when answering them (Church et al., 2006) . I had seen that the Survey of Attitudes Specific of the Foreign Language Classroom (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991) I administered during the pilot study had items that were not relevant to respondents in Mexico (most of the items about relatives being born abroad or speaking other foreign languages were left blank, that was a whole section of the questionnaire). That scale referred more accurately to situations common in second language settings than to foreign language settings where backgrounds are majorly homogeneous. The close relatives of most of the participants in the pilot study were born in Mexico, spoke Spanish as their first language and in many cases, their only language; most participants and their siblings were in the country and had similar linguistic experiences and characteristics. So for the majority of respondents with a similar cultural background, this section was not relevant and even provoked some confusion among them. Furthermore, as ALTE recognised "when 'Can Do' ratings are based on self-report, and come from a wide range of countries and respondent groups, we find some variability in respondents' overall perception of their own abilities. That is, people tend to understand 'can do' somewhat differently, for reasons which may relate in part to factors such as age or cultural background" (ALTE, 2002a p. 5). After considering the cultural setting in which my research was placed, I decided to create the CCQ, that is, I decided to

select some of ALTE's Social and Tourist statements and adapt them to meet the characteristics of the Mexican university setting. The questionnaire was composed, revised, and edited in English and later on translated into Spanish for its implementation. The next subsection explains how the items were adapted from the original form.

Designing the CCQ items

Keeping in mind that the purpose of this research was to explore how first year university students perceived their own communicative competence in EFL, the items I adapted from the ALTE statements intended to address aspects of the definition of communicative competence given in Chapter 2. Also, self-perceptions were identified in Chapter 3 as conformed by cognitive (efficacy) and emotional (confidence) elements (see Figure 5), and the items in the CCQ reflect this: all items require respondents to assess their own perception on the particular tasks described, and indicate with their answers (numerical) the degrees of confidence and efficacy they perceive to have. Moreover, as I described in the previous subsection, the items were stated in terms of two types of distance to the respondent: short distance or familiar people or situations, and long distance or unfamiliar people or situations. For instance, although items 1 to 4 refer to efficacy and confidence about how to start and end a conversation in English, a more detailed analysis can reveal that items 1 and 3 refer to conversation with 'friends or people I know', while items 2 and 4 refer to 'strangers or authorities'. Items 5: I know when to respond to an interlocutor or how to participate in a conversation, and 6: I know how to respond or participate during conversation also seem to be equal, but they assess different issues. Items 5 and 6 respectively assess time and manner of interaction in conversation in EFL, in other words, turn taking and addressing.

Items 7 to 9 assess respondents' repertoire of abilities associated to production, that is, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. These items were intended to identify overall

confidence and efficacy beliefs in tasks aimed at communicating ideas without assistance. Items 10 and 11 again refer to tasks of different distance to the respondent, conversations with friends or strangers. But in these items the focus is on confidence in one's comprehension skills as the wording used was: 'I understand conversations…' The next two items also refer to understanding, but these refer to concrete ideas in aural and visual format (item 12), and language grammar (item 13) in the form of rules and patterns. Item 14 refers to efficacy and confidence in knowledge of the foreign language grammar in oral form, while item 18 refers to applying correct grammar in writing and item 19 to knowledge of use of the language for letter writing conventions.

Finally, items 15 to 17 refer to understanding the target language in print. These three items were differentiated in the questionnaire to account for the lack of reading culture prevailing in the country. That is, if item 17 referring to novels and other types of literature was the only item included about this issue, those respondents who do not read novels or literature in general would confused about what to respond. So item 15 inquires about common forms of print familiar to university students in any discipline: textbooks and manuals, while item 16 refers to other familiar print forms: magazines and newspapers. As I said in the previous subsection, the content of the items in the CCQ was not as specific to day to day situations as the items in the ALTE statements. For instance, while ALTE statements would refer to flight information in airport notice boards, the CCQ items refer to textbooks, magazines or newspapers of a more general nature. The last item, Item 20 was aimed at assessing overall self-confidence: my errors do not impede my communication. High numerical responses to this item mean that the respondent has great self-efficacy and self-confidence in his linguistic and social skills and abilities, which are far beyond the challenges imposed on him by the prospect of communication in the foreign language.

The CCQ items were all created with the intention to get data to depict the state of things of the cohort under investigation. In other words, the aim was to measure the efficacy and confidence existing among students at the time and place and they were designed to be adequate to the university setting and Mexican culture. The next step in the design of the scale was to validate the CCQ questionnaire for that particular setting.

Validating the CCQ questionnaire

There are several manners to assess the construct validity of new measurement instruments. According to Newman and Benz (1998), "construct validity can be obtained by measuring the internal consistency of the instruments used" (p. 25); the construct validity of the CCQ was obtained with the Cronbach alpha procedure described in another subsection in this chapter. But first I obtained construct validity by piloting the Spanish version in Nottingham among university postgraduate students who had been EFL learners in a Mexican setting and whose experiences closely resembled those of the actual intended respondents. This process produced a few comments about the word choice of two items in the background data section. I responded to those comments and created a second version of the CCQ background data section.

The second version of the CCQ was piloted again in Mexico in November 2006. Randomly selected student volunteers from one school in the university completed the questionnaire. The volunteers were university students under 20 years old on average (n=10, age M=19.6), which resembled the targeted population of first year undergraduates. The modified second version of the questionnaire did not raise any further comments about the background data section. However, respondents in this second validation commented on the close similarity of some of the Likert-type items measuring perceived communicative competence. I

reviewed those items and decided to combine some of them and eliminate others resulting in the revised final version of the CCQ containing 20 Likert-type items (see Appendix E).

Data analysis decisions and techniques

In this subsection I report about decisions I made regarding data analysis of the CCQ questionnaire. I cover pre-analytical stages such as the creation of a data set, data cleaning and decisions regarding handling of missing values and creating new variables. Then I cover each of the different statistical tests and statistical analyses used to examine the data and measure association between my variables. SPSS (version 14) was used for data cleaning, creation of a dataset and quantitative data analysis.

Data cleaning

All variables had codes defined a priori (see the coding log in Appendix G). Before the data were analysed, the complete data set was revised and cleaned checking for correct input and missing value codes used. According to de Vaus (2002) and Field (2005), finding many missing values—questions and items for which participants accidentally or intentionally did not provide any response—in a data set requires conducting an analysis to determine whether there are patterns in the lack of responses, or among groups of respondents. When there are few missing values and the analysis does not show patterns for their absence, it is possible to treat individual variables and cases where a missing datum is found. This treatment is called missing values inclusion and can occur in one of three ways: through *pairwise* deletion, *listwise* deletion, or substitution with the sample mean.

Pairwise deletion is widely recommended (de Vaus, 2002; Field, 2005; Pallant, 2005) since it has less impact on the whole data set—only missing values for specific variables will be omitted from that particular analysis—and the cases will be included in the analysis of all

other variables for which they have data. In my research for example, the sample included (n=369) respondents, but there were some missing data on cases about school of enrolment (n=341). I conducted a visual analysis of the missing values in the different variables but concluded that there was no clear pattern as to their omission so I did not want to exclude whole cases or whole variables from the rest of the analyses. By applying pairwise deletion I was able to include the cases containing missing values (n=28) in the analyses for which they did have valid data.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The newly created CCQ scale assessing students' self-perceptions was evaluated using factor analysis. De Vaus (2002) and Pallant (2005) recommend factor analysis for new scales when the analysis is intended to measure structural reliability and validity of the scales, and summarises the data into their underlying components. Pallant (2005) differentiates between two types of factor analysis procedures as follows:

> Exploratory factor analysis is often used in the early stage of research to gather information about … the interrelationships among a set of variables. Confirmatory factor analysis, … is a more complex and sophisticated set of techniques used later in the research process to test specific hypotheses or theories concerning the structure underlying a set of variables (p. 172).

In this stage of the main study, there were no hypotheses to be tested but the CCQ scale had not been administered before, so the most appropriate approach to investigate the underlying components of the scale on students' self-perceptions was exploratory factor analysis. Apart from identifying the purpose for conducting factor analysis, it is necessary to determine which procedure to follow: principal components analysis (PCA) or factor analysis (FA). In this research I determined to apply PCA using all the variance between variables to provide a summary of the scale (Pallant, 2005); however, since the purpose of conducting PCA was exploratory, I refer to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in my discussions in this thesis. EFA takes three steps (Pallant, 2005): first it is necessary to determine whether factor analysis is

indeed appropriate for the sample (van Schuur & Kiers, 1994); second, the number of components (or factors) underlying the composition of the scale has to be identified to be extracted; third, the identified factors have to be rotated for better analysis and interpretation (Field, 2005).

Assumptions to be met to conduct exploratory factor analysis

In order to determine whether EFA is appropriate, the sample and data have to comply with certain assumptions: sufficiently large sample size, good factorability, high Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test, and statistically significant ($p<.05$) Bartlett's test of sphericity (van Schuur & Kiers, 1994). There are several characteristics to be met to ensure sample size is appropriate for a study. For example, Nunnally recommends a ratio of cases to items of 10:1 (1978 cited in Pallant, 2005); also Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) recommend that "as a general rule of thumb, it is comforting to have at least 300 cases for factor analysis" (p. 613). My study had a ratio of valid cases to items of 369:20, and the number of cases (n=369) was over 300. The sample size of my research was sufficient to recommend conducting factor analysis. In addition, other assumptions were met giving the decision to conduct factor analysis more robust support. The assumption about the strength of the inter-correlations of the items (factorability) is measured with values within a range over 0.3 (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) but under 0.8 (Field, 2005) in the correlation matrix (displayed in Appendix H). This range of values implies that some correlation between variables is expected since they measure the same phenomenon (represented by correlation values over 0.3), but also some difference among variables is found (shown with correlation values under 0.8), making them all relevant to the scale. If the majority of the correlation values is not within this range, it is recommended to drop those variables with very low and very high correlations before conducting factor analysis (Field, 2005). The analysis of the correlation

matrix produced for this investigation complied with the assumption of the majority of the values within the valid range (see Appendix H) again giving support to the analysis.

The third assumption requires that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test ranging from 0 to 1 is high since "a value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable factors" (Field, 2005 p. 640). Pallant (2005) suggests a value of 0.6 as the minimum acceptable KMO, but she does not clarify what constitutes a good KMO value. On the other hand, de Vaus (2002) and Field (2005) agree that a minimum value of 0.5 is 'barely acceptable' and then indicate that good to superb KMO values ranging from 0.7 to 0.9 are excellent to support the use of factor analysis on a scale. Considering that all items in the CCQ were newly created to assess several aspects of self-perception of communicative competence, I decided to apply the less strict minimum KMO value acceptable (0.5) to avoid a limited or biased analysis of the scale. In case there were KMO values as low as 0.5 in the dataset, I kept in mind that both de Vaus (2002) and Field (2005) recommend careful analysis of the variables in the scale that yield low but acceptable KMO values.

Finally, the last relevant assumption to meet is that Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant (in other words, $p<.05$). Field's (2005) explanation of the purpose of Bartlett's test gives a clear idea of why statistical significance is important:

> Bartlett's measure tests the null hypothesis that the original correlation matrix is an identity matrix. For factor analysis to work we need some relationships between variables and if the *R*-matrix were an identity matrix then all correlation coefficients would be zero. Therefore, we want this test to be *significant* (i.e. have a significance value less than .05). a significant test tells us that the *R*-matrix is not an identity matrix; therefore there are some relationships between the variables we hope to include in the analysis (p. 652, emphasis the author).

As Field explained, factor analysis requires some kind of relationship between variables, so values of zero in the correlations of the different variables are not indicative of such relationships and thus factor analysis becomes inappropriate for a scale. However, the

analysis of Bartlett's test for this scale resulted in a significant value ($p<.05$) so factor analysis was appropriate for the variables in the CCQ scale.

Extracting factors

Pallant (2005) defined factor extraction as "the smallest number of factors that can be used to best represent the interrelations among the set of variables" (p. 174). Factor extraction permits the researcher to see how a scale is composed when all the variables involved are analysed. De Vaus (2002) highlighted that before attempting factor extraction we need to select the method of extraction from a variety of options and the number of factors to extract; Pallant (2005) noted that the most common method used to extract factors is principal components analysis, which was used in this research. De Vaus (2002) also stressed the need to "retain only the best factors" (p. 188) by calculating the eigenvalue associated to each factor. According to de Vaus (2002), the eigenvalue "indicates the amount of variance in the pool of original variables that the factor explains. The higher this value, the more variance the factor explains" (p. 188). There are, however, several techniques to obtain eigenvalues to help in the decision to extract factors, among them: Kaiser's criterion, a scree test, and parallel analysis.

Kaiser's criterion recommends keeping all factors with eigenvalues over 1 (Field, 2005; Pallant, 2005), and Field (2005) indicated that Kaiser's criterion is "based on the idea…that an eigenvalue of 1 represents a substantial amount of variation" (p. 633). On the other hand, a scree test produces a graph (scree plot) of the eigenvalue for each factor and Pallant (2005) recommends "inspecting the plot to find a point at which the shape of the curve changes direction and becomes horizontal…retaining all factors above the elbow, or break in the plot" (p. 175). Also according to Pallant (2005), "parallel analysis involves comparing the size of the eigenvalues with those obtained from a randomly generated data set of the same

size. Only those eigenvalues that exceed the corresponding values from the random data set are retained" (p. 175). Since my research was exploratory and the CCQ scale had not been statistically analysed before, I applied the three techniques to compare results and support the decision of how many factors to extract. The results of these analyses are presented in a subsection in Chapter 5 along with the findings from the investigation.

Rotating factors: improving interpretation

Once the number of factors to extract has been determined by means of one or several of the methods and techniques described above, the variables show how they cluster together (load) onto factors. However, sometimes the factors obtained are not easy to interpret as they are since variables have high loadings onto some factors and low loading onto others, but the process called rotation presents the loadings in a clearer manner that makes interpretation easier (de Vaus, 2002). Field (2005) explains the results of this process: "after rotation, the loadings of the variables are maximized onto one factor…and minimized on the remaining factor(s)" (p. 635), simplifying factor interpretation. Factor rotation has two broad types: orthogonal rotation and oblique rotation. Orthogonal rotation works best when the underlying constructs are assumed to be independent, while oblique rotation implies a certain correlation among the factors (Field, 2005; Pallant, 2005). In an exploratory study it is recommended to conduct both types of rotation to see what output is obtained. Field (2005) noted that if the underlying constructs were independent, the results of both rotation techniques would be identical and the component correlation matrix would be an identity matrix, but he also recommended that if "we cannot assume independence…the results of the orthogonal rotation should not be trusted: the obliquely rotated solution is probably more meaningful" (pp. 662-663). Due to the fact that the CCQ scale was new, I decided to explore it using both rotation techniques and then report the meaningful one in this thesis.

Once the number of factors to extract is determined, the next question relates to interpreting the factors and the weight of each particular variable onto each factor. Although variable loadings over 0.3 are usually considered important, this value is not fixed; the significance of variable loadings lies in the size of the sample (Field, 2005). Field (2005) refers to Stevens's table of critical values as a comparison for loadings: "to summarize, he recommends that for a sample size of 50 a loading of .722 can be considered significant, for 100 the loading should be greater than .512, for 200 it should be greater than .364, for 300 it should be greater than .298, for 600 it should be greater than .21, and for 1000 it should be greater than .162" (Stevens, 1992 cited in Field, 2005 p. 637). The sample size for this research was n=372, so I decided to consider loadings of 0.3 or higher to be significant for the interpretation.

The EFA conducted showed the underlying composition of the CCQ scale. The results of these analyses are displayed in Chapter 5 where the interpretation of the underlying factors identified is also presented. Another methodological decision I made was to assess the structural reliability of the CCQ scale, since it was a newly created instrument. The next subsection discusses the justification for this decision.

Structural reliability of the scale

Cronbach's alpha is a procedure used to investigate the internal consistency of a measurement instrument and obtain construct validity. As Cortina (1993) explained "if error factors associated with the use of different items are of interest, then internal consistency estimates, such as coefficient alpha … may be used" (p. 98). Cronbach's alpha measures mean that, as long as the same items are included in the CCQ scale, it should be expected to produce similar results. Cronbach's alpha coefficient varies from zero to one and the closer to one, the more reliable the scale is. To understand more specifically what a reliable

coefficient is, de Vaus (2002) explained that "as a rule of thumb *alpha should be at least 0.7* before we say that the scale is reliable" (p. 184, my emphasis).

Cronbach's alpha analysis provides a table of coefficients before extracting (item total correlations) and after extracting (alpha if item deleted) items from the scale. Several authors (de Vaus, 2002; Field, 2005; Pallant, 2005) recommend keeping all items if the overall alpha coefficient obtained for a scale is substantially higher than the values under the 'alpha if item deleted' column. On the contrary, if Cronbach's alpha values in that column are substantially higher than the overall alpha coefficient of the scale, it is recommended to drop those particular items from the scale to increase the reliability coefficient. Beyond their usefulness in assessing reliability, Cronbach's alpha coefficients do not provide data about the dimensionality of a scale, that is, the alpha coefficient does not indicate the underlying composition of the scale (Cortina, 1993). To assess the scale's dimensionality and its composition, factor analysis is the appropriate statistic, as discussed in the subsection above. After assessing the reliability of a new scale (Cronbach's alpha value for the CCQ is presented in Chapter 5 with the findings of the inquiry), it is important to assess that no parametric data in the scale breach established assumptions; these assumptions are explained in the next subsection.

Assumptions about parametric data

There are four principal assumptions that a dataset should not breach. The most important is the normality of the data, i.e., that "the data are from one or more normally distributed populations" (Field, 2005 p. 64), which can be easily assessed by plotting a distribution of the frequencies of scores obtained. Apart from the visual display of a frequency distribution, normality in a scale can be calculated with the values of kurtosis and skewness in the sample. Field (2005) explains how skewness and kurtosis indicate normality of the data:

> The values of skewness and kurtosis should be zero in a normal distribution. Positive values of skewness indicate a pile-up of scores on the left of the distribution, whereas negative values indicate a pile-up on the right. Positive values of kurtosis indicate a pointy distribution whereas negative values indicate a flat distribution (p. 72).

Another statistical tool is the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality where "a non-significant result…indicates normality" (Pallant, 2005 p. 57) or "if the test is non-significant (p>.05) … the distribution of the sample is … probably normal" (Field, 2005 p. 93). There are other graphic tests also assessing normality such as normal Q-Q plots. Normal Q-Q plots are linear comparisons of expected and observed values where "a reasonably straight line suggests a normal distribution" (Pallant, 2005 p. 58). In normal Q-Q plots the values expected are a straight diagonal line, and the observed values from the dataset appear as little circles in the chart. Due to the different nature of these tools I decided to use all of them in order to assess the normality of the data in this inquiry.

The second assumption is homogeneity of variance, which requires that "as you go through levels of one variable, the variance of the other should not change" (Field, 2005 p. 97). In other words, "the variability of scores for each of the groups is similar" (Pallant, 2005 p. 198) or homogeneous. Levene's test is commonly used to assess homogeneity of variance since non-significant results (p>.05) indicate that the dataset does not breach this assumption. When homogeneity of variance is violated, there are alternative tests the researcher is advised to follow. Some authors (Field, 2005; Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) recommend using either the Welch test (1951) or the Brown & Forsythe test (1974). Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) further suggest that "violations of homogeneity usually can be corrected by transformation of the DV [dependent variable] scores. Interpretation, however, is then limited to the transformed scores" (p. 86). Transformation procedures rend highly complex variables to interpret, so Field (2005) recommends choosing the Welch test because it "…seems to fare best except when there is an extreme mean that has a large

variance" (p. 348). Thus in my study, when homogeneity of variance was violated, I used the Welch test output instead.

The third assumption about parametric data is the level of measurement of the variables (Field, 2005). There are three levels of measurement: the highest is interval data, then ordinal data and finally the lowest is nominal data. According to de Vaus (2002), "as a general rule it is better to construct variables so that they are measured at a higher level. Not only do such variables provide more information but they also open up a wider range of methods of statistical analysis. The higher the level of measurement the more powerful are the methods of analysis that can be used" (p. 205). In the CCQ scale, the Likert-type items yielded data at the interval level since it was intended to later use them in bivariate methods of analysis. These interval data ranged from one to five, and the intervals represented the same difference in self-perception from one value to the next one. So for example, a value of one has the same difference from a value of two that a value of two has from a value of three, and a value of three has from a value of four, and so on.

The last assumption is independence of observations, which means that "the behaviour of one participant does not influence the behaviour of another" (Field, 2005 p. 64). Participants' behaviour may be influenced especially in studies in the social sciences where there is interaction through pair or group work or from the social context where the study takes place (Pallant, 2005) and this influence was controlled for in my research. Independence of observations was achieved by asking that participants filled out the CCQ considering only their personal assessments, and did not confer with any classmates.

The methodological decisions justified above provided data to assess the CCQ as a measuring scale of students' self-perception of communicative competence. The characteristics of the scale made the analyses described earlier appropriate. However, the

CCQ did not only contain the scale measuring self-perception, there were also background data to collect in order to analyse them searching for patterns illuminating the influences behind the construction of self-perceptions (as discussed in the subsection about the types of data in this chapter, refer to Table 5).

Describing the sample: Background data

Background data were variables with data at the nominal or ordinal level and so univariate analysis was conducted on those variables to provide descriptive statistics (de Vaus, 2002). The purpose of univariate analysis was to map the characteristics of the sample in the terms of the eight relevant variables investigated. A section in Chapter 5 presents the results of those univariate analyses when statistical significance was obtained. Statistical significance in univariate analysis indicates that the descriptive patterns found can be generalised to the population and they are not due to sampling error (de Vaus, 2002).

Associating background data to self-perception of communicative competence

Besides summarising the characteristics of the sample by using univariate analysis at the descriptive level, each background variable was investigated against self-perception of communicative competence by means of bivariate analyses. According to de Vaus (2002), "the heart of bivariate analysis is to see whether two variables are related (associated)…bivariate analysis provides a systematic way of measuring whether two variables are related and if so how strongly they are related" (p. 241). Associations and differences between variables and the strength of those can be assessed by different methods, which depend on the level of measurement and categories of each variable. Pallant (2005) indicated that exploring associations becomes relevant when the variables investigated are of the nominal level, there are two or more interval level independent variables, there are samples from different times, or there is a set of related variables at the interval level (as is

the case with factor analysis described earlier). Contrarily, exploring differences becomes salient when there are independent variables with two or more groups and the dependent variable(s) are continuous.

Since the score of self-perception of communicative competence (the dependent variable) yielded by CCQ was an interval level (or continuous) variable and the background (independent) variables were nominal level or ordinal level with two or more groups, the relevant methods used were T-tests and ANOVA. For nominal level independent variables with two categories (dichotomous), independent samples T-tests were used, while for ordinal level variables with three or more categories (or groups), one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was chosen. Again, results of the bivariate analysis are shown in Chapter 5 when statistical significance was found, but in this case, statistical significance (p-value) indicates there is a difference in the groups that is not due to sampling error (de Vaus, 2002). In order to determine the strength of the associations or differences between the variables investigated, that is, "the degree to which the two variables are associated with one another" (Pallant, 2005 p. 201), the effect size is calculated, commonly by obtaining eta square. More details about these decisions are discussed in the following subsections.

Independent samples T-tests

Background variables that consisted of two different options or groups (such as gender and EFL course) were explored against the self-perception scores using independent samples t-tests, which aim to produce data about the differences of dichotomous independent variables (such as the relevant background ones) and the continuous dependent one (such as the self-perception scores). T-tests compared the means between the two groups—gender (female/male) and EFL course (English 1/English 2), to determine whether differences were real or due to chance. Again, Levene's test was used to assess homogeneity of variance (refer

to subsection on assumptions about parametric data in this chapter), but in this case t-tests provide an alternative value in the output table to analyse if the assumption of homogeneity has been breached.

One-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA)

In contrast to t-tests, ANOVA analysis is helpful to understand the nature of the associations or differences amongst variables with more than two groups. Pallant (2005) explained the meaning of the output obtained from the ANOVA analysis:

> An F ratio is calculated which represents the variance between the groups, divided by the variance within the groups. A large F ratio indicates that there is more variability between the groups (caused by the independent variable) than there is within each group (referred to as the error term) (p. 214).

Background data containing more than two groups, such as area of study, age groups, time studying EFL, time practising per week, places where practice occurs, and skills covered in extra practice, were the independent variables, while the score of self-perception was the dependent continuous variable for this analysis. The characteristics of the variables investigated suggested that one-way between groups ANOVA was the appropriate technique to explore differences between variables. One-way implies that the analysis will include one independent variable with three or more levels and one continuous variable, while between groups means that each group contains different cases of the sample (Pallant, 2005).

Thus ANOVA tests that there is a real (statistically significant) difference in the means of the groups, but it does not provide information about where and how much of a variation exists between those groups, unless we conduct post-hoc tests. According to Pallant (2005) post-hoc tests do not test hypothesis, but rather explore the differences between groups without predetermined ideas, that is why they are known as *a posteriori* tests. Post-hoc tests set harder criteria (statistical power) to determine statistical significance to identify the groups

between which there are differences and several types of post-hoc tests are available. Field (2005) suggested that the choice of a post-hoc test depends on the characteristics of the sample; selection criteria include considering the statistical power each method has to control for sampling error and rejecting real difference errors, and its behaviour with slight breaches of assumptions about parametric data. Tukey's HSD test assumes the variances for the groups compared are equal and, although it is considered a conservative test (Field, 2005), it has sufficient power in the analysis of large differences of means (as is the case of the sample in this research) and so it was selected as the method for conducting post-hoc tests.

Effect size

Effect size is the strength of associations and it "reflects the proportion of variance in the DV that is associated with levels of an IV" (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007 p. 54). In short, effect size tells us how strongly the dependent variable associates with a particular independent variable, which is used to make inferences about the behaviour of the variables investigated. According to Cohen (1988, cited in Pallant, 2005 p. 201), effect size is measured by eta squared values indicating a small effect (r=.01), a moderate effect (r=.06), and a large effect (r=.14). However, Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) refer to Cohen's guidelines differently: small effect r=.01, medium r=.09, and large r=.25 . In the present study, I used a combination of these references to present effect size in my analysis: small effect (r=.03), moderate effect (r=.07), and large effect (r=.10).

The discussion in the previous subsections justified the methodological decisions I made about approaches to treatment and analysis of data and statistical tests and procedures I undertook in view of their applicability to this research. After presenting the methodology

applied to the quantitative component of this research, I describe the qualitative research methodology and instrument used in my study in the next section in this chapter.

The focus group technique

Focus groups started being used in social research around the 1940s and their emphasis is on the interactions among the participants enabling researchers to derive shared meaning as it is given by the group. Focus group sessions emphasise the need for discussion, negotiation, and agreement to obtain meanings out of the views expressed. This investigation of university students' self-perceptions, depicting students' views based on collective representations of communicative competence among the subculture of first year undergraduates, benefitted from using focus groups because the interactions of the group encouraged participants to reveal their concepts, feelings and beliefs (Gibbs, 1997). This interaction results in the group's articulation of meanings, processes and norms underlying its perspectives—say the group's self-perception. Indeed, as Bloor and his colleagues (2001) put it, "the group is a socially legitimated occasion for participants to engage in 'retrospective introspection', to attempt collectively to tease out previously taken for granted assumptions" (pp. 5-6, emphasis: the authors), and thus is a very good source of rich data. Participants in the focus group sessions collaborated in expanding their responses about how they perceived themselves and how they constructed their individual self-perceptions. Later on, members of the group explored those self-perceptions and negotiated to express the group's meanings and underlying influences providing their particular cultural perspective about communicative competence.

Size of the focus groups

The actual focus groups in my study consisted of three and two participants respectively, which made them very small groups. Although there are not exact numbers, there are

recommended sizes for good focus groups: six to 10 people for full groups, and four to six people for mini-groups (Morgan, 1997; Greenbaum, 1998, 2000; Bloor et al., 2001). Litosseliti (2003) was more specific in recommending group sizes according to the field of study:

> Projects in the social sciences typically involve full focus groups comprising between six and ten people, or mini focus groups with four to six participants. In marketing research…, it is not uncommon to use telephone focus groups (involving four to six people), video-conference focus groups, and online focus groups (with 15-20 participants) (p. 6).

Although even by the standards of mini focus groups my sessions may be considered small, Morgan (1997) provided insight from his experience suggesting:

> One should not feel imprisoned by either this lower or upper boundary. I have conducted groups of 3 highly involved participants that would have been unmanageable at size 6, and I have led discussions in naturally occurring groups of 15 to 20 in which the process was quite orderly. Ultimately, both the purposes of the research and the constraints of the field situation must be taken into account (p. 43).

I believe that the voices of participants are as relevant to this exploration as if the groups had been large and should therefore be presented and discussed. The fact that few students participated in the focus groups in this study does not alter the more important fact that those participants fulfilled all the characteristics of the sample and became expert informants for the purposes of my research. However, as Morgan (1997) acknowledged, for research to be considered thorough, the constraints of the setting have to be made explicit. So, a cautionary note is important: the findings shed light on some of the influences behind university students' self-perceptions of communicative competence in EFL, but these particular findings just represent those participants directly involved in the construction processes taking place during this study. Findings from focus group sessions can only be used to elucidate meanings from each group, and to compare and contrast data between groups, and cannot be conclusive of the views of whole cohorts of students or schools.

Furthermore, the influence of the constraints of the setting was observed in the contrast between the focus group sessions original planning, and their actual development. Table 6 helps understand this; under the heading *participants*, the table displays the numbers and proportions of female to male participants; the column *prospective* indicates the students addressed to participate—note that it was not possible to over-recruit participants as recommended in literature since no other students were interested in taking part, the column *recruited* shows the numbers of students who agreed to participate, finally the column *actual* shows the actual numbers of participants attending the sessions.

Table 6: Focus group session composition planning and outcome

Location: School of Business					
Time: 16:00 to 18:00 hrs.			Participants		
Date	FG no.	Score quartiles	Prospective (F / M)	Recruited (F / M)	Actual (F / M)
23rd Jan, 07	1	0-34%	24 (15 / 9)	7 (5 / 2)	3 (2 / 1)
24th Jan, 07	2	35-68%	56 (29 / 27)	10 (5 / 5)	2 (1 / 1)
26th Jan, 07	3	69-100%	28 (11 / 17)	6 (4 / 2)	0

As can be observed from the numbers in Table 6, there were three participants in the first group and only two in the second group. No one attended the third focus group session, which had to be cancelled. After each session, I tried contacting the participants who did not attend, in most cases they could not be reached and the students I contacted did not justify their absences but refused to re-schedule for a later day. These students exhibited an attitude towards participating in extra curricular activities (which include research projects) that from my experience has been observed in the university setting. However, this point is further discussed in Chapter 6 in the section about limitations of the focus group technique in the setting. The qualitative data from the focus group sessions were explored using thematic analysis, described in the last subsection in this chapter.

Exploratory thematic analysis

Exploratory thematic analysis is used in qualitative data analysis and characterised by the lack of a priori definition of themes. Instead, the data are *explored* in order to extract emerging themes (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). There were some decisions to make before extracting themes though; first, I translated the recordings directly from Spanish into English while constructing the transcripts (full session transcripts can be found in Appendices B and C). Also, it may be relevant to point out that when participants used head nods it was interpreted as *yes* and head shakes signified *no*, as is the custom in the Mexican culture of which all participants and the moderator were members. Another note is that although I personally prefer to use the masculine form of pronouns and adjectives when referring to unspecific third person singular forms (he, him, himself, etcetera)—as I have pointed out in the preface to this thesis, interpretation was derived from the choice of words of the participants. Finally, I adapted the Jefferson transcription notation system (shown also in Appendices B and C) as used by Antaki and his colleagues (Antaki, 2002; Antaki, Billig, Edwards & Potter, 2002) to transcribe the focus group data.

Summary

Chapter 4 has introduced my personal philosophy of research, the rationale for conducting this investigation and the research design and methodology I followed. I have claimed to be a pragmatist who is open to learn about and apply what research methods will better respond to particular research questions. This chapter has also pointed out that I adhere to an inclusive perspective about research at the methodological level more than to an excluding position. My research design and methodology followed this inclusive view and is supportive of mixed or multiple methods approaches to research, but as a pragmatist I also have expressed that I recognise that multiple or mixed methods do not always complement each other adequately. The present study was based on identifying a problem that needed to

be addressed: lack of information on university undergraduates' self-perceptions of communicative competence in EFL. Addressing this problem required asking university students to become expert informants and indicate what self-perceptions they had and what influenced their self-perception construction.

The contribution of the pilot study conducted before the main investigation has been recognised as well since, without it, the fact that the pilot's research questions did not address the phenomenon of self-perception of communicative competence would not have been obvious. The inconclusive outcome of the pilot illuminated the need to focus on the research questions addressed with this thesis. Addressing the main study research questions suggested the implementation of quantitative and qualitative methods as research instruments for data collection and analysis in a complementary manner. This chapter has further described the sampling procedures followed, as well as the ethical guidelines considered regarding human participants in social research. The research instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis decisions have been described. The rationale for applying exploratory factor analysis and assessing the reliability of the CCQ scale with Cronbach's alpha coefficients has been provided. I have also listed and described the assumptions about parametric data this investigation complied with in order to undergo univariate descriptive and bivariate inferential analyses (such as independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA). The impact of effect size on interpreting associations has been stressed. In terms of qualitative data, the use of exploratory thematic analysis has been substantiated. In sum, this chapter has described my research philosophy as well as the research design and methodology, and the methods used in the inquiry; the findings obtained from these decisions are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings

Chapter 5 presents findings from this mixed methods investigation. The quantitative component of the study is presented first. Detailed statistical analysis of the CCQ, including univariate, bivariate, and reliability analyses are described. The rationale supporting those methodological decisions was introduced in Chapter 4 so there are references to that in this chapter. It is necessary to note that only the analyses that yielded statistically significant findings are presented. Findings from the qualitative analysis of focus group data are presented in a separate section and samples from the full transcripts in Appendices B and C were included supporting this presentation. Data are integrated onto the interpretation and discussion stage presented in Chapter 6. To bring Chapter 5 to a close, a summary lists all relevant findings.

Data analysis decisions

Valid dataset and treatment of missing values

As explained in Chapter Four, I decided to analyse parametric data using statistical analysis techniques. This facilitated assessing the reliability of the CCQ scale and also exploring relationships among self-perception of communicative competence and background variables within the questionnaire. Few missing values were found but no participants failed to respond to all questions and items, and there did not appear to be a pattern for the missing data. Therefore I applied the pairwise deletion method (refer to section in Chapter 4 about data analysis decisions) ensuring that the structure of the dataset included all unaltered data in the study.

Non-specific responses

Some respondents provided incomplete or non-specific responses, such as: *school* or *university* in the case of school of enrolment, or *English* in the case of EFL module. Non-specific responses were not included in the analysis of the dataset, and this accounts (like the exclusion of missing values) for number variation (n) for the analysis of each variable.

Age restriction

Minimum age for participants in the study was 16 years (discussed in Chapter 4), and the first visual and statistical inspection of the data revealed three participants under 16 years old were found (Table 7), so these cases were investigated.

Table 7: Age groups (n=367)

Ages	Frequency	Percentage
15 years old	3	0.8%
16 years or older	364	99.2%
Total	367	100.0%

Cross-tabulation analysis showed the age discrepancy occurred among participants of the School of Music (Table 8), which was explained since this school offers courses to the general public without becoming enrolled in university to receive academic credit. Three of these learners completed the survey, but since these individuals were not in fact university students, they were excluded from the study; under-16 year olds were filtered out before conducting any statistical analyses on the dataset.

Table 8: Cross-tabulation of ages by school (n=340)

	Age groups		
School	15 years old	16 years or older	Total
Architecture	0	18	18
Business	0	85	85
Engineering	0	49	49
Law and Social Science	0	98	98
Medicine	0	37	37
Music	3	37	40
Nursing	0	13	13
Total	3	337	340

Multiple responses in background questions

The last two questions in the background section of the CCQ asked about places where participants had studied EFL (question seven), and the ways they practised the foreign language (question eight). In the questionnaire these nominal variables allowed respondents to choose as many responses as fitted their realities; however, in the analysis, responses were organised in mutually exclusive ordinal categories so someone indicating only one response would not appear in the group of those indicating any other responses or combinations of responses.

Univariate analysis, background data

A brief reminder of questions and responses elicited is included. Descriptive statistical results are presented in tables in this section; figures are used to assist in visualising statistically significant group compositions.

School

Open ended nominal variable; responses were schools where participants were registered; I reorganised school names into areas (Table 9). Stratified random sampling yielded proportions representing the population of first year undergraduates (N=1240).

Table 9: Areas represented in the sample (n=341)

	N=1240		n=341	
Areas	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Engineering	146	11.8%	49	14.4%
Law and Social Sciences	526	42.4%	184	54.0%
Health Sciences	373	30.1%	50	14.7%
Arts and Humanities	195	15.7%	58	17.0%
Total	1240	100.0%	341	100.0%

The sample yielded similar proportions of students from Arts and Humanities (represented by the Schools of Music and Architecture), Engineering (School of Engineering), and Health Sciences (Schools of Medicine and Nursing), whereas over half of the students were in Law and Social Sciences (Schools of Law and Social Sciences, and Business) (see Figure 13).

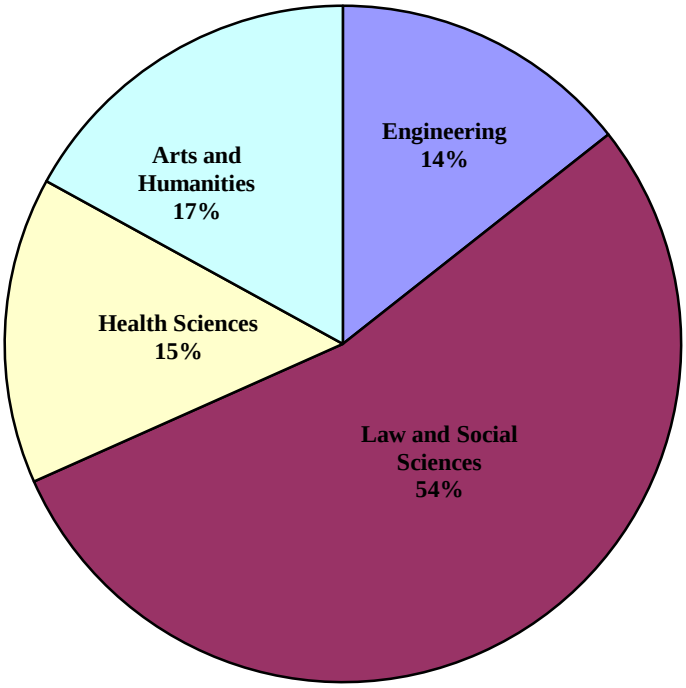

Figure 13: Areas of knowledge represented in the sample (n=341)

Figure 14 compares the percentages of the population and sample. Figure 14 reveals that the area of Health Sciences was acutely underrepresented (14% out of 30% of the population). This was explained by the fact that one school in this area did not participate in the study as explained in Chapter 4, limiting the possibility of access to prospective participants. Contrastingly, more students of the area of Law and Social Sciences than the sample required completed the survey because most of the students who were addressed in those schools chose to participate in the study.

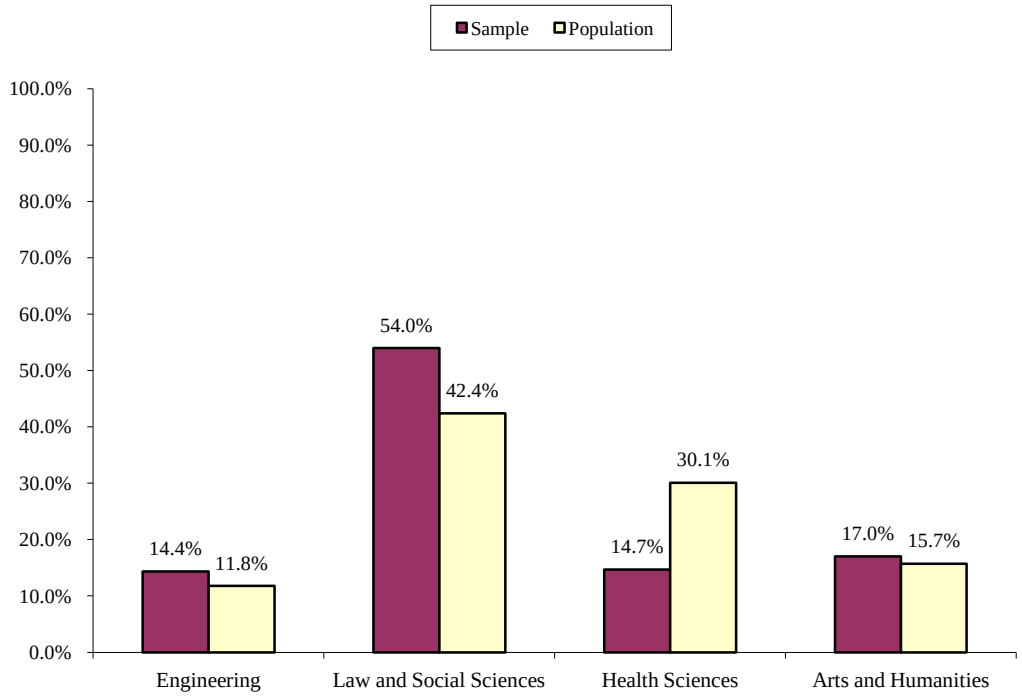

Figure 14: Comparison of areas of study of the population and sample (percentages)

Language module

Open ended nominal variable; responses were EFL modules in which each participant was enrolled. Since the sample selected first year undergraduate students, language module was a dichotomous variable with the two categories (subjects): English 1 or English 2. Table 10 shows percentages of participants enrolled in each subject. The majority of the participants (82%) were enrolled in English 1. Only less than 18% were enrolled in English 2.

Table 10: EFL modules (n=281)

Modules	Frequency	Percentage
English 1	231	82.2%
English 2	50	17.8%
Total	281	100.0%

Gender

Gender was also a dichotomous nominal variable since respondents ticked female or male in the questionnaire. Table 11 shows a balanced sample: 50% of participants were females and 50% were males.

Table 11: Gender of sample participants (n=366)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	183	50.0%
Male	183	50.0%
Total	366	100.0%

Age

Participants indicated their ages in full years; the data range was 16 to 56 years old (n=364) in this continuous variable. However, most respondents were younger than 20 years old so I re-organised responses. All 16 and 17 year olds were one group, 20 year olds or older were another group and 18 and 19 year olds were separate groups. As can be seen in Table 12, over 34% of respondents were 18 years old and the smallest group represented were 16 and 17 year olds (over 14%).

Table 12: Age groups of participants (n=364)

Age groups	Frequency	Percentage
16 and 17 years old	52	14.3%
18 years old	125	34.3%
19 years old	90	24.7%
20 years and older	97	26.6%
Total	364	100.0%

Time studying English in a foreign language class

Closed question; respondents chose one from a series of seven options. The options were seven categories (less than six months to over five years); a preliminary analysis of the dataset revealed it was more useful to group certain categories. Table 13 shows that less than one third of the sample (almost 31%) had studied English for less than six months while participants who had studied English for over three years (27%), between six months and one year (22%), and between one year and three years of study (over 20%) accounted for about a quarter of the sample each (see Figure 15).

Table 13: Time studying EFL (n=355)

Time studying EFL	Frequency	Percentage
Less than six months	109	30.7%
Six months to one year	78	22.0%
Over one year to three years	72	20.3%
Over three years	96	27.0%
Total	355	100.0%

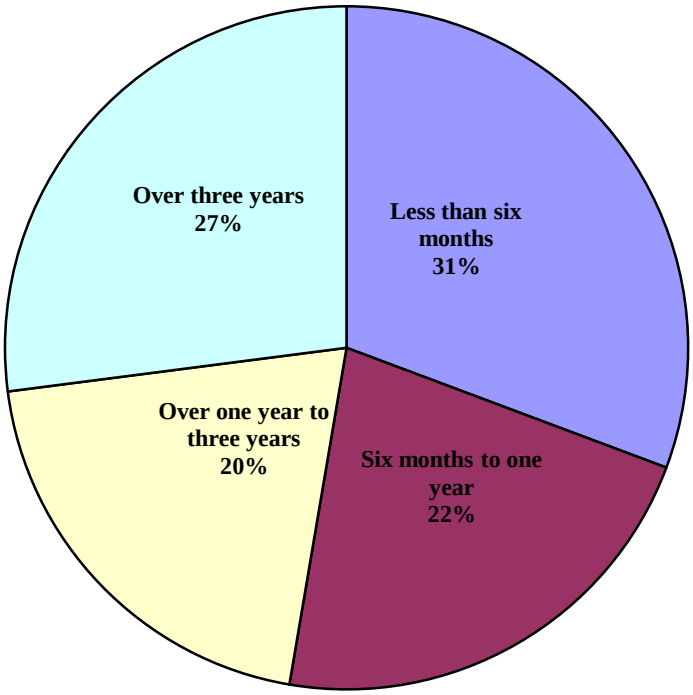

Figure 15: Time spent studying EFL

Time per week practising English off school

Respondents chose one from a series of five options. The preliminary analysis of frequencies suggested recoding the original categories (see Table 14) was more informative. After recoding it was possible to observe that over two thirds of respondents (69%) indicated practising less than one hour per week apart from their EFL class at school. Almost a quarter practised between one and two hours per week (24%), and slightly over 5% practised more than two hours per week.

Table 14: EFL practice per week (n=353)

Hours of practice per week	Frequency	Percentage
Less than one hour	244	69.1%
One to two hours	87	24.6%
Over two hours	22	6.2%
Total	353	100.0%

Places where participants had studied English

Respondents could select more than one option in this question, so responses do not match cases (participants) in the sample. This description discusses percentages in terms of cases (n=365) in mutually exclusive categories, or participants' responses accounted for in only one category. Table 15 shows that the majority of participants (60%) had studied EFL only at school while a little over 15% reported they had studied at home and school.

Table 15: Places where participants studied EFL (n=365)

Places of study	Frequency	Percentage
Home	21	5.8%
School	219	60.0%
Language centre	27	7.4%
Home and School	55	15.1%
School and Language centre	27	7.4%
Home, School, and Language centre	16	4.4%
Total	365	100.0%

As a final note about Table 15 each of the other mutually exclusive categories accounted for less than 10% of the sample.

Manner of practice

Respondents chose all options that applied to them in question eight. Table 16 shows the frequency and proportion of responses given (responses=688), but I refer to proportions of participants (cases) indicating each response (n=327) shown in the last column in that table. The analysis indicated a large percentage of participants (almost 70%) practised watching television or films in English. The second most frequent response was reading EFL textbooks (35%), while reading magazines or newspapers published in English was the third

popular response given (24%). However, reading literature or novels in English was the least popular manner of practising English (less than 6%).

Table 16: Manners of EFL practice (n=327)

Manners of practice	Responses n	Responses Percentage	Percentage of cases
Watching television or films in English	228	33.1%	69.7%
Reading magazines or newspapers published in English	78	11.3%	23.9%
Reading online magazines or newspapers published in English	55	8.0%	16.8%
Reading EFL textbooks	115	16.7%	35.2%
Reading literature / novels in English	19	2.8%	5.8%
Chatting on the Internet	68	9.9%	20.8%
Chatting in person of by telephone	54	7.8%	16.5%
Writing text or letters in English	71	10.3%	21.7%
Total	688	100.0%	210.4%

After this analysis, responses were grouped according to the skills they represented (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and organised in mutually exclusive groups. Categories included individual skills, all skills together, and combinations of two and three skills (Table 17). Table 17 shows the three most frequent combinations of skills practised were all receptive (listening only=26.6%; reading only=16.8%; and listening and reading skills combined=16.2%). Speaking and writing (productive) skills, individually or in most combinations, represented manners of practice for less than 5% of respondents.

Table 17: Language skills practised by participants (n=327)

Skill or skills practised	Frequency	Percentage
Listening	87	26.6%
Reading	55	16.8%
Speaking	14	4.3%
Writing	11	3.4%
All skills practised	24	7.3%
Listening and Reading	53	16.2%
Listening and Speaking	16	4.9%
Listening and Writing	4	1.2%
Reading and Speaking	7	2.1%
Reading and Writing	5	1.5%
Speaking and Writing	2	0.6%
Listening, Reading and Speaking	24	7.3%
Listening, Speaking and Writing	7	2.1%
Reading, Speaking and Writing	5	1.5%
Listening, Reading and Writing	13	4.0%
Total	327	100.0%

Question eight was further transformed into mutually exclusive ordinal categories at an even more general level. The number of skills practised ranged from *none* (zero skills), *one* (listening, reading, speaking, or writing), *two* (combining any two skills), *three* (combining any three skills), and *four* (all skills combined).

Also, apart from the options given in the questionnaire (Table 16, page 161), the option *other responses* was given. Table 18 shows the majority of participants (83%, n=369) did not specify other ways of practising apart from those listed. Among those who specified other manners of practice (a little less than 17%), the most frequent skills were receptive skills such as listening to songs in English (slightly over 7%); other varied skills either receptive or productive, or a combination of both, accounted for the other 10%.

Table 18: Question 8, other manners of practice (n=369)

Manners of practice	Frequency	Percentage
No extra practice specified	307	83.2%
Using EFL when abroad or when chatting with friends or family	9	2.4%
Using commercial language programmes	4	1.1%
Translating with the help of a dictionary	11	3.0%
Using computer and video games and the Internet	11	3.0%
Listening to songs in English	27	7.3%
Total	369	100.0%

Review of univariate analysis

Over half of the sample was enrolled in Law and Social Sciences (54%), while the areas of Engineering (14%), Health (almost 15%) and Arts and Humanities (17%) were more equally represented. A majority was enrolled in English 1 (82%) at the time and the largest age group was 18 year olds (34%); the proportion of male to female participants was exactly 50:50. Many participants indicated they had studied English (formally) for less than six months (31%) while 27% revealed they had studied for over three years. At the time of this research, 60% of respondents studied only at school and 69% practised English for less than one hour per week after school. Respondents also practised after school by watching English television programmes or selecting films in English when going to the cinema (almost 70%

cases); reading textbooks such as the ones used in a formal class (35% cases), and reading magazines or newspapers in the target language (24%) and these were the three most frequent manners of practice off school as well. Listening (27%) and reading (17%) individually, and grouped together (listening and reading 16%) were the skills most frequently practised. Finally, most respondents (83%) did not practise English in any other manner.

The questions in the background section of the CCQ described participants' experiences and practices with EFL prior to their enrolment in university. These independent variables were later related to the self-perception score when conducting bivariate analysis. However, before presenting the results from those analyses the following section introduces findings from the analysis of the structure of the CCQ scale.

CCQ scale structural analysis: EFA, reliability and validity

Exploratory factor analysis

EFA was used to see underlying factors observed and assess measurement validity of the instrument. Assumptions required to conduct this procedure were all met; sample size was large enough (372 cases; ratio 18.6:1), supporting the existence of enough cases to conduct a thorough exploration of the relationships (correlations) between the items in the scale. There was high factorability (see the Correlation Matrix in Appendix H) since correlations between the ranges of 0.3 to 0.8 indicate a certain relationship between the items but at the same time they are still different suggesting all items contribute something particular to the scale, which further supports using EFA to investigate its composition. In this investigation, most values in the correlation matrix fell within the 0.3 to 0.8 range (Appendix H). Only item 20 *my errors do not impede my communication* obtained slightly lower than 0.3 correlations with item 2 *I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers* (r=.293) and item 4 *I*

know when and how to end a conversation with strangers (*r*=.272). This finding is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Table 19 shows that the statistical tests about non violation of assumptions supported the suitability of the CCQ scale for EFA: KMO test was very good at a value of .935, showing a very high relationship among the items. The same table shows Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p<.05$) indicating the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and EFA was appropriate.

Table 19: Keiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett's Tests

Keiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy		0.935
Bartlett's Test of sphericity	Approximate Chi-Square	4793.622
	degree of freedom	190
	Significance	0.000

Extracting components

As discussed in Chapter 4, I followed three criteria to assess how many components to extract (following the PCA method) from the CCQ scale and their results are presented in this subsection.

First Kaiser's criterion (eigenvalues ≥ 1) was applied, since Kaiser is appropriate for samples when "the sample size exceeds 250 and the average communality is greater than .6" (Field, 2005 p. 655). In this study, average communality was .6416 (calculated from the table of communalities—Table 20) and the sample size (n=369), so these tests complied with the assumptions to apply Kaiser's criterion. Chapter 4 also discussed that the PCA method of extraction is the specific name given to the type of factor analysis conducted, and that this method was chosen since the purpose of the inquiry was to explore the data set using all the variance found among the variables, not just shared variance (Pallant, 2005).

Table 20: Average communalities

	Initial	Extraction
I know when and how to start a conversation with friends or people I know.	1.000	0.711
I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers or authorities.	1.000	0.724
I know when and how to finish a conversation with friends or people I know.	1.000	0.720
I know when and how to finish a conversation with strangers or authorities.	1.000	0.668
I know when to respond to an interlocutor or how to participate in a conversation.	1.000	0.637
I know how to respond or participate during conversation.	1.000	0.580
I have enough vocabulary to express my ideas, feelings, and mood.	1.000	0.586
I have good pronunciation.	1.000	0.599
I am fluent enough in the language to express my ideas clearly.	1.000	0.686
I understand conversations with friends or people I know.	1.000	0.651
I understand conversations with strangers or authorities.	1.000	0.611
I understand the ideas expressed in films or television programmes.	1.000	0.630
I understand the language grammar.	1.000	0.548
I apply correct language grammar in a conversation.	1.000	0.712
I understand textbooks, manuals or directions.	1.000	0.709
I understand magazines and newspapers.	1.000	0.801
I understand novels and other types of literature.	1.000	0.654
I know how to write using correct grammar.	1.000	0.643
I know how to start and finish a letter or a school report.	1.000	0.654
My errors do not impede my communication.	1.000	0.308

The eigenvalues to which Kaiser's criterion was applied were obtained from the unrotated explanations of total variance between items found (Table 21). This table shows the initial eigenvalues and the eigenvalues after extraction with the PCA method. As can be observed, there are three components with eigenvalues matching Kaiser's criterion, so the analysis suggested extracting them. However, the exploratory nature of this inquiry required that other criteria were explored.

Table 21: Total variance explained (PCA extraction method, unrotated)

	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Square Loadings		
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	10.346	51.729	51.729	10.346	51.729	51.729
2	1.418	7.089	58.818	1.418	7.089	58.818
3	1.068	5.339	64.157	1.068	5.339	64.157
4	0.834	4.169	68.326			
5	0.764	3.819	72.145			
6	0.685	3.425	75.570			
7	0.640	3.201	78.771			
8	0.553	2.763	81.534			
9	0.483	2.417	83.951			
10	0.451	2.257	86.208			
11	0.419	2.094	88.302			
12	0.383	1.914	90.216			
13	0.347	1.736	91.952			
14	0.324	1.622	93.574			
15	0.295	1.477	95.051			
16	0.273	1.366	96.417			
17	0.212	1.059	97.476			
18	0.203	1.014	98.490			
19	0.173	0.863	99.353			
20	0.129	0.647	100.000			

The second criterion used to determine the number of components was the screeplot shown in the next page (Figure 16). This graph displayed the eigenvalue for each factor and it was possible to observe a clear drop from factor one to factor two, while the rest of the factors had very close eigenvalues. In view of the findings from PCA the use of this criterion for extraction of components was inconclusive.

Parallel analysis, the third criterion used to support factor extraction produced randomly generated eigenvalues (20 variables x 369 cases) that were summarised in a table (Table 22, page 168) comparing them to actual eigenvalues from the unrotated solution of the EFA (PCA extraction method). Parallel analysis supports the extraction of those components whose eigenvalues are lower than those obtained from PCA (Pallant, 2005).

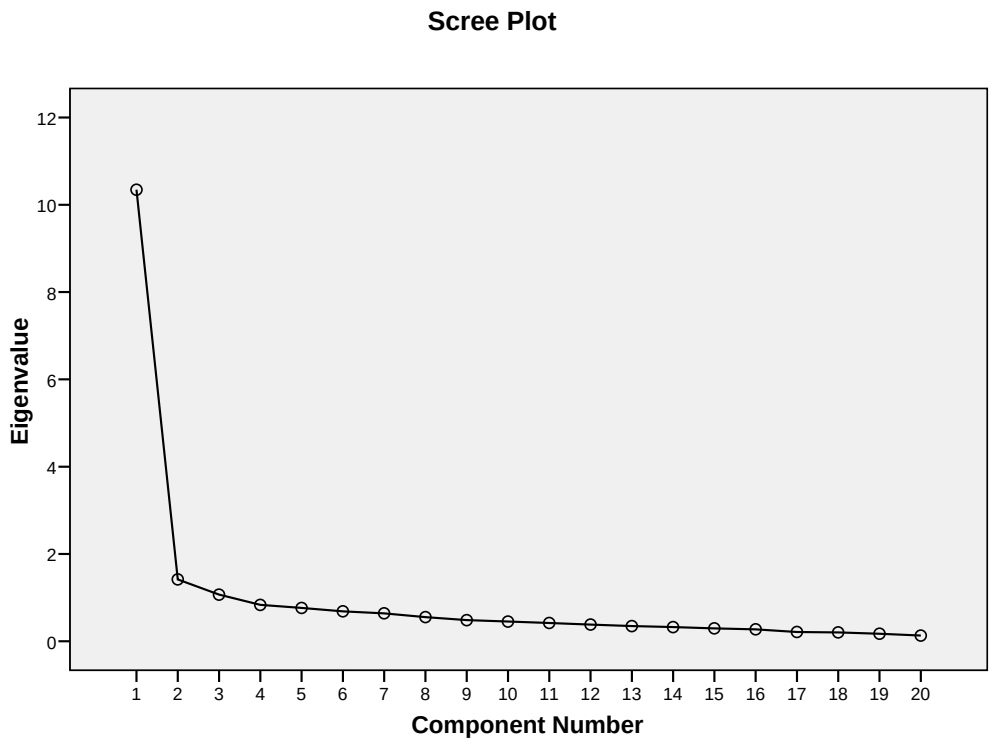

Figure 16: Screeplot of eigenvalues

Parallel analysis revealed only two components matching the criterion, so the analysis supported extracting only those components (Table 22). In sum, each criterion applied to support deciding the number of components to extract presented a different scenario. Kaiser's criterion supported extracting three components, the screeplot was inconclusive and parallel analysis supported extracting two components. Thus, further tests were considered necessary.

Table 22: Comparison of eigenvalues from PCA and parallel analysis

Component	Eigenvalue from PCA	Eigenvalue from parallel analysis
1	10.346	1.443
2	1.418	1.356
3	1.068	1.293
4	0.834	1.244
5	0.764	1.199
6	0.685	1.154
7	0.640	1.113
8	0.553	1.073
9	0.483	1.036
10	0.451	1.000
11	0.419	0.967
12	0.383	0.932
13	0.347	0.896
14	0.324	0.860
15	0.295	0.827
16	0.273	0.792
17	0.212	0.761
18	0.203	0.725
19	0.173	0.685
20	0.129	0.635

The analysis of the component matrix (Table 23) showed item loadings on three components. All items correlated strongly with component one, but even though fewer items loaded onto components two and three, according to the critical values (Field, 2005) recommended for comparison (Chapter 4), their extraction was supported by the significant absolute values of their loadings (over 0.298). Since both Kaiser's criterion and the analysis of the component matrix supported the extraction of three components I decided to continue the EFA following these criteria. Three components were investigated as explaining the composition of the CCQ scale.

Table 23: Component matrix (PCA extraction method)

	Component (a)		
	1	2	3
I know when and how to start a conversation with friends or people I know.	0.762	0.362	
I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers or authorities.	0.705	0.475	
I know when and how to finish a conversation with friends or people I know.	0.700	0.453	
I know when and how to finish a conversation with strangers or authorities.	0.684	0.444	
I know when to respond to an interlocutor or how to participate in a conversation.	0.759		
I know how to respond or participate during conversation.	0.735		
I have enough vocabulary to express my ideas, feelings, and mood.	0.705		
I have good pronunciation.	0.686		
I am fluent enough in the language to express my ideas clearly.	0.783		
I understand conversations with friends or people I know.	0.764		
I understand conversations with strangers or authorities.	0.754		
I understand the ideas expressed in films or television programmes.	0.701		0.333
I understand the language grammar.	0.696		
I apply correct language grammar in a conversation.	0.743		-0.376
I understand textbooks, manuals or directions.	0.721	-0.336	
I understand magazines and newspapers.	0.777		0.319
I understand novels and other types of literature.	0.743		
I know how to write using correct grammar.	0.721		-0.354
I know how to start and finish a letter or a school report.	0.768		
My errors do not impede my communication.	0.509		

a Three components extracted.

Rotating components

Exploring the CCQ scale without a priori assumptions implied analysing eigenvalues obtained from unrotated solutions as showed above and also conducting both orthogonal and oblique rotation techniques to determine which yielded more meaningful results (refer to section on factor rotation in Chapter 4). After several trials, oblimin rotation, one technique for oblique rotation, revealed different results (Table 24) than those of varimax rotation (one type of orthogonal technique) indicating that the items could not be assumed to be independent (Field, 2005). In other words, the three components seemed to have a certain degree of dependence (refer to Chapter 4). Moreover, the component correlation matrix (see Table 25) was not an identity matrix (where the covariance values are zero and suggest component independence) and supported conducting oblimin rotation since all components showed strong (over 0.3) correlations (Pallant, 2005). The data yielded by the oblimin

rotation table (Table 24) were more meaningful to understanding the composition of the scale and are used in this discussion. However, the table showing the total variance explained with varimax rotation is included in Appendix I for comparison purposes.

Table 24: Total variance explained (PCA extraction method; oblimin rotation)

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Square Loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings (a)
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	10.346	51.729	51.729	10.346	51.729	51.729	8.243
2	1.418	7.089	58.818	1.418	7.089	58.818	7.482
3	1.068	5.339	64.157	1.068	5.339	64.157	8.502
4	0.834	4.169	68.326				
5	0.764	3.819	72.145				
6	0.685	3.425	75.570				
7	0.640	3.201	78.771				
8	0.553	2.763	81.534				
9	0.483	2.417	83.951				
10	0.451	2.257	86.208				
11	0.419	2.094	88.302				
12	0.383	1.914	90.216				
13	0.347	1.736	91.952				
14	0.324	1.622	93.574				
15	0.295	1.477	95.051				
16	0.273	1.366	96.417				
17	0.212	1.059	97.476				
18	0.203	1.014	98.490				
19	0.173	0.863	99.353				
20	0.129	0.647	100.000				

a When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Table 25: Component correlation matrix

Component	1	2	3
1	1.000	0.576	-0.688
2	0.576	1.000	-0.609
3	-0.688	-0.609	1.000

The component correlation matrix (Table 25), shows a higher absolute correlation between components one and three (.688), but correlations between components one and two (.576), and two and three (.609) are still high. So, there is dependence between all components of the scale. After PCA extraction, the three component solution in Table 24 explained over 64% of the variance and this analysis suggested that in this administration and context, the

scale has a certain degree of measurement validity. However, as the footnote in the same table indicated, after oblimin rotation it was observed that all components correlated highly and a value of the total variance explained cannot be obtained. In this case, the statistic value available is the eigenvalues after rotations, which were quite balanced for all components due to their correlation: component one 8.243, component two 7.482 and component three 8.502.

The next step was to ascertain the pertinence of the items to specific components to assist in their interpretation. For this test, the actual variance of each item on a component was analysed and values with loadings below 0.4 were not considered (Field, 2005). The resulting pattern matrix (Table 26) showed loadings representing the contribution of each variable onto just one component, yielding its unique variance. Considering absolute values of the loadings in the pattern matrix (Field, 2005), it is possible to observe that the variables loaded highly onto each component, meaning that each component represents a strongly built unique construct that needs to be named from the analysis of the variables involved. However, since oblimin rotation does not assume independence between components (Table 24), a structure matrix is available for further analysis.

The structure matrix shows the shared variance correlations between each item and all the components identified, and it helps to observe where correlations are stronger. The structure matrix for this investigation (Table 27) revealed all items in the scale had strong relationships with all three components (except the item *my errors do not impede my communication*, which correlated with components one and three). This finding further supports the decision to conduct oblimin rotation on the data and suggests that the three underlying components identified represent constructs in the social world that are sub-components of a larger construct.

Table 26: Pattern matrix showing unique component loadings

	Component		
	1	2	3
I understand magazines and newspapers.	0.899		
I understand textbooks, manuals or directions.	0.880		
I understand the ideas expressed in films or television programmes.	0.774		
I understand novels and other types of literature.	0.698		
I understand conversations with friends or people I know.	0.688		
I understand conversations with strangers or authorities.	0.575		
My errors do not impede my communication.	0.499		
I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers or authorities.		0.854	
I know when and how to start a conversation with friends or people I know.		0.854	
I know when and how to finish a conversation with strangers or authorities.		0.814	
I know when and how to finish a conversation with friends or people I know.		0.732	
I know when to respond to an interlocutor or how to participate in a conversation.		0.586	
I know how to respond or participate during conversation.		0.530	
I apply correct language grammar in a conversation.			-0.856
I know how to write using correct grammar.			-0.791
I have good pronunciation.			-0.780
I am fluent enough in the language to express my ideas clearly.			-0.709
I have enough vocabulary to express my ideas, feelings, and mood.			-0.673
I know how to start and finish a letter or a school report.			-0.671
I understand the language grammar.			-0.648

Table 27: Structure matrix showing shared component loadings

	Component		
	1	2	3
I understand magazines and newspapers.	0.895	0.513	-0.614
I understand textbooks, manuals or directions.	0.839	0.425	-0.567
I understand conversations with friends or people I know.	0.800	0.524	-0.623
I understand novels and other types of literature.	0.797	0.459	-0.639
I understand the ideas expressed in films or television programmes.	0.784	0.529	-0.514
I understand conversations with strangers or authorities.	0.750	0.611	-0.591
My errors do not impede my communication.	0.552		-0.410
I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers or authorities.	0.481	0.851	-0.520
I know when and how to finish a conversation with friends or people I know.	0.509	0.846	-0.487
I know when and how to start a conversation with friends or people I know.	0.568	0.834	-0.591
I know when and how to finish a conversation with strangers or authorities.	0.470	0.818	-0.503
I know when to respond to an interlocutor or how to participate in a conversation.	0.585	0.788	-0.625
I know how to respond or participate during conversation.	0.560	0.725	-0.618
I apply correct language grammar in a conversation.	0.595	0.463	-0.641
I am fluent enough in the language to express my ideas clearly.	0.626	0.567	-0.822
I know how to write using correct grammar.	0.573	0.465	-0.801
I know how to start and finish a letter or a school report.	0.634	0.540	-0.800
I have good pronunciation.	0.516	0.486	-0.773
I have enough vocabulary to express my ideas, feelings, and mood.	0.471	0.595	-0.736
I understand the language grammar.	0.571	0.469	-0.735

Identifying components

The next step was identifying the underlying components found in the pattern matrix (Table 26) in terms of the concept of communicative competence (Chapter 2) and the themes from the literature reviewed in Chapter 3. Also, the structure matrix (Table 27) supports the initial proposition of the purpose of the CCQ scale to assess one single phenomenon: self-perception of communicative competence.

Component one: the items loaded onto this component assess the self-perception of participants as efficacious language users in terms of the development of their receptive language skills. Most items begin with the statement 'I understand…', so respondents' agreement with these items means they perceive some efficacy in their understanding of the foreign language both in aural and written forms. It is worth mentioning that item 20 in the CCQ '*my errors do not impede my communication',* showed the weakest loading (.499) meaning that although the item is part of the structure of this component, it does not support it well. The reason for this may be the interpretation of the reach of the statement since errors in communication do not only mean errors in producing the language, but also errors in understanding and interpreting the linguistic input received. In this case, the item could have been interpreted by respondents to mean that errors when comprehending language input do not impede the larger process of communication since the individual may still be able to achieve his communication goals after some clarification and negotiation of meaning. Another characteristic of the items loaded onto this component is that agreement with the statements reflects some confidence in one's receptive skills. These observations led me to consider that the component identified not only some aspects of the concept of self-efficacy but also of self-confidence, at least at the level of receptive ability in the foreign language, so the component was identified as *self-efficacy and confidence in receptive skills*.

Component two was identified as *knowledge of rules about oral communication*. All items loaded onto this component referred specifically to knowledge of the conventions of conversation at two levels of distance to the respondent. These levels of distance were short distance (conversation with friends and family) and long distance (conversations with strangers and authorities) as explained in Chapter 4. It is observable that these items did not ask respondents to indicate their self-perceptions of efficacy in oral communication, but rather to show their agreement (confidence) about having knowledge of the rules governing it. Thus this component was different to component one, but it is still part of the larger construct of communicative competence that in sum covers both knowledge of the language and ability to use it.

Component three was composed of items covering some of the wider aspects of communicative competence as defined in this thesis. Some of these items referred to confidence in one's knowledge of English grammar in oral and written form, while others referred to notions of self-efficacy at using the foreign language grammatically and fluently, and having sufficient vocabulary and good pronunciation to express one's ideas effectively. The items loaded onto component three covered both knowledge of the language and ability to use it for communication and so the component was identified as *communicative competence*. Component three differed from components one and two; component one refers more particularly to self-efficacy in understanding the TL and component two refers to having confidence in one's knowledge in oral situations, but component three covered both self-efficacy and self-confidence particularly in expressing one's ideas in written or oral form. Finally, the structure matrix (Table 27) showed that all three components were highly correlated and this suggests that the proposition that all components measure aspects of a larger construct was correct. In this investigation the analysis of each component supported the larger construct of self-perception of communicative competence since both self-efficacy

(cognitive) and self-confidence (emotional) elements conforming self-perception (Chapter 3) and communicative competence (Chapter 2) were investigated with the CCQ scale.

Reliability of the scale: Cronbach's alpha

The CCQ scale in the questionnaire required that respondents assessed self-perceptions and indicated agreement with 20 items in a Likert-type rating scale (described and justified in Chapter 4). Then it was relevant to assess CCQ's internal reliability and I indicated in the previous chapter how the use of Cronbach's alpha helps achieve this. The scale's overall Cronbach's alpha value was .950 (Table 28), which was an excellent result since it indicates that the items in the scale used together as a set, should produce consistent overall results when included in future administrations of the questionnaire.

Table 28: Cronbach's Alpha value for the CCQ scale

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	N of items
0.950	0.950	20

After conducting the PCA for the exploratory factor analysis, I revised the reliability of the three underlying components individually to see whether they affected overall reliability of the CCQ scale. I used Cronbach's alpha again and found that for the three components, Cronbach's alpha did not vary much (Table 29).

Table 29: Cronbach's Alpha values for each underlying component

Component	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	N of items
1 Self-efficacy and confidence in receptive skills	0.890	0.893	7
2 Knowledge of rules about oral communication	0.904	0.904	6
3 Communicative competence	0.899	0.901	7

Cronbach's alpha for the individual components and the overall scale provided support to say that the scale is internally reliable. CCQ's overall alpha was .950, and as can be seen

from Table 29 above, individual components' alpha values were above .8, but in no case they were greater than the overall .950 meaning that the reliability of the scale was increased by the inclusion of all components. If individual components' alpha had been greater than overall alpha it would suggest that a particular component held the others together; whereas if individual alpha values had been less than .7, it would mean that the inclusion of such component weakened the overall reliability of the scale. After having established the scale's internal reliability, the next step was to assess communicative competence scores for the sample and to compare these against the background section of the CCQ with bivariate analysis. The next section presents the findings from those analyses.

Review of structural analysis of the CCQ

The characteristics of the CCQ scale made it suitable to undergo exploratory factor analysis. Principal components analysis (PCA) was the method of extraction chosen to explore the underlying structure of the scale and its output revealed three components should be extracted (eigenvalues>=1). Oblimin rotation was conducted to gain a better view of the behaviour of the item loadings onto each component and the pattern and structure matrices obtained helped identify the components. Component one was named self-efficacy and confidence in receptive skills, component two was knowledge of rules about oral communication, and component three was communicative competence. However, since all components loaded highly in the structure matrix, it is possible to say they are all aspects of the larger construct of self-perception of communicative competence. PCA also accounted for 64% of total variance explanation supporting measurement validity of the scale and reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha analysis (.950). In sum, the CCQ scale measured what it was designed to assess, and it is probable it will yield similar results in future administrations in similar contexts.

Bivariate analysis, communicative competence scale

Participants' self-perceptions of communicative competence were summarised in a new variable named *CommComp* containing composites of average score of the 20 Likert-type scale items for each participant (see variable coding log in Appendix G). I conducted statistical analyses on the composite variables:

- to assess parametric validity of the data
- to explore differences between self-perception of communicative competence and background variables (gender, age group, area of study, EFL course, time studying EFL, time spent practising EFL per week, places of study, and ways of practice outside of school)

The rationale for these and other methodological decisions was introduced in Chapter 4, and only statistically significant findings of all analyses are described in the following subsections.

Assumptions about parametric data

Independence of observation was assumed since the CCQ questionnaire used a five-point Likert-type scale where the intervals between the values of one to five, were all equal. Also participants in each school were approached at the same time, received equal information about the research and could not confer when filling out the questionnaire, making the data of each participant independent.

Normality of the dataset was assessed statistically with a descriptive analysis of the *CommComp* variable (Table 30). Table 30 shows a Mean value quite in the centre of the five-point scale (M=2.9866), a very small negative skewness (-.235), and also a very small negative kurtosis (-.384) all indicative of a normal distribution of data. A bell curve displayed the sample scores (Figure 17), finding them supportive of a normal dataset

distribution. A boxplot displayed the median score (Mdn=3.0) and searched for outlier values, and as can be observed in that plot, there were none (Figure 18).

Table 30: Descriptive statistics for scores of communicative competence (n=369)

N	Valid	369
	Missing	0
Mean		2.9866
Median		3.0000
Mode		2.65
Skewness		-0.235
Standard error of skewness		0.127
Kurtosis		-0.384
Standard error of kurtosis		0.253
Minimum		1.00
Maximum		4.90
Percentiles	25	2.4355
	50	3.0000
	75	3.5500

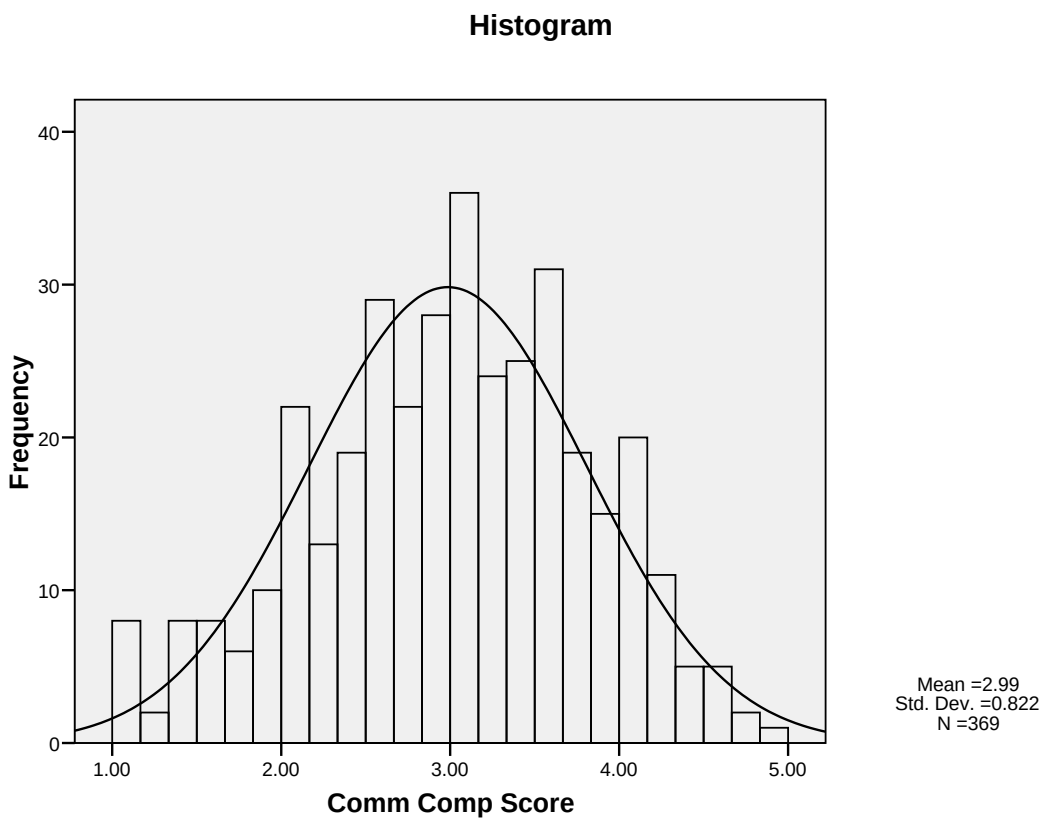

Figure 17: CCQ scores in bell curve

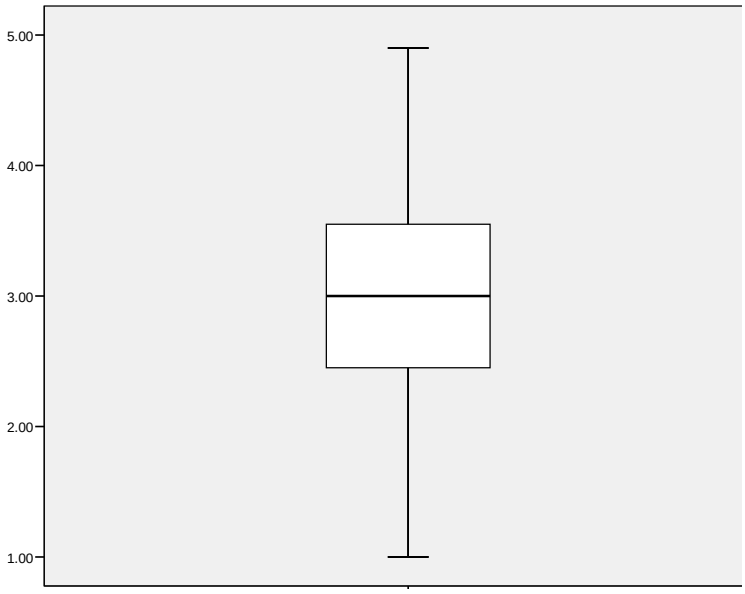

Figure 18: Boxplot of CCQ scores (Mdn=3.00)

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality (Table 31) showed a non-significant result (p>.05) for the *CommComp* score, indicating there was a normal distribution of the sample.

Table 31: Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistics	degree of freedom	Significance	Statistics	degree of freedom	Significance
Score of communicative competence	0.036	369	0.200	0.990	369	0.014

Finally, observed *CommComp* scores (circles) in the normal Q-Q plot traced were very closely distributed along the expected values (straight line in Figure 19), meaning there was a normal distribution for the overall scale.

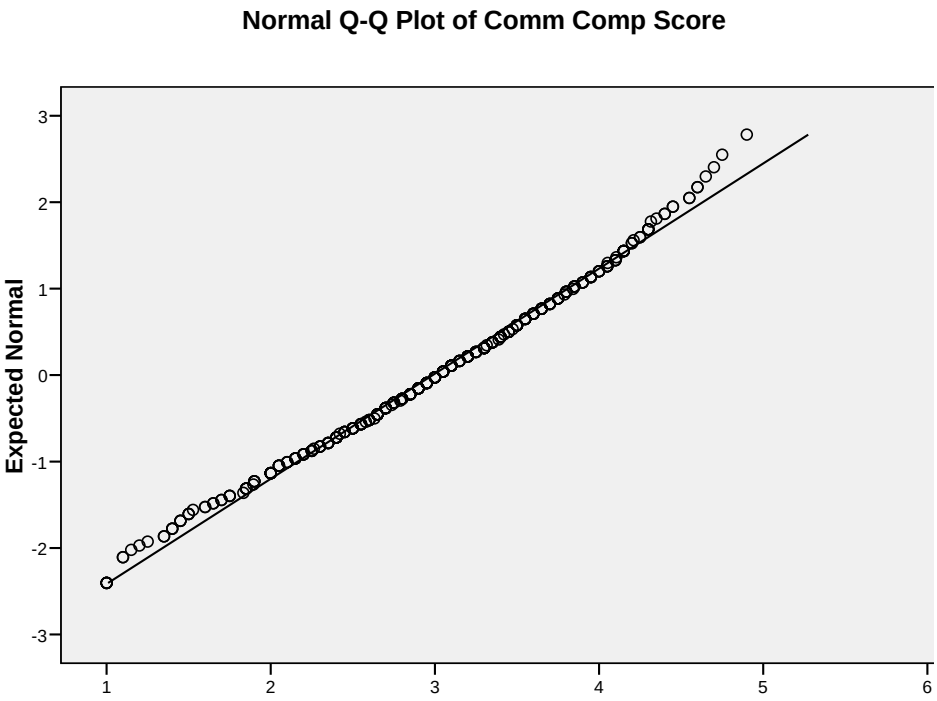

Figure 19: Observed values (circles) along expected values (line)

Homogeneity of variance was assessed with Levene's test (Table 32). The significance values were all over .05 [$F(4, 364)=1.355$, ns] and difference in variances was non-existent, sustaining that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not breached.

Table 32: Levene's test of homogeneity of variances

Score of communicative competence	Levene statistic	degree of freedom 1	degree of freedom 2	Significance
based on Mean	1.355	4	364	0.249
based on Median	1.539	4	364	0.190
based on Median and with adjusted degree of freedom	1.539	4	353.558	0.190
based on trimmed Mean	1.416	4	364	0.228

Exploring groups: Communicative competence scores and background data

EFL modules

Table 33 shows descriptive statistics for English 2 (M=3.28; SD=.786) and English 1 (M=2.95; SD=.793). An overview of this table suggests respondents enrolled in English 2 had higher self-perceptions of communicative competence than those enrolled in English 1.

Table 33: Communicative competence scores by EFL module of study (n=281)

EFL module	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error Mean
English 1	231	2.9585	0.79310	0.05218
English 2	50	3.2831	0.78600	0.11116

The following t-test (Table 34) displays homogeneity of variances between the two groups is non-significant (p>.05). However, there was a statistically significant difference between English 1 and English 2 [t(279)=-2.62, p=.009], although the magnitude of this difference was relatively small (eta squared=.024). This difference supported the initial observation that EFL course of enrolment does influence participants' self-perceptions of communicative competence.

Table 34: T-Test for Communicative competence and EFL modules

	Communicative Competence score								
	Levene's Test for equality of variances		t-test for equity of Means						
	F	Significance	T	degree of freedom	Significance (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Standard error difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.487	0.486	-2.63	279	0.009	-0.3246	0.12351	-0.56774	-0.0815
Equal variances not assumed			-2.64	72.229	0.01	-0.3246	0.12280	-0.56938	-0.0798

Time studying EFL

Descriptive statistics for time studying EFL (Table 35) showed the highest Mean was among those who had studied EFL for over three years (M=3.26; SD=.807; min=1.00; max=4.90),

while the lowest was among those who had studied EFL for six months or less (M=2.72; SD=.878; min=1.00; max=4.70).

Table 35: Communicative competence scores and Time studying EFL (n=355)

		less than six months	six months to one year	one to three years	more than three years	Total
N		109	78	72	96	355
Mean		2.7276	3.0890	3.0392	3.2682	3.0310
Standard deviation		0.87802	0.59649	0.77801	0.80710	0.80805
Standard error		0.08410	0.06754	0.09169	0.08237	0.04289
95% Confidence interval for mean	Lower bound	2.5609	2.9545	2.8564	3.1047	2.9321
	Upper bound	2.8943	3.2235	3.2220	3.4318	3.1008
Minimum		1.00	1.60	1.15	1.00	1.00
Maximum		4.70	4.45	4.35	4.90	4.90

Levene's test was statistically significant (p<.05), indicating homogeneity of variances had been violated (Table 36). In this case, and since few other variables violated the assumption of homogeneity of variances, instead of conducting a one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA), I used the Welch test (Table 37) to explore the mean differences between the four groups about time studying EFL and CommComp (refer to Chapter 4 for a justification of this).

Table 36: Levene's Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene statistic	degree of freedom 1	degree of freedom 2	Significance
4.767	3	351	0.003

Table 37: Welch Test of equality of Means

	Statistic (F)	degree of freedom 1	degree of freedom 2	Significance
Welch	7.282	3	189.018	0.000
Brown-Forsythe	8.830	3	336.714	0.000

Table 37 revealed that the Welch test result was statistically significant (p<.01) indicating a difference in the means across the groups under study [$F(3, 189)=7.282$, $p=.000$] and the effect size was moderate (eta squared=.067). With a statistically significant difference in means in this test, a post-hoc table (Tukey HSD) identifies where the difference is (Table

38). Post-hoc analysis identified very small but statistically significant negative mean differences of the group studying EFL for less than six months (M=2.72; SD=.878) with all the other groups (six months to one year [M=3.08; SD=.596], over one year to three years [M=3.03; SD=.778], and over three years [M=3.26; SD=.807]). Negative mean differences suggest that the shorter the time a participant in the sample studied EFL, the lower his self-perception of communicative competence is.

Table 38: Multiple comparisons of Means and Time studying EFL

(I) Time studying EFL	(J) Time studying EFL	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance	95% Confidence interval Lower bound	95% Confidence interval Upper bound
less than six months	six months to one year*	-0.36137	0.11621	0.011	-0.6614	-0.0614
	one to three years*	-0.31160	0.11900	0.045	-0.6188	-0.0044
	more than three years*	-0.54060	0.10968	0.000	-0.8237	-0.2575
six months to one year	less than six months*	0.36137	0.11621	0.011	0.0614	0.6614
	one to three years	0.04978	0.12806	0.980	-0.2808	0.3804
	more than three years	-0.17923	0.11945	0.438	-0.4876	0.1291
one to three years	less than six months*	0.31160	0.11900	0.045	0.0044	0.6188
	six months to one year	-0.04978	0.12806	0.980	-0.3804	0.2808
	more than three years	-0.22900	0.12216	0.241	-0.5444	0.0863
more than three years	less than six months*	0.54060	0.10968	0.000	0.2575	0.8237
	six months to one year	0.17923	0.11945	0.438	-0.1291	0.4876
	one to three years	0.22900	0.12216	0.241	-0.0863	0.5444

Time practising EFL per week

Weekly practice, displayed in Table 39, showed the highest mean among practice for over two hours (M=3.61; SD=.699; min=2.20; max=4.65), and the lowest among practice for less than one hour per week (M=2.84; SD=.795; min=1.00; max=4.70).

Table 39: Communicative competence scores and Weekly practice off school (n=353)

		less than one hour	one to two hours	more than two hours	Total
N		244	87	22	353
Mean		2.8414	3.3431	3.6129	2.4494
Standard deviation		0.79582	0.72540	0.69980	0.81536
Standard error		0.05095	0.07777	0.14920	0.04340
95% Confidence interval for mean	Lower bound	2.7411	3.1885	3.3026	2.9278
	Upper bound	2.9418	3.4977	3.9232	3.0985
Minimum		1.00	1.35	2.20	1.00
Maximum		4.70	4.90	4.65	4.90

Homogeneity of variances was not violated (Levene's test, p>.05, Table 40) and since there were more than two groups with different cases in this variable, one-way between groups ANOVA analysis (Table 41) was appropriate. ANOVA revealed a significant (p<.01) difference [$F(2, 350)=20.537$, $p=.000$] with large effect size (eta squared=.10).

Table 40: Levene's Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene statistic	degree of freedom 1	2	Significance
0.748	2	350	0.474

Table 41: ANOVA and Weekly practice off school

	Sum of Squares	degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance
Between groups	24.579	2	12.289	20.537	0.000
Within groups	209.437	350	0.598		
Total	234.016	352			

A significant (p<.05) post-hoc analysis (Tukey HSD, Table 42) revealed small negative difference for less than one hour of practice (M=2.84; SD=.795) and one to two hours (M=3.34; SD=.725); moderate negative difference for less than one hour and over two hours of practice (M=3.61; SD=.699) was also observable. Differences suggest the more practice per week, the higher self-perception of communicative competence one has (Figure 20).

Table 42: Multiple comparisons of Means and Weekly practice off school

(I) Weekly practice off school	(J) Weekly practice off school	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance	95% Confidence interval Lower bound	Upper bound
less than one hour	one to two hours*	-0.50165	0.09659	0.000	-0.7290	-0.2743
	more than two hours*	-0.77147	0.17220	0.000	-1.1768	-0.3662
one to two hours	less than one hour*	50.16500	0.09659	0.000	0.2743	0.7290
	more than two hours	-0.26983	0.18460	0.311	-0.7043	0.1647
more than two hours	less than one hour*	0.77147	0.17220	0.000	0.3662	1.1768
	one to two hours	0.26983	0.18460	0.311	-0.1647	0.7043

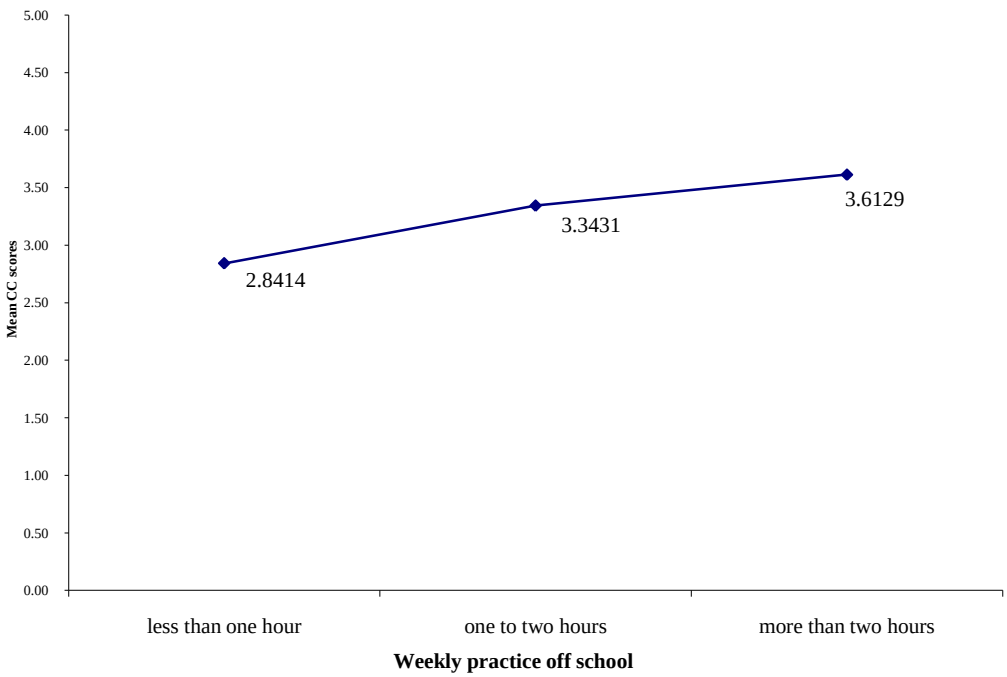

Figure 20: Communicative competence scores and Weekly practice off school

Places of study

Table 43 displays numbers of places where participants have studied; mean values indicate that the group with the lowest mean (perception) was No place of study (M=2.24; SD=.325; min=1.89; max=2.65), while the highest mean was among those who expressed to have studied in three places (M=3.86; SD=.552; min=2.75; max=4.60).

Table 43: Communicative competence scores and Places of study (n=369)

		no place	one place	two places	three places	Total
N		4	267	82	16	369
Mean		2.2487	2.8656	3.2443	3.8688	3.0569
Standard deviation		0.32594	0.82778	0.68239	0.55283	0.82236
Standard error		0.16297	0.05066	0.07536	0.13821	0.04281
95% Confidence interval for mean	Lower bound	1.7300	2.7659	3.0944	3.5742	2.9024
	Upper bound	2.7673	2.9653	3.3942	4.1633	3.0707
Minimum		1.80	1.00	1.00	2.75	1.00
Maximum		2.65	4.90	4.75	4.60	4.90

Levene's test (Table 44) showed that homogeneity of variances was violated ($p<.05$) so the Welch test was conducted (Table 45) and revealed a statistically significant [$F(3,$

13)=23.790, *p*=.000] difference in means between groups; effect size was moderate to large (eta squared=.09).

Table 44: Levene's test of homogeneity of variances

Levene statistic	degree of freedom 1	2	Significance
3.792	3	365	0.011

Table 45: Welch Test of equality of Means

	Statistic (F)	degree of freedom 1	2	Significance
Welch	23.790	3	13.896	0.000
Brown-Forsythe	25.271	3	80.895	0.000

Post-hoc analysis (Table 46) revealed that studying at three places (M=3.86; SD=.552) had statistically significant differences (p<.05) with all other groups. Moreover, studying in two places had a small but statistically significant (p<.05) difference with studying in one place; however, no other statistically significant differences were observed.

Table 46: Multiple comparisons of Means and Places of study

(I) Places of study	(J) Places of study	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance	95% Confidence interval Lower bound	Upper bound
no place	one place	-0.61691	0.39540	0.403	-1.6374	0.4036
	two places	-0.99560	0.40193	0.065	-2.0329	0.0417
	three places*	-1.62007	0.43879	0.001	-2.7526	-0.4876
one place	no place	0.61691	0.39540	0.403	-0.4036	1.6374
	two places*	-0.37869	0.09910	0.001	-0.6345	-0.1229
	three places*	-1.00315	0.20203	0.000	-1.5246	-0.4817
two places	no place	0.99560	0.40193	0.065	-0.0417	2.0329
	one place*	0.37869	0.09910	0.001	0.1229	0.6345
	three places*	-0.62446	0.21453	0.020	-1.1781	-0.0708
three places	no place*	1.62007	0.43879	0.001	0.4876	2.7526
	one place*	1.00315	0.20203	0.000	0.4817	1.5246
	two places*	0.62446	0.21453	0.020	0.0708	1.1781

This finding suggests that to studying EFL in three places (home, school and language centre), would give students more positive self-perceptions of communicative competence

than studying in any combination of two places (home and school, school and language centre, or home and language centre), or in any one place (home, school, or language centre), or no place. However, only slightly over 4% of the sample expressed studying in three places so this finding is not representative of the sample. Figure 21 displays the increase in self-perception as the number of places of study augments.

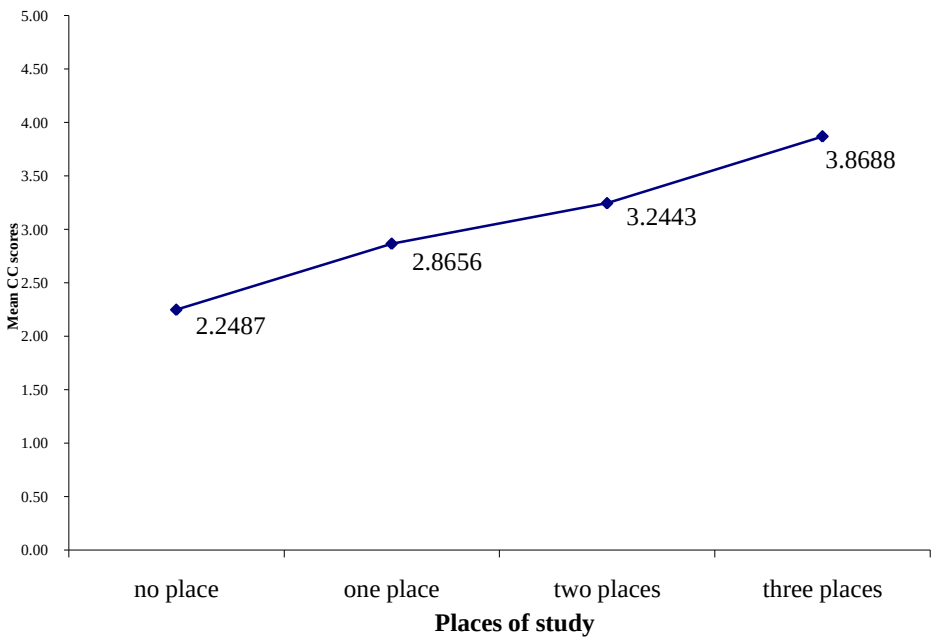

Figure 21: Communicative competence scores and Places of study

Skills practised

Table 47 shows mean values were lowest for the group *no extra practice of skills* (M=2.50; SD=.901; min=1.00; max=4.45), and means were highest for the group who practised *four skills* (M=3.85; SD=.520; min=2.74; max=4.75). Homogeneity of variances was violated (Table 48, p<.05). The Welch test (Table 49) revealed a statistically significant difference in means [$F(4, 104)=24.629$, $p=.000$]. The strength of the associations (effect size) between these groups was large (eta squared=.15).

Table 47: Communicative competence and Skills practised off school (n=369)

		no practice	one skill	two skills	three skills	four skills	Total
N		42	167	87	49	24	369
Mean		2.5039	2.8864	2.9215	3.4305	3.8578	3.1200
Standard deviation		0.90195	0.81169	0.69810	0.61758	0.52056	0.82236
Standard error		0.13917	0.06281	0.07484	0.08823	0.10626	0.04281
95% Confidence interval for mean	Lower bound	2.2229	2.7624	2.7727	3.2531	3.6380	2.9024
	Upper bound	2.7850	3.0104	3.0703	3.6078	4.0776	3.0707
Minimum		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.70	2.74	1.00
Maximum		4.45	4.70	4.45	4.90	4.75	4.90

Table 48: Levene's Test of homogeneity of variances

Levene statistic	degree of freedom 1	2	Significance
4.189	4	364	0.002

Table 49: Welch Test of equality of Means

	Statistic (F)	degree of freedom 1	2	Significance
Welch	24.629	4	104.011	0.000
Brown-Forsythe	19.478	4	206.227	0.000

The next table presents the data about skills. The table (Table 50) indicates that *no practice* (M=2.50; SD=.901) had a statistically significant negative difference (p<.05) with all other numbers of skills; *one skill* (M=2.88; SD=.811) had a significant negative difference (p<.01) with *three skills* and *four skills*; *two skills* (M=2.92; SD=.698) had a statistically significant negative difference (p<.01) with *three skills* and *four skills*; no other statistically significant differences were found among other groups. It appears that among participants, practising particular skills did not make a difference in self-perception; however, practising EFL against having no practice at all made a positive difference in self-perception. Furthermore, practising three and four skills had a positive difference to practising only one and two skills.

Figure 22 shows the differences in means across the groups suggesting a pattern of slightly increased self-perception as the number of skills practised increases.

Table 50: Multiple comparisons of Means and Skills practised off school

(I) Skills practised	(J) Skills practised	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance	95% Confidence interval Lower bound	Upper bound
no practice	one skill*	-0.38244	0.13086	0.030	-0.7412	-0.0237
	two skills*	-0.41753	0.14243	0.029	-0.8080	-0.0270
	three skills*	-0.92650	0.15940	0.000	-1.3635	-0.4895
	four skills*	-1.35384	0.19397	0.000	-1.8856	-0.8221
one skill	no practice*	0.38244	0.13086	0.030	0.0237	0.7412
	two skills	-0.03508	0.10023	0.997	-0.3099	0.2397
	three skills*	-0.54406	0.12316	0.000	-0.8817	-0.2064
	four skills*	-0.97139	0.16548	0.000	-1.4251	-0.5177
two skills	no practice*	0.41753	0.14243	0.029	0.2700	0.8080
	one skill	0.03508	0.10023	0.997	-0.2397	0.3099
	three skills*	-0.50898	0.13540	0.002	-0.8802	-0.1378
	four skills*	-0.93631	0.17478	0.000	-1.4155	-0.4571
three skills	no practice*	0.92650	0.15940	0.000	0.4895	1.3635
	one skill*	0.54406	0.12316	0.000	0.2064	0.8817
	two skills*	0.50898	0.13540	0.002	0.1378	0.8802
	four skills	-0.42733	0.18887	0.160	-0.9451	0.0904
four skills	no practice*	1.35384	0.19397	0.000	0.8221	1.8856
	one skill*	0.97139	0.16548	0.000	0.5177	1.4251
	two skills*	0.93631	0.17478	0.000	0.4571	1.4155
	three skills	0.42733	0.18887	0.160	-0.0904	0.9451

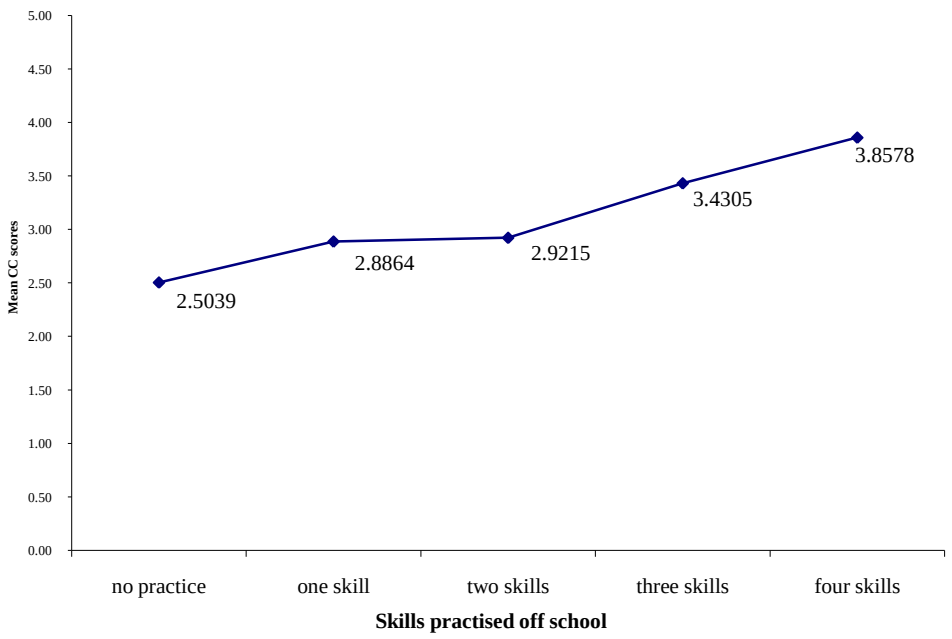

Figure 22: Communicative competence scores and Skills practised off school

Other types of practice (practice dynamics)

Qualitative data obtained from question eight (76 responses) were analysed using exploratory thematic analysis; 13 themes were identified and transformed into quantitative values. When themes suggested participants practised EFL individually with non-interactive activities, these were recoded as a thematic group (*practice alone)*. When responses suggested some type of interaction—via electronic means or face to face—they were recoded as *interactive practice*. If there was no indication of extra practice, this was recoded as *no other practice*. Transforming qualitative data enabled using one-way between groups ANOVA analysis to compare the differences in means among the three thematic groups of the new variable; however, results have to be taken in cautiously because the large majority of participants did not provide any responses in the *other* category (over 83%). The new variable was compared with scores of communicative competence and the results show (Table 51) the lowest mean values among *no other practice* (M=2.92; SD=.815; min=1.00; max=4.90), while the highest mean values were *practice alone* (M=3.38; SD=.778; min=1.40; max=4.60).

Table 51: Communicative competence scores and other types of practice (n=369)

		no other practice	practice alone	interactive practice	Total
N		307	42	20	369
Mean		2.9290	3.3805	3.0425	2.9866
Standard deviation		0.81553	0.77800	0.82530	0.82236
Standard error		0.04654	0.12005	0.18454	0.04281
95% Confidence interval for mean	Lower bound	2.8374	3.1380	2.6562	2.9024
	Upper bound	3.0206	3.6229	3.4288	3.0707
Minimum		1.00	1.40	1.00	1.00
Maximum		4.90	4.60	4.30	4.90

The assumption of homogeneity of variances was not violated (Table 52; Levene's test p>.05), so Table 53 shows ANOVA results observing a statistically significant difference (p<.01). The significance suggests that the types of other practice undertaken made a difference in self-perception of communicative competence among participants [*F*(2,

366)=5.761, *p*=.003]; however, the strength of the association of these groups was small (eta squared=.03).

Table 52: Levene's Test of homogeneity of variances

	degree of freedom		
Levene statistic	1	2	Significance
0.071	2	366	0.932

Table 53: ANOVA and Other types of practice

	Sum of Squares	degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance
Between groups	7.595	2	3.798	5.781	0.003
Within groups	241.276	366	0.659		
Total	248.871	368			

The post-hoc table of multiple comparisons (Table 54), showed a moderate but statistically significant negative difference (p<.05) between n*o other practice* and *practice alone* suggesting that even individual practice yields more positive self-perception than absolutely no practice of EFL. No other statistically significant differences were found among the data. Figure 23 displays the differences in means for the three thematic groups.

Table 54: Multiple comparisons of Means and Other types of practice

(I) Other types of practice	(J) Other types of practice	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significance	95% Confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
no other practice	practice alone*	-0.45142	0.13358	0.002	-0.7658	-0.1371
	interactive practice	-0.11347	0.18737	0.817	-0.5544	0.3275
practice alone	no other practice*	0.45142	0.13358	0.002	0.1371	0.7658
	interactive practice	0.33795	0.22058	0.277	-0.1811	0.8570
interactive practice	no other practice	0.11347	0.18737	0.817	-0.3275	0.5544
	practice alone	-0.33795	0.22058	0.277	-0.8570	0.1811

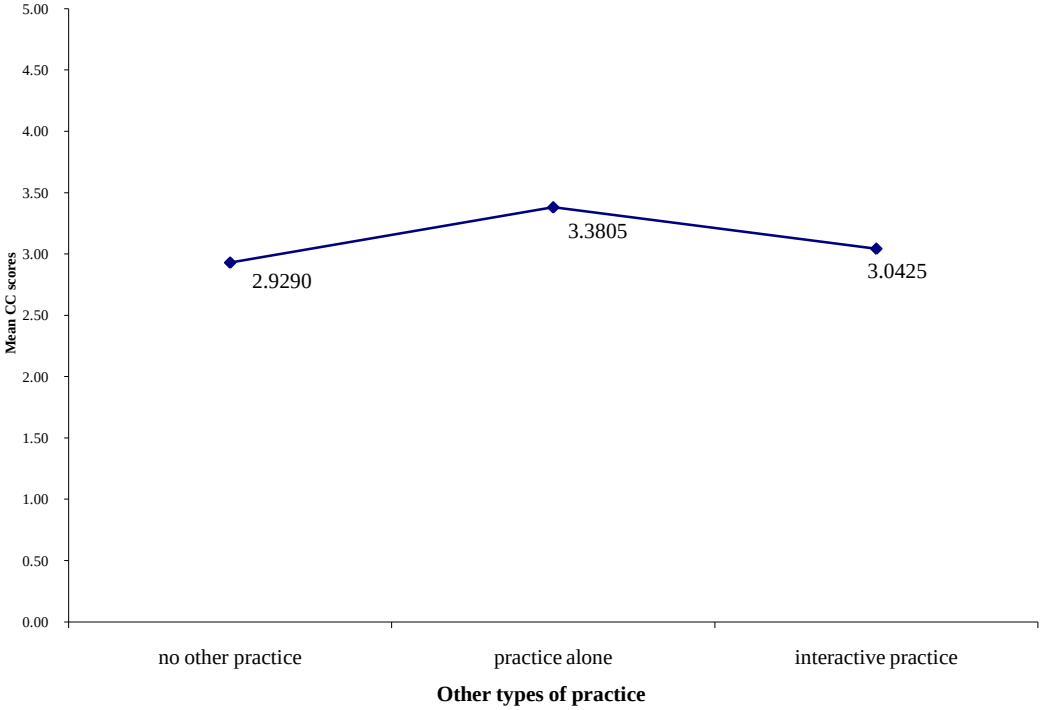

Figure 23: Communicative competence and other types of practice

Review of bivariate analysis

Assumptions about parametric data were all met: the dataset was normally distributed, all data were independent, interval data were used in the analyses and homogeneity of variance was not statistically significant. Bivariate analysis revealed that only a few groups (categories) of background data made a statistically significant difference on self-perception of communicative competence. Most of these categories referred to contact with the target language, both in time and manner. For instance, lower self-perceptions were found among students enrolled in English 1, who studied English for less than six months, practised for less than one hour off school, or did not indicate studying at any place at all. Also, self-perception was lower among those who said they did not practise English skills apart from what they did at school or simply said they did not practise any language skills.

Focus group sessions: Qualitative data analysis

Data analysis decisions and reach of the focus group data

Focus group data were subjected to exploratory thematic analysis and the results of that investigation are presented in this section. As a reminder, when used in this presentation and further discussion, participant names have been changed to ensure confidentiality. First, data found in both focus group sessions (intergroup) are introduced; then summaries of main themes found within each focus group (intra-group) are described and then there are details from individual participants' comments. The data presented in this section are not intended to be considered representative of other individuals beyond those who participated in the two focus group sessions conducted. The views and perceptions of the participants in this study may reflect those of their generation and university cohort, and also be informed by participants' larger socio-cultural environments, but can only be seen as enlightening and not as illustrative of such.

Commonalities between groups

The focus group schedule (Appendix F) was closely followed, but also ideas of participants were pursued during the sessions so there were detours from the plan. Keeping this in mind, the first issue was to explore how participants conceptualised English and how these concepts made them feel, then to get to the origins of their feelings. One intergroup finding was qualifying the acquisition of English as a foreign language as a useful attainment instrument; that is, participants' viewed learning EFL or speaking English as a means to attain better job and career opportunities. Participants agreed that their socio-cultural backgrounds and environments also seemed to support a view of communicative competence in English as a tool for social mobility. This finding supported the discussion about the relevance of communicative competence in English introduced in Chapter 1 (about the local setting) and Chapter 2 (about globalisation and communicative competence).

English was defined as something necessary and of international (if not universal) impact, but at the same time difficult. The groups realised it requires time and effort to be able to learn to speak the language, but also that English is an interesting tool for communication. The group felt a need to study, to actually take foreign language courses in order to "get it", which perhaps is reflected in the CCQ scores with higher self-perception among those who studied English at least at one place, usually school. Furthermore, English was an instrument for achieving other objectives beyond those related to personal development—for example, successfully finishing university degree studies (academic achievement), or gaining status among peers and colleagues—someone who speaks English well becomes pretty or attractive. However, attractiveness was not defined as physical appearance but rather as beauty and elegance perceived by the listener wishing for ability and confidence to interact with any person in the target language. This finding suggested the involvement of ideal self theory (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009a) among the influences building self-perception, and as such was reported as an emerging framework in Chapter 3.

At the time of this study, participants felt they lacked the time and concentration to continue studying or start studying EFL, which was supported by quantitative findings about the background experiences with the language obtained from CCQ data (earlier in this chapter). Group members said university study was very demanding and this made them feel they had wasted the time before, when they did not have as many responsibilities, to learn English. So, although participants did not see it as an impossible or unachievable goal, they also felt learning and speaking English were very difficult tasks. It is relevant to note how group members attributed their failure (having low self-perception of communicative competence) to both internal and external elements; they had not put enough effort in learning earlier in their lives, English was very difficult and university study responsibility made it harder to find time to learn. These comments highlighted that some elements of attribution theory

(Weiner, 1986, 2005; Schunk, 2008) were also emerging from the data and as such were discussed in Chapter 3. When prompted for more details about their comments, group members referred to the importance given to English by business recruiters in terms of percentages as quantifiers of language ability commonly used and how they did not fit those criteria. The importance of English as a means to attain better job and career opportunities (identified as gain) was highlighted by both groups.

Where groups also agreed was in their personal distance from the foreign language and what it represents. On the one hand, there was a view of respect and admiration for the language and its impact on the rest of the world mixed with a wish to be able to become part of that world; on the other hand, the distance from English speakers made participants perceive it was impossible to achieve the necessary skills to speak the foreign language. Furthermore, group members perceived English speakers so distant from them as to become an issue of group identity. If you speak English you identify yourself as a fitting member of that group (Norton, 1997; Rubenfeld et al., 2006), and you gain the status associated with that particular group as long as you maintain that identity.

Focus group session one: Samples from participant input and interaction

CCQ scores indicated participants in this group were in the lowest quartile of scores (minimum= 1, maximum=5) of self-perception of communicative competence among the sampled students (see Table 55).

Table 55: Focus group session 1

Score quartile: 0 to 34% (1.00 to 1.70 score)			
Participants present: female (2), male (1)			
Gender	Age	CCQ score	Area of study
Female	18	1.40	Law and Social Sciences
Male	19	1.45	Law and Social Sciences
Female	17	1.50	Health Sciences

To make presentation clear, only the lines of reference from the transcript are included in the text. Please refer to Appendix B for any data from the participants in this session. An association technique recommended by Greenbaum (1998) is probing respondents about their concepts; so group members had to compare English to an animal and then to describe the characteristics of the foreign language that reminded them of that particular animal.

Emilia compared English to a cat because "it is loving at the time when you start petting it, like English, at the time when you first want to learn, then later, well, it scratches at you because it becomes complicated with the grammar, the verbs" (lines 39 to 42). She felt an attraction for learning the language, but then she perceived its complexity and felt wary of it. Vanesa used a dove to say that if she felt confident in her ability to speak the language, the dove (language) would be her access to different places and people (lines 54 to 56), but she did not feel she had sufficient competence in the language at the time. On the other hand, Mateo saw English as a rabbit, something that he likes, but that he did not possess. However, he explained that he felt he could become competent in the language "because, if it catches my attention, I'd want to learn it" (lines 67 to 68), stressing he had to continuously remind himself that English was something that would catch his attention. From Vanesa and Mateo's comments it is possible to glimpse at some of the ideas behind willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998), if there is sufficient confidence, the individual will want to communicate; in this case, both Vanesa and Mateo implied they were not willing to communicate at the time because their confidence in their skills was low.

When asked if they felt that it was impossible to get or acquire English, participants responded with gestures and words (lines 80 to 82) that it was not so. Later on, participants had to pretend they already owned their animals—as if they already owned English, and to reflect on what they would do in that case. This prompt allowed for interaction among group members as can be interpreted from the following exchange:

118	Vanesa	So you are giving us the situation from the perspective that
119		we already have, to say it this way, this animal which is the
120		English=
121	M	=uhuh.
122	Emilia	What would we do with it?
123	M	Uhuh.
124	Vanesa	[smiling to herself] Well, I'd take care of it, I'd feed it=
125	M	=so that it can take you to more places?=
126	Vanesa	=right.
127	Mateo	I'd do the same with the rabbit, I'd keep on… I'd keep on
128		taking care of it… once I'd learned it… I'd keep on practicing
129		It… and well, then, once learning it well, really well, as you
130		Say… it would have little rabbits, ahh=
131	Vanesa	=and they would be like, I, I,… the rabbit I saw it at first as
132		the way of your knowledge, I mean that they would mult- I
133		mean, that I'd see that animal from the point of view that
134		you would like to multiply your knowledge or that you had
135		more knowledge, not only with that one rabbit, at least that's
136		what I…[stops talking and smiles]
137	M	[to Mateo] Want to add something?
138	Mateo	Well, yes, to multiply what I know, and as you say, I'd try to
139		learn English well, to learn it well as it is… and then as
140		you say, sell my knowledge or give it away so that others…
141	M	…so that you'd benefit from it?=
142	Mateo	=Yes.
143	M	Emilia, how about your cat?=
144	Emilia	=I'd train the cat so that… I'd try it so that it does not scratch
145		me anymore… that it turns to… let's say…tame it=
146	M	=tame it?
147	Emilia	=Yeah.

The expressions that participants used in the extract above suggest that, once perceiving they had the ability to speak the language participants would value it and keep practising. When Vanesa interrupted Mateo (line 131) she added her own meaning to his concept, and Mateo found a way to agree with Vanesa (line 138) in her views. Emilia's choice of words to "train the cat" (line 144) suggests the idea that she would need to feel in command of her EFL ability, which she did not feel at the time.

Another technique used to prompt ideas from participants was direct semantic association (Greenbaum, 1998). Participants were asked to write down words they would use to qualify the English language and whether they agreed with one another's qualifiers. Mateo saw

English as *interesting* not in itself, but rather as a means of attainment of opportunities, a fast way to a promotion or a better job; but in the first place, he saw English as a required skill to get employment (lines 178 to 182). Emilia agreed in viewing English as a career development tool, but she also considered it as a means to get acquainted with native users of the language and their foreign countries (lines 185 to 187). However, in contradiction with the enthusiasm and value placed on being able to communicate in EFL, when asked to consider whether they felt they could manage communication in the language in a hypothetical situation (lines 193 to 194), participants' immediate emphatic negative responses seemed to reflect self-perceptions of realities that were not quite expected to change soon (line 195).

The discussion moved to the feelings participants experienced when considering the hypothetical situation above and more specifically, how such feelings influenced them if put to the task of expressing themselves in the foreign language. Participants shared feelings of insecurity, but each indicated different choices of action derived from the implications that no engagement in a given foreign language communicative situation had for them. Emilia considered the hypothetical possibility of studying abroad a unique opportunity, so she said she could not miss it, thus forcing herself to rise to the challenge (lines 263 to 266) even feeling insecure. Vanesa (lines 238 to 242) and Mateo (line 261) felt too insecure to risk not making the most out of the opportunity or losing face in the process so they would not put themselves out there until they felt more confident. Emilia's choice of action would prompt her to communicate (increasing her willingness to communicate intentionally), while Vanesa and Mateo's fear of failure and loss of face (identity and ought to selves), seemed to weigh too heavily on their own potential willingness.

Touching on ideal and ought to self theories, another descriptor of English proposed by group members was *to improve myself*. The use of such an expression prompted asking how

participants felt that speaking English improved them, whether they improved as individuals or professionals. They said that being able to speak the foreign language would make them feel and *be perceived* as better professionals and persons. In this sense, both participants' perceptions of self and of their social group values seemed to centre on the concept of *self-improvement* that group members conveyed. Vanesa associated communicative competence in a foreign language with becoming more secure of herself (lines 304 to 306), and of her professional skills (lines 307 to 308). Emilia revealed a personal admiration for people who can speak foreign languages; thus having this ability would make her in turn feel admirable as an individual (lines 310 to 312). As a professional, Emilia considered she would be seen as "not fully educated" (lines 318 to 319), or lacking high personal aspirations (lines 314 to 315) if she did not speak English.

Following up participants' own words, I asked about self-perception in terms of level of education given that they did not feel they could speak English. Although all agreed that they could not speak English, Mateo (lines 328 to 329) and Vanesa (lines 333 to 341) considered that the term education is greater than just the ability to speak a foreign language. This part of the discussion supported the conceptualisation of self-perception of communicative competence as an aspect of the larger self-concept introduced in Chapter 3.Mateo and Vanesa saw foreign language ability as one area of their professional preparation but not as the whole of it; however, Emilia disagreed on the basis that speaking English was crucial to her field of study (lines 343 to 346). In Emilia's context, speaking English was *necessary*, meaning that speaking English was a key requisite to find a good job (lines 361 to 362).

Another hypothetical situation was added to the discussion when Mateo said he did not understand English (line 370) and Vanesa highlighted her insecurity in understanding English and the lack of time she had to get to study a foreign language (lines 376 to 381). These attitudes prompted asking about participants' feelings of having a conversation in

English. Mateo indicated he would feel strange since he would not feel competent enough to participate in the conversation (line 390) and Vanesa agreed with him because of the same reasons (lines 393 to 395). Emilia stressed that even if she did not feel competent enough, she would try to communicate (line 355) or else she would feel excluded (line 399). The emphasis throughout the discussion of participants declaring they were unable to communicate in EFL was a relevant finding because it revealed a tension with the quantitative data. These feelings clearly reflected participants' actual self-perceptions of communicative competence, which were not supportive of self-perception assessed by the CCQ scores during the questionnaire administration.

Returning to characterising English, Vanesa discussed foreign language classes since she felt English classes were usually boring and repetitive, and this did not help learners feel motivated to stay in class and benefit from it. She defined her ideal EFL classes as practical and orientated towards achieving communication with other English speakers (lines 211 to 214). Participants agreed on this and further proposed that learners should take responsibility for their own learning and affective responses to the language class. When encouraged to elaborate on how to become responsible for their learning, group members provided suggestions to learners with similar self-perceptions and in similar situations, summarised as:

- Actions to take: practise with someone else (lines 418 and 445), take a language course (lines 420, 422, and 443), spend effort and time into learning the language (lines 437 and 439)
- Affect (feelings): do not feel frustrated (line 424), think positively (line 431), feel it is an achievable goal (lines 428 to 429)
- Attitudes towards the language: think it is useful to speak English (lines 428 to 429)

Focus group session two: Participants' comments and group interaction

This group was composed of participants in the medium quartile of self-perception scores in the CCQ questionnaire (see Table 56 for details; refer to Appendix C for full transcript).

Table 56: Focus group session 2

Score quartile: 35 to 68% (1.71 to 3.40 score)			
Participants present: female (1), make (1)			
Gender	Age	CC score	Area of study
Male	18	3.40	Engineering
Female	20	3.30	Arts and Humanities

Participants were asked where they thought English was used and if they used it at the time. Luisa mentioned places and situations that were relevant to her and her life, such as school, work and with friends (lines 44 to 45), she also mentioned the Internet as a means of meeting diverse people (lines 45 to 46). Jaime referred to instruction manuals of equipment (lines 53 to 57); Jaime said he needed help to translate and understand written technical English and he wished to be able to do this on his own; he said "you don't know how to put them [components] together, so you have to look for a person to help you, no? …well, it's very important to know it [English] so you can better do it yourself" (lines 57 to 61). Jaime did not say if he used English at the time, but Luisa mentioned she used it with friends, at school, and also as Jaime did, when reading instruction manuals and in television (lines 63 to 66). Luisa also wished she was fluent enough to hold a conversation in English (lines 68 to 69).

Luisa's comment about English in television prompted asking about watching American films at the cinema. Although commercial non-Spanish films are exhibited with Spanish subtitles in most Mexican cinemas, in some instances they are dubbed into Spanish, particularly children's films. In the former cases, cinema goers have the option to read the subtitles or listen to the original language of the film, while with dubbed films this is not possible. The ensuing focus group interaction resulted in data revealing Jaime's feelings

about his lack of ability in the foreign language. Jaime indicated he read the subtitles of the films (line 74), and he did not actually listen to the English dialogue. Jaime explained that to have a “good ear” (lines 77 to 78) for English meant understanding colloquial foreign language and he felt incapable of that; for example, he could not understand a joke in a scene until he read the translation in the subtitles (lines 78 to 79). It seemed important for Jaime to save face and his lack of ability to communicate in English, even though it was not the most important aspect of his life, made him feel embarrassed (lines 80 to81). Jaime said he laughed with those who understood the original language of the film and the colloquialisms—identified as the people who laughed first in the showroom, even though he did not know what he was laughing at, instead of laughing after reading the subtitles and identifying himself as not fluent in English (lines 85 to 86).

The group’s cohesion was challenged and its differences were bigger when asked if group members were taking extra EFL classes at the time or if they had had English lessons before enrolling in university (lines 91 and 93). Luisa said she had been in a class off school for a year (lines 89 to 90) and she had also previously enrolled in an English teacher training programme (lines 107 to 109). She had dropped out of that programme because she felt the English level required of students was too high for her: “I felt English was too difficult”, she said (lines 111 to 112). Jaime was taking the EFL courses offered free of charge at university and although he felt comfortable in those classes because he remembered most of the topics from his earlier education (line 102), he also felt there was a gap in his learning from secondary education. He said: “I did have English class, but, but I did not retain anything of that” (lines 122 to 123). Jaime attributed his failure to remember anything he had learned before to external elements such as the teacher and his teaching style, and the book, but he said he had put effort then (lines 130 to 137); on the contrary, Luisa attributed any failure she felt to lack of effort (line 148).

Attitudes towards the foreign language are changeable with time since according to Jaime's experience of EFL learning in secondary education he saw only the playful side of life and he was not responsible for his own learning (lines 159 to 161). Jaime's attitude towards English when he was young said "English is like mathematics … or Spanish; it is something quite regular, that perhaps I can see when I grow up… it was more important for me to get on with my friends and have a good time" (lines 162 to 165). Further discussion suggested losing face and belonging (language identity) were important influences behind participants' attitudes towards the language learning (or learning in general) and self-perception of communicative competence. Jaime said that if he understood a joke in English told by a friend or peer he felt "fitting in" (lines 203 to 204); if he did not understand the joke he either felt rejected (line 206), or preferred to save face by keeping quiet (line 207). Luisa seemed to agree to a certain extent with Jaime's feelings; she qualified understanding a joke as 'great' because "you are part of the conversation" (line 213); however, while Jaime felt rejected or chose to keep quiet when he did not understand some English expression, Luisa would ask her friends for help because "you have to learn new things and, maybe that is one way to do it" (lines 215 to 216).

Participants' associations of English to an animal and later reflection on the meaning their choices had were the next step in the discussion. Coincidentally, both participants chose eagles to represent English; Jaime said the eagle was a symbol of the United States, which was the country that first came to his mind when thinking about English (lines 260 to 265). Luisa's association coincided with Jaime's (lines 283 to 284), but she added that the eagle signified: "the freedom of the language that goes around the world… that is free and can go around the world in some way" (lines 286 to 288). However, the group's associations reflected that their self-perceptions of English communicative competence deemed the task as something not easily attainable. In order to reduce this distance to the language and its users, a hypothetical social situation where participants needed to use English as the means

of communication was introduced. Although both participants agreed that they would try to engage in conversation if interested in a person (lines 336 to 337), Jaime initiated an argument with Luisa because his self-perception of communicative competence made him less able than Luisa in his eyes (line 338) even though he could not have measured their respective competences.

Luisa reacted self-derogating her foreign language skills: “but I don’t know that much…I know maybe the basics” (lines 339 to 341). Jaime explained that she had the advantage of being enrolled in an extra English class, which helped her refresh her earlier learning or memories of the foreign language (lines 343 to 345). Furthermore, Jaime assessed Luisa’s competence when he declared that: “her knowledge is growing” (line 348). Luisa denied Jaime’s self-derogation of ability (lines 349 to 350) and used the same mechanism on her: “not because I am studying it [English] now it means that I know” (lines 351 to 352). The previous discussion was valuable in revealing Jaime’s feelings of falling short of his own expectations when comparing his knowledge of EFL with that of peers: “if [you ask me whether] I feel that there are classmates who know more than I do? Yes. Yes, I think so” (lines 374 to 375). Luisa shared Jaime’s feelings of insecurity and underachievement: “I feel like, I have friends who know more than I do” (lines 379 to 380).

Participants’ qualifications of English highlighted several interesting descriptors. Luisa showed respect for the relevance that English has internationally (lines 438 to 439), but she later on defined English as “grand, it is universal and it is, eh important in the whole world” (lines 515 to 517). She also referred to English as the “language of the world” (line 574). Jaime provided his own concept of English which mixed with his larger self-concept in a way: “when you know another language you know more than other people…it increases your knowledge and it means to be a little bit more than others, I think” (lines 529 to 533). Both group members agreed that the ability to use the foreign language communicatively

represented an attainment instrument for them to get better jobs and promotions (lines 461 to 464; lines 478 to 479.

The next qualifiers reflected participants' views of the foreign language speakers and language identity (Gutiérrez Estrada & Cortez Román, 2006). Jaime perceived English as "more elegant" (lines 605 to 606) than Spanish because it sounds nicer, except when someone "speaks Spanish elegantly, correctly, it sounds well" (lines 607 to 608). Jaime further used the word attractive to refer to "someone who already knows and knows how to speak and listen to it [English] and it sounds nicer" (lines 777 to 778). Luisa also considered English as attractive, but she meant "not so much that it is elegant but simply, the correct way" (lines 788 to 789). Group members' perceptions of individuals who speak the foreign language as attractive prompted asking what they thought of listening to someone who spoke English badly or not fluently. Jaime suggested that such a person had not completed his foreign language course and was using only what he could remember (lines 616 to 619), he also justified the person saying: "I say it is valid, too" (line 621). Luisa indicated that to her, it would be valid considering the situation of the person, if such a person had learned English while living abroad, in a Mexican or Latin community in the United States, for example, it would be justifiable that he spoke English incorrectly (lines 622 to 626).

These comments revealed a certain bias as to what it means to learn English formally and learn it well. Luisa's words implied that if you migrate to an English speaking country for work, and you do not take formal English instruction, any English you learn is going to be defective because "they learned English and many times it is not correct" (lines 625 to 626). Luisa elaborated on this issue; she said that although valid or acceptable, a person had a responsibility to himself to improve what knowledge of the foreign language had already been acquired (lines 648 to 651). Luisa provided examples of how she would expect the person to try to improve: "with a good course, or … speaking the language, but correctly, or

something… at school with friends" (lines 651 to 653), revealing again the need to learn English in a formal setting to be considered *good*. Jaime agreed that if people had wasted opportunities to learn the foreign language they probably needed someone to point them in the direction of making the most of any future opportunity given (lines 662 to 666). Jaime's comment initiated a discussion about who they thought should provide guidance and support to someone who had not taken previous learning opportunities seriously. Both agreed that it should be the people closest to them, usually the family who wanted their children to improve (line 670; lines 676 to 679), identifying significant others as another strong influence in the construction of their self-perceptions as identified in Chapter 3.

Participants advised other individuals with similar feelings about their communicative competence in English. Luisa proposed to "study and put a lot of effort and that it is not impossible to learn" (lines 846 to 847); she and Jaime agreed that it requires "to have a lot of patience and a lot of dedication, but it's the weapon of the future" (lines 847 to 848).

Summary

This chapter has outlined the relevant findings and issues from the study. First, descriptive statistics made sense of the CCQ background data for the sample. These analyses provided a picture of the dataset while the structural analysis of the CCQ scale revealed its composition. EFA (PCA method) analyses identified three underlying components named *self-efficacy and confidence in receptive skills, knowledge of rules about oral communication* and *communicative competence*. The three components were highly correlated supporting the proposition set forward with the CCQ scale that they were elements of the larger concept of self-perception of communicative competence defined in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha was high (alpha=.950), and the scale showed measurement validity for this context. Bivariate analyses (independent samples t-tests or

one-way between groups ANOVA) identified statistically significant differences ($p<.05$) between self-perception scores and EFL course, time studying EFL, time practising per week, number of places of study, amount of skills practised, and other types of EFL practice.

The qualitative data analysis (exploratory thematic analysis) reflected that English is perceived as a means of social mobility and a university requirement (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2). The data did not reveal the wish to learn English for purely self-enjoyment or personal growth, but rather participants shared views about usefulness of learning EFL, speakers of the language against monolingual speakers, and feelings derived from lack of time and opportunity to learn the foreign language during university studies. This chapter has presented findings from quantitative and qualitative data analyses (described in full in Chapter 4). Findings are connected to the influence of the social context views in Mexico (Chapter 1 and 2) and the construction of self-perception of communicative competence and other emerging theories (Chapter 3) in the discussion in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

Chapter 6 integrates the quantitative and qualitative findings of this investigation onto a discussion of their meaning for self-perception of communicative competence explored in the university setting (section one in this chapter). This discussion outlines the emerging themes used as frameworks to understand the influences behind self-perception construction among the participants in the study. Relating emerging themes to the data leads to some implications from the study that constitutes the second section, while section three outlines limitations found at several levels during the investigation. Finally, the fourth section of Chapter 6 presents my reflection about personal learning from this research experience and a summary brings the chapter to a close.

Discussion of quantitative and qualitative findings

The present research aimed to explore university students' self-perceptions of communicative competence among a cohort of first year undergraduates in Mexico. The purpose of this research has been to provide insights about students' self-perceptions of competence, frequently understudied in this research setting (RECALE, 2006; Ramírez R. & Moreno Glockner, 2007; El Colegio de México, 2008). I have argued that research on the learner in Mexico has focused on studies about learners' perceptions about external issues, such as the target language culture (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998; Ryan, 1998a; Mallén Estebaranz, 2007), leaving the study of the self, particularly self-perception almost neglected. Also, the influences on the construction of self-perception have not been explored in this context. The investigation followed a cross-disciplinary and cross-sectional study design for which the CCQ (López González, 2006) was created and implemented. The findings from the study (Chapter 5) addressed the research questions introduced in Chapter 1.

The main question guiding this research was how do first year university students perceive their own communicative competence as EFL users? The question aimed to investigate the phenomenon in terms of assessing a cohort's self-efficacy and self-confidence levels. CCQ quantitative analysis revealed that the participating cohort of university students had a moderately positive self-perception of communicative competence (M=2.99; refer to Chapter 4). This indicated that the cohort exhibited an inclination towards assessing their own communicative competence as sufficient for doing the tasks listed in the CCQ (see Appendix E). The accuracy of the score can be presupposed since the format and content of the CCQ are familiar to this level of students and research has shown that under such condition self-assessments in foreign language consistently correspond to objective comparisons (Blanche & Merino, 1989; Morín Lam, 2003). A self-perception overall score such as the one obtained with this sample presented a picture of a reasonably confident and self-efficacious cohort of young university students who perceived they were able to sustain communication in the foreign language at a basic user (Council of Europe, 2001) level of proficiency (see appendix A for level description).

Research questions two (what issues influence students' self-perceptions of communicative competence?) and three (from where do those issues derive?) were addressed with qualitative data from focus group discussions in this research. To explore self-perception, the groups reflected on the meaning of being communicatively competent in English as a foreign language and the origins of their conceptualisations. The ensuing discussions revealed issues that appeared to ultimately weigh on participants' self-perception (refer to Figure 12 in Chapter 3) of communication ability and that were discussed as themes emerging from the data in the same chapter. The issues revealed implied lack of self-confidence in EFL based on a conviction of inadequate (inefficacious) communicative competence even though there were both a strong desire to be considered fluent in EFL, and some lingering hope that this

can be achieved among participants. However, the conviction of inefficacious communicative competence derived from external comparisons and concepts embedded in participants' self-perceptions that were further investigated.

Secondary research questions addressed that lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy by investigating how learners coped with negative self-perceptions, what participants thought they could do to change them and what they thought university could do to help them change their negative self-perceptions. The analysis further revealed feelings of inadequacy, regret and concern associated with internal and external attributions of failure to achieve communicative competence and fulfil the university matriculation EFL requirement. Encasing these issues, there is the recognition and acceptance of a need to learn and speak English—*proper English*—for international communication and professional success. The themes introduced in Chapter 3 entwine together with self-perception (Figure 12) and serve as frameworks to illuminate the concepts discussed by participants.

Lack of self-confidence, unwillingness to communicate

Lack of confidence in their communicative competences shared by participants in this research makes them unwilling to communicate in English even in hypothetical situations where personal and professional benefit is at stake. When EFL is conceptualised as difficult, as was the case in this research, self-confidence is diminished. In this state, self-doubts about efficacy (Bandura, 1986a; Bandura & Locke, 2003) to achieve success—communicate in the foreign language—arise. In this vicious cycle, positive self-perceptions of communicative competence are highly unlikely since "students' self perceptions about what they can do are closely related to self-confidence" (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004 p. 33). Participants deny feeling able and willing to attempt any type of communication in English at the time of this study, which is supported by research into WTC. For instance, Cao and Philp (2006) found that

participants in their study about characteristic WTC in classroom interactions "attributed their comparatively low participation … to a lack of self-confidence" (p. 488). Self-confidence as argued in this thesis is a central aspect of communicative competence.

However, the hope held about overcoming lack of self-confidence (participants indicated it is possible for students like them to speak English), points towards lack of stability in the self-confidence, meaning it can be changed. This is again associated with WTC since as Vanesa said, what would make her try to speak English at the time and feel more confident in her communicative competence was "the will to improve myself" (Appendix B, line 285). That is, if there was no other way to go about it, Vanesa would use English so as not to keep herself back and impede her self-improvement. Participants also proposed strategies for self-directed learning behaviour, such as dedicating more time and effort to their EFL lessons; they also recommend re-orientating feelings of inability in order to gain confidence in their communicative competences, as Vanesa's example above. The theory of WTC appears to fit as an umbrella term covering both communicative competence and self-confidence as propensities under the objective of exerting communication and it has been presented in Chapter 3 as a possible framework of reference. The feeling that one does not know enough brings the discussion to attributions for such ideas.

Feelings of inadequacy and internal attributions

The question of how participants deal with self-perceptions of communicative competence that do not meet their own standards can be addressed following Weiner's (1972) claim that "*within achievement-related contexts*, affect is determined primarily by attributions to internal versus external factors" (p. 374, his emphasis). Affect means the feelings and emotions experienced as a reaction to something (Arnold & Brown, 1999); for example, in dealing with negative self-perceptions, participants said they usually avoided situations

where communication in English was required—that is, they showed no WTC at all attributable to the complexity of the task. Also one issue that permeated from participants' comments was a reliance on something or someone that allowed participants to not engage in English communication while still saving face. For instance, when asked what they would do if they met someone who was speaking English Jaime said "in those cases, I try to speak only Spanish, I mean, I ask her to speak only Spanish so that I don't feel…well, bad" (Appendix C, lines 225 to 227). Jaime's comment presupposed that the person in question should be able to speak Spanish and was willing to switch to this language to maintain a conversation with him. The other example of reticence and avoidance to save face came from Jaime as well; he said he reacted at the cinema as if he understood what was being said in the film, instead of reacting to the Spanish translation provided. So Jaime's self-confidence was not improved because he avoided using the TL and knew he did not understand a lot. However, reticence does not help improve self-perception as Crozier's (2001, introduced in Chapter 3) study on shyness and reticence shows. Moreover, precisely because participants were aware of social concepts about English such as *English is instrumental in promoting better job and career opportunities*, there were social expectations they were supposed to fulfil when they became professionals.

In fact, university students in this research were aware of the matriculation requirement to demonstrate communicative competence in EFL by the time they finished their studies, as discussed in Chapter 1, and they felt they were not able to comply with that requirement. According to how self-perception of communicative competence compared to the social expectations, students assessed whether they were capable of becoming the highly competitive professionals that the social views defined as discussed in Chapter 3 about attribution theory. As discussed in that chapter, MacIntyre, Noels and Clément (1997) claimed that "clearly, language students sometimes underestimate or overestimate their language ability" (p. 267) because of one of two biases: self-enhancement or self-derogation.

The problem is not so much that they self-enhance their abilities, because the outcomes of those who have higher self-efficacy has been found to be better than that of more able peers (Wood & Bandura, 1989; Ozer & Bandura, 1990). The problem arises among students such as those in this research who expressed no communicative competence whatsoever (with emphatic head shakes indicating *no*). Also, participants expressed a belief in the need to keep practising the target language to achieve their communicative goals, but they did not have time to practise EFL in their first year in university and regretted not practising earlier in their lives when they had time.

As such, participants frequently attributed their failure to communicate in EFL to lack of ability and effort on their part, which increase feelings of inadequacy as Weiner (1972) suggested so long ago "affect is maximized when success and failure are attributed to the internal elements of ability and effort" (p. 375). Occasionally, external issues such as complexity of the task (indicated by the complexity of the EFL grammar) and luck (according to some participants, their teachers in secondary education never attended their classes) were found attributable, but Weiner was quite right in saying that internal attributions weigh more heavily on the feelings of participants. The attributions revealed by participants imply a change somewhere in the EFL learning and teaching process. The question about what participants think university can do to help them change enduring negative self-perceptions is addressed here. As Matsuda and Gobel (2004) suggested, starting the change in the classroom and creating a comfortable atmosphere may be conducive to effort and study. There is evidence supporting this view from comments among participants in this research. Vanesa considered most language classes repetitive and boring and suggested that classes were practical and orientated towards achieving communication with other language speakers (Appendix B). Overall, participants agreed that more and better orientated practice was important, but also emphasised the need for learners to take responsibility for their own learning process (Appendices B and C).

Conflicting images of the self, the ideal and ought-to self systems

Participants' conceptualisation of communicatively competent professionals touched on the concept of possible selves developed by Markus and Nurius (1986) and the ideal self system proposed later on by Dörnyei (2005, 2009a), and Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) introduced in Chapter 3. In fact, participants' self-perceptions did not comply with the expectations of communicative competence in English supported by the social environment in which they were involved. Moreover, the social expectations placed on university students and future professionals regarded high EFL communication abilities as more than desirable (for instance the university EFL requirement) and put a sense of obligation on students to achieve the goal and learn the FL and speak fluently. After all, this was the expectation for which participants perceived they ought to aim.

In fact, the participants' self-concepts, which reflected their self-perceptions of communicative competence, continuously fell short of the socially fostered, ought-to self. This was evidenced by participants' comments during the use of associations since no one said he felt he could speak English well. The negative influence of the possible selves on the construction of self-perception appears to be clear and the ought-to self system sustained by involvement in the social environment seems to weigh especially heavily on participants' self-perceptions. Moreover, their personal aspirations and ideal selves matched this demanding picture since participants indicated feeling the need to find the time and energy to undertake EFL formal study before they were fully prepared to graduate.

However, there were conflicting images of the self battling in some participants' minds. Mateo's, Jaime's and Vanesa's comments suggested they had high overall self-concepts even if their self-perceptions of communicative competence in English were not high. Mateo said: "I don't have an education in *that* aspect, which is the language; there are several types

of education" (Appendix B, lines 328 to 329, my translation, his emphasis). Vanesa agreed and elaborated on the issue:

> Maybe, I feel as if there is an insecurity about that aspect, to call it a name, but I cannot say that I do not have an education because I know that in other subjects I take I have sufficient preparation to say that I feel capable to speak, to carry on in conversation on this topic or something, and at the same time, I could not say that I have excellent English, I can't say that because *preparation* is larger (Appendix B, lines 333 to 341, my translation, her emphasis).

In his group session Jaime clarified: "even if you don't know English, I mean people can do good things and not know English, not because you don't know English you cannot do them" (Appendix C, lines 547 to 549). These comments supported the proposition in Chapter 3 that self-perception focuses on particular aspects of a larger self-concept, and that self-concept is more stable than self-perception in a particular domain (see Figure 4).

Language identity, belonging and investment

Foreign language communicative acts challenge people's self-concepts and identities (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000; Gutiérrez Estrada & Cortez Román, 2006). Indeed, people's concepts and identities suffer in the foreign language interaction since each speaker is continuously exposed, scrutinised and tested each time he engages in foreign language practice in the class or elsewhere. Speakers' self-images are continuously challenged by the results of interactions during speech events (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 1997, 2000), especially if they are, as Norton (2000) proposed, "socially constructed in inequitable relations of power" (p. 73) and so speakers search for mechanisms to balance those challenges. For instance, Felicia from Norton's study of immigrant women in Canada said: "I feel comfortable using English *with people I know and have confidence with* them, especially with the lady who I meet each week to practice English and Spanish conversation. *I feel uncomfortable with new people* and *never can speak English in front of Peruvian people who speak English correctly*" (Norton, 2000 p. 57, my emphasis). Felicia was a wealthy Peruvian with a well established background in her native country, but with her

status as immigrant in Canada she struggled to establish her own new status as a speaker of the language and as she said, did not engage in conversation with Peruvians that she identified as speaking English correctly because it threatened her own image.

In my own research, Felicia's feelings were supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. The analysis of the correlations between the items in the CCQ scale revealed a low relationship (under 0.3) between item 20 *my errors do not impede my communication*, and items 2 *I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers or authorities*, and 4 *I know when and how to finish a conversation with strangers or authorities*. Statistically speaking these low correlations imply that the items measure issues that are not closely related, and in this discussion it could be interpreted that because the situations presented in items 2 and 4 referred to strangers, people with whom the respondents may not feel confident, errors would impede communication. For instance, at the end of session one, after having asked the three participants to say their names and places of origin in English, I asked them how they felt. Emilia, Vanesa and Mateo agreed they felt nervous and Vanesa explained this was because "we're not very comfortable with each other yet" (Appendix B, lines 488 to 489).

Although the students had been in the session of almost one hour, they were strangers to one another and felt anxious about exposing their communicative ability in the group. Admittedly, participants were not in inequitable power situations, they were not in an English speaking community, and did not have as much investment in everyday English interactions. However, they used similar defence mechanisms; in the first group, Vanesa (line 236) and Mateo (line 261) desired to protect their status as competent future professionals, indicating they would refuse engaging in English communication until they felt they were good enough not to embarrass themselves. In the second group, Jaime said he chose to pretend having some understanding of English by keeping silent. Contrastingly,

Emilia would try to find the way to participate in the group and belong (Appendix B, lines 233 to 236), expecting her efforts to be rewarded with assistance from interlocutors (lines 310 to 312). Luisa did not suffer unbalanced power situations when choosing to engage in English conversation because she relied on her friends—her interlocutors and community, to help her when she did not understand something (Appendix C, lines 212 to 216).

In all cases, that is, with Felicia, or the students in my research, each individual saw in English communication a threat to their status and rights of belonging in their native contexts (identities) and a challenge to their self-concepts, and each person reacted to the threat in particular ways. Other examples of reactions to threats to identity may be speaking English with an accent (Lippi-Green, 1997; Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard & Wu, 2006; Clemente & Higgins, 2008), or a shift to the language (Terborg, 2000) that gives the speaker the right to claim belonging to the power group—power being understood as Norton (2000) defines it in relation to a temporal and particular context. However, choosing to speak with an accent or to use any other linguistic mechanism implies not only that the speaker is willing to communicate, but also that he perceives he can do it. In the case of the participants in my study, each one of them perceived they could not communicate in English. This situation supports the concepts about non-native speakerism that participants seemed to share: if you cannot speak English fluently, elegantly, appropriately, you are not really speaking English well (refer to Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 for my discussion of this).

In the social environment surrounding these students, the immediacy of peer judgments weighs more heavily on their self-perceptions than the distant possibility of using the foreign language in real speech events. Their self-images and self-concepts are challenged each time the participants are forced into foreign language speech events in their native communities (such as in the EFL class) and they feel they cannot participate. However, as long as there are face-saving mechanisms to protect their identities (such as laughing together with the

audience when watching a film in English), participants can keep pretending to be communicatively competent in the language. On the other hand, if there are no face-saving mechanisms available, participants choose to avoid putting themselves in situations that require them to show their use of the language among their peers.

International communication: Standards for communicative competence

Among other things, Chapter 2 presents a discussion of the conceptualisation of communicative competence in EFL in Mexico and the standing of English as a global language that is supported by the views expressed in this study. Data from the two subsections about focus groups interactions in Chapter 5 revealed that the participants recognised English as the means to access international arenas. The expressions participants used to describe the FL (essential, necessary, the language everyone speaks) were similar, although as discussed above, their ideal and ought-to selves about communicative competence varied according to the views held in each participant's field of study (or social environment). For instance, one participant studying tourism said that English communicative competence is essential to her professional development, that is, she ought to be competent in English in order to find any job in her field; whereas a future medic expressed she could still be a competitive professional even if she could not speak English well, though her ideal self was to be communicatively competent.

Beyond the priority each gave to English communicative competence in their future professional lives, participants' expectations of communicatively competent speakers are similar: to demonstrate that one speaks English, a person has to speak *the correct way*. Variations from the standard (most frequently American) English are viewed by these participants as lack of competence, not as examples of individuality or accent. Also, there was repeated emphasis on the need to learn in a formal setting as in a language class, for

instance, to improve one's self-confidence Mateo recommended "take a language course of the most important things" (Appendix B, line 420). Jaime's comment about someone who speaks English with difficulty is an example: "well, I say that he could not pay for half the course. He just learned the first half, for example the basics" (Appendix C, lines 616 to 617). Luisa discussed the issue as well:

> Well, to me, it would depend on how he acquired his knowledge, if he took a course; or many people learn it because they live abroad in the States, and they come and you can see that they lived among Mexicans and also Americans, but they learned English and many times it is not correct, because…the pronunciation is different, because of the same proximity with Mexico and the United States, they make it more *pocho* (Appendix C, lines 622 to 630, her emphasis).

This group also agreed that it is acceptable to a certain degree to speak English with some difficulty, but that this reflects poorly on the person's image and he should try to change the situation:

> Luisa: Yes, it is acceptable, but if one knows that he has problems and that one should try to improve oneself, well, if I already know so much, if I know the vocabulary and many verbs and words, why not try to improve it? As [Jaime] says, with a good course, or …speaking the language, but correctly, or something. I don't know, at school with friends…
> Jaime: But for example, we have to see the person, if the person is someone who has been given the knowledge and he doesn't want to learn and that is the reason he speaks bad, well, one should tell him to snap out of it (Appendix C, lines 648 to 657).

After my discussion about appropriation of English and English with an accent, it is interesting to see that the views expressed by participants in this research support my claim in Chapter 3 about the prevalence of communicative competence as defined in terms of knowledge of the grammar of the language and ability to use it appropriately (Hymes, 1972; Widdowson, 1989). However, for these participants, similarly to other university students in other regions of Mexico (Clemente, 2007a; Clemente & Higgins, 2008), English communicative competence gives you a particular elegance and higher status among peers as long as "English was to be performed within the context of native-speakerism" (Clemente & Higgins, 2008 p. 148). As a participant in Clemente and Higgins's (2008) study about postcolonial accent in Oaxaca said: "people think that because you speak another language

you have a better cultural level,… and that gives you a better status, doesn't it?" (p. 72). That student's perception is supported in this research when Jaime said that a speaker of English is attractive because he "knows how to speak and listen to it and it sounds nicer" (Appendix C, lines 777 to 778), and pretty since "I feel that it is more elegant to speak English than Spanish" (lines 605 to 606). So English communicative competence in the exploration of this context means to use the language well and know how to use it correctly.

Tensions and points of encounter between quantitative and qualitative data

The picture the qualitative data presented was different from the one displayed by the CCQ scores. While the overall score revealed a moderately high self-perception of communicative competence (M=2.98) among the sample, face to face discussion told a story of lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy and thus, low self-perception. This may be the result of high comparative standards beyond those listed by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001): the expectations of one's ideal self and the ought-to self of the social environment. As discussed in Chapter 3, the cognitive and emotional self-assessments involved in building self-perception cannot be separated from each other (Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci & Moller, 2005). Also, unless objective or external means of assessment are put in place, the individual can only rely on the way he sees himself and this perception is the one that matters most (Aronson & Steele, 2005). Moreover, external assessment instruments have to be positively regarded by the individual and his social group context to matter at all.

The data in this research came from subjective reports of ability, as against objective external instruments such as exams or class marks. That is, in subjective reports, the individual may accurately assess he can do certain tasks at specific levels of ability because he has self-confidence in his ability to achieve the standard; conversely, lack of self-confidence can make assessment inaccurate. However, if assessed by external means, he may fall short of

the specified standard, or contrarily, he may do better than expected, but the individual's self-perception is that he is not good enough yet. This does not mean the individual is intentionally being misrepresented; it is just that his self-assessment incorporates many cognitive and emotional elements into its output. And as Higgins (1987) proposed, affective responses are central to discrepancies between objective and subjective self-assessments.

So the fact that self-perception varied between types of data may reflect the increased emotional weight that comes from discussing (or exposing) one's self for scrutiny in face to face interaction, against the emotional weight associated with responding a questionnaire where one does not see the person reading the data. Furthermore, it may be that the participants' self-perception scores accurately reflected their subjective assessments, but when asked to consider the issues and situations provided in the discussion sessions, their affective reaction (situational anxiety) increased and so at the time of the group sessions, their self-perceptions dropped (Hurd, 2007; Cubukcu, 2008).

Nonetheless, despite the differences, there was also what I call points of encounter between the data. These refer mainly to formal study and continuous practice in English as significant advantages and support for improved self-perception. The bivariate analysis of background data and self-perception scores revealed that the only statistically significant relationships were found in the variables about time studying English on and off school, and places and manners of study (refer to Chapter 5). As discussed in that chapter, these differences meant that the more time spent formally studying, the more skills practised, in general the more contact the person had with the target language, the higher the self-perception score was. The qualitative data repeatedly supported these findings since participants said time and again that having time to study would make them feel more confident in their skills, as would studying a language course in a school instead of just trying on their own. So, qualitative and

quantitative data have points of encounter in my discussion of these issues, which suggest complex implications discussed as follows.

Implications from the findings

For one thing, communicative competence as understood over three decades ago is still a prevalent EFL objective in the Mexican university context. Whereas Leung (2005) argues for a redefinition of the concept, the correct speech of mainstream English natives is a relevant aim for learners in this setting. So what about globalisation? What about World Englishes? What about appropriating English? Should this university drop its outdated and almost imperialistic communicative competence goals and jump on the wagon supporting a *Mexican English*?

At the macro level, should Mexico do so? At the risk of hurting susceptibilities I have to say I think we would rather not. I believe that at this stage of FLE development (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2008b) the basis for students to gain self-confidence in their communication skills and abilities is to have solid parameters against which to compare their efforts and outcomes, and these parameters can derive from notions of proper language use and grammaticality. I do not say this situation is ideal, and certainly hope that concepts such as sensitivity to other cultures are one day the common basic goal of our EFL education, but the pragmatist in me suggests achieving first this huge bit of communicative competence to be able to establish who we Mexicans are, in English, with an accent. Moreover, the fact that communicative competence as defined by Hymes (1972) is still relevant to this day in the perception of Mexican students implies revising the objectives and purposes of FLE research. As long as the learner's self-perception is not fully addressed as a relevant line of research, and researchers focus our interest elsewhere, we will miss valuable information about learners' constructs and learning needs.

At the micro level, students' self-assessments require some reflection. Why did participants feel English is too difficult? Or that English classes are meaningless? Why did they fall short of their personal standards in English communicative competence? Also, how can participants' self-perceptions move them towards making the effort to continue studying? Would further English study help overcome lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy as suggested by participants? Learning English is a task that can be as easy or as difficult as both teachers and students make it to be, so perhaps stakeholders' attitudes should be revised. Also, in order to change attributions of failure, it is necessary to understand students' self-perceptions of inadequacy and views about the language class. This understanding is the first step to any changes in teaching practices and learning behaviours that may be indeed conducive to achieving the communicative objectives of EFL programmes (McLachlan, 2001; Sayer, 2005). Collaboration between teachers in exchanging information and exploring their students' views is also central to this change. But it is also important that students understand their own self-perceptions and where they originated so that they become responsible for their own learning, if they are ever to become, as Rogers (1980) proposed, *whole and self-sufficient* learners.

Norton's (1997, 2000, 2001) work on language identity as discussed in this study implies understanding the position that students have towards the English language and the influence derived from the values of the social group. Students' self-perceptions will assess whether becoming communicatively competent in English means losing their identities and sense of belonging, or improving one self and being more highly regarded socially and professionally. On the other hand, students' perceptions of English speech dictate that English has to be spoken correctly, and *correctly* is defined in their terms. Moreover, for the participants in this research, speaking English correctly gives speakers positively regarded

identities. But, is there one shared EFL identity among students in this university? Or on the contrary, are there specific EFL identities according to particular issues?

Students need to be aware of their self-perceptions so as to get more control over their learning (O'Brien, 2007; Zimmerman, 2008). However, in a setting such as the one in this study, if students reflect on their self-perceptions at all, these assessments are buried under the weight of the more frequent output from objective measurement instruments such as exams or tests. As long as students' self-perceptions of communicative competence are unknown, ignored, or disregarded by all participants in the learning process, EFL learning and teaching are doomed to be irrelevant to the needs of the learner. If so, the implication at the institutional level is that the matriculating requirements will remain distant unrealistic and unattainable objectives for learners who keep hoping they will be spared; however, at the individual level, English will keep being the language used by people who are prettier, more elegant, and in the long run, more competent professionals than the majority of students are.

Empirical research is inevitably subject to methodological weaknesses and this research is not exempt. I have highlighted some methodological constraints in Chapter 4 but here I discuss other limitations I have ascertained later on in this research.

Limitations of this research

This research is an exploratory study of university undergraduates' self-perceptions of communicative competence; as such the data gathered revealed issues identifiable with thematic frameworks as I have discussed in the paragraphs above. Namely, the ideal self system, WTC, the weight of attributions and identity, as well as the prevalence of the concept of communicative competence derived from sociology so long ago. It is important to highlight that the aim and scope of this research has not been implementing formal studies

about the emerging themes, or assigning causality among them, but I also stress the need to do so in future research. Additionally, all participants were first year university undergraduates in one geographical region in the north east of Mexico, so the results of this research are necessarily limited to these types of populations in institutions where the educational policy fosters communicative competence as the objective of its curricula. I have also classified contextual limitations, such as the ones derived from the setting itself, and methodological limitations, derived from the choices made for this investigation. First I discuss contextual limitations.

Contextual limitations

Research into foreign language education has not the strength of the public university in Tamaulipas. Students in the schools sampled for this research are familiar with some research instruments such as questionnaires because they have seen them or used them in other subjects such as an introduction to the scientific method of inquiry. In fact, the whole university context is familiar with surveys, and we are sometimes wary of their purposes. It is not that common though, to be asked about your language learning, except during English exams.

In short, there is no culture of research into EFL issues to be spoken of in this context. When I started this investigation in 2005 I planned to conduct a survey for several reasons discussed in Chapter 4, so that part of the investigation was supposed to work well. But when a qualitative component was added to my research, the complications started. Actually complications did not start at the time of designing the qualitative component in paper, in theory, focus groups work perfectly, and they do in many instances. However, in practice, the lack of a culture of research in FLE of the university changed the whole scenario for the setting of focus groups.

A central complication was that there was no incentive to draw participants to the sessions since the university policy forbids paying students for doing any curricular or extracurricular activity. For example, it is possible to give tuition scholarships to students who participate in extracurricular activities such as the folk group, or the school choir, but it is illegal to pay them for attending any of the training sessions or formal presentations. Thus without incentives, it was a matter of participants' willingness to attend to the agreed sessions and so, many did not attend, and did not provide a justification for their absences or show interest in re-scheduling at a later date. Another example of the lack of research culture in the setting is a suggestion someone made to request the presence of the students who had agreed to participate by asking their school directors to notify them they had to take part in this exercise. I chose not to do that because I believe that it is not an ethical procedure. So the lack of a culture of research was present at different levels in campus, and as a single teacher-researcher it was not easy to overcome it. Incidentally, the lack of research culture and bad weather could have influenced recruited participants not to attend since sessions were not part of curricular activities and most people in Tampico stay indoors when it rains and there was cold winter rain almost every day in the weeks scheduled for the focus group sessions.

Methodological limitations

This research did not focus on self-perception during classroom interaction, so it was not possible to address participants' suggestions of improving self-confidence and self-efficacy by increasing the opportunities for realistic, engaging and relevant practice, and also by ensuring dynamic and motivating teacher practices. An exploration of self-perception during different types of classroom interaction may be useful in the future.

In relation to the research instruments, there are limitations at varied levels. For example, after analysing the structure of the CCQ, statistically speaking, the EFA analysis conducted on the CCQ scale indicated that the scale was reliable, so it measures participants' self-perceptions on the concepts stated in each item, which could be classified within the underlying components of the scale: self-efficacy and confidence in receptive language skills, knowledge of rules about oral communication, and communicative competence. On the other hand, there were not enough data to make in-depth inferences about the relationships of the correlating background variables. Also, varied data about students' previous foreign language educational settings, learning experiences and achievement marks will be needed to support those inferences.

At another level, the particulars of the administration process—respondents were approached in the language classroom during the class schedule and with their teacher present—worked well since the response rate was high (97%), but at the same time may have influenced participants' responses since the process could have been perceived as similar to an examination. In addition, the fact that completing the questionnaire did not require participants to demonstrate actual communicative competence may have provided a relaxed context in which self-enhancement (MacIntyre et al., 1997) could occur.

Thus, although this cross-sectional investigation gives an important picture of the situation at a specific time, a further longitudinal study would have assessed whether self-perception changed over time. Investigating self-perception over time gives not only good indicators of the reliability of the scales used, but also makes it possible for researchers to notice changes and investigate what issues are likely to lead to those changes. Moreover, longitudinal studies can assess the complementarity of different types of instruments, both quantitative and qualitative. I would suggest keeping the CCQ scale—plus the changes suggested in the

structure of the background data section—and validating it in other EFL settings in the country to later adapt it to research in other countries.

Limitations of the focus group technique

The use of focus groups as means to gather data has been more widely spread in marketing research than in other areas of social research (Gibbs, 1997), and as such, there are limitations to consider. For instance, there are few examples of the use of focus groups in FLE research, as the review of studies in higher education in the setting presented earlier in this thesis (Chapter 1) showed. Also, university students in the setting of the present study were not easily surrounded by a culture of research that included them as expert informants. So the students in the sample were unlikely to be familiar with research studies in general and with the characteristics and purposes of focus groups in particular. This means that although this research followed the ethical principles of not deceiving individuals and requesting informed consent from prospective participants, it was not possible to ascertain that all students addressed clearly understood the purposes of the present investigation. Moreover, in focus group discussions, having very small numbers of participants in the sessions gives more time to follow each person's participation in depth. However, for focus groups to be effective (Morgan, 1997), regular size groups cover as many areas in as much detail as possible, so although this has been justified in Chapter 4, it is possible to question the trustworthiness of the focus group sessions in this research because the groups were very small.

Reflection on the research experience

I have allowed myself freedom to write in this reflection in the hope of conveying the curiosity which initiated my interest in doing this research. Of course, there have been ups

and downs in the process, and that fact is also expressed in the tenor of this reflection. Please bear with me and read about where I think this incredible journey began for me.

I cannot recall a time when English was not interesting to me. My personal experience with English started at home, reading. I inherited the custom of reading English works from my grandfather. I read works from authors such as Frances Hodgson Burnett and Louisa May Alcott that my granddad always made sure I had access to because for him, reading was imagining and relaxing. I do not remember if he taught me any vocabulary, but he must have done so since I know at first I could not understand any words so I just browsed through the pages, but after some time there was meaning in those pages. In junior high school I had a great time in the third year English class because I was good at spelling. The first and second years were uneventful as far as I remember, but I do not recall any specifics about the class, the content, or my learning. I just remember that the teacher always wore black. Well, that was until the third year when she wasn't in mourning anymore. So in third year we had spelling contests every class; we attended a special language classroom and all were seated, then we stood up and the spelling started: if you got the word correct you stayed in the contest—yes, standing up—and got to the next round. After a few 40 to 50 pupil rounds, some classmates flunk in purpose just to be able to sit down.

A few years later, I was watching American television on a daily basis and I learned to imitate English sounds as close as I figured them out. I used to watch advertisements trying to understand their meaning. Once I had the idea of one of them, I concentrated on the sounds, watched the ads as many times as possible (they were repeated frequently) and tried to imitate the sounds I had heard. Although I have never claimed to have a good pronunciation because I do not have good hearing, I credit American television for giving me the chance to practise English. I did not know if my communicative competence was any good because class marks represented what I did in exams, homework, and attendance.

However, this not having an external assessment of my competence did not stop me from using English whenever I had the chance, which honestly was not often. My self-perception of communicative competence was based on my confidence on imitating English sounds that to me, sounded pretty accurate, and the grammatical knowledge I had, to which any other Mexican student in mainstream public education had the same access.

When I finished university I took placement assessment in a language centre in town because I wanted to apply for a postgraduate scholarship abroad and objective assessments were required (as still are these days); the placement revealed that my English was good. I had errors with sounds I could not differentiate but I still could get by. I learned to use avoidance strategies before I knew what they were because the pragmatist in me decided I did not need to live down many embarrassing situations. Still, my self-perception did not waver, I could speak English and I never questioned this belief. Life brought on the opportunity to become a language teacher and this experience has taught me amazing things about the pronunciation of this language that I am still not able to say correctly to this day. But still, my self-perception of communicative competence has remained high. This is the first and most important reason why I was tremendously curious about why former students emphatically said they could not speak English. My personal English learning experience is also the reason why I felt the need to explore students' self-perceptions was central if I wanted to help improve future students' communicative competence in EFL.

However, this research experience taught me that it is not possible to go around just asking the questions that come to your mind. You have to think the questions, write, develop and assess them… and go back to thinking them again! I have learned that reading means work, and that it is not always as pleasant as it used to be, but that it has its own rewards. I have learned that I am in fact a quantitative method person, but that I believe other methods have very good points I do not want to overlook from now on. This research experience has

shown me some of the biases I have about things and that it may be in my own benefit to be clear about them and not work on assumptions built on them, such as I did with the pilot study referred to in Chapter 4. The use of mixed methods in this thesis was a step forward in this direction.

My learning from this research experience tells me that you can write every day for a year and have nothing much to show for it, but that each time you spent thinking of the issue at hand is a building block towards your own timely understanding. I have learned that you have to give learning time. Learning to do research in England has taught me that I am a product of my Mexican culture much more than I believe myself to be, and that although I have a clear Mexican identity sometimes I do not fit. Working with my supervisors has taught me that you do not answer questions—you *address* them in your research. Research training taught me that this reflection is worth nothing if the rest of my thesis does not ring true, if my quants are not reliable and valid, and if my quals do not have a minimum trustworthiness. Still, I am writing it; I know my quants are reliable and valid, my quals are trustworthy, and I have confidence that my thesis will ring sufficiently true.

Coming back to university in Mexico to collect data showed me that there is a world of work to do out there, within public university education teaching and research, and that I want to be able to do my bit of that work. I want to close this reflection addressing a couple of extra questions. First, would I do it again? Yes; I would (even with the panic attacks). Second, would I change anything? Apart from the recommendations for further research I list in Chapter 7, I have been very lucky in this research experience and in the learning I have gained from it, so no, I would not change anything.

Summary

The main findings of this research were discussed in Chapter 6; I integrated quantitative and qualitative findings in the discussion whenever possible and relevant. The picture about self-perception of communicative competence in the cohort under study revealed by the CCQ scale was highlighted. This depicted a moderately positive overall self-perception (M=2.98) that contrasted with the qualitative findings. However, some of the background variables analysed had statistically significant differences with self-perception scores, and this was supported by findings from the qualitative data. The tension found between some of the quantitative and qualitative data was also highlighted in a special section in the chapter. After conducting all analyses, some implications derived from the findings were observed and these were also presented to the reader's consideration. Implications at the macro and micro levels of discussion were listed. The limitations of the study have been presented as well in another section. Contextual limitations, such as the lack of a culture of research and methodological limitations such as the cross-sectional nature of the inquiry have been made explicit; limitations of the use of focus groups in the setting were discussed. The last section in the chapter presented the personal reflection that originated my research and also a reflection on the research experience undertaken during this investigation. Chapter 6 connects the whole inquiry with the conclusions of this research summarised in Chapter 7.The contribution to knowledge derived from this thesis and the recommendations for further research are also highlighted in that chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This research has highlighted that obtaining a picture of the state of self-perception of communicative competence in English among first year students is relevant to improving language learning and teaching in the university setting. This has not been a simple task and exploring the influences of the underlying issues shaping self-perception is even more complex. I open Chapter 7 with a section summarising the outcome of this exploration. The second section underlines the contributions to knowledge of this thesis and recommendations for further research are proposed in the last section.

Throughout my thesis I have argued that there is a gap in the information available about EFL learners' self-perception of communicative competence at the tertiary education level in Mexico. Research in the country has infrequently addressed the investigation of students' self issues focusing instead on classroom interactions (Johnson, 1997; Morín Lam, 2003; Johnson, 2004) and intercultural perceptions (Canuto & Gómez de Mas, 1998; Gómez de Mas, 1998; Nagao Nozaki, 2007). In addition, work on critical pedagogies usually has not centred on communicative competence (Cortez Román, 2006; López Gopar et al., 2006; Mugford, 2006; López Gopar & Khan, 2007). The data gathered with the CCQ scale addressed the knowledge gap about students' self-perception of communicative competence in terms of self-efficacy and self-confidence. The information provided measured the university cohort investigated revealing that the participants had an overall moderately positive self-perception of communicative competence (M=2.98).

The knowledge gap has also been addressed with qualitative data about the influences working on these particular EFL learners' self-perceptions. EFL education is a highly complex, personal, psychological, and social construct in which English does not mean the

same for all learners. Likewise, the implications derived from claiming ownership of or rejecting this foreign language can be widely discussed among theorists, but in the end, these implications are not equal among learners. For the participants in my research, university undergraduates in the first year of their studies, English has to be spoken correctly or not at all, and speaking English like this gives individuals an aura of elegance and cultural superiority beyond explanation. English is also a solid means for economic gain, although it was never clear who exactly benefits economically, or how gain is measured. More occasionally, English is a means to access other international cultures, and particularly American and English cultures.

The influence of English in these students' lives is undeniable: English is everywhere around them, from the instruction manuals of home appliances, to the films at the cinema, and the clothes they wear and the food they eat. The national education discourse in Mexico is clear about English: If you are not a fluent English speaker you are at a disadvantage. On the other hand the high standard of the concept of *fluent English speaker* accepted by these university students is very prescriptive: to err may be human, but it is not acceptable; you have to sound accent-less if you want to call yourself a fluent speaker of English. However, participants' concept of communicative competence very much supports the definition given in this thesis; communicative competence implies knowledge of the language and ability to use it. In this research, participants agreed that one has to learn about the TL in formal settings, practice a lot, and make attempts to become as close to native speech in representative societies such as the U.S.A. or England. Finally, the underlying influences constructing participants' self-perceptions have become apparent in this investigation. I have listed theories under which the issues revealed can be understood (WTC, ideal and ought-to self theory, identity and social identity, attribution theory).

Overall, this exploration of university students' self-perceptions addressed the issues it was designed to investigate. The impact of this first step will have to be seen in the future. Of course, the future is already here. The impact of global communication is already felt across nations and individuals. Right now, to be able to speak only one's native language equals missing out on opportunities at several levels, and the participants in this study know it well enough.

Original contribution of this thesis

There are several areas to which this thesis has contributed. First, this research on students' self-perception of communicative competence is original since it is the first of the kind that I am aware of in this context. This research has addressed the knowledge gap about university undergraduates' self-perceptions of communicative competence in Mexico, constituting an important contribution.

Second, this study has placed an emphasis on the self that has been absent from other studies focusing on students' perceptions as was reviewed in Chapter 3 (Gómez de Mas, 1998; Ryan, 1998a, 1998b; Mallén Estebaranz, 2007). In fact, the CCQ is a methodological contribution since the characteristics of the setting, without being unique, made other types of *Can-do* measurement instruments inadequate. The CCQ scale's content targeted the local EFL context specifically, linking its items to guidelines from international entities, such as ALTE (2002a) as points of comparison. As such, this questionnaire can be further replicated in other similar contexts in order to increase its validity.

A third contribution is theoretical in nature since I propose a model of interaction between aspects of the self, namely, self-perception, self-efficacy, and self-confidence (see Figure 5).

Another theoretical contribution is the diagram showing the emerging themes I believe greatly influence self-perception construction (Figure 12) in the setting.

Recommendations for future research

The findings addressed the questions put forward in this thesis, but also created new questions that are important to address in future research. In terms of the CCQ scale, there are several adjustments recommended: the first is to collect more background data (such as type of secondary education, marks obtained in the English class in previous educational sequences, etc.), that depict students' EFL backgrounds in clearer detail. It would also follow from this investigation to conduct surveys outside time allotted to the English class, and with other new cohorts of students to validate and expand the CCQ results. Also, longitudinal studies such as the ones described in the limitations section in Chapter 6 would serve to gather comparative data about self-perception through time. Individuals' physical, academic and psychological maturation and the impending demand to fulfil university matriculation requirements may make a difference in self-perception. Additionally, after completing the English curriculum (passing the courses of English 1 and English 2), it would be interesting to see if students develop strategies in order to fulfil the matriculation EFL requirement, and to explore strategy impact on communicative competence self-perception and concept.

Another purpose for a longitudinal study would be to compare self-reported perception of communicative competence and achievement scores obtained with objective assessments (such as tests). Longer studies can also permit the inclusion of larger focus groups and individual interviews designed to gather more insights about students' EFL experiences. The thematic frameworks introduced in Chapter 3 need to be further explored to accurately assess the nature of their involvement in shaping self-perception and a model of their interactions—if any existed—may be necessary. Examples of research questions that can be addressed are:

- Is WTC an applicable model across settings? If so, how do students' self-perceptions relate to WTC?
- Is there any relationship between self-perception and actions oriented to improve communicative competence (learning strategies, etc.)?
- How does the concept of English held by students relate to language identity?
- How does self-perception of communicative competence relate to university students' ideal and ought-to selves?
- What is the actual current impact of EFL in university students' lives?
- What are the attributions for success among students with high self-perception?
- What are the attributions for failure among those with low self-perception?

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Appendix A: CEFR Global Scale Guidelines

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Appendix B: Focus group 1 transcript

Jefferson Transcription Notation System (adapted)
Transcription notation was simplified—pauses were shown with ellipses, but overlap symbols were retained to emphasise the interaction among participants and moderator.

M	Moderator
WG	Whole group respond out loud
…	Fading voice, trailing last word
(.)	Just noticeable pause
Timed pauses, in minutes.seconds	
Wo(h)rd	'Laughter' within words
End.	Full stop (period) denotes falling, ending intonation
Word?	Question mark denotes questioning intonation
Cu-	Sharp cut-off of a prior word or sound
(word)	Transcriber's guess at an unclear part of the recording
Word=	Overlapping speech, other speaker's interruption
=word	
Word	(italics) Emphasis by speaker or added in transcription

Focus group one (first quartile)
Location: School of Business, University of Tamaulipas
Date: Tuesday 23rd January, 2007
Time: 16:00 to 18:00 hrs.
Focus group session length: 50:34

Participants:

Name (real names have been changed)	Sex	Age	CCQ Score	Area of study
Emilia	F	18	1.40	Law & Soc.Sci.
Mateo	M	19	1.45	Law & Soc.Sci.
Vanesa	F	17	1.50	Health Scs.

Transcript

1	M	Well(.) the purpose of this session, as I told you before
2		is to ask(.) ah, university students what makes them feel
3		the way they do about their ability to communicate in
4		English, ok? What makes you perceive your ability the way
5		you do? And we'd- well, *I* also would like to know what do you

6		think would make you change any bad feelings or keep good
7		feelings you have about it.(.02) But the most important issue
8		of this session is whether you as a group, share any of these
9		thoughts, ok? (.03) I would like to start by asking you to think
10		of *English*, the language, speaking the language, and think of
11		what animal would best represent what English represents *to*
12		*you*. (.02) Please write a bit about this and then we will share
13		it in the group. [participants write their ideas; silence] (.40)
14	Vanesa	It was only about *English*, or also Spanish?
15	M	Sorry?
16	Vanesa	It was only about English?
17	M	All is about English, here all is about English, so(.) when you
18		think about the English language, what animal do you
19		associate with it? It doesn't matter which, ok?=
20	Vanesa	=uhuh. [participants write their ideas; silence] (3.03)
21	M	Ready? [participants write on, not ready yet; silence] (.25)
22		Ok, let's start.
23	Mateo	ladies first= [whole group laughs]
24	Emilia	=hehehe
25	M	=ladies(h)first
26	Vanesa	what a gentleman
27	M	isn't he? it's always like that when it's convenient for them
28		Ok, which of the ladies wants to start?
29	Vanesa	Emilia does=
30	Emilia	=haa
31	M	Ok Emilia, for you, what animal is English?
32	Emilia	(.) well, a cat
33	M	A cat.
34	Emilia	Yes. [looks at peers and shrugs shoulders, smiles]
35	M	Why?
36	Emilia	Because(.) at the time when(.03) because it is loving at the
37		time when, hm(.) you start petting it=
38	M	=Uhuh.
39	Emilia	(.02) like English, at the time when you start(.) wanting to
40		learn(.)hm, well,(.) then later, well(.) it starts scratching at you
41		(.) the cat, beca(h)use(.) it starts to be complicated with the
42		grammar, the verbs, the tenses, the past, the present…
43		[finishes without looking at peers, and smiling]
44	M	(.) So it is loving in the beginning, but then it scratches you=
45	Emilia	=yes, it starts to be more complicated [Vanesa laughs,
46		Mateo smiles and looks at Emilia, group looks embarrassed,
47		fidgety, and keeps smiling and laughing]
48	M	It starts to be complicated (.02) something else you want
49		to add to that?
50	Emilia	No
51	M	Well, (.) Vanesa?=
52	Vanesa	=Me? A dove [looks at M, does not interact w peers]
53	M	A dove? Ok, why a dove?
54	Vanesa	Because(.) I feel it is a language that(.) if I have the
55		confidence that I know it, it can take me to(.) to know many
56		places as well as meet the people who live there.
57	M	[writing on board] uhuh, it can take you(.) to=
58	Vanesa	=to know places and meet other types of people.
59		[peers look around or at M, no peer interaction]

60	M	Ok(.03) something else?=
61	Vanesa	=no, that's it.
62	M	doesn't it scratch you later? [general laughter]
63	Vanesa	No
64	M	Ok, Mateo?
65	Mateo	A rabbit [looks at M, does not interact with peers]
66	M	A rabbit(.02) why?
67	Mateo	Because(.01) so that it catches my attention(.01) so that I'd
68		want to learn it.
69	M	(.)it would catch your attention [writing on board](.07) Do you
70		like rabbits?
71	Mateo	[nods 'yes'] (.03)
72	M	Do you have rabbits?
73	Mateo	No, but I like them.
74	M	(.03) and they don't have claws to start scratching at you.
75		[group laughs] Hey, but rabbits multiply very quickly=
76	Emilia	[nodding] =that's right
77	Vanesa	=as well [to Mateo] English multiplies for you(h)
78	M	[to Mateo] Ok right now it's a rabbit because you like them,
79		very well, a cat, a dove, and a rabbit(.03) do you think that
80		these animals are impossible to find or to get? [group silently
81		and smilingly shake their heads 'no']
82	Mateo	No.
83	M	No, right? (.02) and for example the cat, Emilia, you've already
84		got it and you've played with it and it's started scratching at
85		you, what would you do with it?
86	Emilia	[smiling] I leave it there aside.
87	M	Do you throw it away from you?
88	Emilia	[smiling] No, well I just leave it aside over there.
89	M	So you leave it aside, the cat or English you leave it aside, yes?
90	Emilia	Yes, for the moment=
91	M	=For the moment, until you see it's tamed?=
92	Emilia	=yes.
93	M	(.04) [to Vanesa] and the dove that took you to far places?
94		And it left you there, and then? Did the dove leave you there?
95	Vanesa	[crossing her arms and smiling] I look for another dove to
96		bring me back [whole group laughs]
97	M	Another dove that speaks Spanish? (.) Ok(.) Mateo, the
98		rabbit has had babies, it was a female rabbit and it gave birth.
99	Mateo	[smiling and closing his eyes] Well, so there are more.
100	M	Would you keep all the little rabbits? [peers nods 'yes']
101	Mateo	(.05) No.
102	M	No, would you give away, sell or eat all the little rabbits?
103	Mateo	[shrugging] I'd give them away.
104	M	You'd give them away, would you keep any little rabbit?
105	Mateo	[nodding] Well, yes.
106	M	I give you this analogy or metaphor because if we think about
107		which animal represents the foreign language to us we can see
108		what animals, or things attract us to it or(.) or make us reject
109		it(.02) and I ask you to tell me more so that you, on your own
110		can realise and can tell me what else is there, like 'I've got my
111		rabbit and my dove, and now what? The kitten scratched me'
112		[whole group laughs] 'How do I feel with it? It's an "animal"

113		that I want to keep for a long time, not for just a little while.'
114		But maybe we need to play with it when it is in a good mood=
115		=[Emilia laughs]= (.02) right? [group nods 'yes'] (.04) come on,
116		tell me, this is to learn from you, remember? (.02) how do you
117		feel with your English?
118	Vanesa	So you are giving us the situation from the perspective that
119		we already have, to say it this way, this animal which is the
120		English=
121	M	=uhuh.
122	Emilia	What would we do with it?
123	M	Uhuh. (.02)
124	Vanesa	[smiling to herself] Well, I'd take care of it, I'd fe(h)ed it=
125	M	=so that it can take you to more places?=
126	Vanesa	=right. (.03)
127	Mateo	I'd do the same with the rabbit, I'd keep on (.) I'd keep on
128		taking care of it (.) once I'd learned it (.) I'd keep on practicing
129		it (.) and well, then, once learning it well, really well, as you
130		say (.) it would have little rabbits ahh=
131	Vanesa	=and they would be like, I(.) I(.) the rabbit I saw it at first as
132		the way of your knowledge, I mean that they would mult- I
133		mean, that I'd see that animal from the point of view that (.)
134		you would like to multiply your knowledge or that you had
135		more knowledge, not only with that one rabbit, at least that's
136		what I…[stops talking and smiles] (.01)
137	M	[to Mateo] Want to add something?
138	Mateo	Well, yes, to multiply what I know, and as you say, I'd try to
139		learn English well, to learn it well as it is (.02) and then as
140		you say, sell my knowledge or give it away so that others…
141	M	…so that you'd benefit from it?=
142	Mateo	=Yes.
143	M	Emilia, how about your cat?=
144	Emilia	=I'd train the cat so that(.) I'd try it so that it does not scratch
145		me anymore(.) that it turns to(.) let's say…tame it=
146	M	=tame it?
147	Emilia	=Yeah.
148	M	Because you are not going to throw it away, are you?=
149	Emilia	=No I would educate it=
150	M	=educate it (.01) then, as I was saying, it is not impossible to
151		have these animals, it is not impossible to *speak English*
152		[group shakes heads agreeing] it is difficult according to what
153		you are telling me(.) or do you feel you have it, Vanesa?=
154	Vanesa	=No, I still don't have it=
155	M	=you still have to get it [Vanesa smiles] (.) do you have cats
156		Emilia?
157	Emilia	No, I don't.
158	M	(.) But you like them.
159	Emilia	Yes.
160	M	Ok, let's have another little exercise, I'm going to ask you that
161		on a paper or on the other side of the paper you used, you
162		draw a series of lines like the ones to play tic-tac-toe and in
163		each square you write one word that represents English, for
164		example "English is…" it's not going to be an animal anymore
165		so use other words "English is…" pretty, ugly, big, small, easy,
166		difficult, interesting, boring, in each square a word, ok?

167		[group writes, silence] (4.50) ok?
168	Vanesa	Does it matter if I didn't fill all the squares?
169	M	Well, let's see, you will tell me, ok? so I'm going to ask you to
170		take turns to say one of the words you have written and the
171		others check if you have it on your paper, if you do, please let
172		me know so that you can tell us why? What it means for you,
173		ok? Let's begin with Mateo now, let's see, please one of the
174		words you have written. English is…
175	Mateo	…interesting.
176	M	Interesting, do you have it as well? Yes? [group nod heads]
177		ok, so let's see, why is it interesting?
178	Mateo	Well, because it allows you to move on forward(.) get another
179		type of job (.) in any, I mean, if you know English, ehh, it
180		becomes easier (.02) ehm, well yes, you move up faster, you
181		have, ehm, as I said before, work, mor- these days all jobs in
182		general are asking for English, that's why I think it is
183		interesting=
184	M	=what do you think Emilia? Do you agree with Mateo?
185	Emilia	Well, yes, because it allows us to develop more in our career,
186		and to get to places and well, to the little corners of the places
187		where English is used.
188	M	You, ehm (.) imagine that you were working in a company
189		and that they would ask you to get in touch with your (.)
190		colleague in the U.S. (.) Would it make it an interesting job?
191		That possibility to communicate with foreigners? [Emilia nods]
192	Mateo	Well, yes. [Vanesa nods]
193	M	And, the way that you feel right now about English, would you
194		be able to do that?
195	WG	No. [and shaking heads]
196	M	No? Absolutely? To ring a colleague and tell him "hey, how are
197		you? I need you to send me blah blah blah"? no? [whole group
198		shake heads] ok, second word, please?
199	Emilia	Dedicated.
200	M	Dedicated, anyone else has it? [peers say 'no'] Then please tell
201		us why dedicated?
202	Emilia	[smiling] Well because I think that for English it is very
203		necessary(.) to give it time and dedicate effort to learn it well.
204	M	Do you have to go to an English class to learn English?
205	Emilia	I think so.
206	M	[addressing group] And you? What do you say?
207	Mateo	Yes.
208	M	So you should take an English class?
209	Mateo	I think so.
210	M	Vanesa?
211	Vanesa	Yes(.) but- it's that (.) if it is, I still think, if it is a *very*
212		*practical* class, yes (.) and if not, well, (.02) a-, a way in which
213		you could communicate with people who (.) who only, I mean
214		who only use that tool, not in a class that is very monotonous.
215	M	Practical, it should be practical, where there are tools as we
216		said before [group nods] ok, Emilia, tick your word since only
217		you had it. Ok, Vanesa, one word, please?
218	Vanesa	Better opportunity.
219	M	Better opportunity, someone has something like that?
220		[Emilia shakes her head 'no'] ok, tick your word, please.

Vanesa: It’s that I, as they were saying just now, English to me would mean to have in the future in my profession as in any other branch of study a better opportunity after graduation and, not only, because I am a medic and to be(.) whatever they are going to be, and to have not only my language, it would be a better job opportunity to be- to have English.

M: As a medic, in what- in what situations do you think that you would need English?

Vanesa: In that, in that if I am given the opportunity to study abroad in places where I would need it. It would be very difficult to make the most out of the learning experience if I cannot understand what they were saying.

M: Ehm, so if right now you were given this opportunity to study abroad, could you take this chance in a country where English is spoken? (.03)

Vanesa: Maybe not.

M: Maybe not? Why?

Vanesa: Because I feel insec- I mean, maybe because I would like to, I would like to improve, improve my English, yes, if, if I would take the option- but from the point of view that maybe, I’d be struggling more to try to learn a lesson on medicine over there than learn it over here [nods] well, no.

M: Yes, eh, in that situation you would be learning a class about your subject, not about English, but for example you, [addressing peers] who are in the area of humanities, if you were given a situation like that, where you go for a summer to Canada, the United States, England, Australia, a country where English is spoken, where you are going to be taking lessons on your field, of your major, not of English specifically, but obviously, the language used would be English, what’d happen with you in that case? Would you take it? Could you take the opportunity?

Mateo: No.

Emilia: No.

M: Absolutely not? [Mateo and Emilia shake their heads] Do you agree with Vanesa in anything?

Mateo: Well, yes, in that- first that English is very useful for our studies.

M: Ok, and in this situation? In which you could not take the opportunity?

Mateo: Well, no, I couldn’t because I don’t feel sure about my English.

M: Emilia?

Emilia: Well, if I had the opportunity even if I did not know about everything, well yes, because, hm, no- opportunities do not appear frequently, and I do not know much English, but I’d find a way, I don’t know how, but, well…

M: …because it would be a special opportunity? you would prefer to take it?=

Emilia: =yes.

M: [addressing whole group] What would make you feel more secure, ehm, in that situation, what would make you feel more secure, so that you could take it? About your level of English. What would help you? What do you think it could be? (.04)

Vanesa: I didn’t get that.

275	M	Let's say, there is the possibility of a course, summer study, a
276		Seminar, but you say you don't feel sure about taking it, what,
277		what could happen- or what could you do- or what could
278		someone do for you, so that you would feel better and you'd
279		decide to take that opportunity, Emilia says that even if she is
280		not very sure about her English, but because of the rarity of
281		the opportunity itself, because of the uniqueness of the chance,
282		she would take it and struggle with it, but from what you said
283		before, it seems that you agree in that you would say 'no'. So
284		what do you think would help you say 'no, but maybe, yes'?
285	Vanesa	The will to improve myself, to really want to use it, learn it(.)
286		Yes, more than anything, the wish to develop myself.
287	M	Mateo?
288	Mateo	Come again?
289	M	What would help you feel more secure so that you'd decide to
290		take an opportunity such as this, no matter what. (.06)
291	Mateo	Well, I don't know.
292	M	Or would you absolutely say 'no, first I need to do something
293		else'?
294	Mateo	Well, (.) only the experience.
295	M	The experience. (.04) ok, we have three words, right? Ok any
296		other word over there, please?
297	Mateo	A key tool to practise in your career.
298	M	A key tool for your career, anyone? No? ok, it is a tool- ah! I
299		also wanted to ask you, a moment ago someone said 'to
300		improve myself', so, English improves yourselves as
301		professionals? Or as individuals? What do you think?
302	Mateo	Well, both, no?
303	M	Do you agree?
304	Vanesa	I as a pers- as(.) in both aspects, in the aspect of an individual
305		because I would feel more secure, I'd feel better, more secure
306		as in situations that I could face that I would have to use this
307		language, and as a professional, because it would mean a, a,
308		to have a better opportunity in my field of work.
309	M	Emilia?
310	Emilia	As a person also and as a professional because as a person, I
311		don't know, I'd feel, for example, I admire those people who,
312		can speak English, I hope that of course they would help me,
313		and as a professional, well, as well, it is necessary. A person
314		who does not have English- I think it is someone who does not
315		want to improve, because these times, English is necessary.
316	M	You were going to say 'a person who does not have English…'
317	Emilia	A person who does not have English, well, I just imagine that
318		the person does not have an education, that's what we have
319		been told. [smiling]
320	M	That is what you have been told.
321	Emilia	Yes, well, yes
322	M	I'm going to ask you a question about this you are saying, you
323		say that you do not feel secure about your English, you all- I
324		am going to use this expression, ok? You are people who do not
325		have English, [whole group nods] from what Emilia just said (.)
326		do you think you match that definition? 'I don't have English
327		and I don't have an education?' (.03)
328	Mateo	Well, I don't have an education in *that* aspect, which is the

language, there are several types of education. [Vanesa nods]
M There are, right?=
Vanesa =maybe…
M Sorry? Go ahead.
Vanesa Maybe- I feel as if there is an insecurity about that, about that *aspect*, to call it a name, but I cannot say that I do not have an education because, because I know that in others, in other- in subjects for example, in subjects I take, I know that I have, I mean, I have sufficient preparation to say that I feel capable to speak- to carry on in conversation about this topic or something, and at the same time, I could not say that I have excellent English, I can't say that because *preparation* is larger than that.
M [addressing group] Do you agree or disagree?
Emilia I disagree, because for example in my case I am studying tourism and we have been told that if we do not have 90% of English, I mean, we would not be able to graduate, that is what I mean.
M Ok, so in this issue about percentages, if I told you, you need 90% of English to pass, or to graduate, what would you say? 'Oh dear, I'm not going to make it?' [whole group laughs] 'Why should I bother?' Or what would you do?
Emilia I don't know but I'd have to find a way to make it
Vanesa I would put more effort in trying to learn. (.03)
M Do we still have more words? Emilia? Sorry it was Mateo?
Mateo Yes, before.
M Oh, sorry, so it is Emilia's turn.
Emilia Necessary.
M Necessary, anyone else? No? [Emilia laughs] Why is it necessary? Because of what we've discussed?
Emilia Yes
M Something else in particular?
Emilia Because in the future, a person who does not speak English will find it very hard to find a job.
M That is what has been said for the last ten years, anyways, we are here now, necessary, another word Vanesa?
Vanesa Difficult.
M Difficult, anyone else?
Emilia Me.
Mateo Complicated.
M Complicated, ok we are in tune here. Why difficult Mateo?
Mateo In my case because I just don't understand it.
M You don't understand it when you listen to it?
Mateo [nods]
M Do you understand it when you read it?
Mateo Nope [smiling], a little bit.
M Ladies? Why is it complicated, why is it difficult?
Vanesa I think because I don't have some of the foundations that make it more complicated to understand it now, I mean, because of the level one studies here now it is not the same to the level one studied in junior high school or in high school, so it is difficult for me from the point of view that I *know* that *right now* I don't have the foundations to understand it well.
M Ok, any other word that we have not mentioned? (.02)

383	Vanesa	Communication.
384	M	Communication, English is communication. Anyone else?
385		What do you think? Do you agree? English is communication?
386	Mateo	Yes, for the people who speak it, yes.
387	M	If you heard here right now someone speaking English what
388		would you think? How would you feel? Let's say that you were
389		*not* understanding the conversation.
390	Mateo	Well, strange.
391	M	Sorry?
392	Mateo	Strange.
393	M	Strange? Strange well? [Vanesa shakes her head] (.02) why?
394	Vanesa	Because I'd like, I mean, I'd like to express something, maybe
395		participate, give my opinion if I can in that conversation.
396	M	Would you say you would feel excluded? (.02) [group nods]
397	Mateo	From the conversation, yes=
398	M	=Yes?
399	Emilia	=yes.
400	M	And that feeling, is that good or bad?
401	Vanesa	Bad.
402	Emilia	[laughs]
403	M	Ok, let's now wrap this up, ehm, apart from the questionnaire
404		I gave you before where I asked you to express how you feel
405		about your English, I'd like to ask you to- if you recall a bit of
406		what you have mentioned here; more or less, the three of you
407		feel in a similar manner about your English, of course each
408		one has different thoughts about what you are going to do
409		about it, thinking of this, about how you feel and think, what
410		advice would you give to others so that they feel better? What
411		would you suggest others to do? Or even about yourselves, or
412		maybe activities or actions to change the way you feel? About
413		English of course. (.03) Let's make a list of three things you'd
414		recommend to others who feel the same way about what to do
415		to feel better about your English level, three things.
416		[groups writes on papers] (3.15) ok? Ready? Ok, who wants to
417		start now? Giving advice… [writing on board]
418	Emilia	To practise with someone else.
419	M	[writing on board] ok, something else? (.05)
420	Mateo	Take a language course of the most important things.
421	M	[writing on board] what are *'the most important things'*?
422	Mateo	I mean, the most basic things about English.
423	M	[writing on board] (.03) what else? (.03)
424	Vanesa	I wrote something like, don't feel frustrated because you don't
425		have it now, but think of the other stuff, considering that- I
426		mean, any of us in our majors, I mean, not to- not to- try not to
427		feel frustrated by thinking 'I don't have it, I don't have it', but
428		rather consider that 'I can', I mean 'I can have it' or 'it would
429		be good to have it'.
430	M	Ok, don't feel frustrated, to think you can. [writing]
431	Emilia	To think positive.
432	M	To think positive? Is that what you think? [Emilia nods]
433		Ok, something else? (.03) you have some more, right?
434	Vanesa	It's that, I agree first with him,=
435	M	=also to practise it=
436	Vanesa	=uhuh

437	Mateo	I wrote also to put effort in learning it.
438	M	Put effort in learning it [writing on board]=
439	Emilia	Dedicate time to it.
440	M	Dedicate time to it. Anyone else agrees on this one?
441	Vanesa	[nods] yes.
442	M	Yes? Put effort into it?
443	Vanesa	I wrote to continue studying it.
444	M	Ok, any other we don't have on the board?
445	Mateo	To practise it.
446	M	To practise it. Would it be similar to the first one here?
447	Mateo	[nods]
448	M	Ok, then we should always practise it, take a language course,
449		don't feel frustrated, don't despair, if you think 'I don't get it,
450		but…', put effort into it, try hard, and dedicate time to learn.
451		That is, we're not going to be able to speak English overnight,
452		right? [Vanesa shakes her head] but if we dedicate time to it
453		we will make it? Ok, just to finish now, I'd like to ask each of
454		you to say your name and where you are from in English.
455		[group stares, smiles and looks startled] Mateo?
456	Mateo	What's my name and where I live? [smiling and fidgeting]
457	M	Uhuh. It doesn't have to be the exact address, but in general.
458	Mateo	(.03) in English?
459	M	That's right.
460	Mateo	(.) 'my name is Mateo', eh (.04) do I have to say something
461		else? (.05) 'my(.) address(.) Tampico.'
462	M	Ok, Emilia?
463	Emilia	Hm 'my name is Emilia(.) I am(.) from(.) Tampico, Tamaulipas.'
464	M	Vanesa?
465	Vanesa	'My name is Vanesa, eh I'm from(.) Mante, Tamaulipas.'
466	M	(.02) Do you have any problem with that? How do you feel
467		Speaking English? Because you *are* speaking English. [group
468		smiles and nods] How do you feel Mateo? You are even
469		smiling, why? Please tell me, how you feel? 'it's..' what?
470	Mateo	[shrugs] I don't' know- no.
471	M	You feel…what? Nothing?
472	Mateo	Weird
473	M	Weird? I even noticed that when I asked you all to do this you
474		seemed to wake up, like 'what? What?' [Vanesa laughs] You
475		are in a situation where you are required to speak English,
476		what does the situation make you feel? You feel afraid? Nice?
477		Is it a challenge? I don't like to put words in your mouths, it's
478		better if you tell me from your own thoughts.
479	Emilia	I felt nervous.
480	M	You felt nervous. [Mateo nods]
481	Mateo	Nerves [nodding]
482	M	Nerves [groups nods] when each of you were speaking, I saw
483		that you were not looking at each other, why? [Vanesa and
484		Emilia look at each other and smile]
485	Emilia	Well, I don't know [Mateo stretches up]
486	Mateo	When we were speaking, about the question you asked us?
487	M	Uhuh, you've been discussing here together for a while.
488	Vanesa	[smiling and laughing] yes, but(.) we're not very comfortable
489		with each other yet.
490	M	Hmm, that is going to be difficult then because we are almost

over now [group smiles and laughs]. I want to thank you for taking part here, what you have said are great ideas for me to go further with my study, in many occasions those feelings of fear, nerves, are commonly expressed, but this is what I want to get from you, how you feel and what are the reasons for feeling this way, so, I want to thank you again, and tell you that all you have mentioned here is confidential, and it is only for the purposes of my study, thank you.

Appendix C: Focus group 2 transcript

Jefferson Transcription Notation System (adapted)

Transcription notation was simplified—pauses were shown with ellipses, but overlap symbols were retained to emphasise the interaction among participants and moderator.

M	Moderator
WG	Whole group respond out loud
…	Fading voice, trailing last word
(.)	Just noticeable pause
Timed pauses, in minutes.seconds	
Wo(h)rd	'Laughter' within words
End.	Full stop (period) denotes falling, ending intonation
Word?	Question mark denotes questioning intonation
Cu-	Sharp cut-off of a prior word or sound
(word)	Transcriber's guess at an unclear part of the recording
Word=	Overlapping speech, other speaker's interruption
=word	
Word	(italics) Emphasis by speaker or added in transcription

Focus group two (second quartile)
Location: School of Business, University of Tamaulipas
Date: Wednesday 24th January, 2007
Time: 16:00 to 18:00 hrs.
Focus group session length: 56:55

Participants:

Name (names have been changed)	Sex	Age	CCQ Score	Area of study
Jaime	M	18	3.40	Engineering
Luisa	F	20	3.30	Arts & Hum.

Transcript

1	M	Good afternoon, Luisa and Jaime.
2	Luisa	Good afternoon.
3	Jaime	[smiles]
4	M	We need to adapt the structure of this focus group session

because as you can see, it's only the two of you today. [smile] but I want to make good use of your time since you came, and as I was telling you when you arrived, I'd like to learn about the reasons that make you feel the way you do about your ability in English. First let me briefly tell you about me, I am Maria, I am a student in a doctorate programme, and this is part of the study for my thesis. This study is about perceptions of students in their first year in this university about the way they use the English language. We- I want to do lots of things after this project, but first I need to get to know how you, the students feel so that I can do something about it later on. The idea was to conduct a group of discussion with a number of participants, but as you can see, it's not going to be possible=

Jaime =I say we can do it.

M Well, yes, we can have a discussion group, but it is going to be smaller and in terms of the methodology for my study it may need to be validated, but I don't think that your perceptions, even if it's only the two of you lack validity, of course they are valid, we're just not going to be able to share them with others. The videocamera is recording now so that in case I forget to write something or I miss something that you say=

Jaime [fidgety] =are you the only one to see it?

M I will see it, maybe my supervisors, they do understand some Spanish, I'm not sure how easy it will be for them to follow it, but it would only be to see what happened during this part of my investigation. No, I'm not showing it in any network=

Jaime [smiling] =yes, I hope it's not going to…

M or in any channel and you are not going to be exposed to the World. no.

Luisa [laughs]

Jaime it's ok.

M Ok so the participants today are Luisa and Jaime, first I'd like To ask you, if you think about English, the English language, Where would you use it? Where do you use English? (.) [Jaime Smiling, signals for Luisa to be the first to speak, Luisa smiles] Ah! So generous! [group laughs]

Jaime Ladies first.

M Sure.

Luisa Well, it's just that English as they say, nowadays is universal, in all places it is very much used, at school, at work, with your friends, because now with the internet and all, well, you get to meet people from other countries and well, the language that the majority speak is English. It's used(.) in everything. If that is what the question is about?

M Yes, yes, yes. With friends, on internet, everywhere. Jaime?

Jaime It's all fine, I've nothing to add.

Luisa [smiles]

M uhuh.

Jaime No, well, it's very important since it is used in everything, for example, in instruction manuals. [Luisa nods] There are home devices that, that you bought original, not from the black market, and it just happens that the instructions are printed in English, and then, well, you don't know how to put them together, so you have to look for a person to help you, no? but

		anyways, then you have to get to know how is it going to work
		and how is it connected and plugged, and, and… well, it's very
		important to know it so that you can better do it yourself.
	M	Uhuh, at this time, do you use English for anything?
	Luisa	Me? Well, for school, eh… very little with my friends, but I do
		have- I have a few who speak it, well, I've not worked with
		foreigners at all and as he says [pointing towards Jaime] many
		devices, and I don't know, shops, on the television, it is
		necessary to have the knowledge, even if right now it is only
		the basics, but I'd like to be fluent and be able to have a
		conversation. [finishes with head nods]
	M	When you go to the cinema, do you watch American films?
		[Luisa nods her head]
	Jaime	Hmm, yes.
	M	And what do you do when you watch those films?=
	Jaime	=read, read=
	M	=do you listen?=
	Jaime	=read the subtitles more than listen to what the characters
		are saying. Ah! That's the other thing, you have to have a 'good
		ear' to, to- for example, if the actor tells a joke, you have to read
		it from the bottom of the screen, and the others laugh, they,
		they- laughed because they understood it and you are just there
		waiting to read and you laugh at last, so…that is what
		happens(.) well, that is what I've been told happens to others,
		haha [Jaime and Luisa laugh]
	M	So, you would be laughing with the first group?
	Jaime	(.) yes [laughs] well, no, I mean, seeing that the others laugh
		well, (.) yes, yes.
	M	Ok, (.) have you studied English or are you studying English
		at this time apart from your university English lessons?
	Luisa	[nods] yes, a course in the university, but apart from the
		lessons I get from school. I've been studying for a year now.
	Jaime	[to Luisa] an example?
	M	What do you mean? [Luisa looks at Jaime]
	Jaime	That she says something, a phrase, to see. [Luisa laughs]
	M	but it's not an exam, hehee
	Jaime	Ok, sorry [group smile]
	M	Do you have extra English lessons apart form the university
		classes, Jaime?=
	Jaime	=No, no, only the class from school.
	M	And you take one English class now, right?=
	Jaime	=yes, yes.
	M	So, how do you feel in that class?
	Jaime	Good! Eh, I'd already seen all that but- as she said, hm, those
		are things that I'd forgotten, that- the rules that the words
		have and all that…
	M	Before you enrolled in university, did you take English lessons
		in high school and junior high school?
	Luisa	[nods] yes, well in my case, I had started studying another
		major which was a university certificate of education in
		English=
	M	=uhuh=
	Luisa	[smiling] so, then one of the reasons was that I felt English was

too difficult, but- anyway, there were other factors, but for example, the English that is spoken by the students in that programme is quite good here in Tamaulipas compared for example with my cohort from school, in junior high school and elementary school, I am for example behind the level of those elementary school children.

M Jaime?

Jaime What was the question?

M If you have taken English lessons before the university?

Jaime Well, eh- I studied at the CBTis, and the programme said that I did have English class, but, but I did not retain anything of that and in junior high school, yes, we did have English class.

M Why didn't you retain anything in high school?

Jaime Because, I don't know, I was told to get to read and…just that, it was to read and try to answer something, but we were not taught the grammatical rules of English and things like that. things that I saw in junior high and not in high school.

M What do you think was missing from those lessons=

Jaime =it was the teacher's fault [Jaime laughs]

M Was it the teacher's fault definitely?

Jaime No, I don't know. [Luisa nods her head] the book…

M What do you mean, the book?

Jaime Yes, the book, because they were very simple, it was not very well explained.

Luisa Also the effort=

Jaime =no, I did put effort=

Luisa =I mean, I'm not saying you didn't, but sometimes when one *wants* something, well, one looks for it, of course, one tries to improve, I mean, one tries to improve himself [Jaime laughs] not necessarily through a course, but=

Jaime =you didn't hear what she said, right?

Luisa What?

Jaime That is what she was saying.

Luisa Ah.

M But=

Jaime =No, well, yes, sorry.

Luisa But if it's me, well I'd say the effort.

M Do you think he lacked the effort?

Luisa Hmm, well [smiling]

Jaime [looking at Luisa] yes.

Luisa [laughs] well, yes.

Jaime Noo!!

M Don't worry, nothing leaves this room, you can be as friendly as before you entered here when you leave the room.

Jaime No!

Luisa I mean, maybe he did not lack the effort, but maybe he lacked the motivation.

Jaime Yes, well, maybe in those years I did not have motivation since I didn't know anything about the real life, I mean, I knew that, that I would still be supported economically by my family, and well, English is like mathematics, and that, or Spanish, it is something quite regular, that perhaps I can see when I grow up and not studying verbs, and- it was more important for me to get on with my friends and have a good time. That's it, I've

said it, hehe. [Luisa smiles]

M When do you think that you have grown up?

Jaime Right now, ah! No, I mean, I don't know, when you have a- when you can sort out your own problems, have ah- be responsible towards your own life., I don't know, when you grow old- I don't know! Hehee

M And Luisa, what do you think? Are you grown up yet?

Luisa No, I don't think so.

Jaime I think she is.

Luisa No, I think that we still lack a lot of responsibility to, well, to be able of being in charge of myself and my things, speaking both about money and school things, hmm, I, I arrive late all the time=

Jaime =ah, she is still a child=

Luisa =I'm not very responsible there, that doesn't mean I'm still a child=

Jaime =I think that no one can say that, that you are a grown up, or= that you are old enough to do things, I mean, the way you do things- maybe a child who does not have, does not have, ehm, parents, but who could overcome this in his teenage years, you could say, well, he already has the responsibilities of a grown man, and there is no specific age- I feel there is no specific age to be grown up…

M [looking at Luisa] what do you say?

Luisa [nodding] yes, he is right. (.01) I think, I think every day you learn something and there is no age to say, I know everything and I'm now big, and every day one is learning new things and improves himself. No matter how old, for example you, who are studying a doctorate- I'm not sure, but I can imagine that you may think that there are still so many things to learn and well, I don't know if that's what you meant with "grown up"?

M Well it's just that you said 'when I am grown I will learn'=

Jaime =ah, yes! I said that as if saying, well when I am 40 I will do that, but, but now I see that the situation is very difficult and I see that my mother doesn't want to feed me anymore, [Luisa Laughs] it's a matter of improving oneself and that is why English is so important, and even more, it is very funny, for example, someone says a joke in English and if you, if you get to understand it, you feel… ah(.) fitting.

M Fitting? And if you don't get the joke?

Jaime Well you feel rejected, haha!! No, you feel, well, that's it, I did not get it and you keep quiet.

M Do your friends, eh close friends speak English? [Luisa nods]

Luisa Some do, the majority do. [smiling]

M How do you feel when you are with them and they say a joke or make reference to something in English?

Luisa Well, as he says, when you get it [Jaime laughs] it's great, I mean, because, I mean, you are part of the conversation, but when you don't, it's like 'erh, could you explain that?' [wincing] But, well, I mean, you have to learn new things and, maybe that is one way to do it.

M Jaime?

Jaime Eh?

M Do you have close friends who speak English?=

Jaime	They can barely speak Spanish, no, I mean(.)- A, a classmate knows a lot of English, and, and- what was the rest of the question?
M	When you are with someone who speaks English, how do you feel about it?
Jaime	Ah, well, I try, I try- not to speak with her, ha! No, I mean, in those cases, I try to speak only Spanish, I mean, I ask her to speak only Spanish so that I don't feel…well, bad.
M	So it used to make you feel bad if she was speaking English and you could not get it, right?
Jaime	Well, yes. I'd feel uncomfortable, not that I felt less, no.
M	Ok, you have some paper in front of you, which Jaime is using to fan himself=
Jaime	No, I was thinking of making a paper ship.
M	Well, before you make the paper ship, I want to ask you to think about what English is, and think of an animal, tamed or wild, and think of what animal represents what English is for you 'English is a…' what animal for you. You are going to write it down and also why this animal, ok? (.03) [Jaime looks at Luisa's paper smiling] no, you can't copy from her, eh? (.03)
Jaime	=I'd never thought about it.
M	English is a…
Jaime	Can it be imaginary animals? No?
M	(.) yes, it can be, but you'll tell me why? (.40) Jaime?
Jaime	Ah, I was falling asleep. But I can't draw!
M	It's not drawn, it is written. [Jaime looks at Luisa's paper again] hey, no copying.
Jaime	It's just that- I was thinking what she wrote, I already have it, (.01) but I am going to make- may I make, may I, hmm tell you the same animal, but=
M	=yes, the reason =may be different
Jaime	=the reason can be different?
M	But you have to tell me your own reasons. He has a very good Eyesight, right? [both laugh] (.40) [to Jaime] ready?
Jaime	Yes. I'm going to draw it for you.
M	Ok. (.20) [to Luisa] ready?
Jaime	It looks like a chicken.
Luisa	Uhuh.
M	Ok, Jaime you start.
Jaime	No, it's her idea and it would be…ok, I'll start. Eh, I wrote the eagle because the eagle is like an American symbol, and as it's always visible, eh, in the White House and such and=
M	=uhuh, the American symbols=
Jaime	=yes, and since I have it in my mind that only in the United States you speak English because- 'ah, he speaks English and he comes from such place in the U.S.', and that's why.
M	Because it represents the United States to you?
Jaime	Yes.
M	Ok, the eagle, and did you draw your eagle?
Jaime	Yes.
M	Can I see?
Jaime	Ahh. [showing the paper]
M	Ah, it's ok.
Jaime	It looks like a parrot.

274	M	Well, more like the eagle of a certain football team that I will
275		not mention here. [both laugh] may I keep that paper later?
276	Jaime	[looking at the paper] hmmm, I'll sell it to you.
277	Luisa	Ah!
278	M	Ah! Forget it then, hahaha.
279	Jaime	Yes! [handing in the paper].
280	M	But you are going to still need it for a while.
281	Jaime	Ah! Sorry, ok.
282	M	Ok, so then Luisa?
283	Luisa	Well, in my case it is the same, it represents the United States,
284		I also have that idea that it is shown in many symbols there,
285		and apart from that, the eagle, I don't know, I think I see it as
286		freedom or eh, well actually, the freedom of the language that
287		goes around the world, I mean, that is free and can go around
288		the world in some way.
289	M	Does it allow you to fly with it?
290	Luisa	Uhuh.
291	Jaime	Besides, eagles also are in castles in England, [smiling] I don't
292		know if this is true, because over there English is another
293		accent, I believe, I've been told, yes? And in America it is
294		another one, and both countries are an eagle. I guess.
295	M	Both represent an eagle to you.
296	Jaime	Yes.
297	M	Are you both afraid of eagles? (.03)
298	Luisa	[shakes her head 'no']
299	Jaime	Ah! Is it a psychological test? [jumping up and down]
300	M	[laughs]
301	Luisa	No, I don't think so.
302	M	No? do you like eagles?
303	Luisa	Well, it's not like ' I like them'=
304	Jaime	=ha, to have it at home, well no!=
305	Luisa	=and I would not have a problem if there is one close, but I don't
306		know, maybe I'd feel some fear, something like that.
307	M	Jaime?
308	Jaime	I don't know, I like to see eagles on the television. They must be
309		very pretty.
310	M	And do you think that one day you could be close to an eagle?
311	Jaime	Yes.
312	Luisa	[nods] yes.
313	M	We are thinking that English is represented by this eagle, right?
314		So you are not afraid of it, it is not something very (.) common,
315		to have close by everyday, but you are not afraid of it, and
316		someday you could get it, yes? [both nod] ok, when someone
317		comes to you and speaks in English, maybe a tourist who is lost
318		in the city, a person who needs directions, or for example you
319		are in a club and there is a guy and a girl, and they are very
320		attractive, and they are American, they only speak English and
321		they come to you and speak in English to you, then what?
322	Jaime	Ah! 'oh, yes!'
323	Luisa	Hmm,
324	Jaime	'oh beautiful girl' ahh, I don't know, I look for someone who is
325		from here.
326	M	You would not want to meet an American girl?
327	Jaime	Hmm, if she wanted to meet me yes.

328	M	But she does not speak Spanish. (.02)
329	Jaime	If I, if I fell for her, well, maybe I'd do it for her.
330	M	What would you do for her?
331	Jaime	Well, study English, hehee.
332	M	Ok, but that comes later, how about now, when she is in front of
333		you and she speaks to you in English and then?
334	Jaime	Well, I don't know, in that moment I tell her what I can, or not
335	M	But you would try?
336	Jaime	Sure!
337	Luisa	[nods] I'd try to, I'd try to have a conversation=
338	Jaime	=because she already speaks, but I don't=
339	Luisa	=but I don't know that much, to have a chat and I don't know
340		how to tell a joke or things like that, I mean, I don't know that
341		much, I know maybe the basics.
342	M	Why do you say that she speaks English?
343	Jaime	Because she has, she has a fresh memory of it, I mean, that
344		the course she is taking is reminding her of things she could
345		not remember but that she already knew.
346	Luisa	But there are many things that I am learning now.
347	Jaime	That's it, there are things that she did not know, but she is
348		learning and her =knowledge is growing, no?=
349	Luisa	=But how can you say? Maybe you have, I don't known,
350		studied in junior high school or something and you could know
351		I mean [Jaime laughs] not because I am studying now it
352		means that I know=
353	M	=but=
354	Luisa	=there are people who studied three years ago, and they know
355		only the basics, and [shrugging] they know anyways.
356	M	Do you mean the extra classes apart from university lessons?
357	Luisa	[pointing to Jaime] I imagine that is what he means.
358	Jaime	Yes, yes.
359	M	Because in the university you take the same class=
360	Luisa	=I don't know I've waived the obligation to take it.
361	M	Ok, if you have waived it, then it is different, but=
362	Luisa	=[laughs] no, the programme=
363	Jaime	=You see? She is taking it again and she is being reminded of
364		it and that makes her not to forget, I am just beginning, we've
365		been in class [Luisa laughs] for just a week and it's been just
366		to get to know one another because, we need the book to start
367		the class.
368	M	That is why I am not assessing how you feel about your class
369		in university now.
370	Jaime	But- hehee
371	M	But?
372	Jaime	No, nothing.
373	M	So she knows and you don't.
374	Jaime	Hmm [looking at Luisa] there was a question about if I feel that
375		there are classmates who know more than I do? Yes. Yes, I
376		think so.
377	M	And does that make you feel bad?
378	Jaime	No. I don't care. [shrugging]
379	Luisa	You know? I feel exactly like you, I feel like, I have friends who
380		know more than I do.
381	Jaime	But it's not me, you are not referring to me=

382	Luisa	No, but, I mean, eh (.02) let's say that we share the feeling of,
383		=Of sometimes feeling less in front of others, no?
384	Jaime	=but you know more than I do.
385	M	In fact that is the reason you were asked to be here today,
386		because in your previous questionnaire you indicated similar
387		perceptions, obviously, each person is different, each person is
388		going to measure against others some way, but simply put, your
389		perceptions are similar. It's good that you mention it, that you
390		share this feeling because=
391	Jaime	=we are not the only lost ones=
392	M	=no, absolutely, it's just that you are my volunteers, because
393		unfortunately I can't go asking everybody., ok so you've told me
394		what animal it is, it is an eagle, you are not afraid of them, but
395		do you feel respect towards them?
396	Luisa	Hm a bit.
397	M	Ok, I'm going to ask you something else, to make a sort of tic-
398		tac-toe in your paper, on the other side, please [both grab their
399		papers and start drawing the squares] and in each square- yes?
400	Jaime	I'll tell you later.
401	M	Ok.
402	Jaime	No, better now, are you going to pay us? Hehee
403	Luisa	[pointing towards the refreshments]
404	Jaime	Ah! Yeah there are refreshments.
405	M	At least I can give you that, and I have a diploma for each.
406	Jaime	Tickets to the clubs?
407	M	Haha, please let us record that my budget cannot afford that, ok
408		in each square you will write one word about what English is to
409		you.
410	Jaime	One in each? In the six squares?
411	M	Nine?
412	Jaime	Nine, ah I don't know how to count anymore.
413	M	The most you can write, if you can't fill in the nine=
414	Jaime	One in each square?
415	M	Yes, one word in each square, 'English is…' instead of using the
416		animals now we are going to use words, 'English is…' what? One
417		word in each square. (1.21) if it were a contest?
418	Jaime	No, it's just that there's no motivation. If there was some money.
419	M	If there was some money would you do it?
420	Jaime	Yes
421	Luisa	It would be false.
422	Jaime	[to Luisa] What would be false? The money? [looking at M] yes?
423		[looking at Luisa] I didn't get that, I didn't get that! I'm done!
424	M	[to Luisa] would you like to explain to Jaime what you mean?
425	Luisa	Your responses would be false because you would be doing it
426		because of the money, not really because of what you think and
427		feel. [looking at Jaime]
428	Jaime	But I'd do it faster, hehee [Luisa shakes her head] no?
429	M	What do you think?
430	Jaime	No, well I came just like that without a reward of money=
431	M	=yes, without money, there is no money for anyone, put it in the
432		record that there is no money for anyone… [Jaime laughs]
433		…not even for me [Jaime laughs, Luisa nods] the reward is a job
434		well done. (.57) ready?
435	Luisa	Well, yes.

436	M	Ok, let's begin with Luisa one word, then Jaime one word and
437		each briefly please tells us why that word.
438	Luisa	Well, the first one is respect, respect towards the language for
439		the importance it has around the world.
440	M	Yes Jaime?
441	Jaime	Yes!
442	M	Do you have it?
443	Jaime	No, I don't.
444	M	Ok, then put a cross on it, Luisa=
445	Jaime	[laughing] = you got it wrong!=
446	M	=it's not wrong, it's just that you didn't write the same word.
447	Jaime	Yes, English is essential.
448	M	Essential, why?
449	Jaime	Because, as we have told you before, it is required everywhere.
450		even more, to get the university degree you have to know a
451		certain percentage and I think that it is more because of that,
452		that I have to study English, because otherwise I don't get my
453		degree, no? so it is essential.
454	M	It is essential. Do you have that one, Luisa?
455	Luisa	Eh, no, but I have a similar one: necessary.
456	M	So because you got the same idea, you get a tick both of you.
457		another word, Luisa?
458	Luisa	Triumph.
459	M	Triumph.
460	Luisa	Ehm, because of the same reasons, because it is necessary and
461		nowadays in any job or at school, if you know it, you can put one
462		tick more on your- on your curriculum and your career, and it is
463		one step further in the ladder to get, to get higher, how could I
464		say? (.) yes, to have something more.
465	M	To improve, to develop oneself? I'm not sure I should put words
466		in your mouth.
467	Luisa	I had another word, but I can't…
468	Jaime	Let it go.
469	M	Sometimes we blank out.
470	Jaime	Eh?
471	M	Sometimes we blank out.
472	Luisa	[nodding]
473	M	Jaime do you have something like triumph?
474	Jaime	I don't know, gain?
475	M	Gain, I don't think so, so cross because you did not have it. Why
476		gain, Jaime?
477	Jaime	Because when you know it you already have-if you have a good
478		level of English, high, quite high, you can have a good job and
479		make more money, that is why I think that English is gain. Yes
480		or no?
481	M	It's whatever you say.
482	Jaime	Ah! [to Luisa] yes or no?
483	Luisa	You are very materialistic.
484	Jaime	Why?
485	Luisa	It always has to do with economy.
486	Jaime	No, not that much, I'm not like those people who- no, to make a
487		lot of money is not my thing, I say this because that is what a
488		lot of people say 'well, I am going to put a lot of effort in my
489		English because in such and such company they ask you for a

		good English level and I'm going to make more money and I'm going to improve my lifestyle', that's what others supposedly say, right? I feel it's not like that, but it's the word that English gives me, English is gain.
	M	But you don't feel that way?
	Jaime	Well yes because apart from the money, you gain the friendship with other people who are from abroad, maybe I will find a tourist who will ask for my help or I will ask for his help and maybe with one word in English all can change and…I get a person to help me, gain, to have a partner to…
	M	A partner in crime
	Jaime	In what?
	M	I'd say a partner in crime.
	Jaime	(.01) hm you put a word in my- you said you were not going to put any words…
	M	No, I call it that way, partner in crime=
	Jaime	=Ah, ok, well [looks uncomfortable]
	M	I'm not calling you that, ok?
	Jaime	Yes, ok., so that is gain.
	M	Ok, Luisa, do you have another word?
	Jaime	No, how about the coincidence?
	M	Ah, sorry. But she was talking about triumph and you were talking about gain, Luisa, do you have gain somewhere there?
	Luisa	No, grandiose.
	M	Grandiose, why?
	Luisa	Grandiose, because that is my, my perspective towards the language that it is grand, it is universal and it is, eh, important in the whole world. That is what I mainly mean. That type of greatness.
	M	Jaime?
	Jaime	Yes?
	M	What do you think?
	Jaime	What do I think? Or do I have that word?
	M	Do you have it?
	Jaime	No.
	M	What do you think about it?=
	Jaime	=greatness=
	M	=you were talking a while ago precisely of how the language is universal and=
	Jaime	=greatness, well yes, when you know another language you know more than other people, there are people who only speak Spanish, even more, sometimes they can more or less command Spanish and to know another language is- it increases your knowledge and it is to be a little bit more than others, I think.
	M	Another word, Jaime?
	Jaime	Eh, efficacious.
	M	[to Luisa] do you have efficacious?
	Luisa	No.
	M	[to Jaime] why efficacious?
	Jaime	Well it is more or less that, efficacious, efficacious [laughing] I don't even know what it means, [looks at Luisa and sobers down] efficacious, because, when you know English- it even sounds like an ad 'when you know English', no, well, efficacious, because if you know it you can do great things, and maybe good things and

		for others, and that is to be efficacious.
	M	If one does not know English one cannot do good things?
	Jaime	Ah! Of course, of course yes, yes. But that is what I mean with efficacious, but yes, if, even if you don't know English, I mean people can do good things and not know English, not because you don't know English you cannot do them.
	M	But professionally?
	Jaime	Yes, you can internationalise anything that you do.
	M	What do you think Luisa?=
	Luisa	=yes=
	M	=Is English efficacious?
	Jaime	Tell me, come on.
	Luisa	[moving her head from side to side]
	M	He can take it, he says, he can take it.
	Jaime	Well, who knows, so don't be too hard on me, ok? [Luisa laughs]
	Luisa	No, well, about his(.) concept of the word, well yes, I agree.
	Jaime	In what? I said too many things.
	M	Uhuh.
	Luisa	[laughs] in that it is important, and necessary and…
	Jaime	I didn't say that.
	Luisa	Well, in summary, come on, you talked too much.
	Jaime	Yeah, right? Well do you have it? Ah, sorry.
	M	You don't have efficacious, right?
	Luisa	[shaking her head 'no']
	M	Another word, please Luisa?
	Luisa	Hm, I only have universal.
	M	Universal, why universal?
	Luisa	[shaking her head, and smiling] because of the same things. It is important, it is universal.
	M	What do you mean by universal?
	Luisa	Well, it is (.) the language of the world.
	M	The language of the world. Jaime do you have universal?
	Jaime	I have international.
	M	Hm,=
	Jaime	=it's almost the same
	M	It's almost the same, which is the diff- how would you define international?
	Jaime	International because English is spoken in different countries. and for example, if you do something- I am boring you!
	M	No!
	Jaime	For example, a person makes something, and, and wants to export it, and has to make phone calls, for example or bring people from other countries, and they don't know how to speak, how to express themselves, so they could not sell their product except in their own country, and because of that… and if they know another language they can contact other countries like the United States, England, and those and that is why I said international. [smiling]
	M	Is it good that English is international or universal?
	Luisa	[slowly nods her head, Jaime looks at her] well, it is good, but there could also be other languages that, well right now I think that English is the main one because the United States are the strongest power, no? something like that. [Jaime laughs]
	Jaime	Or England [Luisa looks at him, he turns away]

598	M	Ok, you have not more words on your paper, right? [Luisa shakes
599		her head] Jaime? Do you still have more words?
600	Jaime	Yes, four.
601	M	Let's see.
602	Jaime	Hm, pretty.
603	M	English is pretty.
604	Jaime	Yes, when you speak it, it sounds more, nicer, like with more
605		emphasis, like 'ok' or, hehehe yes, I feel that it is more, more,
606		elegant to speak English than Spanish. Well, it also depends on
607		who speaks it, for example, if a person speaks Spanish
608		elegantly, correctly, it sounds well.
609	M	If you hear someone speaking English, as we say "chopped off"
610		or without fluency a person who says that he speaks English
611		and you hear that he speaks with a lot of trouble, it is very hard
612		for that person to speak, what do you think? (.04)
613	Jaime	That he didn't pay the course. Hehe, let her talk more.
614	M	No, no, no, I want to hear from both, I want both to tell me
615		what you think.
616	Jaime	Well I say that he could not pay half the course. He just learned
617		the first half, for example the basics.
618	M	What=
619	Jaime	=and he is just fending for himself with that.
620	M	He is fending for himself.
621	Jaime	Yes. I say it is valid, too.
622	Luisa	Well, to me, it would depend on- how he acquired his knowledge
623		if he took a course, or many people learn it because they live
624		abroad in the States, and they come and you can see that they
625		lived among Mexicans and also Americans, but they learned
626		English and many times it is not correct, because also even in
627		the United States, English is spoken differently, in the north, in
628		the centre, and in Texas, to name some areas, the pronunciation
629		is different, because of the same proximity with Mexico and the
630		United States, they make it more "pocho" I think it's called.
631	M	=yes, they call it "pocho".
632	Luisa	And that influences the accents. [Jaime plays with a pencil]
633	M	I am sorry I got distracted for a moment.
634	Luisa	It's ok.
635	M	[to Jaime] are you ok?
637	Jaime	Yes, sorry.
638	M	Ok, so English is pretty, and if you hear someone speaking
639		English with some difficulty it is valid, it is acceptable.
640	Luisa	Yes.
641	Jaime	Also, nobody is at fault if they don't know English, I mean, well
642		one should not feel like 'ah, he doesn't know English, poor…' I
643		was going to say a word, but better not.
644	M	No, there are certain things we cannot say in the recording.
645	Jaime	Ah! [looks at the camera] sorry! Because one, well, one learned
646		Spanish by (.) seeing others, nobody knows everything from the
647		beginning.
648	Luisa	Yes, it is acceptable, but if one knows that he has problems and
649		that one should try to improve oneself, well, if I already know
650		so much, if I know the vocabulary and so many verbs and words
651		Why not try to improve it? as he says, with a good course, or I
652		don't know, speaking the language but correctly, or something,

I don’t know, at school with friends…

Jaime: But for example, we have to see the person, if the person is someone who has been given the knowledge and he doesn’t want to learn and that is the reason he speaks bad, well, one should tell him to snap out of it and tell him that he is so…[looks at the camera] beep, ah! No!! [smiling]

M: Do you think… do you think so?

Jaime: Me? Yes I think so.

M: Why?

Jaime: Well, the people who have the opportunity to learn and they do not make the most of it, and waste time, like I wasted time in CBTis, well, yes, I was forced to snap out of it, eh! And then you can tell the person, put your effort into it and they would be able to understand and all. Well, that is what I was told, hehe.

M: Who do you think that should do that, force someone to snap out of it and react?

Jaime: I think that the people who are around you, who want to see you improve yourself, like my mum, she said ‘you know what? You better not spoil all of this, no, because you’d leave my home’ and I believed her.

M: You do believe her?

Jaime: Yes, I do believe *her*. Hehehe

M: What do you say, Luisa?

Luisa: Well, yes, the closest to you, the ones around you, are usually the family, then, the people who- for example, to me personally they are the ones who are on top of me with ‘study, finish the course, do not drop it, you are closer to the end’ because I was taking other courses but I dropped out of them after a month or so=

M: =why?

Jaime: =because of laziness?

Luisa: Yes. So right now they are the ones who are saying things like ‘come on, try it, it’s for your own good, it’s your future, you know it is important…’ so it becomes kind of mind opening and it helps you realise where you stand and how much you have and what you need to, to triumph or to become an=

Jaime: =an outstanding person=

Luisa: =uhuh=

Jaime: =Not to be one more in the crowd. That is what I’ve been told. before I- ah, it feels like an AA meeting! Before I was like those guys that I can still see in the classroom that, that, think that things can be mediocre, it doesn’t matter, I half do it, or I, or I ‘pray’ so that the teacher does not come to class today, or things like that, and I say, well yes, it is good that the teacher doesn’t come but, now, now, what am I going to do, I don’t know it’s just that, when you have the problem in front of you, I mean you see the need you have, until then you start thinking, and, because of that, you think and you make it happen.

M: Sorry do you think that- well, Jaime, you have mentioned that somehow you needed that someone made you snap out of it to make you change your mind, and Luisa you say that your family constantly make efforts to make you keep on track and not just stop=

Jaime: =To snap you out of it? Can we use that? Well yes, a snapping.

707	M	Well, it is an expression and we can use it, perhaps an emotional
708		snapping? [both nod] it does not have to be a physical blow, ok?
709		Do you think that you are at a stage where you don't need that
710		emotional snapping? Or do you still need that emotional snap?
711	Luisa	I do need it=
712	M	=yes?
713	Luisa	=constantly, hehee.
714	Jaime	Why? Are you very lazy?
715	Luisa	No, but…
716	Jaime	Do you skip classes?
717	Luisa	Hmm
718	Jaime	I do, hehehehe [all laugh]
719	M	[to Luisa] there's no need to answer that.
720	Luisa	Well, the thing is that it's very easy for me to party and see my
721		friends, but it is also an emotional snapping that you are here
722		you are alive, you have plenty and you have to see beyond, and
723		not only think of now, but rather think of the future.
724	Jaime	But it is not only important to know it English, you need to put
725		it in practice. That's what I'm told, not only=
726	Luisa	=but to put it in practice, you have to learn it.
727	Jaime	[laughs] but if…ah! Ok, ok. [smiles]
728	M	Come on, but what?
729	Jaime	But there are people who know what they have to do and don't
730		do it, and that is like, not knowing. At least the little bit you do
731		know, use it somehow. Like people who don't know but want to
732		give it a go, they go and ask questions and say 'well, I want to
733		know this, and that' and the teacher sees the effort and gives
734		them suggestions, like 'do this and check that'.
735	M	What do you think Luisa? [she moves on her chair]
736	Jaime	Should write a book, right? [smiling] she too.
737	Luisa	[to Jaime] and do you still need the snapping?
738	Jaime	What?
739	Luisa	Do you still need those emotional snapping?
740	Jaime	[to M] Yes?
741	M	It's a question.
742	Jaime	Ah! Sorry! I thought she was telling me.
743	M	No.
744	Jaime	Hm, I don't know, maybe sometimes I forget, sometimes I go
745		more towards having fun and I get lost, go for, I don't know, for
746		a drink=
747	M	Do you need the emotional snapping for other subjects? Or only
748		specifically for English?
749	Jaime	No, for English and other subject, not specifically for English,
750		because the other subjects are necessary just like English. I
751		have to learn about everything to move on.
752	Luisa	[nodding] yes, it is in general, in the school subjects and in my
753		everyday life.
754	M	Jaime, do we still have one or two words there?
755	Jaime	What was the last one? International?
756	M	Yes.
757	Jaime	And what is it? A cross? Or?
758	M	It's a cross yes.
759	Jaime	Problematic.
760	M	Problematic, why?

Jaime Because when you are learning it you get stressed, and that's it.
M Why? Why do you get stressed to learn?
Jaime Because, it has many, grammatical rules, and things like that and things that overwhelm you and get you bored and tired, and no, it's so- I'd rather learn like- I get a shot of something= [Luisa laughs] =and that's it, I've learned. Easy things.
M A little English pill and that's it?
Jaime That would be right, is it sold in the market already?
M Noo, not yet. They still haven't made it that easy.
Jaime It is her turn.
M Ehm, do you have any other word?
Jaime But it's her turn.
M But she doesn't have any more words.
Jaime Ah! Tool, it is a useful tool for everyday life, well, not so much for everyday life, for the- professional life.
M Ok, a tool, any other?
Jaime Attractive, for example, someone who already knows and knows how to speak and listen to it and it sounds nicer, like…
M Is that related to what you said before that English is pretty?
Jaime Yes.
M I mean, one is attractive because one sounds nice?
Luisa [nods] yes.
Jaime Yes, but also- it's just that I have many ideas about English and Spanish and how they sound depending how one speaks them, because you can also speak English in a very ugly manner.
M It has to be special.
Jaime Yes, very elegant.
Luisa I think that it is not so much that it is elegant but simply, the correct way, I mean, it's like Spanish also, you can also speak Spanish very beautiful, but if you speak with bad words and double entendre words= [Jaime laughs] well, it stops being nice and the person stops being attractive. It's like that, when you are, for example, you are pulling you are not cursing and all, you have to behave=
Jaime =you behave even if you are not like that=
Luisa =you behave with the correct words, maybe not with words… how are they called? Hmm eh, I mean there are many words that the majority does not use anymore=
M From another time?
Luisa Uhuh, that only grandparents use and that one tends to change them for other types of words more, hm, commercial, in this time. But always correctly, that is also attractive, I'd say.
M Ok, before we wrap it up, something else you would like to say, remember that the topic is how you feel about English. And you have told me many things already that are going to be very useful to me, but is there something like I don't know, maybe for this reason I feel this way? (.05) no?
Jaime I didn't get the question.
M We have been talking about several reasons for how you feel about English, you've told me words that represent how you feel and, well what I am asking now is if there is something you've not mentioned and you'd like to say about why you feel like this with the English language. Eh, you've told me that it is something problematic, but at the same attractive, it can open

		doors for you and something that can take you to new, places
		and new situations, and new opportunities, erhm, it's not that
		you are afraid of it, but it's not something too easy, so I'd like to
		known if there is any reason, I don't know, apart from the fact
		that you did not give it enough time when you could, or maybe
		now you feel that it's time to go back to it, I don't know, what
		else can you tell me about why you feel like this? (.02) do you
		maybe think that teachers have been or not been motivating?
		Or what? (.03) or this is it?
	Jaime	Noo, no, at least not me.
	M	Speak up now or forever hold your piece, as they say. (.04)
	Luisa	Well, yes, with the teachers at school it is important that the
		students feel, that there is a good relationship, because many
		times, for example in junior high, I had- many of us didn't know
		English, and the teacher got stressed because we didn't know-
		we didn't understand and she had to work very hard and all
		that, and then it was necessary to have a bit more patience, or
		perhaps other learning techniques, or…
	M	Do you feel that the English class needs to be more than just
		grammar and, I don't know=
	Jaime	=didactic activities, like objects, and how to communicate and
		how to express yourself, and how to say what you want to say-
		but from the teacher, not like now, the teacher asks students to
		come to the front and read, and we just repeat from the book
		but he does not explain why it is like that and so on.
	M	How to use different things…
	Jaime	Uhuh, because there are people who perhaps do not understand
		and there may be others who have more skills and…
	M	What do you feel- what advice would you give to someone who
		feels like you do about English? What would you recommend
		them to do?
	Luisa	Well, study and put a lot of effort and that it is not impossible
		to learn. I mean, yes, you have to have a lot of patience and a lot
		of dedication, but it's, it's the weapon of the future.
	M	Thank you. Jaime?
	Jaime	Yes, it is the tool of the future.
	M	And what would you recommend someone who=
	Jaime	That it is the tool of the future.
	M	That's it? that's enough?
	Jaime	Yes, that's enough.
	M	Ok, thank you Jaime.

Appendix D: Research ethics forms

Participant information sheet

Survey participant consent form

Focus group participant consent form

Participant Information Sheet

Project title: EFL LEARNER PERCEPTIONS IN TAMPICO, MEXICO (simplified version)
Researcher's name: María Dolores López González, MDES, MAESL
Supervisors' names: Dr. Anne Convery, and Dr. Richard Pemberton

Aims of the project: this study is intended to explore how you perceive your communication skills in the foreign language, and what influences your perception.

What participants will be required to do? If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to:
Complete one questionnaire containing items on personal information and your perceptions. Instructions on how to complete the questionnaire will be given and the whole process should not take more than 45 minutes. Agree to have your final mark for the language class forwarded to the researcher at the end of the semester.
Decide if you want to continue in the second part of the study, which includes another questionnaire and a focus group session which will take place a few days later (your participation in this will be rewarded with a book token and a day bus fare). Finally complete another questionnaire to see whether your perceptions change after finishing the language course.

Confidentiality and security of information: personal information you provide in the questionnaire will be treated as confidential and when the results of the study are published in academic journals or any other means of academic communication you will not be identified individually.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary, you are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences, and if you decide not to participate or participate in only the first stage, this will not affect your rights/access to other services in this institution.

Potential benefit to you as a participant in this study is to explore your views about your communication in English to assist in improving your language learning experience in this university.

Contact details of the researcher in case you require more information on the study:
María D. López, ttxmdl@nottingham.ac.uk
Mobile phone (UK): (0044) 787-058-4395.

Contact details of the research supervisors:
Dr. Anne Convery, anne.convery@nottingham.ac.uk
Dr. Richard Pemberton, richard.pemberton@nottingham.ac.uk

Contact details of the Research Ethics Coordinator should you wish to make a complaint on ethical grounds:
Dr. Andrew Hobson, andrew.hobson@nottingham.ac.uk

Survey Participant Consent Form

NUMBER:

QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title: EFL LEARNER PERCEPTIONS IN TAMPICO, MEXICO (simplified version)

Researcher's name: María Dolores López González, MDES, MAESL
Supervisors' names: Dr. Anne Convery and Dr. Richard Pemberton

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
I agree to have my final mark for the language course in which I am enrolled forwarded to the researcher to be used in her analyses.
I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
I understand that data will be stored in a locked container within the researcher's reach and will only be accessed by people directly involved with the research project, including the researcher, her research supervisors, and examiners if deemed necessary.
I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …… (Research participant)

Print name ……..… **Date** ……

Contact details

Researcher: María D. López, Tel.
E-mail: ttxmdl@nottingham.ac.uk
Supervisor: Dr. Anne Convery anne.convery@nottingham.ac.uk
Dr. Richard Pemberton richard.pemberton@nottingham.ac.uk
School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: andrew.hobson@nottingham.ac.uk

LEAVE BLANK FROM HERE ON IF NOT INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN THE FOCUS GROUP SESSION.

I am interested in participating in a focus group session about perceptions on communicative competence and completing two more questionnaires at a later date and time. I understand that my participation in this will be rewarded with a book token and a day bus fare.

Contact details:

Telephone: ……. E-mail: ..……

Focus Group Participant Consent Form

NUMBER:

FOCUS GROUP and QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title: EFL LEARNER PERCEPTIONS IN TAMPICO, MEXICO (simplified version)

Researcher's name: María Dolores López González, MDES, MAESL
Supervisors' names: Dr. Anne Convery and Dr. Richard Pemberton

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
I understand that I will be videotaped and/or audio taped during the focus group session.
I understand that data will be stored in a locked container within the researcher's reach and will only be accessed by people directly involved with the research project, including the researcher, her research supervisors, and examiners if deemed necessary.
I understand that I will be rewarded for my participation in this stage of the research project with a book token and a day bus fare.
I understand and agree to be contacted at the end of the semester to respond one last questionnaire to follow up with the research project.
I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …… (Research participant)

Print name …… **Date** ……

Contact details

Researcher: María D. López, Tel. (0044) 787-058-4395 (in the UK)
E-mail: mdlopez@prodigy.net.mx

Supervisor: Dr. Anne Convery anne.convery@nottingham.ac.uk
Dr. Richard Pemberton richard.pemberton@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: andrew.hobson@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix E: Communicative Competence Questionnaire

NUMBER: (this was an identification number randomly assigned by the researcher for helping her in locating the information pertaining to each participant among the dataset)

This questionnaire explores how Mexican first year university students perceive their communicative competence in English as a Foreign Language, and it is part of a thesis Project to obtain the degree of Doctor in Education.

Please respond the questionnaire honestly, all your answers will be treated as confidential and your data will only be used in the statistic purpose of the study. It is very important that you reflect on your answers. There are no wrong answers since it is your personal perception.

There are 2 parts in this questionnaire, please make sure you respond to both.

I appreciate your collaboration.

Part 1. Personal background.
Instructions: Respond the next questions about you and your experience with English as a Foreign Language. Your answers will be treated as confidential.

1. Faculty / school: _____

2. Language class (write the name of the class): _____

3. Sex (mark with an "X"): Female: ____ Male: ____

4. Age (in full years): _____

5. Time studying English (mark with an "X" **ONLY** one option that best represents you):

Less than 6 months: ____
6 months to 1 year: ____
Over 1 year to 2 years: ____
Over 2 years to 3 years: ____
Over 3 years to 4 years: ____
Over 4 years to 5 years: ____
Over 5 years: ____

How much time do you dedicate to studying or practicing English per week, apart from your university lessons? (Mark with an "X" **ONLY** one option that best represents you):

Less than 1 hour: ____
Over 1 hour to 2 hours: ____
Over 2 hours to 4 hours:____
Over 4 hours to 6 hours:____
Over 6 hours: ____

7. Where have you studied English? (Mark with an "X" **ALL** the options that apply to you):

At home: ____
At school: ____
In language centres: ____

8. How do you practice English? (Mark with an "X" **ALL** the options that apply to you):

Watching English programmes and/or films on TV or at the cinema: ____
Reading magazines and/or newspapers: ____
Reading magazines and/or newspapers on the Internet: ____
Reading academic texts: ____
Reading novels and other types of literature: ____
Chatting on the Internet: ____
Chatting with friends, in person or over the telephone: ____
Writing texts or letters: ____
Other (specify): _____

Part 2. Questionnaire on YOUR PERCEPTION about Communicative Competence in English.

Instructions: Write the number of the answer that reflects your OWN perception:

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Indifferent
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

No answer is wrong. Sometimes you may think the statements are very similar (or that they are repeated); do not worry and please respond to all items.

In English…	Answer
1. I know when and how to start a conversation with friends or people I know.	
2. I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers or authorities.	
3. I know when and how to finish a conversation with friends or people I know.	
4. I know when and how to finish a conversation with strangers or authorities.	
5. I know when to respond to an interlocutor or how to participate in a conversation.	
6. I know how to respond or participate during conversation.	
7. I have enough vocabulary to express my ideas, feelings, and mood.	
8. I have good pronunciation.	
9. I am fluent enough in the language to express my ideas clearly.	
10. I understand conversations with friends or people I know.	
11. I understand conversations with strangers or authorities.	
12. I understand the ideas expressed in films or television programmes.	
13. I understand the language grammar.	
14. I apply correct language grammar in a conversation.	
15. I understand textbooks, manuals or directions.	
16. I understand magazines and newspapers.	
17. I understand novels and other types of literature.	
18. I know how to write using correct grammar.	
19. I know how to start and finish a letter or a school report.	
20. My errors do not impede my communication.	

THANK YOU!!!

Appendix F: Focus group schedule

This appendix shows the focus group schedule as it was used in the sessions with participants. They were addressed in terms shown in the introduction and then the researcher followed the activities proposed in the rest of the schedule.

Introduction
[Addressing participants] The purpose of this session is to ask university students about what makes them feel the way they do about their ability to communicate in English. We are interested in what makes you perceive your ability the way you do, also we would like to know what you think would make you change any 'bad' feelings or keep 'good' feelings you have about it. But the most important issue of this session is whether you as a group, share any of these feelings.

English: Issues influencing participants' personal concepts
Projective technique: use forced associations to ask participants to describe their meaning of "English" to any animal; ask participants to write about their association and then share their reasons for the association with the group.
Probe: Is English a domestic animal? Or is it a wild one? How do you see English? [list all animals on the board and get meanings from the group].

Probing technique: use concept maps to ask participants to further describe their meanings of "English"; then ask them to share concept maps to see whether similarities occurred in the group [list shared descriptors on the board].

How do participants cope with negative and positive self-perceptions?
Elicitation of responses, do not prompt participants [feed responses back to participants to ensure clarification].

What do participants think they should do to change negative and maintain positive self-perceptions?
Elicitation of responses, do not prompt [list all responses on the blackboard, confirm responses and check whether they are shared].

What do participants think universities should do to help them change negative and maintain positive self-perceptions?
Elicitation of responses, do not prompt [list all responses, confirm and check whether they are shared].

What advice would you give to someone who feels the way you do?
Elicitation of responses, do not prompt [list all suggestions, confirm they are shared].

Appendix G: CCQ Coding Log

ID	Name	Description	Values
1	Number	Numerical identification	None
2	School	School where respondent is a student	1 Engineering 2
3	Module	EFL module registered	1 Inglés Inicial Medio 2 Inglés Inicial Avanzado
4	Sex	Gender	1 Female 2 Male
5	Age	Age in full years	None
6	Timestudying	Time studying EFL	1 less than six months 2 six months to one year 3 one to three years 4 over three years
7	Practicetime	Practice time per week	1 less than one hour 2 one to two hours 3 two hours or more
8	Place01	Place of study EFL	1 Home
9	Place02		2 School
10	Place03		3 Language centre
11	Practicemanner01	Manner of practice EFL	1 Watch television
12	Practicemanner02		2 Reading magazines
13	Practicemanner03		3 Reading magazines
14	Practicemanner04		4 Reading textbooks
15	Practicemanner05		5 Reading literature
16	Practicemanner06		6 Chatting on the Internet
17	Practicemanner07		7 Chatting in person
18	Practicemanner08		8 Writing texts
19	Practicemanner09		9 Other
20	Ccompetence01	Item 1	1 Strongly disagree 2 Disagree 3 Indifferent 4 Agree 5 Strongly agree
21	Ccompetence02	Item 2	
22	Ccompetence03	Item 3	
23	Ccompetence04	Item 4	
24	Ccompetence05	Item 5	
25	Ccompetence06	Item 6	
26	Ccompetence07	Item 7	
27	Ccompetence08	Item 8	
28	Ccompetence09	Item 9	
29	Ccompetence10	Item 10	
30	Ccompetence11	Item 11	
31	Ccompetence12	Item 12	
32	Ccompetence13	Item 13	
33	Ccompetence14	Item 14	
34	Ccompetence15	Item 15	
35	Ccompetence16	Item 16	
36	Ccompetence17	Item 17	
37	Ccompetence18	Item 18	
38	Ccompetence19	Item 19	
39	Ccompetence20	Item 20	
40	CommComp	Overall score of CC perception	None

Appendix H: EFA Correlation matrix

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	I know when and how to start a conversation with friends	1.000									
2	I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers	.687	1.000								
3	I know when and how to end a conversation with friends	.739	.607	1.000							
4	I know when and how to end a conversation with strangers	.496	.732	.655	1.000						
5	I know when to respond in conversation	.611	.525	.573	.546	1.000					
6	I know how to respond in conversation	.584	.496	.516	.482	.764	1.000				
7	I have enough vocabulary to express ideas, feelings, and moods	.517	.480	.439	.452	.521	.538	1.000			
8	I have good pronunciation	.485	.399	.379	.374	.493	.462	.584	1.000		
9	I am fluent to express my ideas	.524	.488	.436	.477	.544	.553	.583	.630	1.000	
10	I understand conversations with friends	.547	.401	.433	.354	.545	.505	.453	.519	.553	1.000
11	I understand conversations with strangers	.535	.533	.471	.508	.516	.488	.412	.454	.527	.704
12	I understand ideas in television or movies	.506	.426	.432	.396	.482	.476	.430	.435	.494	.631
13	I understand EFL grammar	.454	.433	.386	.424	.484	.443	.407	.451	.525	.462
14	I apply correct grammar in conversation	.492	.420	.420	.387	.455	.476	.522	.530	.628	.498
15	I understand textbooks, manuals, or instructions	.416	.386	.416	.387	.429	.435	.401	.416	.514	.542
16	I understand magazines and newspapers	.491	.440	.480	.454	.516	.490	.443	.466	.569	.632
17	I understand novels and other literature	.438	.417	.386	.431	.500	.474	.462	.449	.534	.549
18	I know how to write using correct grammar	.475	.410	.457	.419	.457	.405	.477	.510	.554	.521
19	I know how to start and end letters or reports	.486	.473	.446	.485	.510	.505	.548	.547	.671	.525
20	My errors do not impede my communication	.364	.293	.320	.272	.333	.306	.307	.327	.369	.387

	EFA correlation matrix (cont.)	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	I know when and how to start a conversation with friends										
2	I know when and how to start a conversation with strangers										
3	I know when and how to end a conversation with friends										
4	I know when and how to end a conversation with strangers										
5	I know when to respond in conversation										
6	I know how to respond in conversation										
7	I have enough vocabulary to express ideas, feelings, and moods										
8	I have good pronunciation										
9	I am fluent to express my ideas										
10	I understand conversations with friends										
11	I understand conversations with strangers	1.000									
12	I understand ideas in television or movies	.571	1.000								
13	I understand EFL grammar	.499	.421	1.000							
14	I apply correct grammar in conversation	.540	.439	.661	1.000						
15	I understand textbooks, manuals, or instructions	.515	.571	.482	.504	1.000					
16	I understand magazines and newspapers	.579	.619	.477	.527	.770	1.000				
17	I understand novels and other literature	.533	.505	.487	.545	.633	.760	1.000			
18	I know how to write using correct grammar	.476	.400	.554	.671	.466	.514	.535	1.000		
19	I know how to start and end letters or reports	.516	.493	.529	.581	.527	.564	.536	.639	1.000	
20	My errors do not impede my communication	.364	.371	.344	.309	.381	.400	.356	.335	.391	1.000

Appendix I: Total variance explained (orthogonal rotation)

Component	Initial eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Square Loadings			Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	10.346	51.729	51.729	10.346	51.729	51.729	4.327	21.633	21.633
2	1.418	7.089	58.818	1.418	7.089	58.818	4.321	21.604	43.237
3	1.068	5.339	64.157	1.068	5.339	64.157	4.184	20.920	64.157
4	0.834	4.169	68.326						
5	0.764	3.819	72.145						
6	0.685	3.425	75.570						
7	0.640	3.201	78.771						
8	0.553	2.763	81.534						
9	0.483	2.417	83.951						
10	0.451	2.257	86.208						
11	0.419	2.094	88.302						
12	0.383	1.914	90.216						
13	0.347	1.736	91.952						
14	0.324	1.622	93.574						
15	0.295	1.477	95.051						
16	0.273	1.366	96.417						
17	0.212	1.059	97.476						
18	0.203	1.014	98.490						
19	0.173	0.863	99.353						
20	0.129	0.647	100.000						